

SCHRIFTEN DES ZENTRUMS FÜR ARCHÄOLOGIE UND
KULTURGESCHICHTE DES SCHWARZMEERRAUMES 11

IMPORT AND IMITATION IN ARCHAEOLOGY



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EDITED BY

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Beier & Beran
Langenweissbach 2008

What Lies Behind 'Import' and 'Imitation'?

Case Studies from the European Late Neolithic

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Abstract

Two cases from the 3rd millennium BC, which from a certain point of view may be treated as examples of 'import' and 'imitation', are discussed. A common manifestation of both cases is the presence of artifacts in one culture that are related to an entirely different cultural group (or even several of them). A detailed analysis of both cases, however, in particular the exploration of their cultural and social contexts, leads to the conclusion that in each case the items underwent a different chain of transformations of senses and values.

Резюме

У статті дискутуються два випадки з III тис. до н. е., які безумовно можуть бути розглянуті як приклади імпорту та імітації. Загальним проявом в обох випадках є наявність в одній культурі артефактів, які відносяться до зовсім іншої культурної групи (або навіть до кількох груп). Детальний аналіз обох випадків, зокрема, дослідження їх культурних та соціальних контекстів, приводить до висновку, що в кожному випадку ці предмети проходили ланцюг різного роду трансформацій їх значення і цінності:

Перший випадок - це наявність посуду, формальні риси якого та орнаментация визначають зв'язки з культурою кулястих амфор в похованнях ямної культури в степовій та лісо-степовій зонах Східної Європи. Такий посуд повністю чужий традиціям ямної культури. Всі відомі об'єкти цього типу знайдені в суміжній зоні між двома культурами, які процвітали одночасово деякий період. Очевидно, такий посуд свідчить про контакти між общинами обох культур:

Другий випадок представлений наявністю так званих гудзиків з V-подібним отвором. Такі гудзики, зроблені головним чином з кістки та рогу, відомі в культурах Центральної Європи з початку неоліту. Хронологічно довго відомі вони в культурі Нарва на південному сході Балтики, де вони були зроблені виключно з бурштину. Тільки в ареалі, який простягнувся від Гданської

затоки до Латвії нам відомі майстерні, де гудзики з V-подібним отвором масово вироблялися. Крім знахідок з пам'яток культури Нарва, цей тип артефактів (зроблених тільки з бурштину) відомий на пам'ятках культури кулястих амфор, культури шнурової кераміки, культури Ржучево, культури Злата та культури дзвіноподібних кубків. Ця традиція була продовжена населенням культури кулястих амфор. В культурі дзвіноподібних кубків обидві тенденції об'єдналися з гудзиками, зробленими тут також з каменя (включно напівкоштовного каменя) та металу (включно золото). Після культури дзвіноподібних кубків, на початку II тис. до н.е., гудзики раптово зникають. З огляду на різні культурні контексти важливо встановити, чи мали гудзики в кожному з них те ж саме значення.

Особливу увагу приділено змінам, при яких первісна (вихідна) структура об'єкта була відторгненою і тільки деякі елементи повторені (для прикладу, зразки культури кулястих амфор в ямної культури) та зміні цінності предметів за рахунок доданих до типових предметів елементів (для прикладу, гудзики з бурштину).

Introduction

Right at the very beginning we would like to stress that the terms 'import' and 'imitation' used in the title are purely conventional. That which in the material sphere is perceived as an identity or similarity of forms, techniques and/or materials, is one of the signs of a phenomenon being an object of intensive studies by cultural anthropologists and prehistorians, namely, the cultural contact, or more specifically, its material aspects. As an analytical key, we use the concept of metaphoric and metonymic transformations formulated by E. Leach (1976). Under this concept, signs and symbols (and, consequently, objects that are their carriers) undergo multiple transformations during a transfer. In this paper we wish to show what chain of formal and semantic transformations accompanied the movement of certain ideas, materially represented in the form of different goods.

Example I: Globular Amphora Culture Vessels in Yamnaya Culture Graves

A settlement distribution area of the eastern Globular Amphora Culture group, the so-called Seret Subgroup (Szmyt 1999), may be found between the Prut and Seret Rivers (e. g. in the east part of modern Romania -fig. 1). Globular Amphora artifacts were recorded there at over a dozen sites, the majority of which were burials. Apart from the graves, single fragments of Globular Amphora Culture pottery and flint axes, which are hypothetically related to that culture as well, were also found in the area. The current information (first ^{14}C dates) allows us to set the beginnings of the Seret Subgroup at 2900 - 2700 (Mihailescu-Birliba/Szmyt 2003).

The area east of the Prut River was occupied by societies coming from the steppe zone and belonging to the Yamnaya Culture (fig. 1). These populations followed a mobile way of life related to the semi-nomadic grazing of animal herds. In the area in question, finds from the Yamnaya Culture include kurgans (burial mounds) located at valley edges, chiefly the Prut and Reut Rivers. These sites belong to two groups, distinguished in the western portion of the

Yamnaya Culture dispersion area: an older one, the so-called Dniester Group and a later one - Budzhak Group (Dergachev 1986). The absolute chronology of neither group is not clear. Relying only on indirect evidence, the beginning of the Yamnaya Culture in the forest-steppe on the Dniester may be dated from 2700 to 2550 (Szmyt 1999).

