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Excavating a memory: the British in Georgia

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Abstract

This paper describes the discovery of a sherd of mid 19th century British pottery during excavations at the site of Nokalakevi, in Samegrelo, western Georgia in 2002. The transfer-printed design on the sherd, though only partially surviving, was clearly identified as representing Horse Guards Parade, London. Standard archaeological practice might have seen the sherd, a modern artefact retrieved from the topsoil, discarded, as having no archaeological significance. However its true significance was to lie in its instigation of a period of research, discussion and reflection on the recent history of Anglo-Georgian relations. Unbeknown to the British archaeologists, from 1918 to 1920 British troops were garrisoned across the southern Caucasus in an attempt to support the Whites against Red and Nationalist armies. It is a peacekeeping action that is remembered negatively in modern Georgia and almost forgotten in Britain. This paper provides an historical outline of those events and urges a reconsideration of the value of archaeological finds, to recognise that their real significance might transcend capital and perhaps sometimes even archaeology. In cases such as this, the decision *not* to discard an apparently insignificant artefact can provide access to forgotten pasts, and force us to think critically about our own recent history.

Özet

Bu makalede, 2002 yılında, batı Gürcistan'daki Samegrelo'da yer alan Nokalakevi yerleşim yerindeki kazılarda bulunmuş olan ve 19. yüzyıl ortalarına tarihlenen bir İngiliz seramik parçasının keşfi anlatılmaktadır. Parça üzerindeki desen, sadece kısmen görülebilir olsa da, çok belirgin bir biçimde Londra'daki 'Horse Guards Parade' yapısını betimlemektedir. Standart arkeolojik uygulamalar bu parçayı yüzey toprağından alınmış ve hiçbir arkeolojik önemi olmayan modern bir eser olarak görüp bir kenara atabilirdi. Ancak bu parça Anglo-Gürcü ilişkilerinin yakın tarihinin araştırılması ve tartışılması sürecinde çok önemlidir. İngiliz arkeologlar için meçhul olan 1918'den 1920'ye kadar İngiliz birliklerinin Kızıl ve Milliyetçi ordulara karşı Beyazları desteklemek amacıyla güney Kafkasya'da garnizon kurmuş olmalarıdır. Bu durum, modern Gürcistan'da olumsuz olarak hatırlanan ve İngiltere'de de neredeyse unutulmuş olan bir barış koruma eylemiydi. Bu makalede, bu olayların tarihsel ana hatları sunulmakta ve arkeolojik buluntuların gerçek öneminin bazen arkeolojik kazançları bile aşabildiğini anlatmak ve arkeolojik buluntuların değerlerinin yeniden gözden geçirilmesi gerekliliği üzerinde durulmaktadır. Bunun gibi durumlarda, önemsiz gibi görünen bir buluntunun atılmaması kararı, unutulmuş geçmişe erişim sağlayabilir ve bizi kendi yakın tarihimiz konusunda eleştirel düşünmeye zorlayabilir.

The fortifications at Nokalakevi in Samegrelo, western Georgia (fig. 1) have, since the 1830s, been identified with the late Roman fortress of Archaeopolis described by Procopius of Caesarea in the sixth century AD. Large-scale excavations since 1973 have revealed three phases of fortification wall which define the 20ha site, the first dating to the fourth century AD and culminating in a substantial refortification dating to the reign of the emperor Justinian (AD 527–565). These excavations have also revealed the foundations of a number of late Roman stone buildings, produced evidence of a sizeable Hellenistic period settlement and necropolis, and demonstrated that occupation of the site dates to at least the eighth century BC (Zakaria 1981; 1987; 1993). In 2001 the existing S. Janashia Museum (now Georgian National Museum) expedition established a collaboration with a British team of archaeologists, historians and other specialists. The Anglo-Georgian Expedition to Nokalakevi (AGEN), led by Professor David Lomitashvili, has today been working at the site for over ten years (Everill et al. 2010).

