

Neolithic anthropocentrism: the principles of imagery and symbolic manifestation of corporeality in the Balkans

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ABSTRACT – *The body in the Neolithic was used as adequate symbolic medium which on the one hand strengthened the crucial features of individuals, while on the other was capable to explicate the essential function of particular objects and constructions. As result to this also the concept of imagery hybridism was deployed which incorporate human body within more complex segments of visual culture and symbolic communication. Considering the variety of human representations it can be deduced that anthropocentrism was one of the main visual principles in the Neolithic Balkans which established corporality as major cognitive reference in explication of human agency and its role in understanding the fundamental symbolic processes.*

IZVLEČEK – *Telo je bilo v neolitiku uporabljeno kot simbolni medij, ki je na eni strani krepil temeljne elemente individualnosti, na drugi pa pojasnjeval bistvene funkcije posameznih predmetov in struktur. Razvil se je koncept hibridnega imaginarija, ki je vgradil človeško telo v različne segmente vizualne kulture in simbolne komunikacije. Iz raznolikega upodabljanja človekovega telesa lahko sklepamo, da je bil antropocentrizem glavno vizualno vodilo, ki je v neolitik na Balkanu uvedlo telesnost kot glavni kognitivni napotek pri pojasnjevanju človekovega delovanja in razumevanja temeljnih simbolnih procesov.*

KEY WORDS – *Neolithic; visual hybridism; figurines; burials; anthropomorphic vessels and models*

The numerous archeological studies in the Balkans have provided a significant quantity of Neolithic ceramic objects modeled in the form of the human body. Some of these anthropomorphic artifacts were common to a particular region, or certain Neolithic phases, thus indicating their area of distribution, as well as chronological determination. Beside these elementary features, figurines and other types of anthropomorphic objects go much further than stratigraphical and regional classification, and signify a general Neolithic approach to the conceptualization of material culture *i.e.* anthropomorphism as a fundamental principle employed for the explication of humans themselves, as well as for their surroundings. The abundance of archaeological data enables detailed research and analysis of corporeality as implemented through these artifacts, thus allowing new

knowledge of the level of cognitive accomplishment, including characteristics of Neolithic visual perception or even religious behavior. Hence, corporeality as one of the most potent agents of complex visual informations might be used in attempts to decipher essential aspects of Neolithic communities.

The aim of this paper is to make a brief generalization of the concept of anthropomorphism, and seek to detect entire forms and media used for its manifestation in the Balkans. Since elements of the human body are not present only on figurines, on this occasion the significance of another visual principle will be accented, which is often applied within Neolithic material. Namely, this considers the implementation of imagery hybridism, which in the domain of anthropomorphism aims to link particular

parts of the human body with objects belonging to those that do not originally have corporeal features. In this way, numerous vessels, models, stamps and 'altars' were produced which include human elements, thus employing their decorated exterior to transpose the substances deposited in their interior into another symbolic category. By involving these artifacts, the concept of anthropomorphism is considerably extended to spheres which do not only exploit the body as a component of identification. On the contrary, within this context, the body obtains a more complex symbolic role with the designation of every detail's specific function in the domain of ideas and messages that should be transmitted through these objects. Therefore, it might be noticed that in the Balkans, anthropomorphism exploits several ceramic forms which are engaged as agents between the principles of Neolithic communities and the essence of substances deposited inside or in the vicinity of these embodied artifacts.

The body as medium

The conception of the human body and the material culture employed for its manifestation induced a developed capability among Neolithic populations for the explicit perception of their own corporeal features, and also for developing a specific approach towards an anthropomorphic definition of space. It should be noticed that Neolithic visual culture is one of the earliest human activities to involve the skillful production of abstract, anatomical and geometrical forms, thus allowing us a deep insight into the cognitive structure of embodied vessels, models, 'altars', figurines *etc.* The apparent approach towards how painted and sculptural media were envisaged offers a possibility of accessing the principles of decoration and modeling in Neolithic material culture. These principles indicate a crucial component for the explication of the most specific objects of the period. The geometric organisation of patterns incised, applied or painted on vessels, and anthropomorphic representations, as well as the symbolic engagement of corporeality, are fundamental categories which could be used in the clarification of figurines and other anthropomorphic objects which depict complete or parts of the human body (Naumov 2009a). In this context, analogous examples from the entire Balkan region are considered, thus enabling a more coherent determination of cognitive maps and the symbolic significance of anthropomorphic images.

