

Inscriptions and Images in the Geto-Dacian Domain

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Inscriptions and images have always been extremely valuable proofs in all attempts at reconstructing a true-to-life history. Yet, for a long period of time the number of epigraphs belonging to the Getic culture, as well as the number of representations on pottery, stone or metal has been - and still is - appreciated as modest if compared to that known in the Greek-Hellenistic, Roman cultures, and partially even in the Celtic one.

Relatively numerous discoveries of objects (Dumbrava-Ciurea, county of Iași, Barboși-Galați, Poiana-Galați, Bâta-Doamnei-Piatra Neamț etc.), most of them small in size, on which images and inscriptions were observed will lead to a partial change in the situation above. An important moment of our research is the beginning of an investigation on some vessels from Dumbrava, and especially the 15 small vessels (ranging between 1.5-5.2 cm), which were found in a circular arrangement (diameter 25 cm), together with a fibula and a fragment of a hand-made vessel (Pl. I)¹. While trying to copy images visible on a small vessel from the above mentioned archaeological site, we found out that it was entirely covered with images and inscriptions. Similar discoveries were made in connection with many miniature vessels and with a number of clay, stone and metal. We were also fortunate enough to find a few seals, thus we could conclusion on pot-stamping methods. The examination (by an adequate methodology) of these lately more numerous inscriptions will require a huge collective effort.

This paper will present: a) a proposal of classification for these objects; b) a number of images and inscriptions; c) the means of describing the ornaments and small inscriptions on a zoomorphic figurine; d) brief observations on ethnolinguistic aspects.

a) We proposed, for the above mentioned objects, a classification after the material they are made of, that is C - clay, S - stone or M - metal. As for the way of marking them, the material-initial is followed by the abbreviated name of the site where the object was discovered, plus the number of the object. For example: C Dmb 5 (Dmb = Dumbrava), S BD 3 (BD = Bâta Doamnei), or M Ba 7 (Ba = Barboși).

b) The selection of images and inscriptions means to illustrate, as accurately as possible, some expressive faces, of different ages and features, some animals, and, finally, some writing samples.

c) One of the most important conclusions of our minute analysis of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines regards the presence of an important number of images and inscriptions on the external surface of most of the pieces. In a dwelling

find in the central area of the site at Dumbrava (L₂S - 70), two zoomorphic figurines were found: wild boars, flanked by two miniature cups, a clay replica of a horn, together with a small wheel of clay (Pl. II)². As mentioned when published, though the 2 figurines obviously represent the same animal, their positions and essential features differ. Of the former figurine (5.00 x 4.00 x 3.8 cm) - elaborately made, but incompletely finished, of grey, dense paste, without impurities - only the front part was found, and even this is spoilt on one side. One can observe the round, flat-ended snout, the eyes, the left ear and part of the right one, the high shoulder; these features all indicate a wild-boar representation. At the center of the figurine, towards its belly, there is a cylindric hole, 1.5 cm in diameter, 2.5 mm in depth.

The analysis of the ornaments and inscriptions is made, as in the case of other pieces, for the four positions of the ornaments (Pl. III).

1a. On the shoulder, we can read the letters BOC (*Boç*) the last one unclear; thus a reading BOIC can not be excluded; the letter C is slightly under the level of the first two. On the head of the animal we can read AZAC (*Aζαç*) and IAH (*Iλη*), and, at small distances, ZA ZA (*Za Za*). Other isolated letters appear towards the snout and other parts.

Representations. On this object, there appear leftward profiles on the surface of the head, up to the rear end of the figurine. Those around the hanging hole appear clearer.

1b. At the top extremity there appear only isolated letters, more clearly written in block, Δ.. Z. On the right of the lower side we can read ACIA ZI (*Ασια Ζι*).

Representations. Human profiles: on the upper side face skywards; on the left side leftward downward profiles. In the same area, there also occur human figure of small size, in rightwards profiles.

1c. On the upper side, to the left, more clear block letter-groups, can be seen, ATAIC (*Αταιç*), and to the right ATΛ, with the second letter bent.

