

Stamps seals in Georgia and outside of its borders

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As it is known in the end of 2nd millennium BC and beginning of the 1st millennium BC there were changed cultural style and life rule very appreciably on the territory of Georgia. Appearing an Iron in the certain step of this period absolutely changed the situation. In the different regions of the South Caucasus there started to arise new strong cultures too (Lortkipanidze, 2002, pp. 103-123) There were appeared clay stamp seals in a large quantity on the territory of Georgia exactly in this period (pic. 1). Earlier seals on the territory of Georgia are found in the Kura-Araxes layers of Gudabertka, in Bedeni period layers of Berikldeebi and etc. (Shanshavili, Sherazadashvili, 2013, pp. 7-25). But it must be mentioned that they are made of different materials-mostly a stone and it had not been distributed on the territory of Georgia as actively as in Late Bronze-Early Iron age period. Margo Lortkipanidze was the first who studied the stamp seals discovered in Georgia monographically. In 1969 she published "Corpus of old Georgian Glyptic artifacts I" (Lortkipanidze, 1969). But after this there have been discovered many seals that have not been studied thoroughly up to this time.

To make a research about Late Bronze-Early Iron age seals discovered on the territory of Georgia there was done a project which was funded by Shota Rustaveli National Science Foundation (MR-183625). With the mentioned project there have been collected 117 clay seals, mostly stamps that belongs to this period Georgia. moreover, there were established typology and catalogue of those materials. The classification of the Late Bronze-Early Iron age seals is depended on the depictions of their surface. collected materials are divided into 16 types (pic. 2): 1. Arm filled cross; 2. Seals with cross-like depictions; 3. Spiral shape ornament; 4. Twisted spiral; 5. S-shape spiral; 6. Hook-like spiral; 7. Swastika; 8. Rotating swastika (**borjghali**); 9. Meander-like; 10. Circles placed in each-other; 11. Geometric ornaments made with zigzag and indirect lines; 12. Figurines and scenes; 13. Seals with pseu-

do-anthropomorphic depictions; 14. Numerological seals; 15. Seals with astrological signs; 16. Seals with different geometrical motifs; 17. Clay seals which depictions cannot be identified (Chogovadze, 2019). From the statistic study of the Late Bronze-Early Iron age seals it was revealed that almost all of this period stamp seals are discovered in East Georgia, mostly in Shida-Kartli and Kakheti Regions (pic.3). This kind of stamp seals mostly begun to distribute on the territory of West Georgia in the later periods (Kakhidze, Fartenadze, 2017, pp. 13-14). So, it is true that clay stamp seals had been discovered at many important sites of Shida Kartli such as: Grakliani Gora (Licheli, 2019, pp. 71-90) Khovle Gora (Muskhelishvili,1978), Treli Gorebi, Narekvavi (Davliandze, Sadradze 1993), Katlanikhevi (Kakhutaishvili, 1964) and so on.

One of the main parts of this research is to establish new group of the seals: "Kakhetian seals" (Chogovadze, 2019). Kakhetian seals differ from other regions seals with bigger size. Their handle and basis are much more massive than the other seals. It is obvious that some of the seals, which have been discovered on the territory of Kakheti (Fitskhelauri, 1973), (Fitskhelauri, 1965) in each type are creating their own different style of ornamentation. In fact, very close analogues of this type of the seals are discovered on the territory of Azerbaijan (Ganja-Kazakh region), from same period sites, like Babadervich, Sari-tepe, Mingechaur, etc. (Hasanov, 2018, pp. 52 – 79) because of this I think that it is possible to include above mentioned seals form Azerbaijan in Kakhetian seals group and make the name of it "Central Transcaucasian seals". In addition, same period seals from east Europe and east side of North Caucasus finds few resemblances with Kakhetian and Azerbaijan seals (Hasanov, 2018, pp. 52 – 79), but not so much to include them in the same group. Existence of visual difference between Kakhetian group seals and other seals from East Georgia, in my opinion, is due to the fact that they belonged to the different cultures. I think like this, because the

