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FRAGMENTS OF HELLENISTIC BRONZE STATUARY FROM VANI

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Abstract. The ancient city-site of Vani, with its history spanning more than eight centuries, offers compelling testimony to the legendary “gold-rich Colchis,” particularly through the lavish Colchian goldsmithing artefacts unearthed in the opulent burials of the 5th–4th centuries B.C. In addition to these emblematic finds, Vani is remarkable for the rare abundance and diversity of Hellenistic bronze statuary fragments and sculptural representations discovered at the site. Recent technical analyses of the bronze fragments have opened new avenues for investigating Vani as the principal temple-city of Colchis during the 3rd–1st centuries B.C. The present study introduces an interpretive framework grounded in these material analyses, offering a re-evaluation of the archaeological context in which the bronze torso of a youth—arguably the most complete bronze statue yet discovered in Georgia—was uncovered within the so-called White Structure complex on the central terrace. The study examines the use of anthropomorphic bronze statuary and sculptural representations for religious purposes in the temple-city of Vani during the Hellenistic period.

The extensive variety of Hellenistic sculpture—distinguished by remarkable realism, often approaching naturalism, and by exceptional individualization in representations of both deities and ordinary individuals (men, women, the elderly, and children)—is widely regarded as the most expressive manifestation of Hellenistic culture and has significantly influenced the art of later periods. During the Hellenistic period, sculpture conveyed with remarkable credibility not only the physicality but also the character and inner states of its subjects, whether immortal deities, mythological heroes, sovereigns, philosophers, poets, athletes, or vanquished soldiers. Moreover, such sculptural representations help elucidate the extensive historical, political, and cultural transformations embodied by Hellenism: an unparalleled process of cultural diffusion enabled by a ruler who, more than any other, disseminated Greek culture to a degree that redefined both the contemporary world and the trajectories of subsequent civilisations.

After the death of Alexander the Great, his empire was partitioned among his generals, known as the Diadochoi or Successors, who founded autonomous kingdoms that became the principal Hellenistic dynasties: the Seleucids in the Near East, the Ptolemies in Egypt, and the Antigonids in Macedonia. In his analysis of Hellenistic bronze sculpture, Ludger Alscher interprets it as profoundly symptomatic of the period's fragmented cultural and political milieu.¹ For the monarchs of these nascent Hellenistic states—leaders aspiring to emulate Alexander the Great—sculpture emerged as a powerful instrument for the visual articulation of

¹ Alscher 1957, 7: "Die Vielfalt der Welt bewegt, erheitert und beängstigt uns ... Das von Alexander geschaffene Reich zerfiel nach Kämpfen der Diadochen in einzelne Territorialstaaten, die von mächtigsten Herrschern gelenkt wurden. Mit der Behauptung der Macht musste notwendig die Einheit des Lebens, wie sie im Zeitalter der Polis verwirklicht worden war, sich auflösen. An Stelle der ursprünglichen Autonomie war seit der Wende zum dritten Jahrhundert endgültig die Situation der Abhängigkeit getreten—eine Spaltung der Gemeinschaft in Herrschende und Beherrschte, in Bevorzugte und Unterdrückte, in Reiche und Arme. Unter derartigem Daseinsgesetz wird der Geist entwurzelt durch die Vielspältigkeit individuellen Denkens. Damit ist das Wissen um Verantwortlichkeit, um eine in der Gemeinschaft verankerte Verpflichtung aufs höchste bedroht."

authority. Political leaders adopted the position of benefactors of the arts. Consequently, Greek sculpture surpassed its initial geographical and ideological confines, evolving into a new realm well beyond Greece. Hellenistic sculpture originated and thrived amid the extensive territories of Alexander's former empire—spanning Asia Minor, Egypt, and the Near East—emerging as a quintessential creative manifestation of this broadened Greek realm.

While Greece continued to be a primary artistic centre from which technical and stylistic breakthroughs in statuary disseminated, several other artistic hubs arose beyond its borders. These hubs modified and reinterpreted Greek sculptural traditions, creating a rich and diverse artistic landscape that mirrored the political decentralization and cultural variety characteristic of the Hellenistic era. “This is an end point not just because Greece was soon to be absorbed into the growing empire of Rome (the captor that, as the poet Horace remarked, was itself taken captive by the arts of its more civilised neighbour) but also, more importantly, because the naturalistic tradition of figurative sculpture had reached such a degree of perfection that there was no clear next step. At its best, Hellenistic sculpture leaves nothing to be desired or improved upon.”² The words of Timothy Potts, Earl A. Powell III, James Bradburne, and Andrea Pessina perhaps most clearly capture the pathos surrounding the most extensive recent exhibition dedicated to Hellenistic bronze sculpture, *Power and Pathos: Bronze Sculpture of the Hellenistic World*, held in 2015–2016 at the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence, the National Gallery of Art in Washington, and the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles. Among the highlights of the exhibition was the torso (Fig. 6), which constitutes one of the central subjects of analysis in the present study.

It is well known that the vast majority of surviving Hellenistic—generally Greek—statuary is carved either in marble or other stone. However, bronze statuary was far more highly valued. Moreover, bronze, as good for secondary smelting that can be reused for another cycle of casting, was always highly prized. Because of this recyclability, ancient bronze sculptures were often deliberately demolished or defaced. Intact

² Daehner and Lapatin [2015] 2018, 10.

bronze works are therefore rare, and most surviving examples are missing parts or have reached us in fragments. Consequently, the finds of thematically varied fragments pertaining to bronze statuary from the Hellenistic period are of considerable importance, since many masterpieces of the period survive only as Roman copies or are known solely through literary sources. Given the limited occurrence of bronze sculpture across archaeological sites in Georgia from antiquity, the site of ancient Vani stands out for its unusually high concentration of Hellenistic bronze sculpture fragments and figural representations.

The archaeological site of Vani, located in the Imereti region, Colchis Lowlands, occupies a hill known as “Akhvlediani Hill” and is divided into three terraces. Ancient Vani is considered one of the important religious centers of Colchis—the mythical Land of the Golden Fleece. From 8th–7th centuries B.C. to the 1st century B.C., when the city was twice destroyed as a result of foreign invasions, four main phases in the development of Vani can be identified on the basis of archaeological studies conducted at the site to date.³ Prior to the Hellenistic period, examples of bronze anthropomorphic sculpture are attested in the history of ancient Vani only during its earliest phase—the 8th–7th centuries B.C.—in the environs of Vani, within the “Land of Vani.” A Colchian axe adorned with tiny sculpted “horsemen of the Great Goddess”—a chance find from Sulori—is the only known specimen from the territory of Georgia decorated with anthropomorphic figures. Another relevant object is a unit-cast figurine of a seated male holding a *rhyton* for wine, the so-called “tamada” from Inashauri. It should be noted, however, that the “tamada,” together with a rectangular buckle unearthed in the territory of Vani, belongs to a category of items, stylistically and typologically similar to objects offered in the Heraion of Samos as votive gifts. The entirety of the above artefacts testifies to established connections between Greece and Colchis even in the pre-colonization period.⁴ Prior to the Hellenistic period, sculpture within the

³ For details on the history and development of ancient Vani, see Lordkipanidze 1991; Kacharava and Kvirkvelia 2008a.

