

# **HISTORIA FENNO-UGRICA I:1**

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## **ON THE HISTORY OF THE RITUAL CERAMICS OF THE MIDDLE KAMA RIVER (MATERIAL FROM THE EARLY MIDDLE AGES, 3rd–5th CENTURIES A. D.)**

The most important trend in archaeology is the technical reconstruction of ancient industries. Ceramic material found at settlement sites is usually used to study pottery making, although pottery is also found in burial complexes at necropolises in the region of the Kama River.

A ritual vessel is in effect an element in a burial rite, the location of which together with other finds carries somewhat magical connotations<sup>1</sup>. It is very difficult to define the functional usage of a vessel properly, however. Was it used by the dead man while he was alive, or was it made especially for the burial rite, i.e. was it looked on as endowed with special properties? A very important consideration in the making of ritual vessels was the idea that the ancient population had about life after death. Sometimes there are fragments of broken vessels to be found in graves, as confirmed by microscopic sections of the fractures in pots. In V. N. Belitser's opinion "The use of items in rudimentary funeral or burial customs which are intended to be broken afterwards is well preserved among the Komi people up to the present. That is, if the vessel was used to bathe the corpse it would be broken afterwards by any means available"<sup>2</sup>. The ritual breakage of vessels in burial rites may well be connected with the transmission of the person from terrestrial life to the beginning of life after death. The pottery used in burials has a specific character, with no clear traces of use. Sometimes pottery may be part of a sacrificial complex found at a burial site<sup>3</sup> and may have been placed usually at the head, or less frequently at the feet. Differences in the preservation of anthropological material in the necropolises studied make it difficult to speak of any connection between the sex of the dead person and the vessel placed in the grave, but on the whole vessels prevail in female burials and are less often found in children's graves, although they are sometimes present in male burials, too. Research into ritual vessels with the intention of providing a broader picture of the spiritual life of the society can increase our knowledge of standards of pottery making in general.

It should be noted that the history of the Middle Kama River tribes in the Early Iron Age involves a number of archaeological cultures. The Middle Kama and the lower reaches, together with the tributaries, including the confluence of the Belaya River were occupied by the Pyanobor ethnic community (with two variants, the Chegandin and the Karabuz), while the Upper and Middle Kama areas were originally divided between the Chegandin tribes of the Pyanobor community and the Osinsk variants of the Glyadenovo culture. A rich archaeological material of necropolises dating from the middle of the first millennium A. D. has now accumulated, and these necropolises are situated in the region of the above variants. The burial complexes have mainly been used for the construction of chronological scales and the solution of questions regarding ethnocultural plans,

