

## For the Point of Roman Period Glazed Pottery Vessels Discovered on the Territory of Eastern Georgia

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(Presented by Academy Member Konstantine Pitskhelauri)

**Certain groups of the glazed pottery vessels were discovered at the Roman period settlements and cemeteries on the territory of eastern Georgia. These vessels are interesting on the one hand for their rarity and on the other hand for their morphological features and definitely distinguish them from the locally made pottery vessels that were used for daily life. Some of them, presumably, were used for ritual purposes, but the greater part of them were made for practical uses. Their rarity and context of discovery proof, that they were not produced on the territory of Georgia, and were not used for daily life. Presumably, they were used for special occasions. After the investigation, it can be suggested, that these vessels were imported from Iran and Mesopotamia during 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.**  
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Glazed pottery amphoriskoe and glazed miniature vessels have been rarely discovered in the assemblages dated to the Roman period on the territory of eastern Georgia, which is known as Iberian kingdom from the Roman and Greek written sources and Kartli Kingdom from Georgian sources. Such glazed vessels were available only for the nobles of Iberian kingdom during 1st-4th centuries. Wholly, only 34 Roman period glazed vessels were discovered on the territory of eastern Georgia. They are made by white, kaolin clay, either by hand or by potter's wheel. Mostly, they are glazed in green, and fully glazed except the orifice and the foot [1].

It can be suggested, such small number of these vessels indicates that they don't belong to the local production. Supposedly there was no knowledge and tradition of producing of the glazed pottery in Iberia of Roman period. Still, there are different versions about their origins: some of the scientists argue that they were locally produced, while others suggest that they were imported [1].

Amphoriskos-shaped, two-handled, blue glazed vessel was discovered in Trialeti, in the village Beshtasheni, which held some Macedonian Dinars. Based on the dinars and some other necklaces the vessel was dated to the 1st century AD [2].

A glazed, two-handled clay vessel (Amphoriskos), was found in the burial of the Noblemen at

Armaziskhevi. The vessel has narrow, cylindrical neck; pear-shaped belly and a wide bottom. The handles are attached to the neck and belly. There are two parallel grooving around the belly. The surface is covered with a blue glaze, which has a poor quality. The glaze has ugly, different shades of colour and is guttered from place to place. Three small unglazed projections were remained on the rim of the vessel. They should be the remains of a special clay tripod or stand. The clay tripods, as usual, were used in the potter's kiln. The amphoriskos is 18 cm. high (Fig. 1) [3].

This is the only clay vessel discovered at the cemetery of the Noblemen of Armaziskhevi. It is noteworthy, that there were discovered only precious items and jewellery in the Armaziskhevi

cemetery, which were made by gold, silver and bronze. The tomb, which contained glazed amphoriskos, belonged to a child of 7-8 years old. The amphoriskos is dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD [3]

Four more green glazed vessels were discovered at the Samtavro cemetery (Mtskheta), dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. Three of them are amphoriskoe (Fig. 2) and one of them is a small pot, with thick wall (Fig. 3). It is 6 cm high [4]. The small glazed pot, like the glazed vessel from Armaziskhevi, was discovered in a child's grave. Amphoriskoe were discovered in various rich graves and in two cases they were found in family graves contents, in which three dead corpse were buried: a man, a woman and a young of 13-18 years old [4].



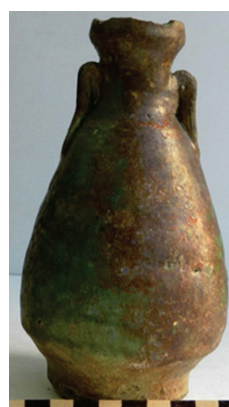
**Fig. 1.** Glazed Amphoriskos. 2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD. Armaziskhevi (Mtskheta).



**Fig. 2.** Glazed Amphoriskos. 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> cc. AD. Samtavro (Mtskheta).



**Fig. 3.** Glazed small pot. 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> cc. AD. Samtavro (Mtskheta).



**Fig. 4.** Glazed Amphoriskos. 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> cc. AD. Khoghotoskhevi cemetery

Two green-blue glazed Amphoriskoe dated to end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. were discovered at Khoghotoskhevi cemetery (Kakheti region) [5] (Fig. 4). They are identical to amphoriskoi discovered at the Samtavro cemetery and are dated to the same period, and, supposedly were imported from the same region of Mesopotamia. The Amphoriskoe from Khoghotoskhevi were a part of inventory of family grave, where three dead were buried (like the Samtavro cemetery).

