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A RICH GRAVE FROM THE VANI SITE

In 2003 a rich grave was excavated at Vani (western Georgia).¹ The grave (No 22) was found on the upper terrace of the site (plots 213-214), where some more graves were revealed during the previous campaigns.

Luckily, the grave No. 22 was not disturbed. It consisted of two parts: a platform and a pit. Both parts were cut in the rocky ground.

The platform was cut at the depth of 0,20-0,25 m from the modern surface. It measured 1,20 m x 1,30 m. The platform had east-west orientation. On the platform a horse and a human were buried. Of the human skeleton (no. 1) only teeth and parts of the lower extremities were preserved. According to the teeth the head of the buried was put in the east. The fragments of extremities show that the knees were bent. Near the teeth, i.e. in the head area, there were found two eye-beads of blue glass, two gold ear-rings, three torques made of silver, bronze, and iron. The iron bracelets (in two piles) were located between the fragments of lower extremities and the teeth, i.e. in the area of the wrists. The horse skeleton was stretched across the platform, on the south-east – north-west axis, with the bent extremities. The human and horse skeletons laid on the 0,10-0,15 m thick layer of crushed sandstone.

The grave pit was cut to the north of the platform. It is rectangular in shape. The eastern wall of the grave pit is 3,80 m long, the southern wall – 4 m long, the length of the western wall is 3,84 m, that of the northern wall is 4 m. The corners of the pit are rounded. Along the walls there was a 0,50-0,70 m wide band composed of sandstone clods. The pit filling consisted of big pebbles. The pebbles were mixed with a compact clayish black layer. During the cleaning of the heap a few pottery sherds were found. Noteworthy is a

¹ In 2003 archaeological investigations of the Vani site were grant-supported by the Gerda Henkel Foundation, as in the previous year. I am taking an opportunity to express the most hearty gratitude to the Foundation, on behalf of the whole staff.

neck of the red-figured squat aryballos, the body of which was found on the floor of the grave.

Along the band of sandstone clods big iron nails were uncovered, testifying to the existence of a wooden construction in the pit (a couch, a coffin or a sarcophagus), though the construction itself has not preserved. The deceased were laid on this wooden construction. It is supposed that in the pit five or six persons were buried (deceased Nos. 2-7). Of the skeletons of four of them (Nos. 2-5) mostly only teeth were preserved. They were found at the eastern wall of the pit, in the distance of 0,30-0,45 m from one another. Thus, we can imagine that the deceased were buried with their heads to the east.

Of the skeleton No.2, besides teeth, a badly damaged fragment of the lower extremities was preserved. To this deceased belong two groups of inventory. One of them was found in the head area. It consisted of a golden temple-ring with the open-work globule, 2 beads made of gold, a silver fibula, glass, cornelian, and amber beads, minute beads made of Egyptian faience, 4 Colchian silver coins – triobols of the common type. Two more groups of inventory might belong to the deceased in question. These are groups of iron and silver bracelets.

To the north of the deceased No.2, individual No.3 was buried. Of the skeleton only teeth and a fragment of the tubular bone were preserved. Under the teeth a group of personal ornaments was cleaned, composed of a pair of golden ear-rings with the grooved globule, gold crescent-shaped pendants, beads made of glass and Egyptian faience, as well as an iron torque. To this individual belongs the group of grave gifts consisting of iron and silver bracelets, a golden temple-ring with the open-work globule, a blue glass eye-bead, beads of glass, amber, cornelian, and gold; bracelets made of silver and iron. According to the disposition of bracelets, one hand was near the face, the other – a little below. The deceased might be laid in crouched position.

The deceased No.4 was laid in some 0,43 m from the above-discussed one. (This is the distance between two groups of teeth.) To this individual belong three groups of inventory – personal ornaments in the neck area, a fragment of leather (?) band, two groups of bracelets. The distance between the bracelet-containing groups is 0,48 m. Of the skeleton only teeth are preserved. According to the disposition of teeth and groups of bracelets the position of the deceased seems to be as follows: with the head to the east, in the supine position, with hands stretched along the body. In the neck area several personal ornaments were cleaned: silver and iron torques, a pair of gold penannular ear-rings, 19 eye-beads. In the wrist areas iron bracelets were found.

