

THE NEOLITHIC ANTHROPOMORPHIC CLAY FIGURINE FROM THE NORTHERN KURZEME LITTORAL

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Abstract

In this article, a Neolithic anthropomorphic clay figurine from the Ģipka dune settlement in the littoral of Northern Kurzeme is examined as a versatile source of knowledge, forming an idea of the activities of the ancient individual in the field of ideology.

This original figurine is analyzed by discovering the many-sidedness of its informative content, which lies not only within the originality of this find, but also in its significance in the examination of so far unsolved questions in the archaeological literature of the Eastern Baltic. These are questions concerning the role of the rite in the everyday life of the Neolithic individual.

The scientific significance of the examined figurine is emphasised by the conditions of its finding at the fortified dune settlement, which was visited only during a particular season due to the yearly performance of an undertaking of a ritual character.

The special conditions of the finding of this anthropomorphic clay figurine are dealt with in this article (the placement in the pit dug under the palisade), its gender affiliation and time of manufacture have been determined, as well as the possible cultural source, the character of the modelling of the figurine, the manufacture technique, the design and style, decoration, its symbolism, the fragmentation (breakage) of the figurine, and the aim of its usage within the common procedure of the performance of the ritual action. The originality of the find is also stressed among other Neolithic anthropomorphic figurines that have been found so far in Northern Kurzeme and among Neolithic anthropomorphic finds of a similar style in the Åland Islands (Finland) found at the beginning of the 20th century.

Attention is paid to the fact that for the first time in the field of Neolithic research of the Eastern Baltic there is a situation when the spatial context of religious (mythological) or cult practice can be perceived. It is characterised by five interrelating zones or elements: place, where the cult (rite) was practised, imagery that is connected to the cult practice, devices, participants in the cult and the actual action of the cult.

The examined figurine from the Ģipka A site is only one of 20 found here in the dune settlements of Northern Kurzeme. These settlements are places for the performance of rites, where specially manufactured anthropomorphic figurines can personify the spirits of ancestors of different generations, for the cult of ancestors was among the most evident cults practised by aborigine communities. The “shadows of the ancestors” were those that could give descendants different benefits, or take them away.

Here at the Ģipka dune settlements, and in no other place, these figurines were broken and placed in specially dug pits, where big and small fireplaces were also burnt. This was carried out by particular persons, the elder or the soothsayer of the community, and these procedures were regulated strictly during the performance of the rite, when a contingent of other interested persons took part.

Key words: Neolithic anthropomorphic clay figurine, symbolism, rite.

In the practice of archaeological excavations, we sometimes have to face special categories of findings in Neolithic settlements or sacrifices, anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figurines, the interpretation of which is a part of the so-called cognitive archaeology. This object, in this case an anthropomorphic, fragmented clay figurine from Northern Kurzeme, that can be seen here, gives an insight that is greater and more detailed than any other average artefact obtained in archaeological excavations (Fig. 1).

This fragmented figurine contains information about the conditions of its finding, the peculiarities of its modelling, the manufacturing technology, decoration, design and style, as well as the time of its manufacture and fragmentation (breaking). Moreover, this figurine allows us to analyse the need for its manufacture and the true causes of its breakage (fragmentation). Taking into account the conditions of its finding *in situ*, it is possible to explain its functional use by trying to reconstruct its significance within the social life and rites of the corresponding Neolithic community, thus creating the chance to see it in the broader context of research into anthropomorphic clay miniature art.

1. The find conditions

The anthropomorphic clay figurine that can be seen here was found in the archaeological excavations in 1998 at the Ģipka A settlement, excavation site B. This settlement was discovered in 1993 by inspecting a blown-over dune area of the Northern Kurzeme littoral in the Ģipka lagoons, in the immediate vicinity of a posterior paleolake. It took shape during the time of the Litorina Sea transgression period, when these dunes were attended during the short-term residence of Neolithic inhabitants. The archaeological excavations were carried out over four working seasons (1993, 1997, 1998 and 2001), by uncovering a 70.5-square-metre area.

