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Two sherds remain of a ceramic figurine, smashed in prehistoric times by the inhabitants of house H 20 and dumped into the house's left-hand side pit. A discussion of current and recent views on LBK figurines – commonly called idols– renders religious connotations doubtful. Instead the label „statuette“ is suggested for these objects possibly linked to an ancestor cult. Finally, a full reconstruction of the original figurine is presented.

9.1 INTRODUCTION

An entry in the excavation diary reporting on the proceedings in trench 14 requires attention:

Feature 14002 ... turned out to be quite rich ... From feature 14002 two botanical samples have been taken and a charcoal sample; also some bone fragments were collected ... Feature 14002 is possibly part of the southwestern side pit [left-hand Längsgrube of House 20]. This feature presents a homogeneous humous filling rich in finds. In its first half a decorated sherd was found, the shape of which cannot as yet be placed. (my translation, PvdV)

After that, the curiously formed sherd disappeared without notice. In July 2005, however, it was returned (together with quite a number of other decorated sherds from fifteen different features in a crate) by an anonymous sender, who presumably had guarded it in the meantime. Among the other sherds, a second fragment of the same object was found. The sheer quantity of the forwarded sherds made it necessary to re-compute almost all tables and adapt my text in a number of places: needless to say that I am very obliged to Mr/Mrs Anon.

More important than that lament are the two oddly shaped pottery sherds from the crate, begging a special discussion. I shall start with a short description accompanying the drawings, then set them in their wider Bandkeramik scholarly context, and finally venture a reconstruction.

9.2 DESCRIPTION

The two sherds to which the diary refers derive from the same object: they neatly fit together (fig. 9-1). The larger fragment measures 75 × 44 × 27 mm; the walls vary in thickness between 6 and 8 mm. This sherd consists of two hollow shapes, the larger one slightly conical (almost a tube) with an inner diameter ranging from about 40 mm to 27 mm; its axis

is taken as defining the vertical with the largest diameter on the lower end. If a tube may be assumed for its original shape, the cone has been halved lengthwise and also broken in its lower part so that no trace of a lower end has remained. On one of the cone's vertical sides a kind of small platform or shoulder (16 × 23 mm) is visible; this platform looks as if a protuberance (like an arm) originally had been fastened there, since lost. Underneath this platform the second sherd fits over an area of c. 11 × 7 mm (vertical × horizontal). The second hollow shape on the first sherd is like a partial rim, and has been fixed on top of the cone, as can be seen on the fracture and by the smearing on the inside of the object. At the junction the sherd attains its largest thickness (8 mm) around the full perimeter. The rim probably represents the top of the original object; its shape suggests a collar. The outsides of both collar and cone have been decorated: the first one with a small set of point impressions. The cone shows a combination of a spiral line and auxiliary points twinned in a refracted (mirrored) pattern set in a frame; on either side are two slanted lines also refracted to V-structures, again with auxiliary points.

The smaller sherd measures 51 × 30 × 11 mm with a thickness from 7 to 9 mm, its thickest part is towards the lower end. This sherd is slightly convex width-wise, quite reminiscent of the tube-part of the larger sherd; indeed the inner surfaces of both sherds smoothly define an oval line at their junction (as shown in the cross-section in fig. 9-4). Unlike the other sherd, the smaller sherd is slightly hollow to a depth of about 2 or 3 mm along its longitudinal axis. Though original corners or edges are missing, the sherd's orientation is fixed by its fit to the other sherd. The upper half of the outer surface is eroded away; a few incised lines only remain at right angles, similar to the first sherd. Importantly, a diminutive almost horizontal ridge in the centre of the sherd suggests the original presence of an appliqué, now broken off. The elements of the decoration on both sherds are fully in line with those on the other sherds from the same *Längsgrube*, putting them firmly in the third House Generation of the settlement.

