

VI SUMMARY

The book, “Studies on symbolic material culture of the Neolithic and the Copper Age in Southeast Europe”, has two goals: to make it easier to gather information from symbolic material culture and to clarify forms of expression inherent in symbolic material culture. To do so, it introduces a new method called contextual attribute analysis. The method has far-reaching implications and will certainly lead to the reevaluation of a large amount of existing symbolic material culture.

The analysis focused on three investigation areas:

1. The collection, processing and presentation of data from a central area of investigation.

The clay figurines of the Sălcuța-Krivodol culture complex were analyzed and are represented as a paradigm for comparisons with other archaeological culture complexes. The bone figurines were examined in their total circulation area in order to work out generally accepted tendencies that went beyond the boundaries of geographic areas and archaeological culture complexes. They were then compared with the clay figurines.

2. The contextual comparison of form and content of the figurines over space and time with other culture complexes.

At this point, a new form of comparing archaeological source material of different archaeological cultures was used to analyze data in different geographical areas and chronological time horizons. This was not based on a stylistic comparison of single attributes, but rather on the comparison of the total structure of anthropomorphic figurines as a closed, contextual, and structural unit.

3. The structural analysis from idea-historical theories to the interpretation of the symbolic material culture.

This last point shows the possibilities (apart from the elaboration of stylistic and form-typological information) of an anthropomorphic figurine to reconstruct its symbolic content. It also allows a mental leap and permits me to draw conclusions about the ideas expressed by the figurines. I thereby come closer to understanding their symbolic content.

With the symbolic material culture I focused on anthropomorphic figurines as they offer the safest starting point given their classification as “special finds”. This means that most of the figurines that have been excavated have (theoretically) been published and are available to be studied. This is not the case with pottery or tools. Such other examples of symbolic material culture were, therefore, only treated summarily. These results were then compared with that of the more elaborate analysis of the anthropomorphic figurines. Differences were elaborated, as were similarities.

The neutral term “figurine” (*Statuette*) has been chosen to represent a small sculpture of an individual figure. I chose this word over “sculpture” or “idol” as the latter suggest an artistic/aesthetic or religious-cult function.

I used a system of contextual attribute analysis to interpret the figurines on a descriptive-empirical (typological analysis of form and decoration of the figurines and their chronology and spatial distribution) and interpretative level (involving symbolism and communication). This breakdown, I believe, will trigger the reevaluation of meaning and function of anthropomorphic figurines. My work breaks down into eight major categories, each of which is treated at length. They are:

1. The meaning of the semi-finished product in regard to the meaning and function of the bone figurines.
2. The meaning of the shape/form of the figurines.

3. The meaning of the ornamentation of the figurines.
4. The symbolic and decorative ornaments.
5. The ritual/cultic function of the figurines.
6. The individual production of the figurines.
7. The distinction in function and content of clay and bone figurines.
8. The potential of figurines to address chronological problems.

The comparison of the clay and bone figurines, which represents a central component of the work, necessitated the use of an attribute-analytical research method. Naturally, this was applied in conjunction with a form-typological and content-referred analysis. These two types of figurines served highly different purposes as each type expresses different functions and meanings. This is shown through a comparison of their decoration including its placement, type, technique and motifs. Forms, such as how the arms are represented, how the upper body, legs, head and gender are shown, also was studied. Interpreting the figurine's use and purpose was only begun once all discernable attributes of form, style, content, and function were analyzed.

Another goal of the work was to reconstruct the "message" each figurine carried. Each was approached as a "carrier" of a symbol, or of a ritual/religious/symbolic expression. Each conveys a glimpse of the mental state or desires of its creator and of the society in which it was created. "Symbol-historical" and "idea-historical" interpretations were therefore applied. Close attention was also paid to where the figurines were found, both temporally and spatially. The north-eastern distribution area of the Kodžadermen-Gumelnița-Karanovo VI culture complex, was, for example, discovered to be a center for bone figurines. This area is also known as a place where clay figurines were made and used at a much earlier date. This leaves open the question of a possible connection between these figurines or in the meaning they carried. This chronological question is, however, the subject of another investigation.

Contextual attribute analysis also allowed differences in ornaments, decoration, clothing, and jewelry to be classified. In terms of forms, the method allowed me to work out the differences between the representative possibilities of gestures, masks, and body positions, which are crucially important in determining the basic idea, meaning and function of the figurines. I have shown that the faces of the figurines most likely represent a mask, which either shows individualized or schematic-abstract facial features. I have compared the ear perforations, mouth ornamentation, and other anatomical details on the masks with the earth masks of the so-called mask graves of Varna. Again, this provides a "look" into the thinking and mental state of societies in the fifth millennium BC in Southeast Europe.

