

ARCHITECTURE

From Idea to Construction

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ABSTRACT

The work is dedicated to the idea and the initial stages of the implementation process of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building (currently the headquarters of the Bank of Georgia), designed by an outstanding figure of Georgian architecture, architect Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava. In specialized literature, the focus is predominantly on the epochal significance and characteristics of this building created in the Soviet space. However, our research has a different objective. The purpose of the presented research is to study and determine the origins of the building of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building, based on new archival sources and the building's conceptual foundations. The presented work reflects the results of this research. It aims to integrate this information and its significance into the scientific domain.

Keywords: Giorgi Chakhava, the Ministry of Roads of Georgia, architecture, architect, constructure, archive

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62343/cjss.2025.276>

Received: March 28, 2025; Received in revised form: July 18, 2025; Accepted: December 8, 2025

INTRODUCTION

The work is dedicated to the idea and the initial stages of implementation of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building, designed by an outstanding figure of Georgian architecture, architect Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava.

The intellectual and innovative architect had a deep understanding of Georgia's rich natural environment, its fascinating terrain, history, and cultural heritage. He was fully aware of the possibilities offered by this combination of potentials. His architecture serves as a kind of program for the full utilization and talented realization of this wealth.

The art and creativity of the architect overcame the dogmatic restrictions within the Soviet sphere, managed to escape the Soviet physical and mental space, established itself in the modern global architectural scene, and exerted a significant influence on it. Giorgi Chakhava, with his talent and creativity, granted freedom to national architecture. Moreover, he made a significant impact on global architectural culture. A progressively-minded artist, despite the closed nature of the Soviet space, he not only became acquainted with the innovations and achievements of world architecture but also successfully integrated them into the national foundation of Georgian architecture. He completely reimagined Georgian architecture in a novel and complex way, in relation to national traditions, the challenging terrain characteristic of Georgia, space, and global architectural innovative achievements.

The defining characteristic of Giorgi Chakhava's work is his exceptional creative freedom, which is consistently reflected throughout his architectural legacy. His innovative approach has significantly influenced modern global architecture, as acknowledged by prominent foreign architectural theorists.

His most iconic creation, the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building (now the Bank of Georgia headquarters), has been featured in numerous esteemed international architectural journals and publications, including:

- **Neuf** (1975)
- **Time** (1976)
- **Domus** (1977)
- **Arthur Drexler** – *Transformations in Modern Architecture*, MOMA Exhibition Catalogue (1979)
- **Rusudan Mirzikhvili**, *Everybody's Favourite*, in: Ritter, Katharina; Shapiro-Obermair, Ekaterina; Steiner, Dietmar; Wachter, Alexandra (Hg.), *Soviet Modernism 1955–1991: Unknown History*, Zürich (2012)
- **Joanna Warsza**, *Ministry of Highways: A Guide to the Performative Architecture of Tbilisi*, Warschau / Utrecht / Berlin (2013)
- **Nini Palavandishvili**, *Ministry of Automobile Roads*, in: Elser, Oliver; Philip Kurz; Peter Cachola Schmal (Eds.), *SOS Brutalism: A Global Survey*, Zürich: Park Books (2017)

- **Bürogebäude**, Annette Gigon, Mike Guyer, Arend Kölsch (Eds.), *gta Verlag*, ETH Zürich (2019)

Giorgi Chakhava's architectural vision has profoundly shaped national architecture, elevating it to an innovative stage and seamlessly integrating it into global discourse. His immense contributions have earned widespread international recognition, solidifying his lasting influence on the field. The impressive array of publications highlighting Chakhava's work reflects his enduring legacy - both in Georgia and worldwide - as a pioneer of architectural innovation.

His work is rooted in profound knowledge, a reimagined historical architectural tradition, and a seamless harmony between modern architectural principles. It embodies the ideal realization of expertise informed by global architectural experience and groundbreaking innovations. Chakhava's designs achieve a delicate balance, preserving architecture, space, and Georgia's challenging terrain and ecosystem with remarkable precision.

Recognized as a visionary, Giorgi Chakhava is not only a pioneer of national architecture but also a defining figure in global architectural culture.

