

Interrelation of Colchian and Koban Cultures According to Burial Constructions and Funerary Customs (Late Bronze – Early Iron Age)

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In the second half of the II millennium and the beginning of I millennium BC several archaeological cultures were formed on the modern territory of Caucasus region. In south Caucasus this period is linked with the archaeological cultures of Colchis, Samtavro, Iori-Alazani, Ganja-Karabakh and etc. As for the North Caucasus, Koban, Kaiakent-Khorochoy and Prikuban archaeological cultures were distributed there. The first one included the western side of the North Caucasus (basin of river Kuban), Koban culture its central part - the south of Stavropol Kray, Karachay - Cherkessia, Kabardino - Balkaria, Ossetia, Ingushetia and the largest part of the territory of modern Chechnya, and Kaiakent - Khorochoy – eastern part of Chechnya and Daghestan.

Analysis of the burial constructions and funerary customs of Colchian and Koban cultures enables to discuss about the interrelation or possible identity of mentioned ones basing on burial evidences. Unfortunately, these aspects of Colchian and Koban cultures in context with other elements have not been yet under the special research. Accordingly, we do not know what the essential common and distinctive features were existed in these adjacent cultures.

Consideration of all details of burial constructions and funerary customs together enabled us to separate 9 main types of burial constructions in the Colchian and 7 in Koban culture. 4 types of burial constructions of Colchian culture are definitely not familiar to the central part of North Caucasus (Burials cover with stone embankment and lined with stones, Burials constructed using the timber, Collective burial-pits, Ossuaries). On the other hand, Burial-vaults and Burials surrounded with cromlechs are unknown for the territory of Colchian culture. Other types of burial constructions are familiar for the both archaeological cultures and range in the scale of their distribution.

The first type of the burial construction – Pit graves of simple configuration are the most widespread type in the both cultures. They count 33.44% of burial constructions in the Colchian culture. As for the Koban culture, they count 43.2% of the burials. This is the raw counting, as the precise data on the burial construction numbers from the both cultures are unknown. Main reason of this is the early dates of their excavation and lack of publishing them in the scientific literature. Similar situation is on the some of the other sites from both archaeological cultures. The Koban burial ground, from which the name of the

Koban culture has derived, is among them because of its destruction by the local and foreign bounty hunters.

The percentage of the pit graves of simple configuration shows their role in the societies of Caucasus region of Late Bronze – Early Iron Age. They were one of the main burial constructions in the ecumene and they can't be considered as the unique burial constructions of Caucasus region. In the Colchian culture three sub-types were distinguished: a) rectangular, b) Oval, c) circular shaped. As for the Koban culture first two sub-types are also familiar, but the circular shaped pit graves are unknown.

As for the funerary customs, we have a very complex situation, because of the variety of traditions. Alongside with common elements, radical distinctive signs can be seen. First of all, it must be mentioned, that for the Koban culture inhumation of deceased is the most spread funerary custom and the tradition of cremation is less known. For the simple configuration pit graves inhumation tradition plays a considerable role. But in Colchian culture, alongside the Inhumation, tradition of cremation is widely spread, mostly in the western part of this culture.

The common elements in these cultures, first of all, feature the tradition of putting the deceased person in the crouched position, on the left or on the right side. On the some of the Koban sites (Komarovo, Isti-su) of the eastern variant they were placed according to their sex. For example, on the Komarovo burial ground males were buried on the right side, while the females on the left [Abramova, 1974: 195]. A similar rule is attested on the Tlia site of Colchian culture, but in some cases males were also buried on the left side.

Actually, if we take a look at the burial sites of Colchian and Koban cultures, in the pit graves of simple configuration with inhumation tradition, one clearly defined rule of the burial customs didn't exist. This concerns as the placement of the deceased on the left or right sides, so their positioning towards the cardinal (Geographic) directions. Apparently, in our opinion it could be caused by the certain peculiarities between the micro-cultural entities.

