

**‘CORD’ ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY  
IN THE VISTULA AND DNEIPEP  
INTERFLUVIAL REGION:  
5TH – 4TH MILL. BC**

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**BALTIC-PONTIC STUDIES**

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## CONTENTS

EDITORS' FOREWORD .....	5
PART 1. 'CORD' ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. INTRODUCTION TO RESEARCH ..	7
Aleksander Koško, Marzena Szmyt, 'CORDED' ORNAMENTATION ON CLAY VESSELS IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER RIVER REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. RESEARCH PROJECT AIMS .....	7
Aleksander Koško, Andrzej Sikorski, Marzena Szmyt, 'CORDED' AND 'CORD-LIKE' ORNAMENTATION IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION IN THE 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. INTRODUCTION TO INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH .....	13
Andrzej Sikorski, MORE THAN JUST 'CORDS' ON NEOLITHIC CERAMIC WARE: AN OUTLINE OF MICROSCOPIC IDENTIFICATION FOR 'CORDED ORNAMENTATION'. SOME THOUGHTS ON RESEARCH METHODS .....	49
PART 2. 'CORD' ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. GENERAL INTERPRETATIONS...	57
Aleksander Koško, Marzena Szmyt, 'CORDED' ORNAMENTATION ON CLAY VESSELS IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. AN OUTLINE OF HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXTS .....	57
Andrzej Piotr Kowalski, NEOLITHIC POTTERY ORNAMENTED WITH 'CORD' IMPRESSIONS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL – SEMIOTIC INTERPRETATION ....	64
PART 3. 'CORD' ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY IN THE VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. REGIONAL MACROSCOPIC AND MICROSCOPIC RESEARCH .....	75
Nadezhda S. Kotova, THE FIRST 'CORDED' CERAMICS ORNAMENTATION OF ENEOLITHIC STEPPE AND NEOLITHIC FOREST-STEPPE CULTURES .....	75
Natalia B. Burdo, Mykhailo Y. Videiko, 'CORD'-ORNAMENTED POTTERY OF THE TRYPILLIA CULTURE. A MACRO ANALYSIS .....	110
Natalia B. Burdo, Nadezhda S. Kotova, Mykhailo Y. Videiko, TECHNOLOGICAL STUDY OF 'CORD' IMPRESSIONS ON MIDDLE AND LATE ENEOLITHIC POTTERY IN UKRAINE .....	122

Sławomir Kadrow, Piotr Olejarczyk, 'CORD' ORNAMENTS ON FUNNEL BEAKER CULTURE POTTERY AT TOMINY, SITE 12 .....	135
Aleksander Koško, Marzena Szmyt, 'CORD' AND 'CORD-LIKE' ORNAMENTS ON THE POTTERY OF FUNNEL BEAKER CULTURE SOCIETIES ON THE POLISH LOWLANDS IN THE 4TH MILLENNIUM BC ....	146
CONCLUSION .....	153
Aleksander Koško, Marzena Szmyt, 'CORD' ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY IN THE VISTULA AND DNEIPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION: 5TH – 4TH MILL. BC. RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS .....	153
References .....	156
List of Authors .....	171

## Editor's Foreword

The issues outlined in the above volume of *Baltic-Pontic Studies* (BPS) presented here, can be said to generate several important and complex questions among which, one relating to the topogenesis of 'corded' ornamentation on the bio-cultural borderlands of east and west Europe, gave birth to an innovative research project. In this respect, specialist researchers of the Pontic-Baltic Eneolithic (from Middle and Late Neolithic contexts) chose 45 vessels (mostly fragments) originating from the Dnieper-Southern Bug drainage area and Vistula, dated to the 5th - 4th/3rd mill. BC for the purposes of microscopic analyses conducted with the aim of identifying 'corded' patterns of ornamentation. These laboratory tests were led by an archaeologist specialising in microscopic analysis to identify interdisciplinary, pre-historic and archaic techniques in the textile crafts.

The implications of the above tests would seem to warrant a manifold approach to possible conclusions on the basis of specialist (microscopic) criteria of differentiated - previously identified as macroscopic - in general terms as 'corded' motifs of ceramic ware ornamentation (part 1). This also concerns an outline of investigation drawn from hermeneutics, prompted by various contexts such as historical and cultural assessment of bio-cultural communities and related findings as well as attempts to generate a coherent framework of linguistic and cultural research for 'corded ornamentation on ceramic ware' (part 2).

In discussing further the 'main issues' presented in this publication of BPS 15 in respect to the hand manufacture of ceramic ware of the Vistula and Dnieper interfluvial region and its peoples, a modus operandi of investigation in the context of region has been proposed whereby researchers of this particular project have been given a free hand, as it were, in respect to the degree and forms of application in microscopic analyses and their findings. A series of commentaries has therefore arisen, from various points of view in so far as reflections on research conducted - possible future strategies for vital questions in this matter that are yet to be answered (part 3).

It is assumed therefore that this volume has in some measure initiated a process of the highest consequence, one introducing a new level of off-site investigation into the genesis of corded ornamentation development, which deserves to be supported in addition through a personal engagement in this research field.

