

# SPRAWOZDANIA ARCHEOLOGICZNE

INSTYTUT ARCHEOLOGII I ETNOLOGII POLSKIEJ AKADEMII NAUK



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**SPRAWOZDANIA  
ARCHEOLOGICZNE**



INSTYTUT ARCHEOLOGII I ETNOLOGII  
POLSKIEJ AKADEMII NAUK

# SPRAWOZDANIA ARCHEOLOGICZNE



KRAKÓW 2020

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So-called Światowit from Wolin. Photo by PAWEŁ SZCZEPANIK

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Dedicated to Professor Jan Machnik for His 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday



Paweł Szczepanik<sup>1</sup>

## COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF EARLY MEDIEVAL ANTHROPOMORPHIC WOODEN FIGURINES FROM POLAND. REPRESENTATIONS OF GODS, THE DECEASED OR RITUAL OBJECTS?

### ABSTRACT

Szczepanik P. 2020. Comparative analysis of early medieval anthropomorphic wooden figurines from Poland. Representations of gods, the deceased or ritual objects? *Sprawozdania Archeologiczne* 72/2, 143-167.

Miniature anthropomorphic images, due to their unique character, have attracted the attention of archaeologists for a very long time. This text analyses the forms, significance and functions of items coming from the early Middle Ages, which were discovered in the area of Poland. The set of wooden objects is diverse in terms of form and probably also in terms of meaning. The biggest number of artefacts come from Pomerania, but some of them were found in other places. The Baltic Sea basin will be used as a broad comparative background during this analysis. Information from written sources and from broad anthropological reflection will also be used in an attempt to determine the functions and meanings of these miniature figurines. Thanks to this analysis, it will be possible to show the importance of anthropomorphic figures in the context of early medieval religion and beliefs.

Keywords: anthropomorphic figurines; miniaturisation; Slavic religion; Baltic Sea region; early medieval archaeology; pre-Christian beliefs

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### INTRODUCTION

The set of early-medieval miniature anthropomorphic figurines is not a very numerous collection, but it is highly diversified in terms of morphology, form and meaning. Although some of them were noted in the monograph of Torsten Capelle's wooden idols (1995, 54),

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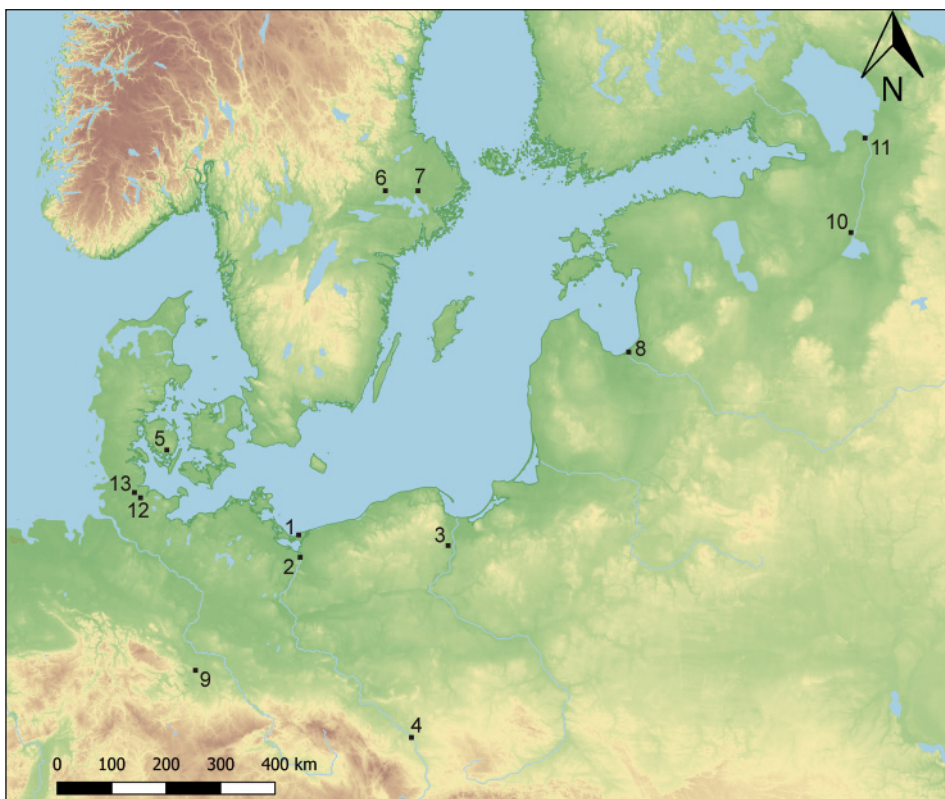


Fig. 1. Map with locations of archeological sites with figurines mentioned in this article: 1 – Wolin, 2 – Szczecin, 3 – Gniew, 4 – Opole, 5 – Svendborg, 6 – Tunby, 7 – Väsby, 8 – Riga, 9 – Merseburg, 10 – Novgorod, 11 – Old Ladoga, 12 – Hedeby, 13 – Schleswig (map by K. Niedziółka and author)

they did not receive extensive study. For starters, the analysis presented in the text deals with a theoretical reflection on miniaturisation and anthropomorphisation. In the following pages, I will present the materials, their previous interpretations and finally the new interpretative possibilities. I will try to show that these items were related to the sphere of pre-Christian beliefs; in this particular context, they probably had different meanings and functions. In the interpretations and descriptions which are available in other literature sources, these objects are interpreted as: images of deities, images of ancestors, and ritual and ceremonial props. Objects from today's Poland will be compared with findings from the Baltic Sea basin (Fig. 1). Among the latter, special attention should be paid to multi-headed artefacts and a set of wooden figurines of the Rus' area, with particular emphasis on Novgorod and Old Ladoga. Initial research on these objects has already been conducted (Szczepanik 2013; 2018a; Kajkowski and Szczepanik 2013; 2013a). However, this represents the first attempt at such a broad comparative approach.

