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# 'Copy and Paste' in the Iron Age: Stamped Pottery between Local Production and the Continental Scale

Gadea Cabanillas de la Torre, Petra Goláňová

## Introduction – stamped pottery, a European decorative trend

Stamp-decorated pottery has a wide distribution area in the Iron Age, extending from the Atlantic to the Balkans, but there is no archaeological proof of the interregional circulation of such items. In fact, assemblages of it seem to be produced regionally all over the continent, with several areas of concentration where stamped decoration met with great success. However, a large number of ceramic finds from the 6th to the 1st centuries BC have as a common feature decoration consisting of the imprints of stamps. The deployment of this technique is thus associated with a codification of this decoration, created by a 'copy and reproduce' method.

During the Early Iron Age, from the 7th to the 5th century BC, a large number of small, local production areas of stamped decoration are known (fig. 1a). In the Iberian Peninsula, they concentrated in the Douro valley, but they also developed elsewhere: in Etruria, in the Alb-Hegau-Keramik zone as well as in part of the Kalenderberg culture area, and on Thracian sites in south-east Bulgaria (Čičikova 1974; Nehrizov 2006). Despite this enormous, yet discontinuous, distribution area, some particular motifs were widely used. For example, the 'running dog' pattern, which is composed of overlapping recumbent S-shaped stamps, is found on pottery from the east in the Thracian region<sup>1</sup> (cf. Čičikova 1974, p. 62, Abb. 4, 10 n°7) to northern Italy (Linksfeiler 1978, p. 87, note 48). Some motifs even show connections with Early La Tène pottery designs. 'Suns', triskeles, and other rotational motifs occur on Vezerzug Culture *pintaderas* in the Late Hallstatt period (cf. Kisfaludi 1997; Schweltnus 2011). Concentric circles in combination with birds appear in the Iberian Peninsula (Wattenberg 1978, p. 167). However, there is thereafter no obvious link with the Early La Tène stamped pottery which developed

from the 5th century BC: this appeared in different areas, on new vessel forms and with distinct compositions and motifs.

Stamped pottery appeared in most European ceramic production areas during the 5th century BC, from Brittany to Transdanubia (fig. 2). In the western La Tène zone, it was primarily present in Thuringia (Müller, Müller 1977), the Middle and Upper Rhine valley, occasionally in Central and Eastern France (Augier 2012; Bardel 2012, p. 78-79, 90, 130) but was massively represented in Brittany (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015). Its distribution area stretches across the Eastern La Tène world to Bavaria (Tappert 2006, p. 149, 184-194), Lower Austria and the Salzburg region (Ramsel 2002; 2011; Stöllner 2002), Bohemia (Linksfeiler 1978), Moravia (Goláňová 2018), West Slovakia (Březinová, Benediková 2002; Čambal 2012), and north Transdanubia (Tankó 2016). The eastern border of this distribution is the same as that traditionally established for Late La Tène *oppida*, but – exceptionally – stamped pottery is also found in southern Transdanubia (Gáti 2014) and Poland (Kraków-Wyciąże: Poleska 2005, p. 188) (fig. 1b).

In Bavaria, Bohemia, and Moravia, stamped pottery disappeared around the beginning of the 4th century BC, but production continued steadily in north-western Transdanubia, in the Danube valley in Lower Austria and in the Salzburg region. In the Great Hungarian Plain and the Carpathian Basin it appeared along with new La Tène settlements and cemeteries (Rustoiu 2014; Tankó 2016; Urák 2018) though here it shows a slightly different, interrupted style of decoration.

In the western La Tène area, a new phase then followed; it was marked by a new impulse, both qualitative and quantitative, in the production of stamped pottery (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 622). It is apparent that the transformations of the late 5th and early 4th century, visible in all aspects of the archaeological record, deeply impacted pottery production and decoration.

In this paper, we will only deal with this early period, comprising the timespan between the earliest La Tène productions and their transformation or disappearance in the 4th century BC. The aim is to understand how this material appeared roughly at the same time, in different contexts in widely-separated areas.

<sup>1</sup> J. Bouzek (2006), for example, has attempted to establish a connection between Early La Tène and Thracian art.



Fig. 1. a. Distribution map of stamped pottery in Europe during the Early Iron Age;  
b. Distribution map of stamped pottery in Europe during the Late Iron Age.

Stamped pottery will first be analysed as a technological style used in similar ways throughout the continent, but whose production context remains for the most part unclear. It is then argued that this technological style is a constituent element of the emergence of Early La Tène art in a multipolar way. Lastly, we will explore the social and regional distributions of stamped pottery in order to discuss the purposes it might have served.

### Stamped pottery: a technological style

Complex decoration using a broad range of design motifs typical of La Tène art appeared during the 5th century BC. This new ornamental style is usually linked with the emergence of different vessel shapes and the use of some innovative techniques. The rapid success of stamped pottery cannot easily be understood as a simple aesthetic trend, as it is embedded in time- and place-specific production patterns. Using stamps as a technique to produce decoration is a deliberate choice, implying advantages – the ability to control and codify an ornamental vocabulary, which can be easily reproduced and quickly applied to the vessels – and drawbacks – the latter related to the material and social constraints represented by both the physical and moral ownership of the necessary tools and the motifs themselves.

Although thousands of stamped pottery fragments have been found throughout La Tène Europe (Schwappach 1977, Abb. 1), very little is known about the stamps used to produce the designs. Only the imprints made with them and experimental work can shed some light on their use. A very small number of relevant tools made of bone and antler is known, mainly from the eastern La Tène area (Megaw, Megaw 2006, p. 376, 378). Surprisingly, none of them has been found to match traces on actual potsherds. Presumably, many such tools have disappeared because they were made of organic materials, or wore out or broke; metal examples may have been melted down for recycling.

Hardly any physical infrastructure for the production of stamped pottery is known. A key exception seems to be a series of La Tène B kilns from Sopron (Hungary), where stamped pottery was produced together with many other ceramic types (Zeiler 2009, p. 53-55). Certain features of the kilns and their archaeological context point to a regional production pattern here. Another interesting piece of evidence shedding much light on stamped pottery production is the group of La Tène B stamped pots found around Lake Neusiedl; these have all been stamped using the same implement (Zeiler *et al.* 2010). This confirms both that stamps could have had a long and complex biography and that at least some stamped pottery production involved networks operating on a regional scale.

The fact that stamped decoration is founded on a specific construction pattern which is based on the repetition of motifs combined according to strict rules also points to diversity in the collective, multipolar creation and circulation of images (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 655-659). The presence of mistakes, different degrees of regularity in designs, and indications of care in the selection of the correct use of surfaces indicates

that stamped decoration was carefully designed and executed. As guidelines were not always deployed, for instance, to keep friezes horizontal, and several levels of skills are visible, it can be inferred that it was necessary for potters to learn a series of techniques; and that different quality standards existed (fig. 2). However, the *chaîne opératoire* of making stamped decoration was embedded in general vessel design and production schemes, and must therefore not have been the work of specialised craftsmen. This is proved by the frequent and coherent combination of stamping with other decoration techniques such as incised or painted motifs, its occurrence on particular parts of the vessel such as the inside of rims and on bases, and its association with specific forming and surface finishing techniques.

In the eastern Early La Tène zone, stamped decoration emerged in connection with a new technology, the potter's wheel, and was mostly applied to fine table ware with no direct local antecedents – including S-shaped bowls and flask shapes (fig. 2). Stamped decoration is only rarely applied on traditional local forms such as Stupava-type handled bowls in the Carpathian Basin, which have parallels in earlier, Early Iron Age items (Tankó 2005). At the end of the 5th century BC, stamps were also used to decorate cooking and storage vessels (including graphite and coarse pots and situlae) in the eastern area: in Bavaria (Tappert 2006, p. 151-156, Abb. 115), Austria (Dürrenberg: Brand 1995, p. 125), Bohemia, Moravia (Goláňová 2018, p. 113-116, fig. 57), and Transdanubia (Jerem, Kardos 1985). However, the decoration motifs and patterns found on such vessels are different from those on fine wheel-turned ware – concentric rings or semicircles, the most common motif on fine pottery, for example appear only rarely on graphite pottery (Goláňová 2018, p. 111, fig. 58, 63).

