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HELLENISTIC AMPHORAE IN CAUCASIAN IBERIA: ATTRIBUTES OF TRADE ROUTE [Pl. 77-78]

INTRODUCTION

From the 4th to the 1st centuries B.C. the history of Georgia is particularly interesting. This is the age when traditional Colchis and Iberian economic, political and social-cultural relations collapsed. This was caused not only by natural historical developments in this region, but by the diffusion of different ethnic groups and, correspondingly, the establishment of different elements of life. Moreover, these large scale events in the 4th to the 3rd century B.C. changed the political map of the East and caused the phenomenon known as Hellenism. One of the most characteristic signs of Hellenism is the unseen development of city life (Pl. 77, 1); this was brought about by the role played by settlements in the Empire of Alexander of Macedonia, and in states of Hellenistic monarchs. Therefore, study of the settlements of the Hellenistic period in any part of Oecoumene is of great importance for the overall study of Hellenistic historical phenomenon, especially since, in this case, the concepts of “City” and “Civilization” coincide with each other. In the 3rd to 1st centuries B.C., on the territory of Colchis and Iberia, strong city centres were constructed which differed structurally from each other. Craftsmanship, administrative, social, religious and economic activities were concentrated in cities. Due to historical interpretation conducted by divers scholars, the archaeological material revealed in these monuments resolves important questions in the history of Georgia such as: genesis of Hellenistic culture and conditions of development, specification of its chronology, possibility of establishing state bodies of Hellenistic type, characteristics of city life, problems of trade traditions and directions of economic interest, etc. Due to the complexity of Hellenism as a definite historical event, it is notable that these questions are not of local character. Similar studies are important for the correct analysis of historical processes in Asia Minor, Egypt and the territory of the East from Euphrates in the 4th to the 1st centuries B.C.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

Caucasian Iberia was isolated from the Black Sea – the most important contact zone with Greek world – by Colchis and a mountain range. The communication system linking the Black and Caspian Seas crossed the central part of Iberia. This had an undoubted impact on trade and cultural innovation in the region. The archaeological sites of Iberia in the second half of the 4th century and early 3rd century B.C. clearly point to two important facts: 1) elements of urban life were, so far, not established in the Iberia of the Early Hellenistic period. The sites known to date – Tsikhia-Gora, Samadlo, Uplistsikhe, etc. – are cultic centres, none of which possessed characteristics of Hellenistic type urban life; and 2) enhanced cultural dominance of the Eastern (Achaemenid) world is quite obvious at this period.

From the 6th c. B.C. Greek pottery was imported in Iberia via Colchis. The second half of the 4th c. B.C. is the period of close trade relations between Colchis and Iberia; Colchian *pithoi* were found not far from the Dedoplis Mindori temple. It seems that after this time local amphorae were imported from Colchis.

There are five archaeological sites where amphorae were found: Atskuri, Jinvali, Mzetamze, Uplistsikhe, Tsikhia-Gora.

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Atskuri

We know that the ancient capital of South Georgia had a well developed religious and economic centre from the 5th c. B.C. to the 1st c. A.D. Settlement is located on the right bank of river Mtkvari (ancient Cyros), in the village of Atskuri. The arrival of Apostle Andrew in Georgia is closely connected with this religious and administrative centre.

The archaeological investigations that were begun in 1988 aimed at excavating and studying the settlement of the pre-Christian period. Six trenches were dug on different strips of the presumed settlement location. In each of these trenches, cultural strata and burials from the 7th to the 1st centuries B.C. were exposed. Stratigraphy of the monument is clearly presented in trench N3, which was dug in the north from the river bank at a distance of 300 meters¹.

Stratigraphy: after removing a humus layer (at a thickness of 15-20 cm), the next two layers – yellowish loose (80 cm) and loam (4 metres thick) – contained no traces of material culture. Due to the accumulation of upper rocks from the southern slopes of the Meskheti Ridge, a five meter thick sterile layer of fixed cobbles was found. In other trenches the thickness of the sterile layer is less, about 2-2.5 meters. As usual, beneath these sterile layers there are gray cultural strata containing several cultural layers of constructions from the 2nd to the 1st centuries B.C. Below this are graves or constructions of the 4th to 3rd centuries B.C. and below those are 5th to 4th centuries B.C. constructions. The last layer consists of graves from the 1st half of 1st millennium B.C.

The architectural remains are represented by various foundations built with cobblestones and ash-lars, allowing us to distinguish two different types of planning: one rectangular and the other circular. It should be noted that chronologically circular structures are characteristic of the 5th to 4th centuries B.C., while in the subsequent period only rectangular buildings occur.

The ceramic material falls into three groups, including both local and imported. The local pottery is represented by Colchian (Western Georgian) jugs with tubular handles, *pithoi*, and cups. Iberian (Eastern Georgian) is represented by painted jugs, *pithoi*, *phialae*, and plates; and Samtskhian (South Georgian) by jugs, cups, plates, etc. A separate group consists of imitation of Greek pottery (*louteria*, amphorae), dated to the 2nd century B.C.

