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ON THE SPREAD OF REPRESENTATIONS OF "FANTASTIC" ANIMALS ON BRONZE ITEMS (ANCIENT COLCHIS AND EUROPE: RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE)

ABSTRACT

Of the zoomorphic animals (deer, snake, fishes, swastika) engraved on Caucasian bronze items of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age most numerous and interesting are the representations of the so-called fantastic animals. Of Georgian material alone, 85 bronze axes have been identified with this image. Researchers (V. Miller, A. Miller, P. Uvarova, I. Meshchaninov, B. Kuftin, V. Bardavelidze, Sh. Amiranashvili, V. Ivanov, N. Urushadze, and N. Abakelia) give various interpretations of these representations.

The paper presents representations attested on archaeological artifacts of Europe, analogous to the Caucasian fantastic animals: on fibulae from Boeotia, a fibula from Yugoslavia, on shields and disks from Italy, all datable to the 8th-7th cent. BC.

The emergence of analogous representations in the Caucasus, which suffer definite transformation over space and time, serves as one more proof of contacts between the Caucasus and South Europe.

Keywords: late Bronze-Early Iron Age, Caucasus, Colchian axe, Colchian bronze culture, fantastic animal.

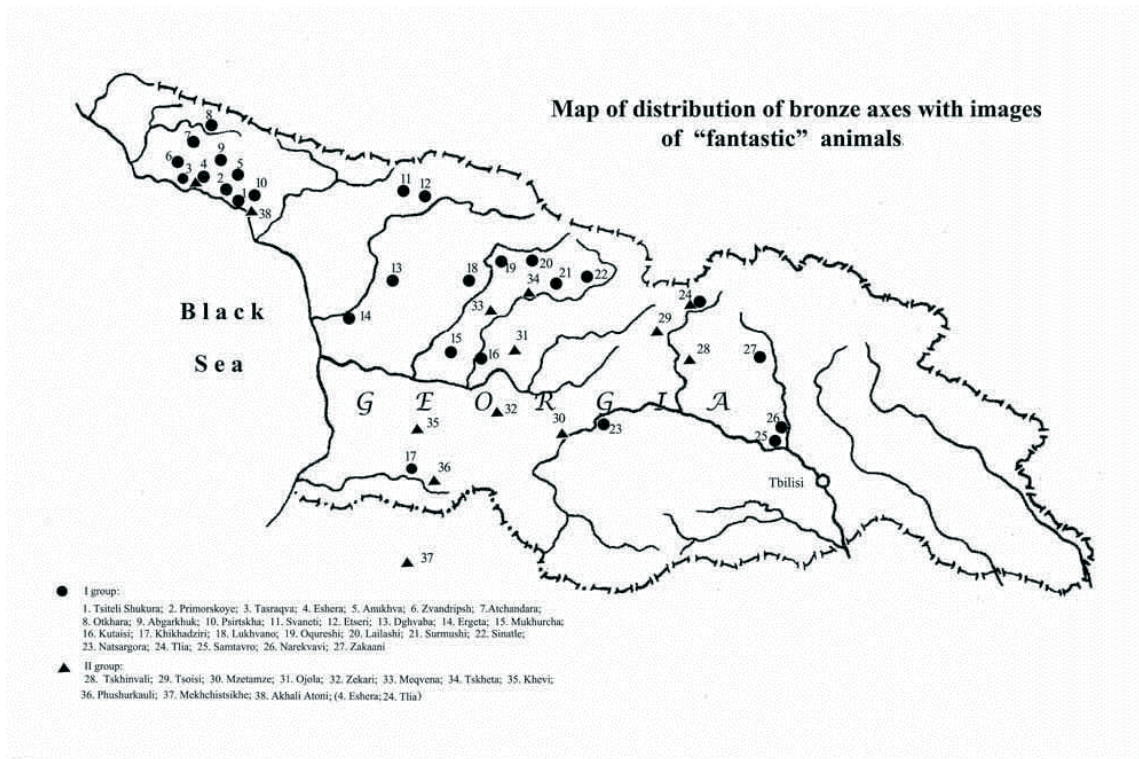
Of the zoomorphic animals (deer, snake, fishes, swastika) engraved on Caucasian, and namely Colchis Culture¹ bronze items of the Late Bronze-Early Iron Age, most numerous and interesting are the representations of the so-called „fantastic” animals (pl. 1/1).

