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## WATERFOWL REPRESENTATIONS ON CERAMICS FROM SAKTYSH I AND VIII

### *Abstract*

The author describes recent finds of waterfowl representations on Pit-Comb ware and late Bronze Age potsherds from Saktysh sites, in the Jeikovo district of Soviet Union.

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Not far from the village of Saktysh in the Jeikovo district of the Ivanovo region, there is a unique complex of ancient settlement sites known in the archaeological literature as Saktysh I–VIII. These settlements lie close to each other on the banks of the Koika river as it exits the marsh-ridden Lake Saktysh. Since 1962 the sites have been investigated by the Upper-Volga Archaeological Expedition, under the direction of Dr. D.A. Krainov. During this period large areas were excavated and enormous quantities of artefacts retrieved at Saktysh I, II, IIa, IV, VII and VIII. The investigations included the remains of dwellings, ritual complexes, and about one hundred burials. All sites are multilayered, i.e. each had been occupied more than once. This conclusion is supported by pottery, stone and bone artefacts, primitive

works of art, and slate and amber ornaments, all which are typologically referable to different phases of the Neolithic, Bronze Age and, partly, the Early Iron Age.

In 1972 and 1978, while working at Saktysh I and VIII, the expedition found two pottery sherds depicting waterfowl. A fragment of the rim from a large semi-ovoid vessel comes from Saktysh VIII (Fig. 1). Judging by the manufacturing technique and decoration, the vessel may be ascribed to the developed stage of the Lyalovo culture, which is radiocarbon-dated at some Central Russian sites to the second half of the fourth millennium B.C. (Uncalibrated dates based on a  $5570 \pm 30$  half-life).

The pale-orange, evenly baked sherd is made of clay with admixture of fine-grained granite gravel ( $\phi$  6–8 mm). The rim is gently bevelled



Fig. 1. Pottery sherds with pictures of waterfowl from Saktysh VIII.

inwards and decorated, like the edge of the vessel mouth, with sloping comb stamps. The impressions are thin, clear and, most likely, made with a stone cliché. Below the toothed belt there is a single row of deep conical pits, made with the sharp edge of a belemnite. The pictures of waterfowl in profile occur below them. Four complete figures and the back part of a fifth are preserved. The birds were made with the same comb stamps used on the rim. The representations are schematic forming a chain with the heads directed towards the right. The body of each bird consists of three long (20 mm) horizontal imprints; a vertical one has been used to depict the neck, which is topped by a short (5 mm) imprint at an obtuse angle to denote the head. These figures are fringed below by the remains of conical peats. Unfortunately, the fragmentary state of this composition makes its reconstruction difficult.

Stylistically analogous representations have been reported on pottery from sites in the northern and northwestern part of the U.S.S.R., Karelia and Finland (Gurina 1972; Edgren 1967; Nieminen & Ruonavaara 1984). After having studied them in detail, N. N. Gurina (1972) came to the conclusion that such pictures are characteristic of this region and that they represent waterfowl. They are connected with manifestations of the Pit-comb and Comb ceramic cultures, which most Soviet archaeologists consider to be the source of the Finnish ethnics.

Sakhtysh VIII is geographically remote from the main distribution zone with waterfowl-decorated Neolithic pottery and the only known site where it occurs south the Volga. Recently D.A. Krainov (1987) advanced a new hypothesis about the origin of Pit-comb pottery (or Lyalovo) culture. In his opinion, this culture did not appear and develop in the Volga-Oka area as suggested by Bryusov (1952), but in the catchment of the Beloye, Kubeninskoye and Onezhskoye lake basins, whence it later spread to adjacent territories, including the Upper Volga region. This hypothesis would satisfactorily explain the presence of a waterfowl-decorated vessel at Sakhtysh VIII.

At Sakhtysh I the expedition found a 3-cm thick lateral fragment of a small globular vessel. It is made of poorly baked dirty-yellow clay paste with a slight admixture of fine river sand. Similar pottery from the Volga-Oka area is dated to the end of the Bronze Age. The fragment is carefully decorated with small comb

stamps. The decoration consists of a belt of inclined short stamps between parallel horizontal lines. Below these there is a wide zigzag element symbolizing water and, further below, a row of stylized representations of ducks in profile (Kititsina 1976). Two figures are completely preserved and two are fragmentary. The arrangement is the same as in the specimen from Sakhtysh VIII, but the figures are done in a different manner. The bodies are represented by broad-based triangles with the necks as vertical imprints each topped by a short comb line at right angle. The figures are c. 10 cm long and c. 8 cm high.

No stylistically similar manifestations are known from the forest zone of eastern Europe (Gurina 1972; Oshibkina 1980), but the composition of the figures is done in the Neolithic tradition. In my opinion this fact testifies to the deep-rooted unity and unbroken succession in the evolution of the main directions of imitative arts in the region for several millennia.

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#### ABBREVIATIONS

KSIA = Kratkie soobshcheniya Instituta arheologii AN SSSR