⁴ Lordkipanidze 2002, 189–190.

settlement itself is represented only by terracotta examples. In the cultic complex dated to the 8th–7th centuries B.C., one miniature female figurine marked by a schematic rendering and a large number of zoomorphic terracottas have been found, including figures distinguished by proto-mes of two- and three-headed fantastic creatures.⁵ A miniature figurine of a nude goddess of the Aphrodite type was found in a cultic complex dated to no later than the 5th century B.C. This complex, consisting of a timber structure, belongs to the second phase (6th to the first half of the 4th century B.C.).⁶ Regarding artistic bronzes, the “richly furnished graves” are notable for the abundance and diversity of metalwork, including both locally produced and imported items from Greece. These burials constitute a defining feature of the second and third phases (4th to the first half of the 3rd century B.C.).⁷

From the second half of the 4th century B.C., a clear influence of Greek culture on building techniques, artisanship, and burial practices becomes evident. An intriguing phenomenon, possibly connected to the cult of the dead, has been attested on the upper terrace and its extension toward the central terrace. Bronze and iron anthropomorphic figurines, dated to the first half of the 3rd century B.C., were unearthed in the immediate vicinity of rectangular cult buildings open to the east, as well as a Greek-type temple adorned with half-columns and groups of graves associated with sacred space. The figurines had been buried in small pits cut into the rocky ground. In three instances, they were placed between two roof tiles, imitating a burial structure. All seven figurines, bedecked with gold earrings, bracelets, and torques, must have been wrapped in a textile, of which discoid appliqés are still preserved.⁸ All the figurines have their

⁵ Tolordava 1990; Lordkipanidze 1991, 155–160; Lordkipanidze 2024, 132.

⁶ Lordkipanidze and Chkonia 2024, 44–46.

⁷ For details on bronze ware unearthed in graves and cultural layers—vessels, jewelry, weapons, and their decorations (e.g., sculpted representations of bull’s heads, fragments of armor, bridles and horse harnesses, bells, and mirrors)—see Kacharava 2025, 17–18, and figs. 28, 48–79.

⁸ For details on the context of the discovery of anthropomorphic figurines from Vani, see Kacharava and Kvirkvelia 2008b, 96–107.

hands extended forward in an adoring posture. Only two bronze figurines exhibit a Hellenistic character: one representing a satyr and the other an unidentifiable nude goddess. The remaining figurines are marked by a schematic rendering characteristic of Colchian anthropomorphic images known from 8th–7th centuries B.C., which sometimes makes it difficult to determine their sex based on appearance. The figurine of a satyr—a typical specimen of Hellenistic art—is the only personified image among them. The satyr's tail, stand, and the object in his hand were intentionally removed to assign him a new meaning in accordance with the local ritual of burying figurines. As a result of the context of their discovery, it is difficult to assign seven statuettes, representing five different iconographic types, the status of specific gods or priests. They may represent humans with divine attributes (ithyphallic figures, statuettes of indeterminate gender, or hermaphrodite figures resembling a goddess), or more generally, a human being after death. It may be argued that we are dealing with representations of “deified” humans buried with gold adornments. The typical Hellenistic statuette of a satyr, used in a ritual thus far known only from Vani, replaced the two-centuries-long tradition of arranging lavishly furnished graves in ancient Vani. The reappearance of bronze and iron anthropomorphic statuary after a prolonged absence may be linked to Hellenistic influence.⁹

The fourth stage lasted from the second half of the 3rd century to the mid-1st century B.C. The hill was enclosed by thick defensive walls, within which primarily religious structures—temples and altars—were constructed (Fig.1). The construction of these buildings disregarded the earlier function of the sites, and in many places cemeteries of Phase III were destroyed. Vani appears to have become, in Phase IV, a distinctive

⁹ On the interpretation of the ritual, see Lordkipanidze 2011a; cf. Lordkipanidze 2002, 212, interpreting some of the figurines as priests performing fertility prayers. Matiashvili (2005, 36–38) argues that, in earlier periods, priests may have been sacrificed in an unknown ritual; by the 3rd century B.C., however, she suggests that this practice was likely replaced by the use of small figurines, which served as substitutes for the actual priests.

city-sanctuary similar to the temple communities common in Asia Minor.¹⁰ It stands out for the number of fragments of bronze statuary and items of bronze temple inventory housed in the Otar Lordkipanidze Vani Archaeological Museum. This collection is distinguished not only by its size but also by its artistic and historical significance.

In 1967, the excavations of the so-called mosaic-floored temple (Fig. 1:7) brought to light a cluster of bronze sculptural representations constituting an outstanding group of Hellenistic works: a figure of Nike, haut-relief representations of heads of Dionysus, and mythic characters of his circle, namely Satyrs, Maenads, and Pan. They were discovered along with other bronze artefacts, such as covers of *kline*; fragments of either a large cauldron or another ritual object; stands in the shape of griffin claws; statuettes of eagles; and covers decorated with images of Erotes, insects, and floral motifs.¹¹ The backs of the images rendered in haut-relief are hollow, suggesting that they served as appliqués of a large bronze vessel or another ritual object and formed a decorative composition, the central element of which was presumably the figure of Nike. The object is damaged by fire to such an extent that any attempt to reconstruct its original shape is impossible. On the basis of the *strophium*-like element on the head, the haut-relief head with a completely disfigured face may have represented a youthful Dionysus (Fig. 2).¹² This representation, together with a head of Dionysus adorned with a wreath of grapevine and ivy leaves—his typical attribute—and resembling the appearance of Alexander the Great (Fig. 3),¹³ as well as figures of his companions—Satyrs, Maenads, and Pan—fits the context of their discovery: a large pithos for the storage of wine and forty Colchian amphorae, presumably deposited as cult offerings, suggesting that the sanctuary was connected with the worship of viticulture and its patron

¹⁰ Lordkipanidze 1991, 184–194.

¹¹ Khoshtaria, Lordkipanidze, and Puturidze 1972, 177–178, and figs. 130–143.

¹² On the parallels of Dionysus with a *strophium*, see, e.g., *LIMC* III.1, 1986, 435–436, 511, s.v. Dionysos (C. Gaspari and A. Veneri); *LIMC* III.2, 1986, nos. 122d, 126b.