Pit graves of simple configuration from the Colchian and Koban cultures have one important distinguishable feature. As it was already mentioned, this is the tradition of Cremation, which is characteristic for the North-Western area of Colchian culture (Guadikhu burial ground). In the Koban culture cremation tradition is attested on the sites of Tereze (Karachay-Cherkessia), Upper Rutkha (Digor, Ossetia), Karabashevo, Eshkakon (Karachay-Cherkessia), Mukulan, Bulungu (Kabardino-Balkaria), but not among the pit graves of simple configuration. In the case of Mukulan and Bulungu, we don't have information in the scientific literature about the burial types [Chechenov, 1969: 38].

Besides the tradition of cremation, custom of secondary burial ritual is unknown for the pit graves of simple configuration in the central part of North Caucasus. While they are known from the sites of Colchian culture: Gagra [Bzhanias, 1991], Tsiteli Shukura [Trapsh, 1969], Jantukhi [Shamba, 1990] and Ureki [Mikeladze, 1985]. These differences are a vivid demonstration of the fundamental differences between these cultures in the burial customs.

Second of common type of burial constructions in the Colchian and Koban cultures – Pit graves covered with a stone embankment are represented on the sites of Colchian culture: Tlia (Tskhinvali region, Georgia) , Khutsubani (Adjara, Georgia) , Ergeta I (Samegrelo region, Georgia) . In the area of Koban culture they are known from 4 archaeological sites: Kumush (Karachay - Cherkessia), Mineralnie vodi (Stavropol Krai), Nesterovskaia and Muzhichi (Ingushetia).

First of all, it is worth mentioning, that burials of this type of the Colchian culture belong to the different chronological periods. On the Tlia burial ground they are represented as on the earlier, as well as on the later stages. Khutsubani burial ground is generally known as a site of the early period [Ioseliani, 1973: 107]. Ergeta I is dated by the later period, around VII-VI centuries BC [Mikeladze... 1985: 40]. As for the Koban culture sites with Pit graves covered with a stone embankment belong to the VI-V centuries BC [Munchaev, 1963: 202], [Alekseeva, 1982: 11].

Such a wide range of both chronological and territorial differences, may exclude any connection between these sites, but we will try to outline the basic nuances, which are common or distinguishable among them.

It should be noted, that distinctive elements dominate over the common characteristics. First of all, it refers to the arrangement techniques of stone embankments. Khutsubani burial ground was containing burials with the stone embankments of rectangular shape, covering the pits of the same form. On the other hand, at the Muzhichi archaeological site some of the stone embankments had the square shape, while others were of oval or asymmetric form. Burial of this type from Ergeta I was significantly damaged, as the most burials from Tlia site, because the cemetery had several layers, which could cause their destruction.

The funerary tradition, attested at the Khutsubani site is not familiar for the other sites of Colchian culture. Tradition of cremation which is observed here is known from the Kumush site of Koban culture. High amount of ashes found in the burials suggest that the process of cremation of dead was done not outside the burial as it was at the Guadikhu, but inside the burials with their inventory [Ioseliani , 1973: 112].

At the Kumush site cremated human bones were placed alongside with the animal osteological material and burial goods. This fact may indicate some connection, however, as mentioned above, the chronological range of these sites differ, Khutsubani burial ground is dated by I quarter of I mil. BC, while Kumush is placed within VI-V centuries BC [Alekseeva, 1982: 11]. Such a broad chronological and territorial distance makes difficult to make any conclusions.

Another common characteristic between the pit graves covered with stone embankment from the Colchian and Koban cultures is the tradition of burial feasts, remains of which are found among the burials of Tlia, Muzhichi and Nesterovskaia.

Cist-tombs are the standard burial type in the Koban culture and their distribution area is fairly wide, but they are unknown for the eastern part of this culture. In the Colchian culture cist-tombs are spread in the mountainous regions, on the Brili and Tlia sites, but unlike the Koban culture, these type of burial did not play a dominant role.