area of Kakhetian seals distribution fits the borders of Ior-Alazani basin culture (excepting: one seal discovered in Kaspi district at Lamiskana and one seal preserved in Kutaisi History museum which discovery place is unknown (Chogovadze, 2019) and other seals of East Georgia is discovered on the territory, where there had been distributed Samtavro culture (pic. 4). Concerning on West Georgia, there have been discovered few seals and in addition they are different from Kakhetian seals with visual characteristics and are more like to Samtavro culture seals (Chogovadze, 2019). We see arm filled cross depiction on Samtavro culture seals very often but there have not been discovered seals with this depiction on the territory of Kakheti. This ornament is also carved on the seals discovered in West Georgia. It follows from the above-mentioned facts, that for Colchian culture clay stamp seals were not typical. First of all because there had not been spread stamp seals on the territory of West Georgia as massively as in East Georgia. and the seals that are discovered in West Georgia, in my opinion, were local imitations of Samtavro culture, or imported ones from the area of this culture distribution.

After the usage of comparative method for searching the analogues of the Late Bronze-Early Iron age Georgian stamp seals it was revealed that in most cases their surface depicts the ornamental motives which were very spread in the other ancient cultures in different periods (Collon, 1997) but at the same time some of the depictions are local. As it is known societies which had been living on the territory of Georgia had intercultural and trade relations with different cultures, such as Anatolian, Aegean, Mediterranean, Near Eastern and so on and these relations could be seen on different materials discovered during the archaeological excavations. Probably this type of seals had been entered on the territory of Georgia from these cultures. It is true that before appearing in Georgia stamp seals had been spread in some other ancient cultures earlier. For example: very close analogues of Georgian Late Bronze-Early Iron Age stamp seals come from the European Neolithic and Copper Age (Makkay, 1984), Minoan and Mycenaean (Matz, Biesantz, Pini. 1964), Anatolian (Sagona, Zimansky, 2009), Iranian (Buchanan, Moorey. 1988), Levantine (Freikman, Garfinkel. 2017), Indus Valley (Collon, 1997) and etc. archaeological sites. It is very important to ascertain from which territory, with which way and when it started to distribute stamp seals on the territory of Georgia. but it is a subject of a future studies.

There exist different considerations about the function of the Late Bronze-Early Iron age Georgian clay

seals between the scholars. M. Lortkipanidze considered the bulla discovered in Khovle as trust worth argument for the fact that there had been used sealed bulla for locking vessels and store rooms at our place. In her opinion it was a routine using a bulla in Khovle, and she explains the fact that only one bulla has been discovered there with the argument, that it used to be broken as soon as the store room or vessel was opened. In addition, the site incurred kind of catastrophe and destruction that it is not surprising that there had been survived only one bulla. She also thought, that part of the stamp seals was used by craftsman for making impressions on the pottery (Lortkipanidze, 1969).

Sh. Mamuladze in his article about the functional usage of the seals mentions the consideration of Krupnov, that the seals with embossed ornament on the surface was used for tattooing the body (Mamuladze, 2010). But in Sh. Mamuladzes opinion this kind of the seals presumably were used for making imprints on the holy breads (Mamuladze Sh. 2010).

In D. Khakhutaishvili's point of view the seals with swastika ornamentation found in the cultic building of Katlanikhevi was possession of the shrine and had been used to make sealings on sacrificial breads and other items. In his opinion, sealing the holy bread was the honorable duty of the shrine priest and the seal with the swastika portrayal had been the main element of his insignias (Khakhutaishvili, 1964).

Some of the seals mentioned above discovered in the North-West side of Azerbaijan has the traces of soot. According to V. Aliev, there was greased oil on the surface of the seal and then set fire on it. He thinks that it was one of the family rituals (Алиев, 1971).

On the surface of the seals that have been collected by me on the territory of Georgia are depicted the ornaments that were spread in almost all ancient worlds civilizations from Neolithic period and it covers a large time span and territories. The fact shows that these seals cannot be used for proofing the personal property, because their depictions are repeating. With this purpose can only be used a seal which depictions don't have the analogues. For example, from the above-mentioned seals this function could have the stamp seal preserved in Oni museum (see the type 12: N1 in Chogovadze, 2019) and the stamp seal discovered at Grakliani Hill (see the type 17: N8 in Chogovadze, 2019). the seals which depictions are repeating I think, could be used for proofing the property of religious union, or some priests. If the depiction on the seal is an expression of the god and the

same god is worshiped in other places and they also portray it in the same way, then it is possible to occur the repeatability of the seals depictions.