1 Which covers the area from the east Black Sea coast (West Georgia), including the central part of North Caucasus and is represented within it by local variations, and by infiltration zones on the bordering territories (Also, see - Лордкипанидзе О. 1989. Lordkipanidze O. 1991. Idem. O. 2001. Idem. 2002)

The depictions of “fantastic” animals (map) are represented on bronze axes, daggers, spearheads, mace heads, clasps, fibulae, torques, tweezers, etc. (Pantskhava 1988; Sulava 2000a; idem 2011).

As a result of the recent researches, about 170 items² with depictions of fantastic animals were found just in the Georgian materials.

2 Which is significantly more common on artefacts decorated with animal images, discovered among the north Caucasian materials (Ramishvili 2010; Sulava and Ramishvili 2011)



Map of distribution of bronze axes with images of „fantastic” animals

The depictions, as we noted, are performed through the engraving technique (See.: Hančar 1934: 15; Pantskhava 1988: 26, 27; Sulava and Kalandadze 2006: 15-20; Sulava 2011: 186-189).

A number of researchers have studied the depictions of fantastic animals. According to V. Miller, depicted is a dog (Миллер 1876. For reference see also Миллер 1922). R. Vichov argued the zoological explanation of the animal and categorized it as of the Griffin-Sphynx-Kentaur rank (Virchov 1883). P. Uvarova believes that the depiction represents a dragon, a fantastic animal, a tiger, a wolf, a jackal (Уварова 1900: 67, 178). According to I. Meshchaninov, animals whose bodies resemble a snake and have open mouths and paws, posteriors with fish fin, are dragons; however, the dog depictions on Caucasian items are more fantastic, than realistic. As for the dragons and dogs (along with the snake and the fish), he viewed them as belonging to the same water zone and thought that this depiction is a representation of a common semantic-mythological connection between a dog, water and a snake, which is also confirmed by local linguistic materials (Мещанинов 1925: 195, 241, 245-256). B. Kufitin agreed with I. Meshchaninov and N. Marr and

conditionally considered these animals as “snake-wolves” or “dragon-wolves”. In his opinion, in the case of this complex – a fantastic dog, snake, and fish - we are dealing with the reflection of the Iber-Megrelian tribal names. Therefore, he considers that these depictions should be identified as a west-Georgian name “Gveri” (“snake-wolf” or “dragon-wolf”) (Куфтин 1949: 57). He parallels it with the Cerberus of Greek mythology, which iconographically and from the cultic and mythological point of view, is related to a snake, like the Georgian “Gveri” (considered its “deputy”) (Куфтин 1949: 195, 196). B. Kufitin also brings up another parallel from the Greek world in the form of archaeological artifacts (what is particularly interesting for us – N.S.), namely, the boat-like fibula with a plate-like receiver discovered in Boeotia (pl. 1/2). The arch of the fibula is made up of three boats, the receiver resembles a rectangular plate, which is decorated with an engraved composition. The main character on the composition is a predator, eating a hoofed animal. This depiction particularly resembles the Caucasian fantastic animal by its fin-like paws (Perrot and Chipiez 1898: 251-253, pl. 118. Куфтин 1949: 56). According to B. Kufitin, Germans were also



