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WOODEN UTENSILS OF THE BRONZE AGE FROM THE TERRITORY OF EASTERN EUROPE: THE QUESTION OF TYPOLOGY

Abstract: The article deals with the problem of classification of wooden utensils from burials of Pit-grave, Catacomb and Zrubna culture. The classification of this type of artifacts meets the problem of their persistence in ground. The information about most artifacts is limited to “reminds of wood from wooden utensil”. Nevertheless, there is representative selection of undamaged or archaeologically undamaged wooden utensils which allows to build classification scheme. Analysis of historiography showed that previously the classification of wooden utensils of Catacomb culture have not been provided. But there are classifications for the utensils of other nomadic cultures of the Bronze and Early Iron Ages. We studied the works of G. Pjatyh, S. Mahortyh, O. Dudin, S. Ljashko, R. Litvinenko. For the development of the classification, the main features of wooden utensils were distinguished. They were organized into four groups: morphological, technological, functional and stylistic. Our typological scheme is based on the principles of morphological classification. All wooden utensils were divided into two groups: container (which includes tray, bowl, bank, basket, pyxis with further subdivision) and table-ware (scoop, spoon, cover).

The scientific novelty of the work consist in systematization of the information on the findings of wooden utensils, clarifying of the terminology for different types of wooden utensils and developing of unitary classification scheme for this type of artifacts.

Key words: wooden utensils, Pit-grave culture, Catacomb culture, Zrubna culture, Bronze age, Eastern Europe.

The systematization and generalization of data on the domestic and religious life of the ancient population is one of the most important tasks of archeology. Among the informative sources which allow conducting researches on the theme are wooden utensils from the burials of the Bronze Age.

Being a relatively rare category of the implements, it early attracted the attention of researchers (Pyatyh 1984, Otroshchenko 1984; Otroshchenko 1992, Litvinenko 1997; Tsimidanov 2000; Antonov Otroshchenko 2004).

As a result, the main directions in study of wooden utensils were determined. They are the following: the origin, typology and classification, function of metal bindings, role and place in the daily life and religious rituals of the ancient population.

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It should be noted that the study related to the Bronze Age wooden artifacts, including utensils, poses a number of rather complex issues. The primary question is poor preservation of wood in the burials, due to the physical properties of wood, namely, its humidity. The wood is fairly porous material containing a large number of capillaries filled with moisture.

It also has a physical property of hygroscopicity – the ability to change its moisture depending on the temperature and humidity of environment. This issue has received coverage in a number of special papers devoted to the definition of preservation of wooden artifacts in different climatic conditions. Without going into a detailed examination of them, it should be stated that the climatic conditions are not favorable for the preservation of wood in the area of Pit-grave, Catacomb and Zrubna cultures. Artifacts are partially or completely decomposing or gaining moisture. During the opening of a burial the extra moisture begins actively evaporate and leads to complete destruction of the item if the immediate conservation is not providing.

Even wooden carts or columnar constructions are founded in fragments. The remains of more fragile wooden items often don't allow reconstructing their original appearance. Frequently only the specific tinder indicates the presence of wooden utensil in grave.

To date, we have data about findings of 14 items in burials of Pit-grave culture that were considered as wooden utensils, 125 similar artifacts for Catacomb culture and 42 findings for Zrubna culture. Thus, our base counts 181 samples. But informative value of them is not equal. For a lot of cases we know only about the form of artifact, which was reconstructed by the tinder of the vessel, or even making conclusion about presence of utensil draw on finding of metal constructive elements.

The first task during the study of the wooden utensils is development of classification. One of the first works dedicated to this question, belongs to G. Pyatyh. He analyzed the wooden utensils from the burials of Zrubna culture from the territory of Volga basin area and proposed to divide it into three types: deep utensils such as cups and bowls, shallow utensils (platters and trenchers) and scoops (Pyatyh 1984, 146).

Close typology was developed by S. Mahortyh for Cimmerian culture. He distinguished bowls, cups and platters. According to S. Mahortyh, bowls are the vessels with the diameter of rim at least twice more than height of vessel. Bowls are distinguish from the platters or trenchers by its "longitude": it shouldn't be more than 20 cm. Cups are the vessels, which have height that less than diameter of rim, but no more than in two times. Platters considered as shallow utensils with "longitude" more than 20 cm (Mahortyh 2005, 34).

O. Dudin studied the utensils of IX-VII centuries BC from the territory of Eastern Europe and also named platters, bowls and cups (Dudin 2009).

The classification scheme for the cultures of the Bronze Age was proposed by S. Ljashko. It based on two main principles of ordonnance of artifacts. The first principle takes into account the method of manufacturing of wooden utensils with a division into three groups: 1) chopped and chiseled 2) cooperage made of separate planks,

3) curved or wickered. According to the second principle, which can be defined as the functional-typological, S. Ljashko divided wooden utensil into bowls, cups, scoops and platters-trenchers (Ljashko 1994, 145).