## THE PROBLEM OF MINIATURISATION AND ANTHROPOMORPHISATION

There are quite a lot of theoretical considerations that attempt to describe the phenomenon of miniature anthropomorphic images. However, they focus mainly on prehistoric cultures (Aldhouse-Green 2005; Bailey 2005; Foxall 2015; Hansen 2007; Renfrew and Morley 2007). On the other hand, all of them point to the need for reflection on the idea of miniaturisation. It is a phenomenon observed since the dawn of human culture, associated with “many aspects of life, death, the supernatural and divine, in some cases weaving them together. They serve worship, play, ornamentation, learning, socialization and social engagement and thought experiments. Undoubtedly, they were entangled in many ways that are now lost to us. But, the widespread urge to remake the world in miniature suggests that changing the scale of things opens up pathways for people to reimagine the world” (Foxall 2015, 4). Therefore, in the context of traditional cultures, miniature figurines should be seen as the results of human contact with the supernatural world, and the miniature object itself can be interpreted as a link with this world (Foxall 2015, 3). These objects should be treated as spontaneous products of culture, not just reduced copies of full-sized elements. When miniature-scale products try to imitate full-size objects as closely as possible, they should be called toys. If we want to discuss size, it seems that the only valid reference point is the human body. According to Douglass Bailey, there can only be three types of size: ‘life-size, smaller than life-size, and larger than life-size’ (Baile 2005, 28-29). We must also agree that the miniatures are something other than models: “Miniatures are small things that do not seek accuracy in representation, that are not precise or exact. Furthermore, miniatures result from human experimentation with the physical world; they are cultural creations” (Baile 2005, 29).

Miniature objects understood in this way refer to the ideological sphere – they create a fetish, rather than simply visualizing specific symbolic content. This implies the need to consider each group of objects, or even every single object in a highly individual way. On the one hand, they will be objects related to the sphere of the *sacrum*. On the other hand, they will be models of objects or creatures known from the surrounding world. The latter may also include full-sized images that have a sacred significance – may be statues of deities of some kind. The inclusion of a specific artefact in a set of miniature items is subjective and diversified because the size that we consider to be normal – whether miniature or full-size – is subjective (Mack 2007, 49). Therefore, in the case of anthropomorphic figures, the reference to the scale of the human body seems to be extremely accurate. So, the uniqueness of the described figurines is associated with their small sizes and anthropomorphic form. For this reason, figures should be considered as a manifestation of miniaturisation and anthropomorphisation. The second matter may be understood as giving the object not only a form referring to the human body, but also invisible features which are characteristic for humans (Kowalski 2010, 35). Such a definition of anthropomor-

phisation becomes a broader interpretation of the act of giving a humanoid shape to something. It focuses only on the form of a particular material product, not on its active features.

## MATERIALS

One unique figurine (Fig. 2) is a four-face so-called Światowit, discovered in Wolin (trench 6; Filipowiak Wł. And Wojtasik 1975). Its discovery caused many emotions related to the possibilities of using archaeology in the context of learning about the pre-Christian religion of the Slavs. The figurine was made of yew wood (height 9.3 cm) and was discovered in a layer of discarded wood and other household waste dated to the second half of



Fig. 2. So-called Światowit from Wolin (trench 6/1660, layer XIV) (Photo P. Szczepanik)



the ninth century. The upper part of the object is decorated with four faces directed to the four directions of the world. These faces are presented very schematically and have a shape similar to a triangle. The faces are not the same; they differ a bit in height and shape (Filipowiak Wł. and Wojtasik 1975, 85-86). The flat-formed shaft or handle has a semicircular ending at the bottom. In addition, the surface of the handle is covered with partially faded kerfs in the form of diagonal lines and ovals (unknown significance) and traces of tar or another unspecified substance. The figurine was discovered near the building interpreted in older literature sources as the “older temple” (Filipowiak Wł. 1993, 24-25; Filipowiak W. 2019, 124). However, the latest interpretations call into question such a role of this building (Stanisławski 2011, 238-239; Polak and Rębkowski 2019, 125-127). A supposed analogy was discovered nearby, but was not related to the remains of the “temple” (Fig. 3: a). It is



Fig. 3. Figurines from Wolin Old Town (a – trench 6/1660, layer XII; b, c, e – trench 6/1709, layer XII; d – trench 6/1709, layer XI) (Photo P. Szczepanik)

also made of yew wood and the lower part of the handle was shaped in a similar manner (Filipowiak Wł. 1993, 29). The upper part, however, ends with a flat disc, not facial images. This item does not bear any traces of an attempt to decorate it with images of faces, but it does seem to be a finished item. Therefore, this analogy should be considered as unjustified (Szczepanik 2018a, 45-46).

Other wooden figurines discovered in Wolin were single-face images. The first of them (height 9.5 cm) is dated to the first half of the eleventh century and was found in an empty area near the hearth (Filipowiak W. 2019, 127). Similarly to the four-face figurine, it was



**Fig. 4.** Figurines from: a-c – Wolin (a – Old Town, trench 6/1709, layer IX; b – Market place; c – Ogrody, trench 2, layer IV); d – Szczecin (Podzamcze, trench VI, layer XXXVIII); e – Gniez (Market place); f – Opole-Ostrówek(ar 342, layer D) (Photo P. Szczepanik)

made of yew wood (Fig. 4: a). The bottom of the handle presents a well-preserved head of a bearded man with a strongly emphasized nose and a triangular head covering. Some researchers interpret it as a representation of a nasal helmet (Stanisławski 2013a, 27). More importantly, the item has visible traces of fire on it. Two other figurines are quite similar in terms of the formation of their heads and head coverings. However, they were made more schematically. The first of them (height 5.5 cm) was found inside the remains of a house and is dated to the end of the tenth century or the beginning of the eleventh century (Filipowiak W. 2019, 125). It presents a man who wears a cone-shaped head covering with a truncated top. It also carries visible signs of destruction – its lower ending is broken (Fig. 3: d). The rim around the forehead and the line marking the face contour with a beard are quite well preserved. The details of the face are almost invisible, only the straight nose is faintly apparent (Szczepanik 2018a, 48). The next figurine is much better preserved (height 4.2 cm) and was found in the remains of the so-called “younger temple”, dated from the last three-quarters of the tenth century (Filipowiak W. 2019, 124). A head with a visible beard, a straight nose and a cone-shaped head covering was placed on an oval handle (Fig. 3: c). Similar to the previous example, intentional destruction is visible in the form of a diagonally cut off lower part (Filipowiak Wł. 1993, 28). Another object (Fig. 3: b) from this context is an oval head (height 4.3 cm). Its eyes are schematically rendered in the form of dots, and its lips are represented by two lines parallel to each other (Filipowiak 1993, 29). The next figurine, omitted by older literature sources, comes from the same stratigraphic context (Fig. 3: e). This object (height 6.8 cm) depicts an oval head placed on an oval handle, which was created with great care. The profile has a flat face with a clearly-defined chin. Once again, the bottom of the figurine is fractured.

