

# Cosmological Aspects of the Stelae of Göbekli Tepe and Their Parallels with the Religious Symbolism of the Trypillia Culture

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## Abstract

This article explores the cosmological aspects of the stelae of the Göbekli Tepe temple complex (Turkey) and their parallels with the religious symbolism of the Trypillia culture (Ukraine). Based on a detailed iconographic and archaeological analysis of the materials, common archetypes of religious consciousness expressed in material forms are identified.

It is established that the architectural organization of the Göbekli Tepe temple complex correlates with the iconographic program of its stone stelae, forming a unified system of sacred signs. Deep parallels are found between the symbolic systems of Göbekli Tepe and the Trypillia culture, manifesting in the shared use of basic cosmological symbols, similarities in architectural principles for organizing sacred space, unity in approaches to depicting calendar and time-related aspects, and resemblances in animal symbolism within complex contexts.

Special attention is given to the study of the calendar system of Göbekli Tepe as one of the earliest attempts to structure the annual cycle. The evolution of this system and its influence on later calendar traditions, including the Trypillia culture, are traced. It is established that the identified parallels pertain not to isolated symbols, but to holistic semantic complexes, which include architectural principles, calendar-astronomical observations, numerical symbolism, and specific geometric forms.

The study confirms the existence of a common religious language of symbols and structures in the ancient agricultural cultures of the Near East and Southeastern Europe, manifested in specific material forms. Based on the analysis, it is concluded that a similar system of

religious beliefs existed in early agricultural societies, which was likely transmitted and developed parallel to the evolution of agricultural traditions.

This study opens new perspectives for understanding the processes of cultural interaction and the evolution of religious consciousness in early agricultural societies. The article suggests directions for further research on religious manifestations in the prehistoric period of the Near East and Europe, emphasizing the potential for comprehensive comparative studies of recently discovered sacred complexes in Turkey, Jordan, Syria, and Ukraine. These studies may further illuminate the spread of shared religious concepts alongside agricultural practices from the Fertile Crescent to Europe.

Moreover, the research examines the relevance of ancient cosmological knowledge in addressing contemporary challenges. Thus, the cosmological heritage of early agricultural societies emerges not only as an object of historical interest but also as a valuable resource for tackling the spiritual and environmental challenges of the 21st century.

**Keywords:** Neolithic, Ukraine, Turkey, Göbekli Tepe, Nebelivka Temple, Trypillia culture, prehistoric religion, prehistoric symbols, Neolithic cosmology, proto-religion

## 1. Introduction

The study of ancient religious complexes and the material forms that accompany their cultures is one of the priority areas of contemporary religious studies, as it allows for a deeper understanding of the development of human civilization and the evolution of religious consciousness. Of particular interest in this context are the temple complexes of Göbekli Tepe and Nebelivka, which are currently the oldest monumental religious structures in Asia and Europe, respectively (Zavaliy, 2024-c). Their discovery and research have radically changed scientific views on the intellectual capabilities and worldviews of early agricultural societies, disproving previously widespread beliefs about the primitiveness of religious beliefs in the Neolithic period. The architectural complexity of these complexes, their clear spatial organization, and their rich symbolic system testify to the intricate cosmological worldview of their builders.

The relevance of the research is determined by the need for a deeper understanding of the religious affinities between the early agricultural cultures of Asia and Europe. Iconographic analysis of the T-shaped stelae of Göbekli Tepe and their comparison with artifacts from the Tripillian culture, specifically the Nebelivka Temple, makes it possible to identify common archetypes of religious consciousness, as well as to trace the transformation of sacred symbols and their adaptation in various cultural and temporal contexts.

The relevance of the study is further emphasized by the insufficient exploration of the interconnections between the religious traditions of the Near East and Southeast and Eastern Europe during the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. A comparative analysis of the cosmological aspects of temple complexes allows for filling this gap in scientific knowledge. The identification of parallels between the symbolism of Göbekli Tepe and the Tripillian culture opens new perspectives for understanding the religious affinities of early agricultural cultures and is important for comprehending the origins and evolution of human religious

consciousness as a whole.

The aim of the research is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the cosmological aspects reflected in the iconography of the T-shaped stelae of Göbekli Tepe, and to identify their ideological connections with the symbolic system of the Tripillian culture and the Nebelivka Temple. Special attention is given to the study of the symbolism of stelae 18, 20, 33, 43 in building D and stela 1 in building A at Göbekli Tepe, their relationship with the architectural organization of the temple complex, and their depiction of the concept of the cyclic nature of time. An important aspect of the study is to trace the transformation of shared symbolic elements, particularly the H-shaped sign, from the monumental architecture of Göbekli Tepe to the ritual ceramics of the Tripillian culture, serpentine symbolism, and other motifs, which provides a better understanding of the mechanisms of cultural continuity and religious syncretism in early agricultural societies.

The methodology of the research is based on a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach, combining the analysis of archaeological sources with methods from contemporary religious studies. The study of "Neolithic religion" requires the involvement of a broad spectrum of academic disciplines, including ethnography, cultural anthropology, the history of religion, and theology, enabling a holistic examination of the religious phenomena of early agricultural societies.

The following methods have been applied in the study:

- Comparative religious studies, which allows for identifying the similarities and differences in the religious systems of the cultures under investigation;
- Empirical method, aimed at the direct study of archaeological artifacts and their context;
- Phenomenological method, which provides an understanding of the essential characteristics of religious phenomena and their significance for ancient societies.

This methodological toolkit ensures a systematic approach to the study of religious expressions in the Neolithic-Chalcolithic period and allows for their comprehensive analysis.

This study is a continuation of the author's previous scholarly work dedicated to the comparative analysis of the oldest temple complexes in Asia and Europe. In the articles "Comparative Analysis of the 'H'-shaped Symbol from Göbekli Tepe and the Ritual 'Binocular-shaped' Ceramics of the Trypillia Culture in Light of Ancient Farmers' Cosmological Beliefs" (Zavaliy, 2024-b) and "From Göbekli Tepe to the Nebelivka Temple: A Comparative Analysis of the Structural Components of the Oldest Temple Complexes in Asia and Europe," (Zavaliy, 2024-c) the methodological foundations for the comparative study of sacred structures of ancient agricultural societies are laid, and key parallels between their structural elements are identified.

## **2. Cosmological Concepts in the Iconography of Stele 43 from Building D at Göbekli Tepe**

In the western part of the circular structure D at Göbekli Tepe, a T-shaped stele (Stele 43)

(Schmidt, 2011, p. 220) was discovered, which has been given the working title "Vulture Stone." The name of the monument is connected to the central image on its surface – a large vulture with outstretched wings, which dominates the composition in the upper section of the monument. This image, along with other zoomorphic motifs, creates a complex system of symbols, which likely reflects the cosmological views of the ancient inhabitants of Anatolia. This monumental sculpture is one of the most informative and intricate in terms of its content among all the known steles of the complex.

The dating of the stele, like the entire Göbekli Tepe complex, belongs to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period, spanning from 9600 to 8200 BCE (Göbekli Tepe, 2018). This makes it one of the oldest known monumental works of humanity, bearing complex religious symbolism.

The surface of the stele is covered with a complex system of relief images, including various zoomorphic and anthropomorphic motifs, geometric symbols, and abstract signs. The particular value of this monument lies in the fact that its iconographic program has been almost completely preserved, allowing for a comprehensive analysis of its symbolic system (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Illustration and photograph of Column 33 from Building D at Göbekli Tepe (photo by K. Schmidt). The H-shaped symbols are highlighted in red

Compositionally, the stele is divided into two parts – the upper and lower sections, which may reflect archaic notions of a bifurcated structure of the universe. It has been noted that in archaic worldviews, alongside the tripartite universe, there is also a bipartite one, which is undoubtedly an earlier concept than the tripartite one (Rigveda, 1999, p. 473).