Both sherds have been made from finely sieved clay without apparent inorganic temper; small holes on the surface of the inside and black specks on the fractures of the two



fig. 9-1 Geleen-Janskamperveld,
feature no 14002; two sherds from
ceramic figurine

suggest organic additives, which burnt up when the object was fired. Organic additives to the temper are very rare in the ceramic inventory of the Janskamperveld LBK village (less than 2% of the pots); this type of temper is reminiscent of pre-Flomborn, or Älteste Bandkeramik practice. The surface has been smoothed on the outside as well as (but less so) on the inside. The colour of the non-eroded surface of the larger sherd is dark greyish brown, of the smaller one brownish grey with preserved parts of dark greyish brown; both their cores are light greyish yellow. The light colours of the sherds' interiors with smaller parts of dark greyish brown are perhaps indicative of a hollow (tubular) original shape, as this would allow sufficient oxygen to enter during the firing of the object; had it been closed on either or both ends much darker colours would have prevailed.

The object, of which the two sherds are the remains, belongs to a class of objects labelled "idols" (more on the terminology and classification in the next section). Such objects occur in a limited number of forms, and their more or less standardized attributes in the Bandkeramik culture allow a guess at the reconstruction of the Janskamperveld specimen as described in the final section of this chapter.

9.3 DISCUSSION

Both Dutch (Beckers and Beckers; Modderman) and German (Becker, Grönwald; Höckmann, Kaufmann, Schade-Lindig, Stäuble, etc) texts on similar unique, non-pottery ceramic objects, label them *idolen* (in Dutch), *Idole* (in German) which may be translated into English as 'idols'. In the three languages that concept may be defined as 'Image of deity used as object of worship' (as the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* has it¹). However, with the exception of Lüning (2005) nowhere in the archaeological literature is presented a justification for the religious attribution of these objects, the cult character merely being assumed, probably based on the rarity and the invariably (sometimes even clearly on purpose) broken nature of these diversely formed and decorated baked clay things from outside the regular bandkeramik ceramic programme. 'Cult' and 'religion' refer to institutionalized conduct, that is repetitive behaviour with a regular attendance and participation of several people, mostly at specific places and set times². Thus, Lüning writes about "priests" and "priestesses" in LBK society (Lüning 2005, 275). As Kaufmann quite some time ago rightly observed, LBK society was not that complex to expect much

institutionalisation — yet he persisted in using the *Idol*-label in his overview (Kaufmann 1976, 63). Although agreeing with Kaufmann's reasoning, I rather prefer 'figurine' or 'statuette' (German *Figur*, *Figurine*, *Statuette*, *Plastik* or *Kleinplastik*) to 'idol' as signifiers, being void of cultic or religious connotations.

Never complete, figurines occur exclusively in the regular household debris, they are never encountered in graves. Yet another common denominator of these Bandkeramik figurines³ is their rarity. Kaufmann writes that "they may be expected in almost every Bandkeramik settlement" but has to admit, a few lines later, that they have been found in only 4% of well over 1400 East-German LBK sites (Kaufmann 1976, 63) — in the present light, LBK figurines are restricted geographically to Central European regions (with a few outliers) and chronologically to the Älteste Bandkeramik period (LBK-I in the German system), also with a few off-shoots into the



fig. 9-2 "Arm of an Idol, Hut 2, Stein" —after Beckers & Beckers 1940, Afb. 9

Flomborn period (LBK-II). On the Dutch Graetheide, far from the Central European main distribution, and post-dating the Älteste LBK, three such objects have now been secured from some seventy or eighty known sites, one from Stein (Beckers/Beckers 1940, 53, 122), one from Sittard (Modderman 1959, 100, 97), and the present one from the Geleen-Janskamperveld excavation (fig. 9-1). For comparative purposes I have presented the other Graetheide figurines in figs 9-2 and 9-3; the Stein 'idol'/object has only superficial similarities (if any) with the one from the Janskamperveld, the Sittard 'idol' is less different.