The next artefact (height 11cm) from Wolin (Market place, trench o) was discovered in the 1930s (The number of trench o was given by post-war archaeologists. About pre-war excavations: see Biermann 2013), and represents a figure with a head covering in the form of a cone with a truncated vertex (Fig. 4: b; Stanisławski 2013a, 22). The head, with a straight nose, is separated from the torso with a strong indentation. On the handle, under the face, there is an additional horizontal incision schematically showing the chin. The form of the bottom of the figure is different from the previously described items. The figurine was equipped with two short legs (Kowalski and Kozłowska-Skoczka 2012, 367).

The last figurine from Wolin (Ogrody) was discovered in the remains of a woodworking workshop, and we can date it to the turn of the tenth and eleventh centuries or to the first half of the eleventh century (Fig. 4: c; Filipowiak Wł. and Stanisławski 2013, 104-115). The figurine (height 7 cm) shows a male figure wearing a cone-shaped head covering. The figurine has a straight nose, a broad chin lying on the chest and straight arms along the body. In the lower part of the item there is a lateral hole. According to the excavators, it allowed the figurine to be hung upside-down (Filipowiak Wł. and Stanisławski 2003, 29).

Another figurine was discovered in Szczecin, which was another very important craft and trade centre (Kowalska and Dworaczyk 2011). A wooden, anthropomorphic figurine

originating from early urban layers was excavated in the area next to one of the buildings. The context of the discovery allows for the object to be dated to the eleventh century (Fig. 4: d). The figurine (height 17cm) presents a figure with a clearly separated head and legs (Wilgocki 1995, 187–190; Kowalska 2013, 627). The left side of the body was covered with an ornament in the form of diagonal crosses. Perhaps it should be interpreted as an image of a coat or other form of a decorated cloak (Wilgocki 1995, 189).

The last miniature presentation from Pomerania is an object from Gniew, on the Vistula river (Fig. 4: e). The figurine was found at the Market place and it dates to the thirteenth century. The object (height 9.5 cm) was carved very roughly and schematically (Ratajczyk 2013, 627-628). Once again, the plain handle is topped with a head wearing a conical head covering. The face has a straight nose, almond eyes and narrow lips.

A figurine from Ostrówek in Opole has a slightly different form from the objects found in the area of Pomerania. It was found between wooden houses and is dated from the third quarter of the eleventh century (Bukowska-Gedigowa and Gediga 1986, 123). The figurine (height 5.8 cm) has the form of a solid, wooden handle which has a straight cut at the bottom (Fig. 4: f). The upper part is decorated with a face, with a marked eyebrow line, straight nose and mouth. The triangular beard once again falls on his chest (Hołubowicz 1959, 125).

Wooden figurines from Poland should be dated quite broadly to almost the entire period of the early Middle Ages, from the second half of the ninth century to the beginning of the thirteenth century. They come from important craft centres and may be associated with trade routes connected with the Baltic Sea. The analogical artefacts discussed below are examples of figurines made of wood and antler. The organic material from which they were made has importance in the context of the interpretation of the functions of these objects.

## ANALOGIES

Let us start with the so-called Światowit. The closest analogy is the figurine from Svendborg (Fig. 5: c). It is made of juniper wood, and it has the form of a slender handle. It is finished with four faces, shown in such a way that each of the oval eyes simultaneously belongs to two adjacent faces. All faces have triangularly shaped beards, long, straight noses and delicately defined lips. The figurine is crowned with a joint, flat-cut head, covered with a separate rim. This item was discovered in the centre of the city of Svendborg in the interwar period. However, more detailed information about it came out not so long ago, due to an inventory carried out in the museum. The figurine comes from the twelfth century and, according to Danish researchers, is proof of a Slavic presence in this place (Jansen 1998, 565).

Another two objects have been discovered in Sweden. The first figurine comes from Tunby (St. Ilian's parish, Västmanland – Fig. 5: b). It was discovered in the 1930s, and it comes from one of the cremation graves dated to the tenth century (Översiktskatalog 1931,

