

SITE: NOKALAKEVI, GEORGIA 2008

INTERIM REPORT ON THE POTTERY FROM THE 2008 SEASON

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Introduction

The following interim report summarises the ceramic work undertaken in the field for 10 days in July 2008. In total the 2008 season recovered in the region of 5980 sherds weighing 90.983 kg. The entire assemblage was rapidly scanned, sorted and recorded in tandem with the excavation and a selection of featured sherds drawn (Figs 1-3). The work built on the fabric and recording system established in 2007.

The pottery work carried out to date is very much a rapid learning exercise and may be subject to modification as more material is studied. Part of the work involved teaching both Georgian and British students basic ceramic processing and recording along with pottery drawing.

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; PY = pyroxene and associated inclusions; FL = flint, FE = iron oxides; MU = mudstone / argillaceous inclusions; GR = mixed grit and G = grog. 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 (EVE)) using a chart. The rims were coded to form, for example, jar/ cooking pot, pithos with sub-division for details of shape. This area of work requires modification and updating as a greater understanding the repertoire of vessels is gained particularly when dealing with small fragments. A range of the defined types were drawn along with other diagnostic pieces such as handles, bases, and spouts.

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.

Fabrics and forms

Full description of the fabrics is in preparation. Table 1 summarises the fabrics identified during the 2008 season. Most of the coarse wares encountered in 2007 continued to feature in the lower levels along with a small number of new fabrics. Imported fine wares continue to be extremely rare and no further examples of the types defined in 2007 were found and only one new type was listed for 2008. Slight variations in the amphorae were evident with a few new fabrics and an absence of some of the types defined in 2007. As with the 2007 assemblage featured pieces were extremely rare precluding clear definition of forms.

The single new fine ware sherd encountered in 2008 is a basesherd from a closed form with a poorly applied brown slip (Fig. 3.75). This is probably a Black Sea copy of an imported Greek ware and typical of the 2nd-1st century BC (D. Lomitashvili pers. comm.). The sherd came from layer 235.

In 2008 amphorae accounted for 2.5% by sherd count of the assemblage, very similar to the proportions found in 2007. Colchian amphorae with a black sand fabric was the commonest recorded. The production of Colchian amphora dates from around the mid 4th century BC through to the 1st century AD (Tsetskhladze and Vnukov 1992, 360). No further complete burial amphorae were recovered in 2008. The typology of the examples found in 2007 correspond to variant B in the provisional typology proposed by Tsetskhladze and Vnukov dating from the end of the 3rd to the end of the 1st century. In particular the rims forms resemble those from the Chaika city-site, NW Crimea, dated to the 2nd-1st centuries BC (ibid fig 8.2; fig 9.1). Another feature illustrated by the Nokolakevi examples is a slightly swollen neck, also thought to be a development in the 2nd-1st centuries BC (op. cit, 368).

Of the remaining amphora there were appreciably less ridged 'late Roman' types but the presence of four possible sherds suggests some contamination. Many of the remaining sherds, although unfeatured, are probably from Hellenistic imported Aegean forms, perhaps for example, Rhodian, Chian, Lesbian, Parian or Thasian.

As with the 2007 assemblage coarse wares dominate, in particular the mainly oxidised light-mid orange, or pale brown, limestone-tempered fabric LI1 which account for 44.4% of the assemblage by count. This is followed by a slightly darker coloured, limestone-tempered ware (LI3) at 24.2% and a mixed grit fabric (GR2) at 13.2% which mainly features as pithoi. New fabrics recorded for the first time, albeit in small quantities, include a flint-tempered ware, two grog-tempered fabrics, two iron-rich fabrics and a ware with argillaceous (?mudstone) inclusions. In addition three new mixed grit variants, and three new sandy fabrics were defined.

In addition to a similar range of vessel types to those defined in 2007, mainly jars, pithoi, handled jugs, flasks and lamps a few new types were noted. The introduction of a new technological feature was observed with a number of rims, mainly from pithoi or similar large vessels (Fig. 1.12-13), where the rim has been folded over creating a small void similar to that seen on glass vessels. Other new forms include pedestalled goblets (Figs 1.30-31; 2.37) and feet from tripod vessels (Figs 1.29; 2.38; 3.70). A single example of an unusual double loop handle was found (Fig. 1.32) and a specialised vessel of some type with an internal ledge (Fig. 1.21). Fragments of a perforated plate, perhaps from a colander were also recovered (Fig. 3.82). At least three pipe-handles were found (Figs 1.14; 2.64-65) which are characteristic of the 7th to 5th century (D. Lomitashvili pers. comm.). Many of these fragments may be residual from earlier horizons but they may also intimate a change in the chronology. A single small sherd with stamped concentric ring decoration (Fig. 3.71) is clearly redeposited, this style being more typical of the 7th-8th century BC (D. Lomitashvili pers. comm.).