More information can be found in the research paper of R. Litvinenko, devoted to typology of wooden utensils from the burials of the Babino culture (Litvinenko 2004, 23–34). Technologically author proposes to divide vessels into two groups: 1) made from a single piece of wood by cutting-chipping; 2) consisted of separate components with the help of different fastening elements (composed dishes). To clarify the terms of classification by morphological principle R. Litvinenko analyses the terms using the explanatory dictionaries. Author identified four types of the names of wooden utensils and proposed the following definition: a bowl (cup) – hemispherical container, often with metal elements; jar – a small drinking vessel; platter (platter-trencher) – “large plate, round or oblong, for serving dishes”; pyxis (coffret) (Litvinenko 2004, 26–30).

Speaking about typology of wooden utensils it should be noted the contribute made by V. Myl'nikov. He studied the materials in North and Central Asia and proposed to divide wooden utensils into vessels, trays, scoops, spoons, strainers (Myl'nikov 2008, 87–89).

Typological scheme offered by us, is based on the principles of morphological classification of V. Gorodcov (Gorodcov 1927). According to it, a material complex of any archaeological culture divided into categories, classes, branches and types. Our scheme is an attempt to divide wooden utensils from burials of Pit-grave, Catacomb and Zrubna cultures into groups according to common characteristics (Table 1). Division by morphological principle allows adding new types into the scheme without changing all classification, which made it very convenient in usage. In addition, the morphological features of the object in most cases correspond to its functional

Table 1. Classification of wooden artefacts discussed in the paper

Division	Category	Class	Branch	Type
Material source	Wooden utensils	I. Container	PT. Platter-trencher	a) Platter-trencher oval in plane
				b) Platter-trencher square in plane
			BO. Bowl	a) Bowl with tapering to orifice edges
				b) Bowl with broadening to orifice edges
			BA. Bank	a) With straight sides
				b) With roundish sides
		BS. Basket	Basket	
		PY. Pyxis	Pyxis	
		II. Tableware	SC. Scoop	a) Scoop with plain bottom
				b) Scoop with roundish bottom
			SP. Spoon	Spoon
CO. Cover	a) Disc Cover			
	b) Square Cover			

purpose, which has the importance during the reconstruction of the role and place of wooden utensils in the daily life and religious rituals of the ancient population.

According to this classification, wooden utensils of Pit-grave culture represented by only two branches – a hemispherical bowl and a platter-trencher (Fig. 1). Most widely the tradition of putting wooden utensils into graves was represented in Catacomb culture, where all branches of our classification could be found (Fig. 2). In Zrubna culture there are bowls, platters-trenchers, banks and scoops (Fig. 3).

The metal parts of wooden utensils, such as bronze wire (used for “sewing” of damaged vessels) bronze clamps (on the rims of the vessels) and bronze plates (which, in addition to the utilitarian function, most likely served as a decoration or had a deeper semantic load), were used for different types of artifacts.

