



## "Ancient Greeks in Kolchida"

2014



*Argo*

*Constantinos Volanakis (1937-1907)*

## LIST of CONTENT

INTRODUCTION

ITINERARY

MAP

SIGHT DESCRIPTION



## INTRODUCTION



*Batumi*

## INTRODUCTION

### Ancient Greeks in Kolkhida

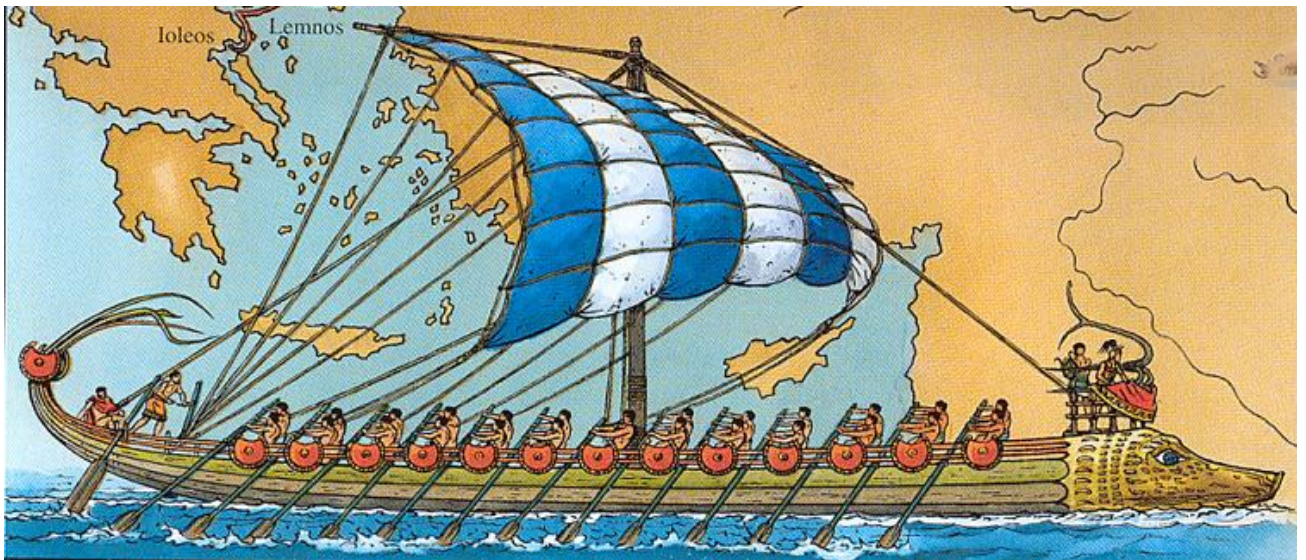
The oldest myth of Argonauts is ahead of the Trojan Legend (II Millennium Part I). Athamas the Minyan, a founder of Halos in Thessaly, but also king of the city of Orchomenus in Boeotia (a region of southeastern Greece), took as his first wife the cloud goddess Nephele, by whom he had two children, the boy Phrixus and the girl Helle. Later he became enamored of and married Ino, bringing drought upon his land when Nephele removed herself. Ino was jealous of her stepchildren and plotted their deaths: in some versions, she persuaded Athamas that sacrificing Phrixus was the only way to end the drought. Nephele, or her spirit, appeared to the children with a winged ram whose fleece was of gold. On the ram the children escaped over the sea, but Helle fell off and drowned in the strait now named after her, the Hellespont. The ram spoke to Phrixus, giving him heart, and took Phrixus, whose name means "curly"—as ram's fleece—safely on to Colchis (modern-day Georgia), on the easternmost shore of the Euxine (Black) Sea. Phrixus then sacrificed the ram to Poseidon and settled in the house of Aeetes, son of Helios the sun-Titan, and lived to a ripe old age. He hung the Golden Fleece reserved from the sacrifice on an oak in a grove sacred to Ares, where it was guarded by a dragon. There it remained until taken by Jason. The ram became the constellation Aries.

The King Tesaliis Peliam offered his nephew Jason the throne to the Kingdom in return of bringing back the Golden Fleece from Colchis. Jason built Vessel "Argo", chose brave greek crew members, after a long journey they came to the Aeëtes Fortress.

