

Preliminary considerations on the decoration of the anthropomorphic plastic from
the Cucuteni A-B settlement of Băiceni – *Dâmbul Morii*
(com. Cucuteni, Iași county).

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Abstract. *Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic plastics are often associated with complex manifestations of the spiritual life of Cucuteni communities. Therefore, knowledge and interpretation of anthropomorphic representations are necessary to have a better picture of the role played in the daily and spiritual life of prehistoric communities. The Cucuteni A-B settlement from Dâmbul Morii provides an important number of such pieces that will complete the data known so far. In this study, attention will be paid to plastic representations with painted, incised, and plastic decorations. Therefore, a batch of 27 anthropomorphic figurines was analyzed, some in a fragmentary state. Based on the decor analysis, a clear separation of figurines by gender was possible.*

Rezumat. *Plastica antropomorfă și zoomorfă este asociată de cele mai multe ori cu manifestările complexe ale vieții spirituale a comunităților cucuteniene. Prin urmare, cunoașterea și interpretarea reprezentărilor antropomorfe este necesară pentru a avea o imagine mai bună asupra rolului jucat în viața cotidiană și spirituală a comunităților preistorice. Așezarea Cucuteni A-B de la Dâmbul Morii furnizează un număr important de asemenea piese ce vin să completeze datele cunoscute până în prezent. În demersul de față atenția va fi acordată reprezentărilor plastice cu decor pictat, incizat și plastic. Prin urmare, a fost analizat un lot de 27 figurine antropomorfe, unele în stare fragmentară. Pe baza analizei decorului s-a putut face o separare clară a pieselor pe gen.*

Keywords: Cucuteni culture, phase A-B, Dâmbul Morii, anthropomorphic figurines, painted decoration.

Introduction

Anthropomorphic and zoomorphic plastics are often associated with complex manifestations of the spiritual life of Cucuteni communities. Therefore, knowledge and interpretation of anthropomorphic representations is necessary to have a better picture of the role played in the daily and spiritual life of prehistoric communities. The Cucuteni A-B settlement from *Dâmbul Morii* provides an important number of such pieces that will complete the data known so far.

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The impressive number of figures found in the area of Cucute-Tripolie settlements allowed to obtain information on these plastic representations, which were included in a series of monographic works or specialized studies dedicated to this field².

In this article, we will discuss the decoration of the anthropomorphic plastic discovered at *Dâmbul Morii*. The pieces analyzed have been partly introduced into the scientific circuit and others are presented for the first time. The batch of the anthropomorphic representations analyzed from this settlement comprises a number of 185 pieces, many of them in a fragmented state, located in the scientific funds of the Archeology Seminar within the Faculty of History and the Museum of Cucuteni Civilization, both of them from the University of Alexandru Ioan Cuza in Iasi.

Geographical and archaeological background

The settlement from *Dâmbul Morii* is located in north-eastern Romania (Fig. 1/A) in Iași county (Fig. 1/B) and within the boundaries of the Cucuteni commune, inside the village of Băiceni, between the Recea and Morii streams to the west and east, presenting a steeper slope to the southeast, and more gentle slopes on the other sides (Fig. 1/C)³.

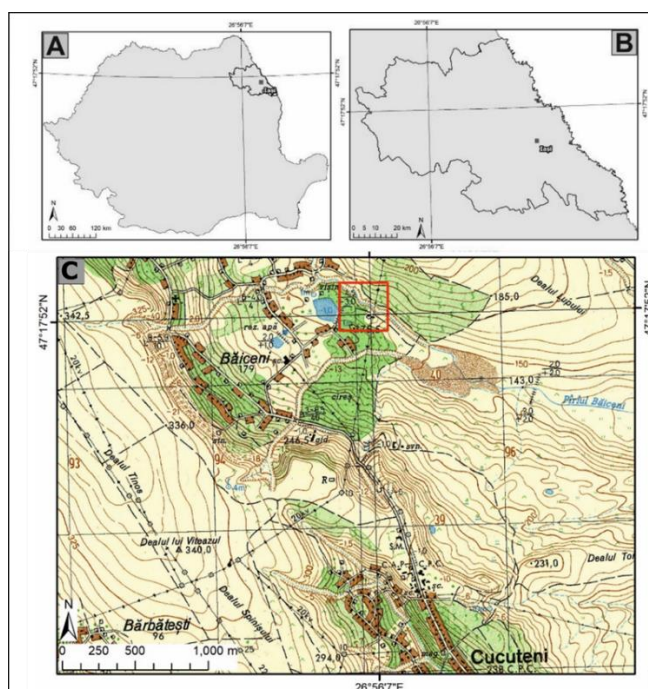


Figure 1. The location of Cucuteni–*Dâmbul Morii* : A. in Romania; B. Iași county; C. on the topographic map, scale 1:25000 ((adapted after Asăndulesei et alii, 2020, p. 321).

