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The circle motives: challenges in Colchian decorative repertoire

წრიული მოტივები: გამოწვევები კოლხურ დეკორატიულ რეპერტუარში

Abstract: Decorative implications are way of understanding practice and faith of population of Colchis. In this context the paper aims to examine the circle decorative motives as matter of faith that reasonably considers number of local objects noted from different regions. By providing five distinctive compositions highlights connections of western lifestyle with eastern logic, based on cultural and cross-cultural approaches. That - in one hand, acknowledges the need of development of conceptual framework to build comparative dimension. In other hand, it aims to open new discussions on ancient symbolic signs giving an understanding of pagan symbolic language and emergences of whether its development or resistance. That seeks to discover nuances of mind shift ‘inside’ object function and decoration by asking the question why this motifs matters?

Key words: Circle motive, Faith, Pagan symbol, Colchian decorative repertoire.

აბსტრაქტი

დეკორატიული მოტივები კოლხეთის მოსახლეობის პრაქტიკისა და რწმენის ერთგვარი ასახვა გახლავთ. ამ კონტექსტში ნაშრომი მიზნად ისახავს წრისგან შემდგარი დეკორატიული მოტივების როგორც რწმენის საკითხის განხილვას, რამაც ასახვა ჰპოვა სხვადასხვა არეალების ადგილობრივ ნაწარმზე. წარმოდგენილი ხუთი განსხვავებული კომპოზიცია, ხაზს უსვამს ცხოვრების დასავლური სტილის კავშირებს ადმოსავლურ ლოგიკასთან, რომელიც ინტერკულტურულ მიდგომებზეა დაფუძნებული. ეს, ერთის მხრივ ითხოვს კონცეფციური ჩარჩოს აუცილებლობას შედარებითი განზომილების შესაქმნელად. ხოლო მეორეს მხრივ, მიზნად ისახავს ახალი დისკუსიის გაშლას უძველეს სიმბოლოებზე, რომელიც იძლევა წარმართული სიმბოლოური ენის გაგებას, და მისი განვითარების აუცილებლობასა თუ რეზისტენტულობას. რაც, მიმართულია იმ აზრობრივი ცვლილებების ნიუანსების აღმოსაჩენად, რომელიც, შესაძლოა, ნივთის ფუნქციასა და მასზე მორგებულ დეკორაციაში იკითხებოდეს, და ისეთი კითხვის დასმით როგორცაა რატომ გახდა ეს მოტივი მნიშვნელოვანი?

საკვანძო სიტყვები: წრიული მოტივები, რწმენა, წარმართული სიმბოლოები, კოლხეთის ეკორატიული რეპერტუარი.

Colchian potters were adept at conveying complex ideas and events through their craft, using circular symbols imbued with emotion to narrate multifaceted stories. They developed four specific compositions of circular decorative ornaments, predominantly featured on pouring vessels discovered in various public workshops. These compositions have been studied thematically and can be analyzed in their following contextual evolution:

1. **Composition 1.** Concentric Circles (Fig.2. Fig.3). 300/320-380 AD
2. **Composition 2.** Radiating circles – Rosette design (Fig.5). 320-380 AD
3. **Composition 3.** Combination of Ram Head and Rosette (Fig.6). 340- 450/500 AD
4. **Composition 4.** Greek cross (Fig.1.C. Fig. 7). 360/380- 450 AD
5. **Composition 5.** Hybrid composition – Rosette, Ram Head, Cross (Fig.8). 380-520 AD

Tracing the process of conceptualization reveals a developmental trajectory spanning from 320 AD to 420 AD (**Fig.1**). The initial composition emerged in northwest Colchis, specifically Apsilia, with the thematic development of roundel motifs becoming prominent only from the second quarter of the 4th century.

Composition 1 consisted of single roundels

Colchian artisans began incorporating single roundels into their designs, symbolizing concepts like the 'eye' or the Creator's mind in the early 4th century AD. These motifs, created through stamping and casting techniques, were associated also as astrological concepts, a part of celestial phenomenon and several belief theory of early years. This practice emerged in central areas such as Shapka and upper regions like Pusta²⁵, appearing occasionally and briefly (**Fig.3.B**)²⁶. These designs adorned various items related to drinking, dining, clothing²⁷ and Jewelry (**Fig.3.A-F**), infusing them with personal significance and reflecting beliefs, duties, and events and perhaps the religious truth that constantly used to express emotions to what they believed.

²⁵ Voronov I. 1982:55. Pic.24.

²⁶ Morphologic and technological details see in: Baghaturia-Kner E. 2022:216-217.

²⁷ Some come from warrior graves: Shapka (Tserkovni hill) male grave 7 dated to the 380-400 AD. Voronov I., Jushin B. 1971:176. Pic. 7. Baghatuia-Kner E.Tabl.98 (A).