In the western La Tène area during this period, stamped decoration occurred on very high quality pottery, with thin walls and carefully finished, regular, often burnished surfaces but wheel-throwing remained globally rare until LT B (Augier 2012; Schneider 2012, p. 139-142; Augier *et al.* 2013, p. 572, 576, 578; Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 296-298, 421-422). Some vessels with complex and regular S-shape profiles might have been finished on a slow wheel device, but stamped fully wheel-thrown vessels only appeared on most (non-elite) sites during the 4th century BC. Both from a technical and an aesthetic point of view, stamped pottery seems to have emerged around the mid-5th century as a much more continuous phenomenon in Brittany and the Middle Rhine than in eastern regions. New vessel shapes evolved from those already in use in the previous period, while a reduced set of simple, geometric motifs (circles, triangles, squares) organised in linear patterns formed the core of the earliest stamped pottery ornamentation (fig. 3).

To sum up, the social and practical organisation for the production of images connected to stamped pottery seems already to have been well established in the 5th century, but we have very little data with which to analyse it. While standardization of the overall appearance of vessels seems to be underway, only the images and their contexts can shed new light on which social purposes were served by its contemporaneous development across several European regions.



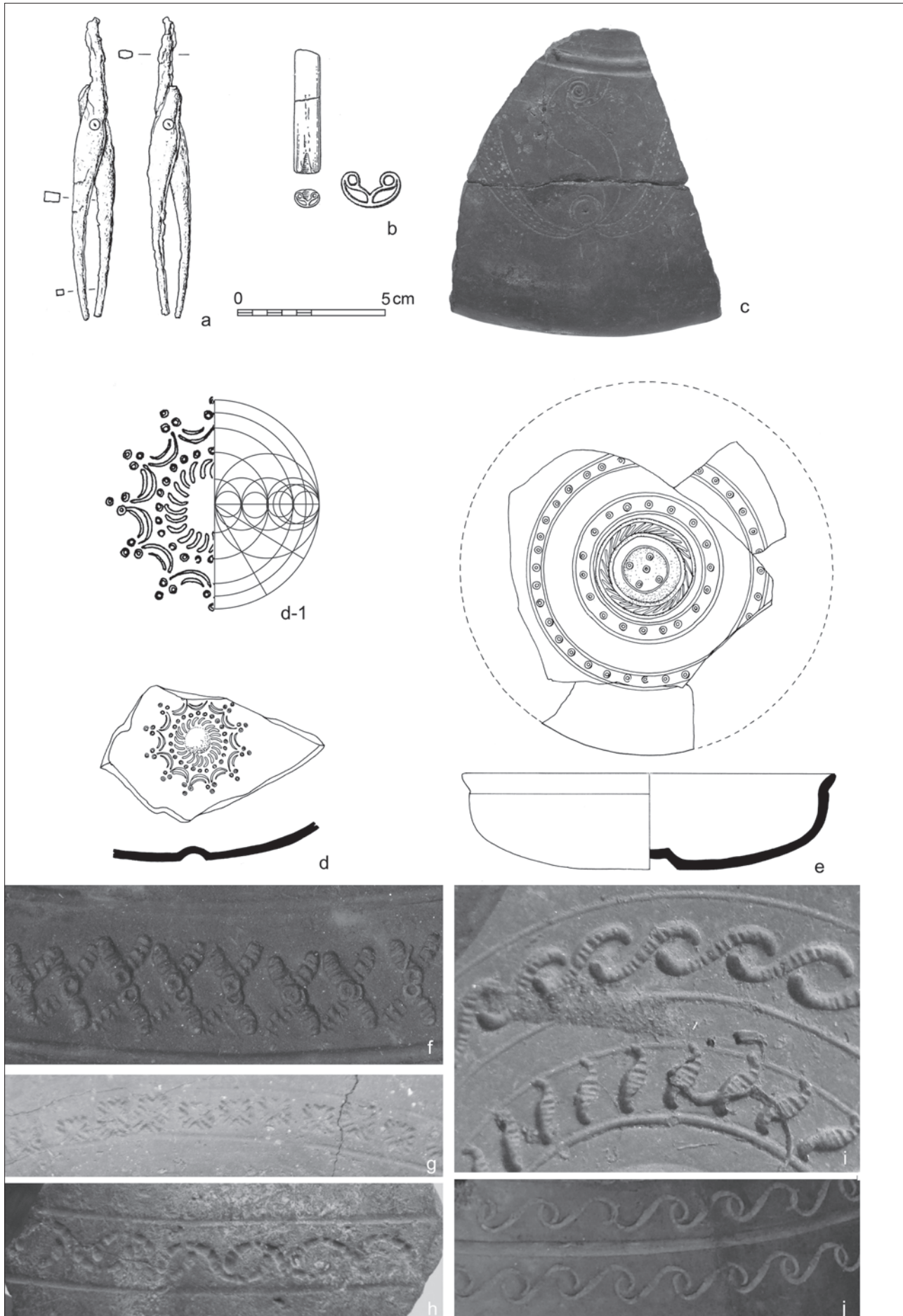


Fig. 2. Technical processes of stamped decoration: pattern construction and printing; a. Tuchoměřice, Bohemia (after Sankot 2007); b-c. Polešovice, Moravia (b after Vlasatíková 2003); d, f. Neředín, Moravia (d after Goláňová 2007); e. Modrá, Moravia (after Goláňová 2007); g. Kervéo, Plomelin (Brittany); h. Roz an Tremen, Plomeur (Brittany); i. Šakvice, Moravia; j. Doloplazy, Moravia.

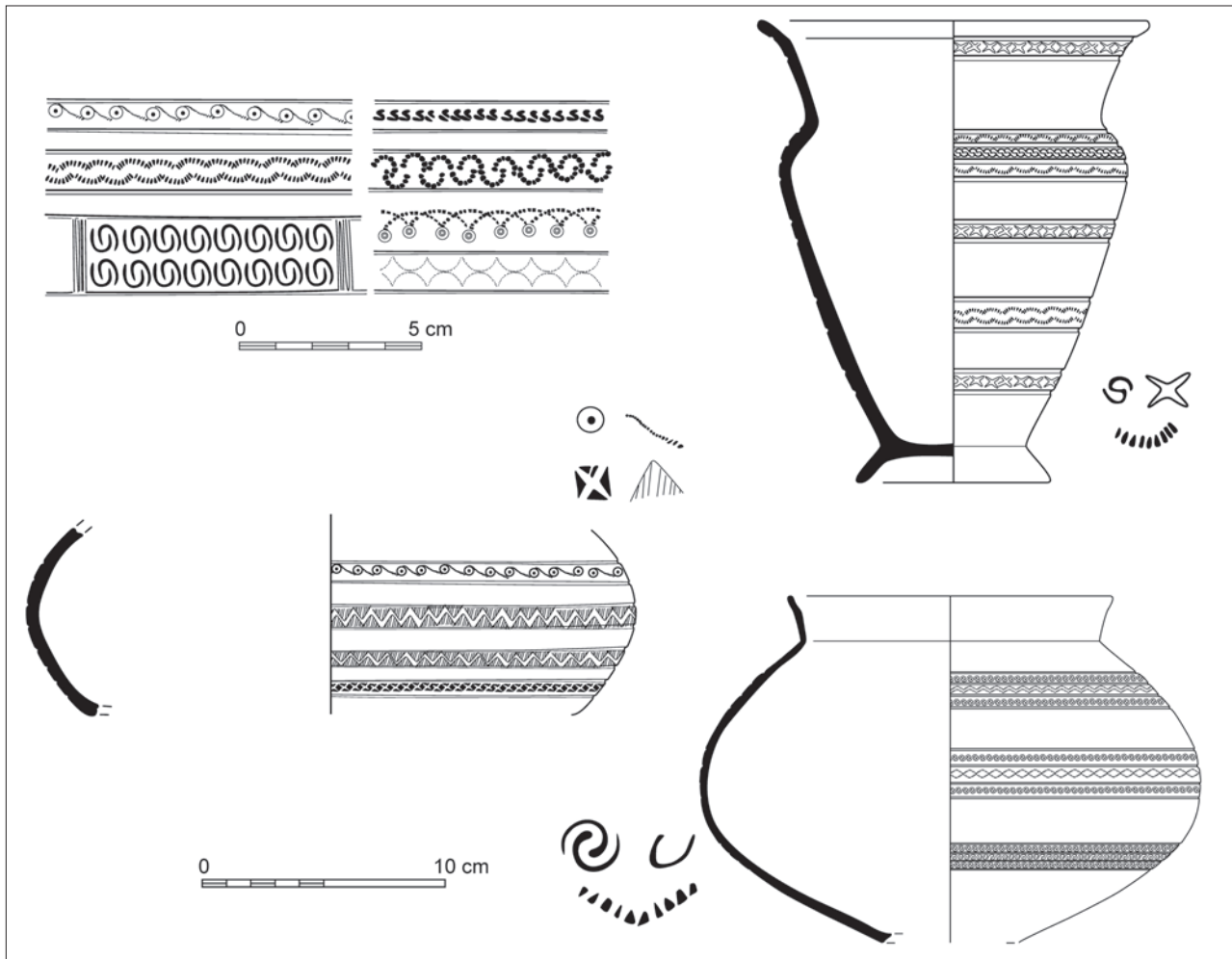


Fig. 3. La Tène stamped pottery as an aesthetic innovation in the Western La Tène area. Ornament types from Brittany (several sites) and objects from left to right: Roz an Tremen, Plomeur; Kerveo, Plomelin and Castellou-Perron, Saint-Jean-Trolimon.

