

ON THE ZOOMORPHIC FIGURINES  
AT THE BEGINNING OF THE IRON AGE

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The passage from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age in Central-Eastern Europe was marked by a process of cultural transformation, accompanied by a change of general aspect of the local cultures of the Late Bronze Age, as well as the establishment of the groups which are characteristic of the two main cultural complexes that prevail at the beginning of the Iron Age: the complex with channeled pottery and the complex with incised and stamped pottery.

Beside the numerous archaeological remains which refer to the elements of material culture, characteristic for the above-mentioned complexes, there are also some new finds which can give us information about some aspects of the spiritual life that characterizes the human communities that lived in this area in the above - mentioned period. These refer especially to the sculptural representations – seen as both cultural symbols, connected to various ritual - magical practices, and as artistic manifestations.

The figurines comprise both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic statuettes. In this paper we shall refer to the zoomorphic figurines found in the area of the Gáva-Holíhrady and Corlăteni-Chișinău cultures (for the two cultures see: **KEMENCZEI** 1971;1982; 1984; **SMIRNOVA** 1974; 1990; 1992; **LÁSZLÓ** 1984; 1986; 1989; 1994; **GUMĂ** 1993, p.181-194, 105-141; **LEVIŢKI** 1994; 1994 a).

There have been made considerations about the zoomorphic statuettes of the early Hallstatt period since the first finds of that kind. Thus, for the zoomorphic figurines of the Gáva-Holíhrady culture finds have been published from the following settlements: Lechința de Mureș (**POPESCU** 1925, p.304-344; **HOREDT** 1963, p.527-537, fig.2/1-11), Teleac (**BERCIU, POPA** 1965, p.71-72, fig.

5/1-7, 6/4-8; **VASILIEV** 1986, p.70-92, fig.1/1-18; **VASILIEV et alii** 1991, p.145-152, fig.27, 28/1-8), Reci (**SZÉKELY** 1966, pl.VII/6 ), Grănicești, Siret (**LÁSZLÓ** 1984, p.79, fig. 9; 1986, p.155-156, pl.5/1-14; 1994, p.90, fig. 46-49), Vărădia, Remetea Mare (**GUMĂ** 1993, p.189-190, 269-270 ) [Romania], Poroszló (**PATAY** 1976, fig.3/7-9) [Hungary], Lisičniki, Krivče, Bedrikovtzi, Holihrady (**MALEEV** 1992, fig. 1-4; 1996, fig.1) [Ukraine]. There have also been published some figurines from the Corlăteni – Chișinău area, such as those from Trinca (**LEVIȚKI** 1994, p.111, fig. 59/1-2; 1994a, p.166, fig. 2/1-2).

At the present time we know of 82 zoomorphic statuettes, the information referring to them being distributed in numerous publications. Thus, we consider it useful to gather that information in this paper and to analyse it. That is the more those who published the statuettes have not always included enough specific information such as the conditions in which the figurines were found, their method of fabrication, their role, their functions – aspects that we shall try to discuss.

The statuettes were moulded in clay and most of them have been found in a fragmentary state; but we have to mention that all the statuettes found in Lechința de Mureș were complete. Their general features suggest the existence of a realistic manner in their moulding, as well as the endeavor to render their anatomical features, including their sex, as accurate as possible. Thus, among the statuettes we can distinguish: 24 horses, 24 cattle, 20 ovicaprids and 14 pigs. Most of the pieces represent domesticated animals, except for the three wild boars from Lechința de Mureș (**HOREDIT** 1963, p.528) (fig.13/1-3). All the animals are presented in a static position, their legs are straight, with no representation of, the hoofs, and the secondary features are given less importance.

Thus, most of the horses have strong bodies, more or less, long-arched necks, sometimes the mane is beautifully rendered (fig.1/1; 2/1, 3; 3/5, 6; 4/1, 2). The small head with pointed ears, the eyes and the mouth are rarely represented (fig.3/1), the tail, in case it is kept, may be short (or cut) (fig.1/2, 3, 5; 2/1; 4/3) or long and in one case it is split at the top (fig.1/1). Most of the times the

legs are disproportionately short. Two of the statuettes are decorated with dotted or painted lines (fig.1/2; 4/2).

The cattle are represented by bulls and cows, the sex of the animals not clearly indicated all the time. Nevertheless, the bulls can be identified by the marking of their sex (fig.7/3) or by the chin, which is brought into relief (fig.6/4; 7/2, 7, 8; 8/2, 4, 5). The statuettes are massive, with thickset bodies, short legs, the horns, straightened forward, are most of the times broken and apparently not very big. The head is schematically rendered, in the shape of a prominence, sometimes the ears being marked, too. The tail, as in the case of the horses, may be short or long.

The ovicaprids can be distinguished from the cattle by their suppler bodies and by their backwards horns. The distinction between sheep and goats is not easy to make, except for the males. The latter can be identified by their large, arched horns, pointed muzzle, by their chin, by their raised tail and by their sexual organs which are brought into relief (fig.9/2, 3, 6). In the case of the other statuettes the distinction among the species and/or of the sex is ambiguous. Three of the statuettes found in Lechința de Mureș were described by K. Horedt as sheep. He describes these statuettes as having small heads and big ears, but taking into account the drawings published, the latter could be considered horns (ram horns?). The absence of the male sexual organs could support K. Horedt's initial interpretation. Finally, a statuette from Lisičniki which has both its horns and its udder marked, may be considered a goat (fig.10/4).

