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## 6. Gonio-Apsarus Museum-Preserve

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Gonio-Apsarus Museum-Preserve was founded in accordance with the Resolution of the Supreme Council of Ajara Autonomous Republic of 21 May, 1994. It was formed on the base of the ensembles, complexes and separate monuments of history and culture of a specific region that represent particular historical, archaeological, architectural or artistic values. The Museum-Preserve is a scientific-research and educational center conducting the study, registration-fixation, popularization and protection of historical and cultural monuments on the territory under control. A standing archaeological expedition is functioning in the Museum-Preserve since 1995. Now this organization included in the Heritage Preserve Agency of Ajara which protects all historical sites on the territory of Autonomous Republic of Ajara, Georgia.

From the very start of its formation, the main attention was drawn towards the archaeological study of the Gonio-Apsarus fort itself as well as the ancient city site. Since 1995 to this day the fieldworks have been conducted annually in the inside as well as outside territory of the fort. Very significant architectural and material evidences of different periods (Ancient, Classical, Roman, and Byzantine, early, developed and late Medieval) have been discovered which enable to make important conclusions after comparing them with the rich written sources about the monuments.

The continuous traces of human existence have been confirmed on the Gonio-Apsarus territory from as early as 8th-7th cc BC up to 1880s together with intensive political, trade-economic and cultural relations with the outer world. The majority of the materials found here are invaluable owing to their scientific importance. Archaeological excavations have yielded rich material constituting valuable historical sources for the study of the past. Distinguished for their diversity are ceramic ware; horn-like platforms connected with the cult of the bull, shrine and altar, bricks, tiles, water-pipes, pithoi, dergis (earthenware jars), pots, bowls, trays, oinochoi, luterae, lighters, lamps, magnificent specimens of glazed pottery and faience of the developed and late Middle Ages: gold, silver and bronze ornaments and earrings, finger-rings, torques, pectorals, beads, bracelets, fibulae, chains; various purpose tools: spoons, awls, needles, knives, lamps, tripods, bulla, horse-shoes, goldsmith's hammer, etc; there are many stone ballista,



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catapult stones, grindstones, polishers, whorls, etc. The same is true of iron weapons (spear- and arrow-heads, a halberd-type weapon, iron balls, a fragment of a big gun). A rich collection of glassware has also accumulated. A cosmetic instrument of bone with dot-ornament has also been found.

Also, there are materials connected with past beliefs and religion. Among them especially significant is a small bronze Serapis statue, etc. Numismatic finds are of particular scientific value for the study of the trade and economic relations of Gonio-Asparus. The Macedonian coin has already been referred to. Especially numerous are coins of the Roman period (Nero, Vespasian, Domitian, Trajan, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, Faustina, Septimius Severus, Commodus, Gordian III and Aurelius). Special note should be made of a copper coin struck in 42-44 A.D. in the name of the King of Judea, Agrippa I Herod (37-44). This is the first discovery of such a coin in Georgia. It is a rare specimen from the numismatic point of view as well. Both Byzantine (Justinian) and European and Ottoman coins also occur.

The red-glazed pottery, discovered at Gonio-Apsarus, is indicative of contacts with the trade and artisan centers of Pergamum and Samos. Amphorae from various manufacturing centers are numerous: Kos, Italic, southern Spain (discovered in Georgia for the first time), Rhode, Sinope, Heraclea, Byzantium, etc.

As we see, over the millennia Gonio-Apsarus was an important strategic, economic and political centre, with major sea and land roads passing through. Fieldworks still continue. The blessed land of Gonio-Apsarus keeps far more secrets still.

On the basis of the obtained materials 6 Candidate dissertations and a number of Bachelor's and Master's theses have been prepared and defended so far. The results of the excavations are annually published in vast scientific reports. Simultaneously, the studies of the researchers are published in the Transactions of the Museum-Preserve of "Gonio-Apsarus". Ten volumes have been published so far. Over 100 researches have been printed in various publications. The staff of the Museum-Preserve participates in national as well as international conferences and symposia.

Almost every year the leading specialists of the Tbilisi Ivane Javakhishvili State University, Center for Archaeological Research and Simon Janashia State Museum participate in the archaeological excavations at Gonio-Apsarus. In 1999-2002 the joint Georgian-German (Chair of Classical Archaeology of Fr. Schiller State University) expedition was working at Gonio-Apsarus. The results of the expedition were reflected in the 3rd volume of the Museum-Preserve Transactions in Georgian and German languages as well as other



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separate articles. At present the joint Georgian-Polish (University of Warsaw) archaeological expedition is working at Gonio-Apsarus.

Excavations by finance of the Heritage Preserve Agency of Ajara have been conducted at other monuments too within the Museum-Preserve control area: Kokotauri Antique period and Charnali ancient sites of 8th-7th centuries BC, Zendidi Medieval church and fortifications, iron kiln-workshop on the territories of Charnali, Avgia, Kvariati, etc.

