

SITE: NOKALAKEVI, GEORGIA 2009

INTERIM REPORT ON THE POTTERY FROM THE 2009 SEASON

By Jane Timby

Introduction

The following interim report summarises the ceramic work undertaken in the field for 10 days in July 2009. In total the 2009 season recovered in the region of 3881 sherds weighing 69 kg from Site A and 1016 sherds weighing 26.9 kg from Site B. Most of the assemblage was rapidly scanned, sorted and recorded in tandem with the excavation and conservation work, and a selection of featured sherds drawn (Figs 1-4). The work built on the fabric and recording system established in 2007. Some of the pottery recovered from the burials on Site A had been removed from the site prior to the pottery analysis.

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. The students under supervision did much of the recording and data input for the 2009 assemblage.

In addition to the pottery recording work, a search of the immediate area outside the settlement located some potential potting clay exposed on the side of a small stream.

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 of 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 and bases.

The data from the pottery recording sheets was entered into an MS Excel spreadsheet. A quantified summary of this can be found in Tables 1-2.

Fabrics and forms

Full description of the fabrics is in preparation. Tables 1-2 summarise the fabrics identified during the 2009 season from Sites A and B respectively. As with previous years, imported fine wares and amphorae continue to be rare. Highlights of this season's work include a sherd with part of an inscription (Fig. 3.76); a large vessel with part of an incised animal (Fig. 4.98); a ceramic wheel from a model wagon (Fig. 2.54); and the remains of several goblets, mainly from surviving pedestal bases (Fig. 2.46-7).

As with the 2007-8 assemblages, local coarse wares dominate, in particular the mainly oxidised light-mid orange, or pale brown, limestone-tempered fabrics LI1 and LI3. The second commonest ware group is the coarser gritty wares. Medieval pottery was identified from work in Site B which used similar raw materials to the Hellenistic material with limestone-dominated fabrics.

In addition to a similar range of vessel types to those defined in 2008, mainly jars, pithoi, handled jugs, amphora, goblets and lamps a few new types were noted. In particular a vertically-handled cauldron (Fig. 2.60), perforated vessels which may have served as cheese presses (Fig. 2.50), a carinated cup (Fig. 2.48) and a local copy of a Greek handled bowl (*kantharos*) (Fig. 2.55).

Site A

Most of the pottery analysed in 2009 was recovered from Site A, some 3881 sherds weighing 69139 g. The overall sherds preservation was quite good with an average sherd weight of 17.8 g. This is a slight increase on previous years suggesting that the fragmentation rate is decreasing with depth of deposits removed. Pottery was recovered from 10 defined contexts and one cleaning context (257). Stratigraphically the most recent pottery is that from grave cuts 239, 256, 262 and 266. Grave pit 239 produced 96 sherds amongst which was a cheese press (Fig. 1.5), various jars some with folded over rims (Fig. 1.7-11), a lamp (Fig. 1.6) and a small conical base (Fig. 1.12). The assemblage was dominated by local limestone-tempered wares. Grave 256 produced a larger assemblage of 132 sherds in a more fragmented condition compared to 239 and probably largely representing redeposited material. Amongst the sherds were jars (Fig.1.1-2) and a lamp (Fig. 1.3).

Only a few sherds of pottery were recorded from Graves 262 and 265. The only vessel of note is a wide-mouthed jar with impressed decoration from context (260) (Fig. 2. 70).

The graves were cut into horizon (217) which has been extensively sampled from previous years. A further 47 sherds (1682 g) can be added to this assemblage. The material mainly replicates that from previous years with jars (Fig. 1.14, 18), jugs (Fig. 1.13), pithoi and dolia (Fig. 1.16-17). Fine wares were rare but did include a shallow dish copying a Greek import (Fig. 00.15).

Deposit (258) from below the stones of Structure 1 produced a large assemblage of 186 sherds the majority of which are local coarsewares in limestone and gritty fabrics and with various sized jars and pithoi (Fig. 1. 19, 21-2, 25), a further fragment of a cheese press (Fig. 1. 23) and a beaker (Fig. 20). The only imports are two bodysherds from an orange, very micaceous, amphora which was probably a Greek import. The fabric resembles amphora made at Thasos, and featured sherds from other contexts in the same ware support this suggestion.

