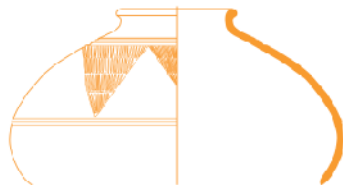


Bronze and Iron Age pottery from Metsamor (2018 season)



Abstract: A rich and diverse pottery assemblage from the Middle Bronze Age through the Urartian Red Burnished Ware and local “post-Urartian ware” of the Iron III period comes from occupational deposits discovered within the lower town of Metsamor during fieldwork in 2018. The stone architecture recorded in this sector functioned in the first half of the 1st millennium BC. The pottery finds thus represent periods from Iron Age I to Iron Age III, for the first time producing a detailed sequence for the previously less than satisfactorily documented Iron Age I phase. New types of pottery were also distinguished for the Urartian and post-Urartian phases.

Keywords: Metsamor, pottery, Iron Age, Transcaucasia, Urartu, Late Bronze Age, ceramic sequence

From the start of archaeological investigations in Metsamor in the 1960s, the site has played a crucial role in studies of ancient Transcaucasian ceramics in Armenia and their relative chronology, particularly in the Bronze and Iron Ages. This is because few of the excavations in Armenia have been carried out on multi-layered fortress or settlement sites, the bulk of the research concerning cemeteries. Metsamor has yielded ceramic material from both the fortress and cemetery, forming a corpus that covers a time span from the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) III through the Iron Age (IA) II periods. The study of

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Acknowledgments

The research was conducted with financial support from the National Science Centre Poland Grant 2018/29/B/HS3/01843.

this comprehensive assemblage has contributed to numerous theories on vessel type distribution (Avetisyan and Bobokhyan 2008; Avetisyan 2009). However, the published ceramic corpus from the site is significantly lacking in material

from certain areas (e.g., the lower town) and from the latest campaigns conducted by Emma Khanzadyan. The Polish–Armenian project exploring the territory of the Metsamor lower town since 2013 has contributed to reevaluating and enhancing



Fig. 1. Plan of the area excavated in the 2018 season (University of Warsaw Metsamor Project | digitizing M. Iskra)

current knowledge on the development of the pottery tradition, both in Metsamor as well as in the entire region during the 2nd and 1st millennium BC.

The progress made in understanding the stratigraphy of the excavated area and the depositional processes that took place between the Iron Age I and Iron Age III periods has enabled the present study of the pottery finds, which are primarily from the 2018 season, aimed at demonstrating the differences in vessel forms and manufacturing techniques between the early and late phases of the Iron Age I period. In other words, data from the 2018 season will constitute a benchmark for research on the pottery assemblage found between 2013 and 2017, particularly in the western sectors of the excavated area. However, at this stage of research, without more detailed data from other parts of the settlement, it seems pointless to reconstruct an improved long ceramic sequences for the entire site. Similarly, a comprehensive typology of ceramics from the 2nd and 1st millennia BC should be the subject of a separate article. Thus, the present arti-

cle focuses on pottery types that are the most characteristic for each occupation stage and on depositional contexts rather than on chronology, which should also be examined separately.

The area occupied in the second half of the 2nd millennium BC and the first half of the 1st millennium BC, investigated during the four-week season in 2018 (for a discussion of the season's results, see Jakubiak 2019, in this volume) [Fig. 1], yielded 6782 potsherds, including 1405 diagnostic fragments and at least six complete or almost complete vessels. Most of the discovered and identified fragments belonged to the Lchashen–Metsamor (L–M) ceramic tradition of the Iron Age I and II periods; however, there is also a high percentage of Urartian and Iron Age III sherds. Interestingly, only a few LBA II–III forms could be recognized in this assemblage, in contrast to the MBA III painted and incised fragments marking the earliest pottery horizon. Although most of the vessels have parallels coming from the Ararat Plain and neighboring regions, a few indigenous types have been singled out as well.

MIDDLE BRONZE AGE III

The considerable fragmentation of the Middle Bronze Age (MBA) ceramic vessel assemblage that has been uncovered in the northern part of the lower town since 2013 hinders any reconstruction of this material, whereas its post-depositional nature in later contexts makes it hardly useful for a relative chronology.

Detailed studies of the stratigraphical contexts in 2018 revealed the presence of small fragments of painted MBA vessels in the upper layers connected with

a post-Urartian (Iron III) occupation on the fortress slope, while larger fragments of cooking pots, jars and bowls, both painted and monochromatic, were accumulated in the lower deposits of architectural structures S1 and S7. The thick upper layer, containing material from the IA III and MBA periods, should be connected with an artificial levelling of the slope for the foundation of large buildings S5, S6, S14 and the enclosure wall (Jakubiak et al. 2017: 564). The soil for

this purpose must have been brought from nearby, most probably from the lower terraces of the hill (deserted at the time), therefore the presence of older material and its defragmentation is the result of an inverted stratigraphy. However, the lower deposits, under the pithoi in S17 and in the IA I layer in S7, represented undisturbed habitation deposits. Considering that 80% of the potsherds belonged to thick-walled, poorly-fired MBA vessels used for cooking and storing food, it is highly probable that remains of MBA buildings destroyed by later occupation can be found somewhere under S17 and S7. This is the first evidence of Middle Bronze Age occupation on the northern slope of the hill.

