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Lobed Ware in the Far East from the Neolithic to the Middle Ages

The study focuses on the origin and survival of the so-called lobed ware in the Far East. The term refers to vessels decorated with shallow vertical grooves, less often with deep, wide dents, either on the most convex part of the body or on the entire surface. Some vessels are covered with groups of vertical carved lines or burnished, less often painted bands imitating lobulation. Such ceramics are especially frequent at sites of the Jurchen era (7th–13th centuries) in the Amur basin. They are also found in Primorye, northeastern China, and in adjacent territories. The study of various sources shows that the lobed ware was made on the Lower Amur as early as the Neolithic (5th to late 2nd millennia BC), with the earliest samples relating to the Kondon culture. Typical lobed ceramics were also made by people of the Malyshevo and Voznesenovskoye cultures. It is hypothesized that the Jurchen-Bohai pottery, including the lobed ware, was directly influenced by Korean traditions of the first two or three quarters of the 1st millennium AD. Given the distinctness of the tradition, its reminiscences in the Amur region can be traced back to the Neolithic.

Keywords: *Amur region, Primorye, lobed vessels, Middle Ages, Jurchen culture, Neolithic cultures.*

Introduction

One of the frequently discussed issues in Eurasian archaeology (especially that of the Russian Far East) concerns the age of the so-called lobed (fluted) ware. This term refers to vessels of various shapes and sizes, with bodies decorated with shallow vertical grooves (commonly from four to eight) made by a narrow blunt tool (paddle or polisher). Less often they are decorated with deep, wide dents made by a pebble or a hammer, producing an effect of separate segments or bossed lobes. Such vessels are the most spectacular ones. Ancient artisans, possibly imitating lobulation, which, apart from elegance, was believed to strengthen the vessels, decorated them with groups of carved or incised lines, less often with burnished bands.

Ceramics of this kind are frequently encountered at numerous sites (flat-grave burial grounds, groups of mounds, fortified settlements, and villages) of the Jurchen era in the Russian part of the Amur region, Primorye, northeastern China, and in adjacent territories. In recent decades, I pointed to the existence of lobed ceramics in a number of Eurasian cultures, nearly all of them dating to the Early Iron Age and the Middle Ages. Nonetheless, noting the few then available indications of the existence of such ceramics in the Neolithic of the Lower Amur, I expressed hope to gain more evidence of their amazingly early origin. I also remarked on the extreme abundance and great variety of such ware on the Amur in the Middle Ages (Medvedev, 1986: 87). The revealed long traditions of the Amur Neolithic pottery-making were also taken into

account. In the 1980s–1990s, for instance, ceramics of the Osipovka culture from the settlement of Gasya were considered the earliest known in the world. Specialists who claim that the medieval lobed ceramics have no apparent prototypes among the earlier Far Eastern pottery (Dyakova, Ivliev, 1985: 250) ignore these facts.

As was shown by recent studies of collections, other sources, and materials, ceramics with typical features of lobed vessels, which appeared on the Lower Amur in the Middle Neolithic (ca 5th–4th millennia BC) and existed there during the Late and Final Neolithic, later on, in the Early Bronze Age, actually disappeared from cultures of the region. At the same time, in some other cultural and historical provinces, it generally appeared in the Early Iron Age. This can be viewed as a discontinuity of cultural evolution and a revival of an earlier, evidently forgotten custom of decorating pottery. Such a reversal might have been triggered by an influence of a foreign cultural tradition.

I will now propose an interpretation of the available facts concerning the earliest examples of lobed ceramics in the Neolithic of the Amur and certain later instances, especially those relating to medieval traditions of this region.