METHODS

Monographic, comparative, analytical, critical, and creative research methods were applied to investigate the origins and conceptual foundations of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building. Following the formulation of the research topic, an in-depth investigation and analysis were conducted, encompassing both published and unpublished archival documentary and visual materials - including project plans, sketches, photographs, and documents from the 1950s and 1960s - alongside press information and specialized literature. These materials were systematically collected, organized, and analyzed in alignment with the monographic research method, ensuring a comprehensive and coherent examination. Logical sequencing was maintained throughout the research process, enabling the derivation of relevant conclusions and insights.

RESULTS

This study provides an in-depth analysis of the origins and design evolution of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building (now the headquarters of the Bank of Georgia), envisioned by renowned Georgian architect Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava. Drawing from extensive archival research - including personal and national records, conceptual sketches, architectural plans, and periodical literature - the investigation traces the building's inception, development, and final realization.

The study highlights early conceptual influences, particularly photographs from Chakhava's personal archive dating back to 1959, titled *Residential Houses Raised on Pillars*. These images illustrate monumental vertical structures elevated on supports, designed to harmonize with rugged, hilly terrains. This visionary approach laid the foundation for the

Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building, refining the concept throughout the 1960s before culminating in its completion in 1975.

The building stands as a landmark of 20th-century Georgian architectural innovation, exemplifying a bold fusion of design and natural landscape integration. Its enduring legacy continues to shape both national and global architectural discourse.

DISCUSSION

One of the main tasks of Georgian architects active during the 1970s-1980s was to design and build structures with minimal impact on the landscape. The architectural proposals developed by Giorgi Chakhava during this period are the best solutions to this challenge (Chakhava, 1975).

The new vision of the authoring group, led by G. Chakhava and comprising architect Z. Jalagania and engineers T. Tkhilava and A. Kimberg, is effectively presented in Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava's article "*Houses on Tower Foundations*" (Chakhava, 1974, p. 60). G. Chakhava's article outlines the principle behind this innovative method, which involves reducing the building area by constructing individual towers. These towers enable the construction of houses without altering the natural terrain. By utilizing varying relief levels, the towers facilitate the development of mountain slopes and ravines while rising above the ground. Such structures free up space for parks and recreational areas, allow unobstructed transportation beneath the buildings, and improve air ventilation by mitigating pollution caused by vehicle exhaust gases.

The authors based their work on two key principles: the functional purpose of the building and its aesthetic expressiveness. In their view, a building elevated on tower supports creates an unusual silhouette of an architectural structure - light, transparent, and seamlessly integrated with the landscape. According to the authors, such compositional solutions harmonize with nature, appearing to hover and blend without disrupting the overall balance.

The experience of constructing houses on tower supports demonstrated that this method can be implemented on terrains of any complexity. Furthermore, the construction of houses on tower supports is also economically justified, even on flat areas. (Chakhava, 1975, p.60).

Architect's innovative ideas continue to influence contemporary architecture to this day. The construction process of the architectural masterpiece, the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building (currently serving as the headquarters of the Bank of Georgia), was completed in 1975. As a result of this project, Georgian architectural history inherited one of the most outstanding structures of the 20th century.

The innovative, metabolist-style building created in the 1970s, with its structure and design, addressed the challenges of the next century rather than those of its contemporary era. The completed project became a part of global architectural culture.

The author of the project idea and the leader of the design team was architect Giorgi Chakhava. The team members included architect Zurab Jalagania and structural engineers

Teimuraz Tkhlava and Aleksander Kimberg ([Chakhava, 1970](#)).

Specialized literature primarily focuses on the epochal significance and characteristics of this building, created within the Soviet space. Our aim, however, is different. Based on Giorgi Chakhava's personal and national archive materials (documents, plans, drawings, sketches, interviews ([Chakhava, 1986](#))) and relevant periodical literature on the subject, we aimed to explore the history preceding the creation and realization of this building's concept. The presented work reflects the results of this research.

The author of the successful project concept, Giorgi Chakhava, later expressed the complex attitude of contemporary society toward his progressive creativity through the reflections of American philosopher William James.¹:

“A great idea goes through three stages on its way to acceptance: 1) it is dismissed as nonsense, 2) it is acknowledged as true, but insignificant, 3) finally, it is seen to be important, but not really anything new(AZ Quotes, n.d.).

