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**SOCIAL STRUCTURE AND SOCIAL INTERACTIONS PECULIAR TO
PIT GRAVE CULTURE POPULATION OF VOLGA-URAL INTERFLUVE**

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Author's abstract

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The thesis manuscript can be found and familiarized with in N.I. Lobachevsky research library of Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education “Kazan (Privolzhsky) Federal University”, located at 420008 Kazan, Kremlevskaya street, bld. 35 (Reading hall No1). Online version of the author's abstract is posted on the Kazan (Privolzhsky) Federal University official site <http://kpfu.ru> and at the official site of Ministry of Education and Science of the Russian Federation State Commission for Academic Degrees and Titles <http://vak.ed.gov.ru>.

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Scientific Secretary of the Dissertation Board,

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GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

Importance of the Problem. Pit Grave cultural and historical area extended over an immense steppe zone from South Cis-Urals at the east to Dniester at the west. It became an ethno cultural cradle land for further historical development over vast territories of Eastern Europe, giving rise to a wide range of historical processes of subsequent epochs. According to N.Y. Merpert and a number of later researchers, Volga-Ural Interfluvium is one of the main regions of Pit Grave culture origin, the area that gave birth to peculiar cultural and historical society with its own established and strictly followed household patterns, social organization, regulatory system and specific paradigms, mental models, and mindsets. Environmental and climate conditions of the Volga-Ural region enabled extensive development of livestock breeding.

Nomadic type of farming meant long-distance moves of considerable groups of population, resulting in dislocation and assimilation, expansion of cultural achievements and regular military collisions. In due turn these processes brought about social changes including complexity and sophistication of social structure. Current status of the sources actualizes studies of Pit Grave culture social relationships, revealed in funeral and burial rituals. At present there is a substantial representative database, accumulated not only during archaeological excavations but also by means of laboratory natural-science researches providing an opportunity to reconstruct social relationships and social differentiation of the Pit Grave culture population. The long felt need to summarize and interpret all accumulated results, including those received during the latest decade within Volga-Ural territory using methods of natural science should be satisfied. The task becomes possible with artefact social interpretation methods and social structure reconstruction techniques for different archaeological cultures, developed by national and foreign science.

The **object of the study** is Pit Grave culture funeral artefacts found over the territory of Volga-Ural interfluvium including over grave constructions (mounds), burial chambers, grave decorations, funeral equipment, remains of sacrificial complexes and funeral feasts.

The **subject of the study** is social structure and society of Volga-Ural interfluvium Pit Grave culture population.

Geographically, the study mainly encompasses Volga-Ural steppe zone. In terms of current administrative division these are the territories of Astrakhan, Volgograd, Saratov, Samara and Orenburg regions. They correspond to Volga-Ural variant of Pit Grave cultural and historical area. This cultural variant can be divided into three local groups: Nizhnevolzhskaya (Low Volga), Srednevolzhskaya (Middle Volga) and Cisuralian (according to N.Y. Merpert, 1974).

Chronologically, in terms of relative chronological system Pit Grave culture refers to Early and Middle Bronze Age. Radiocarbon dates put Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture between 3800 to 2300 BC which corresponds to early (Repin), developed (Gorodsov) and late (Poltavka) periods of Pit Grave culture.

The goal of the work is to reconstruct social development and social differentiation process of the Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture population based on archaeological evidence from burials. The goal sets forward the following **tasks**:

- 1) to review the history of study on Pit Grave cultural and historical area;
- 2) to define methods for studying social and of gender and age structure of Pit Grave culture population based on burial rituals;
- 3) to systematize origins within classification of burial ritual by labour input of Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture;
- 4) to perform comparative analysis on burial labour input in different regional groups of Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture;
- 5) to retrace the evolution of burial complexes of Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture in accordance with modern chronology;
- 6) to analyze and reconstruct gender and age structure of Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture population;

7) to single out social groups and reconstruct social structure of Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture population;

8) to define manufacturing preconditions for the rise of social heterogeneity in Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture population.

The source base of the dissertation is represented with under mound burials of Pit Grave culture, with 394 analyzed burials from 281 mounds. The research is based on a number of published sources and archival materials of Institute of Archaeology Russian Academy of Sciences as well as archive of Orenburg State Pedagogical University archeological laboratory. The specific character of the research implies use of field archaeological research sources in Orenburg, Samara, Saratov and Volgograd regions, as well as results of anthropological research and ethnographic data.

