

SITE: NOKALAKEVI, GEORGIA 2007

THE POTTERY *By Jane Timby*

Introduction

The following preliminary report summarises the ceramic work undertaken in the field for 10 days in August 2007 looking at the pottery excavated from the 2007 season. The entire excavated assemblage from 2007 site was rapidly scanned and recorded assisted by students from Bradford and Georgia. The exercise was very much one of a familiarisation process by the author with no previous knowledge of the ceramics of the periods concerned for this region. It was hoped that by developing a rigorous and consistent approach along the lines used for studying pottery assemblages in Western Europe and the Mediterranean, a firm basis could be established for future work on the ceramics of Georgia. Much assistance and valuable information was kindly provided by Dr David Lordkipanize whose knowledge of the local forms and chronology is unrivalled.

In total the 2007 season recovered in the region of 5847 sherds weighing 101.4 kg to which can be added three complete or partially complete amphorae and two burial pots. These latter vessels were drawn following on-site restoration. The entire assemblage was recorded and a selection of pieces drawn (Figs 1-4). The work carried out to date was very much a rapid learning exercise and may be subject to modification as more material is studied.

Methodology

The assemblage was studied stratigraphically as work proceeded starting with the uppermost layers, which also comprised the largest group of material. The pottery from each recorded context was sorted into fabric groups based on the nature of the constituents of the clays taking into account the types of inclusions, their size and frequency. Fabric codes are used to designate different fabrics. An alpha-numeric system has been used where letters have been used to indicate the major inclusion(s) present followed by a unique Arabic number, thus LI = limestone; CA = calcite; SA = sand etc. PY (pyroxene) has been temporarily used to designate black sand (volcanic fabrics) until the precise geology of these can be determined microscopically. A common name is sometimes used to define certain fabrics, for example Sinopean mortaria, Colchian amphorae etc. Attributes relevant to the definition of a fabric include colour, firing, hardness, feel and texture and inclusions. In addition to their identification the inclusions are defined by their frequency, shape and size. Frequency is defined by rare (less than 3%), sparse (5-7%), moderate (10-15%), common (20-25%), very common (30-40%) and abundant (40-50%). Size ranges commonly used are very fine (up to 0.1 mm); fine (0.1-0.25 mm), medium (0.25-0.5 mm), coarse (0.5-1.0 mm) and very coarse (larger than 1.00 mm). Once sorted into fabric groups and assigned a code, the sherds from each context were counted and weighed and the details filled in on a pottery-recording sheet. Rim sherds were separated out and measured for diameter and the percentage of rim present (estimated vessel equivalent) using a chart. The rims were coded to form, for example, jar/ cooking pot (dergi),

pithoi with sub-division for details of shape. This area of work requires modification and updating as a greater understanding of the repertoire of vessels is gained particularly when dealing with small fragments. To assist in this process most of the defined types were drawn and identified through consultation with DL. Other diagnostic pieces such as handles, bases, spouts etc were noted on the recording form along with any decoration or surface treatment. Ultimately the goal is to define a form type series.

The data from the pottery recording sheets was entered into an MS Excel spreadsheet. A quantified summary of this can be found in Table 1.

Description of fabrics

Table 1 summarises the fabrics identified during the 2007 season. A fuller macroscopic description is in progress, which will be augmented by a microscopic study of a small number of selected pieces. The main wares groups defined are limestone-tempered, calcite-tempered, a mixed grit group, a limestone and volcanic-tempered ware, a limestone and iron-tempered ware, a micaceous ware and sandy wares.

Comment on fabrics

Initial impressions might suggest that the assemblage mainly comprised wares of local origin with few imported or traded wares. The entire amphorae component accounts for just 2.5% of the assemblage by count (excluding the burial vessels) and the finewares present barely registered at 0.2%. A single Sinopean mortaria is possibly the only other import.

The petrology of the material is quite interesting and would repay further work to determine whether all the constituents found in the different fabrics are locally available. There is clearly quite a diverse geology with both sedimentary (calcareous) rocks and volcanic source material, sometimes occurring together, sometimes separately.

The commonest fabric by far is a buff, mainly oxidised, limestone-tempered ware (fabric L1), which accounted for over half the assemblage recorded, 53% by count. This was used to make a variety of jars, pithoi and shallow bowls. Four other limestone fabrics were defined which collectively account for a further 20.8% of the assemblage. Four calcite-tempered fabrics were defined which account for 1.3% of the group and included both wheel made and handmade vessels. The mixed grit group contained various inclusions both of sedimentary (limestone, flint) and volcanic origin and accounts for 9.9% of the assemblage. Sandy wares account for 5.3% and micaceous wares for 0.1%. A limestone fabric with volcanic inclusions accounts for 3.8% whilst the limestone and ferruginous pellets was again less than 1%.