The green glazed amphoriskos, similar to the glazed vessels from Khoghotoskhevi and Samtavro cemeteries and dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD. was discovered at Aragvispiri cemetery (Dusheti Region) [6].

Small sized, blue-glazed vessel, dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD. was discovered at the settlement of "Akhali Jinvali". The clay of the vessel is so massive, that its inner space can hold only small quantity of liquid. Vessel's height is 7.5 cm [7]. The vessel supposedly was used to store some medicine or some other precious fluid substance. Similar blue-glazed vessel, dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD was found at the Urbnisi cemetery [8].

It is noteworthy that glazed pottery vessels of the Roman period, with rare exceptions, do not have additional ornamentation, and probably glazing itself performed the function of decoration during 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The majority of the amphoriskoe were glazed in green. Rest of them were glazed in blue, silver, green-grey colours. After their detailed study we can assume, that no significant morphological changes are observed and they maintained the stability of shapes. This, presumably means, that the functional assignment of the amphoriskoe were not changing during the centuries. They were used as an unguentarium for preserving liquid medicine or perfumes. The majority of these vessels are dated to the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

There is a completely different situation on the territory of the Near East comparing the Georgia. For instance, green glazed pottery vessels were

widespread among the population and they were available even for the very poor people in Parthia and Mesopotamia (in Kish, Babylon, Nippur etc.), and also in minor Asia during 1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> cc. AD [9].

Similar glazed amphoriskoe were widespread in Iran during the Parthian and Early Sasanian period. They were also discovered in Seleucia (modern Iraq) and in Dura-Europos (Syria) in the Late Parthian cultural layers [10].

Some of the Georgian scientists think that "the comparison with glazed ceramics of the Roman period discovered in Northern Black Sea region, Pergamum, Rhodes, Uruk, Armenia, in Dura-Europos, revealed the essential difference between them: shape, the color of clay and glaze, and quality of manufacture. A close resemblance, rather than identity, has been confirmed only with the small amount of glazed pottery of the Roman period of Dura-Europos (Syria) (shape, color of glaze and clay) but unlike ours, Syrian ones are of high quality" [1].

However, it is obvious, that the glazed amphoriskoe from Georgia are identical to the glazed vessels, which were widespread during the the Parthian and Early Sasanian periods (1<sup>st</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD.) in Dura-Europos, and in Seleucia on Tigris. Glazed vessels from Mesopotamia are of low-qualified [9], as well as in Georgia. Some of the glazed vessels' rim and foot were remained unglazed in Dura-Europos (Similar glazed vessels were attested in Georgia also).

Abundant glazed pottery vessels were discovered alongside the common ceramic-ware in Mesopotamia. It means, that glazed vessels did not represent luxury items there and were made for daily uses only [10]. Exactly such low-qualified glazed vessels were imported from Mesopotamia into the eastern Georgia.

Green glazed pottery vessels became the most widely used ware after the common ceramic-ware in Mesopotamia from the first century BC. Chronologically, the spreading of green glazed pottery in Dura-Europos and in Seleucia, as well as

in Georgia, coincides the expansion of the Parthian Empire, although the most forms of these vessels had, probably, been already developed in Hellenistic times [9]. The types of glazed vessels became much more varied during the 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD. Among them two handled amphoriskoe should be mentioned.

According to the quality, two types of glazed ware are attested in the Near East. First type unites high quality "lead glazed" pottery [11], but this type has not been discovered yet in Georgia. However, second type of low quality glazed ware are abundant and frequently discovered in Mesopotamia. Firing of such kind vessels was done in a potter's kiln, at a temperature sufficient to melt the glaze (about 1000<sup>o</sup> C). The glaze coating the surface of the vessel was excessive in some cases. It runs down during firing and formed streaks with blobs at the end. The glaze generally covered the whole outer surface of the vessel, but, in some cases, the lower part of the foot and rim was not covered by glaze [9]. With all of these, above mentioned, morphological and technological features, Mesopotamian glazed ware resembles to the glazed pottery, which were discovered on the territory of eastern Georgia, and this fact approves, that such kind of glazed pottery was imported in Georgia from Mesopotamia.