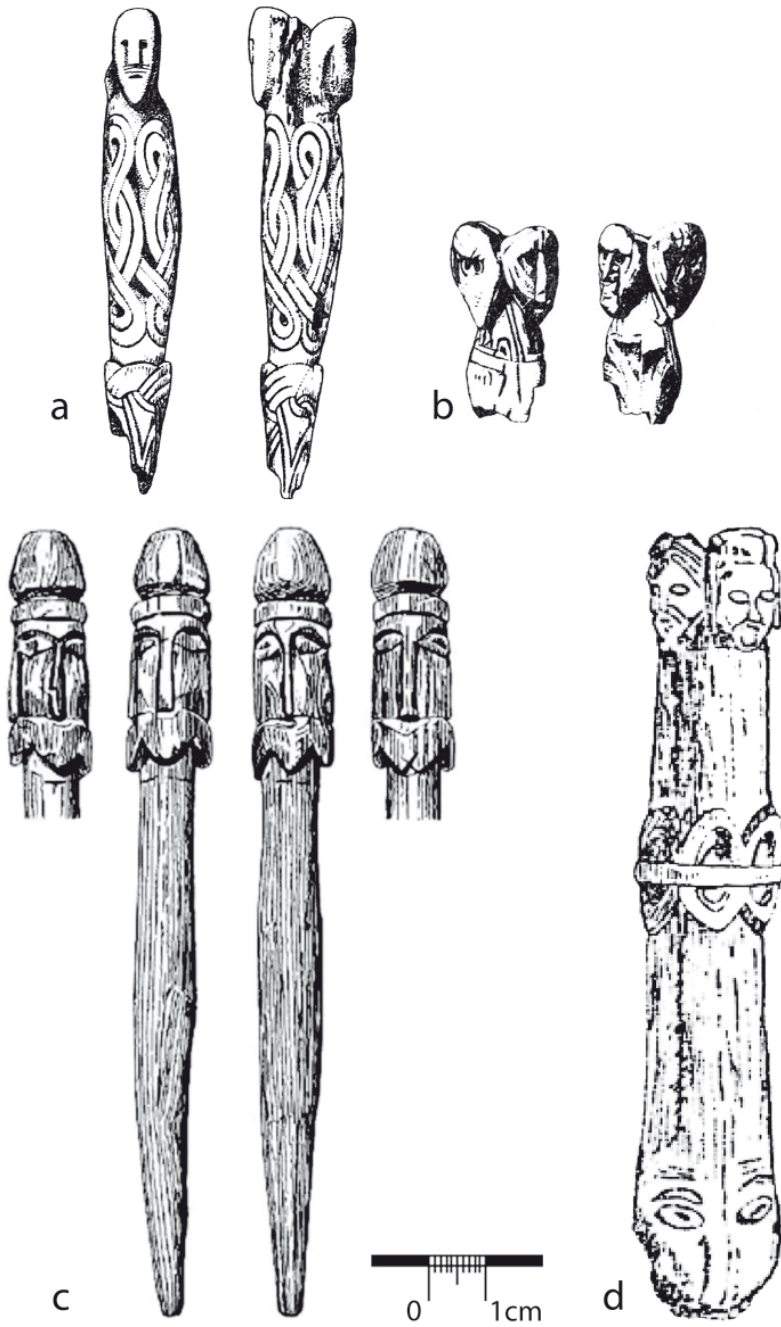


Fig. 5. Four-headed figurines from the Baltic Sea region: a – Väsby, b – Tunby (Östmark 1980, fig. 6); c – Svendborg (Jansen 1998, 565); d – Riga (Kotlarczyk 1987, fig. 15.3) (Preparation of image by author)

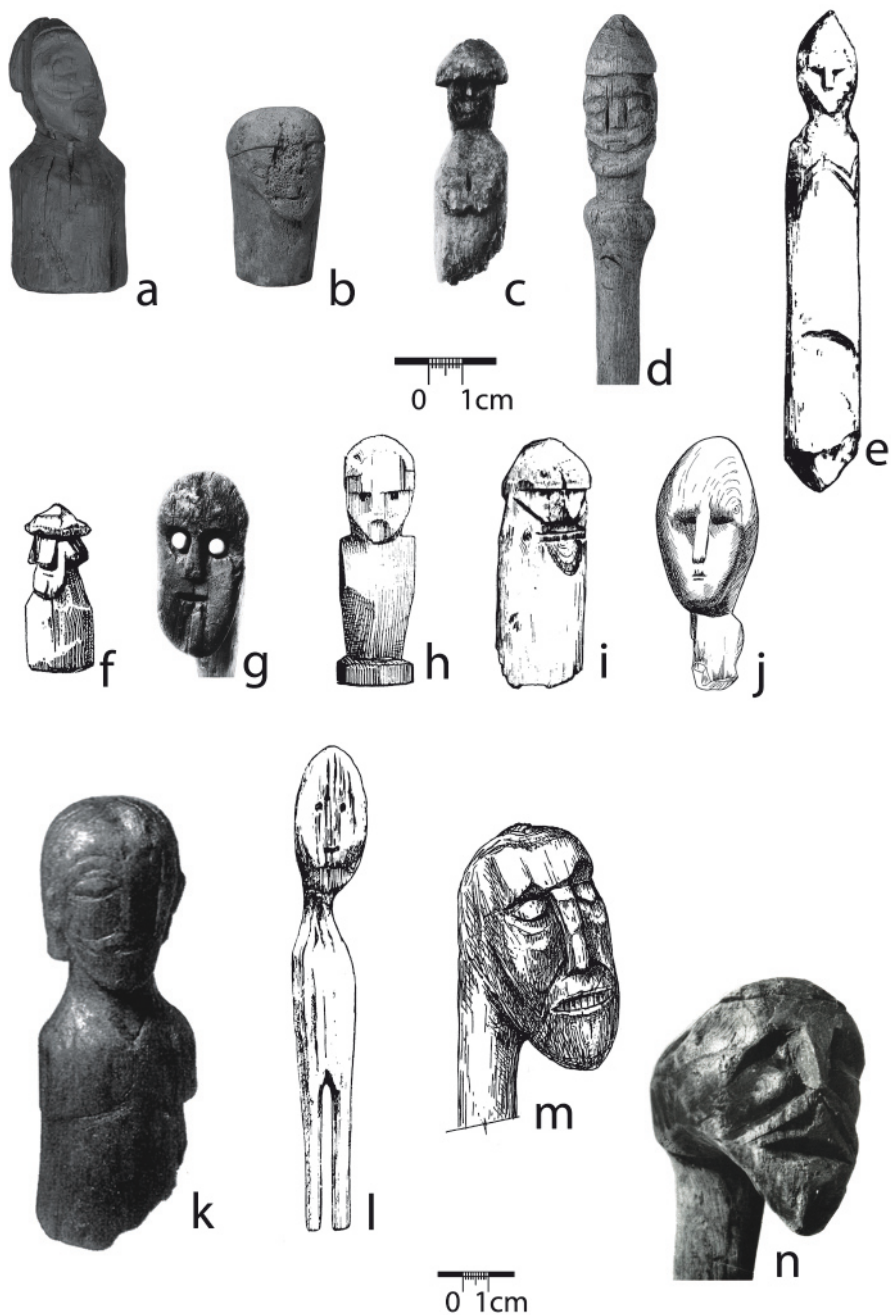


Fig. 6. Single-faced figurines from: a, c-j, l-n – Novgorod (Kolchin 1989b, fig. 202-206; Musin 2019, fig. 6); b – Merseburg (Muhl 2013, fig. 523); k – Schleswig (Radtke 2010, fig. 1) (Preparation of image by author)