Cist-tombs from Brili site were constructed using the local cists which were extracted not far from the burial ground. The work done to construct cist-tombs needed to be organized and could be connected with the wealth of the deceased person, but this social difference is not seen on the inventory found in these burials. They are not distinguishable from the materials found in the other type of burial constructions. Same situation is observed on the Tlia site, were social differences is also not connected with the types of burials.

In this respect, it is interesting geographical principle of the dispersion of cist-tombs in the Koban culture. They are mostly known from the sites which are located in the mountainous and hilly regions: Koban, Upper Ruthkha, Adaidon. They are widely spread in the Kislovodsk city and its surroundings (Industria I, Sultan-gora I, Berezovka I, Berezovka II, Berezovka III, Berezovka IV and etc.). Some major sites containing cist-tombs are: Zaiukovo, Tamgatsik, Uchkulan, Elkush, Ulubaganal, Ispravanaia and etc.

One of the first researchers of Koban culture, E. Krupnov underlined the differences between the cist-tombs in the central part of North Caucasus. These differences are expressed in the fact that in the western area of Koban culture mostly square shaped cist-tombs were spread, while in the central part close to the elongated shaped ones [Krupnov, 1960: 77]. New archaeological sites discovered since 1950-60s show that elongated shaped cist-tombs are familiar for the western area (Sultan-gora, Berezovka III, Ispravnaia, Industria I and etc.) and squared ones are also spread in the central variant of Koban culture (Adaidon). Despite this fact, close to a square shape cist-tombs are mostly widespread in the western variant of Koban culture and may be seen as a

characteristic burial type on this territory (Karachay-Cherkessia, southern part of Stavropol Kray).

Funerary customs attested in the cist-tombs of Colchian and Koban cultures have much in common. This is expressed in the tradition of Inhumation of dead, and in the positioning of them in the crouched pose, on the right or on the left sides.

It should be underlined, that in the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age on the both sides of Caucasus range putting the dead in the cist-tombs on their backs in the stretched position is unknown. Tradition of putting deceased person on the right side in the crouched position prevailed at the sites of Tlia, Koban, Adaidon, but we also have the facts when they are placed on the left sides. A similar situation is observed in the western variant of Koban culture, but there are exceptions, which are observed on the Belorechenski burial ground. Here, in difference from the other sites of Colchian and Koban cultures, where positioning of dead was not determined by their sex, males were buried on the right and females on the left sides [Dudarev, 1978: 124-125].

In the Cist-tombs of Brili site, predominantly males were buried and only in one case we have a fact of paired burial, when male and female were placed together [Archaeology... 1959: 196-197]. Analogue to this burial is excavated on the Ispravnaia burial ground from the western variant of Koban culture. Here, in the cist-tombs #10 and #13 male and female individuals were buried together [Kozenkova, Naidenko, 1980]. Tradition of paired funerary is familiar for the Koban culture, but this is the only fact known for the cist-tombs. Pair burials from Ispravnaia and Brili could be the family tombs, like the burial #129 from Tlia site, which had a different burial construction, but repeated the funerary customs of Brili and Ispravnaia cist-tombs [Tekhov, 1985: 19-20].

In the neighboring zones of Colchan culture cist-tombs are known from Meskheta region of Georgia, in the Borjomi valley (Chitakhevi) [Kvirkvaia, 2009: 19]. Cist-tombs are also widely spread in Kaiakent-Khorochoy archaeological culture on the modern territories of Dagestan and eastern Chechnya and there they represent the dominant type of burial constructions. Zandaki and Alleroy burial grounds which were excavated on the eastern part of modern Chechnya, show some connections between Kaiakent-Khorochoy and Koban cultures in the terms of funerary customs and burial goods.

