

## THE METAL AGES AND MEDIEVAL PERIOD

**L.N. Mylnikova**

*Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography, Siberian Branch, Russian Academy of Sciences,  
Pr. Akademika Lavrentieva 17, Novosibirsk, 630090, Russia  
Altai State University,  
Lenina 61, Barnaul, 656049, Russia  
E-mail: L.Mylnikova@yandex.ru*

### STUDYING THE FORMS OF ANCIENT WARE: THEORETICAL AND PRACTICAL ASPECTS\*

*The methodology of studying the form of ancient earthen vessels, based on approaches suggested by G.D. Birkhoff, A.O. Shepard, H.-Å. Nordström, and others, is discussed with reference to the transitional Late Bronze/Early Iron Age ceramics from Western Siberian sites: Linevo-1, Om-1, and Mylnikova. Most specialists focus on the proportions of vessels. V.F. Gening's statistical approach is shown to be helpful, and the same is true of A.A. Bobrinsky's and Y.B. Tsetlin's methods of evaluating the form of earthen vessels by separating traditional types from imitations. Both shared and distinctive features are revealed, and various analytical techniques as applied to specific research objectives are compared.*

Keywords: *Ceramics, vessels, forms, ceramic studies, form indexes, proportions.*

Russian and Western specialists alike believe that the morphology of earthenware is one of the principal typological criteria. However, a universally adopted approach to its assessment has not been elaborated so far. Speaking of approaches we proceed from a definition proposed by Y.B. Tsetlin (2012: 18), who regards an approach as a “predominant system of views relating to the object of study as well as rules underlying ordering and interpretation.”

Regrettably, only two specialists in Russia – A.A. Bobrinsky and Y.B. Tsetlin – have been specially

addressing methodological issues in ceramic studies since the mid-20th century, although several more have preceded the implementation of these methods in their studies by a comparative methodological analysis (Zhushchikhovskaya, 2004; Glushkov, 1996; Mochalov, 2008; Salangin, 2001; Tkachev, Khovansky, 2007; and others).

A.A. Bobrinsky (1986) proposed two main approaches to the study of the forms of vessels: associative and analytical. He claimed that the associative approach makes it possible to represent an integral image through the form. Those who used this approach tried to elaborate a standard terminology describing forms. Bobrinsky himself (1986: 137) mentioned two types of such terms. Terms of the first type allude to forms of other objects: “turnip-like”, “barrel-like”, “pear-like”, “tulip-like”,

---

\*Supported by a grant from the Russian Federation Ministry of Education and Science to the Altai State University (Project No. 2013-220-04-129, “The Earliest Settlers of Siberia: Origins and Evolution of Cultures in Northern Asia”).

etc. Terms of the second type relate to parallels between ancient and modern vessels.

Under the analytic approach, according to Bobrinsky, forms are viewed as combinations of elementary components which, therefore, must be separated and described. In practice, archaeologists frequently use terms such as “pot”, “jar”, “jug”, “large pot”, “bowl”, “khum”, “amphora”, etc. (Ibid.).

Bobrinsky (1986: 140, 152) claimed that methodologies proposed by L. Gmelin, E. Grasset, A.F. Filippov, V.A. Gorodtsov (1901), G.D. Birkhoff (1933), A.O. Shepard (1965), H.-Å. Nordström (1972), etc., are based on formal approaches to the morphology of earthenware. Forms of vessels, as Bobrinsky believed, relate to modes of construction. In other words, the form is informative with regard to function and to manufacture. The form of a vessel must be viewed as a “materialized result of a system whereby forces such as contraction, expansion, etc., of clay fabric are distributed” (Bobrinsky, 1986: 144). At first, the asymmetry of the vessel is removed, bringing the contour closer to ideal. Next, points of maximal local curvature (MLC) are found and those on the opposite sides of the contour are connected. The resulting geometric figures, according to Bobrinsky, correspond to functional parts of the vessel’s body – the “intrinsic structure of form.” This structure mirrors the potter’s own ideas because MLC points are not randomly selected: they mark the places where effort was applied to create form (Ibid.: 149). Every functional part is referred to by a special term: lip, cheek, neck, shoulder, forearm, body, and base (Bobrinsky, 1988: 6). These seven parts combine into eleven structures, which nearly exhaust the entire diversity of vessel forms (Ibid.: 7). Special procedures are introduced to separate traditional forms from “imitative” ones, and on that basis a succession of traditions used by various generations of potters can be reconstructed (Bobrinsky, 1991).

