

Research Article

Comparative Analysis of the Sacred Architecture of Göbekli Tepe and the Ceramic Temple Models of the Trypillia-Cucuteni Culture: Cosmological Parallels and Religious Semantics

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Abstract: The article is dedicated to a comparative analysis of the sacred architecture of the Göbekli Tepe temple complex (10th-8th millennium BCE, Turkey) and the ceramic temple models of the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture (5th-3rd millennium BCE, Ukraine, Romania), emphasizing their cosmological parallels, religious semantics, and cultural interactions. The study reveals common principles in the organization of sacred space, particularly the use of “U”-shaped entrances, round window illuminators, solar-lunar and serpent symbolism, and orientation according to the cardinal directions, all of which reflect the early agricultural communities’ understanding of the structure of the Universe. The author analyzes the typology of temple miniatures (open, closed, multi-level models), their correspondence to actual cult buildings, and considers them as means of encoding and transmitting sacred knowledge. Special attention is given to the interpretation of symbols such as the “Sacred Tree,” “axis mundi” (world axis), and serpentine motifs in the context of Neolithic cosmological concepts, their role in rituals, and their connection to later myths about death, rebirth, and the duality of knowledge. The study traces the cultural diffusion of religious traditions from the “Fertile Crescent” to Europe, focusing on the transformation and adaptation of sacred practices in local contexts. The article emphasizes the relevance of rethinking the development of ancient religious systems in light of new archaeological discoveries that indicate the complexity of the spiritual worldview of early agricultural societies during the Neolithization stage. The identified parallels between Göbekli Tepe and the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture suggest the existence of universal archetypes of sacred architecture, which served as “cosmograms” – material models of the universe. The study also highlights the social role of temples, reflecting the developed organization of labor, hierarchy, and specialization in early agricultural communities, as well as their potential influence on the formation of religious ideas that could have formed the basis for later mythological narratives, particularly the images of Eden, the World Tree, and the Serpent.

Keywords: Göbekli Tepe; Cucuteni-Trypillia culture; Neolithic revolution; prehistoric religion; proto-Religion; prehistoric symbols; temple models

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1. Introduction

The discovery and study of the world’s oldest temple complex at Göbekli Tepe and the rapid development of archaeological findings in recent decades related to the Trypillia-Cucuteni cultural complex significantly change our understanding of the spiritual life of early agricultural communities.

Excavations at Göbekli Tepe, initiated in 1994 under the guidance of German archaeologist Klaus Schmidt, revealed the oldest temple complex in the world (9600-8200 BCE) (UNESCO, 2018), located in the region of the so-called “Fertile Crescent” – the area where agriculture first developed. In parallel, through the application of magnetic surveying, over one hundred temples and shrines from the Trypillia period were discovered in Ukraine (Videiko, 2022), which, along with the entire Cucuteni-Trypillia archaeological complex (from 5050 to 2950 BCE (Arponen et al., 2024), form a unique “chronicle” of the prehistoric era.

Among these, ceramic temple models hold a special place. These miniature copies of cult buildings are invaluable sources of information about the architectural features and symbolic decoration of actual Neolithic-Eneolithic temples. Particularly significant are the finds from Romania, including open-type temple models from the Archaeological Museum of Piatra-Neamț (Tudosă, 2022), which have preserved detailed reproductions of both the exterior appearance and the interior decoration of the sacred space.

The temple miniatures of the first European farmers allow the verification of the primary agricultural tradition, which likely originated in the territory of the so-called “Fertile Crescent” and gradually spread westward through Anatolia to the Balkans and further into Central Europe (Ammerman et al., 1984; Pinhasi et al., 2005), with its subsequent transformation and adaptation to the local conditions and beliefs of the local communities. This cultural diffusion is evident in the shared architectural-planning principles and symbolic systems of temples and shrines.

Furthermore, the temple miniatures of the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture demonstrate the further development of early agricultural religious traditions, enriching them with new symbolic elements and adapting them to the local conditions of the European region. These architectural and symbolic solutions enable the reconstruction of a complex system of religious conceptions, embodied in the architectural forms and sacred plasticity of prehistoric communities over several millennia of their development.

It is particularly notable that the Trypillia-Cucuteni temple miniatures preserve the basic compositional elements characteristic of early Near Eastern sanctuaries and temples, such as a clear hierarchical organization of the interior space, the presence of a sacred center, and the unity of solar-lunar cults in specific symbolic combinations. At the same time, they demonstrate unique innovations typical of the European Eneolithic: an advanced system of solar symbolism, specific forms of altars and ritual platforms, the distinction of phytomorphic symbols in temple decoration, as well as a complex system of decorative elements that could reflect the cosmogonical conceptions of local communities.

The syncretic nature of the temple models indicates a complex process of cultural interaction between various agricultural communities, during which there was a creative rethinking and enrichment of religious traditions. The Trypillia-Cucuteni temple miniatures can be viewed as an important source of information about the mechanisms of cultural transmission and the adaptation of religious practices in the context of the Neolithization of Europe.

The relevance of this study is driven by the need to reconsider established views on the development of the spiritual culture of early agricultural communities in light of new archaeological discoveries. The discovery and study of the Göbekli Tepe temple complex, as well as the accumulation of material archaeological evidence from Trypillia-Cucuteni, have significantly expanded our understanding of the complexity of the religious worldview of prehistoric societies. These discoveries challenge the traditional view of the gradual, linear development of spiritual culture from simple forms to more complex ones and demonstrate the existence of advanced religious systems already at the early stages of the formation of agricultural civilization.

The comprehensive study of the temple models of the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture is particularly relevant as these unique artifacts allow for the reconstruction not only of the architectural features of cult buildings but also of the symbolic system of early European farmers. The study of temple complexes and cult architecture also provides a deeper understanding of the social organization of prehistoric societies, as the scale and complexity of religious structures indicate the presence of a developed system of labor organization, social hierarchy, and specialization even before the emergence of the first states. This compels a reconsideration of traditional theories on the development of social complexity and the emergence of institutionalized religion, as well as the role of religious institutions in the formation of the first states.

The relevance of this research is heightened by the need to study the mechanisms of transmitting sacred knowledge and practices in prehistoric times, which contributes to a deeper understanding of the processes of formation and development of early civilizations. The study of temple models as a kind of “textbook” of sacred architecture reveals methods of preserving and transmitting cultural information in the pre-literate era. These artifacts may have served as important educational tools through which not only architectural features of structures were passed on but also a complex system of religious conceptions.

In this context, temple models emerge as a unique means of encoding and preserving

information. They could have acted as three-dimensional “chronicles” in ceramics, enabling the transmission of complex architectural, cosmological, and religious concepts from generation to generation without the use of writing. It is significant that these artifacts attest to a high level of abstract thinking and the ability of ancient societies to create complex systems of symbolic communication

2. Materials and Methods

The methodology of the research is based on a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach that combines methods from archaeology, the history of religion, semiotics, anthropology, philosophical and religious studies, source studies, and other disciplines.

The foundation of the research consists of archaeological data obtained from the excavations at Göbekli Tepe (Turkey) and sites of the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture (Ukraine, Romania). The following methods are employed: typological analysis; comparative analysis of architecture; and contextual analysis.