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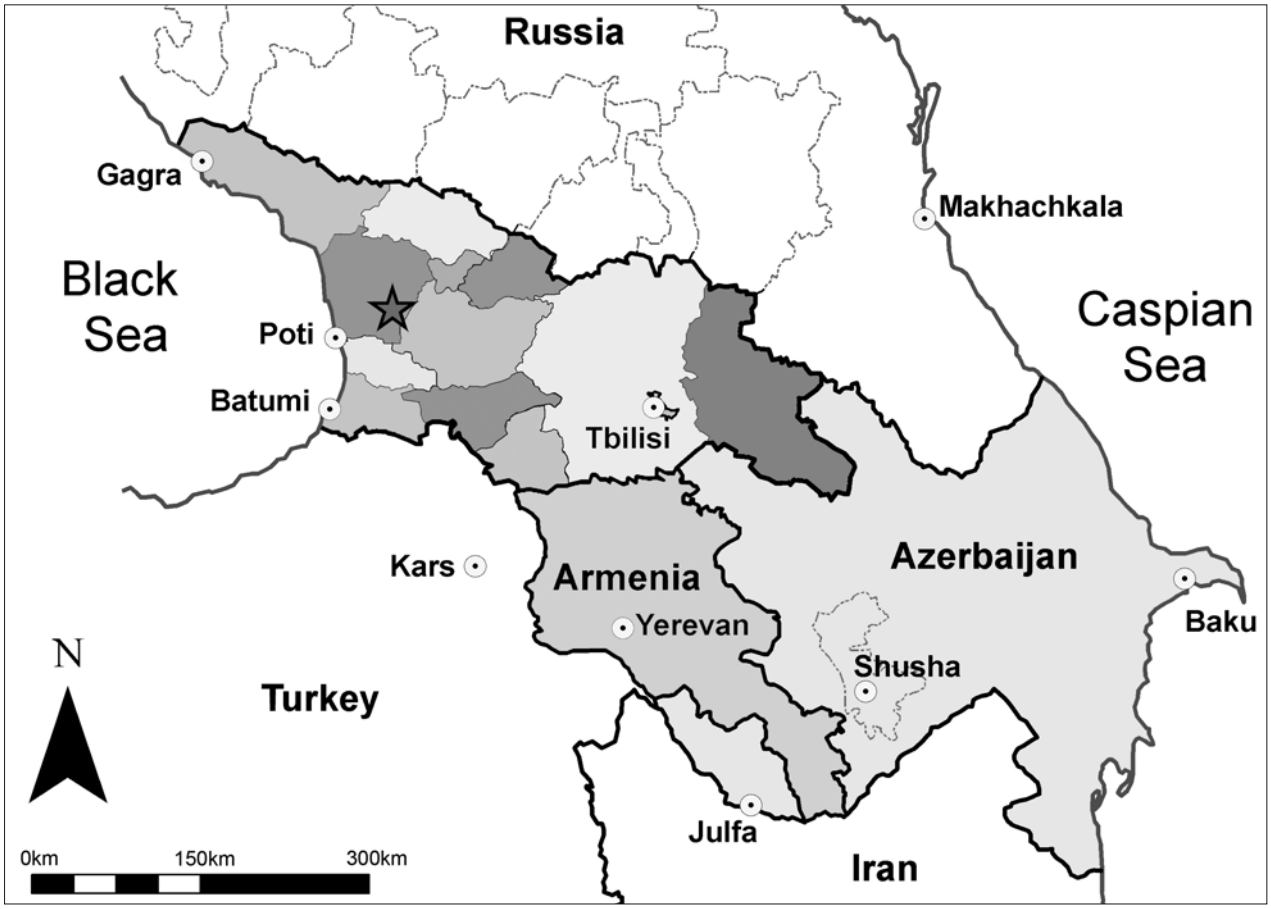


Fig. 1. The modern countries of the short-lived Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia (shaded). Also shown are key locations of the British 27th Division as of January 1919 and Georgian regional boundaries. Nokalakevi is indicated by the star

In August 2002, local workmen were removing the topsoil from what was to become 'Trench B'. The men, some of whom had been employed in seasonal archaeological work here since the 1980s, were finding and discarding large numbers of modern pottery sherds until one happened to catch the eye of an archaeologist. To mixed reactions from the British and Georgian members of the team – including laughter, fascination and indifference – this one sherd was passed from person to person, each time being subjected to scrutiny from every angle. On this fragment of small plate, possibly a twifler or muffin (Jon Goodwin, personal communication), a pink, transfer-printed design clearly showed a European urban scene from around the mid 19th century. What was most striking however – and perhaps surprising given how little of the original piece survived – was the incomplete lettering below, which read 'O R S E G U A R D S'. To our surprise, the Anglo-Georgian Expedition to Nokalakevi had, in the first days of its second season of excavation, unearthed a fragment of 19th century pottery depicting Horse Guards Parade in London (fig. 2). This plate, of a dense earthenware fabric, possibly even an ironstone ware (Jon Goodwin, personal communication), was of a type being mass produced for domestic consumption and export at large manufacturers in Britain in the mid 19th century. The print is indicative of a cheap souvenir piece or child's nursery plate, and could well have been produced in Staffordshire (Jon Goodwin, personal communication), but strictly speaking it provided little information beyond that this trade had reached Nokalakevi. Indeed, a large quantity of similar ceramics was revealed during rescue excavations at the Kulevi oil terminal in the early years of this century (Michael Vickers, personal communication). Given its proximity to the major port of Poti, the Kulevi material gives some indication of the extent of British ceramic imports coming into the southern Russian empire in the 19th century.

