

## DOUBLE-SIDED ZOOMORPHIC FIGURINES FROM TELL YUNATSITE

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**Abstract:** The term “amphisbaena” was introduced in the archaeological literature by V. Balabina. She used it in her classification of the zoomorphs from the Cucuteni-Tripolie in order to mark a specific type of figurines – those with one body and two heads at opposite ends. Zoomorphic amphisbaenas have been found in Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites in Central and Southeastern Europe. There are two main variations – cylindrical body with animal heads or conical protrusions and four-legged figurines. Both variations sometimes have orifices. Amphisbaenas are known not only in the form of separate zoomorphic figurines but also in the form of amulets, figurines with receptacles, altars and vessel-lids. By now there are 15 fragmented zoomorphic amphisbaenas from the Late Chalcolithic layer of tell Yunatsite. It is possible that their number is larger but they are usually found halfbroken (with few exceptions) and thus assigned to the ordinary zoomorphic figurines. All of the specimens belong to the four-legged type and represent two subtypes: I – with realistically-modeled heads and ears (or horns); II subtype, with two variations – schematic figurines with conical protrusions-heads, with or without tails.

**Keywords:** figurines, zoomorphs, amphisbaenas.

There are particular artifacts among the numerous ceramic finds discovered at prehistoric sites, whose function or affiliation to a specific group of artifacts is difficult to define. The difficulties are often due to the fragmentary condition of the artifacts. Thus in the publications their function is often defined as unknown or related to ritual practices (a sphere in which real and irrational interlace). In other cases there are different interpretations of very similar finds. This is normal when non-utilitarian artifacts with schematic depiction are concerned. The lack of obvious practical use of these objects leaves the door open for various interpretations.

The above said is completely valid for a particular type of zoomorphic clay figurines from Chalcolithic sites in Bulgaria. These are artifacts with a single body and two heads at the opposite ends – realistically modeled or schematically marked by protrusions. In the publications these finds are called “objects of unknown purpose”, “stands for clay idols”, “zoomorphic figurines or chairs”, “chairs with bull’s heads”, “clay chairs”, “packsaddles”, “barriers”, “zoomorphic handles” (Миков 1961, обр. 19 а; Детев 1954, обр. 68; Мирчев, Златарски 1960, 19, обр. 38 б; Радунчева 1961, обр. 2, 3; Радунчева 1997, обр. 5; Тодорова и др. 1975, Т. 44: 5, 8; Лихардус, Фол, Гетов и др. 2001, фиг. 29: 1, обр. 13: 10; Чохаджиев

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1997, обр. 181: 5, обр. 188: 5). The authors usually list these figurines among the ritual artifacts without any further analysis of their function. The article of A. Raduncheva "About the Purpose of Some Chalcolithic Zoomorphic Clay Figurines" (Радунчева 1971) is an exception in the list. She studied two such finds from tell Kodzadermen and defined them as chairs with ox heads. The author analyzed the importance of ox and its cult in prehistoric societies. However, I should notice that in my opinion she had placed these figurines upside down which reflected her interpretation. Yet, it is possible that the two-horned zoomorphic heads represent schematic bulls' heads.

The term "amphisbaena" was introduced in the archaeological literature by V. Balabina. She used it in her classification of the zoomorphic figurines from the Cucuteni-Tripolie culture in order to define a specific type– the ones with a single body and two heads at opposite ends (Балабина 1998, 174-176). As the author noted, the term was "borrowed" by the medieval bestiaries continuing the ancient tradition. The name "amphisbaenas" is also used in the zoological taxonomy for a genus of lizards that can crawl with either their head or their tail to the front. In Greek amphisbaena means "moving in two directions" (from *amphis* – in both directions, and *baino* – walk, move).

Zoomorphic amphisbaenas have been found in Late Neolithic and Chalcolithic sites in Central and Southeastern Europe. There are two main variations – a cylindrical body with animal heads or conical protrusions and four-legged figurines. Both variations sometimes have openings. Amphisbaenas are known not only in the form of separate zoomorphic figurines but also in the form of amulets, figurines with receptacles, altars and vessel-lids (Балабина 1998, 175 with references).

By now there are 15 fragmented zoomorphic amphisbaenas from the Late Chalcolithic layer at tell Yunatsite<sup>1</sup>. It is possible that their number is larger but they are usually found half-broken (with few exceptions) and thus assigned to the ordinary zoomorphic figurines.

All of the artifacts belong to the four-legged type. As V. Balabina noted, the four-legged figurines differ by the shape of the head:

- with realistically modeled heads and ears (or horns);
- schematic figurines with conical protrusions-heads.