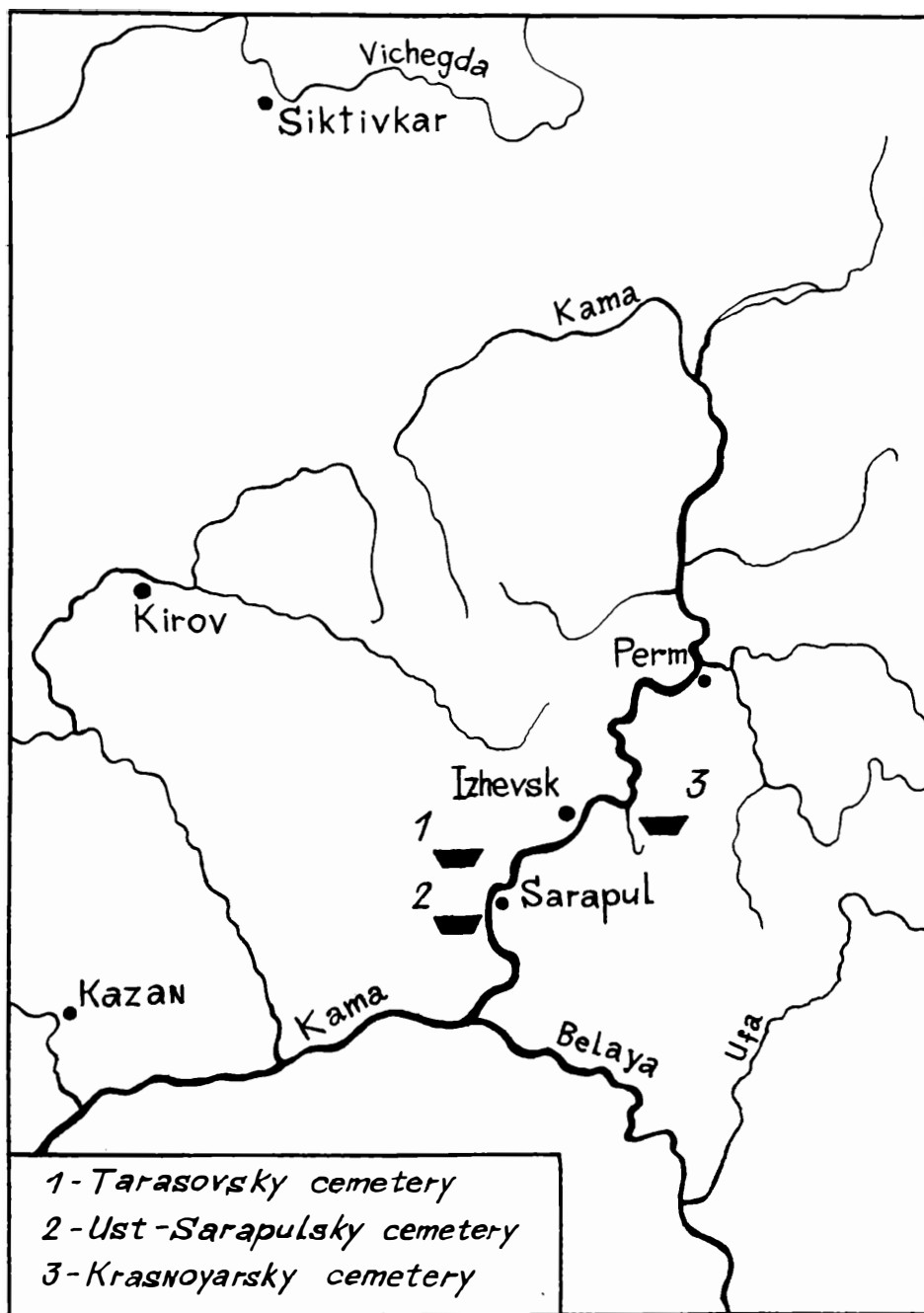


Fig. 1. Map showing the locations of the burial grounds from the 3rd-5th centuries A. D. in the Kama River region.

