

THE IBERIAN (CAUCASIAN) TOWN OF ARTANISSA IN CLAUDIUS PTOLEMY'S COORDINATES

Madona Mshvildadze

One of the essential sources for studying the localisation of Iberian towns is the Geography by Claudius Ptolemy. According to the description of Iberia given in Chapter 8 we find that Iberia is bordered by the populated land of Sarmatia on the north, Colchis on the west, Greater Armenia on the south, and Albania on the east. The focus in this paper is the localisation of Artanissa, one of the Iberian towns, which until now has remained a matter of controversy. Several opinions have been expressed, but these require further examination on the basis of modern methods. Studies of historical maps of the earliest and later periods, vector determination on the basis of steady point on the coordinate grid, placing toponyms on the map, together with corresponding meridians and parallels, have allowed us to identify Artanissa as the modern village of Artany, located on the right bank of the River Iori, in the municipality of Tianeti. Naturally there is space that might have been suitable for urban development. The village is situated between two ravines, with the River Artanula on the left, which downstreams joins the Iori. The location of the point between natural barriers somehow answers the question of its dominant role in the environment. The review of toponyms from a theophoric point of view is also of interest. As is well known, none of the historical territories within Georgia has manifested such a strong convergence of old and new religions as Iberia – interesting for its strategic location. At this stage it is not easy to draw any particular conclusions. We shall be able to do so with more confidence if the search for archaeological material, topographical investigation, and map-making continue to use modern technologies (GIS, etc.).

Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography* is one of the most important sources for an exact localisation of Caucasian Iberian towns. The book consists of eight chapters and it has radically influenced the forming of topographers' conceptions (Lortkipanidze/Kipiani 2009, 3). The work is a kind of manual (an atlas in modern terms) that represents a milieu, i.e. *oikoumene*, opened up by a human. Scholars were able to create 26 regional and 67 smaller area maps based on the knowledge they had obtained from the *Geography* (Stevens 1908, 9). The book includes flat representations of the globe (the Earth) designed with the use of

three different methods of projections such as flatwise, stereographic (i.e. something seen in perspective), and conical. Eight thousand spots, together with their appropriate coordinates, geographic latitudes, and longitudes have been mapped and labelled (Berggren/Jones 2000, 3-4, 17-20). The methodology of the manual includes very interesting peculiarities such as a tendency to indicate important small or large towns and cities distinguished among those eight thousand spots and marked with specific, clearly pronounced symbols. Towns are mentioned in the *Geography* according to certain principles emanating from Ptolemy's own perception of the world, which in its turn had been based on the logical cohesion of geocentrism (Lomouri 1955, 40). Ptolemy was the first who instituted orientation of a map according to the four main directions of the earth.

In spite of the fact that the system of coordinates created by Ptolemy had been based on geocentric methods that caused uncertainties of angle degrees, Georgian historians (I. Djavakhishvili, S. Djanashia, S. Kakabadze, S. Gorgadze, P. Ingorokva, etc.) used to take them at face value. They had been studying Ptolemy's works with great interest and, even now, later generations of scholars such as N. Lomouri, G. Lortkipanidze, and G. Kipiani continue to identify the localisation of Georgian sites according to Ptolemy's coordinates.

In his article "Claudius Ptolemy's 'Geography' – Records about Georgia", N. Lomouri (1955) gave a critical analysis and, most importantly, descriptions of Georgia and its neighbouring territories. His analysis was based on the papers of Muler (1901), P. Montano (1605), F. Wilberg (1838), F. Nobe (1843-45), E. Stivenson (1932), and the prototypic publications of the two manuscripts (1932) (Lomouri 1955, 40). His analysis enables us to better understand and comprehend those data given by Ptolemy.