The deceased No.5 was laid in 0.35 m from the individual No.4. Only teeth and a part of the badly damaged mandible were preserved of the skeleton. The disposition of the teeth testifies to the upright position (not sideways)

of the head. To this individual might be connected a group of inventory in the neck area and two gold ear-rings. The cleaning of the neck area revealed a silver torque, another torque made of iron, eye-beads, a silver penannular ring, and a silver lunula-shaped pendant. In 0,20 m to the east of this group a gold ear-ring was found, in 0,25 m to the west – another ear-ring. Both ear-rings are of simple shape – penannular ones with flattened terminals. Analogous ear-rings were found among the gifts connected with the deceased No.1 and 4.

Besides these four deceased, laid in the eastern part of the pit, with heads to the east, it seems that the grave contained one (or two) more individual(s), buried in the western part of the grave-pit. If so, the deceased might be laid in the crouched position, since there is not enough space.

The area between skeletal remains was occupied by groups of inventory or separate artefacts (Fig. 1). In the corners of the pit stood amphorae – one amphora in each corner. In the north-eastern and south-eastern corners Mendean amphorae were found, while Chian amphorae with the cup-like toes were uncovered in the south-western corner and near the south-eastern one.

A long cylindrical toe drastically widened at the bottom is a typical feature of the Mendean amphorae. In the middle of the bottom there is an indentation, while the rest of its surface is convexed and concave. These very features gave rise to the identification of this group of amphorae by Iraida Zeest in the 1950s.² She called them "the amphorae with the cup-like toes". The production centre of these amphorae was defined later. At first, at least one part of these amphorae were attributed to the island of Thasos or north Aegean centres related with it.³ Later Iosif B. Brashinskii, who firstly shared the opinion about the Thasian provenance, changed his mind and ascribed amphorae with the cup-like toes to the island of Mende.⁴ This opinion was

² Zeest I.B., *Keramicheskaya tara Bospora* [Pottery containers of Bosporos], *Materialy i issledovaniya po Arkheologii Bospora* [Materials and Researches in the Archaeology of Bosporos], 83, Moscow, 1953, p. 88 (in Russian).

³ Shelov D.B., *Keramicheskiye kleima iz raskopok Fanagorii* [Pottery stamps from the excavations of Phanagoria], – *Materialy i issledovaniya po arkheologii Bospora* [Materials and Researches in the Archaeology of Bosporos], 53, Moscow, 1956, p. 151 (in Russian); Shelov D.B., *Kleima na amforakh i cherepitsakh, naidennykh pri raskopkakh Pantikapeya v 1945-1949 gg.* [Amphora- and tile stamps found at the excavations of Pantikapaion], – *Materialy i issledovaniya po arkheologii Bospora* [Materials and Researches in the Archaeology of Bosporos], 56, Moscow, 1957, p. 221 (in Russian); Bon A.-M., Bon A., *Les timbres amphoriques de Thasos, – Études thasiennes*, IV, Paris, 1957, Nos. 2184-2210; Brashinskii I.B., *Uspekhi keramicheskoi epigraphiki* [The progress in the pottery epigraphics], – *Sovetskaya arkheologia* [Soviet Archaeology], 1961, 2, p. 296 (in Russian).

⁴ Brashinskii I. B., *Amfory Mendy* (O lokalizatsii gruppy amfor s "ryumkoobraznymi nozhkami") [Mendean amphorae (On the localization of the group of amphorae with the cup-like

voiced by C.-J. Eiseman, as well.⁵ Now amphorae of the type in question are unanimously ascribed to Mende.⁶ The amphorae from Vani belong to the so-called Portichello type. This type of Mendean amphorae is dated to the end of the 5th-360s BC. Mendean amphorae of the type under discussion are wide spread in the Black Sea area. Their import in the area ceased from the last quarter of the 4th century BC.