However, the perceived 'Britishness' of this one sherd, even if only symbolic, instigated a process of reflection and discussion concerning the shared history of Britain and Georgia. It was to become a personal journey that encompassed two archaeological sites, one in each country, which shared an unlikely connection relating to World War I and events immediately afterwards. The

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sherd took on a value far greater than it might otherwise, becoming the first fragment of a rediscovered memory. This process of remembrance and the creation of new 'memories' is a recurring theme in the book *Archaeologies of the Contemporary Past* (Buchli, Lucas 2001a). Several chapters (Buchli, Lucas 2001b; Hart, Winter 2001; The Ludlow Collective 2001; Wilkie 2001) consider the role of archaeology and material remains when revisiting a past that is bereft of the usual temporal distance, particularly those that are loaded with complex and uncomfortable associations. The act of remembrance which formed the fabric of the abstract restoration of the 'Horse Guards' sherd was to become more powerful than the find itself. Indeed, the restored memory became increasingly divergent from the sherd which had instigated its discovery. Consequently, this is a rather unconventional archaeological paper. It describes not what can be said about the site of Nokalakevi as a result of one archaeological find, but how that find inspired research on a far broader, yet much more personal topic: the historic nature of Anglo-Georgian relations. This process, at times uncomfortable, urges further consideration of the value of archaeological finds, often placing them beyond capital value and, occasionally, beyond archaeological value, with a significance that is hard to define and is not perhaps instantly obvious.

The crossroads

Situated on the periphery of some of the world's great empires, Georgia and the historic kingdoms within it have often had to forge alliances, sometimes uncomfortable alliances, in order to maintain their identity. Unfortunately these precarious power politics have, on more than one occasion throughout its long history, led to conflict, occupation or even annexation. Nokalakevi-Archaeopolis itself has witnessed the ebb and flow of Greek, Persian, late Roman, Iranian, Arab and Turkish influence. By the mid 18th century western Georgia was dominated by the Ottoman empire and eastern Georgia was governed loosely by Iran. The east Georgian kingdoms of Kartli and Kakheti were united under King Erekle II (1762–1798), who forged closer political ties with Russia in order to strengthen Christian power in the region. In 1783, Erekle signed the Treaty of Georgievsk with the empress Catherine the Great, which established Kartli-Kakheti as an independent Protectorate of Russia. However, Russian military policy in the south Caucasus region vacillated between direct confrontation with Ottoman Turkey and the removal of its forces in order to avoid such expensive conflict. On more than one occasion Georgia had been abandoned by its northern neighbour to face terrible retribution by Turkish or Persian armies, and in 1795 Tbilisi was sacked by Agha



Fig. 2. Photograph and scale drawing of the 'Horse Guards' plate

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Mohammad Khan of Persia. Following the death of Catherine in 1796 and Erekle in 1798, Russian troops were stationed in Kartli-Kakheti, and in 1800 it was effectively annexed to the Russian empire when Paul I refused to crown a successor to Giorgi XII (1798–1800). The policy was formally enacted after Alexander I came to the Russian throne following the assassination of Paul I in 1801, when Kartli-Kakheti was fully incorporated and the kingdom was abolished. A similar policy was adopted across the rest of the area of modern Georgia, with Solomon II of Imereti, the last reigning Georgian king, being deposed in 1810 and the Principality of Samegrelo being annexed in 1857. Within a few years Russia had annexed the entire Transcaucasus region, finally taking Adjara in the southwest of modern Georgia from the Ottoman empire in 1878. Russian political control reduced the influence of Turkey and Iran across Transcaucasia, but the administration was heavy-handed and lacked sympathy for the diverse political and cultural heritage of the region. In 1840 Russian was made the official, bureaucratic language of Georgia.

An independent Georgia

Following the Russian revolution the empire fragmented and an independent Democratic Federative Republic of Transcaucasia, incorporating modern Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, was declared by a Menshevik government on 22 April 1918. Founded on democratic principles, this state sought to unite the many ethnic groups across the region. Before long the three nations sought their own identity, however Bolshevik propagandists were quick to portray this as a 'failure' of democracy where they had 'succeeded'.

> Azerbaijan sought salvation in the Turks, Armenia feared the Turks more than fire, Georgia sought the protection of Germany. Within five weeks after its solemn proclamation, the Trans-Caucasian Republic was dissolved. The democratic declamations at its obsequies were not less fervent than at its birth. But this does not alter the fact that the petty-bourgeois democracy revealed its complete impotence to overcome national friction and to harmonize national interests. On May 26, 1918 – again without consulting the population – an independent Georgia was established as a fragment of Trans-Caucasia (Trotsky 1922).