CXX). The figurine was made of bone and its lower part was destroyed. The upper part is crowned with four faces with triangularly-shaped, slender beards. The faces have long, straight noses, lips and eyes in the form of holes. A vertical hole goes through the figurine. According to Jan P. Lamm, this object could serve as the handle of a stitching awl (Lamm 1987, 228). The second Swedish item comes from Väsby (Vallentuna parish, Uppland – Fig. 5: a). It was discovered in a cremation grave dated to the ninth or early tenth century (Östmark 1980, 11). The figurine is crowned with two oval-shaped faces, with schematically-marked straight noses, eyes and moustaches. The figurine originally had four faces, but, unfortunately, they were broken and two of them were not preserved. The sculpture's main body was covered with a complicated ornament in the form of an interlace and a string braid with sharp triangles placed at the bottom (Duczko 2000, 39). This type of ornament may refer to the 'Pomeranian school of Scandinavian-insular ornamentation' and perhaps confirms that this item is a Pomeranian product (Chudziak and Kaźmierczak 2013). According to J. P. Lamm, a bone handle from one of the graves from Birka could be an analogy for the object from Väsby (Lamm 1987, 228). In terms of the form of the object, its function and decoration, this statement seems to be a misinterpretation. But we must underline that some other typical objects from the Viking ages were found in the above graves – namely, richly decorated oval brooches in the Tunby grave (Översiktscatalog 1931, CXX) and an iron neck-ring with Thor's hammers in the Väsby grave (Östmark 1980, 28).

Another analogy to the so-called Światowit figure is a wooden figurine from Riga. It was discovered in the context of a wooden road and is dated to the thirteenth century (Caune 1995, 26-27). The figurine depicts two (originally four) bearded, male faces (Fig. 5: d). The faces have strongly marked eyes and noses, highlighted moustaches and long hair. Once again, we may also see a schematic head covering. The central part of the sculpture is divided by a linear ornament, consisting of two parallel, wavy lines, separated by a horizontal line. At the lower edge we may notice the image of an animal head. It has large eyes, and the upper part of its muzzle and nose is very distinctive (Caune 1995, 28-29).

The single-face representations which correspond to Polish artefacts are more numerous. The first of these is a bone figurine from Merseburg dated from the 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> centuries (Fig. 6: b). It was discovered at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it is difficult to say anything more about the context of its discovery. The head has a strongly marked triangular beard and a head covering in the form of a cap (Muhl 2013, 523). The figurine is hollowed out inside, which suggests that it could be the end of a ritual stick (Gabriel 2001). Another figurine was discovered in Schleswig in the context of a harbour and is dated from the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries (Fig. 6: k; Wegner 2012, 51). The image is made very carefully. Of particular note are the thick eyebrows and a moustache raised towards the ears (Radtke 2010, 92-93).

Following the trail of this figure, a group of anthropomorphic figures from Novgorod are noteworthy, where eleven objects were discovered (Kolchin 1989, 201). The first from this group is a direct analogy to the item from Schleswig (Fig. 6: a). The figurine is pre-

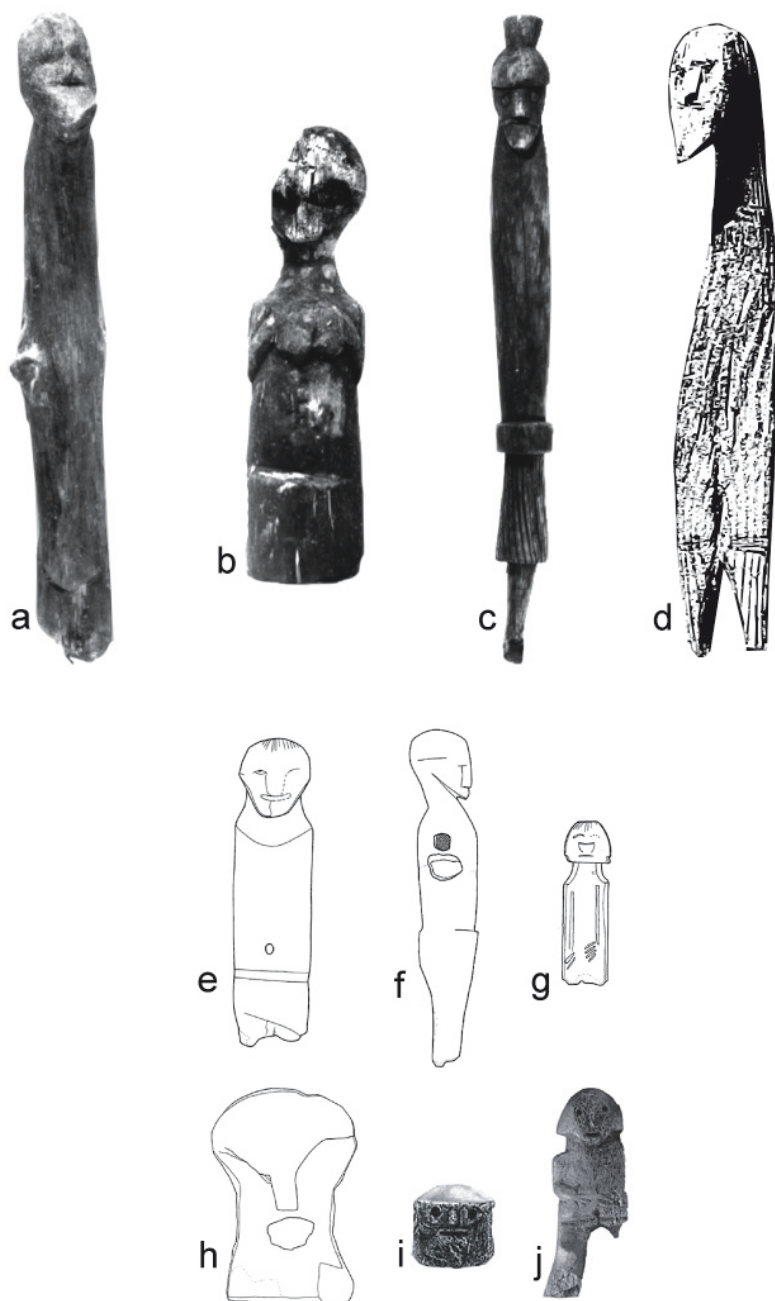


Fig. 7. Single-faced figurines from: a-d – Old Ladoga (Kirpichnikov and Sarabyanov 1996, 74-75; Roesdahl 1992, fig. 277; Duczko 2006, fig. 12b); e-j – Hedeby (Westphal 2006, fig. 63; Kalmring 2010, fig. 292) (Preparation of image by author)