The article places significant emphasis on iconographic and semiotic analysis, which reflect the cosmological conceptions of Neolithic societies (Hodenko-Nakonechna, 2017). In this context we applied symbolic analysis and semiotic approach.

The research methodology includes the study of the connection between architecture and symbolism with astronomical phenomena based on the analysis of the orientation of structures; archaeoastronomical analysis; and cosmological interpretation. A comparative-historical method is used (Kovalchenko, 2003) to identify cultural connections between Göbekli Tepe and Trypillia-Cucuteni. It concerned the comparison of architectural traditions; comparison of symbolic systems; and historical context.

The article applies a philosophical approach to the understanding of religious systems. It referred to the following: interpretation of religious worldview; cultural transmission; and social aspect. The research is based on a wide range of sources. They included archaeological reports; scientific literature; mythological and religious texts.

The methodology of the article is multifaceted and systematic, combining empirical (archaeological, typological) and interpretative (iconographic, cosmological, religious studies) methods. It enables not only the analysis of material artifacts but also the reconstruction of the spiritual worldview of early agricultural communities, revealing their cultural connections and influence on later religious traditions. This comprehensive approach provides a deep understanding of sacred architecture as a reflection of the cosmological and social concepts of the Neolithic and Eneolithic, as well as allows for the tracing of patterns in their development and transformation.

3. Typology of Cucuteni-Trypillia Temple Miniatures

Ceramic temple miniatures and models of cult structures from the Cucuteni-Trypillia culture are a unique source of information about sacred architecture and religious beliefs of ancient farmers from the 5th to 3rd millennia BCE. These artifacts allow for the reconstruction not only of architectural features but also of the worldview concepts of the population at that time.

Examples from excavations of Trypillia buildings have shown that the interior features correspond to depictions on ceramic models found in settlements near Sushkivka and Popudnya (Berezanska et al., 1997, p. 255). The models discovered in Kolomyishchyna II, Volodymyrivka, Popudnya, and Voroshylivka, with ornaments and paintings, also reproduce the structural elements of real dwellings (Berezanska et al., 1997, p. 351). During excavations at the Nebelivka temple complex (Ukraine), an upper fragment of a temple ceramic model was found nearby, corresponding to part of the actual temple's facade and interior decoration (Chapman, 2020).

Ceramic copies of temples and sanctuaries are reliable sources of information about the fundamental concepts of sacred architecture, as these ritual objects preserve established traditions and are created according to worldview canons. Temple construction played an important role in the formation of shared symbols and means of religious communication. Therefore, when studying ancient temple complexes and sanctuaries, it is essential to incorporate such archaeological materials as a key source for understanding the culture of the ancient world.

The main types of temple miniatures include open, closed, and multi-level ceramic models. Each of these types has its own distinctive features.

3.1. Open-type Models

Open-type temple structures are represented as models of buildings under the open sky. Some of these models feature detailed reproductions of the interior, including platforms, altars, and cult objects. Others convey general concepts without particular detailing. These models are equipped with special enclosures and platforms to denote the sacred space. Often, the entrance to such models is designed as a “U”-shaped passage. These miniatures reflect the most archaic type of sanctuaries-temples, partially embodying the civilizational transition from the sanctity of Nature to the sanctity of the structure, where the building itself remains fully open to the surrounding environment (figures 1 and 2).



Figure 1. Open temple model of a building from the Museum Fund of Ukraine (National Museum).



Figure 2. Open Trypillia model of a building from the Museum Fund of Ukraine (Novokhatko, 2004, p. 341).

Open-type temple models serve as transmitters of primary conceptions of sacred space as an open area for performing rituals and sacrifices. The openness of the space emphasized the connection between the earthly and heavenly realms, creating a unique sacred atmosphere. The absence of a roof in these models not only replicates the structural features of early sanctuaries but also conveys the fundamental idea of direct contact between humans and divine forces. This architectural organization, reflected in open-type temple models, resonates with the earliest forms of cult buildings, among which Göbekli Tepe is one of the most prominent examples.

3.2. Closed-type Models

Closed ceramic temple models represent a distinct type of cult miniatures that replicate architectural structures with a complete roof covering. Their main structural feature is the presence of a finished form with a roof and walls, creating a clearly defined interior space.

In the facade of such models, a characteristic circular or oval opening, the “solar entrance,” was placed. On the opposite side of the central entrance, a circular window was positioned on the rear wall, a feature typical of all types of temple models. This window was sometimes complemented by an iconographic depiction of a solar frame (solar rosette), similar to the model in Figure 1.

An important feature of closed models is their symbolic content, which is reflected both in the exterior decoration and in the internal spatial design. The external decoration typically includes a lunar symbol on the roof, combined with a solar symbol – the circular “solar entrance.” This can be interpreted as the combination of the solar-lunar cult in sacred architecture.

The interior space of closed models sometimes demonstrates symbolism that becomes noticeable when light enters the sculpture. For example, on one of the presented models (figure 3), the temple symbol of the Tree is revealed, which is only visible when the interior is illuminated. This light-shadow technique reflects the high level of artistic and technical skill of Trypillia potters and their deep understanding of the symbolic nature of cult buildings. Such use of light as a medium to reveal sacred symbols indicates the existence of an advanced system of solar-light effects in the real temple structures of Trypillia-Cucuteni, through which religious symbols are fully unveiled. For instance, research on the Nebelivka temple complex of the Trypillia civilization has shown that its main religious symbol was the “Sacred Tree” (Zavaliy, 2021b), and its complete symbolic revelation occurred when sunlight entered the temple.



Figure 3. Trypillia closed-type temple models from the Museum Fund of Ukraine (Videnko & Yu, 2004, p. 41,325, 327, 336).

Among the closed-type temple models presented in this section, one stands out due to its unique structural features. Its defining characteristic is its modular design – the upper part of the model is removable, providing access to the interior space (figure 4).

Thanks to this structural solution, the observer gains access to the modeled temple altar and can closely examine the interior layout of the cult building. This feature allows not only the recording of the temple’s external appearance but also the demonstration of its internal organization, which is particularly important for understanding the sacred architecture of that period.

The thoughtful construction and multifunctionality of such models indicate the high level of architectural thought among the Trypillians and the complexity of their religious

practices. Temple models were not merely miniature copies of real structures, but independent sacred objects that combined symbolic, ritual, and likely informational functions.



Figure 4. Trypillia closed-type temple model with a removable structure (Museum of historical and cultural heritage “Platar”, 2004).

The presented closed models of temple miniatures demonstrate the evolution of cult architecture and reflect later religious practices compared to the open models. This indicates a transformation in sacred concepts and the complexity of ritual activities within the Trypillia and Cucuteni communities.

3.3. Multi-level Models

Multi-level temple miniatures represent the most complex type of temple modeling, which likely reflects conceptions of the vertical structure of the universe or the hierarchy of sacred spaces. They consist of several tiers, connected within a unified symbolic design (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Ceramic model of a two-story Trypillia temple structure from the Museum Fund of Ukraine (Videiko, 2005; Korvin-Piotrovskiy & Menotti, 2008).

