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## THE SACRAL WORLD AND SACRED IMAGES OF TRYPILLIA CIVILIZATION

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In this article we suggest a model of the sacral world and sacred images of Trypillia civilization. Despite the efforts of many scholars over the last century to uncover the history and spiritual life of Trypillia culture, there remain significant gaps in our knowledge. The application of complex and systematic approaches to the study of artifacts and finds has allowed analysis in areas and combinations that had not been applied in previous studies<sup>1</sup>. This has enabled us to reproduce the most viable model and to come to a better understanding of the sacred realm of the culture and society of Trypillia.

In terms of reconstruction, the major task has been to determine basic methodical foundations. The existing historiography devoted to problems of the spiritual realm of Trypillia is a testament to the widespread theories commonly employed under former Soviet rule, at the core of which lay themes of economic determinism and primitive evolution. The role of religion as an important factor in social development was completely underestimated.

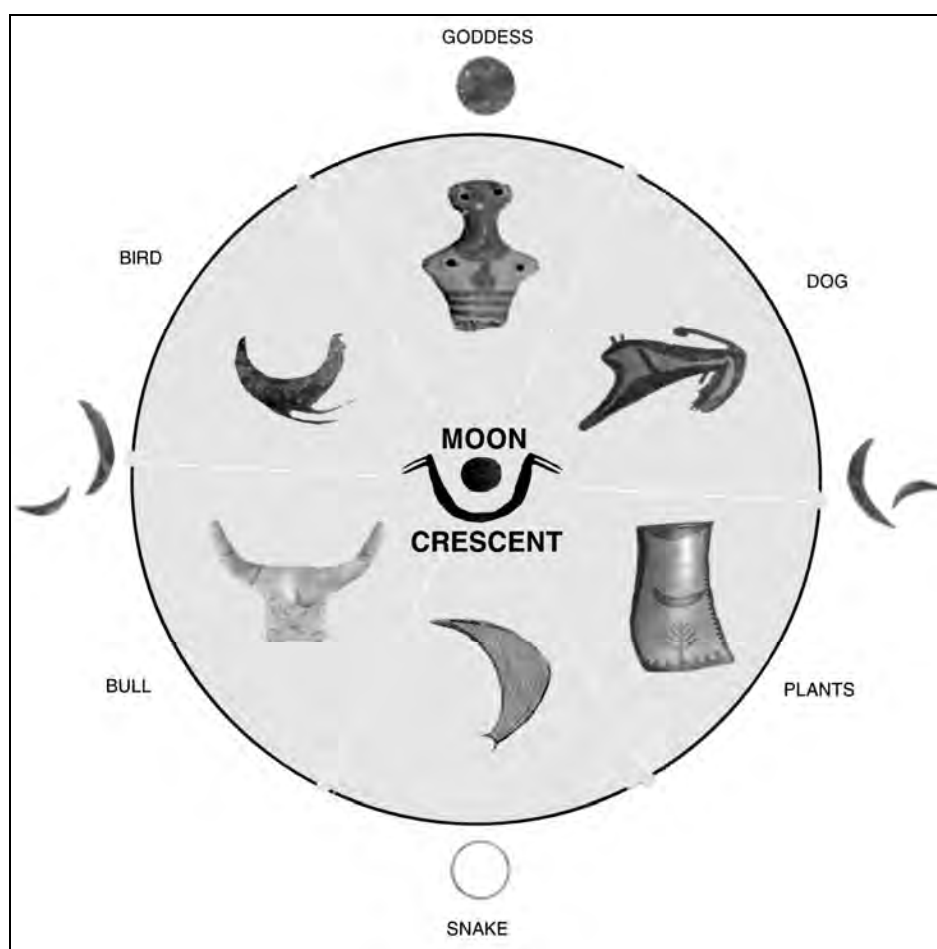
The study of magic in Trypillia civilization requires, first of all, the search for its primary laws and regulations regarding ritual practices. These are given in corresponding works written by specialists, while the artifacts themselves have been analyzed<sup>2</sup>.

The oldest sacred image that we are able to reconstruct is the Bird-Goddess (fig. 1). It is extraordinarily archaic and, perhaps more interesting, it did not appear until the beginning of the fifth millennium B.C. This image was widespread in the Vinča, Criș and other cultures of the Balkan-Carpathian region. This is not surprising if we take into account the extensive archaeological data concerning Trypillia's intensive contact with these regions. Over time, however, we see the unification of two goddess images in Trypillia: The Great Goddess is an amalgam of the Cow Goddess (of the Afro-Asian and Indo-European traditions) with the prehistoric image of the Bird Goddess (tab. 1).

