

“Group Portrait” of the Early Agricultural Era: A Set of Figurines of Vinča Culture from Stubline (Serbia) in the Context of the European Neolithic and Copper Age Societies

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One of the most fruitful trends in contemporary Art History is the social history of art. Interpretation of artworks of preliterate cultures is possible by revealing the interrelationships between a particular society, the peculiarities of its ecology, and the figurative system presented in its art. European Neolithic and Chalcolithic societies (7th–3rd millennia BC) are different by its' structure: from hierarchical to relatively homogeneous. But just during this epoqe war became one of the modes of production, giving birth to the corresponding social institutions. Pictorial representations that clearly show the characters related to the sphere of war are extremely rare. That is why a find of the set of figurines in Vinča D site Stubline, Serbia is of great importance. This set includes 43 clay figurines, 7 miniature clay axe and 2 mace-heads models. Statuettes formed several groups (Crnobrnja 2011). Thus, we have an image of a troop of armed men, united around the leader. Figurines were made in the form of cones, which allowed them to be placed on a flat surface. A squad of almost 50 warriors that was depicted in the composition of figurines described above could portray a group of fighters led by a military leader. Based on the known ethnographic parallels, similar groups could be formed on the principle an age-class system. It is possible that Stubline set could have been used in initiation rituals or may have been intended as a visual representation of the roles of men's society members as in a “tactical game” (which does not exclude the possibility that this set could have been made during cult practice).

Keywords: interpretation, Copper Age, Vinča culture, figurines, age-class system.

European art of the early agricultural era that covers several thousands of years, from the 7th to the 3rd millennia B.C., is usually perceived through the prism of the ‘sacral world’ of fertility cults and worshipping fertility goddesses. This concept became established in the second half of the 20th century thanks to the authority of works by Marija Gimbutas — in the West, and like-minded works by Academician B. A. Rybakov — in the USSR. And only in the last decade it has been getting obvious, that images of the European Balkan-Carpathian ‘Civilization of the Great Goddess’ — ‘The Golden Copper Age’ are more likely a figment of imagination rather than a result of detailed analysis. Consequently, interpretation of the early agricultural figurines changes significantly: attention is paid

to its multifunctionality, the context of the finds, new analogies are designed both in the area of ancient history and ethnography [1, p. 180–3].

One of the fruitful trends was study of sets of figurines — unique groups of pieces found as part of ‘closed’ sets: either in a vessel, or in a dwelling model. Analysis of such sets, their archaeological context and the figurines iconography enabled researchers to distinguish the figurines gender characteristics more clearly, unravel the sets structure and conduct a comparative analysis of the material. Most of those were found in the eastern part of the Balkan-Carpathian early-agricultural area — in the district of Cucuteni–Trypillia covering Romanian Moldavia, Moldova and Right-bank Ukraine. This is down to it being explored rather well. Among those sets, several varieties are clearly distinctive: sets including male and female statuettes, consisting of 13 or 21 figurines; as well as sets related to dwelling models. The author of the article has made an assumption, that anthropomorphic figurines did not depict fertility goddesses of the conceptual early-agricultural pantheon, but rather ancestral characters [1, p. 187–92].

One of the most important challenges in studying ancient figurines is conclusiveness of interpretations. It arises when moving from formal and iconographic analysis to interpretation itself which is not possible without reconstructing the social and cultural context and conducting a comparative analysis based on external material. It is important to avoid primitive logic of observations bases on a priori statements like ‘in farmer societies, by virtue of their household establishment, fertility cults have to be the predominant ones, so all the figurines are related to those’, with subsequent provision of separate precedents in ethnographic studies. This method is not comparative, but virtually a comparative and illustrative one, relying only on the objects’ external likeness. Almost a hundred years ago it was criticised and discarded by most researchers. Comprehensive comparison is possible only at the level of matching structures, historical and ethnographic contexts [1, p. 192–4].

The use of the comparative method can prove productive if conducted based on comparing the following: 1) ecology and related types of households, as well as resulting settlement systems, demographic processes dynamics, etc.; 2) social structures and contexts; 3) cultural traditions within certain regions, where common historical and cultural experiences develop based on interconnection of different cultures, as well as within single cultural, language and ethnic traditions developing in time. In this case, on the basis of wide structural parallels one can make conclusions stemming from a broad evidential foundation rather than arbitrary assumptions. Accordingly, broad extrapolations are possible, enabling to match events standing apart in time and space. Thus comparative researches, along with context reconstruction, archaeological typology and iconography analysis, play a key role in determining the importance of the preliterate cultures artefacts.

One of the less researched aspects of life of Europe’s early farmers societies is revealed through a set of figurines found during the excavation of a settlement dating back to the 5th–4th millennia B. C. in Stubline, Serbia, classified as Vinča archaeological culture (fig. 1, 2). When looking at them, one immediately is reminded of a group portrait of Dutch militia of the 16th–17th centuries, with an outstanding central figure and a certain positioning order showing the internal subordination of characters united in a common theatrical spectacle. But while the Dutch portrait is in a well-known social context and has been analysed multiple times (starting with A. Riegl’s 1902 work [2]), the group of characters in a prehistoric era ‘portrait’ requires not only a detailed iconographic analysis, but also adjusting our view of the societies in which it was depicted.