Pl. 1 Images of „fantastic” animals

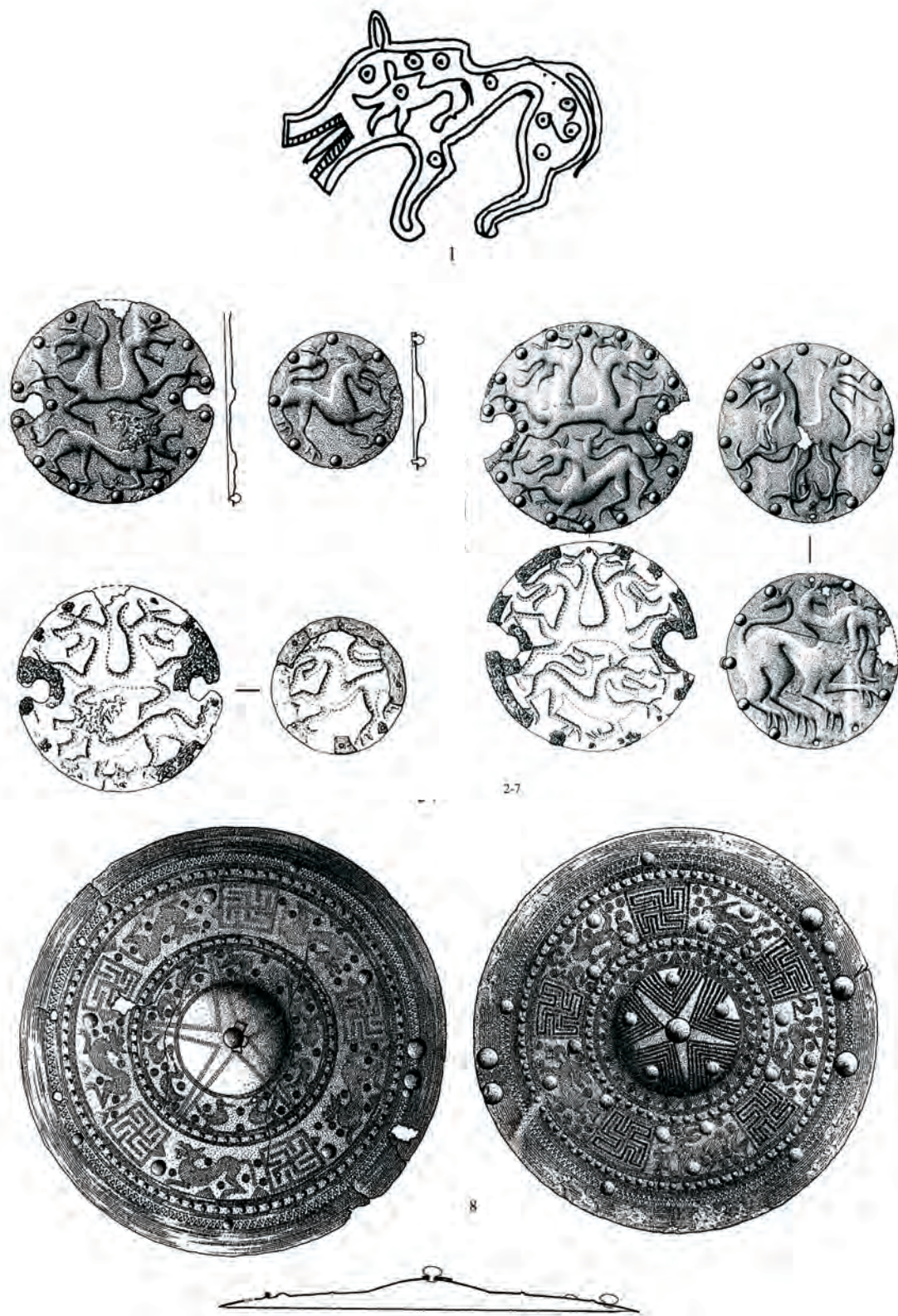
familiar with the dog-wolf beast (Garmmr'a), in their ancient epos (Icelandic-Scandinavian *Edda*) (Куфтин 1949: 196, 197). V. Bardavelidze considered the depictions as dogs; however, the dog cult was developed from the totemic wolf, which is more ancient. In his opinion, wolves, snakes and dogs were the zoomorphic aids of astral gods (Бардавелидзе 1957: 47-53, 54). El. Virsaladze related the depiction to the mythical dog of Georgian folklore, "Qursha" (Вирсаладзе 1964). According to Sh. Amiranashvili as well, the depictions represent dogs; he notes that in the Colchian culture they had a central status (Амиранашвили 1963: 42, 43). M. Khidasheli refers to these depictions by the terms – dog, a dog-like animal, and shares the belief that they are connected with the guardian god of animals (Хидашели 1982: 28, 30, 63-64). N. Urushadze views the depictions of the Caucasian fantastic animals on bronze axes and girdles as dogs and wolf-like symbols (Урушадзе 1984: 29-30; idem 1988: 50-51, 81. Иванов 1980: 59-60). According to L. Pantskha-