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<sup>1</sup> N.B. Burdo, *Sakralnyi svit Trypil's'koi civilizacii*, in *Encyklopedija Trypil's'koi Civilizacii*, tom I, kn. 1, p. 343-420.

<sup>2</sup> M. Eliade, *Mephistefel i androgin*, Kyiv, 2001.



**Fig. 1.** The image of the Bird-Goddess.

<http://www.muzeu-neamt.ro> / <http://cimec.ro>

Figurines	Image / symbol	Function and relationship	Stage of Trypillia Culture
	<b>FIGURINES WITH SCEPTRE OR CROISER</b>		A
	<b>ITHYPHALLIC FIGURE</b>	Prototype of Priap	BI
	<b>MAN</b>	The holy ancestors: warriors, priests. Prototype of Heroes	BII-CI
	<b>YOUTH</b>	They are perhaps forerunners of a Dying God of Vegetation known from historical mythology	BII-CI
	<b>ANDROGYNE</b>	Two-sexual Divinity, symbol of unity of all essences	BII-CI

Tab. 1. Antropomorphous Divinities.

The Great Goddess is certainly a reflection of Trypillian anthropomorphism. Her symbols – the Moon and Snake – accompany her. Among female sacred images we can distinguish a woman with a baby, the Kora Goddess, and a Matron Goddess (tab. 2). This is ascertained on the basis of comparative analysis since, in Trypillia, we find artifacts which are clearly anthropomorphic alongside others whose form is not immediately intelligible. In the field of plastic arts we have determined that the numerous handles of Trypillia vessels are in fact anthropomorphic symbols. The initial realism however, later gave way to more schematic images. It is quite possible that those who produced them did not fully understand their meaning. This is a vivid example of the earliest phase of development of its material culture which may have been partially or completely forgotten.

In our own research we have discovered a new sacred image – that of Androgynies (tab. 3). This was considered to be a divine, perfect creature – the embodiment of all oppositions. The male characteristics are present but they are not yet clearly expressed. It is possible that this image is related to the Kora Goddess.

For a fairly long period, many Trypillian artifacts with depictions of bucrania were interpreted as allegories of the bull. The combined images of Bull-God and Woman-Earth were considered to be representative of male and female beginning, as Sky and Earth<sup>3</sup>. To my mind these constructions actually post-date the period of Trypillia culture. We have, therefore, failed to determine the actual place of these images within the corpus of extant material remains. Where bucrania images can be traced to a particular context they likely symbolized the bull as sacrifice. The Great Bull-God is rarely depicted in artifacts (tab. 4).





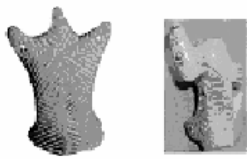


Numerous images of snakes survive in Trypillia ornamental patterns (tab. 5). The image of a snake is interpreted as the moon deity. The combination of snake and moon, however, is an image specific to Trypillia alone. Although both images appear in mythology, they never appear together. Their combination can thus be considered a typically Trypillian invention.

The different sacral objects and symbols, typical for Trypillia Culture, are forming a group around the Moon, presented at different stages (fig. 2-3). The Moon symbols dominated at the painted pottery and generated „the Moon coding”<sup>4</sup>. Symbolic images of the bull’s horns, raised hands of the female figurines, birds images look like a metaphor of the Crescent (fig. 2). Trypillia Culture sacral symbols contaminated around the Moon in appearance of circle (Moon) or crescent and related to the images of the Moon Goddess, Moon Bird, and Moon Snake. All being is subjected to Moon: woman, bird, animals, plants, waters (fig. 3).




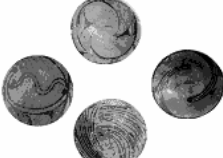

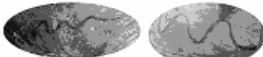

On the basis of our reconstructions of the sacral complex, we have determined that the idea of recreation-revival reincarnation was believed to exist in this culture and that the immortality of the human soul – considered the highest aim – was obtainable through the execution of certain rituals (tab. 1-5). Sacral activity was directed, first of all, toward maintaining the existing world order in the fight against chaos.

<sup>3</sup> N.V. Danilenko, *Eneolit Ukrainy*, Kiev, 1974, p. 219-223.











<sup>4</sup> T. Tkachuk, Ya. Melnyk, *Semiotychnyi analiz Trypil'sko-Cucutenskikh znakovykh system (malovanyi posud)*, Ivano Frankyvs'k, 2000, p. 132-139, ryc. 1.