### Stamp-based decoration as a component of Early La Tène art

Ceramic vessels are less frequently designated and analysed as La Tène art than their more prestigious metallic counterparts. However, a detailed study of the motifs, patterns, decoration, and visual devices used on stamp-decorated vessels furnishes incontrovertible evidence for the use of ornamental elements, traditionally regarded as exclusively applied to luxury metallic items, on ceramic objects.

### From the Early to the Vegetal Style on pottery and metal

Stamp-decorated objects show the parallel development of the Early Style on both ceramic and metallic items. Identical tools – stamps, compasses, pointed gravers – are used to construct similar motifs and patterns on vessels regardless of their material. For instance, patterns of decoration similar to those observed on Early La Tène stamped pottery can be found on several bronze beaked flagons, including those from Pavlov (Goláňová, Navrátil

2017), Dürrnberg, grave 112 (Tiefengraben, Wiltchke-Schrotta 2014, p. 74-75, Fototaf. 5-9), and Glauberg, grave 2 (Martins 2002, p. 143, Abb. 104). Concentric circles arranged so as to resemble a three-leaved palmette or used as links in friezes of confronted S motifs also establish a connection between the Eigenbilzen gold strip (Belgium) and contemporaneous pottery produced in Brittany (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 628-629, fig. 4).

Some ornamental designs belonging to the Early Style *Zirkelornamentik*, based on complex intersections of circles, thus frequently appear both on round bronze phalerae, but also in the same circular area on the base of shallow pottery bowls in the eastern La Tène area (fig. 5). Complex patterns based on arcs also emerged in Brittany during the second half of the 5th century, and became very popular by the end of the century, when they started being used to decorate the base of low, open ceramic shapes.

During this period, those patterns evolved into a suite of continuous friezes that formed the core of the Vegetal Style. At the end of the 5th century, simple S friezes were replaced by continuous versions which conveyed a sense of movement; these

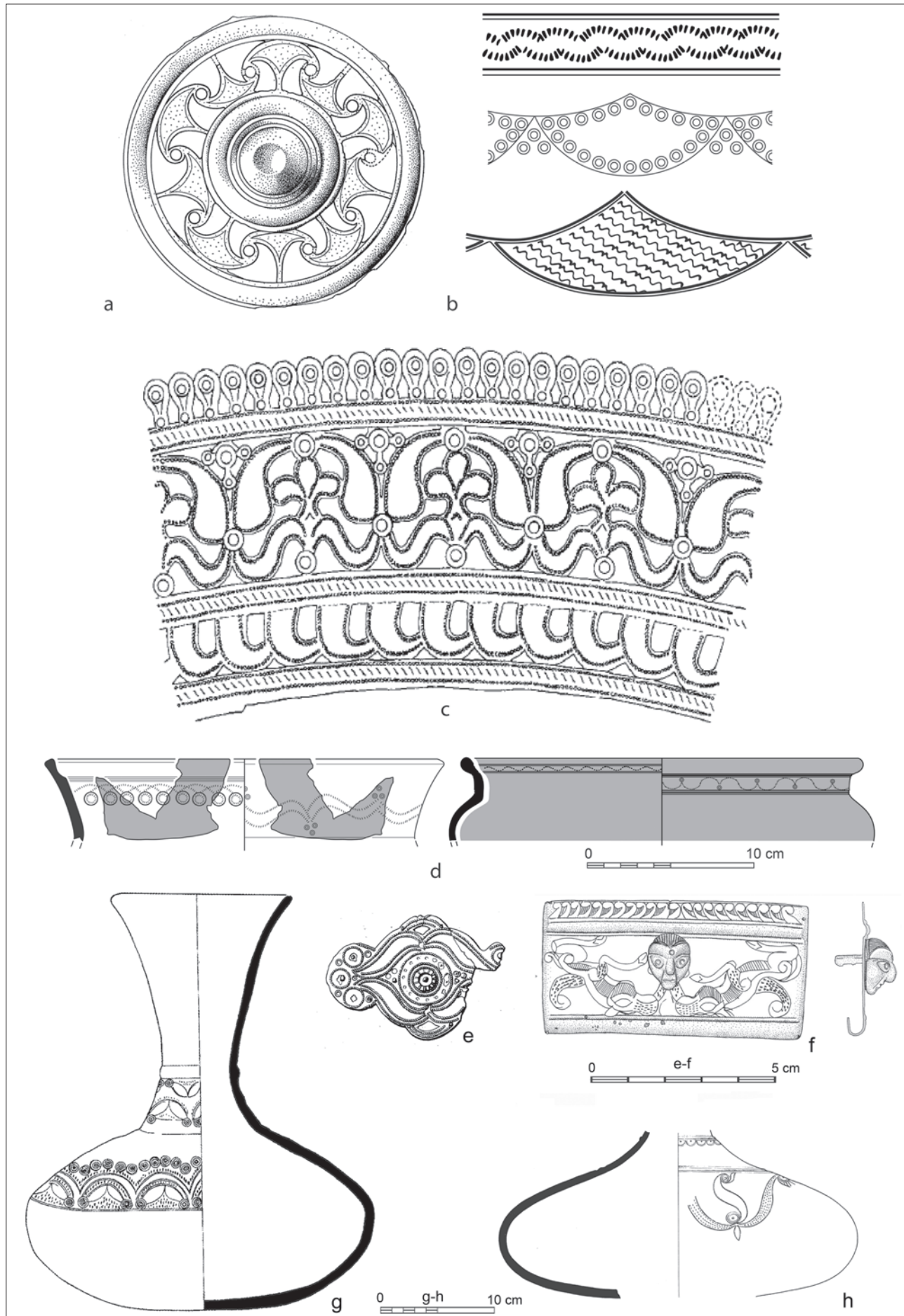


Fig. 4. Examples of Early Style patterns on stamped pottery and metallic items; a. Bronze fibula from Dürrnberg, Austria (after Frey, Schwappach 1973, fig. 21); b and d. Late 5th-early 4th century, stamped pottery from Brittany; c. Open-work gold strip from Eigenbilzen, Belgium (after Harding 2007, fig. 3.3, n°2); e. Chlum, Bohemia (after Pleiner, Rybová 1978); f. Stupava, Slovakia (after Čambal 2012); g. Hlubyně, Bohemia (after Filip 1956); h. Polešovice, Moravia (after Vlasatíková 2003).



are often referred to as 'running dog' patterns. Linking elements in confronted S-friezes evolved from concentric circles into yin-yangs or palmettes and eventually merged with the main motifs to create whirligigs (fig. 5).