Defining the character of the cognitive background lying behind anthropomorphic representations, we are able to comprehend the essential features of Neolithic corporeality and figurative art. This makes it possible to establish the elemental structures applied within media which most often emphasize the symbolic components of the human body, considering also the whole repertoire of stylized or actual patterns and details disposed on figurines and anthropomorphic objects. These artifacts expound the mental processes involved within the symbolic communication among communities inhabiting the whole of the Balkan Peninsula. Therefore, the body has been used as an agent which extrapolates common principles incorporated within corporal functions manifested in the domain of visual culture through various objects, accentuating specific elements of humanity.

Attempting to understand the human body and especially its employment in the imagery of diverse cultures, numerous researchers have contributed abundant on the complex character of the human anatomy and its exact role in social and symbolic relationships (Hamilakis *et al.* 2001; Chausidis 2005; Borić and Robb 2008). Hence, they resolve external body features and the manner of its implementation within visual communication and realm explication. Consequently, a diversity of theses are deduced which profoundly elaborate an entire spectrum of possible variations and concepts manifested through the body, and which can be used in this endeavor to comprehend Neolithic corporeality.¹

Due to the vast number of artifacts with anthropomorphic representations, it is possible to define the forms of Neolithic corporeal engagement. On the one hand, there are miniature figurines where the tendency towards actual 'portrayal' of the human body is practiced; while on the other, there is a variety of vessels, models and 'altars' which also bears elements of anthropomorphism. The principles incorporated in the production and perception of these objects allows a determination of the heterogeneous components of Neolithic iconography. Thus, the presence of heads with unified stylized facial features, standardized representation of the male and female body, the distinct position of upper extremities, fragmentations of figurines, their coating with white colouring, as well as the manner of individuals' disposition in burials indicate the thorough treatment of the body as a medium in the Neolithic Balkans.

¹ Here should be accented the works of Benac 1990; Talalay 1993; Skeates 1994; Biehl 1996; Chapman 2000; Bailey 2005; Sanev 2006; Chausidis 2007; Hansen 2007; Fowler 2008.

Anthropomorphic figurines

This group comprises the most numerous category of anthropomorphic objects reflecting Neolithic corporeality (Fig. 1). The figurines represent the basic elements of the human body, thus establishing the principles which Neolithic communities in the Balkans imply as understanding, perception and depiction of their bodies (Bailey 2008; Nanoglou 2005; Naumov 2009a.47–58). Analysis of such objects indicates that there are several elemental forms of representing the human body, each specific to particular Neolithic phases. This includes the stylization and reduction of details in the Early Neolithic, despite the accentuation of physical features and incised decoration in the Late Neolithic (Benac 1990; Biehl 1996; Tasić 2009). Such observation confirms the diverse approach towards modeling bodies of different gender. Thus, female bodies are usually represented with emphasized genitalia, corpulent buttocks, breasts and upper extremities placed over breasts or genitalia, or onto hips; while those of males often bear only genitalia as a gender indicator and, are rarely depicted as a seated figure or with hand placed on head (Naumov 2009b.92). Regarding a case study of sexually determined miniatures, statistical data on published figurines unearthed in the Republic of Macedonia confirm that the production of female miniatures was predominant (Naumov 2009a.49). In contrast, the research on the complete figurine repertoire from Çatal Höyük demonstrates the abundance of asexual representations (Nakamura and Meskell 2009), which should also be tested with further case studies on each Neolithic settlement in the Balkans.