Since the 1970s, numerous articles have been published about the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building. Today, several international publications highlight the fact of its creation and its significance. Strangely enough, amidst years of silence from professionals within Georgia, the building initially gained recognition abroad. The global architectural community acknowledged it as an innovation within the Soviet architectural space. This building stands as a symbol of the creativity of Georgian architecture, connecting the past and the present.

This silence from professionals in the field is rooted in architect Vakhtang Davitaya's letter, dated September 1979, titled “When Silence Harms Progress!” ([Davitaya, 1979](#)). *Literary Georgia*. (№ 38).

V. Davitaya describes Georgian architecture of this period as excessively rational, lacking in ideas, and marked by template-based indifference.

In such a monotonous environment, an extraordinary architectural structure is born and successfully realized. It stands out with its clear tectonics, structural boldness, compositional intensity and dynamism, transparency, and complete harmony with the landscape. A significant new “accent” for the capital is created.

In V. Davitaya's letter, skepticism and an unfavorable attitude toward the architectural novelty of the capital are clearly evident. This sentiment is further confirmed by Georgian press articles, such as “House on a Slope” ([Golovin, 1980](#)) and by the still vivid historical memory of the era.

Notably, V. Davitaya, in the same letter, highlights the challenging path an idea must traverse to become a realized project: “...This project also endured a difficult journey, but since it is now a reality, we must assume that reason triumphed... The realization of this structure has overcome significant organizational, technical, and psychological barriers... Time will likely bring adjustments to our evaluation of this subject... But for now, I unequivocally

1 William James (1842–1910) - American philosopher and psychologist.

state that we are witnesses to an important architectural event.” (Davitaya, 1979).

This letter serves as both an advocacy and a justification for the innovative project, reflecting its significance despite the challenges it faced. It’s a testament to the resilience of visionary ideas.

During an in-depth study of the prehistory of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building, attention was first drawn to photographs of project proposals (“Residential Houses Raised on Pillars”) dated back to 1959.

These sketches were created by Giorgi Chakhava and his creative team (architect Z. Jalaghania and engineers T. Tkhilava and A. Kimberg).

The photographs, preserved in Giorgi Chakhava’s personal archive and in several publications, depict monumental, vertical structures elevated on pillars in challenging, hilly, rocky terrain. These designs were remarkably progressive for their time, leaving a strong impression with their bold vision.

The structurally and architecturally intriguing and innovative project proposal from the 1950s, designed for development on challenging terrains, can undoubtedly be regarded as a precursor and a noteworthy stage leading up to the Roads Department’s Engineering Building project. It significantly predates and enriches the timeline of this groundbreaking idea, highlighting its deep-rooted conceptual origins.

The conceptual foundation of the Roads Department Ministry’s engineering building project is confirmed by documentary materials, sketches, plans, drawings, and periodical literature preserved in the personal archive of architect Giorgi Chakhava. It is worth noting that the documents about this building in Chakhava’s personal archive have reached us in an incomplete form; however, they contain very interesting and significant information.

Among the archival materials of Giorgi Chakhava in our possession, the earliest document is a copy of the “Decision of the Executive Committee of the City Council of Workers’ Deputies of Tbilisi” dated August 14, 1968 (#477, Protocol #17, Paragraph 4). Also dated August 14, 1968, is the plan for the land plot at Gagarin #27, preserved in Giorgi Chakhava’s archive.

The content of the aforementioned document pertains to the allocation of a land plot for the construction of the administrative building of the Main Directorate of Highways under the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR. As indicated in the document, the Main Directorate of Highways, under the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR, had petitioned the Tbilisi City Council Executive Committee to construct an administrative building on the land plot (extending from the four-story house on Gagarin Street #27). Based on this petition, the Tbilisi City Council Executive Committee requested:

Preparation of the general plan, after which the exact area of the land plot would be finalized

Execution of tasks related to the allocation of the land plot and the transfer of red lines into nature, carried out by the Construction and Architecture Department at the request of the

Main Directorate of Highways

Demolition of existing houses on the plot, in accordance with the general plan, with the consent of the Orjonikidze District Council Executive Committee, and providing the displaced residents with alternative housing as per legal requirements

Submission of all materials related to the foundation marking for verification of accuracy to the Construction and Architecture Department and the Geodesy Service, for project approval and construction permit issuance

Active participation of the Main Directorate of Highways in the improvement of the quarter and the construction of underground communications

Thus, on April 14, 1968, based on Decision #477 of the Tbilisi City Council Executive Committee, a 1.5-hectare land plot was allocated for construction at Gagarin Street #27, near the beginning of the slope by the embankment. At that time, the general plan needed to be prepared, the land plot had to be cleared of local residents, who in turn were to be compensated with housing within the legal framework, and other necessary tasks needed to be performed (transferring the measured land plot's red lines into nature, clarifying the geodetic section, and so forth).

