

A HOME ALTAR AT GURA BACIULUI

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Definitions and generalities regarding the altars

Naology (*Naos* = the main room in a temple; *logos* = science) it is a discipline involved in the study of the sanctuaries, altars, their type and functionality.

Temple in our accept is a monumental cult place, were different religious practices took place and that contains several altars and sanctuaries.

One of the most expressive Neolithic temples is Sanctuary 2 at Parța (Banat culture), partially reconstructed in Banat Museum, Timișoara. It is a dwelling with monumental clay statues, over 1,75 m high (*Lazarovici Gh., 2000; Lazarovici Gh., et alii 1994; Lazarovici Gh., Maxim Z., 1995b; Lazarovici Gh. et alii 2001, 214 and the next*).

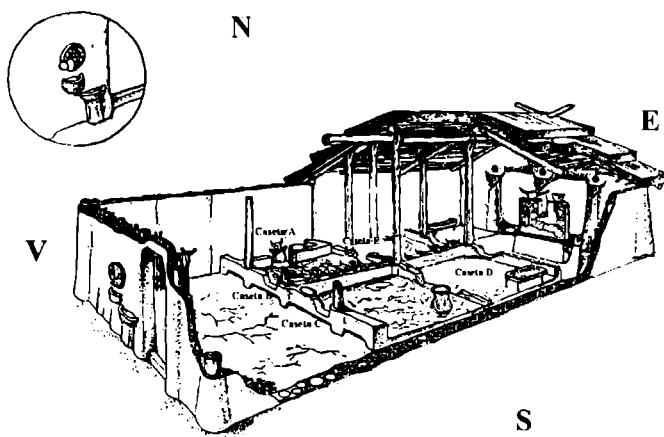


Fig. 1: Parța, Sanctuary 2

The temple or Sanctuary 2 at Parța was devoted to several couples of divinities, fig. 1: *Great Mother* (with a human or cow head) with the *Bull partner; Sun and Moon*. In the same place it was also noticed a cult related with *the pillar, axis mundi*; there are lonely or double pillars at the entrance or marking altars or sanctuaries). At Parța, there are several areas related with the sacral rituals:

- **The monumental altar** with the double statue has a pedestal for offerings deposition;
- **Altar A** was used for ritual burning;
- **Altar B**, used for the deposition of different products in pots (pot with a human face that contains bones and other 6-7 pots (some destroyed or missing because of a later digging for a well).
- **Altar C**, used for the ritual depositions of cereals dedicated to the couple *Sun – Moon*;
- **Altar D**, used for ritual depositions and blood sacrifices for the couple *Great Mother – Bull*;
- **Cultic grinding** is proved by a grind (with a clay bed for the flour) find on the western wall of the sanctuary and a cup on top of it, fig. 1. Above these, another round span was in the wall, decorated with a clay Moon, suggesting the *Sun-Moon* couple (Lazarovici Gh. et alii 2003; Lazarovici Gh. 2003).
- **Altar E**, used for ritual offerings dedicated to the couple *Great Mother – Bull* and other;
- The rectangular span in front of the main double statue designated to the light adoration was oriented to the east, to the sun rising. This span was decorated with two columns/pillars ended with bullheads, having different symbols between the horns for the Sun and respectively the Moon.

Other dwellings and cult places at Parța.

In other dwellings monumental objects have been found: some of them have been used as totems, other have maybe a sacral role for offerings or burning, associated with cassettes and marking small altars.