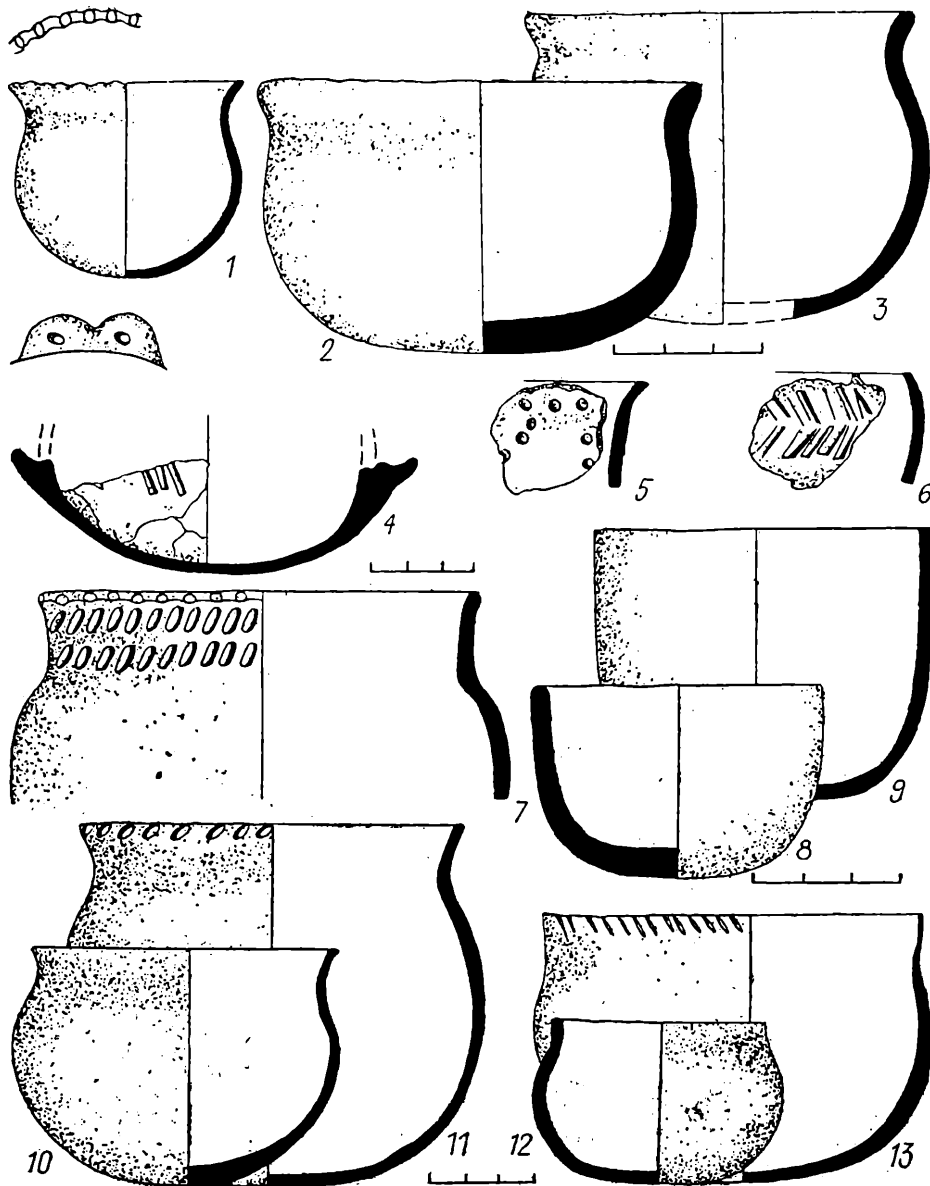


Fig. 2. Ceramics from the Ust-Sarapul burial site.

but the vessels found in their graves have not received the attention due to them at either the descriptive and or the morphological level<sup>4</sup>. It is known, that the ethnic picture of the Early Middle Ages on the Kama River is well reflected in the pottery of the region, and some technical aspects have been taken into account (e. g. the composition of the clay), but this was done by eye. No special work has been done to study ritual vessels from graves on the Middle Kama.

The objects of investigation here are ceramics from burial complexes in Early Medieval cemeteries in the Middle Kama region: Tarasov (31 vessels from 1780 graves), Ust-Sarapul (12 from 109 graves) and Krasnoyarsk (20 from 144 graves). 63 sample pots found in the bed containing the graves were analysed technically with respect to two aspects: the ancient potters' knowledge of their material and the clay substances available. It is the set of "adaptational" working habits involved in pottery which quickly respond to the mixing of different groups of people, due to the contact method by which the craft of potting is transmitted. The firing temperature of the ancient pottery was determined by an experimental method in individual cases.

The ritual vessels were examined by a binocular microscopy method devised by Prof. A. A. Bobrinski<sup>5</sup>. The investigation began with an analysis of the vessels from the point of view of their status as concrete examples of the art of pottery making, an evaluation which leads, in Bobrinski's opinion, to a statement of the general historical and culture-specific aspects of their production and to appropriate means of analysis. A technological description was first produced of the potsherds at each necropolis, and then those of each culture. Thus the vessels from the Tarasov and Ust-Sarapul cemeteries, belonging to Pyanobor culture, were compared with those from the Krasnoyarsk necropolis, representing the Glyadenovo culture, these having a common genetic basis, the Ananinsk culture.

The results of the technical analyses led to the identification of the following general traits:

1. The ceramics were made without a potter's wheel.
2. The raw materials were fusible iron clays, natural river sand and brown oolitic ironstone.
3. Traces of the crushing of clay in a dry condition are found in the methods of handling the clay.
4. The most general formula for making up the potting clay is the old tradition of adding potting waste (grog) and bird dung to it.
5. The ancient potters' knowledge of clay may be defined on the level of its recognition as the main raw material.
6. The pots were probably fired over an open bonfire or in a hearth, giving firing temperatures of 450–470 °C.
7. The level of pottery making may be defined as proto-pottery (clay content of the potsherds no more than approx. 50 %).

