

THE SEATED FIGURINES BELONGING TO VĂDASTRA CULTURE*

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Abstract: Archaeological researches carried out over time in the reference sites belonging to the Vădastra civilization in Oltenia led to the discovery of a significant number of figurines. In the present article, there are to be presented six figurines in the sitting position, belonging to Vădastra culture, from Oltenia, which were discovered in the settlements from Hotărani, *La Turn* point, and Vlădila, both in the Olt County. Most researchers believe that anthropomorphic plastic representations are related to the cult of fertility and fecundity.

Keywords: Neolithic, Vădastra, sitting figurines, significance, archaeological researches.

Of the many categories of artifacts discovered during the archaeological research carried out over time in the sites of the Vădastra culture from Oltenia¹, the plastic art

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¹ C. Mateescu, *Săpături de salvare și cercetări arheologice la Vădastra și în împrejurimi*, SCIV, VI, 3–4, 1955, pp. 447–455; Idem, *Săpăturile arheologice de la Crușovu*, MCA, III, 1957, pp. 103–114; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra*, MCA, VI, 1959, pp. 107–115; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra*, MCA, VII, 1960, p. 57–62; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra*, MCA, VIII, 1962, pp. 187–192; Idem, *Contribution à l'étude de la civilisation de Vădastra Phase Vădastra II*, Atti del VI Congresso internazionale delle scienze preistoriche e protoistoriche, II, sezoni I–IV, Italy, Roma, 29 agosto–3 settembre 1962, vol. 2 pp. 258–263; Idem, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra (1960–1966)*, MCA, IX, 1970, pp. 67–75; Idem, *Centenarul săpăturilor arheologice de la Vădastra*, SCIV, 22, 4, 1971, pp. 643–650; Corneliu Mateescu, *Săpături arheologice la Vădastra*, MCA, X, 1973, pp. 19–23; Idem, *Remarks on cattle breeding and agriculture in the middle and late Neolithic on the lower Danube*, Dacia NS, 19, 1975, pp. 13–18; Idem, *Contribution to the study of the Neolithic dwellings in Romania: a dwelling of the second phase of Vădastra Culture (Middle Neolithic)*, Dacia NS, 22, 1978, pp. 13–18.; D. Berciu, *Arheologia preistorică a Olteniei*, Arhivele Olteniei, XVIII (101–103), 1939, pp. 37–49; Idem, *Contribuții la problemele neoliticului în România în lumina noilor cercetări*, Bucharest, Academy Publishing House, București, 1961; Idem, *Zorile istoriei în Carpați și la Dunăre*, Bucharest, Scientific Publishing House, București, 1966; M. Nica, *Asupra originii și dezvoltării culturii Vădastra de la Fărcașele (jud. Olt)*, "Historica", I, 1970, pp. 31–51;

occupies a special place, both by the problems it brings forward, and by its complexity. The discoveries revealed a number of several hundred representations belonging to the mentioned culture, mostly feminine, the masculine ones being a rarity (Map 1). The problem of the Neolithic plastic art has generated, over time, many discussions on its significance, but also on the typology.

In terms of significance, most researchers believe that the figurines are related to the cult of fertility and fecundity. D. W. Bailey interpreted the plastic representations as a means of affirming individual and group identity², the sacred representing a constituent element of the individual and the collective consciousness. The significance of neo-Eneolithic anthropomorphic plastic art, particularly rich, suggests an intense religious life, the author managing to identify the elements that lead to the interpretation of the figurines as “a form of affirmation of the individual and group identity”³.

There ought to be also mentioned, in this context, the statement of the researcher Radian Romus Andreescu regarding the significance of Gumelița anthropomorphic plastic representations: “It would be outside the historical evidence for this world not to have had its share of spiritual life, its sacred part, a regularity encountered in the societies of all times and in the known spaces”⁴. In our opinion, Vădastra civilization was no exception in this respect either.

We are faced with cultural archetypes, centered on female deities, a religious context in which the Great Goddess or The Great Mother was worshipped⁵. It is to be assumed that there was, in those times, a belief system in which the magic probably had an important role, anthropomorphic figurines and vessels being used in certain practices. Female statuettes become symbols of fecundity, and fertility, and it was assumed that, given their symbolism, “they are used as props in the sympathetic magic rituals” ... a true “bearer of the mysteries of fecundity and fertility”⁶. An example could also be the “ancestral religious gestures” on the Gumelnița cult vessels, which emphasize the connection between the anthropomorphic representations and the religious life of the respective communities⁷.