Amphorae with the cap-like toes represent the only containers produced by the island of Chios in the 4th century BC. Amphorae of this type appear already in the beginning of the century, though during the first 20 years the cap was not yet shaped. That's why the amphorae of the early stage are called "amphorae with proto-cap-like toe". A series with a real "cap" appears from 370s BC. At the last stage (the last quarter of the 4th century) the "cap" is again weakly defined. It takes gradually the shape of a cone; the handles are attached low under the rim. Both amphorae found in the grave belong to the fully developed series. So, it could be dated to the mid-4th century. Chian amphorae of the type in question are wide spread in the Black Sea area. At the Vani site such amphorae have already been found in previous years.⁷

Near the north-eastern corner of the pit there was found a red-figure squat lekythos. On the vase there are depicted two heads facing one another. It has already been noted that the neck of this very lekythos was found in the pebble filling. Squat lekythoi decorated with heads or whole figures of women proliferate in the Attic painted pottery of the so-called Late Classical I stage (i.e. the last quarter of the 5th-370s BC), and they persist into the 4th century BC.⁸ According to the shape the lekythos from Vani could be dated to the 4th century BC, when the body takes the shape of an ovule (instead of a sphere), and the neck becomes longer.⁹ The cone-shaped rim allows even more precise dating: rims in the shape of the inverted cone is characteristic of 400-375 BC.¹⁰

toes)], – *Khudozhestvennaya kultura i arkhologiya antičnogo mira* [Artistic Culture and Archaeology of the Classical World], Moscow, 1976, pp. 67-74 (in Russian).

⁵ Eiseman C. J., Amphoras from the Porticello shipwreck (Calabria), – *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration*, 2, 1 (1973), pp. 1-15, figs. 1-3.

⁶ Monakhov S.Yu., Grecheskiye amfory v Prichernomor'ye. Kompleksy keramicheskoi tary [Greek amphorae of the Black Sea area. Ceramic contexts], Saratov, 1999, pp. 165ff. (in Russian).

⁷ Vani, vol. VII, Tbilisi, 1983, pp. 9-10, 16-17, Nos. 9-12 (in Georgian).

⁸ Boardman J., Athenian red figure vases. The Classical period, London, 1989, p. 170.

⁹ Peredolskaya A. A., Atticheskiy lekif iz VII Semibratnego kurgana [An Athenian lekythos from the seventh kurgan of the Seven Brothers], – *Pamyatniki antičnogo prikladnogo iskusstva* [Monuments of the Classical Applied Art], Leningrad, 1973, pp. 62-70 (in Russian).

¹⁰ Schefold K., Untersuchungen zu den Kertscher Vasen, Berlin-Leipzig, 1934.

To the north of the individual No.5, between the group of personal ornaments and the Mendean amphora in the north-eastern corner a silver vase and a glass unguentarium were found. The silver vase is damaged, though it is possible to reconstruct its shape. The vase has a concave neck; its oval body is channeled. There is a band of ornament at the junction of the neck and the body. The bottom is decorated with the tongue pattern.

It has already been mentioned that associated with the grave goods is a vessel made of opaque black glass. It has a square elongated body, a very small flattened base, a broad and short neck, very narrow shoulders. The rim is thick and rounded, formed by bichrome twists. There are knobs on each of the four corners of the shoulder. The Vani vessel is decorated by a monochrome chevron pattern in whitish-green. This thread decoration covers the entire body of the vessel and terminates a short distance above the base. There are yellowish-brown bands above and below the chevrons. The light-brown bands along the four vertical edges are added after the chevrons and horizontal bands. The inner space of the vessel is cylindrical, tapering slightly toward the base.

Core-formed glass vessels of this type are identified as receptacles for the black substance used to darken the edges of the eye-lids. The black cosmetic paint is called kohl. Hence the designation of such receptacles as kohl-tubes. By the way, the glass vessel from Vani still contained a portion of the black powdery substance.¹¹

The Vani specimen belongs to the IB group of Barag's classification. The kohl-tubes of this type are thought to be of the Iranian provenance; they are mainly dated from the 5th-4th century BC, possibly even from the 4th century BC.¹² The Vani specimen finds analogies in the collection of L. Oppenlaender.¹³

To the west of the above discussed kohl-tube and silver vase, two bronze vessels were cleaned. These are: a phiale mesomphalos and an oinochoe. The upper handle attachment of the oinochoe is decorated with a female head, while on the lower attachment a Silenos (?) head is depicted.

The group of grave goods yielded near the eastern edge of the grave contained many items. These are: a silver funerary band or belt, silver and bronze bells, two bronze buckles with gold-plated discs, various beads made of glass, Egyptian faience, and amber, and tube-shaped and conical decorations made

¹¹ Though the analysis of this material has not yet been made, one can suppose that this is remains of kohl.

¹² Barag D.P., Rod-formed kohl-tubes of the mid-first millennium B.C., *Journal of Glass Studies*, vol. XVII, 1975, pp. 23-36.