As we already mentioned, three main subtypes of cist-tombs are identified in the Koban culture. Such diversity is unknown for the South Caucasus and they do not have such significant role, they are playing in the central part of North Caucasus.

One of the interesting burial constructions found in the central part of North Caucasus are Kurgans, which are spread on the vast area, but in the Colchian culture they are known only from the Goradziri site (Imereti region of Georgia). The site was dated by the excavators based on the burial goods with VIII-VII cc. BC and kurgan type burials with the II half of the VIII c. BC [Gogadze, Davlianidze, 1981: 21].

Synchronic kurgans from the central part of North Caucasus represent in their construction techniques merger attempt of local and foreign cultural traditions. These could be observed on the burial sites of Zaiukovo and Kamenomost, where kurgans were covering the traditional for the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age Koban culture cist-tombs [Chechenov, 1969].

Kurgans were vastly spread on the burial grounds of VI-V cc. BC. The major sites of this period are: Muzhichi, Nesterovksaia (Ingushetia), Karabashevo (Karachay-Cherkessia), Ani-irzo and Boisi-irzo (Chechnya). The funerary traditions from these sites are almost identical to each other, except the Karabashevo site, where A. Alekseeva suggested the existence of the tradition of cremation [Alekseeva, 1982: 12].

Cremation tradition is also confirmed on the Goradziri burial ground, however, not in the Kurgan type burials, but in the burial pits of simple configuration [Gogadze, Davlianidze, 1981: 8]. It should be noted, that there were detected the traces of the fire in the Kurgans which was expressed with the burnt wood fragments. The researchers explained that with the existence of burial chamber of wooden construction [Gogadze, Davlianidze, 1981: 7].

It is possible that the cremation of the dead still existed in the Kurgan type burials of Goradziri. In this regard, connection between the Kurgans of Karabashevo and Goradziri can be underlined, but there are differences in their construction techniques. Kurgan of Karabashevo had a burial chamber arranged in the center using the stone cists and cobble stone [Алексеева, 1982: 12], while the burial chambers of the Kurgans of Goradziri were built only using the timber materials.

Kurgans of Goradziri were poorly preserved that makes difficult to trace other similar or distinguishable features with Karabashevo site, but the common elements are quite abundant. It has to be mentioned, that Goradziri and Karabashevo sites are a synchronic to each other, which alongside the large territorial distance can exclude any direct cultural connections between the micro-cultural societies whom belonged these burial grounds.

If we take a look on distribution map of Kurgan type burials, we see that they are almost concentrated in all geographic areas. In general, these types of burials are characteristic for the later period of Koban culture and are connected

with the so-called Scythian expansion and spread of its cultural elements not only in the central part of North Caucasus in the Early Iron Age, but almost in the entire Caucasus region.

Scythian influence is not attested only in burial constructions or funerary customs, but also on other kinds of archaeological material. Scythian-type samples of material culture were playing a significant role on the archaeological sites of Koban culture dated by the VII-V cc. BC. At the same time, large amount of archaeological material are found on the sites of Colchian culture as on the mountainous, so on the lowland and coastal sites of VII-VI cc. BC. There are many sites which confirm the co-existence of Colchian and Scythian elements. Especially noteworthy are burial grounds of Tlia, Brili and Kulanurkhva, which are more evident in these regard. For example, as noted by Abkhaz archaeologist M. Trapsh, from the 12 burials excavated on the Kulanurkhva burial ground, 9 (## 1-3, 6-9, 11, 12) represented traditional to the Colchian culture materials and 3 of them Scythian-type burial goods (## 4, 5, 6). He explained this fact by the co-existence of two different ethnic groups on a relatively small area [Trapsh, 1962: 76-78].

In the relation of Kulanurkhva site which is situated in the coastal area of the Black Sea in Abkhazia, interesting sites are Brili and Tlia burial grounds from the mountainous region. From the numerous burials of Tlia site, layers of VII-VI cc. BC contain large amount Scythian-type materials, first of all combat weaponry. Same situation is observed on the Brili site, where Scythian materials also play significant role.

