
Cultural and food choices of ancient communities of the 6th mill BC in the forest zone of Eastern Europe (based on Upper Volga culture materials)

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Résumé

The introduction of pottery as an innovation in a hunter-gatherer milieu was triggered by many factors, including cultural traditions, local economic systems, the resources of each geographical zone, and site function (fishing station, long-term settlement etc). Different archaeological cultures have been identified in the varied geographical regions of steppe, forest-steppe and forest zones of Eastern Europe, reflecting the historical reality which existed at the first occurrence of ceramics. The Upper Volga region encompasses a number of early ceramic sites dated to the 6th Millennium BC. The forest zone, with various resource-rich ecological niches, allowed for highly productive hunting, fishing and gathering, as clearly shown at the well-stratified wetland site Zamostje 2. Based on petrographic and technological macrotrace analyses, several chains of technological operational sequences can be identified. Different technological traditions in the region can be distinguished by ceramic decor and morphological groupings. However, the similarities with other ceramic complexes attest to the origins of these traditions elsewhere. It seems the process of transmission was facilitated by the elaborate river networks of the Upper Volga. In general, changes in ceramic traditions through time which seem to point to different origins within Eastern Europe, also seem to

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correspond to changes in food processed in vessels.

Lipid analysis suggests that vessels were primarily used for the storage or processing of both terrestrial and aquatic animal products. However, a particular importance, especially during the earliest occurrences of pottery, was devoted to plant products. This has also been demonstrated by SEM analysis of food crusts. Such a trend can be found on a number of sites from this region. In turn, this would suggest the existence of a cultural-alimentary tradition in the Upper Volga area and perhaps over the wider forest zone of Eastern Europe. GIS modelling of the landscape can identify how the sites form part of an ancient network through which knowledge of pottery was dispersed. Through gathering data on both pottery use and pottery manufacture techniques, we can show that cultural choices existed within ancient communities of the 6th Millennium, fulfilling their cultural, economic and household needs, including those of cuisine and taste.

Mots-Clés: hunter, gatherers, earliest pottery, pottery function, lipids analysis