

# THE PROLIFERATION OF CORD ORNAMENTATION DURING THE ENEOLITHIC AND THE BRONZE AGE

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The following paper discusses the evidence about the cord imprints coming from Ukraine that chronologically spans from the mid-5<sup>th</sup> Millenia BC till the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> Millenia BC. Cord ornamentation of such cultures as Srednyi Stog, Dereivka, Usatovo, Late Trypillia, Globular Amphora, Pit-Grave and Catacomb will be described, categorized, and compared.

**Keywords:** *Cord ornamentation, Late Trypillia, Pit-Grave culture, Catacomb culture.*

## Introduction

One of the most characteristic pottery decoration technics existing during the Eneolithic and Bronze age is the so-called cord-marks. Cord imprints are often described as an essential feature of the Indo-European cultural complex and the spread of cord imprints is often associated with the migration of Indo-Europeans at the beginning of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millenia BC.

In the following paper, the evidence about the cord imprints coming from Ukraine will be discussed. Chronologically discussed evidence spawns from the mid-5<sup>th</sup> Millenia BC till the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Millenia BC. Cord ornamentation of such cultures as Srednyi Stog, Dereivka, Usatovo, Late Trypillia, Globular Amphora, Pit-Grave and Catacomb will be described, categorized, and compared.

## Materials and Methods

The primal materials for the current research were the pottery drawings and photographs belonging to the cultures that inhabited the territory between Dnieper and Carpathian Mountains during the mid-5<sup>th</sup> – mid-3<sup>rd</sup> Millenia BC. More than 1000 drawings and photos were investigated from which the ones decorated with the cord imprints were selected. Srednyi Stog, Dereivka, Usatovo and Late Trypillia cultures are represented mainly by sherds gathered during the excavation of the settlement sites while Globular Amphora, Pit-Grave and Catacomb cultures are represented by the complete vessels found in burials. Such inconsistency in data origin

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puts a certain limitation on the dataset comparison results. While the cultural layer of a settlement is a result of artefacts' natural deposition process, the burial monuments is an artificial construction. A sample of 1000 drawings and photos is representative as it includes data about almost every pot available from the publications. While performing the research voluminous catalogues of pottery as well as minor publications were used. The complete collection of Globular Amphora culture pottery was published by Sveshnikov (1983). Numerous Pit-Grave culture pottery drawings were published by Shaposhnikova, Fomenko and Dovzhenko (1986), Samoilenko (1988), Melnyk and Steblina (2013), Chernykh and Daragan (2014). Data about Catacomb culture pottery was taken from Kovaleva (1983), Bratchenko (2001), Kaiser (2003), Melnyk and Steblina (2013), Chernykh and Daragan (2014).