Concerning on V. Aliev (Алиев, 1971) consideration about setting a fire on the surface of the stamp seals, in my opinion, it was not common on the territory of Georgia, because we have not seen any traces of soot on the seals and also we could not find any information about it in the literature which mentions Georgian seals. I can neither refuse or confirm the idea about using such kind of seals for tattooing the body. In this case too it is not seen any traces of the dye with naked-eye and also there does not exist any of this information in the scientific literature about Georgian seals.

I also cannot confirm M. Lortkipanidze's opinion about using this period stamp seals for making imprinted ornamentations on pottery (Lortkipanidze, 1969), because among the thousands of the vessels and their fragments which have been discovered on the territory of Georgia belonging to the Late Bronze-Early Iron age I have not seen the depiction of the same ornaments which is portrayed on the surface of above mentioned seals or sealing of the stamp. To prove this idea M. Lortkipanidze also brings the example of one stamp seal discovered in Khirsa pottery workshop, but it must be mentioned that this seal was not discovered during the archaeological excavations, more over it is a chance found in the thrown-out ground of excavator (Fitskhelauri, 1965). As it follows from above-said, it is not possible to appoint exactly if there existed any connection between this seal and the pottery workshop at Khirsa. It also should be taken into account, that in the book of this site excavations head K. Fitskhelauri, where he talks about the Khirsa pottery workshop, there are not mentioned any vessels imprinted with the seal and we also could not find any fragment of pottery with the sealing on the drawings of the publication (Fitskhelauri, 1965).

Concerning to the next opinion by M. Lortkipanidze, that seals could be used for locking vessels or storerooms with sealing (Lortkipanidze, 1969), I agree to it partially. To justify this opinion, she mentions the bulla from Khovle Gora (Lortkipanidze, 1969). It is true that there have not been found the seals with the same depiction that is on Khovle bulla, but we cannot deny that the imprint was done by the seal. It is a fact that we have a case of locking something by sealing, because on the bottom of the bulla there are kind of traces like it was stick on the valve of the vessel. In spite of this, I don't agree to M. Lortkipanidze that locking the vessels and storerooms with sealed

bulla was a routine in Khovle. It is true that only one bulla has been found there, despite the fact that, there have been found lots of the seals on this site. It is not far from reality that after opening the locked item the bulla was broken, but if it was happening systematically, there could be discovered not only one, but the several fragments of the bulla. It must be mentioned that except of the above-mentioned bulla, we do not have any other cases of finding it in this period on the territory of Georgia, in spite of excavations of a many Late Bronze-Early Iron Age sites. It follows from the above mentioned, that locking something with the sealing didn't occurred systematically not only in Khovle, but also on the territory of Georgia in the late Bronze-Early Iron age.

In my point of view, in his work Sh. Mamuladze more agrees to the idea that the clay Stamp seals were used for sealing the dough, than to the above-mentioned consideration of Krupnov. As I have already written above, he brings some examples to strengthen this argument, in addition from ethnographic reality too. (Mamuladze Sh. 2010). D. Khakhutaishvili also supported the idea of printing the holy breads by clay stamp seals. He thought, that the holy breads were baked in the ovens situated at the shrines and sealed with clay stamp seals there. In his opinion this ritual was connected to the religious celebrations (Kakhutaishvili, 1964). This consideration is supported by the fact that most of the clay seals discovered in Shida Kartli were placed near to the Khovle type ovens, which are rightfully recognized as a bread baking oven. Mentioned ovens are discovered not only in the dwellings, but also in the temples and shrines (Kakhutaishvili, 1964). This fact shows us that the making imprint on the holy bread was connected to the religious believes.

It is also interesting fact that concertation of this period seals is evident on the lowlands of Kakheti and Shida Kartli. Presumably, in Late Bronze-Early Iron age period in these regions there were growing cereals in a quite large quantities, and it is proved by finding many grinding stones and sickle blades there (Tetrashvili, 2018), (Fitskhelauri, 1965). As it seen, there have been fine climatic conditions to grow cereals on these territories from ancient times.

