



Anthropomorphic figurines and miniature beads from the Early Neolithic settlement of Ilindentsi, southwest Bulgaria

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ABSTRACT

The paper presents two types of small artefacts: anthropomorphic figurines and miniature beads, all of which were acquired during the excavations of the Early Neolithic settlement at Ilindentsi during 2011–2018. The anthropomorphic clay figurines are arranged in three groups: Group 1 – figurines with enlarged hips and buttocks (steatopygia); Group 2 – prism/parallelepiped shaped figurines and Group 3 – figurines with plastic projections on the head (buns or horns). One partially preserved marble figurine was also found. All of these objects show an interesting spatial distribution while being concentrated in two distant houses. All figurines confirm a general trend in the development of these objects in the central Balkans and northern Greece but also emphasise the supraregional contacts with the Pannonian Plain.

Miniature beads are very characteristic of the Early Neolithic settlement at Ilindentsi. Forty-one beads have been found, most of them within the boundaries of house № 2. Thirty-six beads were made of clay and only five beads from other raw materials: shell, rock and mother-of-pearl. The collection of miniature clay beads from Ilindentsi is unique, with no parallels from other contemporary sites in the Balkans. In terms of importance it places Ilindentsi right after emblematic Anatolian sites such as Çatalhöyük and Çukuriçi. The clay beads from Ilindentsi pose a number of questions about their place and role in the so-called Neolithic package; their function, social dimension and last but not least their expression of people's specialized skills.

KEYWORDS

Early Neolithic, central Balkans, anthropomorphic clay figurines, marble figurine, clay beads

Introduction

Ilindentsi is a prehistoric settlement in the Sandanski-Petrich valley, southwest Bulgaria dated to the second half of the Early Neolithic while also displaying a very smooth transition to the Middle Neolithic (Grębska-Kulova et al. 2011; Grębska-Kulow, Zidarov 2020) (fig.1.1). Three phases have been distinguished, based on the structural transformation of the pottery assemblage: The Early Neolithic phase is characterised by the dominance of red-slipped and white-on-red painted pottery, the Final Early Neolithic I (FEN I) phase by the appearance of fine grey pottery and the Final Early Neolithic II (FEN II) phase by the appearance of black polished pottery of excellent quality. In both the

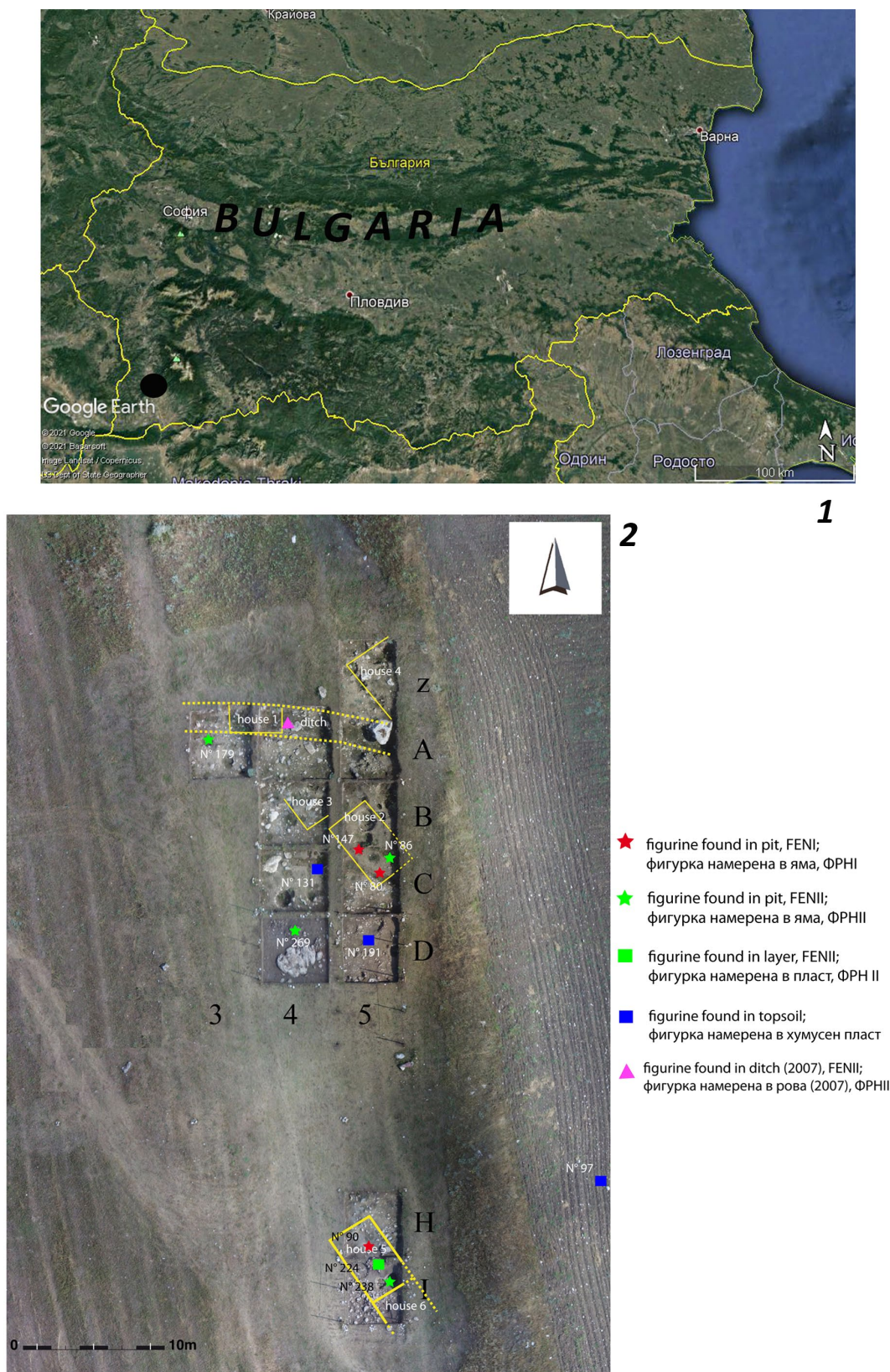


Fig. 1.1 – Map of Bulgaria with location of site of Ilindentsi; 2 – Spatial distributions of anthropomorphic figurines. Photo Ch. Tzankov

Обр. 1. 1 – карта на България с местоположението на обект Илинденци; 2 – пространствено разположение на антропоморфните фигурки. Снимка Хр. Цанков

FEN I and FEN II phases red-slipped pottery and white-on-red painting are still frequent. The phases are confirmed by stratigraphic observations with two clearly distinguishable archaeological layers, an Early Neolithic layer and a Final Early Neolithic layer with two occupation horizons (Grebska-Kulow et al. 2014, obr. 3; Grębska-Kulow et al. 2017, fig. 3). The article presents anthropomorphic figurines and miniature beads acquired in the period 2011–2018 during the implementation of the Field School of Archaeology funded by the Balkan Heritage Foundation. Anthropomorphic figurines are an important indicator of cultural affiliation and contacts, and miniature beads are the most impressive and original finds discovered on this site.

Anthropomorphic figurines

Anthropomorphic figurines are a characteristic attribute of prehistoric cultures in Southeast Europe, Anatolia and the Near East. They are one of the elements of the so-called ‘Neolithic package’ (Hansen 2016, 85–86), and certain features in their iconography (‘coffee-bean’ eyes, hairstyles, legs bent under the waist) provide important arguments for plausible links between Anatolia, the Middle East and the Balkans during the 7th–6th mill. BC. Yet they are likewise characterized by regional peculiarities possibly marking local cultural traditions, but also the intensity and directions of interregional contacts. Although there is abundant literature dedicated to the study of prehistoric anthropomorphic figurines, their function and meaning have not been defined with any precision. The most popular theory links the majority of female figurines to fertility cults, while the figurines themselves are often considered to be emanations of the ‘Great Goddess’ (Gimbutas 1989, Cauvin 1997). However, this theory, has serious opponents (Bailey 2005, 16–25 and cited literature). Hansen (2015), after studying 50,000 figurines from the vast territory between Mesopotamia and the Danube, concluded that this claim cannot be proven, especially since male figurines appear from the very beginning of the Neolithic period and a large number of figurines do not bear any clear sex markers. According to Hansen, it is certain that the figurines are mainly related to agricultural cultures characterized by painted ceramics, and are the undisputed expression of a wide communication network between Southeast Europe, Mesopotamia, the Middle East and Anatolia while also related to deep social transformations characterizing the development of the new economy based on farming.

In the presence of so many uncertain ideas we would like to present some newly found figurines from southwest Bulgaria that offer fresh insight into this complex subject.

Early Neolithic figurines in the valley of the Struma River – state of research and typologies

The Early Neolithic anthropomorphic figurines from the Struma River valley were the subject of numerous publications reviewing the collections from several Early Neolithic sites: Kovachevo (Lichardus-Itten 2017; Lichardus-Itten, Demoule 2016), Galabnik (Pavúk, Bakamska 2018), Balgarchevo I, II (Pernicheva 2008), and Vaksevo (Chohadzhiev 2001). These analyses led to the production of several typological schemes (Chohadzhiev, M. 1981; Chohadzhiev, S. 2007; Pernicheva 2008; Becker 2010; Pavúk, Bakamska 2018). The first typology proposed by Mikhail Chohadzhiev (1981) is based on the figurines from Galabnik and Pernik. Two main types were defined as: 1. figurines with a long neck and a round or elliptical cross-section, and 2. figurines with the shape of a parallelepiped. The author assumed that the fragments of bipartite parts with legs and enlarged hips (steatopygia) most likely belong to the first type. Stephan Chohadzhiev (2007, 110–114) reviewed all published finds from the Struma River valley and identified three main groups: sitting female figu-

rines, standing female figurines and figurines-busts, which appear in the second phase of the Early Neolithic along with the dark-painted ceramics. Lilyana Pernicheva (2008) proposed a typology of the figurines from the basal Neolithic layers at Balgarchevo – I (Early Neolithic) and II (Middle Neolithic), noting that it is impossible to make a clear distinction between the two periods because of the smoothness of the transition and the great similarities between the figurines from the two phases. Thus she distinguished seven groups: 1. Figurines resembling a parallelepiped; 2. Figurines with a cylindrical or flattened-cylindrical torso; 3. Bell-shaped figurines; 4. Miniature standing figurines with steatopygia; 5. Sitting or semi-sitting figurines with steatopygia; 6. Standing figurines with steatopygia; 7. Bodies of anthropomorphic figurines. The first group is further subdivided into four types: A. Heads in the form of a parallelepiped; B. Rectangular flattened heads slightly tilted back; C. Statuette-busts; D. Rectangular figurines with rudimentary hands and zigzag decoration on the front.

Valeska Becker proposed an alternative typology reducing the variety to two types only: Type 1: non-articulated, column-shaped figurines with different cross-sections, and type 2: figurines with marked legs, arms and hips, dividing them into sitting and standing (Becker 2010, 26).

A completely different typology was offered by Pavúk and Bakamska (2018). In the earlier period, defined as the Galabnik cultural group with white painted pottery, two main types have been distinguished: Type A. Pear-shaped figurines, with enlarged buttocks, short legs or without legs, and cylindrical torso; Type B. Figurines with steatopygia, tiny waist and hands presented as small projections. In the later period, corresponding to the Starčevo culture, characterised by dark-painted pottery, three main types have been defined: Type C. Figurines hollow inside; Type D. Figurines with steatopygia, covered with incised lines; and E. Prism-shaped figurines.

The reviewed typologies are quite diverse, defined through the choice of different criteria (figurine posture, shape of torso and neck, decoration). It is clear however that these classifications are heavily influenced by the preservation status of the objects. In all classifications, however, two main groups stand out clearly: 1. Articulated three-dimensional figurines with enlarged hips and buttocks (steatopygia) with a great variety of types based on anatomical details (shaping the thighs, torso and head themselves), decoration and the body posture. 2. Unarticulated figurines shaped as a prism or parallelepiped.

