
Techniques and ideas. Context of use of the zigzag motif in Zamostje 2 (Upper Volga region)

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Abstract

Decorated bone tools and stone pebbles, sculptured whole forms or parts of objects, sometimes resembling zoomorphic creatures, are, from our point of view, manifestations of the Mesolithic art. They took their place in the ideological (cult) and everyday life of the ancient population, the line between them is not always possible to draw. Meaning of the symbols used almost always eludes us. Therefore, we will try to correlate one of the ornamental motifs with the context of its use and a set of technical skills and tools necessary for its implementation.

For the Late Mesolithic settlement Zamostje 2 (Upper Volga, 7th mil. BC), the zigzag motif is the most common. It is associated with different categories of bone implements, to a lesser extent with engraved stone pebbles, as well as with some wooden figurines. The manufacturing of zigzag lines in some cases (types) was characterized by a clear sequence of operations (chaînes opératoires). Some types of zigzag images (in particular, double) are repeated in a strictly defined position. It seems that the meaning of the zigzag on objects with a piercing and penetrating function may be related to the concept of a snake.

For clarification of these statements and hypotheses we consider the types of zigzag, the methods of its manufacturing, the possible working tools basing on the data of experimental, use-wear and technological analysis as well as a three-dimensional visualization experience. Despite the advanced technology of artefact decoration from the Mesolithic population of the Upper Volga region and favorable conditions for preservation of organic materials in many Mesolithic and Early Neolithic settlements, the motif of zigzag seems to be a characteristic feature of Zamostje 2 site only, which may reflect its cultural or ethnic identity. In turn, some other motives find parallels in the materials of Northern and Central Europe.

Keywords: Late Mesolithic, Upper Volga region, bone tools, Mesolithic art, ornamental motives, techniques, thematic and cultural context

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