The affinity for female representations in the Balkans specify several social and symbolic aspects incorpo-

rated within the production, employment and significance of these artifacts. Their sculptural treatment (including modeling and decoration) points to data which explicate the social status of certain individuals within Neolithic communities, as well as their symbolic character in rites of passage (Talalay 1993). This is also confirmed by the deliberate fragmentation of figurines – especially female – which are most often excavated in a damaged state, usually broken into several pieces which are rarely found in their entirety. Although all these miniatures were previously considered as unintentionally broken by processes of decomposition, the latest research illustrates that some were deliberately fragmented. During modeling, certain body parts (head, and most often buttocks) were attached with wooden rods or simply attached to their equivalent or torso (Hansen 2004; Naumov 2009a.53). Later, when the figurines were used, this method of construction enabled easier breakage and the separation of particular parts from the torso. This deliberate fragmentation of miniatures was associated with the symbolic treatment of the human body, which in this case is observed as: (i) a process of intentional body ‘dismemberment’, confirmed by certain burial practices (Gheorghiu 2001); (ii) using such objects within various forms of mediation between individuals and communities (Chapman 2000); (iii) their use in rites of passage, when particular individuals change their social status and enter take on a new status (Talalay 1993; Naumov 2009a).

In addition to this aspect of the actual use of figurines, their decorated exteriors also induce a complex symbolic perception incorporated within the principles of corporeality. In Early Neolithic, only a few patterns are depicted on figurines, mainly resembling genitalia, while in Late Neolithic the incision of motifs is much more frequent. The abundance of definite patterns is often associated with their equivalents being present on various objects (vessels, stamps, ‘altars’), which gives rise to questions of their significance and possible mutual relations (Biehl 1996). Detailed analysis of patterns engraved or painted on particular anthropomorphic artefacts confirms that concrete motifs were disposed on exact parts of the represented body, thus accentua-

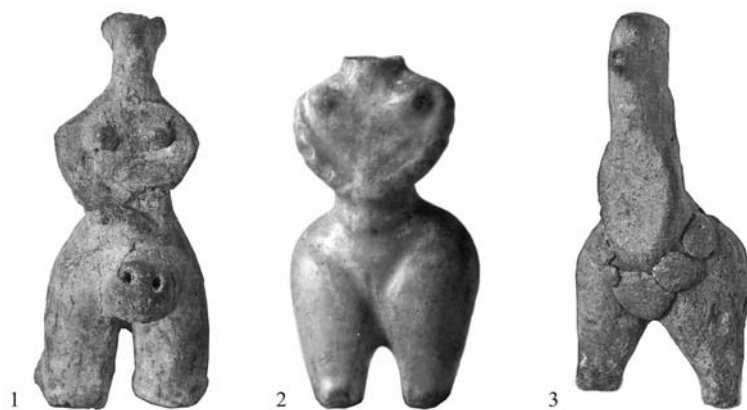


Fig. 1. Figurines from Veluška Tumba, Madjari and Grgur Tumba (Kolištrkoska-Nasteva 2005.Fig. 3, Fig. 5; Sanev 2006.Fig. 11). Dimensions: 1. 6.0cm high; 2. 6.8cm high; 3. 5.5cm high.

ting the symbolic character of the actual anatomical zone (Naumov 2009b.93–96).

Intramural burials and their relation to corporeal principles

The burials seem to have no essential associations with Neolithic visual culture, yet they are closely related to the symbolic treatment of the human body and its capacities as a social agent. Even in death, the body has been employed as a unit comprising several crucial components regarding both the deceased individual and community associated with them throughout the burial. The unified manner of treating the body during such ritual practices, manifested in the definite positions in which corpses were buried, indicates that particular ideas were to be implemented or transmitted on the basis of corporeal principles. The placing of corpses laterally, as well as the bending of hands and legs towards the torso, is related to perceptions of the body after life, and how it can further contribute to symbolic processes related to death.