Images	Sacred images and symbols	Function and relationship	Type of finds Stage of Trypillia Culture
	<b>VIRGIN-GODDESS</b>	Kora-Persephona prototype	Figurines, A-CII
	<b>LADY-GODDESS, SOVEREIGN</b>	Demetra prototype	Figurines, A-CII
	<b>MADONNA</b>	Mother-Goddess, the Blessed Virgin prototype	Figurines, BII-CI
	<b>THE PREGNANT GODDESS</b>	Mother-Goddess, potential life-bearer	Figurines, A-CI
	<b>ORANTA</b>	Protectress-Goddess	Figurines, BI-CI
	<b>MOON GODDESS</b>	Incarnation of the Moon and Great Goddess	Figurines, BII-CI
	<b>TWO GODDESSES</b>	Prototype of Virgin-Goddess and Mother-Goddess at Mesopotamia and Demetra and Kora-Persephona at Greece	Models of thrones, cult ware, A-CII




Tab. 2. Incarnations of the Great Goddess.

Picture	Image / symbol	Function and relationship	Type of finds Stage of Trypillia Culture
	<b>MOON and CRESCENT</b>	Symbols of recurrence, coming into being; growth; revival	Mainly painted pottery BII-CI
	<b>MOON DOG</b>	Dog with circle – symbol of the full Moon on the tail. Fantastical being from the semantic field of the Moon. Prototype of the Space Dogs	Painted pottery BII-CI
	<b>MOON BIRD</b>	Birds images, conventionalized to Crescent. Symbol of rebirth, coming into being	Painted pottery BII-CI
	<b>MOON SNAKE</b>	Fantastic Space Being Ribbon – the body of the Snake, the head – sign of the Moon or Crescent	Pottery A-BII
	<b>SNAKE COIL</b>	Sign of the Moon. Symbol of Snake Coil. Symbol of rebirth, coming into being and eternity	Pottery A-BII
	<b>SNAKE</b>	Semantic field of humidity, synonym of the water sign – the wavy ribbon	Painted pottery BII-CI
	<b>DOUBLE SNAKE COIL INTERSPERSED</b>	Symbols of renovation, coming into being and rebirth	Pottery A-CII

Tab. 3. The Moon symbols and incarnations.