The earliest vessels with elements of lobulation in the Neolithic cultures of the Amur region

There is now reason to say that lobed ware existed at least in three Middle and Late Neolithic cultures (Kondon, Malyshevo, and Voznesenovskoye) and in the Final Neolithic of the Lower Amur. Vessels with simplified elements of lobulation (or rather, pseudo-lobulation) in the form of groups of incised vertical lines or grooves mostly in the lower half of the body (their upper portions were primarily decorated with horizontal straight or wavy thin rolls, or less often with scaly impressions) were found in the early 1960s during the excavations of the Neolithic settlement of Kondon-Pochta (field studies of the site were completed in 1971–1972). As all Kondon vessels, these were hand-made, flat-bottomed, medium-sized (from 9–10 to 25 cm high) containers of a simple open shape. They lay in the ground mostly in crushed condition, but were completely reconstructed. By way of illustration, I will describe three typical vessels of this site, associated with two dwellings*. Notably, Far

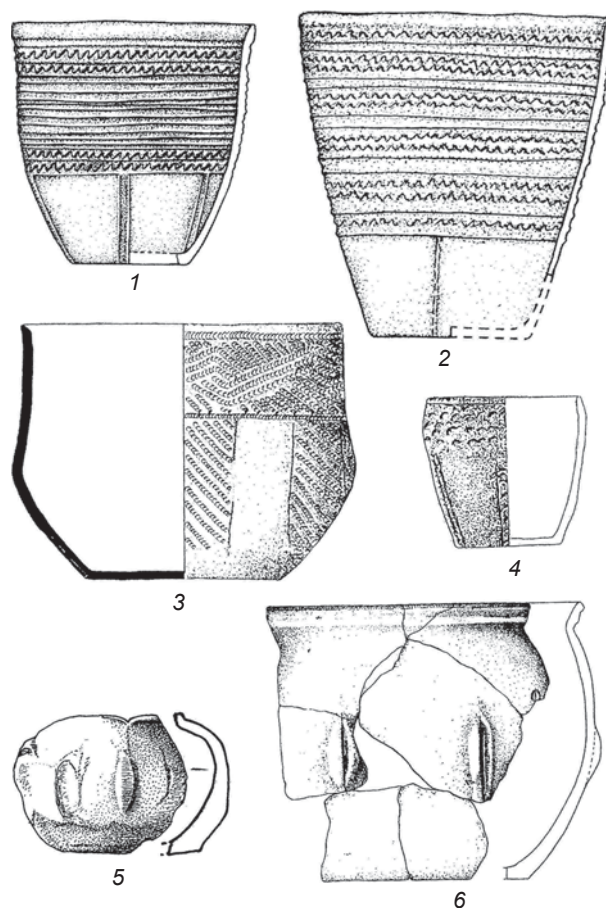


Fig. 1. Neolithic ware with elements of lobulation (5, 6), and pseudo-lobed ware (1–4) from the Lower Amur. 1, 2, 4 – Kondon (after (Okladnikov, 1984)); 3 – Malyshevo (after (Derevianko, Medvedev, 1994)); 5 – Voznesenovskoye (Museum for the History and Culture of Peoples of Siberia and the Far East IAET SB RAS); 6 – Final Neolithic (after (Medvedev, 2017)). Not to scale.

Eastern Neolithic ceramics, including Kondon ware, have not ever been examined before in the aspect considered in this article.

Vessel 1 (Fig. 1, 1) was found in dwelling 8, together with other vessels of various kinds (Okladnikov, 1984: 105, pl. LII, 5). All of them had broken bottoms. The vessel is 23 cm high, with gently curved profile, situla-shaped, with a barely distinct waist between the body and the slightly sharpened rim. The lower smooth surface, below the ornament composed of horizontal straight and wavy lines, has just six vertical grooves. The vessel can be regarded as pseudo-lobed; its lower portion resembles rather a segmented piece. This kind of decoration should probably be viewed as a precursor of embossed lobulation.

Vessel 2 (Fig. 1, 2) was also found in dwelling 8. It is approximately 19 cm high. It has the shape of situla, with a gently narrowing lower part and the upper part

*All the ceramics described here, with the exception of one medieval vessel from Shuangchencun, China, are housed at the Institute of Archaeology and Ethnography SB RAS.

flaring out, without distinct neck. Under the embossed decoration composed of ten straight and ten wavy discontinuous rolls, there are four vertical shallow grooves apparently meant to divide the lower zone of the vessel into segments.