The MBA III ceramic assemblage [Fig. 2] should be ascribed to the Karmirbed ware, which is well represented in the Metsamor citadel and cemetery (Khanzadyan, Mkrtch'yan, and Parsamyan 1973: 20–27; Khanzadyan 1995: 5–37; 1996). The bulk of it consists of red-surface, monochrome, painted or unornamented fragments [Fig. 2:3–11], but there are also black-polished vessels with dotted and incised decoration [Fig. 2:1,2]. These are large pots and deep bowls ornamented with a two-dotted wavy-line pattern that is commonly encountered on sherds found in the MBA layer from the citadel (Khanzadyan, Mkrtch'yan, and Parsamyan 1973: Figs

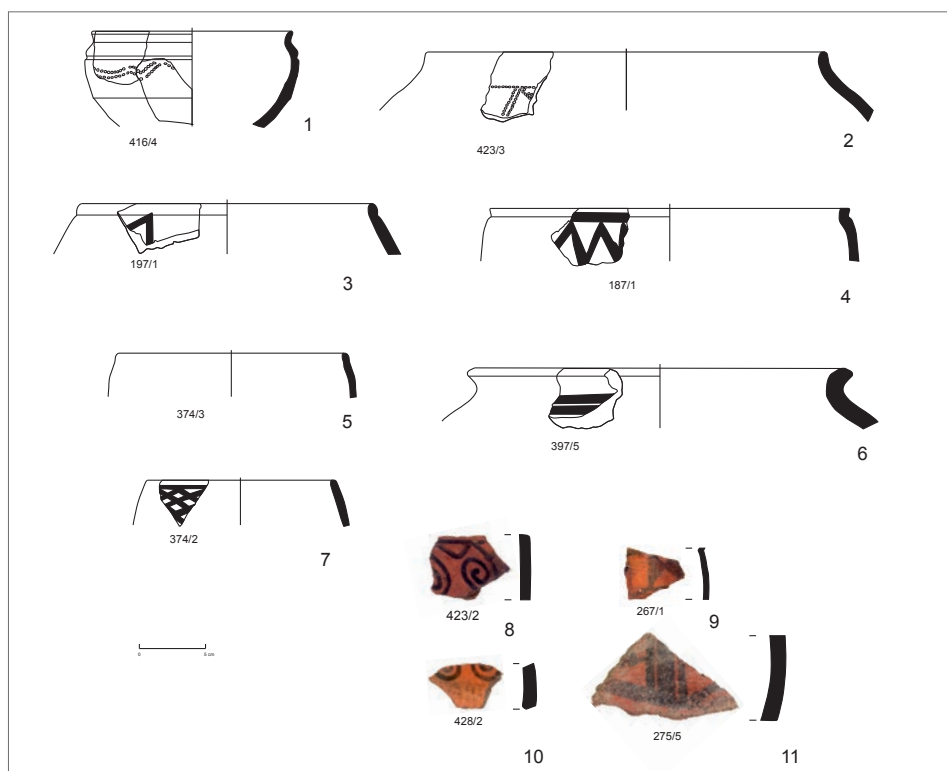


Fig. 2. Middle Bronze Age III sherds (University of Warsaw Metsamor Project | drawing D. Gawlikowska and Z. Lachowicz, photo S. Manas Jolis, digitizing M. Iskra)

24, 25). The repertoire of red-surface vessel forms and ornament types essentially repeats well-known examples from other MBA sites in the Armenian Highland.

Bowls of spherical or slightly biconical bodies and an ornament (bow tie, net, zigzag patterns) painted on the collar and upper part of the body are the most significant [Fig. 2:3,4,5,7,8]. The second group consists of various fragments, mostly bodies of middle- and large-sized jars with globular bodies, relatively short necks and decoration painted on the handles [Fig. 2:6,8,10,11].

On the grounds of a relative chronology of tombs Nos 57 and 59 from the cemetery (Khanzadyan 1995: 17, 24), the dating of the MBA layer in the fortress (Khanzadyan, Mkrtch'yan, and Parsamyan 1973: 26) and radiocarbon datings from the sites of Oshakan (Kalan-taryan, Piliposyan, and Melkonyan 2004: 69) and Horom (Badaljan, Kohl, Stronach, and Tonikjan 1994: 29), the MBA fragments uncovered in 2018 can be dated to the 17th–16th century BC, which is when the MBA settlement in Metsamor is believed to have reached its maximum size.

LATE BRONZE AGE II–III

Late Bronze Age (LBA) II–III potsherds are quite rare in the pottery assemblage from 2018 (only 4% of the total number of diagnostic fragments). Small rim frag-

ments predominate [Fig. 3], contrasting with the few characteristic bottoms decorated with multiple notches at the edges. All the pieces were found loose