The Ģipka A site is the first fortified dune settlement in Latvia discovered so far, whose central part is girdled by fence-like enclosures. Fence-like enclosures of this kind, palisades, are characteristic of periods from the end of the Middle Neolithic and Late Neolithic in other places in the lands of the Baltic Sea basin.

Four remnants of this kind of palisades have been found at the Ģipka A site, which can be traced down by little pits made in the dune sand. They are all facing the same direction, which indicates that the same dwellers visited this settlement several times during the autumn or winter seasons, renovating the fence torn by the sea, winds and storms.

The Ģipka A settlement is considered to be a place for the performance of cycles of rites, where, during the respective season of the year, the arrivals dwelt for a short time, performing these functions, as well as others connected with them, in order to return later to their bases, settlements inhabited all year long.

The anthropomorphic clay figurine examined here, its broken-off head, and a diagonally split fragment of the middle part of the body, were found in a small pit (0.3m) under the outer palisade, where it was put after finishing a ritual action. It is possible that, along with the ritual breakage (fragmentation) of the figurine, there were sacrifices put into the pit, in the form of meat or other food. This is indicated by the colour marks in shades of grey on the sand of the pit, caused by the rotting of materials of organic origin (Loze 2006, Fig. 63, p.120).

This pit was dug especially with the purpose of placing the remains of an anthropomorphic figurine in the selected place after breakage. It occurred due to the attempts of the inhabitants to establish the protection of the settlement territory from unwanted visitors or evil spirits. The latter could bring powerful storms as well as other misfortunes, bad luck in seal hunting, illness, disease, disagreements within the community, and other kinds of disasters.

It is a significant fact that in breaking the figurine, its head was first broken off, moreover by damaging its right side. This is indicated by the position of the broken-off head at the bottom of the pit. At the same time, a part of the torso of the figurine that was split diagonally was found in the upper part of the pit. It gives evidence about the gradualness of the breaking of the anthropomorphic figurine during the practicable rite, which was prescribed to observe the particular functions of the gradual breakage of this figurine (Fig. 2:2)

Possibly, the other body parts of this anthropomorphic figurine were divided after filling up this pit, and could be searched for in other pits that were dug while erecting this very palisade. It has been stated that a couple of metres in a northwest direction from this pit, under the same palisade, another pit was dug, in which a fragment of a foot of the anthropomorphic figurine was found.

2. The age and cultural affiliation of the find

This fragmented clay figurine, that was manufactured especially for a visit to the Northern Kurzeme dunes, is only one among 20 others found in this and other dune settlements, which differs due to the special rep-