Negotiations with the German government were initiated by three conservative nationalist Georgian representatives, who had supported Germany throughout the war. However, the protection of this major power presented an opportunity for the Georgian government to ward off the Turks, for whom the withdrawal of the Imperial Russian Army presented an opportunity to take swathes of territory from the Caucasus republics. The German troops stationed in Georgia were warmly received, however by September 1918 the defeat of Germany by the Allies seemed inevitable. The Georgian government was forced to emphasise its neutrality before looking to the likely victors to support its independence. Following the armistice with Bulgaria and the Ottoman empire, the British government despatched troops to the region to secure Constantinople and the Black Sea ports. The primary British objective was, however, to prevent the oil reserves at Baku falling into the hands of an enemy power, which, by that time, included the Red Army. Lord Curzon, British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs (1919–1924), was determined that Georgian sovereign territory – containing the important railway that enabled Azeri oil to travel west – was to be respected by Denikin's Whites, the Armenians and the Reds. Discussions were held with the Menshevik Georgian government led by Noe Zhordania, at which a slightly different impression appears to have been given by the British commander, General Thomson, following a more Churchillian view.

> The British commander, General Thomson, told Zhordania that British objectives included the restoration of the Caucasian viceroyalty in the name of Russian authority. Britain desired to liberate the Caucasus from the Germans and the Bolsheviks; to re-establish order without interfering in the internal affairs of the country; to restore trade with the ports of Persia and other areas not occupied by Bolshevik Russia; and to provide for the movement of Allied military personnel over the Transcaucasian railways. Such a programme, particularly the first item, was naturally unacceptable to the Georgians. In the memoirs which he wrote years later, Zhordania contrasts the 'genuinely noble, profoundly friendly and respectful' manners of the German commander Kress von Kressenstein with the behaviour of the first British representative to arrive in Tbilisi – 'like a sergeant major, coarse, rude, imperious and masterful'. At one point, the Georgians talked wildly of opposing by force the entry of British troops into their country. However, more conciliatory counsels prevailed. By the end of December 1918, Evgeni Gegechkori, who succeeded the pro-German Chkhenkeli as Foreign Minister, was assuring the British Mission in Tbilisi that 'the Georgian government, animated by the desire to work in harmony with the Allies for the realization of the principles of right and justice proclaimed by them, gives its consent to the entry of the troops' (Ramishvili 2010).

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The first detachments of the British 27th Division arrived at the Adjaran port of Batumi (in modern Georgia but retaken by the Ottoman empire from Russia during World War I) in December 1918. Batumi was declared a free port and became a British protectorate under the governorship of Brigadier General W.J.N. Cooke-Collis, and the rest of the 27th Division moved eastwards across the Transcaucasus region (see fig. 1). Divisional HQ was established in Tbilisi in January 1919 and by May detachments of the division were also in Batumi and Poti (modern Georgia), Gagra (Abkhazia), Baku and Julfa (Azerbaijan), Shusha (Nagorno-Karabakh), Yerevan (Armenia), Kars (Turkey), Krasnovodsk (modern Türkmenbaşy, Turkmenistan, on the eastern shore of the Caspian Sea) and Petrovsk (modern Makhachkala, Dagestan on the western shore of the Caspian Sea) where 221 Squadron and 266 Squadron, Royal Air Force, were also based. Forming part of the British Army of the Black Sea, under the overall command of General George Milne, the principal role of the 27th Division was to keep the peace and assist in the evacuation of 'White Russian' soldiers and civilians ahead of the advance of the Red Army. However, the units, supported by the Royal Navy's Aegean Squadron which had moved into the Black Sea, attempted to slow the Bolshevik troops wherever possible. HMS Ark Royal transported Sopwith Camel and Airco de Havilland DH9 aircraft to Batumi, and other ships, including HMS Liverpool, HMS Riviera, HMS Caradoc and HMS Calypso, fired on Red Army troop movements near the northern and eastern Black Sea coast. For Trotsky, the British involvement presented a propaganda gold-mine with which to bolster the efforts of Bolshevik troops.