Vessel 3 (Fig. 1, 4) was found in dwelling 9. The vessel is in the form of a small (9.5 cm high) situla or a jar, with a slightly convex body and a lip beveled inward. The upper third of the vessel bears ornamentation composed of three or four horizontal rows of arciform or scaled impressions. The lower part is decorated with narrow vertical grooves and adjacent bands of arciform dents. In addition to this piece with elements of pseudo-lobulation, three more small (from 5 to 10 cm high) pot-like vessels were found in the dwelling. Two of them are plain-walled, while the third bears linear figures against the background of vertical dotted zigzag (Ibid.: Pl. XLII, 2, 3, 11).

The next group of pseudo-lobed or lobed ware consists of vessels of the Early Middle Neolithic Malyshevo culture. One vessel was found in 1986 in excavation II of the multilayered settlement of Gasya, on the right bank of the Amur, near the village of Sakachi-Alyan. It lay in the lower cultural horizon, on the bottom of a pit 120 cm deep in virgin loam, and was crashed into several parts. The vessel (Fig. 1, 3) (Derevianko, Medvedev, 1994: 40, fig. 14, 4) is flattened pot-like in shape. Its height is 14.5 cm; the body diameter is 19.5 cm. The lip is beveled inward; the straight neck is indistinct, smoothly transiting into the body. The largest portion of the outer surface is ornamented. Below the rim and in the upper part of the body, the vessel is encircled with rows of bracket-like impressions. A meander-shaped composition of similar rows lies between them. On the burnished surface of the body, vertical incised lines accentuate plain bands, interchanging with those ornamented by inclined rows of bracket-like impressions. Stratigraphic and other data make it possible to attribute this specimen to the 4th millennium BC and to consider it the earliest among the pseudo-lobed vessels.

Another Malyshevo vessel with elements of pseudo-lobulation was found in excavation I of the Ostrov Suchu site in 1975. The vessel is 32 cm high. It has a jug-amphoral shape, unusual for the Amur Neolithic (Fig. 2, 5). The body is convex, with a maximum diameter of 31 cm. Rim with a rounded edge terminates the straight neck. Its diameter is 21 cm and the height is 15 cm. Almost the entire surface of the vessel is covered by mostly horizontal densely arranged rows of bracket-like angular impressions (upper part of the body) and roundish oval pits (neck and the lower part of the body).

The ornamental zone between the neck and equator is separated by four narrow vertical stripes delimited by incised lines and painted with red ochre. A similar stripe runs along the edge of the orifice. The vessel is very elegant and was hardly destined for everyday use; more likely, it was related to ritual. Even if the red stripes are just a surface decoration, they might replicate lobes, as traditionally believed.

Another group of the most important Neolithic vessels was also discovered during the excavations at Ostrov Suchu. In 1974, a pot-shaped vessel 6.5 cm high with a short vertical rim painted with red ochre was found in the dwelling of the Malyshevo culture (Fig. 2, 1–4). The entire surface of the vessel is covered with ornament, mostly in the form of inverted angles filled with oblique rows or small spirals of tiny angular or bracket-like impressions of retreating paddle. This specimen shows all the typical features of lobed vessels. Before decorating and firing the vessel, four deep vertical grooves resembling dents were made on its walls. Such a technique made the vessel similar to a four-lobed prototype.

A small vessel 3.5 cm high (see Fig. 1, 5) of approximately similar shape was found in dwelling 2 of the Late Neolithic Voznesenovskoye culture (mid-2nd millennium BC) on Suchu Island (Medvedev, Filatova, 2021). It is light-brown and yellowish, with burnished outer surface. The most convex part of the body bears at least six vertical oval elongate dents rendering the vessel lobate. While the function of this tiny specimen cannot be assessed with certainty, it was hardly used for domestic purposes.