In the upper part of Stele 43, the main zoomorphic figures are depictions of birds, which likely carry a celestial symbolic context. In particular, the image features figures that resemble a vulture and ibises. Also prominent in the artistic field of zoomorphic symbols is a snake. Among the abstract symbols, three upper spheres, eleven squares, one central circle, two H-shaped symbols, and wavy lines that fill the upper section of the stele can be distinguished.

In the lower part of the stele, purely chthonic creatures are depicted: a scorpion, a snake, a boar, a presumably waterfowl, and a decapitated human figure. These elements may symbolize the earthly, mortal world. In contrast, the upper section is saturated with celestial symbolism – the dominant images are those of heavenly birds, embodying aspects of celestial existence.

### *2.1 Upper Part of Stele 43 from Building D at Göbekli Tepe*

Particular attention in the upper section of the stele is drawn to the tripartite structure, where three arch-shaped elements are positioned above the horizontal plane. In the presented image (Figure 1), it is clearly visible that these circular structures vary in size, with their arcs gradually decreasing from right to left. Such a gradation of sizes is unlikely to be coincidental – it probably reflects a specific cosmological concept related to the annual movement of the Sun, which requires further justification.

The largest arc, located on the right, may symbolize the maximum height of the summer solstice, the middle arc – the spring and autumn equinoxes, and the smallest left arc – the lowest point of the winter solstice. This interpretation is supported by the fact that all three arch-shaped elements are positioned above an imaginary horizontal line, which may symbolize the horizon line.

It is important to note that the same dimensional logic of the circular structures applies to the three stone enclosures at Göbekli Tepe – A, B, and D, when considering their sizes and relative positions (Figure 2).

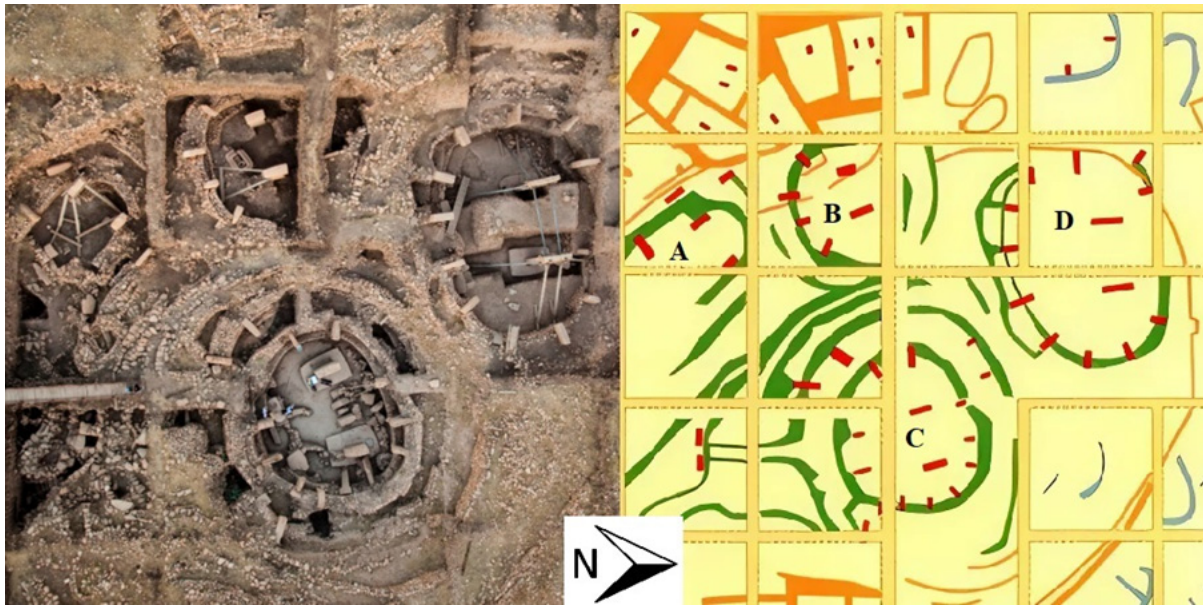


Figure 2. Aerial view of the main excavation area of the Göbekli Tepe temple complex (Dimitrios S. Dendrinios, 2016, p. 28)

In the presented plan of the archaeological excavations, it is clearly noticeable that these three circular structures differ in size, with their sizes decreasing from right to left when viewed from the eastern side – the side where the sun rises. Structures A, B, and D reflect the same logic as the three arch-shaped elements in the upper part of Stele 43: the largest structure, D, corresponds to the largest arc, the medium-sized structure, B, corresponds to the middle arc, and the smallest structure, A, corresponds to the smallest arc on the stele. Such correspondence is unlikely to be coincidental and suggests a unified architectural and cosmological concept, embodied both in the monumental architecture of the temple complex and in the symbolism of the stele.

It is important to note that in the presented plan of the archaeological excavations, these three stone enclosures are arranged around the central structure C, forming a complex architectural composition and structure of the temple complex. In the central enclosure C, there are eleven T-shaped columns, which form the basis of the stone circle. The numerical value "eleven" is also clearly represented on the "Vulture Stone" in the form of rectangular elements placed between the three arch-shaped structures and the central circle (Figure 3).



Figure 3. The numerical value "eleven" in the architecture of Göbekli Tepe: (left) Plan of the central structure C at Göbekli Tepe with eleven T-shaped columns (highlighted in red); (right) Fragment of Stele 43 with eleven rectangular elements (highlighted in red), placed between the three arch-shaped structures and the central circle

It is noteworthy that the central circle on Stele 43 is both compositionally and symbolically aligned with the actual structure C on the site, which also has a circular shape and is the center of the entire architectural ensemble. Thus, there is a pattern in the real architecture of the religious complex and its iconographic depictions, where numerical values and geometric shapes complement and confirm each other.

It is particularly important that lines are depicted from the three arch-shaped structures on the stele to the central circle, converging at a single point. This same concept is realized in the actual planning of the complex, where the three enclosures (A, B, D) are arranged around the central structure C, creating a unified architectural composition. It creates the impression that the religious figures of the time sought to convey the idea of a single sacred center, where all spatial-temporal coordinates of the temple converge.

In this context, the central structure C at Göbekli Tepe may have been perceived as the point of intersection between the celestial and earthly worlds, a kind of axis mundi ("the axis of the world"), around which the entire sacred space was organized. This is confirmed not only by the architectural layout but also by the symbolic representation of this idea on Stele 43. These facts suggest that the ancient builders of Göbekli Tepe did not merely create individual structures and images but implemented a holistic cosmological concept, where each element had its specific place and meaning within the overall system of sacred coordinates.

The cosmological picture described here corresponds to the organization of the flow of the annual time cycle, where the three main solar events above the eastern horizon form eleven equal time periods of the year – likely months in the modern sense – which make up the concept of the sacred Year-Universe. This suggests the existence of a complex religious system in Neolithic society, where time and space were viewed as an inseparable unity, and the temple complex served as the material embodiment of this idea. The hypothesis presented is supported by the iconographic features of another stele from Göbekli Tepe, number 33, and

archaeological materials from the Trypillian culture of modern-day Ukraine, which will be discussed in separate chapters of this work.