Some other features should be noted in addition to these general traits. Here are a few concrete examples. Ceramic artefacts at the Krasnoyarsk cemetery were

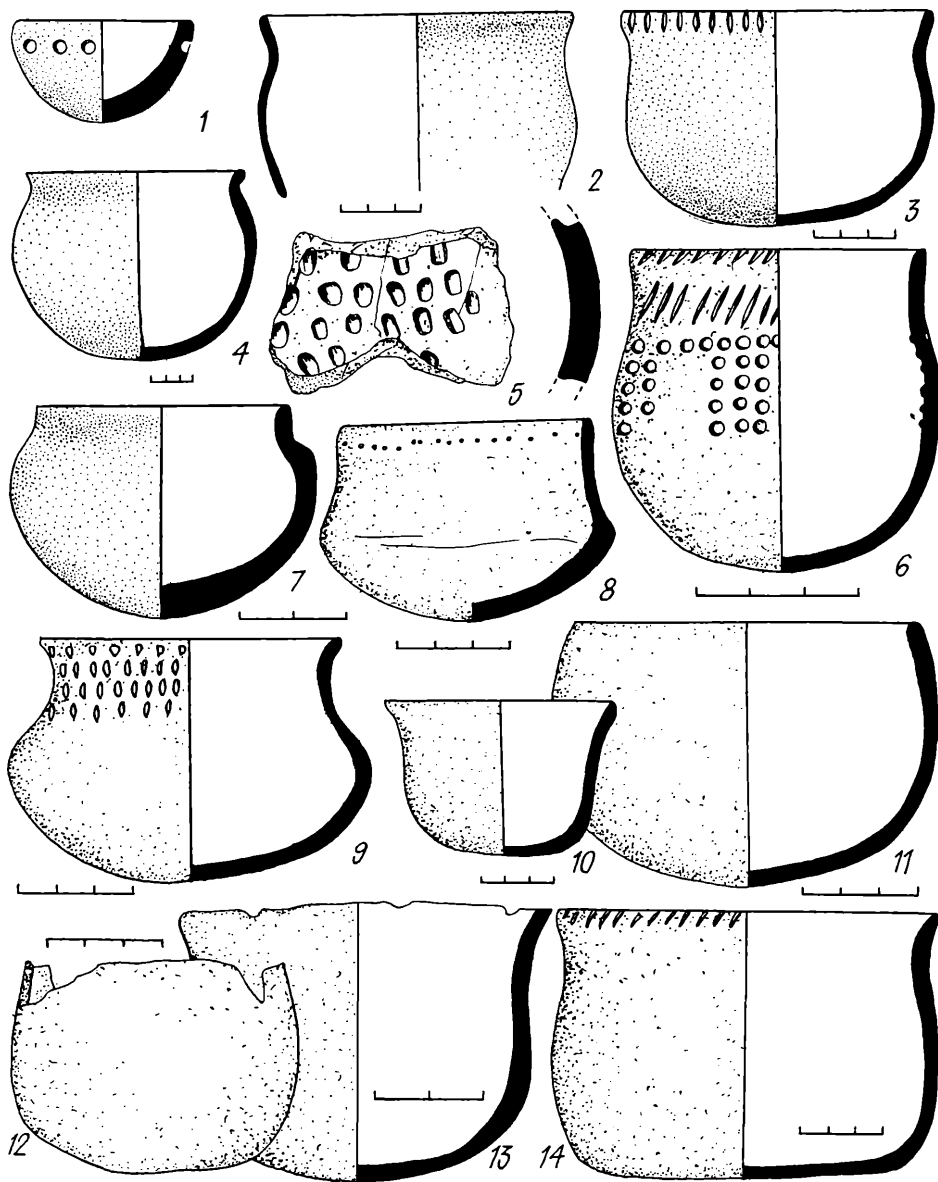


Fig. 3. Ceramics from the Tarasov burial site.