A half of a broken Final Neolithic vessel (late 2nd millennium BC) found in 1993 in excavation III of the Ostrov Suchu site is noteworthy. The vessel is flattened pot-like in shape, 19 cm high (see Fig. 1, 6) (Medvedev, 2017: 157, fig. 2), with gray-brown engobe. At least five vertical rolls with sharpened ends, 1.0 cm thick and up to 5.0 cm long, were attached to the middle part of the body. These are transected with deep furrows along the ridge, making them similar to double ribs, again alluding to a lobate structure. What we deal with in this case are not “standard” lobed ceramics with various indentations in the walls. Such a ware, judging by the available finds, which are admittedly rare, was rather uncommon, but it did exist in the Neolithic and will hopefully draw the experts’ attention.

So, on the basis of the materials from the Lower Amur, it can be stated that various kinds of lobed vessels were in use at least from the early stages of the Middle Neolithic to its final period.

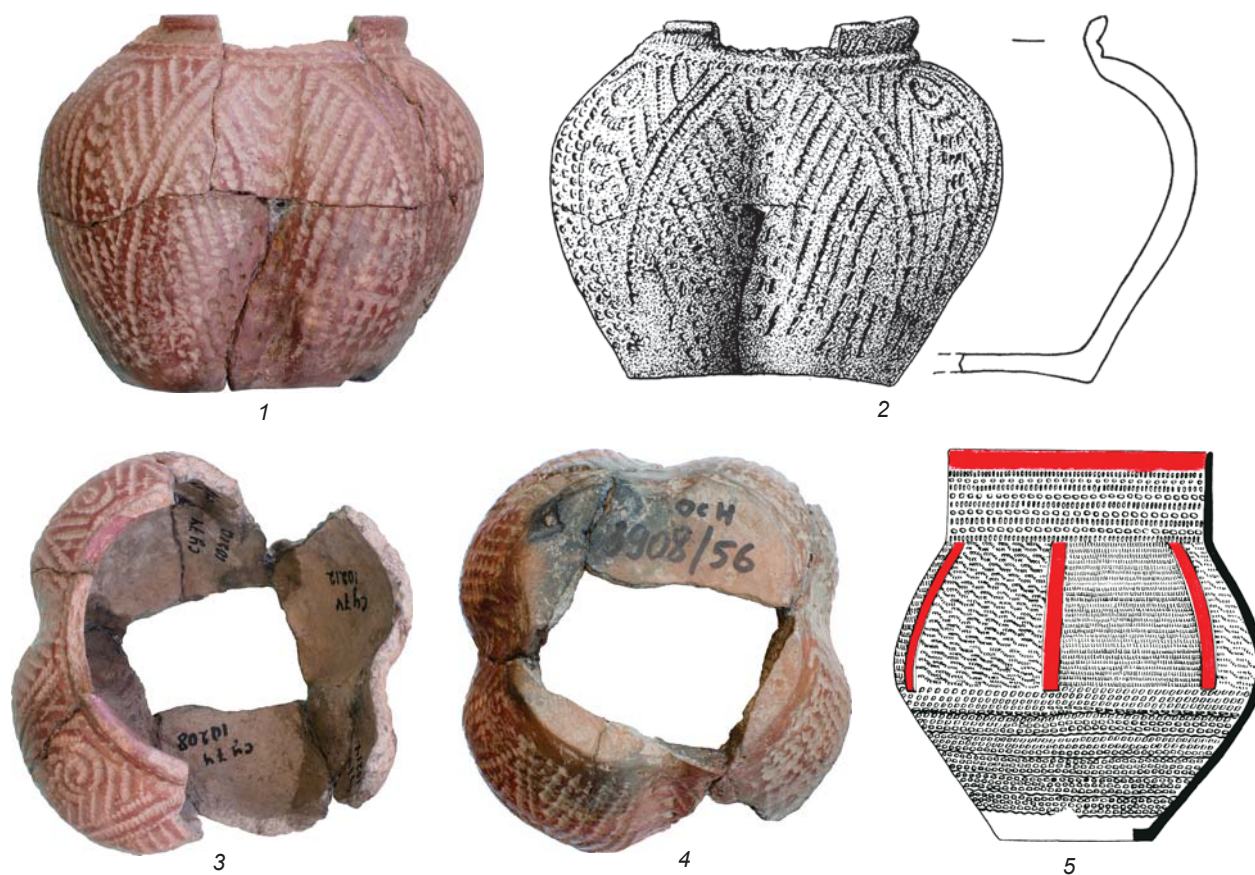


Fig. 2. Ceramics of the Malyshevo culture from Ostrov Suchu. Museum for the History and Culture of Peoples of Siberia and the Far East IAET SB RAS.

1–4 – lobed vessel from dwelling B: 1, 2 – general view, 3 – upper view, 4 – view from the bottom; 5 – vessel with vertical stripes covered with red paint, from excavation I (1975). Not to scale.

Lobed ware in some Eurasian prehistoric and medieval cultures

Early examples of lobulation on vessels in Eastern European archaeological cultures can be judged from Chalcolithic Tripolye ceramics from Moldova. In particular, a vase from Druța I settlement, with a series of vertical and slightly inclined oblong dents on the body, possesses all the features of the lobed ware (Ryndina, 1984: Fig. on p. 415). There are reasons to consider vases and beakers of the Komarov culture (Upper and Middle Dniester regions), with series of vertical carved and incised lines on the body (Epokha..., 1987: 114, 212, fig. 53, 28), as the examples of the Late Bronze Age pseudo-lobed ceramics.

In the Early Iron Age, lobed and pseudo-lobed ceramics became fairly widespread in Eurasian cultures. For instance, typical vessels of these kinds were encountered in burials of the Sarmatian Age (mid-1st millennium BC) in the Lower Volga region (Sinitsyn,

1960: Fig. 3, 10; 5, 8), Northern Caucasus (Korenyako, Naidenko, 1977: 235, fig. 4, 7; 242, fig. 6, 4), and at many other sites.