In light of the analysis of Stele 43 from the temple complex and its stone circles, the symbol of the circle emerges as a kind of conduit for cosmological ideas that are realized in religious-ritual form. From the circular architectural structures to the symbolic circles on the steles, there is a coherent system of sacred geometry in this ancient temple, where the circle serves as the primary element in the organization of space and time. In the context of the temple complex, such a geometric shape likely acted as a kind of portal, connecting the earthly and celestial rhythms.

The concept of the circle in the structure of Göbekli Tepe is also closely related to the limestone rings found by archaeologists at the site, the purpose of which has yet to be determined (Figure 4).

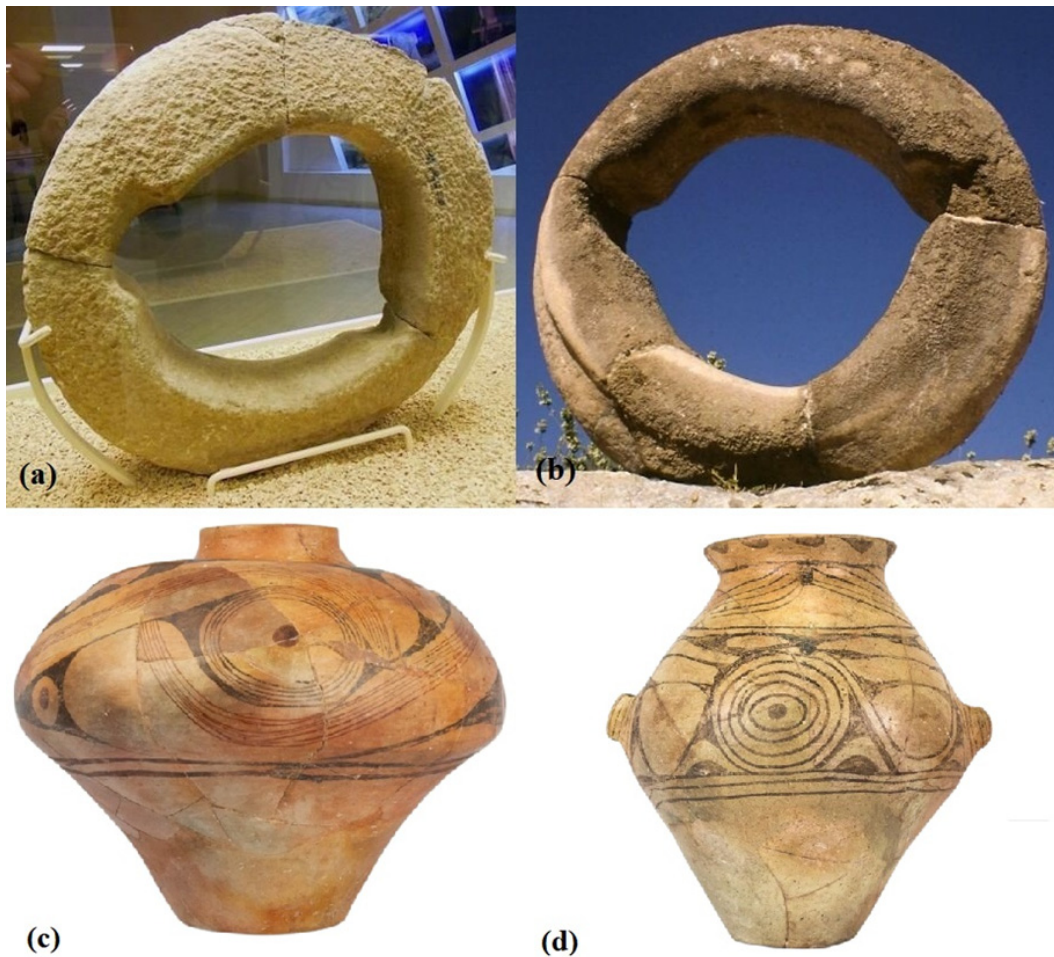


Figure 4. Stone rings from Göbekli Tepe and Trypillian ceramics: (a) Stone ring from Göbekli Tepe, Sanliurfa Museum (Turkey) (Collins, 2015); (b) Stone ring at the site (Schmidt, 2011, p. 92); (c), (d) Trypillian ritual vessels with the central motif of "the sun in the circle" from the Museum Fund of Ukraine (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004-b)



The massive stone rings at the Göbekli Tepe temple complex, considering their shape and size, likely served a dual function: they acted as sighting devices for astronomical observations and held ritual significance within the context of the solar cult.

In the author's view, such structures in the temple complex could have been used to mark the sunrise over the horizon at key points of the year – the equinoxes and solstices. Positioned at designated points within the temple complex or its boundaries, the stone rings would have allowed for the precise marking of the moment the solar disk appeared in their opening. This would have created the opportunity not only to observe important calendar dates but also to conduct related rituals associated with the cult of the annual cycle.

The practice of astronomical observations through such sighting devices is well-known in many ancient cultures. In the Trypillian culture, this phenomenon is particularly well-studied – ancient temples were spatially oriented to the point of the sunrise during the spring equinox. A distinctive feature of these sacred structures was the presence of special circular or arch-shaped "sun temple entrances," which served as sighting devices for observing the sun on key calendar dates. During the equinoxes, sunlight passing through these openings or entrances would fall on specially designated spots inside the temple, usually on main religious symbols, allowing the clergy to determine the exact calendar date.

Additionally, numerous ceramic artifacts from Trypillian settlements have been found, depicting religious scenes of "the sun in the circle" (Figure 4, c, d), which reflects the material embodiment of the sacred moment of the sun's entrance into the temple in artistic forms.

The limestone circles at Göbekli Tepe can be regarded as some of the earliest manifestations of universal principles of sacred geometry in the history of human civilization. They served not only as architectural elements but also embodied the fundamental cosmological concepts of early agricultural societies.

The particular significance of the early "sun in the circle" symbol lies in its potential to demonstrate the emergence of the later symbolic-allegorical composition of the "All-Seeing Eye" as early as the period of the early Neolithic, long before the appearance of religious texts. This is indicated by well-known Trypillian ritual forms featuring specific anthropomorphic depictions of the "eye in the circle" and the "eye in the triangle," which showcase the gradual evolution of the solar symbol and its transition to more abstract concepts. It is known that the "Eye" is a symbol of all solar deities and their life-giving power (Cooper, 1987, p. 62). One can assume that it was within early agricultural cultures that the primary conceptualization of the temple symbol "sun in the circle" as a symbol of divine omniscience and supreme wisdom took place.

This topic requires further consideration within the framework of a separate academic study, as it demands a thorough analysis of a wide range of archaeological materials and their comparative-typological investigation. The foundation for the development of this research was laid by the author in the article "Research of the Symbolic and Allegorical Composition of the 'Eye of Providence' in the Cultural Heritage of the Trypillia Protocivilization and

Religious Analysis Context" (Zavalii, 2022-b) and the book "The 'All-Seeing Eye' in the Glow of Taurus. A Return to Religious Origins." (Zavalii, 2022-a).

Returning to a detailed examination of Column 43 from Göbekli Tepe and its iconography, it is important to focus on the depiction of three birds in the upper part of the stele. Together with solar-annual symbolism, they may indicate the existence of early conceptions of birds as celestial guides of astronomical cycles. The placement of this composition in the upper section of the stele, traditionally associated with the celestial sphere in ancient cosmology, further emphasizes the astronomical nature of these zoomorphic depictions.

