

A THERIANTHROPIC DEPICTION FROM EARLY BRONZE AGE UPPER THRACE (?)

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Изследването е фокусирано върху много интересно релефно изображение от Ранната бронзова епоха. Находката е открита при проучванията на селищната могила при Казанлък. Това е релефно изображение върху фрагмент от стена на съд, което представя изправена антропоморфна фигура с глава на бик или глава с рога. Въпреки фрагментирания вид на предмета, запазената му част е достатъчна, за да бъде дискутирана принадлежността му към група изображения, които в специализираната литература са известни под названието „териантропни“ или „териоморфни“. В повечето случаи това са хибридни образи на човешко тяло с глава на бик или друго рогато животно. Най-голямата им концентрация е по гръцките острови, като отделните паралели на представената находка са изображения върху необичайни керамични съдове. Целите на съобщението са: 1. да се изследва възможността дали т.нар. „териоморфни/териантропни“ изображения съществуват реално в Тракия през Ранната бронзова епоха; 2. да се направи опит да се обяснят начините на инфилтриране на идеите за тези изображения в местна среда.

The study focuses on a very interesting clay relief depiction from the Early Bronze Age. This is a relief image on a fragmented ceramic wall representing a standing anthropomorphic figure with the head of a bull or a head with horns. The aim of the paper is to provide answers to questions regarding the existence of *therianthropic* depictions in Upper Thrace during the Early Bronze Age.

Introduction. Previous researches¹

The find has been detected during the investigations of Tell Kazanlak in the last century. It was recovered in square J-12, twelfth stratigraphical layer, at a depth of 3,35 m². In the first publication, the depiction was dated to the Early Neolithic – *Karanovo I culture (phase II)*³. There is no information about the original archaeological context. The original publication mentions that two fragments were found in Early Bronze Age strata, making the provenience unclear⁴. Ceramic analysis was conducted by K. Leshtakov⁵. According to this, the find is generally accepted to be dating to the third phase of the Early Bronze Age, also known as the *St. Kirilovo* phase.

Description

The original excavator out pointed that the sherds belong to an unknown vessel⁶. The color of the outer surface is light-brown, while the inner surface is dark grey-

brown in color. The outer surface is well smoothed as opposed to the inner surface, which is roughly smoothed. There is a vast amount of polyps on both surfaces.

The depiction represents a schematized standing figurine. The head is poorly modeled. Over the head are two fragmented horns with different thickness. These horns are decorated by twelve deep incisions. Immediately underneath is a short neck showing a smooth transition with the amorphous body. Laterally – on the right and left are two modeled hands – in horizontal position. The hands have different dimensions and shapes. On the central part of the body is an incised “Z”-shaped sign or motive. Below are two legs, which also show different dimensions. Actually the left part of the body is more bulky than the right one (horn, hand, leg). It is likely that this figure belonged to a group of images similar to the one already mentioned. It may explain for instance why the left hand is bulkier than the right one.

Parallels and interpretation

There are no analogies in Upper Thrace during the Early Bronze age. In general, Thrace lacks figurines or images resembling the relief of tell Kazanlak⁷. Detailed inter regional study shows that the closest parallels are originating from Cyprus⁸. These are figures on deep jars or bowls, which usually are found in shrines, sacred areas or graves. Examples from Bellapais – Vounous on the central part of the North coast of Cyprus can be mentioned⁹. The artifacts belong to the burial inventory of tomb 91–14 and tomb 160A.16, which have been excavated near the aforementioned site¹⁰.

The depictions are four and all of them are incised. In the first case – three of them have been made on the frontal part of the deep bowl, while the other example is on a large jug¹¹. The first three figurines are representations of upstanding, bulls, rams or mouflon, each of which is horned¹². They are freestanding with their anatomical features schematized. Two of them have straight horns with branches, while the third has well curved horns without any branches. Their bodies are simply drawn by single incised lines for the hands and the legs. Two of the bovines have some kind of dress or decoration on the body. The fourth depiction on a jug represents dressed animals, but it does not have any additional parts towards the horns, likewise of the others examples. These images are identified as being part of the production of the so-called *Stewart № 1* potter at Vounous in the classification established by J. Hennessey¹³. J. Hennessey hasn't speculated on the meaning or the significance of the depicted animals. He only observes that these are schematic human or animal forms¹⁴.