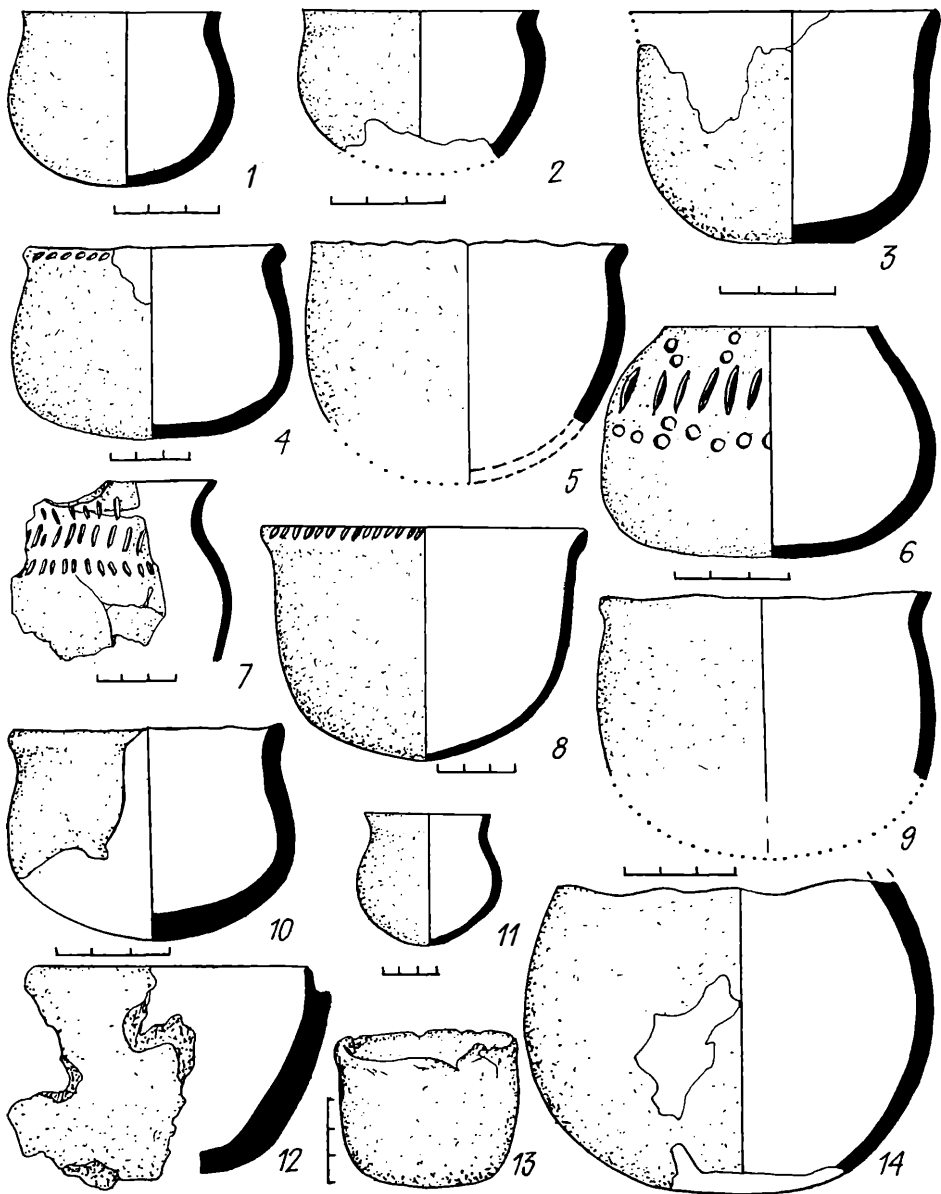


Fig. 4. Ceramics from the Tarasov burial site.