Further material was also recovered from (216), part of Structure 2 amounting to some 59 sherds, mainly local wares but with another sherd of Greek amphora, in this instance burnt. A considerably larger assemblage was recovered from (259) below the Structure which produced some 291 sherds. Although again dominated by the same local limestone-based fabrics a few slightly different wares feature in the group, notably calcite-tempered and flint-tempered sherds. Further sherds of lamp feature (Fig. 1.30) along with a curved wall dish (Fig. 1.29), a decorated beaker (Fig. 1.28) and large jars/pithoi, some of which have decorated rims (Fig. 1.24; 27).

The largest assemblage recovered from the site this season came from (235), a further 2455 sherds to add to the 2413 sherds recovered from 2008. Not only does the assemblage show a greater range of fabric but a number of unusual items of note were found. Limestone fabrics (LI1 and LI3) continue to dominate but sandy fabrics make up 5% by count of the group and there are several calcite-tempered, flint-tempered and mixed grit wares. Amphorae make up 1.3% of the group, mainly orange micaceous sherds including two rims (Fig. 2.42, 51) of Thasian type vessels which were produced from the late 6th–early 5th centuries. A single piece of Greek Attic ware was also present. In addition to the usual dominance of jars / pithoi (Fig. 1.26, 31; Fig. 2. 32-4, 43-4) there were a few handmade jars with complex tooled line decoration (Fig. 2.35-8), open lamps (Fig. 2.39-40) and cheese press fragments (Fig. 2.50). New forms include a shallow conical dish (or lid) (Fig. 2.41), a foot from a tripod or similar vessel (Fig. 2. 45), pedestalled goblets (Fig. 2. 46-47) a small carinated cup (Fig. 2.48). There is thus an increased presence of vessels associated with drinking and the serving of food as opposed to cooking and storage. Another rare find was the wheel from a model cart (Fig. 2.54) and a fragment of a large decorated pithoi or dolia with part of an incised animal (Fig. 4.98).

Layer (232) below (235) with 361 sherds continues to show the presence of more sandy wares, quite a few coarse gritted wares, Aegean amphora sherds (Fig. 2.61) and a further

single piece of imported Attic-type ware (Fig. 2. 65). Other finewares include the handled bowl (Fig. 2.55) in a local fabric but presumably copying a Greek *kanthoros*. Another new vessel form not previously recognised is a cauldron with a vertically-projecting 'basket'-type handle (Fig. 2. 60). Further pedestalled bases from goblets occur too (Fig. 2. 62-3). A recurrent feature of these handmade vessels is their quite crude construction and slightly asymmetrical profile. The vessels are presumably designed to be hand held rather than free-standing which raise the question as to whether they were only expected to have a very short lifespan, i.e. made for a specific occasion such as a funeral feast. Further domestic and storage vessels continue to feature (Fig. 2. 56-9).

Site B

The 2009 work within Site B produced a moderately small assemblage of 1016 sherds. Unfortunately none of the pottery from previous work in this site has been analysed so it has not been possible to assess how this assemblage fits in with that already removed. Pottery was recovered from seven defined contexts and one cleaning horizon with the amounts ranging from just three sherds from (400) to 454 sherds from (401).

Stratigraphically the most recent pottery is from reburial (400), grave (402) and grave (394) which produced 3, 65 and 21 sherds respectively. This produced very few featured sherds and much of it is likely to be redeposited. A new medieval limestone fabric (LI6) was defined from material in (402) which also had a sherd of Byzantine amphora.

A further 60 sherds of pottery were recovered from the cemetery soil (303) which contained further sherds of Byzantine ridged body amphora (probably Late Roman 1 forms) although no clear featured sherds were present. Slightly more material, 135 sherds, was recovered from the daub layer (340) below (303). Some of these sherds were quite large fragments but overall the group looked quite mixed with a possible Byzantine amphorae sherd mixed with some ?medieval and some Hellenistic sherds (e.g. Fig. 3.74). Of particular note was a bodysherd from a closed form with inscribed letters (?Greek) made after firing (Fig. 3.76) in a Hellenistic fabric. A fineware Black Sea copy of an imported dish was also recovered (Fig. 3.73) and a number of jars (Fig. 3. 72, 75, 77-8). A base from a large jar had a tooled lattice inscribed into the base (Fig. 3. 71).