To the first type we may with discretion assign a half-preserved figurine from tell Yunatsite. The uniformly shaped cylindrical and quite disproportionately

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<sup>1</sup> Tell Yunatsite is situated in the western part of Upper Thrace, near the village of Yunatsite, Pazardzhik region, Bulgaria. It is a multi layer settlement and was inhabited during several millennia – from the Chalcolithic till the Late Middle ages. The tell was first excavated in 1939 by V. Mikov (Миков 1940) and since 1976 regular archaeological excavations were made there. The thickness of the layers is about 10 m and until now layer A (Iron age, Roman and Mediaeval periods) (Катинчаров, Мерперт и др. 1995), layer Б (17 Early Bronze age I-III levels) were excavated. The excavation of layer В (Chalcolithic) is in process.

In 2002 started the realization of a new Bulgarian-Greek scientific project. The director of the Bulgarian team are Dr. Yavor Boyadzhiev ( NAIM- BAS) and Stoilka Terzijska-Ignatova ( RMH – Pazardzhik), deputy head. The director of the Greek team is Dr. Yoanis Aslanis ( KERA-NHFR).

elongated body provides ground to suggest that the artifact belongs to the first type of amphisbaenas. The head is modeled by pinching, the muzzle is open, the legs are broken. There is a diagonal orifice.

All of the other figurines from tell Yunatsite belong to the second type – schematic figurines with conical protrusions-heads. There are two variants:

- without tails (fig. 1: 2-5);
- with horizontal conical protrusions – tails (fig. 1: 6-8; 2: 1-7).

In her classification V. Balabina described similar amphisbaenas as figurines with or without muzzle. In my opinion the horizontal protrusions (or knobs) more likely represent tails. This is attested by their position and shape. Thus, the amphisbaenas of the second variant of the second type are figurines with one body ending in both ends with conical protrusions-heads and protrusions-tails. In this variant there is also a difference in the position of the legs – horizontally extended (fig. 2: 3-5) or in normal standing position (fig. 1: 6-8; fig. 2: 1-2, 6-7). Zoomorphic amphisbaena of the second type have been found in Romania too (Marinescu-Bilcu, Ionescu 1968, Pl. XXI 8).

The zoomorphic amphisbaenas from tell Yunatsite are made of fine clay. Their surface is usually nicely smoothed. The dimensions of the complete artifacts vary between 4 and 8-9 cm. In some of the figurines the protrusions were modeled by drawing out of the body but in most of the cases they were additionally attached (which explains their lack in most of the finds).

By now this kind of figurines remains enigmatic. I disagree that they are models of chairs or beds, even if we assume that the protrusions represent zoomorphic arm-rests. The shape of the body – cylindrical, with oval cross-section – does not suggest their comfortable use for seating. Besides, in almost each Chalcolithic site clay models of chairs with normally modeled seats and backs have been found. It is quite possible that they represent real elements (probably wooden ones) of the interior of prehistoric houses.

Undoubtedly, the zoomorphic amphisbaenas were ritual objects with certain meaning and importance for the prehistoric people. The vision of fantastic animals with two heads and two tails in opposite directions originated from complex mythological concepts. The concept of opposed and at the same time mutually connected images could have symbolized directions (East-West = sunrise-sunset) as well as the dual nature of things – male and female, good-bad, dark-light, etc. With respect to this it should be noticed that one of the figurines from tell Yunatsite has indications for being of male sex (fig. 2: 5). Unfortunately it is half-preserved so it is not possible to say whether it was unisexual or dual-sexual.

Similar double-sided images (sometimes of both sexes or of different species) existed not only in prehistory – like double-faced clay anthropomorphic figure from tell Starozagorski mineralni bani, double-sided bone figurine from tell Kazanlak, etc. (L'or de Thraces 2002, № 60, 89), but also in Antiquity and Medieval ages – in art, literature and heraldry (Средневековый бестиарий 1984; Борхес 1994, 7; Герасимов 1960). In the mythologies of many peoples two-headed creatures are in some cases fearful symbols of destruction whilst in others

they are guards of home and symbols of vigilance – one of the heads sleeps but the other is awake. In the Egyptian mythology two-headed lion embodies the gods of sunrise and sunset. Two lions standing in opposite directions and depicted with the solar disk symbolized past and future, yesterday and today. In many cases double-sided zoomorphic figurines (as well as anthropomorphic ones) were connected to house and fireplace (Лещаков 2003). In China similar beliefs are embodied in porcelain figurines of animals – the two Fu dogs are powerful symbols of protection. Placed at the window or in the middle of the house they prevent bad energies or people from entering the home. It is possible that zoomorphic amphisbaenas as well were regarded by prehistoric people as having magical powers and were thus placed in houses to protect them. These unusual syncretic images may have been also related to fetishism – respected as objects with supernatural powers, or to animism – as being personification of good (or bad?) spirits.