There were a number of towns and villages in Caucasian Iberia such as Lubioni (Λούβιον κώμη) –75° 40' - 46° 50'; Agina (Ἄγινα) –75° - 46° 30'; Uasaida (Οὐάσαιδα) –76° - 46° 20'; Uarika (Οὐάρικα) –75° 20' - 46°; Sura (Σοῦρα) –75° - 45° 20'; Artanissa (Ἀρτάνισσα) –75° 40' - 46°; Mestleta (Μεστλήτα) –75° 40' - 45°; Dzalisa (Ζάλισσα) –76° - 44° 40'; and Harmaktika (Ἀρμάκτικα) –75° - 44° 50' (see Fig. 5).

Here we are going to focus our attention on the localisation of the town of Artanissa, mentioned in the list of Iberian inhabited areas, which has remained a chief interest of scholars and is still widely disputed. S. Kakabadze and P. Ioseliani associate it with Georgia's historic geographical region of Artaani, which is now identified as in the territory of modern Turkey, along both banks of the upper reaches of the Mtkvari (Cyrus) river; its Turkish name is Ardahani. The territory was a part of the Tsunda dukedom (together with the Djavakheti and Kola regions) in the time of King Parnavaz in the 3rd century BC. V. Tomashek believed that Artanissa was the same town as Artanudji, situated in the southwest part of historical Georgia on the left bank of the Artanudjistskali river. The etymological similarity of this name made Tomashek assume that the two last

sigmas (σ/ς) point to the presence of certain affricate, supposedly “dj”. In order to add credence to his supposition, Tomashek referred to one of the manuscripts belonging to Ptolemy, which included a different form of the same name – Ἀρτάνουσσα. He believed that *oi* might have been a graphical mistake from *ou* (i.e. “u”) (Lomouri 1955, 59-60). If so, in the case like this the name Ἀρτάνουσσα could have been connected with Artanudji.

S. Kaukhchishvili believed that Artanudji is the very same site of scientific interest, which was mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenetos (AD 905-959). According to him Artanuji (now it is a town and district of the Artvin Province in the Black Sea region of Turkey) was the trading centre of the 8th-10th century Iberia (Kaukhchishvili 1964, 72-73). The similar view has been suggested by G. Grigolia in his article “Artaani Iberiashi” (“Artaani in Iberia”). As he states, a country Artanissa, currently situated on the territory of Turkey, known as “Artahani” is similar to Ptolemy’s “Iberian town – Artanissa”. As he says Artaani, together with the Kola region, had always been a part of Iberia. The international routes coming from Byzantium (and also from Persarmenia, i.e. Iranian Armenia) to Shida (“Inner”) Kartli-Tbilisi-Bardavi, passed through Artaani and made entrance to Javakheti. Actually, Artaani connected the Black Sea coastal harbours with Tbilisi-Bardavi through the Artanuji road and Iran and Byzantium through the route coming from Kola. The same author notes that later “Artanissa Town” had been deserted and renamed as Huri (Kajta kalaki/The town of demons) (Grigolia 2010, 50).

L. Chilashvili completely disagreed with all of these opinions and believed that “Artanissa town” should have been sought on the southern slopes of the Caucasian mountain ridge, somewhere to the north of Mtskheta, on the upper reaches of the Iori river, namely in the environs of the present-day village of Artani. His suggestion was strengthened by fieldwork carried out at the headwaters of a Iori tributary, the Kushkheura (left bank) in 1954 and 1966. These yielded buttressed walls of a castle built of huge, trimmed stone blocks (Chilashvili assigned them to antiquity: Chilashvili 1968, 57-58).

Nowadays, it is extremely difficult to determine the function and architectural context of the site on the Kushkheura River. The structures are badly damaged and hidden beneath the flora (the territory is covered with opulent vegetation). Four tower structures survive in considerably better condition. They are built of huge, deliberately hewn stones (but the walls have collapsed and it is impossible to see the interiors) (Figs. 1, 2). The orientation of the structures is noteworthy. They point to the east and the corners of almost all of their eastern walls are rounded while the outer surfaces of them are strictly fitted to the existing relief. This casts doubt on the function of the structure which might, more likely, have been a shrine than a fortress. It should be considered that within the structures there are an icon of a later period together with deer antlers presented to it and a chapel dedicated to the Virgin (Fig. 3). Toponyms like Kviria, Kopala and Qvajama shrines, Pirqushi, Iaghsari, etc. have survived in the area (definitely



Fig. 1. Ruins of one of the towers, village of Kushkhevi, Georgia, 2014 (photo author).