va, the depiction represents a dog; together with all other depictions (deer, horse, snake, fish), it is viewed as the ancient zoomorphic image of the "great mother of nature" (Pantskhava 1988: 39, 48, 49). According to N. Abakelia, the symbol of a dog, and a wolf associated with it, are revealed in a number of contexts of the Georgian cultural traditions; i.e.: the celestial dog (embodiment of lightning), the water dog (which incorporates the whole complex of beliefs), etc. As N. Abakelia comments, identification of zoomorphic symbols – such as dogs and wolves represents an ordinary phenomena in the common Caucasian (and not only Caucasian) tradition. She brings up examples of both linguistic and mythological associations. In German traditions, two wolves, the holy animals of Odin and Wotan are constantly referred to as dogs (see Abakelia 1997: 56-58). The warriors of the god of war Odin, are identified as "wolves", as "greyhounds"; the beast with a dog's head is known due to the German beliefs (Hundingas) as men-dogs, "dog offsprings" and from Celtic traditions (dog-headed beasts; similarly, a Celtic name of "water dog" with its interior form resembles the Georgian *m-tsav-dzaghli* (see: Abakelia 1997: 57; Иванов 1980: 57-64). An analogous creature is represented in the Hittite ritual tradition. N. Abakelia shares the beliefs of N. Marr, that a wolf-dog, as a guard or a watchdog is classified with the representatives of the reptiles' class – dragon, snake and accordingly the whale, i.e. with the inhabitants of the underworld (Abakelia 1997: 58). Therefore according to N. Abakelia, in the Georgian mythic-ritual system the symbol of a dog/wolf is represented through many aspects and, just like a number of other mythological traditions, is unified within one image. As seen from this short review, the dog cult was widely spread in different aspects in Caucasia, as well as in Europe. This can also be seen through the archaeological materials collected by us.³

We have already mentioned the similarity with the Boeotian fibula. On the face of it, we come across completely unexpected parallels of

³ Herewith we would like to note, that the famous Caucasian image thematics – snakes, fish, swastika, meander, Maltese crosses, which are now not subjects of our research, find parallels with the images of the Thessalian fibula receivers (Kilian 1975: Taf. 461312,1325, Taf. 621884; Donder 1994: 16-31, Taf. 26; Sens 2002: 49-93, Taf. 13, 14)

2



Pl. 2 The fibula from Dalj; bronze shields/discs from Italy

depictions of Caucasian fantastic animals in Italy. The decorations of the so-called “leech-like” fibulae are found in Bologna (pl. 1/3). The back of these fibulae are decorated with the depictions of analogies of the “Caucasian fantastic animals” facing one another (Montelius 1895: II, pl. VI/50). According to I. Sundwall, this fibula is made of gold and the depiction of the fantastic “dog” is rendered using the technique of granulation (Sundwall 1943: 178, 188, 189, fig. 286, fig. 303). Fibulae of this type are dated to the second half of the 8th century B.C. (Sundwall 1943: 55).

Images of our interest can also be evidenced on other artifacts of Europe. In our opinion, of great significance is the fibula from Yugoslavia (Dalj), which is considered by R. Vasić to be similar to the “Kuban Bestia” (Vasić 1971: 2, pl. II/13) (pl. 2/1).

Bronze shields/discs from Italy are also covered with analogical images (pl. 2/2-7, 8). There are two varieties: the images on one group of the shields/discs cover the whole surface and are represented by one-headed or two-headed creatures; the images on the second group of the shields/discs are located between circular friezes filled with geometric patterns, and the representations of animals interchange with swastikas. The concentration of these items is evidenced in central Italy. A few of them have also been discovered in South and North Italy. Their chronology goes back to the beginning of the 7th century B.C. to the mid-6th century B.C. (Tomedi 2000: 39-42, 72-80, pl. 17-21, 100, 149, 153).