cisely dated to 930-950 (Musin 2018, 178) and is partially destroyed (Pokrovskaya 2007, 411-412). Another interesting example is a wooden stick topped with a head wearing a conical hat, which has a strongly raised moustache and is dated to the twelfth century (Fig. 6: d; Andersen and Birkebæk 1993, fig. 68). The next figurine is a simple handle with a schematic head covered with a conical cap or a nasal helmet (Fig. 6: e). We may also observe schematic hands lying on the chest (Kolchin 1989a, 452). A similar gesture is visible on another, partly destroyed figurine (Fig. 6: c). In this case, the head is covered with a conical, wide-brimmed cap (Musin 2018, 179). A similar copy is a small figure with a schematic face, covered with a low, wide hat (Fig. 6: f; Kolchin 1989, 451). A figure with a large oval head placed on a disproportionately small body has a different form (Fig. 6: j). It has a straight nose and small lips marked on the face. Its high forehead and wide chin are highlighted (Pokrovskaya 2007, 411). Another figurine (Fig. 6: i), dated to the middle of the tenth century (Kolchin 1989, 193) is a direct analogy to the item from Opole. A head with a low conical cap was placed on the short handle. The details of the face show a triangular nose, straight mouth, and a chin lying on the chest (Kolchin 1989a, 451). The next examples from Novgorod, dated from the 10<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries, have a slightly different form (Fig. 6: g, m, n). Their size is approximately several centimetres. They each have a simple and straight wooden body with an oval or round head (Kolchin 1985, 108-111). A common feature of all these images is the schematic manner of their representation and visible damage in the lower part. It is especially worth noting figurines with schematic faces depicting vertical noses.

Further artefacts come from Old Ladoga. This set dates from the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries. It contains a few figurines of various forms (Fig. 7). The first of them has the form of a rough piece of wood. On its top there is an oval head with a triangular nose and a beard (Fig. 7: a). The next figurine presents an individual with his hands lying on his chest. Oval eyes are marked on the round head, but part of it is cut off (Fig. 7: b; Kirpichnikov and Sarabyanov 1996, 74-75). The next item is a sculpture in the form of a handle. It has a head covered with a hat with an unusual ending on the top (Fig. 7: c). Its face is well developed. Round eyes, a straight nose, and an arched moustache are visible (Roesdahl 1992, 301). The lower part of the item may suggest that it was originally part of a more complex wooden composition. The last object from this group refers to items from Novgorod. It has a protruding face with a strongly defined chin, straight nose and delicately marked eyes and lips (Fig. 7: d). It differs from other samples because the shape of its lower part is different. In this case, it took the form of two short legs (Duczko 2006, fig. 12: b), similarly to Pomeranian items.

The next figurines were discovered in Hedeby (Schietzel 2018, 463). They may be treated as analogies to the discoveries from Wolin to a large extent. These objects should be dated quite widely between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> centuries and were found in the context of a settlement and harbour. The first figurine is an oval handle with a schematically illustrated head with a wide, flat nose and two short, damaged legs (Fig. 7: e). An analogous, smaller item has a similarly shaped head with visible hair (Fig. 7: g). Additionally,

hands were shown on the body (Westphal 2006, 204). The next figurine has the form of a flat wooden board (Fig. 7: f). Only a straight, wide nose and a half-round hat are marked on the round head. A very interesting fact is that it is equipped with a hole on the shoulder line that was used to attach movable hands. Such hands were also discovered in this place. However, they were not the part of discussed object. Another figurine was made of antler (Fig. 7: j). It depicts the figure of a man standing with widely spread legs. One leg is broken off, and his arms are on his stomach. The head has a conical shape. On the face are small eyes, shown as points, and a short nose and mouth (Kalmring 2010, 399). A head with a similarly depicted face and a low, conical hat is also made of antler (Fig. 7: i). The last anthropomorphic image from Hedeby is the flat image of a head (Fig. 7: h). The representation is very schematic, but elements such as triangles, an asymmetrical nose and an open mouth are visible (Westphal 2006, 204). The above list of miniature anthropomorphic figurines made of wood and bone seems to close the list of anthropomorphic discoveries connected with the Baltic Sea basin.

## REVIEW OF PREVIOUS INTERPRETATIONS

The literature contains copious information and presents various ways of interpreting these items. Let us try to systematise them. In order, we will start with the so-called Światowit and four-faced figurines. The name of the item from Wolin may already be seen as its own interpretation. It refers to a four-headed idol of Sventovit, worshiped in Arkona, and described by Saxo Grammaticus (XIV, 39, 565). According to Władysław Filipowiak, the figurine is a miniature image of this deity used for personal worship (Filipowiak Wł. 1993, 33). He describes it as a 'travel figurine' (germ. *Taschengott*) (Filipowiak Wł. 2001, 100-101; 2013). This object, as well as other figurines of Światowit, worked as equivalents to Christian personal emblems in the form of crosses (Jansen 1998, 567; Filipowiak 2001). According to Janusz Kotlarczyk, Światowit is a simplified version of the statue of the Zbruch Idol (1993, 56-57). This monument is an example of a stone sculpture and can be dated to the early Middle Ages (see Tynieć 2016 – review of the research). It is combined with an extensive cosmological vision of the Slavs (Szczepanik 2018b, 48-53 – review of the research). Other researchers declare that Światowit and other figurines should be interpreted as the images of ancestors (Bylina 1992, 24; Wawrzenuk 2004). Further interpretations suggest that it is a wooden model of a whetstone (Urbańczyk 2014, 146). Whetstones played a significant role in Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon beliefs (Lamm 1987, 223-224; Mortimer and Pollington 2013, 129-164). This is supposedly proof of the Scandinavian provenance of the artefact. Nowadays, archaeologists debate the relationship between Światowit and whetstones. Objects from Wolin resembling the shape of the figurine handle were called 'Sventovit-like' (Filipowiak W. and Szydłowski 2019, 222-223). Metal whetstone holders decorated with facial images that were discovered in Wolin may

be further proof of the Scandinavian provenance of the finds. According to Władysław Duczko, they are a testament to Scandinavian religious concepts present in Pomerania (Duczko 2000, 26). However, only the casting mould from Szczecin has images of four faces (Filipowiak Wł. 1993, 30). Whetstones from Wolin were decorated with images of two faces, and they do not have any analogies in the Scandinavian world (Janowski 2014, 29-30). Another fitting of a whetstone was decorated with three schematic faces and the image of an animal (Janowski 2019, 61-62). It seems that these objects should be considered as a phenomenon peculiar to Wolin and a local product (Janowski 2019, 63). However, it should be emphasized that these cannot be called figurines.