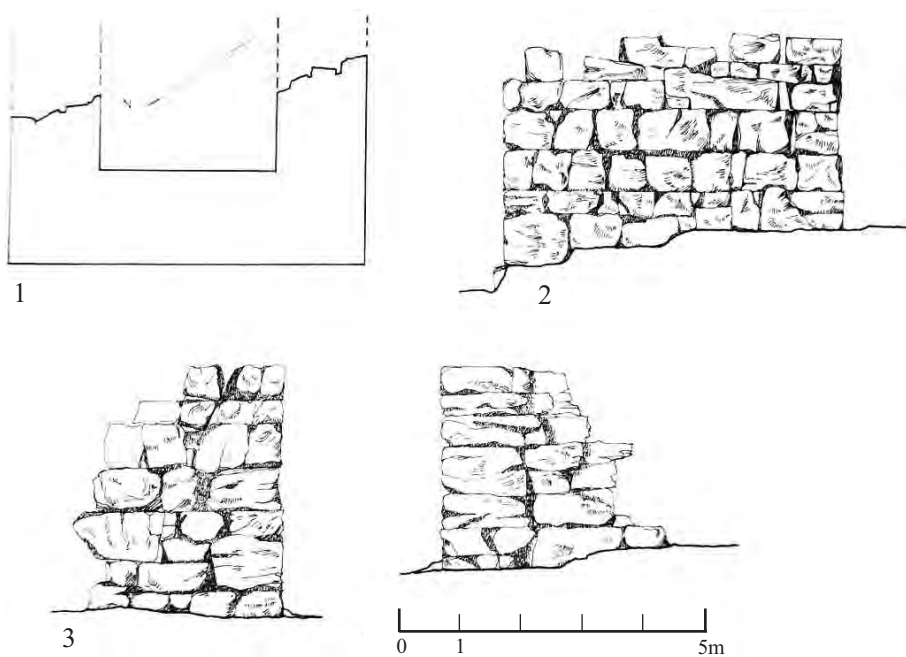


Fig. 2. Ruins of one of the towers, village of Kushkhevi, Georgia, 2014. Plan: (1) a fragment of the western wall, (2) a fragment of the northern wall, (3) remains of the southern wall (drawing G. Kipiani).



Fig. 3 A chapel with deer's horns presented, village of Kushkhevi, Georgia, 2014 (photo author).

indicating that this spot had been an area of some special veneration in the pre-Christian period)¹.

All of the opinions about the localisation of Artanissa are interesting and logical but they were formulated without access to modern tools and these scholars were unable to properly study the maps of historical Georgia (those made by medieval geographers and cartographers), calculate vectors of urban areas with the use of constant spots, etc. Instead, they drew their conclusions based only on a semantic or technical analysis of toponyms.

We have used a variety of methods in order to examine the problem more closely: 1. Seeking out earlier and modern period historical maps (Fig. 4 (1), (2), (3)); 2. Fixing a constant spot on the grid of coordinates and identifying a vector through triangulation; 3. Tracing toponyms on the map with respect to parallels

¹ In the mountainous regions of Georgia (Tusheti, Fshavi, Khevsureti) the pagan cults have functioned until the begin of the 19th century. The said deities have been preserved. In order to differentiate them from the Georgian Christian shrines, in Georgian scientific literature they are referenced as "traditional shrines".



Fig. 4. (1) N. Sanson, 1655, Tabula Asiae III, reconstruction of map after Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography* (<<http://www.armenica.org/history/maps/sanson1658gal72.jpg>>).