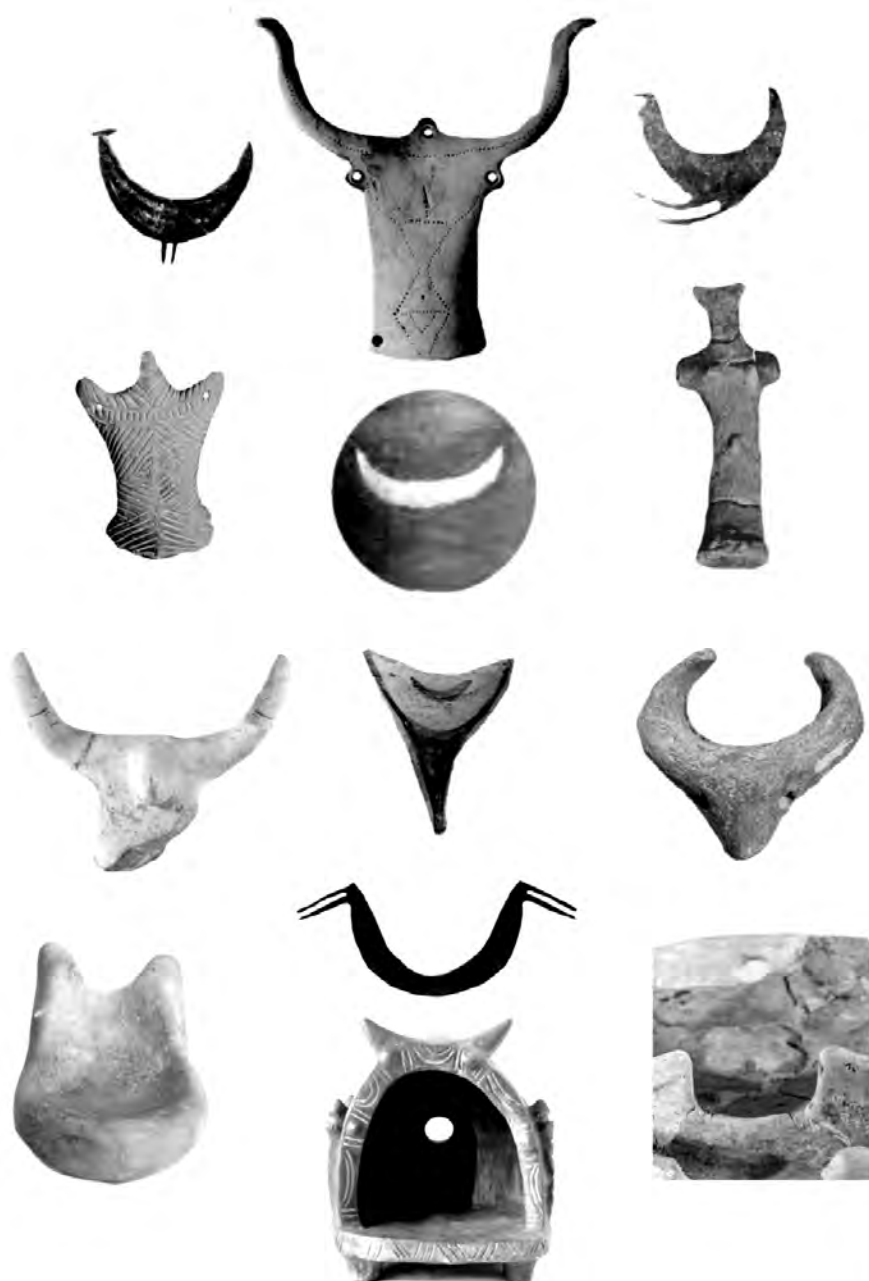
Images	Symbols	Function and relationship	Type of finds Stage of Trypillia Culture
	<b>BULL</b>	Semantic field of the Moon. Incarnation of the Great uranic God. Symbol of Power, fertility, God- offering. Sacrificial animal	Figurines, ware BI-CI painted pottery, CI
	<b>BOVINES (bull / ram mixed)</b>	Symbol of sacrifice to Great God and Great Goddess	Figurines, A-CII
	<b>RAM</b>	Incarnation of the Great God. Symbol of Power, burgeoning, God-offering	Ware, BII-CI three-dimensional clay symbols, BII
	<b>SHEEP</b>	Symbol of Sacrifice	Figurines, BII-CI
	<b>PIG (SOW)</b>	Symbol of burgeoning. Sacrificial animal	Figurines, BII-CI.
	<b>WILD BOAR</b>	Symbol of Power and Fertility	Figurines, BI / II-CI, three-dimensional clay symbols, BII
	<b>GOAT</b>	Symbol of Fertility.	Figurines, BI, painted pottery, CI.
	<b>DOG</b>	Semantic field of the Moon. Sacrificial animal. Prototype of the Space Dogs	painted pottery, BII-CI
	<b>DEER, FALLOW -DEER</b>	Semantic field of the Sun. The animal of Artemis. Sacrificial animal	Figurines, A. Painted pottery, CI. Three-dimensional clay symbols, BII
	<b>SHE- BEAR</b>	Semantic field of the Moon. Incarnation of the Great Mother. Prototype of the Artemis Bravronia	Figurines, CI

Tab. 4. The sacred animals.

Images	Sacred images and symbols	Function and relationship	Type of finds Stage of Trypillia Culture
	<b>BIRD-GODDESS</b>	Semantic field of Virgin-Goddess and Bird-Goddess Prototype of women-like winged Spirits and Demons	Figurines, A-CII ware, A-BI / II
	<b>COW-GODDESS</b>	A horned woman Symbol of fertility Prototype of Goddess – wife of the Great God, incarnated at Bull	Figurines BI-BII Models of thrones Cult ware, A-CII
	<b>SNAKE-GODDESS, COBRA</b>	One of the Great Goddess incarnations as the Moon Goddess. Symbol of regeneration Prototype of the Uto, Goddess-Cobra	Figurines Usatovo culture/ Trypillia CII

**Tab. 5.** A typical hybridization of woman, bird, snake.





**Fig. 2.** Symbols of the Moon at Trypillia Culture.

<http://www.muzeu-neamt.ro> / <http://cimec.ro>



**Fig. 3.** Contamination of the Moon sacred symbols at Trypillia Culture.

The central component of this eternal fight was an individual's immortality and the notion that he then became equal to the Gods. This was expressed in rituals and was depicted in many of the artifacts we have collected.