Such evolutionary changes led to the combination of stamped and incised motifs to create fluid, sinuous, continuous patterns. Smooth incised decoration combined with the stamped motifs

from this period are conceptually balanced, with the vessel surfaces well used and thought-out, which is not the case with later incised decoration on this pottery (Goláňová 2018, p. 141; Venclová 2018). Curvilinear stamped motifs can be used as part of the main pattern, while simple motifs such as lines of dots and circles can help to texturise surfaces within that pattern. The way incised motifs on pottery were filled is very similar to

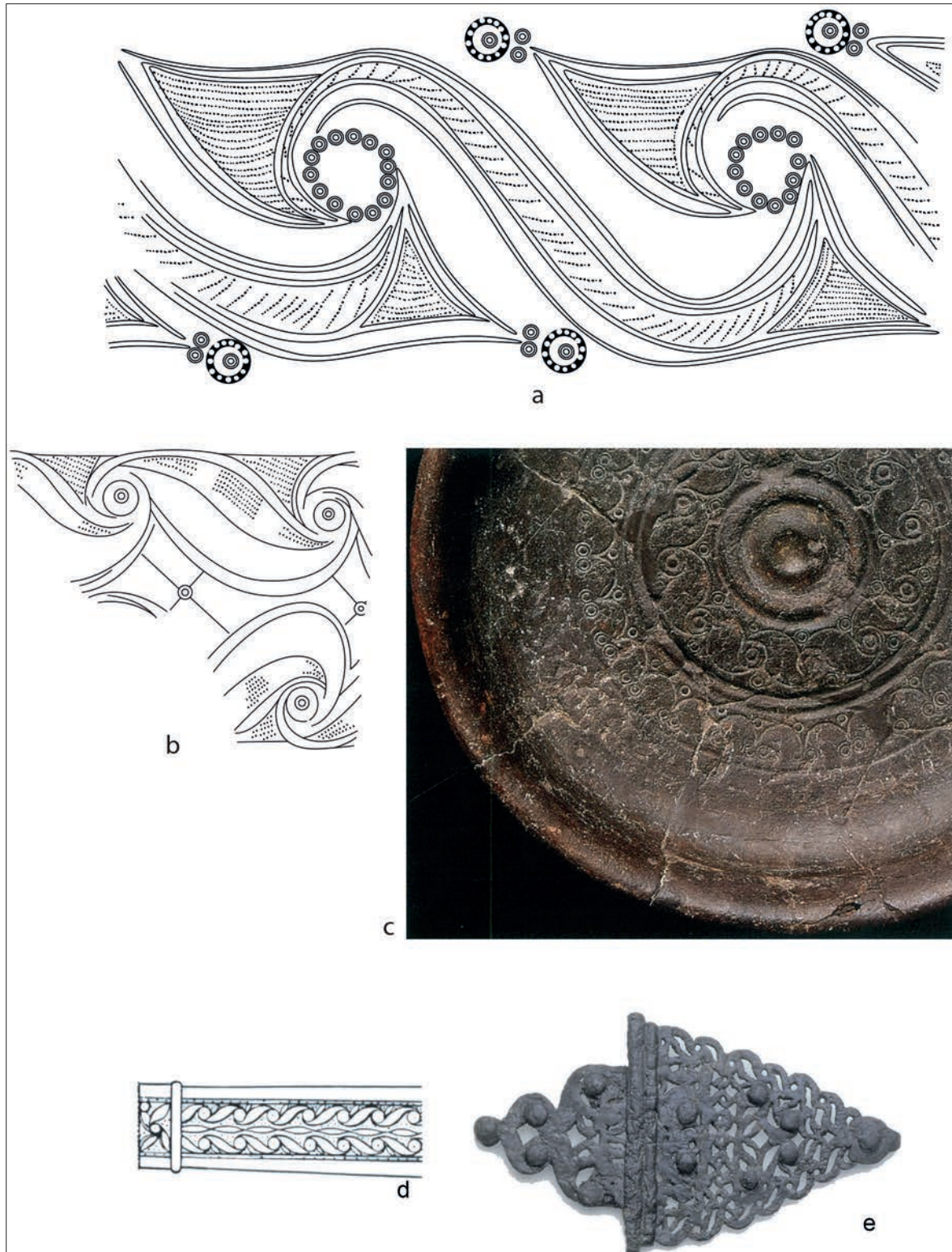


Fig. 5. Parallel developments of Continuous Style patterns on stamped pottery (a-c) and metallic items (d-e); a. Kerouer, Plouhinec (Brittany); b. Pendreff, Commana (Brittany); c. Manětín-Hrádek, Bohemia (after Kruta 2006); e. Reinheim, Germany (after Frey 2002, Abb. 169, n°2); f. Hochscheid, Germany (after Wegner 2006, Abb. 6).



the techniques used on metal artefacts (fig. 4). The S-motifs or bird wings on the Polešovice flask appear very similar to those of the hybrid beings depicted on a bronze belt-hook from Stupava, Slovakia (cf. Megaw, Megaw 2001, p. 68, fig. 72; Čambal 2012, Abb. 4-5) and follow a very similar pattern to the birds depicted on the sword sheath from grave 1 from Glauberg, Germany (Frey 2002, p. 202, Abb. 168 p. 5) and a lynchpin from Unterradelberg, Lower Austria (Megaw *et al.* 1989, p. 506, Abb. 14).

### Playing with the viewer: hidden faces on drinking vessels

Apart from its specific motifs, stamp-decorated pottery belongs to La Tène art in the visual devices it displays. More-or-less explicit animal motifs belonging to the Early Style appear particularly in the eastern La Tène area (Goláňová 2012, p. 240, Abb. 2). Often incised, they are based on S-motifs with stamped circles as heads or eyes. Very few examples are known in the western area, although there are depictions of a duck and, more interestingly, dragon-birds, found in late 5th or early 4th century BC contexts in western France (Le Goff 1992, p. 124; Gomez de Soto 2006; Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 250-251). Zoomorphic incised motifs on pottery are again constructed similarly to those known on metallic items, with stamped motifs playing roles both as meaningful elements – representing parts of the body – and as texturizing motifs – such as lines of dots impressed/printed with ‘combs’.

There are, however, no explicit human depictions on stamped pottery attributable to the 5th century BC. The only explicit display of human faces on pottery appeared later, as plastic decoration during the 3rd century BC in the Carpathian Basin (Szabó 1992). As is the case with other Early Style decoration of the 5th century BC, anthropomorphic images seem to lie hidden in apparently abstract motifs – such as more-or-less developed palmettes, and groups of three circles joining opposed S motifs... (fig. 6)

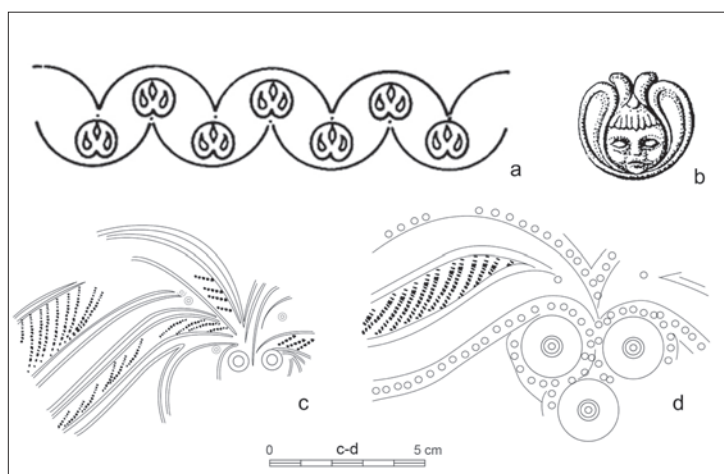


Fig. 6. Ambiguous anthropomorphic depictions on Early La Tène stamped pottery; a. Stamped decoration from Bezdědovice, Chlum, Bohemia (after Schwappach 1973); b. Phalera motif from Hořovičky, Bohemia – former logo of the Institute of Archaeology, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague; c-d. Armorique, Plouaret and Kerven Teignouse, Inguiniel (Brittany).

Ambiguous images which play games with the viewer seem to be a major feature linking stamped decoration to Early La Tène art. Some motifs on pottery are stamped upside down (Megaw, Megaw 2010, fig. 1 – the sherd is depicted upside down, fig. 7) – and thus appear correctly oriented when the flask is raised to the lips. In fact, the decoration of most *Linsenflaschen* decorations is meant to be seen from above when the vessel is in use (fig. 7). On many open vessels recovered throughout the distribution area, the main stamped compositions occur on the inner base of open bowls – often called *Braubacher Schalen* –, such that the user had to empty the contents to discover them, also from above. In the western area, the external base of the vessel was also decorated, more frequently in open vessels but also on some closed forms. Users had to lift such objects to reveal these designs, primarily to other observers: when pouring liquids from such a vessel, its external base was not visible to the user, but to other observers. These details demonstrate that stamped pottery was conceived in such a way as to suggest multiple, complex readings of their decoration as the objects were observed and used. This is a specific feature of Early La Tène art.