The corpus of the known figurines from the Struma River valley was recently enriched by eleven new examples found during the recent excavations of the Early Neolithic settlement at Ilindentsi between 2011–2018 (Grębska-Kulow, Zidarov 2020). They are characterized by varying degrees of preservation, but none of them is fully intact. The figurines were found in different stratigraphic deposits (fig. 1.2): three were found in the topsoil layer (humus or directly under the humus), one originated from a habitation layer dated to the final Early Neolithic period, and the majority – seven figurines – were found in pits dating to the first and second phases of the final Early Neolithic period.

They are defined by significant diversity in terms of raw material, morphology and decoration – ten are made of clay and one is marble; three are decorated with incised lines, three with impressed dots, one has a painted surface, and four are without any decoration. Two of the figurines (Inv. No 191 and 269) are too fragmented and will not be discussed in this paper.

Typology of the clay anthropomorphic figurines from Ilindentsi

According to their morphology they can be arranged into three main groups:

Group 1. Figurines with enlarged hips and buttocks (steatopygia)

This group is represented by four figurines (figs. 2. 1–4; 3. 1–4). In general, they are made of several segments (at least three) with a bipartite lower part (two buttocks and legs) and a torso with

head but in all four examples only one of the symmetrically made lower parts is preserved. Two figures are certainly seated, and one is standing. The foot of the fourth figurine is missing, thus preventing the reconstruction of the posture. Two of the figurines are decorated with incised ornaments, while the other two are decorated with impressed dots.

One of the best preserved figurines (Inv. No 224 – figs. 2.4; 3.4) was found near the oven of house 5 (fig. 1.2) in a layer dating to the final Early Neolithic II (FEN II). The left half of a standing figurine has been preserved – it has exaggerated thighs and buttocks, and well formed foot with an expanded base. There are traces of small, round punctures in the area of the pubic triangle. The remains of a charred stick which was used to attach the two separately fashioned lower parts still remained on the inner side.

To the southeast of the oven, in pit I5/15 likewise dated to FEN II, the right leg of a seated figurine (Inv. No 238 – figs. 2.2; 3.2) was found. The figurine has legs wide apart which become very narrow toward the feet. Its surface is covered in wide and deep incisions, forming a crusted meander-shaped ornament. Furthermore, the incisions have remains of white paste, a feature that must have created a stark contrast with the red coating of the surface. The modelling appears rough and the figurine was barely fired.

To the northwest of the oven, in pit H5/26 dating to FEN I, the left leg of another bipartite figurine (Inv. No 90 – figs. 2.3; 3.3) was found. It probably belonged to a standing figurine, however, the lower part of the leg is missing. The surface is very smooth, and four parallel incised lines cover the thighs and buttocks. On the inner side, the impression of a round stick that used to piece together both legs is still visible.

The last figurine of this group (Inv. No 97 – figs. 2.1; 3.1) was found in the plough zone beyond the excavated area, during surface study conducted in 2013. It is small in size, with a slight expansion of the hips and flattened buttocks underneath, suggesting a sitting pose. Its upper part is decorated with four drop-like impressions and on the inner part the impression of a connecting stick is visible.

Group 2. Variation of the prism/parallelepiped figurines

Typical prism shaped figurines are not found at Ilindentsi but there are three specific examples that look somewhat comparable to this group.

The closest to this group is the figurine (Inv. No 179 – figs. 4.1; 5.1) of which only the head is preserved with an almost rectangular face and a triangular cross-section. Its nose and eyes are presented in the usual way, but the impressed dots on the forehead and on the cheeks strongly resemble those seen on parallelepiped shaped figurines. It was perforated sideways below the face, suggesting that it was most likely worn as a pendant/amulet. The figurine was found in pit A3/3 dated to FEN II.

The joined head and torso of the second figurine (Inv. No 80 – figs. 4.3; 5.3) has a rectangular cross-section but the torso expands towards the bottom, which is admittedly not characteristic of the parallelepiped-shaped figurines. There are thin incised chevron shaped lines on the top of the head possibly depicting the hairstyle. The face has a slightly protruding round nose, two deep cuts for eyes and one horizontal cut under the nose for lips. The bottom of the torso bears two parallel oblique incisions. Finally there is a deep impression of a wooden stick with trapezoid cross-section which might have been a connecting element or a head mounting segment. The figurine was found in square C5, pit 15E dated to FEN I close to house No 2.

Formally, this group can also be joined by an extra-large head (Inv. No 147 – fig. 6) with a height of 22 cm. The face is summarily shaped, with a pinched nose, round dot for a mouth and additional layer of clay applied to the large eyes. Another feature of this figurine is the decoration of white paint that covers the face and the top of the head. The paint is quite unevenly applied and there are areas that lack this coating. Notably, however, there is a deep groove running sideways across its

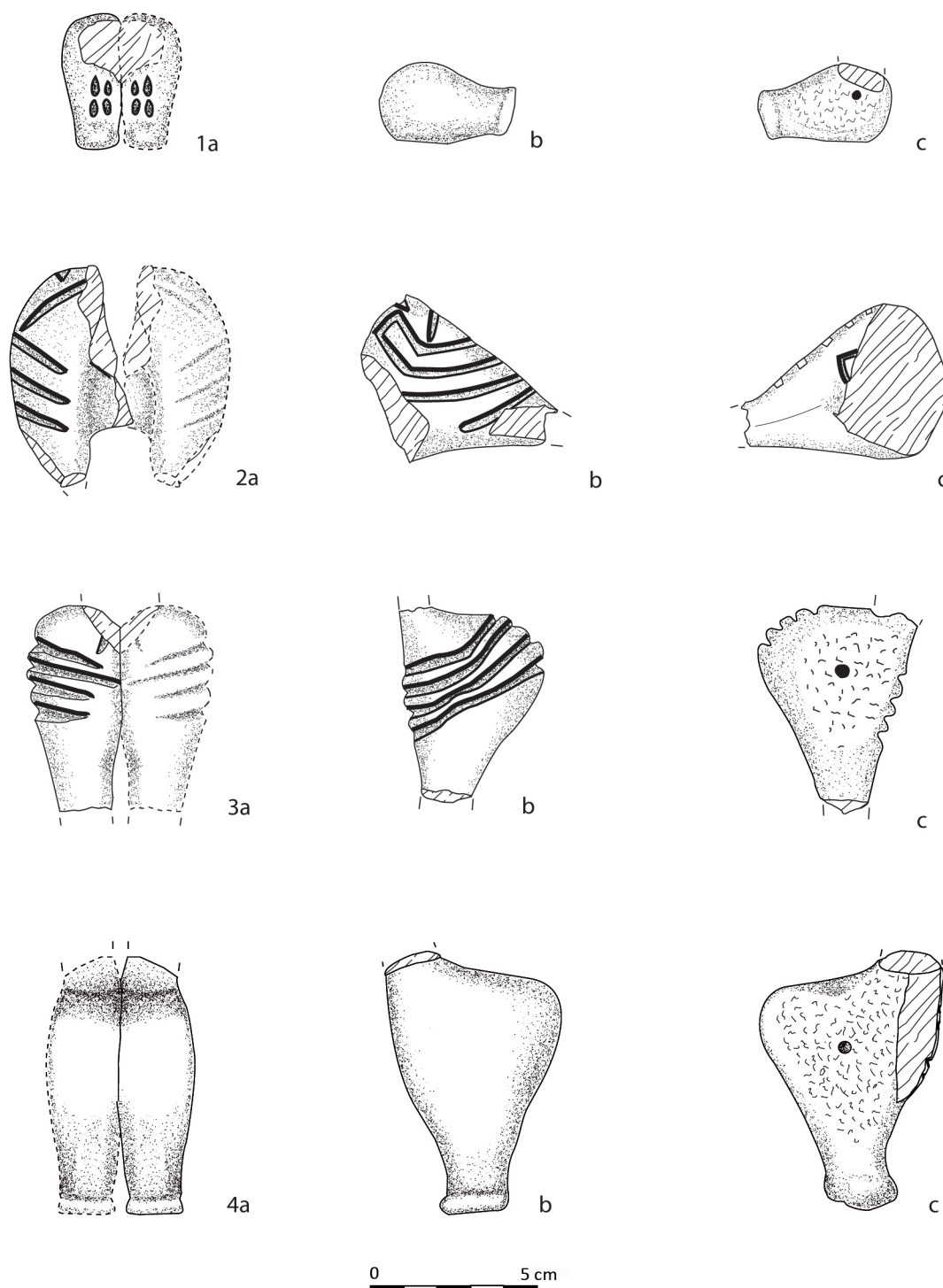


Fig. 2. Group 1, anthropomorphic figurines with enlarged hips and buttocks (steatopygia).

Drawings M. Grebska-Kulow

Обр. 2. Група 1, антропоморфни фигурки с уголемен ханш и седалищни части (стеатопигия).

Рисунки М. Гребска-Кулов

base. Judging from the size and shape of this groove, it appears that a wooden beam with a circular cross-section and a diameter of about 8 cm supported the heavy head at its base. The back was carelessly shaped without signs of smoothing, indicating that this part was not displayed, which in turn suggests that the head was meant to be stationary. The head was found in square B5, pit 20 dated to FEN I in the area of the same house No 2.



Fig. 3. Groupe 1, anthropomorphic figurines with enlarged hips and buttocks (*steatopygia*).

Photos M. Grebska-Kulow

Обр. 3. Група 1, антропоморфни фигурки с уголемен ханш и седалищни части (*стеатопигия*).

Снимки М. Гребска-Кулов

Finally, there are few atypical finds from Ilindentsi requiring the definition of another group.

Group 3. Figurines with plastic projections on the head (buns or horns)

During previous excavations at Ilindentsi in 2007 an elongated head with a circular cross-section and two outgrowths at the top of the head, resembling short horns (Grębska-Kulova et al. 2011, fig. 17.7) was found. Another figurine belonging to this group was found during the 2011–2018 excavations (Inv. No 131 – figs. 4.2; 5.2). Unlike the first one, this one is flat with an elliptical cross-section. The head and part of the torso are well-preserved. The head expands laterally at the top, forming pointed horn-shaped growths. The nose is pinched and has two holes in it. The eyes are

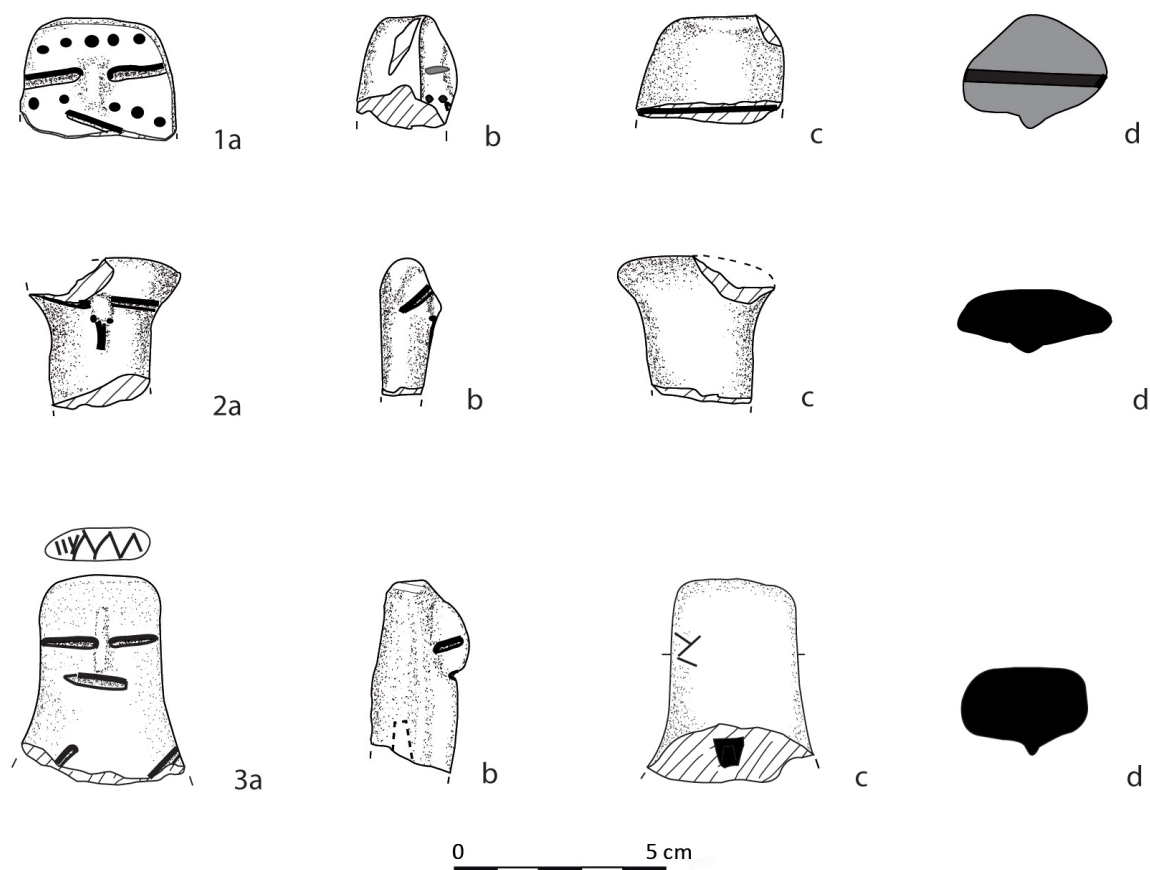


Fig. 4. 1, 3 – Groupe 2, anthropomorphic figurines with the form of prism/parallelepiped (drawings M. Grebska-Kulow); 2 – Group 3, anthropomorphic figurines with plastic protruberances on the head (buns or horns). Drawings M. Grebska-Kulow

Обр. 4. 1, 3 – група 2, антропоморфни фигурки с формата на призма/паралелепипед; 2– група 3, антропоморфни фигурки с пластични израстъци на главата (кокове или рогчета).