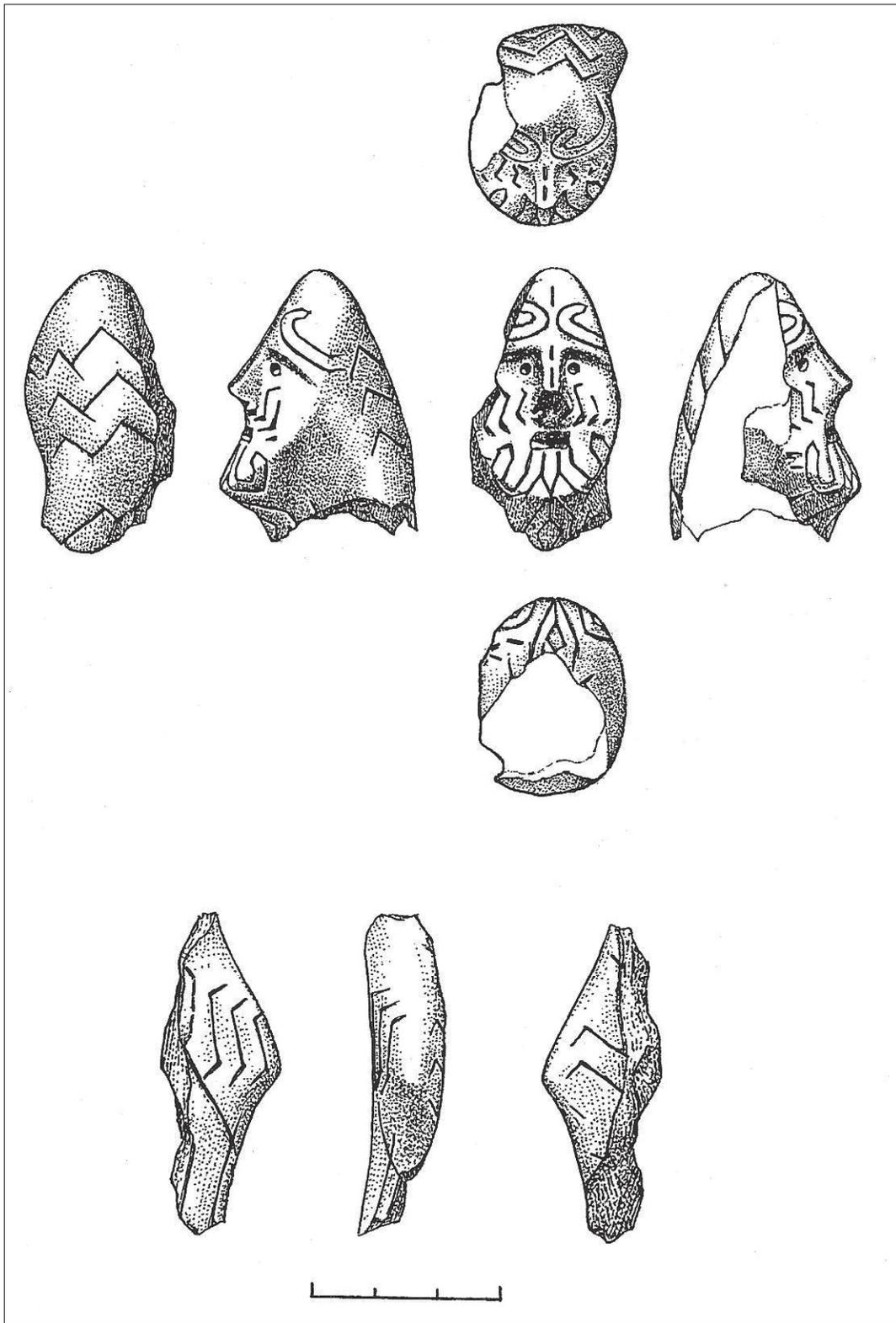


Fig. 1. The fragmented small clay anthropomorphic figurine from the Gipka A Neolithic site (drawings by Aiga Ivbule).

resentation of a headdress, reminiscent of a scarf. It is possibly the first finding of this kind, but not the last or the only one. However, it belongs to a common style of miniature art in clay, because, while creating it, both the established form of body representation and the decoration regularities of Northern Kurzeme dune settlements were taken into account.

The age of the Ģipka A ritual or sacral settlement sites in Northern Kurzeme can be detected due to findings of extraordinary anthropomorphic clay miniature samples. They were obtained at Ģipka Neolithic settlements, the cultural layers of which contain pit ceramics, which are inherent to settlements of Scandinavian shoreline and Litorina Sea islands. In Northern Kurzeme, it is represented by fragments of imported dishes, that indicate close contacts between the producers of this anthropomorphic miniature clay sample and the then inhabited Finno-Scandinavian shoreline and Litorina Sea islands. These pit ceramics represent a culture that has spread from the shoreline of Jutland to the west coast of Finland, and the age of which in calibrated numbers can be referred to the time period 2800–2500BC (Nielsen 2004, p.20, Table 1). This means that the Northern Kurzeme Neolithic dune settlements were also seasonally inhabited during exactly this period of time.

3. The character of the modelling of the anthropomorphic figurine

The examined fragmented anthropomorphic clay figurine from the Ģipka A Neolithic dune settlement belongs to the type of Northern Kurzeme anthropomorphic miniature art in clay with a headdress reminiscent of a scarf (Fig. 2:1). This is the first finding of this type of figurine, which differs from all previous figurines obtained at the same sites of the Ģipka A, B and Pūrciems C settlements (Loze 2006, pp.150-172). The type of head modelling of this kind indicates the usage of headdresses characteristic of the Neolithic. This significant figurine is distinguished by a particularly careful modelling of the face, scrupulously representing its features.