## Editorial comment

1. All dates in the B-PS are calibrated [BC; see: Radiocarbon vol. 28, 1986, and the next volumes]. Deviations from this rule will be point out in notes [bc].
2. The names of the archaeological cultures and sites are standarized to the English literature on the subject (e.g. M. Gimbutas, J.P. Mallory). In the case of a new term, the author's original name has been retained.
3. The spelling of names of localities having the rank of administrative centres follows official, state, English language cartographic publications (e.g. *Ukraine, scale 1 : 2 000 000*, Kiev: Mapa LTD, edition of 1996; *Rèspublika BELARUS', REVIEW-TOPOGRAPHIC MAP*, scale 1:1 000 000, Minsk: *BYELORUSSIAN CARTOGRAPHIC AN GEODETIC ENTERPISE*, edition 1993).

**Aleksander Koško, Marzena Szmyt**

**‘CORD’ ORNAMENTS ON POTTERY IN THE  
VISTULA AND DNIEPER INTERFLUVIAL REGION:  
5TH – 4TH MILL. BC.  
RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS**

The articles presented in this volume of *Baltic-Pontic Studies* document the realisation of a research project devoted to the issues surrounding the autogenesis of ‘corded’ ornamentation on ceramic ware from the middle of the 5th to the turn of the 3rd mill. BC as applied by the peoples of the Vistula and Dnieper interfluvial region. In this context, research was focused on the oldest stage of corded ceramic ware crafts (*archaeo-cords*) dated to the 5th and 4th mill. BC, with the aim of testing so called traditional macroscopic data. Thus, the creation of an integrated interdisciplinary base of research fields in respect to ‘corded’ ornamentation’ was envisaged whereby these crafts could be viewed not so much as important for archaeological taxonomy but rather, as a source of knowledge bordering on archaeo-technology (mainly in the hand manufacture of ceramics and textiles, as well as the use of animal and plant fibres) and a given culture’s cognitive matrix of symbols (mainly the semiotics of ornamentation).

The overall research aim therefore became the question of identifying possibilities of loosening the ‘taxonomic corset’ in archaeological readings of ‘corded’ ornamentation’ and reaching beyond, as well as putting a new research methodology to the test that would be based on specialist research into prehistoric and archaic textile crafts. As a result, multi-directional analyses were conducted, in which the most ground-breaking results were gained under microscopic observation. The research covered 45 fragments of ceramics, including intact vessels where macroscopic analysis (with the naked eye) showed ‘cord’ impressions.

One particularly inspiring newly found dimension in research findings is the conclusion that in the above mentioned tests of ceramic ware, apart from ‘corded’ ornamentation in its various patterns, a wide array of textiles was also used.

Most often, the sides of clay vessels were impressed with a 'simple' technique, practically not requiring any additional tools or non-weave applications. The most frequent such applications were as follows: needlework 14, plaiting 12, plaiting/needlework 5, netting 5 and much less often, macramé 1 and fringes 1. Cords that were impressed (11 in total) testify to the relative popularity of these negatives as well – which at times served as a complementary ornament. In several instances basket-like impressions were identified (cross-ribbed plaiting), though no material imprints were recorded.

The consequences of the research conducted were, in the first instance such that a general mortification befell all concerned. It transpired that that the 'corded ornamentation' that to date had been widely recognised (the 'ABC' of archaeology) as standard, had in fact now revealed a complex system of complex techniques and applications. There is therefore, no certainty that in future research, further means of ornamenting ceramic ware, previously unrecognised, will not be found.

The research results gained are, in our opinion, a very good basis for looking afresh at both research findings and their interpretation. At the same time, new insights in this context lend themselves to raising further questions and establishing new research aims. Moreover, venturing into the field of specialist laboratory analysis (microscopic) in addition to present research methodologies can be said to 'supersede' several so called traditionally held views that are based solely on macroscopic analysis, thus forcing a revision of important methodological approaches. One illustration, a priori, of the above state of research, remains the necessity of limiting the research scope in arguing for the 'role of corded ornamentation' ('corded' and 'cord-like') in a taxonomic outline of prehistory. The field of specialist 'corded' research also creates a rather exciting prospect of viewing the process of cultural growth in terms of the techniques and means of application in respect to the textile crafts.

Further, the weaknesses of such arguments can be said to be evident, especially when considering the limitations of conducting specialist investigations. Nonetheless it is our view that all difficulties notwithstanding, such laboratory tests are essential and initial steps need to be taken so they are commonly accepted as a necessary research tool.

The resulting research and its implications would suggest that in planning further projects of this nature, greater attention needs to be paid to the principles of creating a series of diagnostic findings. In this regard a preference for complete vessels is necessary, thus creating the possibility of conducting a relatively full analysis (systemic) of pottery techniques and applications, as well as textile ornaments that may demonstrate the variety of domestic and ritual applications.

The main field, it could be said, of the above research that might bear fruit in the future, ought to be, however, one of culture studies that are focused on a hermeneutic, interdisciplinary means of identifying the cultural codes of pre-

historic communities and expressions of their view of the world. In this light, recent research and its findings [Kowalski. . . , in this volume] provide a new, exciting 'starting point' for the above in terms of prehistoric archaeological cultures understood afresh.

*Translated by Ryszard J. Reisner*

## ABBREVIATIONS

- AP URSS – Arkheologiczni pamiatky Ukrainskoyi Radianskoyi Sotsialisticheskoi Respubliki. Kiev.
- BPS – Baltic-Pontic Studies. Poznań.
- KSIA – Kratkiye Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii. Moskva.
- KSIA AN USSR – Kratkiye Soobshcheniya Instituta Arkheologii Akademiyi Nauk Ukrainskoy Sovetskoy Sotsialisticheskoy Respubliki. Kiev.
- MIA – Materialy i Issledovaniya po Arkheologii USSR. Moskva. Leningrad.
- SA – Sovetskaya Arkheologiya. Moskva.

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