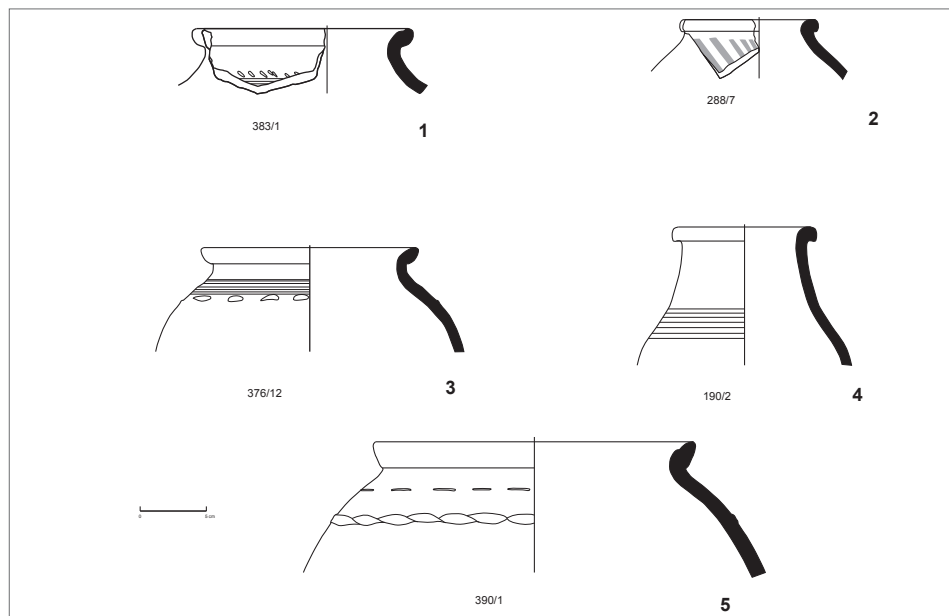


Fig. 3. Late Bronze Age II–III sherds (PCMA UW Metsamor Project | drawing D. Gawlikowska, R. McClenaghan and J. Pawlik, digitizing M. Iskra)

in layers dated to the IA I–III periods.

There was no evidence from the excavations of a homogenous context containing exclusively LBA material. Even under structure S1, the IA I assemblage was preceded directly by MBA painted ware. It seems likely that the LBA II–III sherds were re-deposited in the eastern part of the lower town during the construction of the early Iron Age pit-house structures as well as when levelling the slope in the late Iron Age. In the first case, the LBA potsherds were found in the backfill layer under the clay floors of S7, S1 and S10. The LBA ceramic repertoire is represented mainly by various forms of middle- and small sized pots with short necks and long-necked jars. Bowls, especially those with straight shoulders and conical bod-

ies, which were very popular as grave goods in the LBA, are surprisingly few in the assemblage. Most of the pots are decorated on the shoulder with impressed, multiple horizontal lines and a fingernail ornament frequently encountered on vessels from the 14th–13th century BC. However, some fragments have burnished decoration [Fig. 3:2] on their necks, particularly popular in the LBA II period (Khachatryan 1975: 190, 191). The long-necked jars [Fig. 3:4] discovered in the settlement are relatively small in size with a bulbous body and low quality of surface treatment compared to contemporaneous jars appearing as offerings in several LBA graves from the cemetery dated to the 14th–13th century BC (Khantzadryan 1995: Pls 22,1,3, 23,4,6).

IRON AGE I–II

The core—almost 70% of the material—of the ceramic corpus from the 2018 season is composed of early Iron Age forms belonging to the later phases of the Lchashen–Metsamor (known also as Lchashen–Tsitelgori) ceramic tradition. The pots from this period are black, dark grey or dark brown in color, mostly wheel-thrown, made from local fairly well sorted clay, containing coarse medium and large inclusions. The surface is frequently well-burnished and decorated with impressed fingernail ornaments, wavy and horizontal lines, fluting, incised dots, diagonal lines, triangles or linear bands in relief. This assemblage includes cooking pots, jars, storage jars, bowls, pitchers, beakers and cups.

The entire material can be divided, stratigraphically and chronologically, into three subgroups representing three stages of settlement occupation. The first subgroup is connected with the occupation of structure S17 and cultural layers below floor levels in S7, S9 and S14. The second is associated with the occupation levels of structures S1, S7, S10, S8, S12, S13 and S15, while the third subgroup represents the post-abandonment deposits within these structures. With regard to the current periodization of the Iron Age, the first two subgroups should be ascribed to the IA I/pre-Urartian period, while the third to the IA II/Urartian period (based on the concomitance of Urartian Red Burnished Ware fragments in post-abandonment deposits). Based on

Khanzadyan's earlier observations from Metsamor, the first and the second subgroups correspond to the upper levels of the "burnt layer", broadly dated to the 13th–8th centuries BC (Khanzadyan, Mkrtch'yan, and Parsamyan 1973: 32), while the third subgroup to the "kiln layer" formed during Urartian times (Khanzadyan, Mkrtch'yan, and Parsamyan 1973: 27). It should be noted that there are no considerable differences in manufacture, shape or decoration between vessels from the three subgroups, meaning that their timespan must have been relatively short: most probably from the 7th century BC to, tentatively, the second half of 10th–first half of the 9th century BC, as suggested by a radiocarbon date¹ and the fact that some of the discovered vessels echo types known from the Metsamor shrines and Dvin (Kušnareva 1977). Moreover, the first subgroup did not yield any fragments bearing a resemblance to the L–M 4 assemblage known from Talin or Mastara, which is classified as a borderline phase between the Late Bronze and the Iron Ages (Avetisyan 2009: 60).

It is not surprising that the bulk of the assemblage from this season belonged to thick-walled kitchenware forms, mostly poorly fired, cooking pots with a coarse surface, frequently found sooted [Fig. 4:1–4]. They are encountered in considerable quantities especially inside structures S9 and S1, which could have functioned as a bakery and kitchen. The vessels have an ovoid body, small neck and a slightly flaring rim. Simple decoration in the form of large impressed notches (i.e., fingernails), wavy lines or zigzag patterns occurs in

the middle and lower parts of the body. The vessels vary in size, thus two groups can be distinguished: small vessels with a 10–12 cm rim diameter and a height not exceeding 20 cm, and vessels with a 20–30 cm rim diameter with a possible height between 30–40 cm.