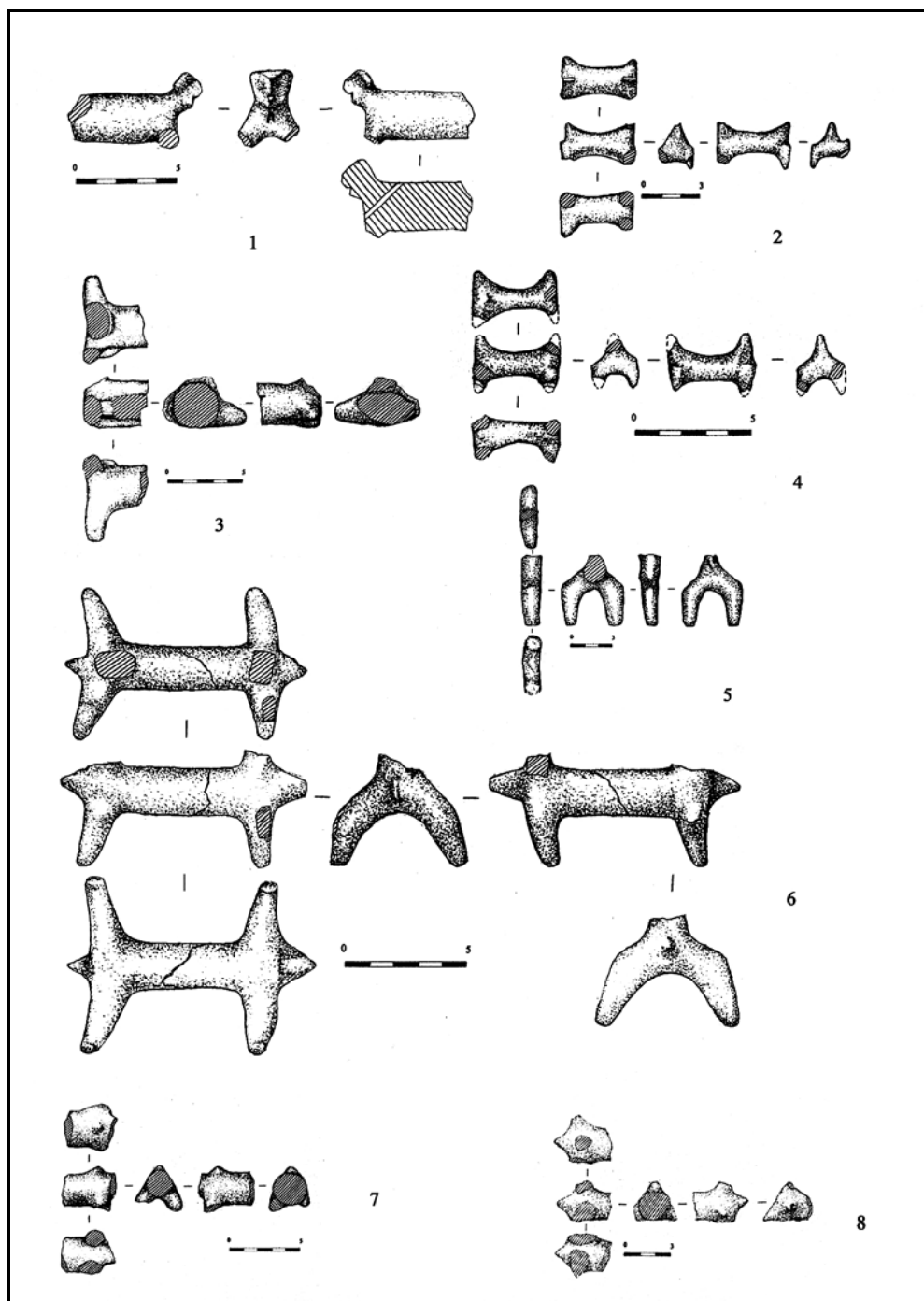
As I mentioned in the beginning, such figurines have been found in many Chalcolithic settlements in Bulgaria – Bikovo (Детев 1954), Zavet (Миков 1961), Sava (Мирчев, Златарски 1960), Kodzadermen (Радунчева 1971), Sedlare (Радунчева 1997), Drama (Лихардус, Фол, Гетов и др. 2001), Slatino (Чохаджиев 1997), Golyamo Delchevo (Тодорова и др. 1975), Azmashka tell (Калчев 2005, 52), Ruse (Чернаков 2005, обр. 3: 10, 11, 14а, 14б, обр. 4: 5а-б), etc.