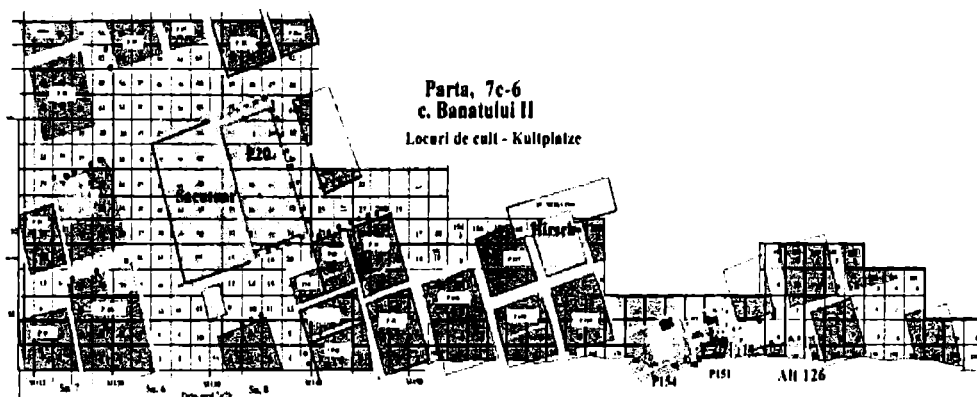


Fig. 2: Cult places at Parța, level 7c-6

In Sanctuary 1 at Parța

- Altar A was used for burning and offering deposition (portable fireplace, socle for an idol-bust and ashes, cassettes);
- Altar B was used for blood offerings (birds, small animals);
- Altar C was used for burning cereals or other straw offerings (fireplace, pit in the eastern part of the sanctuary).

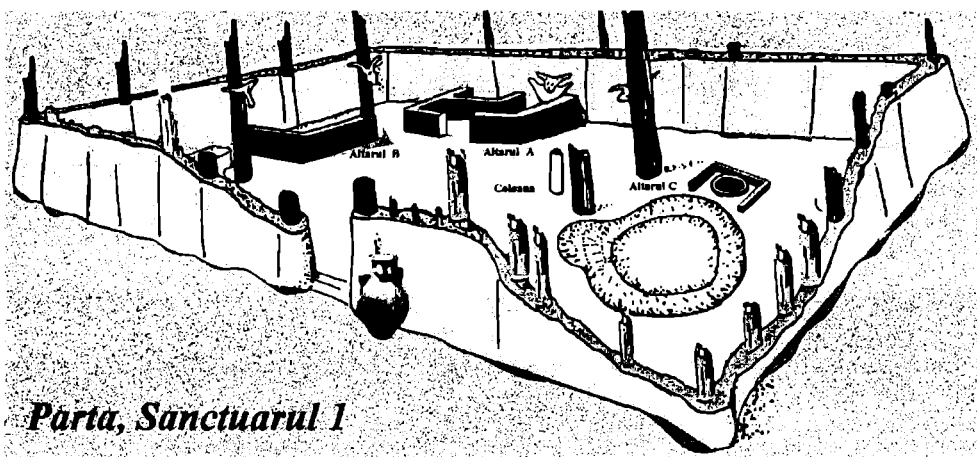


Fig. 3: Parța, Sanctuary 1

Monumental pieces have been found in each big block of houses on the walls. They indicate the place of a home altar/shrine or the place of a family totem:

- **House of the Moon;**
- **House of the Deer;**
- **House of the pillar and of the bull head;**

We believe that is quite difficult to separate the communitarian and home altars or sanctuaries, but they represent models of imagination in the Danube area or for the mythology of Early and Developed Neolithic.

The appearance of the monumental altars, clay pillars, monumental blocks of clay or stone is very old. In the Near East, sanctuaries are noted in 8/7 millennia at Göbelki Tepe, Nevala Çori etc. (Hauptmann H., 1993; Hauptmann H., Schmidt K., 2000; Schmidt 1997/1998; 1999; 2000); later on, in 7/6 millennia only at Çatal Hüyük there are over 30 communitarian and home sanctuaries, in a true Neolithic town. All these sanctuaries contain monumental pieces. In the inventory of these sanctuaries frequent there are column, stela, bench, altar, cassette, fireplace, cup etc.).

All of these have been used for burning some products (*fumigatio*), for blood sacrifices (*mactatio*), for libation (*libations*), for offerings (*oblatio*) etc.

Based on these just presented reasons, that belongs to some civilizations with a protourban character (Pața was surrounded by four ditches and 4-5 palisades), with a socio-religious center (temples, altars), with economical activities related with the producing of the pottery and others activities (Lazarovici Gh., et alii 2001) – we reanalyze here some of the Gura Baciului discoveries (Lazarovici Gh., Maxim Z., 1995).