found to include cases of two mixed clays of differing texture, one with iron and one without points to the adaptation of newly arrived potters to local traditions. In one instance a sample contains a riverside silt, suggesting the use of a new desopit (silt) for making pottery and a widening of the traditional knowledge of the potters to include sources of this material. There was one deposit of silt at the locality concerned, but the composition of the potting clay turns out to be different. This confirms the fact that the people were probably not homogeneous in their cultural background. In addition, the traditional compositions of the clay include complicated formulae in some samples from the Krasnoyarsk site, among them an interesting combination: "clay+grog-3+dung (small animals) + organic (unstated origin)". This formulae is absent from among the vessels from the Tarasov and Ust-Sarapul sites. Since the composition of the clay is considered a "culture-specific trait", it is probably possible to connect this pottery tradition with the local (Glyadenovo) people. Simple formulae of the type "clay+shell" may be deduced from the ceramics of the Ust-Sarapul and Krasnoyarsk sites, as also from investigations into the involvement of the ancient people in river trade. Natural factors will have influenced the technical tradition, of course. Shells are encountered everywhere on the banks of the Kama River and its tributaries, and the incorporation of shell material in the clay gives it high technical properties (contributing to the strength of the pots). Also, it appears with wide chronological limits in the Kama region and is of a general character, so that it is difficult to regard it as a cultural indicator. Finally some specific details may be pointed out about the clay used for the pottery found at the Ust-Sarapul site. Setting out from the two simple formulae "clay+bird dung" and "clay+shells without molluscs", we find that each of these is used with grog as an additional ingredient ("clay+bird dung+grog", "clay+shells without molluscs+grog"). This probably points to contacts with the users bearers of pottery in which grog was always added to the mixture. Ritual vessels, like the pottery found at dwelling sites, contain a well of information about the adaptability of the working habits of ancient potters.

The results obtained from the technical analyses of this category of ceramics not only help us to resolve questions concerned with standards of pottery making and the traditions and habits of the carftsmen but also add to our ethnic picture of the people of the Middle Kama region in the Early Middle Ages. First of all, it helps us to learn about culture-specific Krasnoyarsk necropolis, which is situated in a "contact zone" between the Glyadenovo and Pyanobor archaeological cultures. This cemetery was undoubtedly left by a local people, the Glyadenovo culture, but they had been influence to some extent by their southern neighbours, the Chegandin variant of the Pyanobor community.