The lower part of the body of this anthropomorphic figurine, that has been split diagonally (its left side was found in the pit under the palisade), allows us to characterise its modelling as possessing common qualities of Neolithic miniature sculptural art, the projection of inclined, slightly rounded shoulders, and a sharply narrowing of the waistline (Fig. 2:2).

An insight about the base of this anthropomorphic figurine can be given by fragments of foot parts of this or other figurines found in other places at the same Ģipka

A, as well as Pūrciems C settlements (Loze 2006, Figs. 81:4, 89:6).

4. The technique of manufacture

This anthropomorphic figurine is prepared from well-poached clay with a sufficiently high temperature of annealing that guaranteed its durability. Judging by the committed damages and later splitting places, its head was made from two strips, one representing the face and the chin with the neck part fitting to it, but the other forming the back of the head with a scarf-like headdress.

5. The decoration technique, design and style

The decoration of the face and body of the anthropomorphic figurine of the Ģipka A site, which could also be a representation of a tattoo, was created by incisions. The following elements were used in its creation:

- a vertical line with tiny opposed incisions at each end (on the face and chest);
- a horizontally incised broken line with short incisions directed downwards at both ends (on the back);
- a double contour-rhomb motif (on the chin);
- an unfinished hexagonal motif without a bottom part (on the chin);
- a walking-stick motif (on the forehead and chin).

The layout of the decorative elements is in vertical lines on the face, and horizontal ones on the back. This is emphasised also by the decoration of other anthropomorphic figurines found in the Ģipka A settlement (Loze 2006, Fig.81:4). It has been ascertained that the decorative elements that have been chosen for the decoration of the respective anthropomorphic representation are connected with the social or ideological function of these figurines.

The duality of the decoration of this anthropomorphic figurine should be remarked: its straight and broken linearity (rectilinear and curvilinear). This display of the decoration style on the anthropomorphic clay figurine is not a characteristic quality of Eastern Baltic ceramics. It is attributed to the linear pottery decoration style (line and ribbon ceramics), in this case on the surface of the anthropomorphic clay figurine, which has a rather archaic origination. This style is a characteristic quality of early farmers' linear pottery culture (Pavlu 2000, Fig.5.03a.). This is the earliest farming culture of Central Europe, that spread from western Ukraine



Fig. 2. The head of the small fragmented anthropomorphic clay figurine from the Ćipka A Neolithic site (photograph by Ilgvars Gradovskis).

to eastern France, and refers to a time period of circa 4500–3000BC.

It is useful to mention that the layout of the two decorative elements, vertical and horizontal lines on the surface of the anthropomorphic figurines, is a characteristic feature of the decoration of anthropomorphic figurines of linear pottery culture. It can be illustrated by the torso of the anthropomorphic figurine found at Przybranowo, Wrocław district Kuyavia, where indeed there is decoration combined in this way on its surface (Czerniak 1989, Fig.5, p.61).

Concerning the combination of the walking-stick kind of lines with horizontal and vertical lines, this style of ceramics ornamentation is characteristic of the later phase of linear pottery culture (Czerniak 1989, Fig. 4: i, j, p.60). It has been ascertained not only in Kuyavia on the left bank basin of the Wisła, but also in the Chelmo area on the right bank basin of the Wisła, also close to the Drweca affluent (Kirkowski 1994, Fig.5:4-6, p.78). This linear pottery culture (Kultura ceramiki Wstęgowej Rytnej) in Poland is dated to the time period circa 4500–3900BC, assigning to the newer phase the period 4200–3900BC. Besides, settlements of this culture have been researched also in Pomerania, part of

the lower Wisła basin with its left-side influents (Czerniak 1986, p.159).