B. Pharmakovski expressed his ideas regarding the first group of shields, saying that they can be found in the Etruscan art, which is greatly dependent on the art of Asia Minor (Фармаковский 1914: 29, pl. XIX/3). S. Boriskovskaya, who studied the discs decorated with the images of “four-legged fantastic creature” of the Hermitage collection, also notes that the researchers studying these discs, characterized them as Orientalized (Борисковская 1973: 5-15).

A bronze shield covered with analogical depictions is known from grave 49 of the necropolis of Paradis (Azerbaijan) (pl. 3). Here, as on the Italian shields, there is an image of five animals on the circular friezes. Instead of swastikas, they are divided by four vertical ribbons. According to the authors the necropolis is dated back to the 11th-7th

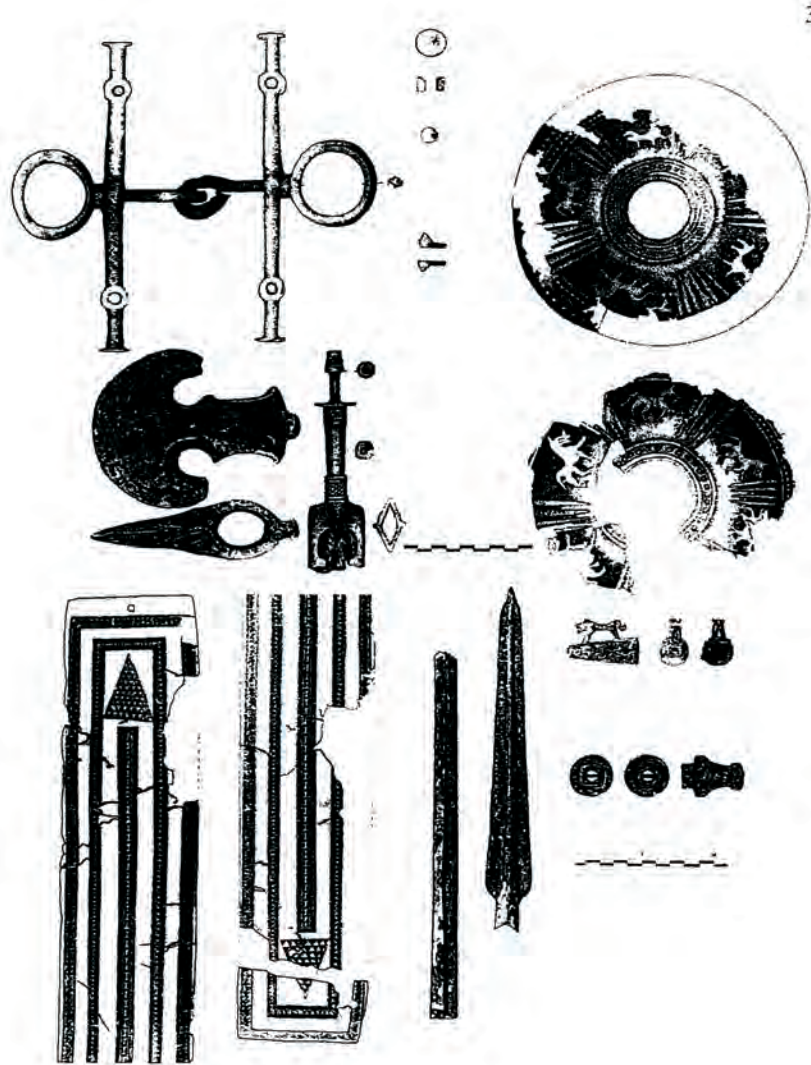
centuries B.C.⁴ and belongs to the Ganja-Qarabakh culture (Nagel, Strommenger 1985: 10). So far as I know, no analogy of the Paradis shield can be found in the Caucasus.

I believe that the following materials confirm once again the contacts between Caucasus and southern Europe⁵; of course the artifacts or various details of the artifacts proving this, have been the subject of transformation throughout time and space. In spite of this, however, it is possible to follow these contacts (or impulses)⁶.