> Red Warriors! On all fronts you are encountering the hostile machinations of Britain. Counter-revolutionary forces are firing on you from British artillery. In the dumps at Shenkursk and Onega and on the Southern and Western Fronts you are finding supplies of British manufacture. Prisoners that you have taken wear British uniforms. Women and children of Archangel and Astrakhan are being killed by British pilots using British dynamite. British vessels bombard our coastline. British gold sows depravity by corrupting dishonest elements on the front and in the rear. British wireless lies and slanders our workers' and peasants' Russia day in and day out and attempts to poison the whole world with its lies.
>
> Soldiers! Sailors! Your hearts have on many occasions overflowed with hate for predatory, lying, hypocritical bloody Britain. And your hate is just and sacred. It will multiply your energies in the struggle against the enemy tenfold.
>
> Yet even now at the moment of our ferocious battles against Britain's hireling Yudenich I demand of you: never forget that two Britains exist. Alongside the Britain of profit, violence, corruption and blood-thirstiness there exists the Britain of labour, intellectual might, and great ideals of international solidarity (Trotsky 1919).

The British had already fought in Baku, where a small force led by Major General Lionel Dunsterville had moved up from Persia and briefly attempted to prevent the Turks gaining control of the Caspian oilfields in August 1918. This episode is described by Colonel Sir Alfred Rawlinson (1924) who served as an Intelligence Officer under Dunsterville. Rawlinson was a somewhat colourful character: being a gold-medal-winning polo player at the 1900 Olympics; a racing driver, competing in the 1908 Isle of Man TT; and becoming, in 1910, only the third person to earn a Royal Aero Club aviators certificate. He distinguished himself for his role in the evacuation of allied troops and equipment following the siege of Baku by the Turks in September 1918. Baku returned to British control following the armistice soon after. Both the occupations of this city were complicated, however, by the high degree of pro-Turkish feeling amongst the local population. In the 1937 novel *Ali and Nino* the arrival of these troops is described by the author, under the pen name Kurban Said:

> A few days later I was standing on the Esplanade [in Baku] when the first ships carrying English occupation troops appeared from beyond the island of Nargin. The General had blue eyes, a clipped moustache and strong broad hands. New Zealanders, Canadians and Australians flooded our town. The Union Jack fluttered over our country next to our flag (Said 2000: 214).

However, it was not long before the advance of the Red Army forced the 27th Division to begin the retreat from Azerbaijan on 15 August 1919. By 7 September 1919 Divisional HQ had been moved from Tbilisi to Batumi, before the commanding officer and general staff handed over control to the Governor General. In February 1920 Archibald Wilson MP, as Financial Secretary to the War Office, reported to the House of Commons, that:

> The present strength of the 'British Army of the Black Sea' is as follows:–
>
> British 10,798
>
> Indian 13,000
>
> Labourers, Muleteers and Followers 8,401

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> The bulk of this force is in the vicinity of Constantinople but detachments are stationed at Salonika, the Dardanelles and Batoum and on the Anatolian Railway (Hansard 1920).

The 27th Division was formally disbanded on 24 September 1919, but an inter-allied force remained at Batumi until 9 July 1920, when the city was handed over to the Georgian government. The Georgians rejoiced as the last British troops left, revelling in the reclamation of historic Georgian territory, but the British were in effect abandoning them to their fate as they had done already in Azerbaijan, a turn of events described in *Ali and Nino*:

> 'Now we're free forever,' he cried joyfully, 'no more foreigners on our country's soil!'
>
> 'Look here, Iljas Beg,' I said and took him to the map, 'our natural allies should be Turkey and Persia, but now they are both powerless. We're hanging in mid-air, and from the north one hundred and sixty million Russians are pressing down on us, thirsting for our oil. As long as the English are here, no Russian, Red or White, dares to cross our borders. But once the English have left there's just you and me, and our few regiments to defend our country' (Said 2000: 228).

On 25 February 1921 the Red Army seized Tbilisi, completing the invasion and occupation of Georgia by 18 March, when the Menshevik government itself was forced to flee from Batumi to France. During this brief but very bloody war the British government under Lloyd George signed a trade agreement with Moscow in exchange for British non-involvement and the Royal Naval units stationed in the Black Sea were ordered not to intervene. After three years of resistance and guerrilla warfare, Soviet rule over Georgia was finally consolidated following the unsuccessful 'August Uprising' of 1924.

> At first the insurgents achieved considerable success. A number of Red Army units were eliminated. But the Russian commander in Georgia, Mogilevsky, reinforced all strategic positions in and around Tbilisi, and repulsed the chief forces of the patriots, led by Colonel Kaikhosro Choloqashvili ... The unequal battle raged for three weeks. The rising was crushed and terrible reprisals took place. Conservative estimates place the number of prisoners and hostages killed by the victorious Communists at between 7,000 and 10,000. Many women and children were slain in cold blood. In the village of Ruisi, for instance, every human being carrying the name of Paniashvili was put to death. About 20,000 persons were sent to Siberia immediately after the insurrection. Many months later, foreign visitors to Tbilisi would receive smuggled notes begging them to intercede for individual prisoners held captive in the dungeons of the Cheka, while lorry-loads of prisoners being driven off into exile were a common sight on the roads (Lang 1962: 244).