The fill (410) of inhumation [412] produce a small group of 42 sherds amongst which was a single sherd of late ribbed amphora and various redeposited coarsewares. The lowest excavated level to produce pottery was (401) sealed below the daub layer (340). This produced a moderately large assemblage of 454 sherds weighing 12411 g with again some quite large sherds but again with apparent mixed chronology. There were a number of distinctive jar bases in a limestone fabric with the clear impression of reed matting on the bases where the pots had been placed whilst drying before firing. These are probably of medieval date. Further odd sherds of Byzantine ribbed amphorae are present and various Hellenistic sherds. Many of the vessels illustrated from this deposit cannot be paralleled with forms recorded to date from Site A and most were single examples, for example, Fig. 3. 82 with finger depressions and Fig. 3.84 with a small looped handle.

A further 254 sherds were recorded from Site B recovered from general cleaning and thus essentially unstratified. A few of these have been illustrated (Fig. 3.85-97) because they reflect new types not previously noted in the past two seasons work. Of note is a large ovoid jar (Fig. 3.93), a flagon (Fig. 3.89) and one or more vessels with applied divided lugs (Fig. 3.90-1).

Clay sources

The pottery work undertaken to date suggests that a high proportion of the material looked at is likely to have been made quite locally to the site. The river adjacent to the site cuts through limestone bedrock which could well have supplied much of the tempering material found in many of the vessels. Additionally numerous pebbles of mixed geology including flint and other more exotic rocks are available from the river bed. Clay is a heavy commodity and most pottery production will be located close to a clay source and where there is water and plenty of available wood for fuel to fire the kilns. Cliff faces and stream and river banks provide useful places to access clay beds where these exist and such a deposit of clay has been found within the modern village and not far from the ancient settlement. Whether this clay was used by ancient potters has yet to be tested. Initial impressions suggest it is a very pure, malleable clay which may well crack in firing without the addition of grits to improve the thermal capacity and the functional range of the pottery vessels whether they are for cooking, keeping liquids cool or other goods dry. Different types of tempering material may be selected depending on the anticipated use of the finished pot as these may provide different properties. It is hoped that some experimentation can take place to test the potential of the clay for making vessels and to construct a primitive clamp or similar kiln to attempt some firing.

Conclusions

The work undertaken in 2009 has built on and developed that started in 2007-8. 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 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.

Catalogue of illustrated sherds

Figure 1: SITE A

1. Everted rim, wide-mouthed jar. Fabric: L1. Context (254).
2. Wide-mouthed jar with a triangular rim decorated with comb-impressed latticing. Fabric L1. Context (254).
3. Lamp. Fabric: L3. Context (254).

4. Base with a groove around the lower wall. Fabric: L3. Context (239).
5. Handmade vessel with perforations ? cheese-press. Fabric: L1. Context (239).
6. Open lamp. Sooted on the interior. Fabric: L1. Context (239).
7. Wide-mouthed jar with a folded-over rim. Fabric: L3. Context (239).
8. Wide-mouthed jar with a folded-over rim. Fabric: L3. Context (239).
9. Wide-mouthed jar with an internally bevelled rim. Fabric: L1. Context (239).
10. Conical-mouthed jar. Fabric: L1. Context (239).
11. Wide-mouthed jar. Fabric: L3. Context (239).
12. Small conical ?base. Burnt. Fabric: L1. Context (239).
13. Handled jug. Very pale beige fabric with a scatter of black volcanic sand. Fabric: BS. Context (217).
14. Narrow-necked handled jar. Fabric: L1. Context (217).
15. Shallow dish decorated in the interior with a rouletted ring. Brownish-black worn slip on a pale buff fabric with a pinkish core. Fabric: FW5. Context (217).
16. Thick-walled dolium. Fabric: GR1. Context (217).
17. Large, conical mouthed pithoi with a finely combed exterior surface. Fabric: GR1. Context (217).
18. Wide-mouthed jar with a folded over rim. Fabric: L3. Context (217).
19. Everted rim, necked jar. Fabric: L1. Context (258).
20. Short, everted rim beaker. Fabric: L1. Context (258).
21. Slightly hooked rim jar, burnished on the interior. Fabric: L3. Context (258).
22. Conical-mouthed jar. Fabric: L1. Context (258).
23. Bodysherd from a cheese-press. Fabric: L1. Context (258).
24. Thickened rim pithoi decorated with impressed comb latticing on the exterior of the rim. Fabric: L1. Context (259).
25. Rolled rim necked jar / pithoi. Fabric: L1. Context (258).
26. Wide-mouthed jar / pithoi. Fabric: L1. Context (235).
27. Conical-mouthed jar. Fabric: L1. Context (259).
28. Beaker decorated with comb-impressed decoration. Fabric: L1. Context (259).
29. Curved-wall dish with smoothed surfaces. Fabric: L3. Context (259).
30. Small open lamp, sooted on the interior. Fabric: L3. Context (259).
31. Necked jar with a combed neck surmounted by a single wavy line. Fabric: L1. Context (235).