We underline again that Gura Baciului is very important for the Early Neolithic in Romania, while this site reflect the spatial organization over a long period of time (during cca. 7 phases of architectural evolution), were the sacred place, maybe with the community totem, *axis mundi*, was in the middle of the site (only two pits have been discovered here). In all these mentioned phases it was kept an organization model around a small square (fig. 5), dwellings being rebuilt in the previous spaces (Lazarovici Gh., Maxim 1995, fig. 10-14), maybe reflecting familial relations.



Fig. 4: Ain Ghazal, sanctuary, altar?
– semicircle apse with floor and a
central pit (after K. Schmidt K)



Fig. 4b: Nevali
Çori, column
with statues
(after H.
Hauptmann)

The lonely dwelling that might be considered as a *home sanctuary* is P24 (*Lazarovici Gh.*, Maxim Z., 1995, 109-111, 145-146, fig. 13/4, 21/7; fig. 33, area M7). Here, on the walking level (P24a), was found a stela* made by a local grit stone (16,5 x 11 cm, 15 mm thick). This piece, with the inferior part broken from older time, represents a female bust, where two orifices represent the breasts. This piece belongs to the middle sort category, entirely having about 25 cm height.

Stela is a schematic representation of the *Great Mother* (fig. 6). On the dorsal part it is the head of a phallus and two three alveolus that might represent the drops of seeds (sperm), the pieces being related with the fertility and fecundity cult. We do not know how it was the altar on which the stela was set on; on the upper part it is an orifice, but without anatomical meaning. We believe that this might indicate a home altar.

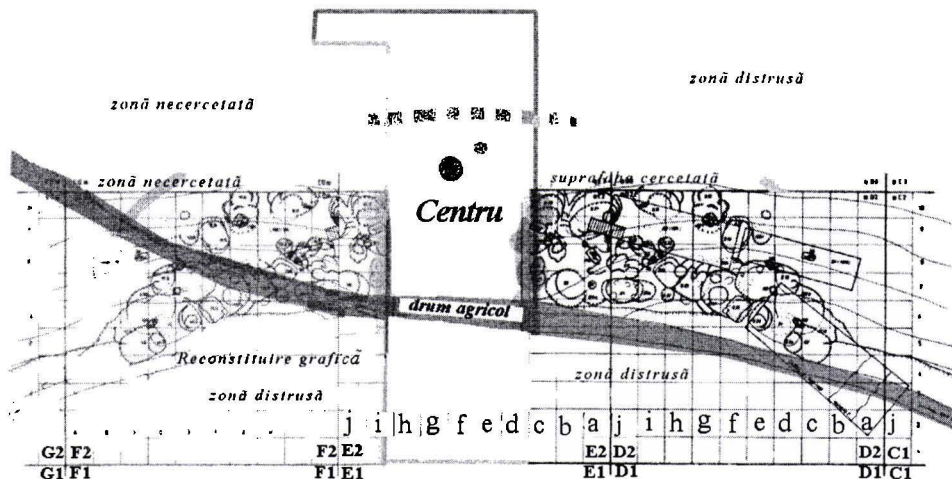


Fig. 5: Gura Baciului, Early Neolithic

This complex P24 is related with Starčevo – Criș culture (cca. 6.300 – 5.500 CAL BC) and especially with phase IVA, about 5.400 – 5.300 CAL BC (Lazarovici Gh., Maxim Z., 1995, 137-142, tab. 17/6b; Lazarovici Gh., 2006).

We have to remember that in the perimeter of this complex it was discovered an incineration grave (M7), covered with a monumental stone head. Incineration is not very usual in the Early Neolithic in Romania, most of the graves being of inhumation in a cower position (for the graves problems see Lazarovici Gh., Maxim Z., 1995, 176-197, 395-402).

The abandon of the complex (house P24), the deposition of the sherds, bones and other domestic fragments, the burying of fired skeleton (fire took place in other part) between these fragments, over which it was the stone head maybe reflect the ritual devoted to a priest or priestess.

Such persons involved in the maintenance and supervision of the rituals in the temples, sanctuaries had to exist even from Preceramic Neolithic and later on. Even later on there are very interesting rituals related with the most important steps in the lifetime (birth, initiation, marriage, death).

