

UNCOMMON PRACTICE OF GUMELNIȚA ZOOMORPHIC CLAY FIGURINES MODELLING

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The neo-eneolithic settlement from Vitănești, Purani Village, Teleorman County, is located 7 kms east of Alexandria on a river meadow of the Teleorman River.

During our excavation at Vitănești, our attention was drawn to an extra-ordinary find: a small zoomorph statue (l = 3.6 cm, h = 4.0 cm). The hind legs and tail were lost long before excavation. The zoomorph's body is relatively short and the fore legs, separately modeled, are slightly laterally spread (fig. 2a). The issue that focused our attention on this piece was the relatively simple modeling of the head.

The animal's face appeared to be covered by some sort of mask that had a type of small handle instead of the muzzle. A similar manner of representing the muzzle, laterally perforated, was also observed on other zoomorph statues, including others discovered at Vitănești. What makes this piece to be special is the manner of modeling the muzzle, as it appeared to be attached to a mask. This is clearest at the upper part of the head, where the horns, partially broken, were partly covered by a thin film of clay and were a part of this mask. In addition, on the neck the line separating it from the mask is visible. Furthermore, on the animal's back and belly is another plastic clay film, subsequently adjusted, is observable. Although, the body has no forelegs, two small clay protuberances have been added. Taken together these observations led us believe that the statue suffered several changes that are visible especially at the mask applied on the animal's head. A radiograph made by Ing. Geo Niculescu in the Physical Investigations Laboratory of the Romanian National History Museum confirmed the fact that this element was subsequently applied over the animal's face. Because of this, we decided to dismantle this mask, proceeding also to the recovery of all fragments for the further restauration of the piece. Our preliminary suspicions were confirmed when we discovered another face of the animal under the mask. The muzzle, laterally perforated, was broken; there was a hole on the neck and the horns, partially broken arched towards the inner side (fig. 2b).

At some point a mask has been added over the original face of the zoomorph statue. The mask covers not only the muzzle, but also the horns. Even more, it seems that a thin clay film covers the entire animal body and the two small prominences, which had been modelled on the animal's belly.

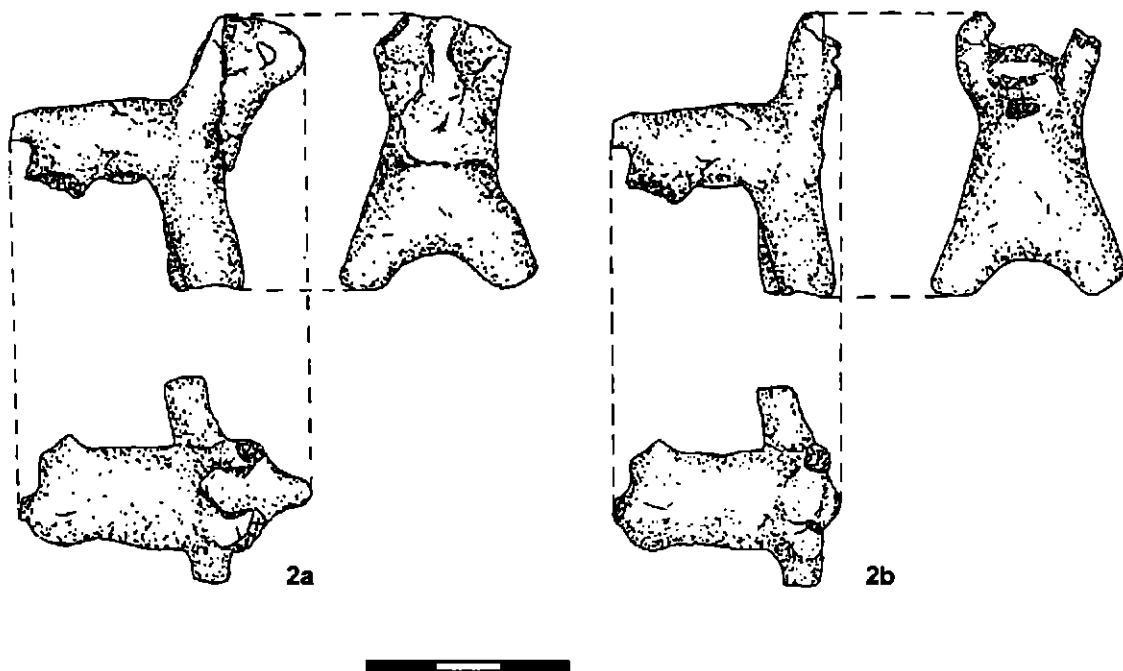
The Vitănești zoomorph is the first discovery of such a find from Gumelnița context and, as such, deserves discussion.

Gumelnița zoomorphic plastic arts has been the subject of numerous studies and exceptional representations, such as the zoomorphic pottery from Calomfirești¹. In the main, however, most of this plastic arts is quite rudimentary and schematic modeling.

With respect to the Vitănești zoomorph, it is important that the zoomorph, in its present state, had suffered important changes. There are two explanations for the causes of these changes.

¹ Vi, Dumitrescu, *Arta preistorică în România*, București, 1974, fig. 279

First, the present state of statue may be the result of restoration, which took place in Gumelnița time. Thus, the muzzle and maybe, the horns were broken at a certain moment and the Gumelnița craftsman modeled a new face. Although this may have been the case, it leaves several questions unanswered. It would have been easier to restore the missing part of the muzzle and maybe of the horns, instead of covering the entire face with what practically represents a new face. It is important that the horns are covered by a clay film, that practically led to the change of the animal's aspect and, probably, also to the altering of its identity. Thus, by covering the horns, an animal clearly belonging to the Cornuta group, by covering the horns, becomes something else (although it is impossible to determine the species). It also must not be forgotten that a thin clay film covered the entire animal body and two small prominences appear on the belly. This is the manner of representing the mammals of female animals.



These facts lead us to believe that the changes made to the animal have in their aspect a worshipping nature. The changes might represent a change of the cultic significance of the statue, possibly a change from a male statue (a bull?) to a female zoomorph, (as demonstrated by the two prominences representing the mammals). It is difficult to understand these changes.

A possible explanation could come from the Anatolian Neolithic, more precisely from the famous settlement from Catal-Huyuc². In this settlement the covering of animals or animal heads with successive layers of lime was a common practice (some of the layers with painted decorative motives) that was performed after the end of the ceremonies when these statues had fulfilled or consumed their ritual function³.

² J. Mellaart, *Çatal - Hüyük, une de premières cites du monde*, Tallandier, 1971.

³ Idem, p. 82, 119-124, photo, 18-21, fig. 31, 36)

This could also be the case for Vitănești zoomorph; however, the Vitănești example seems to be more complex. The covering of the head (including the 'wiping' of the horns) and representation of the mammaries appears to indicate the changing of the animal sex from male to female.

To conclude, we are faced with a quite complex situation in which the identity of the animal actually changed. The zoomorph had clearly represented a horned bovid (possible a bull). It was changed into another animal, which appears to be female, but whose species identification is difficult to determine. Concerning the significance of the change, it is best not to propose unsupported hypotheses. This is especially the case as the world of Gumelnița zoomorphic plastic art is little explored (this is mainly due to the fact that the zoomorphic art usually takes second place to anthropomorphic art). The changes of zoomorph identity and species are very interesting but it needs to be verified by other discoveries of similar objects. While the causes of the sex and species changes are difficult to ascertain, the existence of this object proves once again the complexity of the spiritual life of the Gumelnița civilization.