6. The gender affiliation of the represented figurine

The fragmented anthropomorphic clay figurine made in the Ćipka A settlement is a reproduction of a woman. It is indicated by the chest part of a broken female figurine found right there *in situ* in this settlement with unmistakably elaborated woman's breasts (Loze 2006, Fig. 85, p.157). Just like the figurine that can be seen here, it has an arrangement of horizontally broken lines and bands on the back, but the front is decorated with two rows of hexagons. This figure of a baseless hexagon can also be found on the front of our examined figurine under the chin, where it has been enclosed within a complex combination of ornamental elements. It possibly indicates that this figurine also, just like the above-mentioned figurine, was covered with these rows of incised hexagons in its chest (Fig. 2).

7. The symbolism of the decoration

The special significance of the anthropomorphic clay figurine found in the Ģipka A settlement is emphasised by the decoration, the reproduction of face and body tattoos. It should not be perceived merely as an embellishment of the figurine: it carries a much deeper meaning that cannot be worked out so easily.

It must be mentioned that the decoration of the fragmented anthropomorphic figurine of the Ģipka A site contains information which would have remained unknown if we had not looked for close and far parallels to this walking-stick motif elsewhere.

All the decorative elements of this figurine, apart from the walking-stick motif, are geometric, which is characteristic of the decoration complexes of linear pottery. However, this walking-stick motif, this fascinating sign, in our case in the form of a double line, is a characteristic feature of anthropomorphic figurine decorations of the southeast Europe Late Neolithic-Eneolithic ceramics cultures. It derives from the fact that the figurine examined by us also belongs to a significantly later culture group in comparison to linear pottery culture.

Attention must be paid to the fact that systematic research of recent years in the field of anthropomorphic miniature forms has given good results. We can refer to the Gradenitsa-Krivodole cultural complex, where, among the decoration of the 381 female figurines found in 33 sites, the walking-stick motif can be found on the chests and hips (Biehl 1996, Fig. 3:4, 19, p.157). This cultural complex is characteristic of the Late Neolithic and Eneolithic territory of northwest Bulgaria, where it synchronises with Karānova 6 and Vincha D Neolithic layers, and is dated to the time period circa 3800–2800BC.

It is generally stated that this walking-stick motif, along with other motifs of early farmers, could be a symbol that shapes a far-reaching communications system. However, here in northern Kurzeme it does not form a separate sign, but is enclosed in a complex, quite accurately performed composition of decoration, with the involvement of other motifs.

The motif of the unfinished hexagon that has been enclosed in the decoration of the examined figurine under the neck is also worth attention. In southeast European Neolithic, especially Vincha Culture, it is considered to be one of the most widespread signs of sacral symbols. In the data bank composed of these signs, it occupies 41st place (Lazarovici 2003, Fig. 4:41, p.61).

Symbol studies are the subject of symbolic (gnostic) and structural archaeology, and are based on the ethno-archaeological research of material culture. In this

case, the archaeological culture is seen as a complex collection of symbols which determines how individuals have acted in the respective society. Symbols do not reflect, but play an active part in shaping the norms of social behaviour. They are active in social strategies (Hodder 1982, pp.74-86).

8. The fragmentation (breakage) of the anthropomorphic figurine

The anthropomorphic clay figurine that can be seen here was not broken by accident. It was broken on purpose during the performance of some rite. In this case, when a figurine that we are interested in has been found fragmented *in situ* in a settlement inhabited seasonally or in the short term, there is reason to affirm that this process of breakage indicates the practice of a rite in connection with the protection of the settlement. It is indicated by the digging of a special pit under the fence-like enclosure, a palisade, in which during the performance of the rite, the two parts of the figurine, the broken-off head and the fragment of the torso, were placed (Loze 2006, Fig. 63, p.120).

It might be added that the breakage of anthropomorphic figurines in Ģipka dune settlements was performed in a gradual way. Probably first the head of each figurine was damaged. This can be seen well with the figurine found at the Pūrciems C site, which has a small breakage on the back of the head (Loze 2006, Fig. 79, p.151).

Probably the next step was taken in order to break the heads off the figurines. Indeed in the Ģipka A settlement there are fragments of the heads of five figurines. Later, the body was divided into two parts in the middle, which is indicated by the chest of the female figurine found in the Ģipka A site (Loze 2006, Fig. 85, p.157). Thus, the broken figure was broken in half, and in half once again diagonally, as was done with the figurine described by us here. The flat base, which served as a support instead of legs, was also separated. Fragments of flat bases also belong to the three figurines found at Ģipka A and one in Pūrciems F (Loze 2006, Fig. 81:4, Fig. 89:6).