The ceremony of sacrifice can be detected in the act of burning settlements<sup>5</sup>. The details of these ritual burnings can be determined through archaeological excavations: Most domestic objects that were housed inside were taken out, while the ritual objects (generally pottery) were brought inside. The latter sometimes occupied almost all the interior space. The grouping of different ceramic shapes, ritual vessels, and sacral objects can be identified. Vessels containing the bones of animals have been found under the ruins of some houses. These sometimes contained human bones as well, although the actual placement of individual bodies has not yet been clarified. It is possible that the houses in a settlement were ceremonially filled with firewood or reeds, whereupon each was set on fire and burnt.

Perhaps the inhabitants believed that, as the sacrificial fire dissipated, so too would the souls of its dead inhabitants regenerate in the sacral world. In addition to the „great sacrifice" of dwellings and settlements, traces of everyday life can also be detected in the archaeological record. For example, skulls of bulls, dogs, and other animals buried in the earth, are sometimes found together with artifacts. It is possible that some burials found in Trypillia settlements (including those of children) should be attributed to sacrificial practices.

The anthropomorphic figurines of Trypillia can apparently be divided into several different types (tab. 1-3). These include images of gods or spirits articulated with defined, well-preserved features; statuettes, some of which may have replaced the objects of magic actions in magic ceremonies; and a large group of statuettes used in ceremonies as immolations.

We consider that the ornamentation of Trypillia pottery may have functioned as a kind of magical conjuration (tab. 5). The visual analysis of this ornament shows that the number of subjects, along with their composition, was fairly limited and did not change over time. Rather, they suggest a steady, enduring tradition. Compositional elements include ovals, rhombi, crosses, spirals and snakes, zoomorphic and anthropomorphic figures. Together these shapes and figures form an endless array of static or dynamic ornamental compositions. Swastikas, crosses, hexagons and octagons are symbolic, magical signs. Sometimes these signs comprise larger systems, or pictograms. These have a sacral, magical meaning and, to our mind, were the reflection of a conjuration ceremony intended to evoke and control other world forces.

Some anthropomorphic vessels, including double vessels (which have the appearance of binoculars) are reminiscent of human figures. Their shapes may suggest ritual poses and gestures. Most widespread are the upright, straight figures. They were found in anthropomorphic sculpture and among anthropomorphic vessels and paintings

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<sup>5</sup> N.B. Burdo, *Sakral'nyi aspekt arkhitektury tripolskikh protogorodov*, in *Tripolian settlements-giants. The international symposium materials*, Kyiv, 2003, p. 18-21; V.O. Kruts, *Tripol'skie ploschadki – rezul'tat ritual'nogo sozhzhenia domov*, in *Tripolian settlements-giants. The international symposium materials*, Kyiv, 2003, p. 74-76.

on such vessels. Sometimes these figures bear an object on the head, which is held either by one hand (in the case of painted figures or by two hands with arms bent at the elbows (in the case of painted figures) with anthropomorphic supports).

The magic regulation „a part is equal to the whole” may explain certain anthropomorphic and symbolic representations incorporated into Trypillia pottery. It seems that it was not necessary to model a vessel in the form of the human figure in order to recall the human form. An anthropomorphic appendage seems to have been sufficient, for example a small conical handle made with a horizontal or vertical hole. Identical „handles” placed on the stomachs and knees of female figurines suggest that these were also understood as anthropomorphic symbols. In order to re-create the image of Oranta<sup>6</sup> the potter merely had to supply the vessel with two stylized protuberant handles.

This type of rounded projections likely reflected a sacral female image. Anthropomorphic images were also suggested by the depiction of a hand, by the presence of stylized figures in relief, which do not remind the form of a human body, or simply by a protuberance on the rim. Zoomorphic images on vessels are suggested by the depiction of four legs, a head, bucrania, or simply by the presence of small projections where a tail or head would be found.

The basic sacral ideas and images of Trypillia were derived from the oldest European Neolithic as represented by the cultures of Greece, Karanovo I-III, Criș, Linear pottery, Vinča, Karanovo V and VI, Gumelnița and Lengyel. The formation of its sacral traditions took place during the Trypillia A-BI stages, to which period the majority of its artifacts can be assigned. A new stage in the history of Trypillia culture can be traced in the transition to the Trypillia BI-BII stages, especially the latter. From this period on, Trypillia society was reduced to a system of original sacral complexes and the evidence for magical practices show little sign of either influence or innovation.

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<sup>6</sup> Oranta – from Latin *orans* – adored, the image (mainly of woman) with hands, cocked to sky. Womans hands, cocked and spreaded corresponded to horns of cow and are symbol of Crescent.