Thus, areas west of the Prut (i. e. between the Prut and Seret) were covered by the Globular Amphora settlement while areas east of the river (i. e. between the Dniester and Prut) were exploited by Yamnaya Culture people. A comparison of the data from both regions shows that the populations of both cultures could have been at least partially contemporaneous with a line of demarcation between them that ran along the Prut and middle Dniester Rivers. Only a few kurgans were discovered west of the Prut, where they must have appeared after the end of the Globular Amphora settlement structures (fig. 1).

The societies of both cultures differed in many aspects of their lifeways. Nevertheless, there are certain aspects that are shared in their traditions. These are graves where the rules of the Yamnaya Culture obeyed all major rituals except one: the grave goods placed in the burials exhibit Globular Amphora traits, in most cases on the vessels (Szmyt 2000).

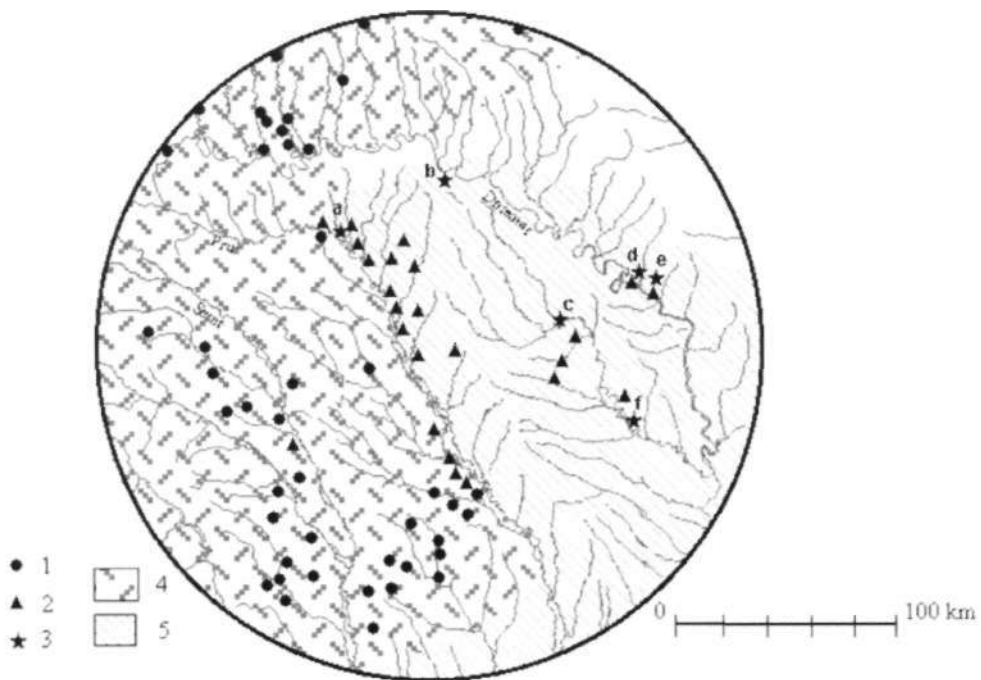


Fig. 1. Spatial relationships between the Globular Amphora Culture and the Yamnaya Culture on Seret-Prut-Dniester Rivers. Key: 1. graves of the Globular Amphora Culture; 2. graves of the Yamnaya Culture; 3. graves of the Yamnaya Culture with Globular Amphora traits (a. Corpaci, b. , . Marculești, d-e. Camenca); 4. range of the Globular Amphora Culture; 5. range of the Yamnaya Culture

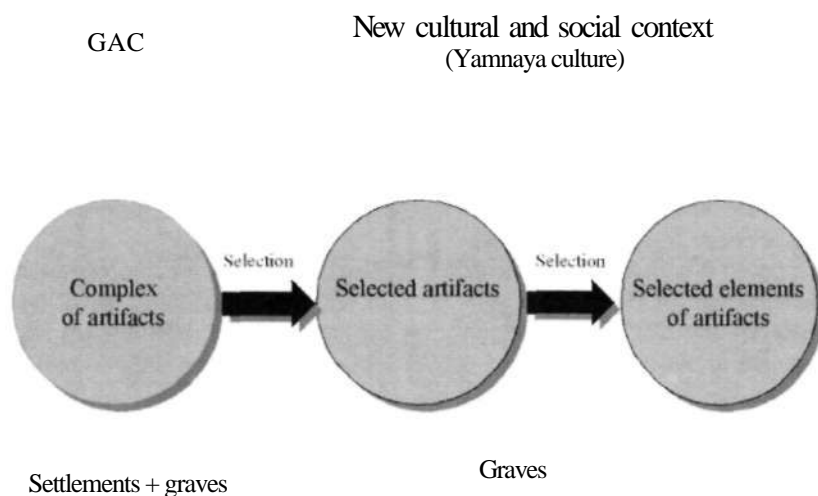


Fig. 2. Chain of transformations. A case of Globular Amphora Culture vessels in Yamnaya Culture graves. Key: GAC = Globular Amphora Culture