¹³ Cf. Kacharava and Kvirkvelia 2008c, 119, n. 11, where it is considered a representation of Ariadne with a grapevine wreath.

deity. This extremely curious order of things, which has been archeologically evidenced, finds parallels with cult wine cellars attested in Georgian ethnographic reality. Wine cellar used to be a sacrificial area for performing religious rites and special cult wine cellars were arranged, where specific place—the right corner was usually designated for pithoi containing communion wine, i.e., wine for offerings to a deity. Forty amphorae—offerings to gods were placed precisely in the eastern part of a temple unearthed at Vani.¹⁴

A Hellenistic bronze artefact from Vani that can be directly linked to Alexander the Great—specifically to his campaign in India—is a bronze lamp featuring three sculpted elephant heads and busts of Heracles in a lion's skin, Ariadne, and a horned (*tauromorphos*) Dionysus holding burning torches. It may be suggested that the lamp's imagery represents the scene in which Dionysus, Ariadne, and Heracles are on their way back from India. The triumph of Dionysus in India symbolized victory both politically and religiously, serving as a mythical model for Alexander's campaign, whereas this six-nozzle oil lamp presents one of the earliest depictions of the theme (Fig. 4).¹⁵ It was part of a hoard unearthed in 2007 near the so-called mosaic-floored temple complex (Fig. 1:17). The hoard comprised covers of *kline* legs; a large *louterion*-type ritual vessel; a handle with a Gorgoneion appliqué; a few stands, including one with a figurine of Cyrene; an incense burner with three sculptured elephant heads (Fig. 5); a single wick oil lamp decorated with a floral ornament; a lamp with sculptural images of Ganymede and Zeus disguised as an eagle; a three-nozzle oil lamp topped with figures of Erotes holding musical instruments; two iron candelabras; the so-called hearth for burning wood; and spearheads. They were presumably placed in a specially arranged pit dug into the foundation of a collapsed defensive wall in the mid-1st century B.C., when the city was under attack, in order to hide them.¹⁶ Presumably, the process of hiding this temple inventory itself may have been accompanied by a ritual. It cannot

¹⁴ Lordkipanidze 2002, 226.

¹⁵ Lordkipanidze 2011b.

¹⁶ Akhvlediani, Kacharava, and Kharabadze 2022, 8–11, and pls. XXIX–XLII.

be ruled out that the iron spearheads were placed in the pit as apotropaic objects. The items from the hoard find their closest functional and stylistic parallels among artefacts from the so-called mosaic-floored temple. The choice of themes is similar as well: on the one hand, Nike, descending from heaven, and images of Dionysus and his circle; on the other hand, Ganymede, connecting the heavenly and earthly worlds, and a lamp depicting the triumph of Dionysus over the Indians. It should be noted that, just as the scene of Dionysus' return from India is one of the leading themes on Roman sarcophagi, Nike and Ganymede are also depicted together on Roman sarcophagi.¹⁷ The inventory containing the described Hellenistic bronze artefacts, intended for one or more temples, was presumably produced in various centers, as indicated by the composition of the bronze alloys. The selection of mythological themes and ritual items appears to be well thought out and well adapted to the local system of religious beliefs, which once again attests to the importance of Vani, as a principal temple-city of Colchis within the Hellenistic world.

Examples of bronze anthropomorphic sculpture are attested in two additional complexes within the settlement, which likewise belong to the fourth phase. However, unlike the fully preserved so-called "buried" statues, the decorated fittings of temple inventory included in the hoard, and the bronze sculptural representations from the Mosaic-Floor Temple—recovered as fragments yet belonging to a single object—the White Structure complex (Fig. 1:16) and the Twelve-Stepped Altar complex (Fig. 1:12) comprise numerous fragments deriving from multiple statues. It is striking that the White Structure complex yielded such a significant work as the bronze sculpture of a youth's torso, which remains the only known nearly life-sized statue from ancient Georgia preserved in such a complete state. In the second case, only fragments of statues have been found, albeit in far greater quantity and with markedly greater diversity. A bronze nude torso of a young man (H. 1.05 m) stands out for its athletic build, characteristic of Classical Greek sculpture.

¹⁷ E.g., a marble sarcophagus with a clypeus portrait of the deceased boy (3rd century A.D.) kept in the National Museum of the Palazzo Venezia, Rome.

According to the unanimous opinion of scholars, the Vani torso can be attributed to the type of athletically built nude male statues of the Severe Style. Judging by both its general appearance and specific details, the Vani youth is strongly reminiscent of the marble sculpture of the *Kritios Boy*, although the posture of the legs appears to differ.¹⁸ The overall appearance and characteristics of Greek statuary from the transitional period between the Severe and High Classical styles, on the one hand, and the archaeological context of discovery, on the other, raise the question of dating. It is assumed that the Vani torso, brought to light during the excavation of a building destroyed in the 1st century B.C., had been dumped there from another location. Otar Lordkipanidze defines the Vani torso as an eclectic work of art combining a variety of stylistic features. He provides the famous *Athlete of Stephanus* statue, dating from the Roman period, as an example. It belongs to the group of classicizing statuary known as the *Apollo Omphalos*, which dates back to the Severe style. To some extent, the Vani youth resembles sculptures from the aforementioned group. "A date for the Vani statue must remain uncertain until its original site is ascertained. Its stratigraphic context suggests that the statue may have been made in Vani at the end of the second or early in the first century."¹⁹ All in all, the statue is one of the earliest classicizing Hellenistic works that reflects the Severe Style.²⁰ Carol Mattusch, who devoted an entire chapter of her monograph to the Vani torso, asserted that "the torso of youth was produced in Vani in the Hellenistic period, modelled by a Colchian artist imitating the style created in Greece in the 5th century B.C. and cast by a Colchian craftsman using various local materials and refined local technology."²¹ It should be noted that a lead isotope analysis of the torso, conducted by Mark Walton at the J. Paul Getty Museum in Los Angeles, indicates that the parent material used for the torso is not linked to the well-known Greek ore deposits at Laurion.

¹⁸ Lordkipanidze 1991, 189; Mattusch 1996, 210–212. For a detailed iconographic analyses of the torso, see Guruli, Kalandadze, and Lordkipanidze 2025, 112–115.

¹⁹ Lordkipanidze 1991, 191.

²⁰ Lordkipanidze 1991, 190–191.

²¹ Mattusch 1996, 216.

Rather, it is more likely associated with mines in Artvin (a region considered part of the Kingdom of Colchis) or Rhodope.²²

The torso of the youth, exhibiting all the technical characteristics of bronze sculpture—including casting techniques, specific surface treatments, and likely the choice of raw materials—was most likely produced in a local workshop. This can be supported by the discovery of various remains of bronze production and, most notably, of the foundry workshop unearthed in the northern section of the central terrace at the archaeological site of Vani (Fig. 1:29).²³ The Vani torso, which differs from the Roman statue of *Apollo Omphalos* and its replicas only in scale, should not be regarded as a copy or direct replica of the bronze original of this important Apollo type, created in the Severe Style. Rather, it represents a “free imitation.”²⁴

This “freedom” is most evident in the individual artistic execution of the sculpture, which masterfully captures the essence of a youthful deity, combining an athletic physique with refined elegance. Does the statue depict simply a young athlete or—as Hellenistic rulers are often represented as nude athletes—a heroized ruler? Technical studies showing the absence of pubic hair rule out the possibility of an adolescent.²⁵ The possibility of a ruler portrait is also excluded, as Jens Daehner suggests that “the conspicuous combination of a full-grown body with mature musculature but adolescent sexuality would conceptually best befit an eternally youthful god, such as Apollo.”²⁶ The idea that the sculpture

²² Maish et al. 2019, 82.