Overall, I have shown that a determined/rule-based system governed the organization and production of the figurines. This is clear when one examines the figurine types and ornamentation styles and their proliferation over large geographical distances. In western Bulgaria and southwestern Romania, the settlements of the Sălcuța-Krivodol culture complex – which were as far apart as the settlements of Gradešnica and Pernik – share a similar system of production. This indicates a shared mental connection – at least as pertains to the creation of the figurines. The same is true of the clay figurines in the Sălcuța-Krivodol culture complex and of the clay and bone figurines in the Kodžadermen-Gumelnița-Karanovo VI culture complex. Differences, particularly in the pattern of ornaments and presentation of body forms, existed but can be attributed to individual style and thus the maker's creative freedom. Thus, we again can conclude that the figurines were not produced by a single individual specialized in the production of figurines. Rather, they were manufactured in different places, by different makers and by non-specialists working in a home, rather than a "workshop". This thesis is supported by the find at Chotnica, where unfinished bone figurines were found in a home. Since they are unfinished, the figurines provide insight into the stages of production in figurine creation. They

also allowed me to apply my method to a large group of bone figurines which had always been attributed to an earlier time period. I interpret these bone figurines as semi-finished and most likely unused, and therefore without fixed meaning.

The fixed system of production encompassed the shaping of the figurines and the ornamentation which determined their function. The individual maker had to comply to the system in terms of the form. For instance, when a sitting or standing figure was created, the rules governed how it was portrayed. This included the gestures and “actions” portrayed by the figurines. Such a ritual action must be seen within the mental world of the fabricator. To do so, we have to look at the way the ornamentation is expressed and consider what each component meant. These symbolic ornaments have to be differentiated from the purely decorative and aesthetic ornaments, which makers were relatively free to determine. This determined system clearly contradicts past interpretations of the figurines as play dolls or other profane objects or simply as items of aesthetic merit.

Another important matter I was able to discover and, more importantly, to prove empirically with the help of contextual attribute analysis is a so-called “destruction cult” (i.e. instances in which the figurines were purposely destroyed.). Such acts also denote communication and were realized according to fixed rules and carried particular symbolic value. The symbolic meaning of anthropomorphic figurines can also be seen in the “special” places where they have been found and probably were used. This also speaks against their use as dolls or everyday objects devoid of symbolic meaning. Such places include the corners of homes, in containers, under house floors and by hearths; furthermore their placement with a bukranium, miniature furniture, ritual containers, or as anthropomorphic representations (in the actual form of a bone figurine) on ceramic containers also indicates that they served some sort of special function.

I believe that these figurines were used as part of a cult/ritual and that the existence of such ritual offers major insight into the lives and psychological development and early religious beliefs of early humans. My interpretation indicates that the different ritual actions within the figurine cult were not based on an anthropomorphic conception of a god or gods, and were not directed toward a particular figurine which was seen as a representation of a god. Similarly, I invalidate interpretations of the figurines as representing a mother goddess, a so-called fertility cult or sun cult. This last interpretation was based on the discovery of “sun-shaped” ornamentation on two miniature objects. The objects were then pulled out of their context at the so-called cult scene at Ovčarovo and hailed as proof of such a cult. There is no indication that any such sun god existed or that there was any sort of pantheon of gods or goddesses. The same applies to attempts to reconstruct profane functions of the figurines as initiation or sympathy charm objects, death companions, memory figures, or demonic or house spirit figures. I also disprove the long-held notion that the figurines show signs of steatopygia. One area that remains problematic is interpretations regarding the elevated cranium on some figurines. Still, I believe this should not be interpreted as a sign of “ethnic” or societal differentiation, but rather can be attributed to the tendency of decorating figurines with abstract facial masks.

I do not debunk old theories without offering a new one. My work points to the probable existence of a figurine cult, particularly a cult of destruction, in which figurines were intentionally broken. The broken-off parts were likely taken to another place and deposited or destroyed. There is strong evidence that the breakage, which usually occurred in the same place - involved a transformation. The figurine represented something different in its whole and its broken form. Clearly, form – be it abstract and/or with ornament – played a pivotal role as the figurine shifted in meaning. Masks, too, were crucial in this transformation cult. Destruction, therefore, becomes the final phase in the production/transformation/conversion cycle of a figurine.

I believe that the transformation process occurred both in homes and in special buildings, as is the case of figurines from the Cucuteni-Tripolje culture complex. Here, the forms of the house models

and the presence of uniquely-built buildings point to some sort of special function. I believe this involved the figurines and that in this case they were not used individually, but collectively in a ritual.