Figure 2: SITE A

32. Large storage jar with a sharply everted flaring rim with a slightly uneven top. Oxidised. Fabric: L2. Context (235).
33. Wide-mouthed jar / pithoi. Fabric L1. Context (235).
34. Flared rim jar decorated with a single line of impressed dots on the rim. Fabric: L1. Context (235).
35. Handmade, simple rim jar. Fabric: L3. Context (235).
36. Handmade jar decorated with tooled lines in a geometric-style design. Fabric: L3. Context (235).
37. Handmade jar decorated with tooled multi-directional groups of lines. Fabric: CA1. Context (235).

38. Bodysherd decorated with blocks of incised lines. Fabric: CA1. Context (235).
39. Open lamp. Fabric: L3. Context (235).
40. Small open lamp. Sooted on the exterior and upper interior. Fabric: L3. Context (235).
41. Shallow conical dish. Fabric: GR1. Context (235).
42. Amphora rim. Oxidised micaceous fabric, probably Aegean. Fabric: AMP10. Context (235).
- 43-44. Narrow-necked jars with an externally ridged necks. Fabric: L1. Context (235).
45. Foot from a tripod or similar vessel. Fabric: L3. Context (235).
46. Pedestalled vase from a goblet cut away in the underside. Fabric: L3. Context (235).
47. Handmade pedestalled goblet with a small handle. Fabric: L3. Context (235).
48. Small carinated cup. Fabric: L1. Context (235).
49. Base. Fabric: L3. Context (235).
50. Handmade, perforated cheese press. Fabric: GR1. Context (235).
51. Amphora with oval section handles. Oxidised, very micaceous fabric. Possibly a Thasian amphora made on the Greek island of Thasos in the late 6th to early 5th centuries. Fabric: AMP10. Context (235).
52. Small 'knob'. Fabric: GR1. Context (235).
53. Applied horizontal lug. Fabric: L3. Context (235).
54. Ceramic wheel from a model cart. Fabric: LIPY. SF 19. Context (235).
55. Handled bowl. Fabric: L3. Context (232).
56. Flared rim jar / pithoi. Fabric: L1. Context (232).
57. Handmade flared rim jar. Combed interior. Fabric: L1. Context (232).
58. Narrow-mouthed jar. Fabric: L1. Context (232).
59. Wide-mouthed, handled jug. Fabric: L1. Context (232).
60. Vertical loop handle from a cauldron. Fabric: GR1. Context (232).
61. Amphora. Pinkish interior with a yellow-beige core/exterior. Fine fabric ?Aegean. Context (232).
62. Slightly asymmetrical pedestal from a goblet. Fabric: GR1. Context (232).
63. Slightly asymmetrical pedestal from a goblet. Fabric: L3. Context (232).
64. Small pedestalled base. Fabric: GR1. Context (232).
65. Base with a shallow footring. Black-slipped fine buff ware. Attic ware (FW1). Context (232).
66. Slightly tapering handle or tripod foot with a round cross-section. Fabric: L1. Context (232).
67. Bodysherd with a raised ridge above which is combed decoration and an applied rib with lightly diagonally scored surface. Fabric: L1. Context (232).
68. Small bodysherds decorated with horizontal lines of lenticular impressions. Fabric: L1. Cleaning horizon (257).
69. Short projecting handle. Orientation uncertain. Fabric: L3. Cleaning horizon (257).
70. Small, wide-mouthed jar decorated with two lines of lenticular impressions. Black in colour. Fabric: L3. Context (260).