Aeetes asked to Jason the hardest tasks in exchange for Golden Fleece. Jason managed to fulfill these requirements by helping and complied with Aeetes' daughter Medea, who fell in love with him at first sight. Jason won the Golden Fleece, and returned home with Medea. But soon Jason betrayed Medea and married the daughter of Corinth King. Medea took a cruel revenge on Jason, by witching she killed the king and his daughter, also she hid her two children in the temple of Hera. According to another version of the legend, instead of hiding she killed them.



## ITINERARY



*Argonauts*

### Tour starts from BATUMI

Batumi - Poti - Mestia - Kutaisi - Tbilisi

**Day 1.** Meeting the group in Batumi, Adjara region. Transfer and accommodation, evening at leisure.

**Day 2.** Sightseeing and cultural excursion in Batumi (Bathus): Gonio Fortress, museum of History and Architecture, departure for Poti (Phazis); yacht trip on the river Rioni and lake Paliastomi. Overnight in Poti.

**Day 3.** Departure for Svaneti region ("rivers and springs in Svaneti carry gold sand, which people catch in sheep skins" - Strabo wrote in I c.). Overnight in administrative centre of Svaneti, Mestia.

**Day 4.** Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography. Leisure evening.

**Day 5.** Drive to Kutaisi. Cultural excursion to the city of Kutaisi, the capital of ancient Kolkhida: historic and architectural complex of Gelati, Bagrati Cathedral, and the ruins of an ancient city of Vani. Night in Kutaisi.

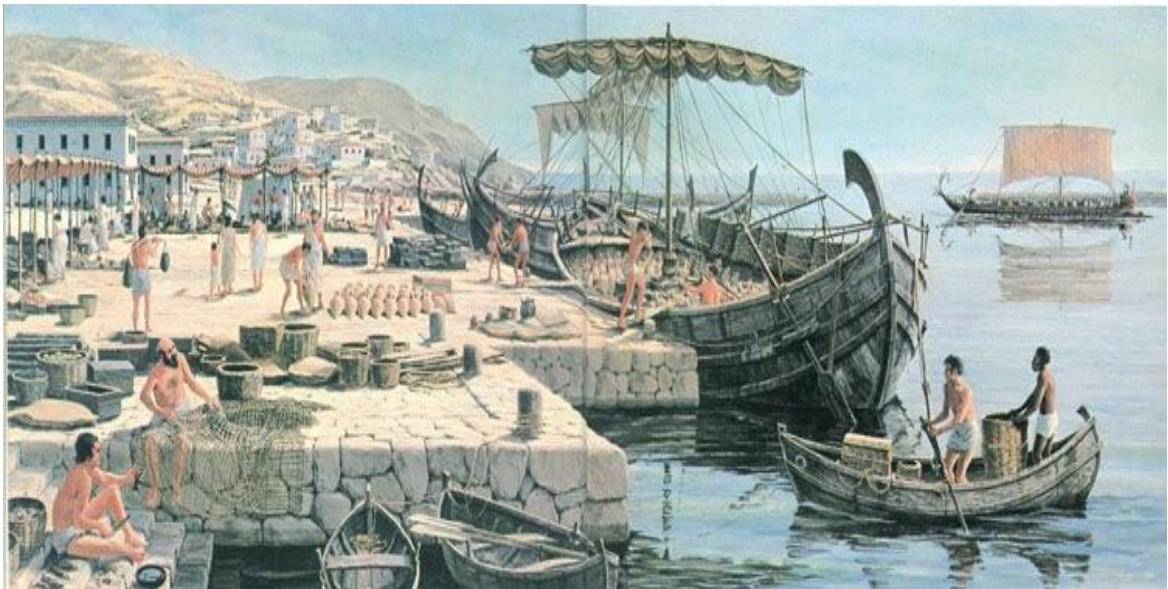
**Day 6.** En route to Tbilisi: cultural excursion to Uplistsikhe; evening at leisure in Tbilisi.

**Day 7.** City of Mtskheta: Svetitskhoveli Cathedral; sightseeing in the capital: Narikala fortress, Sioni Cathedral, State Museum of History of Georgia.