The depiction of a large bird in the historiography of Göbekli Tepe research is commonly associated with a vulture, after which the stele itself received its working title. Here, the vulture is shown with outstretched wings in flight. It is known that in many cultures, this bird was a symbol of rebirth and purification. It was believed that vultures took the bodies of the dead to the heavens. Many archaic civilizations (Native Americans, Mesopotamians, and others) believed that these birds were messengers of the gods. Perhaps, in this way, the ancient Anatolians wanted to further strengthen the solar cult with an appropriate image. It is well known that large birds were often associated with the solar cult (Cooper, 1987, p. 21). This could be further emphasized by the depiction of three wavy lines on the vulture's neck, which bring us back to the hidden symbolism of the tripartite year (Zavalii-c, 2024, p. 887).

An important narrative contrast is presented by the solar bird – the vulture – against two other birds depicted on the opposite side of the stele. By the characteristic shape of their curved beaks, they can easily be identified as ibises-birds that in ancient cultures were traditionally associated with the lunar cult. The symbolic significance of the ibis was emphasized by the resemblance of its curved beak to the shape of the young or waning Moon. This sacred perception of the ibis later found reflection in ancient Egyptian tradition, where the moon god Thoth was depicted with the head of this bird (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2017). Sometimes ibises were shown with a crescent moon on their heads (Cooper, 1987, p. 86).

From the above, it can be suggested that in the upper section of the scene on Stele 43, religious figures of the time attempted to convey the idea of dividing the annual cycle into periods of day and night through the depiction of birds, thereby creating one of the oldest known calendar records. The contrast between the daytime bird – the vulture, associated with the Sun – and the nocturnal birds – the ibises, associated with the Moon – may reflect an understanding of basic astronomical dualism: the alternation of the light and dark parts of the day. What is particularly significant is that this symbolic system in the case of the vulture is emphasized by three "solar lines" on its neck, while in the case of the ibises, one is depicted with an eye, and the other without. This combined imagery could represent the two key phases of the Moon, which align well with the open and closed eye of the bird – full and new moon.

The composition of the upper part of the stele likely reflected a comprehensive concept of the sacred calendar cycle, combining solar and lunar principles of timekeeping. Stele 43 was an integral part of a carefully planned religious complex, the architecture of which, as our research indicates, had a clear orientation relative to annual solar phenomena. In the context

of such an astronomically oriented structure, the symbolic encoding of the natural cycles of the Sun and Moon through artistic depictions of birds assumes particular importance.

In the upper part of Stele 43, among the zoomorphic depictions, there is also the image of a snake – one of the most common symbols on the obelisks of Göbekli Tepe. The snake is positioned separately in the right part of the composition and has a characteristic wavy body shape (Figure 1). Notably, on Stele 43, the snake is depicted in conjunction with other symbols that encode calendrical and annual meanings. Therefore, its significance can logically be linked to astronomical observations and time cycles, and there are specific grounds for this.

The serpentine, wavy shape of the snake's body may symbolize the cyclical movement of celestial bodies or the changing of the seasons. In many ancient cultures, a snake biting its own tail (ouroboros) was a symbol of eternity and the cyclical nature of time (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2008). While the snake on Stele 43 is not closed into a circle, its winding body can convey a similar idea of cyclicity. Perhaps, through the image of the snake, the builders of Göbekli Tepe marked a certain astronomical calendar context – from the alternation of day and night to larger time intervals: months, seasons, and the year as a whole. The pattern on the body of the snake, alternating light and dark segments, may reflect the fundamental duality of natural cycles: the change of day and night, the phases of the moon, or even the alternation of warm and cold seasons. If this is the case, the image of the snake in the context of the stele's imagery signifies cosmic order and the cyclical nature of time.

This interpretation aligns with the overall system of symbols on Stele 43, where the images of birds may represent specific cosmological aspects of day and night, while the snake serves as a universal symbol of their ordered movement through time. In this context, the snake appears as a cosmological diagram that demonstrates the creators of Göbekli Tepe's understanding of the fundamental principles governing the Universe-Year. Moreover, the depiction of the snake within the spatial-temporal symbolism may point to its role as a mediator between different cycles – the diurnal, lunar, and solar. Thus, the snake could have served not only as a calendrical marker but also as a symbol of the very principle of cosmic order, where all natural cycles are subordinated to a single rhythm.

A particular point of interest is the observation of the combination of the images of the snake and the bird within a unified ideological complex, which could have become the archetypal foundation for the formation of one of the most powerful mytho-religious symbols – the dragon or winged serpent. This syncretic creature, merging the chthonic nature of the reptile with the celestial essence of the bird, appears in the mythologies of many cultures around the world as an embodiment of the unity of opposites and a symbol of cosmic wholeness. The dragon, as the result of this archaic synthesis, inherits from its prototypes not only external traits but also the profound symbolism of being a mediator between worlds, a guardian of sacred knowledge, and an embodiment of magical transformation. Alongside this, the large vulture becomes a later manifestation of the mythical Griffin, which symbolizes the sun, the sky, and the light of the star. In the East, the Griffin shares the symbolism of the dragon as an embodiment of wisdom and enlightenment (Cooper, 1987, p. 76-77).

A special interest in our research is also given to the H-shaped symbol, which is highlighted by red ovals in (Figure 1). It repeats in Göbekli Tepe across various narrative lines in monumental art, indicating its deep religious or sacred significance. The appearance of this symbol on various steles at Göbekli Tepe points to its systematic nature in the religious-mythological tradition of early agricultural societies and may suggest the existence of an established system of sacred signs related to astronomical observations and calendrical calculations.

On Stele 43, this symbol is placed in the upper part of the composition, which may indicate its connection with the celestial sphere and the sacred "mechanics of the Year." Notably, the H-shaped symbol is presented here twice, with both depictions almost identical in shape and size. Such duality may suggest the dual nature of the phenomenon or concept that this symbol represents.

The doubled H-symbol in both the vertical and horizontal planes, depicted one above the other, is also present at Göbekli Tepe on the so-called "megalith of ideal symmetry" (Column 18 of Building D). The repetition of this symbolic code at Göbekli Tepe emphasizes its special significance in the religious worldview of early agricultural societies.

As indicated in the author's research in the article "Comparative Analysis of the 'H'-shaped Symbol from Göbekli Tepe and the Ritual 'Binocular-shaped' Ceramics of the Trypillia Culture in Light of Ancient Farmers' Cosmological Beliefs," (Zavalii, 2024-b) this symbol may have had a universal meaning representing the integrity of the annual cycle (from equinox to equinox) within the system of religious beliefs of early agricultural societies. First, it may have reflected the fundamental idea of the unity of the celestial and earthly spheres, which is confirmed by its depiction on the steles and the architectural features of the Göbekli Tepe temple complex itself. Second, through this symbol, the idea of a holistic calendar cycle divided by the equinoxes may have been conveyed, aligning with astronomical observations and the orientation of the temple structures.

It is important to note that similar symbolism later appears in the Trypillian culture in the form of "binocular-shaped" artifacts. The Trypillian "binoculars" show striking similarity to the H-symbol from Göbekli Tepe not only in form but also in their ritual purpose and cosmological meaning. This is confirmed by archaeological finds of "binoculars" in temple complexes, including near the main altar of the Nebelivka Temple of the Trypillian culture (Videiko, Burdo, 2020, p. 248).

Thus, the analysis of the H-shaped symbol from Göbekli Tepe reveals a complex system of religious concepts in early agricultural societies. This suggests the possible existence of a shared system of religious-symbolic thinking in the Neolithic period of Anatolia and Eastern Europe.

## *2.2 Lower Part of Stele 43 from Building D at Göbekli Tepe*

The bipartite scene of the "Vulture Stone" in its lower section likely reflects the chthonic, earthly sphere of existence, compositionally less dense compared to the upper part. This is indicated by both the arrangement of the images and their symbolism. In the lower register of

the stele, several animal figures and one human figure can be distinguished: a scorpion, a snake, the head of a wild boar, an amphibious bird, and an anthropomorphic figure of a decapitated human.

