

# Gudiashvili Square-A model of Urban Archaeology

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Gudiashvili Square is located in Kalaubani, in the historical part of Old Tbilisi. Due to its location, it is obvious that it has a great historical and archaeological importance. In late medieval ages this square was named as Bezhana Garden. Until 1828 it was known with the name of Moghnisi (as Moghni, as Moghnini) on the behalf of the Virgin Armenian Church, located near to the square. This place until today is known with the name- Kolortaghi, same as Klortaghi. In 1828 it was named of Abas-Abad on the behalf of capturing Persian city- Abas Abad by the Russian Imperial General Paskevich. In 1923 the square was named Alaverdiani, on the behalf of Stefane Alaverdovi. What about the contemporary name- Lado Gudiashvili Square, it was given in 1988 on the behalf of famous Georgian painter-Lado Gudiashvili<sup>1 2</sup>. With the primary name- Bezhana Garden, Gudiashvili Square is marked on the Map of Kartli created by Vakhushti Batonishvili in 1735<sup>3</sup> (**Fig.1-a**). During the centuries the square was rebuilt for several times. In 1844 the square has finally formed with its surrounding streets, dead-ends and corresponds to the contemporary situation<sup>4</sup>.

Gudiashvili Square has its own history, how it survived and came to us with the help of more than 10 years of civil-urban activism that was started by „Tiflis-Hamkari”- The union of Tbilisi Caretakers (**Fig.1-b**).

Gudiashvili Square is located inside Narikala fortress and it was obvious to be historically and archaeologically sensitive area that was proved after beginning a large scale rehabilitation-restoration project<sup>5</sup>. We need to emphasize the fact that archaeological discoveries on the territory of Tbilisi are mainly connected to the construction works. Tbilisi is densely populated and because of this it is very difficult to conduct proper archaeological excavations. The tight urbanism, construction works mainly on the territory of Old Tbilisi are unsolved and very complicated issues until nowadays<sup>6 7</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Elisashvili A., Amashukeli T., Elisashvili Ts., Tsotskhalishvili M., Gordeladze T., 2011, p.3

<sup>2</sup> Special thanks to Tsira Elisashvili and Lia Bokuchava for their support and contribution during the works and the research.

<sup>3</sup> Dumbadze M., Guchua V. (Ed.), 1990, p.459, pl.65-E

<sup>4</sup> Suramelashvili M., Chachkhunashvili Ts., 2007, pp.5-6

<sup>5</sup> A large-scale rehabilitation-restoration project funded by Tbilisi Development Fund in 2018 with the support and funding of Tbilisi City Hall.

<sup>6</sup> Archaeological monitoring was being carried out from the beginning of the project (2018) by National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation Georgia (by Z.Giorgadze, T.Niniashvili, T.Gurgenidze). From 2019 archaeological monitoring continued by myself and Lana Chologauri. For nowadays archaeological monitoring still continues by myself.

<sup>7</sup> Conservation-restoration projects of Gudiashvili Square and its surrounding area were fulfilled by ICOMOS Georgia in 2016. The first stage of restoration-rehabilitation projects were done by ICOMOS Georgia and the works were performed under their supervision. Special thanks to the team of ICOMOS Georgia for their support and contribution during the works and the research.



Fig.1- a-Map of Kartli by Vakhushti Batonishvili, 1735; with red circle location of Gudiashvili Square; b- Civil- Urban activism on Gudiashvili Square (© Tiflis Hamkari)

On Gudiashvili Square archaeological remains are represented not only with ceramic assemblages<sup>8</sup>, which dates from VIII-IX centuries till XIX centuries (more than 15 groups have been subdivided), but also with the cellars, wine cellars, collectors, refrigerators, bread ovens and other dwellings with different functions (**Fig.2**). Maia Mania remarks that there was standpoint that after invasion of Persians in 1795, when Tbilisi was destroyed and burnt down to the ground by Aga Mohammad Khan Qajar, in the first half of XIX century, constructions of new buildings were done by using of old basements. That is the reason why in Old districts of Tbilisi- in Kala and Isani are preserved Medieval Age streets web<sup>9</sup>. On Gudiashvili Square are revealed cellars with vault arches. Maia Mania remarks that such vault arches undoubtedly belongs to XVII century and in XVIII century simultaneously appears semi circled shaped arches<sup>10</sup>. Maia Mania also mentions that those cellars were used for keeping food-stuffs. Under the floors are found the well-refrigerators built with bricks. Common are wine cellars with Kvevri (a big vessel for wine) inside it, buried into the ground. And sometimes these cellars were used for living and had trade functions as well<sup>11</sup>. As Gabriadze mentions, such kind of well-refrigerators are characterized for feudal and other wealthy persons' dwellings. They kept inside snow and ice, which were used for medical purposes by the doctors<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Restoration and conservation of ceramic assemblages are done by Nino Kamkamidze