Jennifer Webb and David Frankel have put forward a different interpretation. In their view, the figurines are probably supernatural beings; it represents “humans dressed in animal skins and skulls or masks” or “transformation of human actors into animals during ritual performances”¹⁵. The authors relate these actions to funeral practices, which include a range of activities such as dancing, singing, feasting¹⁶. Each of these is concentrated on the horned animals and their significance. According to their analysis, different elements of the animal body are considered to be sign of

the funeral procession. For as much as these depictions are combined together with different geometrical forms like disks, zigzag motives and so on, the researchers contend that these zoo-anthropomorphic depictions can be interpreted as symbols of connection between the living and the dead¹⁷. We can accept the images as symbols of dualism in nature, signs of the transformation in nature as global conception and contemporary for the coherence between the human species with wild animals and domestic animals.

Unfortunately, in the case of tell Kazanlak, there is not enough evidence to warrant comparison with the objects from Vounous. Indirectly, we may infer some ritual meaning of the depiction based on information from ritual structures near the tell or from evidence of a ritually-significant ditch surrounding the mound¹⁸. Meanwhile, missing another finds like zoomorphic figurines or relief depictions from the mentioned tell which can be related with the sherd. These gaps do not permit a deeper analysis or interpretation.

The presence of therianthrope depictions raises some important issues. Why and how has information for these images travelled all the way from Cyprus to the Kazanlak valley in the north part of Upper Thrace? Here I should mention that there are no known imports from tell Kazanlak, which can be related with archaeological materials from Cyprus. We do not have data for Early Bronze Age graves from the mound or the vicinity. Based on these facts, it is extraordinarily difficult to reconstruct practices or influences from the Mediterranean in Thrace; one only observes a high degree of similarities between so-called therianthrope depictions from Vounous, Cyprus and tell Kazanlak in Upper Thrace.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize once again the remarkable similarities between figures of the aforementioned regions. It is currently very hard to suggest a correct interpretation of the Kazanlak artifact. So the term “therianthrope” has to be considered as technical for describing this type of iconography. Beyond doubt this kind of depictions has been prosopopoeia of all worldview and beliefs of the prehistory people and the most important things in their daily life – providing for livelihood, the realization of relationships with foreign people or populations and keeping in touch with the Earth, the natural powers and all known or unknown Gods by different actions, practices and rites.

БЕЛЕЖКИ

¹ Here I would like to express my gratitude to the Regional Historical museum of Kazanlak – Dessislava Andreeva for all information regarding this interesting artifact.

² **Андреева, Д.** Антропоморфни изображения върху неолитни керамични съдове от тел Казанлък. – Археология, Л, 2009, с. 111.

³ **Андреева, Д.** Антропоморфни изображения..., с. 111. In fact, D. Andreeva herself expressed reservations regarding the dating of the sherd and wanted to attribute it to an Early Bronze Age layer. New chronological attribution was one of the reasons motivating this study.

⁴ **Андреева, Д.** Антропоморфни изображения..., с. 109.

⁵ **Лещаков, К.** Относителна хронология на пласта от ранната бронзова епоха в селищна могила Казанлък. – В: *STUDIA ARCHAEOLOGICA UNIVERSITATIS SERDICENSIS Supplementum IV. Stephanos Archaeologicos in honorem Professoris Ludmili Getov.* Ред. Тогко Стоянов, Стефка Ангелова и Ивайло Лозанов. София, 2005, с. 442–454.

⁶ **Андреева, Д.** Антропоморфни изображения..., с. 110 – обр. 1, 7; с. 111.

⁷ Exceptions to this statement include, however, two highly stylized bone figurines originating from Ezero and one from Ovtcharitsa II – **Катинчаров, Р.** Произведения на изкуството, накити, култови изделия. Езеро. Раннобронзовото селище. София, 1979, с. 401–402; 403-обр. 199–200, 404-обр. 201; **Leshtakov, K., Kancheva-Russeva, T., Stoyanov, S.** *Prehistoric studies. Settlements sites.* (Maritsa-Iztok. Archaeological Research, Vol. 5), Radnevo, 2001, p. 21, 60 – fig. 30-n. They represent beings with beaked heads and rectangular body. They are interpreted as anthropomorphic figurines. The second example is sherd of hollow pot with already broken horns. They are not used as direct parallels to the find from Kazanlak, but can be accepted as examples of Therianthropic plastics.

