

anthropomorphic figurines. - Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland, 92, 1962, 1, 38-54.

Vandova 2004: V. Vandova. Neue Angaben über das

frühe Neolithikum in dem Talkessel von Kjustendil (Vorläufiger Bericht). - In: V. Nikolov, K. Bacvarov (Hrsg.). Von Domica bis Drama. Gedenkschrift für Jan Lichardus. Sofia, 2004, 25-33.

Early Neolithic ceramic anthropomorphic imagery from the Struma River Valley and the Sofia Plain in the context of Anatolia (Abstract)

Desislava Takorova

Anthropomorphic imagery is a universal feature of the material culture of the early farmers and seem to be related to the religio-mythological beliefs of the communities that created them. This group of artifacts is also a typical element of the Early Neolithic culture in the Struma River Valley and the Sofia Plain in the late seventh and early sixth mill. BC. For objective reasons, most numerous are the female figurines, which have usually been interpreted as the Earth Mother Goddess.

While most studies of this element in the Early Neolithic culture, attested at all sites in the Struma River Valley and the Sofia Plain (fig. 1), are dedicated mainly to typological analyses, the aim of this paper is to make sense of their emergence within the context of the genesis of the first local farming communities. For the purpose, the anthropomorphic imagery from the area is divided into three major groups: figurines, plastic applications, and face pots, and are subjected to a comparative analysis against finds from earlier and contemporary sites in West Central and Southwestern Anatolia. The conservative nature of the religio-mythological beliefs of migrating groups and, respectively, the semantic meaning of the related elements of the material culture provide the opportunity for obtaining meaningful results regarding the connections between the two regions under consideration.

The selection of West Central and Southwestern Anatolia for the purpose of the comparative analysis is hardly accidental. A number of studies on the Early Neolithic cultures in the Balkans trace their origins to Asia Minor and emphasize that they did not appear as local developments. In the last decade, a considerable amount of information was accumulated about recently exca-

vated prehistoric sites in Anatolia: Aktopraklık, Barçın, Menteşe (Northwestern), Ulucak, Ege Gübre, Yeşilova, Çukuriçi, Dedecik-Heybelitepe (West Central), Bademağacı (Southwestern). This fact makes the emergence and development of the Early Neolithic in the Struma River Valley the subject of great interest, as the area was an important corridor that connected the Aegean-Anatolian region with the Central Balkans; the Sofia Plain was a natural extension of this corridor. In result, more and more authors pay attention to the cultural similarities between the central area of the Balkan Peninsula and West Central and Southwestern Anatolia, while in the same time stress upon the specifics of the Marmara region and its isolation from the earliest Neolithization processes on the Balkans.

For this reason, the comparative analysis of ceramic anthropomorphic imagery from the Struma River Valley, the Sofia Plain, and Anatolia presented in this paper aims to identify the presence or absence of similarities, and to define their character. They could be more general, related to the overall characteristics of the individual categories, or they could apply to separate elements of specific types of artifacts.

The following conclusions were made as a result of the comparative analysis:

- The anthropomorphic figurines display common iconographic and semantic features: almost complete predominance of female images; exaggerated depiction of the hips and the buttocks, probably related to fertility beliefs; in some cases, the hairstyle is depicted, probably indicating social identity; most often, the artifacts were discovered in a fragmentary state. The main difference is the considerably more schematic nature of the figu-

rines from the Struma River Valley and Sofia Plain (fig. 2, 3). It could be assumed with a high degree of probability that the parallelepiped-shaped anthropomorphic figurines with incised decoration originate from Southwestern Anatolia (fig. 4).

- The plastic representations of arms/hands on pots suggest that in both discussed regions, the ceramic pots bore important symbolic meaning and acted as a hypostasis of the human body. Plastic applications on vessels are widespread in both regions, but those from Western Anatolia (Ege Gübre) are closer to the pieces from Central Anatolia, while the finds from the Struma River Valley and the Sofia Plain remind of those from Southwestern Anatolia because of the schematic rendering and the low relief (fig. 5).

- The face pots from both regions are remarkably similar. It should be noted that the earlier ones depict only a human head, while the later artifacts represent a complete figure and their decoration has rich symbolic meaning (fig. 6).

- In chronological terms, the artifacts from sites in Southwestern Anatolia precede both those

from the Struma River Valley and the Sofia Plain, and those from West Central Anatolia.

Set in the context of the comparative analyses of other elements of the material culture and of the Neolithic package in the discussed regions, such as pottery assemblages, painted decoration on pots, cult tables, stamp seals, sickles, bone artifacts, plant remains, and building traditions - along with the results from new types of analyses like the human Y chromosome, strontium isotope analyses of human teeth, and DNA analyses of pig teeth - these conclusions unequivocally indicate one more time that the origins of the Early Neolithic in the Struma River Valley and the Sofia Plain should be sought for in Southwestern Anatolia and are related to the processes that took place in the latter region. The parallels that could be observed throughout the Early Neolithic suggest that the direct contacts between the two regions lasted until at least the mid-6th mill. BC. On the other hand, no connection can be made thus far between West Central Anatolia and the beginning of the Neolithization in this part of the Balkans.

ас. д-р Десислава Такорова
Национален археологически институт
и музей - БАН
BG-1000 София, Съборна 2
dtakorova@abv.bg

Desislava Takorova, PhD, Research Associate
National Institute of Archaeology and Museum
Bulgarian Academy of Sciences
2 Saborna St. BG-1000 Sofia
dtakorova@abv.bg