If we take a look at the burial sites of VII-V cc. BC from the central part of North Caucasus, it can be observed that archaeological materials which are of Scythian origin are mostly represented with military weapons, while the ceramics, jewelry and other items bare the local traditions. Kurgans from the Koban culture contain a large amount of archaeological material of Scythian origin, which allows us to make some certain conclusions.

Dispersion of Kurgan-type burials in the area of Koban culture and large amount of elements of Scythian origin in the archaeological materials indicate the great influence of the Scythians in the North Caucasus. Some of the archaeological sites where are represented only with Kurgans (Ani-irzo, Boisi-irzo), suggest that there could be not only cultural "expansion", but it is possible to discuss about their migration in these areas (Modern territory of Ingushetia and Chechnya). In addition, on the modern territory of Ingushetia, Nesterovskaia and Muzhichi burial grounds Kurgan type burials were accompanied with other type of burial constructions (Pit graves covered with a stone embankment), which we believe is a proof of coexistence of the carriers of two different cultural elements. However, Kurgans from these two archaeological sites doesn't differ from the pit graves covered with a stone

embankment in the terms of funerary customs and inventory. This fact eliminates the fact of the cultural dominance of Scythians in the central part of North Caucasus.

In similar cases we are dealing with on the burial grounds of Brili, Tlia and Kulanurkhva in the south Caucasus, where appearance of Scythian elements does not mean the mass migration of bearers of foreign cultural elements, but indicate the large economic, cultural or possible military connections between the local population of Caucasus region and Scythians. On the other hand, according to the above mentioned Ani-irzo and Boisi-irzo burial grounds infiltration of foreign cultural groups must not be excluded.

Dispersion and attribution of Kurgans not only in the Colchian, but also in the area of Koban culture still are one of the problematic issues in the scientific circles of Caucasian and foreign researchers. However, generally it can be said, that in the Late Bronze – Early Iron Age Caucasus region they begin to spread from the II half of VIII c. BC and are associated with a foreign cultural influences which mixed with the local elements on the both side of the Caucasus mountain range.

Relatively limited geographic area of distribution is characteristic for the Burials lined with stones on the edges. In the Colchian culture they are represented on the burial grounds of Gagra and Tlia, while in the central part of North Caucasus only on the Ulubaganali site (Karachay-Cherkessia). We have little information in the scientific literature about this type of burial constructions from Ulubaganali site [Kovalevskaya, 1984: 34-35] and therefore it is quite difficult to draw parallels with the sites from South Caucasus.

However, according to the funerary customs, we can reveal the general union of the three types of burials from both archaeological cultures. This is the tradition of inhumation of deceased, but there are chronological differences, first of all, between the Gagra and Ulubaganali sites. Gagra burial ground, which belongs to the early stages of Colchian culture, is dated with I quarter of I mil. BC [Bzhania, 1991], while V. Kovalevskaya dated Ulubaganali site with the II half of VII c. BC and I half of the VI c. BC [Kovalevskaya, 1984: 49].

Burials lined with stones like the pit graves of simple configuration may not be considered as a native burial construction of the Colchian and Koban cultures, because of their distribution is quite broad and chronologically belong to the different eras. Accordingly, it is difficult to discuss about their origin and make conclusions, but as for the funerary customs, they do not differ from other types of burials of Colchian and the Koban cultures. However, have some local characteristics. This is clearly expressed in the burial ground of Gagra, where the deceased persons were placed on their back in the stretched position

and in this case differ from Tlia and Ulubaganali sites, where dead were buried in the crouched position on the right, or on the left sides.

