CLAY STAMPS FOR POTTERY DECORATION FROM THE EARLY IRON AGE IN THRACE

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(S u m m a r y)

The stamped decoration is typical for the Thracian pottery of the Early Iron Age, with its specific geometric style. The exclusive variety of the stamped motives is due to the complicated combinations of the ornaments, and to the various stamps, used for decorating, every one of which is unique. Usually these stamps were made of clay. Although the vessels with stamped ornaments are widespread, the stamps for decorating are known from few sites only. Most of them are from South-Eastern Bulgaria, where the stamped pottery is the most frequently discovered. Such stamps are found in 14 sites — mostly from Rhodopes and Sakar mountains.

The statistical analysis shows that the most frequently used stamped ornaments are three: circles, pseudo cord and S-like motives. There are several bigger ornaments, used mainly for decorating pithoi, conventionally called "wide stamps". Other forms are the 2-like motif, rhombus, half-moon, angles and squares. The producing of stamps did not require special conditions or abilities. Their pure utilitarian function defined their simple form. They could be divided in two groups — stamps for one and for two ornaments. In some cases other objects and materials have been used as well — bones, feathers, shells etc.

The pottery decoration with stamps followed specific rules. After the statistical analysis, several defined trends concerning the choice of motives, combinations and organization of the decoration, are found out. The same basic ornaments form impressing variety of combinations. At the same time, on wide territory could be discovered a stable compositional design for the vessels of each category. The pottery decoration from the Early Iron Age in Thrace follows a common style, characterized with its strict geometrical aesthetics, symmetry, and rhythmical repeating details. It expressed the abstract reflection of the reality, where the ornaments and motives were bearing information and constant formulas with encoded semiotic symbols.