Idem, *Evoluția culturii Vădastra pe baza descoperirilor de la Hotărani-Fărcașele (Jud.Olt)*, “Historica”, II, 1971, pp. 5–33.

² D. W. Bailey, *Reading prehistoric figurines as individuals*, in *World Archaeology*, 25 (3), 1994, p. 329; Idem, *Balkan Prehistory, Exclusion, Incorporation and Identity*, Routledge, London, 2000, p. 102.

³ D. W. Bailey, *Reading prehistoric figurines as individuals*, in *World archaeology*, 25 (3), 1994, p. 329.

⁴ Radian-Romus Andreescu, *Plastica antropomorfă gumelnițeană. Analiză Primară*, The National Museum of Romanian History, Bucharest, 2002, p. 87.

⁵ M. Sfériades, *The European Neolithisation Process*, in „Poročilo”, Ljubljana, 21, 1993, pp. 137–162; E. Comșa, *Figurinele antropomorfe din epoca neolitică pe teritoriul României*, Bucharest, 1995; D. Monah, *Organizarea socială, religia și arta în epoca neo-eneolitică*, in *Istoria românilor vol. I, Moștenirea timpurilor îndepărtate* (coord. M. Petrescu-Dimbovița, Al. Vulpe), Bucharest, 2010, pp. 161–188.

⁶ D. Monah, *Plastica antropomorfă a culturii Cucuteni-Tripolie*, The Museum of History, Piatra Neamț, 1997, pp. 87–89.

⁷ V. Voinea, *Gesturi și semnificații în arta gumelnițeană*, în *Cultură și civilizație la Dunărea de Jos*, XXII, 2005, pp. 383–398.

Beliefs about the fecundity and fertility of women, animals and soil are found both in Southeast Europe and Anatolia⁸ demonstrating the existence of a magical-religious system. The Great Goddess or Mother, generating everything that is alive, is symbolized by the use of decorative motifs, considered anthropomorphizing symbols (angular, linear signs, meanders, circles).

The presence in the clay from which the statuettes were to be modeled of traces of seeds or chaff⁹ was correlated with the practice of magical-religious rituals that symbolize “the sowing”. We must emphasize that one of the figurines presented by us, the one that is kept at the Museum of Romanăți, in Caracal, (inventory no. 10839), discovered in Hotărani, *La Turn* point, Sk. 2/2, contains chaff in the clay from which it was made.

In Vădrasta plastic art, there are known several types of representations, among which there ought to be mentioned figurines, statuary groups, large anthropomorphic statuettes, miniature masks, etc.¹⁰. A criterion for the typological framing of the discovered figurines was the one that related to their position, respectively the upright position (standing), or the sitting one.

In the present article, there are to be presented six figurines in the sitting position, belonging to Vădastra culture, from Oltenia, which were discovered by M. Nica in the settlements from Hotărani, *La Turn* point, and Vlădila, both in the Olt County. The stratigraphic context in which the Neolithic figurines that are subjected to our analysis were discovered, allows us to frame them in the second phase of Vădrasta culture.

Of the totality of the figurines of Vădastra culture, reaching a few hundred, the figures in the sitting position, which in Nica's opinion appear in the final stages of the culture, are only seven. One of these is very fragmentary and poorly preserved, the piece not being available¹¹. For this reason, in the present material, there are presented six female figurines, in a sitting position, belonging to Vădastra culture, from Oltenia.

The analyzed figurines do not have a rich décor, except for some incised lines that separate the anatomical elements. However, there are also encountered two fragmentary decorated pieces, discovered at Hotărani. On one of them (Sk. 1/2), it can be noticed an incised spiral décor, and, on the second one that represents a bust, there is a décor with incisions and excisions figuring, perhaps, the clothing¹² (Sk. 4).

Regarding the way in which they were modeled, we can note that it is generally schematical, only one of them having evidenced breasts (Sk. 2/2). One of the figurines

⁸ J. Cauvin, *Naissance des divinités. Naissance de l'agriculture: la Révolution des symboles au Néolithique*, Paris, 1994, pp. 51–52.