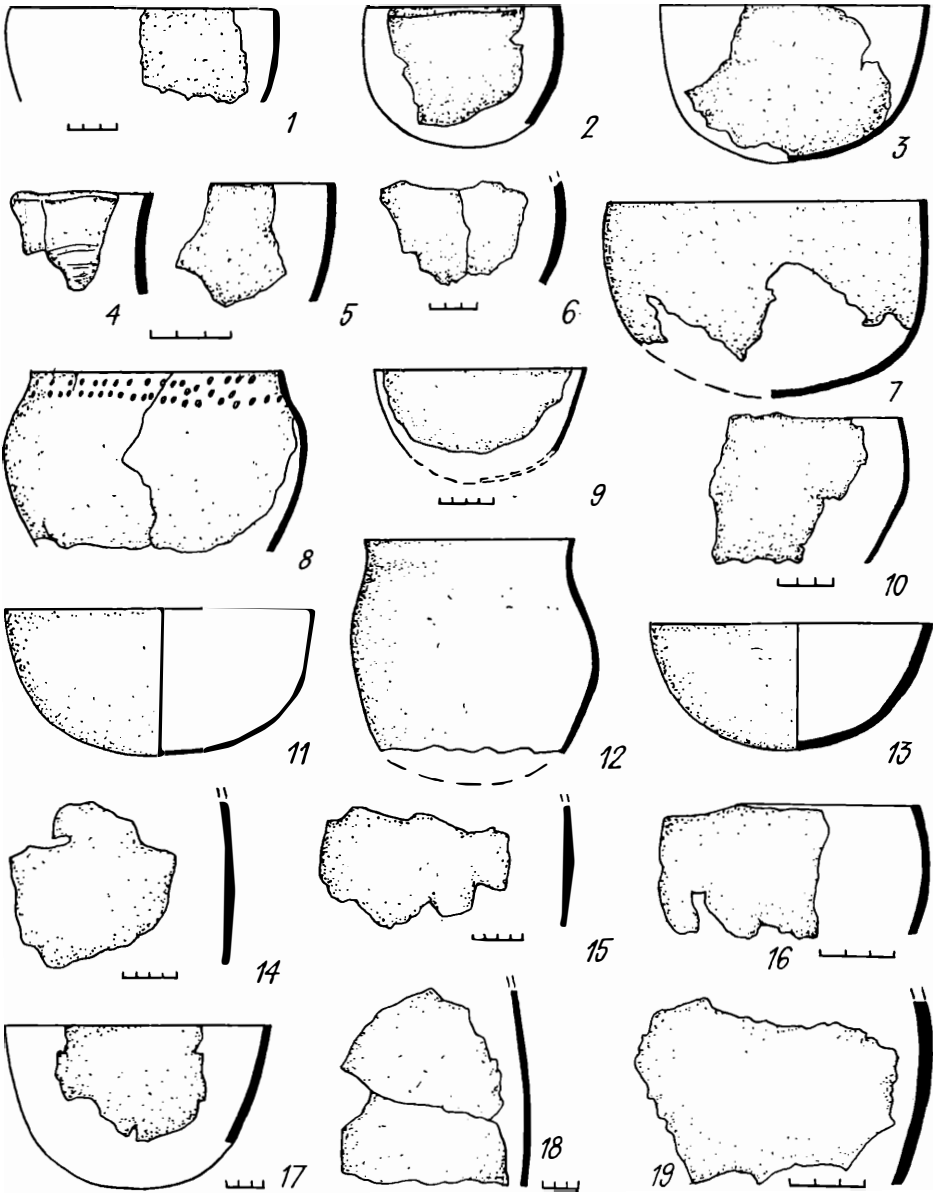


Fig. 5. Ceramics from the Krasnoyarsk burial site.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> U. Brei, D. Tramp, *Arkheologicheski slovar* (Moscow 1990), p. 211.
- <sup>2</sup> V. N. Belitser, *Ocherki po etnografii narodov Komi* (TIE. Novaya seria. T. 45 Moscow 1958), p. 329.
- <sup>3</sup> O. V. Armatynskaya, *Zhertvennye komplekсы v pogrebalnykh pamyatnikakh Udmurtskovo Prikamya II-v vv. n. e.* (Novye arkheologicheskie issledovania na territorii Urala. Izhevsk 1987), pp. 69-75.
- <sup>4</sup> O. V. Armatynskaya, *Ust-Sarapulski mogilnik (priuralie v drevnosti i srednie veka.* Ustinov 1986), pp. 26-46; O. A. Kazantseva, *Krasnoyarski mogilnik (novye arkheologicheskie pamyatniki Kamsko-Vjatskovo mezhdurecha.* Izhevsk 1988), pp. 43-65.
- <sup>5</sup> A. A. Bobrinski, *Goncharstvo Vostochnoi Evropy* (Moscow 1978), p. 272.

## Tiivistelmä

O. A. Kazantseva

### **Keski-Kamalla asuneiden heimojen rituaaliastioiden valmistuksesta (III-V vuosisadoilla) varhaiskeskiaikaisten kalmistolöytöjen perusteella**

Keski-Kaman alueen väestön arkeologisesta historiasta tunnetaan muutamia kulttuureja. Tieteellisessä mielessä alueen erikoisuus on sen asema kahden kulttuurin eli tsegandilaisen ("pjanobrilaisen") ja osinilaisen ("gladenovilaisen") kulttuurin kosketusvyöhykkeessä. Alueella on hauta-alueita, joista on runsaasti arkeologista materiaalia. Näitä kalmistolöytöjä on käytetty pääasiassa ajoitusjärjestelmän luomiseksi ja kulttuuri-etnillisten ongelmien ratkaisemiseksi. Hautauksissa käytetty keramiikka ei ole tutkimuksen pääkohde vaikka, kuten tunnettua, kuvastuu Kaman alueen etninen varhaismenneisyys selkeästi juuri keramiikassa.

Tässä artikkelissa tarkastellaan ensi kerran keramiikkaa hautaus-seremonioihin kuuluvana osana. Keramiikan sijoittelu uhrilahjojen joukkoon puhuu sen puolesta, että ne omasivat mahdollisesti maagista merkitystä. Keramiikka viestii näin ollen niin hengellisestä elämästä, kuin käsityötaidon tasostakin. Tutkimuskohteena ovat olleet juuri Kaman valuma-alueen kalmistoista löytyneet astiat. Tutkimustyössä on käytetty prof. A. A. Bobrinskin kehittelemän stereomikroskopian menetelmiä ja näin on päädytty kyseessä oleviin johtopäätöksiin muinaisten savenvalajien traditioista.