Fig. 4. (3) N. Germanus, 15th century, Black Sea to Caspian Sea (HM 1092, Folio: ff. 35v-36 Huntington Catalog Images), reconstruction of the map after Claudius Ptolemy (<http://dpg.lib.berkeley.edu/webdb/dsheh/heh_brf?CallNumber=HM+1092&>).

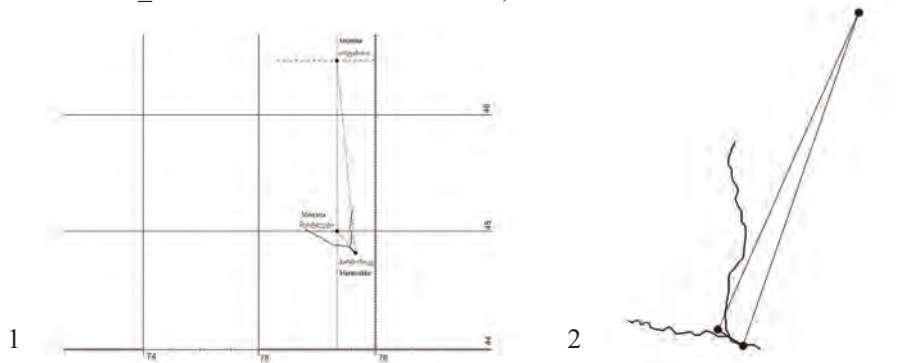


Fig. 5. (1) The grid of geographic coordinates, showing location points of Mtskheta (Mestleta), Armaztsikhe (Harmozike) and Artana (Artanissa?). (2) The present-day representation of the location points (author, 2013).

Fig. 4. (2) C. Cellarius, 1706, Iberia and Colchis. Detail from the map “Bosporus, Maeotis, Iberia, Albania et Sarmatica”. *Notitia Orbis Antiqui sive Geographiae plenioris tomus alter. Asiam et Africam antiquam exponens*, Leipzig (<<http://www.ancient.eu/image/591/>>).



Fig. 6. (1) Masonry identified in the Ghorghashula gorge (photo author)..

Fig. 6. (2) Traces of tool use on the stone, village of Zemo (Upper) Artani, Georgia, 2013 (photo author).
↓



and meridians; 4. Identifying toponyms, correlating earlier and modern ones, and attributing their possible accordance with one another; 5. Toponymic analysis. The degrees and minutes for Mestleta (Mtskheta) and Harmaktika (Armaztsikhe) set out by Ptolemy himself were used as basic points for fixing a localisation on the grid of coordinates. According to triangulation, the third angle was Artanissa itself (Fig. 5, (1), (2)). If we look at Ptolemy's data we will see that it is clear that Artanissa was supposedly coincident with Artan village lying on the right bank of the Iori River in the Tianeti district. Visually, it is fairly apparent that the area is naturally suited for urban settlement. The village, together with the Artanula River flowing along its left side and then merging into the Iori, is sandwiched between two gorges. Localisation of the spot among nat-



Fig. 7. Schematic measurements of the wall in the north of the Ghorghashula gorge, village of Zemo (Upper) Artani, Georgia (drawing G. Kipiani, 2013).

ural borders points to its dominant role in the area. If we look attentively at the locality we can see that only Artanissa would have been able to control quite a long stretch of the road running along the Iori river. It seems quite possible that there might have been some kind of urban settlements around Artanissa.

There are lower and upper Artani villages in Tianeti municipality (Artani is an ancient name of the village). Regrettably, the village's architectural and archaeological sites have not yet received proper attention. Artani, then in the Tbilisi region, consisted of 50 families (288 persons) in 1925. In 2002, only 64 inhabitants were left in lower Artani. The village now belongs to the Mtskheta-Mtianeti region, Tianeti district. A village with 49 inhabitants lies on the right bank of the Iori at an altitude of 1170 m, 12 km from Tianeti. Upper Artani also lies on the same bank of the same river but at an altitude of 1180 m and is 13 km from the same Tianeti district.

