

VESSELS WITH ZOOMORPHIC PAINTED DECORATION IN THE COLLECTIONS OF THE BOTOȘANI COUNTY MUSEUM

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Abstract: The aim of this study is to review and discuss key discoveries from the Botoșani County Museum collection, focusing specially on zoomorphic (animal) depictions. The study explores the origins of these unique vessels, with particular attention to their context within previously known finds. The zoomorphic vessels raise questions about recurring themes and potential symbolic associations. These artefacts, which are recent discoveries from old collections, are introduced to the literature, offering new insights and images.

The vessels were found in different locations in Botoșani County, Romania: Ștefănești – Stâncă Doamnei (B1 phase of the Cucuteni Culture) and Ștefănești – Stârcea (B2 phase of the same culture), both excavated in 1974 by Anton Nițu and Paul Șadurschi. While some of these discoveries have been published, key details remain missing from the reports. One vessel was discovered at Trușești – Țuguieța, in a Cucuteni B house (Dwelling XXXIX), two others come from Hănești – La Iaz and one big vessel has unknown origin, but it can be assigned to the Cucuteni B2 phase.

The study discusses interpretations of the zoomorphic decorations on ceramics from the Cucuteni-Trypillia culture, suggesting that these images may depict mythical beings or narratives, possibly arranged in sequential scenes. It is believed that the representations of carnivores or snakes may have had an apotropaic (protective) function, while birds, often associated with other animals, could symbolise events or moments of a mythical past.

Cuvinte-cheie: cultura Cucuteni-Tripolie, zoomorf, reprezentări pictate, sens simbolic

Rezumat: Scopul acestui studiu este de a trece în revistă și de a discuta unele descoperiri-cheie aflate în colecțiile Muzeului Județean Botoșani, concentrându-ne, în special, pe cele cu reprezentări zoomorfe pictate. Studiul explorează originile acestor vase unice, acordând o atenție deosebită contextului lor în cadrul descoperirilor cunoscute anterior. Vasele zoomorfe ridică întrebări despre temele recurente și potențialele asocieri simbolice ale decorurilor respective. Aceste artefacte, recent identificate în colecții vechi, sunt introduse în literatură, oferind noi imagini și perspective.

Vasele au fost descoperite în diverse locații din județul Botoșani, România: Ștefănești – Stâncă Doamnei (faza B1 a culturii Cucuteni) și Ștefănești – Stârcea (faza B2 a aceleiași culturi), ambele cercetate în anul 1974 de către Anton Nițu și Paul Șadurschi. Deși unele dintre aceste descoperiri au fost publicate, unele detalii-cheie lipsesc din rapoarte. Un vas a fost descoperit la Trușești – Țuguieța, într-o locuință Cucuteni B (locuința XXXIX), altele două la Hănești – La Iaz, iar un vas mare are originea necunoscută, dar poate fi încadrat în faza Cucuteni B2.

Studiul discută despre interpretările date decorurilor zoomorfe prezente pe ceramica culturii Cucuteni-Tripolie, sugerând că aceste imagini pot înfățișa ființe sau narațiuni mitice, eventual aranjate ca scene secvențiale. Se crede că reprezentările carnivore sau șerpilor ar fi avut o funcție apotropaică (de protecție), în timp ce păsările, adesea asociate cu alte animale, ar putea simboliza evenimente sau momente dintr-un trecut mitic.

The purpose of this study¹ is to analyse and discuss several ceramic vessels and fragments, located in the collection of the Botoșani County Museum, focusing mainly on the vessels with painted zoomorphic representations. The vessels with zoomorphic decoration raise questions regarding the themes represented, the animals preferred by the Cucuteni potters, as well as their possible symbolic associations and meanings. These artifacts, discovered five decades ago, some of which were already known, are introduced in the literature, offering new perspectives and images updated according to current standards. Our study also aims to explore the position of the animals on these unique vessels, paying special attention to the context of the discoveries.

Most of the vessels discussed here were discovered at two sites in Botoșani County: Ștefănești – Stâncă Doamnei (phase B1 of the Cucuteni culture) and Ștefănești – Stârcea (phase B2 of the same culture), both investigated in 1974 by archaeologists Anton Nițu (Institute of Archaeology in Iași) and Paul Șadurschi (Botoșani County Museum). Although some of these discoveries have been published, some important details about them are missing from the reports. Also, in general, the authors of the excavations avoided discussing and interpreting the zoomorphic representations on the Cucuteni ceramics.

Another case is, in fact, a re-evaluation of the decoration on a vessel discovered in the 1950s at Trușești – Țuguieța, Botoșani County. We also discuss two vessels found in 1960 at the Hănești – La Iaz site (the official name of the site is Slobozia Hănești – La Grajduri) and an unpublished vessel with zoomorphic decoration, part of the old collections of the Săveni Archaeological Museum.

¹ A less detailed version of this paper has been published in Romanian in: S.-C. Enea, F.-A. Tencariu, A. Asăndulesei, C.-C. Lazanu (eds.), *O inimă dedicată timpurilor străvechi. Profesorul Dumitru Boghian la 70 de ani*, 2025.