Fig. 1. Set of figurines from Subline, general view (by Спасић 2013)



Fig. 2. Figurines during the process of excavation (by Crnobrnja 2011)

Stubline Set — a Military Squad Depiction

This unique set was found in 2008 when researching a Vinča D settlement in Crkvine district near Stubline village in Serbia, about 40 km to the south-west of Belgrade [3–5].

After a geomagnetic survey that enabled to determine the general dimensions and layout of the ancient settlement, one of the smallest (9.1×4.8 m) and relatively poorly preserved dwelling (1/2008) was chosen, that is located on the western outskirts (fig. 3). The interior of the dug out building, whose cob work was burnt in a fire, corresponds to the standards of house architecture of the late period of the culture, Vinča D2. It included two ovens, a clay platform — an ‘altar’, a clay platform for grain milling with a quern stone (fig. 4). Besides ceramic vessels and their fragments, weaver loom weights, two typical for the Vinča culture anthropomorphic figurines were found in the dwelling, as well as a clay bucranium (a schematic depiction of a bull’s head) that apparently adorned one of the walls [3, fig. 5].

However, the main find was a set of 43 schematic figurines and 11 clay weapon models — axes, pickaxes and mace-heads (fig. 1). It is clear that the figurines depicted people armed with crush weapons: each of them has a hole in the right shoulder where perished wooden handles would be fixed. The largest figurine is 67 mm. It is head and shoulders above the rest of the figurines, their height being between 33 and 63 mm [5, tab. 1]. This gave enough grounds for the archaeologist to assume that the set depicted a group of people united into a single social group with explicit stratification [5, p. 142].

The figurines are rather unkempt, unlike most Vinča statuettes many of which are made very thoroughly and covered in diverse depressed and colourful decorations. The exception is the biggest figurine that was positioned in the central group. Its surface was thoroughly smoothed.

The figurines were located near the oven on a clay platform, the most part of which was preserved between two 18th century graves. A larger part of the set survived intact: 34 figurines lay *in situ* under a layer of burnt daub that fell in a fire that destroyed the building. Thus incidental events contributed to the figurines being secured in the position in which they were at the moment of the fire, and they were not moved in this layer. The statuettes made up several groups of 10 — 6 — 6 — 3 — 3 — 3 characters (fig. 5) [5, fig. 8]. The number of groups had been bigger, as the complex was partially destroyed in later excavations: 9 figurines were found out of the general context, and it is possible that a number of figurines from peripheral groups was lost.

The biggest statuette was in the central group. In contrast to the other figurines, not only was it made more thoroughly, but its head is also modelled in more detail. So, the depicted character can be considered the ‘leader’ surrounded by a group of ‘regular’ warriors consisting of 9 people — also divisible by 3 like the smaller groups. Consequently, this is a depiction of an organized squad of warriors, in a certain way grouped around the ‘leader’.

The order of forming the group is indicated through combining statuettes of different sizes. So, the central group of 10 figurines and the three adjacent groups of 6 figurines each has the most smaller statuettes, and these also have axes and mace-heads, while the three groups of three figurines each consist of bigger statuettes. This is especially well seen in the two marginal groups positioned on the flanks (fig. 5).

The statuettes are cone-shaped with a flat base which enables to arrange them on a flat surface. Based on this, we can assume that repositioning of the figurines was important

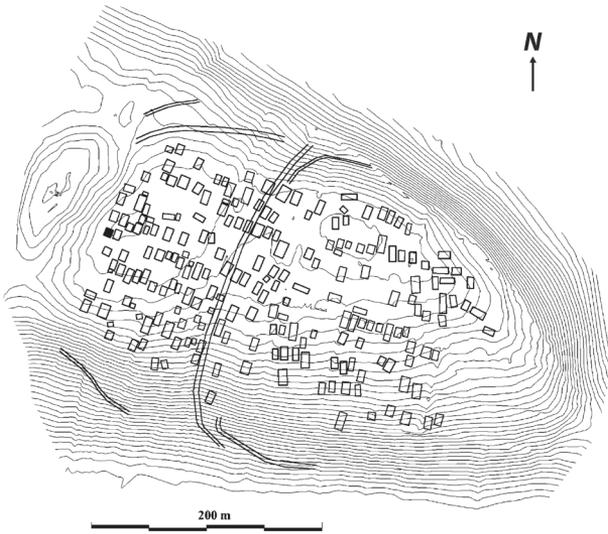


Fig. 3. Plan of Stubline settlement (by Crnobrajna 2014)