As follows to the above-mentioned facts in my opinion, most of the Late Bronze-Early Iron age clay seals discovered on the territory of Georgia was used for sealing the dough. Sealed breads as D. Khakhutaishvili thought, was sacrificed to the goddess (Kakhutaishvili, 1964). This consideration is also supported by ethnographical data (Бардавелидзе, 1957); by the fact of discovering most of the seals near to the bread baking

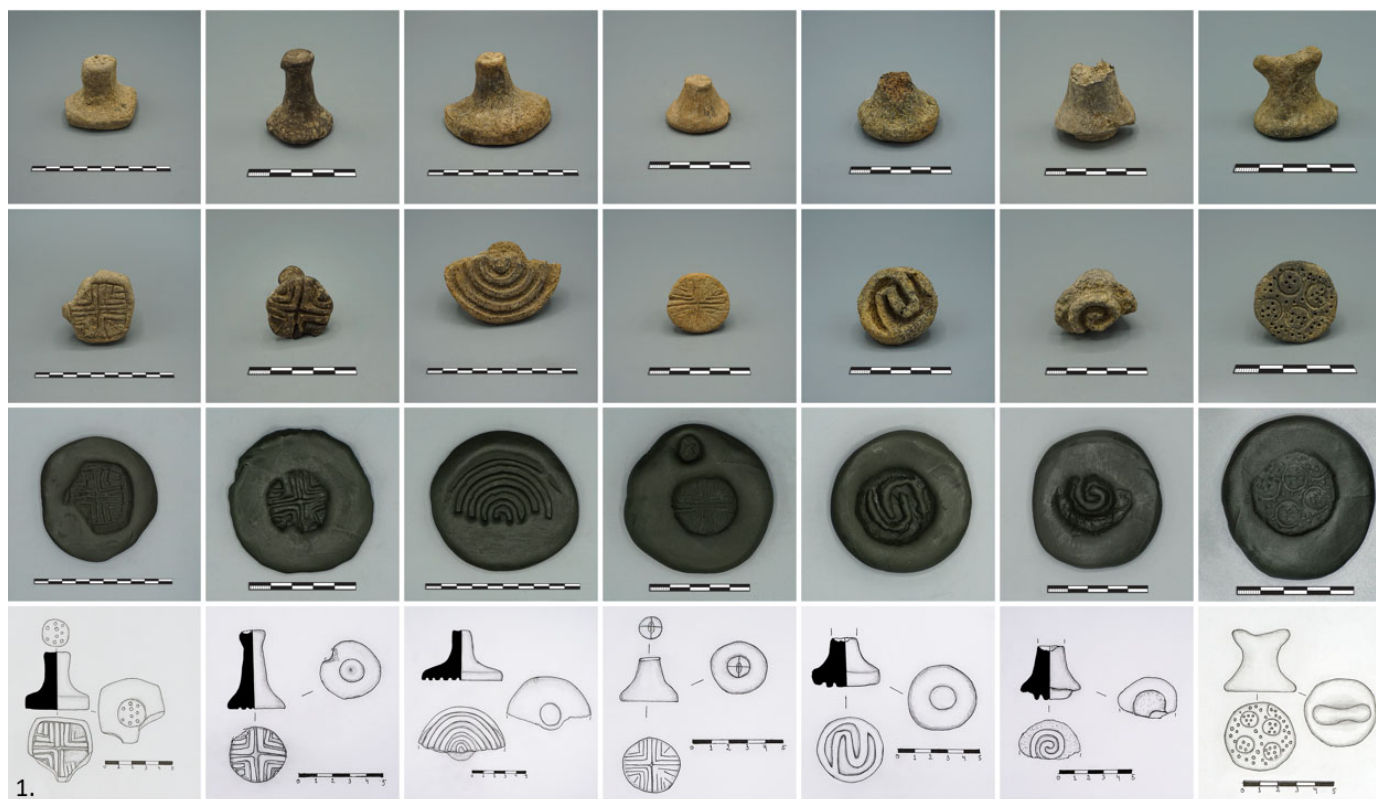
ovens, and in some cases finding them in the temples; by the concentrations of the seals discovery places in the kind of the regions where there is convenient climate for growing the cereals from the ancient times; and lastly we don't have enough and strong arguments to proof other considerations about the function of the clay seals. Moreover, we can boldly deny some of them. So, due to all above mentioned, I think that there is left only one consideration which is more logical and correct than others: Late Bronze-Early Iron age clay seals discovered on the territory of Georgia mostly were used to make imprints on the holy breads and this act was connected to religious believes.