This clearly demonstrates the comprehensive and coordinated effort required to bring such a project to life.

The following document, preserved in architect Giorgi Chakhava's personal archive, was issued exactly a year later. It is the protocol of "ТОЦСТРОЙ" of the Georgian SSR, which is of multifaceted interest in studying the history of this building. This protocol's information will be explored in greater detail in future research related directly to the building.

At present, its content is intriguing because, according to this protocol, by August 14, 1969, the Construction-Architectural Council, together with the chief architect of Tbilisi, reviewed the project assignment for the engineering building of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia under the Georgian SSR.

During the session, the brief content of the project assignment was presented by its author, Giorgi Chakhava. From the document, it is evident that by this time, the project assignment had undergone specialist examination, and expert conclusions had been prepared regarding architecture, structural aspects, plumbing, electrical works, and cost estimates. The document also reveals that the order to prepare the project assignment was issued back in October 1968.

Additionally, a general plan ("Genplan") prepared by the "Gipropromselstroii" Tbilisi branch, dated 1968, includes the following components:

- Roads Department;
- Open parking lot for cars;
- Entrance to the courtyard of the Roads Department;
- Lawn;

- Residential building to be designed;
- Sidewalk.

In the archive of Giorgi Chakhava, there is also visual material dated 1969 (sketches, section drawings, and plans).

Based on the stylistics, this part of the sketches should belong to the 1960s.

If all of this was ready by 1968-1969, it is self-evident how much earlier the thought and work on its idea, transforming the idea into a project, developing it into a project proposal, designing it, undergoing numerous professional and bureaucratic discussions, overcoming obstacles, and making decisions and resolutions would have begun. All of this provides a strong basis to attribute the initiation of the idea for the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building to the first half of the 1960s.

Additionally, we consider as further evidence the note in Giorgi Chakhava's autobiographical manuscript related to this building: "1970 - Tbilisi, Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building with architect Z. Jalaghania and structural engineers T. Tkhilava and A. Kimberg." From this, it can be assumed that by this time, the project for the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building was ready for realization. Furthermore, it indicates that for the architect, the readiness of the project held greater importance than its physical implementation. This is evidenced by the fact that in 1975, when the construction of the building was completed, there is no note in his autobiographical manuscript marking this event.

Thus, the sketches from 1959 and the documentary material preserved in Giorgi Chakhava's archive from the 1960s, along with accompanying information and visual materials (the land plot plan dated December 1968, facade sketch dated 1969, section drawings, floor plans, various perspective sketches, and the note found in his autobiographical manuscript), serve as credible evidence that the author group, under the leadership of Giorgi Chakhava, began considering this type of architecture from the 1950s and started working on its physical implementation as early as the beginning of the 1960s.

CONCLUSION

Based on the presented research, it can be confidently stated that the conceptual idea of the unique building of the Ministry of Roads of Georgia Engineering Building, completed in 1975, originated in the late 1950s, with the design phase taking shape in the 1960s.

Gradual steps toward its realization began in the second half of that decade, culminating in a structure that stands as a remarkable monument to 20th-century Georgian architectural culture.

The building's design responds directly to the complex Georgian topography by utilizing the rocky landscape and freeing land space beneath its structure. Rising to sixteen stories, it is constructed from metal trusses and reinforced concrete, with internal wall partitions made of cement blocks-engineered to withstand seismic activity measuring up to 8 on the

Richter scale.

As recognition of the project's original architectural concept, the authors were officially awarded by the Council of Ministers of the Soviet Union, underscoring the significance of their work within the architectural discourse of that era.

This building remains a testament to the innovative spirit and harmonious integration of architecture with natural landscapes, leaving a lasting impact on both Georgian and global architectural heritage.

Ethics Approval and Conflict of Interest

This study was conducted in accordance with relevant ethical standards. The authors declare that there are no financial, personal, professional, or institutional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the design, conduct, interpretation, or publication of this work.