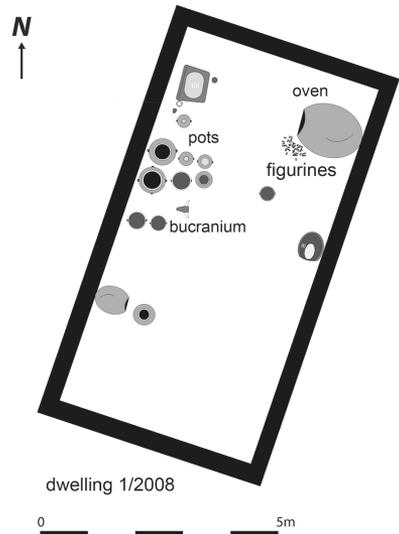


Fig. 4. Plan for the building 1/2008 (by Спасић 2013)

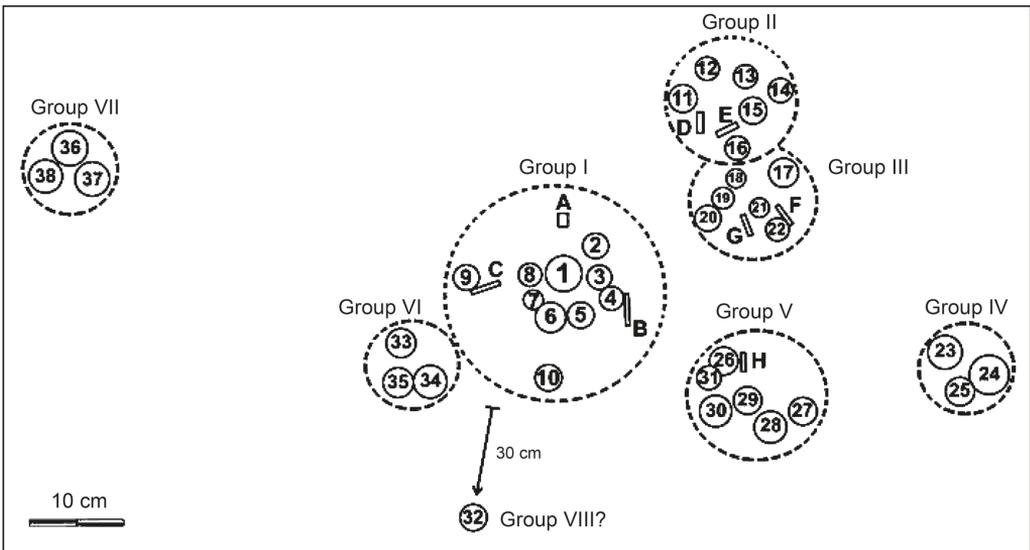


Fig. 5. Grouping of figures (by Crnobrajna 2011)

and was performed repeatedly. The shape of the figurines also draws attention, with the face clearly indicated with a prominent nose: it is the nose that determines the direction of the gaze and the motion of characters when they are positioned.

The uniqueness of the Stubline set is in the figurines having been fixed *in situ* at the final stage of the building existence (fig. 2). Thus, even if partially, the **author's arrangement** of the figurines was preserved that poses a **composition** — a true **group portrait** initially uniting up to 50 characters. This composition is arranged both based on their hierarchy

shown through the statuettes size, and on their spacial links — the figurines are combine into squads of 3, 6, 10 ‘warriors’.

In favour of this being a group portrait of specific characters speaks the fact that the author chose the most optimal way of indicating the status and place of the characters in a group — through a volumetric and spatial composition. First, in such a way this task is solved easier and more demonstrative than when depicting an organized group on a plane. Second, the positioning of the miniature figurines may be changed, depicting a sequence of actions or changes in the characters’ combinations.

The figurines size could show their statuses hierarchy (the so-called ‘social perspective’). To additionally mark the figurines, colour and details made of organic materials (fabric, thread, cork, leather, etc.) may have been used, but, unfortunately, these usually do not survive.

Both the shape and the lack of decorations, together with slipshod making, enable researchers to single out the Stubline statuettes into a special category of small clay plastics of the Vinča culture. And also to assume that similar sets, if such existed, may have been created for certain events out of raw clay or other undurable materials, and mostly have not survive till our days.

The find of this sculptural composition in Stubline gives rise to a number of questions, solving which will enable to better discover its plot and see a society behind it that created this set of figurines:

- How typical is a depiction of such squad for what seemed a peaceful era of the Copper Age?
- How were the warriors armed, and how typical were those weapons?
- Which category of people could such sets depict? What place did military parties hold in European early-agricultural societies? And how could these societies have been organized themselves?
- And, finally, for what purpose and how could the Stubline set figurines have been used?

Copper Age Wars — Inevitable Reality

In the context of popular views of a peaceful early-agricultural ‘Civilization of the Great Goddess’, with its fertility cults and worshipping female goddesses, a depiction of an armed squad looks unusual. But this contrast disappears if we turn to a number of sources related to military activity of early farmers — both results of archaeological research and their ethnographic parallels. In the last two decades, a rather extensive bibliography was written in this sphere that includes not only publication of existing materials, but their comprehensive analysis clearly showing the opposite [6–8].