Although the bulk of diagnostic sherds discovered in the IA I and II layers represented middle- and large-sized jars, there is an unassuming number of larger fragments that may help in a precise typological identification. The most characteristic type is a short-necked jar with a rim diameter of 14–20 cm, flat base and wide bulbous body ornamented on the shoulders with various incised and impressed patterns [Fig. 4:5,7]. The vessels are mainly black-colored with burnished surface, although there are a few fragments that are pale brown or yellow in color. This type of jar was widespread in the Ararat Plain and adjacent regions between the 11th and 8th centuries BC. Examples found in 2018 came also from deposits dated roughly to this period (first and second subgroup). It seems likely that in Metsamor this type of jar disappeared after the Urartian occupation of the site. The best preserved example is decorated with incised ribbed triangles and five deep horizontal grooves [Fig. 4:7]. Other fragments have vertical and diagonal furrows incised between horizontal grooves or bands of incised chevrons. Interestingly, single bands of incised or impressed wavy lines occurred only on vessels from the second subgroup, deposited in layers dated to the turn of the 9th and 8th century BC.

1 Sample MKL- 4230. 68.2% probability: 972 (5.9%) 959 calBC, 938 (62.3%) 828 calBC.

Only a few sherds were identified as belonging to pitchers. Structure S9 yielded several pieces of a highly ornamented pitcher with a short cylindrical neck and biconical body [Fig. 4:6],

found in a deposit dated to the first half of the 9th century BC. The ornament consists of bands of incised circles, grooves, chevrons and diagonal furrows covering the entire upper part

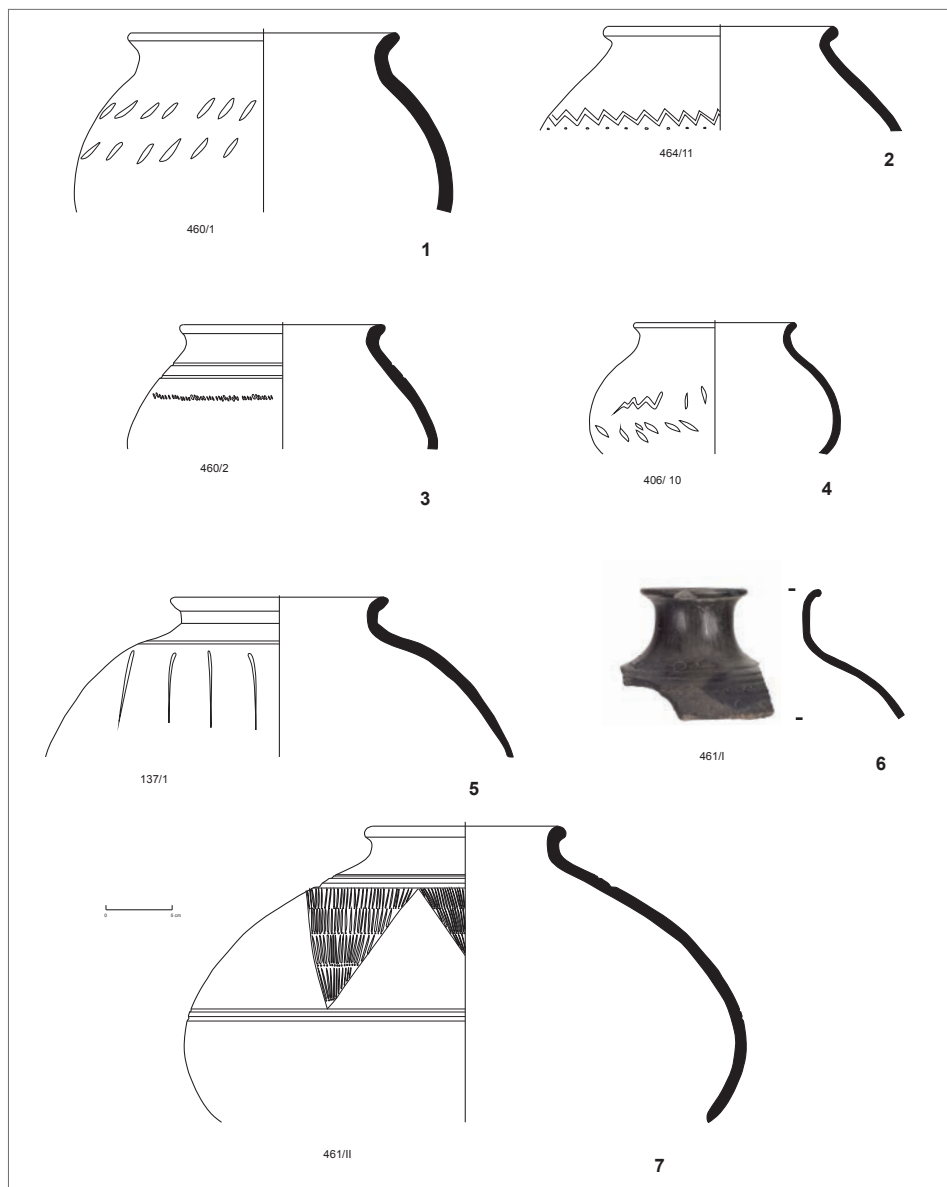


Fig. 4. Iron Age I-II jars and cooking pots (PCMA UW Metsamor Project | drawing D. Gawlikowska, R. McClenaghan and J. Pawlik, photo S. Manas Jolis, digitizing M. Iskra)

of the body, if not more. A glossy burnished surface attests to the high quality of this type of vessel, rarely encountered in utilitarian deposits from the Metsamor settlement. There are only a few parallels for this type originating from the Metsamor cemetery, i.e., two unpublished pitchers (now on display at the Metsamor Museum) of the same shape and with the same kind of ornamentation, additionally with handles, found in *kurgan* VII (M. Iskra, personal observation).