Financing

The research was carried out without financial support.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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Figure 1. *A residential house on pillars*



Figure 2. *A residential house on pillars*

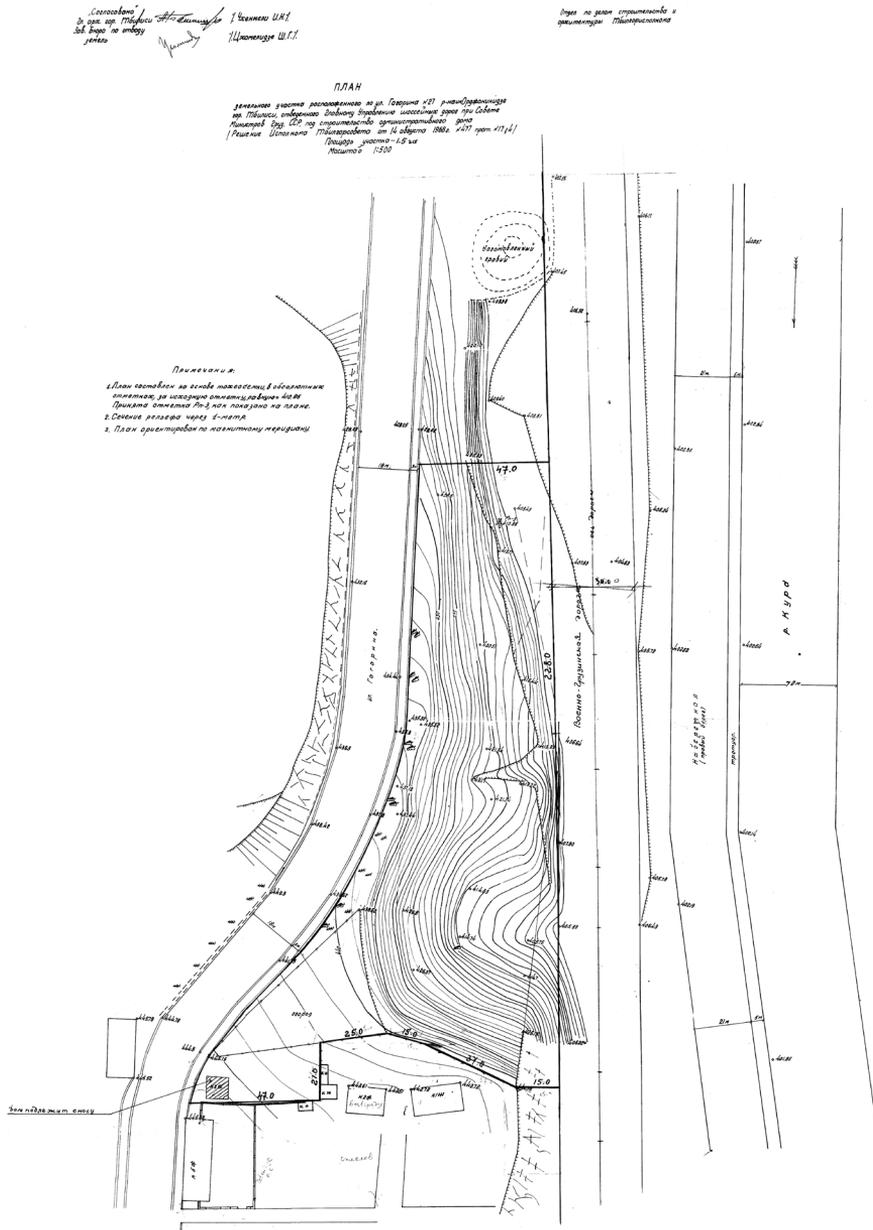


Figure 3. Plan of the land plot located on Gagarin Street No. 27

Ordzhonikidze District, Tbilisi, allocated to the Main Directorate of Highways under the Council of Ministers of the Georgian SSR for the construction of an administrative building (Decision of the Executive Committee of Tbilisi City Council dated August 14, 1968, No. 477, Protocol No. 17 84).