² MARIN 1948; BERLESCU 1964; COMȘA 1995; MONAH 1997, 2012, 2016.

³ DINU 2006, 31; 2009, 106; ASĂNDULESEI et alii. 2020, 320; BALAU 2020, 170.

The first researches at *Dâmbul Morii*, were carried out by Hubert Schmidt, in 1909 or 1910. The German archaeologist undertook a small test trench, of about 31 x 2 m, in the west-northwest part of the settlement, named by him "*The settlement in the valley-Talsiedlung*", in which ceramic remains were discovered, as well as parts of a dwelling. He also unveiled two surfaces of about 3 x 6 m, without making significant discoveries⁴.

In 1961, under the leadership of Prof. Mircea Petrescu-Dîmbovița, the researches in the eponymous resort from *Cetățuia* were resumed. At the same time, attention is paid to the settlement in the valley, where, under the leadership of Prof. Marin Dinu research has been carried out in several stages (1961-1966, 1977-1978, and 1989)⁵.

The excavations (**Fig. 2**) were carried out within three sectors: sector A, in the S-SE part of the promontory, located behind the defensive ditch; sector B, about 150 m NV from the south-eastern edge of the promontory, where the defensive ditch was identified; sector C, in the N-NV part of the promontory, outside the defensive ditch of the settlement, where the settlement supposedly extended over the entire surface of the promontory⁶.

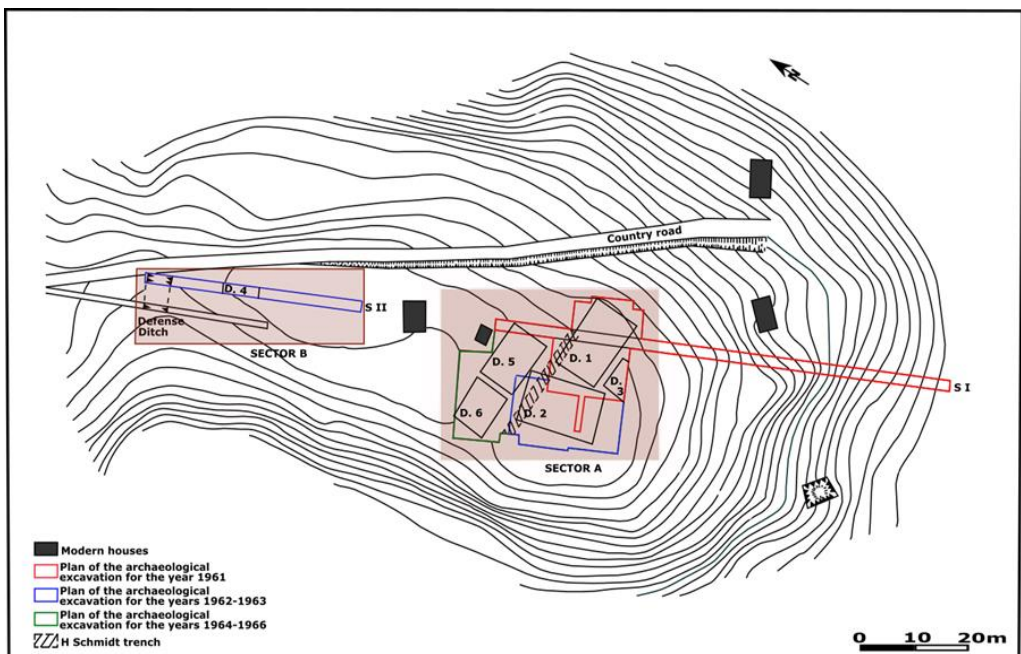


Fig. 2. Cucuteni – Băiceni – *Dâmbul Morii*. Excavations plan for the years 1961-1966 (adapted after Dinu 2006, p. 43).

⁴ SCHMIDT 1932, 12-13; PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA, 1966, 32.

⁵ DINU 2006, 33.

⁶ DINU 2006, 33-35, 43 (fig. 3); BALAUR 2020, 172.

The settlement was inhabited during at least three stages. The oldest belongs to the sub-phase Cucuteni A₂, identified in sector A, where the remains of a dwelling were discovered, having a burnt clay floor, applied on a layer of thin wood branches⁷.