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presented as two parallel slits, and there is a vertical cut line for lips under the nose. The figurine was found in topsoil layer 2 in sq. C4.

Finally, at Ilindentsi a piece of a rare marble figurine (Inv. No 86 – fig. 7) was also found. Only its lower part is preserved, consisting of barely articulated but separated massive legs. The curving outlines on the opposite end indicate that it was broken across the waist.

Spatial distribution and function

The spatial distribution of the figurines from Ilindentsi (fig. 1.2) shows an interesting pattern. Three figurines of the first group were found in the area of house No 5, which is distinguished by the rare (for the time and region) use of stone foundations (Grębska-Kulow, Zidarov 2020, 217). One is found close to an oven whereas the other two were intentionally deposited in pits together with house debris. The two busts and the marble figurine were found in the area of house 2 inside three separate pits also containing the remains of a burnt house dating to the earlier (FEN I) phase of occupation of the house. In all these examples one can look for a special ritual of burial of a destroyed house.

Likewise, the remainder were usually found in pits or in a topsoil layer containing archaeological finds.

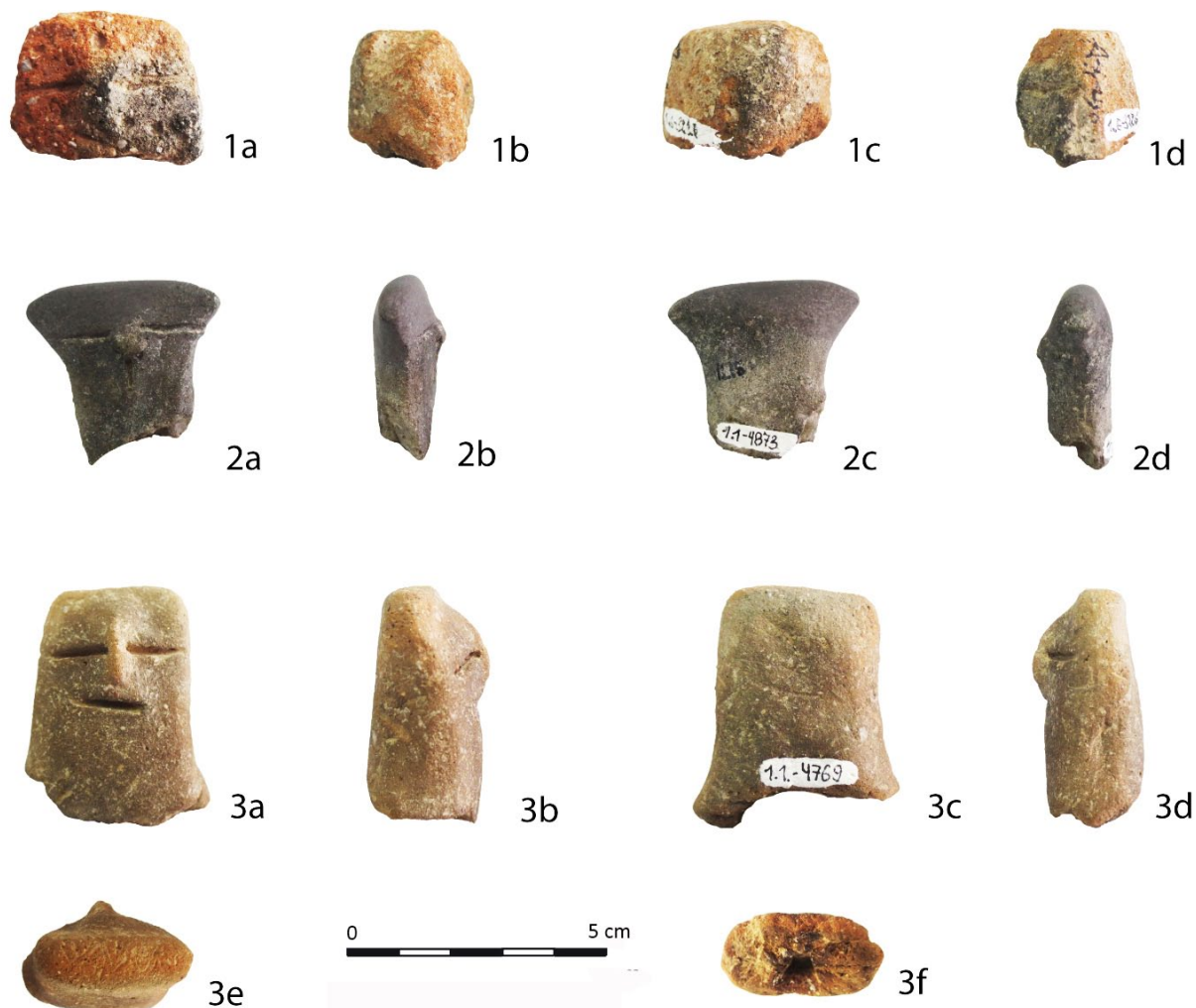


Fig. 5. 1, 3 – Group 2, anthropomorphic figurines with the form of a prism/parallelepiped; 2– Group 3, anthropomorphic figurines with plastic projections on the head (buns or horns). Photos M. Grebska-Kulow
 Обр. 5. 1, 3 – група 2, антропоморфни фигурки с формата на призма/паралелепипед; 2– група 3, антропоморфни фигурки с пластични израстъци на главата (кокове или рогчета).

Снимки М. Гребска-Кулов

The connection between some figurines and the house is obvious and is reinforced by other elements, such as decorations like those on the models of houses, and evidence for their permanent position in the house interior. The largest head (bust) was most likely fixed to a wooden beam such as a totem pole and could have served an apotropaic purpose, protecting the house and its inhabitants.

On the other hand, the smaller figurine with the sideways pierced neck was likely designed to be hung and worn, probably as an amulet.

Anthropomorphic figurines in the Neolithic (supra)regional context

The figurines from Ilindentsi fit into the common iconography of the Early Neolithic anthropomorphic figurines from the Struma Valley, but also show some peculiarities of their own.

The most numerous are the bottom parts of articulated bipartite figurines featuring steatopygia. They could be distinguished in terms of posture – standing or sitting, with closed or open legs. The fact that most of them are fragmented hinders the possibility to reconstruct, with any degree of accuracy, the shape of the torso and head (with a circular or elliptical cross-section). Due to the



Fig. 6. Anthropomorphic clay bust with large dimensions. Photos M. Grebska-Kulow
Обр. 6. Антропоморфен глинен бюст с големи размери. Снимки М. Гребска-Кулов

specific technology of creating this type of figurine – segment by segment, the discovery of complete figurines such as the illustrious figurine from Kovachevo (Lichardus-Itten 2017, fig. 2) are extremely rare.

Figurines with enlarged buttocks and hips were rather popular during the Early and Middle Neolithic in the Balkans, as they were also during the Late Neolithic but with a rather modified shape.

A considerable diversity in terms of anatomical details (shaping of the legs, torso and head shape) and decoration has been observed within this group of figurines. Figurines with steatopygia from Ilindentsi display several distinctive features. For example, it is obvious that the sitting figurine (Inv. No 238 – figs. 2.2; 3.2) has its legs wide apart and the pubic triangle is underlined with incisions. The split legs are a characteristic feature of the bipartite figurines from Mavropigi in northern Greece (Starnini 2018, fig. 20.2,4; 21.2; 24.1,2,3; 26.1,4), Pelagonia (Naumov 2015, Tab. 28.1,3,5; 29.4; 30.5,6; 32.5), and it is particularly characteristic of one figurine from the Mramor locality near the village of Chashka (Jovčevska 1993, p. 40, T. II.7). It is worth noting that the legs of this type of figurine throughout the central Balkans are typically joined together or are barely open. In that sense, the above-mentioned figurine from Ilindentsi matches the northern Aegean traditions, while the rest have joined together legs and fit better into the central Balkan traditions.

Typically the figurines with pronounced steatopygia either lack decoration or have impressed dots covering the hips and legs (Pernicheva 2008, Obr. 2.5; 3.3,5-8,12). Similar decoration is observable on a figurine (Inv. No 97 – fig. 2.1) but it is reduced to 4 (8) dots covering the front side of the legs and on another one as well (Inv. No 224 – figs. 2.4; 3.4) The incised decoration is rarely used on the Early Neolithic figurines (Pernicheva 2008, fig. 2.3–4; Pavúk, Bakamska 2018, Abb.1.6; 2.8). Two figurines from Ilindentsi are decorated with quite wide and deep incisions, on one of which they are parallel and resemble a belt (figs. 2.3; 3.3), an element that appeared on Early Neolithic figurines