In the presented example, the lower tier forms a platform-like base supported by legs, while the upper tier contains architectural elements such as niches, openings, and symbols typical of Trypillia temple models. This structure may symbolize the cosmological views of ancient farmers regarding the lower world (underground/chthonic) and the upper world (celestial/sacred) in their interaction. This may be further emphasized by the fact that the lower part has a closed (dark) character of expression, in contrast to the upper part, which is open to the solar entrance through window-passages. Such a duality in the architectural design could reflect the universal concept of the cosmos in ancient cultures, where the sacred building functions as the “axis mundi” – the axis of the world, connecting different cosmic realms (Eliade, 1959, p. 36-37). Similar symbolic representations of multi-level cosmological concepts are also found in other artifacts of the Trypillia culture, particularly in the ornamentation of ceramic vessels (Rybakov, 1986).

Recent studies of actual temple complexes of the Trypillia culture have established that there was a tradition of both single-story and two-story temples. Moreover, these temples were either fully covered or partially covered structures. For example, research on the

Nebelivka temple revealed that it was two-story, with different parts of the temple likely being partially or fully covered (Chapman et al., 2020). This same feature is observed in the Trypillia settlement of Bilyi Kamen in Vinnytsia (Ukraine). Out of the four identified “mega-structures,” one was likely roofless (Rud et al., 2019). Some settlements had open sanctuaries – so-called “rondels” (Institute of Archaeology of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, 2011).

Thus, the temple miniatures of ancient farmers represent real concepts of sacred architecture that were embodied in monumental construction. The ceramic models not only reflect the external appearance and structural features of temple buildings but also convey complex religious semantics. The variety of architectural solutions – from single-story to two-story buildings, from fully enclosed to partially or fully open structures – demonstrates the advanced tradition of temple construction.

Temple models may have also served as a means of preserving and transmitting sacred knowledge in a more mobile and accessible form, adapted to the needs of settled communities. These miniature copies of temples were likely used during ritual practices and in the education of new generations, ensuring the continuity of religious traditions and symbolic-architectural canons. This points to the high level of architectural thought and religious culture in ancient agricultural societies, which created a complex system of sacred knowledge and methods for its preservation and transmission.

4. Architectural-Symbolic Parallels between the Göbekli Tepe Temple Complex and the Ceramic Temple Models of Trypillia

Among the common motifs and conceptual parallels that particularly connect the temple structures of Göbekli Tepe and the Trypillians, one should highlight the characteristic architectural composition: a circular building under the open sky with a “U”-shaped entrance, opposite which, on the opposite side of the structure, there was a special opening or window. This architectural feature can be traced both in the monumental temple complex of Göbekli Tepe and in the miniature ceramic models of the Trypillia civilization, serving as one of the fundamental principles of organizing sacred space (figures 6 and 7).



Figure 6. (Left) Artistic reconstruction of Building C at Göbekli Tepe with the highlighted “U”-shaped entrance (National Geographic Photo) (Hacıoğlu, 2024; Schmidt, 2011, p. 152); (Right) Trypillia ceramic temple models of the open type with “U”-shaped passages and rounded windows (Novokhatko, 2004, p. 351; Videnko & Yu, 2004, p. 40).

The depicted artifacts and artistic reconstructions demonstrate the shared principles of sacred space organization, reflected in the presence of characteristic “U”-shaped entrances, circular layouts, and unique window openings in the part of the structure or model opposite the entrance.

It is important to note that in the northern walls of the circular structures C, B, and D at Göbekli Tepe, special illuminator stones were embedded (Collins, 2015) (“vulva stones”). In the structure of the temple buildings at Göbekli Tepe, a clear symbolic north-south axis is formed: from the southern entrance, between the two central columns, to the circular illuminators.



Figure 7. (Left) Graphic reconstruction of the central columns and the stone with the opening in Building D of Göbekli Tepe (Photo: R. Hale and the German Archaeological Institute); (Right) The illuminator stone embedded in the northern wall of Building D at Göbekli Tepe (Photo: Erhan Yildirim) (Black, 2024).

The placement of illuminator stones on the side opposite the entrance at Göbekli Tepe demonstrates an exact correspondence with nearly all known temple models of the Trypillia complex, where a clear symbolic axis can also be traced from the entrance (either “U”-shaped or circular) to the opposite side, where a circular window was located. It is important to note that such a planning solution is also confirmed by archaeological excavations and the reconstruction of the Nebelivka temple of the Trypillia culture. During the research, it was recorded that the main passage (solar entrance to the temple) began with a semicircular or circular arch (Videiko & Burdo, 2015), and at the end of the main ritual hall, on the wall opposite the entrance, a circular window was traditionally placed (Religion of Trypillia, 2020).

Circular openings in the structural elements could have served an important astronomical and ritual function, related to the observation of celestial bodies and the marking of calendar festivals. As the author’s research in the article “Cosmological Aspects of the Stelae of Göbekli Tepe and Their Parallels with the Religious Symbolism of the Trypillia Culture” suggests, the architectural features of the Göbekli Tepe complex, particularly the arrangement of T-shaped columns, special illuminator openings, and other elements, formed a complex system of light effects that, on certain days of the year, likely marked sacred dates (Zavali, 2025).

In the example of the Trypillia religious complex, it was established that temples and sanctuaries were spatially oriented toward the sunrise at a time close to the solar equinox (Zavali, 2023). During the equinox, the sun rose opposite the central arch-like or circular entrance of the temple, and set along the east-west axis opposite the rear window of the structure. Thus, on designated sacred days, sunlight entered the temple twice a day, creating a special light effect, thereby marking a specific calendar date. This phenomenon is emphasized by the depictions of solar rosettes at the entrance and rear window of some Trypillia temple models (figure 8).



Figure 8. Temple elements with solar rosettes: (Left) Fragment of the temple facade with a solar rosette on a ceramic model from the Nebelivka settlement (Chapman et al., 2018); (Right) Rear temple window with a solar rosette from a temple model in the “PLATAR” collection (Burdo, 2022, p. 73).

It can be suggested that the circular windows in the temple complexes of both agricultural cultures served as markers or points of light entry and could have functioned as a kind of calendar, marking the beginning of agricultural seasons or sacred dates through the specific lighting of the interior space of the temple. This architectural astronomy created a symbolic connection between earthly temples and celestial phenomena.

The circular windows in the Trypillia temple complex could also have practical functions. Since Trypillia temples and sanctuaries in their architectural design included fire altars, these windows additionally served as a ventilation system. They facilitated air circulation to sustain the ritual fire and remove smoke, which was necessary for the functioning of a closed-type cult structure. This architectural feature demonstrates the ancient farmers' understanding of not only the sacred but also the practical aspects of temple construction.

The presented architectural concepts of the temples at Göbekli Tepe and Trypillia, while being universal in certain conceptual aspects, primarily differed in their spatial orientation toward the cardinal directions.

As is known, Göbekli Tepe is a complex of circular structures that, during its religious function, most likely featured an open-air temple space. Several factors point to this: (1) The varying heights of the T-shaped pillars with significant discrepancies, which are unlikely to align with a roof structure (Schmidt, 2011, p. 126, 149); (2) The presence of drainage channels in the floors of the stone enclosures; (3) Grooves at the tops of some T-shaped pillars, which were likely designed to collect ritual rainwater in the open air.

Moreover, the architectural layout of the complex reflects a well-thought-out cult-astronomical system, oriented towards the points of sunrise and sunset on key days of the agricultural calendar (Zavaliy, 2024c, p. 891-892). The positioning of entrances, central T-shaped columns, and illuminator stones created a sacred north-south axis that interacted with natural light during the sun's movement across the southern part of the sky.