The pigs are represented by samples which have robust bodies, short tails, short and strong legs which are pointed and somewhat rounded at its endings. The head is more or less realistically moulded, among the anatomical details only the ears are represented most of the times. The statuettes from Lechința de Mureș are complete and can be distinguished from the others by several features: they have prolonged snouts, very well emphasized manes, and two of them have strong fangs and stressed male sexual organs, being considered wild boars (fig.13/1–3). Among the

five incomplete statuettes from Lisičniki, two can be distinguished by anatomical details which are specific to the sow (fig.12/ 6, 7).

Taking into account the information about the context in which the statuettes were found we can mention the existence of several kinds of finds: in the dwellings of the settlement, in specially arranged pits and in the cultural layer. The location of some figurines suggests, too, their magic-religious role. Thus, in V. Vasiliev's opinion it is suggestive that in the settlement from Teleac, in dwelling number 17, near a fragmentary statuette considered a sheep (fig.10/9) there has been found a miniature phallus. In the same settlement, in dwelling number 12, near the fireplace there has been found a zoomorphic statuette, and another piece representing a bull (fig.7/2) has been found in dwelling number 37, where there has also been found a fragment of an anthropomorphic statuette (VASILIEV 1986; VASILIEV et alii 1991, p.151).

Also, in the settlement from Grănicești it is probably not a coincidence that, out of the 35 pieces, 19 (54,29 %) come from three adjoining complexes: 8 from hut number 1, 4 from hut number 2, and 7 come from the area near the fireplace; only the other 16 (45,71 %) are found in the cultural layer. A. László, not excluding the existence of a connection between dwellings and fireplaces on the one hand, and between them and the statuettes on the other hand, states that this connection provides those pieces a certain role in the beliefs and magical-religious practices of the communities from Grănicești (LÁSZLÓ 1994, p.90).

As in some settlements (Vărădia, Remetea Mare, Lechința de Mureș), there have been found ritual pits that contain beside other objects (animal bones, vessels) zoomorphic statuettes, deposited in small „herds” and representing various animal species, we can assume the existence of a tradition of giving offerings. The most eloquent example is the deposition from Lechința de Mureș (about which we have some information) where there have been found 11 zoomorphic statuettes together with two complete vessels in a specially arranged pits, at a depth of 1, 70 m (HOREDT 1963,

p.534; for Vărădia and Remetea Mare see **GUMĂ** 1993, p.189-190, 267-270).

A special case is the find from Lissičniki where, in the fortified settlement, there have been found the remains of a „temple” which also included the fragments of a clay altar. Among the known finds there are several zoomorphic statuettes, made out of clay, which seem to be in connection with this altar: 3 horses, 2 cattle, a goat and a pig. The researcher of this settlement connects this find to agricultural beliefs, the above-mentioned pieces being laid on an altar as symbols of fertility (**MALEEV** 1994, p.329).

It is certain that no statuette (anthropomorphic or zoomorphic) has ever been found in graves, but in settlements, so in the current stage of the research we may exclude the idea that they would have had a role in the funeral practices.

As to the function of those zoomorphic statuettes, it is generally agreed that they may be connected, in one way or another, to a „cult of fertility and fecundity” (**HOREDIT** 1963, p.534; **VASILIEV** 1986, p.80-81; **VASILIEV et alii** 1991, p.148-150; **MALEEV** 1992, p.22; 1994, p.369; **LÁSZLÓ** 1994, p.90-91).

In agreement with the previously-expressed opinions about the role and significance of the zoomorphic statuettes studied in our paper, we estimate that these representations can be connected to some practices and beliefs which are meant to protect the animals and to influence their growth.

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Fig. 1. Statuettes representing horses. 1: Lechința de Mureș (after K. Horedt); 2-7: Teleac (after V. Vasiliev et alii); 8: Siret (after A. László).



Fig. 2. Statuettes representig horses. 1-5: Grănicești (after A. László).

Fig. 3. Statuettes representing horses. 1,2: Zaleski (after I. N. Maleev and I. Krušelnicka ); 3,4: Gorodnitsa; 5: Bedrikovtzi; 6: Krivče (after I.N. Maleev).

Fig. 4. Statuettes representing horses. 1-6: Lisičniki (after I.N. Maleev).

Fig. 5. Statuettes representing cattle: 1-6: Grănicești (after A. László).

Fig. 6. Statuettes representing cattle. 1-6: Grănicești (after A. László).

Fig. 7. Statuetes representing cattle. 1. Lechința de Mureș (after K. Horedt ); 2-3:Teleac (after V. Vasiliev et alii); 4: Trinca (after O. Levițki); 5,7: Lisičniki; 6. Holih rady (after I.N. Maleev).

Fig. 8. Statuettes representing cattle: 1-5: Lisičniki (after I. N. Maleev).

Fig. 9. Statuettes representing ovicaprids. 1-6: Lechința de Mureș (after K. Horedt).



Fig. 10. Statuettes representing ovicaprids. 1-4: Teleac (after V. Vasiliev et alii); 5: Trinca (after O. Levițki); 6: Grouchevo; 7: Holih rady; 8: Lisičniki (after I.N. Maleev).

Fig. 11. Statuettes representing ovicaprids. 1-6: Lisičniki (after I.N. Maleev).

Fig. 12. Statuettes representing pigs. 1,4-7: Lisičniki (after I.N. Maleev );  
2-3: Teleac (after V. Vasiliev et alii).





Fig. 13. Statuettes representing pigs (1-5) and cattle (6-7). 1-3: Lechința de Mureș (after K. Horedt); 4-7: Grănicești (after A. László).













### LISTA ILUSTRĂȚIILOR

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