²³ For the results of the technical analyses of the torso, see Guruli, Kalandadze, and Lordkipanidze 2025, 115–120. For details on the technology of sculpture casting and the foundry workshop at Vani, see Guruli 2025, 45–52, figs. 7–9.

²⁴ For a detailed discussion of the terms “copy” and “free imitation,” see Niemeier 1985, 9–12.

²⁵ Cf. Mattusch 1996, 210, 213. The scholar identifies the diagonal modelling of pubic hair as one of the main stylistically distinctive features of the Vani youth, suggesting that carvings had been executed so delicately on the wax model that, after casting in bronze, they became barely visible. That said, the torso should be classified as adolescent, which rules out the possibility of it representing a ruler.

²⁶ Daehner and Lapatin [2015] 2018, 295.

depicted a deity of great significance is further supported by several key factors. First, the presence of various “repairs” or structural reinforcements on the statue suggests that it was an object of particular veneration. Second, the deliberate damage to the head and genital area, inflicted by both blunt and sharp instruments, indicates intentional defacement—a practice commonly associated with the ritual desecration of divine or royal imagery by an adversary. There is no evidence of damage to the torso that would suggest it fell, slid, or rolled from a distant location, as previously hypothesized. The contextual evidence of its discovery highlights several noteworthy details, suggesting that the sculpture did not arrive at its location through accidental displacement but was, in fact, an integral component of the complex, helping to define its character (Fig. 7). One of the primary challenges in studying the torso concerns its chronology, which remains problematic due to the complex relationship between its discovery within a structure destroyed in the 1st century B.C. and the stylistic traits characteristic of early Classical Greek sculpture. In this regard, the results of the technical analyses have provided significant insights, indicating that, based on its technical parameters, the sculpture should be dated no later than the 4th–3rd centuries B.C. Therefore, it is important to describe in detail the context of the torso’s discovery, as well as that of the other sculptural fragments, which are published here for the first time on the basis of reports on the archaeological excavations conducted at Vani in 1988–1992.

A visible pathway (Fig. 1:14) leading directly to the Vani torso immediately became a subject of special interest during the excavations. They began in squares H7 and I7 of section 133 on the southeastern slope of the central terrace. A row of uneven bedrock slabs running from east to west was identified at a depth of 85–95 cm below the surface. In order to expose the row of stones, it became necessary to broaden the trench to the north. The tile debris that was found contained fragments of both imported and locally manufactured clay wares. After the removal of the debris, only animal bones were recovered. Following the northward extension of the trench, bedrock appeared, elevated to the west but seemingly cut and intentionally sloping northeastwards. The unearthed

clay sherds included fragments of so-called Gnathia-style ware characteristic of the 4th century B.C., as well as local roof tiles stamped ΒΑΣ[ΙΑΙΚΗ] ΜΗΛ[ΑΒΗΧ] ΧΟΡΧΙΠ (N07:1-88/278).²⁷ After further widening the “bedrock area” of the excavation and removing a layer of tile debris and rubble, a fragment of bronze fibula, a polychrome glass vessel, imported clayware, and a cylinder-shaped marble object (N07-1-88/268) were discovered (square G7). The latter appears to have been designed as a base for a small statue. After bedrock slabs were exposed, the excavation area was further broadened to cover the following sections and squares: section 133, squares F9–10, G9–10, H9–10, I9–10, K9–10; section 134, squares A10 and B10; section 148, squares E1, F1, G1–2, H1–2, I1–3, K1–3; and section 149, squares A1–2. Particular attention was drawn to section 133, squares F10, G10, H10, I10, and section 148, squares E1, F1, G1–2, H1–2, where, beneath a layer of gravel, fragments of tiles, local and imported clayware, and animal bones were found, along with a part of a bronze sculpture—the right hand of a female (N07:1-88/376) (Fig. 8).

Subsequent deepening of the excavation area revealed an additional section with a row of bedrock slabs oriented east-west. Heaps of tiles and bedrock rubble, containing limestone gravel, were observed along the row. It contained three stamped handles of Rhodian amphorae, a fragment of a black-burnished lamp, and fragments of the mouth, neck, and handles of Hellenistic *lagynos*-type vessels dating from the 3rd–2nd centuries B.C. It appears to have collapsed from above onto the pathway, which was paved with bedrock slabs. Debris was removed to allow for the fixing of the slabs laid directly on the rocky ground. A channel cut along the pathway ran directly into slabs. It was determined that the pathway would change direction and continue to the east. To the south of the pathway, a blackish layer containing sherds of Colchian pottery dating from the 5th–4th centuries B.C., a bronze bracelet, and a buckle featuring a representation of Pan were documented.

²⁷ A few analogous stamped tiles were attested in different complexes at the site. Stratigraphic data point to a date in approximately 4th–3rd centuries B.C. For details, see Akhvlediani 1999, 1–10.

Squares D9–10, E8–10, and F9–10 of section 133, as well as squares E1 and D1 of section 148, were excavated to determine the initial course of the pathway paved with sandstone slabs. An area extending some 4 m to the west and 4 m to the south and north was mapped for further excavation. After the removal of the humus layer, a layer containing sherds of Colchian pottery was identified. At a depth of 1 m, two large pieces of bedrock (55x35 cm) and one limestone slab were documented. The soil was compact and appeared to have been well rammed. At approximately 1 m below the surface, a layer containing limestone flakes was identified. At a depth of some 70–80 cm, a layer of masonry was revealed in the westernmost part of the 4 m excavation area. A bronze statue of a youth was brought to light further west in section 133, on the edge of squares C8 and C9. Its shoulders were oriented toward the east, whereas the lower abdomen and legs presumably still lay within the unexcavated area to the west. Naturally, the trench was widened westward by some 95–100 cm. It turned out that the statue was missing its head, arms, and legs below the knees (Figs. 6–7). As became clear after clearing, the statue had been dumped onto a pile of tiles (particularly numerous were curved ones, the so-called *kalypteres*), along with the remains of a sporadically charred log. Fine fragments of tiles, together with clay and rubble, were attested to the south of the statue. Four nails were found to the north and west of the area. The following artefacts were evidenced: fragments of an opaque blue bead; an unidentified bronze object (a claw or pendant?); and a fragment of a bronze vessel or statue with a gilded surface bearing an ornament composed of triangles with horizontal lines between them (N07:1-88/374) (Fig. 9). Yellowish soil in section 133 and in nearby squares D9–10 and E8–9 contained tiles and rubble. Immediately adjacent to the statue, within the heap of tiles, nails, and fragments of a black pithos were revealed. The statue had fallen onto the roof tiles. After the statue was removed (tiles were also found beneath it), it became necessary to widen the archaeological trench once more. The trench covers squares A6–10, B5–10, C5–10, and D6–10 of section 133, as well as the easternmost part of square K9 in section 132. The mapped area measures approximately 8 m toward the southern edge and 10 m toward the west. Fragments of tiles and white limestone were found on