Representations. In the first third of the inside, at a short distance from the circumference, on the left side, there appears a protoma of a horse, in leftwards profile and under it an animal difficult to identify (snake ??). On the circumference, on the lower half, a human face is sketched, in leftward profile, and on the right side, a figure in rightwards profile.

1d. Besides a few isolated letters, visible in many places on the base surface of the figurine, those on the upper right side are clearer: ATIC (*Ατιç*) and AZI (*Αζι*), and below ATAIC (*Αταιç*).

Representations. Over the entire right side, one can see seven leftwards small profiles, each having a distinct physiognomy. On the right, there are four such rightwards profiles, which make up a bigger profile to the right.

2a. This sequence on the surface of the figurine could be conventionally divided into three registers.

On the rim of the left side, in some areas going to the inside part - one can see leftwards profiles, with or without clear physiognomic features, which make up a column of superposed heads. In most cases, certain elements of the face of an upper level are also parts of the one below. The small faces of the first register form two bigger faces on whose surfaces there appear inscriptions like: ATIC (*ΑΤΙς*), in a semicircular order, starting from the basis. Less clear faces appear on the right, but their identification is difficult especially because the big letters (written by polishing) cover two thirds of the register. Considering only the bigger letters, obviously directed to the right, it is possible to read ΔΩΖΙΑ (*Δωζια*) in a less usual situation, the last letter almost horizontal and a combination of italic and monumental writing, also to be found on other vessels. Under these polished letters, flanked by two horizontal lines, we can read the following letters (not all very clear) ΔΙΖΑΙ (*Διζαι*), on the left ΑΖΙ (*Αζι*), on the right ΖΙ (*Ζι*). On white, there appear leftwards semi-profile faces. On the middle register, the border is covered with a leftward profile, made up of smaller ones and incised or polished inscriptions. On the margin the letters overlap so that reconstruction is hypothetical. ΑΤΙΑ (*Ατια*) is repeated near the right side.

The most important part of the polished inscriptions can be only uncertainly decyphered < T > (*Ατα?*) and to the base ΑΤΑΙς (*Αταις*). The third register begins with a small leftward profile, on the left side and the lower right part. More clear are those at the bottom of right side: ΖΙ (*Ζι*) and ΖΑ (*Ζα*).

2b. By turning the figurine 180° from 2a, the obtained ornament can also be divided into three registers. On the first one can see, disposed circularly, the letters ΔΙΖΙΑς (*Διζιας*) on the left and ΑΖΙΑς (*Αζιας*) on the right.

Representations. On the left corner, there is as a Janus-like double-face, the one in leftward profile with European features while the one towards the inside with Far-East features. The representation is unclear. On the top and bottom right side one can see a group of human faces, in rightward profile and Janus-like.

The inscriptions of the middle register (the larger in surface) are unclear: ΔΙς ΤΑΙΑ (*Δις Ταια*), perhaps < F > (*Ατια?*); for some, like those at the bottom we choose a reading in the 2a position.

Representations. On the left side only the bottom faces are visible, at the margin as well as on inside area. Anyway, inscriptions appear both between the two horizontal lines and beyond them. All human representations are Janus-like the third register is mostly covered by a polished writing. Though the letters are unequal in size and their execution is no proof of the skill of the author, the most credible lecture seem ΔΙΟς (*Διος*). Among the numerous smaller inscriptions, gathered especially towards the basis, more certain are ΑΤΤΙ (*Αττι*) and ΖΙς (*Ζις*).

Representations. On the right side the only clearer representation is that which covers about one third of the surface of this register. It is an image made up

of smaller ones and animal protoma (horse, deer, bovid ?).

2c. A vertical division of this part is not difficult, but it would not be very relevant especially for representations. On the left side, we can identify the three files of Janus-like heads. Isolated letters or groups like AT, ZI, ATA (*Ατ, Ζι, Ατα*) can be noticed on different parts of the surface. The necessity of reading the big polished letters is not likely to appear. Finally, on the right side, we can see superposed Janus-like heads, and from among the groups of small polished letters we can decypher: AZI TAIC (*Αζι Ταις*) at the top and AT > (*Ατα ?*) at the bottom.