The author does not set a task to include all the numerous materials on this topic, existing on the whole territory of Europe settled by early farmers. Suffice it to pay attention to the Balkan-Carpathian cultures of the Late Neolithic and Early Eneolithic, close in terms of time to the settlement in Stubline related to the late Vinča culture, the second half of the 5th — the early 4th millennia B. C. Those are the widely known cultures of Gumelnița–Karanovo VI, which area covers the lower reaches of the Danube and the neighbouring districts of the Balkans and the Carpathians in the limits of modern Southern Romania and Northern Bulgaria, and Cucuteni–Tripolye, covering the area from the

Eastern Carpathians to the Dnieper — on the territory of modern Romania, the Republic of Moldova and Right-bank Ukraine¹.

The evidence of the military conflicts has a diverse character. Primarily, there are actual traces of settlements being assaulted and mass finds of human remains in their cultural layers. Several settlements of the Gumelnița–Karanovo VI culture present such picture. In Pietrele in Romania, in one of the burnt down dwellings of the Gumelnița layer, remains of 8–9 people were found, apparently belonging to one family. One of the persons ‘carries evidence of ante-mortem violence with a blunt instrument’. Besides, disparate human bones (with animal bite marks on some of those) were found in the cultural layer as well [15, p. 76–8]. Similarly, in Yunatsite in Bulgaria, numerous remains of inhabitants were found in burnt houses (47 skeletons in total preserved in various states), including ones with evidence of ‘specific cranial trauma made with picks’ [16; 17].

Over a hundred arrowheads found in Druța I settlement in Northern Moldova of the Cucuteni–Tripolye culture (Cucuteni A — Tripolye BI period), by all appearances testify to military actions related to an assault on the settlement. The heads were mostly concentrated on the periphery of the dwellings, at the field side of the headland, which enabled researchers to assume that the settlement was attacked from this side. The arrowheads are typical for the Tripolye culture [18]. Osteologic materials of this monument have not been analysed.

In addition to whole skeletons with evidence of violent death, fragments of human bones in settlements cultural layers also are important. This is a usual occurrence in the Gumelnița culture [19; 20]. It is not entirely obvious how exactly those are linked to military actions: part of such finds could come from destroyed intramural burials (in the buildings or on the territory of the settlement). In a number of cases we, apparently, could be facing a skull cult: e.g. in Căscioarele in the Lower Danube, under the floor of a building, next to the oven, two human skulls were found. It is possible that the dwellers of that settlement also practices cannibalism: on a number of long bones there were traces of removing the soft tissues using a tool with a sharp cutting edge [19, p. 122–3]. Special importance attributed to skulls in the Gumelnița culture is also evidenced by the traces of beheading and boiling out, found on a fragment of an occipital bone in Bolhrad [21]. There is also a set of articles shaped as disks with a hole in the centre (adornments? elements of composite cult objects or peculiar visual representations of military trophies?) carved out of human cranial bones [22].

The Cucuteni–Tripolye culture is a different story. There is no reliable data about the funeral rites of the bearers of this culture, except for several burials on the territory of the settlements. Possibly, they practiced one of the funeral rites that eventually does not leave any archaeological traces (burial in trees, burning and scattering the ashes, etc.). However in the cultural layers of several settlements there are isolated human bones. This was noted during the first excavations of the Tripolye culture monuments near Kiev by its discoverer Vikentiy Khvojkа back at the end of the 19th century [23, c. 780, 794]. Later it

¹ The traces of military conflicts in the form of mass graves of those who died violently are found not only in the densely populated area of the Balkans, but also during the excavations of settlements belonging to various cultures of Central and Western Europe [9–12]. And while for neolithic pioneers — the bearers of the Linear Pottery culture that is linked to the expansion of farming in Europe to the north of the Balkans and the Carpathians in the 6th millennium B. C. — this may be explained through conflicts with local aboriginals — hunters and gatherers [13, p. 339–40], — when the Copper Age comes these clashes occur already between the members of early agricultural societies themselves [14].

was confirmed numerous times in further researches of the culture both in Ukraine and in Romania [24, p. 195–6; 19].

In that context, a find in the Liveni (Romania) draws attention — a thighbone with marks of human teeth, which may be considered a sign of cannibalism [25]. In a settlement in Poduri (Romanian Moldova), human bones were discovered with signs of soft tissue removal, as well as bones with dog bite marks [19, p. 149]². Fragments of human bones were also found in the cultural layer in Petreny [27, p. 33].

Special attitude toward heads is confirmed with a burial of human skulls together with a dog skeleton discovered by T. M. Tkachuk in Bilshivtsi settlement of the Tripolye CI stage in the upper Dniester [28]. Some inhumations on the territory of Tripolye settlements, because of unnatural poses and separate body parts alongside whole skeletons, may be considered a result of human sacrifices [29, p. 191–212].

Similar data also derives from excavations of the Vinča culture settlements, though those are not as indicative because of fewer field archaeological work, the results of which have recently been summed up in an article by R. Balaban [30].

Of course, fragments of human bones may have ended up in the cultural layer if the bones of the deceased had been put in some light ground structures that did not survive. Many peoples of the world had such practice. Suffice is to recall a ‘tambuna’ — ancestral skull shrines in Melanesia, where relatives also quite often kept separate bones of the deceased at home. Travellers and ethnographers regularly mention those, in particular, Nikolai Miklouho-Maclay [31].

