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Sakdrisi Gold was acknowledged as the oldest known mine in the world: at least 5,000 years old

In spring of 2004, a group of scientists visited the Sakdrisi Hill, the geological study of which continues from the Soviet times. They established that the mineral deposit's quartz rock veins contain gold. They also discovered very old weapons and tools, which led to suspicions of the hill actually being an ancient mine. Analysis samples taken from the tools and coal found in the area were sent to Heidelberg University's Physics Institute, which sent the results back in April of 2005. What was stated in them was mind-boggling – the mine was determined to be more than 2,300 years old, with mining operations having taken place in it as far back as III century B.C.

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In August of the same year, a joint Georgian-German expedition established an archeological dig on the site, determining that the ancient gold mine was at least 5,000 years old, which is 1,500 years older than what was back then considered the oldest mine in the world, located in the eastern part of Egypt. The discovery has caused quite a commotion in scientific circles, with facts discovered by the Sakdrisi expedition ending up in many prestigious publications. Sakdrisi was acknowledged by the entire world as the oldest known mine in the world. In 2006, Georgia’s Ministry of Culture awarded the place the status of a cultural monument. The Georgian-German expedition spent eight more years researching the location, with the Kachaghiani Hill being their prime target. However, Sakdrisi ended up attracting a completely different kind of attention that had nothing to do with scientific curiosity. A gold mining company Quartzite became very interested in the place and conducted exploration works through drilling in 2011 and 2012, despite not having permission for it. In 2012 Quartzite was replaced by RMG Gold (Rich Metals Group – Ed.), which came up with an initiative to relocate the historical monument elsewhere and turn the place into a full-fledged gold mining quarry. Moreover, the company began drilling operations in the location of a medieval settlement of Abulmugi, damaging a multitude of archeological artifacts.

According to unofficial data, the area contains from five to 10 tons of gold, with a total value amounting to approximately 500 million USD. Official data is currently classified.

An excerpt from a letter by Zurab Makharadze, head of the National Museum’s archeological center, to the Minister of Culture:

“Following our protest, the company asked us to evaluate the archeological value of the location. Our digs have revealed many interesting objects, but then RMG Gold stopped cooperating with us. Its representative told us that our work there would have a point only if establishment of a quarry actually started in Sakdrisi. On April 17, 2013 they handed the work over to “Club Temple” and brought completely different specialists to oversee and direct it. We consider such actions by the company as an attempt to destroy the unique cultural heritage site and the oldest gold mine in the world.”

The subject of Sakdrisi became even more acute as parliamentary elections approached, with many people wishing to know the reason for the company's intense interest in the site. It turned out that geological probing has revealed that the amount of gold concealed within the mine is quite massive. According to unofficial data, the area contains from five to 10 tons of gold, with a total value amounting to approximately 500 million USD. Official data is currently classified.

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Sakdrisi Gold Fever - GeorgianJournal

Nino Burchuladze

3/6/2015

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http://www.georgianjournal.ge/society/29855­sakdrisi­gold­fever.html

Sakdrisi Gold Fever

The museum which would be fully financed by the company, appealed to Prime Minister Ivanishvili and had him create a commission dedicated to the subject. However, when eleven members of the commission delved deeper into the matter, it turned out that the mine’s classification as a cultural monument happened illegally,” declared Soso Tsabadze, advisor for RMG Gold. The so-called commission’s conclusion has, quite predictably, shocked the scientific circles. The conclusion dropped a very broad hint that the mine in question was not the oldest mine in the world at all and accused the aforementioned Georgian-German expedition’s members of fraud. Moreover, the commission sent copies of the conclusion to the world’s leading scientific centers.

However, later it was revealed that the majority of the commission’s eleven members received funding, directly or indirectly, from RMG Gold. Their conclusion was deemed premature by International Academy of Science, who dubbed their intention to have the mine’s status of a cultural monument revoked as criminal.

On January 7th, 2014, RMG Gold apparently decided to effectuate its intent anyway and started drilling operations at Sakdrisi Hill, which caused a massive public outrage. RMG Gold’s license, according to which Sakdrisi was part of its business domain, expired on April 7th, and the new license involved a partner company named Mining Investment Gold. However, RMG Gold managed to reach an agreement with the new partner and applied for extension of the license to the Georgian government. It was granted free of charge, extending the license to January 1st of 2015. This led to many questions from the public, with people wondering why the government didn’t even bother to name a hefty price for such a large gold deposit. According to estimates, Georgia’s budget lost at least 55 million USD due to this deal.

With the issue of Sakdrisi becoming more acute by the minute and the scientists failing to reach a consensus on the preferred course of action, on the 5th of May of 2014 Georgia’s Cultural Heritage Protection Agency invited two foreign experts, professors Venelin Jelev and Albrecht Jockenhövel, to Georgia with the purpose of inspecting the mine. After getting acquainted with all the necessary documentation, the professors concluded that Sakdrisi may indeed be the oldest known mine in the world and offered the government several ways out of the tense situation.

However, despite the intense civil activism aimed at protecting the mine and despite the court’s decision banning RMG Gold from conducting any work in the area, the Minister of Culture lifted the site’s status of a cultural monument and later that of an archeological object, which caused immense indignation and public outrage. The very next day RMG Gold started demolition works in the area. Moreover, the government issued the revocation act in power, albeit obliging the Ministry of Culture to discuss the issue again. This essentially blocks probing into the Sakdrisi affair.

The NGO “Green Alternative” has filed a court appeal regarding the revocation of Sakdrisi’s status of a cultural monument, deeming it illegal. The court complied and annulled the revocation act, but the Ministry of Culture took the matter to appeal court.

Alcoholic bears rescued from Sochi zoo to be treated in Romania

Russian BBC reports that two blind bears which were kept at one of the Georgian restaurants located in Sochi, are going to be sent to Romania to be rehabilitated.

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Many accuse the government of lobbying for RMG Gold and demand that Parliament create an investigative commission to look into these sudden and unexpected decisions. The unique mine, however, can still be saved.

“NO to occupation” – Georgian students pledge solidarity to Ukrainians

Students of Free and Agricultural Universities of Tbilisi have started a campaign under the title “No to occupation”.

Pure genius – Georgian composer sails on a self-made boat in Abkhazia

The video, recorded in Bichvinta bay, 1982, depicts a well-known Georgian composer Vakhthang “Kukho” Kukhianidze, testing a sailboat he built himself. The speed his vessel gains is extremely surprising.

Fewer cars on sidewalks in Tbilisi – More space for pedestrians

Over fifty parking spots have already been done away with in Vake-Saburtalo district. According to Tbilisi City Transportation Service, a total of 210 parking spots will be removed.

“Yesterday I was in Tbilisi...” - Sandra Roelofs’ video of her visit

Sandra Roelofs, Georgia’s former First Lady, visited Tbilisi on the 31st of January and posted a slideshow video of her visit on her Facebook page.