The 2008 pottery in relation to the site

Most of the pottery analysed in 2008 was recovered from various layers within the cemetery area. In addition three vessels were recovered more or less intact two of which were associated with burials (Fig. 3.84-5) and one from layer (235) which must be disturbed from a burial (Fig. 3.74). Vessels typologically similar to the handled flask (Fig. 3. 84) and handled mug (Fig.3.85) from the cemetery at Pichvnari, but in finer fabrics, are dated to the early 3rd century BC (M. Vickers pers. comm.). The isolated handled jug with its pinched spout may be a local imitation of a Greek oinochoe. Similar vessels at Pichvnari are dated to the mid 5th century BC (M. Vickers pers. comm.)

The largest assemblage came from layer 217/211/213 continuing on from the 2007 season. This horizon yielded some 2398 sherds weighing 39.2 kg, 40% of the total recovered assemblage. The sherds preservation was moderately good with an average sherd weight of 16.3 g. Two fabric groups dominate; limestone-tempered fabric LI1 which accounts for 44.2% and the gritty ware group which makes up a further 22.4%.

A further significantly large group of material was recovered from layer 235 stratigraphically below 211 with 2413 sherds weighing 33.3 kg. The sherds are slightly more fragmented with an average sherd weight of 13.8 g. At least two possibly intrusive sherds are present, the brown-slipped fineware (FW4) and a sherd of probable later Roman amphora. On the other hand the deposit produced several of the new fabrics along with vessels typologically of 5th-4th century date.

The remaining individual assemblages are much smaller. Rubble layer 232 yielded 104 sherds with an overall average sherd size of 19.2 g suggesting slightly better preservation. This contrasts with material collected from the putative yard surface 229 which had an average sherd size of 13.3 g.

A number of sherd joins were observed between several different contexts perhaps indicative of the disturbed nature of these deposits which were repeatedly recycled for the

digging of graves and other features. Another explanation might be that the soils creating these horizons have been brought in from another common source. Most of the pottery recovered is presumably dumped, accumulated material from the adjacent settlement. In particular sherd links were made between layer 217 and grave fill 236, between layers 234 and 235, 236 and 235 and between layers 234 and 231.

Comparison of 2007 and 2008 assemblages

One of the main purposes of quantifying pottery assemblages is to define trends which may be linked to chronology. This data has to be accrued over many years from different sites in order for clear patterns to emerge which can be tied down to chronological points. The data from Nokolakevi is still in its infancy but already there are small changes apparent when the data from 2007 is compared with 2008 (Table 2), which may be reinforced or refuted with further work. It can be observed that the proportion of gritty fabrics has increased from 10.2% to 20.1% by sherd count. As noted above some new fabrics have appeared (flint, grog and ferruginous). The limestone with pyroxene inclusions (LIPY) has decreased as a group as has the limestone-tempered group. Within the limestone group fabric LI3 is becoming more prolific. Many of the minor fabric groups remain fairly constant, for example, the calcite tempered wares, the very micaceous wares and the sandy wares. The range of forms and decorative styles also show slight subtle changes which will probably become highlighted with detailed analysis.

Conclusions

The work undertaken in 2008 built on and developed that started in 2007. The analysis 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 Nokolakevi 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.

Catalogue of illustrated sherds

Figure 1

1. Wide-mouthed jar/ pithos with flared rim. Fabric M1. Layer (217).
2. Wide-mouthed jar/ pithos with flared rim. Fabric LI3. Layer (217).
3. Wide-mouthed jar/ pithos with flared rim. Fabric SA3. Layer (217).
- 4-5. Pithoi with internally thickened rims. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
6. Large storage jar with a slightly expanded rim. Fabric LI3. Layer (217).
7. Wide-mouthed jar with a flared neck and rounded, beaded rim. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
8. Flared neck jar with a small expanding rim. Unevenly fired with wipe marks on the interior. Fabric LI3. Layer (217).