At medieval archaeological sites, the number of lobed ceramic vessels increases. For example, vessels with vertical dents were found during the excavations at Chersonesus. Such a ware became widespread in medieval Transcaucasia. Certain specialists argued that it was unique and imitated the decoration of metal ware (Jakobson, 1979: 82, fig. 50, 1–3; p. 83). One could agree with this claim, were it not for much earlier clay prototypes. These, in fact, suggest the reverse, i.e., that metal vessels replicated those made of clay.

In the Asian part of Eurasia, in Central Asia and farther east, lobed-grooved ware appeared mostly in the Early Middle Ages. In particular, it was recorded at Qidan sites in Inner Mongolia (see, e.g., (Wang Yuping, 1956: 31, fig. 4)). Quite a lot of lobed vessels of the Jurchen culture (in China, Sanhao culture) was found in the Heilongjiang Province of China (Graves..., 1977: 51, fig. 4, 1, 2; p. 54, fig. 13).

Ceramics of this kind were found at Bohai settlements of the 8th–10th centuries in Primorye (Semenichenko, 1976: 89–90; and others).

Korean wheel-thrown lobed ware of the 1st millennium BC is also noteworthy. The earliest vessels of this series are attributable to the Mahan culture, which existed during the first centuries of the Common Era in the southern part of the Korean Peninsula. In particular, the collection of the Buyeo National Museum comprises a gray clay pot whose upper part is decorated with rectangular impressions of a stamp superimposed by stripes forming an oblique net. The surface of its body bears a series of shallow vertical grooves. The vessel is dated to the 2nd–3rd centuries. Later on, in the Goguryeo Kingdom (4th–6th centuries), wheel-thrown ware was manufactured that was virtually identical to the Bohai and Jurchen ceramics: gray burnished vase- or pot-like vessels, including those with applied band handles, and bowls. Goguryeo ceramics also include steamer pots and other types of cookware. In the 1990s, such utensils were represented in the exposition of the National Museum of Korea in Seoul. Among the contemporaneous lobed ceramics of the Early Koguryo, dating to the mid-1st millennium, there are hand-made vessels from certain Mohe sites on the Middle Amur. They are decorated in a pseudo-lobed fashion, with vertical incised lines on the body. A typical example is a complete vessel from the Poltse-Mohe burial ground of Amurzet (Fig. 3, 1).