Only rarely do we find any flint axes, which are infrequently found in Yamnaya Culture graves anyway, especially the type associated with the Globular Amphora Culture. The graves, of which there are five at present, are located exclusively between the Prut and Dniester Rivers (*fig. 1*). They also have close counterparts in other parts of the Globular Amphora/Yamnaya frontier, such as on the middle Dnieper. All the graves contained remains of adults (sex has not been determined). The pottery found in the graves has forms and ornamentation that are totally different from patterns characteristic of vessel techniques of the Yamnaya Culture (*pl. 1*). In addition, in most cases, we have no information on the manufacturing, so we cannot say much about it. Some of these vessels are fully consistent with Globular Amphora pottery, that is vessel forms and ornamentation patterns have numerous analogies with ceramic material from Globular Amphora Culture sites (*pl. 1.A*). The other vessels exhibit certain modifications of Globular Amphora Culture vessel forms, but retaining the original ornamentation (*pl. 1.B.C*). A separation of the form and ornamentation of the vessels can be observed - forms undergo modification more often (earlier?) while the ornamentation maintains their original patterns longer.

The complexes indicate face-to-face relationships of the societies of both cultures. Their cultural contacts, however, seem to have been of a more limited character. This is borne out by the fact that only one percent of Yamnaya graves explored so far along the Dniester have produced finds suggestive of mutual influence. In turn, Globular Amphora sites between the Prut and Seret Rivers bear no trace of contacts with Yamnaya Culture societies.

In this case we are dealing with a prototype pattern and its transformations. The original pattern (i. e. a vessel of GAC) was a complex structure, formed from many elements (traits). These elements include: raw material, ceramic volume, forms of the whole vessel and its individual parts (rims, handles etc.), techniques of ornamentation, decorative motifs, firing techniques etc. All these different factors interrelate. This ceramic form incorporated a materialization of customs, rituals and self-identification patterns. During the transformations of the initial structure, only selected and individual elements were adopted and realized (*fig. 2*). It also constituted a "break" (or perhaps a rejection or forgetting?) with the original (i. e. initial) structure and, perhaps, of the original values materialized by it.

Example II: Amber Buttons with V-Shaped Perforations

The example of amber buttons with V-shaped perforations is more complicated but considerably more eloquent as well. We shall restrict our discussion, however, to a single aspect of the material culture which displays a chain of transformations from one cultural pattern as part of an adaptive process in different cultural milieus.

There are two major types of amber buttons with V-shaped perforations: A - with a hole bored from the convex side and - with a hole bored from the flat side. They were already being produced at the beginning of the Neolithic on the southeastern Baltic region, especially in the Narva/Post-Narva