The most interesting is the collection of Greek pottery, which is unique not only for the Georgian hinterland, but also for the entire Transcaucasus region. Included in this collection are: 6th century B.C. Ionian cups made in some of the Greek cities north from Miletus – first half of 5th century B.C., Attic *kylikes* – 4th c B.C. *lekythoi* and black-glazed pottery from Asia Minor from the 3rd to the 2nd centuries B.C. There is also one fragment of a red-glazed Pergamian plate of middle of the 1st century B.C. Some parts of painted pottery belongs to the Achaemenid World, as well as bronze buckles and bone harness fittings like those found in Mashat, Sardis, Gordion².

The most important fact from the point of view of Greek influence is not only the Georgian historical chronicle *Kartlis Tskhovreba* (*History of Georgia*, written in 11th century) about the existence of the sanctuary of Apollo and Artemis in Atskuri, but also the existence in the grave of N 4-95 of a silver coin of a king of Pontus Polemon II (49-63 A.D.), used as a Charon's obol, which is a direct indication of either strong Greek influence or the existence of a Greek population in the town.

Several small fragments of amphorae were found in Atskuri. Fabric of Atskurian amphorae are dark brown, which seem to have been manufactured South of modern Colchis (Western Georgia), possibly in the area of Trabzon (as it was suggested for some fragments of dark brown amphorae, found in Crimea). Date: 3rd-2nd cc. B.C.

1) V. Licheli, "St. Andrew in Samtskhe – archaeological proof?", in T. Mgaloblishvili (ed.), *Ancient Christianity in the Caucasus, Iberica Caucasica*, 1, London, 1998: 34-36.

2) V. Licheli, "Achaemenidische Fundorte in Samtskhe"; *Archäologische Mitteilungen aus Iran und Turan* 32 (2000): 139-142; V. Licheli, "Problems of Culture of Colchis and Iberia (4th-1st cent B.C.)", *Dzibani*, Suppl. V, Tbilisi, 2001: 53; Licheli 2001: 253.

Jinvali

In Jinvali the foundation of a building, built of quadrels, was revealed. The walls, destroyed after the strong fire, are preserved in the shape of a ruined mud brick mass. The sizes of the mud bricks are 0.5x0.5 m and 0.5x0.25 m. The building is not entirely excavated. The size of the central building is 10.5x5.8 m. On the floor, on which there are traces of fire, fragments of pottery were discovered. In the northwest corner of the building there are two damaged quadrangular rooms, around which fragments of kitchen pottery were found. In the south part of the same building the remains of a Π-shape cobblestone foundation were excavated, the function of which is unspecified. Side storerooms were revealed in the south and north of the central building. It is to be noted that along the west wall of the complex were excavated remains of an underground storeroom (length: 16 m, width: 3 m, depth: 4.5 m), which supposedly had a wooden roof. The west wall of the upper complex toppled down exactly in this storeroom, together with kitchen pottery and *pithoi* (painted red) and jars. From the point of chronology it is interesting that the black polish bowls, bottoms of amphorae, terracotta figures of a horse and a foal, and bones of other animals were discovered. The settlement is dated from the 3rd-1st cc. B.C. The following excavations showed that the mud brick wall was plastered with clay on both sides. Smaller rooms, which were discovered during the first season, revealed kilns (2 kilns, quadrangular). Among the materials discovered in the south storeroom (light clay pottery, decorated with red lines and chevrons) there was only one amphoriskos, imported from Rhodes. Date: 3rd-2nd cc. B.C.

Mzetamze

This necropolis is located in the mountainous range in the open valley. Only 60 burials have been excavated in Mzetamze which date from the middle of the 2nd millennium to medieval times and are divided into four groups. Among the burials of this early period "pit-burial" is most interesting; it was excavated in the northeast part of the necropolis. The skeleton is completely decomposed and it is impossible to determine its position. Moreover neither burial objects give the opportunity to determine the position because they were accumulated together. The items consist of a bronze pendant disc, which is decorated with triangles, flat bronze bracelets, pins, etc. The collection dates to the 12th-11th cc.

The burials of successive period are arranged in a pit. Due to poor preservation of bone materials it is impossible to determine the sex and age of the dead, though their body posture is clear; they are buried in a crouched posture on the right or left side.

Bronze objects are frequent in the burial, which finds close parallels in the bronze culture of Colchis. Here, we find objects characteristic to Colchis culture such as decorated Colchian axes. It is worth noting that the same necropolis contains iron axes analogous to bronze axes. Near to Mzetamze necropolis, in Telovani, a mould for producing a Colchian axe was discovered. In addition, at the beginning of the 20th century, about one kilometer north of Mzetamze necropolis, workshop remnants were discovered.

All this indicates that the bronze objects were produced locally in the same gorge. The Mzetamze necropolis is mostly composed of exactly such type of burials. In about 50% of excavated burials of all four periods, Colchian type items raise special interest in the context of local culture. This group of graves dates back to the 8th-6th centuries B.C.

The burials of the successive period, from the 6th to the 4th centuries B.C., are of different types. They represent a type of cist graves built of flag stones, in which the skeleton was placed again in a crouched posture, on the right or on the left side. Metal objects are made of iron (axes, knives, spear-head).