The amphorae include few diagnostic featured pieces from the 2007 assemblage although a considerably larger assemblage with many handles and rims was recovered from previous seasons. The commonest form from the 2007 assemblage is the Colchian type with a distinctive volcanic black sand fabric (Fig. 3) presumably from the Black Sea coast. In addition there are some fabrics reminiscent of Aegean types,

in particular Rhodian amphorae and a large number of 'Late Roman amphorae' (LRA) in particular types 1, 2, possibly 3 and 5 dating to the 5th-7th centuries. Other ribbed unrecognised types hint at East Mediterranean sources. The material housed in the museum from the previous work appears to include a high proportion of LRA 1 amphorae, a type which evolved through the 4th-7th centuries. It was produced in the Roman provinces of *Cilicia* and Cyprus and there may be other as yet unknown sources. The principal content was probably wine. The amphorae were probably exported to the Black Sea region from the later 4th century onwards.

Preliminary discussion and assessment 2007 site

A significant proportion of the pottery recovered from the 2007 excavation came from deposit 137/174 which effectively sealed all the subsequent archaeology. This amounted to some 2371 sherds weighing 46.6 kg, 40.5% by count, 46% by weight (see Table 2). The condition of the material was variable with some quite fresh sherds but other more abraded pieces. An overall average sherd size of 19.6 g suggests that although clearly a dumped / demolition horizon, it has not suffered too much disturbance. Whilst this was a good deposit for seeing the range of fabrics present it did not prove to be so in defining a ceramic phase, ie. where the pottery fabrics and forms from a single chronological horizon could be isolated. The deposit contained material dating to the Hellenistic period but mainly to the late Roman/Byzantine period, the latter marked in particular by sherds of later Roman amphorae.

Context 188, dark rubble overlying the Roman road, produced a very small assemblage of 14 sherds (192 g) slightly more fragmented than 137/174 but with little diagnostic material. Probably cut into 174 was burial 194 which yielded no pottery.

Sealed below deposit 137/174 were a number of burials three of which were contained within Colchian amphorae (Fig. 3). Burial 191 also produced an additional 85 sherds, 72 of which appear to come from one limestone-tempered jar with a triangular rim. Burial 207 yielded an additional 18 sherds presumably accidentally incorporated into the grave backfill.

Further pottery was recovered from postholes 218, 223 and beamslot 214. The latter produced the most material with 238 sherds (3.15 kg). Fabric L1 accounts for 47% of this by count and fabric L3 for 29%. Posthole 223 with 108 sherds shows a slightly different pottery profile with several sherds of amphorae and fabric GR1 and L3 dominating the group. Posthole 218 contained just two sherds along with some daub and ceramic building material.

The graves were cut into a series of deposits associated with possible structures. Context 211 (see Table 2) produced a large group of 1403 sherds weighing 19.5 kg. The average sherd size is 14 g indicating a higher level of fragmentation compared to 137/174. The limestone-tempered fabrics dominate, and like the upper horizons fabric L1 is the most prominent accounting for 45.5% by count, slightly less than the upper levels. The finer fabrics, L3 and particularly L4 however are more prominent compared to the upper levels suggesting that this ware is earlier. Sandy fabric SA2 also appears for the first time.

Possibly contemporary with 211 are deposits 213 with 323 sherds (5.3 kg), 216 with 828 sherds, (14.15 kg) and 217 with 300 sherds (7.36 kg). A single ridged possible LRA 1 amphorae sherd from 216 may be intrusive or indicate a late Roman date for this deposit (?) Throughout fabric L1 continues to dominate, particularly in deposit 216 where it accounts for just over 60%.

The remaining pottery recorded came from context 226 with 124 sherds (1365 g) amongst which was the rim of a probable Rhodian amphorae (late Hellenistic-early Roman) and 229 with 34 sherds (568 g). Grave [227] produced two complete vessels, a single handled flask and a handled globular drinking vessel (Fig. 4) for which a 4th century BC date has been suggested (D. Lordkipanize pers comm.). Both vessels are in sandy fabrics, which appear to be characteristic of the pre-Roman period.

Conclusions and further work

The work undertaken in 2007 was very much a preliminary exercise and limited to a certain extent by the nature of the particular archaeology exposed. The initial impression from the 2007 assemblage is that there is little evidence of a Roman/Lazican presence and that the Hellenistic levels are sealed by late Roman-Byzantine deposits confirming the results obtained from investigations elsewhere at Nolakakevi.

