

Some Ceramic Forms in Western Georgia (I-IV Centuries A.D.) Koba Koberidze

The territory of East Georgia, the rare burial grounds and the settlements of the Late Classical period show evidence of a certain group of ceramic products, which is clearly different from the material that was used for everyday life. This becomes especially vivid due to their different morphological features, as well as the apparent rarity of ceramic forms and the context of discovery. Such ceramic products, presumably, were being prepared for other kind of special occasion.

These are bicorporal jugs, *amphoriskos*- and *Askos*-shaped vessels, glazed vessels, which attract attention due to their different and rare forms and that is what distinguishes them from the ceramic products for everyday use. The impression is that most of these were specially prepared to be penetrate into the tomb¹.

Bicorporal Jugs

In the burial grounds of Samtavro, dating III-IV centuries was found a Jug, of clay which was straw-colored, with three-lipped mouth and two bellies. On the upper belly it has one ear and on the lower – two. The jug is 14,2 cm. tall (Picture 1). The lower belly has two rows of bumps around [Manjgaladze, 1985:95].

One more jug is found in the burial ground of Baiatiskhevi dating III-IV centuries. Characteristic to them is a round, open mouth. The upper part of the corpus is a sphere-shaped pot, which is covered with bumps and the same is molded on the lower part as well. One can trace red paint on the jug. Its height is 10,5 cm (Picture 2) [Nikolaishvili 1995:105].

It is noteworthy that both bicorporal jugs are found in the burial grounds of children of the age of 7-8. It is not excluded that the vessel was used for medical purposes (apparently, some drug or medical fluid was deposited) and in daily life this was the vessel used for the children, where it was found.

The two-bellied jug is in Western Georgia as well – the tomb of Kldeeti, which is dating from II century AD (Picture 3). Due to its different morphological marks these Jugs were considered as ritual vessels [Lomtadze, 1957:26].

Glazed Vessels

The glazed vessels of the late-antiquity period are quite a rarity. As we can guess during this period they were made for special purposes. Presumably, glazed vessels during I-IV centuries were affordable only for the noble, and it could also be argued that they stood on the same rank as jewelry.

In Trialeti, namely Betnasheni, Amphoriskos-shaped, two-eared, blue, glass-like, glazed vessel was discovered which held some Macedonian Dinars. Based on it and some other necklaces B. Kuftin assumed that the vessel dated from I A.D (Picture 4) [Kuftin, 1941:25].

Noteworthy is the glazed, two-eared clay vessel (Amphoriskos) found in the burial grounds of the Noblemen of Armasiskhevi, which has narrow, cylinder form, narrow neck, high, pear-like belly and a wide bottom. The mouth is surrounded by a wide lip. The ears are attached to the neck and belly. There are two parallel grooving around the belly. The surface is covered with blue glaze. The glaze is of poor quality. The glaze has ugly, different shades of colour and is guttered from place to place. The Amphoriskos is 18 cm high (Picture 5).

This is the only clay vessel found in the burial grounds of the Noblemen of Armasiskhevi. The tomb belonged to a child aged 7-8) [Mtskheta..., 1955:101].

This glazed pottery is a sign that in the late antique times glazed vessels were regarded just as valuable as jewelry and were specially made for tombs. The Amphoriskos dates II A.D.

Four more glazed vessels were found in the burial grounds of Samtavro dating III-IV centuries. One from it is a small pot – thick-skinned and covered in green glaze. It has a straight mouth, distended belly, two false ears and a heel. The clay is small-grained, burnt out in light grey colour. It is 6 cm high [Manjgaladze, 1985:64]. This small pot like the glazed vessels of Armasiskhevi was found in a child's burial ground (Picture 6).

In the same burial grounds has been found three clay vessels in the form of Amphoriskos. Characteristic to them is an open mouth, low, narrow neck, pear-like belly, a small heel, two ears – attached to the neck and arm. The glaze is uneven in some places. All of the three Amphoriskos are glazed in green. Their heights are 14-17 cm (Picture 7).

The Amphoriskos were found in different tombs and in two cases they are part of the family inventory, where three dead were buried: A Man, A Woman and a young of 13-18 years [Manjgaladze, 1985: 63,65,96].

Two green-blue glazed Amphoriskos were found in Khoghotoskhevi burial grounds (near Khornabudzhi) dating from the end of III A.D. to the first half of IV A.D. [Sinauridze, 1967:144] (Picture 8).

The Amphoriskos of Khoghotoskhevi burial grounds are identical to those on the Samtavro burial grounds. It may also be possible that they were made in one and the same workshops². Rather interesting is that the Amphoriskos discovered in Khoghotoskhevi as well as Samtavro are a part of inventory of Family Sepulchers where three dead were buried.