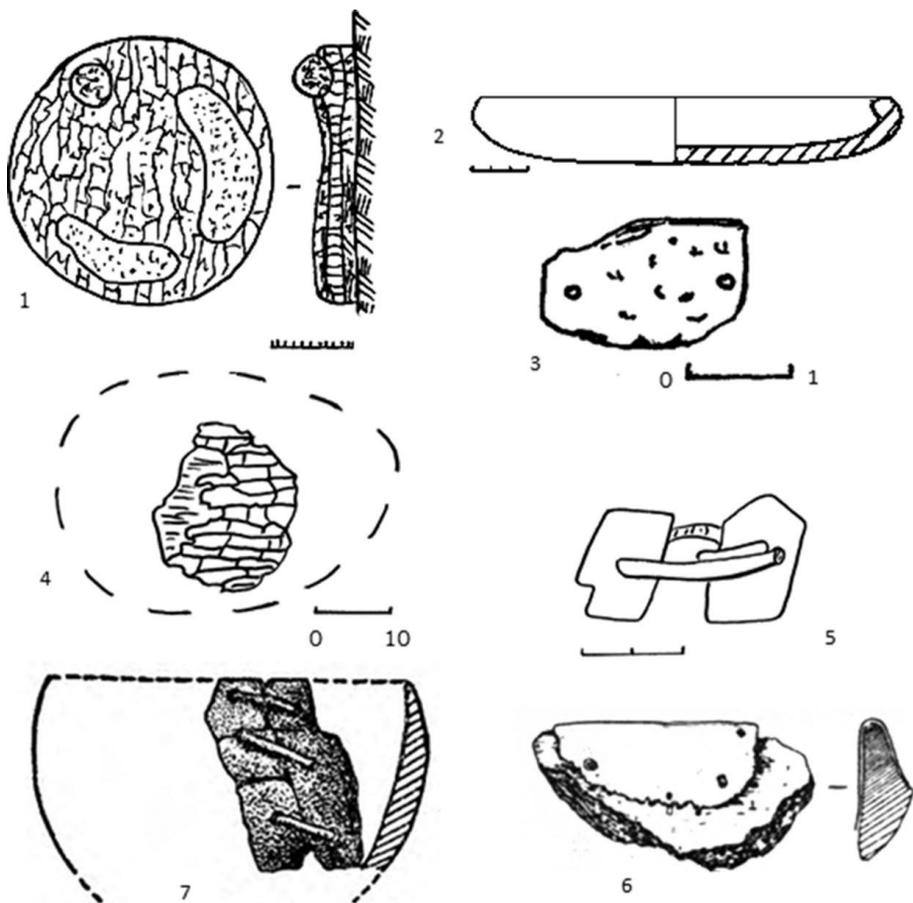


Fig. 1. Selection of wooden artefacts: 1 – Lahny, k. 1 b. 2 (Suprunenko 1994); 2 – Alkaliya 33/3 (Subbotin 1988/23); 3 – Tiraspol' k. 3, b. 19 (Savva 1988); 4 – «Ljubasha» k. 2, b. 5 (Ivanova *et al.* 2005); 5 – Pavlovsk, k. 49, b. 6 (Sinjuk, 1983); 6 – Karagash, k. 2, b. 2 (Evdokimov, Loman 1989); 7 – Primorsk, k. 1 (Mihajlov 1972, 82)

Thus, the tradition of putting of wooden utensils in graves originates in Pit-grave culture and spreads in next periods. The shape of wooden vessels could repeat the shape of pottery or vessels made of leather. The form determines the functionality of the item: bowls for food or liquid, platters for meat or carrying different objects, banks for dice and so on. Analysis of the funeral context indicates multifunctional usage of wooden vessels. Some of them were used as alternation of pottery, others were intended for worship as special containers.