⁹ O. Höfmann, *Die menschengestaltige Figuralplastik der südost-europäischen Jungsteinzeit und Steinkupferzeit*, Hildesheim, 1968, p. 135.

¹⁰ Marin Nica, *Reprezentările antropomorfe în cultura Vădastra descoperite în așezările neolitice de la Hotărani-Fărcașele, județul Olt*, in “Oltenia. Studii și comunicări”, II, 1980, pp. 27–57.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 47, fig. 7a, 7b.

¹² M. Nica, *op. cit.*, fig. 13 / 5a, 5b.

from Vlădila, schematically made, is preserved from the middle down only, having the anatomical parts separated by incised lines (Sk. 3). Modeled very schematically, there is another undecorated figurine, as well discovered in Vlădila (Sk. 2/1). Last but not least, there are two other fragmentary figurines, discovered in Hotărani. The first of these is a small fragment, basically a bent leg¹³ (Sk. 1/1), and the second, a bust decorated with incisions and excisions, probably representing the clothing¹⁴ (Sk. 4).

In general, the figures in the sitting position are accompanied by a small chair and have been discovered in the vast majority of the neo-Eneolithic cultures in the Balkan area. In our case, we do not know, in Vădastra culture, such a representation of a chair. From this perspective, it is difficult to interpret their significance. The study of the plastic art on large areas, as well as new archaeological researches, could lead to the drawing of more pertinent conclusions regarding the mentioned plastic category.

The catalogue of seated figurines belonging to the Vădastra culture:

1. Hotărani *La Turn*, Olt County. Description: Figurine foot, represented seated. It was moulded with good-quality clay. It is decorated with incised lines (Sk. 1/1).
Dimensions: (height, width): 2x2.5 cm.
Cultural framing: Vădastra Culture.
Preservation place: Museum of Oltenia, Craiova.
Inventory number: 4963
Bibliography: Marin Nica, *Reprezentările antropomorfe în cultura Vădastra descoperite în așezările neolitice de la Hotărani-Fărcașele, județul Olt*, in "Oltenia. Studii și comunicări", II, 1980, fig. 9/7 a-b.
2. Hotărani *La Turn*, Olt County. Description: Fragment of anthropomorph statuette, a part of the body and of the inferior side, moulded seated. No anatomic detail. The head, the arms and the legs are broken. The piece has an incised décor, spirals and meanders, in oblique position (Sk. 1/2).
Dimensions: (height, width): 5x2, 5 cm.
Cultural framing: Vădastra Culture.
Preservation place: Museum of Oltenia, Craiova.
Inventory number: 4965
Bibliography: Marin Nica, *Reprezentările antropomorfe în cultura Vădastra descoperite în așezările neolitice de la Hotărani-Fărcașele, județul Olt*, in "Oltenia. Studii și comunicări", II, 1980, fig. 9/8 a-b.
3. Vlădila, Olt County. Description: Fragmentary figurine, preserved from the middle down, probably feminine, it was *moulded seated*. The moulding clay is

¹³ M. Nica, *op. cit.*, fig. 9/7a, b.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, fig. 13 / 5a, 5b.

fine, of red-brick colour. The statuette has the following anatomic elements figured: thickened abdomen, separated from the inferior side through an incised line; the legs, as well separated through an incised line, the buttocks and the hips are slightly accentuated. The piece is not decorated (Sk. 2/1).

Dimensions: (height, width): 2, 5x2 cm.

Cultural framing: Vădastra Culture.

Preservation place: Museum of Romanăți, Caracal.

Inventory number: 10682

Bibliography: Sabin Popovici, *Plastica culturii Vădastra de pe valea Oltului Inferior*, in "Muzeul Oltului", Slatina, 4, 2014, Pl. 5/2.

4. Hotărani *La Turn*, Olt County. Description: Moulded with some stylised anatomic elements, it is a figurine similar to the precedent one. It is fragmentary. The moulding clay is fine, red-brick coloured. The head and an arm are broken. The breasts and the abdomen are strongly evidenced. The legs and a hand are represented sketchily. The arm, stretched laterally, has a perforation. Most probably, for the figurine to be hung. The piece is not decorated, with the exception of two incisions, each of them separating certain anatomic elements (Sk. 2/2).

Dimensions: (height, width): 5x2 cm.

Cultural framing: Vădastra Culture.