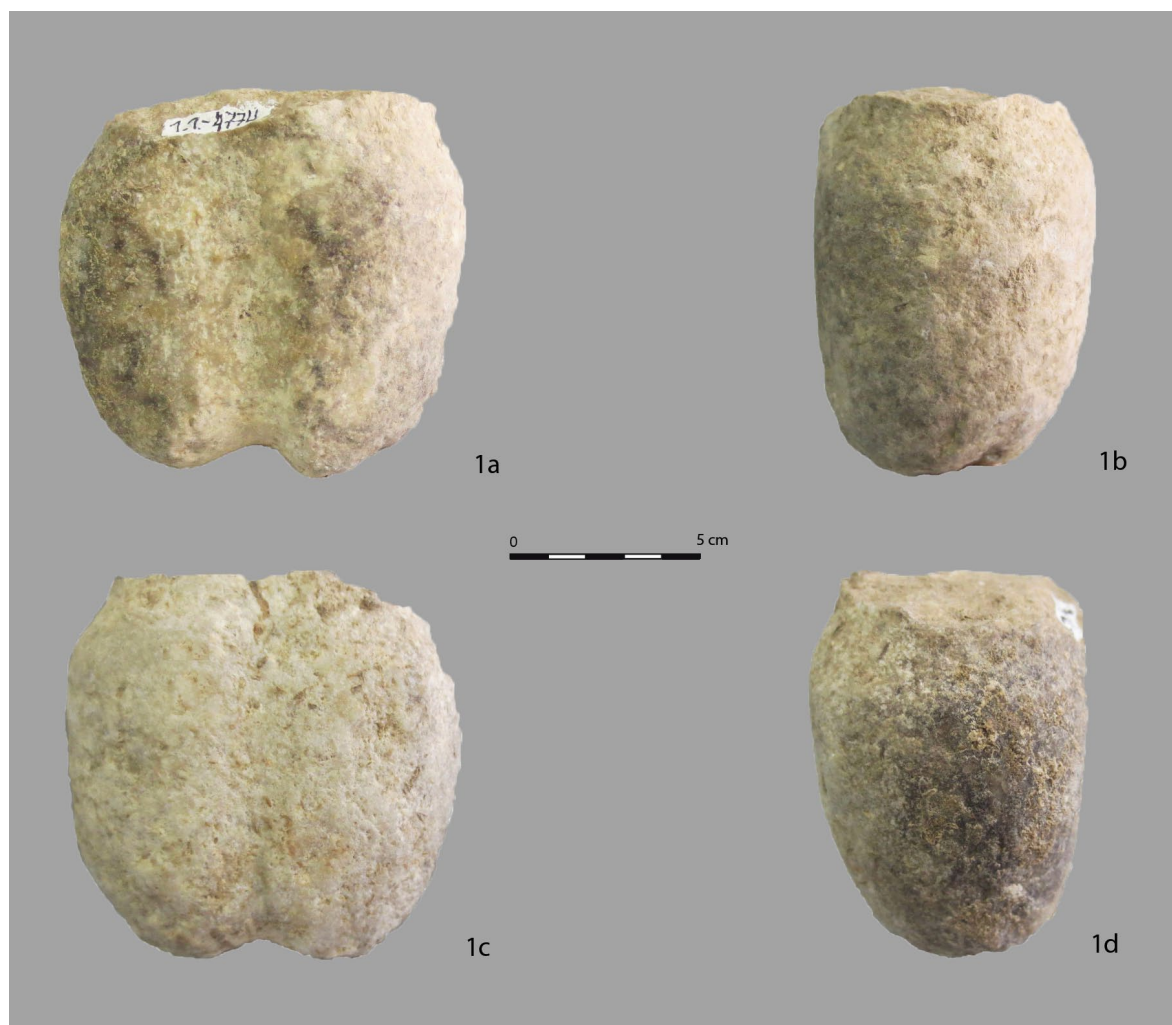


Fig. 7. Anthropomorphic marble figurine. Photos M. Grebska-Kulow
Обр. 7. Антропоморфна мраморна фигурка. Снимки М. Гребска-Кулов

at Kovachevo as well (Lichardus-Itten 2017, fig. 2). On the second figurine (figs. 2.2; 3.2), the wide cuts form a more complex composition resembling a meander. This type of decoration rarely appears on figurines, like one from Sapareva banja (Hansen 2016, fig. 9.1) but it is reminiscent of the decoration on the models of houses from Zelenikovo and Govrlevo, North Macedonia (Naumov, Čausidis, 2011, Tab. IX. 9; XIX.2), cult vessel from Early Neolithic site Brezhani (Grębska-Kulow 2017, fig. 4.24) and one 'cult table' from Kovachevo (personal observation).

The parallelepiped-shaped figurines appeared in the second half of the Early Neolithic and are associated with the Starčevo culture in the Upper Struma valley (Pavúk, Bakamska 2018, 56). There are divergent opinions regarding their origin. Vajsov suggested that this type of figurine likely originated in western Bulgaria (Todorova, Vaysov 1993, 193). Becker connects them to the Starčevo–Körös–Criş culture complex (2010, 26–29), while Takorova (2015, 13) seeks their origin in Anatolia in the Lakes region (Hacılar VI, Bademağacı). The possible Anatolian connection is favoured also by Matsanova (1996, 107; 2002, 137). Figurines of this type were found in Pernik (Čhohadžiev 1983), Galabnik (Pavúk, Bakamska 2018, Abb. 3. 6–9), Sapareva Banya (Becker 2010, Abb. 1. 6), Mursalevo (Takorova 2015, fig. 4), Slatina (Nikolov, Takorova 2018, p. 70, fig. 76), Rakitovo (Matsanova 1996, 107, Tab. 5.1) but also in Méhtelek-Nádas (Starnini 2014, figs. 31.1; 31.3) in the area of the Körös culture. A common element that connects the figurines from the Struma Valley and Pannon-

ian Plain is the pricked decoration in combination with incisions. These ornaments represent unique patterns on each of the figurines but the repetitive use of the concept and technique gives grounds to distinguish a separate stylistic variation among the parallelepiped figurines. The figurine from Ilindentsi is distinguished from the rest by an almost triangular cross-section and a transversal perforation across its widest part which would have facilitated stringing.

Another figurine (Inv. No 80 – figs. 4.3; 5.3) closely matches the group 1 pseudo-parallelepiped figurines defined by Pernicheva (2008, 28), asserting the popularity of this group throughout the valley of the Struma in the second half of the Early Neolithic and during the Middle Neolithic period. The rectangular shape of the top of the head and the intended representation of a hairstyle strongly resembles the typical parallelepiped figurines of the Upper Struma (Pavúk, Bakamska 2018, Abb. 2.6; Takorova 2015, fig. 4; Čohadžiev 1983, Abb. 33.2) and the Sofia Plain (Becker 2010, 24 abb. 1.2). Among the characteristic features should be noted the pronounced lips defined by a combination of a horizontal incision and a cavity at the bottom. This makes the figurine comparable to others from Balgarchevo (Pernicheva 2008, fig. 2.11; 3.10), Galabnik (Pavúk, Bakamska 2018, Abb. 2.6), and from Endröd 119 in Hungary (Starnini 2014, fig. 26.5). The figurine from Galabnik is defined as type C which is synchronous with the early phase of Starčevo and Anza II–Vršnik (Pavúk, Bakamska 2018, 54), while at Balgarchevo it is known from the later phase of the Early Neolithic. Figurines consisting of the lower part of the body with the hole at the neck level are known from Zelenikovo (Naumov 2015, P. 35.4; 38.4,5,6) and Govrlevo (Naumov 2019, Fig. 16) in North Macedonia. A similar clay figurine with a piece of bone placed in a hole was found in Tumba-Madžari (Stojanova-Kanzurova 2011, 39, Fig. 5). Numerous such figurines are registered in Anatolia, in Hacilar, Höyücek and Çatalhöyük (Mellaart 1970, fig. 232.1; 233.1–6; Duru 1995, 485, pl. 46.1–3; 47.1,2; Hansen 2014, fig. 19, 20).

A large clay head (Inv. No 147 – fig. 6) is made in a similar style, but the mouth is presented as a round hole, which strongly resembles the figurines from the area of the Körös culture (Starnini 2014, figs. 26.5; 27.6; 29.2,3). With the exception of this one however, such figurines have not yet been found either in the Upper Struma Valley, or in North Macedonia. It is distinguished by the use of an unusual clay matrix, crusted eyes and white painted decoration. Eye inlay is not unusual and occurs in the Middle East and Anatolia (Hansen 2014, fig. 6), as well as in the central Balkans, but typically it is made of different materials such as shell or obsidian, while our example features the same raw material and does not present such a contrasting effect. A comparable head made of organic-tempered clay and mussel-encrusted eyes from an unknown site is stored in the collections of the Regional Museum of History in Kyustendil (Čohadžiev, S. 1981). This head has a cylindrical shape resembling the cylindrical heads from Pelagonia, but unlike them, it is not hollow inside, having two vertical holes through the ears which most likely allowed it to be hung in the interior of a house. Similar examples were also reportedly found at the prehistoric village of Sapareva Banya (Chochadzhiev, M. 1981, footnote 7). A stylized human face made of chaff-tempered clay was fixed to an interior stake installation in house 1 dated to the end of the Early Neolithic at Balgarchevo (Grębska-Kulow, Kulov in press). These examples reveal a custom of attaching anthropomorphic faces to upright wooden beams inside the houses in the catchment areas of the Struma and Vardar towards the end of the Early Neolithic (ca. 5500–5400 BC).

Among the finds from Ilindentsi we recognize another distinctive type of anthropomorphic figurine with plastic projections on the head. This feature first appears among the figurines from the Early Neolithic site of Mavropigi in northern Greece (Starnini 2018, figs. 6.2; 7.1; 11.1). From there, we can start tracking the development of this special group of figurines with lateral projections on their heads resembling buns or horns. An example with a long, cylindrical neck and three pronounced buns is known from Porodin, Pelagonia (Simoska, Sanjev 1976, fot. 80). Figurines with buns and long

cylindrical necks have been recorded at Anzabegovo II (Gimbutas 1976, 210, fig. 144) and Pernik (Čochadžiev 1983, 63 Abb. 33.3). A similar figurine with a long cylindrical neck and two horns was found in 2007 in the filling of a ditch at Ilindentsi. Further examples can be identified in North Macedonia (Naumov 2015, tab. 6.3; 7.5; 9.1; 39.5,6,7), at Balgarchevo I and II (Pernicheva 2008, Obr. 1.5; 2.1,2,8), and at Kovachevo (Lichardus-Itten 2017, fig. 4.5). It seems that this particular shaping of the head has a long chronological development during the Early and Middle Neolithic and covers the territory of northern Greece, North Macedonia and the Struma valley in Bulgaria. So far there are no examples of this type from the area to the east of the Struma valley. Two characteristic variants can be distinguished: figurines with cylindrical necks and two or three outgrowths resembling buns, and figurines with flat bodies and two corneal growths smoothly drawn sideways at the top of the head.

Finally, a fragment of a marble figurine was also found, closely resembling another one from Kovachevo (Lichardus-Itten, Demoule 2016, Abb. 1.10) but lacking any anatomical details. Marble figurines with various iconographies are already known from a number of Early Neolithic settlements but remain considerably rarer than those made of terracotta (Lichardus-Itten, Demoule 2016 and cited literature).

Small beads: context and techno-typological characteristics

The personal adornments from the site consist mainly of shell and clay pieces: *Spondylus* bracelet fragments, pendants and beads, a pendants of *Glycymeris*, a pendant of nephrite, stone and mother of pearl beads and a notable number (36) of miniature clay beads, which are the focus of this short study (figs. 9–14).

The assemblage of 41 very small beads came from the flotation of sediment from Sq. C5, (most of beads), and small number from Sq. B5, C4 and A3 (fig. 8). The most interesting is the situation in Sq. C5, where dwelling 2 is located and where 31 micropiercers of chalcedony are discovered (fig. 15).

These 41 beads were grouped into two small necklaces of 21 and 20 beads, respectively (figs. 9 and 10). This grouping is entirely random, with only museological/exhibitional reasons.

There are only five beads made of various materials (shell, stone, mother of pearl; figs. 11.1; 13.4c; 14). The rest of the beads in the collection (n=36) represent a variety of miniature clay beads. The beads in their finished state represent coloristic, textural and dimensional variation of clay subjected to high temperature. The firing affected most obviously the colour nuances of the beads (figs. 11–13). Thus an aesthetic effect was reached, enhancing the appearance of the beads.

Their diameters are between 3 and 5 mm, the diameters of the holes vary between 1.2 and 1.8 mm. The beads display two main shapes: biconical or spheroidal beads (n=8); and cylindrical with variable lengths of the cylinders and almost all slightly asymmetrical in the parallelism of their ends: one group consists of a cylinder more than 2 mm long (n=14), another consists of beads with a shorter cylindrical body (n=14). There are practically no disc beads *sensu stricto* – means “small bead (height between 1 and 1.5 mm, face between 1 and 4 mm) with circular, flat and parallel faces” as described and illustrated from Çatalhöyük (Bains et al. 2013, 348, fig. 19.8). The short cylindrical beads could be considered technologically and typologically as a hybrid type between cylindrical and disc beads with pronounced asymmetrical features, but this distinction has no obvious significance for the current study (figs. 9 and 10).