In this part of the stele, the central figure is the scorpion, placed on the boundary between the lower and upper parts of the stele, that is, between the ideal celestial and the material earthly worlds. This placement of the scorpion is not coincidental, as in many ancient cultures this figure served as a mediator between different levels of existence. The scorpion, as a nocturnal creature existing on the boundary between the underground and terrestrial worlds, was often perceived by ancient societies as a guide between various cosmological zones. For example, in Mesopotamian mythological tradition and ancient Iran, scorpion men guarded the gates to the underworld and stood watch at the gates of the Sun God (Scorpion man, 2017). In ancient Egyptian mythology, the goddess Serket, often depicted with a scorpion on her head, was the protector of the dead in their journey to the afterlife (Pinch, 2004, pp. 187-188), further emphasizing the role of this symbol as a mediator between different planes of existence.

It is important to note that the scorpion on Stele 43 is placed horizontally, serving as a transitional link between the lower and upper worlds, emphasizing its role as a symbolic mediator between the levels of the cosmos. Its placement creates a visual axis that divides the composition into two parts, with the scorpion itself acting as a "bridge" between them.

The symbolic meaning of the scorpion as a mediator between different planes of existence is further emphasized by its biological traits. The venomous nature of the scorpion and its hidden lifestyle (nocturnal activity, hiding under stones, unexpected appearances) underscore its connection with the dark, potentially dangerous forces of the earthly realm. The depiction of the scorpion serves as a reminder of the real dangers and the transient nature of human life, which is additionally emphasized by the image of the decapitated human figure on Stele 43.

The depiction of the wavy snake in the lower part of the stele, like its similar symbol in the upper register, lends this image a universal cosmological significance, highlighting its role as an overarching symbol that connects different levels of the cosmos. Notably, the wavy form of the snake, repeated in various parts of the composition, may symbolize the cyclicity of natural processes and the constant movement between cosmic zones. The duality between different levels of the cosmos resonates with later mythological themes, where the snake becomes an ambivalent symbol, embodying both positive and negative aspects of existence. A striking example of this duality is found in Christian tradition: on one hand, the snake as a symbol of wisdom and healing appears in the iconography of Saint John the Evangelist and Saint Benedict, where it is depicted in a cup; on the other hand, it represents evil in the forms of Satan, the tempter, and the apocalyptic dragon.

Like the scorpion, the snake is depicted at the transitional boundary between the upper and lower parts of the stele. Its body is directed upward, which, together with the similar positioning of the scorpion, creates a complex semantic framework, where both creatures of the chthonic world are directed toward the symbolic upper part of the cosmos. What is particularly striking is that both images are positioned along the same compositional axis, which could be interpreted as a symbolic reflection of the process of transition between

worlds or worldview zones. The symbolism of the transition between worldview zones in later cultures of the Near East and the Trypillian civilization evolved into the image or prototype of the World Tree, the Tree of Life, the Cosmic Tree, or the Tree of Knowledge, where the mythological snake became its sacred attribute (Cooper, 1987, p. 147, 148, 149).

The combination of the images of the snake and the scorpion along the same compositional axis creates a complex semantic framework, where both creatures, associated with the chthonic world and dangerous to humans, likely serve as powerful symbols of transformation and transition between worlds. Their dual nature – as deadly beings and, at the same time, sacred intermediaries – reflects archaic notions of the ambivalence of the sacred. Both creatures possess venom, which in mythological consciousness was often associated not only with death but also with the magical power of transformation, healing, and initiation.

An important aspect is that both the snake and the scorpion belong to creatures that periodically shed their old skin (the snake sheds its skin, the scorpion sheds its exoskeleton), which in many cultures was interpreted as a symbol of rebirth and renewal (Cooper, 1987, pp. 123-124, 145-146). This adds an additional layer of meaning to their placement on the stele – they could have been perceived as guides for the soul of the deceased during its transformation. In this context, death was likely viewed as a transitional state necessary for further rebirth or merging with the upper world. Their placement at the boundary of the stele between the upper and lower worlds can be interpreted as a visual metaphor for the journey of the soul passing through a dangerous zone of liminal space, where these chthonic creatures act simultaneously as guardians of the boundary between worlds and as guides through it.

The decapitated human figure in the lower part of Stele 43 likely symbolizes the loss of the physical body and the beginning of the transition to another state of being. Its placement in the lower register, where chthonic creatures capable of regeneration and bodily renewal are also present, may metaphorically reflect the process of spiritual transformation of the deceased. The decapitated figure is positioned in an active pose – it appears to be moving, which may indicate the dynamic nature of the process of transition between worlds. The absence of the head in this context can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the moment when the soul separates from the body, where the head is traditionally associated with the seat of life force and consciousness. The active pose of the figure emphasizes that death was not perceived as the final point of existence but as a dynamic process of transition.

In many ancient cultures, decapitation held a special ritual significance and was often associated with the idea of sacrifice as a necessary condition for cosmic renewal. For example, in M. Eliade's work "Patterns in Comparative Religion," (Eliade, 1958-b) the concepts of sacrifice as a form of cosmic renewal in various cultural traditions are explored.

In the lower part of the stele, the images of the wild boar and the waterfowl (likely a duck or goose), together with the overall composition, may highlight different aspects of the cosmos.

The boar, as a chthonic animal associated with the earthly element, traditionally symbolizes strength, aggression, and danger. Its placement in the lower register of the stele emphasizes its connection with the material, earthly world. The boar's characteristic ability to dig into the

earth, in a mythological context, can be interpreted as a symbol of penetration into the underworld, making it a mediator between worlds.

The waterfowl, capable of existing both on land and in water, as well as flying in the air, possibly embodies the idea of the union of different cosmic zones – water, earth, and sky – on Stele 43. Its presence in the lower register complements the complex semantic framework, which may reflect various paths and possibilities for transition between worlds. In the context of ancient cosmological views, such an ability to cross boundaries between different levels of existence gave the creature a special sacred status. The bird's universal nature transforms it into a symbol of cosmic unity and the interpenetration of various realms of being.

The image of the decapitated human figure on Stele 43 is smaller than all the other animal depictions, which may reflect early forms of pantheistic and cosmocentric worldviews, where humans did not dominate the natural world. The dominant scale of zoomorphic images over anthropomorphic ones indicates a worldview in which natural forces and their embodiments were perceived as more powerful than humans.

At the same time, the composition of the stele reflects the concept of unity, where the animal, human, and cosmological worlds exist as a cohesive system. In such a worldview, each element, regardless of its size, performs its own sacred function.

In the context of posthumous symbolism, this proportion of sizes may reflect the idea of humans being subordinated to the laws of the natural-cosmic cycle during the transition to the afterlife, where animal mediators serve as guides and guardians of this process. This interpretation resonates with archaic beliefs where nature was seen as a living organism, filled with sacred powers, and humans were an integrated part of this all-encompassing system.

### *2.3 Unity of the Upper and Lower Worlds in the Compositional Structure of Stele 43 from Building D at Göbekli Tepe*

The overall compositional structure of Stele 43 unfolds through a complex system of symbols, where the upper and lower sections form a cohesive depiction of the cosmos with the celestial and earthly spheres intricately intertwined. This unity of sacred space reflects deep-seated notions of the connection between the sacred and the profane, life and death, where the transition between worlds is woven into the overall cosmic order, uniting all levels of existence.