2d. For the analysis of the ornament in this position it is compulsory to return to the vertical division into registers. On the left margin there is, in block letters, incised, yet not all equally certain, ATIC (*Ατις*). In this position the group of heads are skywards oriented. The polished letters could possibly make up TICAΙ (*Τισαι*). On the basis we can see as continually disposed: ΔΙΑ ATI ZIAC (*Δια, Ατι, Ζιας*) and towards the right side the representation of two heads, the latter Janus-like. Only on this piece there are mentioned no less than 22 groups of letters, mostly proper names, words from at least three different languages: *Αζας* (1), *Αζι* (2), *Αζιας* (1), *Ασια* (1), *Ατα* (4), *Αταις* (3), *Ατι* (2), *Ατια* (2), *Ατις* (1), *Ατισα* (1), *Αττι* (1), *Βος-Βοις?* (1), *Διας* (1), *Διζαις-Διζασι?* (1), *Διζιας* (1), *Διος* (1), *Δις* (1), *Δωζια* (1), *Ιλη* (1), *Ταις*, *Τασια*, *Τισαι*.

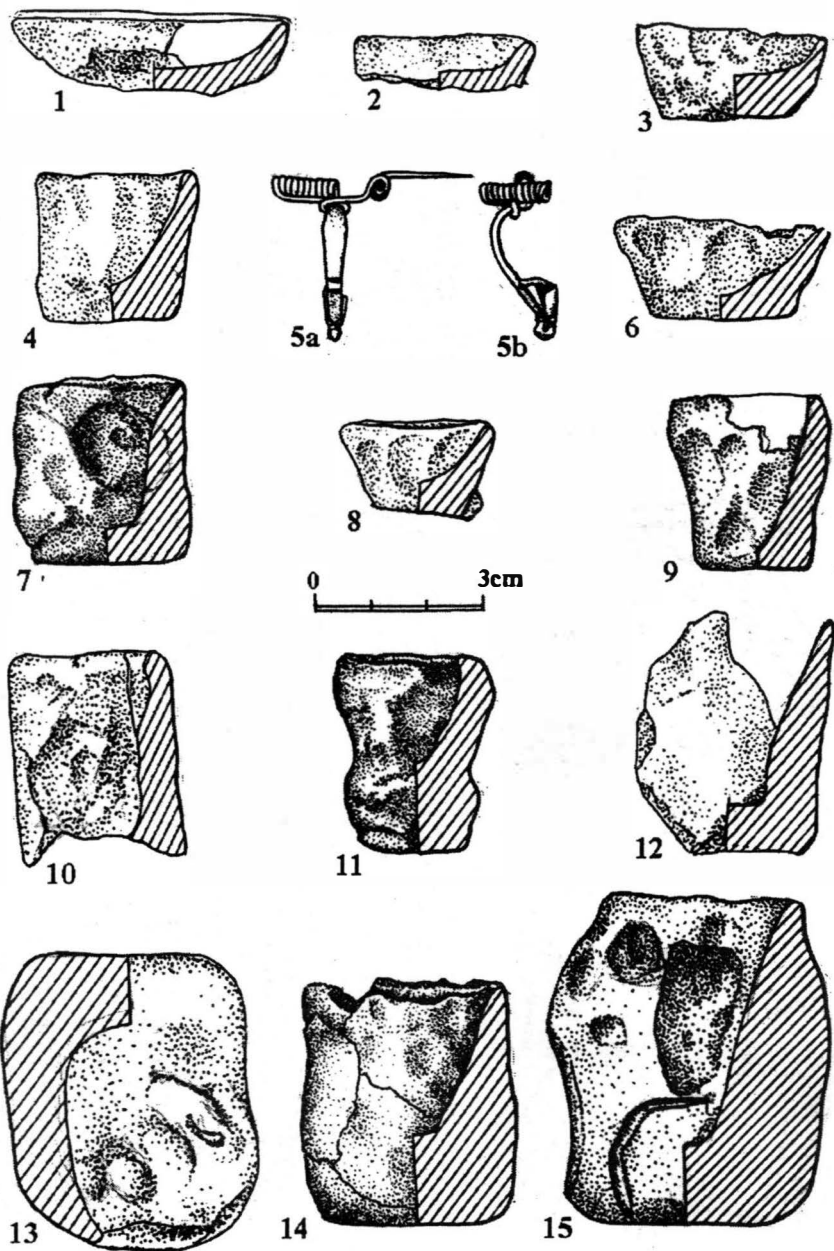
Some of them, like *Ατι*, *Ατια*, *Αττας*, *Αττι* can also be found in the Greek, Roman, Thracian and even Iranian areal. Except some theonyms - *Δια* (*Zeus*, in the Acc.) or *Διος* (*Zeus*, in the Gen.) - most Greek anthroponyms and toponyms come from the Microasian areal: *Ασια*, *Ατα*, *Αταις*, *Ατισα*, *Βοιος?*, *Ιλη*, *Ταις*, *Τασια*, *Τισας* having analogies in the Phrygian, Lydian, Pisidian cultures. Finally: *Αζας*, *Διζιας*, *Διζαις*, *Δωζια* are first and foremost Thracian³.