Area of the plot – 1.5 hectares - Scale 1:

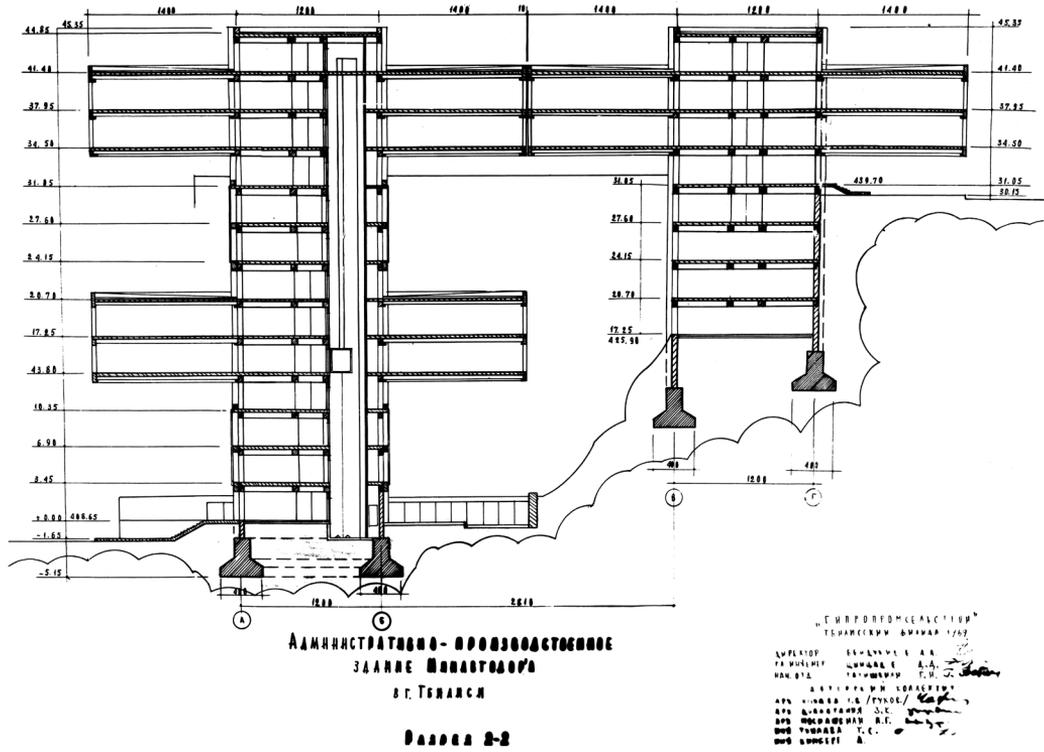


Figure 5. Administrative-production building of motor roads - Section - 1969 'Gipropromselstroy' Tbilisi branch (Georgian National Archive 14_8_1517_10)