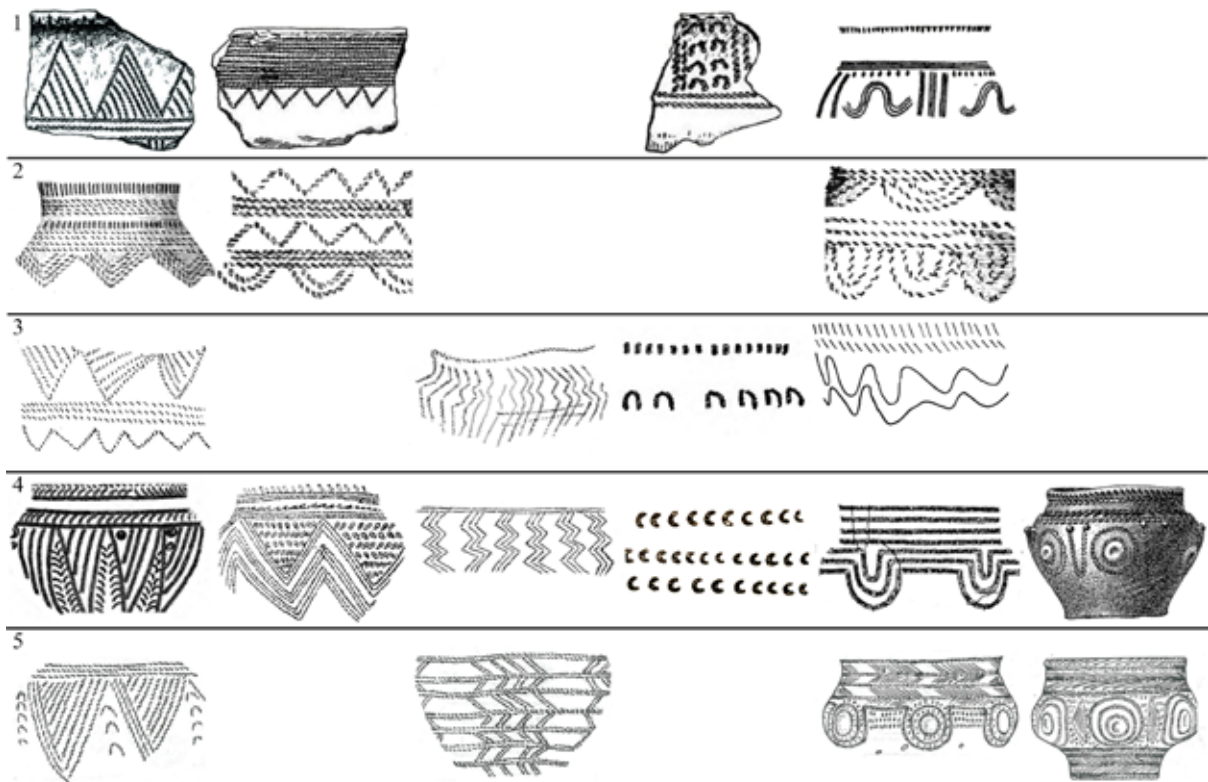
The main method of the research was the macroanalysis of the cord imprints.

## Results

As was noted by N. Kotova, corded ornamentation was observed for the first time in the steppe area on the Sredniy Stog culture pottery of the early Eneolithic Age. It is represented by the coiled cord imprints performed with the string wrapped around some basis – another string of stick. Pottery sherds decorated with the imprints of coiled cord come from such sites as the upper layer of Semenovka 1, the lower horizon of the fifth layer of the Razdorskoe 1 settlement, and grave 15 of the Igren burial site. Mentioned monuments date back to 4800-4350/4300 BC (Kotova, 2010, p. 76).

Nowadays it is hard to identify, with a high degree of certainty, the first culture whose population started using 'classic' cord imprints for decorating their ceramics. Apparently, the most plausible hypothesis is that the first corded ornamentation was produced by the population of the TC. The earliest and single corded ornament currently known is the one on kitchenware ceramics from Veselyi Kut settlement (Trypillia B I-II, information by O. Tsvek) (Kotova, 2010, p. 109).

A major transformation of the corded ornamentation happened at the end of the Eneolithic (the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> Millennium BC). Proliferation, as well as a variety of technics and ornamental compositions, increased. Corded ornamentation becomes highly popular in the Usatovo culture. According to V. Zbenovich, up to 87 % of Usatovo kitchen pottery sherds were decorated with cord imprints (Zbenovich, 1974, p. 88). Ornamental compositions are triangles, zigzags, horizontal lines, net, curved lines etc. A characteristic feature of Usatovo pottery is the moon-shaped cord imprints (Fig. 1, 1).



**Fig. 1.** Comparison of cord ornamental compositions

1 – Usatovo culture; 2 – Globular amphora culture; 3 – Pit-grave culture;  
4 – Ingul Catacomb culture; 5 – Donetsk catacomb culture

A certain number of sherds decorated with a classic cord was found on Trypillia CII settlement Sandraki of Vinnytsia region (Sandraki 2004). Imprints of coiled and classic cord were observed of pottery from Trypillia CII settlement Vilkhovets of Cherkasy region. The author of the excavation supposes that the tradition of corded decoration was adopted by Trypillia people from their neighbours – inhabitants of the Moliukhov Buhor settlement (Videiko 2020, p. 75). A collection of painted and decorated with cord pottery sherds was gathered at the island Hrushevskiyi in the Mykolaiv region (Lahodovska, 1953, p. 102). An outstanding black polished vessel decorated with cord imprints and covered with red paint was found in the burial of Serezliivka type near the village Vilshanka in the Kirovohrad region (Lahodovska, 1953, p. 104).

