

ART MOTIFS IN DOMUS DE JANAS: PURELY STYLISTIC FIGURATIVE EVOLUTION OR EXPRESSION OF CULTURAL CHANGES?

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This talk will be delivered in French.

The art of Domus de Janas, funerary hypogea excavated between the 5th and the beginning of 2nd millennium b.C - 7000–4000 years ago - manifests itself with richness and a variety of schematic motifs, executed with different techniques: sculpture, painting and engraving.

Horn-shaped sculpted figures are particularly numerous, in which a hierarchical typology is divided into 3 typological groups (bucranium 1, 2, 3) and 24 types has been recognised. The motifs relating to bucranium 1, in turn, are divided in simple, transitional and complex motifs, among which signs of a figurative evolution have long been detected.

Under this assumption, the simple motifs appear as the closest to the anatomical characteristics of the bovine protome. The transitional motifs mark the stage of the hatch symbolisation, in which the corniform motif, which represents the bovin horns - a part, therefore, of the protome - is merged, on an architectural level, with the hatch.

In this fusion, not only a substitutive figurative function was observed, as the hatch took the place of the bovine's head, but also a conceptual elaboration which is magical-religious and clearly connected with the funerary custom. The hatch, which replaces the head of the bovine animal, has itself become the head of the animal.

Complex motifs are the horn-hatch schemes expanded and projected onto the back wall of the main cell, following the antechamber, occupying it first partially, then entirely, in axial symmetry. The hatch transforms into a false door, constituting the central architectural-cultural element.

Regarding the location of the motifs, we underline their presence prevalent in the pavilion, in the antechamber, in the main cell and, rarely, in a secondary cell, i.e., in environments which have clearly attracted the interest of the artisans and grave excavators, as they are engaging on an ideological-funeral level.

In the antechamber we recognize not only the space that leads to the cell where the deceased is buried, but also a sort of antechamber of the deceased's home, therefore an area of physical separation and, at the same time, of spiritual closeness. For these reasons it is a place where magical-religious rites of propitiation of the souls of the deceased and their divinities are performed, as attested in literature.

The transfer of ritual signs from the antechamber to the next cell marks a cultural change.

The sacred entrance through the divinity and into her world through a real entrance, which takes on the meaning of a symbolic threshold, must have assumed, at a certain moment, the characteristic of a cultic manifestation open to the participation of the community. This resulted

in the search for a larger environment, choosing from those available, that would better respond to the changed needs. Hence the transfer of the ritual ceremonies to the next cell, larger than the antechamber, as a connecting space between cells and disengagement, with the transfer also of the architectural-decorative elements, the "signs" of the cult - including the protomi - restructuring the environment itself.

The archaeological documentation on the hypotheses outlined is neither frequent nor unequivocal. Perhaps interdisciplinary contributions could provide supporting evidence or at least useful clues.

References

- [1] G. Tanda, *Le domus de janas decorate con motivi scolpiti*, Condaghes, Sassari, 2021