In this context, burials within Neolithic dwellings and those practiced inside vessels and sacks or in the interior or vicinity of ovens are particularly significant (Bačvarov 2003; Naumov 2007). The actual position of deceased individuals and the predominance of the skeletal remains of infants and children in the Neolithic Balkans correlated with the anthropomorphic transformation of the space where these rituals were performed (Fig. 2). The rituals were mostly related to ideas of life after death and the symbolic regenerative aspects that such rituals should obtain. Consequently, not infrequently they were partly performed within objects associated with the interior of the female abdomen, thus initiating the production of artifacts which would moreover

support and explicate such cognitive principles. It should be noted that burial practices within houses, vessels and ovens were symbolically strengthened by the conception of anthropomorphic vessels or house and oven models, thus establishing a more potent hybrid relationship between the body and particular objects.

The implementation of visual hybridism in Neolithic anthropomorphic objects

Besides the 'actual' body representations, there are more complex forms of corporeality within Neolithic visual culture. Images of the body are involved in particular hybrid relations with utilitarian objects or constructions intended for preparing and storing food and substances, or in those used as miniature replicas of dwellings (Naumov 2009a). Thus, various types of anthropomorphic vessel, models (of houses and ovens), 'altars' and stamps were developed and employed to stress the symbolic function of these objects, as well as the broader semiotic aspects of human body. Consequently several components of visual hybridism were applied: (i) equalizing the human abdomen with the inner space of the embodied objects; (ii) personification or incarnation of particular individuals or mythical characters by these objects and (iii) objectifying the person being represented. All or some of these components can be incorporated throughout the use of an anthropomorphic object depending on the context and details displayed on the surface. Since such human elements are found on different types of object, the actual linkage between the represented character and concrete object (vessel, house, oven *etc.*) should be considered. The abundant repertoire of anthropomorphic items indicates the complexity of ideas and messages transposed throughout their exterior, use and cognitive potency.

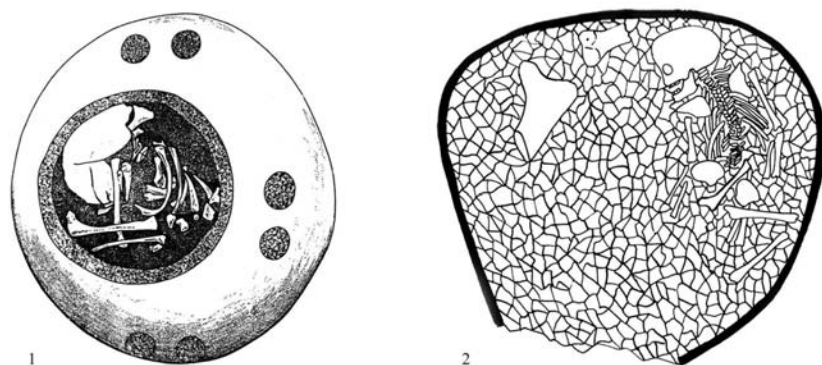


Fig. 2. Infant burials inside deliberately fragmented vessel and oven from Amzabegovo and Curmatura (Nemeskéri and Lengyel 1976.Fig. 242; Gimbutas 1989.Fig. 233).

Anthropomorphic vessels

The representation of the body is not confined only to solid figural objects; it is also applied throughout the modeling of other artifacts, which are seemingly not in anatomical correlation with the body. Among this group of objects, anthropomorphic vessels should be considered on which parts of the human face, breasts, pubis or upper extre-

mities are incised, painted or fastened to their exterior (Naumov 2006; 2008a). Although there are numerous anthropomorphic vessels without gender indication, the majority of those of confirmed gender depict elements of genitalia, breasts or other female features, thus providing further information of perception of female body in the Neolithic (Fig. 3). So far, no vessel has been found in the Balkans on which male genitalia are depicted,

indicating the favoring of a certain gender within these forms of representation. The abundant ethnographic data suggests that the symbolic incorporation of female body into such media was reflected not only in how they were perceived, but also in how they were named, thus using terms related to women's social status or biological aspects of their abdomen (Gordon 1977. 224, 225; Elijade 1984. 342; Chausidis and Nikolov 2006; Naumov 2006; Haaland 2007.165; Fowler 2008.51).