A comprehensive table of these words should be preceded by separate picture and drawings of the texts, to enable the readers to estimate the truthfulness of our proposed reading. Sometimes the photos of the small inscriptions, some letters measuring 2 mm and the incisions being not very deep - are not of highest quality. Neither decyphering, nor understanding the images is always easy. As for this first stage we will have but few linguistic considerations. For every case, we are going to sustain the final framing or the priority options; we also intend to state the frequency of letters and regarding this to point out the characteristics of writing Thracian-Dacian or Scythian words with the Greek alphabet, followed by an estimation of the implications of these inscriptions and images in the interpretation of history, the history of religion and culture over a long period.

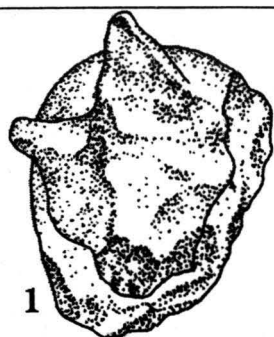
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NOTES

1. S. Sanie, *Din istoria culturii și religiei geto-dacice*, Iași, 1995, p.200.
2. S. Sanie, Ș. Sanie, *Cercetările arheologice de la Dumbrava (com. Ciurea, jud.Iași)*, CercIst, IV, 1973, p.86.
3. S. Sanie, *op. cit.*, p.236-241.

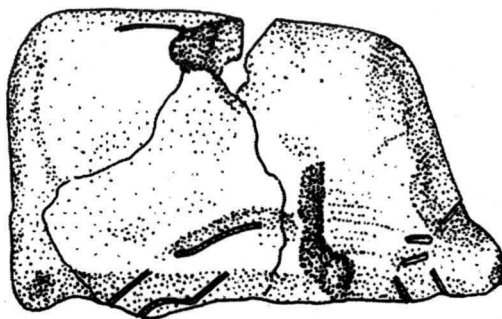


Pl. I Dumbrava. Small vases (1-4; 6-15) and fibula (5a, 5b) which formed an archaeological complex.



