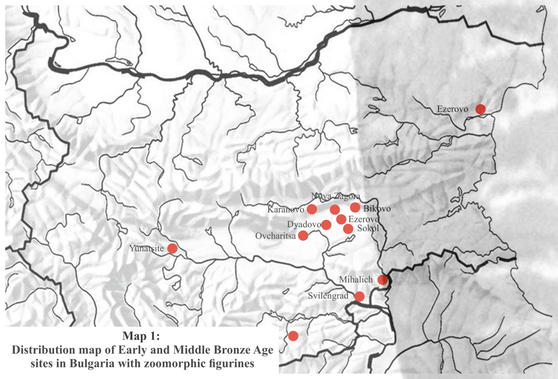
Early and Middle Bronze Age Zoomorphic Figurines and Depictions from Present-Day Bulgarian Lands

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During the Early Bronze Age (c. 3500-2100) several changes occurred in Upper Thrace – related directly to the problems surrounding the end of the Chalcolithic civilization and the *Transition* period that followed. Thrace became a crossroads between the Aegean-Anatolian world, the Northern Black Sea region, and Central and Eastern Europe. All this is manifested through the appearance of several new types of items and merchandise – the first imports. Alongside these new items are examples of zoomorphic figurines, which potentially have a significant role in understanding the changes underway during this period as their distribution and frequency in the Early Bronze Age fell markedly in comparison to the preceding period. The aim of the study is to present data about the archaeological context, chronology, parallels, and interpretations of these intriguing artifacts.

Geographical and chronological framework

The sites where zoomorphic figurines and protomes were found are very few in number (Map 1); 43 examples were discovered at just 11 sites. The region with the greatest concentration is the Martisa valley and its tributaries. The distribution of the discussed finds is shown to the right (Tab. 1); they are ordered geographically – from west to east.



Map 1:
Distribution map of Early and Middle Bronze Age sites in Bulgaria with zoomorphic figurines

Based on newly obtained data from ^{14}C dating, as well as recent corrections and refinements, this study uses the following chronological framework for the Early Bronze Age and the beginning of the Middle Bronze Age:

Early Bronze Age I - Ezero – c. 3500-2900 BC.

Early Bronze Age II - Michalic – c. 2900-2500/2400 BC.

Early Bronze Age III - St. Kirilovo – c. 2500/2400-2200/2100 BC

Middle Bronze Age - Galabovo – c. 2200/2100-1600/1500 BC (Alexandrov 2020, 251, fig. 1).

Archaeological context

All known examples were found at settlements, many in clear habitation contexts: in the bases of structures, on the surface of ovens/kilns or on the floor surface (Dyadovo); in a ditch/enclosure (Bikovo); in a pithos (Sokol); and in building horizons without additional information (Yunatsite; Ezero). Further finds come from an unclear archaeological context (Svilengrad) or dug strata lacking other archaeological material (Ovcharitisa; Karanovo, Nova Zagora, Sokol, some finds from Svilengrad and Mihalich). Four figurines from Sokol were found together as a group. There is no mention of them being found as mortuary gifts, as part of burial rituals or as an offering at a sacred place. Most of the figurines date to the second phase of the Early Bronze Age.

Technological and typological features

A) Technological characteristics

The figurines are hand-modeled in clay – the anatomical features are conveyed schematically and only very rarely with accuracy. Their surface is usually medium-well smoothed, the colors mainly a combination of varied shades of gray and brown, with the infrequent inclusion of other colors, such as black and red-brown. A few are decorated with stamped or incised motifs.

B) Typological features

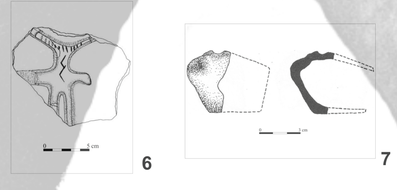
The typology of the zoomorphic objects is based on: 1. the type of animal depicted; 2. the body shape, which is further subdivided by the variable position of its anatomical features.