Nevertheless, lacking further data on residue analysis, it is still uncertain in which contexts these vessels were used, although burials practiced in the interior of some anthropomorphic or utilitarian equivalents broaden their symbolic perception and use (Nemeskéri and Lengyel 1976.375–410; Hodder 1990.52; Bačvarov 2003.141–142; Naumov 2008a. 97). Despite questions regarding their use, the abundance of visual elements confirmed on these objects enable a thorough insight into spheres in which the human body is consistently or stylistically represented. Therefore, the variety of the repertoire of anthropomorphic vessels provides a new perspective for understanding corporeality and its complexity within Balkans. The presence of such objects throughout the Balkans and South-East Europe in general, substantiate the persistence of human body integration within media which reciprocally display the symbolic aspects of both body and object.

Anthropomorphic house models

The linking of the human body and the house is one of the most complex symbolic categories in Neolithic visual culture. It has been confirmed on various conceptual levels in Anatolia and South-East Europe (Hodder 1990), but its prominent manifestation was



Fig. 3. Anthropomorphic vessels from Tarinci, Orlavat and Drenovac (Kolištrkoska-Nasteva 2005.Fig. 27; Gimbutas 1989.Fig. 83; Stalio 1977.Fig. 203). Dimensions: 1. 7.5cm high; 2. 8.6cm high; 3. no scale.

realized through specific artefacts unearthed in the Republic of Macedonia. Namely, an abundance of anthropomorphic house models were produced from the Early to Late Neolithic in this area which encompass diverse components of corporeality and architecture. In general, these objects are house models atop which a long cylinder with a human face, breasts, pregnant belly or arms is applied, thus incorporating the house into the composite body of the depicted figure (Fig. 4). As with the anthropomorphic vessels, these artefacts mainly embody female characters, although the possibility that some asexual models might be related to male individuals or beings should not be dismissed, despite the fact that there has been no confirmed application of male features recently. Regarding the concentration of details on these artefacts, there were regional variations; thus, architectonic elements were mostly favored in south-western areas (Pelagonia), despite the anthropomorphic exaggeration which is much more common in the north (Naumov 2006).

Anthropomorphic house models have been under constant analysis, and various attempts have been made to define their significance, which mainly considered the predominance of female feature in their visual and religious conceptualization (Sanev 1988; 2006; Chausidis 1996; 2007; 2008; Naumov 2006; 2009a; 2009b; Temelkoski and Mitkoski 2001). Recently, their symbolic relationship with the practice of burial inside dwellings and settlements has been emphasized, broadening the spheres of their involvement in Neolithic cognitive processes (Naumov 2006; 2007; 2009b). This observation was mainly based on the crucial association of the corpse and the house, as well the quantitative abundance of anthropomorphic house model fragments within settlements. As a case study of these objects in Govrlevo confirmed, their frequency is higher than that

of miniature figurines.² Despite the previous interpretation on the exclusivity and rarity of anthropomorphic models, the latest research underlines that they were quite often present and used in settlements, suggesting that they represented deceased individuals or mythical beings.

Nevertheless, although these artefacts require further and much more profound analysis, there are elementary data which enable a general understanding of their visual appearance and significance. The hybrid relationship between house and human incorporated within these anthropomorphic models especially emphasizes that the body in the Neolithic was perceived in a more complex manner, and that the dwelling was not understood only as an object. Surely this could be a reflection of a much more common explication of the living space, which was clarified by means of an anatomical mechanism, or associated with a specific individual.

The embodiment of a significant community member (inhabiting actual or spiritual world) in the ceramic medium additionally strengthens their memory and respect within society, as well as implementing the symbolism of corporeality within the objects (constructions) associated with them and represented by anthropomorphic house models. The presence of several layers of clay coating on some of these artifacts indicates that they were used for long periods and underwent constant treatment and care. Further analysis will confirm whether they were used as lamps, incense burners or altars, although their character as containers for deposited miniature figurines is recently strengthened with new data (Naumov 2009a:56).