⁸ **Webb, J., Frankel, D.** Social Strategies, Ritual and Cosmology in Early Bronze Age Cyprus: An Investigation of Burial Data from the North Coast. – *Levant*, 42, 2, 2010, p. 200 – fig. 14, 201 – fig. 15.

⁹ **Webb, J., Frankel, D.** Social Strategies..., p. 186, fig. 1.

¹⁰ **Webb, J., Frankel, D.** Social Strategies..., pp. 201–202.

¹¹ **Webb, J., Frankel, D.** Social Strategies..., p. 200 – with cit. lit.

¹² **Webb, J., Frankel, D.** Social Strategies..., p. 200.

¹³ **Hennessey, J.** Cypriot artists of the Early and Middle Bronze Age. – In: *The Cypriot Bronze Age. Some Recent Australian Contributions to the Prehistory of Cyprus.* Australian Studies in Archaeology I. Ed. J. Birmingham. Sydney, 1974, pp. 17–23. J. Hennessey identified pottery groups produced or created by different artists or ateliers on Cyprus. The first artist or *Stewart 1* is referred to as one of the finest potters and decorators **Hennessey, J.** Cypriot artists..., p. 23.

¹⁴ **Hennessey, J.** Cypriot artists..., p. 23. E. Zouzoula announces that the motive of horned man or bull men are solar symbol – **Zouzoula, E.** The fantastic creatures of Bronze age Crete. PhD thesis, University of Nottingham, 2007. 64. According to Tzavella-Evjen, these depiction have eastern origin and can be influenced during MM III – LM I – **Zouzoula, E.** The fantastic..., p. 64 with cit. lit. E. Zouzoula supplements that the image from *Ayios Onouphrios tholos* is one of the earliest representation of *bull-man* or being with human body and bovine head – **Zouzoula, E.** The fantastic..., p. 75. It is dated in EM.

¹⁵ **Webb, J., Frankel, D.** Social Strategies..., p. 200 – with cit. lit.

¹⁶ **Webb, J., Frankel, D.** Social Strategies..., p. 200.

¹⁷ **Webb, J., Frankel, D.** Social Strategies..., p. 203.

¹⁸ In the last decade, the structures around the mound have been investigated by prof. Vassil Nikolov, who reinterpreted them as a sanctuary or ritual ditch. **Николов, В.** Светилище от ранната бронзова епоха на тел Казанлък. – *Археология*, XLIX, 1, 2009, с. 23–33; **Nikolov, V.** Early Bronze Age sanctuary at Tell Kazanlak. – *Studia Praehistorica*, 13, 2010, с. 319–337.

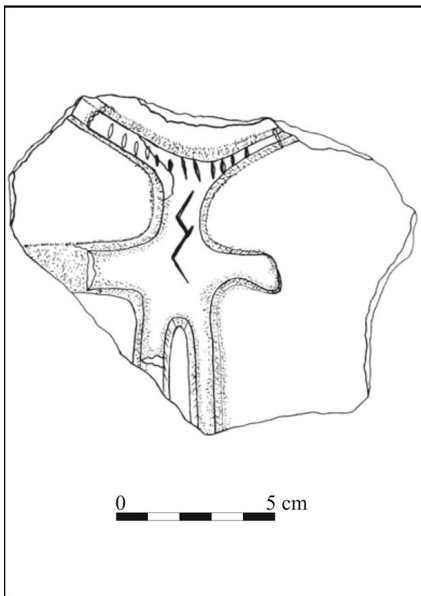


Figure 1. „Terianthropic” depiction from tell Kazanlak (Андреева 2009)