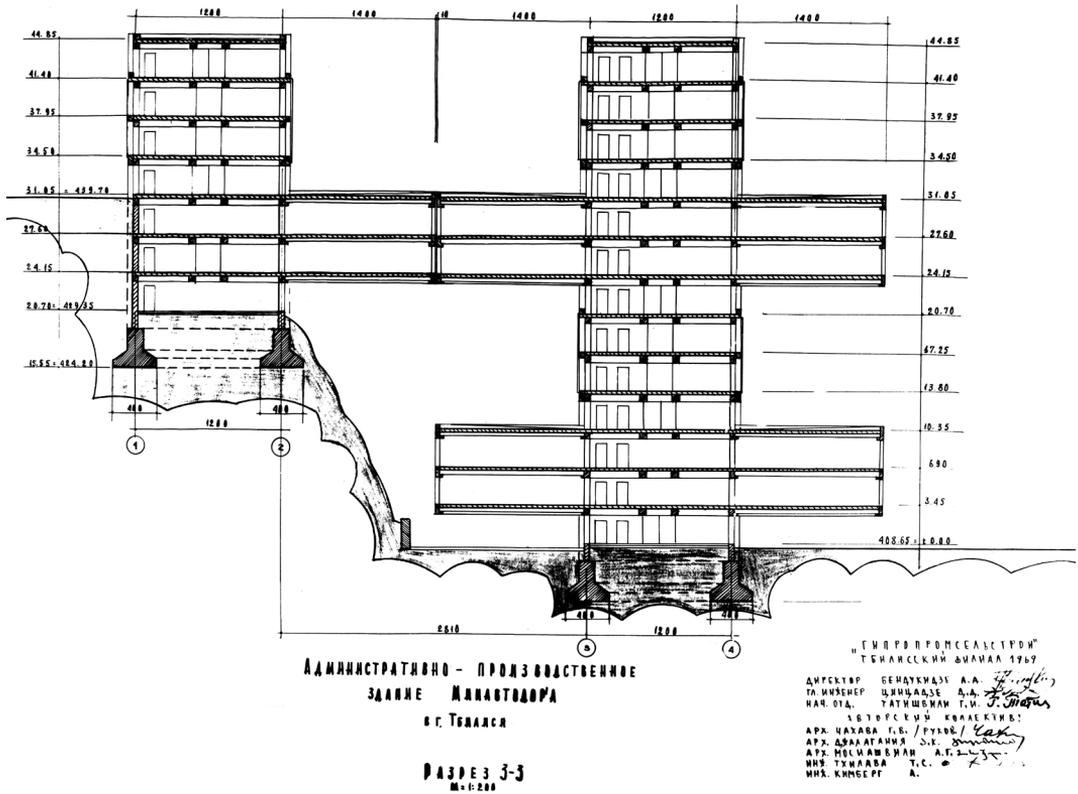


Figure 6. Administrative-production building of motor roads - Section - 1969 'Gipropromselstroy' Tbilisi branch (Georgian National Archive 14_8_1517_11)

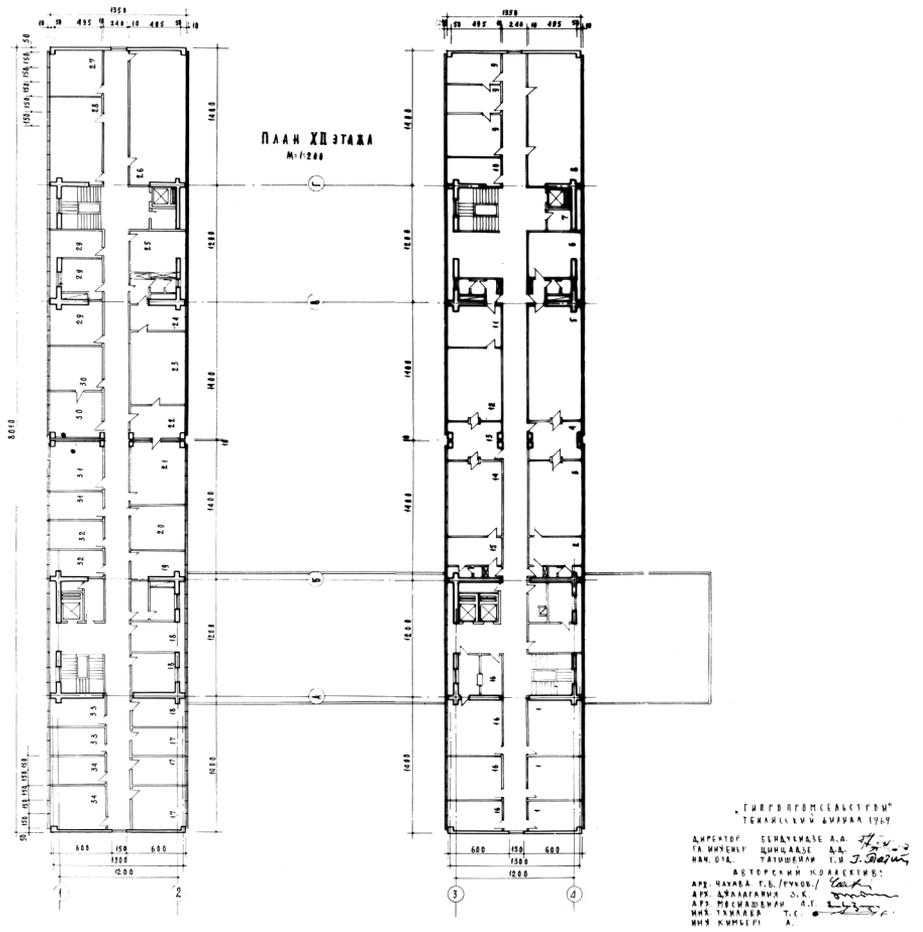


Figure 8. Plan of the 12th floor of the administrative-production building of motor roads ‘Gipro-promselstroy’ Tbilisi branch (Georgian National Archive 14_8_1517_12)