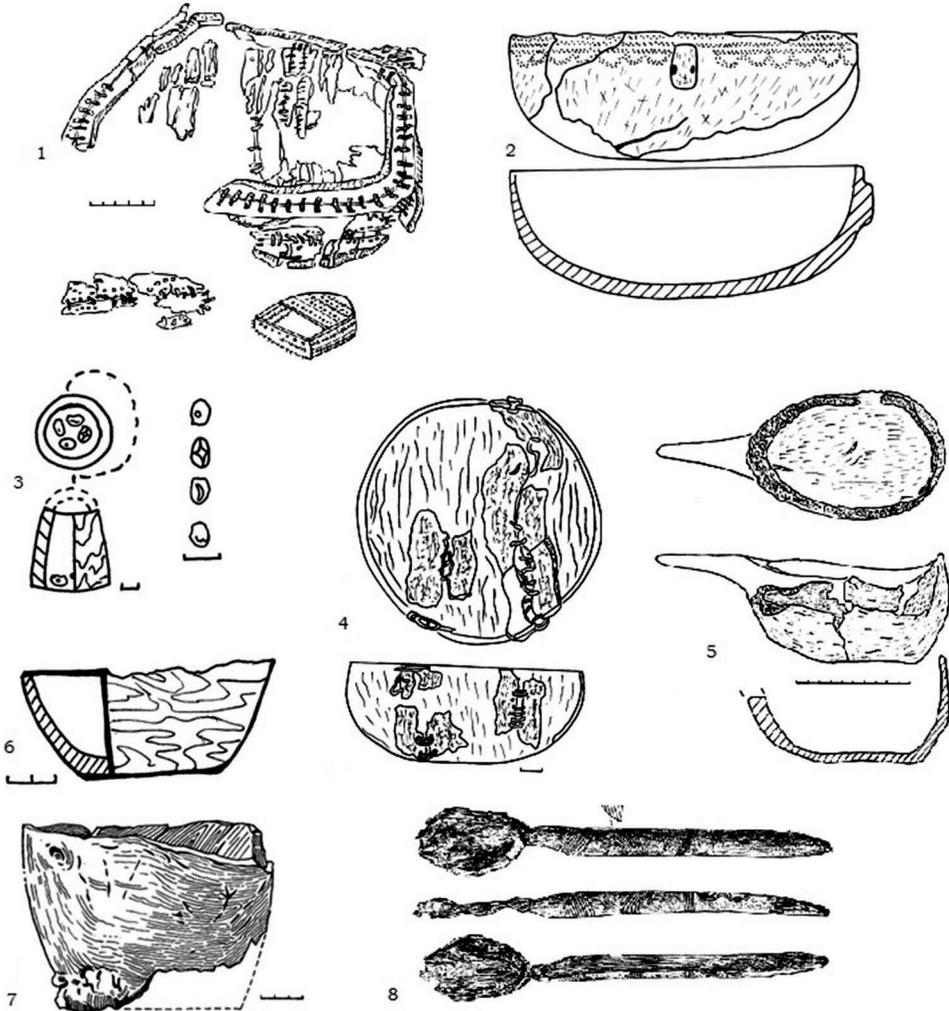


Fig. 2. Selection of wooden artefacts: 1 – Kuznecovskij burial field, gr. II, k. 1, b. 3 (Uzjanov 1983); 2 – Belovodsk, k. 6, b. 2 (Vybornyj, Sanzharov 1998); 3 – Malozahar’ino, k. 1, b. 5 (Kovaleva *et. al.* 1989); 4 – Forpost, k. 2, b. 8 (Sanzharov *et. al.* 2006/ F 2 ob. 02–231); 5 – Burlackoe 84, k. 3, b. 3 (Moruzhenko *et. al.* 1985); 6 – Stojanovskij mogil’nik, k. 2, b. 4 (Pogorelov 1996); 7 – Balki, kurg. Vysokaja mogila, b. 17 b (Bidzilja, Jakovenko 1973); 8 – Zimogor’e 1/12 (Pyslaru, Samoilenko 2010)

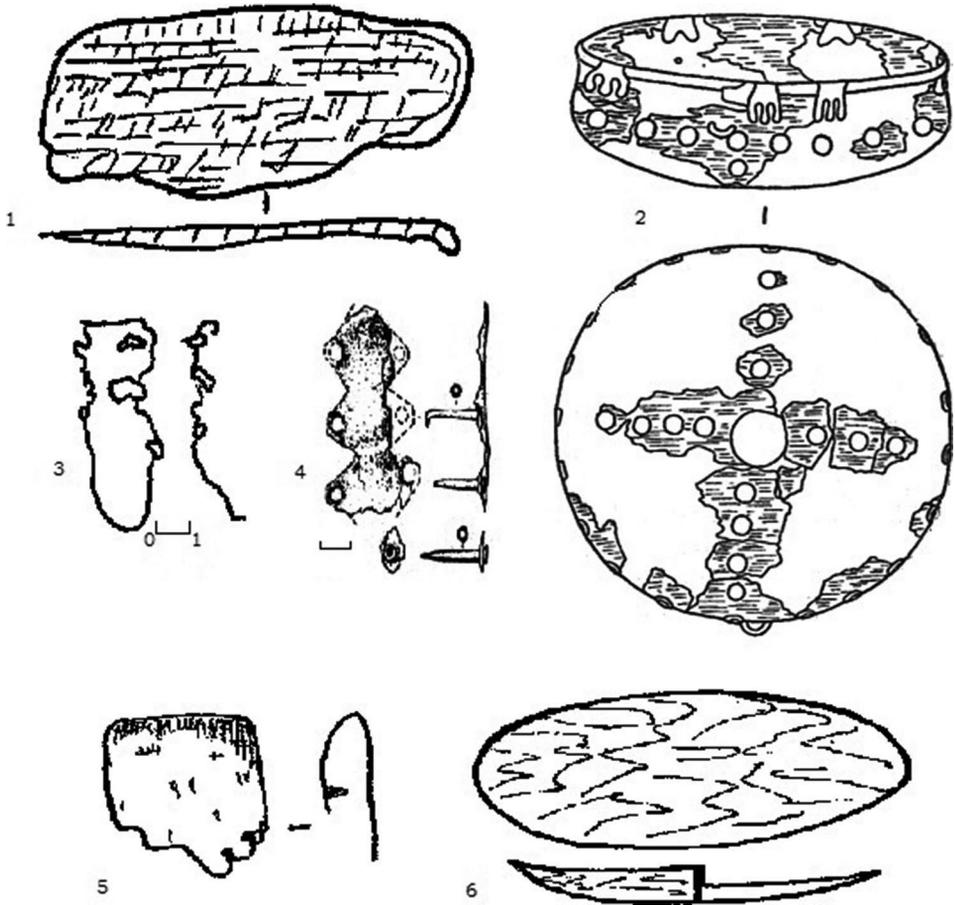


Fig. 3. Selection of wooden artefacts: 1 – Rusinyj Jar, k. 1, b. 2 (Polidovich, Cimidanov 1996); 2 – Ore-hovo, k. 9 (Telegin et al. 1984); 3 – Pesochnoe, k. 1 (Zudina, Skarbovenko 1985); 4 – Min'kovka, k. gr. I, k. 4, b. 1 (Kravec, Posrednikov 1996); 5 – Marinovka, k. 1, b. 17 (Mamontov 1983); 6 – Verbki, k. gr. II, k. 3, b. 4 (Marina et al. 1986)

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