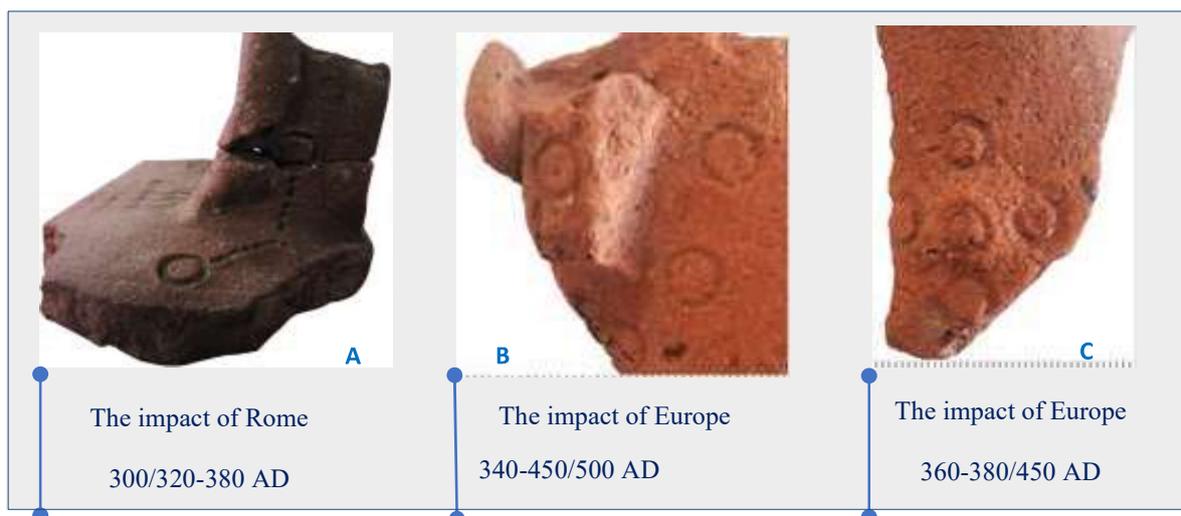


Fig. 1. Development of foreign decorative components during 320-420 AD. A-Concentric circles adopted from imported Zoomorphic design that is achieved in Apsilian way from 320 AD. B - Influence of Pannonian type roundel medallion on the design of Apsilian pottery from 340 AD. C - Influence of new religion expressed in cross shape circles arrangement in Apsilia from 360 AD.

The first noble journey of circle ornament into the daily reality of warrior in Apsilia made the story memorable through what situation it first appears. A notable example is a skillfully crafted pottery jug from the early 4th century featuring circular motifs. This jug suggests the introduction of foreign artistic influences. Its design appears to be a deliberate adaptation of Western styles made by foreigner (probably by foreign warrior). Perhaps, the jug with circle decorative motive was conscious made western model filled with metaphor, but at this time 300/320AD it was made at individual level. Soon after 330

By 330–360 AD, circular decorations had become prominent in regional art, coinciding with an increased presence of imperial forces. This period saw many potters creating refined compositions with uniform decorative elements, leading to two distinctly different groups centered on the basic circular motif (**Fig.2**). They become capacity to mirror underlying aspects by combining Colchian ornamental semantic extended of wavy lines, crisscross geometric elements, twisted device (**Fig.2.B, D, E**). In the next twenty years it appears on limited series of local fasteners²⁸ (**Fig.3.1-4**), ivory and bone items²⁹. This evolution in decorative art reflects the dynamic cultural interactions and exchanges occurring in Colchis during this time.

Apsilia, in NW Colchis, emerged as a significant producer of stamped roundel decorations between 340 and 450 AD (**Fig. 2**). It questions the design's influential factors³⁰, the intent, the concepts and the art of symbolic objectification of different meanings. As a symbol, the circle has deep roots in various ancient cultures. The use of circular motifs in ancient art has been a subject of extensive study, revealing their

²⁸ It includes cross-shaped catch-plate *fibulas* and buckle. *Fibulas* generally relates with female fasteners. They occur in Aukhuamakhu graves 3 (Trapsh 1971:102. Tabl.XXXIX.8) and Apushta cemetery grave 6, 9 (Voronov J., Voznjuk A., Jushin V., 1970:177,181. Pl.6-5; 9-6). Two other *fibulas* relate to Tserkovni hill cemetery graves 7, 8 and 9 (Voronov, Jushin 1971. Pic.7.2; Pic.8.10,11; Pic. 9.3); one buckle from Aukhuamakhu cemetery grave 3 may belong to the early III stage (AD 380-400). Trapsh 1971:102. Tabl.XXXIX.9.

²⁹ It includes pennant and scabbard. Pendant appears in Akhatsarakhu cemetery grave 6. Trapsh 1971. Pl. XXXIV.20. The scabbard attribute to the Imported Nydam type sword that was decorated by single roundels and evidenced in Tsebelda cemetery grave 1-43 .Voronov Shenkao 1982. pic.18.1a

³⁰ This creates tone to controversial topics regarding to the 'Tsebeian culture'. See the problems of so called 'Tsebelian culture' in Baghaturia-Kner E. 2022:10.

profound symbolic significance across various cultures. In Mesopotamia³¹, Egypt, and Greece, circles often represented concepts such as infinity, unity, and the cyclical nature of time, frequently associated with the divine.