From local feature to global trend corded ornamentation converts during the Early Bronze age. One of the communities responsible for the expansion of the corded decoration was the Pit-Grave culture. From 443 vessels considered 87 were decorated with the classic cord imprints which make 19,6 % and only 4 pieces were decorated with coiled cord imprints. The most common ornamental composition of Pit-Grave culture is the

belt of triangles which encircles the vessels body. If to look at the pot from the top, mentioned compositions remind the depiction of the sun with the triangles being the sun's rays. A similar solar composition was documented on the interior surface of the Pit-Grave culture bowl found in the grave Zelenyi Hai 5/9 excavated in the vicinity of Kryvyi Rih (Melnyk and Steblina, 2013, rys. 29, 11). The other ornamental compositions are zigzags, loops, horizontal and oblique lines (Fig. 1, 3).

A different approach for use of cord imprints in decoration can be observed on the vessels of the Globular Amphora culture. Globular Amphora culture's potters used cord ornamentation less frequent than potters of Pit-Grave culture. From 160 Globular Amphora vessels published by I. Shveshnikov (1983), only 12 were decorated with a cord which makes 7,5 %. Instead of a triangle, the most common ornamental element is a loop. The other elements, such as horizontal lines and zigzags can be observed as well (Fig. 1, 2).

Although corded ornamentation was known for quite a long time it flourished only during the 26<sup>th</sup>–22<sup>nd</sup> centuries BC when it was adopted by craftsmen of Ingul and Donetsk catacomb cultures, who were unusually creative in terms of inventing new ornamentation patterns. In addition to such well-known from previous epoch elements as a triangle, zigzag and horizontal line new elements appear. They include concentric circles, festoons, different types of curved waves and others. The tradition of coiled cord imprints, which was forgotten during Pit-Grave culture time, is renewed. However, cord decoration is used less frequently than during Pit-Grave culture time. From 325 examined vessels of Ingul catacomb culture, it was documented on 45 of them which makes 14 %. Ornament becomes lush and covers a greater part of the vessel's body. Ornamental compositions are more complex and consist of multiple elements. Although those elements display similarity each of them is performed in their own unique way (Fig. 1, 4–5).

## Discussion

As follows from the provided above facts the first-ever documented cord ornamentation is represented by the imprints of the coiled cord. It was observed on the pottery of pastoral communities that inhabited the steppe area during mid-5<sup>th</sup> – mid-4<sup>th</sup> Millenia BC.

The origin of the classic cord ornamentation is more problematic. It was believed for a long time that it was invented by steppe potters as well. However, according to the oral testimony delivered by O. Tsvek classic cord was observed on kitchenware ceramics from the Trypillia B I-II



Veselyi Kut settlement which suggests that classic cord was used by the agricultural societies of the forest-steppe zone before it was implemented by the pastoral communities of the steppe zone. The distribution of cord decoration during the Late Eneolithic/Trypillia CII period supports such a hypothesis. During the last quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> Millenia BC, cord ornamentation is frequently observed on the Late Trypilia pottery while the pottery found in the steppe zone demonstrates little traces of cord. Probably, it is Trypillian craftsmen who developed new schemes of cord decoration and passed them to the next generation of East European cultures, namely Pit-Grave and Globular Amphora culture.

The ornamental tradition of Pit-Grave culture and the forthcoming Catacomb culture appears to be different which proves the foreign origin of Catacomb culture.

While observing the variety of corded ornamentation it can be noticed that certain elements such as triangles and zigzags are repeated by different cultures throughout vast chronological and spatial distance. Nevertheless, such evidence is not attested to be reliable evidence of the genetic relationship between cultures. It is more likely that those basic ornamental elements were invented independently by different people.



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