the surface of the tile heap. In its central part, masonry of white limestone and bedrock was revealed after clearing the tile heap. The bulk of the tiles is oriented northward. Traces of charred logs, plaster, and nails were also visible, along with quantities of curved tiles. A fragment of a female bronze statue—the leg, broken at the knee—was found under a tile (square C8, section 133) (N07:1-88/378) (Fig. 10). The western wall of an unidentified structure, built of white limestone slabs, was revealed after clearing the tile heap in the southern part of the trench (the heap occupied squares B8, C7–8, and D7 of section 133). The wall consisted of two rows of alternating, unevenly cut white limestone and bedrock slabs. By the south-eastern corner of the structure, outside the wall, fragments of a bronze statue were found, along with parts of clayware—feet of amphorae, fragments of imported amphora bodies, and parts of mouths of pithoi. The masonry of the eastern and northern walls of the structure is the same—unworked, plain limestone and bedrock fragments. Fragments of mouths of various pots and pieces of bronze were found along the eastern wall, outside the structure. Collapsed large bedrock quadrels were attested both inside and outside the structure, whereas tile fragments were found along the eastern wall. Two limestone slabs and one of bedrock, which had fallen outside the wall in the southern part of the structure, were revealed alongside another limestone slab with a rounded edge, possibly an architectural detail. The smooth bronze fragments, together with the left hand of a female statue (N07:1-88/596) (Fig. 11), were deposited under the above slabs. Nearby, along the southern wall, a few gilded patches used to cover small defects in a bronze statue, a fragment of a silver finger, an unidentified bronze object with a profiled top and two holes, and a bronze pin were unearthed.

Further widening of the trench by 6 m to the south and 5 m to the west revealed a heap of roof tiles, possibly part of the one previously removed by the archaeologists. Rubble containing cobblestones, fragments of clayware, and pyramidal loom-weights was identified approximately 2.7 m south of the structure. A fragment of garment drapery from a bronze statue (?) (N07:1-88/598) (Fig. 12), as well as a bronze fragment of a hair curl (N07:1-88/599), was found in the clay loam in square D10 of section

133. A bronze fragment adorned with a relief floral ornament was uncovered in square B1, section 148 (N07:1-88/600).²⁸

In 1989, a fragment of a bronze oil lamp with relief ornamentation was unearthed in square B1 of section 148. Another bronze oil lamp was discovered in square B9, while square A1 yielded a fragment of a bronze sculpture.²⁹ According to the excavation report, apart from the aforementioned fragments, the layer contained a considerable number of sculpture fragments, the identification of which, unfortunately, is not possible. Alongside these unidentifiable bronze fragments, the excavated area also revealed numerous tile fragments, both local and imported, as well as fragments of ceramic vessels. Among the finds were pieces of a bracelet adorned with spiral decorations and “a bronze sculpture fragment of a foot—presumably belonging to the statue of a youth discovered in 1988—featuring a detailed rendering of the heel and ankle (N07:1-89/205).”³⁰ During the excavation, at a depth of approximately 90–95 cm below the surface of the white structure, a wall constructed of bedrock and white limestone was uncovered, oriented east-west. The masonry appears irregular, and on the eastern side, where pebbles are mixed in, the structure is partially collapsed. The wall extends across squares A7, B8, and C8 of section 133. Within square B8, a slightly bent bronze rod with a triangular cross-section was discovered: “it is suggested that this may have been a fragment of a candelabrum (N07:1-89/206)”³¹ (Fig. 13). At the boundary between squares B2 and B3 in section 148, “a cylindrical bronze object of indeterminate function was found, decorated with transverse grooves and filled with lead. A similar bronze object, but without lead filling (N07:1-89/201), was discovered in square A9 of

²⁸ An almost complete detailed report of the archaeological context of the discovery is published for the first time due to the paramount importance of the torso. Excavations in sections 133 and 148 were led by Elene Gigolashvili. For details, see Lordkipanidze et al. 1989, 2–12, pls. I–VIII.

²⁹ In 1989, excavations in sections 133, 148, 132, and 147 were led by Elene Gigolashvili. For details, see Lordkipanidze et al. 1990, 14–18, tabs. I–II.

³⁰ Lordkipanidze et al. 1990, 15.

³¹ Lordkipanidze et al. 1990, 15.

section 133. It is possible that both objects, along with the aforementioned bronze rod, constituted elements of a candelabrum. In square B3 of section 148, a twisted silver plate with gilding was unearthed, with traces of wood preserved on its inner surface (N07:1-89/608).³² Further excavation within squares D8–9 and C10 of section 133, at a depth of approximately 1 m below the level of the white structure, revealed a layer containing fragments of white limestone. This layer was also observed in the southern and western walls excavated in 1988. Along the western edge, a bedrock outcrop emerged, and upon clearing the area south of the east–west-oriented limestone wall, it became evident that the bedrock had been cut. Within the resulting “channel,” a row of uneven bedrock slabs was identified, likely continuing the “road” of tiles uncovered in 1988, extending in a westerly direction. This “road” veers slightly north-west and continues into the unexcavated area, while an adjacent wall also curves northward. The newly revealed section of the “road” measures 14 m in length, whereas the segment documented in 1988 extends 10 m. A 4.5 m-wide strip of unexcavated soil separates the two sections.³³

As demonstrated by the excavations conducted in 1990, three niches and pits carved into the bedrock (Fig. 1:15) were revealed south of the pathway constructed from slabs, within squares I10 of section 132 and H1–2 and I1–2 of section 147. All the niches open to the east and are aligned in a single row. To the north, they are bordered by a small, rounded niche with a circular pit cut into its base. This pit appears to have been used for lighting a fire, as indicated by the reddish discoloration of the bedrock on its walls and edges. Within two of the niches, alongside ceramic fragments—predominantly of various types of locally produced pottery—fragments of terracotta sculptures were discovered. In one niche, a fragment depicting a knee beneath draped clothing, along with additional fragments of drapery, was found. The second niche, structured as a two-tiered space, features a shelf with a rounded compartment beneath it, accessible through a rectangular entrance. In the lower section, a fragment of a terracotta sculpture’s foot was unearthed,

³² Lordkipanidze et al. 1990, 16.