The Nebelivka temple and other temple structures of the Trypillia complex were oriented east-west (Zavaliy, 2023), which corresponded to the main principles of the solar cult and the lighting of the interior space on key calendar days. This difference in temple orientation between the two agricultural cultures may indicate an evolutionary transition from open to fully or partially roofed temples among ancient European farmers. In roofed structures, the creation of sacred light effects on specific solar days was only possible with a clear orientation of the building to the east. Meanwhile, in an open temple complex, the mystery of sunlight on certain days of the year could last throughout the entire daylight period.

The orientation of agricultural temple complexes in relation to the cardinal directions likely evolved from Göbekli Tepe to Trypillia under the influence of changes in the construction of cultic structures. This transformation was largely determined by the climatic conditions of the European territory.

The analysis of the conceptual features of ancient agricultural temple complexes allows for parallels to be drawn between Trypillia temple miniatures (and real temples) and the architecture of the Göbekli Tepe complex. Their structure and characteristic elements were likely carefully planned and played a decisive role in the formation of sacred space.

It is important to emphasize that in Trypillia miniatures, the symbol of the horizontal crescent, expressed through the "U"-shaped entrance or crescent on the roof of the structure, is invariably combined with the symbol of the circle or the point of entry of the sun during the equinox. The consistent adherence to this canon indicates its fundamental significance in the worldview of early agricultural communities and suggests the existence of a developed religious system. The "U"-shaped elements and circular symbols, united in a single visual complex, can be interpreted as a kind of religious code that preserved and transmitted the core worldview concepts of Neolithic societies. Their presence across different cultures indicates the likelihood of a shared religious symbolism that transcended geographical and temporal boundaries.

This "religious code" can be traced within a broader context of worldview concepts, forming universal religious ideas. Confirmation of this is found in the depiction on the ceiling of Building 18 in Göbekli Tepe, where the "U"-shaped form is combined with a circle. This combination of symbols likely originated from the architectural feature of the temple itself, which was revealed along the sacred axis of south-north during solar mysteries. It is important to note that similar symbols were widespread in Trypillia artifacts, as evidenced by findings from the excavations of the Nebelivka temple of the Trypillia culture (figures 9 and 10).



Figure 9. Comparison of the circle with crescent symbol at Göbekli Tepe with corresponding symbols from the Trypillia civilization. The presented fragments of Trypillia pottery were found in the cultural layer near the Nebelivka temple complex (Chapman et al., 2018). The Trypillia pot shown was found at the Trypillia settlement of Grebini (Novokhatko, 2004, p. 132).



Figure 10. Circle and crescent symbols on Trypillia artifacts from the Museum Fund of Ukraine (Allatra.tv, 2020).

As shown in the images above, the crescent and circle symbol on the ceiling at Göbekli Tepe exhibits a striking similarity to similar symbols found on fragments of Trypillia pottery from the Nebelivka temple and in Trypillia culture more broadly. Numerous depictions of the horizontal crescent have been found on Trypillia pottery, with only a few depicting the vertical crescent (Moiseenko, 2006). This visual comparison confirms the existence of a shared symbolic language among ancient farmers, and the repetition of the symbol may indicate the preservation of its meaning over millennia.

The presence of identical symbolic elements in the material culture of Göbekli Tepe and the Trypillia civilization points to their fundamental role in shaping the religious system of agricultural communities. Research into the semantics of these signs could reveal the spiritual principles that shaped the perception of the sacred over millennia.

This symbolic motif should be considered in the context of the temple cult of Neolithic farmers, where it held special significance. In many ancient cultures and religious traditions, the temple was perceived as a reflection of the universe (Eliade, 1959, p. 42-43). For example, Egyptian temples were considered microcosms embodying the structure of the universe (Shafer, 1998). In Hinduism, the temple is seen as a model of the cosmos, with its various parts symbolizing different aspects of the world order (Michell, 1988). The civilizations of Mesoamerica – the Maya and Aztecs – built temples as symbolic counterparts of the cosmic order (Freidel et al., 1993, p. 140-141). The placement and orientation of these structures were often aligned with astronomical phenomena, solar and lunar cycles.

When constructing the Nebelivka temple of the Trypillia culture, fragments of pottery, utensils, animal bones, stones, flint, sand, wood, straw, and grain were added to the clay mixture in the walls. Imprints of wild and domesticated plants, tree leaves, and other

unidentified plant remains were preserved on the clay (Religion of Trypillia, 2020). It is likely that this feature of the Trypillia temple's construction had symbolic significance – the structure embodied the Trypillia cosmos and was sanctified by the natural environment, which generally aligns with the broader context of sacred beliefs in ancient societies.

From the above, it can be concluded that both in Trypillia and Göbekli Tepe, solar-lunar symbolism likely reflected the structure of the universe. The placement of lunar symbolism at the beginning of the sacred space of the temple, at the entrance or threshold, emphasizes its fundamental role in contemporary conceptions of the cosmos and the sacred. The new moon, emerging from the darkness, best symbolizes the beginning of a new cycle or journey.

It would be appropriate to include figure 11 in the structure of the article, where the iconographic features of the “U” symbol from the stela of Building 18 in Göbekli Tepe are further analyzed and compared with a similar symbol found on Trypillia ceramic artifacts.



Figure 11. The “U”-symbol in the cultural contexts of early farmers: (Left) Stela 18 of Building D at Göbekli Tepe with the “U”-symbol (Krim, 2023); (Right) Trypillia “U”-symbol on a ceramic artifact (Videnko & Yu, 2004, p. 73, 423).

The central positioning of the “U”-symbol on the stela 18 of Building D in Göbekli Tepe, among other images, likely reflects its role as a key element – a kind of “portal” to the sacred space, similar to the stone “U”-shaped entrance in Building C at Göbekli Tepe. The composition on the stela symbolically replicates the reality of the circular structures of the complex: the image unfolds in a circle around the sculpture, and in the center of the side of the stela, a clear “H”-symbol is visible, which the researcher connects with the two largest central columns in Buildings A, B, C, and D (Zavali, 2024).

The “U”-shaped symbol on Stela 18 spatially coincided with the actual “U”-shaped stone entrance to Building C – both were oriented to the south, indicating their symbolic kinship. This suggests that the stela served as a kind of symbolic “map,” reflecting the key spatial and sacred characteristics of the Göbekli Tepe complex.

The conducted analysis opens a new interpretative layer that significantly expands existing hypotheses. The “U”-shaped elements, the symbol of the young crescent moon with its horns facing up, and the circular signs form a unified system of sacred symbols – both within the visual complex and separately on various artifacts. This symbolic language, embodied in architectural elements and decorative features, reflects a profound religious-cultic understanding and emphasizes the special significance of these symbols.

As previously mentioned, such a symbolic combination could have marked or transmitted a sacred moment in time. This could have been the period of the spring equinox, after which the farmers observed the arrival of the young moon – the best moment for sowing seeds. It is known that seeds planted during the phase of the growing moon tend to produce stronger and healthier plants. This is linked to the idea that the influence of the lunar force on water and gravity can stimulate the germination of seeds and their root systems (Vegetable, 2024).