According to a list of Georgia's historical and cultural sites made in 2004, there are three shrines (altars), six churches (one of them is a complex), the ruins of several towers and a granary at upper Artani. Trimmed stones scattered around the Ghoghashula gorge and stone masonry along a hill slope on the right bank of the gorge have been identified during surveys of the territory of upper Artani village. The stones bear traces of trimming tools (Figs. 6, (1), (2), 7). Remains of some structure were identified in the north of the gorge (the locals call them Tagva Taghlaura's castle) (Fig. 8, (1), (2)). This structure has completely col-



Fig. 8. (1)-(2) Remains of the structure identified in the north of the Ghorghashula gorge (ruins of Tagva Taghlaura castle), village of Zemo (Upper) Artani, Georgia, 2013 (photos author).



Fig. 9. The wall fixed at the right bank of the Artanula river – 1.20 m thick and 170 m long, village of Zemo (Upper) Artani, Georgia, 2014 (photo author).

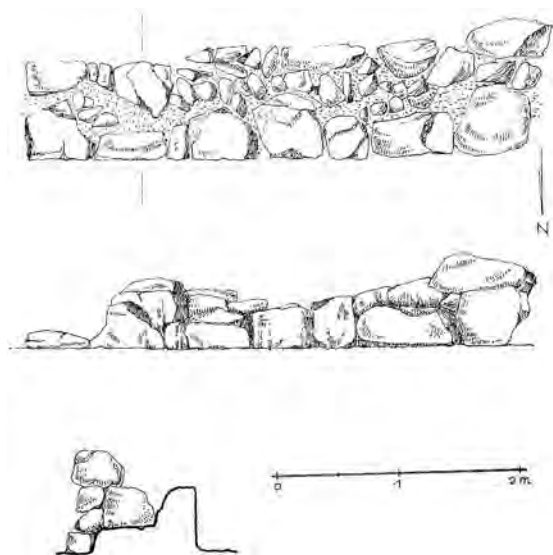


Fig. 10. The wall at the right bank of the Artanula river, plan of lower structure exterior masonry (drawing G. Kipiani and M. Akhalaia, 2014).

lapsed. A number of architectural details and fragments of pottery have also been recovered from this spot. Photographs have been taken at the site and GPS coordinates recorded (Fig. 7).

An interesting picture is presented on the Artnula, another tributary of the Iori, at the site of a new bridge. A stone wall, about 170 m long and 1.20 m wide was found along the right bank of the river (locals said that it had been there for quite a long time before and it was even used for quarrying stone: Figs. 9-10). The length of the wall suggests that it had outwardly projecting towers which might have been found in the yards of the villagers if looked for.

Existing data do not allow us to make any exact inferences. Because of the fact that the sites have never even been mentioned in scholarly literature, they demand further examination. It is also extremely important to uncover any possible inter-linkages between the sites.

The 18th-century church of the Archangels lying in upper Artani village (Fig. 11), now badly damaged and disused, attracts special attention for the ancient capitals inserted in the structure (Figs. 11, 12). There are ruins of a Late Medieval several storey tower (only two storeys have survived) and one more church.

It is very interesting to examine the toponym from a theophoric point of view, since it is well known that Iberia is the only region of historical Georgia where the pantheons of earlier and new religions (paganism and Christianity) were so close to each other. Other countries were constantly interested in events taking place in this strategically important part of Central Transcaucasia that commanded the very important Dariali corridor leading to the north. Iberia was the north-eastern strong-point not only of Transcaucasia and eastern Anatolia but also of the entire eastern Mediterranean world. Iberia's attractive location offered her great opportunities to control important trading routes running to all the four edges of the world via its territory. The roads were used by different peoples of several origins and cultural particularities. This stimulated their crowding together within a considerably limited territory, which in turn created the main conditions for the further social development of these peoples and for the creation of a state. Such a political environment fuelled an almost predictable coexistence of different religious cults and systems. In the 2nd century AD Iberia experienced concurrent and continuing Roman and Iranian political influence, and it seems almost inevitable that local paganism was syncretised with the religious cults of these foreigners, which in its turn left an indelible mark on the process of urbanisation and the institution of a particular toponym.