Certain amount of work has been conducted on numerous monuments of material culture within the protection area. While working on them the main attention was drawn towards the lists of the monuments, descriptions as well as historical, archaeological, ethnological, folklore and toponymic data; on the other hand, recommendations, explanatory cards, catalogues, registration cards, passports and annotations and other types of documentation have been prepared. Only in 2009-2010, over 120 passports have been prepared for the architectural and archaeological monuments existing on the territories of Khelvachauri, Keda, Shuakhevi and Khulo municipalities.

Also, double-checking of the existing objects of cultural heritage, including immovable monuments and buildings with monument-signs has been conducted, together with their registration, marking coordinates on maps, gathering information around them, measuring of certain parts of the monuments, preparation of maps, sketches, plans, sections and other architectural drawings, topo-land survey and situational maps, photo-fixation, etc. Accordingly, digital and hard versions of thematic maps have been created. They have been processed with the recent technologies. Soon the synthesis of Georgian and English textual and cartographic data will be finished. It will enable the information become available for the broad population, specialists, tourist sector and decision-making organizations. We think all this will provide the elaboration and accomplishment of the rehabilitation program for the monuments of material culture, monument inventory, approximation to the modern standards and implementation of international experience in this field. It will enhance the popularization of the monuments of material culture included into the Museum-Preserve area within as well as outside the country. During the last period a lot has been done in collecting the information about our cultural heritage, their study and research at high scientific level, preparation and publication of Georgian and foreign scientific-popular works, guides, booklets and other types of reference literature. Albums and guides with Georgian and English annotations and color illustrations about the most important and significant monuments of the Georgian treasury in the region have already been prepared for publication.



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Owing to the archaeological fieldworks conducted in Gonio-Apsarus Museum –Preserve area for years, a lot of archaeological materials have been accumulated that enabled us to open a museum inside the fort territory in 2010. Over 28 000 movable monuments have been registered in the museum-preserve funds. Simultaneously, the determination of the historical, scientific and artistic values of the exhibits preserved in the museum takes place, as well as their typological and chronological classification, transfer into the museum inventory books and publication. The Museum has already got quite rich funds of graphic sketches and photo-illustrative materials.

One of the main directions of the museum activities was and still is the cultural-educational activity. The current museum and educational reforms sets onto agenda the necessity of close collaboration of the Museum-Preserve with the school educational system. This collaboration implies the involvement of the children and youth of various ages into the museum activities and popularization of museum activities through projects, strengthening of love and respect towards the history and cultural heritage of one's own as well as foreign countries. For this purpose, since 2009 special educational programs have been functioning at the Museum with the help of which it becomes possible to accomplish specific educational projects based on international experience and achievements. Simultaneously with other projects, for the last 4 years the Gonio-Apsarus Museum-Preserve has been accomplishing the cultural-educational project: "Touch History with Your Hands". At this stage it is designed for the schoolchildren of 5th-6th grades. The schoolchildren involved into the program get acquainted with the exhibits preserved at the museum through specific funny games. They prepare their copies in clay and play dough. The themes of the lessons deal with paintings of the ancient man, history of creation and making of military and farming weapons, preparation techniques of Antique and Georgian outfit, mosaic, construction art, restoration of items found through archaeological excavations. Imitative archaeological works are often conducted on specially arranged archaeological fields where children learn methodology of excavation, photo and graphic fixation of the finds, conducting diaries, preparation of small reports on the accomplished works, etc.

In 2013-2014, within the frames of the international cultural-educational project under the name "Archaeoculture; Following the Traces of Ancestors", educational-interactive lessons were held. It was dedicated to the history and archaeology of ancient Colchis, Anglo-Saxons and Poland. The partner of the project is also is a Club of Young Archaeologists from Eastbourne, England. The project participants were the schoolchildren from the neighboring villages to the monument: Gonio, Akhalsopeli and some city schools too. They made clay, wooden and stone items of everyday use, military weapons, jewels, etc. On the other hand, the Museum-Preserve staff annually



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provides consultations for schoolchildren in selecting and preparation of topics for national scientific conferences. Apart from this, the Museum-Preserve has close contacts with the Batumi State University on the basis of Memorandum of Collaboration. It should also be noted that Gonio-Apsarus is one of the monuments where together with archaeological excavations the conservation of the already discovered constructions and buildings is taking place as well. Only this year conservation is conducted on six sectors. The cost of the work is 117 817 GEL. Planning works have already been completed and from 2015 the Gonio-Apsarus fort rehabilitation program will start. Every year nine towers will be restored. The total budget for the rehabilitation project is 500 000 GEL. Simultaneously, the work is under way on the perspective development plan of the Gonio fort and its surrounding territory.

Finally, we would like to comment that the role of the Gonio-Apsarus Museum-Preserve is remarkably great in the development of tourism in the region. During the last period the number of visitors in Gonio has considerably increased. In 2012 the number of visitors was 47 450 whereas in 2013 it reached 53 306. However, we should also note here as well that the economic potential (within the context of tourist interests) of Gonio-Apsarus as well as other monuments of cultural heritage is still unused. Therefore, we consider the restoration-protection and infrastructural development of the monuments of cultural heritage in the region as well as throughout the country as one of the priorities of the specialists working in this field and the governing bodies.