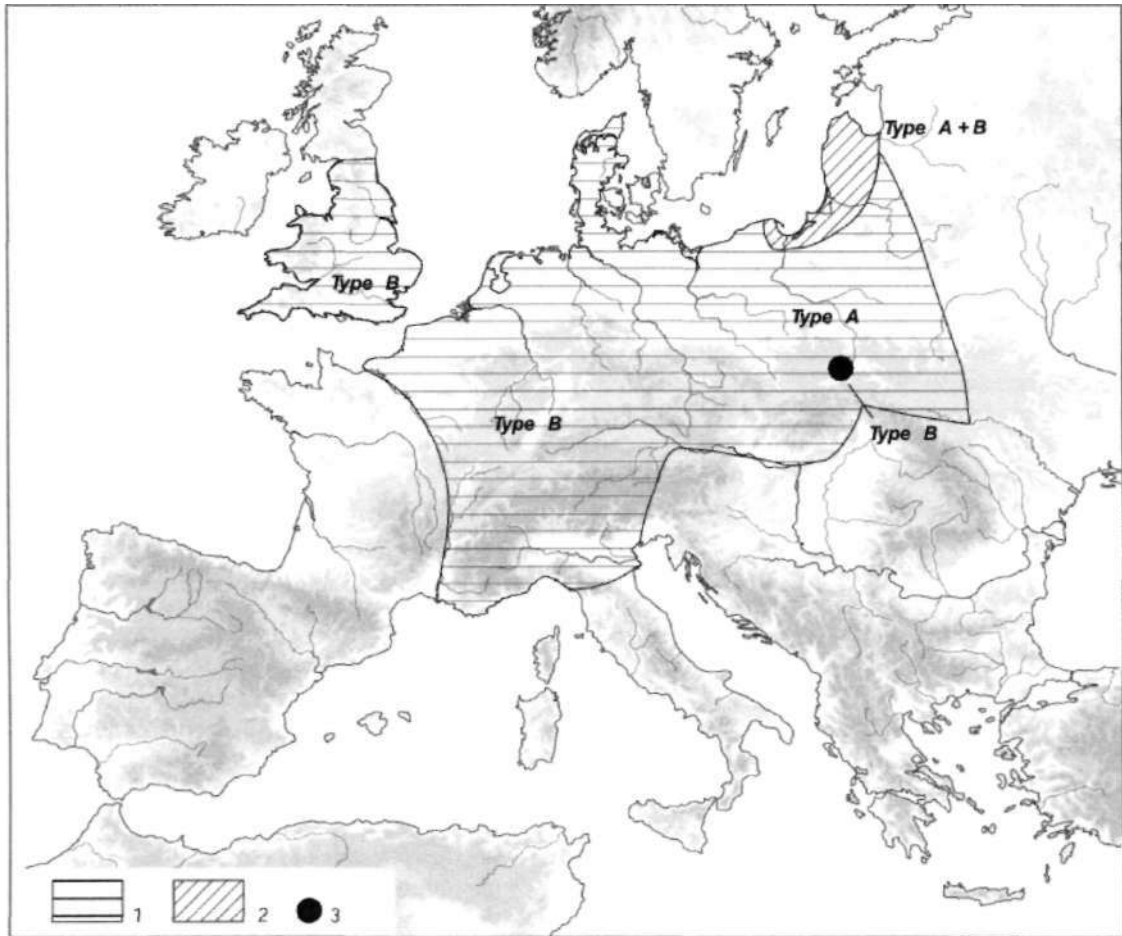


Fig. 3. Dispersion of amber buttons with V-shaped perforation. Key: 1. mainly graves; 2. mainly production-sites; 3. Złota Culture

Culture (Loze 1975; Loze 1999; Gimbutas 1985). Only in the area stretching from the Bay of Gdańsk to Latvia (fig. 3) do we know of workshops where V-perforated buttons were mass-produced (Loze 1979; Loze 1999; Mazurowski 1985). Besides the examples from Narva Culture sites, this type of artifact is known from Globular Amphora Culture, the Corded Ware Culture (in particular its variant from the lower Vistula called the Rzucewo Culture), the so-called Złota Culture and Bell Beaker sites (Mazurowski 1983; Czebreszuk/Makarowicz 1993). Only in the case of the Narva Culture, i. e. the main production centre, do we observe a balance between both typological varieties (pl. 2). All the other cultural units were characterized by a clear-cut distinction: type A is known only in the Rzucewo and Globular Amphora Cultures (pl. 3), whereas type B was found exclusively in the Złota Culture and Bell Beaker graves (pl. 4). In addition, it should be mentioned that Globular Amphora populations preferred oval buttons, whereas in the Bell Beaker Culture a simi-

lar preference is not observed (buttons may be oval/round or rectangular).

Two major thresholds can be distinguished in the dispersion of the buttons (fig. 4). The first occurred 3000 BC. Until then amber had been a local raw material, used, in principal only in those regions where it occurred naturally. After that date, in particular thanks to the mediation of Globular Amphora people, and, to a lesser degree, the Złota Culture, amber spread, inter alia in the form of the buttons in question, deep in the south of Central Europe. The other threshold date comes around 2400 BC. It is then that buttons with V-shaped perforations appear in Bell Beaker assemblages and together these reach the Mediterranean (Harrison 1980).

The chain of transformations begins on the southeastern Baltic, where the two major types of the artifact in question were produced. These two types must have had clear cultural values attached to each other since their connection to certain archaeological cultures in particular and no others was so close

and regular. The first stage of the dispersion of V-perforated buttons is related to type A. Type A was, at that time, preferred only in a small enclave at the confluence of the Vistula and San Rivers by people of the so-called Złota Culture. With the appearance of Bell Beakers elements in the northern part of central Europe, preferences in button shape shifted in favour of type B.

In this whole process, we are struck by the situation observed in the production center on the southeastern Baltic (from the Bay of Gdańsk to Latvia). Amber workshops in this area were left behind by the populations of the Narva and Rzucewo Cultures. Relying on the data that we have, a hypothesis can be adopted that the production of buttons with V-shaped perforations continued there throughout the 3rd millennium BC. Was this production, however, "exchange-oriented"? We have no clear answer to this question. Again, it should be stressed that it is only in the Narva society where both varieties of buttons were equally important whereas in the other

cases, one type is favoured over the other. This was related to some clear cultural values which, unfortunately, cannot be currently specified. Thus, the same product meant something else in different cultural contexts (fig. 5). For example, it seems that, first of all, the raw material (amber) as a special carrier of cultural information was important for the Narva people. By contrast, in the Globular Amphora Culture and in the Rzucewo Culture, it had a value manifested not only in the raw material (amber) and in the type of product (button), but also by the fact that the perforation was made in the convex side. Not only were the raw material and product type important in the Bell Beaker milieu and in the Złota Culture, but also one of its special characteristics, namely, that the perforation was bored from the flat side.