Distribution of burials lined with stones on the edges of both Archaeological cultures is diverse from the geographical point of view. They are spread as in the mountainous (Tlia), foothill (Ulubaganali), so in the seaside zones (Gagra), which excludes connection of their dispersion with certain natural - climatic conditions. Comparative chronological and territorial emissions, to some extent, also do not suggest a direct cultural links between the individuals buried in these types of burials. At the same time, given the fact that on the above mentioned burial grounds, burials lined with stones on the edges are spread side by side with other types of burials and are characterized by the relatively small number compared with them.

This case once again underlines the fact that despite the relative uniformity of the funerary customs on these burial grounds, we don't meet one certain common tradition of constructing the burials.

Such diversity of the burial constructions could be caused by many factors. Among them is a social moment. However, archaeological material found in these tombs doesn't suggest that statement, because inventory of the burials lined with stones on the edges, like the pit graves of simple configuration do not differ from and we can say is identical of the materials found in other more complex burial construction types, which may exclude social or ethnic factors. One of the main reasons of these differences in the constructions of burials, we believe could be un-uniformity of religious believes.

Reportedly other types of burial constructions in the areas of Colchian and Koban cultures are less related to each other. Interesting types of burial constructions from Colchian culture are tombs constructed with wooden boards, which are only found on the Tlia burial ground (burials # # 129, 293, 300, 301). They demonstrate the certain common features with the burial # 6/70 of Muzhichi burial ground from the eastern variant of Koban culture (Modern territory of Ingushetia). R. Munchaev who conducted archaeological excavations on this site didn't exclude existence of wooden walls because of the charcoal lines on the edges of the burial #6/70 [Munchaev, 1963: 144].

Tradition of inhumation was a characteristic feature of Muzhichi necropolis as it was on the Tlia burial ground of Colchian culture. At the same time, stone embankments covering burial #6/70 and majority of burials from Muzhichi, are also widespread on the Tlia site, as it was already underlined. Tombs # # 216, 240, 253 of Tlia burial ground which were constructed using the timber and covered with stone embankment found are closely related to the burial #6/70 of Muzhichi site [Tekhov, 1985: 33-39].

Among the aspects of burial constructions and funerary customs in the interrelation problems between the Colchian and Koban cultures one of the interesting phenomenon are collective burials of Late Bronze - Early Iron Age from the both sides of Caucasus range. In the scientific literature collective burials from the north-western Transcaucasia are known as "collective burial-pits" or "collective burial grounds", while collective burials from the area of Koban culture are named as "collective burial-vaults".

Collective burials from North Caucasus are dated by the early stages of Koban culture, by the end of the II millennium BC. In the Colchian culture earliest burials of this type are known from Brili burial ground and belong approx. to the 10th c. BC, but majority of them chronologically are placed between the VIII-VI cc. BC.

Collective burials from Colchian and Koban culture have one significant common feature in the funerary customs, which is expressed in the tradition of cremation of the deceased persons. There are known the facts of as a partial so of the full cremation. Existence of cremation are attested on the Tereze and Upper Rutkha burials grounds of Koban culture and on the Nigvziani, Ureki, Jantukh, Merkheuli, Pichori and Paluri sites of Colchian culture. Unlike the sites of north-western Transcaucasia, burials from the Koban culture were preserved much better, first of all because of the stones, which were main material in the constructing of collective burials in the central part of Northern Caucasus. Usage of stone in the area of Colchian culture is known only from the Brili archaeological site [Archaeology... 1959: 190].

The full reconstruction of funerary customs in the collective burials of Colchian culture is impossible, as it was already mentioned, because of their poor conservation, mainly due to the climatic conditions. Similar situation is observed on the sites of Koban culture (Tereze, Upper Rutkha) as well. Here, recovery of the funerary customs is also quite problematic. The exception is burial-vault #3 from Tereze, but unlike two other burials from this site this one included skeletons of only two individuals with the tradition of inhumation [Kozenkova, 2004: 60-63]. Parallels to this burial could not be found on the other sites of Koban and Colchian cultures.