Therefore, the problems of interpreting figurines are related to their cultural provenance and the question of whether they are Slavic or Scandinavian objects. According to Błażej Stanisławski (Stanisławski 2013, 133-134; 204-207), these objects should be associated with the circle of Scandinavian culture. This is primarily indicated by the fact that similar items are known from excavation locations related to Scandinavian settlement and/or influence. According to Leszek Gardęła, their discovery in such contexts should not suggest their Scandinavian origin. Their relationship with the beliefs of the peoples of the North should be rejected (Gardęła 2014, 96-98).

Archaeologists have a similar attitude towards the interpretation of single-face images, which are often associated with the Scandinavian cultural circle. The main argument for such interpretations (Duczko 2006, 77-78; Pokrovskaya 2007, 402), apart from the locations of the discoveries, is the report of Ibn Fadlan describing the sacrifices made by Rus merchants: "when the ships come to this mooring place, everybody goes ashore with bread, meat, onions, milk and *nabid* and betakes himself to a long upright piece of wood that has a face like a man's and is surrounded by little figures, behind which are long stakes in the ground" (Smyser 1965, 97). However, in the description of this ritual, there is no information that the wooden figures are miniature; there is only information about a large statue surrounded by smaller ones.

If we go further, we may find one more, extremely interesting interpretation in the literature. It defines these objects as the images of the deceased. The veneration of the dead could be one of the basic elements of the pre-Christian beliefs of the Slavs (Bylina 1992, 24; Wawrzeniuk 2004). According to this proposal, miniature figurines should be interpreted as images of house spirits (Kolchin 1989, 192-193; Pokrovskaya 2007, 402) or as representations of ancestors and the deceased (Wawrzeniuk 2016, 100).

## NEW WAYS OF INTERPRETATION AND CONCLUSIONS

Before we proceeding to the analysis of the significance of the artefacts discussed above, let us look at the archaeological contexts of their discovery. They come from cultural layers of typical character, associated with wooden residential buildings, roads,

squares and harbors. Such contexts may suggest that after fulfilling their roles they were simply thrown away. As we remember, the figurines have traces of numerous irreversible damage, and after the ritual animation – activity was over, the objects could lose their status and value. It is also very interesting that only Swedish examples come from funerary contexts. Unfortunately, we do not have more detailed information about that. However, the context of cremation graves may indicate a direct reference to the religious and mythical sphere of the objects in question. Let us move on to the discussion of these meanings.

We will begin again with the four-face figurines. These objects should certainly be considered in a broad socio-cultural perspective, but their original meaning was directly related to the sphere of Slavic beliefs (Szczepanik 2013; 2018a; Kajkowski and Szczepanik 2013a). This thesis can be confirmed by several arguments. The first is connected with religious studies. It concerns the functioning of characters with many faces or heads in Slavic, Germanic and Baltic mythologies. The existence of multi-headed deities in Slavic mythology has been discussed many times and seems not to raise doubts today (Pettazzoni 1946; Gieysztor 2006; Słupecki 1994). Written sources inform us about the deities endowed with three, four, five and even seven heads/faces functioning in the religion of the Slavs. For us, the most important is the four-headed Sventovit. Interestingly, such characters appear neither in Baltic mythology (Suchocki 1991; Greimas 2007) nor in Germanic mythology. In Norse mythology there are figures of giants with several heads, but they are always characters with three heads, or with a number of heads that is a multiple of three (Słupecki 2003, 294; Gardela 2014, 96-97). Therefore, if we consider multi-face figurines as an element of Scandinavian culture, we have to reject their interpretation as objects that are images of mythological characters known from written sources. This is because four-face figures in this mythology simply do not exist. Of course, we cannot assume that they do not depict other nameless characters with unknown characteristics and meaning. However, we have a source that informs us about the functioning of the cult of miniature figurines in Scandinavia. This cult concerns sculptures depicting deities in anthropomorphic form (Lamm 1987, 222). We also have some written sources about Slavic culture that describe miniature figurines (Szczepanik 2018a, 55). These are the descriptions of a miniature, golden statuette of Triglav from Szczecin (Ebo II, 13), a bronze Saturn from Starogard Wągrzyjski/Oldenburg in Holstein (Widukind III, 68) and statues from Wolin of an unspecified form (Ebo III, 1). The latter were probably taken by the inhabitants from the temple during the mission of St. Otto of Bamberg. Then, they were used in pagan rites related to the apostasy of newly baptized Pomeranians (Kajkowski and Szczepanik 2013, 59).

The next source has a quite different character and does not mention any miniature figurines, but does mention the remains of Slavic settlements from the early thirteenth century. In his chronicle, Henry of Latvia (X, 13-14) described “the strange and tragic history of one small tribe which settled on the Lithuanian-Latvian border. The tribe called *Vindi* in 1206 was (at the time) insignificant and poor. Expelled from the River Winda, they settled on the site where Riga was later built. But even here they did not feel peace,

because they were attacked by Kurs (one of the Baltic tribes) who chased away and killed many of them” (Ochmański 1982, 27). It seems that the *Vindi* tribe should be recognised as Slavs who lived on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea (Murray 2013). Perhaps in that case, the described figurine should be recognized as evidence of that settlement? It presents one of the most complex mythical narratives in the religion of the pagan Slavs. The upper part of the idol crowned with four faces depicts a deity – Sventovit. The lower part takes the form of a creature with a dragon or snake head, which we can interpret as the image of a chthonic-aquatic dragon known from cosmological myths. Both figures represent the sovereigns of two spheres of the cosmos. They are separated from each other by a water zone, shown as a wavy ornament. Similarities are also visible in other categories of artefacts, *i.e.*, bronze fittings of knife sheaths (Szczepanik 2017).