However one can also imagine a situation similar to the one witnessed in Indian settlements digs in the area of the Great Lakes in the USA, that date back to the period of military conflicts in the late 15th — early 16th centuries, before the Iroquois League was established that united a group of tribes speaking the Iroquoian languages³. During those times settlements were growing, complex fortification systems were developing. Simultaneously numerous fragmented bones appear in the cultural layers. A significant part of human remains (50–70%) is skull parts. This brings us to the assumption that human heads were taken as trophies: the military chief house of the Iroquois enemy, the Huron people, was called ‘the house of the cut-off heads’. The Iroquois tribes had a widespread practice of making adornments, pins, daggers and rattles out of different human bones [32, p. 283]. So torture and killing of the prisoners mentioned by Lewis Henry Morgan, a renown researcher of the American Indians [33, p. 180–2], are proved by archaeological finds (L. Morgan preferred not to touch upon the topic of cannibalism, because his informers were rather respected people, such as Ely Samuel Parker (1828–1895), son of a Seneca tribe chief and a U. S. Army general).

In the agricultural societies of the Southwestern United States, the most vivid evidence of violent conflicts dates back mostly to the period of climate change in the 12th–13th centuries, though they happened both in earlier and later periods. They also occurred in other areas in North America [34].

² Evidence of cannibalism is present in the Linear Pottery culture of the Central and Western Europe as well [26].

³ It is supposed that those conflicts were caused by climate changes. After their escalation by the mid-16th century, a period of relative peacefulness started, which, apparently, is linked to the establishment of the Iroquois League [32]. From the 17th century, Iroquois wars were directed against other tribes: one of their incentives was the development of fur trade with the Europeans, which led to fights for hunting lands.

Violent intergroup conflicts are also characteristic of agricultural societies in other parts of the world, which is proven both by ethnographic observations (especially indicative are observations in contemporary Melanesia), and by artefacts [35; 36]. As we can see, this rule was also true on the territory of early-agricultural Europe.

It would seem that it was during this period that wars became one of the means of production. Military enterprises could be not only spontaneous, but also were arranged regularly, on a cyclic, seasonal basis. So, judging by works by Titus Livius and other Roman historians that were based on the chronicles, the military cycle in Ancient Rome started with the election of consuls in March, the review of troops followed by agricultural works, and when harvest came, one army that included young warriors, *iuniores viri*, left to ravage the neighbours, and the other one stayed to protect the town territories.

Weapons and Warriors in Iconography of Early-agricultural European Societies

In the Stubline set the figurines are made unkempt, and it is the weapons that the author drew attention to: each figurine has a hole for attaching a wooden bar. It seems that those were crush weapons: 11 clay models were found among the figurines — 8 perforated axes and 3 mace-heads attached to wooden handles that were inserted into the corresponding holes in the figurines. The remaining weapons, apparently, included wooden clubs or spears.

Stone mace-heads were known already during the early Neolithic in Greece [37, p. 222; 38, p. 181–2, fig. 10]. A significant number of stone mace-heads come from the Neolithic Linear Pottery culture area in Central and Western Europe [39]. In the Copper Age they were widely spread also in the Balkan-Carpathian region. Alongside those, stone perforated axes, pickaxes made out of drilled deer prongs as well as copper axes were used [40; 41]⁴.

On the turn of the 5th and 4th millennia B. C., some types of crush weapons expanded beyond the Balkan-Carpathian early-agricultural area: cross-shaped mace-heads and ‘scepters shaped as horse heads’ were found in the plains all the way to Fore-Caucasus and the Volga region [43; 44]. In respect of the ‘scepters’ we could suppose that they not only served as power attributes [45], but, in the first place, were a part of asymmetrical clubs. Both rough treatment of the ‘scepters’ back part, and a cusp in their upper part indicate this: this is how a ‘scepter’ could be put into a hole in the wooden handle and additionally fixed with a cord or a leather band.

In the same way metal, bone or flinty elements could be inserted into the wooden handle. Chalcolithic bone and copper ‘daggers’⁵ could also have served as such inserts. Some ethnographic varieties of assault cudgels, such as Iroquois *deer-horn war-clubs* had similar inserted blades [48, p. 21, Plate V, 57, 58]. In the Bronze Age — in the 2nd millennium B. C. — similarly constructed ‘battle axes’ became widely spread in the whole of Europe [49].

⁴ It is remarkable that many copper axes do not have any traces of hammering the blade and visible signs of usage, however there is no need to consider such weapons as ‘ceremonial symbols’ [42] — they can still be used as effective and prestige assault weapons.

⁵ This does not exclude their use as daggers. Daggers made of flint blades were widely spread in the European Eneolithic, they were identified traceologically [46; 47].

However the majority of characters from Stubline were, apparently, armed with wooden clubs, the most spread type of weapons of archaic societies. Those were widely used in prehistorical Europe: a whole collection of wooden clubs has been recently discovered during the excavation of a battle field dating back to the Bronze Age in the Tollense river valley in Northern Germany that occurred circa 1200 B. C. [50]. A wooden club was an attribute of one of the leading heroes of Greek mythology, Heracles.