Noteworthy is ceramic ware of the 7th century from the Silla Kingdom, housed in the Seoul Museum. In distinction from the Goguryeo ceramics, it bears a weaker resemblance to the Bohai-Jurchen ceramics. Silla vessels were made more thoroughly; there is a visible difference in assortment of the ceramics, too. However, along with differences, the Bohai-Jurchen and Silla ceramics still show a substantial similarity. Small narrow-necked jars with typical vertical grooves, that is lobed, occur among Silla vessels. It is reasonable to assume that the Jurchen lobed-grooved, hand-made and wheel-fashioned ware appeared in the Amur basin somewhat later than that of Mahan, at about the same time as the similar wheel-thrown pottery of Silla, i.e., in the 7th century.

The view of the scholars who analyze the lobed vessels of the medieval Far Eastern cultures is essentially that such a tradition had no local roots and had allegedly been introduced from Central Asia, first to Qidan and then to Primorye-Amur. Another claim is that “the most likely time of contact between Qidan and the Primorye-Amur cultures was the late 8th to early 10th century AD” (Dyakova, 1993: 326). Such a view, reckoning without the presence of lobed vessels

in the Amur Neolithic and later—in cultures of the first two or three quarters of the 1st millennium AD on the Korean Peninsula (note that the Amur ceramics are quite different from those of Qidan), is illogical and cannot be accepted (for more details, see (Medvedev, 1998: 453–458)).

Jurchen lobed ware

In the Far East, the highest number of various lobed ceramic vessels is known in the Jurchen culture, especially in its northern Amur area. The earliest samples—hand-made, wheel-adjusted, narrow-necked jars and pot-shaped vessels with vertical grooves and dents—were found at the Korsakovsky flat-grave burial ground on Ussuriysky Island (burials 44, 141, 346, and others). Because this is the key Far Eastern cemetery in terms of both the number of excavated graves (386) and the number of lobed vessels, it deserves a special attention. Among the 459 hand-made and wheel-thrown vessels, 47 are lobed, including singular pseudo-lobed specimens. The last-mentioned usually have an archaic amphoral shape and pairs of vertical curved lines on the body (Fig. 3, 2). All other lobed vessels are decorated with dents and small grooves. They vary in shape and size, although most common are jar-shaped, with a narrow neck and a relatively wide body; pot-shaped vessels with rounded profile are also numerous (Fig. 3, 3–9). The vessels actually lack traces of soot or smoke. They were mainly used as tableware or, in some cases, as funeral items. This cemetery provides a convincing proof that people who left it had manufactured and used lobed vessels from the 7th century until the first decades of the 12th century. This is the only cemetery in the entire Far East that was used for nearly half a millennium (with intervals).

At the next large Nadezhdinsky burial ground, 115 examined graves yielded not less than 14 vessels with pronounced elements of lobulation: vertical grooves or, in some cases, dents on the body. Such decorations are present on narrow-necked jars and more often on pot-shaped roundish vessels with a short neck (Fig. 3, 10–12, 14). Lobed ceramics were found at other Jurchen cemeteries, too: Dubovsky, Bolonsky, Molchanikhinsky (Fig. 3, 13, 16, 19), Nazaichevsky, Kamenushka, and Protoka Bystraya.

Of great interest is lobed ware from Jurchen (Jin) cemeteries in adjacent Chinese territory, especially in the area where the center of Jurchen consolidation was located and where their state of Jin was formed with the first (main) capital—Shangjing (Huiningfu, modern Baicheng). In the vicinity of Baicheng,



Fig. 3. Lobed ware of the Mohe (1) and Jurchen (2–20) cultures from cemeteries (1–19) and fortified settlement (20) (after (Medvedev, 1986, 2016, 2017)).

