

Depictions of birds in the Cucuteni-Tripolye civilisation

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In the settlements of the Cucuteni and Tripolye cultures there have been discovered few osteological remains from birds. On the other hand, in the Cucuteni-Tripolye imagery, birds seem to occupy an important position. The oldest depictions date from the Cucuteni A phase. Four figurines, of rather modest dimensions, have been discovered at Frumușica. They are modelled realistically enough as to allow the identification of the species to which they belong. Starting with the Cucuteni A-B phase, and then throughout the Cucuteni B phase, the ornithomorphic figurines cease to be produced. During this time span, the anthropomorphic and zoomorphic painted depictions become widespread, and the first painted images of birds appear.

During our investigations we have identified a number of figurines, several zoomorphic vessels, several protomes, and dozens of painted images. A significant number of Cucuteni-Tripolye ornithomorphic representations are modelled or painted realistically enough that we can identify the species to which the birds belong; other representations, particularly the vessels, are fragmentary and stylised to a degree which renders the identification of the species impossible. Conversely, the painted images are often clear enough for permitting the identification of the species.

On the basis of these data, the authors attempt to establish, with as much accuracy as possible, which of the depicted species were domesticates. The authors are also concerned by the meaning of the images employed for illustrating cosmogonic myths. The vessels onto which bird representations were painted are part of the sacred apparatus, and where used for various religious rituals.

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