Wide expansion of crush weapons poses a question whether in the Copper Age and the Neolithic age there were helmets, armour and shields made of organic materials, and so not surviving till our time. Such wooden, woven and leather armour is well-known through ethnographic collections from different parts of the world. Were the described figurines supplemented with additional details made of organic materials? This could explain their slipshod making.

Against the background of numerous traces of military conflicts and finds of weapons, evidence in the form of the Neolithic and Copper Age artworks that would clearly demonstrate characters related to this sphere is comparatively scarce.

The most expressive collection — big figurines (20–30 cm tall, sometimes hollow) depicting sitting men — comes from the digs of the settlements of the late Neolithic Tisza culture, that developed based on Balkan traditions in the Tisza river basin in Eastern Hungary in the first half of the 5th millennium B. C. Among those, the most famous is ‘God with a Sickle’ from Szegvár-Tűzköves (fig. 6) [51]. Besides a bracelet and a belt, emphasising the character’s status, a bended cudgel or a metal sickle-shaped weapon clutched in his right hand serves as the main attribute (a similar metal object over 0,5 m long was accidentally found near Lake Balaton) [52, p. 354, fig. 215]. In the same settlement, similar sculptures were found, one of them together with an axe model (fig. 7) [53, p. 56, fig. 15, 16; 54]. Fragments of lookalike figurines were also found in other Tisza settlements. The height of the sculpture or a shaped vessel from Vesto Magor, according to one reconstruction, could reach 80 cm [55, p. 97–9, fig. 7, 8, 9]. Tisza sculptures, most probably, did not depict abstract gods (Cronos, as János Makkay believed) [51], but rather more specific characters: ancestors of lineage groups, lineage chiefs, leaders who often turn into folklore and mythology characters with time. Alongside male ones, female characters also exist. But these sculptures and anthropomorphic vessels are, likely, a local thing, because there are no direct analogies in the late Neolithic and early Eneolithic Balkan-Carpathian cultures.

Separate male figurines are present also in the Balkan-Lower Danube region cultures — Vinča and Gumelnița — however their attribution and iconography require further elaboration. By contrast, a rather expressive collection of male figurines comes from the Cucuteni-Trypillia area. Those are distinctly attributed by a belt and a shoulder belt (fig. 8) [56]. Sitting or standing male figurines with a belt and a baldric constitute sets together with female ones [57; 1, p. 190–1].

There are no armed figurines among those. However the fact draws attention that in the whole area of early-agricultural Balkan-Carpathian cultures there are numerous small clay models of copper or stone axes [58; 59]⁶. One could consider them children’s toys (following Polish researcher T. Chmielewski) [59, p. 50–5], but these could also have been part of installations with figurines from perished organic materials, similar to the Tisza culture sculpture — the abovementioned statuette from Szegvár-Tűzköves (fig. 7) where,

⁶ The tradition of making terracotta axe models remained in the Balkans in the Early Bronze Age too. N. Ya. Merpert even assumed a special ‘axe cult’ existed [60].



Fig. 6. "God with a sickle" from Szegvár Tűzköves, Tisza culture (by Makkay 1964)



Fig. 7. Figurine with an ax model from Szegvár Tűzköves, Tisza culture (photo by A. Behr-Glinka)



Fig. 8. Male and female figures from the set. Dumești, Romania, Cucuteni-Tripolye culture (by Monah 1997)

according to the reconstruction, the axe was attached with a wooden handle, same as with Stubline figurines.

Thus, a Copper Age warrior 'portrait' does not look expressive enough. Among finds of anthropomorphic figurines, female statuettes prevail, and figurine sets are mostly directly related to meaning fields not associated with war. This could be explained with various reasons: small plastics association with home and home production — the area of female labour, matrilineal structure, etc. This question has not been resolved yet. However we cannot expect mass finds of any decorative art objects reflecting military activity of Europe's early farmers. Here we can cite an example of Minoan art, where, judging by palace frescoes and small figurines, female images are also the central ones. As Judith Weingarten, a researcher of Minoan culture, noted, its art somewhat resembles 17th century Dutch art — the 'Golden Age' of Dutch painting when violent wars frequent during that age were almost not represented in art work [61].

Military Unions in the Structure of Neolithic and Eneolithic European Societies

One of the fruitful trends in contemporary art studies is the social history of art [62]. Through discovering the dialectics of interconnections between the society, its structure, its ecology and development characteristics, and the imagery in its art, one can more comprehensively expose the aspects of artworks interpretation and present the society itself.

Based on archaeological materials, European Neolithic and Eneolithic societies form a rather non-homogeneous picture. On the one hand, there are societies with clearly distinctive differences in groups statuses. So, social hierarchy can be expressed in various burial ground materials like in the famous Varna Necropolis in Bulgaria, where only several burials out of almost 300 (<0.5%) had sets of gold adornments. The structure of settlements and the patterns of material distribution in their different parts can also indicate social hierarchy. Like, for example, in Polgár-Csőszhalom in Hungary, where a fortified hillfort dominates the surrounding settlement or, possibly, in Parța in Romania, where a similar structure was found (a fortified part and surrounding buildings) [63, p. 237–9].