In other words, when at Göbekli Tepe the stone stelae of the temple formed a well-recognizable symbol, created by the sunlight and dedicated to the equinox, and in the Trypillia temple, sunlight entered through the “solar passage” aimed at the point of the spring equinox, the sunlight of the balanced day would shine through, and during this period, the young moon would appear in the sky – this could have been a particularly significant moment of sacred time. It was not just a calendar marker, but a point of connection between cosmic forces – the sky and the earth, the sun and the moon, which, according to the beliefs of ancient people,

maximally facilitated the awakening of the life force of the earth and the seeds, sanctified by religious tradition. Furthermore, such a progression of a calendrical phenomenon could have been perceived as the moment of the highest sacred power, when a portal between the earthly and heavenly realms was opened, allowing ancient farmers to establish a connection with divine forces.

The cosmic synchronization, recorded in the architecture of ancient agricultural temples, could symbolize the moment of the deity's "descent" to earth, its "solar gaze" through the universe (likely the origin of the later symbolic-allegorical composition of the "All-Seeing Eye"), or its "resurrection" after a period of darkness – following the winter season. According to the author, the primary cult of the grain planted during a specific ritual period of the year formed later conceptions of a God who dies and is resurrected. The sacred purpose of the plant's fruit is to die in the earth, and only through this does new life – the plant – arise. The plant, emerging from the earth to the sky, symbolically resurrects and, in turn, saves agricultural life, literally providing the "daily bread." Thus, the primacy of the sanctity of the dying and sprouting grain cult in historical religions likely became the foundation for the widespread cult of the dying and resurrecting God.

The agrarian myth of the dying and resurrecting God is well known in the mythology of the Ancient East, although the earliest form of this myth originated in the context of the primitive hunting societies (the myth of the dying and resurrecting beast (Horushcha, 2007). This gave rise to myths about Osiris (Ancient Egypt), Adonis (Phoenicia), Attis (Anatolia), Dionysus (Thrace, Greece), Jesus (Judea), Yarilo (the Rus-Ukraine), and others (Bily, 2024).

These legends are closely intertwined with calendar-based agrarian mythology. In Christianity, the archaic agrarian cult is clearly reflected in the words of Jesus Christ to his apostles: "I am the living bread that came down from heaven" (John 6:51), as well as in the sacrament of Communion, where the Eucharistic bread (prosphora) symbolizes the body of Christ. In the Gospel of John (John 12:24), the death and resurrection of Jesus are compared to a grain that, falling to the ground, dies to produce many fruits.

The archaic symbolism of the circle (equinox) and the horizontal crescent (young moon of the first quarter) is most vividly expressed in agricultural temple complexes as a sacred date of rebirth and resurrection. In Islamic culture, the appearance of the new moon still holds special significance, as it marks the beginning of a new month and determines the dates of religious festivals and fasting. The celebration of Nowruz (New Year), coinciding with the spring equinox, has been observed for over three millennia by various communities in the Middle East and other regions (United Nations, 2010).

In Christian tradition, the symbolism of death and resurrection acquired new spiritual meaning, while retaining many elements of ancient agricultural beliefs. Easter is accompanied by the blessing of ritual bread ("kulichi") and other agricultural products, symbolically linking the resurrection of Christ with the cycle of natural rebirth.

The celebration of the Resurrection of Christ (Easter) is deeply connected with ancient agricultural traditions and astronomical cycles, as it falls on the first Sunday after the first full moon following the spring equinox. The symbol of the circle with the crescent, as a sacred mark of the rebirth and resurrection of nature, is found in the ancient temples of Göbekli Tepe and the Trypillia culture and can be related to the Christian Paschal tradition. The difference lies in the fact that in the Christian Paschal tradition, the full moon after the equinox became a key marker, inherited from Jewish tradition. It was on the night of the full moon that the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, as described in the Torah, took place. Therefore, the celebration of Passover (from which the name Easter – Paska (ukr., rus.) is derived (Ivannikova, 2019) after the full moon became an important tradition that reflects the history and spiritual aspects of this holiday. Thus, the full moon after the spring equinox in the Christian Paschal tradition not only indicates the time of the celebration but also symbolically connects the idea of liberation (the historical context of Passover) with the idea of rebirth and resurrection, which originates from ancient agricultural traditions. This synthesis of astronomical cycles, agricultural traditions, and historical contexts reveals the profound unity of human perception of nature and spiritual life, which has been traced from the earliest times to the present day.

This continuity demonstrates how Christianity, despite theological reinterpretation, has preserved a profound connection with ancient religious systems, integrating their cosmological wisdom into a new spiritual context. The symbols of cyclical renewal, embodied in cosmic landmarks and sacred dates, permeate the entire religious history of humankind – from the earliest agricultural cultures to the Christian Paschal tradition. They reveal a deep continuity and continue to resonate in human culture even today.

The architectural and symbolic parallels between the Göbekli Tepe temple complex and the ceramic temple models of Trypillia vividly demonstrate the shared religious concepts and symbolic codes in ancient agricultural cultures. Characteristic architectural elements – “U”-shaped entrances, circular windows, and symbols of the crescent moon – point to the existence of common principles for organizing sacred space and religious beliefs. These elements not only served astronomical and ritual functions but also reflected a profound religious understanding of the structure of the universe. This symbolic language likely laid the foundation for the further development of agricultural myths about death and renewal, which can be traced in later religious traditions of humanity.

5. Architectural and Symbolic Parallels Between the Göbekli Tepe Temple Complex and the Cucuteni-Trypillia Open-Type Temple Model

In the Cucuteni-Trypillia cultural complex, open models of temple structures with “U”-shaped entrances and sacred iconography have been discovered, which are of particular research interest in comparative analysis with Göbekli Tepe. Two such temple models are preserved in the Archaeological Museum of the city of Piatra-Neamț (Romania) (Tudosă, 2022). These temple models, as part of the Neolithic religious complex of Europe, are of significant importance for the comparative study of early forms of sacred architecture and religious beliefs in Neolithic agricultural cultures.

Particular attention should be given to one of the Cucuteni temple models, which has survived to the present day with well-preserved symbolic content and original images. A stylistic analysis of this model allows for important conclusions regarding the semantics of decorative elements, structural features, and stylistic characteristics, as well as their correspondence to actual temple structures of Neolithic agricultural peoples. An image of this sanctuary model is presented in figure 12.

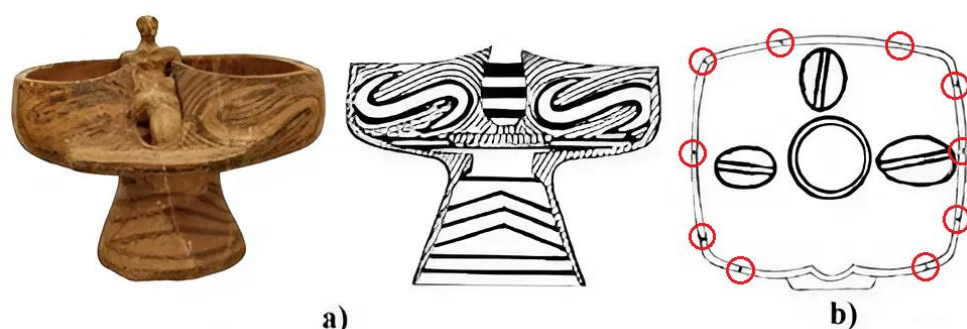


Figure 12. Model of the sanctuary/temple from the Archaeological Museum of Piatra-Neamț, Romania: a) Front view; b) Top view (Lazarovici, 2005, p. 146). Ten applied discs along the upper edge of the model are marked with red circles.

