



KING MATTHIAS MUSEUM
Hungarian National Museum



INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGICAL SCIENCES
Eötvös Loránd University

ANIMALS AND ARCHAEOLOGY WORKSHOP

June 14–16, 2013

King Matthias Museum of the Hungarian National Museum

Royal Palace, Visegrád

Painted bovines on the ceramic ware of the Chalcolithic Cucuteni and Tripolye cultures

Abstract

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Bovines, either wild or domesticated, played a major role in the religious symbolism of the Neolithic populations of the Near East and South-eastern Europe. After the collapse of the astonishing Chalcolithic civilisations of South-eastern Europe around 4050 Cal BC, only the Cucuteni and Tripolye cultures from Eastern Romania and Western Ukraine survived for another six centuries. Starting with the Cucuteni A-B–Tripolye BII phase, some cult vessels begin to feature painted images of wild and domestic animals. During the Cucuteni B–Tripolye CI phase, the first painted representations of bovines make their appearance. The bovines seem to illustrate a cosmogonical myth or, in other instances, to compose, alongside other animals, friezes that decorate the cultic vessels. Some representations are realistic enough as to allow the approximate identification of the species. Whether the depictions are of wild or of domesticated specimens can be ascertained depending on the context. Of particular interest is the representation of a cow with a calf, “blessed” by a female deity.

This work was supported by a grant of the Romanian National Authority for Scientific Research, CNCS – UEFISCDI, project number PN-II-ID-PCE-2011-3-0885.