9. The anthropomorphic figurine in the context of the research of ritual settlements

The Ģipka A site, being one of the ten most attended coastal rite performance places in Northern Kurzeme, was also girdled with fence-like enclosures, palisades, which were renovated during the visit each season, thus providing security for arrivals not only from forest

animals, but also from hostile individuals. These could possibly be only those belonging to another Neolithic culture, whose language and physical type were different.

The Ģipka type dune settlements are called Neolithic ritual sites. Litorina Sea basin ritual sites in Scandinavia are classified in seven groups (Malmer 1986, pp.91-110).

These are: 1) sacral settlements of special location (Alvastra pile building); 2) megaliths-dolmens or passage tombs (*Jordhej*); 3) temples (*Tustrup*); 4) swamp findings (*Salpetermosen*); 5) fortified settlements (*Sarup*); 6) findings in water (*Segea*); and 7) ritual deposits (*Rabelov*). A special choice of location is considered to be one of the most typical features of ritual sites in Scandinavian archaeological literature, the presence of many fireplaces, an untraditional disproportionality of tools used in everyday life, a small amount of flint tools and a lack of flint processing (Malmer 1986, p.98).

However, direct parallels with Scandinavian ritual sites and performance places cannot be drawn, because the Ģipka dune settlements are of a shoreline type. Besides, it is not only one site, but a whole system of seasonally attended settlements. It is a new, and up to this day little investigated, situation within the Litorina Sea basin. Yet the manufacturing style of the anthropomorphic clay figurines found in the dune settlements of Northern Kurzeme allows us to compare them with 100 fragments of anthropomorphic clay figurines that represent more than 60 of these figurines found at the beginning of the 20th century at the Jetbele site on the island of Yumala, which belongs to the Åland Islands (Cederhvarf 1912, pp.307-323). The manufacturing style of these figurines is similar to that of ones made in Northern Kurzeme, which can be seen in the modelling of the posture of the figurines: they have a raised head and a face turned towards the roof of heaven, as well as a flat base instead of legs, and shoulders formed by a rounding-off. However, direct parallels with the example of the anthropomorphic miniature sculptural art found at the Ģipka A site, as well as with others found at the same site or Ģipka B or Pūrciems C site, do not exist.

Despite the territorially small area of excavations, the Ģipka A site investigated in Northern Kurzeme is distinguished by particularly characteristic, very typical features of ritual performance. All five zones of ritual action identified by specialists in cults and early religions are represented here. They are connected with the place where the cult has been practised, imagery that is connected with the cult practice, devices, participants in the cult, and the actual practices/actions of the cult (Bertermes, Biehl 2001, p.17-20). This is the first case

in the praxis of Eastern Baltic Neolithic research when it is possible to perceive the spatial context of the religious or cult practice. It can all be found at the Ģipka A site, which shows itself as a site for the performance of rites, with the burning of fireplaces, anthropomorphic figurines, Neolithic people, and the manufacturers and breakers of anthropomorphic figurines among them.

The cult practice, which in this case manifests itself as a performance of a ritual cycle, with broken figurines and their placement in specially dug pits under palisades, as well as other sacrifices, indicates the wish of the Neolithic individual to subdue supernatural forces and beings to his own benefit.

Thus, the examined anthropomorphic clay figurine is an object that features in the performance of a particular rite as a symbol belonging to it. Not only this or any other figurine at the Ģipka A site, or elsewhere on the Northern Kurzeme shore, but also its decorative elements on the face, or other parts of the body, could be a symbol. The symbol is the most important part during the performance of a rite, it does not change or lose its specific functions until the end of the rite. The symbol is considered to be the tiniest unit of a rite, it is an elementary unit of a specific structure in the context of the rite. It preserves the specific character of the ritual action during the entire time of the ritual performance process.