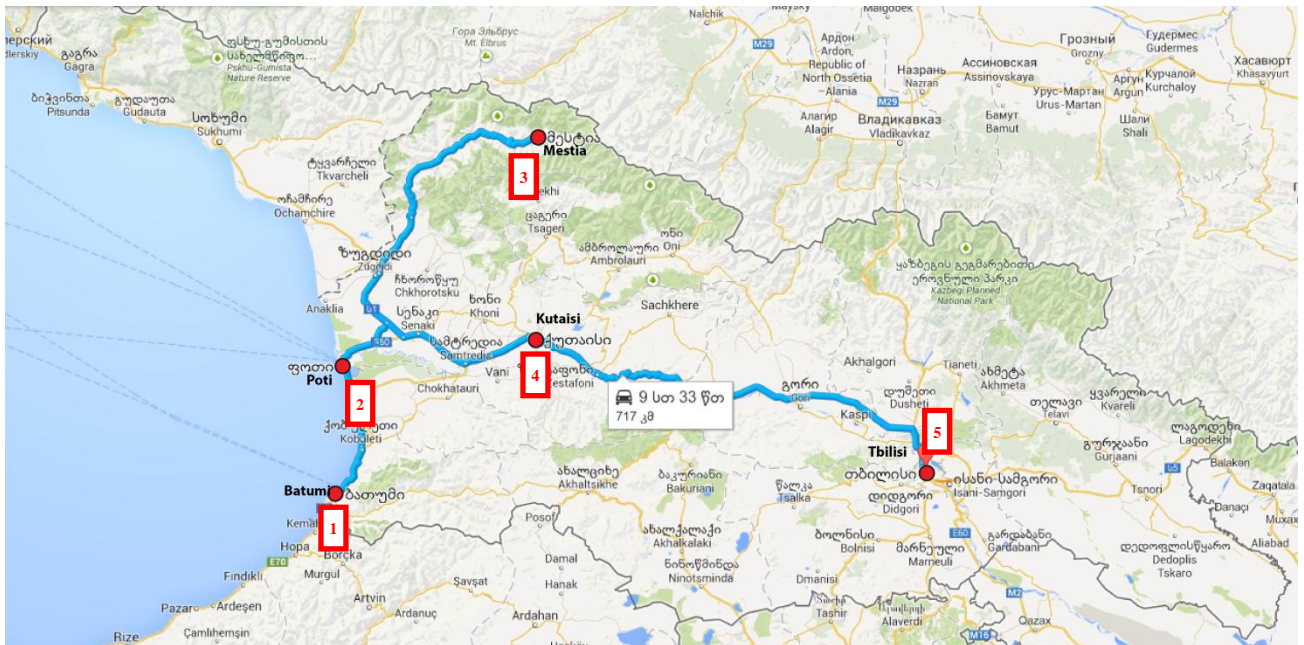
**Day 8.** transfer to airport and departure.



MAP



**Phasis** was an ancient and early medieval city on the eastern Black Sea coast, founded in the 7th or 6th century BC as a colony of the Milesian Greeks at the mouth of the eponymous river in Colchis, near the modern-day port city of Poti. According to the myths, the Argonauts travelled in Colchis on the river Phasis.



1. Batumi
2. Poti
3. Mestia
4. Kutaisi
5. Tbilisi



## SIGHT DESCRIPTION 1/3



*Batumi*

*Medea's monument with the Golden Fleece  
(sculptor Merab Berdzenishvili).*



*Gonio fortress (Apsaros)*



*Batumi Botanical Garden*

### Batumi

Batumi is one of the oldest cities in Georgia founded as early as BCE. Its initial form - Batus - had already been mentioned in the 4th century BCE. The name must have derived from the Greek word meaning 'deep'. Aristotle (4th c BCE), Pliny (2nd c CE) and others called the place "Pontus Bathea". In antique times the local population used to have active trade relations with the neighboring as well as distant countries. During the reign of the Roman Emperor Hadrian (2nd c CE) there used to be a Roman military camp on the territory of present Batumi.

**Gonio fortress** (previously called Apsaros, or Apsaruntos),

is a Roman fortification in Adjara on the Black sea, 15 km south of Batumi, at the mouth of the Chorokhi river. The legend about the Argonauts is revived along the Batumi coastline, especially at the Gonio Fortress (named *Apsaros* by Greeks in memory of Medea's dismembered brother, Apsyrtus).