The work undertaken to date has demonstrated that there is considerable potential in characterising the assemblage both through a fabric and form series. The value of applying a more rigorous methodology will only become apparent as more material is recorded in this way from both Nokalakevi itself and from other sites further away allowing intra- and inter-site comparisons. To this end it is important to record the entire assemblage from a defined archaeological horizon prior to any disposal of the finds. New forms should be drawn when encountered.

The petrology of the fabrics is quite distinctive and future work could be directed at identifying the local geology and identifying possible clay sources. This would help establish how many of the wares are local. Future work should also be directed to developing a more rigorous form type series in collaboration with Dr Lordkipanize, which can be chronologically defined.

Catalogue of illustrated sherds

Figure 1

1. Slightly everted rim jar (pot). . Black in colour. Fabric L3. Context 137.
2. Small everted rim jar (pot). . Black in colour. Fabric: M1. Context 137.
3. Everted rim jar (pot). . Fabric: L1. Context 137.
4. Flared rim jar (pot). . Grey in colour. Fabric: L1. Context 137.
5. Sharply everted rim jar (pot). . Oxidised exterior, grey interior. Fabric: L1. Context 137.
6. Concave mouthed flared rim jar (pot) with a lightly combed exterior surface. Wheel made. Brown in colour. Context 137.
7. Everted rim jar (pot). Wheel made. Black in colour. Fabric: L3. Context 137.

8. Small flared rim jar (pot/kolani). Wheel made. Grey in colour. Fabric: L1. Context 137.
9. Everted rim jar (pot). Wheel made. Orange-brown in colour. Fabric: L1. Context 137.
10. Thickened everted rim jar (pot). Wheel made. Black in colour. Fabric: CA1. Context 137.
11. Wide conical mouthed jar (dergi) decorated with combed wavy lines. Wheel made. Grey exterior and oxidised interior. Fabric L1. Context 137.
12. Wide-mouthed jar (dergi). Wheel made. Fabric L1. Context 137.
13. Thickened everted rim jar (dergi) with a ridged body. Wheel made. Grey in colour. Fabric L1. Context 137.
14. Thickened everted rim jar (dergi). Oxidised in colour. Wheel made. Fabric L1. Context 137/174.
15. Triangular rimmed jar (dergi). Wheel made. Fabric L1. Context 137.
16. Triangular rimmed jar (dergi) with finger-pressed upper rim surface. Wheel made. Fabric L1. Context 174.
17. Hook-rimmed jar (pot/dergi). Wheel made. Grey in colour. Fabric: SA1. Context 137.
18. Rolled rim conical mouthed jar (dergi). Combed wavy line decoration in the neck. Patchy oxidised, grey black surfaces, buff core. Wheel made. Context 137.
19. Triangular rim, conical mouthed jar (dergi). Burnt. Wheel made. Decorated with combed wavy line, impressed ring- and-dot and incised lattice. Fabric: L1. Context 137.
20. Flared rim large jar (dergi). Fabric: GR1. Context 137.
21. Bodysherd from a closed form, probably handmade. Scrape marks on the interior and lattice impression on exterior. Fabric: CA1. Context 137.
22. Bodysherd from a closed form with bands of red painted decoration. Fabric: SA1. Context 137.
23. Flared conical mouthed large jar (dergi) with a narrow irregular neck cordon. Fabric: GR1. Context 174.
24. Large flared rim jar with a cordoned neck (dergi). Grey in colour. Fabric: CA3. Context 137.
25. Heavy rim large jar or pithoi (dergi/pithoi). The rim is perforated probably to facilitate drying during manufacture. Impressed decoration on rim. Probably Hellenistic. Fabric: L1. Context 137.
26. Wide-mouthed jar (dergi/pithoi). Oxidised in colour. Fabric: L1. Context 137/174.
27. Curved wall dish with a triangular rim (jame). Oxidised exterior, grey interior. Fabric: L1. Context 137.
28. Shallow bowl (jame) with a rolled slightly pendant rim. Grey in colour. Fabric: L1. Context 137.
29. Thinner walled bowl with a slightly pendant rim. Fabric: L1. Context 137.
30. Small dish (jame). Fabric: LIPY. Context 137.
31. Curved wall dish (jame). Fabric L1. Context 137.
32. Small dish (jame) with a slightly internally thickened rim. Black in colour. Fabric: CA1. Context 137.
33. Small curved wall dish (jame) with a slightly internally projecting lip. Fabric: L1. Classical type (6th-5th BC). Context 137.