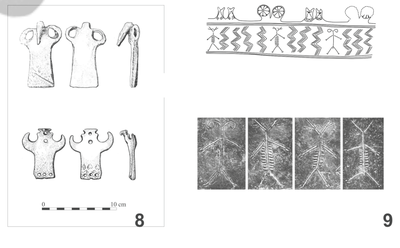
The figurines can be divided into three main types, based on individual elements of their bodies – birds (Karanovo, Dyadovo, Bikovo); theriomorphic or therianthropic (Kazanlak, Ovcharitsa II, Ezero) and domestic and/or horned animals (bulls, oxen, cows, sheep, goat, etc.).

Their schematic nature makes it very difficult to distinguish between different species of animals, especially in the category of domestic and/or horned animals. This difficulty is exacerbated by the poor preservation of some examples.

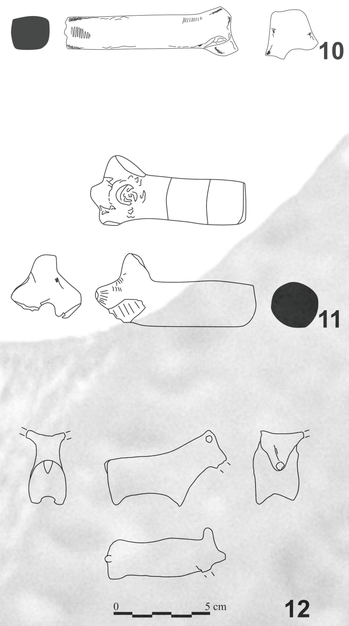


Tab. I - Bird figurines/protomes
Dyadovo (1), Bikovo (2), Karanovo (3), Kavos (4), Kanligecit (5)

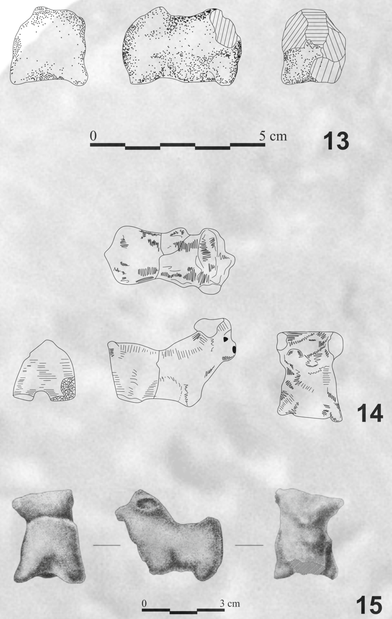




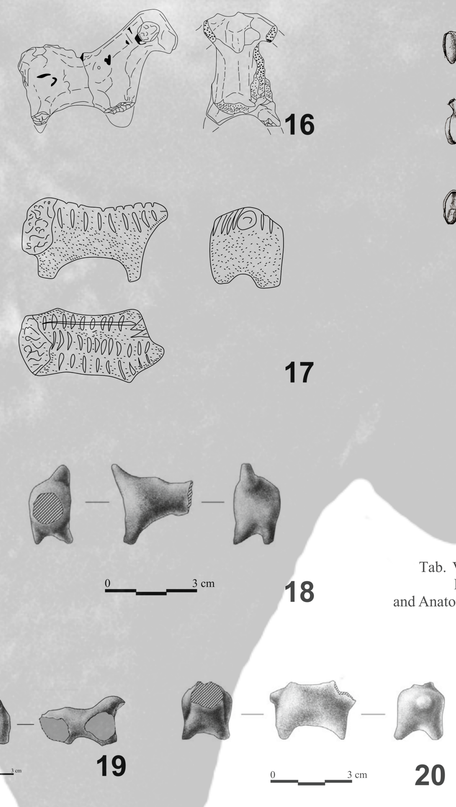
Tab. II - Therianthropic artifacts - Kazanlak (6), Ovcharitsa (7), Ezero (8) (Vounous, Cyprus (9), after - Hennesey 1974