It is difficult (even unreasonable) to attempt a very precise and exhaustive formal typology of these particular delicate ornaments. Moreover, no conventional typology of personal ornaments and particularly beads as an element of Neolithic material culture in Bulgaria is yet established and approved. The attempt of implementing one of the rare typologies of clay beads – that from Çatal-

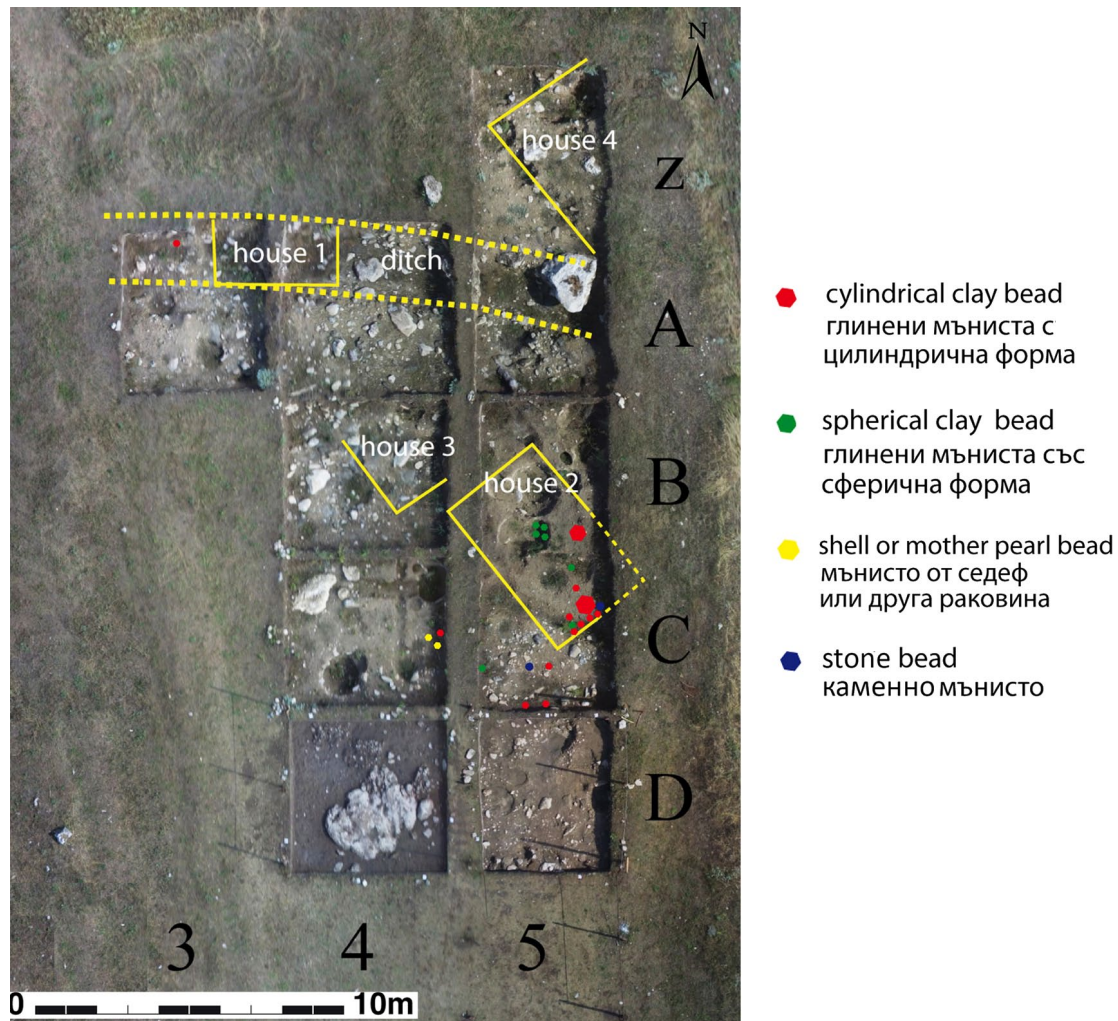


Fig. 8. Spatial distributions of miniature beads made of clay, shell, mother of pearl and stone.

Photo Ch. Tzankov

Обр. 8. Пространствено разположение на миниатюрни мъниста от различни суровини.

Снимка Хр. Цанков

höyük is partially useful, but no formal extrapolation of the entire typological matrix/list is applicable (Bains et al. 2013). The beads from Ilindentsi cover in fact only two of the six types recognised among the abundant bead assemblage from Çatalhöyük – the tubular type which could be either barrel or cylindrical and the sub-spherical type comprising three spheroid-shaped beads with different degrees of regularity (ibid., 347–348, fig. 19.8). What we call biconical beads are more similar to the irregular spheroidal beads, illustrated in fig. 19.11 (ibid., 350).

It is obviously premature to establish or adapt clay bead typology in the case of Ilindentsi owing to the limited number of pieces. More reasonable and epistemologically relevant is to try understanding the purpose of fashioning such small beads and the intention and skills behind them. It is obvious that there are several steps in manufacturing the beads. What could be considered certain in the 'chaîne opératoire' of these small objects?

- They were made of fresh, plastic clay. The texture of the finished beads reveals additions to the clay which may not have been intended as temper. An obvious example represents a bead with a large quartz crystal on its surface (figs. 11.4b; 12.3a). Often the recognizable ingredients consist of sand or grit (fig. 13). No organic material could be distinguished in the clay, but further comparative

micro-analysis of the beads and pottery from the site should clarify the issue.

- The manufacturing process for (mainly) tubular, including cylindrical, beads is described from Çatalhöyük, based on experiments: ... “the clay (while still damp) was most likely wrapped around a reed, straw, twig or a grass, and when the bead was shaped, it was (together with the material used for perforation or without it) placed close to the heating source or left to dry in the sun” (Bains et al. 2013, 350). This process sounds convincingly as for most of the existing clay bead repertoire and entirely applicable to the beads from Ilindentsi. There is, however, a significant difference: in contrast to the beads from Çatalhöyük, which are very fragile, thus considered as being not intentionally baked, or passively baked and only very few-briefly fired (ibid., 351), the beads from Ilindentsi were fired at a temperature similar to that used for pottery firing thus losing most of their fragility. The fact they were recovered by flotation is also suggestive of their resistance.

- The pre-forms of the spheroidal beads (small clay balls) have been perforated unidirectionally with an organic (wood, bone) needle or with a natural, fine, sharply pointed object (a pine needle, reed or fine twig). The evidence for this is the asymmetric holes in most of the clay beads – compare their holes with those of the stone beads (figs. 11.1; 13.4b and 14). The asymmetry is not only in the shape of the holes themselves but more in the difference between the starting and ending points of the perforations. Some of the beads preserve a small clay ‘lip’ around the exit hole (figs. 11.3a; 12.1,2,4b). This suggests the clay had a damp and plastic consistency at the moment of perforation, but at the same time was sufficiently resistant to preserve the shapes of the initial clay balls.

Here, it may be helpful to mention a short, improvised experiment by one of us (MG) using ad hoc materials: simple flour dough, a metal needle (purely to gauge its efficiency) and a wooden needle were used (fig. 16). Five small balls were perforated using the wooden needle (2 mm in diameter) and the effect of the ‘lip-like’ deformation appeared immediately. Because of the smoothness of the dough, the balls were subjected to a slight deformation as well. Additionally, two small balls were pierced with a metal needle, which provoked more obvious deformations of the holes and shapes of the balls.

- The shapes of the clay beads could be interpreted in the following perspective: i) shape variations were carefully predetermined and produced before piercing and firing; ii) the biconical/spheroidal beads represent a kind of preform for the short cylindrical beads (similar also to sub-spherical – figs. 11.3a, 12.4b), which resulted in additional post-firing delicate abrasion of the bead surfaces until they were sufficiently reduced in thickness. At this stage of transformation the hole became more symmetrical (but not regular! – see for ex. fig. 13.2b) from both sides and the texture of the fired clay become more colourful (compare fig. 12.1–2 with fig. 13); iii) the cylindrical beads represent the crucial category with a length variation in between. It is difficult to know which type of bead was most desired in terms of shape – the most delicate short cylindrical or the long cylinders (otherwise called tubular beads). In any case, it is impossible to refit the cylindrical beads in their final form into a long (entire) cylindrical preform assuming its subsequent division into segments.

- There are several beads that represent particular cases of a hypothetical technological process. One bead with a noticeable ‘lip-like’ exit hole shows, however, circular concentric microtraces suggesting rotation/drilling instead of simple piercing (fig. 12.4b). Three beads (figs. 11.2b and 3b) possess quite regular holes with symmetrical contours. The fashioning abrasion is obvious and best represented in the case of one bead with a strongly shaped perimeter (fig. 11.4b). One explanation could be that during perforation the needle was slightly rotated in the holes, thus producing circular/concentric traces caused by small abrasive particles within the clay.

- The peculiar allure and technical stigmata of the clay beads became most obvious when compared with some stone beads (figs. 11.1c and 14). The regular shapes and holes of the stone beads indicate careful abrading and fashioning after (possibly) mechanical and more frequently bipolar

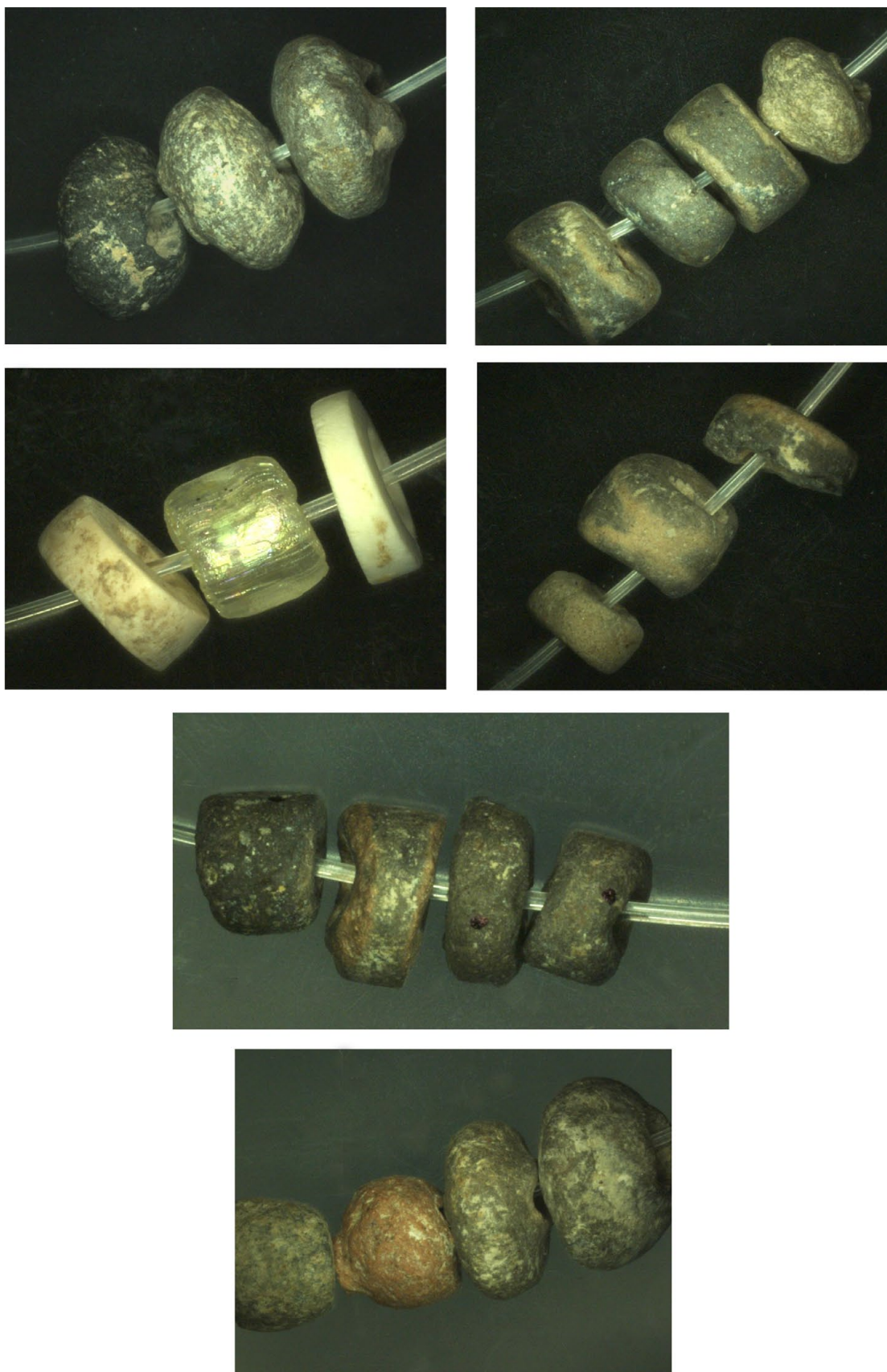


Fig. 9. 'Necklace' 1 in 6 portions/groups of beads (magnification x25; scale bar in mm). Photos M.Gurova
Обр. 9. 'Наниз' 1 в 6 групи мъниста (увеличение x25; мащаб в mm). Снимки М. Гюрова