Finally, let us focus on the data suggesting contexts in which the buttons were used in individual cultures (fig. 5). For this purpose we shall examine grave finds from the Globular Amphora Culture, Corded Ware, Złota and Bell Beaker graves. The first

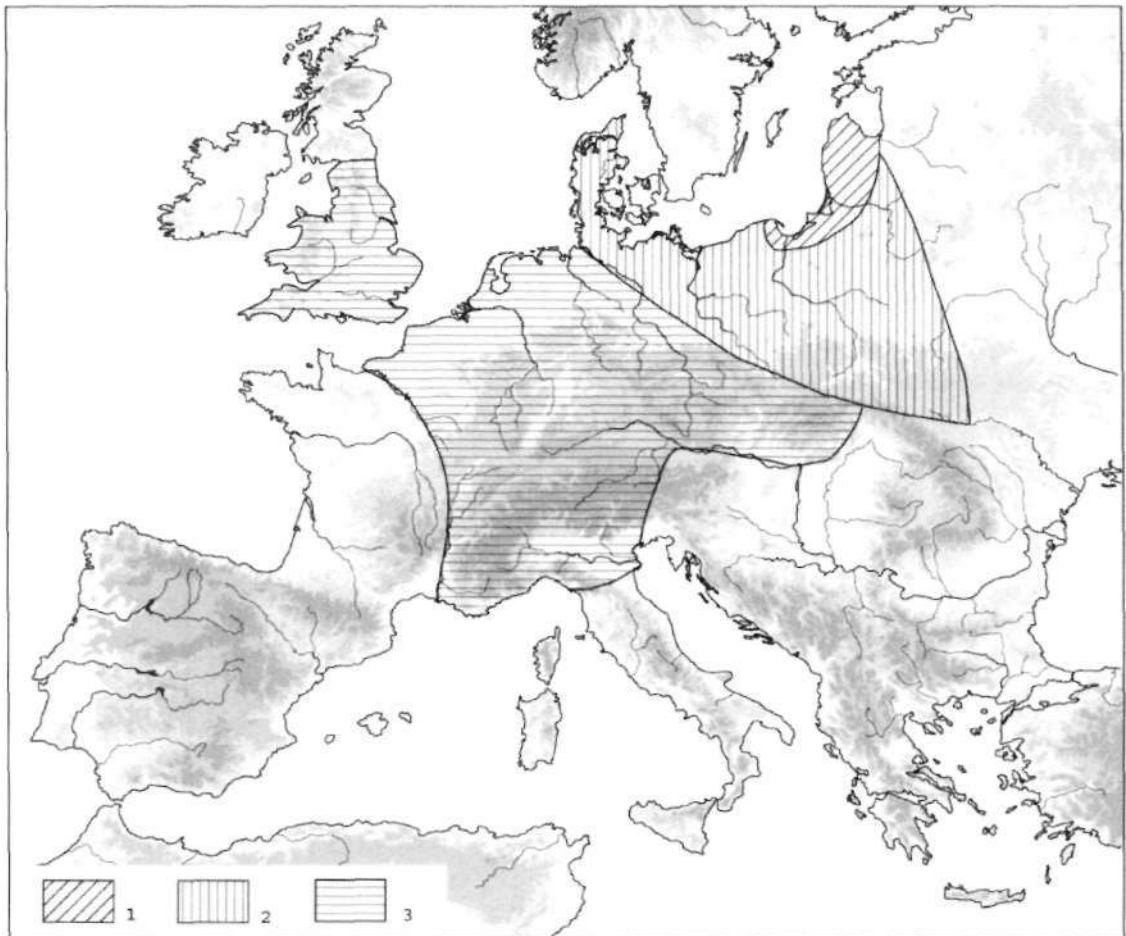


Fig. 4. Stages of dispersion of amber buttons with V-shaped perforation. Key: 1. Sambia center; 2. after 3000 BC; 3. after 2400 BC

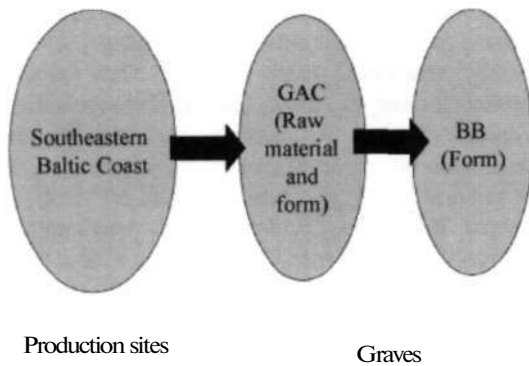


Fig. 5. Chain of transformations. A case of amber buttons with V-shaped perforation. Key: BB = Bell Beakers, GAC = Globular Amphora Culture

difference lies in the fact that only in the Bell Beakers were amber buttons combined with similar products made of different materials (bone, metal, semiprecious stones). By contrast, in the other groups, buttons with V-shaped perforations, were combined

with other types of amber beads (*pi. 3*). In the Bell Beakers, buttons were part of head and chest ornaments (certain finds may be interpreted as traces of buttons sewn onto clothing) similar to the Globular Amphora Culture, where buttons comprised part of a necklace. However, in the culturally indeterminate graves (Corded Ware Culture?) from the southeastern Baltic littoral, they are also found next to the legs of the deceased (Manasterski/Waluś 2001).