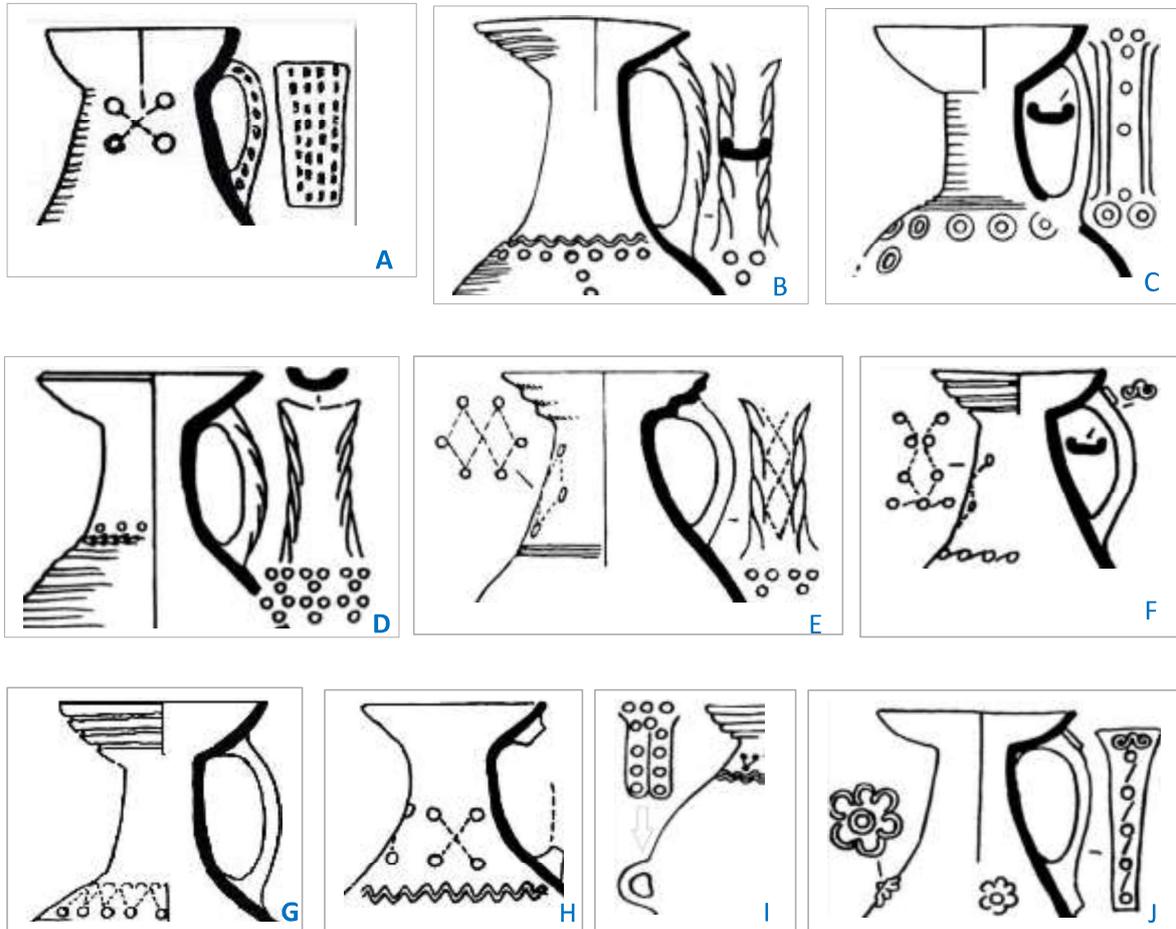


Fig. 2. Composition 1, Concentric Circles (single roundels). Pouring wares from Tsebelda cemetery: **A**-Juglet from Female grave 69 (15) of 4th century. **B**-Warrior gave 236 (69) of 4th century AD. **C**-Warrior grave 163 (28) of 4th century AD. **D**- Female grave 430 (350-380 AD). **E**-Gave 89 (19) of the 5th century AD. **F**-Warrior grave 210 (43) of the 4th century AD. **G**- Warrior grave 258 (22) of early 4th century. **H**- Female grave 262 (2) of late 4th century AD. **I**- Female grave 244 (8) of late 4th century AD. **J**- Warrior grave 250 (350-380 AD). Source: Voronov I. 2003:23-24, 49, 39, 52, 107, 27, 52. Figs:34 (2), 109 (5), 80 (5),207 (3), 44 (2), 121 (2), 123 (5), 114 (3), 117 (6).

The examined composition may have been employed in ancient times to convey concepts about space and the eternal deity, as seen in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Greece³², or to symbolize the cosmos and the perpetual motion of all things. It can inform about the Sun and a rhythm of universe which has more or less spiritual and societal values that bridge traditional classic knowledge. Of course, they might have conceptual similarities and differences as the origins ideas trace back to the 2nd millennium, when

³¹ See: Koch-Westenholz U. 1995.

³² Zodiac derives from the ancient Greek 'zodiakos kyklos' which means circle of animals, since most of the zodiac signs are depicted by an animal. As for the names of each sign, they come from the constellation they represent in the sky and are matched with specific date.

circles symbolized infinity, unity, and the cyclical nature of time associated with the divine. However, Neolithic³³ and Bronze Age³⁴ circular structures do not fully explain how they convey such abstract ideas, making it challenging to determine their conceptual origins. Astrological approaches suggest that the oldest traditions of constellations originated with the Mesopotamians, with the Egyptians adopting them later³⁵, and the Greeks³⁶ incorporating concentric circles as celestial symbols during the Geometric period.³⁷ There is a tradition of at least 2,000 years of recording celestial observations and terrestrial events (inscribed on clay tablets known as C-form texts), where the cyclical nature of the seasons³⁸ (sun and moon) was used, possibly for agricultural or other activities.³⁹ Scientists have struggled to understand the embedded concepts observed in decorative art.

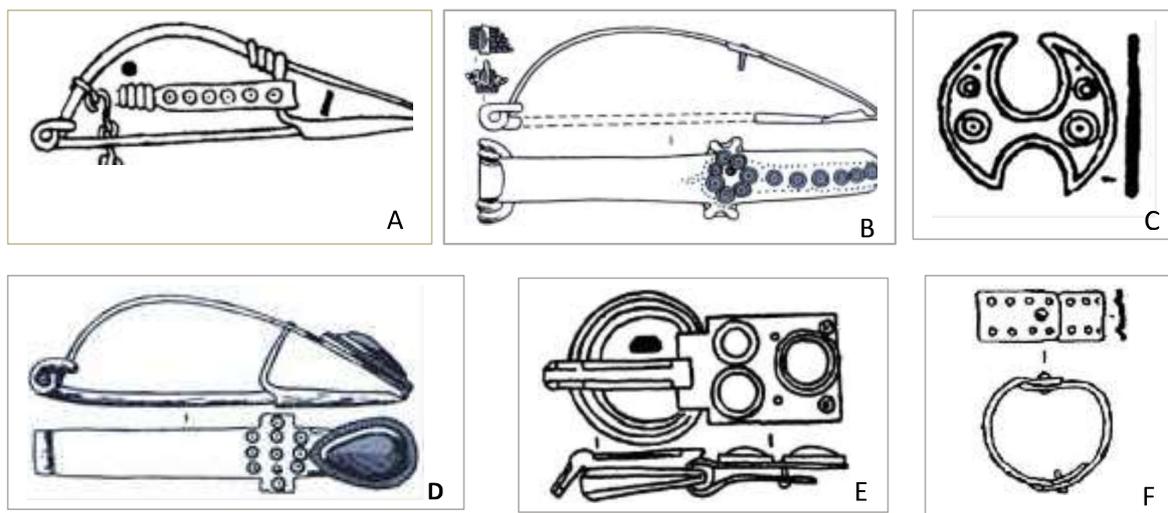


Fig. 3. Selected objects depicting a circle decorative element. Selected items from Tsebelda cemetery: **A-** Fibulae female grave 115 (22) of the 4th century AD. **B-**Fibulae from Apushta male grave 10 (380-400 AD). **C-** Brooch from female adult grave of the late 5th century AD. **D-**Shapka (Tserkovni hill) male grave (380-400 AD). **E** – Buckle from male grave 399 (20) of 5th century. **F-** Finger ring from warrior grave 155 (20) of 5th century AD. Source: *Voronov I. 1982:32, Pic.24., Voronov 2003:76, 55, 34, 37-38. Pic.191 (15), 58 (9), 62 (36), 76; Baghatuia-Kner E.2022. Tabl.98 (A).*

The examined composition may have been intended to evoke similar emotional responses as the circle art briefly featured on a 5th-century BC juglet⁴⁰ in Colchis (Fig. 4). This suggests that the concept, with

³³ Neolithic people perhaps connect to the ideas of rising sun and rebirth.