From the perspective of the overall composition, the model has a clear central structure based on symmetry and a vertical axis. The central part of the structure stands out as the dominant feature, while the side elements balance the composition. This is especially noticeable in the top view – the central circle is surrounded by three equidistant elements, creating a balanced construction.

Along the upper edge of the model, which conventionally forms the boundaries of the sacred space or the wall of the sanctuary/temple, ten discs are placed, evenly distributed in a circle. The presence of these ten evenly spaced discs may indicate astronomical or calendrical functions of the structure. It is important to note that a similar structure can be observed in the enclosures D and C of the Göbekli Tepe complex, where ten to eleven T-shaped stone pillars were set up in a circle (Parzinger, 2018, p. 68).

According to research on the Nebelivka Disc – an authentic portable temple calendar – the Trypillia year was likely divided into ten equal parts (Zavaliy, 2021a). Thus, the placement of ten symbolic discs in a circle on the studied open-type model likely served to emphasize the wholeness of the annual cycle. In this context, the ten discs of the temple model may have symbolized certain time cycles, stages of world creation, or other significant calendrical periods.

Particularly symbolic is the correlation between the four central structures of the Cucuteni model and the circular enclosures A, B, C, D of the Göbekli Tepe complex, as well as the identical arrangement of altars and the central religious symbol in the main ritual hall of the Nebra Temple. It is noteworthy that the sizes of the enclosures at Göbekli Tepe, the altars at Nebra, and the structures of the model demonstrate a logical correlation that reflects a unified cosmological concept (figure 13).

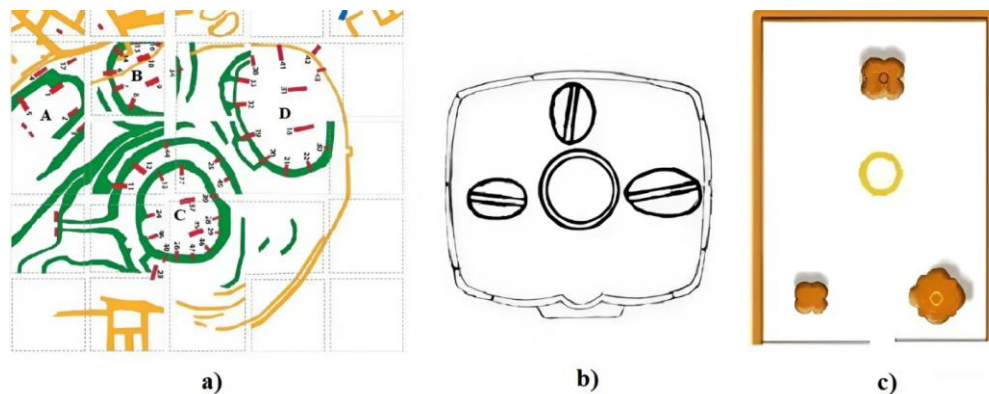


Figure 13. Comparison of the spatial organization of sacred architecture in ancient agricultural temple complexes and the ceramic model: a) Plan of Göbekli Tepe; b) Cucuteni model of the sanctuary/temple from the Archaeological Museum of Piatra-Neamt (Romania); c) Plan of the main ritual hall of the Nebra Temple.

The spatial organization of ancient agricultural temple complexes is a vivid reflection of the cosmological beliefs of Neolithic societies, which is thoroughly explored in the work “From Göbekli Tepe to the Nebelivka Temple: A Comparative Analysis of the Structural Components of the Oldest Temple Complexes in Asia and Europe” (Zavali, 2024c, p. 877-879). The architectural planning of these sacred structures directly correlates with three key astronomical events of the annual cycle: the summer solstice (the highest position of the Sun), the spring and autumn equinoxes (the middle position), and the winter solstice (the lowest position). This spatial-calendar pattern not only determined the orientation and structure of the temple complexes but also established them as a microcosmic model of the Universe. Including the analysis of the Cucuteni culture ceramic model within this study provides additional confirmation of this concept, revealing the deep connection between the architectural embodiment and the cosmological beliefs of the creators of these monumental structures.

Special attention should be given to the central circular element, which is the largest in the structures of Göbekli Tepe and the ceramic model. Its placement in the center, between elements symbolizing the annual cycle, likely indicates a symbolic designation of the center of the cosmos. Smaller elements, arranged along the periphery in a clearly defined order, form the sacred geometry of the space. This organization suggests that the central point symbolizes the world axis, around which the universe revolves, while the peripheral elements reflect the cyclical nature of time and the established cosmic order.

In the Cucuteni model, the central part has the shape of a rounded through indentation that passes from the top to the bottom of the ceramic structure. Museum staff place figures of goddesses into this indentation (see Figure 12, a), although it is unlikely that this was its intended use during the period when the model was in use. This constructive feature of the temple/sanctuary model deserves particular attention, as it likely held deep sacred significance. The central through indentation could have served as a symbolic channel of communication between the upper (celestial) and lower (underworld) realms, forming a vertical axis that penetrates the structure of the cosmos. In many ancient cultures, such elements were interpreted as the “axis mundi” – the world axis, through which communication with divine forces took place.

A comparison with similar central structures at Göbekli Tepe and Nebelivka allows for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. At Göbekli Tepe, the dominant architectural feature of the center was two massive T-shaped pillars. In contrast, at Nebelivka, the central element was the Sacred Tree (Zavali, 2024c), located in the central pit or depression (Videiko & Burdo, 2015) of the main ritual hall, which aligns well with the symbolism of the central trough indentation in the Cucuteni model.

It is important to note that the vertical symbol of the column can be considered one of the oldest forms of sacred verticality in the cultic centers of ancient societies, which later transformed or coexisted with the image of the World Tree. For example, in Crete, there is evidence that the primary cult of the Sacred Tree gave way to the cult of the column, which marked the place of God's presence or the point where His presence was felt during processions and offerings (Kovacs, 2016). However, in both cases, archaeological and ethnographic data point to a close functional and semantic connection between these two symbols (Lazarovici, 2005, p. 150; Toporov, 1991; Toporov, 2010).

In the context of Göbekli Tepe and Nebelivka, various manifestations of a single archetypal phenomenon – the sacred vertical as a central element of ritual space – can be traced. The T-shaped pillars of Göbekli Tepe and the Sacred Tree of Nebelivka embody the same concept – “axis mundi” (the axis of the world) – but in different material forms. Meanwhile, the sacred Cucuteni iconography reflects the motifs of the “Tree” in the upper (divine) world, represented as paired trees, which precisely corresponds to the metonymic transition from the paired depiction of two columns to the solitary cultic phytomorphic images (figures 14, 15, and 16).