The Amphoriskos discovered in Aragvispiri (Dusheti Region) are like the glazed ones found in Khoghotoskhevi as well as Samtavro. The difference is that the Amphoriskos discovered in Aragvispiri is not-proportional and is modeled by hand. The surface is covered by green glaze and dates from III A.D – beginning of the IV A.D. [Robakidze, 1982:91].

On the settlement of the new Jinvali a minor sized, blue-glazed vessel was discovered. It has a narrow neck, open mouth and pear-like belly, and a little separated bottom. The Ketsi (earthenware frying-pan to bake maize-flour) is so massive that the inner space can hold liquid. Its height is 7,5 cm (Picture 9). The vessel is dating from III A.D [Ramishvili, 1983:110].

Due to its small capacity, it probably was used to store some medicine or some other fluid substance.

A blue-glazed vessel of the same form and probably same importance was found in the burial grounds of Urbnisi. It has a pear-like body and a small heel. The vessel is 7 cm (Picture 10). The vessel lay on the body of the dead. The vessel dates from IV A.D. [Chilashvili, 1964: 64].

In Georgian there are 34 glazed vessels of the late antique period. They are made of white, kaolin clay either by hand or by machine tools. The level of their burning out is medium. Mostly they are glazed in green; they are fully glazed except the bottom and the heel.

There are many versions about their emergence: some argue that they are locally made, while others argue that they were imported [Manjgaladze, 2008:72].

These vessels date from III A.D to the first half of the IV A.D.

While comparing them to other glazed ceramics (Northern Black Sea, Pergamum, Rhodes, Uruk, Armenia, Dura-Europos) underlined the difference between them, which can be detected in form, colour of the clay and glaze, the quality of making. A resemblance but not identical seem the glazed vessels of the Dura-Europos (Syria) due to form, colour of the clay and glaze, but the main difference is that the Syrian production is of rather high quality.

After a microscopic analysis [T.Morchadze, 1979] which attested that the glazed vessels and the vessels found in Mtskheta, near the village Kodman, are identical a thought arose that the glazed vessels in Georgia were made by the imitation of the glazed vessels in Syria³ and that in the III-IV centuries Mtskheta had a centre for producing glazed ceramics [Manjgaladze, 2008:73].

The glaze is a glassy substance that is attached on the ceramic product by burning out, that is put on the clay vessel, giving it smooth surface. The thickness of the glaze is 0,15-0,3 mm. Glaze is a silicate. The essence of the glaze can be various, but the main part of it is SiO₂ mineral, which we come across in the nature in many kinds (Quartz, Crystal, Flint, Quartzite, mountain crystal, etc.). Lead in the form of rust is also used to get glaze.

The glaze is easier to fuse than clay. Glaze has double importance: one practical, the other decorative. The glaze evens the surface of the vessel, closes the forms, that on the one hand

defends the clay from unhealthy influence and on the other hand the glazed surface can be easily washed and the vessel is also waterproof, chemically durable and beautiful.

The use of glaze requires mastery from the potter as well understanding of clay and glazing. Every glaze, no matter which methods and rules are being used, has the following requirements: the glaze should be attached to the surface of the vessel tightly and firmly, the glaze should not gutter in places. The glaze should not break or fall off the surface; it should not dissolve in water, acids and etc. [Japaridze, 1956:18].

It could be argued that the rarity of glazed vessels in the late antique period is due to the fact that during this time the characteristics of glaze was not yet fully understood and therefore there was no basis for serial production.

Askos

On Eastern Georgian territory Askos-shaped vessels have been found, which are thought to have emerged in I B.C. and existed until IV A.D.

Two Askos-shaped vessels were found in the late-Hellenistic burial grounds. The corpus of one of these vessels looks like a seated duck. It has a beak-shaped mouth; the twisted ear is horizontally attached on it. The belly is round. Its surface is smooth and it is tintured with red colour. At the end of the mouth it has two bumps, which express the eyes of the bird (Picture 11) [Tolordava, 1963:43].

The second Askos-shaped vessel is also painted red. Its body is elongated. The ear is horizontally attached to the corpus from above. Its body is simple (Picture 12) and dates from I B.C. [Tolordava, 1980: 56].

Another late antique (I century A.D) Askos-shaped vessel was found in Svetitskhoveli I District (near Svetitskhoveli) burnt out in pink colour and then afterwards painted in red. It has a low gap-beak shaped mouth; the body is round; in a shape of a pot; it has a low heel. The vessel is 12,3 cm high (Picture 13) [Apakidze... 1978:140].