The excavation of figurines is generally announced in short reports (e.g. Lehmann 2004, 64, the 'Venus of Kückhoven' almost hidden between hundreds of pages of finds and features; or Stäuble/Steguweit 2003, with their 'Adonis von Zschernitz' inconspicuously tucked away between noisy advertisements of Roman archaeology books; an exception is Schade-Lindig 2002). Systematic general treatments have been few and far between until the last turn of the century: Höckmann (1972), Kaufmann (1976) in the last century; then one shortly after another beginning with Pavlů (1998, mainly about Central European finds), followed by Grönwald (2004; with an extended bibliography, all titles pre-1980, and most even pre-1950), Hofmann (2005; also with an extensive bibliography), Lünig (2005), Becker (2006a, b), and Hansen (2007).

When comparing the various studies, it is striking that the circumscription of this class of objects becomes narrower with time. In the 1970s Kaufmann and Höckmann include all kinds of outlandish shapes as well as the anthropomorphic/tortoise (*Krötendarstellungen*) pottery appliqués and incised decorations on pottery vessels; both authors present extensive typologies based on the systematization and grouping of their data. Grönwald, in the present century still elaborating on Höckmann's earlier studies, emphasizes the rarity of the

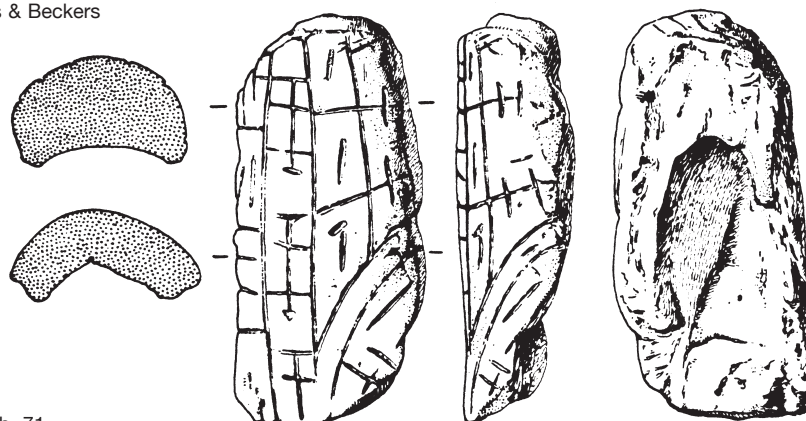


fig. 9-3 The Sittard Idol —after Modderman 1959, Abb. 71

statuettes, their exclusive settlement location and fragmentation; as his predecessor, he distinguishes anthropomorphic and cylindrical ‘idols’, but also a vase-like enthroned type with many sub-types (he bases the cultic implication on the probably intentional fracture of these objects). Other recent studies have generally been more restrictive in the definition of types. Thus, in her two overviews of Balkan and Central European figurines, Becker defines two main types of ‘idols’: one limbless type without feet or legs, and rounded or oval on section; the other type is quite articulated with a face, a long neck and upper part of the body, has accentuated buttocks and well-formed legs and feet — each of these two classes again comprises a fairly large number of sub-types. Quite different in approach is Pavlů’s reticent and straightforward study of Central European face vessels as regional cultural markers. Lüning similarly observes that only a restricted gamut of shapes, gestures and postures is behind the many differences; they come in four types, female, male, zoomorphic and human-zoomorphic. In a clearly post-modern reaction to these generalizations, Hofmann writes about the individuality of each of these objects and proposes a continuum from purely anthropomorphic shapes by intermediate stages to zoomorphic images.

If the present Janskamperveld sherd indeed presents half of a cylindrical figure, it may be grouped with the anthropomorphic class recognised by all authors quoted.