Fig. 10. 'Necklace' 2 in 5 portions/groups of beads (magnification x25; scale bar in mm). Photos M.Gurova
Обр. 10. 'Наниз' 2 в 5 групи мъниста (увеличение x25; мащаб в mm). Снимки М. Гюрова

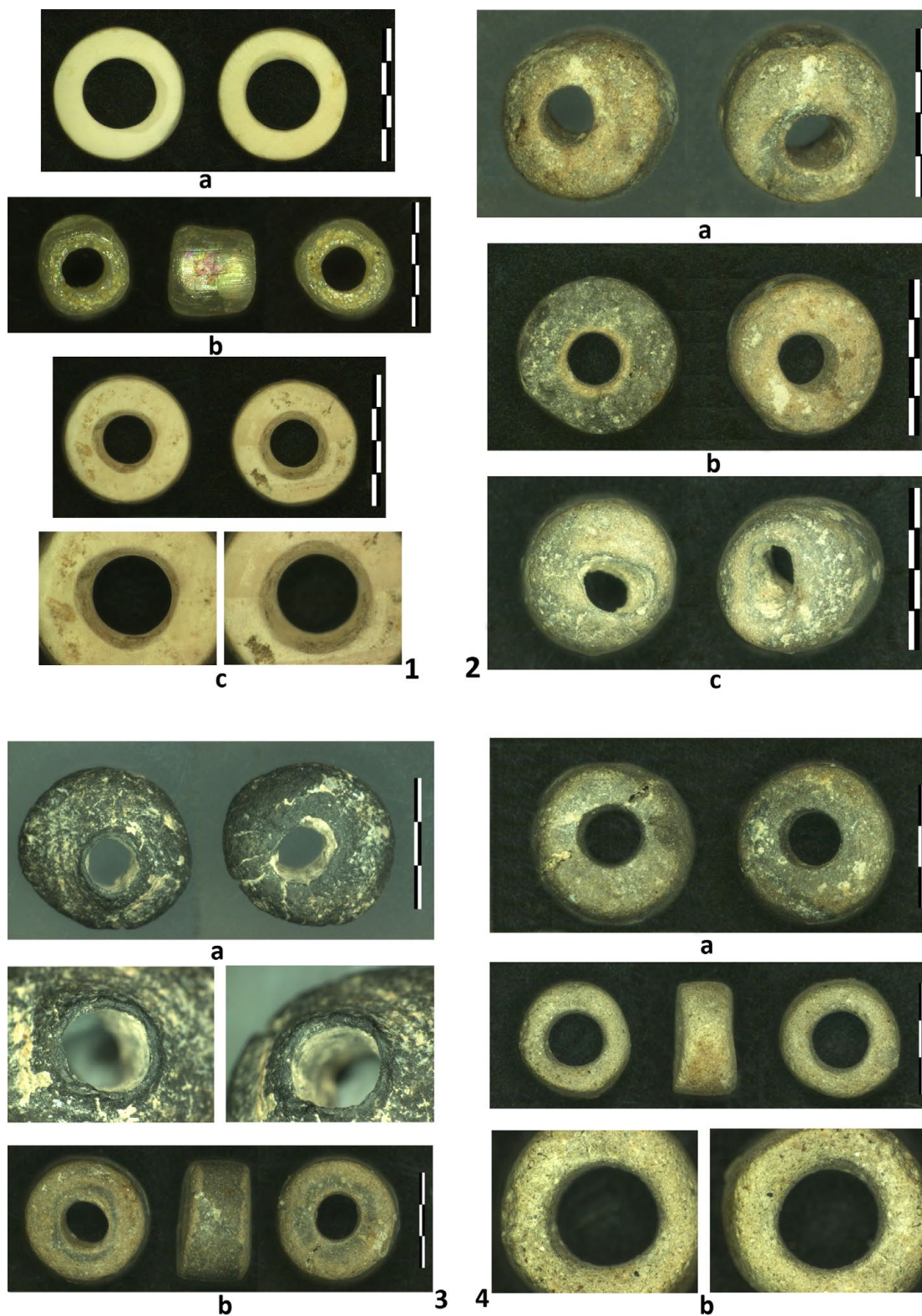


Fig. 11. Beads: 1 – of shell and other materials; 2–4 – of clay (magnification x25; scale bar in mm). Three beads are presented with micro photo details: 1c, 3b & 4 b (magnification range from x50 to x80).

Photos M. Gurova

Обр. 11. Мъниста: 1 – от раковини и друг материал; 2–4 – от глина (увеличение x25; мащаб в mm). Три мъниста са представени с микродетайли: 1c, 3b & 4 b (увеличения от x50 до x80).

Снимки М. Гурова

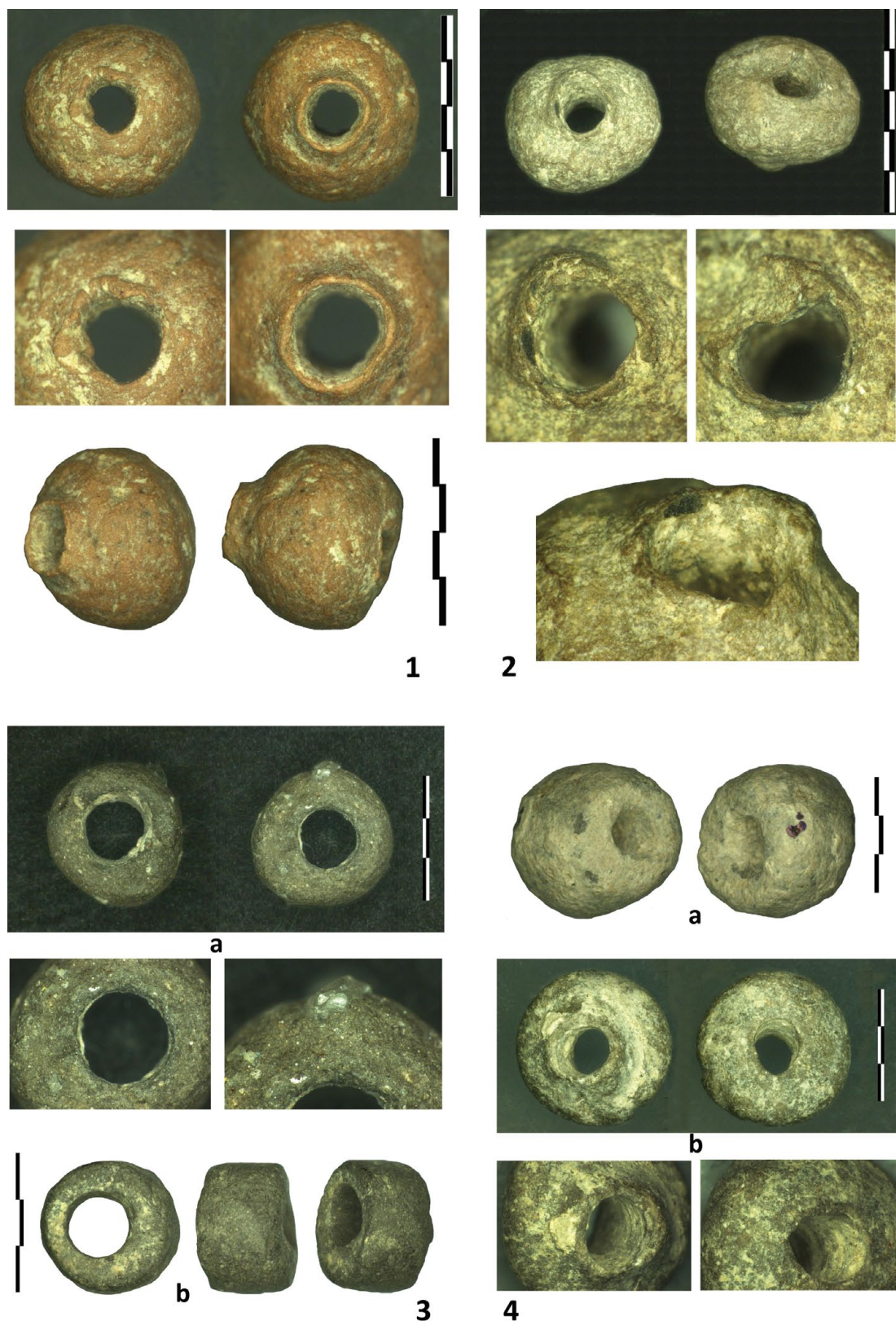


Fig. 12. Beads of clay with various shapes (magnification x25; scale bar in mm). Four beads are presented with micro photo details: 1, 2, 3a & 4b (magnification range from x50 to x80). Photos M.Gurova
 Обр. 12. Мъниста от глина с различна форма (увеличение x25; мащаб в mm). Четири мъниста са представени с микродетайли: 1, 2, 3a & 4b (увеличения от x50 до x80). Снимки М. Гурова

drilling (fig. 11.1c). Contextually, we can assume that the small stone beads were drilled using some of the micropiercers found in proximity (*vide supra*) (fig. 15). On the other hand, morphologically, the micropiercers from Ilindentsi, are definitely not suitable for the most efficient mechanical drilling with a pump drill (see Gurova et al. 2013; Gurova, Bonsall 2017).

As for the clay beads, it is difficult to expect perfect shapes and perforations, taking into account the plasticity and softness of the fresh clay – the material that was subjected to transformation and fashioning. This raw material presumably excludes the use of bipolar drilling.

Neolithic clay beads in their supra-regional context

Clay beads are not frequent finds among the personal ornaments. One of the reasons lies plausibly in the fragility of the raw material. In many taphonomic contexts such implements could not survive, or could remain lost to science if the excavators do not practice sieving and flotation of the sediments. Even if found, clay beads obviously do not attract as strongly as the beads of beautiful shell, coloured stones and other exotic materials.

Whatever the biographies of the clay bead artefacts, the fact that they appear sporadically and sensationally deserve attention and consecutive meticulous archaeometric and comparative analysis.

To our knowledge no specialized study of clay beads has been produced for Bulgaria and adjacent regions. A brief glance at the published materials invites a more specific inquiry into this interesting category of jewellery.

In Bulgaria no clay beads from (Early) Neolithic contexts have been so far published. Recently a small necklace of 14 clay beads came from the rescue excavations of the multilayer prehistoric settlement of Golo Bardo (Levski municipality) (Vaysov et al. 2020). The Late Neolithic layer displays areas of specialized flint (micropiercers) and bone tools. In a shallow pit from the next occupation level belonging to the Early Chalcolithic a necklace of 13 disk-like clay beads is discovered (Vaysov et al. 2020, 279, Cat No 243).

In spite of the abundance of published beads belonging to the Early Neolithic of Franchthi and close parallels between some shell beads from Ilindentsi and pieces from Franchthi (Perlès, Rigaud 2021, fig. 5), and the coexistence of beads and micropiercers/drills, documented on both sites (Perlès, Pion 2020), no clay beads are reported from the Early Neolithic personal adornments from Greece. The repertoire of jewellery paraphernalia in Greece is logically based mainly on prolific use of various shells (see also Ifantidis 2019).

As for Anatolia in general, there is scarce and unbalanced information on clay beads in the context of the personal ornaments. E. Baysal mentions reports of unfired beads from Çayönü and Çatalhöyük, and a single example of a fired bead from Pinarbaşı. On the other hand there is a ‘notable exception’ from the site of Çukuriçi Höyük which displays the manufacture of a standardized range of spherical, biconical and tubular forms of baked clay beads without parallels at other sites (Baysal 2017, 12, 14, fig. 11). On the basis of the bead assemblages from western Anatolia, E. Baysal states out that the Aegean was the “gateway to the east and west”, emphasizing the lack of comparative studies with Balkan bead collections (*ibid.*, 16).