### Material and social contexts: elite versus popular art?

#### Regional distributions of stamp-decorated pottery

Across its whole distribution area, the largest assemblages of stamped pottery come from settlements. In Moravia, stamped pottery represents ca 6 % of wheel-thrown pottery and approximately 1 % of the whole pottery assemblage during the 5th century (Goláňová 2018, p. 93); likewise in Bohemia (Hostomice: Budinský 1999, p. 292). During the 4th century BC, with few exceptions (Sopron: Schweltnus 2011, p. 366), stamped pottery represents only a low percentage of the ceramics recovered from both settlements and cemeteries (Komjatice: Horváth 2014; Nitra-Šindolka: Březinová 2002; Rustoiu 2014) and it appears as a marginal decoration scheme on the pottery found in *oppida* during the 2nd and 1st centuries BC. Here, it is only represented by a few items among thousands of pottery sherds (Stradonice: Valentová 2013, p. 41-42; Staré Hradisko: Ženožičková 2011, p. 75). By this time, stamped pottery must have lost its specific social functions and prestige display on ceramic items must have shifted to painted pottery (fig. 8).

In Bohemia and Moravia, stamped pottery does not appear in substantial quantities on the earlier hillforts (Závist, Vladař, Ježkovice-Černov), although some of them had central functions (Goláňová 2012, p. 237). There is little data available for the Slovak and Lower Austrian hillforts, where only scattered finds are known (Karwowski 2006; Pieta 2007). In the Middle Rhine area, few La Tène A contexts have yielded stamped pottery. Stamped pottery belonging stylistically to that phase is found on different types of settlements, such as at Bad Nauheim (Hörnig 1991, p. 192; Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 452-454), where it is probably associated with salt production, but also possibly at fortified settlements such as Christenberg bei Münchhausen

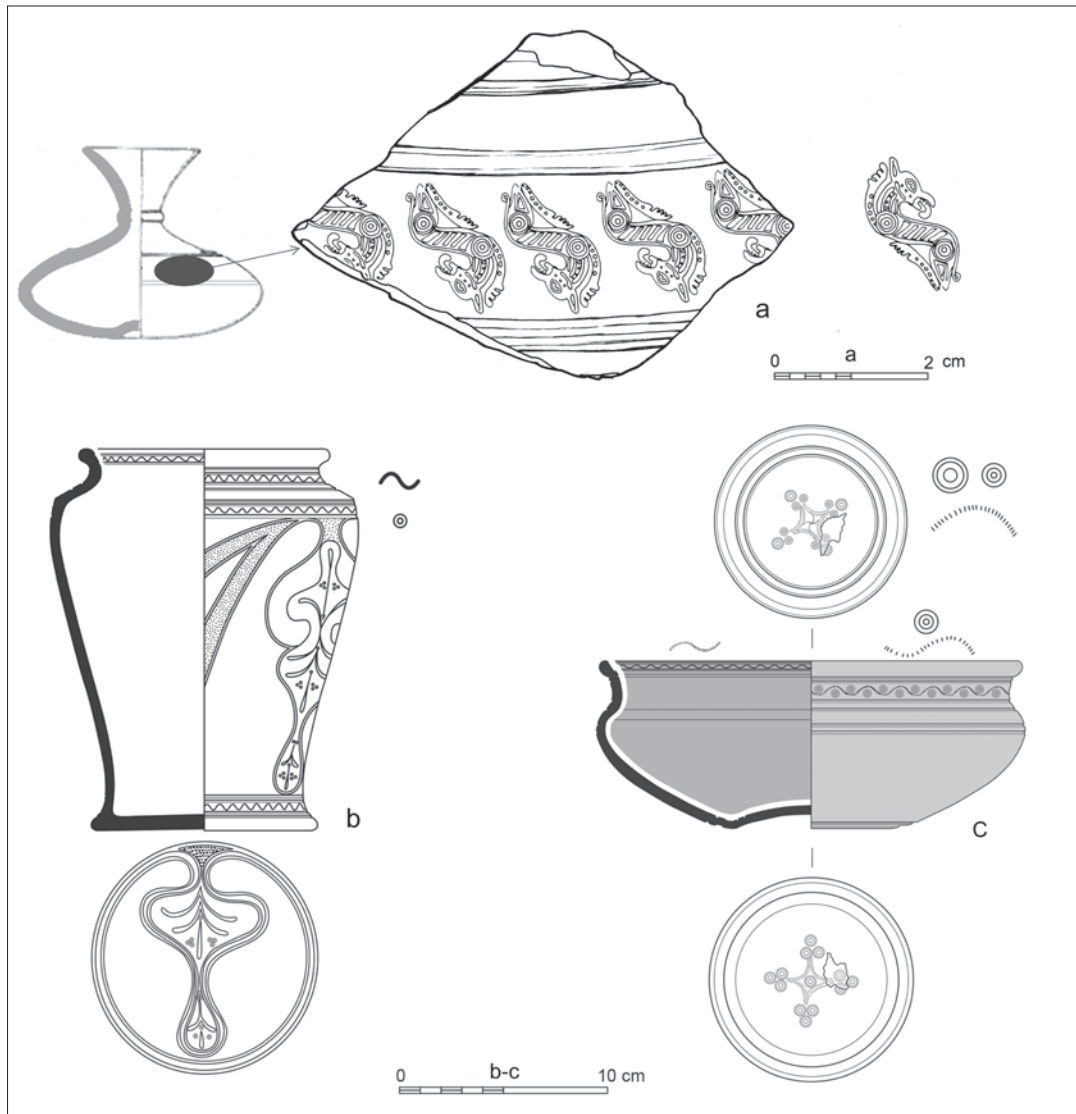


Fig. 7. Stamped motifs only visible while pottery is in use; a. Printed upside down from the eastern La Tène area: Kanín (drawing based on Megaw, Megaw 2010); b-c. Located at the bottom of vessels, from Brittany (Saint-Pol-de-Léon: after Chérel *et al.* 2018, 14; Paule: after Y. Menez/M. Dupré).

(Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 428-430). In Brittany, the earliest *souterrains* used for storage typically yield large amounts of pottery from the late 5th century BC, such as at Prat or Paule (Côtes d'Armor), and stamp decorated ceramics are not limited to large or rich rural sites (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 311-316).

In the 5th century BC, few burials are known in some parts of the eastern Early La Tène zone (including Moravia: Goláňová 2018, p. 66-72; and part of Bavaria: Schußmann 2010, p. 147). In Bohemia, Austria, and western Slovakia, where graves are more frequently found (mainly in cemeteries continuing from the previous period), stamped pottery is a regular component of the grave goods (Manětín-Hrádek: Soudská 1994; Bučany: Bujna, Romsauer 1983; Inzersdorf ob der Traisen: Neugebauer 1996). However, it appears only exceptionally in richly furnished burials in Bohemia (Želkovice: Hlava 2015). The elites of south and west Bohemia are thus identifiable in their graves by the presence of wagons, gold artefacts, and Mediterranean imports (Chytráček 2012), not by means of either a large quantity or a better quality

of stamped pottery. The question of the control of stamped/wheel-turned pottery production has recently been discussed and the economic engagement of the elites has been postulated as a stimulus for the acceptance of a new technology (the fast potter's wheel). The elite would have used fine ceramic vessels as lower status prestige goods and profited economically from their production, without depositing them in their own luxury assemblages (Thér, Mangel 2014). The connection between this new technology and the new ornamentation is critical: stamping on hand-made fine pottery occurs only very rarely, although it consists of high-quality ornament (Goláňová 2012; Schußmann 2013).