The oldest reference to the fortress is by Pliny the Elder in the *Natural History* (1st century AD). By antique tradition foundation of Apsaros associated with the expedition of the Argonauts. There is also a reference to the ancient name of the site in Appian's *Mithridatic Wars* (2nd century AD). In the 2nd century AD it was a well-fortified Roman city within Colchis. The town was also known for its theatre and hippodrome.

### Batumi Botanical Garden

The garden is located at the place called "Green cape". Batumi Botanical Garden has no analogue in the world as plant species from completely different climatic and landscape zones grow together in harmony, for example, the Canary Palm and Japanese Sakura (cherry tree). The garden features thousand species of astonishingly beautiful plants.

The lower, upper and seaside parks are located on the main route of the garden. Currently, the garden consists of nine floristic sectors, those of Caucasian humid subtropics, East Asia, New Zealand, South America, the Himalayas, Mexico, Australia, and of the Mediterranean. The garden collection comprises 2.037 taxonomic units of ligneous plants, including 104 of Caucasian origin. The rests are the representatives of the other phytogeographic flora.



## SIGHT DESCRIPTION



*Argonauts on the shore of Poti (Phasis)*



*Rioni river (Phasis)*



*Lake Paliastomi*

### Poti

is a port city in Georgia, located on the eastern Black Sea coast in the region of Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti in the west of the country. Built near the site of the ancient Greek colony of Phasis and deriving its name from the same.

The recorded history of Poti and its environs spans over 26 centuries. In Classical antiquity and the early Middle Ages, the area was occupied by the Greek polis of Phasis which was established by the colonists from Miletus led by one Themistagoras at the very end of the 7th, and probably at the beginning of the 6th century BC.

### Rioni

known to the ancient Greeks as the Phasis River, Rioni was first mentioned by Hesiod in his *Theogony*. Later writers like Apollonius Rhodius (*Argonautica*) and Virgil (*Georgics*) considered it the easternmost limit of the navigable seas. Herodotus considered Rioni as a boundary between Europe and Asia.

Rioni is the main river of western Georgia. It originates in the Caucasus Mountains, in the region of Racha and flows west to the Black Sea, entering it north of the city of Poti (near ancient Phasis). The city of Kutaisi, once the ancient city of Colchis, lies on its banks.

### Lake Paliastomi

is a small lake near the city of Poti, connected to the Black Sea by a narrow channel. Its surface area is 17.3 km<sup>2</sup> and the mean depth is 2.6 m. Some ancient pieces of Colchis have been found near and in the lake by archaeologists. It is also an important fishery site. The lake is included within the boundaries of the Kolkheti National Park.



## SIGHT DESCRIPTION



*Mestia*



*Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography*

### **Mestia**

is a highland townlet in northwest Georgia, at an elevation of 1,500 metres (4,921 feet) in the Caucasus Mountains.

Ancient Greek geographer Strabo (I century BC) wrote - the real reason for the trip was Colchi's treasure of gold, iron and silver, which king Ayet received from Svaneti (marked province at that time was part of the Colchis). By Strabo the rivers in Svaneti bear gold that is gathered by means of perforated wash-tubs and sheep skins. This gave birth to the Myth of Golden Fleece. Plinius (I century) says that in Caucasian highland there live insubordinate Svans who are skillful in gold mining are well known by their golden fleeces.

Historically and ethnographically, Mestia has always been regarded a chief community of Svaneti province. Despite its small size, the townlet was an important centre of Georgian culture for centuries and contains a number of medieval monuments - churches and forts - included in a list of UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

### **Svaneti Museum of History and Ethnography**

was established in 1936. Exhibition of archaeological discoveries made in Svaneti date back to the 3rd century BC, and the museum's collection contains many examples of ceramics, jewelry, cult or religious objects and armaments. In the halls of permanent exhibitions, encompassing manuscripts from the 9th-18th centuries, unique icons, archaeological and ethnographic items.