³⁴ See Burl A. 2000. *The Stone Circles of Britain, Ireland, and Brittany*. Yale University press, 1.

³⁵ In Hathor temple at Dendera with a circular ceiling - depiction of cosmos, showing constellations, gods, and goddesses, which are connected to celestial, the divine, and circles.

³⁶ Early philosophers Plato and Aristotle³⁶ obviously impacted by Hellenistic astrology, there are the text of Antiochus of Athens. Egyptian understanding of circle is symbolizing the Sun, depicted also with human face an often named as god or goddess.

³⁷ Concentric circle featured Proto-geometric pottery. Circles sometimes adorned cinerary containers. See *Ibid.*, 219. In Geometric Period circles represent the cosmos through stars and sun, which associate probably to a celestial and religious symbol.

³⁸ The account of the ‘*Sun visiting its mother*’ is obviously a reference to the summer and winter solstices; two solar “stations” (the summer and winter ingresses / first points of Cancer and Capricorn) were apparently regarded as being the same place in some sense. Chenciner, 1997.

³⁹ Some evidences of celestial and divine forces are reflected in circular forms through astronomy and the position of the Tholos door facing east.

⁴⁰ From proportional aspect it could be used for special liquid or for some special purposes. The jug occur in Tsikhisdziri. See: Kakhize A., Phartenadze T.2017:55. Fig.68

socially consistent meaning, could have been understood long before and developed in decorative art. However, it is challenging to differentiate symbol art as circle represented a single unit lacking the beginning and end, which was named as ‘monad’ by Greek philosopher Pythagoras.⁴¹ Hermetic philosophy also explored the circle's significance, stating, "God is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere."



Fig. 4. Classic experience of circle design. 1. Tsikisziri Juglet of 5th century. Sources: Kakhidze A., Phartenaze T. 2017:54.Tabl.67.

This means that different communities, cultures and historical periods utilize the visual depiction of the circle. Correspondingly, Roman art may inscribe further conceptual differences. Let us go through the chronology of events. It is a time when Constantine replaced Hercules (the patron god of Maximian) with Sol- the Sun God Helios after the victory of Maxentius.⁴² While the religion was still changing, perhaps it allowed artists to convey Constantine’s commitment⁴³ to Sol through the circle symbol in decorative art. It starts coming so quickly into the focus of the Roman Empire around 320-350 AD and correspondingly in Colchis. From a chronologic view, it is quite possible to influence the Bishopric Pithius easily, where the Roman armies were stationed and supplied its vicinity, including Apsilia. When we compare the dynamic of circle decorative motives explored in Apsilia and the chronology of the invention of those ideas, it coincides with the militarization of the area and is attributable to external Roman influence.

⁴¹ Pythagoras believes the *monad* to be god, the unity Supreme Being. See: Hemenway P. 2005. Divine Proportion: (Phi) in At, Nature, and Science. NY. (See also Gottfield Wilhelm Leibniz 1846. Discourse de metaphisique). Other related significance of circle that became a subject of mathematics, lead to the development of trigonometry, geometric constructions and eventually calculus. It representing a zero in our system of numbering, symbolizes potential or the embryo.

⁴² Sol concept believed to be the result of whether Constantine’s vision or his political maneuvering when he *rotated letter X bent over the marked Christ on the shields* of his soldier. Constantine experienced the vision as moment of profound inspiration in 309 or 310. About shields see Barnes T.D. 2011:79. It is also known that after taking Rom in 312 AD the Festival of pagan Isis tokens were issued every 5 years.

⁴³ It is suggested that Constantine incorporated Sol and Christ in Cristian belief. He decorated his arch in Rome with Sol depictions, he erected a statue of himself as Soll/Helios/Apollo on his forum in Constantinople and Sol introduced on the coinage as well. However, Constantine portraying himself as both Sol (and Helios) and the new Christ. See in: Ramskold L & Wolfram T.2022:151-152. See also : Bardill 2012:28-37.

I think there were several possible reasons why circle entered into the decorative reality of Colchian art: it likely served multiple purposes, reflecting the society's values and beliefs. These motifs may have symbolized aspects of Colchian identity, such as the association with King Aeetes, the son of Helios, and the economic history linked to the Golden Fleece. Additionally, the adoption of these symbols could have been influenced by the integration of new religious concepts.

From the 1st century BC to the 7th century AD, circular decorative motifs gained popularity across various regions⁴⁴, including the Celts, Romans, Germans⁴⁵, Eastern Black Sea Littoral⁴⁶, and Britain⁴⁷. The flow of such material showed best management to bridge antiquity and the early byzantine. They visually explored religion complexity in experience of various cultures to serve conceptual reflection on taste, fashion⁴⁸, including jewelry, hygiene⁴⁹ and other objects of daily life. Perhaps they were looking to build new society with new ideas and such decorations were perhaps functionally necessary, as they applied influential objects of imperial official character and tax-related purposes. Their focus and passion through different means better facilitate an understanding of rising political power in artistic expressions.

Composition 2, radiating circles – Rosette design

In Composition 2, the circle motif evolves into a radiating rosette design, prominently featured on the front belly of pouring vessels, with careful attention to scale and orientation (**Fig.2.B; Fig.5.A-E**). Some jug handles exhibit horizontally arranged circle lines above the rosette (**Fig.5,F**), enhancing the visual theme. Potters experimented with various iterations, adjusting rosette positions to create authentic variations. The skills to make different examples inspired me to make other versions combined with X shape arrangements (**Fig.5.A**) and geometric motives (**Fig.5,F**). However, they edited, modified, and shifted rosette positions; those are genuine versions. It often becomes the primary decor for hemispheric and later on pear shape jugs, but mostly aligns with proportional properties, such as function pots for dining or drinking. It tested on various objects, including the dress attire and male functional belt fasteners.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ The belt attire of 6th -7th centuries where it applied corresponds to the owned the warrior from Danube area (Arcybasévo). It also applies on bone bags of arrow-head from Hungary (Bein), horse saddles (Awar graves) etc. See in: Bálint Cs., 1989:41, 73, 155. Abb.16.7; Abb.35.4; Abb.65.4

⁴⁵ The coin on which it is represented, considered to a post-Roman development of Celtic art. See: Hansen 2010:74. More information sees in: Laning 1993. Laning 2006. Laning 2010. *Signa militaria* and *signum manipularis* with the legionary eagle that represented on the frieze of San Domenico in Sora (Augustinian date) from Abazgia was decorated with central dot roundels. See: D'Amato R. 2009:127. pic.156g.