Anthropomorphic oven models

The implementation of anthropomorphism in the living space was not confined only to dwellings, but is also found on objects used for daily purposes. Besides anthropomorphic containers for cereals in Top-tepe, other actual constructions featuring human elements are not yet confirmed (Özdoğan and Dede 1998), but considering the ideas of anthropomorphism induced by miniature equivalents, it can be deduced that similar concepts were also applied to the actual constructions. In this context, models of ovens contribute greatly to understanding the components of corporeality involved in such construc-



Fig. 4. Anthropomorphic house models from Majari, Suvodol, Porodin and Govrlevo (Kolištrkoska-Nasteva 2005.Figs. 42, 45, 43; Chausidis 1995.Fig. 6). Dimensions: 1. 39.0cm high ; 2. 16.0cm high; 3. 25.5cm high; 4. 35.0cm high.

tions. Most of the models with anthropomorphic features have been found in Serbia, although indications of human aspects on ovens are present in other Balkan regions (Petrović 2001; Chausidis et al. 2008). On these models, hands and breasts are most often engraved around the opening, while the head was at the top (Fig. 5). As with the previous 'hybridized' objects, the female gender is accentuated among these models, which indicates that the functions of these constructions were explained throughout the female anatomy of certain individuals or beings identified with ovens.

Along the symbolic aspects of ovens, burials practiced in their vicinity or interior contribute furthermore in favor. Some child burials in ovens or in vessels next to ovens found in Romania and Bulgaria imply that this area was symbolically able to realize religious processes intended throughout burials (Bačvarov 2006; Naumov 2007). In this context, the female body was more adequate for the explication of such processes, so it was manifested through a hybrid relationship of body and oven. Surely, this symbolic association was not defined only during burials, but also in the basic use of ovens, *i.e.* bak-

² I would like to thank Miloš Bilbija (Museum of Skopje) for the understanding and supporting my research on anthropomorphic objects from Govrlevo.



Fig. 5. Anthropomorphic model ovens from Medvednjak, Progar and Vinča (Petrović 2001.Fig. 3.1; Vasić 1936.Pl. I.1). Dimensions: 1. 10.0cm high; 2. 6.5cm high ; 3. 10.1cm high.

ing. There is abundant ethnographic data indicating the identification of the female body with the oven, so this should be considered concerning Neolithic communities (Naumov 2006; Chausidis et al. 2008). It is still to be examined whether these models were associated with concrete individuals or were indicators for the humanization of actual objects and constructions used in everyday and ritual life.

Anthropomorphic 'altars'

Although objects generally termed 'altars' are mostly familiar due to their unified table-like appearance and engraved surface patterns (Nikolov 2007), there are some which feature parts of the human body. These include artifacts on which the conventional form (table) is supplemented with head protomes, the torso in a particular activity, or simple applications of the human face to the exterior (Fig. 6). Considering that the 'altars' do not depict miniature models of any authentic object, they do not represent a direct lineage between a human and particular form, as is the case with other anthropomorphic models. Therefore, the primary function of 'altars' implies several ways in which anthropomorphism was used in these objects.

In particular, these 'altars' are not utilitarian items therefore were used for deposition of certain sub-

stances (liquid and vegetal) or miniature figurines which should be symbolically transposed into another realm (Naumov *in print/a*). Consequently, the application of human elements to such artifacts indicates that this symbolic transposition was done under the patronage of a definite character who observes or motivates such activity. This is further strengthened by the attachment of four protomes to the 'altar' corners, emphasizing that some of these objects were not associated with one, but with a number of individuals or mythical beings. Regarding the anthropomorphic altars from Donja Branjevina and Porodin, the range of imagery is much broader, so it is hard to define without any accurate archaeological observation.