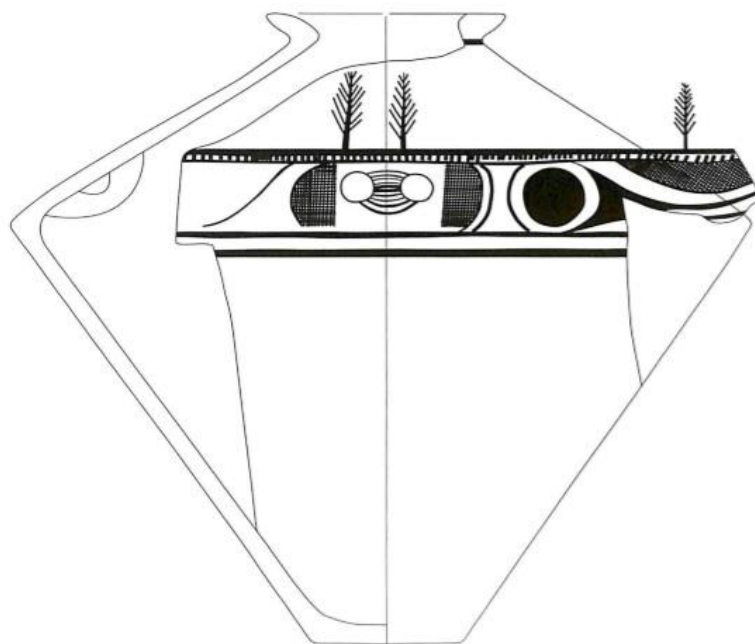


Figure 14. Depiction of two Sacred Trees in the celestial world on a ceramic pot from the Maidanetske settlement (Ukraine) (Müller et al., 2017, p. 117).



Figure 15. Depiction of two mythological Trees on a ceramic model of a Trypillia temple from the Museum Fund of Ukraine (Videnko & Yu, 2004, p. 44).



Figure 16. Depiction of solitary Sacred Trees in the celestial world on Trypillia ceramic pots from the Museum Fund of Ukraine (Zavalii, 2024a, p. 69).

Symbolically, German archaeologist K. Schmidt, before the excavations at Göbekli Tepe, documented a solitary mulberry tree – the “Tree of Wishes” – at the top of the hill, to which local residents would come to express their requests. This place clearly served as a pilgrimage center (Schmidt, 2011, p. 15, 17). At the Trypillia settlement of Nebelivka, where the largest and most developed temple of Eneolithic Europe was located, an Indo-European burial mound has survived to this day (Chapman et al., 2020), with a large tree growing at its summit. During equinoxes and solstices, modern Rodnover communities in Ukraine organize pilgrimages to this site (Religion of Trypillia, 2021). These living examples illustrate the continuity of sacred tradition, where the tree becomes an object of pilgrimage and ritual practice.

Thus, the evolution from the cult of the column or columns to the cult of paired trees or a single tree signifies not merely the replacement of one symbol with another, but a complex process of transformation, interpenetration, and mutual complementarity of sacred vertical symbols, which served as central elements of ritual space in different cultures. Such spatial organization reflects not only architectural preferences but also profound worldview beliefs about the structure of the universe and the place of humans within it, linking the studied monuments to the broader context of ancient sacred traditions of Eurasia.

From the above, it follows that later religious texts describing the cult of the Sacred Trees find their archaeological confirmation precisely in the territory of modern-day Ukraine. This provides grounds to consider this region as one of the possible candidates for the role of the “primordial homeland of the World Tree” or the image of the “lost Edenic garden” in the context of the biblical tradition. Archaeological finds from the proto-settlements of the Trypillia complex – Nebelivka, Maidanetske, Tal’anky, and other settlements – provide convincing evidence of the existence of a religious cult of the Sacred Tree or Trees.

The concept of the Garden of Eden as the first sacred space with the worship of a Tree, which was associated with God’s temple, is clearly traced in biblical texts and early Jewish

commentaries (van Ruiten, 1999). Symbolic parallels between Eden and the later Jerusalem temple are evident in many details: the Tree of Life in the center of the garden is reflected in the menorah (seven-branched lampstand) of the temple; the cherubim at the entrance to the garden resonate with the cherubim who guarded the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies; the priestly service in the temple has its precursor in Adam's role, who was entrusted with "tending and keeping" the garden. According to the analysis of the Book of Genesis, the Revelation of John, and Jewish commentaries, the Garden of Eden is seen as the first archetypal temple (garden-temple or city-temple) in which humanity worshiped God (Orlov & Garcia-Huidobro, 2018, p. 45-47, 53-57). This interpretation emphasizes the fundamental unity of the concept of sacred space in the Judeo-Christian tradition, where Eden serves as the original model for all subsequent temple structures.

Interestingly, the geographical location of the Trypillia civilization within the boundaries of four rivers (the Dnieper, Southern Bug, Dniester, and Prut) coincides with the biblical description of the Garden of Eden, which is surrounded by four rivers (Gen. 2:10-14). In the Book of Genesis (2:9), two special trees are mentioned that grew in the middle of the garden: the "tree of life" and the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil." At the same time, the reference that God placed man in this place to tend it and work the land (Gen. 2:15) fully corresponds to the agricultural way of life of the Trypillians. Thus, the idea of the "World Tree" or the "Garden of Eden" could have been not only an abstract image but also a reflection of a real sacred manifestation, embodied in the first temple complexes of ancient agricultural societies.

Moreover, the Trypillia culture, which flourished and formed its so-called mega-settlements (the first large proto-cities) between 4100 and 3400 BCE in Central Ukraine (Müller et al., 2016), aligns well with the biblical chronology from the creation of the world. If we consider the biblical chronology, where the creation of the world is dated to approximately 4004 BCE (Barr, 1985) then the Nebelivka temple, which has a calibrated date of 4000-3900 BCE (Hofmann et al., 2019) can be conventionally considered to be at the origins of such a concept. Notably, the commonly used Byzantine chronology of "from the creation of the world" is sometimes replaced by the version "from the creation of the world in the Starry Temple" (Levenson, 1984), which may indicate the importance of the concept of the temple as the fundamental origin of the cosmos. Such sacralization of architectural structures is characteristic of the Trypillia culture, where the temple was considered a miniature copy of the surrounding universe.

This suggests that the Trypillia mega-settlements could have been among the first large-scale social structures known in the ancient world and may have served as one of the sources of archetypal images later incorporated into religious texts. Interpreting actual archaeological findings and later religious texts through the lens of the philosophy of religion reveals such parallels. This provides grounds to consider the territory of Ukraine as one of the regions where fundamental religious ideas may have formed, which were later incorporated into subsequent written religious systems.

Returning to the parallels between Göbekli Tepe and the Cucuteni-Trypillia ceramic model, it is important to note the "U"-shaped entrance leading to the central sacred space. This element is characteristic of Trypillia open-type temple models and corresponds to the archaeological remains at Göbekli Tepe. The "U"-shaped entrance clearly refers to lunar symbolism associated with the idea of connecting the temple space to the cult of the sun and the moon. The motif of two "snakes" entwining the "U"-shaped entrance on the front wall of the model could be associated with lunar cycles, which are often linked to serpentine images. Serpentine decoration has parallels in the reliefs on the pillars at Göbekli Tepe, where wavy lines and serpent motifs are also frequently found.