In the Middle Rhine, late Hunsrück-Eifel Kultur burial contexts yielded most of the well-dated stamped pottery items and assemblages for the 5th and early 4th century BC (Haffner 1976, Taf. 45, 49, 89, 114). Grave inventories that include these decorated wares are usually of middling status, with the Dreikopf bei Pellingen chariot burial providing an exception (Nortmann 1995;

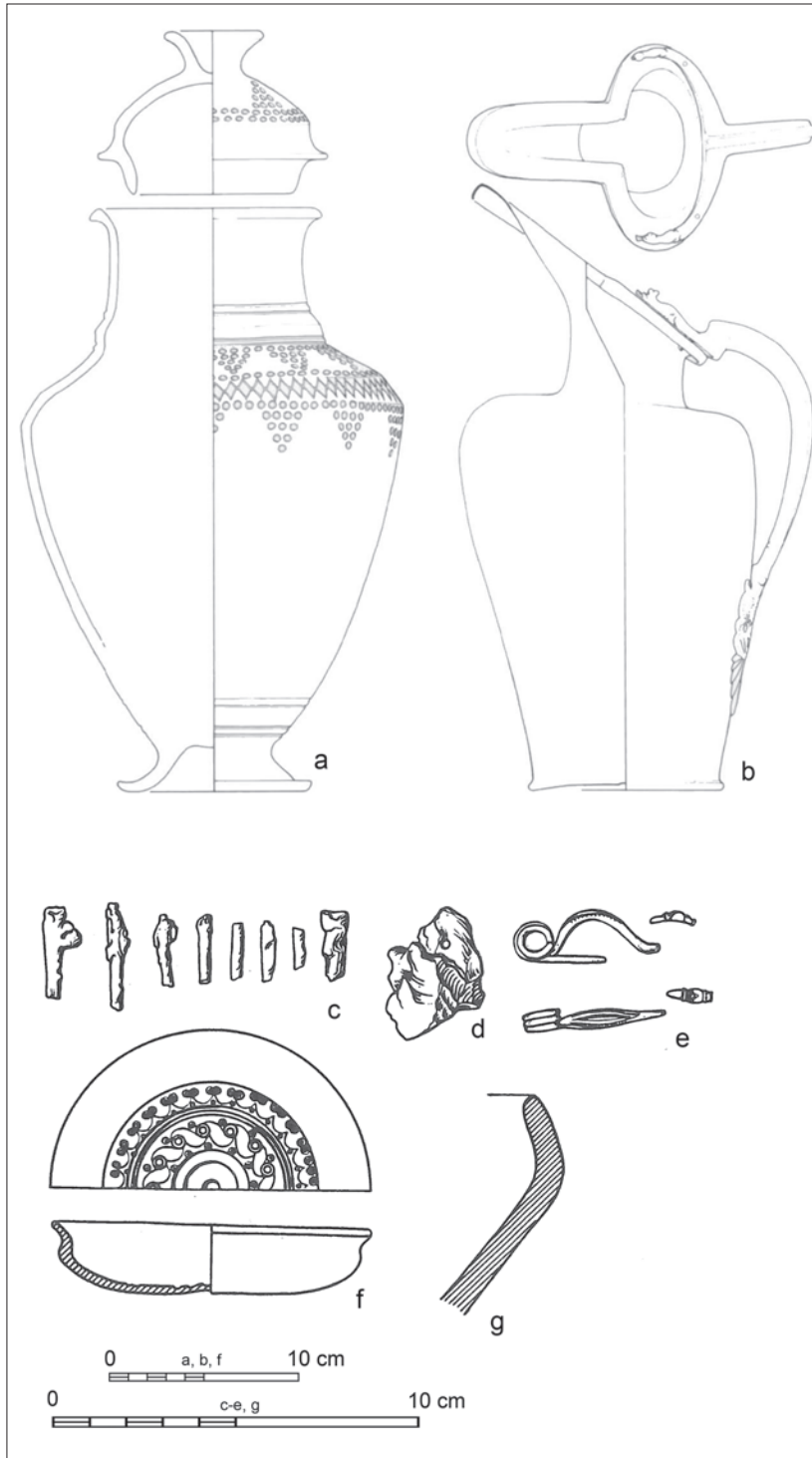


Fig. 8. Stamped pottery in context; a-b. Exceptional drinking set from the rich grave of Dreikopf bei Pellingen (after Nortmann 1995); c-g. Assemblage from Manětín-Hrádek, grave 66 with the richly-decorated stamped pottery (d amber; after Soudská 1994).

fig. 9). In Brittany, stamped pottery first appears in small enclosed cemeteries in the mid-5th century BC. A few cremation burials featured stamped urns at some 12 sites throughout the region, but contained no other special items suggesting that stamped pottery might have been considered as a prestige good here (Villard *et al.* 2010, p. 86-89; Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 306-308). Almost all evidence for burial practices disappeared here, however, at the turn of the 5th-4th centuries, when quantities of

stamped pottery increased dramatically in settlement contexts. As in the Middle Rhine, the earliest stamped pottery urns form a reduced, very homogeneous series of tall shapes used to contain liquids, with simple decoration (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 617-619). This suggests that the search for uniformity rather than distinction prevailed in this type of burials and the material associated to them.

### Stamped pottery – artistic evolution and social change

In the late 5th century BC, stamped pottery reached a series of high points in terms of its quality, homogeneity, and quantity, creating communities of objects that probably reflected human networks. Pottery appeared, in this context, as an inexpensive medium, easy to produce and transport, for the transmission of the same patterns as organic – such as stamp-decorated leather or wood – or metallic items, only less rare and/or less rarely preserved. The link between the success of stamped pottery and Early La Tène societies and their food consumption practices is proved by its disappearance or radical change in the early 4th century BC.

In the eastern Early La Tène area, at the time when stamped decoration was disappearing from pottery at the beginning of the 4th century, the motifs used – especially the S-shapes – moved instead to personal adornment (fibulae: Sankot 2014; Hlava 2017, tab. 21, n°13, tab 29, n°7; Duchcov hoard: Kruta 1971; arm-rings and anklets: Hlava 2017, tab. 13, n°7-8; Čižmářová 2009, tab. 15, n°4) and weapons (scabbards, spears: Čižmářová 2005, obr. 80, n°2; Čižmářová 2009, tab. 16, n°15, tab. 22, n°1). This shift reflects a huge transformation that implies major changes in many aspects of the archaeological record at the turn of 5th and 4th century BC. Hillforts were abandoned and frequently traces of violent fire are visible in their ramparts (Závist, Vladar: Chytráček *et al.* 2010; Ježkovice-Černov: Čižmář 1995). With the exception of the Danube (Lower Austria, Transdanubia) and Salzburg areas (*e.g.* Dürrnberg), Late Hallstatt cemeteries were abandoned at the end of the 5th century (LT A/B). Completely new flat inhumation cemeteries were founded with their initial graves dated to the Pre-Dux horizon (LT B1a). While along the Danube, distinctively rich graves occur which were furnished with gold artefacts and, exceptionally, imported bronze vessels, *e.g.* Mannersdorf, grave 13 (Ramsl 2011), in Bavaria, Bohemia and Moravia, high-ranking graves are missing from these new cemeteries.

In these regions, fine stamped pottery – socially significant, fine table ware – disappeared almost completely at the beginning of the 4th century BC (fig. 10). It appears in two cemeteries only out of approximately 250 known for this period in Moravia. Stamping on pottery continued only in central Moravia, but here it appeared on graphite cooking and storage pots and on *situlae*, as a band under the neck of the vessel, in combination with vertical combed decoration (Hlava 2008). This change implies that the social practices directly linked to stamped pottery vanished at the beginning of the 4th century BC. A distinct ‘deurbanisation’ is attested in this area during this period (Salač 2014). The



Bohemia + Moravia	5th cent. BC	4th cent. BC	3rd cent. BC	2nd–1st cent. BC
Fine pottery	[shaded bar]			
Kitchen pottery	[shaded bar]			
Jewellery	[shaded bar]			
Weapons	[shaded bar]			
Horse/wagon	[shaded bar]	?	?	[shaded bar]