The toponym Artanissa includes a theophoric root. Names of gods including the roots "Art", "Asha", and "Ash" are common in both the Roman and Persian pantheons. A Greek Ἄρτεμις-Artemis had been considered the goddess of hunting, forests, desert, animals, punishment, and fertility. Later she was identified with the moon. There is a passage about the goddess Artemis' relations with Iberia in



Fig. 11. Archangel church (18th century), village of Zemo (Upper) Artani, Georgia, 2013 (photo author).

one of the appendices of the ancient Georgian chronicle *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (The Georgian Chronicles). It is a 'Homily of Andrew the Disciple in Georgia' say-



Fig. 12. A secondarily used capital of an earlier period, Archangel church (18th century), village of Zemo (Upper) Artani, Georgia, 2013 (photo author).

ing that “there was an idol altar in Atskveri town where were worshipped their vicious gods Artem and Apollo” (*Kartlis Tskhovreba*, vol. 1: 41; *idem*, vol. IV: 16-25; Das Leben Kartlis, 1985, 96-97). If we judge by this appendix and admit that Artemis was worshipped in the western part of the Kartli (Iberian) kingdom, then we can suppose that she was worshipped in some way or other by the highlanders as well (Bochoidze 1993, 354). Asha Vakchishta, the same as Arta Vakchishta, a member of the Iranian triad of gods, was a defender of justice and ideal order in the universe, the soul of fire (Kavtaradze 2009, 115; Meletinskiy 1990, 81; Widengren 1965, 13-14).

There is one more interesting fact in connection with the toponym. The locals call the village Devta Nasakhlari (“remains of Giants’ dwelling”). The story goes that the village had once been inhabited by giants who built a cyclopean stronghold. Kopala, the ancestor of the modern population, defeated the giants, drove them from the area and settled there himself.

It still remains difficult to draw exact conclusions, but if explorations continue in appropriate areas and it becomes possible to collect archaeological material, make topographical surveys with the use of modern tools (GIS), map the plots properly, etc., then the problem will be solved far more cogently.

