

Vakhtang Licheli (Tbilisi)

## **Ancient Colchis and Intercultural Relations**

Special interest of neighboring empires towards the countries or tribal alliances, existing in the Caucasus, was always determined by the geographical location of the region in question. At the beginning of the period of Greek colonization, an entity, consisting of several states with a rather high level of development, already existed in the southern part of the Caucasus. Among them, Colchis happened to be more advanced. The Colchian Kingdom existed in Colchis, i. e. the present-day Western Georgia and its adjacent territory washed by the Black Sea. In the Caucasian region the Kingdom of Colchis seems to be the most advanced state entity in the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium-beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC (Lordkipanidze, 1972). At the same time, however, it was the period, when two destructive powers appeared on the historical arena, causing disappearance of many eastern states, including the Kingdom of Colchis. These destructors were the Cimmerians and approximately half a century later – the Scythians. Ancient Greeks called the Cimmerians and the Scythians the peoples which occupied the territories adjacent the Caucasus from north, as well as southern plains of the present-day Russia. Under the name of the Cimmerians a heterogeneous ethnic entity is usually meant, including groups of people speaking the Iranian language as well. New groups of Iranian-speaking people began intensive influx from the east into the region under discussion, at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC.

It should be marked that in the Transcaucasian (Western Georgia) material culture dated to the 7<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. BC along with the local and eastern elements, Aegean elements are evidenced.

To my consideration this issue might be easily resolved taking into account the results of the works carried out on the island of Samos during

the last years. In particular the archaeological context of votives the part of which is the Colchian statue of knight woman, there are (in accordance with the results of the excavation conducted under the leadership of Prof. H. Kyrieleis) – imported objects coming from Babylon, Phoenicia, Iran, Assyria, Urartu and Cyprus. On the basis of these materials, the Hera is considered to have the special sign (trait) in the ancient times – she is the goddess protecting horses and horsemen. In the light of the forgoing, the discovery of the Colchian statue here is truly natural – the statue, as well as the other things, was sacrificed to Hera by one of those travelers/merchants, who happened to appear in the Colchian area. In the East, beyond the Colchian borders, in Caucasus-Anatolia region, there weren't discovered any of the statues of Colchian knight woman; it means that we might consider that the appearance of this figure in the Aegean World is the result of communication with Colchis.

However, in the given case, what should be explained is the thematic identity with the same kind of statues discovered in the continental Greece. In this case most important is horse women's terracotta figurine from the Heraklion museum, dated back to the Late Bronze-Early Iron Ages. This is the earliest representation of this style, showing the way of genesis and spreading of horse women's statue (from Crete to Greece and Cochis). But in this case we have unsolved problem of statistical comparison of statuettes in two different regions: Greece and Colchis.

At the same time there are Iranian items found in the graves in Colchis: at first the existence of contacts with the Persian world became obvious due to data found in collective burials of 9<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> c. BC (containing also statues of knight woman). It was attested by finds of the so-called III type whole-cast daggers in Colchian collective graves. Among them were three samples discovered at Ergeta (necropolis 1, No. 5, 7 pit-grave; No. 3, 2) and two samples – in Dghvaba necropolis (7<sup>th</sup> c. BC). They belong to the so-called "Near Eastern-type" daggers, which finds the closest analogies with the Hasanlu IV daggers (Mikeladze, 1990, 57; Haerink, Overlat, 2004, 31-70) The bronze dagger – found in South Georgia, namely, in a cenotaph excavated in the Mzetamze necropolis – also has connection with the Western Persian World. Its closest analogies are daggers attributed to the group 31-35 by P. Calmeyer. They are united into the artifacts, belonging to the Neo-Babylonian period (Moorey, 1971, 113-129). It could be said with confidence that this dagger was made in Luristan. Discovery of calfrings was also evidenced at the Mzetamze necropolis (Table 1b). This fact has direct and synchronous parallel at Luristan, namely at the Gul Khanan necropolis (burial 37, Haerink, Overlat, 1991; Haerink, Overlat, 2004, 35). It

is quite possible that the fact of spreading of the so-called jugs with a tubular handle all over Colchis are indicating on the existence of the early contact; they were found at nearly all sites dated to the 7<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC (Batumi castle, Pichvnari, Kokhi, Simagre, Ochamchire, Ergeta, Mtisdziri, Dablagomi, Kutaisi, Kulevi, Brili, etc.). Pottery of this type originally appeared in Western Iran. In recent years it is evidenced at Qalaichi (Cf.: Fine Ware, 800-600 BC).

At the same time, next period coincides with the beginning of the most intensive relations between Colchis and the Greek World. Similarity of metal artifacts, standardization of pottery, activation of coin circulation and administrative division of the country give grounds to some scholars to conclude that Colchis of the period under discussion was a united, politically and economically advanced state. At the same time impact of the Achaemenid culture on the territory of Colchis, especially on the Colchian art, was very strong (samples of the goldsmith). At the same time, a striking difference, which existed between the littoral of Colchis and its inner parts, is clearly obvious: the coastal settlements were entirely of the Hellenic orientation, while the Achaemenid tendencies were scarcely felt there. The archaeological finds at the Greek and Colchian necropolises, dated to the 5<sup>th</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> c. BC represent the best proof of this statement (Kakhidze, Vickers, Tavamaishvili, 2007). The majority of the material found at the burial-ground under discussion is of local or Greek production. To rare finds belongs a kohl-tube of Iranian production (Barag's Group I, dated to the second quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> c. BC (Licheli, 2011, 139)). Taking into consideration this archaeological background, we have to assume that interrelation of Colchis in the 8<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> c. BC was oriented to both - Western and Eastern directions, but priority was given to the Western direction - to the Greek World.

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