In the burials of successive periods, metal objects decrease and ceramics, characteristic of Borjomi gorge (Caucasian Iberia), emerge. The group of these burials dates back to the 4th-3rd centuries B.C.

The burials of the last period, middle centuries, do not contain objects.

Similar chronological succession is evident on almost all other necropoleis (Kviratskhoveli, Rveli, Chitakhevi).

Thus, in general, five chronological groups can be distinguished from the Late Bronze Age to the Middle Ages. Colchian type of objects are found in the 3rd chronological groups (the 8th-6th cc. B.C.).

One fragment from a neck of Colchian light brown amphora was found among the Hellenistic graves. Date: 2nd-1st cc. B.C.

Tsikhia-Gora

Tsikhia-Gora is a typical Eastern (Achaemenid type) temple in the middle part of Iberia. This site is located on the small hill on the right bank of the river Mtkvari-Cyros, approximately 8 km west of Samadlo. The earliest cultural layers belong to the Bronze Age. In the 2nd millennium B.C., a fairly large settlement developed, which functioned until the 7th-6th cc. B.C.³. After this time the settlement moved to the nearby valley. Also, the hill changed its function, as documented by the discovery of a double protome capital and the casual find of a bell-shaped column base, which could belong to a layer from the 6th-4th cc. B.C.⁴ and which was almost destroyed during the construction works of the 4th-3rd cc. B.C.

Inside the fortification wall several structures were found, among them a temple, built of stone and mud bricks (Pl. 77, 2). In the courtyard of the temple was a rectangular pillar with a height of 2 m, which seems to be an altar. There is a long building behind the main temple (length 18 m, width 4.5 m), where, on a layer of a tile, the double-protome capital made of limestone where depictions of bulls were found. Of the other constructions of this site a wine store with 48 *pithoi* and 30 hand mills should be mentioned. From the point of view of Greek influence most interesting are the tiles with Greek letters and Colchian amphorae.

To the north of Tsikhia-Gora, a necropolis with pit burials from the 13th-1st cc. B.C. was excavated.

Three fragments of brown fabric amphorae belong to the early type of Colchian amphorae, dating back to the beginning of the 3rd c. B.C. (Pl. 78, 1, 2, 5).

Uplistsikhe

This is one of the important settlements in the study of fortification systems and city strategic planning. Uplistsikhe is one among those complex Hellenistic monuments revealed on the territory of Georgia. Only engineering architectural buildings are found here: a net of water channels, water pipe, walls, tunnel, fortification and ditches⁵.

In the 3rd-1st cc. B.C. Uplistsikhe was composed of several parts. The central and chief part of the city was cut in the rock, caves and constructions, remarkable for their geometrical precision and high quality décor. It is to be observed that in the first millennium B.C. the surface of the rock is so scrupulously elaborated that there are no traces of applying tool techniques. Together with the constructions in the rock, Uplistsikhe buildings built of ashlar are preserved (dry masonry, quadrels are attached to each other with metal clamps installed into pits, similar to Bagineti).

Complex relief, on which Uplistsikhe was built, demanded a different sort of architectural scheming. It can be said that this task was superbly performed here. Buildings in rock are connected to each other with roads and paths; in front of the halls there are small yards and most of them had a household function.

3) G. Tskitishvili, "Results of excavations of the Tsikhia-Gora", *KSIA* 151 (1977): 87-93; *id.*, "Tsikhia-Gora", *Sakartvelos istoriuli da kulturuli dzeglebis aghtseriloba [Description of the historical and cultural Monuments of Georgia]*, 5, Tbilisi, 1990: 169-170; *id.*, "Tsikhia-Gora Temple Complex", *Dziebani* Suppl. XI, Tbilisi, 2003: 7-25.

4) I. Gagoshidze, G. Kipiani, "Column from Kavtiskhevi-Tsikhia-Gora", in *Dzeglis Megobari*, Tbilisi, 1997: 8-11; Licheli 2001: 251.

5) D. Khakhutaishvili, *Uplistsikhe*, II, Tbilisi, 1970: 98.

The city is located on three terraces. The highest point of Uplistsikhe is the middle section, which is divided into two unequal parts by a street. In the west of this street there are buildings located on wide streets and platforms, which are connected to each other with staircases.

Among the monuments of Georgia dating to the 3rd-1st cc. B.C. Uplistsikhe is remarkable as a city in the rocks. It is worth mentioning that Hellenistic engineering construction techniques (tiles, walls) are evident in the city (on the territory of citadel, a net of water channels is cut out where ceramic water pipes were discovered; its source was 4 km in distance, near "Avaznebi" stream).

Uplistsikhe was one of the most important cities of Hellenistic time in Iberia. An amphora found there belongs to the early type of Colchian amphorae, dating back to the beginning of 3rd c. B.C. (Pl. 78, 3, 4, 6, 7).

CONCLUSION

Practically all amphorae found along the trade route are thought to be part of the Caucasian section of the international trade route, later part of the "Silk Road".