Noting that these figurines are ubiquitous in preceding (Starcevo-Körös), simultaneous (Vinča and others), and subsequent (Zeliezovce) Balkan neolithic cultures, most authors implicitly or explicitly seek explanations for the occurrence of this class of objects in the diffusion of neolithic Balkan ideas (especially fertility cults) into Central Europe (e.g., Schade-Lindig 2002, 57, 62, 63; Hansen in Gally/Hansen 2006, 254-255; Grönwald 2004). A small sample of quotes is illustrative: “Similar far-reaching ties right to the Starcevo-ring can be demonstrated” (p. 57); a few lines down: “Often a possibly cultic destruction of the idols has been pointed out ... A connection with the Vinča culture seems thus proven” (p. 57); also interesting is “From the make-up and shape of the idols, connections with easterly regions are less clear, although their basic shapes and ‘ideology’ derive from there” (p. 62) (all from Schade-Lindig 2002; my transl., PvdV). Such remarks make one wonder why geographical space is favoured over diachronic time, as already in the Palaeolithic quite similar figurines were made in the same area as was later occupied by the LBK (Verpoorte 2000). That technology, size and the properties of the clay do severely limit the possible variability and thus force a basic “comparability” on miniature clay objects (once given an anthropomorphic turn) over vast spaces and deep time, is not taken into account by these authors. Like Pavlů wrote: “... the occurrence of similar objects in distant, non-contiguous

cultures and areas shows that we are dealing here with the universal representation of the human body under certain, locally conditioned circumstances” (Pavlů 1998, 124, my transl.).

As regards the *meaning* of these objects, Schade-Lindig proposed a special link between “regional centres” and (the production of) figurines. Writing about the excavations in Nieder-Mörlen, by some considered a “regional centre” of the LBK settlement (*sensu* Zimmermann 1995), she imagines several specializations within the village, among which the tabooed production of ‘idols’. According to her, “regional centres” are generally better equipped with statuettes; however, Elsloo, reputedly a regional centre, has as yet not yielded any figurine⁴. Quantitative differences may be apparent rather than real, though: at Nieder-Mörlen the layer with finds had an exceptional thickness of one and a half metre; small wonder that there are many more figurine(-like object)s there than in other settlements, central or peripheral. A different tack has recently been taken by Hofmann (2005). She writes about these figurines from an ethnographically informed perspective⁵, rightly rejecting diffusionist Balkan unitary connotations and parallels for reasons of ignored geographical and chronological distance, instead of accounting for local uses and meanings in local contexts. To her, “each piece is very individualistic” and quite abstract. This latter quality of enigma will have been a problem to common understandings in LBK societies, and their smashing served to dissipate the resulting tensions “in [a] small-scale domestic ritual involving ... perhaps only one person”. In other words, the figurines were occasionally made to answer individual psychological problems. Lüning’s short twin-essay estimates the total number of excavated figurines at about 150: fifty recognizably female statuettes, fifty possibly⁶ male, and fifty animal figurines (Lüning 2005). There are likenesses between figurines from different settlements, as well as similar decoration in the three classes, likenesses and similarity that may be attributed to a cult of common ancestors of lineage segments (p. 212, clearly referring to Pavlů 1998 who first considered kin relationships as background in this respect). Based on the richer settlements of the Älteste Bandkeramik, where there are equal numbers of houses and figurines⁷, an original location of these statuettes in “a small separate Holy of Holies” in the rear part of the LBK houses is proposed (like the Roman *lararia*), where they served as ancestor images to be destroyed at the giving up of the house, every generation so (Lüning 2005, 273, 209).

Thus one major argument seems to revolve around the numbers of figurines present in the settlements compared to the numbers of houses. However, the declining production of figurines already within the Flomborn period of the LBK impedes any attempt at ‘testing’. Leaving this aside, from a simulation, similar to the one described for the regular

pottery in another chapter⁸, it can be derived that their present rarity (on the Graetheide, and more specifically in the Janskamperveld village) is probably a reflection of earlier rarity, as with 90% sherd loss (as inferred for the pottery at Janskamperveld) about 40-60% of the original units would still be represented in the record; with higher loss rates, that percentage rapidly declines (at 95% only approximately 10-30% remaining). In round numbers: there may originally have been 2 or 3 *ceramic* figurines, or if the last condition obtains, anywhere between 3 and 10; certainly wooden or textile figurines may compensate for the difference, but just as likely Central European customs may have differed from those in the northwestern Bandkeramik as well, including the area of ancestor veneration.