¹³ Oppenlaender Collection, Waiblingen, 2145.

of silver, an iron horse-bit. Of great interest is the silver belt. It is cut from sheet silver and decorated with simple patterns (triangles, swastikas) and figures (birds?) executed in the dot repoussé technique. There are small pin-holes both at the top and the bottom along the length of the band. These perforations suggest that the belt was originally attached to some fabric or leather. The arrangement of silver and bronze bells along the edges of the belt allows us to suppose that some of the holes were meant to attach bells to the belt. Belts are rarely found in the graves both in western and eastern Georgia in the Classical period. The only belt of this period is a golden one from the so-called Akhlagori hoard.¹⁴ Belts or funerary bands are quite rare in the Greek world as well, to my knowledge. A belt housed in the British Museum is said to be from the Dardanelles. It is completely undecorated. The Dardanelle belt is dated to 350-300 BC.¹⁵ Parts of the other object of this form from the Santa Eufemia treasure (in Italy, Calabria) is housed in the same museum. These are two sections of corrugated gold sheet.¹⁶ There is a thin silver belt in the British Museum, and what seems to be two particularly elaborated belts in the Stathatos collection.¹⁷ Two gold ornaments from Carpenisi (?) are decorated with massed floral ornament with plentiful use of filigree, granulation and inlays.¹⁸ They are dated to the Hellenistic period.

Golden jewellery pieces were found near the south-western edge of the pit. First of all there was found a triangular pendant of the necklace. It is composed of hollow globular beads soldered to one another. Globular beads are made in two halves, which are soldered. This type of pendants finds *comparanda* in the so-called Akhlagori hoard and the Sairkhe necropolis. The Akhlagori hoard was recently dated to the end of the 4th-beginning of the 3rd century BC.¹⁹ As for Sairkhe, necklaces consisting of such elements were found in three graves: graves No.1, 8, and 10. The grave No.1 contained three triangular pendants, the grave No.8 yielded twenty ones, while the grave No.1 testified that triangular pendants represented parts of a necklace. The mentioned graves are dated to the first half of the 4th century BC (grave No.10), mid-4th century (grave No.8) and the turn of the 4th century BC (grave No. 1).²⁰

¹⁴ Smirnov Ya., Akhlagoriiskii klad [The Akhlagori hoard], Tiflis, 19334, p. 52, pl. V (in Russian).

¹⁵ Williams D., Ogden J., Greek gold. Jewellery of the Classical world. 1994, p. 107, No. 61.

¹⁶ Williams D., Ogden J., Greek gold. Jewellery of the Classical world. 1994, p. 209, No. 141.

¹⁷ Amandry P., Collection Hélène Stathatos, Les bijoux antiques, Strassbourg, 1953, nos. 265-266.

¹⁸ Higgins R., Greek and Roman jewellery, Second Edition, 1980, p. 168.

¹⁹ Lordkipanidze O., The Akhlagori hoard (An attempt at dating and historical interpretation), – *Archäologische Mittelungen aus Iran und Turan*, 33, 2001, pp. 143-190.

²⁰ Nadiradze K., Sairkhe – the ancient town of Colchis, Tbilisi, 1990, pp. 51, 95, pl. XXXIV, 2 (in Georgian).

In some 20 cm from the necklace pendant, some more golden jewellery pieces were cleaned: a plain globular bead, a golden button with three holes for sewing on the fabric; a group of inventory in the central part of the grave contained 7 golden jewellery pieces and 1 iron item. The golden jewellery comprises a temple-ring with the open-work globule, a melon-shaped bead, a pendant with the chain, a globular bead, 2 tubular beads, one of which is grooved, two buttons. As for the iron item, it represents a fragment of the bracelet. Of interest is the melon-shaped bead (Fig. 9). Its segments are separated vertically by single lines of granulations. At either end around the central perforation there are leaf patterns and a ring of granules. By both its size and shape it is unique for the Colchian jewellery. The closest analogy was found among the Lydian gold – the segmented melon-shaped bead found in the tomb of Sardis dated to 575-540 BC.²¹

In the central part of the grave-pit three clay vessels were found. Two of them represent two-handled pitharia, while the third one is a jug. They find parallels among the pottery of the 6th-first half of the 4th century BC. Elongated proportions of the vessels in question give us grounds to ascribe them to the later stage of the pre-Hellenistic Colchian pottery.