In summarising the anthropomorphic Neolithic clay figurine examined in this article as the source of research, and seeing it in the common context of research of the Northern Kurzeme dune Neolithic settlements, by bonding it also to the findings from Yumala island at the Jetbele site, a general insight is shaped about the activities in the ideological field of the people of the Litorina Sea basin at the end of the Neolithic period. They become apparent with the mobile seafaring Neolithic inhabitants leaving behind not only seasonally inhabited ritual sites on the littoral, but also leaving anthropomorphic clay figurines, as the most certain indicators of the performances of these ritual cycles.

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NEOLITINĒS MOLINĒS ANTROPOMORFINĒS FIGŪRĒLĒS IŠ ŠIAURINĒS KURŽEMĒS TERITORIJOS

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Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje neolitinės antropomorfinės molinės figūrėlės, aptiktos Gipkos smėlio kopų gyvenvietėse

šiaurinėje Kuržemėje, buvo tiriamos visais prieinamais įvairiapusiškais tyrimų metodais, siekiant nustatyti individualumo lygmenį priešistorės ideologinės veiklos lygmeniui.

Ši originali figūrėlė įvairiapusiškai analizuojama ne tik jos atradimo požūriui, bet stengiamasi iširti neaiškumus, pasirodžiusius Rytų Pabaltijo archeologinėje literatūroje jos tyrinėjimo klausimais. Būtent šie klausimai yra susiję su neolito gyventojų, kaip individo, svarba kasdieniame apeigų cikle.

Tyrinėjant figūrėlę didelis dėmesys atkreipiamas į tai, kad ji aptikta įtvirtintoje kopose esančioje gyvenvietėje, kuri buvo lankoma tik tam tikru metų laikotarpiu, kai buvo atliekamos tam tikros apeigos.

Ypatinga šios antropomorfinės molinės figūrėlės radiomo aplinkybė šiame straipsnyje pažymėta atskirai (ji aptikta duobėje, iškastoje po tvora). Figūrėlės modeliavimo, gaminimo technologija, dizainas ir stilius, dekoravimas, simbolika, atsižvelgiant į figūrėlės fragmentiškumą, panaudojimo tikslą, suteikia galimybę paaiškinti čia vykusių ritualinių apeigų procedūrą. Šio radinio originalumas yra tas, kad figūrėlių buvo rasta iki šiol tik Šiaurės Kuržemėje. Ši figūrėlė išsiskyrė iš kitų aptiktų neolito antropomorfinių figūrėlių savo stiliumi, kuris yra panašus į Alandų salų (Suomija) figūrėlių, žinomų jau XX a. pradžioje.

Atkreiptinas dėmesys į tai, kad pirmą kartą Rytų Pabaltijo neolito tyrinėjimuose fiksuojama situacija, kai suvokiamas religijos (mitologinio) kulto kontekstas. Gipkos A gyvenvietėje aptikta figūrėlė yra tik viena iš dvidešimties, aptiktų Šiaurės Kuržemėje. Tą faktą charakterizuoja penki sąryšio elementai: vieta, kur buvo atliekamos kulto apeigos, vaizdinys, susijęs su kultu, priemonės, kulto apeigų dalyviai ir reali kulto akcija. Šios Gipkos gyvenvietės yra apeigų atlikimo vietos, kuriose specialiai buvo lipdomos antropomorfinės figūrėlės, jas įsameninant kaip protėvių dvasias skirtingose žmonių generacijose ir skiriant akivaizdžiam protėvių kultui, kurį praktikavo vietinės bendruomenės. Kaip tik taip „protėvių šešėliai“ buvo perduodami palikuonims kaip privilegija arba atimami.

Tik Gipkos kopų gyvenvietėse kaip niekur kitur šios figūrėlės buvo sudaužomos ir dedamos į specialiai iškastas duobes, kur buvo deginami mažesni ar didesni ugniakurai. Šią ceremoniją atlikdavo ypatingas asmuo – bendruomenės senolis ar žiniuonis, o atliekamos procedūros buvo tiksliai surežisuotos ceremonialui, kuriame dalyvaudavo ir kiti suinteresuoti asmenys.