9.4 AN ATTEMPT AT RECONSTRUCTION⁹

In fig. 9-4 is presented an attempt at a graphical reconstruction of the Janskamperveld figurine. The starting point for the reconstruction is the junction of the two sherds which defines an oval with axes of 45 × 52 mm (inside 29 × 40 mm). Perpendicular to this junction plane, the long axis of the figurine to be reconstructed neatly groups both sherds to a joint height of 96 mm. The top of the statuette is still partially present, feet or bottom are no longer in evidence, but the thick lower part of the second sherd suggests a nearby position of the bottom rim or the bottom of the hollow figure. The part of the oval occupied by the larger sherd suggests a similar piece as complement to complete the shape on the other side. This allows a symmetrical positioning of another platform to which a second protuberance may have been

fixed; it also allows a mirroring of the ornament, resulting in a symmetrical filling in of the space between the platforms.

A problem is posed by the upper rim, which starts to look like a collar, if the previous paragraph is a correct inference. Collars were unknown among Bandkeramik figurines: whenever an upper part is present, a head with eyes and nose (with often also a hat on top) is evident (cp. the figures accompanying Lüning 2005). Leafing through the literature, though, two Hungarian statuettes from the Zeliezovce culture (Late Music Note, slightly younger than LBK-V) site of Törökbálint-Dulácska were found which without any doubt show collars similar to the one reconstructed in fig. 9-4 (Becker 2006a, T. 56, and 474-475; also in Hansen 2007, T. 509-1.2). With that image still in mind, a rimsherd (diameter 12 cm) from Bad-Nauheim-Nieder-Mörlen, a (early Flomborn) Bandkeramik object, also has to be interpreted as showing a collar (Kneipp 1998 T. 53, 3; Becker 2006a, T. 78-3). Thinking this through the collar defines the back of the figurine, and a face can be reconstructed on the front. This then leaves the two small platforms facing forward, and two arms can be reconstructed over the 'diminutive ridge' in the centre of the lower sherd, like in the Hungarian examples but also visible on several LBK statuettes. The 'eroded' upper half of the lower sherd suggests the presence of an appliqué larger than the two arms, and therefore a small bowl has been drawn there in the reconstruction; breasts, indicative of a female image, can probably be ruled out: those that are found on other Bandkeramik figurines are small, and not sufficient to fill up the eroded space. This leaves only the lower rim of the object questionable;