Here, it is worth drawing a parallel again between the actual archaeological findings from the temple complexes of ancient agricultural societies and biblical motifs, particularly the image of the serpent, which plays a key role in the narrative of the Garden of Eden. In the Book of Genesis (Gen. 3:1-15), the serpent is associated with the "tree of the knowledge of good and evil" and serves as an ambivalent symbol: on one hand, as the tempter leading to the fall, and on the other, as the bearer of knowledge, opening new horizons of understanding for humanity. This duality resonates in the Cucuteni-Trypillia temple model. The serpents entwining the entrance could also be interpreted as guardians of the sacred space, similar to the cherubim who, according to Genesis 3:24, guard the way to the Tree of Life after the expulsion of humanity from Eden.

The parallel with Göbekli Tepe reinforces this idea. The serpentine reliefs on the T-shaped pillars at Göbekli Tepe indicate the ancientness of this symbol in the religious systems

of agricultural communities. Thus, the image of the serpent in the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture, its parallels with Göbekli Tepe and the biblical Eden, attest to a deep symbolic continuity. The serpent, like the Sacred Tree, serves as an intermediary between the earthly and the divine, between chaos and order.

The Trypillia mega-settlements, with their temples and complex social organization, may have been not only physical centers but also hubs for the formation of religious ideas. These ideas may later have entered a broader cultural context, influencing concepts of Eden, the World Tree, and the ambivalent role of the serpent as a symbol of knowledge and transformation.

It is important to emphasize the craftsmanship of the decorative elements in the discussed ceramic copy of the sacred structure. Every detail is carefully thought out and recreated in accordance with the religious traditions of its time. Stylized zoomorphic, cosmological, and geometric motifs are harmoniously integrated into the overall composition, creating a sense of wholeness and sacredness. This attention to detail, as well as the compositional and rhythmic organization, reflects the high level of artistic culture of ancient agricultural craftsmen. Each decorative element carries a semantic load, reflecting worldview concepts, while also organically fitting into the overall structure of the object. The origins of this tradition likely trace back to the early Neolithic period, reflecting the fundamental principles of the worldview of ancient farmers.

The compositional structure of this temple model reflects a complex and multifaceted cosmological symbolism that synthesizes key ideas and principles of the planning and functioning of sacred complexes in the Neolithic and Eneolithic periods. This ceramic model embodies the worldview and aesthetic pursuits of its era, serving as a material expression of the sacred meanings that defined the life and spiritual orientation of ancient communities.

In-depth study of such artifacts allows for a better understanding of the complex processes that led to the formation of early civilizational centers, tracing the stages of the establishment and development of the first symbolic systems, and also assessing the role of sacred art in the organization of the living space of ancient societies.

Thus, a comparative analysis of the open temple model of the Cucuteni-Trypillia culture and the Göbekli Tepe complex allows for the tracing of the evolution of sacred architecture and religious beliefs of Neolithic communities. It also reveals common structural elements, which may indicate cultural contacts or the existence of a shared cultural substrate formed as a result of similar social, economic, and spiritual conditions in the development of early agricultural societies.

6. Conclusions

The comparative analysis of the sacred architecture of Göbekli Tepe and the ceramic temple models of the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture demonstrates profound cosmological and religious parallels between these two early agricultural traditions. These parallels indicate the existence of a developed religious system even before the emergence of writing and formalized religious doctrines. The system was based on a deep understanding of astronomical cycles, included complex cosmological concepts, and was expressed through an intricate symbolic language.

Common architectural principles, such as the use of “U”-shaped entrances, circular windows, serpentine and solar-lunar symbolism, and orientation towards the cardinal points, reflect the universal perceptions of Neolithic communities regarding the structure of the universe and sacred space. These elements, along with symbols of the “Sacred Tree,” columns, and the concept of “axis mundi” (world axis), point to a complex system of religious beliefs that connected the earthly and the celestial, as well as calendar cycles with agricultural and ritual practices. The comparative analysis demonstrates that these shared elements are not only architectural solutions but also reflections of profound religious concepts related to the cyclicity of time and cosmological ideas about the universe.

The Trypillia-Cucuteni temple miniatures, represented by open, closed, and multi-tiered models, not only reproduce the architectural features of real cult structures but also serve as carriers of sacred knowledge, encoding cosmological concepts and religious beliefs. Their typological diversity and symbolic richness testify to a high level of development in religious culture, architectural thought, and the universality of early agricultural traditions.

The research has shown that both traditions employed universal architectural solutions that reflect shared perceptions of the structure of the universe: (1) architectural-spatial unity (Common principles of organizing sacred space have been identified, including the south-

north orientation at Göbekli Tepe and east-west at the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture, linked to astronomical phenomena and calendar cycles. The positioning of structures or their elements according to celestial events reflects the idea of harmony between earthly and celestial processes.); (2) symbolic language (Solar-lunar symbolism (circle and horizontal crescent) formed a religious code associated with agricultural myths of death and rebirth in the natural calendar cycle. This code can be traced from Göbekli Tepe to the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture and is reflected in later religious traditions.); (3) cultural continuity (The temple models of the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture demonstrate a religious affinity with Near Eastern architectural canons, which may indicate cultural interaction or the archetypal origin of certain religious concepts.); (4) socio-religious aspect (The scale of temple complexes and the complexity of their symbolism indicate a high level of social organization and specialization in both cultures, even before the emergence of a classical understanding of statehood.)

The temple models of the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture attract attention as unique artifacts that likely played a key role in preserving and transmitting knowledge in the prehistoric world. Research shows that these ceramic miniatures not only reproduced the concepts of real architectural forms but also encoded complex cosmological ideas. They may have served as tools for transmitting knowledge about sacred architecture and the structure of the cosmos without the use of writing. This highlights their role as means of recording abstract concepts in material form, which was particularly important in prehistoric societies. A comparison with Göbekli Tepe confirms that such artifacts were part of a broader tradition of preserving information through material culture. Their significance as proto-literate objects, bridging the gap between oral tradition and written language, appears well-founded and warrants further study.

The archaeological findings from Göbekli Tepe and the Nebelivka temple confirm the existence of developed religious systems at early stages of Neolithization, challenging the notion of a linear development of spiritual culture. The symbolism of death and rebirth, embodied in agricultural myths, originates in Neolithic cults and resonates in later religious traditions, including the Christian Paschal tradition. Of particular significance is the image of the “Sacred Tree,” which in the Trypillia culture is associated with the idea of cosmic order and may be linked to biblical concepts of the Garden of Eden.

The identified parallels between Göbekli Tepe and the Trypillia culture highlight the importance of the territory of Ukraine as a region where key archetypes of European sacred tradition were formed. This establishes a foundation for understanding religious beliefs and practices not as isolated phenomena, but as components of a cohesive cultural complex that developed in close connection with economic, social, and technological changes in the lives of ancient societies.

Comparative study of the sacred architecture and iconography of the temple models from the Trypillia-Cucuteni culture and Göbekli Tepe opens new perspectives for understanding the shared spiritual foundations of early agricultural societies. It allows for tracing the origins and evolution of fundamental religious concepts and symbols. The analysis reveals the existence of universal archetypes of the temple and sanctuary, which were formed in prehistoric times and influenced architecture and art for millennia, up to the present day. Temple structures in both cultures were not only places for rituals but also unique “cosmograms” – material representations of the model of the universe, through which humanity sought to comprehend and organize the surrounding world.

Further study of such artifacts and religious objects in a broad comparative context will undoubtedly enrich our understanding of the spiritual life of early civilizations and the patterns of human cultural development

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