The Askos-shaped vessel is found in the burial grounds of Zemo Avchala, which does not have a part of mouth and neck and ear. Only a small part of ear attached at the body of the vessel can be traced. In scholarly literature this Askos is mentioned as a closed boat-shaped vessel [Makalatia, 1928:177].

Two Askos-shaped vessels are found in the burial grounds of Samtavro dating from II A.D. Such vessel has two-mouths, out of which one is three-lipped and the other round. These two mouths are connected to each other with a bow-shaped handle. The place where the ear joins the three-lipped mouth has a hole and a small bump, and on the other side it has only a bump. It has

a sphere belly that has a belt consisting of slanting cookies. It is burnt out and straw-coloured. It is 11,7 cm high (Picture 14) [Ivashchenko, 1980:79].

Second Askos-shaped vessel is also three-lipped and has a long neck. The ear is attached to the mouth and the end of the corpus. The body is simple and has a long body. The vessel is 11 cm long (Picture 15) [Ivashchenko, 1980: 79].

Interesting enough seem the two Askos-shaped vessels discovered in Baiatiskhevi burial ground in III-IV centuries A.D: they look like stylized images of birds. They have three-lipped mouth, long neck, oval-shaped ear and an ornamented tail. It has two bumps at one side and two bumps on the other. These two vessels are nearly identical in their shape. Different is their ornamentation: One has a band around consisting of lines (Picture 16), paint can also be traced. The second Askos-shaped vessel has stripes, it has three bands around consisting of bumps (Picture 17).

One Askos-shaped vessel is found in the tomb of a child (6-8 years old) along with bicorporal jugs, and the second vessel was an inventory of a noblewoman's tomb [Nikolaishvili... 1995: 105,130].

One more Askos-shaped vessel is found in the tomb of Jinvali dating from III-IV centuries A.D. and which also look like stylized images of birds. It has a round mouth. Its body is designed with oblique ornaments [Ramishvili, 1982: 35].

As we see on the territory of Eastern Georgia the Askos-Shaped vessels appear from I century B.C. Characteristic for these vessels are the horizontally attached ear, round or a bit long belly, bottom with a low heel or without one, surface painted with red paint and a body without ornament. They do not have a neck.

The Askos-shaped vessel discovered on the Svetitskhoveli I District which stands morphologically near the Askos-shaped vessels of the I A.D.

From the II A.D the Askos-shaped vessels have some morphological changes: they get three-lipped mouth⁴, their neck and corpus becomes longer. The ear is attached to the mouth and is not any more horizontally clayed to the corpus. From this period two-mouthed Askos-shaped vessels also develop (Samtavro). We also have bumps in the upper part of the ear and small holes at the end of the ear, which reminds us of the Fowl-motif. During this period ornament appears on the corpus and the heel disappears.

The forms established in the II century AD continue existence in the III-IV AD (Baiatkhevi, Jinvali), and we have examples of tincturing it with red paint.

Askos – a tea-pot shaped vessel – in the Greek World was used for oil and other kinds of species or perfumes. The shape of the Askos enables the drop-by-drop flow of fluid (oil, perfume, honey)⁵. Askos developed in V century BC and existed until the end of the IV century BC [Kakhidze, 2007: 116].

It may be possible that the Askos discovered in Western Georgia is not only connected with the Askos spread in the ancient world but also to the vessels that existed in the Near East. They can be found in Mingachevir ceramics, in the ceramics discovered near River Amy Daria [Kaziev, 1960:26].

Amphoriskos like Askos were used for storing different kinds of oils and perfumes.

The bicorporal, Amphoriskos- or Askos-shaped vessels are a rarity and their unique forms maybe a sign that we have to do not to deal with common/everyday usage but with special ritual-connected vessels.

After a close examination of the ceramics we may argue that potters in those times on the one hand created massive productions for common use and on the other hand created ceramic pots of different forms for exceptional occasions, which should have had another importance attached to it.