In conclusions, from the study of Late Bronze-Early Iron age seals discovered on the territory of Georgia it was revealed that these items played an important role in the life of this period people. It gave us important information about Late Bronze-Early Iron age of Georgia. it is obvious that this period seals are divided into 2 groups: Samtavro culture seals and Ior-Alazani Basin culture seals. Existing the analogues of this seals in different cultures outside of the territory of Georgia proved the fact that local communities had varied cultural relations with ancient world's civili-

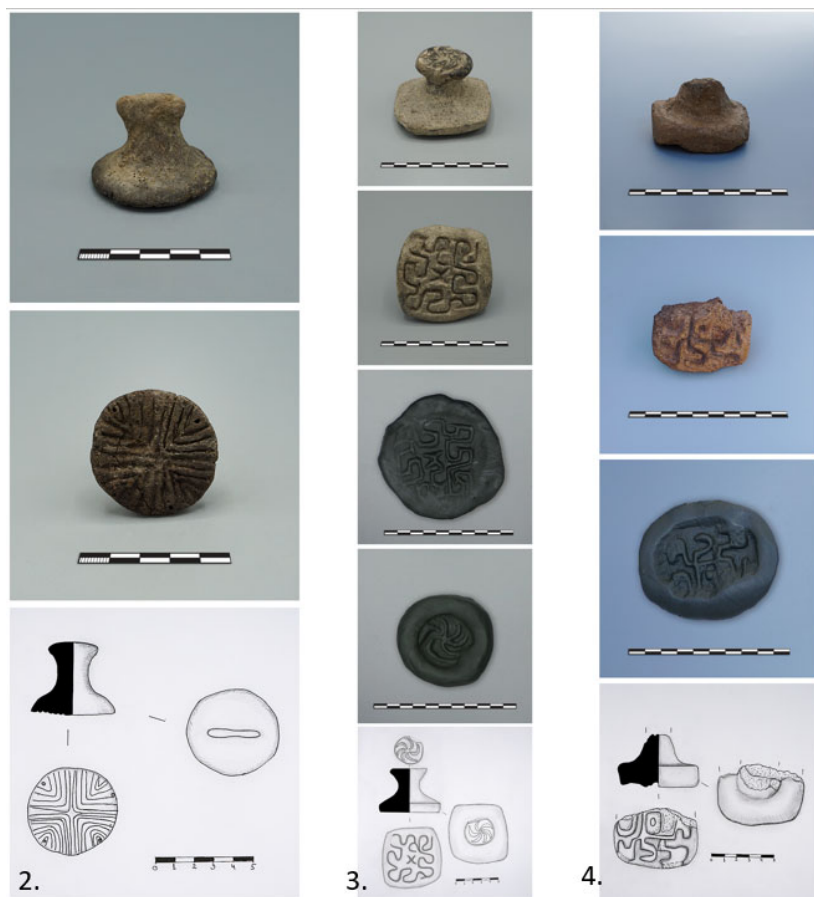
zations. But on this stage of research it is unknown from which territories and with which ways had distributed stamp seals in Georgia. unfortunately, the research is complicated by the fact, that there does not exists enough interests about these artifacts and due to it there are a few literatures about them, if we do not take in account M. Lortkipanidzes monographic work about seals. This book is mostly a catalogue, and there have passed many times after the publication of it. So, there did not existed fundamental research about Late Bronze-Early Iron Age Georgian seals up to this time. And to conclude the function, it is obvious that most of this period seals were used to imprint the holy breads as a sacrificial item for goddess by the priests. In connection to this, it is interesting and needs to be investigated, if the function of the seals belonging to the culture where from it started to distribute seals on the territory of Georgia were the same as ones discovered in Georgia. finally, I must say that the above-mentioned questions about seals is possible to be answered in the future and for this it is planned for research to be continued and also to grow its scales.