Assuming that the figurines are related to Slavic beliefs, we must ask another question: are they images of a deity (or deities) or not? If they are images of deities, were they given reverence similar to that of full-size statues known from written sources? Maybe they were rather specific religious fetishes? It is a difficult question. Were they worshipped equally to statue of Sventovit from Arkona, in front of which the priest could not even breathe (Saxo XIV, 39). On the other hand, we remember that miniature statues of Triglav or anonymous figurines from Wolin were bestowed with *agency*. While comparing Slavic artefacts, we are obliged to make a distinction between figurines made of organic materials discovered during archaeological excavations and figures made of precious metals, known from written sources (Szczepanik 2018a). We may conclude that the precious ores were part of the equipment of people or institutions whose task was to administrate such images. Of course, they were also able to possess them. Both conditions were fulfilled by pagan temples. They were not only the places of *theophany*, but they were also treated as the depositories of treasure (Ślupecki 2013). Recalling Arkona, it is worth mentioning that the Danish king Sven sent gifts to this pagan temple (Sundqvist 2016, 196). It could be proof of the existence of Slavic religious ideas in the Scandinavian environment. Perhaps the figurines from these areas should be examined and recognised as traces of such contacts. Maybe these relations occurred not at the level of monarchy, but of ordinary people?

Once again, we may put forth the thesis that the material from which the figurines were made was important. Images made of wood and bone could be relatively easily made. On the other hand, they could also be easily transformed and destroyed. Thanks to this, they were ideally suited for ritual and magical activities. Special significance was attached to these images due to the fact that they were made of ‘living’ elements of nature. The possibility of transforming products made from natural materials was directly related to the changes of seasons and the cyclicity of life and death (Aldhouse-Green 2005, 96). If we assume that these objects were ritually animated, then perhaps they should be considered in the category of religious fetishes. Thus, these objects referred to the spheres of competence of a deity but they were not synonymous with that deity. A religious fetish understood in this way may be an object that determines and enables ritual activities that are not

directed at it (Leeuw 1997, 33). From this point of view, figurines could not be treated as objects of worship. For this reason, these figurines could be combined with ritual activities. They should not be interpreted as images of deities with *theophanic* properties. It is worth noting that the figurines could not be stood upright at a particular place because of the form of their bottoms. Until now, it was assumed that the 'handles' were used to hold figurines by hand. Perhaps the way in which this part was shaped (phallic?) was associated with their function in vegetative and love magic, extremely important for all traditional communities (Čausidis 1999, 291). It is worth recalling here that one of the most important competences of Sventovit was the sphere of vegetation and fertility (Kajkowski and Szczepanik 2013, p. 212-213).

To sum up this section, in my opinion the miniature four-face figurines discovered in the Baltic Sea basin could be the traces of Slavic religiosity, related to the sphere of competence of Sventovit. However, these objects were not strictly defined idols. They were rather ritual props and/or religious fetishes referring to a specific sacred force and the spheres of competence of a particular deity. The range of their occurrence and the local, individual character of each of the objects is also worth consideration. This may be evidence that the elements of Slavic beliefs were transferred throughout the entire Baltic Sea basin. Therefore, the phenomenon of these figurines is associated with complex contacts, which cannot be reduced to the simple circulation of objects in isolation from cultural and religious contexts (Duczko 2000, 39).

The meaning of the single-face figurines found in many places may be close to the meaning of the above-discussed images (although it certainly does not have to be). When analysing this group of artefacts, we should point out several common features. The first of these are the conical head coverings, sometimes considered to be images of helmets (Stanisławski 2013a, 26). Such head coverings are known from many other anthropomorphic discoveries. This may indicate the form of a characteristic male head covering from that period. The simple form of the nose is probably associated with the schematism and simplicity of representing this detail of facial physiognomy and not with the nasal component of the helmet. However, we cannot discount the theory that this manner of forming the head is supposed to refer to brave ancestors or mythical heroes, who were remembered and imagined in such a way. On the one hand, we can consider the conical shape of the heads with the sphere of fertility and vegetative magic. On the other hand, they could illustrate the relationship of these images with the sphere of military competence.

We must also keep in mind the extremely important traces of damage visible on the surface of the figurines – traces of fire or various cut marks. They should be interpreted as the remains of ritual animation aimed at annihilating the force inside the image. Going further, this may suggest that these artefacts could have served as a votive offering. This thesis is confirmed in Slavic ethnographic material (Moszyński 1967, 248-249; Kunczyńska-Iracka 1987, 67-71). Interestingly, during the Prussian mission of St. Bruno, miniature

wooden idols were supposed to be destroyed by throwing them into a fire (Tyszkiewicz 2009, 130). These objects should be interpreted as performative images, understood as “material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance” (Proschan 1983, 4).

In this context, the interpretive possibilities associated with ‘multi-part’ figurines are extremely interesting. One of the figures from Wolin (Fig. 4: c) can be considered as an example of this. It is difficult to clearly determine what was the form of the lower part or the movable legsthat were attached in this place – similar to the moving hands from Hedeby or Birka (Price 2006, 181). The next question is whether the figurine was placed on a pole or pillar, *etc.* Adopting the second possibility, this image could refer to a representation visible on a bronze fitting from Starogard Wagryjski/Oldenburg in Holstein, showing an extensive cosmological vision with a male deity at the top (Szczepanik 2017, 174-175). At the same time, it is difficult to decide whether these items were elements of temple equipment or whether they were only used for home worship.

Thus, figurines could perform many extremely different functions. Certainly, these images should not be interpreted as images of gods in a literal sense. It seems that they could represent the images of ancestors or other mythical characters, and performed primarily ritual-ceremonial functions they – were specific ritual props. Undoubtedly, an attempt to assign a specific artefact to a specific mythical figure is still quite difficult and remains an open matter. We agree with Neil Price that it is impossible to draw definitive conclusions in this field (Price 2006, 182). However, we can assume that the four-face figurines are clearly associated with the cult of Sventovit. These objects could be evidence of the spread and importance of his worship in the Baltic Sea basin. The words of Saxo Grammaticus (XIV, 39) – “This deity had other temples in many places which were looked after by priests with almost equal worship, but less power” – may become the confirmation of this thesis.

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