Methodology and methods of research were chosen to satisfy the research goal and tasks. Among general scientific methods the research relies on analysis, abstraction and generalization. Special archeological and historical methods of research include typological, cartographic, stratigraphic methods as well as correlation method and comparative-historical method. Complementary to conventional archeological methods the research exercises science data of paleopedology, biomorphic analyses, palaeoanthropology, metallography and radiocarbon dating.

Academic novelty. Volga –Ural Pit Grave culture social structure and relationships for the first time have become an object of independent research and are treated as a whole. The research not only goes into detail analysis of the burial rite and Pit Grave burial equipment, but applies natural science data (radiocarbon dating, paleopedology, palaeoanthropology). Local groups burial rituals of Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture variant for the first time underwent comparison in terms of labour input for the mound and burial chamber construction, quantity of burial equipment in the graves and other features. The research also for the first time traces gender and age and social structure evolution within three periods of Pit Grave culture, specifying features and degree of manifestation of social Pit Grave culture population social relationships.

Dissertation issues for defense:

1. Volga –Ural Pit Grave culture knew several approaches to mound and burial chamber construction depending on the social status of the buried individual. The architecture of the mounds and burial chambers construction were changing during the three stages of the Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture. Mound ritual became dominating burial rite over the whole Volga-Ural territory at the early stage of the culture, its main elements being developed at the following stages. The Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture flourished within the mature period, its social and manufacturing relationships accounting for the process of social differentiation. Burial complexes of the latest (Poltavka) period demonstrate complete consistency with those of the previous stage.

2. Social differentiation of the Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture population was based on both gender and age aspects of the society members and their public functions. Social relationships were patriarchal; parents' social status and occupation could be hereditary.

Social differentiation of the Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture population led to formation of social groups; among them –hereditary casts (of ministers of religion and craftsmen) and a group of people whose main occupation was the art of war. Social power belonged to the leaders who regulated public production and totally controlled social product distribution.

3. The society of Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture population can be characterized as “early complex societies” (according to V.M. Masson, 1991) based on the following characteristics:

- 1) monumental ceremonial centers and extraordinary burial complexes;
- 2) social differentiation revealed in burial rites;
- 3) production specialization and clusterization of social groups associated with particular occupation.

Intensification of livestock breeding and development of new copper-ore fields became fundamental factors for the growth of differentiated social structure.

Practical value of the research. The results of the research can be taken into consideration during development of special courses and synthesis papers, while preparing study guides on early and middle bronze epoch of the territory under study as well as for museum displays.

The conclusions of the dissertation research have **theoretical scientific relevance** for studying Volga-Ural Pit Grave society and contemporary cultures of adjacent regions concerning paleosocial reconstructions.

Research validity was proved by a considerable number of the used archeological sources analyzed together with natural science data received during comprehensive research of the Volga-Ural Pit Grave culture artefacts.

Validity of conclusions of the dissertation research was proved by detailed supporting data represented in charts, tables and diagrams.

Methodology used for the data analysis including both general scientific methods and special archeological methods corresponds to the object, subject, goal and tasks of the research.

Evaluation of results. Conceptual issues of the research were presented at scientific archeological conferences: XLIV International Ural-Povolzhsk Archeological Student Conference (Yekaterinburg, 2012); New Materials and Methods of Archeological Research (Moscow, 2013); IV(XX) All-Russia Archeological Conference (Kazan, 2015); New Materials and Methods of Archeological Research (Moscow, 2015); 21st European Archeological Conference (Glasgow, Great Britain, 2015); All-Russia Archeological Scientific and Practical Conference “Ethnos, society, civilization. IV Kuzeyev Readings” (Ufa, 2015), III Young Scholars International Conference. «Contemporary Archeology-3: new interpretations of the Archeological data» (Saint-Petersburg, 2015), V International Science Conference. «Kadyrbayev Readings » (Aktobe, Kazakhstan, 2016), V(XXI) All-Russia Archeological Conference (Barnaul-Belokurikha, 2017). The main research findings were shown in 16 academic papers.

The research **consists of** introduction, three chapters, conclusion, reference list, acronym list and appendices, which correspond to the goals and tasks of the research. The appendices include a map, tables demonstrating the main data of the studied material and drawings.