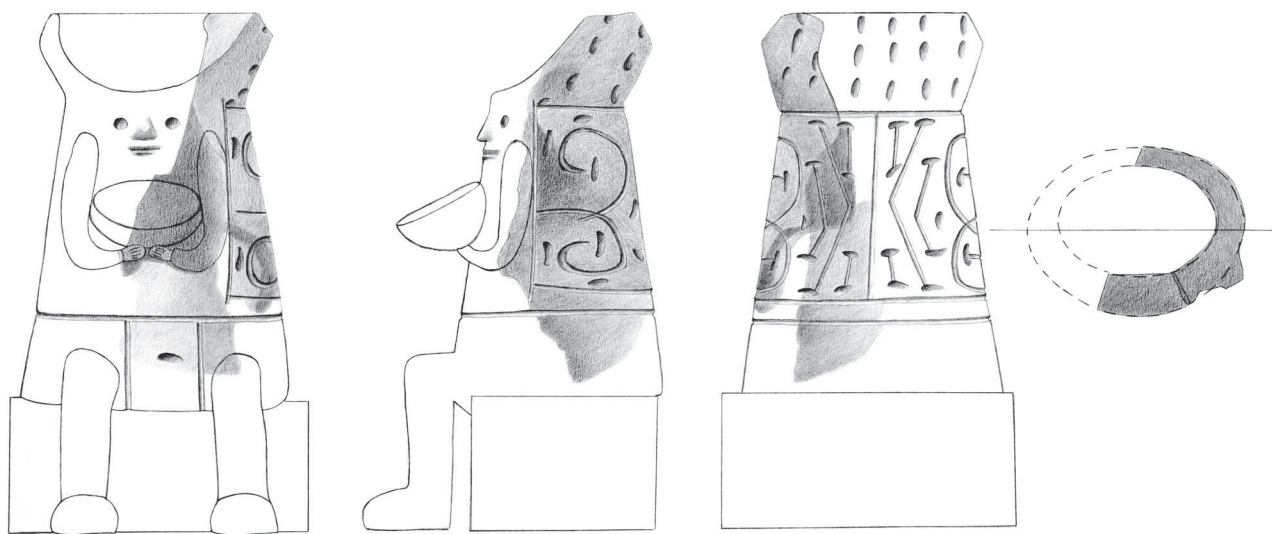


fig. 9-4 Reconstruction of the figurine; drawing by Erik van Driel

the solution in fig. 9-4 is one of a number of possibilities. One weak indicator of a sitting posture may be the slightly conical shape of the larger sherd; judging from the illustrations, sitting (“enthroned”) figurines show such outlines, whereas standing statuettes have either straight or crooked cylindrical body shapes (cf. Gally 2006, Abb. 5 in Gally/Hansen 2006). If the reconstruction of this figure is accepted, then the height of the statuette is 140 mm, which is neatly within the range of sizes of these objects.

A note on the number of sherds into which the original statuette may have been broken, this *à propos* the simulation referred to: in the upper part three sherds make up the circumference, the height is divided over more than two sherds; this would amount to the figurine having been fractured into 6 to 9 sherds, perhaps even one or two more.

The biggest problem with the reconstruction is, of course, the head. The top of the larger sherd clearly had no such feature but a collar instead, whereas all those LBK “idols” that have preserved their upper parts show head-like protuberances, however awkwardly executed. The Nieder-Mörten sherd mentioned above is not very helpful in this respect either. Yet one enthroned female figurine (from Erfurt) which lacks a head and shows a rim instead has often been depicted, although from the drawings it is not clear whether the rim has actually been observed or is merely an imaginative reconstruction (Kaufmann 1976, Abb. 3a; Grönwald 2004, Abb. 20).

To sum up: with the sherds at hand it is impossible to decide whether it is a female or a pan-human/male image (although the latter option is more likely), nor whether it had a stool / throne to sit on or stood upright (although the former option is more likely). The reconstruction in fig. 9-4 presents just one possibility, being one (not unlikely) permutation of LBK standards.

Notes

1 The German equivalent of the COD, *Wahrig Deutsches Wörterbuch*, renders ‘*Idol: Götzenbild; Abgott, Gegenstand der Verehrung*’, also clearly implying religious comport; Dutch dictionaries present similar definitions.

2 Another (similarly dishomogeneous) class of LBK objects, where cult practices have been assumed, is the earth works, an interpretation which has also been contested.

3 In this discussion the quotes are mainly from secondary sources; references can be found there.

4 This need not be conclusive as not even half of that settlement has been excavated.

5 In line with recent Anglophone theorizing, Melanesian and Indonesian ethnography is projected on prehistory.

6 “Possibly male”: most objects in this group are unmarked as to gender characteristics, and may convey a meaning similar to the English word ‘man’, either *human being* or *adult male*.

7 If one calculates the loss of ceramics and statuettes at about 90-95%.

8 Average number of sherds on fracture: 5; variation ± 3 , and 8 ± 5 .

9 I gratefully acknowledge extended and intensive discussions of the present figurine, its reconstruction and its implications with Jens Lüning, Köln.

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