9. Upper and lower parts of a handmade simple everted rim jar. Fabric GR2. Layer (217).
10. Narrow-necked jar with a folded over rim. Fabric CA2. Layer (217).
11. Wide-mouthed flared neck jar/ pithos with a folded over thickened rim. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
12. Wide-mouthed jar with a folded over rim. Fabric LI3. Layer (217).
13. Jar with a folded over rim. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
14. Fragment of a handled spout (colloquially known as a pipe-handle). Diagonal incised lines on the handle. Fabric LI3. Layer (217). This form appears at Nokolakevi around the 7th to 6th centuries BC.
15. S-shaped jar with an internally beaded rim. Fabric CA2. Layer (217).
16. Flared rim jar with slight internal bead. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
17. Flared rim jar decorated with an incised wavy line. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
18. Flared rim jar/jug. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
19. Flared rim jar/jug with a band of combed wavy line decoration. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
20. Handled jug. The top of the handle has four applied pellets. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
21. Bodysherd from a large vessel of unknown form with an internal ledge, Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
22. Shallow dish with a smoothly burnished interior. Fabric SA1. Layer (217)
23. Small lamp. Sooted on the interior just below the rim and on the exterior of the rim. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
24. Curved wall dish. Fabric SA1. Layer (217).
25. Small dish or cup. Fabric LI3. Layer (217).
26. Amphora. Fabric AMP1 ?Rhodian. Layer (217).
27. Bodysherd with a grooving to the body above which is a line of incised crosses. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).
28. Bodysherd from a closed form decorated with tooled vertical grooves to create a fluted effect. Burnished in the upper part. Fabric LI3. Layer (217).
29. Foot from a tripod vessel. Slightly oval in shape. Fabric GR2. Layer (217).
30. Foot from a pedestalled cup. Burnished exterior. Fabric LI3. Layer (217).
31. Foot from a pedestalled cup. Burnished exterior. Fabric LI3. Layer (217).
32. Double-loop handle. Fabric LI1. Layer (217).

Figure 2

33. Wide mouthed jar with an internal lid seating. Fabric LI3. Layer (213).
34. Handmade, globular jar with short everted rim. Fabric GR6. Layer (213).
35. Neckless jar with a squared rim decorated with impressed comb lines on the upper surface. Fabric GR2. Layer (213).
36. Necked, flared rim jar / flask. Fabric LI1. Layer (213).
37. Pedestalled foot from a cup. Fabric LI1. Layer (213).
38. Tear-drop shaped projecting foot from a ?tripod vessel. Fabric LI1. Layer (213).
39. Narrow necked, flared rim jar. Handmade. Fabric LI3. Layer 229.
40. Narrow necked jar or jug with comb-impressed decoration on the exterior face. Fabric SA1. Layer (229). The form is typical of the 6th-5th centuries BC.
41. Small curved wall dish. Fabric LI3. Layer (229).

42. Flagon/ small amphora. Fabric LIPY. Layer (229).
43. Shallow curved wall dish with a burnished surface. Fabric SA1. Layer (229).
44. Wide-mouthed flared rim jar. Slightly burnt. Fabric LI1. Layer (231).
45. Wide-mouthed everted rim jar. Fabric LI1. Layer (231).
46. Wide-mouthed flared, jar with a slightly internally thickened rim. Fabric LI1. Layer (231).
47. Flared rim jar with a slight internal bevel. Fabric LI1. Layer (234).
48. Flared triangular-rimmed jar/ jug. Fabric LI1. Layer (231).
49. Amphora. Fabric as LIPY. Layer (231).
50. Wide-mouthed, neckless jar with a ridged upper body and squared-off rim. Oxidised. Fabric LI3. Layer (234).
51. Pithos with a decorated collar rim internally beaded. The exterior rim face is decorated with combed wavy line. There are also random circular stabs, presumably to assist drying before firing to prevent spalling. Fabric LI1. Layer (234).
52. Handled jug with a squared rim. The handle is decorated with three applied pellets with indented centres, probably both decorative and functional as a thumb-stop. The body is decorated with bands of impressed comb crosses. Fabric LI1. Layer (234). (typical of 6th-4th centuries BC).
53. Wide-mouthed, everted rim jar. Fabric LI3. Layer (235).
54. Handmade everted rim ovoid jar. Fabric CA2. Layer (235).
55. Flared rim jar with an internally thickened rim. Fabric LI1. Layer (235).
56. Neckless jar with inward facing walls. Below the rim are incised grooves below which is a line of crude rouletting. Fabric GR2. Layer (235).
57. Flared rim jar with slight internal thickening. Fabric SA1. Layer (235).
58. Wide-mouthed jar, decorated with rouletting on the shoulder. Fabric SA1. Layer (235).
59. Pithos with a thickened rim. The rim is decorated with an impressed combed-lattice with random piercings. Fabric LI1. Layer (235).
60. Pithos with a triangular rim similar to Vani type 1A dated to the 5th century BC. Similar vessels have been found at Gonio-Apsaros (Mamuladze and Khalvashi 2002, Taf V, 4-5). Decorated on the outer face by two lines of coarse rouletting. Fabric LI1. Layer (235).
61. Wide-mouthed jar or bowl with a hammer-head rim. Fabric LI3. Layer (235).
62. Flared expanded rim jar. Fabric LI1. Layer (235).
63. Narrow mouthed jar with incised wavy line decoration below the rim. Fabric LI1. Layer (235).
64. Spout attached to a handle (colloquially known as a pipe-handle). Fabric GR2. Layer (235). This form appears at Nokolakevi around the 7th to 6th centuries BC.
65. Spout attached to a handle. Fabric LI1. Layer (235).