Figure 2

34. Large bowl or *luterium* (jame/*luterium*). Grey in colour. Fabric: GR1. Context 137.
35. Bowl or dish (jame) with combed wavy line decoration. Pale orange. Fabric: L1. Context 137.
36. Sinopean mortarium. Buff fabric with black sand. Fabric: SINOP. Context 174.
37. Small dish (jame) or open lamp. Sooted on the upper interior and exterior. Fabric: GR1. Context 174.
38. Small handmade jar/ beaker (*coljobi*). Fabric: L3. Context 137/174.
39. Lid or conical mouthed jar. Decorated with incised herring-bone decoration. Worn lip. Fabric: GYF. Context 137.
40. Small amphorae. Oxidised. Fabric: OXF. Context 174.
41. Small amphora. Fabric: LIPY. Context 137.
42. Small amphorae or flask with at least one handle. Oxidised. Fabric: LIPY. Context 137.
43. Small conical mouthed flask. Oxidised. Fabric: LIPY. Context 137.
44. Handle decorated with an animal head. Fabric: L1. Context 174.
45. Handle originally decorated with two 'horns' since broken. Fabric: L1. Context 174.
46. Loop handle. Grey-black in colour. Fabric: L3. Context 137.
47. Handle with a small applied pellet on the top. Fabric: GR2. Context 174.
48. Handle. Fabric: L3. Context 137. Typical of early Antique period.
49. Cup decorated with combed wavy lines. Fabric: L1. Context 137/174.
50. Fineware beaker with a red slip. Fabric: FW2. Context 137/174.
51. Fineware vessel with a black slip on the interior surface and part of the exterior. Fabric: FW1. Context 137.
52. Handmade closed form mainly oxidised with darker patches. Scraped base. Fabric: L2. Context: burial 199.
53. Conical mouthed jar (*dergi*) with an internally thickened rim. Pale brown. Fabric: L1. Context 199.
54. Amphora/flagon rim. Oxidised. Fabric: LIFE. Context 223.
55. Amphora rim. Oxidised. Fabric: AMP1, ?Rhodian. Context 226.
56. Small ?jar. Fabric: SA1. Context 213.
57. Solid handle or tripod leg. Fabric: LIPY. Context 213.
58. Hollow pedestalled base. Fabric: L5. Context 213.
59. Bodysherd with incised spiral decoration. Fabric: L4. Context 214.
60. Small dish with an orange-brown exterior and grey interior. Fabric: L1. Context 214.
61. Spout from a *luterium*. Fabric: LIFE. Context 174.
62. Small handmade dish or open lamp. Blackened interior, Fabric: L3. Context 211.
63. Bowl with a hole pierced through the wall. Fabric: L4. Context 211.
64. Small dish. Fabric: L3. Context 211.
65. Small bowl. Fabric: L4. Context 211.
66. Bodysherd from a closed form decorated with incised crosses. Fabric: L1. Context 211.
67. Bodysherd with an applied projecting lug. Fabric: L1. Context 211.
68. Bodysherd decorated with a row of finger depressions. Pale brown with an orange core. Fabric: LIFE. Context 211.
69. Handmade small base with a body cordon, ?beaker or small jar. Fabric: L1. Context 211.

70. Conical mouthed jar with a comb-impressed decorated rim. Fabric: L1. Context 211.
71. Conical mouthed jar with an internally thickened rim and external combed wavy line decoration. Fabric: L1. Context 216.
72. Conical mouthed jar (dergi) with comb impressed decoration. Fabric: L1. Context 216.
73. Narrow-necked closed form. Fabric: L1. Context 216.
74. Cordon necked ?jar. Fabric: L1. Context 216.
75. ?Lid with handle. Fabric: L1PY. Context 216.
76. Conical flared rim jar (dergi) with horizontal tooling on the neck. Fabric: L1. Context 216.
77. Handled conical mouthed jug with an expanded rim. Row of five clay pellets at top of handle. Fabric: L1. Context 216.

Figure 3

1. Colchian amphora. Complete apart from basal knob. Double finger depressions at base of handles. A trident symbol on the neck inscribed before firing. The vessel has been deliberately holed just below the handle. Burial 191, context 189.
2. Colchian amphora. Single finger depression at the base of each handle. Upside-down 'anchor' symbol on neck and three parallel lines under handle loop inscribed before firing. Burial 222, context 220.
3. Colchian amphora. Badly spalled through burning. Handles lost. Evidence internally that the vessel was made in two halves. Feature 207, context 205.

Figure 4

1. Small complete single handled flask. Very heavy base, roughly pitted in the underside. Sandy oxidised fabric, slightly micaceous. Grave 227.
2. Handled globular mug. Dark black-brown in colour. Fabric SA1. Grave 227.

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