In fact, there is a very detailed and informative study on Neolithic ornamentation from the Çatalhöyük excavations and reports (Bains et al. 2013). Based on a corpus of 642 clay ornaments a detailed typology of six main categories is provided. The reconstructed ‘chaîne opératoire’ is complete – from the raw material (available alluvial clay) through the manufacturing process to the use and, finally, discard of the ornaments. Spatial and diachronic distributions of the beads are provided leading to some interesting observations: the clay beads at Çatalhöyük were not placed in special deposits; their presence is low in burials and buildings and very restricted in the all excavated con-

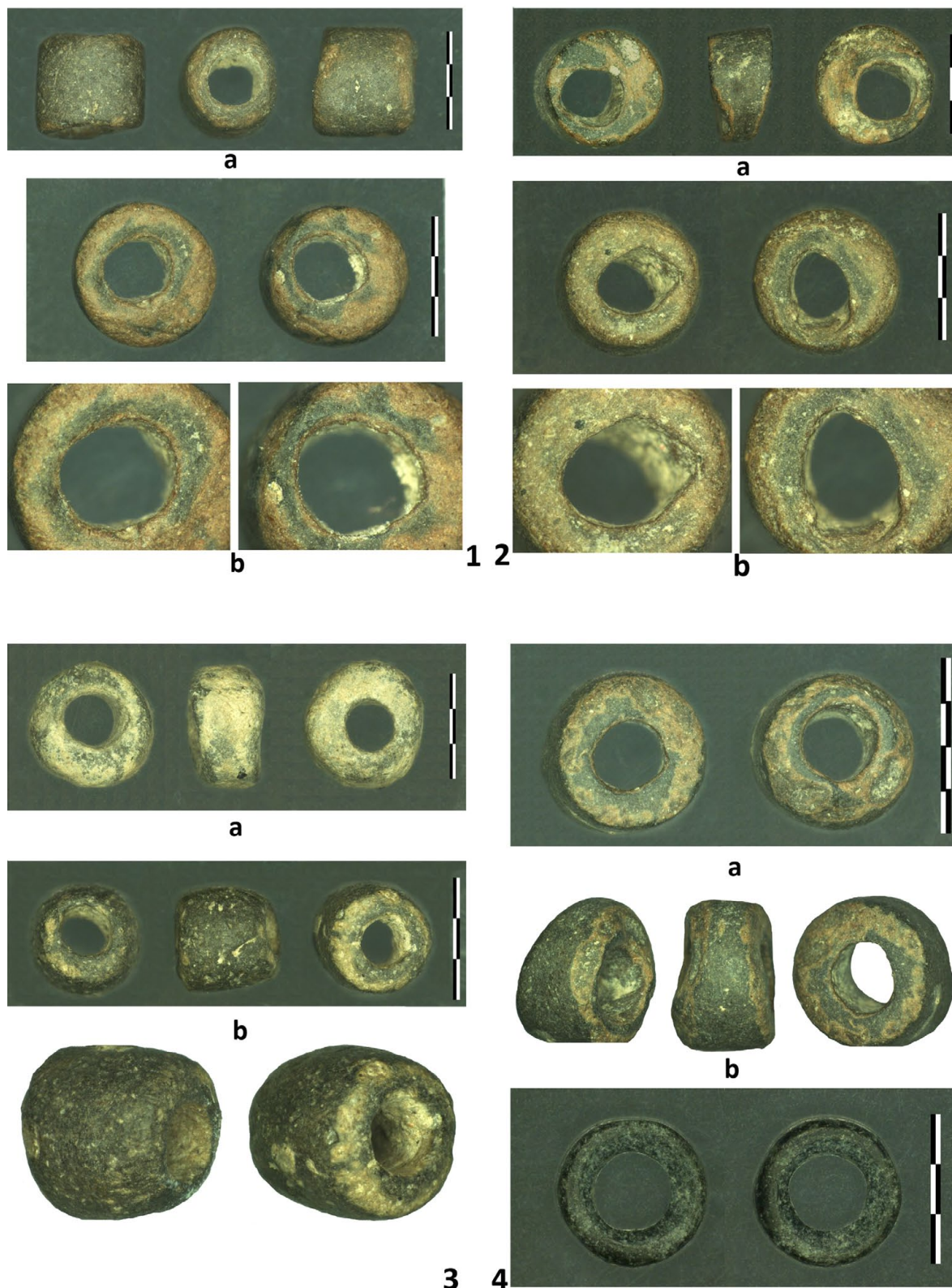


Fig. 13. Beads of clay with more standardized shape (magnification x25; scale bar in mm). Four beads are presented with micro photo details: (1– 4)b (magnification range from x50 to x80). Photos M.Gurova
 Обр. 13. Мъниста от глина с по-стандартизирана форма (увеличение x25; мащаб в mm). Четири мъниста са представени с микродетайли: (1– 4)b (увеличения от x50 до x80). Снимки М. Гюрова

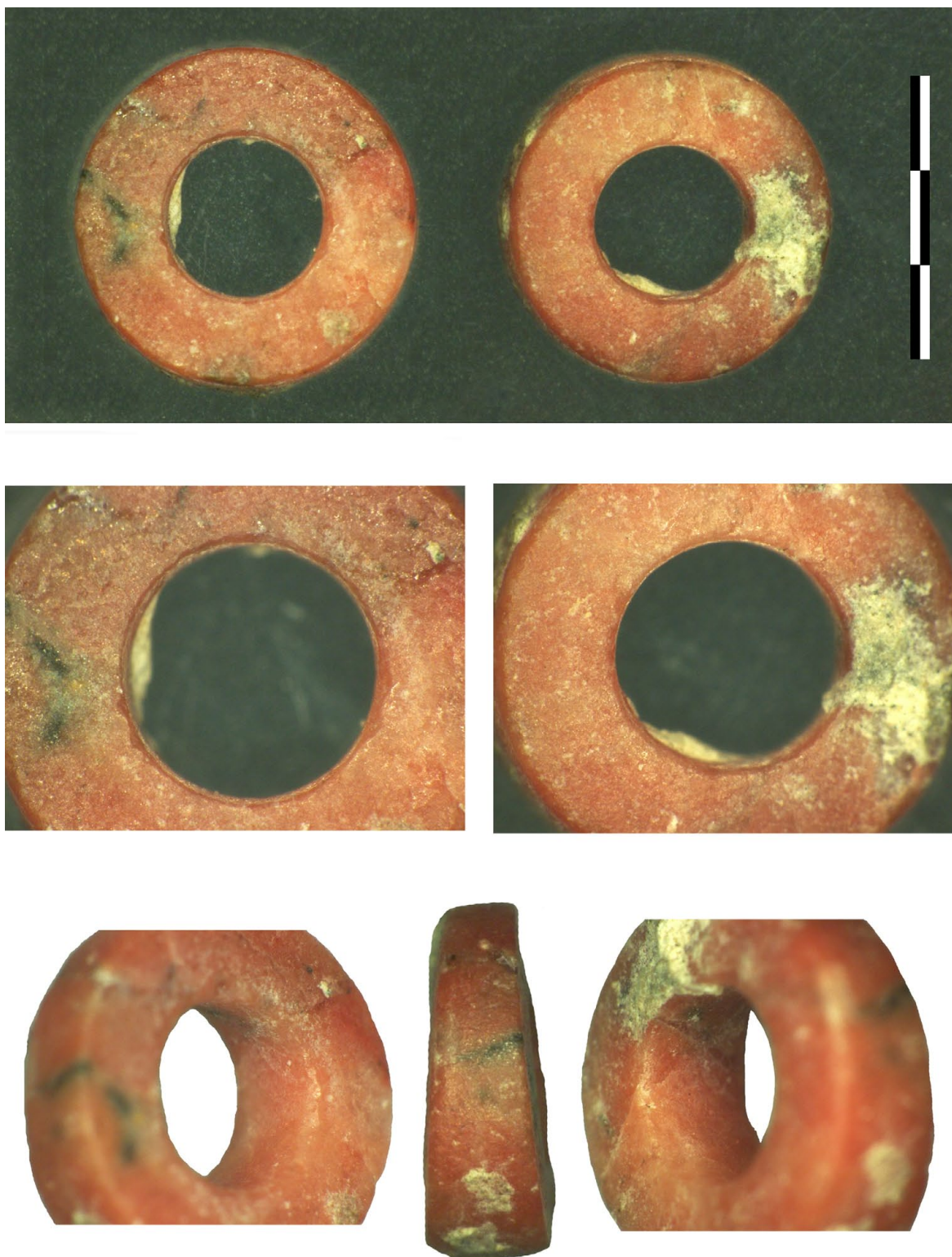


Fig. 14. Disk bead of reddish stone (magnification x25; scale bar in mm). Photos M.Gurova
Обр. 14. Дисквидно мънисто от червеникава скална порода. Снимки М. Гюрова

texts, despite the fact that their production was not time consuming and did not require specific skills.

A recent study on discoidal beads from Starčevo culture contexts presents the disc beads as a novelty introduced by/alongside the Neolithic package (Boroneanț et al. 2019). A small collection of



Fig. 15. Micropiercers from Sq. C5 (scale bar in mm). Photos M.Gurova
Обр. 15. Микропробои от кв. C5 (мащаб в мм). Снимки М. Гурова

ceramic disk beads is commented and illustrated (*ibid.*, fig. 14). The beads came from four Romanian and three Hungarian sites, but the dimensions of the finds raise the question of whether the items are beads or perforated ceramic discs. Based on the illustration, only one bead is sufficiently small to be compared with the beads from Ilindentsi – the one from the Hungarian site of Szentgyörgvyölgy-Pityerdomb (*ibid.*, 58, 71, fig. 6.5).

Three additional clay beads are published from Hungary: two from Endröd, site 3/119, and one – from Szarvas site 8/23 (Starnini 2014, 263–4, fig. 146). All beads are mentioned within the miscellaneous small and fired clay objects, but unfortunately the illustration does not provide reliable information of the dimensions of smaller items. Most likely none of them is smaller than 1 cm.

Discussion and conclusions

The coroplastic items from Ilindentsi form an interesting and diverse collection both in terms of typology and functionality. On the one hand, the presence of two main groups conforms to the general trends in the development of this type of object already identified during the second phase and the end of the Early Neolithic in this region, but we feel it is important to stress the differentiation between two distinct varieties within the second group: Type 1: removable heads (busts); Type 2 monumental busts fixed inside houses. These provide new evidence for possible supraregional contacts between western Bulgaria and the Carpathian basin through several elements – the parallel-piped-shaped figurine with dotted ornament and the idol busts with the distinctive rounded shapes of their mouths.

Furthermore, we identified a new distinct type of figurine defined through corneal growths/hair buns with a relatively confined geographical distribution shared between the modern borders of northern Greece, North Macedonia and southwest Bulgaria. The western connection supports earlier hypotheses for the greater intensity of the contacts between the catchments of the Struma and Vardar River valleys and their parallel cultural development.

These observations however raise new questions. It seems that the iconography of some parallel-piped-shaped figurines that developed along the Struma valley and in the area of Sofia found further development in the Carpathian Basin during the second half of the Early Neolithic period. And yet, does that necessarily imply unidirectional influence or could we begin discussing the reciprocity of the contacts, including the manifestation of certain Carpathian imports as suggested by some rare obsidian finds (Bonsall et al. 2017)?

In a similar manner, the origin of the figurines with flat torsos is typically presented as a distinct Karanovo I development, but on closer inspection it seems questionable whether they indeed made their earliest appearance in Thrace, given that there are numerous examples of these figurines from the Vardar River, i.e. well beyond the distribution area of the style of white-painted pottery characteristic for Karanovo I. Furthermore, considering that local white-painted pottery styles appeared considerably earlier in the central Balkans than in Thrace, we would expect that the flat modelling of the upper parts of the figurines may have actually originated in the west, and from there it could have spread gradually to the east alongside the white-painted pottery.