By now the semantic code of the zoomorphic amphisbaenas remains non-deciphered but this is one of the challenges which the archaeological investigation offers us.

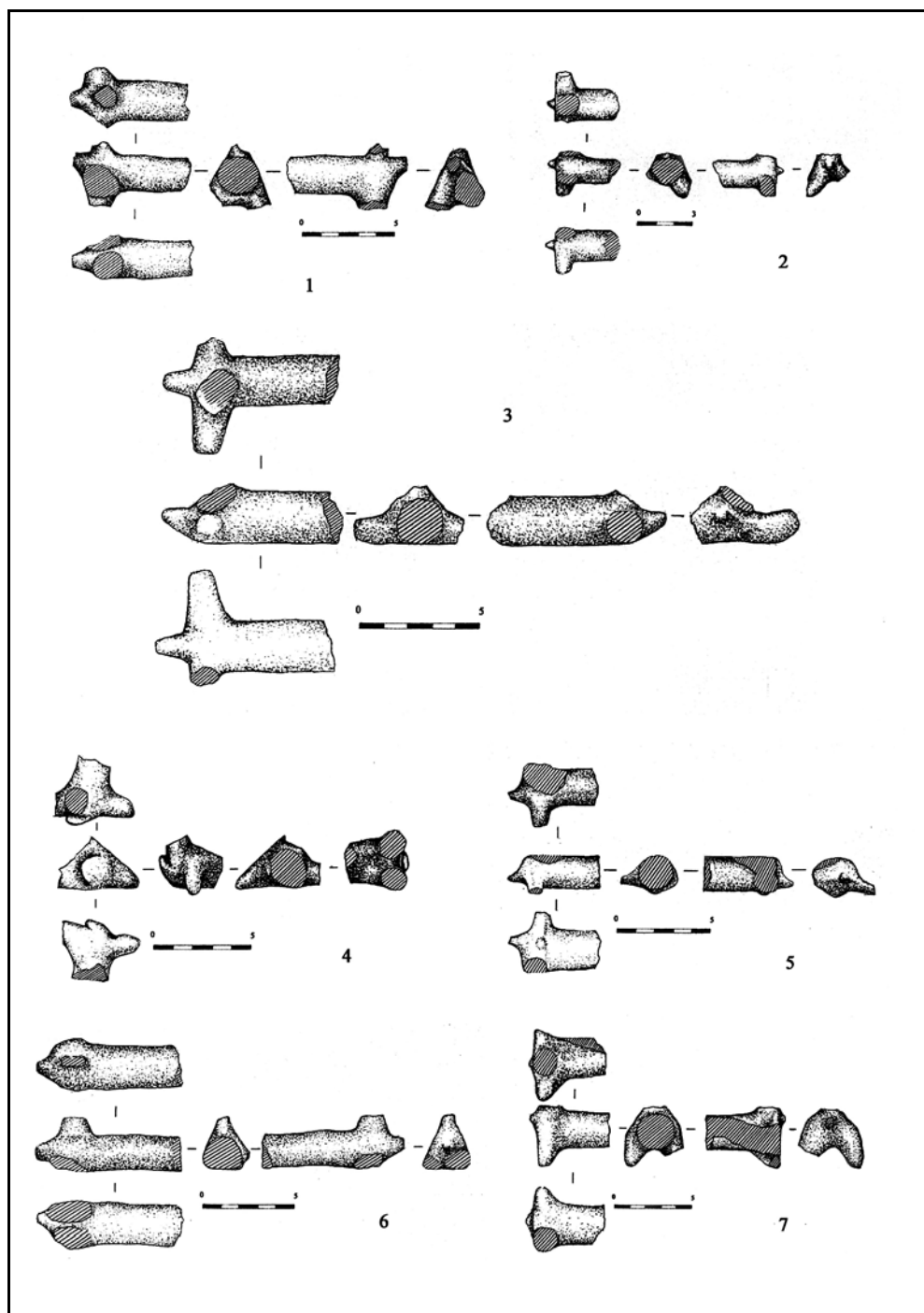
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**Fig. 1:** Zoomorphic amphisbaenas from Tell Yunatsite: 1- type I; 2-5 – type II, variant 1; 6-8 - type II, variant 2.



**Fig. 2:** Zoomorphic amphisbaenas from Tell Yunatsite: 1-7 - type II, variant 2.