Conclusions

Both examples illustrate situations that formally suggest 'import' or 'imitation' but are in fact signs of far more complex phenomena. What we find the most interesting in them is the chains of transformations of senses and values that the given products underwent. Special attention should be paid to the changes where the original (initial) structure of an object is renounced and only some elements are still repeated (example of Globular Amphora Culture vessels) and the diversifying of values attached to some elements of an object type (for example, amber buttons).

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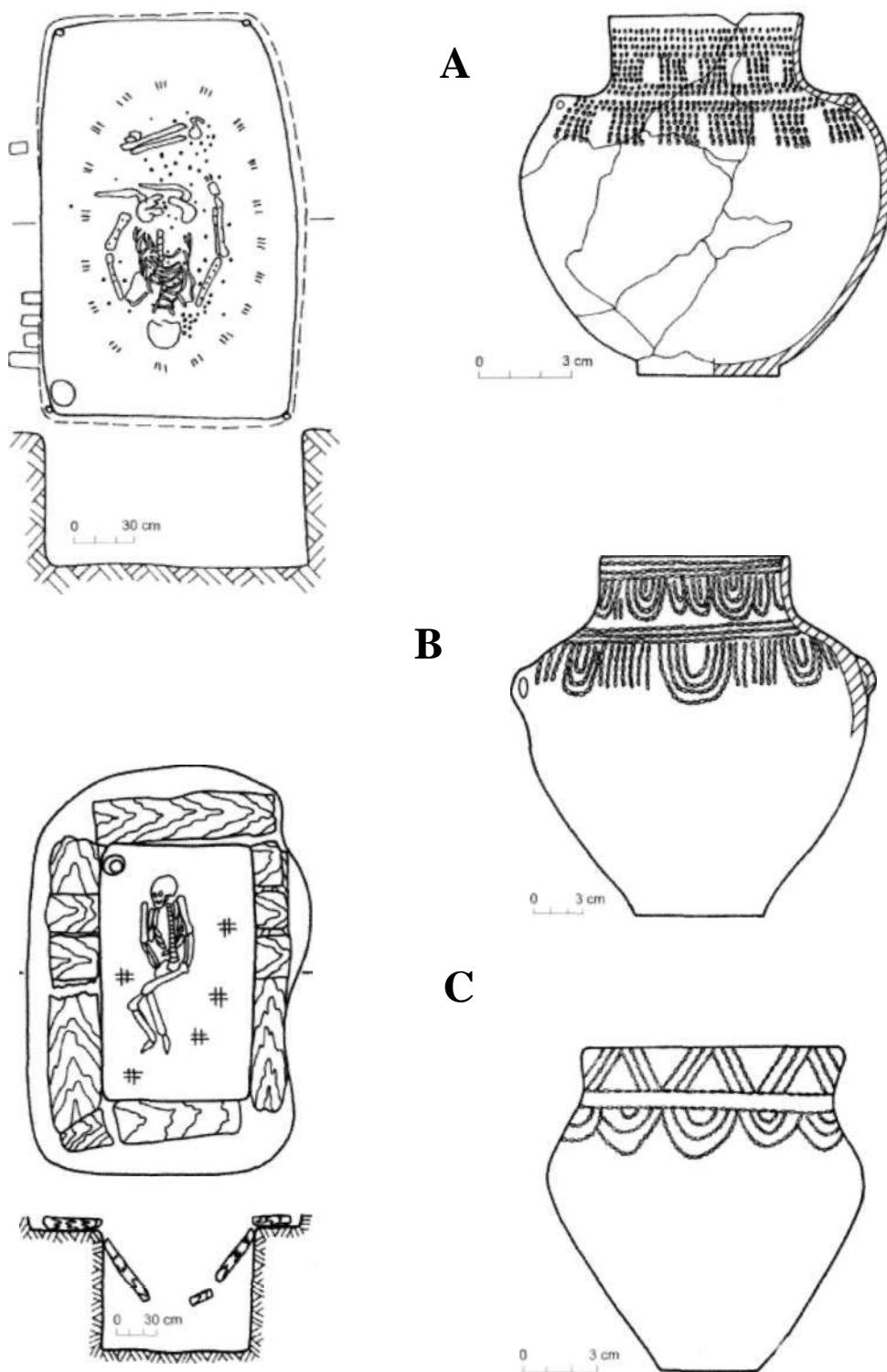
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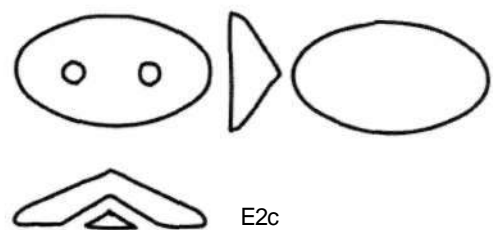
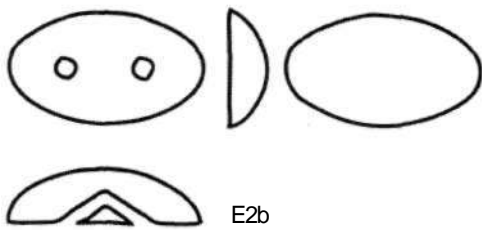
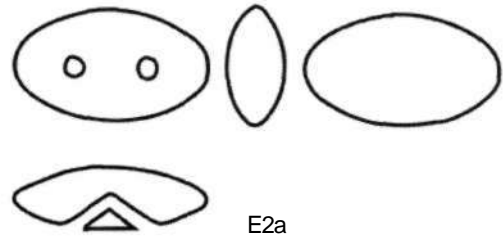
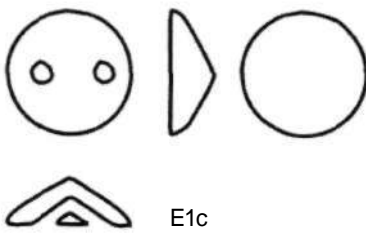
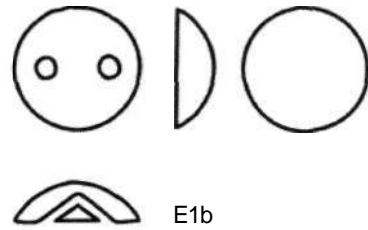
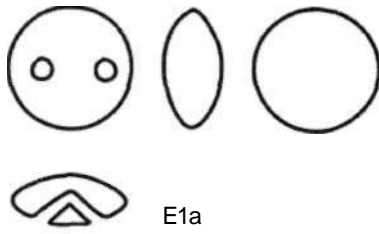
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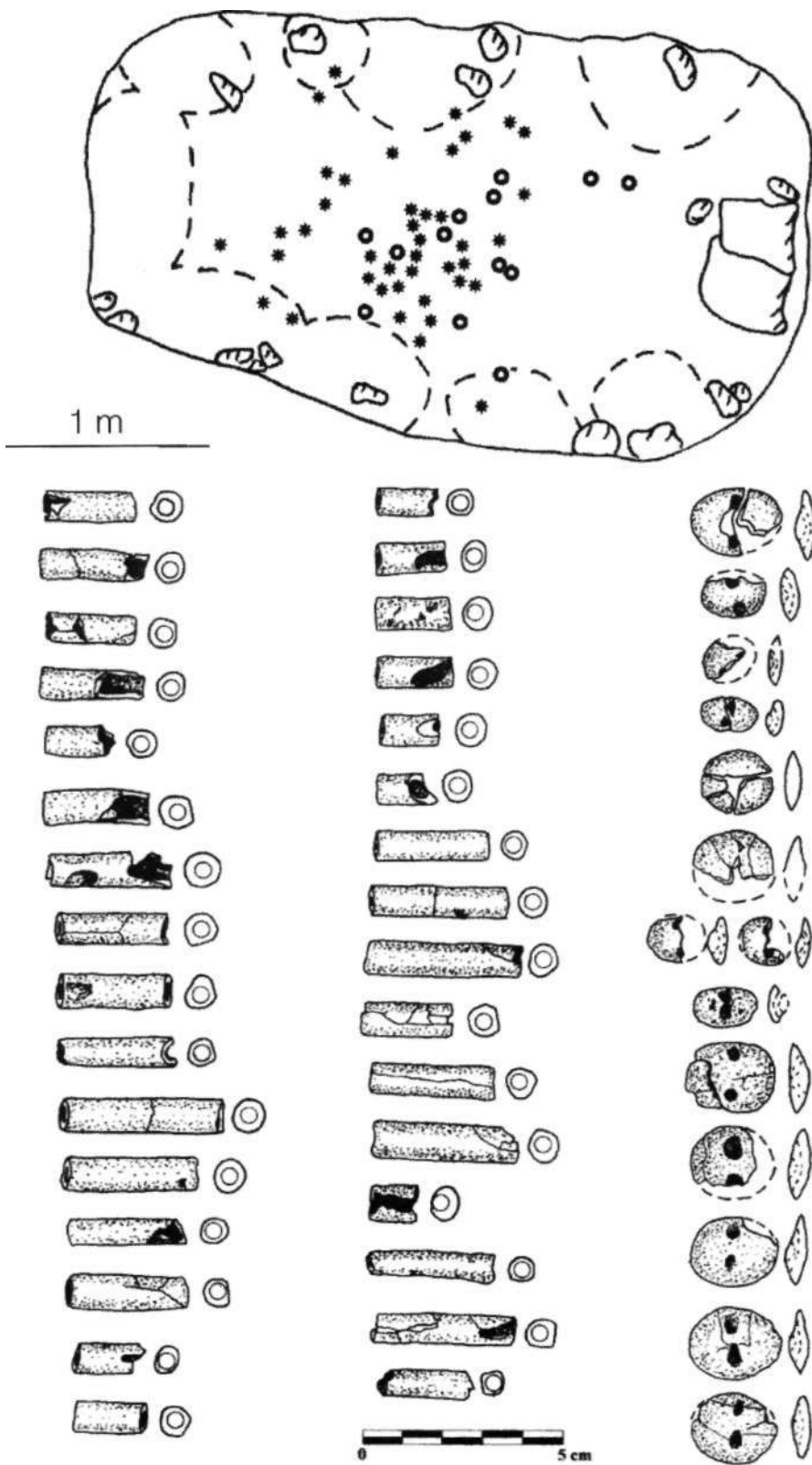
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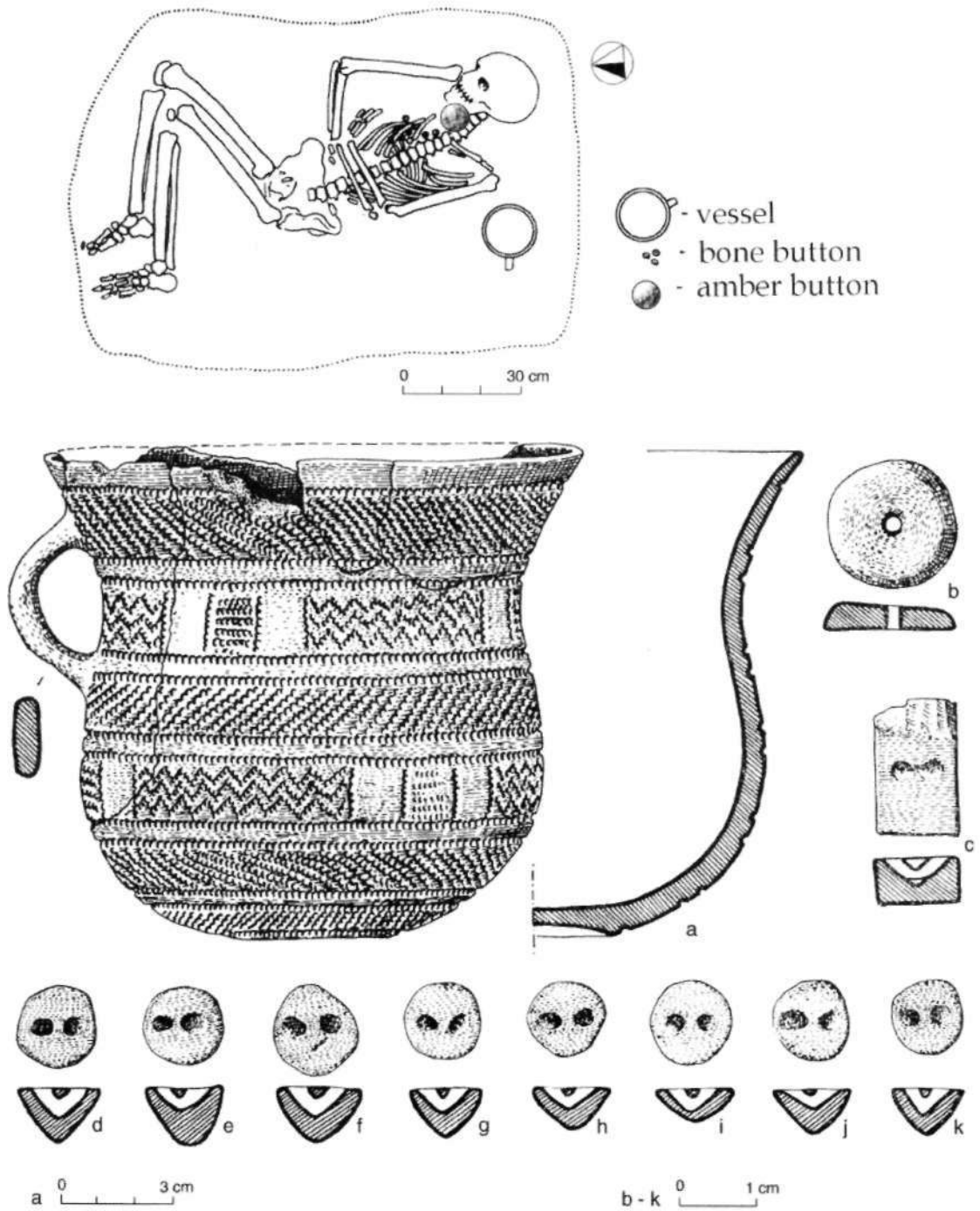
Pl. 1. Some Globular Amphora traits in Yamnaya Culture graves. A. *Orhei* (foll. Manzuraje et al. 1992); B. *Corpaci* (foll. Yarovoi 1984); C. *Orhei* (foll. Yarovoi 1985)



l. 2. Typology of amber buttons with V-shaped perforation in the Middle Neolithic production center in Latvia (foll. Loze 1999)



Pl. 3. A Globular Amphora Culture grave from Jajkowo site 45 (foll. Sobieraj et al. 2003);
Key: circles = amber buttons with V-shaped perforation



Pl. 4. Buttons with V-shaped perforation in a Bell Beakers grave from Strachów site 2; b-c. amber; d-k. bone (foll. Noworyta 1976).