⁴⁶ Identical pendants to the Akhatsarakhu sample appears among the population of Tanais-Sinjavka, Kerch (grave 179) and Skalistoe (grave 421). See: Bierbrauer 2008.Tabl.4.12; .25.12; .28.4. We define some bone jewellery from the Eastern Black Sea area. Identical pendants to Akhatsarakhu sample appears at Tanais-Sinjavka settlement, Kerch grave 179 and Skalistoe grave N421. See in: Bierbrour V., 2008.Tabl.4.12; .25.12; .28.4).

⁴⁷ See Laing, Liloyd Robert 2010. Pic.2.1-e; 2.3-b, d.

⁴⁸ It applies the plate brooches also in Britain. Laing, Liloyd Robert 2010. Pic.2.1-e; 2.3-b,d.

⁴⁹ It applied to items of personal care including combs and various 3rd -4th century AD cosmetic sets. They occur in Lakenheath, Suffolk and Norfolk. See: Jakson R. 2010.29, 144,168.

⁵⁰ Radiated circles we see on local personal adornment and cross-shaped catch-plate *fibulas*. Some *fibulas* accompanied male dress accessories that corresponding to wide belt fittings. Some corresponds to female clothes. Male functional belts with X'-shaped fittings occur in late 4th century Pushta grave 10. See in:Voronov 1982:55. Pic.24.22; Other two examples of bronze and iron *fibulas* were found with Alrakhu female graves 7 and 10. Gunba 1978:17, 20.Table VII.2. Table X.4.

Chronologically, this design aligns with the second quarter of the 4th century AD. Notably, such medallions were absent from local products before 300/320 AD, as evidenced in many parallels that I have cited in my research about the decorative semantic of Olginskoe pottery.⁵¹

These artifacts suggest that Roman time potters perceived the circle differently, exemplified by the rosette model, which embodies feminine values. Objects accurately explain that potters saw a circle from a different angle. This is easy to see in the ‘rosette model’- as a matter of feminine values. From composition, Rosette, as the focal point, gives a sense of the classic symbol of Venus - the Roman goddess of love who somehow encourages the role of maternal principles in society later. Its earliest phenomenon was originally seen as a pagan symbol, perhaps for the ‘great mother,’ who experienced the prehistoric people.⁵² The latest postulate of this sense we realized in the following composition is a concept of the ‘Virgin Mary’ and the ‘Mother Goddess.’ However, another possible concept may communicate with alternative knowledge of ancestors saying something about the solar planet and a wheel of cosmos in the planetary world. This motif, originally a pagan symbol for the 'great mother,' traces back to prehistoric times. Alternatively, it may represent solar imagery or the cosmic wheel.



Fig. 5. Composition 2, Radiating circles – Rosette design. Selected jugs from Tsebdela cemetery: **A**-Female Grave 265 (29) of 5th century AD. **B**-Female Grave 244 (8) of 5th century AD. **C**-Female Grave 89 (19 of 5th century AD. **D**-Warrior grave 1a-2, 360/370-380 AD. **E**-Male grave 358 (380-400 AD). **F**- Female grave 404 (380-420 AD). *Source: Voronov 2003:53, 27, 104, 106. Pic.124 (4), 44 (4), 63 (4), 192 (10); Voronov I, Shenkao N. 1982:163.Fig.15 (3).*

We do not have accurate evidence to support both ideas, but some burial contexts offer insights:

- A) Female association: This design is often found in female graves, indicating its significance in conveying themes of love, mystery, or remembrance.

⁵¹ Baghaturia-Kner E. 2022:171, 180,211.

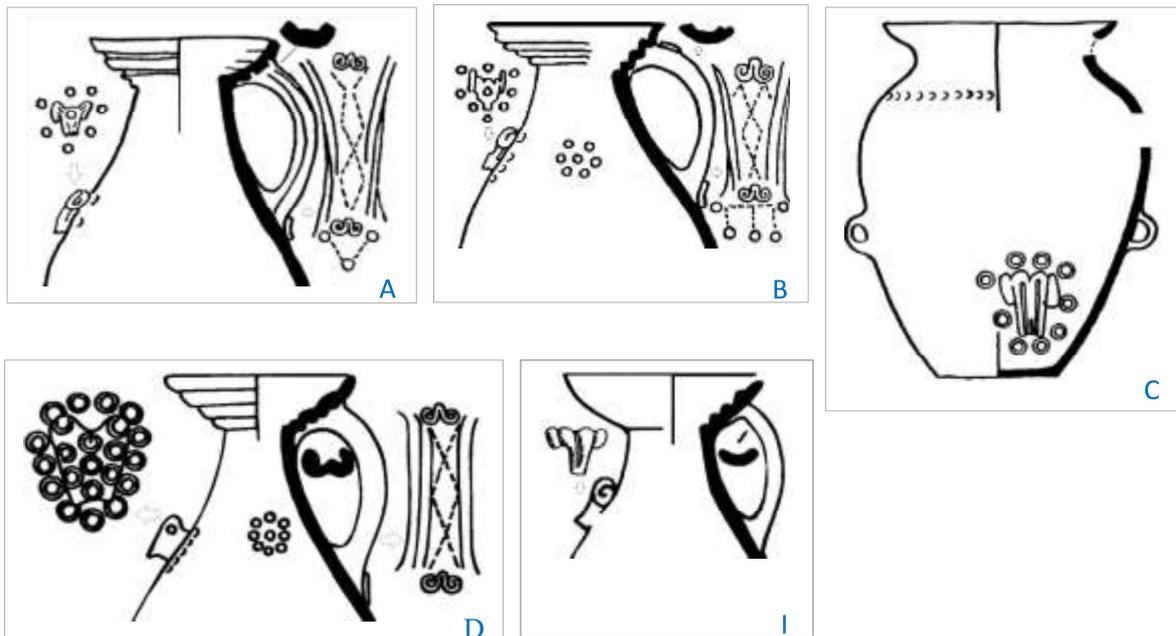
⁵² It considers also a pagan symbol of great mother. The circle is symbol of the Vagina – the feminine origin of fertilization. It reminiscent the prehistoric southern Arabian sites of Sharm, Fujairah, Wadi Ashwani, Wadi ah-Shanah, Wadi al-Hilu, and Wadi Daftah. A rosette suspended of five dots, with a dot-in-circle indicating a ‘spiny oyster’ from Arabian Sharm. See: Ziolkowski M.C & Al-Sharqi A.S. 2006.