## SIGHT DESCRIPTION



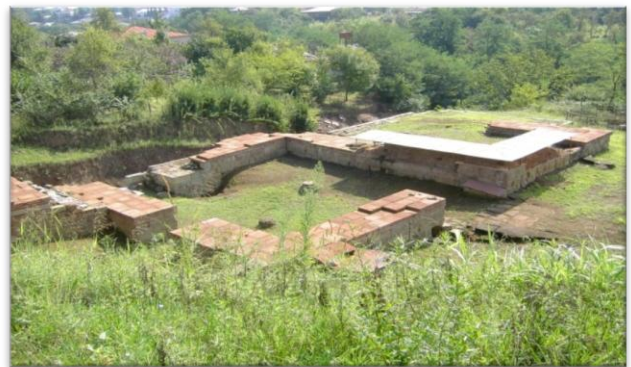
*Kutaisi*



*Bagrati Cathedral*



*Gelati Temple*



*Ancient city of Vani*

### **Kutaisi**

Kutaisi is considered as one of the oldest cities in the world. The old Greek history and mythology dates the city by the "Epoch of Minos" (XVII-XV centuries B.C).

The well known "Argonautica", which express the tidings older then 3300 years, is totally focused on the main city - Kutaisi.

In 10th century the importance of Kutaisi becomes the first capital of United Kingdom of Georgia and the residential place for King Bagrat III. Kutaisi was capital of United Georgian Kingdom for 124 years after that.

### **Bagrati Cathedral**

was built in the early years of the 11th century, during the reign of King Bagrat III due to which it was called "Bagrati" Cathedral. The cathedral, rebuilt officially on September 16, 2012 after heavy damage ages ago, served as a masterpiece in the history of modern and medieval Georgian architecture.

### **Gelati**

is a monastic complex near Kutaisi. It contains the Church of the Virgin founded by the King of Georgia David the Builder in 1106, and the 13th-century churches of St George and St Nicholas.

The Gelati Monastery for a long time was one of the main cultural and intellectual centers in Georgia. It had an Academy which employed some of the most celebrated Georgian scientists, theologians and philosophers, many of whom had previously been active at various orthodox monasteries abroad, one of which was the Mangan Academy in Constantinople. Among the scientists were such celebrated scholars as Ioane Petritsi and Arsen Ikaltoeli.

### **Ancient city of Vani**

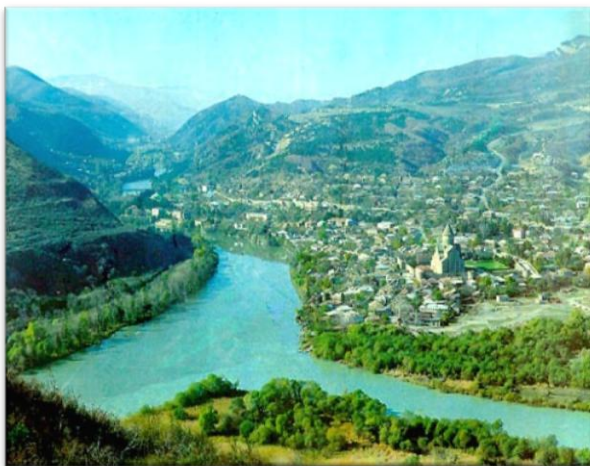
is in Imereti region of western Georgia, 41 km southwest from the regional capital Kutaisi. Systematic archaeological studies carried out in the Vani environs since 1947 revealed the remnants of a rich city of the ancient power of Colchis. The name of this ancient settlement is still unknown but four distinct stages of uninterrupted occupation have been identified. The first phase is dated to the 8th to 7th centuries BC. In this period Vani is presumed to have been a major cultic centre. The second phase - end of the 7th and beginning of the 6th to the first half of the 4th century BC - is represented by cultural layers, remains of wooden structures, sacrificial altars cut in the rocky ground, and rich burials. It is assumed that on this stage Vani was the centre of a political-administrative unit of the kingdom of Colchis.



## SIGHT DESCRIPTION



*Uplistsikhe*



*Mtskheta*



*Svetitskhoveli*

## SIGHTS DESCRIPTION

**Uplistsikhe** (literally, "the lord's fortress") is an ancient rock-hewn town in eastern Georgia, some 10 kilometers east of the town of Gori, Shida Kartli.