³³ Lordkipanidze et al. 1990, 17–18.

delicately modelled beneath draped garments. This fragment was placed on a flat roof tile and covered with a grooved tile. The uncovered material confirms the simultaneous function of the bedrock slab pathway and the niche sanctuary complex, as indicated by the presence of stamped Rhodian amphorae dating to the 3rd–2nd centuries B.C.³⁴

In 1991, bronze artefacts were again uncovered in the same stratigraphic layer where the youth's torso had been found.³⁵ Among these finds was a fragment of a bronze plate, "adorned with a dot-formed ornamentation (possibly an eye plate?),"³⁶ discovered alongside the base of an *amphoriskos* at the junction of squares A5–6 and within square B6 of section 148. Additionally, three fragments of a bronze *thymiaterion* (or possibly a candelabrum) were recovered from squares B3 and C3. These fragments, cylindrical in form and decorated with deep horizontal grooves, closely resemble two similar pieces discovered in 1989. Alongside them, a fragment bronze sculpture foot was identified (N07:1–91:96), containing remnants of an iron armature (Fig. 14). "This foot may have belonged to a female statue."³⁷ Furthermore, a large lead casting residue was uncovered in square C3 of section 148. Excavation continued in squares C2, D2, E2, C1, D1, and E1 of the same section, where a significant concentration of roof tile fragments was encountered. "It is likely that these tiles may be an extension of the roof tile layer upon which the bronze sculpture was found lying in 1988."³⁸ In square E1 of section 148, at a depth of 52 cm from the surface, the base of a bronze *thymiaterion* or candelabrum was discovered. This artefact consists of a column with a small base. Nearby, additional bronze fragments and an iron spearhead were recovered.

³⁴ In 1990, excavations in sections 133, 148, 132, and 147 were led by Elene Gigolashvili. For details, see Lordkipanidze et al. 1991, 7–11, tabs. I–VI.

³⁵ In 1991, excavations in sections 147 and 148 were led by Elene Gigolashvili. For details, see Lordkipanidze et al. 1992, 2–9, tabs. I–IV.

³⁶ Lordkipanidze et al. 1992, 7.

³⁷ Lordkipanidze et al. 1992, 8.

³⁸ Lordkipanidze et al. 1992, 8.

Following the removal of the bronze-bearing layer, a compacted stratum rich in fragments of white limestone was exposed. This layer contained imported ceramic sherds, including material datable to the 4th–3rd centuries B.C. Further deepening in squares C1, D1, C2, and D2 of section 148 revealed a pile of tiles, as well as pebbles and bedrock stones, at a depth of 3.5 m from the surface. Additionally, a wall constructed of large sandstone blocks was exposed over a length of 5 m, oriented north to south. In front of this wall, two pits cut into the bedrock were revealed — one circular and the other elongated.³⁹

In 1992, following the removal of the tile pile in squares C1, D1, C2, and D2 of section 148, excavations continued in squares C2, D2, C3, and D3, where the inner face of the wall identified in the previous season was further exposed. As the trench was expanded to expose the walls, a cylindrical bronze object was uncovered at the junction of squares C1 and D1, within the same stratigraphic layer that had previously yielded fragments of a bronze candelabrum and sculpture. The object features an iron nail embedded at one end (N07-1:92/39). Additionally, a fragment of a bronze sculpture with a gilded surface (N07-1:92/12) and an unidentified metal artefact were found directly within the tile pile, identified as part of the residual layer of the 1988 tile accumulation. In the area where the humus layer was removed, an initial yellowish layer was revealed, followed by a gravel layer containing fragments of various ceramic vessels. At the junction of squares D2 and E2, fragments of limestone were recovered, one surface of which was smoothed and painted red. Within the same stratum, a stone pile was identified, surrounded by sherds of black- and red-glazed pottery, along with fragments of a Colchian amphora. The pile extended across squares C2–4 and B3–4. Additionally, limestone fragments with embedded pebbles were recorded, similar to those previously documented in the gravel layer. Further deepening along the southern edge of the trench exposed another concentration of stones interspersed with limestone fragments. In square D4, another unidentified bronze artefact was recovered — an ornamented rod

³⁹ Lordkipanidze et al. 1992, 9.

(N07-1:92/30). Following the clearance of the structure and its surrounding area, it was determined that the building had a rectangular plan. The walls consisted of two courses of unevenly sized sandstone blocks. The interior was entirely filled with a stone pile. One corner of the structure was identified, linking the northern and eastern walls. The northern wall measured 8.60 m in length and 91 cm in width, while the exposed portion of the western wall measured 2.45 m in length and 88 cm in width. The partially revealed eastern wall extended for 3.22 m.⁴⁰

It can be assumed that the statue was found inside a structure, positioned at a considerable distance from the walls and not in a markedly disordered condition, as is clearly visible in an excavation photograph (Fig. 7). The sculpture was placed on tiles, with additional tiles covering or partially overlaying it. At this point, it is worth recalling the phenomenon of so-called “buried sculptures,” which appears to be unique to Vani. Specifically, statues were deliberately placed between two tiles, as evidenced by the discovery of a fragment of a terracotta sculpture’s leg carefully positioned between a flat and a grooved tile within one of the niches of a shrine uncovered near the location of the torso.⁴¹ It may also be significant that iron nails have been documented only in proximity to the torso in sections 148 and 133. This observation gains further relevance when considering that in the rich burials of Vani dating to the 5th–4th centuries B.C.—including the tomb with a tile covering discovered at Dablagomi, part of the “Land of Vani”—the presence of nails is interpreted as evidence that the deceased was interred within a wooden sarcophagus.⁴²

According to the excavation reports, the so-called shrine complex with niches and the pathway constructed of tuff slabs functioned concurrently during the 3rd–2nd centuries B.C. This suggests that the so-called White

⁴⁰ In 1992, excavations in section 148 were led by Elene Gigolashvili. For details see, Lordkipanidze et al. 1993, 2–5, tabs. I–III. For the so-called shrine complex with niches and the pathway, see Lordkipanidze 1995, 386, tab. 77, 1–4.

⁴¹ Lordkipanidze 1996, 386, pl. 77, 4.

⁴² For Dablagomi grave, see Kacharava, Lordkipanidze, and Chkonina 2024, 88.

Structure, where the torso was discovered and which is directly associated with the pathway, is likely to be contemporaneous with them. However, this does not exclude the possibility that the building had an earlier phase of use.

The concentration of other bronze fragments, including those of small-scale sculptures, within the same stratigraphic layer as the torso, strongly suggests that these artefacts were an integral part of the complex associated with the torso. The identified fragments that have undergone technical analysis can be functionally categorized into the following groups: (1) four fragments of hollow-cast bronze sculpture, including the heel fragment, exhibit a curved, cylindrical form, suggesting that they may belong to the limbs of a life-sized sculpture; despite minor differences in chemical composition and similarities in patina between the torso and these smooth-surfaced fragments, it remains uncertain whether they can be attributed to the statue of the youth; (2) a solid-cast, spiral-shaped lock of hair; although the lock is chemically similar to the torso and stylistically corresponds to a common curl type characteristic of the Early Classical period,⁴³ it does not match any of the hairstyle details of *Apollo Omphalos*-type sculptures; (3) gilded bronze fragments, including a fragment with engraved geometric ornamentation identified by Marina Pirtskhalava as part of a tunic hem;⁴⁴ (4) a solid-cast bronze fragment with a rounded triangular cross-section, which, based on patina and surface finishing, may represent an “unidentified attribute” of Apollo, comparable to the object held in his right hand in the Capitoline Museum statue;⁴⁵ (5) drapery or clothing details comprising a large fragment of garment drapery and a composite fragment of two pieces depicting floral ornamentation and a stem covered with diagonal notches;⁴⁶ (6) a small bronze column and five grooved fragments adorned

⁴³ Boll 1978, 21, pl. 13, N81a–d.