Two large pithoi (1/18 and 2/18), *in situ* in structure S17, were found to be just below the floor level of a later structure, S1, where at least two other pithoi were discovered in 2013 [Fig. 5]. Both vessels were damaged in their lower parts, but were still sealed with stone lids, having

been used by the occupants of structure S1 as an underground cache for precious items (two large bronze bracelets were discovered at the bottom of pithos 2/18). These are necked jars with slightly articulated narrow rims and ovoid bodies decorated with single bands of incised wavy lines. The two are comparable in height (78 cm and 70 cm, respectively), but less so in body diameter: 100 cm as compared to 70 cm. They are fairly similar in overall size to the jars discovered in 2013 (Jakubiak et al. 2016: 565).

Bowls from the period can be divided into four types: 1) deep bowls with conical bodies and short, straight or slightly concave shoulders; 2) sharply profiled bowls with straight shoulders; 3) shallow bowls with ellipsoid body; and 4) carinated bowls with conical



Fig. 5. Two *karases*/pithoi discovered in structure S17 (PCMA UW Metsamor Project | photo T. Zakyan)

body and flaring rims [Fig. 6]. The first type [Fig. 6:1–3] is frequent in layers containing sherds from the first and second subgroups and may thus be dated to the IA I/pre-Urartian period. These bowls

are black in color with some exceptions being brick-colored. Their exterior and interior surfaces are commonly burnished. They are decorated with one or two horizontal grooves on the shoulder.

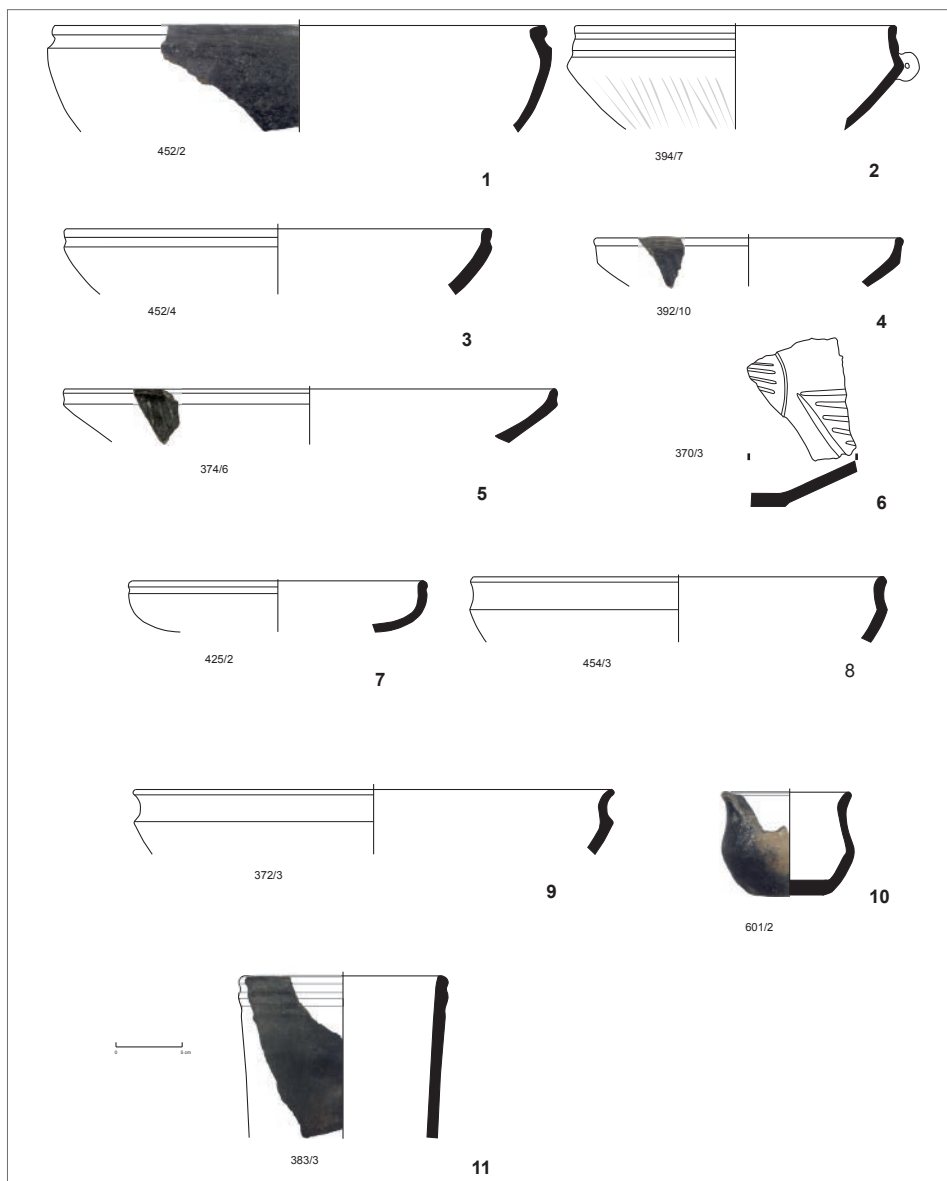


Fig. 6. Iron Age I–II bowls and other pots (PCMA UW Metsamor Project | drawing D. Gawlikowska, R. McClenaghan, J. Pawlik and Z. Lachowicz, digitizing M. Iskra)

Some of the vessels have small, vertical lugs placed under the rim [Fig. 6:2]. Three fragments have lips decorated with impressed chevrons or wavy lines.