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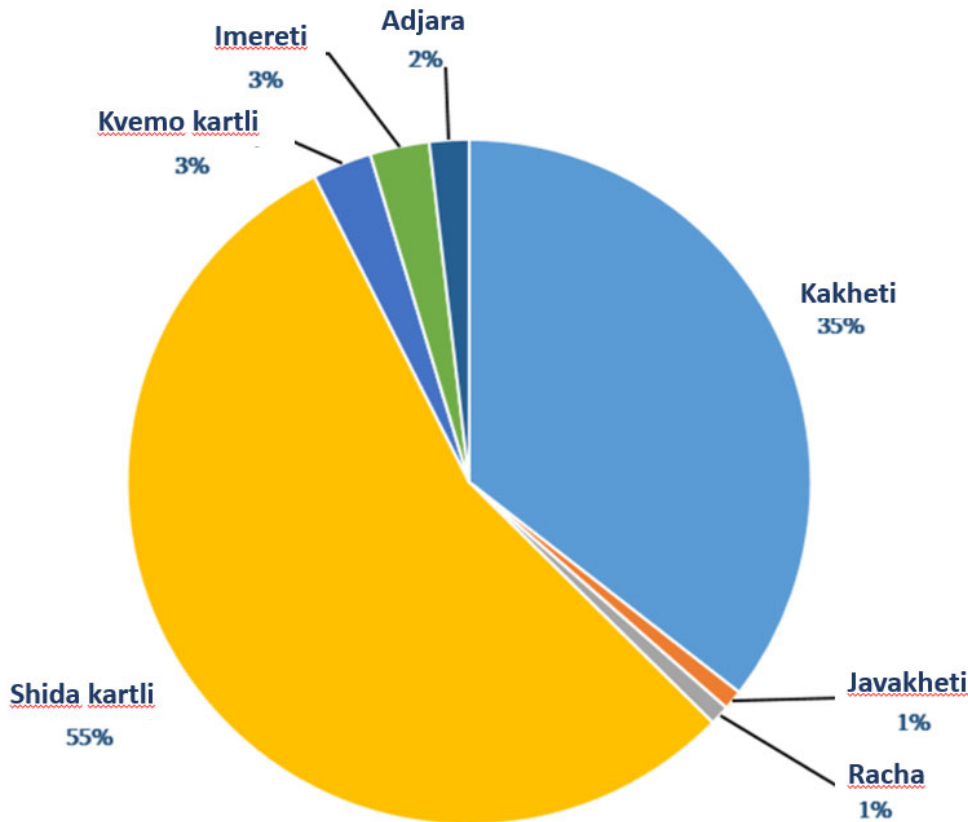
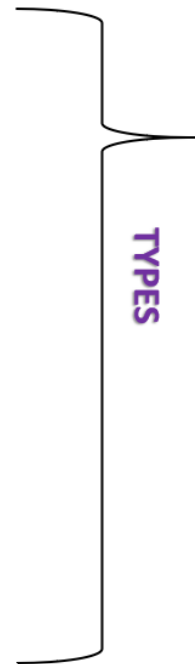
Picture 1. 1. Stamp seals from Grakliani Gora with different ornamentation; 2. Stamp seal discovered on Grakliani Gora with Arm filled ornamentation; 3. Stamp seal preserved in Lagodekhi local lore museum. 4. Stamp seal preserved in Lamiskana Jambakur-Orbeliani palace-museum.

Picture 2 Classification of Late Bronze-Early Iron age seals discovered on the territory of Georgia.