One of the two-handled pitharia contained golden jewellery, a silver phiale and 5 silver coins – half-drachmae of the common type. The gold jewellery was composed of several temple-rings, a loop-in-loop chain, a signet-ring, various beads and spacer beads, pendants, buttons, and plaques. All types of the temple-rings – with rays, with a granulated globule, with an open-work globule, boat-shaped, Sairkhe-type – are characteristic of the Colchian jewellery of the pre-Hellenistic period (6th-early 4th centuries BC) (Figs. 2-6). Beads are of various types – spherical and channeled, plain and spherical, oval, tubular, and doubled. One of the beads is noteworthy, namely – a big spherical bead decorated with channeling. Of interest are spacer beads. They are of two types – one of them is swastika-shaped (Fig. 7), while the other is rectangular (Fig. 8). Some pendants consist of beads and plain discs. Buttons are stamped. They have three attachment holes (for sewing on fabric). On the oval bezel of the ring a love-scene is engraved (Fig. 11). The hoop is hammered from the same piece of gold as the bezel. Plaques with the representation of a sphinx are made of gold sheet. The appliqués are die-formed or punched from the back.

To the north of the pitharion with golden jewellery a group of silver jewellery and two groups of silver coins were revealed. The group of silver

²¹ Waldbaum J., *Metalwork from Sardis: the finds through 1974*, Cambridge-London, 1983, p. 126, cat. No. 760, pl. 46; Waldbaum J., *Metalwork and metalworking at Sardis, – Sardis, Twenty-seven Years of Discovery*, ed. by Eleanor Guralnick, Chicago, 1987, pp. 38-39, fig. 20.

artefacts is badly damaged. Identified were some conical ornaments, spherical and tubular beads. Together with the silver jewellery, some minute beads made of Egyptian faience were revealed. On the silver jewellery a golden tubular ornament, richly decorated with the finest granulation was uncovered (Fig. 10). Jewellery of this type is already known from Sairkhe.

It is worthy to note that almost all pieces of golden jewellery show definite signs of wear, indicating that they were not made solely for the funeral.

The above mentioned groups of silver coins consisted of one and the same types of coins – Colchian triobols of the common type. One of the groups contained 41 coins, while the other counted 40 pieces.

Judging by the inventory, especially imported pottery, the grave No. 22 might be dated preliminarily to the first half – middle of the 4th century BC.

It looks like that the grave was damaged during the digging of the complex composed of a channel and rectangular cuttings. The function of the complex is yet unclear.



Fig. 1 – General view of the grave.



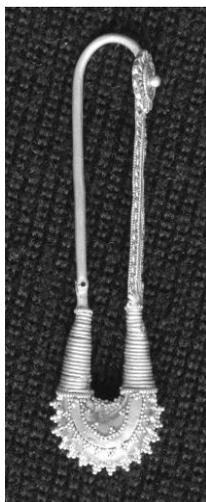
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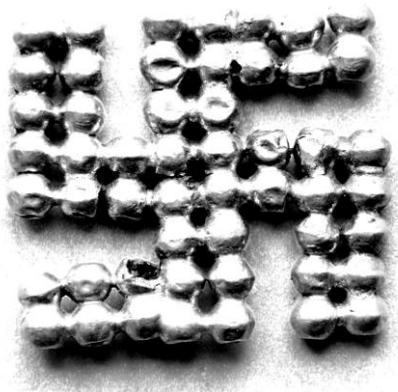


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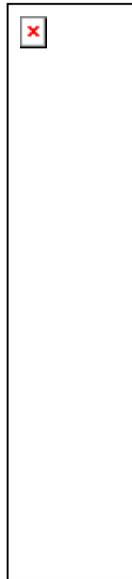


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Figs. 2-6 – Gold temple-rings.



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Figs. 7-8 – Gold spacer beads.



Fig. 9 – A gold bead.

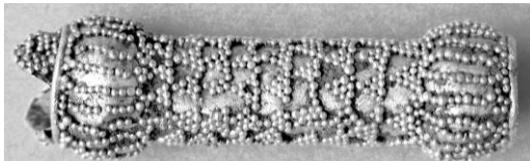


Fig. 10 – A gold tubular jewellery.



Fig. 11 – A gold finger-ring: bezel with a love-scene.