The 27th Division rediscovered

The British 27th Division was composed of regular army units recalled from garrisons across the empire, including Canada, Hong Kong and India. It mobilised and assembled in November 1914 at Magdalen Hill Camp outside Winchester before marching to Southampton, from where it was despatched to the western front in late December. It served there until the end of 1915 when it was ordered to the Macedonian front, where it spent the remainder of the war. From Bulgaria it was sent to undertake operations in the eastern Black Sea region from December 1918. The site of Magdalen Hill, or 'Morn Hill', Camp is now open agricultural land, some two miles east of Winchester, and is the location of a second archaeological excavation with a personal connection to the author.

Since 2008 Simon Roffey and Phil Marter, also of the University of Winchester, have been directing excavations of the medieval leper hospital and later almshouses that lie underneath the northern edge of the camp (Roffey, Marter 2010a; 2010b). These excavations have encountered a number of material remains of this camp, including the bases of the temporary quarters that once housed the 'ordinary' ranks and other facilities. An analysis of this period of the site's use is currently being prepared for publication (Marter, Roffey in preparation). Among the soldiers who gathered at Magdalen Hill Camp were those of the Norfolk Regiment. Private Frederick Pendall of the Norfolks kept a diary throughout the war, and this provides a fascinating insight into his short spell in Georgia, which bears substantial reproduction here.[1]

> [April] 26th [1919]. We were issued out with drill clothes, shorts and tunics, but it is still very cold, too cold for drill clothes. We are leaving here shortly, some say for Russia, others say it is for Egypt, but of course we don't know where we are going.
>
> April 29th. Are still at Varna and know nothing of when we are leaving. Varna is quite alright, but we

[1] The diary of Frederick Pendall is reproduced here with kind permission of the heirs to the estate of Frederick Pendall. They have given limited approval for the diary to be reproduced in whole or in part for personal and non-commercial use provided this notice is included.

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want to get home. The Bulgarians are very friendly and they don't look poverty stricken, they are a fine race of people and dress very well, in fact better than the English according to what we had read in the papers.

May 5th 1919. Left camp for dock, got on boat at 11.30 on the ship Scary Bee, a filthy old cattle boat. We were put on the same deck as the mules and the stench was something awful, it is only a short journey as we are bound for Russia, a place called Tbilisi in South Russia. We go to Batumi by boat and then on by train. We were only warned for [sic] this about ½ hour before we were to start. I should think there are nearly 1000 mules and horses on this boat.

May 6th. We laid in dock all night and set sail at 7 in the morning. She is rather a fast boat, but as we are going all the way round the coast I am afraid it will take us longer than we expected. The Royal Berks, Devons and Worsters left Varna by this boat, but it was already full up when it got there [having] come from Salonica. We are now about 7 hours out and the Black Sea is as calm as a millpond, I hope it will keep so as I don't like a rough sea.

May 7th. Rough sea am very sick, feeling awful.

May 8th. Arrived at Batumi and went straight on to the train, 21 men in a cattle truck and left for Tbilisi same night.

May 9th. We are all enjoying the scenery, it is magnificent. We have been curving round high mountains all the way and a river raging all the way beside us, only we are going uphill and that is going down, it is really most astonishing how people get up and down the hills. They crop the hills where it would be impossible for us to walk.

May 10th. Arrived at Tbilisi early morning, had our breakfast on station and marched off to our barracks, about 3 miles from the station. Tbilisi is a very nice city, beautiful buildings, electric trams and everything is like being in one of our towns in England. The people here are [...] a fine good looking people on the whole, but the poorer classes are starved and nearly naked, it is pitiful to see them as they gather anywhere round a British Camp to pick up the pieces that are lying about. There is plenty of everything here for those that have plenty of money and they want plenty too, as everything is so dear. Bread 2/2d per lb in English money, 25 Roubles in Russian money.

May 12th. Paid out 200 roubles £1-13-4 that is the first since March 25th. 6 weeks. I bought 1lb of apples for 6 roubles that is 1/0d for 3 apples. Strawberries are 8 roubles 1/4 per lb. We have been issued with bread today that is the first for a week. We had nothing but army biscuits and bully. I have had to pay 8/0d in one week for biscuits as I could not eat the Army stuff. Cream crackers are 2/8d per lb and that is all I can get at the canteen and we cannot live on nothing. I am still in my job as Orderly Room Runner so I have practically nothing to do. I saw a Russian Military funeral, quite a grand affair, they have some funny customs here, they have a very elaborate coffin to take them to the grave in, but they bury them without and bring the coffin back again as it is only hired for the occasion. They are just in an ordinary box. [...] they dress the corpse in fine dress and carry it to Church so as it can be seen and a man walks in front with the coffin lid, but they bring the coffin there as well, but they do not look anything like a funeral at home as they go to it in any dress, all colours and smoking and laughing as if it was a wedding. Today I had a bottle of lemonade it cost 6 roubles 1/0d in English money.