The green glazed amphoriskos from Armaziskhevi is the best artefact for approving this suggestion. Besides the identical morphological features, two details indicate, that this vessel was imported: **1-** Ornamentation: two parallel groovings around the shoulder. Similar ornamentation is characteristic for the glazed pottery from Dura-Europos. **2-** Three small unglazed projections, which were remained on the rim of the vessel. They should be the remains of a special clay tripod or stand. This motif was also characteristic for the glazed ware from Mesopotamia in Parthian period [9].

Vessels were placed in a potter's kiln either standing on their bases or inverted on their rims in Mesopotamia. In the latter case, they were always

raised on three knobs or projections of a special clay tripod or stand, which prevented the rim from touching the floor. However, for this reason, three unglazed projections or points were remained on the vessel's rim [9]. Vessels, which were fired with this method, were frequently found on the territory of the Near East. After the exploring of Roman period locally made pottery vessels from Georgia, it should be assumed, that above mentioned method of firing of the pottery was unknown for the pottery makers in Iberia during the Roman period, because, there were not attested the signs of a clay tripod (Imprint signs of the tripod on the vessel's rim) on the locally made pottery vessels.

It should be mentioned, that there has not been discovered any clay tripod yet on the territory of eastern Georgia at the archaeological sites of Roman period. Therefore, it is impossible, to consider the glazed vessel from Armaziskhevi cemetery as a local product, because, this vessel was fired with the method, which was unknown for Iberians in this period.

After the consideration above mentioned facts, it can be assumed, that glazed pottery from eastern Georgia were imported from Iran and Mesopotamia, therefore, these vessels were considered as luxury items in Iberia (unlike the Near East). For this reason, glazed ware were available only for the rich people in Kartli kingdom (In any case, according to the archaeological materials, similar situation was in Iberia during 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries). That is a reason, why the glazed pottery rarely attested in eastern Georgia.

We can assume after the investigation that glazed pottery vessels were imported from Parthia, Seleucia and Dura-Europos in Kartli kingdom during the 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries. Imported vessels are of a low- quality.

Therefore, archaeological materials proof, that Iberian kingdom had close cultural-economical relations with the Iran and Mesopotamia during the 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> centuries AD.

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## აღმოსავლეთ საქართველოს ტერიტორიაზე დადასტურებული გვიანანტიკური ხანის მოჭიქული კერამიკული ჭურჭლის საკითხისთვის

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წინამდებარე ნაშრომი ეხება აღმოსავლეთ საქართველოს ტერიტორიაზე დადასტურებული გვიანანტიკური ხანის მოჭიქული კერამიკული ჭურჭლის შესწავლას, მათი წარმომავლობის, მნიშვნელობის და დანიშნულების განსაზღვრას. კვლევით დგინდება, რომ ამგვარი კერამიკული ნაწარმი წარმოადგენს იმპორტს პართიიდან და მესოპოტამიიდან, რის გამოც, ისინი ქართლის სამეფოში (იბერიაში) ძვირად ფასობდა და, შესაბამისად, მხოლოდ სოციალურად დაწინაურებული ფენისთვის იყო ხელმისაწვდომი (ყოველ შემთხვევაში ამგვარი ვითარებაა ახ.წ. I-IV საუკუნეებში), რაც თავისთავად ხსნის მოჭიქული კერამიკული ჭურჭლის აღმოჩენის იშვიათობას გვიანანტიკური ხანის საქართველოში. აღმოსავლეთ საქართველოს ტერიტორიაზე აღმოჩენილი ამგვარი თიხის ჭურჭელი (ძირითადად ამფორისკები) იდენტურია პართიაში, დურა-ევროპოსსა (სირია) და სელევკიაში (ერაყი) აღმოჩენილი გვიანპართიული პერიოდის, შედარებით დაბალი ხარისხის მოჭიქული ჭურჭლისა და შეგვიძლია დანამდვილებით ვთქვათ, რომ სწორედ ამ რეგიონებიდან ხდებოდა მათი იმპორტი საქართველოს ტერიტორიაზე სავაჭრო-კულტურული ურთიერთობების შედეგად. სავარაუდოდ, ამფორისკები გამოიყენებოდა სუნამოს და სამედიცინო სითხის შესანახად. საქართველოს ტერიტორიაზე აღმოჩენილი ამგვარი ჭურჭლის ძირითადი ნაწილი ახ.წ. III საუკუნისა და IV ს.-ის პირველი ნახევრით თარიღდება.

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