B) Maternal Symbolism: The subsequent Composition 3 (**Fig.5**) may further emphasize maternal aspects, revealing the dual nature of religious beliefs. This is demonstrated in combined compositions featuring a ram, often associated with Christ, fitting well with early motherhood themes.

These decorative schemes likely played a crucial role in exploring allegories, especially during periods of religious transition in Colchis. Similar workshops existed in regions like Pannonia, where Christian monograms were later incorporated into designs. Thus, Colchian workshops emerged concurrently with the growing Greek and Roman interest in constellations.

Composition 3, combination of Ram head & Rosette

Composition 3 presents a conceptually and aesthetically intriguing design that combines a rosette with a ram's head⁵³ to convey profound spiritual themes. This motif appears mainly on the front bodies of hemispheric and pear-shaped jugs (**Fig.6**), with the animal figure crafted from molded clay, highlighting features such as eyes, horns, and a subtly defined muzzle⁵⁴. This transitional design emerged around 340 AD and persisted until approximately 500 AD⁵⁵. This heraldry composition has interesting aspects: it shows the symbols providing Christian meaning, giving a sense of mysticism, affecting people and perhaps the magician. Therefore, this heraldic composition serves dual purposes: it embodies Christian symbolism, evoking mysticism and potentially magical connotations.



⁵³ Chronologic and workshop difference are seen in distinction of stylized ram heads, the face and horn featuring. Earlier types give a remarkable picture of schematized animal head with featureless face and possible a horn-like (a stag's horns) at both sides of head. Little refined later types are quite different in treatment of face components and horn. Also, there are images of sheep, goats, and bulls are carved on pouring wares. Display parts are the shoulder, below handle or belly of flared rim jugs, whether spherical or pear shape. See Baghatuia-Kner E. 2022:211-219

⁵⁴ The unbalanced modelling sometimes argues for pig depiction, but comparisons that closely match the Olginskoe sample suggest an ox/bull display. Abgidzrakhu grave 39. Trapsh 1971:61. Tabl.XVIII-2

⁵⁵ Earliest version of jug with similar composition comes from Apiancha cenotaph 24. Gunba 1978:33. Tabl.XXI.1

Fig. 6. Composition 3, combination of Ram head & Rosette. Selected jugs of Tsebelda cemetery: **A-B-** Female grave 106 (14) of late 5th century AD. **C-**Female grave 198 (31) of 4th century AD. **D-**Male grave 393 (380-400 AD). **I-** Female Grave 213 (46) of 5th century AD. *Source: Voronov 2003:50, 44, 106, 45-46. Pic.53 (8, 9), 96 (2), 189 (1), 100 (5),*

The idea behind **Ram (Fig.6,B,D,I)**, which is often placed close to the rosette, may conduct a peaceful aspect of Christian philosophy on the one hand and also communicate with imperial ideology and it is more nuanced than we think.

In Colchian culture, where the "Golden Fleece" holds significant importance, the depiction of the ram suggests a fundamental conceptual evolution. It also does not exclude some astronomic or astrologic aspects, such as matters of fertility, courage, and zodiacal constellations in ancient and classic science seen in the experience of different cultures⁵⁶. It has the potential to include all relative ideas from ancient and early Christian knowledge. That is why it is hugely influential for both Pagans and Christians. I believe that the crucial aspect of composition is to give rise to Christian meaning and make the visual impression challenging. From the chronological sequence, we realize that if the circle, on the contrary, may point to the Sun-Sol that creates dimensions for 'Christian integrity' in Constantine's time, then this composition is a more convenient schema for Christian aspects.

Such symbolic interplay offers diverse perspectives on beliefs and their manifestations in material culture. Composition 3, in particular, reflects narratives paralleled in multiple cultures. The circular medallion appears to be a localized adaptation of imported designs, as evidenced by stylistic similarities with rosettes⁵⁷ from Cologne and parallels in Pannonian art.

Composition 4, Greek cross

Composition 4 features two intersecting circles arranged to form a Greek cross (**Fig.7**). The upper and lower decorative zones are crafted by pressing tools to create sharp indentations on the surface⁵⁸, making the stamped cross easily recognizable (**Fig.1.3**). This typology emerged between 360 and 450 AD. Notably, the cross is typically positioned on the front body below shoulders (**Fig.7.2-3**) of pouring vessels⁵⁹, though it is occasionally found on the shoulder⁶⁰, below handle (in southern Apsilia) an exclusive on neck⁶¹ (**Fig.1.3**).

⁵⁶ If we focus on astronomic-astrological aspects of Ram-Aries set inside circle, it could highlight some cosmic peculiarities according to Greek Knowledge. Accordingly, community of Phasis and Dioskuria could easily lead content of Ram symbol on Colchian pottery.

⁵⁷ A slight distinction of a Budapest comb revealed in enclosed bird images of roundel medallion, which is a part of different series (Cnotliwy E. 2010:217. Kat. 241). It was successfully distributed in middle Byzantine textual art and personal possessions. Later stylistic analogies of roundel medallions are seen also on textiles in Museum of Haven, Yale University Art Gallery. Fallke O., 1913:57.fig.75; Martiani-Reber M., 1986:63-64, no.33. A similar schema on a silk Tunic probably of imperial authority representing the frontal bust imitation has been expected for apotropaic purpose. 5th-6th century pendants with Christian imagery often imitate radiating schema that sometimes incorporate coins to give similar association of radiating roundels. Such is a sample from Virginia museum of the fine Art. See in: Kondoleon Ch 1987:307-316; as well as in: Gonosova'A., and Kondolen Ch.1994:109-111

⁵⁸ See Olginskoe jug in: Baghaturia-Kner E. 2022. Table. 26. A-1.