May 14th. Inoculated for Cholera.

May 19th. Inoculated TAB for enteric fever. A very heavy thunderstorm, hail stones as big as marbles. My name has gone in again for demob, but I don't know if I shall get away. Received a letter from home written on the 29th April.

May 20th. Joyful news. Order came for myself and 3 others to be Demobbed. Papers all rushed through, went for Medical inspection and left for Batumi, same night as 4 men are DEMOBBED as over 40 years old. We are again in cattle trucks on the way to Batumi to catch boat for Constantinople ROLL-ON-HOME.

22nd. Arrived at Batumi early morning. Cooked breakfast at 7 left for rest camp, 10 men in a bell tent, floor all mud and no waterproof sheet.

24th. Still waiting at rest camp, heard nothing of going away, posted letter home to say I am demobbed.

May 29th. Still at rest camp, no news of boat coming in, nothing to do but lie about, it is terrible the price of boots about here. I saw a pair of boots marked up in a shop window 1500 roubles that is £7-10-0 in English, you could have bought them for 10/6d in England in peace time.

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> June 3rd. Left rest camp at Batumi at 12 o'clock, got on boat at 2.30. the same boat that took us the Scary Bee, an old cattle boat. We had not table, forms, hammocks etc. We just had an iron floor to sleep on with two blankets. We were at rest camp for a fortnight and we had nothing to eat but bully and biscuits (Pendall 1919).

Another account of Georgia at this time, from a rather different perspective, is provided by Colonel Sir Alfred, 'Toby', Rawlinson (1924). Rawlinson, a British Intelligence Officer (see above), was once again despatched to Transcaucasia in 1919 to gather information on subjects including the discipline of the White Army troops in the north Caucasus and whether the Turks were abiding by the terms of the armistice in the south. He landed at Batumi on 10 March 1919, and travelled on to Tbilisi with the Chief of the General Staff at Constantinople, General Cory, on the late Tsar's imperial train. Accompanied by an escort of 100 British infantry, they were not threatened by the bandits that were operating widely in the area, and 'ran through to Tiflis in fourteen hours without incident, instead of the two, or even three, days which the journey might otherwise have taken, although the actual distance is very little over 200 miles' (Rawlinson 1924: 141). Rawlinson describes the rich cultivated land on the Colchian plan, bounded by mountain ranges to the north and south, which narrows into the mountains that dissect western and eastern Georgia. Passing through the Surami tunnel into Kartli, he observes that the cultivated land of east Georgia is extensive, though not as rich as its western counterpart. Arriving in Tbilisi on 11 March he offers the following description.

> Tiflis itself is a most interesting city, and even at the time with which we are dealing it was hard to imagine, when there, that one was in the Caucasus. The town is finely sited astride of the Koura River, which, rising on the old Russo-Turkish frontier, flows through Georgia and its eastern neighbour, the old Russian province of Baku [now the Republic of Azerbaijan], and falls eventually into the Caspian Sea, about 100 miles south of the town of Baku. The valley, rising by an easy slope to the north of the river, is well cultivated on that side; but to the south rises more abruptly till, within 2 miles of the river, almost precipitous heights are reached at 2,000 feet above the river level. The main public buildings and the better part of the city are situated between the river and the steep hillside on the south; the streets are well laid out, with electric light and trams, fine hotels, an opera-house, the old Royal palaces, and all the marks of Western civilisation (Rawlinson 1924: 142).

Rawlinson only spent about a month in Georgia, leaving Batumi for his next mission on 11 April 1919. Before departing, however, he provides a fascinating anecdote to illustrate the plight of the Georgian aristocracy. He describes them as being, prior to the revolution, 'wealthy and well educated' and 'refined and hospitable people' (Rawlinson 1924: 147), but now stripped of their possessions and forced to take whatever menial work was available in order to avoid starvation.

> One most pathetic story came to my knowledge which well illustrates the sad state of these cultured families, upon whom, through no fault of their own, fell the cruellest effects of the revolution. One night some of our officers told me, they had 'asked themselves' to dinner with a charming Georgian family whom they knew to be actually starving in their own great house, without food, light, fire, or money to buy any of these things. Our men said they would bring their own food and fuel, if they might have the use of the big kitchen of the house to cook it in. So they collected provisions from everyone, and took care to take with them a supply which would leave over sufficient to keep the whole family for a week, until they could offer to come again without hurting the feelings of their hosts. A true and, I think, pretty story of the spirit which distinguishes the British Army, and which makes them welcomed the world over (Rawlinson 1924: 148).