Recently, the author published a monograph on the Caucasian Iberian cities in Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography* (Mshvildadze 2015).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berggren, J.L./Jones A. 2000: *Ptolemy's Geography: An Annotated Translation of The Theoretical Chapters*, Princeton, NJ/Oxford.
- ბოჭორიგე, გ. 1993: თუშეთი, "მეცნიერება" [= publisher], თბილისი. =
- Bochoridze, G. 1993: *Tusheti*, "Metsniereba" [= publisher], Tbilisi.
- ჭილაშვილი ლ. 1968: ქალაქები ფეოდალურ საქართველოში 1, "მეცნიერება" [= publisher], თბილისი. =
- Chilashvili, L. 1968: *Kalakebi Feodalur Sakartveloshi 1* [Cities in Feudal Georgia 1], "Metsniereba" [= publisher], Tbilisi.
- გრიგოლია, გ. 2010: არტაანი იბერიაში. სამეცნიერო ჟურნალი "სვეტიცხოველი 2", თბილისი. =
- Grigolia, G. 2010: Artaani Iberiashi, (sametsniro jurnali) *Svetickhoveli 2*, 50-60 [Artaani in Iberia, (Scientific Journal) *Svetickhoveli 2*, 50-60], Tbilisi.
- ქართლის ცხოვრება, ტ. I, 1955: ტექსტი დადგენილი ყველა ძირითადი ხელნაწერის მიხედვით ნ. ყაუხჩიშვილის მიერ, "სახელგამი" [= publisher], თბილისი. =
- Kartlis Tskhovreba* [The Georgian Chronicles], Vol. I, 1955: The text verified with all of the existing manuscripts by S. Kaukhchishvili, "Sakhelgami" [= publisher], Tbilisi.
- ქართლის ცხოვრება, ტ. IV, 1973: ბატონიშვილი ვახუშტი აღწერა სამეფოსა საქართველოსა. ტექსტი დადგენილი ყველა ძირითადი ხელნაწერის მიხედვით ს. ყაუხჩიშვილის მიერ, "საბჭოთა საქართველო" [= publisher], თბილისი. =
- Kartlis Tskhovreba* [The Georgian Chronicles], Vol. IV, 1973: Batonishvili Vakhushti *Agcera Samefosa Saqartvelosa* [Description of the Kartli Kingdom by Prince Vakhushti (also known as Vakhushti Batonishvili)]. The text verified with all the existing manuscripts by S. Kaukhchishvili, "Sabchota Saqartvelo" [= publisher], Tbilisi.
- ყაუხჩიშვილი, ს. 1964: რას გვიამბობენ ძველი ბერძნები საქართველოს შესახებ, "საბჭოთა საქართველო", თბილისი. =
- Kaukhchishvili, S. 1964: *Ras Gviamboben Dzveli Berdznebi Saqartvelos Shesaxe* [The Ancient Greeks about Georgia], "Sabchota Saqartvelo" [= publisher], Tbilisi.
- ქავთარაძე, გ. 2009: წარმართული იბერიის ღვთაებათა არსისათვის, კავკასიურ-აღმოსავლური კრებული 13, 113-139, თბილისი. =
- Kavtaradze, G. 2009: Tsarmartuli Iberiis Gvtaebata Arsisatvis [To the Essence of Deities of Pagan Iberia], *Kavkasiur-Akhloagmosavluri Krebuli* [Caucasian-Oriental Collection] 13, 113-139, Tbilisi.
- ლომოური, ნ. 1955: კლავდიოს პტოლემეისი "გეოგრაფიული სახელმძღვანელო" ცნობები საქართველოს შესახებ, მასალები საქართველოსა და კავკასიის ისტორიისათვის. ნაკვ 32. თბილისი. =
- Lomouri, N. 1955: Klavdios Ptolemaiosi, "Geografiuli Sakhelmdzgvanelo" Tsno-bebi Sakartvelos Shesakheb [Claudius Ptolemy, "Geography", documents about Georgia], *Masalebi Sakartvelosa da Kavkasiis Istoriisatvis* [Data on Georgian and Caucasian History] 32, 39-65, Tbilisi.
- ლორთქიფანიძე, გ., ყიფიანი, გ. 2009: ქალაქ „Σαράν“-ს ლოკალიზაციისათვის. "არტანუჯი", თბილისი. =
- Lortkipanidze, D./Kipiani, G. 2009: *Kalak "Σαράν"-s Lokalizaciisatvis* [For Localization of City of "Σαράν"], "Artanuji" [= publisher], Tbilisi.

- Мелетинский, Е. М. 1990: Мифологический словарь, Москва. =
Meletinsky, E.M. (ed.) 1990: *Mifologicheskie Slovary*, Moskva [Mythological Dictionary,
Moscow].
- Mshvildadze, M. 2015: *Caucasian-Iberian Cities in Claudius Ptolemy's "Geography"*.
Tbilisi.
- Stevens, H.N. 1908: *Ptolemy's Geography: A Brief Account of All the Printed Editions*,
London.
- Das Leben Kartlis, 1985: *Eine Chronik aus Georgien 300-1200*, Herausgegeben von Gertrud
Pätsch, Leipzig.
- Widengren, G. 1965: *Die Religionen Irans* (series: Die Religionen der Menschheit, 14),
Stuttgart.

Madona Mshvildadze
Ilia State University
Kakutsa Cholokashvili Ave 3/5
Tbilisi 0162
Georgia
mshvildadzemadona@gmail.com