Bobrinsky’s ideas of ceramic forms and the methods whereby these must be assessed were elaborated by Y.B. Tsetlin (2012). He writes of three approaches to the study of ceramic forms and of pottery manufacture in general: “emotionally descriptive”, “formally typological”, and “those relating to cultural evolution” (Ibid.: 2012: 140). Tsetlin claims that scholars using the first approach seek to be as illustrative as possible. Hence the “elegant” terms relating to outward features and names of modern or recent “ethnographic” earthenware. One of those who used this approach, in Tsetlin’s opinion, was V.A. Gorodtsov. His book *Russian Prehistoric Ceramics* (Gorodtsov, 1901) marked the beginning of a new stage. From that time on, the morphology of vessels was assessed in more and more detail, eventually leading to the current paradigm (Tsetlin, 2012: 141–142).

The principal ideas of the formal typological approach to the analysis of the morphology of vessels were first

formulated by art historians – L. Gmelin, E. Grasset, and A.V. Filippov (Ibid.: 141–143). G.D. Birkhoff (1933) adjusted their ideas for use in archaeological studies. The next step was made by A.O. Shepard (1965), who sought to develop optimal methods for studying archaeological ceramics. Among other advocates of the formal typological approach Tsetlin mentioned H.-Å. Nordström (1972), who proposed a method for measuring the proportions of vessels, V.F. Gening (1973, 1992), who compiled software for a statistical analysis of measurements relating to archaeological ceramics, and I.S. Kamenetsky (Goshev), who outlined formal rules for describing the form of vessels (Goshev (Kamenetsky), 1994), etc.

According to Tsetlin, all methods of apportioning the form of vessels and evaluating proportions that were suggested by these specialists, except probably those proposed by H.-Å. Nordström and A.O. Shepard, are quite formal. “Researchers refrain from explaining why they use precisely these rather than other landmarks of the contour, or why they employ precisely these rather than other ratios for assessing the proportions of vessels” (Tsetlin, 2012: 148–149).

According to the cultural approach advocated by A.A. Bobrinsky (1978), the forms of vessels are “embodied results of purposeful efforts,” mirroring technological traditions of the potters and those of their customers. Therefore the study of ceramics must be aimed at reconstructing specific cultural traditions of manufacture and mechanisms underlying the functioning of those traditions in various cultural contexts (Ibid.: 149).

The form of any vessel, according to Bobrinsky (1986, 1988) and Tsetlin (2012: 161), includes intrinsic structure (component parts), and general proportions, which can be subdivided into categories such as high, medium, or low, and functionality. To make a vessel one needs a system of physical efforts, punctual and spatial, directed at the material; in the course of work the potter develops a rigid stereotype whereby a specific form is reproduced. Both researchers point out that the potter’s “mental template” is mirrored by his/her “motor template” (Bobrinsky, 1986, 1988; Tsetlin, 2012: 161).

Experimental studies carried out at the Institute of Archaeology RAS Laboratory for the History of Ceramics (Moscow) have demonstrated how difficult it was for potters to create novel forms. “Demolishing the stereotype,” Tsetlin (2012: 161) noted, “is a painful, slow, and gradual process”. Based on the results of the experiments, a variation curve of proportions and a nomenclature of classes of vessels were generated. “High”, “medium-high”, and “low” vessels were described as “traditional” whereas intermediate forms such as “high to medium high” and “low to medium low” were considered “imitations” (Ibid.: 162).

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/1034342>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/1034342>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)