While one might doubt the validity of his final statement, for anyone familiar with the proud Georgian traditions of good 'hostliness' (and good 'guestliness') this story represents a powerful moment of cultural sensitivity, perhaps because those traditions were also important in Britain then. Either way, it is a small, but wonderful, example of the positive, human impact of the British presence in Georgia in 1919, regardless of the political/military failure to prevent the country falling into the hands of the Red Army.

Discovery, remembering and forgetting

Prior to the discovery of this single sherd, the majority of the British team had little or no idea that British troops had played any kind of role in Georgia's modern history. The discussions that stemmed from the find instigated research on the topic, which is outlined above, but perhaps more important was the personal reflection that resulted from this newly acquired knowledge. The continuing success of the Anglo-Georgian Expedition is based on friendship as much as it is on hard work, and for many of our Georgian colleagues it is a potent symbol of the friendship between Britain – and the West in general

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– and the 'new' Georgia. The Georgian and British flags are flown side by side from the dig house, and the annual expedition t-shirts also bear both flags. The British team, representing the single largest British contingent in Georgia for the duration of the expedition, takes home fond memories of Georgian hospitality, and the internet facilitates the continuing friendship between staff and students of both nations.

Finding the sherd encouraged us to consider the nature of an earlier British presence. The scene on the sherd was certainly a stylised view of a specific landmark of London, an unequivocally military setting but featuring aspects of ordinary civilian activity. However, the plate could well have been one of many exported to the Russian empire through ports such as Poti, and is certainly not an indicator of a British presence in Nokalakevi. However, in flights of fancy one could easily imagine a party of British officers picnicking in such a picturesque and historic location, and for us this small sherd became synonymous with a shared British and Georgian history. The positive nature of the relationship between the British and Georgian elements of the expedition perhaps encouraged us to imagine that the British troops, who had ostensibly been despatched to Georgia to try to prevent the invasion of the Red Army, had been received on similarly positive terms. It seemed analogous to recent events, in which Britain and the West in general have attempted to foster stronger links with Georgia and support its new, democratic and Western-leaning aspirations.

Instead we were faced with an uncomfortable reality. The British military command had certainly not been particularly sympathetic to the Georgians, whom they perceived to be allies of the Germans. This was of course only partly true, as the Georgians had sought assistance from Germany early in 1918, but only in support of their own desire for self-determination and because at that stage the central European allies were still capable of winning the war. It was simply a convenient, rather than an ideological alliance for the Georgian government, but one that led the British to mistrust them. When asked, Georgian colleagues told me, sometimes reluctantly, that this period of the British involvement in Georgia was regarded as a bad one by most Georgians, to whom the details of this period are well known. Far from being seen as defending them from the Bolsheviks, the British are perceived as interfering in internal affairs, imposing new borders in areas of conflict between Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan that were later set in stone under the Soviet regime. Many of these disputed borders were to become the flashpoints of the post-Soviet period, a difficult legacy of the British 'policing' action.

Perhaps most importantly, from a Georgian perspective, was the British support for the White Army, which was fighting ostensibly to preserve the rule of the tsars and the Russian empire, and which was also opposed to Georgian self-determination. The British found themselves in an impossible situation in the middle of White, Red and Nationalist combatants, each of which was fiercely opposed to the others, and it is hardly surprising that the British war cemetery at Tbilisi was later eradicated by the Georgian S.S.R. A young Georgian colleague concluded by saying 'but this is history', as if to alleviate any sense of awkwardness brought about by being told an uncomfortable truth. This was not a process of forgetting, but perhaps a disassociation engendered through its consignment to history.

In contrast, the sherd, regardless of its actual Britishness, has created a new memory from what, in Britain at least, was largely a forgotten history. Of course, by far the most likely explanation for this piece of pottery being present in Nokalakevi's archaeological record is that it was one of thousands imported into the Russian empire as part of the flourishing trade links with the West in the 19th century, and that it was once owned by one of the wealthier families of Nokalakevi. However, an archaeological interpretation could really do little more than describe the piece, while the biography of its later life would remain largely a mystery. The sherd has very little archaeological value, and yet we have actually learnt a great deal from it – not as an artefact that itself has provided valuable archaeological data to be processed and analysed, but as an artefact that instigated reflection, discussion and discovery. This process has challenged our preconceptions and created a new shared memory from the fragments that had survived. In a sense, this memory had been made whole, in much the same way that a vessel can be restored from a handful of sherds, rejoined and made complete.

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