a

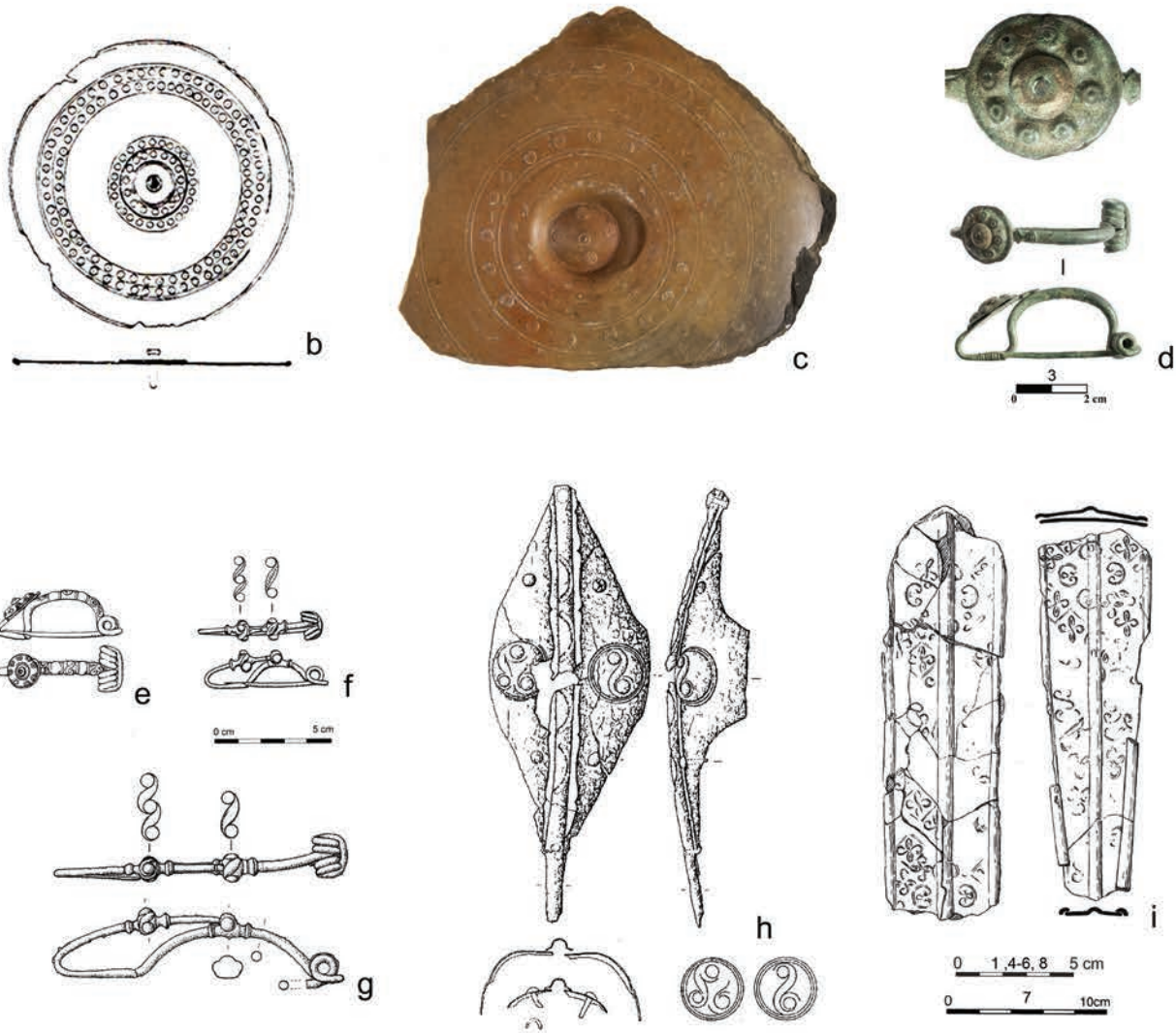


Fig. 9. Schematic evolution of pattern display in Bohemia and Moravia during the Late Iron Age (a); b. Phalera – Mirkovice, Bohemia (after Chytráček 1990); c. Inner surface of stamped bowl – Modrá, Moravia; d-g. Bronze fibulae – d. Čelechovice, Moravia (photo L. Bedáň), e. Marefy, Moravia (after Čizmarová 2013), f. Královice, Bohemia (after Sankot 2014), g. Libčeves, Bohemia (after Sankot 2014); h. Shield boss – Holubice, Moravia (after Čizmarová 2009); i. Sword scabbard – Postoupky, Moravia (after Čizmarová 2017).

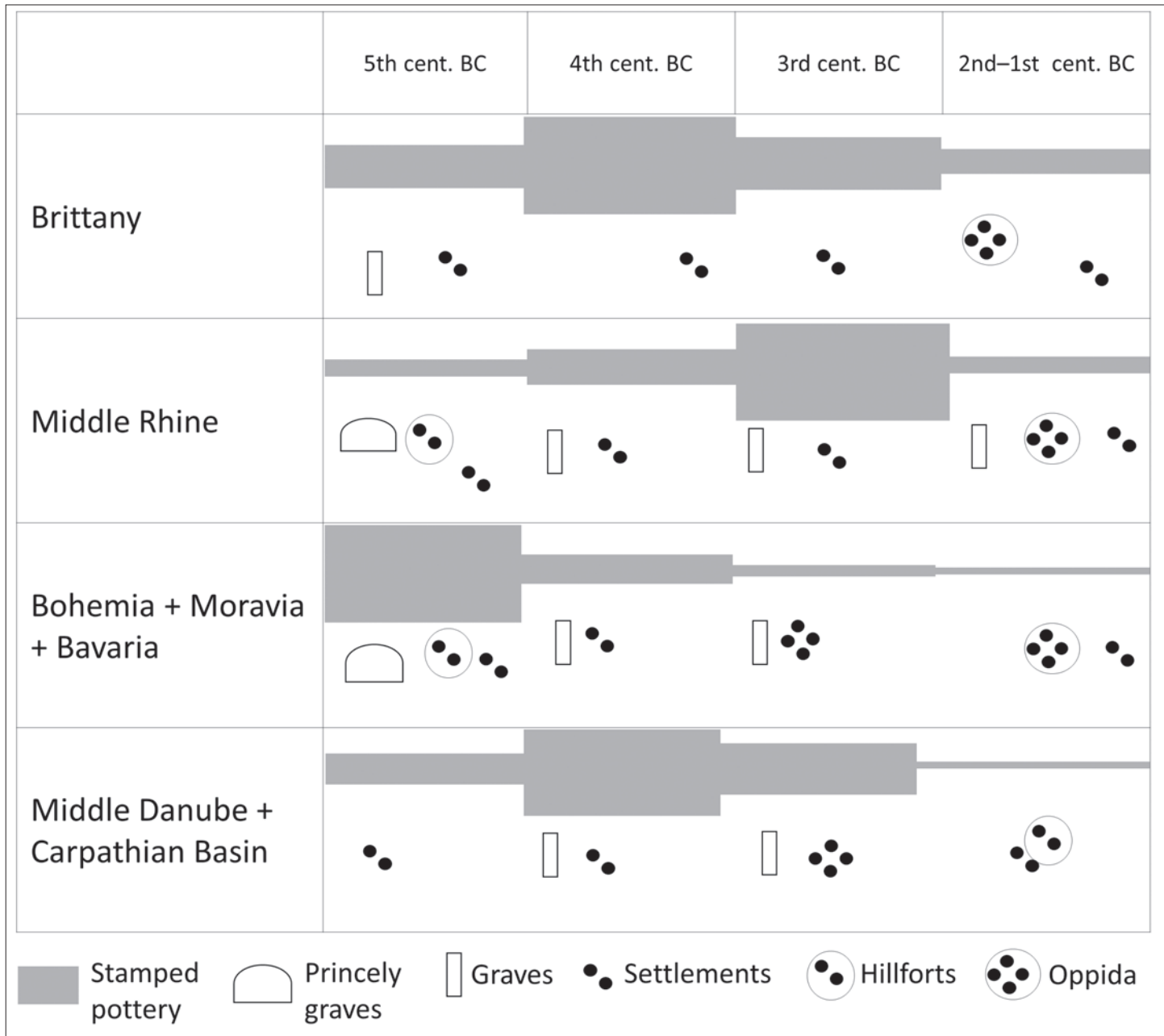


Fig. 10. Evolution of the popularity of stamped pottery and social changes according to the general archaeological record from the 5th to the 1st century BC.

emergence and flourishing of trade and distribution centres (e.g. Nĕmčice nad Hanou, Roseldorf)<sup>2</sup> are not visible archaeologically until the 3rd century BC.

In the eastern part of La Tène Europe (southern Slovakia, Hungary, Romania), which lacked finds culturally attributable to La Tène A, stamped pottery emerged during LT B1-2 (Urák 2018) and continued in use in both settlements and graves, sometimes until LT C-D, although often in reduced quantities. The range of

motifs and patterns identified is limited. Complex continuous patterns are missing, while groups or single imprints are not rare.