⁵⁹ There is sufficient evidence for shoulder decorations seen in hemispheric jugs in Abgidzrakhu cemetery graves 9, 19, 36. Trapshi 1971:30, 40, 58, 110. Tabl.V, XLV.1, XVI.2. XLV.

⁶⁰ Cross implication on shoulders of hemispheric jugs are found in Alrakhu cemetery graves 3, 4 and Apiancha grave 37. Gunba 1978:12, 43-45. Tabl.III.2b; IV.1; XXXV.3.

⁶¹ Exclusive appearance of cross on the neck of jug is evidenced in Olginskoe grave 1 dated to the 380/385-400 AD (See: Baghaturia-Kner E. 2022).

The prominently featured cross motif on Colchian pottery serves a straightforward purpose, is closely associated with the Christian faith, and illuminates the emergence of new religious ideas. In the latter half of the 4th century, this symbol was relatively novel and presented significant challenges; pottery was rare among the Mramba community. This rarity suggests that most local populations adhered to ancestral beliefs during this period. Moreover, the cross motif did not become a prevalent design element within the circular decorative repertoire of Colchis and fell out of favor after 450 AD. But noticeable is their appearance in warrior graves of Apsilia⁶².

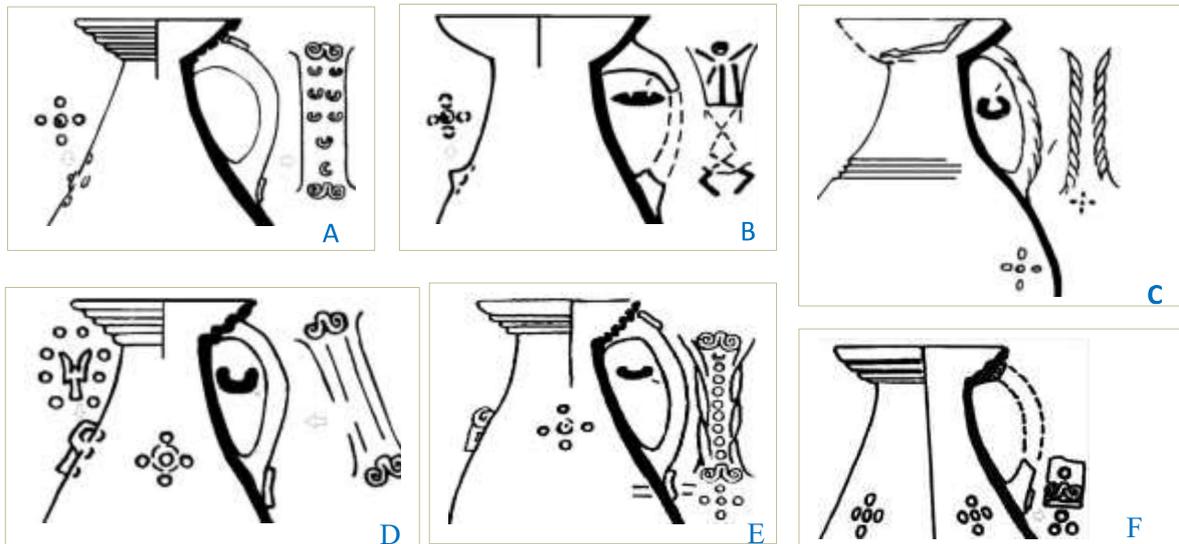


Fig. 7. Composition 5, Greek cross. Selected Pouring wares from Tsebelda cemetery: **A**-Female grave 91 (21) of 5th century AD. **B**-Female adult grave 86 (16) of late 4th – early 5th century AD. **C**-Female grave 329. **D**-Female adult grave 90 (20) of 5th century AD. **E**- Female grave 120 (27) of 5th century AD. **F**- Male grave 2-3 of 400-410 AD. *Source: Voronov I. 2003:27, 26, 36, 103. Fig.42 (11), 45 (2), 151(5), 69(16); Voronov I., Shenkao N., 1982:148. Fig.16.*

Composition 5. Hybrid composition (Rosette, Ram Head, Cross)

This composition presents a creative and exotic amalgamation of symbols, combining the cross, rosette, and ram's head into a cohesive design (**Fig.8**). Cross, rosette, and Ram Head are specific components recognized in the resolution of this model⁶³. What is also about the cross is many different formations and subtle variations (**Fig.8.C-D**). The lower neck shoulder (**Fig.8.A-B**) is a small field selected for positioning the frontal cross, showcasing various sophisticated formations and alterations (we are dealing with versions showing most sophisticated harmony of shapes). Rosette on the belly is truly where it belongs and involves the animal leading. The rosette adorns the belly of the vessel, seamlessly integrating with the stylized ram's head, creating a dynamic sense of movement as the ram appears to engage with the independent cross. The rosette adorns the belly of the vessel, seamlessly integrating with the stylized ram's head, creating a dynamic sense of movement as the ram appears to engage with the independent cross. This intricate combination emerged towards the end of the 4th century AD, gained

⁶² Consider the inhumation warrior graves from Mramba cemeteries: Abgizrakhu cemetery graves 31 (date to the 350-380 AD), grave 1 (date to the 400-450 AD). Baghaturia-Kner E. 2022. Tabl.81, A; Tabl.80,A.

⁶³ See jugs from Abgizrakhu grave 28, Akhatsarakhu 1, Alrakhu 4 of Mramba necropolis. Trapsh 1971.

favor among the Mramba⁶⁴ community, and, interestingly, was occasionally applied to 5th-century pithoi⁶⁵. However, for reasons not entirely clear, the popularity of this composition declined in the 5th century⁶⁶ and had largely disappeared by the early 6th century AD⁶⁷.