1

a

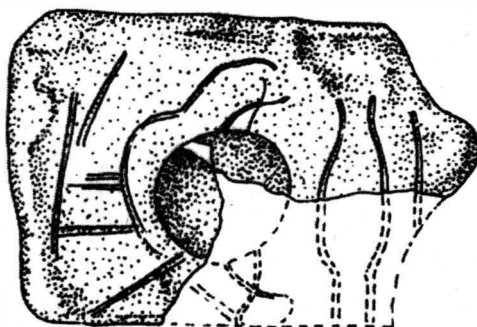


2

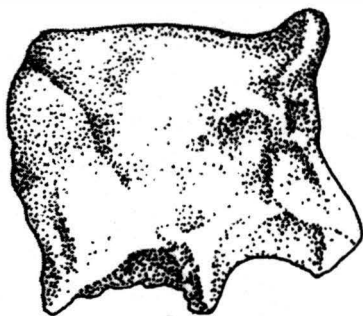
a



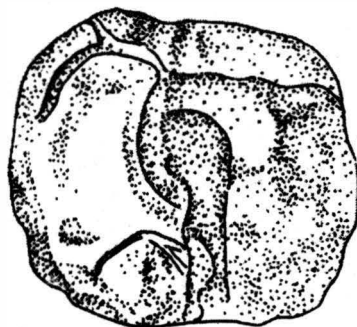
b



b

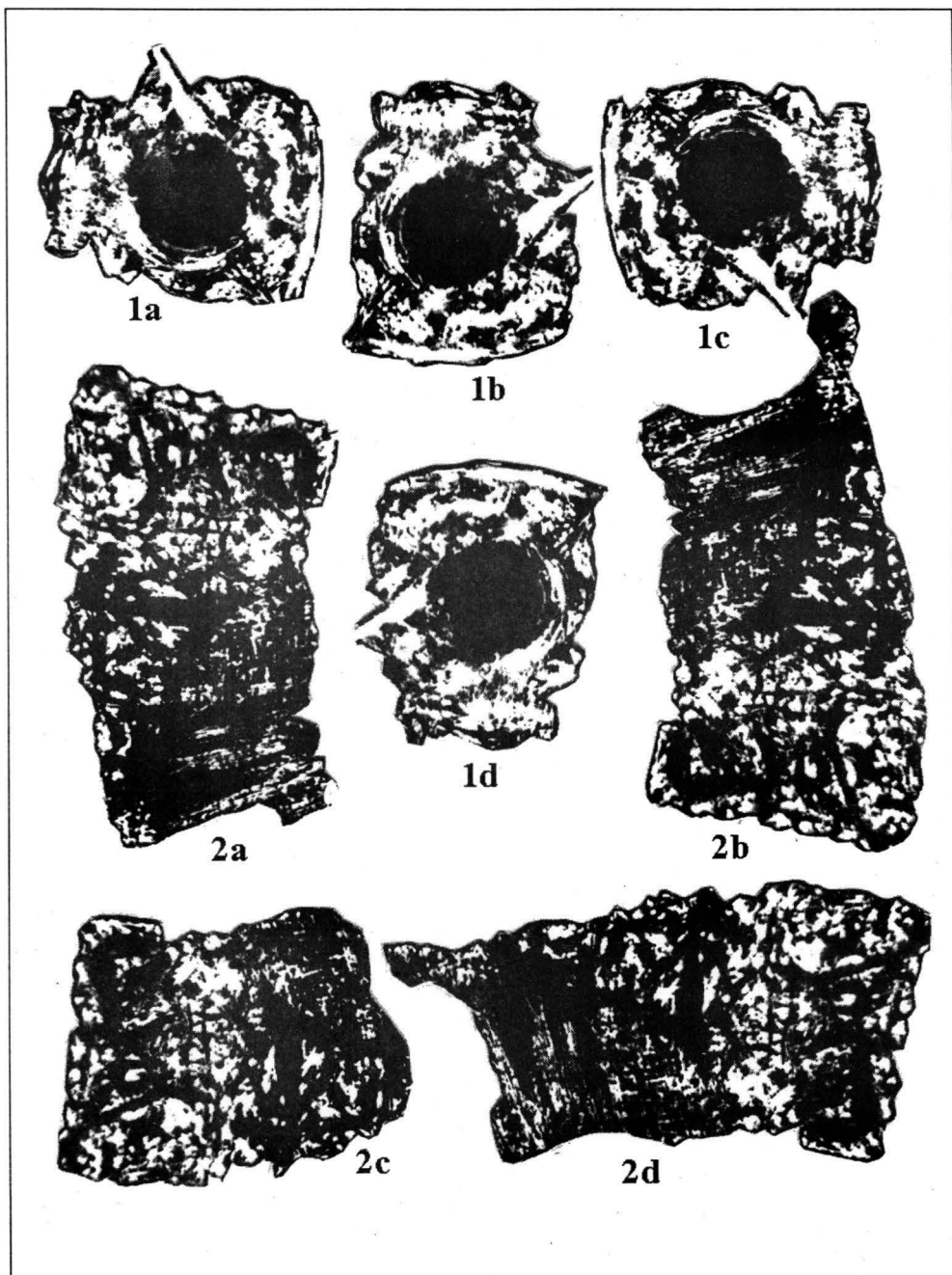


c



c

Pl. II Dumbrava. Zoomorphic figurines.



Pl. III Dumbrava. Unfolded decoration on a zoomorphic figurine.