The second type [Fig. 6:4–6] is much more interesting, since the vessels are of better quality and more elaborate ornamentation consisting of incised patterns on the lower body. These middle-sized bowls, measuring 24–34 cm in diameter, are entirely black in color with a high quality burnish both inside and outside. They have short straight shoulders decorated with a horizontal groove, a conical body with straight walls and a flat narrow base. Sherds are ornamented on the body with incised rays. In one case, an ornament resembling a triangle composed of incised lines is found on the flat bottom of a bowl [Fig. 6:6]. These bowls were found in the same layers as the first type and did not occur in later deposits dated to the IA II/ Urartian period. However, bowls of the same type, found by Khanzadyan in the fortress (Khanzadyan, Mkrtch'yan, and Parsamyan 1973: Pl. XIV), were described as vessels characteristic of the “kiln layer”, which she dated to the IA II/ Urartian period. Consequently, the finds from the 2018 season prove that sharply profiled bowls were already in use at least a century earlier than previously thought and were considered by the Metsamor inhabitants as traditional fine ware products.

Several pieces of rims of shallow bowls with ellipsoid body, the third type of bowl [Fig. 6:7], were found in IA I deposits inside structures S1 and S10. These relatively small vessels (20–26 cm in diameter) are undecorated and, judg-

ing from parallels (Khachatryan 1975: Fig. 161), have very narrow flat bases.

The fourth type, carinated bowls with flaring rims [Fig. 6:8,9], appeared in the second and third subgroups in the uppermost habitation deposits of the pre-Urartian structures, such as S13 and S14, as well as in post-abandonment layers filling these structures, in the latter case together with Urartian Red Burnished Ware sherds. Bowls representing this type are mostly large- and middle-sized with diameters between 36–30 cm and 25–20 cm. One of the most characteristic features of the larger vessels is a thick everted rim. The bowls are mostly black or dark grey in color, although some fragments have a yellow or dark brown surface. Carinated bowls from Metsamor are always plain, similar to east Anatolian parallels (Grooved Ware, Urartian Red-Burnished Ware). Distant parallels to some of the thin-walled fragments, in shape and surface treatment, can be found in Urartian Red Burnished bowls, proving that Urartian ceramics were imitated in local pottery-making in the 8th and 7th century BC.

The last noteworthy pottery types belonging to the Lchashen–Metsamor group are a carinated beaker [Fig. 6:10] and a high cylindrical cup [Fig. 6:11]. The two types of drinking vessels are seldom encountered in utilitarian deposits from the lower town, thus the discovery of an almost complete beaker is very symptomatic. It is a very small pot (8 cm in height, 8 cm in rim diameter), made on the wheel with a black burnished undecorated surface. It was found east of structure S10, in a deposit dated to the second half of the 9th century BC. The

upper part of a high cylindrical cup was found in a midden located west of structure S1. It is a fine black-ware type with burnished external surface, the body slightly tapering towards the bottom and a rim diameter of 15 cm. The cup is decorated with two horizontal grooves impressed under the rim. In Metsamor, high cylindrical cups with almost the same dimensions were found in the

“burnt layer” inside the fortress (Khanzadyan, Mkrtch‘yan, and Parsamyan 1973: Pl. X,3,4,5). Moreover, a large number of parallels are known from other sites in Armenia, also dated to the IA I period (Esayan and Kalantaryan 1988: Pl. LXVII.4; Torosyan, Khnkikyan, and Petrosyan 2002: Pl. XLIX,1,2,4; Avetisyan and Avetisyan 2006: Pl. 50.2).

URARTIAN RED-BURNISHED WARE (=IRON AGE II)

The term Urartian Red Burnished Ware (URBW) refers to a group of well-fired vessels, mostly red and reddish-brown

in color with slipped and burnished surface, found on Urartian sites in deposits dated to the 8th/7th century BC.