The next habitation stage was assigned to the sub-phase Cucuteni A-B₁, also identified in sector A, where seven surface dwellings (1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 10 and 11), of medium and large sizes, were investigated (**Fig. 2**).

The last stage of habitation, assigned to the sub-phase Cucuteni A-B₂, was identified in sector C, outside the defensive ditch, where the excavations carried as sections and test trenches led to the discovery and investigation of three surface dwellings (7, 8 and 9)⁸.

Raw material and shaping

Regarding anthropomorphic plastic, an important issue is related to materiality, methods, and manufacturing techniques⁹. Clay was mostly used as a raw material. Three categories of clay from which these pieces were made were established: coarse, porous paste, with vegetable residue, surfaced finished, with uneven combustion, clay paste with impurities (sand, pebbles), unevenly burned at low temperatures and of different colors, especially reddish-brown and a very fine paste, with natural degreasers mixed, homogeneously burned, to red brick¹⁰. A series of interdisciplinary researches showed that in the paste of female anthropomorphic statuettes, with a porous appearance and poor burning, there were mixtures of chaff, cereal caryopsis, and flour¹¹.

The anthropomorphic plastic from the Cucuteni A-B phase inherits a series of features and manufacturing canons specific to the Cucuteni A₃ and A₄ stages, however, they differ from those in the previous stage by lengthening the body and legs, both in the case of female representations (**Fig. 4/1, 2**) as well as in the case of the male ones (**Fig. 3/3**), the lower part is sometimes shaped in the form of a single leg, undifferentiated or separated by a groove, and finished with a disc or a sole. Also, the dimensions of the hips and thighs are reduced, doubled by a dorso-ventral flattening of the pieces¹². Specific to this intermediate phase is the statuette with discoidal head, slender waist, and united legs. Other characteristic features of the anthropomorphic plastics from the Cucuteni A-B phase are the representation of the apron (**Fig. 4/1**), usually integrated in the decoration, as well as a slight flexion of the legs¹³.

⁷ DINU 2006, 34; DINU 2009, 107.

⁸ IBIDEM; IBIDEM.

⁹ BOGHIAN 2004, 140.

¹⁰ MONAH 1997, 52.

¹¹ BOGHIAN 2004, 140; MONAH 1997, p. 52-54

¹² DUMITRESCU, 1979, 84-85; MONAH, 1997, 97; BOGHIAN 2004, 148.

¹³ MONAH 1997, 97-98; 2012, 119-121; 2016, 126.

Decoration

Regarding the decoration of the anthropomorphic figurines of *Dâmbul Morii*, judging by their appearance at the moment they were discovered, it can be categorized as: decorated by painting and plastic application, with incisions, and undecorated. Most of the pieces discovered are undecorated. However, it is possible that some of them had a thin layer of red paint¹⁴.

The decoration with plastic elements is largely associated with male representations. It consists of the plastic modeling of the sex, as well as the relief modeling of a belt that tightens the waist, associated with a diagonal, modeled in the same way, starting from the shoulder to the hip. There are also cases in which this belt-diagonal assembly is made of incised lines and points¹⁵. Among the specimens identified at the *Dâmbul Morii*, two have a modeled sex (**Fig. 3/1, 6**). The belt modeled in relief was captured on a single figurine (**Fig. 3/1**), but taking into account the fact that the upper part is missing, we do not exclude the possibility that it had a diagonal shaped in the same way. In the case of three figurines, the diagonal belt assembly is represented by incised lines and dots, made in different ways. The belt seems to be marked either in the form of two incised lines, with a series of incisions dots between them (**Fig. 3/4**), or in the form of an incised line framed by two rows of incised dots (**Fig. 3/3**). Modeling differences also exist in the case of the diagonal. In this case, the modeling is done either in the form of two incised lines, with a row of points between them (**Fig. 3/3, 5**), or in the form of a simpler variant, with two incised lines (**Fig. 3/4**). On the latter, a necklace is represented by incised dots.

On a single fragment of a figurine, a belt made by two rows of punctiform incisions was most likely identified (**Fig. 5/7**), unfortunately, the fragmentary state did not allow its association with a female or a male figurine. In two other cases, on the leg, it seems to have been modeled with incised dots, probably a scarf, most likely associated with the belt (**Fig. 3/7, 8**).

¹⁴ MONAH 1997, 101; 2012, 124.

¹⁵ MONAH 1997, 102; 2012, 124.