On the other hand, alongside those different societies exist, where status hierarchy cannot be traced clearly enough, like, for example, in Cucuteni–Trypillia. Here there are no distinctive clusters in the settlement structure that would indicate connection with the elite. Settlements either had a radial layout formed by dwellings that were built in circles, or consisted of several groups of buildings. And if any defense structures were built, e. g. ditches and ramparts, they surrounded the entire settlement rather than its part. There is also no significant difference in the buildings inventory [63, p. 240–1].

So, what was the structure of the society that had a settlement in Stubline?

Stubline settlement was part of a settlement cluster [64; 65], but at this stage it is hard to tell whether it was a system existing at the same time or a number of successive villages. Judging by lack of dense cultural layer deposits, this was not a longterm tell settlement with its higher status relative to other settlements in the area, but rather a site that existed a limited number of years within a fairly mobile system of territory development.

The settlement numbers about 200–250 buildings surrounded with a defensive ditch. In the course of its existence, the area of the settlement was expanded through enclosing

another area with a ditch that was later built-up⁷. It was in this part, close to the external ditch, where the building stood in which the statuettes were found [64, fig. 2].

Stubline layout reconstructions based on magnetometric survey are vary: it could be either formed by parallel rows of dwellings or their groups [66, p. 181, fig. 6; 65, p. 19–22, fig. 5, 6]. It is not possible to determine this without further excavations. However there is obviously no centre that could be linked to a dominant group in the social hierarchy system. Consequently, we can assume that the settlement population formed a relatively egalitarian society.

The researcher supposes that between 1,250 and 1,750 people could have lived in this settlement together [66, p. 180]⁸. Based on the assumed population count, the number of adult men accounts for 25–30%, or about 300–550 men. A squad of almost 50 warriors depicted in the composition amounts to a significant part of the possible military force of the settlement. Based on ethnographic and historical parallels, similar groups could have been formed under various principles.

One of them provides for a system of age classes, most extensively described in terms of East African cattle-breeding and farmer societies — Galla, Konso, Nuer, Maasai, etc. [69; 70]. The number of age classes may vary from 3 to 5–6. They include the entire population from children to the elderly. Among them, groups of young men and unmarried men of around 18–25 years old stand out that performed military duties. Inside those groups, there is an own hierarchy in the form of military chiefs and division into the senior and the junior. Transition from one age class into another one involves going through a coming-of-age ceremony [71].

We would like to draw an attention to another fact favouring this comparison. The mentioned for the purposes of comparison East African societies are characterised with a relatively high level of mobility. It is typical not only for the cattle-breeders, but also for early-agricultural groups that practice extensive farming with forced, due to resource exhaustion, periodic moving of settlements to a new place. Such settlement options, alongside more persistent ones (based on forming multi-layered long-term settlements), were widely practiced outside the vast area of early-agricultural societies of the Balkan-Carpathian circle during the Neolithic and Copper Age [63, p. 164–8].

Evidence of age classes and male societies is also traceable in European Antiquity. The role of male societies in Sparta was described by Yu. V. Andreev [72]. The issue of distinguishing age classes in Athens, Sparta and on Crete was studied by N. Kennell [73]. The Roman army structure with its division into *principes*, *hastati* and *triarii* possibly also reflects an archaic system of age classes [74]. Such organisation principles based on horizontal connections could have been widely spread in European prehistorical societies of the Neolithic era and the Bronze Age.

⁷ The mobile settlement system, as well as the layout of settlements, one-layered and relatively short-term, and in a number of cases with expansion by means of an additional ditch, resembles a picture characteristic for the Cucuteni-Tripolye culture.

⁸ Such settlement population is indeed acceptable for ethnographic farmer societies. For example, by L. Morgan's estimates based on testimony of European travellers, Iroquois 17th century settlements could number up to 3,000 people [33, p. 167–8]. Contemporary reconstructions do not contradict this data: the population of 15th–16th century fortified settlements rather densely built-up with 'long houses' is estimated at 1,500–2,000 people [67, p. 36–7]. Judging by Morgan's data, settlements with population of 800–1,500 people were also common among the Mississippi River basin and the British Columbia Indians, and the population of the largest pueblos reached 5,000 people [68, p. 46–7, 94].

Another type of alliances are 'male secret societies' and 'secret unions' known through ethnographic observations in Melanesia, tropical Africa and North America. Those also often were militarised or united warriors, serving both as protection against external threats and as means of regulating relations in societies [75, p. 136 and the next; 76, p. 158 and the next].

Both types of unions are similar in the way that they were relatively closed, and joining them usually required performing certain rituals — initiations. Besides, they are typical of societies where stable hierarchical structures have not been formed (apart from, maybe, 'secret unions' in West Africa that developed simultaneously with the existing states).

In Lieu of a Conclusion: Stubline Set in Scientific Discourse

As we have already mentioned, 'warrior' figurines from Stubline, that form a volumetric and spatial composition, are unique.