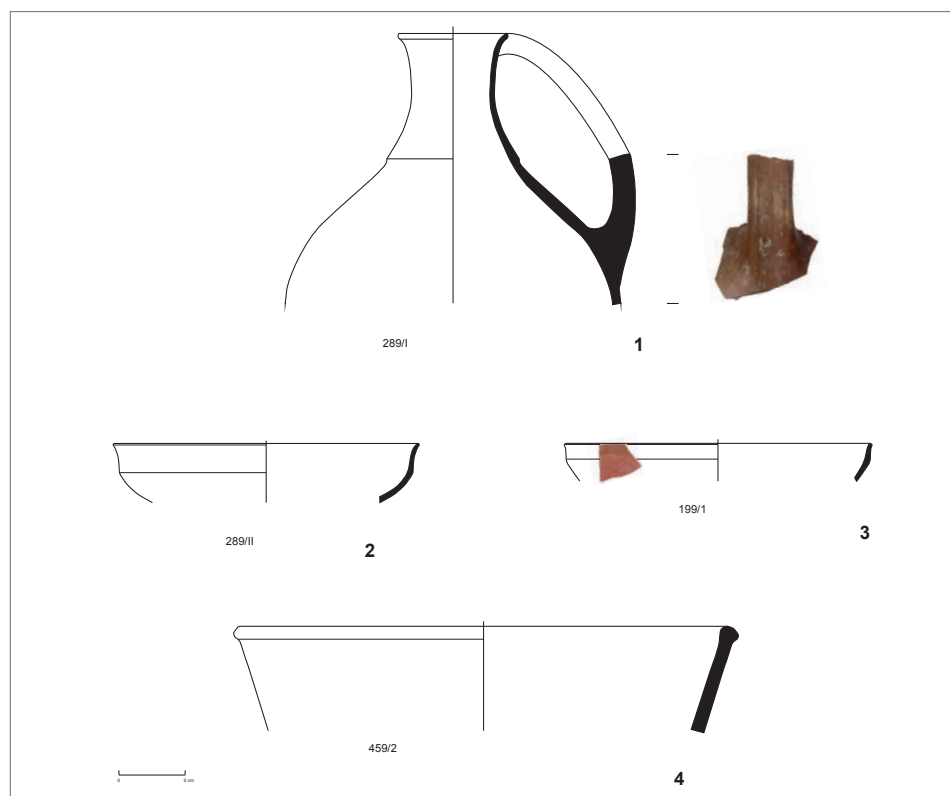


Fig. 7. Urartian Red Burnished Ware (PCMA UW Metsamor Project | drawing D. Gawlikowska, R. McClenaghan, photo S. Manas Jolis, digitizing M. Iskra)

Since the vessels are encountered mainly in important administrative centers of the kingdom, this group is sometimes referred to as “palace ware” (Kroll 1976: 9) to indicate its reputation as luxury goods pertaining to higher classes of Urartian society. Some authors have gone even further, arguing that URBW was used by a class made up mostly of Urartians and, by default, less frequently by ordinary non-Urartians (Çilingiroğlu 1997: 134). URBW is well known from the fortresses at Armavir, Karmir Blur, Oshakan and Aragats, where it is represented by various forms and technological types. At Metsamor, however, it was rare: a few complete vessels from tombs Nos 4 and 53 (Khanzadyan, Mkrtch'yan, and Parsamyan 1973: Pl. XLII), four unpublished incomplete bowls from the so-called “Urartian workshop” located in the northeastern part of the fortress excavated by Khanzadyan in the 1980s, and a few isolated finds from the lower town. Thus, a clustering of URBW finds in a single context is unexpected and significant.

Almost all of the URBW sherds discovered this season came from two areas in squares C17 and D17, where the southern rooms (S8 and S13) of the “large building” were uncovered. Both contexts can be interpreted as post-abandonment deposits of rooms S8 and S13, since the sherds were in the debris of the collapsed stone wall of the room. The assemblage consists of fragments of three bowls, a pitcher and a vat. The bowl fragments [Fig. 7:2,3] are dark red in color with polished surface. These were relatively small vessels, thick-walled (4–5 mm) with upright and

slightly convex necks, pointed rims and hemispherical bodies. Since the same types, which were found in Oshakan, Karmir Blur, Erebuni and Bastam (Kroll 1979: Fig 2.2,3; Esayan and Kalantaryan 1988: Pl. L,6,9) are described as late examples of Urartian pottery, the bowls from Metsamor should be dated to the 7th century BC.

A vat [Fig. 7:4] discovered in the same context in D17 was the largest vessel from this assemblage judging by its rim diameter (about 37 cm). This type of vessel has a straight trapezoid body and was used most probably as a container for cheese fermentation (Avetisyan 1992: 41, Pls X, XI). The vat fragment has the same color and fabric as the abovementioned bowls and its outer surface is also burnished. The upper part of a pitcher with a handle [Fig. 7:1] is recomposed from nine fragments found scattered in the debris of wall 1067. The vessel is made of fine-tempered, pale red paste covered with brownish-red slip, which has a highly burnished outer surface. The pitcher has a cylindrical neck with a ridge separating it from the piriform body. Judging by the preserved fragments, the specimen may be related to a vast group of trefoil pitchers known from almost all important Urartian sites in Armenia (Avetisyan 1992: Pls XXIII, XXIV, XXVI), Turkey (Kozbe, Sağlamtimur, and Cevik 2001: Pl. II.4,5,6) and Iran (Kroll 1979: Figs 1.1, 3.1). These vessels were in constant use from the 9th to the 7th century BC, which makes their precise dating hard. However, compared to the abovementioned finds from the same context, the pitcher also should be dated to the 7th century BC.

IRON AGE III

The pottery assemblage of the IA III period was identified on the grounds of a stratigraphic analysis rather than morphological features. Given the diverse views on the lasting character of Urartian features in the Transcaucasian pottery tradition, especially during the first half of the 6th century, in many cases it is very difficult to draw a clear boundary between “late Urartian” and “post-Urartian” types. Moreover, deposits connected with the “post-Urartian” habitation of the site (Jakubiak et al. 2016: 562) have yielded a significant number of black/

grey burnished ware types, which proves that the local pottery tradition (Lchashen–Metsamor) of the early Iron Age did not disappear in Metsamor with the collapse of the political structures of the Urartian kingdom in the Ararat Plain. Research on the traditional black/grey ware sherds is in its infancy and will not be discussed here. Some sherds, however, bear unique features that can be encountered only in material from the well-dated “post-Urartian” deposits from Erebuni or Tsaghakhovit.