<sup>9</sup> Mania M. 2003, p.150

<sup>10</sup> Mania M., 2003, pp.152-153

<sup>11</sup> Mania M., 2003, pp.151-152

<sup>12</sup> Gabriadze A., 2013, p.149



Fig.2- a- cellar with the well inside; b- wine cellar (©Tatia Butsuradze)

It is obvious that on Gudiashvili Square ceramic materials were produced locally. This supposition was proved by the discovery of ceramic workshop<sup>13</sup> with its kiln and additional dwellings. Near to this kiln were found defective ceramics, represented with bowls, oil-lamps and etc. (Fig.3). Massive ceramic workshop was also excavated in Tbilisi, near to 300 Aragveli garden, which according to the archaeologists was functioning in XII-XIII centuries<sup>14</sup>.



Fig.3- a- Ceramic kiln; b-defective ceramic from the workshop on Gudiashvili Square (©Tatia Butsuradze)

Here might be existed another workshop with its pit in which were thrown ceramic production remnants. This practice was very common, when habitants of Tbilisi were throwing ceramic production remnants in the river Mtkvari or buried them in the ground<sup>15</sup>. For an example, under the basement of old cellar, which according to the art critics dates to XVII-XVIII centuries, was excavated a floor level in which was dig out a pit full of ceramic assemblages (**Fig.4-a-b**). The pit is dated to XI-XIII centuries according to the studying of a big amount of materials, which comes from it. Among those materials should be distinguished a jug, which is decorated with very schematic images of lions, fishes, rosettes, rings and medallion. This jug is thought to be belonged to the Islamic period production and is presumably dated

13 During the monitoring of National Agency for Cultural Heritage Preservation Georgia

14 Lomtadze G., 1955, pp. 160-162

15 Dumbadze M., Guchua V. (Ed.), 1990, p.125

to XI-XII centuries. It was made in mold and is imported<sup>16</sup> (**Fig.4-c**). The cellar of which only the floor level was preserved was presumable ceramic workshop, because such pits according to other archaeological discoveries were located inside such dwellings. The upper cellar with vault arches is supposed to be destroyed during the invasion of Persians in 1795, on which indicates the layer of fire that was fixed during the cleaning of its interior.

What about other important discoveries from Gudiashvili Square, there was found the coin of King Tamar, which dates to XII century and is represented with the only one copy (**Fig.5-a**). Among the rare findings should be distinguished clay toy, which might be a horse figure and wooden bath shoe decorated with nacre plates, which looks like an Eastern style (**Fig.5-b**). There have been revealed Ottoman tobacco clay pipes (**Fig.5-c**), which are generally dated to XVI-XVIII centuries and have analogies as on the territory of Georgia as outside the borders. For an example, such tobacco pipes were found in Akhalkalaki (Javakheti region) and are generally dated to XVI-XVIII centuries)<sup>17</sup>. Here we have ceramic fragments with Arabic and Georgian inscriptions and many other important materials as well.



Fig.4- a-Cellar with vault arches; b-Pit full with ceramic assemblages; c-Islamic period jug from the pit (©Tatia Butsuradze)



Fig.5-a-Coin of King Tamar; b- wooden bath shoe; c- part of Ottoman Tobacco Pipes (©Tatia Butsuradze)

Gudiashvili Square has a great importance in the framework of Urban Archaeology. This is the first case when those cellars are integrated in the buildings and are preserved. New, contemporary buildings, which date to the end of 19th and beginning of 20th centuries were built on the basements of those old

<sup>16</sup> An article about those ceramic assemblages, dating and the determination of this pit will be soon published

<sup>17</sup> Jandieri E. 1974, pp.60-61

cellars. Some of these historical cellars will be under the glass roofing and will be visible. There is also a desire to be opened a museum on the square, where the visitors will be able to acquaint with the history and archaeology of Gudiashvili Square. Revealed materials indicate on the fact that there was a tight trade, cultural interrelations with the adjacent regions, cultures. The traces of a big fire what have been depicted in the cellars indicate on the fact that these old dwellings were destroyed during the Persians' invasion, more precisely by Agha Mohammed Khan Qajar in 1795, when Tbilisi was burnt down to the ground.

Restoration-Rehabilitation project of Gudiashvili Square and its surrounding area is still an ongoing process and new upcoming discoveries are expected. Studying of Gudiashvili Square materials, cellars are an ongoing process and the results will write and reveal a new page in the history of Medieval Ages' Tbilisi.

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