The unity of the composition is realized through a system of visual and symbolic links between the elements. Key mediators are the snake and scorpion, positioned at the boundary between the upper and lower parts of the sculpture. Their placement and upward orientation create a visual axis that connects both spheres of existence. The regenerative abilities of these creatures, through shedding their skin and exoskeleton, emphasize the idea of transformation and transition between states of being.

In this worldview, each element occupies a specific place and plays a unique role in ensuring the cosmic unity. The sizes of the depictions form a symbolic hierarchy – from the dominant

vulture in the upper part to the small decapitated figure at the bottom. This gradation of size reflects not only the physical but also the symbolic significance of the elements in the overall structure of the cosmos.

As a result, a complex yet harmonious system of interrelationships is created, where each symbol works to affirm the idea of the unity of the cosmos and the possibility of transition between its various levels. In the context of the understanding of life and death at the time, this takes on special meaning – the process of transition between worlds is presented as an integral part of the overall cosmic order. This intricate symbolic program of Stele 43 demonstrates a developed system of beliefs, where death is not perceived as the end of existence but as a stage of transformation within a unified, interconnected Cosmos.

### 3. Cosmological Concepts in the Iconography of Stele 33 from Building D at Göbekli Tepe

A deeper understanding of the cosmological views of the creators of Göbekli Tepe and their comparative analysis with the Trypillian culture requires an examination of the iconography of Stele 33, located in Building D. This study will expand the context of interpretation and allow for the verification of hypotheses formulated based on the previous analysis.

It is important to emphasize that the analysis of the iconography of Stele 33 not only deepens our understanding of the symbolic language of Göbekli Tepe but also reveals the systematic use of certain images and numerical systems. This points to the existence of a coherent cosmological concept embodied in the monumental art of the temple complex of ancient Anatolia (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Photo of T-shaped Column 33 from Building D at Göbekli Tepe (The mysterious secrets, 2021) in three different planes. The H-shaped symbols are highlighted in red



Stele 33 presents a complex composition, with the central motif consisting of wavy lines that cover a significant portion of the surface and are interpreted as stylized depictions of snakes. Their dominant position indicates the key role of this symbol in the overall compositional system. The wavy outlines of the snakes can be interpreted as cosmic rhythms (Cooper, 1987, p. 148) that convey the flow of time and embody the cyclic nature of existence. The surface of the stele also contains depictions of a fox, birds, spiders, and the already familiar H-shaped symbols in both vertical and horizontal projections on two faces of the sculpture.

Particular attention is drawn to the numerical symbolism of the stone stele, where four key numbers stand out – two, three, eleven, and thirteen, reflected in various parts of the composition. It is worth noting that the same numerical markers are present on Stele 43, which may indicate the existence of a well-established system of numerical symbolism in the religious complex. The H-shaped symbol on Stele 33 repeats twice, which, like on Stele 43, may emphasize the concept of duality. Sacred duality is also expressed through the depiction of two spiders on the stele: one is placed in the center of the frontal composition, and the other is near its base. While the second spider is not clearly visible in Figure 5, its presence is clearly recorded in other photographic materials of the stele (Schmidt, 2003, p. 7). In the context of the temple's overall cosmological program, the doubling of the symbol is likely associated with the idea of the two annual equinoxes – spring and autumn – which divide the annual cycle into two parts and play a determining role in the calendrical observations of ancient peoples.

The relief on the stele shows how the snakes converge towards the center of the composition, forming a distinct focal point with their heads. This center of the column is marked by a large H-shaped symbol and a spider, which may symbolize the idea of cosmic unity, embodied through these sacred images.

By studying the numerical symbolism of Stele 33 and building on the previous analysis of Stele 43, it is possible to trace the reflection of the sacred year cult through the numbers three and eleven. Both steles reveal an established system of numerical symbolism: the number three represents the three-dimensional structure of the solar year (summer and winter solstices, equinoxes), while the number eleven denotes the time periods between these events. On Stele 33, these numerical indicators are embodied through the heads of snakes, which take on rectangular forms, echoing the rectangular elements found on Stele 43.

Such structural similarity in conveying numerical symbolism on different steles from Building D points to the existence of a coherent system of cosmological concepts, where numbers served as markers of sacred time and cosmic order.

It is noteworthy that numerical markers are manifested not only in the iconography of the steles but also in the architectural organization of the temple complex – particularly in the arrangement of eleven columns in Buildings C and D (Parzinger, 2018, p. 68). This confirms the systematic use of numerical symbolism in the sacred space of Göbekli Tepe.

As for the thirteen snake heads on the right side of the front of Stele 33, which converge at the center of the composition with their rectangular heads, this can be interpreted as the

transmission of information related to the lunar cult in its annual cycle. The symbolism of the number thirteen indeed fits well with the lunar year, which consists of thirteen full lunar cycles, approximately 28 days each. This interpretation becomes particularly compelling when considering that these thirteen snakes are visually connected to the image of the fox on the side face of the stele – a creature traditionally associated with the nocturnal, lunar aspect of existence due to its nocturnal behavior and corresponding coloration.

In southern Anatolia, snakes and lizards are the primary prey of foxes. The image of snakes emerging from the body of the fox can be interpreted as a transformation of states: the unified image of the nocturnal hunter breaks down into thirteen snake bodies. Such a metamorphosis may symbolize the transition from the unity of the lunar year to its separate cycles or months, or even to its conceptual periods.

The compositional arrangement of thirteen snakes enters into a symbolic dialogue with the eleven snakes on the opposite side of the stele, which emerge from the image of a bird – a symbol of the solar cult. In this way, the creators of Göbekli Tepe likely etched into stone a cosmological concept of the unity of solar and lunar time: the number thirteen symbolizes the lunar year cycle, eleven represents the periods of the solar calendar, and three signifies the three-dimensionality of the solar year over the eastern horizon.

The combination of three, eleven, and thirteen snake heads at the center of the stele forms a semantic structure of numerical indicators of the year in both its lunar and solar dimensions. This unity of day and night, solar and lunar aspects is emphasized by the central positioning of the spider – a symbol of cosmic interweaving. A spider in the center of a web traditionally symbolizes the center of the world (Cooper, 1987, p. 156). Another spider is depicted at the base of the stele, likely to emphasize the duality of the annual cult, from equinox to equinox, in the web of which (metaphorically, in the web) the entire unified Year resides.

The unity of the day and night, solar and lunar aspects is highlighted by the central placement of the spiders and the H-symbol (read as two columns) – symbols of cosmic interweaving and the world's equilibrium. Both significant symbolic elements complement each other, creating a picture of the cosmos.

The cult of the numbers eleven and thirteen at Göbekli Tepe is also reflected in the organization of the circular structures of Buildings D and C. According to the reconstruction by K. Schmidt, the original discoverer of the complex, presented in his book "They built the first temples," (Schmidt, 2011, p. 164) eleven columns formed a complete circle, and two central columns completed the total to thirteen.

In the circular structure A of Göbekli Tepe, there are three T-shaped pillars (Die T-Pfeiler, 2017, p. 14-15), which overall organizes the entire structure and may symbolically associate with the metaphor of the tripartite solar year. Building B contained seven columns arranged in a circle (Ancient-origins, 2014), which may indicate a connection to the lunar cult – the Moon requires seven days to transition from one quarter to another. The number seven in this context serves as a marker of the key phases of the lunar cycle.

This architectural organization of space resonates with the numerical symbolism of Stele 33

and 43 (as well as other T-shaped steles at Göbekli Tepe), forming a coherent system of sacred numbers within the temple complex. It created a multi-layered structure of symbolic encoding, where architectural elements and iconography complemented each other, enhancing the overall sacred meaning.