Figure 3: SITE B

71. Basesherd from a wheelmade jar with a smooth exterior. Tooled line latticing on underside of base made whilst the vessel was still in a green (unfired) condition. Fabric: L3. Context (340).
72. Wide-mouthed jar decorated with a line of punched circles below the rim. Fabric: CA1. Context (340).
73. Fineware base with a shallow footring. Probably a dish or other open form. Thin brownish slip on the interior, slightly more reddish in colour on the exterior. Very fine, pale grey/buff fabric with no visible inclusions. Fabric: FW4. Context (340).
74. Handle with two projecting spurs. Fabric L3. Context (340).
75. Small diameter jar with a short everted rim. Fabric: L3. Context (340).
76. Bodysherd from a closed form with a post-firing graffiti (incomplete). Fabric: M1. SF4. Context (340). Hellenistic.
77. Wide-mouthed jar. Fabric L1. Context (340).
78. Large, handmade storage jar with a burnt, distorted rim. Smoothed interior. The exterior has a smooth, semi-burnished finish and matt black painted vertical lines. Fabric: L3. Context (340).
79. Wide-mouthed jar decorated with a band of vertical lines. Fabric: L3. Context (401).
80. Wide-mouthed jar or bowl. Fabric: L1. Context (401).
81. Large jar / pithoi with a slashed rim, a double raised cordon and impressed arcading. Fabric: GR1. Context (401).
82. Jar with a slightly flaring, undifferentiated rim. Decorated with a single slightly irregular line of finger depressions. Fabric GR6. Context (401).
83. Open vessel with a thumbled applied cordon below the rim. Fabric: QTZ. Context (401).
84. Large jar with an internally bevelled rim and the remains of a small looped handle. Fabric: L3. Context (401).
85. Plain-walled bowl. Fabric: GR2. Context (398).
86. Handmade simple rim jar. Fabric: GR1. Context (398).
87. Carinated dish. Fabric: L1. Context (398).
88. Simple everted rim jar. Smoothed exterior. Fabric: L3. Context (398).
89. Flagon, with a damaged top. Fabric: OXIDF. Context (398).
90. Bodysherd with an applied lug split into two pieces. Fabric: GR2. Context (398).
91. Jar with applied lugs. Fabric: GR2. Context (398).
92. Wide-mouthed jar. Fabric: L3. Context (398).
93. Large jar with an incurving rim, Fabric: GR2. Context (398).
94. Flared rim large jar / pithoi. Fabric: L1. Context (398).
95. Flared rim large jar / pithoi. Internally combed. Fabric: GR1. Context (398).
96. Wide-mouthed jar decorated with diagonal lightly tooled lines. Fabric: L3. Context (398).
97. Wide-mouthed jar. Fabric: L1. Context (398). No 13

Figure 4: SITE A

98. Bodysherd from a large vessel, ?pithoi decorated with depressed rectangular impressions above which is a line of ring-and-dot impressions. The zone above this

shows the two front lower legs of a hoofed animal incised into the clay. Fabric: GR3. Site A, Context (235).

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to Professor D. Lomitashvili for generously sharing his knowledge of Georgian ceramics with me and to the British team for inviting me to join their expedition. Thanks are also due to all the students and other volunteers who diligently quantified and recorded the pottery and undertook the initial drawings. This year the drawings were mainly prepared by Shorena Khtsuriani, Sally Jamburia, Lisa Bak, Frankie Edwards, Gemma Ward and Rebecca Dorran. Data input by Lisa Bak and Frankie Edwards.

Figures

1. Nos 1-31. Selection of pottery from Site A. Scale 1:4
2. Nos 32-70. Selection of pottery from Site A. Scale 1:4
3. Nos 71-97. Selection of pottery from Site B. Scale 1:4
4. Decorated potsherd from layer 235.