Even if the modest collection of fragmented anthropomorphic figurines cannot provide answers, it is nonetheless significant that it may inspire new avenues for future research and macro-regional correlations.

As for the clay beads, with no pretension to know all possible publications mentioning clay beads in the context of the Early Neolithic of the Balkans and adjacent regions, we however can state that the information about such objects is still very scarce. In this regard, the finds from Ilindentsi will certainly provoke interest for further specialized and comparative analysis. It would be worth establishing a relevant experimental programme with clay and various organic and bone needles/piercing instruments to shed light on the efficiency of consecutive operations of the ‘*chaîne opératoire*.’ Furthermore, a higher interpretative level could be reached after comparing the clay beads with a large spectrum of beads made of other materials in the context of the potential skeuomorph problem, (see for ex. Ifantidis, XXXII). It is definitely a problem deserving closer attention taking into consideration E. Baysal’s statement about the clay necklace from Çukuriçi: “The burnishing of these clay beads gives them the appearance of dark coloured stone and as the forms are also reminiscent of shapes associated with stone these also might be considered possible skeuomorphs” (Baysal 2017, 14).

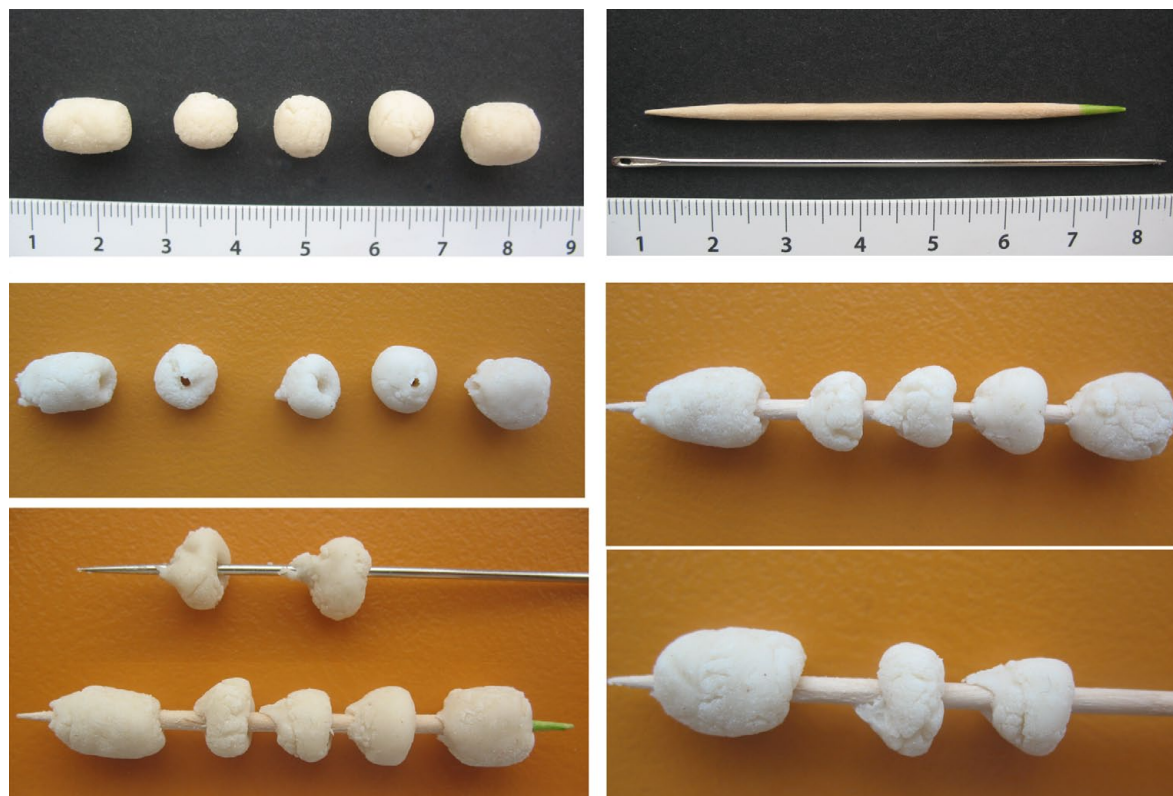


Fig.16. Experimental piercing of 5 dough balls with wood and metal needle. Photos M.Gurova
Обр.16. Експериментално продупчване на 5 тестени топчета с дървена и метална игла.
Снимки М. Гурова

The impressive clay bead assemblage (36 miniature pieces) represents incomparable evidence of ornaments and could be inscribed in the conceptual inquiry, well formulated on the basis of enormous jewellery corpus from Greece: “... the archaeological studies of ornament manufacture, conditions of use, destruction, repair, deposition, and/or exchange can be examined under various epistemological prisms” (Ifantidis, XXVIII). Conceptualizing the social proxy of the clay bead requires more solid empirical data and broader comparative study. On this stage of knowledge and reasoning of the finds some relevant questions could be formulated as follows:

- what is the time span of appearance and functioning of the clay jewellery beads; are they culturally assigned to the Early Neolithic or might they appear randomly in later periods as in the case of the Golo Bardo site (see Vaysov et al. 2020)? Were there some diachronic changes/transformation in the processing, deposition and use of the clay beads?;

- what is the spatial distribution of the clay beads – did they follow the wave of advance of Neolithic novelties from the Levant through Anatolia and SE Europe or did they appear simultaneously at different places thus confirming the polycentric theory of origin, diffusion and evolution of past cultural events?;

- are they commonly (or frequently) associated with other types of beads or did they appear as a separate branch of apprenticeships? An interesting observation relates to the case of Sq C5 of Ilindentsi. The clay beads from there pronouncedly dominate over other jewellery items and formally the beads could be associated with the large series of micropiercers from this square. On the other hand, it is certain that chalcedony piercers were not used for clay bead manufacture because of undeniable morphological and technological constraints;

- following on from the above – could clay beads be interpreted as requiring solid craft spe-

cialization and experienced skills attributed to the members of jewellery workshops or is it possible they were made by children/young women with great patience and passion and in the context of autonomous household production?

- which social (individual and communal) value did these unpretentious and not particularly aesthetic ornaments embody? There is much more to be done for assessing the meaning and purpose of the clay beads in the material culture of sedentary communities.

Clearly, there are more questions than possible answers and we think a general remark by E. Baysal could serve as a fitting end to our initial study: “In the most general terms, prehistoric ornaments offer an opportunity to study multiple materials in one of their most mobile formats, and to trace directionality of movement as well as production and distribution in cases where source is known” (Baysal 2020, 66). A successful first step would be a detailed study on prehistoric personal adornments and creation of a typological classification that might shed light on both chronological and cultural aspects of these objects and the societies that produced them.

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Антропоморфни фигурки и миниатюрни мъниста от раннеолитното селище Илинденци, Югозападна България

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(резюме)

Статията представя антропоморфните фигурки и миниатюрните глинени мъниста, открити по време на археологическото проучване на праисторическото селище Илинденци, Масовец в периода 2011–2018 г. Обектът се отнася към втората половина на ранния неолит и средния неолит (Grębska-Kulow, Zidarov 2020). Антропоморфните фигурки са важен индикатор за културна принадлежност и контакти, а миниатюрните мъниста са най-впечатляващите и оригинални находки от този обект.

От праисторическото селище Илинденци произхождат 11 антропоморфни фигурки в различна степен на запазеност, но нито една цяла. Намерени са в различни стратиграфски контексти: три са намерени в хетерогенен пласт (хумусен или непосредствено под хумуса), една произхожда от пласта, отнесен към втората фаза на финалния ранен неолит и седем са намерени в ями от първата и втората фаза на финалния ранен неолит (обр. 1). Десет от тях са направени от глина, а една е от мрамор. Шест глинени фигурки имат украса от врязани линии или набождания, една е покрита с пласт бяла боя, а три са без украса.

В резултат на типологическия анализ на глинениите фигурки, те са обособени в три групи:

- Фигурки с уголемен ханш и седалищни части (стеатопигия). Това е най-популярната

група, представена от четири фигурки (обр. 2.1–4; 3.1–4);

- Фигурки с формата на призма/паралелепипед. В Илинденци не са намерени типични за тази група фигурки, но три частично отговарят на тази характеристика (обр. 4.1.3; 5.1.3; 6);
- Фигурки с пластични израстъци (кокове или рога) на главата. Към тази група са отнесени две фигурки от обекта (обр. 4.2; 5.2).

Намерена е и една схематично представена мраморна фигурка. Тя е запазена само в долната си част, с едва загатнати и разделени крака. Фигурката е счупена в стесняване, отговарящо на талията (обр. 7).

Пространственото разположение на фигурките показва интересна особеност (обр. 1). Три от първата група са намерени в южната част на селището, в района на къща № 5, а две от втората група, както и мраморна фигурка са намерени в района на къща № 2. Останалите са намерени в ями или в пласта със смесен археологически материал, а последната е от повърхността в югоизточната периферия на селището и извън разкопаната площ.

Антропоморфните фигурки са много информативни за културното развитие и контакти в района на Средна Струма през втората половина на ранния неолит. Фигурките показват много ясни връзки с материали от Република Северна Македония, което потвърждава тезата за оживени културни контакти и сходно културно развитие на двата региона през ранния неолит. Няколко стилистични елементи свидетелстват за надрегионални връзки между Западна България и Панонската низина.

Интерпретацията на фигурките повдига и няколко дискуссионни въпроса:

а) за характера на контактите на населението от долината на Струма и Софийското поле (от една страна) и Панонската низина (от друга) през втората половина на ранния неолит. Възниква въпросът дали движението на хора и идеи не е било двупосочно?

б) за генезиса на фигурките с плосък торс, които традиционно се свързват с култура Караново I – интересно е в кой от ареалите те се появяват най-рано? По поречието на Вардар има много фигурки от този тип, но не се среща типичната бялорисувана керамика от Карановски стил. Очевидно не е изключено този начин на оформяне на горните части на фигурките да е със западен произход и последващо разпространение в източната посока.

Миниатюрните мъниста са много характерни за раннонеолитното селище Илинденци. Намерени са 41 мъниста (обр. 9 и 10) като повечето от тях произхождат от къща № 2 (обр. 8). Основната част – 36 бр. са направени от глина и значително по-малко – 5 бр., са оформени от други суровини: миди, минерали, седеф (обр. 11.1,4; 14). Специфична особеност за обекта представляват глинени мъниста. Техният диаметър варира между 3 и 5 mm, а диаметърът на пробитите дупки е между 1.2 и 1.8 mm.

Мънистата могат да се обособят в два основни типа: цилиндрични (28 бр.) с различна дължина на цилиндричната част и с различна симетричност (успоредност) на трансверсалните страни (обр. 11 и 13) и сфероидни или биконични (8 бр.) (обр. 12.1,2,4). Глинени мъниста от Илинденци са добре изпечени, твърди и устойчиви на вода, което се доказва от факта, че са намерени сред материалите от флотация. Мънистата със сфероидна форма се характеризират с остатъчно тесто (оформено като малко и несиметрично устие) около втората (по посока на пробиването) дупка, т.е. изходното им отворствие. В този смисъл те са много показателни за технологията на оформянето им – еднопосочно пробиване и вероятно нанизване на тънки иглоподобни предмети от кост, дърво или друг вид органичен материал (обр. 12.1,2,4b). Това потвърждава и простият, но информативен експеримент на един от авторите (МГ) с малки топчета от обикновено тесто, пробивани с дървена клечка и с метална игла (последното е за сравнение на ефективността, не за наподобяване на праисторическа техника!) (обр. 16).

Anthropomorphic figurines and miniature beads from the Early Neolithic settlement of ...

Колекцията от миниатюрни глинени мъниста от Илинднеци е уникална, не намира аналогии сред публикуваните материали от синхронни праисторически селища на Балканите и намира паралели с емблематични анатолийски обекти като Çatalhöyük и Çukuriçi. Глинените мъниста поставят редица въпроси относно тяхното място и роля в т.н. неолитен пакет, тяхната технология и предназначение, както и значението им в духовните аспекти на праисторическото общество.