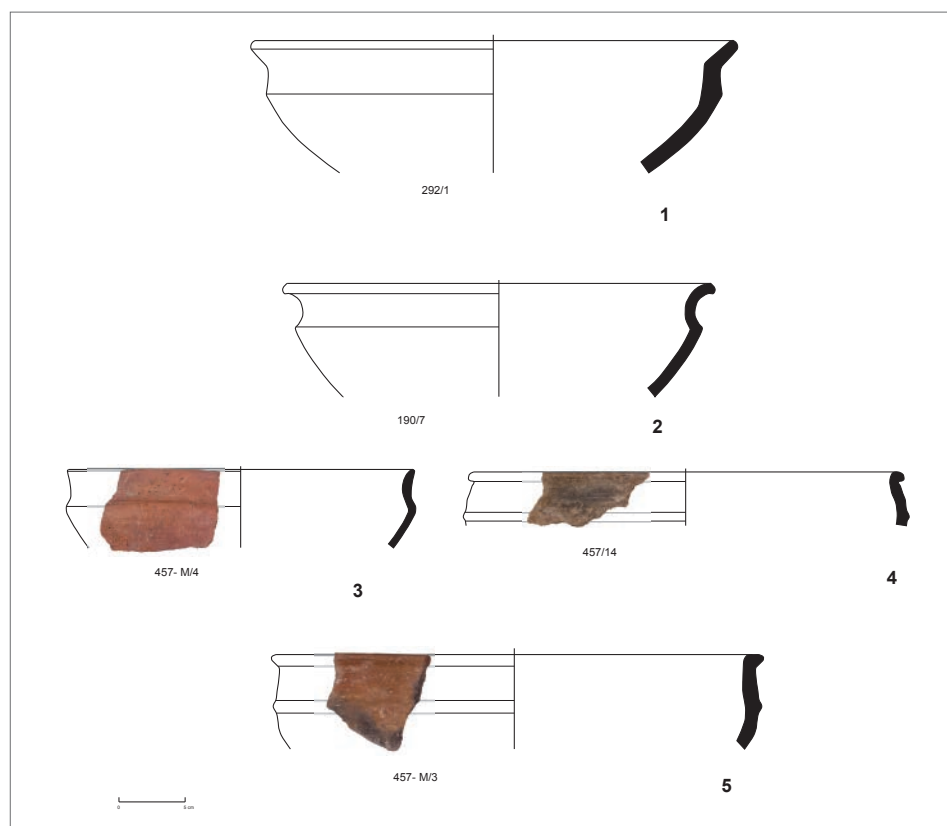


Fig. 8. Iron Age III bowls (PCMA UW Metsamor Project | drawing D. Gawlikowska, R. McClenaghan and J. Pawlik, digitizing M. Iskra)

Most of the IA III sherds discovered in the 2018 season came from upper layers associated with structure S16 or from rubbish pits unearthed nearby, close to wall 1059. Radiocarbon dating of this phase could be dated to the second half of the 6th–last quarter of the 5th century BC. Deep bowls appear to be the most representative among the brick- and brown-colored fragments of cooking pots. They can be divided into three essential types. First, there is a large deep form with a diameter of 32–34 cm, convex neck and hemispherical body [Fig. 8:1,2]. The vessels are either light or dark brown in color, made of well-sorted clay with coarse inclusions. This type has some parallels at Astghiblur and Shamlugh (Karapetyan 2003: 25,3, 28,2). A thin-walled carinated

bowl with flaring rim represents the second type [Fig. 8:3]. Two fragments were found in a rubbish pit located near structure S16. They belonged to middle-sized vessels with a rim diameter of 22–25 cm, dark red in color with burnished external and internal surfaces. They were made of well-sorted local clay containing medium-size inclusions. This type is particularly well represented in the IA III layers from Tsaghkahovit (Khatchadourian 2018: 233). Last but not least are large-sized bowls (diameter 30–36 cm) with straight necks, rounded rims and a hemispherical body [Fig. 8:4,5]. The discovered fragments are decorated with a single horizontal rib placed under the neck of the bowl. They are the same dark red or dark brown color with both surfaces burnished.

CONCLUSIONS

The rich and diverse pottery corpus acquired in the 2018 season enabled an investigation into the habitation of the northern part of the lower town from the Middle Bronze Age III to the Iron Age III periods. MBA III tableware forms, coupled with coarse kitchenware vessels, attest to household activity in this area as early as in the 17th–16th centuries BC. The site was most likely unoccupied after that as the few sherds typical of the Late Bronze Age all came from secondary contexts. The predominance of the IA I and II local assemblages representing the Lchashen–Metsamor ceramic tradition demonstrates the intensity of habitation in this part of the site, especially during the second half of the 10th through the beginning of the 8th century BC. Two pithoi discovered *in situ* and a large number of thick-walled

storage jar fragments suggest a storeroom function for some of the structures located in this area. The concomitance of both local and Urartian sherds, recorded in the stone debris of the Iron Age I structures, demonstrates the coexistence of two ceramic traditions at the site during the 8th and 7th centuries BC. It also shows that the area served as a rubbish dump during the IA II period. The local production of black/grey ware pottery of the Lchashen–Metsamor type appears to have been continued in the following IA III period, when large stone structures like S5 or S16 were established. New types of brick/red ware were also introduced, introducing a gradual change highlighted by new features, from the “Achaemenid” to the “post-Urartian” pottery tradition during the 6th and 5th centuries BC.

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How to cite this article: Iskra, M. and Zakyan, T. (2019). Bronze and Iron Age pottery from Metsamor (2018 season). *Polish Archaeology in the Mediterranean*, 28/2, 309–326. <https://doi.org/10.31338/uw.2083-537X.pam28.2.17>

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