The iconographic analysis of Stele 33 from Building D reveals a complete picture that harmoniously complements the architectural symbolism of the temple complex and resonates with similar motifs found on other steles. Particularly noteworthy is the fact that the unity of the annual cycle of day and night is expressed through the mysterious H-shaped symbol, which is repeated on many steles at Göbekli Tepe, including the "Vulture Stone."

This symbol later acquired fundamental significance in the Trypillian culture and became an important element of the sacred space of the Nebelivka Temple.

#### **4. Cosmological Concepts in the Iconography of Stele 18, Building D, Göbekli Tepe**

Stele 18 from Göbekli Tepe, also known as the "Stele of Perfect Symmetry," (Clare, Tuna Yüncü, Uludağ, 2019, p. 13-14) is located in Building D of the Göbekli Tepe temple complex. This T-shaped pillar stands out due to the exceptional craftsmanship and the clarity of its compositional structure. The image shows that the surface of the stele contains a carefully conceived system of relief elements, organized with remarkable geometric precision. The vertical composition can be interpreted as a reflection of the two-level structure of the universe, similar to the interpretation of Stele 43 from Building D. The relief elements on the stele are arranged according to a clear system, which may reflect an understanding of cosmic order and the interconnection of different levels of the cosmos (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Stele 18 from the center of Building D, Göbekli Tepe with detail of symbols (Glover, 2022)

An important, and even key, detail in understanding the sacred function and cosmological meaning of the stele may be its spatial orientation in the landscape and its placement within the temple complex. The T-shaped pillar is located at the center of Building D alongside Pillar 31, giving them a special status as the *axis mundi* – the world axis, which in the cosmological beliefs of many ancient cultures symbolized the center of the universe and connected different cosmic levels.

Particular attention should be paid to the interaction between Stele 18 and other architectural elements in the Göbekli Tepe enclosures. Its central location within the structure forms a complex system of spatial and visual connections with the peripheral stelae, creating a multi-level ideological structure reflected in the iconography of the stele itself. The compositional organization of its relief elements demonstrates a clear southern orientation, as evidenced by the positioning of the symbolic hands, the depiction of the fox, and other symbols directed in that direction. This spatial orientation encourages a comprehensive analysis of these iconographic elements in connection with the architectural layout and the archaeological artifacts discovered in the enclosures of Göbekli Tepe, which were also

oriented towards the southern side of the world. Notably, the vertical division of the surface of the stele into two main zones can be interpreted not only as a reflection of a cosmological model of the cosmos but also as a symbolic embodiment of the actual architectural composition.

It is also noteworthy that Stele 18, as one of the two central pillars, occupies the eastern position within the stone circle of the structure. This placement likely held significant sacred meaning, as it was this stele that received the first rays of the morning sun. This may have determined its distinctive artistic design and complex symbolic program, which, in terms of refinement and conceptual depth, far surpass the decorative elements of the adjacent central Pillar 31, located in the western part of the center of Building D.

#### *4.1 The Upper Part of Stele 18, Building D, Göbekli Tepe*

In the upper part of the T-shaped stele, special attention is drawn to the system of symbolic relief elements, which are repeated in other parts of the sacred complex. The stele stands out in that, in its upper section, it captures only two main symbols that should be associated with metaphors for celestial, specifically upper, sacred phenomena. These are the H-shaped symbol together with the symbol of a circle with a center framed by a horizontal crescent, arranged one above the other.

The presence of only these two symbols in the upper part of the stele may indicate their special sacred significance and likely their role as fundamental elements in the religious-symbolic language of Göbekli Tepe. This is emphasized by the fact that both symbols occupy a central position in the upper part of the composition of the central stele in Building D and are executed with exceptional geometric precision.

This concise yet deeply symbolic composition can be interpreted as a reflection of key cosmological concepts. The H-shaped symbol likely conveys the idea of duality and the unity of the annual cycle from equinox to equinox. Its combination with the circle within the crescent creates a complex semantic structure, where the circle may symbolize the Sun entering its key point in the annual cycle "likely the spring-autumn equinox" while simultaneously being linked to the lunar phase of the young Moon – the symbol of the waxing crescent. The combination of solar and lunar symbolism in one composition may reflect an understanding of the interconnection between the solar and lunar cycles within a unified flow of time.

These observations form a picture that opens a new layer of interpretation, expanding on existing hypotheses. The H-symbol together with the circle in the crescent, within a single visual complex, could be viewed as a specific sacred date or a sacred moment in time.

It might have manifested in the following way: on the days of the solar equinox, when the Sun rises exactly in the east and sets exactly in the west, a light phenomenon occurred within the Göbekli Tepe temple complex. The two central T-shaped pillars would alternately cast shadows upon each other, in the morning and evening, creating a visual effect resembling the H-symbol. During these special days of the year, the interplay of light and shadow transformed the two separate central pillars into a unified sacred symbol, combining them

into a holistic semantic complex. This effect was likely perceived by the ancient people as a sacred event, symbolizing the union of the celestial and earthly realms and marking a specific calendar date.

On this special day, as the Sun moved from east to west along its azimuth, it illuminated the entire Göbekli Tepe complex from a southern direction at an angle that likely allowed the sun's rays to pass through the two central columns and the special carefully positioned openings positioned in the northern walls of three of the complex's structures (Buildings C, B, and D) (Collins, 2015). These openings were located between the two central T-shaped pillars of each building when viewed from south to north. This created a sequence of light effects throughout the "sacred day," when the Sun's rays, passing through the architectural elements of the temple, formed a dynamic system of lighting in the space, creating hidden light symbols that did not manifest on other days of the year. Of particular importance was the fact that, on the days of the equinox, the sunlight evenly illuminated both the right and left parts of the complex, symbolically reflecting cosmic balance and their interconnection.

To visually represent this information, we should consider the graphic reconstruction of the central columns and the stone with the opening in Building D at Göbekli Tepe, developed by the German Archaeological Institute. This reconstruction shows the positioning of the two central T-shaped pillars relative to the southern entrance and the special illuminator embedded in the northern wall of the structure. Stele 18 is depicted on the right side of the image (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Graphic reconstruction of the central columns and the stone with the opening in Building D of Göbekli Tepe (Credit: R. Hale and the German Archaeological Institute)

In this context, the upper part of Stele 18 appears to function as calendar entry, where the combination of two symbols conveys a specific moment of sacred time. This interpretation is supported by archaeological findings within the temple, which may have served as tools for astronomical observations. Special attention is drawn to the stone ring (Figure 4, a, b), which could have been additionally used as a sight for observations, and the stone "U"-shaped entrance on the northern side of Building C (Schmidt, 2011, p. 152) (doorstone according to K. Schmidt). The shape of the latter clearly resembles the symbol of a horizontal crescent, which is unlikely to be accidental. It is also worth noting that the symbol of the crescent in the lower horizontal position is a natural feature of the first phase of the moon crescent in the Near East.

Notably, the complex of these archaeological finds demonstrates a striking correspondence with the symbols carved in the upper part of Stele 18. This correlation is especially clear when viewed them from the southern part of the temple. Such spatial organization suggests the existence of a well-thought-out system of visual markers that could have been used for

astronomical observations and ritual practices, and possibly also symbolically recorded a specific date in the year.

It is worth noting that in the Christian Canon, the celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is still associated with the spring equinox. It is known that the Paschal cycle is linked to the spring equinox, but with an adjustment for the new moon: the celebration begins no earlier than the spring equinox on the first Sunday after the full moon. Thus, it can be suggested that the H-symbol (equinox) and the circle with a crescent (the point of the Sun's entry into the temple during the new moon) could be an ideogram of a specific sacred date, which was determined through a complex system of astronomical observations within the temple itself.