1 – Amurzet; 2–9 – Korsakovsky; 10–12, 14 – Nadezhdinsky; 13 – Dubovsky 15 – Shuangchencun (China); 16 – Bolonsky Ostrov (Achan); 17 – Pervoye Ozero; 18 – Olsky; 19 – Molchanikhinsky; 20 – Djari. Not to scale.

Chinese archaeologists examined the burials possibly belonging to constructors or inhabitants of the capital. Grave goods included wheel-thrown burnished clay vessels. Among them, a jar 32.2 cm high (Fig. 3, 15) is noteworthy (Medvedev, 2016). Its body is decorated

with vertical grooves, with horizontal bands of stamped scaly ornamentation located in between. This vessel is a compelling evidence that lobed ware was manufactured by Jurchens during the Jin Empire, and this in its center. Ceramics of this sort are also present in the collection

from the contemporaneous fortified settlement of Djari in the Khabarovsk Territory (Fig. 3, 20).

Dozens of lobed vessels were discovered during excavations of numerous kurgan cemeteries of the Jurchen epoch (8th–13th centuries) in the Russian Amur region: Pervoye Ozero, Olsky (Fig. 3, 17, 18), Venzelsky, Ludannikova Sopka, and others.

The totality of historic and archaeological facts shows the Jurchen culture to be the richest in diverse lobed ware in the Far East. Previously, before the evidence of such ceramics in earlier cultures of the region became available to me, I had suggested that they could have been invented *in situ* by medieval Tungus-Manchurian speaking Jurchen. As it turned out, however, the lobed ware in the region appeared in the Middle Neolithic.

Conclusions

The facts cited in the present paper leave no doubt that the ceramics known as lobed owing to its peculiar decoration was manufactured as early as the Middle and Final Neolithic (5th to late 2nd millennia BC). The earliest examples of such ware include vessels of the Kondon culture. These do not display clear features of lobulation—distinct vertical grooves. However, vertical curved or incised lines on the bodies give vessels the look of pseudo-lobulation.

In the Middle Neolithic (Malyshevo culture) though, along with pseudo-lobed ware (Gasya site), “classic” lobed vessels were manufactured. This allows us to make a conclusion about nearly synchronous evolution of these ceramic traditions on the Lower Amur. In the future, such ceramics will hopefully be also discovered at Neolithic sites elsewhere. Facts concerning the technology of Neolithic pottery are relevant to the study of Bronze Age ceramics as well (certain scholars attempt a chronological subdivision of such ware within a single culture, which would appear inexplicable).

It should be noted that one lobed vessel from Ostrov Suchu is attributable to the Late Neolithic, while another one, to the Final Neolithic (late 2nd millennium BC). Later on, prior to and at the beginning of the Early Middle Ages, pseudo-lobulation appeared on some Mohe and Poltse-Mohe clay vessels (Amurzet, Naifeld, Petrovskoye Ozero). Stages of spreading the lobed ware in the Amur region and Primorye were associated with the Bohai and especially the Jurchen cultures (7th to the first half of the 8th century). Their early pottery manufacture, including the production of lobed vessels, appears to have been directly influenced by ceramic

traditions of Korea in the first three quarters of the 1st millennium AD. However, indirect reminiscences of the Neolithic tradition are likewise possible in later cultures of the Amur region.

I cannot accept that “lobulation (in fact, pseudo-lobulation – V.M.) was first rendered in the Amur-Primorye cultures on a typical Mohe vessel... in the 4th century AD” (Dyakova, 1993: 325), and that lobed ware, under the influence of Sogdian merchants, “became widespread approximately from the 8th–9th centuries in the Amur region and, to a certain degree, in Primorye”, while “it was absolutely unknown in the Far East in the preceding time” (Shavkunov, 1985: 151). Judging by the available archaeological findings, lobed ceramics had very deep roots in the Far East, especially on the Amur. It had been manufactured and used in the region much earlier than the 1st millennium AD, specifically since the Neolithic.

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