Figure 9. Sketch of the building’s facade - From the Tbilisi entrance side - 1969 (Georgian National Archive 14_8_1517_9)



Figure 10 – 1. *Sketches of the building's facade - architect Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava's personal archive*

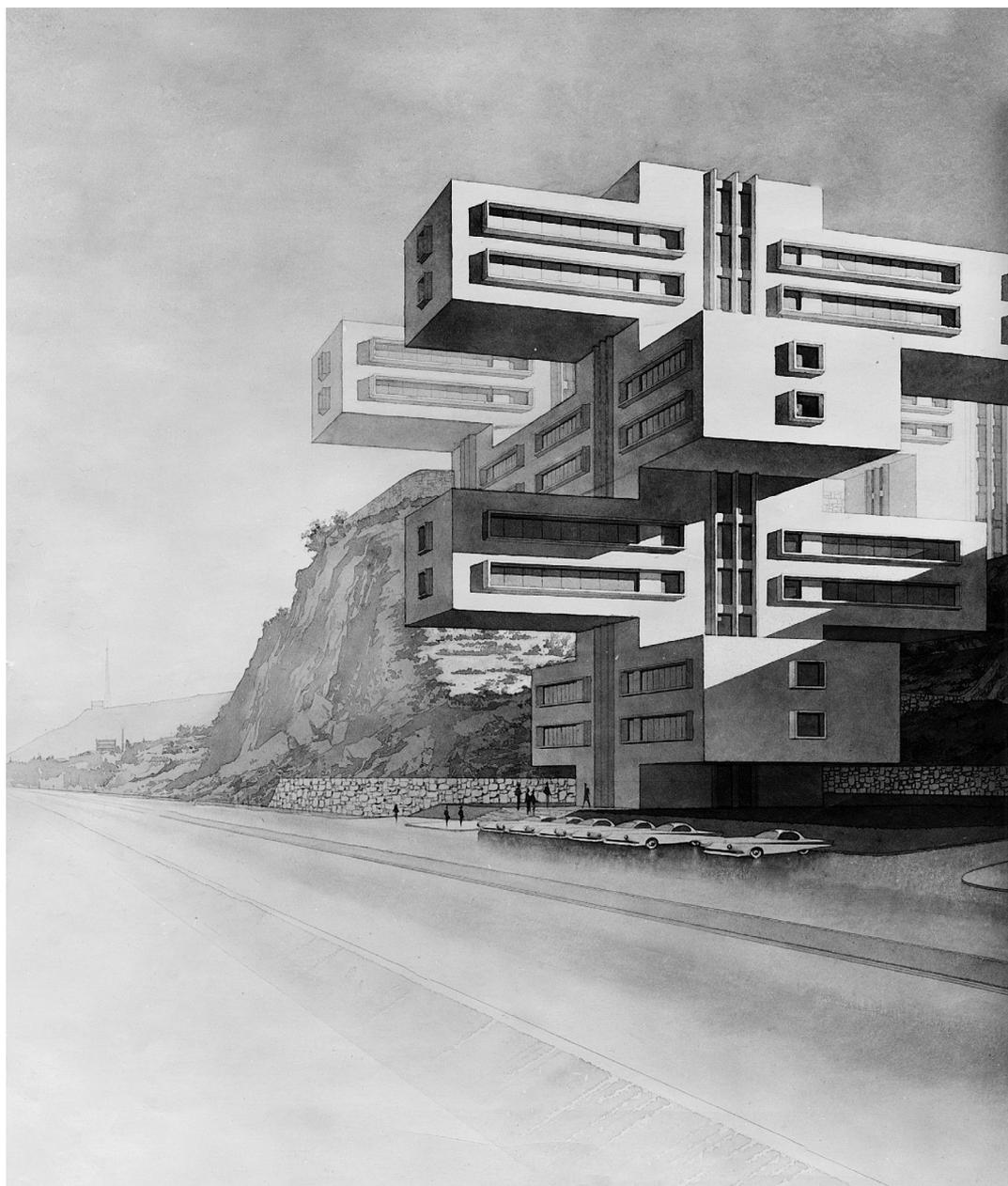


Figure 10 – 2. *Sketches of the building's facade - architect Giorgi (Gogi) Chakhava's personal archive*