One hundred years later after the end of Gura Baciului site, in Vinča culture, phase B (cca. 5150 – 5050 CAL BC) at Balta Sărată (Lazarovici Gh., et alii 1999; 2000; 2003a) it was discovered the house of a priestess related with

sacred grinding, cultic deposition and keeping of the grind (for sacred grinding see *Lazarovici Gh., 2003*).

We do not intent to extend here all the problems related with the rise of such a stela and the deposition of the incineration grave between the fragments of the house debris, but we have to notice that the rituals related with this sort of „priestess” are very interesting.

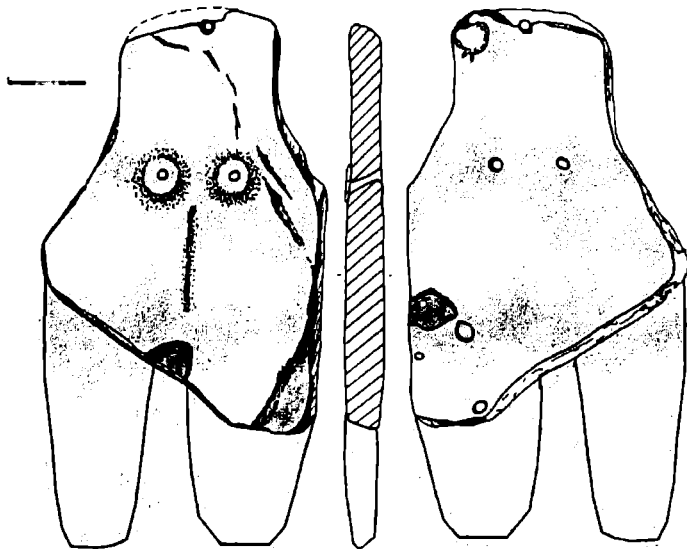


Fig. 6: Gura Baciului P24a, stone stela

The problem of the stone heads, of the head, or skull cult has been largely presented in the Gura Baciului monograph. There are many other examples, sometime very shortly presented, as the stela we have mentioned here.

After a set of theoretical studies about rituals and other discoveries at Balta Sărată or Tărtăria, in the Precucuteni culture at Poduri (House 36 near fireplace 2, *Monah D., 1982, 11-13; 1997; 2001; Cucuteni 1997, 109, cat. 14a-d; Monah D., 1997, 35; Lazarovici Gh., et alii 2001, 289*), Isaiia (Sanctuary 2, *Ursulescu N., 2001; Ursulescu N., et alii 2002; Ursulescu N., Cotiugă V., 2000*) and even at Sabatinovka (*Zbenovič V., 1996, 32-33, Abb. 15*) it seems that inventories of such priestess have been discovered, so their existence seems to be real and necessary.

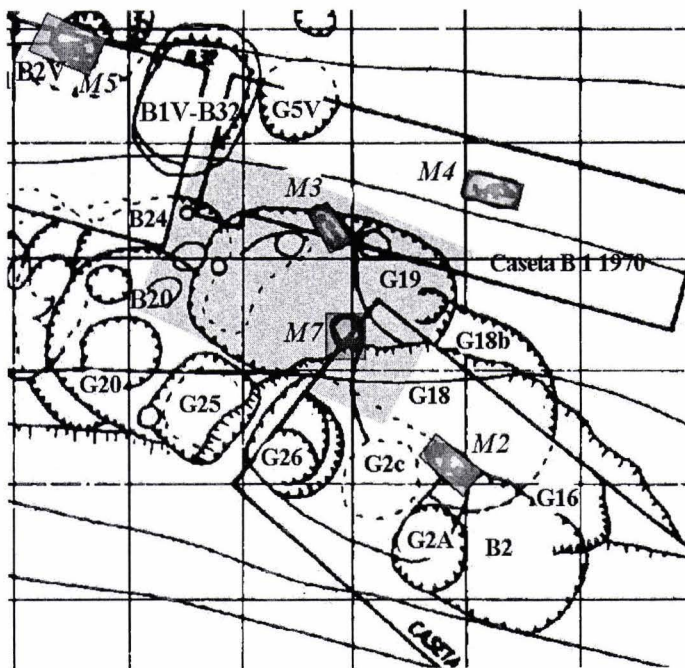


Fig. 7: Gura Baciului P24a, area grave 7



Fig. 8: Gura Baciului P24a, burnt grave 7

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