⁴⁴ Gigolashvili and Pirtskhalava 2012, 57.

⁴⁵ LIMC II.1, 1984, pp. 257–258, 318, nos. 599a–t, s.v. Apollon (V. Lambrinoudakis and O. Palagia). For the complete list of replicas, see Johannowsky 1969, 374–375.

⁴⁶ These fragments are identified as parts of robe drapery and of a breastplate. See Gigolashvili and Pirtskhalava 2012, 56, and fig. 24.

with bead-and-reel ornamentation identified as a detail of a candelabrum, attested in other complexes at Vani; and (7) fragments of small-scale sculptures, which typically constitute about one-third of life-size statuary, including a fragment of the left hand (Fig. 11), a fragment of the right hand (Fig. 8), a fragment of the right thigh and knee (Fig. 10), a fragment of the left foot (Fig. 14), and a fragment discovered in 1991 and identified as a fragment of the right shoulder (Fig. 15). Based on chemical composition, melting temperature, and stylistic analyses, it can be assumed that these fragments belonged to four different small-scale statues.⁴⁷

The first striking feature is the large quantity of bronze artefacts of various types. In this regard, among other sites uncovered at Vani, only the so-called Twelve-Stepped Altar complex presents a comparable assemblage. Approximately one thousand bronze fragments were unearthed in and around the debris of the Twelve-Stepped Altar. Alongside the figurative fragments—among which the cuirass typical of armoured rider statues and fragments of an equine sculpture are of particular importance⁴⁸—there is also a substantial quantity of non-figurative, unidentifiable fragments, as well as artefacts associated with bronze manufacture, including quantities of bronze drips and numerous bronze patches. On the basis of the Hellenistic-period foundry workshop identified on the central terrace, the most plausible interpretation is that the statues were broken up for secondary use. However, statistical analysis of the plain fragments—including the study of their dimensions, alloy composition, degree of damage, archaeological context, and their separation into fractions, as well as correlation analyses and examination of the characteristics of the bronze items in order to detect regularities—has made it possible to propose a hypothetical connection between the fragmentation of the bronzes and some form of ritual practice. Deliberately smashed statues could point to a ritualised practice of breaking offerings, widespread in antiquity and attested at Vani, notably on the sacrificial platform of a cultic complex dating to the 8th–7th centuries B.C.,

⁴⁷ For details of the technical study of the fragments, see Guruli, Kalandadze, and Lordkipanidze 2025, 125–129.

⁴⁸ Kalandadze et al. 2025.

where intentionally broken clay vessels and terracotta figurines were found and may likewise have been ritually broken.⁴⁹

It is noteworthy that both the White Structure and the Twelve-Stepped Altar complexes have yielded fragments of functionally similar artefacts, including parts of human sculptures—specifically limbs, drapery, and gilded bronze elements—as well as non-figurative fragments belonging to various statuary. Given that neither complex has yielded a single bronze fragment identifiable as a head or facial feature, fragments depicting parts of the human body acquire particular significance. At the site of the Twelve-Stepped Altar, fragments such as a bronze hand clutching animal fur, three large fingers, a single finger, a shoulder, and a foot—each of exceptional artistic quality—differ markedly from one another in every respect. These pieces show no contextual or stylistic connection, either among themselves or with the numerous non-figurative fragments discovered and analyzed within the same cultic complex. They are therefore likely to represent individual votive offerings.

In contrast, the fragments discovered alongside the torso—namely, the left and right hands (Figs. 11 and 8), the right thigh and knee (Fig. 10), the left foot (Fig. 14), and the right shoulder (Fig. 15)—exhibit such a coherent functional relationship that, based on their shared stylistic features and overall appearance characteristic of the classicist style of the 2nd–1st centuries B.C., Elene Gigolashvili has identified them as parts of a single sculptural composition intended for decorative purposes.⁵⁰ The position of the left arm and hand perfectly corresponds to the iconographic type of a nude Apollo holding either a lyre or a bow in his left hand. This type of small-scale statue was very popular during the Classical period and the Roman era. Judging from the exquisitely refined modelling of the male musculature and the extended right leg, the fragments of the right thigh and knee may also be attributed to an image of Apollo, whose depiction featured an extended leg and conformed to a

⁴⁹ For a detailed study of the fragments from the area of the Twelve-Stepped Altar, see Guruli et al. 2025.

⁵⁰ Gigolashvili 2013.

typical iconographic type.⁵¹ It should be recalled that silver statues of this type are attested at Vani. Two silver statuettes of Apollo, belonging to a unique set of objects previously known only from Delian inscriptions as exclusively costly offerings to the god—one featuring an archery belt for a quiver, the other holding a *phiale*—were discovered within a “treasury” of the cultic complex at the Twelve-Stepped Altar.⁵² Based on Roman parallels derived from Greek sculptures of Apollo wearing a long himation, the fragments of the above-mentioned terracotta sculpture—showing a leg bent at the knee and a sandal almost entirely covered by the himation—may be attributed to the same iconographic type of Apollo.⁵³ The right hand, bent at the elbow and wrist, could be associated with an image of the goddess Nike, whose bronze statue is attested at the Vani city-site. However, if we assume that the fragments of the arm and hand belong to one and the same statue, the possibility of their connection to Nike must be ruled out, since the position of the raised right hand does not correspond to the horizontal alignment of the shoulder. The fact that the images of goddesses in the temple-city of ancient Vani are predominantly represented by Aphrodite or Aphrodite-type deities allows us to associate the right hand with the well-known iconographic type of the nude Aphrodite bathing.⁵⁴ However, since the refined limbs of Apollo often make it difficult to distinguish his statues from those depicting female figures, the possibility that the attested right hand was associated with Apollo statuary cannot be ruled out.⁵⁵ It is

⁵¹ *LIMC* II.1, 1984, pp. 239–240, 325, s.v. Apollon (V. Lambrinudakis and O. Palagia); *LIMC* II.2, 1984, nos. 436, 439, 444, 445.

⁵² See Lordkipanidze 2004.

⁵³ *LIMC* II.1, 1984, pp. 204–205, 322, s.v. Apollon (V. Lambrinudakis and O. Palagia); *LIMC* II.2, 1984, nos. 146, 149.

⁵⁴ *LIMC* II.2, 1984, nos. 485, 486, s.v. Aphrodite. From this group of sculptures, we have mentioned only two examples, as both preserve the hand, whose pose resembles that of the Vani fragment. See also *LIMC* II.2, 1984, nos. 86, 90, 100, s.v. Aphrodite (*in peripheria orientali*).