Anthropomorphic rhyta

Only one rhyton with corporeal features has been found recently – in a Neolithic site at Smilčić; it represents a human in kneeling position, which essentially outlines the entire object (Perić 1996; Mlekuž 2007). Unlike other anthropomorphic objects, it has no depiction of the head or upper extremities; only the lower part of the body is modelled, with evident 'cutting' in the area of stomach in order to make a larger opening (Fig. 6.4). The interior of the receptacle is colored in red, particularly accentuating the symbolic significance of the area (Marijanović 2007; Chausidis *in print*).

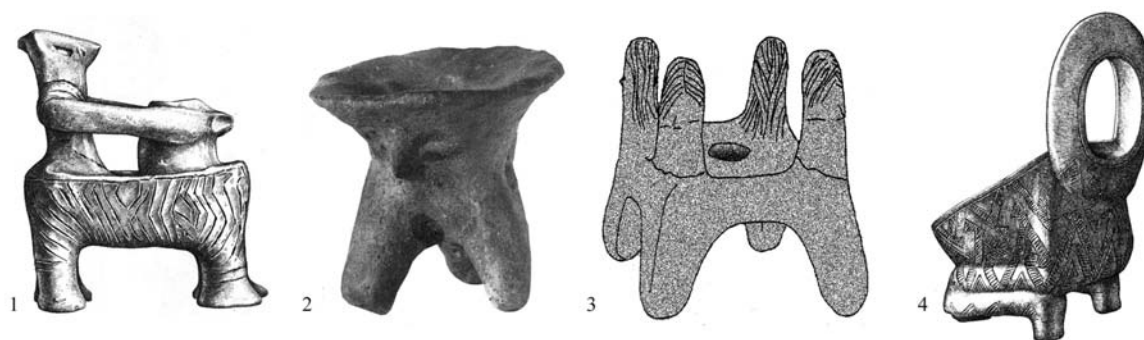


Fig. 6. Anthropomorphic altars from Fafos, Porodin, Donja Branjevina and Smilčić (Garašanin 1979.T. XXXIII: 4; Naumov 2009a.XXXVII: 4; Karmanski 2005.Pl. VIII; Batović 1979.T. XCII: 4).

Considering the primary non-utilitarian function of rhyta, as well as the position of the character represented, it can be induced that the purpose of the object and image was closely related to that of 'altars', and intended to 'offer' the substances in the rhyton (Naumov 2009b.116; *in print/a*). Concerning the area for the deposition of substances *i.e.* the stomach, such symbolic transpositions of material were supposed to occur within the abdomen, which further strengthens the hybrid relationship between the human body and particular rhyta.

Anthropomorphic stamps

These artefacts themselves unify the most elementary aspects of Neolithic miniature figurines and stamps. Their handles are modelled as the upper part of a figurine, while the base or top of some represent heads are decorated with precisely determined patterns (Fig. 7). They were used as stamps, thus the motif on the base or top being imprinted on a soft surface.

The context of their position within sites indicate that they were used during activities concerning bread production or were intended to transmit the semiotic features of represented characters onto material which had to be decorated and symbolically protected throughout by patterns (Naumov 2008b). Although small in dimensions, these anthropomorphic stamps embodied potent cognitive significance, which was spread by the repetition of certain patterns on different products or individuals. Moreover, the representation of human and sometimes animal beings (Türkcan 2007) contributed to the concrete ideas embodied by these artefacts.

The universality of Neolithic concepts of hybridism

Neolithic visual culture, besides anthropocentric forms of hybridism, often employs the animal body to establish particular hybrid relationships with vessels, 'altars', models, stamps *etc.* Although anthropological research has mostly concentrated on the treatment of the human body, zoomorphic hybridism should also be noted, due the suitability of the symbolic potential that some animals possess, which can be embodied by objects, as well used to define certain mythical aspects of these objects.

Although the appearance of hybridism as imagery in the domain of material culture (but not in painting) was primarily a Neolithic advantage, it continued to

be an appropriate visual conceptualization in Prehistory, and also in the later epochs of the Classical period and Middle Ages (Naumov *in print/b*). It can be considered that hybrid forms established in the Neolithic existed among other cultures and civilizations, mostly due to the functionality of such imagery, and the cognitive category and its universal features, which have been common in different periods and in various parts of the world. Consequently, as a result of historical sources and ethnographic data, the context of use of these artefacts has been determined, as well as the repertoire of characters represented by/on them.