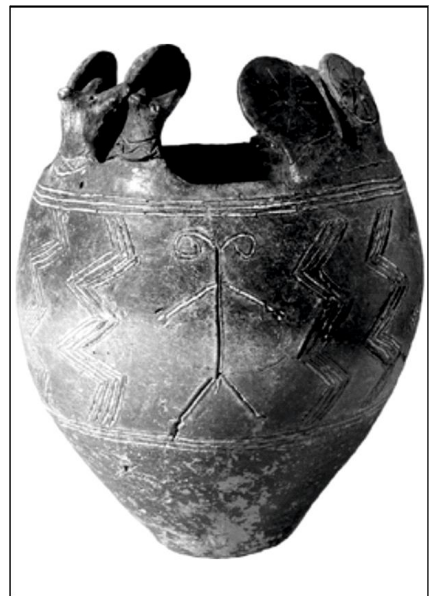


Figure 2. „Teriomorphic” vase from Vounous, Cyprus (The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge – from Knox 2013)

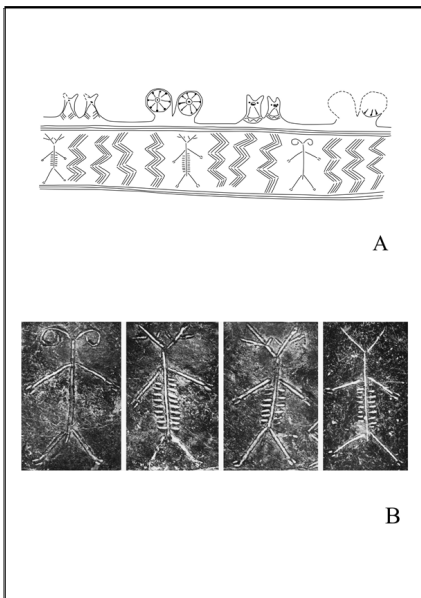


Figure 3. Depictions from Vounous, Cyprus, details: A – (Hennessey 1974); B – (Webb, Frankel 2010)

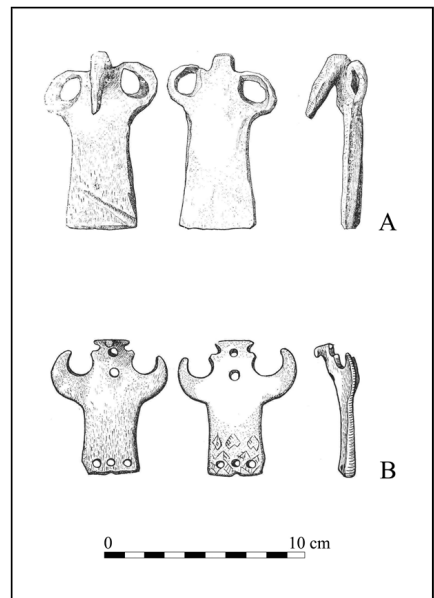


Figure 4. Conceivable „teriomorphic” figurines from Ezero (Катинчаров 1979)

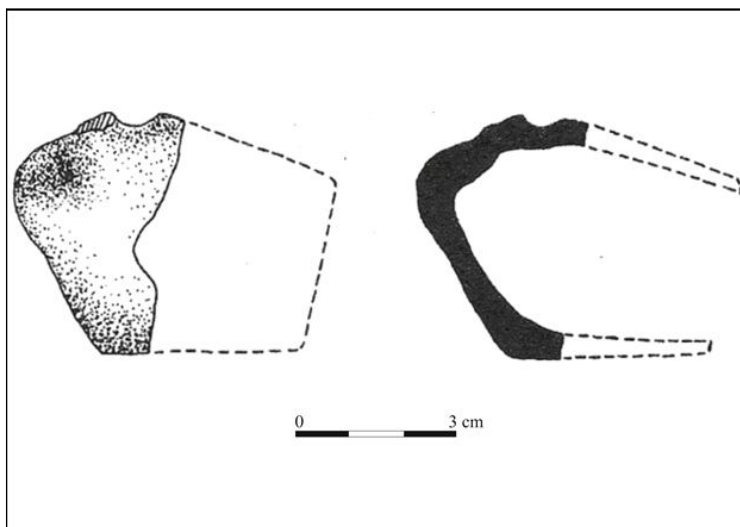


Figure 5. „Teriomorphic” vase from Ovtcharitsa II (Leshtakov et al. 2001)



Figure 6. Map of distribution of so-called „terianthropic” images in Upper Thrace