Abstract for the general public

The South Caucasus has a unique geographical location, where different cultures have interacted with each other; that is why it is always in the scope of interest to various researchers. To the north, it borders the Eurasian steppes, whilst to the south, there was a place of the emergence of Near Eastern and Anatolian cultures. Over thousands of years, the region has experienced numerous social and cultural changes as well as influences from various cultures, while still maintaining its distinct traditions. The important Late Neolithic culture that developed in the South Caucasus is called Shomu-Shulaveri, dating to the 6th millennium BCE and located in the modern territories of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

This research examines a significant Late Neolithic settlement in Georgia named Khramis Didi Gora and associated with this culture. The excavation started in 1976 but ended shortly thereafter, while a second excavation project began two years ago. The lack of interdisciplinary approaches in Georgia raises several questions concerning the population's lifestyle, formation, socioeconomic factors, and religious views. Nevertheless, our understanding of the environment and trade is very limited. This research will address inquiries regarding the dietary habits of the population, their crop adaptation methods, animal husbandry techniques, and the influence of the environment on these practices.

To answer these questions, the project will use modern archaeometric tools, such as stable isotope analysis, to study faunal and plant remains and, if applicable, human individuals as well, to strengthen the interpretation of the results. One of the important key goals of the project is to create regional strontium isoscape map using modern plants, which will be valuable material not only for studying mobility on Khramis Didi Gora but also for the studies planned in the area of Kvemo Kartli. This baseline will help researchers to identify where people and animals came from and how they moved through the landscape.

The results will not only provide us with answers regarding the daily life of the Khramis Didi Gora population but will also offer us a chance to compare its highland environment to the lowland Fertile Crescent in the Near East, allowing us to study possible influences or differences based on their specific environmental conditions. The project will make its data openly available and take responsibility for publishing 2 or 3 articles in peer-reviewed journals. It will also support international collaboration among various scientists and provide Georgian students with opportunities to learn instrumental approaches, which is a novel concept in Georgia.