One important aspect of my work was to distinguish between the uses of clay and bone figurines. The bone figurines seem to have had a “lesser” value and though their abstract and schematically-represented expressions likely referred to the figurine cult, they do not appear to have been “actively” used in the cult practice as the clay figurines were. The bone figurines were lighter and seem to have had a more mobile use, meaning they were probably worn around the neck or sewn onto clothes. While the clay figurines certainly functioned together collectively, individual figurines may also have functioned alone. This is probably the case with figurines depicting gestures indicating gender or reproduction, such as breastfeeding, touching the vagina or penis with a hand, displaying a protruding (pregnant) belly. It is also possible in figurines showing a gesture relating to the head, such as moving a hand toward the head. I believe that these figurines served as symbols for intellectual thinking. Likewise, those with arms spread outward, to me represent an attempt to capture a sense of the spiritual, or something that transcends the experience and capabilities of a human being. Overall, I see the figurines as representatives of life’s pivotal moments – pregnancy and birth (figurines with large breasts, protruding bellies), the struggle to survive/feed oneself (figurines shown grinding wheat and some shown breastfeeding a child) and death (broken figurines). In all the representations, a clear anthropomorphism is present: it is the human being (as opposed to a god or gods) that serves as manufacturer, user and subject of representation.

In addition to setting up a new system of classification, my work also shows how differences in anthropomorphic figurines can be used to trace chronological development. In the past, such comparisons were reserved for pottery and tools. Since the figurines were cult objects and were therefore subject to a longer developmental rhythm, my chronological periods are not as detailed as those of archaeologists working with pottery. Unlike everyday objects, the forms of figurines did not change quickly over time. Rather, they remained stable, indicating a continuity of belief. The symbols depicted on them were not mere ornament and therefore, too, did not change dramatically over time. Finally, the figurines were not mass-produced, but rather were made by individuals, which leaves a wide margin for personal stylistic differences. This renders close comparison among figurines over time problematic. Still, I have established four chronological periods at the Salcuta-Krivodol culture: Kurilo, Gradešnica I, Gradešnica II and Krivodol. I found evidence for continuity in form, ornament, and function from Kurilo, which is the oldest level, until the Krivodol, the youngest level.

I did not limit my work to a single region, but also compared figurines in this region to those in neighboring or supra-regional areas. The comparisons showed similarities in form and ornamentation of both types of figurines and indicates that some sort of belief system, cult practice, or at the very least the rules of production extended beyond the borders of archaeological cultures. As such, I have used the term “cult communities/complexes” to describe them. For me, this is a fascinating juncture of the work, as it indicates that thought-patterns and mental images/beliefs transcended “cultural” borders, or at least those borders that archaeologists have created through the analysis of material culture.

I came across increasing “individualization” of the figurines, particularly the masks, which begin to show specific features during the Early Copper Age. This was an age of change, as is reflected in the economy, societal make-up, crafts techniques and burial rites. By comparison, the changes in the figurines are meager. Yet, they do exist and separate these figurines from those produced in the Palaeolithic and Neolithic.

I want to point out that these figurines and what they represent are unique to this region’s Late Neolithic and Early Copper Age. If one regards the symbolic material culture of the Palaeolithic, Early Neolithic, or the Early Bronze Age, different meaning of the symbolic and iconographic world has

evolved. This was likely due to a shift in the way the world was conceived and the way lives were led. For some reason, the need for figurines and what they represented dissipated in the Early Bronze Age. Why? This remains a mystery and could be an interesting subject of a further dissertation.

As with most works of this magnitude, new questions emerged during my research process that while interesting, were beyond the scope of my theme. For instance, while the figurines clearly played a pivotal role in this society at this time, they seem to have had little role in contemporary cultures in Central and Western Europe. Why not? Why and how was symbolic material culture so different? And what happened in the preceding and following periods? Likewise, it would be worthwhile to analyze how far beyond the North-Pontic areas of the Tripolje culture the symbolism of anthropomorphic figurines extends. And where did the symbols come from in the first place? Many figurine researchers believe they came from the south, from the Aegean-Anatolian area. A further possible influence, however, came from the north, i.e. the North-Pontic steppes. This area certainly influenced the rise of the Early Copper Age civilization. A comparison of their symbolic material culture would certainly also provide great insight.

A continuation of my research is vital to unlocking the symbolic codes that connected civilizations without writing. Symbol research proves that while lacking written words, early societies possessed structures that connected people over cultures and geography. My work establishes the existence of the symbolic structure. Yet, we must also ask why the symbols were so prevalent and why they were so strongly embedded in the ritual system. Did they form a sort of primitive communication system? Researchers have already unsuccessfully tried to decode various characters on Neolithic ceramic containers in hopes of finding evidence of an early language or script. Yet, perhaps this is even more simple than that and involves the passing of ideas or mental relationships, rather than words. As such, it certainly marks the start of communication.

Again, the goal of this work was to supply a scientific basis for the study of symbolic material culture. My work with the figurines convinces me that they served to symbolically bind this Late Neolithic, Early Copper Age society and that their meaning was understood over a wide geographic area. This represents a huge research step as it firmly establishes the existence of a primitive communication and belief system even before the written word emerged.