4 Burial no. 49 of the Paradis necropolis can be dated more precisely. The inventory of the burial, besides of the mentioned bronze shield, consists of the following bronze and iron items: bronze– horse-bit, which is analogous of one from the Mingechauri burial 1 (Abramishvili 1997: pl. I/123); so-called Transcaucasian axe, which is analogical to the axe from Samtavro (burial no. 591) (Абрамишвили 1957: pl. I/165); spear-head with a tall razor and a long, socketed shaft (Abramishvili 1997: pl. I/101), however it has a longer spearhead bushing; the girdle, which represents an analogy of the one discovered in burial 61 of the Gantiadi necropolis (in the same burial, a one-piece arch-fibula has been discovered as well) (Кахиани et al. 1985: pl. XXX); a tube-like item, on which “fantastic animal” of Caucasian type is soldered; a tip with two rings; a macehead, which is analogical to the one from burial 276 of the Samtavro necropolis (Абрамишвили 1957: 132-134; Sulava 2000: pl. II/3); bimetallic - a spear-head, with a bronze hilt and iron mouth. Analogical spears are thought to be of Urartian production by B. Piotrovskii, while R. Abramishvili argues their local production (Пиотровский 1955: 42. Пиотровский 1959: 177; Абрамишвили 1961: 370, 371, pl. XII, XIII123, XIV, XVI); iron – spearheads, spherical beads of various size made of cornelian, and pottery (Nagel, Strommenger 1985: 77-79, tab. 23-26). In our opinion, the complex must be dated by the first half of the 8th and 7th centuries B.C. (see also: Abramishvili 1997: pl. I). The given date is hereby supported by the discovery of the so-called eastern Caucasian axe and the two-piece arch-like fibula in burial 112 at the Paradis necropolis (Nagel, Strommenger 1985: 118, tab. 4; on two-piece arch-fibulae see: Sulava 2001)

5 Based on the Colchis (and Caucasus) fibulas, besides the contacts with the Egeos world, distinguished were contacts north Italy-Balkan materials (disc-like augmentations, luxuriously engraved thick arcs, arcs with lobelike bottoms, with hangers and etc.). If we glance over the other materials of the Colchian culture as well, we will find out, that these contacts can be identified based on other artefacts as well. We mean – the ceramics with zoomorphic handles, spectacle-like hooks, spiral-ended bracelets and torques, bronze vases, the engraving method and etc. (Sulava 2011: 210, 211). The identification of materials reflecting these contacts and their chronological synchronous alignment opens up interesting perspectives for further research and cooperation

6 S. Reinhold, in his work – “Late Bronze and Early Iron Age in Caucasus”, states that, it is Caucasus from where the cultural impulses spread from to the west, which



Pl. 3 Bronze shild from necropolis of Pardis

One of the documentary proofs of these contacts is the appearance of the imported fibulae on the coastal area of the Black Sea (Abkhazeti). This fact seems to be important from the following point of view: the spread of the images discussed by us could be related to the introduction of these particular artifacts (fibulae). The boat-like fibulae represent the earliest imports found on the territory

are now viewed as originators of forms in the European Hallstatt Culture development (Reinhold 2007: 2-5, 333). Before we make such conclusions, we are confronted by the problems of chronology; in particular, how realistically can the chronological synchrony between Europe and Caucasus be determined today. Only after ascertaining this problem, can we discuss in what directions did the cultural impulses spread

of Colchis, dated to the end of the 8th century and the beginning of the 7th century B.C. (Sulava 2003; idem 2006: 159-161, 185, pl. 57/688, 689. Idem 2011: 157-166, pl. 57/691-698). They are characterized by rectangular plate-like receivers, plain or decorated with engravings. Here we must also recall engraved images on the shaft of the boat-like Boeotian fibula which has been identified as a parallel by B. Kufin. It may be that imported fibulae of this very type (with plate-like engraved receivers) introduced into Colchis the decoration of bronze items with engraved patterns, as well as subjects. However, the engraving on bronze works seems to be known in Europe since the 8th century B.C. (Maryon 1949: 115, 117. Also see: - Sulava and Kalandadze 2008).

E. Sapouna-Sakelarakis, one of the researchers of Greek fibulae, calls animal design of our interest “a running dog” décor; he notes, that together with broken lines, slanting notches, linked corners and hook-like spirals, belong to the Geometric Age (900-700 y. B.C.) (Sapouna-Sakelarakis 1978: 7).