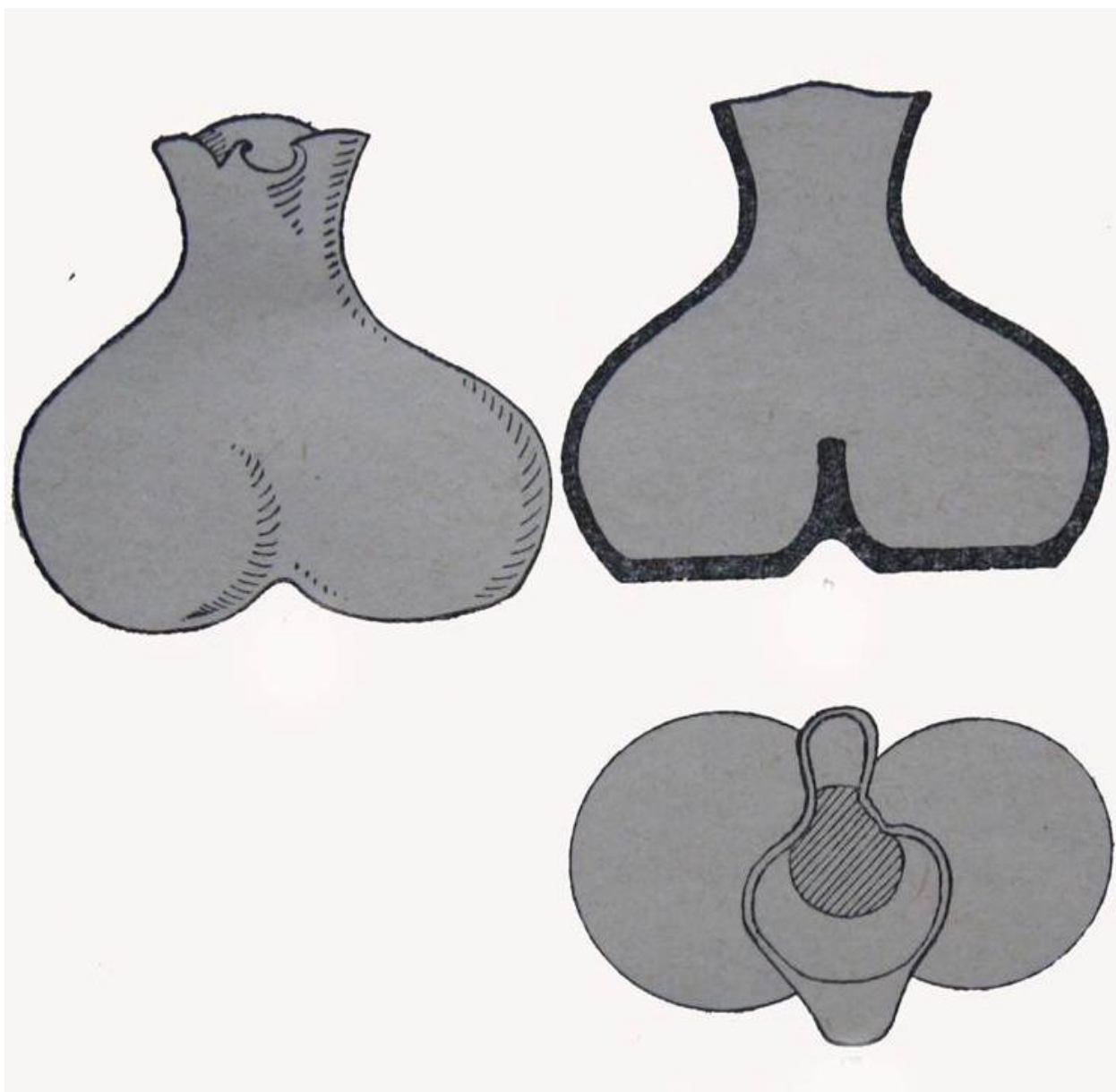
It is not accidental that the glazed vessels from the burials of the Samtavro and Armaziskhevi nobles, Askos-shaped vessels from Baiatiskhevi, two bicorporal Jugs from Samtavro and Baiatiskhevi were stocked in the Child's Sepulcher, and the discovered Amphoriskos were parts of the Family Burial Ground, where three dead were buried.

Therefore, despite the degradation of the ceramic vessels, which was caused by the increased interest in glass and metal in the late antique period of Georgia, Ceramic vessels still remained as a part of common life and does not lose its diversity. Pottery was still one of the most important fields of workmanship and it is not fully replaced by metal creations. One argument in the favor of this thesis can be that in the tombstones of the late antique period glass and metal objects outnumber ceramic creations. This can be seen not only in the tombstones and cities of this period, but also in the tombs or houses of noblemen/women (The castle of the Queen in Gori, royal residence in Bagineti), what was due to the practical or ritual use of the ceramic vessel.

1 Such type of ceramic products is mainly found in tombs and we rarely come across of them in ancient settlements.

































The vessels of Khogoto and Samtavro date from III-IV A.D.

3 We may think about it due to the form, clay and colour of the glaze, and technique of glazing.

4 We do not meet the “beak” motif any more

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5 This form was regarded as Lydian in the Ancient World

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