Interrelation between the collective burials from Colchian and Koban archaeological cultures is very problematic case, first of all because the above mentioned factors. Tradition of cremation which is an only similar rule attested on the burial grounds of the both archaeological cultures is not enough to judge about the direct cultural communications between the individuals who created and were buried on these sites. Other elements of funerary customs and burial constructions are quite distinctive from the both sides of Caucasus range and radically differ from each other.

Currently available data do not allow us to solve this problematic issue, because the tradition of cremation had the wide territorial and chronological distribution in the ecumene. Accordingly, we do not have enough proof for the acceptance or rejection of the hypothesis of V. Kozenkova, according to which cremation rule began to spread in the Northern Caucasus from the modern territory of Eastern Europe. From the territory of Koban culture this element of funerary customs spread in the western Transcaucasia. V. Kozenkova thinks that the primary source of this tradition in the areas of Koban and Colchian cultures was in the so called "Timber-grave culture" ("Srubna culture"), where it came from the Andronovo culture [Kozenkova, 2004: 153].

We believe that depending only on the two archaeological sites in the area of Koban culture this problematic case could not be closed and it needs more information and new archaeological sites for the solvation of these issues.

Other types of burial structures familiar for the Colchian culture are less known or even not represented in the central part of North Caucasus. This refers to the burials with the edges lined with stones and Ossuaries. The first type is characterized by tradition of inhumation in the Colchian culture and similar funerary customs are also attested on the sites of Koban culture. Ossuaries as the burial type are alien to the area of Koban culture and also funerary customs known from these burials in the Colchian culture do not have analogies in the North Caucasus. However, ossuaries are characterized with the local distribution in the western Transcaucasia, as they are represented only on the modern territory of Abkhazia on the burial grounds of Eshera, Vereshaginskaya gora, Tseli Shukura, Primorskoe and Zvandripsh. With the local distribution like the ossuaries are characterized burials surrounded with Cromlechs. They are excavated only on the Muzhichi burial ground on the modern territory of Ingushetia, but unlike the burial constructions, funerary customs from these types of burials do not differ from other sites with the tradition of inhumation.

As it can be seen, burial constructions from the Colchian and Koban cultures in the Late Bronze - Early Iron Age are illustrated with variety of types. As in the North Caucasus, so in the western Transcaucasia, we have the burial constructions who are represented on the both areas and those who do not have any parallels and have a local importance. A similar situation could be observed in the funerary customs, but opposite to tombs, these elements are not characterized with such varieties.

These varieties in the burial traditions are the illustration of that diversity that was attested in the ancient Assyrian and Urartian inscriptions. Each of the tribe, or unions of other type could have had some peculiar features, which are reflected in the burial sites of Colchian and Koban cultures. It must be mentioned, that based on the archaeological data, area of Colchian culture is

characterized with more diversity and in central part of North Caucasus such variety is less detectable.

If this heterogeneity of the characteristics in the burial traditions in the areas of Colchian and Koban cultures could be linked with the micro-cultural diversities, what could be cause of this heterogeneity within one particular archaeological site? These facts are well seen in the both archaeological cultures, when we meet different burial constructions and funerary customs inside one burial ground, even such radically different ones as tradition of inhumation and cremation.

The coexistence of cremation and inhumation is confirmed on many archaeological sites in the Colchian and Koban cultures. In this regard, general overview of the archaeological material found on these sites of Colchian and Koban cultures could be interesting, during which it can be seen that on those burial grounds with heterogeneity of funerary customs and burial constructions, inventory found in them do not differ from each other. It suggests the uniformity of the elements in the material culture of the individuals buried on these burial grounds.

With the uniformity of the archaeological material found in the tombs of Late Bronze – Early Iron Age, one of the main factors in the existence of different burial constructions and funerary customs, as we already mentioned, could be the un-uniformity of religious believes in the societies of this period of the Caucasus region. This factor, in our opinion, is well seen on the burial sites of both, Colchian and Koban cultures.

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