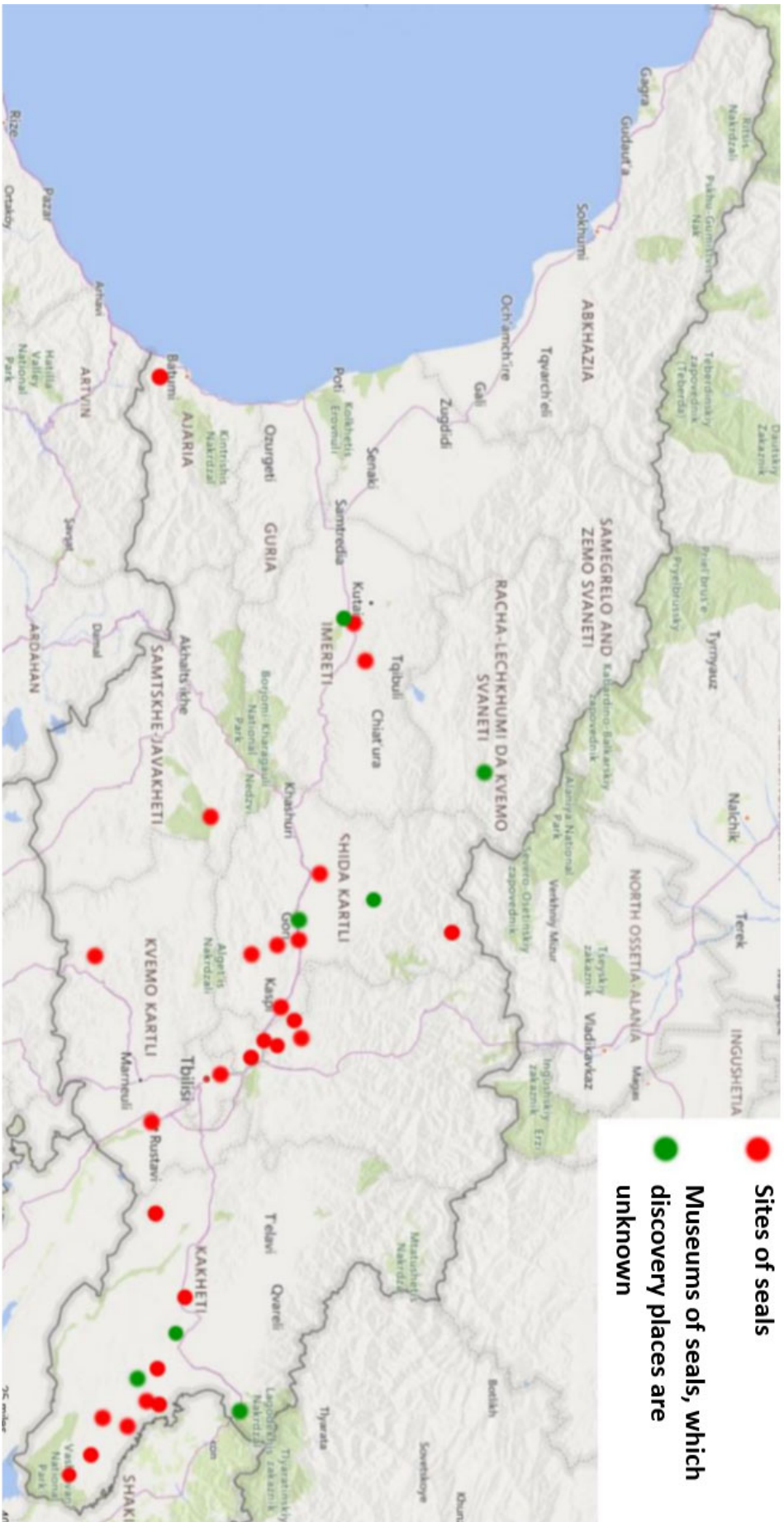
I want to give special thank for allowing me to publish the seals in this article to the head of Grakliani Gora excavations-Vakhtang Licheili, to the director of Lagodekhi Local lore museum-Davit Kvavadze and to the guidance of the Lamiskana Jambakur-Orbeliani palace-museum.

Classification of Late Bronze-Early Iron Age seals

1. Arm filled cross
2. Seals with cross-like depictions.....
3. Spiral shape ornament
4. Twisted spiral
5. S-shape spiral
6. Hook-like spiral
7. Swastika
8. Rotating swastika (Bordjghali)
9. Meander-like.....
10. Circles placed in each other
11. Geometric ornaments made with zigzag and indirect lines
12. Figurines and scenes
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14. Numerological seal
15. Seal with astrological signs
16. Seals with different geometric motifs
17. Clay seals which depictions can not be identified.....



Picture 3. Statistic chart showing the percentage dividing of the seal quantity in different regions of Georgia.



Picture 4. map showing the distribution of Late Bronze-Early Iron age seals discovered on the territory of Georgia.