Fig. 3. Cucuteni – Băiceni – *Dâmbul Morii*. Decorated anthropomorphic figurines with plastics elements and incisions

The incised decoration, used in the Cucuteni A-B subphase, was made for geometric motifs, arranged on the hips and thighs, usually the belly marked with a rhombus, sometimes with the abdomen decorated with spiral loops and semioval, going right under the breasts, delimited by horizontal lines. Characteristic of phase A-B seems to be the representation of the apron, triangular (Fig. 4/2, 3, 4, 5, 6) or with a sectioned tip associated with fringes (Fig. 4/1), sometimes filled with circular or triangular prints. However, there is a risk of confusing this decoration with the pubic triangle¹⁶ (Fig. 4/5).

From the settlement of *Dâmbul Morii*, the pieces that have an incised decoration are mostly in a fragmentary state (Fig. 5 / 1-9). The motif of the apron is attested to six figurines (Fig. 4 / 1-6). In only one case can we speak of modeling of the apron with fringes and with a sectioned tip¹⁷ (Fig. 4/1). In two cases the apron is represented by a simple triangle (Fig. 4/2, 5), and in the other three cases the triangle is filled with incised lines (Fig. 4/6), incised lines

¹⁶ MONAH 2012, 124-127.

¹⁷ PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA 1966, fig. 34, DINU 2006, fig. 12/1; MONAH 2012, 1216, fig. 101/1; BOGHIAN 2004, 149.

completed by dots (fig. 4/3), or only with incised points (Fig. 4/4). In the case of the last two pieces, the fringes are rendered by incised dots.



Fig. 4. Anthropomorphic plastic decorated with incisions from Cucuteni – Băiceni – Dâmbul Morii. Representation of the apron

From the first observations, it seems that the incised decoration on the plastic was made of geometric reasons, arranged on the hips and thighs (Fig. 5/3) or buttocks (Fig. 5/1), usually, the belly marked with a rhombus (Fig. 5 / 9), sometimes on the buttocks being present also spiral loops and semiovate motifs (Fig. 5/6). On a fragment of a figurine kept from the knees to just above the abdomen (Fig. 5/1), we can see that on the thighs that the incised lines are arranged horizontally, the legs being separated by a deep vertical incision, on the buttocks the oblique lines form a rhombus, and above the hips, the abdomen is separated by two horizontal lines. The abdomen area is decorated with oblique lines arranged at an upward angle. On another figurine, probably the thigh area (Fig. 5/3), we can discern an inclined arrangement of the incised lines on the sides, up to the knee area. The same inclined arrangement of the

incised lines can be seen in the front, but it stops in the knee area. Another figurine fragment, represented by a torso, the decoration is presented in the form of striations arranged on the sides (Fig. 5/4). We do not rule out the possibility that this decoration may be associated with a very rare theme in anthropomorphic plastic, namely the association woman-plant, as is the case of a figurine discovered in Caracușani, which has a fir tree incised on its belly¹⁸ (Fig. 5/10). Among the discovered figurines, there is a fragment decorated with deeply incised points (Fig. 5/5), on the basis of which we can not make other statements about the decoration. We also mention here a fragment of a statuette (Fig. 5/2), discovered in pit no. 1 under dwelling no. 2 in sector A, pit assigned to Cucuteni A habitation level. The decoration of this piece seems rather sketchy, and we do not rule out the possibility that this figurine may have been in the early stages of execution, taking into account the fact that it does not appear to have been burned.



Fig. 5. Anthropomorphic plastic decorated with incisions: 1-9, Cucuteni – Băiceni – *Dâmbul Morii*; 10. Caracușanii Vechi.

¹⁸ MONAH 1997, 101, fig. 124; 2012, 123, fig. 124.

In the category of pieces decorated with incisions we also include an *en violin* idol. The decoration of this type of object differs from piece to piece, ranging from simple incised dots arranged around the head and body, in a single string, or two strings. For the most part, the pieces discovered in the area bear some resemblance to those from Hăbseşti¹⁹ (Fig. 6/3-5), Truşeşti²⁰ (Fig. 6/2) or Scânteia²¹.

The piece discovered at *Dâmbul Morii* (Fig. 6/1), in the 1963 campaign, presents a series of small incised dots around the body and head, most likely with two unfinished perforations in the head area, representing the eyes. In the body area, the decoration consists of a circle of incised points, the center of the circle being marked by another incised dot. On the other side, this piece has no decoration.