The existence of bronze “treasures” characteristic of some regions of Europe (Atlantic, north, central-European, Adriatic-Carpathian) (Hänsel B. 1997) and some of Caucasian regions (the region of Colchian culture), is explained by the sacral-religious moment (Lordkipanidze 2001: 182, see also cited references). O. Lordkipanidze noted, that “bronze “treasures” and religious rites reflected in them are specific only to Colchis on the entire territory of Caucasus”; “the “treasures” including bronze items are spread on the very territory and in those very borders, which is known as “Colchis” from the 7th century B.C. at first in the Urartian cuneiform inscriptions, and later in Greek literary sources (it is enough to mention: Herodotus, II, 103-105, IV, 37-38: Pseudo-Scylax, 81; Strabo, XI, 1,5; XI, 1, 14-17 (See - Lordkipanidze 2001: 187)). As a result we have grounds to assume, that the so-called “treasures” of the Colchian bronze culture (and accordingly the related sacral rites) are carriers of an ethnic character” (Lordkipanidze 2001: 186-187). It is possible to support this opinion by the observations performed as part of our research: a large number of the bronze artifacts (Colchian axes, clasps) found in “treasures” characteristic of the Colchian culture are decorated with representations of the so-called “fantastic” animal, outlining the territory populated by people sharing a similar religious beliefs. If we add to this the burial grounds containing items with representations of “fantastic” animals, which basically cover the same territory, the area and the borders of infiltration of people bearing the Colchis bronze culture seem to be more convincing.

ABBREVIATION DEFINITIONS:

SSMM / Saqartvelos sachelmtsifo muzeumis Moambe / ssmm – saqarTvelos saxelmwifo muzeumis moambe (Georgian National Museum Publication)

ЗКВАМР – Записки Коллегии Востоковедов при Азиатском музее Российской Академии Наук

ИРАИМК – Известия Российской Академии истории материальной культуры

МАК – Материалы Археологии Кавказа

МАР ИАК – Материалы Археологии России Известия Археологической Комиссии

ПАИ – Полевые Археологические Исследования

СА – Советская Археология

AJA – American Journal of Archaeology

PBF – Prähistorische Bronzefunde

UPA – Universitätsforschungen zur prähistorischen Archäologie

WPZ – Wiener Prähistorische Zeitschrift

ABBREVIATIONS:

Abkhazeti – Journal of Academy of Sciences of Autonomous Republic of Abkhazeti. Tbilisi

ACADEMIA – Journal of Human Sciences (Association of Modern Scientific Investigation). Tbilisi

BOREAS – Münstersche Beiträge zur Archäologie. Münster

Dziebani – The Journal of the Centre for Archaeological Studies of the Georgian Academy of Sciences. Tbilisi

IBERIA-COLCHIS – Researches on the Archaeology and History of Georgia in the Classical and Early Medieval Period. Tbilisi

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REZIME

**RASPROSTRANJENOST
PREDSTAVE FANTASTIČNIH
ŽIVOTINJA NA BRONZANIM
PREDMETIMA
(ANTIČKA KOLHIDA I EVROPA:
PERSPEKTIVA ISTRAŽIVANJA)**

Ključne reči: kasno bronzano i rano gvozdeno doba, Kavkaz, kolhidska sekira, kolhidska bronzana kultura, fantastične životinje.

Među zoomorfnim predstavama na bronzanim predmetima sa Kavkaza iz kasnog bronzanog i ranog gvozdenog doba, najbrojnije i najinteresantnije su predstave tzv. fantastičnih životinja. U radu su predstavljene predmeti koji potiču sa različitih lokaliteta u Evropi, a koji svojim izgledom podsećaju na primerke sa Kavkaza. Da pomenemo predstave sa fibula iz Beotije, Jugoslavije, na štitu iz Italije, datovane u period od VIII do VII veka pre nove ere. Pojava sličnih predstava fantastičnih životinja sa lokaliteta na Kavkazu, koje su pretrpele izvesne transformacije tokom vremena u novim geografskim uslovima, predstavlja još jedan dokaz o kontaktu između Kavkaza i južne Evrope.