In whole, one could note several features of this composition at once:

- a) Characters' individualisation shown through the figurines' size and shape (clearly distinct in the largest statuette), typical weapons. Such features could indicate a certain status of the depicted characters — their belonging to an age stratum or position in the social hierarchy.
- b) Grouping of figurines into proportional groups that compose a single military squad.

What function could such set have performed, being placed on a platform at the back of the house? The author has already raised this question in relation to Cucuteni—Tripolye statuette sets [57]. We can make several assumptions.

First, that could have been a set used in initiations, when in the course of the ritual the initiated was shown a model of the group he was entering.

Second, that could have been a tactical game based on modeling a warrior squad forming-up — with disposition that would clearly demonstrate the roles of the certain characters and their groups in a specific operation. Such interpretation option does not exclude the first one.

Third, those could have been votive offerings — dedication images used in various cult activities, including planned or held military and other events.

Mobility of the figurines, apparently, excludes their commemorative function — one of the main ones in monumental sculpture and painting, easel painting. This is the key difference from Dutch and other variations of a group portrait: as distinct from a static image depicted on canvas, in fresco or a sculptural group, the Stubline 'mise-en-scene' is closer to a Role-play where the position of each character can be changed at any time.

D. Bailey, American researcher, believes that the interpretation of the Stubline composition as an 'unambiguously symbolic representation of individuals (figurine) within a given community (composition)', initially suggested by the excavation author Adam Crnobrnja [5, p. 140], is no more than one of the ways of 'anecdotal explanation' of ancient clay figurines. This opinion is based on polysemy of the possible functions of the figurines [78, p. 826–7]. However here D. Bailey cites as an example the criticism of popular 'paleomythological' interpretations of early-agricultural clay figurines in the sense of fertility cults, matriarchate and goddess cults that are based solely on an *a priori* thesis

that those were the main ones in agricultural societies [78, p. 829–33]. Insufficiency of such ‘proof’ is obvious and has been mentioned above. It is due to this reason that studies in the area of interpreting prehistoric art would often turn into ‘retrospective guessing’ based on arbitrary choice of basic premises [79, p. 210]. But then, by challenging even the obvious fact, D. Bailey shifts the study of prehistoric clay art from looking for its meaning to studies on perception of artworks in contemporary arts and crafts [78, p. 839–44]. Is such approach truly justified?

To my mind, it is not an adequate one: instead of travelling to the ‘described past’ [80] presented in speculative at heart ‘paleomythological’ reconstructions, in cases similar to Stubline where the finds context reconstruction is possible, iconographic method is applicable that is the basis for contemporary study of art [81]. Together with archaeological reconstructions and adequate use of ethnographic analogies, it makes it possible to discover those actually existing facts and events that belong to the culture of the remote past which ‘has already happened, and each fact relating to it has happened’ [79, p. 210]. Each new find becomes another step to its further understanding.

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**«Групповой портрет» раннеземледельческой эпохи:
набор статуэток культуры Винча из Стублине (Сербия)
в контексте обществ неолита — медного века Европы**

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Одно из плодотворных направлений в современном искусствознании — социальная история искусства. Интерпретировать памятники искусства дописьменных культур возможно через раскрытие взаимосвязей между социумом, особенностями его экологии и отражающими его образами. Европейские общества эпох неолита и энеолита (VII–III тыс. до н.э.) разнообразны по структуре: от иерархических до относительно однородных. Именно в эту эпоху войны становятся одним из способов производства, порождая соответствующие социальные институты. Изобразительные памятники, которые бы наглядно демонстрировали персонажей, относящихся к сфере войны, исключительно редки. Важное значение имеет находка набора статуэток на поселении культуры Винча D в Стублине (Сербия). Набор включает 43 глиняные фигурки, вместе с которыми найдены 7 моделей топоров и 2 миниатюрные булавы. Статуэтки образовывали группы из 10 — 6 — 6 — 6 — 3 — 3 — 3 персонажей. В центральной группе находилась одна статуэтка крупнее остальных (Crnobrnja 2011). Таким образом, перед нами изображение отряда вооруженных мужчин-воинов, объединенного вокруг лидера. Статуэтки изготовлены в виде конусов, что позволяет их расставлять на плоской поверхности. Этот набор уникален. Грубость изготовления фигурок указывает на то, что аналогичные наборы могли делаться для конкретного действия из необожженной глины или других нестойких материалов и в большинстве своем не сохранились. Отряд, состоящий из почти полусотни воинов, который изображала композиция из Стублине, мог представлять собой отдельную группу бойцов, возглавляемую военным вождем. Исходя из этнографических параллелей, аналогичные группы могли образовываться на основе системы возрастных классов. Вполне вероятно, что набор фигурок из Стублине играл какую-то роль в инициациях или служил для наглядной

демонстрации места членов объединения в «тактической игре» (параллельно с распределением ролей, что не исключает того, что такая расстановка могла быть сделана в процессе культовой практики).

Ключевые слова: интерпретация искусства, энеолит, культура Винча, антропоморфные статуэтки, система возрастных классов.

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