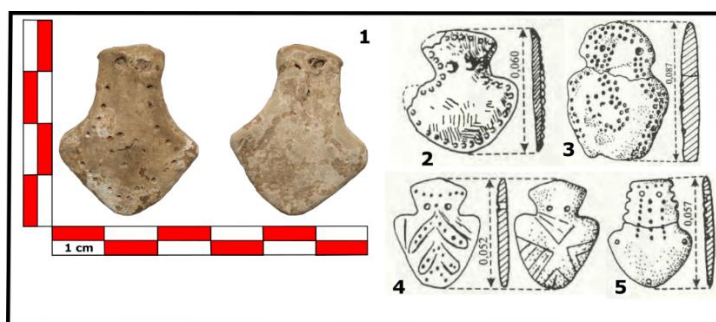


Fig. 6. *En violin* idols: 1. Cucuteni-Băiceni *Dâmbul Morii*; 2. Truşeşti; 3-5. Hăbşeşti.

The painted decoration attributed to the Cucuteni A-B phase is largely inspired by the incised decoration from the previous stage. It was most often made of light red or brown stripes on certain parts of the body. Representative seems to be the decoration made of horizontal stripes of color, drawn on the body of the statuettes, in some cases forming angular motifs on the torso or back²².

So far, from the settlement of *Dâmbul Morii*, we have identified only three fragments of figurines that have a painted decoration. The first figurine is decorated with is angular motifs on one side, and by vertical bands, slightly arched on the other side (Fig. 7/1). These stripes

¹⁹ DUMITRESCU 1954, fig. 36/1; MONAH 1997, fig. 258/2, 4, 10; BOGHIAN 2004, fig. 146/1-2, 12.

²⁰ PETRESCU DÎMBOVITA et alii 1999, 521-523, fig. 370/1; MONAH 1997, fig. 258/7.

²¹ MANTU, ȚURCANU, 1999, 142, fig. 355.

²² MONAH 1997, 104; 2012, 127.

were brown on the whitish background of the engobe. Specimens with a similar painting were also discovered in the settlements of Traian²³ (Fig. 7/3) and Ripiceni-Holm²⁴ (Fig. 7/2).

The second fragment, also a torso coming from a female figurine, with breasts marked by two clay pills, and with raised arms, has a decoration with red or brown stripes, probably on a whitish background of the engobe. We can't say if the decor was extended on the back on the figurine. (Fig. 7/4).

The third fragment is represented by a leg, probably from a male figurine. The decoration seems to have been made of horizontal stripes, brown in color, applied on the whitish background of the engobe (Fig. 7/5). A similar decoration seems to have been applied on a figurine attributed to the Cucuteni A phase discovered at Scânteia²⁵ (Fig. 7/6).



Fig. 7. Painted decoration on anthropomorphic plastic:
1,4, 5 Cucuteni-Băiceni- *Dâmbul Morii*; 2. Ripiceni-Holm; 3. Traian; 6. Scânteia.

Discussions

Although for the settlement from *Dâmbul Morii* we have a relatively large number of anthropomorphic representations, many of them are in a fragmentary state, therefore we considered it necessary, for a start, to present the pieces with plastic, incised, and painted decoration. After a first analysis, we can say with certainty that male representations, few in

²³ BEM 2007, 185, fig. 410/2; MONAH, 1997, 104, fig. 110/7; MONAH 2012, 127, fig. 110/7.

²⁴ MELNICIUC 2011, 283, fig. 112/7; DUMITRESCU 1954, fig. 36/1; MONAH 1997, fig. 258/2, 4, 10; BOGHIAN 2004, fig. 146/1-2, 12.

²⁵ MANTU, ȚURCANU, 1999, 149, fig. 393; ENEA 364, fig. 3/9.

number, are characterized by the presence of the belt-diagonal assembly, either in the form of incisions or embossed, while female representations are indicated by the presence of the pubic triangle or apron. In an extensive study dedicated to the representation of the apron, both on anthropomorphic plastic and ceramic, it was hypothesized that its representation was made not to mask or cover the pubic area, but rather to highlight the characteristics of femininity, and probably the fecundity of the those pieces ²⁶. Another hypothesis is related to the association with a certain status or affiliation to a certain clan, group or family. ²⁷

Regarding the interpretation of the representations associated with the diagonal, it was hypothesized that these would be associated with the posture of the *hero / young fighter*, or that these figurines would have been used in certain rituals of passage to adult life²⁸. As it has been observed, most of the pieces are in a fragmentary state, since antiquity. Although the idea that this fragmentation was intentional, in some cult practices is accepted ²⁹, it is difficult to prove this hypothesis.

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²⁶ MELNICIUC, KOVÁKS, 2019, 188.

²⁷ IBIDEM.

²⁸ ENEA, 2016, 361.

²⁹ MONAH, 1997, 63; DIACONESCU 2016, 118.

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