Neolithic anthropocentrism

The concept of corporeality and its development in several categories indicate that the treatment of the body was accurately defined and closely related to ideas associated with it. No matter whether the use of a real (*i.e.* deceased) or modelled body is in question, it was included in several spheres of interaction which functioned throughout particular symbolic attributes: emphasizing, gesticulation, fragmentation, and disposition *i.e.* deposition in certain contexts. This metaphorical, but determined use of the body in visual and ritual communication was the result of distinct associations regarding the manner and details engaged in body representations. Therefore, they were commonly manifested through comprehensible components incorporated within the transposition of definite messages and sensual implications. In this domain, visual culture most consistently realized its function *i.e.* its purposes, by means of several imagery media to transmit ideas which should be perceived by individuals present in a particular place. In addition, clay artefacts were promoted as the most suitable objects which could be additionally affected through the application of details that supplement the visual and symbolic implication that they emanate.

Statistical data suggest that the majority of sexually confirmed figurines were female, not considering the numerous complete and fragmented miniatures with no gender features. This information alludes to the fact that the female body was more suitable for embodying particular ideas, which could either refer to portrayed individuals or mythical characters. The predominance of the female gender within Neolithic visual culture is also present in other media. Thus the modelling of anthropomorphic vessels and models of houses or ovens frequently feature elements of the female body. The affinity for representations



Fig. 7. Anthropomorphic stamps from Medvednjak, Govrlevo and Kurilo (Gimbutas 1989.Fig. 21; Naumov 2008b.Fig. 8: 9; Todorova and Vaisov 1993.Fig. 175.15). Dimensions: 1. 6.2cm high; 2. and 3. no scale.

of women provides information on the social relations that individuals established in a given community, and their associations with mythological characters and concepts closely linked with the most crucial cognitive spheres.

Although it is difficult to give conclusive explications of the semiotics of anthropomorphic representations, several considerations might be contributed. Most of the generally confirmed anthropomorphic artefacts are associated with symbolic features of female body, but depending on the object on which they are represented, they were employed in diverse contexts. Miniature figurines usually concern social relations between concrete individuals, rather than the objectification of some Neolithic pantheon. Consequently, particular visual attributes provide information on dynamic changes in status and rites of passage in which the women of a certain community were involved.

Anthropomorphic vessels and house or oven models were included in the sphere of more complex imagery, or even mythological definitions of the objects and the materials deposited in them. Thus, the entire repertoire of anthropomorphic vessels, models and 'altars' – due to their hybrid and exceptionally potent symbolic character – were conceived as 'beings' which were intended to preserve and stimulate the substances or 'inhabitants' deposited in them or in-

side the actual constructions they represent. In this context, it might be deduced that Neolithic communities, in order to explain themselves and the functioning of their surroundings, employed their own bodies as the most logical matrix for defining space and the processes developed through the objects and structures they produced.

Such anthropocentrism has played its role in a common world perception in which it was explicated with the inner space, functions, dimensions and symmetry of human body. Considering the engagement of their own bodies, Neolithic populations, mainly throughout their corporeality, clarified the lineages between the members of one or several communities, or the complex relationship between them and their realm. They most often perceived and understood better their own bodies, which were manifested as an elementary reference for comprehending the world. Thus, Neolithic anthropomorphism is a logical response to those cognitive positions which humanity supports in the prehistoric phases of its existence. The variations of human body representations in the Neolithic Balkans indicate several principles employed for the clarification of the crucial ontological state of the period. Therefore, it can be considered that the elucidation of such principles manifested throughout corporeality and developed hybrid relationships might contribute towards understanding the complex symbolic processes and essential ideas which were engaged in the explication of Neolithic individuals, communities and their surrounding.

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