The late 4th-century AD Colchian pottery exhibits a sophisticated fusion of classical and Roman artistic elements, reflecting a dynamic progression in design brought in roman order. This period marks a significant transition, with motifs such as the rosette and ram head becoming prominent, symbolizing Christian themes. We get these things very nicely on two different scales on the body of pouring wares, where the body, creating a structured and dynamic pattern (Fig.8.1).

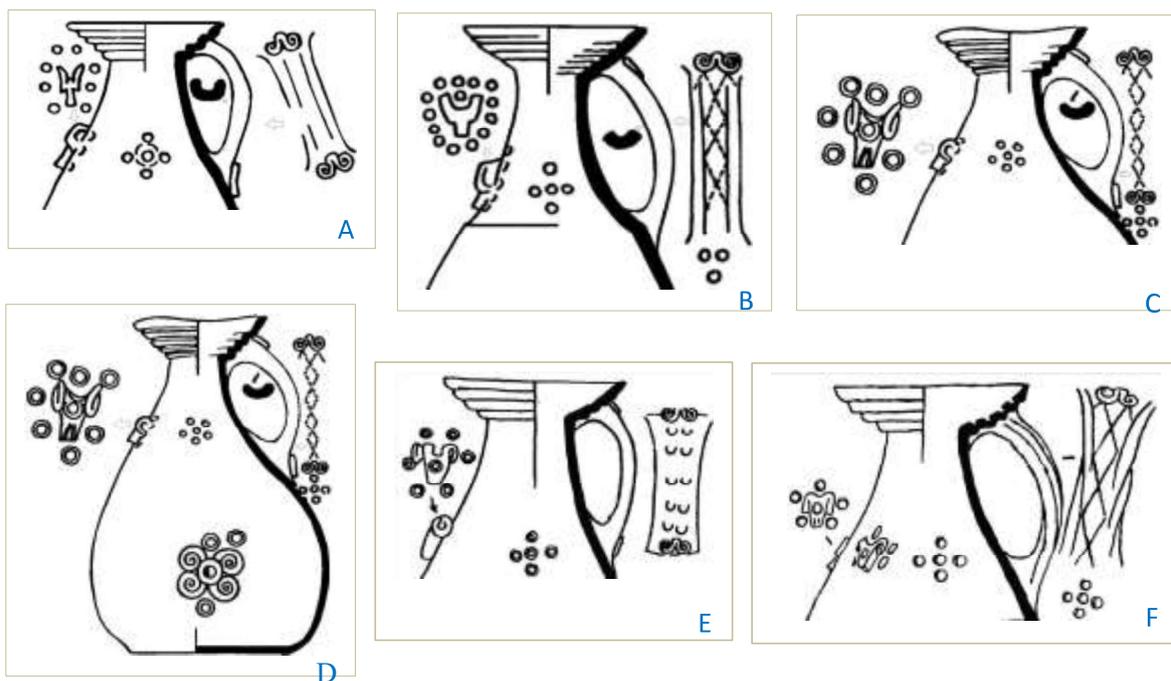


Fig. 8. Composition 2, Combine motives of Radiating circles, Rosette design, Ram and Cross. Selected pouring wares from Tsebelda cemetery: **A-** Female adult grave 139 (6) of late 4th century AD. **B-** Male grave with horse 377 (380- 400 AD). **C- *** . **D-** Female grave 382 (380-420 AD). **E-** Female grave 375 (380-400 AD). **F-** Tsebelda, fort grave 2 (370-400 AD). *Source: Voronov I. 2003: *, 105. Fig. *,177 (4), *, 180 (18), 175 (); Baghaturia-Kner 2022. Tabl.93 (2,2).*

Decorative components are thoughtfully arranged in entire compositional semantic to resonate significant transition in Christianity. This transition reflects aspects of the Mother Goddess, Mary⁶⁸. Positioned centrally, it radiates a profound impression. However, the top presents a more complex challenge, where the cross pattern succeeds on the rim, neck or chest of wine jugs, perhaps to indicate

⁶⁴ The jug appearing in Abgidzraku cemetery grave 36 is similar, with radiating animal motif, but dissimilar with Greek cross representation applied to shoulders. Trapsh 1971:58. Tabl. XVI.2.

⁶⁵ It was exclusively applied to the neck of one storage jar, which is the only example of such decoration in upland Apsilia evidenced in Apushta cemetery grave 15. Voronov, Voznjuk, Jushin. 1970. Pic.12.2.

⁶⁶ The latest find consists of the pouring vessel from male grave 5 of Tserkovni hill. Voronov., Jushin 1971:176. Pic.5.2. It exclusively appears on two handled storage jar of vicinity Apsilia, which evidenced in Atara Armjanskaja (means Armenian Atara) cemetery grave 1. Gunba 1978. Tabl.XLII.1

⁶⁷ Further details see in Baghaturia-Kner E. 2022.

⁶⁸ The white raised - as an emblem of purity, the red- martyrdom and a ring or garland of roses - the emblem of the Virgin Mary; the yellow rose is reserved as a symbol of papal benediction.

what the drinker sought from the process when pouring wine or any liquid in ceremonies or rituals—salvation. There is considerable thought behind these components in their full motion, working together logically. If we accept this visible part as a matter of faith, then the rosette—the symbol of St. Mary, the ram—the symbol of Jesus, and the cross—the symbol of salvation and protection—enhance a conceptual scale for Christian rhetoric. The incorporation of the cross pattern on the rim of wine jugs further emphasizes the Christian symbolism, aligning with the era's religious shifts.

This artistic evolution highlights Colchian artisans' technical prowess and mirrors the time's broader cultural and religious transformations.

However, *composition 5* produces conceptual connections, potter inspiration, and the choice of users and characters that stand closer to the life of specific communities of Apsilian. We can see similar compositional and stylistic expressions on European combs⁶⁹, where we realize some of the decorative schema employed by 4th-century European sites. However, such synthesis is considered the rarest composition, even in the early 5th century.

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⁶⁹ See the 4th century combs from Neuburg (Cnotliwy E, 2010. fig.7.9); Orslavice, Elblag group of Wielbark culture (Vistula mouth) and Pruszcz Gdanski. A slightly earlier group of comb pattern is dated to the beginning of the 5th century occurring earlier decorative types in Pruszcz Gdanski grave N8. See: Cnotliwy E, 2010:188.pic.11.14.