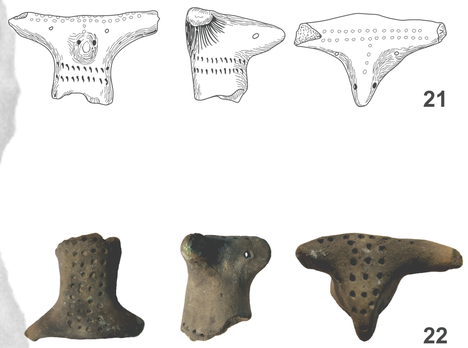
Tab. III - Zoomorphic figurines/horned animals - Group 1 - Nova Zagora (10-11), Mihalich (2)



Tab. IV - Zoomorphic figurines/horned animals - group 2 - Ovcharitsa (13), Mihalich (14), Svilengrad (15)



Tab. V - Zoomorphic figurines/horned figurines - group 3 - Dyadovo (16), Mihalich (17), Svilengrad (18-20)



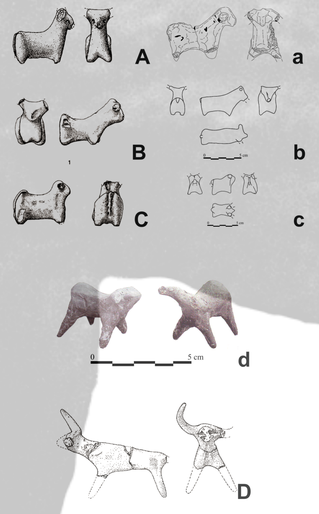
Tab. VI - Horned protomes of Bulls - Ezero (21), Ezerovo (22)

Parallels

Zoomorphic figurines are known from many distant regions, such as Western and Central Europe, the Levant, and the Middle East.

Closer parallels to these ceramic zoomorphic figurines and depictions are known from a wide geographical area. It includes almost all the areas adjacent to Upper Thrace, as well as some that are a little more remote. These are the modern-day lands of Anatolia, Greece, and Romania. The closest parallel to the theriomorphic figurine from the site of Kazanlak comes from the necropolis of Vounus, on Cyrus (Webb, Frankel 2012, 200).

The best parallels come from sites in Anatolia and the Aegean. In the Aegean these include – Vounus, Emporio (Chios), Kavos, Poliochni, Attica and Tiryns (Doumas, Renfrew, Gavalas 2007). In Anatolia these include – Troy, Demirchikhuyuk, Beychesultan, Alishar Huyuk, Kushura-Karahisar, Tarsus, Koruchutepe and Norshun Tepe (Lamb 1937; 1938; Goldman 1956; Obladen-Kauder 1996; Schmidt 2002). The finds from Anatolia in particular have similarities to the examples from Upper Thrace in the shaping of their bodies, and their decoration technique and motifs. Thus far the data seems to indicate the sharing of ideas across different regions.



Tab. VII - Zoomorphic figurines - parallels between Bulgaria: Dyadovo (a/d), Mihalich (b-c) and Anatolia: Demirchihuyuk (A-D, Obladen-Kauder 1996)

Interpretation

The Bulgarian zoomorphic figurines are the only ones that follow a production tradition already established in a previous period – the Eneolithic. This is not the case for finds from the other regions included in this discussion. Possibly this could be related to the thesis that the clay figurines served to indicate the foundations of particular family groups, or more precisely their main livelihood – agriculture – symbolically conceived as totemic animals (Todorova 1986, 203). Zoomorphic figurines have been suggested to have had a votive role, perhaps to replace animal sacrifices, and may have been associated with rebirth (Ashbacher 2017). In Greece, such animal figurines were found in storage areas, often in the corners of such rooms, and may have been intended to provide a protective function (Marangou 1996, 662). Other suggestions for the purpose of these figurines include toys and apotropaic bodily ornaments e.g. pendants (Marangou 1996, 662-663). It can be concluded from this discussion that it is not improbable that the animals closest to people's daily lives were represented through their ceramic images in the domestic or collective ritual practices of the population.