Figure 3

66. Pithos. Faintly incised criss-cross decoration on the outer rim. Fabric GR1. Layer (235).
67. Bowl or luterium. Fabric FE2. Layer (235).

68. Dish with a thickened rim and incised lines on the interior towards the base. Fabric LI3. Layer (235).
69. Cup with a hemispherical body and concave rim. Decorated with combed wavy lines. Fabric LI1. Sherds from contexts (235) and (236).
70. Solid foot from a 'tripod' or similar bowl. Fabric LI1. Layer (235).
71. Small bodysherd decorated with raised concentric rings. Black sandy fabric ?MU1. Layer (235). Residual. Typical of 8th-7th century BC.
72. Small dish. Fabric SA1. Layer (235).
73. Small handmade dish (or lid). Fabric GR4. Layer (235).
74. Complete (reconstructed) pinch-mouthed, handled jug. Oxidised. Fabric LIPY. Layer (235), SF 4.
75. Fine ware base from a closed form. The exterior is covered with an uneven mid-dark brown slip. Probably a 'local' Black Sea imitation of imported Greek fine ware. Typical of the 2nd-1st century BC. Fabric FW4. Layer (235).
76. Flanged rim bowl. Fabric LI1. Grave fill (236).
77. Shallow thin-walled dish. Fabric LI1. Grave fill (236).
78. Wide-mouthed jar or bowl decorated on the rim edge with combed wavy line and comb-impressed crosses on the upper surface. Fabric LI1. Grave fill (236).
79. Wide-mouthed. Flared rim jar. Fabric LI1. Grave fill (236).
80. Handle with a single applied pellet at the top. Fabric LI3. Grave fill (236).
81. Projecting knob thickened at the top. Fabric LI3. Grave fill (236).
82. Bodysherd with multiple perforations, possibly a colander or cheese press. Fabric LI1. Layer (235).
83. Shallow dish or lamp. Fabric SA1. Cremation burial (246).
84. Complete handmade handled jug. Slightly asymmetrical about the central axis. Burnt. Quite crudely incised decoration. Fabric ?GR2. Grave [253] fill (252).
85. Complete globular handled beaker. Fabric GR2. Cremation burial (246).
86. Sharply everted rim jar. Fabric LI1. Pit [250] fill (249).
87. Flared rim jar, Fabric LI3. Pit [250] fill (249).

References

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STONE BOWL (Fig. 4)

A small rim fragment from a stone bowl was recovered from layer 235. The piece is made from a highly polished fine-grained stone. The vessel has a flared rim with punched dot decoration on the interior face in the form of a double line 'V'. The hemispherical body is also decorated with punched dots forming horizontal girth lines and part of a diamond pattern. This vessel is undoubtedly an exotic traded item which would have been highly regarded.

Figures

1. Nos 1-32. Selection of pottery from layer 217. Scale 1:4
2. Nos 33-65. Selection of pottery from layers 213, 229, 231, 234 and 235. Scale 1:4
3. Nos 66-87. Selection of pottery from layer 235, grave fill 236, cremation burial 246 and pit [250]. Scale 1:4
4. Decorated stone dish from layer 235. (drawn at 1:1 – reproduce at 1:2)