⁵⁵ See the small-scale bronze sculpture of Apollo of the Lykeios type from the 1st century B.C.–1st century A.D.: *LIMC* II.1, 1984, pp. 191, 193, 321, 323, nos. 16, 39, s.v. Apollon (V. Lambrinudakis and O. Palagia), whose downward-positioned right-

doubtful that the limb fragments represent so-called anatomical votive offerings; rather, they may be parts of various types of statues of Apollo, Nike, or Aphrodite—the deities worshiped at Vani. It is difficult to say whether the locus of their discovery was also the place of their provenance. Nevertheless, the accumulation of limb fragments from statues, most likely of deities (groups 1 and 7), of precious offerings (groups 2–5), and of temple inventory (group 6) was likely not accidental and could be understood as a well-thought-out selection of votives.

Through the presence of typical temple inventory—such as a lamp, a *thymiaterion*, and a candelabrum, represented in fragmentary form—alongside fragments of ceramic vessels, the White Structure complex shows notable similarities to the temple complex with the mosaic floor. In this context, the bronze jewelry items, as well as the gilded bronze fragments—such as “a bronze plate adorned with dot-formed ornamentation (possibly an eye plate?)”⁵⁶—may be regarded as precious votive offerings.

Similar to the bronze fragments from the complex of the Twelve-Stepped Altar, the bronze fragments found alongside the torso—especially the large piece of garment drapery and the fragment decorated with an acanthus stem and leaf—convey the notion of a ritual act likely reflecting the religious principle of *pars pro toto*, whereby a part was understood to embody the sacred essence of the whole. According to Helmut Kyrieleis’s theory, grounded in the archaeological material from Olympia, a votive offering would be deliberately smashed and discarded, whereas a single fragment had to be retained.⁵⁷ This practice appears to be linked to a Greek religious thought pattern in which a part functioned as a continuation and symbol of the sacred essence of the whole, whereas other fragments could have been smelted and reused.

However, unlike the fragments associated with the Twelve-Stepped Altar, where no single figure dominates, this assemblage appears to

hand finger arrangement closely resembles that of the Vani fragment; *LIMC* II.2, 1984, nos. 16, 39i, 39n, 39q, 39r, s.v. Apollon.

⁵⁶ See n. 36.

⁵⁷ Kyrieleis 2006, 95.

centre on the statue of a specific deity. Considered in light of the iconographic parallels discussed above—including the silver statuettes of Apollo dedicated as offerings in the hoard uncovered in the area of the Twelve-Stepped Altar and the Apollo-type terracotta figurine found in the Niche Complex—the limb fragments further support the interpretation of the torso as a statue of the *Apollo Omphalos* type. The limb fragments, therefore, should not be understood as anatomical votives in the conventional sense; rather, as elements of different types of Apollo statues, they may be regarded as offerings specifically dedicated to him.

Accordingly, it may be argued that the so-called White Structure cultic complex, where ritual practices attested in other cultic complexes at Vani are concentrated—specifically the fragmentation of statues and their “burial”—provides a clear example of how Hellenistic bronze sculpture functioned, on the one hand, as a vehicle for the dissemination of Hellenic culture and, on the other, as a means of expressing local beliefs and conceptions in their own terms.

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Figure 1. General plan of the Vani archaeological site. Fourth stage

- 1: Ceremonial altar, 3rd–1st centuries B.C.; 2: Remains of cult building, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 3: Defensive walls, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 4: Defensive walls, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 5: "Smithery," late Hellenistic period; 6: Building with counterforts, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 7: So-called mosaic-floored temple complex, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 8: Rock-cut pits of undefined function, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 9: Sacrificial pits, 3rd–2nd centuries B.C.; 10: Sacrificial pits, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 11: Remains of buildings, 3rd–2nd centuries B.C.; 12: Twelve-Stepped Altar, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 13: Remains of wall, 3rd–1st centuries B.C.; 14: Remains of paved road, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 15: Ritual niches, 3rd–2nd centuries B.C.; 16: "White structure," 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 17: Pit with temple-inventory hoard, mid-1st century B.C.; 18: Remains of defensive walls, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 19: Remains of defensive walls, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 20: Shaft, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 21: Temple complex, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 22: Channel, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 23: Water-gate, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 24: Remains of defensive walls, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; 25: Sacred barn, 2nd–1st centuries

B.C.; **26**: Building with an apse, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; **27**: Remains of building, 3rd–2nd centuries B.C.; **28**: Monumental stone-block platform, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; **29**: Remains of buildings and of the foundry workshop, 3rd–2nd centuries B.C.; **30**: Defensive walls, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; **31**: Tower, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; **32**: Tunnel cut in the bedrock, late Hellenistic period; **33**: Defensive wall, mid-1st century B.C.; **34**: Round Temple, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; **35**: Architectural complex of the gate, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; **36**: Tower, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; **37**: Barracks, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; **38**: Curtain wall, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.; **39**: Polygonal tower, 2nd–1st centuries B.C.

Drawing courtesy of Guram Kvirkvelia and Irakli Khutsishvili



Figure 2. Appliqué of youthful Dionysus (?) Bronze

H. 12.3 cm; Diam. 5 cm. GNM 10-975:186

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 3. Appliqué of Dionysus bearing the features of Alexander the Great
H. 12.2 cm; Diam. 5.8 cm. GNM 10-975:186

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 4. Six-nozzled lamp adorned with images of elephant heads, Dionysus, Ariadne, and Heracles. Bronze. H. 11 cm; W. 42 cm. N07:1-07/324

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 5. Incense burner adorned with sculptural representations of elephant heads. Bronze. H. 19.5 cm; L. 44 cm. N07:1-07/323

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 6. Torso. Bronze. H. 1.05 m. GNM 2:996-43

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 7. Torso. Excavation view

Photo courtesy of Valeri Salniker



Figure 8 . Fragment of the right hand. Bronze. Forearm to wrist 7.8 cm; wrist to middle finger 3.9 cm; middle finger 3 cm. N07:1-88/376

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 9. Gilded bronze fragment of an equestrian statue: tunic hem of a cuirass
L. max. 4 cm; W. max. 2.8 cm. N7:1-88/374

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 10. Fragment of the right thigh and knee. Bronze
L 12.5 cm; W. at upper part 6.7 cm; W. at knee 3.5 cm. N07:1-88/378

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 11. Fragment of the left hand. Bronze. Remaining upper arm
(shoulder to elbow) 8 cm; elbow to palm 8.8 cm; thumb L. 2.5 cm. N07:1-88/596

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 12. Large fragment of garment drapery. Bronze
H. max. 26.2 cm; W. max. 21.5 cm. N07:1-88/598

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 13. Bronze fragment with triangular cross-section
H. 14.8 cm; W. 2.1 cm. N07:1-89/206

Photo courtesy of Sesili Sordia



Figure 14. Fragment of the left foot. Bronze
Foot L. 9 cm; W at the heel 2.3 cm; W at the toes 3.8 cm. N07:1-91:96
Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo



Figure 15. Fragment of the right shoulder. Bronze
L. 6 cm; W. 3.5 cm. N07:1-91:100

Photo courtesy of Georgian National Museum / Fernando Javier Urquijo