At the beginning of 4th century BC, pottery production in the East underwent complex changes characterised by a regression in the throwing technique employed and, in some regions, a change in the direction of rotation on the wheel, sometimes connected with the disappearance of the symbiotic relationship between elites and specialised potters (Thér *et al.* 2015). Economic reasons cannot account for the complete abandonment of stamping as pottery decoration since the new technology, wheel-throwing, which had accompanied it, survived. The reasons must be sought in a lack of social demand as for example through the decrease in the perceived social value of stamped

<sup>2</sup> The concentration of population in these centres – especially during the second half of the 3rd century BC – changed the spatial and social networks that had existed in the 4th century, but cannot have been the reason stamped decoration on pottery was abandoned a century beforehand.

pottery, or because other media – such as personal ornaments and weapons – were now preferred for the application of this codified ornamentation.

Framed motifs inside circular or square cartouches are not represented on stamped pottery until the 4th century BC (Urák 2018) in Bohemia, Moravia, and Bavaria, but these designs appear later on metal scabbards in this area (fig. 9; cf. Čížmářová 2017, p. 133, Abb. 18). This shift is a proof of the constant stylistical exchanges between pottery and metal producers.

The transformation of the 4th century BC is also visible in the West, but with completely different consequences for stamped pottery production there. Larger amounts of decoration appear in some archaeological features, with up to 46 stamped items found in some *souterrains* in Brittany (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 846-850). Surprisingly, these lavishly decorated assemblages seem to result from domestic activities in relatively modest farms (fig. 10). In both settlement and funerary contexts on the West, decorative styles evolved into complex arc-based patterns labelled as *Bogenstil* (Schwappach 1969, p. 252-258), and sometimes combined with relief and incised decoration. Complex curvilinear stamps depicting whirligigs or lyre motifs also appeared by this time, showing close connections to those developed in the rest of the La Tène world (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 636-638). Funerary contexts suddenly became extremely rare in Brittany and tend to be associated to the reuse of earlier structures or spaces (Villard *et al.* 2010, p. 88-90). Among the few grave inventories known from the 4th and 3rd centuries, some however include richly decorated stamped urns such as the well-known examples of Plouhinec Kerouer and Saint-Pol-de-Léon Kernevez (Daire 1991, p. 238, 240; Villard *et al.* 2010; Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 308-310).

In the Middle Rhine area, stamped pottery appeared in some LT B graves under barrows, especially those belonging to the late Hunsrück-Eifel Kultur including those at some large cemeteries such as Bescheid *In der Strackheck* and Oberzerf-Irsch *Medemstück* (Haffner 1976, p. 76-78, Taf. 79, p. 81, p. 82; Cordie-Hackenberg *et al.* 1993, p. 157-162, Taf. 41; Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 453-458). However, this pottery became far more frequent in flat LT C grave assemblages, with Braubach (Rheinland-Pfalz) as the best-known, eponymous example (Schwappach 1977). In both the Middle Rhine area and Brittany, changes in settlement trends are observed in this period, so that, apart from some major sites – such as Inguiniel (Morbihan) in Brittany or Bad Nauheim (Hessen) in the Middle Rhine –, a shift occurs in settlements yielding large amounts of decorated pottery. In Brittany, this phenomenon is particularly visible through the large number of storage *souterrains* that were abandoned and filled in around the end of the 5th and in the early 4th century BC., probably together with their surrounding settlement structures (Bossard 2015, p. 189; Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 324-330).

The coincidence between stylistic and social changes allows to infer that, in order to fulfil new needs created by different economic and social networks, pottery was replaced by other items for social agency purposes. Coinage, in particular, expressed better than pottery both the elites' power and its local origin within

the *civitates* evolving around the *oppida* (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 651). During the 3rd century BC, the communities of Central Europe started to mint coins and during the succeeding 2nd and 1st century, the coinage was, along with vehicle elements and horse harness, the medium through which symbols codified in previous centuries continued in use.

## Conclusions

Stamped pottery is a widespread European phenomenon even outside the La Tène world, for example in the Iberian Peninsula. However, its discontinuous distribution is difficult to explain as a single core-periphery pattern. Rare evidence suggests direct contact between its production areas. However, common trends can be established: in the La Tène area, stamped pottery largely follows evolutionary developments similar to those of La Tène art in general, proving that there is no relevant distinction that can be established between metallic (prestige) and ceramic (more modest) items. Decoration belonging to both series of objects display the same complexity, a similar degree of codification and the same potential for visual agency. Rather than being an economic choice or a cultural feature, the decision to favour one or the other probably depended on their symbolic properties and their ability to ensure coherence in assemblages and the transmission of visual messages in everyday-life situations (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 678).

Stamped pottery was widely distributed, and was probably created, in the main zones in which finds are concentrated. It does not appear in specifically rich or prestigious contexts, showing that some forms of art may have been accessible to larger parts of society beyond the elites. It appears, then, not as an expression of power but as a demonstration of coherence and evidence for more general social dynamics. The existence of these shared dynamics, and complex networks of contacts running through different social groups, might explain the broad success of stamped pottery in very distant, apparently disconnected areas.

As O. Gosselain puts it (Gosselain 2011, p. 4), "le style ornemental ne relève pas d'un marquage délibéré des frontières sociales ou d'un système de communication tourné vers l'extérieur. Il ne découle pas non plus de considérations purement esthétiques ou de choix arbitraires individuels. La décoration est au contraire un support essentiel de l'idéologie, elle est profondément signifiante en tant que réification des visions du monde. Mais plutôt qu'à des acteurs externes, c'est aux membres mêmes de la société qu'elle s'adresse [...] à travers] les repas quotidiens". The possibility of widely copying and reproducing similar yet individually distinct decorated objects in unprecedented quantities must have been a key motivation for the development of stamped ornaments on La Tène pottery.

The need for codified ornaments on ceramic vessels probably appeared in specific situations for Late Iron Age communities. The 5th century BC is a transitional period during which the regions under consideration probably developed new cultural and social identities in response to general change. The social



context evolved during the following centuries, at an uneven pace in the different regions, until the affiliations displayed in stamped decoration and the social dynamics they served became obsolete as new political and economic landscapes emerged (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 651). Major changes in stamped pottery styles and contexts reflect social changes throughout La Tène Europe: the beginning of the period, the 4th century BC

and, for the regions where it still existed, in the 3rd-2nd centuries BC, with the development of *oppida*. The link between the success of stamped pottery and specific social reproduction practices at both a local and interregional scale is proved by the fact that, with the development of a new urbanization phase, these complex codes that had been previously established became obsolete and disappeared (Cabanillas de la Torre 2015, p. 648).

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## Abstract

Stamped pottery developed through the La Tène period in several disparate regions of Europe from Portugal to Romania. Owing to its uneven distribution, this pottery raises the issue of scales of integration in the surprising diversity within the unity of the Celtic world. La Tène art is often approached as a unitary phenomenon simply from the consideration of prestige objects, attributing to the elites the responsibility for maintaining coherence in La Tène visual repertory. The study of the deployment of stamping as a technique for conveying standardised images at the continental scale allows the (re)production of these codes to be approached within regional assemblages. Analysis of the practice of stamping on pottery within temperate Europe and the Iberian Peninsula shows that it developed suddenly at a variety of local scales during the 5th century BC, and thereafter evolved in sometimes converging, and sometimes diverging patterns across its different production areas. The evolving patterns in this artistic production seem to have been triggered by major social changes, thus explaining their contemporaneous appearance across the continent.

## Résumé

"Copier-coller" à l'âge du Fer : la céramique estampée entre productions locales et échelle continentale. L'estampage sur céramique se développe pendant tout le second âge du Fer dans plusieurs régions européennes souvent non contiguës, du Portugal à la Roumanie. Il pose de par sa répartition discontinue la question des échelles d'intégration et de l'unité étonnamment diversifiée du monde celtique. L'art laténien est souvent abordé comme un phénomène unique à travers le mobilier prestigieux, attribuant aux élites le privilège de maintenir la cohérence des schémas visuels laténiens. L'étude de l'estampage comme technique véhiculant des images standardisées à l'échelle du continent permet d'aborder la (re) production de ces codes au sein d'ensembles régionaux. L'analyse de la pratique de l'estampage sur céramique en Europe transalpine et en péninsule Ibérique montre que ce phénomène se développe rapidement à des échelles locales pendant le v<sup>e</sup> s. av. n. è. puis suit des évolutions tantôt convergentes, tantôt divergentes dans les différents foyers de production. C'est les grandes mutations sociales de l'âge du Fer qui impulsent ces évolutions artistiques et qui expliquent leur contemporanéité à travers le continent.