

## Pichvnari, Georgia 2008

### Michael Vickers and Amiran Kakhidze

The eleventh season of the joint British-Georgian Pichvnari Expedition, organised on the Georgian side from the Batumi Archaeological Museum and the Batumi Research Institute, and on the British from the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford took place between mid-July and mid-August 2008. This year was unusually exciting, since hostilities between Russia and Georgia broke out during the last few days of our season. Both the personnel and the site escaped unscathed. Most 'British' students left via Turkey on instructions from the embassy.



The nature of the site of Pichvnari was briefly described in an account of the first season's activities in *Anatolian Studies* 51 (2001) 65-90 (and cf. brief reports in successive issues of *Anatolian Archaeology* since 1998). A monograph on the first five seasons' work was published in 2004: M. Vickers and A. Kakhidze, *Pichvnari 1: Greeks and Colchians on the East Coast of the Black Sea: Results of Excavations Conducted by the Joint British-Georgian Expedition 1998-2002* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and the Batumi Archaeological Museum, 2004; 458pp., 333 illustrations; obtainable from Oxbow Books). Another volume, A. Kakhidze, *Pichvnari 2: The Classical World in the Eastern Black Sea Area: the Fifth Century BC Greek Necropolis at Pichvnari: Results of Excavations Conducted by the N. Berdzenishvili Batumi Research Institute Pichvnari Expedition 1967-1987* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford and the Batumi Archaeological Museum, 2007; 408pp., 100 b/w illustrations, 16 colour; obtainable from Oxbow Books). *Pichvnari 3*, dealing with work in the Hellenistic cemeteries between 1965 and 2004, is in an active state of preparation. A Major Research Grant from Jesus College, Oxford expedited production of *Pichvnari 2*, and work on all three volumes has been greatly assisted by the British Academy Joint Activities scheme, which enabled Georgian scholars to visit libraries in Oxford.

This was the first year when our major benefactor was the Leon Levy Foundation of New York, and all concerned are most grateful. The British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara (BABSI fund) had supported two five-year programmes between 1998 and 2007, and we celebrated our tenth anniversary with a conference in Krakow (Pontika 2008: Recent Research on the Northern and Eastern Black Sea in *Ancient Times*), funded by the British Academy and the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences. The Leon Levy Foundation also sponsored an update of the Pichvnari website (Google it), and together with the Friends of Academic Research in Georgia (FaRiG), assisted in the acquisition of a 7-seater

vehicle for the expedition's use (invaluable when we had to evacuate students quickly). Other principal benefactors were the Oxford Craven Committee, the Oxford Marjory Wardrop Committee, the Department of Antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum, and the Batumi Archaeological Museum. Thanks to the generosity of the Andrew and Sandra Graham Fund, we were able to employ the services of Maka Bokeria, a palynologist from the Georgian National Museum.

Lying at the junction of the Choloki and Ochkhamuri rivers to the north of Kobuleti, and a kilometre or so inland, Pichvnari was a major settlement from the late Bronze Age, but became more obviously wealthy during the period of Greek colonization. An area between the Choloki and the sea was used for burials ostensibly by the native Colchian population and immigrant Greeks; at first in separate cemeteries, but by the Hellenistic period together. The 2008 campaign fell into three parts: 1) the Hellenistic cemetery, 2) the Colchian cemetery, and 3) the later classical Greek cemetery.

1) Students from Batumi University had cleared part of the Hellenistic cemetery during the two weeks prior to our arrival. This was extremely convenient, for it meant that our team were able to start immediately on the preparation of the graves for drawing and photography. 20 burials were found, each one containing grave goods, including imported and Colchian pottery. For the first time, a typical Colchian iron sickle (*tsaldi*) was found in a funerary context; other known specimens come from hoards or were chance finds.



Hellenistic cemetery



Hellenistic cemetery



Colchian pottery



Colchian pottery

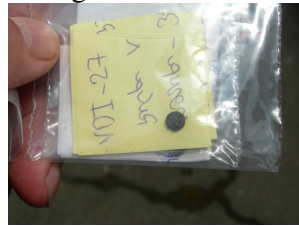


*tsaldi*

2) A trench in the Colchian cemetery investigated last year was extended to the north, and worked on by our group accompanied by post-graduate students from Batumi University. 25 Colchian graves of the fifth century BC were found. Charon's obols were frequently found, usually a single Colchian silver tri-obol (*kolkhidki*) per burial. In one case, however, the deceased appears to have had his/her mouth stuffed with more than a dozen such coins. Five graves, however, produced minute fractions (one-forty-eighths) of *kolkhidki* (*hemitetartemoria*). Gold beads were also found. Grave 391, contained two *kolkhidki*, silver jewellery, and Attic *lekythos*, and an unusual core-made glass vessel on which the horizontal swirls had been left uncombed. As last year, there were some finds of the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, representing a late Roman re-occupation of Pichvnari.



Colchian burial



Fraction of *kolkhidki*



Grave 391



Glass vessel from Grave 391

3) The same students began to excavate part of the classical Greek cemetery that dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, but work was not quite complete when we had to stop on account of the Russian invasion. The outline of graves began to emerge when the surface was carefully scraped down with a *toki* (a kind of mattock). 14 graves and 9 'ritual platforms' were found. The latter were places where funerary banquets had taken place and consisted of broken pottery (including a fragmentary Attic red-figure crater), animal bones and charcoal. They provided a rich resource for our palynologist. One burial unusually contained two coffins.



*Toki*



'Ritual platform'



Double burial



The co-directors of the 2008 season were again Amiran Kakhidze, Director of the Batumi Archaeological Museum and Michael Vickers, Professor of Archaeology in the University of Oxford, and Curator of Greek and Roman antiquities at the Ashmolean Museum; Dr Gia Tavamaishvili was Deputy Director, and other Georgian participants included Dr Nineli Varshakidze, Dr Manana Odisheli, Nino Dzeladze, Emzar Kakhidze, Miranda Turmanidze, Nargize Surmanidze, (archaeologists), Maka Bokeria (palynologist), Anzor Javelidze, Giorgi Dumbadze (architects and surveyors), Givi Nakhutsrishvili (photographer), Zurab Varshanidze (laboratory assistant); students: Tamasi Darchidze, Vitali Kartsivadze, Sul Khan Okropiridze (all Batumi State University), Maggie Gudadze (Tbilisi State University), Claudio Baldi (University of Zurich), Maria Degtiarenko (University of Virginia) , Suji Chandrasekaran (Lincoln College, Oxford), Ellen Hitchcock (St Antony's College, Oxford), Emma Rix (Corpus Christi College, Oxford), Sebastian Źmuda (University of Wroclaw), Sandro Sekhniashvili (Oxford), Koba Khvedelidze (Tbilisi). Guliko Tsiskaradze and Darejan Gurgenedze cooked as well as ever, and Guram Svanidze ensured that we never went short of supplies. We were frequently visited by local and national television crews. Michael Vickers received an honorary doctorate from the Shota Rustaveli Batumi State University.



Amiran Kakhidze



Maka Bokeria



Maggie Gudadze



Claudio Baldi



Maria Degtiarenko



Suji Chandrasekaran



Emma Rix



Sebastian Žmuda



TV interview

In 2009 we plan to finalise the publication of *Pichvnari 5*: M. Vickers and A. Kakhidze, *Pichvnari 5: Results of Excavations Conducted by the Joint British-Georgian Expedition 2003-2007*.



New vehicle