Built on a high rocky left bank of the Mtkvari River, it contains various structures dating from the Early Iron Age to the Late Middle Ages, and is notable for the unique combination of various styles of rock-cut cultures from Anatolia and Iran, as well as the co-existence of pagan and Christian architecture.

### Mtskheta

Mtskheta is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world, is located approximately 20 kilometres (12 miles) north of Tbilisi at the confluence of the Aragvi and Kura rivers. Mtskheta was capital of the early Georgian Kingdom of Iberia during the 3rd century BC - 5th century AD. It was a site of early Christian activity, and the location where Christianity was proclaimed the state religion of Kartli in 337. Mtskheta still remains the headquarters of the Georgian Orthodox Church.

The rare blend of cultural values had ruled in this part of the world since the Bronze Age until prosperous Christian era over the unique eclectic lifestyle creating the mood of the town which is as old as the history of Georgia. Mtskheta is the most religious city of Georgia as it has been the shrine of pagan idols since times immemorial and it is where Christianity in Georgia takes its origin.

In 2014 according to the Patriarch's blessing and consecration, Mtskheta was given the status of a holy city

### Svetitskhoveli Cathedral

in Mtskheta is amongst the most significant monument of Georgian Christian architecture. The current cathedral was built in the 11th century by the Georgian architect Arsukisdze. Svetitskhoveli, known as the burial site of Christ's mantle, has long been the principal Georgian church and remains one of the most venerated places of worship to this day. It presently functions as the seat of the archbishop of Mtskheta and Tbilisi, who is at the same time Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia.

It is the second largest church building in the country, after the recently consecrated Tbilisi Holy Trinity Cathedral, and is listed as an UNESCO World Heritage Site.



## SIGHT DESCRIPTION



*Narikala*



*Sioni Cathedral*



*Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia  
(The State Museum of History of Georgia)*

## **Narikala**

is an ancient fortress overlooking Tbilisi and the Kura River. The fortress consists of two walled sections on a steep hill between the sulphur baths and the botanical gardens of Tbilisi. On the lower court there is the recently restored St Nicholas church. Newly built in 1996-1997, it replaces the original 13th century church that was destroyed in a fire. The fortress was established in the 4th century as Shuris-tsikhe (i.e., "Invidious Fort"). It was considerably expanded by the Umayyads in the 7th century and later, by king David the Builder (1089-1125). The Mongols renamed it "Narin Qala" (i.e., "Little Fortress"). Most of extant fortifications date from the 16th and 17th centuries. In 1827, parts of the fortress were damaged by an earthquake and demolished.

## **Sioni Cathedral of the Dormition**

is a Georgian Orthodox cathedral in Tbilisi. It was initially built in the 6th and 7th centuries. Since then, it has been destroyed by foreign invaders and reconstructed several times. The current church is based on a 13th-century version with some changes from the 17th to 19th centuries. The Sioni Cathedral was the main Georgian Orthodox Cathedral and the seat of Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia until the Holy Trinity Cathedral was consecrated in 2004.

## **Simon Janashia Museum of Georgia**

formerly known as the State Museum of History of Georgia, is one of the main history museums in Georgia, which displays the country's principal archaeological findings.

The Museum evolved from the Museum of the Caucasian Department of the Russian Imperial Geographic Society, founded on May 10, 1852 and converted into the Caucasian Museum on the initiative of the German explorer Gustav Radde in 1865. After Georgia regained independence from Russia (1918), the museum was renamed into the Museum of Georgia in 1919.

The Museum houses hundreds of thousands of artifacts of Georgia's and the Caucasus' archaeology and ethnography. A permanent exposition chronologically follows the development of Georgia's material culture from the Bronze Age to the early 20th century. Some of the Museum's most valuable exhibits include the Homo Ergaster fossils discovered at Dmanisi; the Akhagori hoard of the 5th century BC which contains unique examples of jewelry, blending Achaemenid and local inspirations; a collection of approximately 80,000 coins, chiefly of Georgian minting; medieval icons and goldsmith pieces brought here from various archeological sites in Georgia; Shukhuti's mosaic, a bath mosaic from the village of Shukhuti that dates from the 4th-5th century; and a lapidary which includes one of the world's richest collection of Urartian inscriptions.