Preservation place: Museum of Romanăți, Caracal.

Inventory number: 10939

Bibliography: Sabin Popovici, *Plastica culturii Vădastra de pe valea Oltului Inferior*, in "Muzeul Oltului"- Slatina, 4, 2014, Pl. 5/3.

5. Vlădila, Olt County. Description: Figurine, probably feminine, depicted *seated*. The piece is preserved from the middle upwards. It was made schematically, without a clear delimitation of the anatomic elements. It is not decorated. The back is straight. The arms are stretched laterally, like two stumps. The legs, the abdomen and the back of the figurine are separated parallel incised lines (Sk. 3). Dimensions: (height, width): 4, 5x2, 5 cm.

Cultural framing: Vădastra Culture.

Preservation place: Museum of Romanăți, Caracal.

Inventory number: No inventory number.

Bibliography: Sabin Popovici, *Plastica culturii Vădastra de pe valea Oltului Inferior*, in "Muzeul Oltului"- Slatina, 4, 2014, Pl. 5/1.

6. Hotărani *La Turn*, Olt County. Description: Probably feminine figurine, represented seated. The piece is a fragment, only the bust, with broken head,

legs and arms, probably since the old times. It has an incised décor, representing, perhaps, items of clothing (Sk. 4). Dimensions: (height, width): 7 x 3, 5 cm.

Cultural framing: Vădastra Culture.

Preservation place: Museum of Oltenia, Craiova.

Inventory number: 306

Bibliography: Marin Nica, *Reprezentările antropomorfe în cultura Vădastra descoperite în așezările neolitice de la Hotărani-Fărcașele, județul Olt*, in "Oltenia. Studii și comunicări", II, 1980, fig. 13/5a, 5b

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Sk. 3: 1. Vlădila – female anthropomorphic figurine, in a sitting position- Vădastra culture.

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Map 1. Map of Vădastra culture sites where figurines were discovered.



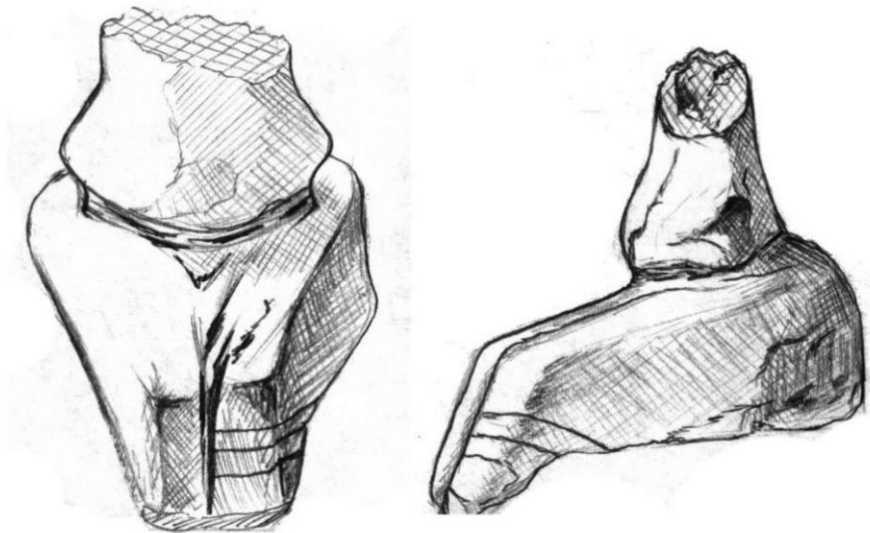
Sk. 1: 1, 2. Hotărani, *La Turn* – female anthropomorphic figurines, in a sitting position – Vădastra culture (photo Sabin Popovici, drawings taken after Nica 1980, fig. 9 / 7,8)



Sk. 2: 1, 2. Vlădila, Hotărani, *La Turn*; female anthropomorphic figurines, in a sitting position – Vădastra culture (photo Sabin Popovici, the drawings were made by Mariana Șerbănescu, Caracal, Olt).



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Sk. 3: 1. Vladila – female anthropomorphic figurine, in a sitting position – Vādastra culture.



Sk. 4: 1. Hotărani, *La Turn* – female anthropomorphic figurine, in a sitting position – Vădastra culture (photo and drawings by Viorel Chirea, Caracal, Olt).

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