Therefore, the architectural features of the Göbekli Tepe complex, particularly the placement of the T-shaped pillars, special openings-illuminators, and other elements, formed a complex system of light effects that, on certain days of the year, likely recreated the symbolism depicted on Stele 18 of Building D. Particularly significant is the fact that such a system for determining sacred dates through the combination of solar and lunar calendars has been preserved to this day in various calendrical traditions. Thus, the upper part of Stele 18, in the author's view, appears not merely as a decorative element, but as a complex calendrical record reflecting the ancient builders' profound understanding of astronomical cycles and their sacred significance.

#### *4.2 Lower Part of Stele 18, Building D, Göbekli Tepe*

The lower part of the stele, with its specific iconography, symbolically reflects the concept of the earthly sacred space. This can be seen in the relief "border" that frames the lower part of the stele. A key feature of this "border" is the symmetrical composition formed by H-shaped symbols, arranged in both vertical and horizontal planes. These symbols, repeated around the perimeter of the stele, create a clear visual parallel with the architectural organization of the stone enclosures at Göbekli Tepe, where the inner sacred space is separated from the outer world by T-shaped pillars.

If the H-symbol is viewed as the combination of two T-pillars casting shadows upon each other on specific days of the year, creating a unified visual image, then the circle of H-symbols on the stele corresponds to the T-pillars around the perimeter of the temple enclosures at Göbekli Tepe. The enlarged H-symbol depicted on the side of Stele 18 may also correspond to the two central T-pillars. Thus, the lower part of Stele 18 likely reproduces the principle of organizing the sacred space of the temple, where the T-pillars are represented by their sacred counterparts. It is worth noting that the number of H-symbols on the front depiction of the lower part of Stele 18 approximately corresponds to twice the number of T-pillars in Buildings D and C.

It is also important to note the U-shaped symbol on the stele, depicted surrounded by five H-symbols. This configuration may correspond to the U-shaped form of the "doorstone" – the northern entrance to Building C at Göbekli Tepe (Schmidt, 2011, p. 151-153).

Notably, from the U-shaped symbol of the stele, a fox skin seems to hang down, which



expands the interpretive possibilities of the lower part of the stele. The fox, as a predator and a nocturnal animal, could have been associated with the lunar cult, as discussed in detail in Chapter 3. The placement of the fox skin beneath the U-shaped symbol on the stele likely further emphasized the meaning of the U-symbol itself as a metaphor for the lunar cult and its corresponding phase.

Thus, the relief border at the lower part of Stele 18, with its specific iconography, appears as a complex symbolic system reflecting the concept of sacred space and its organization within the Göbekli Tepe temple complex. The symmetrical composition of the H-shaped symbols on the stele creates a coherent system of spatial demarcation, similar to the separation of the temple enclosures by T-pillars. The quantitative correspondence between the H-symbols on the stele and the doubled number of T-pillars in Buildings D and C points to the deliberate use of numerical symbolism.

The lower part of Stele 18 includes the pedestal on which the entire structure is mounted. Its frontal relief depicts seven birds, most closely resembling ducks. This composition deserves particular attention, as waterfowl in ancient cultures often symbolized the union of various cosmic realms – the sky, earth, and water.

The sacred number seven in many cultures is associated both with the lunar cult (the seven days of transition from one quarter to another) and with the continuum of solar-lunar time (the relationship between the structure of the tripartite solar year and the four phases of the moon). In this context, the depiction of seven ducks, upon which Stele 18 is supported, takes on additional cosmological meaning.

The placement of the ducks at the lower part of the stele may symbolize the fundamental, foundational level of the cosmos, where waterfowl, capable of existing in all three elements, serve as mediators between different cosmic realms. This is especially significant in the context of the overall vertical composition of the stele, where each level holds its own cosmological significance. In many mythological systems, birds were considered the creators of the world, diving to the bottom of the primordial ocean to retrieve the material needed to create the earth (Cooper, 1987, p. 54), (Hrushevskiy, 1994, p. 34-36).

The placement of the seven ducks at the base of Stele 18 could symbolize the foundation of the cosmos and its cyclical nature, expressed by the number seven – a reflection of the complete cycle of solar-lunar calendrical phenomena within the year. This interpretation aligns with the overall symbolic program of Stele 18, the other stelae of the complex, and the temple itself, where elements of both solar and lunar cults are combined. The fundamental importance of the numerical code seven in the religious system of ancient agricultural societies as a universal symbol of cosmic harmony, connecting the different cycles of celestial bodies, is also clearly evident in the Cucuteni-Trypillia culture and the Nebelivka Temple (Zavaliy, 2021-a, p. 88).

This interpretation highlights the complexity and multi-layered nature of the symbolic program of Stele 18, where each element – from the top to the pedestal – contributes to the creation of a holistic cosmological depiction of the world. This suggests that Stele 18 may

have served as a model or "record in stone" of the system of correspondences between the architectural elements of the temple and their symbolic representation in monumental art. In this system, each element occupies a specific place and holds a particular significance within the overall cosmological image of the Universe-Temple.

#### *4.3 The Unity of the Upper and Lower Worlds in the Compositional Structure of Stele 18, Building D, Göbekli Tepe*

Particular attention in the study of the holistic structure of Stele 18 is drawn to the side reliefs depicting elongated arms that stretch vertically along the stele and visually "hold" its lower part. These relief elements, clearly visible on the sides of the monument, may be of key importance for understanding the symbolic connection between the upper and lower worlds in the overall cosmological composition of the stele.

In this case, the relief hands can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of the connection between different levels of the cosmos. In this context, the anthropomorphic, hanging hands act as conduits between the upper part of the stele (the celestial realm) and its lower part (the earthly world). Metaphorically, the upper world holds the lower world in its hands, emphasizing the hierarchical nature and interdependence of different levels of existence.

In ancient cultures, the symbolism of hands was often associated with the idea of creation, protection, and establishing connections between various realms of existence (Cooper, 1987, p. 78, 130). In the context of the stele under study, the relief hands may reflect the idea of the active intervention of sacred forces in the material world. This symbolic representation can be interpreted as a reflection of classical religious concepts, where higher powers not only rule over the earthly world but also sustain and protect it.

Moreover, the combination of anthropomorphic elements with abstract forms of sacred symbols may symbolize the synthesis of human and divine principles within the sacred space of the temple. This gains particular significance in the context of the overall function of the stele as the axis mundi – the world axis that connects different levels of the cosmos.

Of particular note in the context of the unity of the upper and lower worlds in the composition of Stele 18 is the transformation of the fox image. In the central part of the stele, a living fox is depicted on the side relief, while in the lower part, its skin hangs beneath the U-shaped symbol. This duality in the representation of a single animal in different states may carry deep meaning.

The vertical transformation of the image from the living creature to its skin can be interpreted as a symbol of transition between different states of being, marking the boundary between different realms upper and lower realms, and as a metaphor for the transformation of sacred time, considering the traditional association of the fox with the lunar cult (Cooper, 1987, p. 86).

This dual representation of the fox may also point to certain ritual practices, where the transition of an animal from a living state to a dead one reflected sacred acts and sacrifices characteristic of hunter-gatherer societies. In the context of the early Neolithic society of

Göbekli Tepe, where hunting played a significant role, ritual sacrifice was likely an important part of religious ceremonies.

It is noteworthy that the fox skin is positioned beneath the U-shaped symbol of the moon, which may indicate a connection between sacrifice and specific phases of the lunar cycle. Such interconnection between cosmic rhythms and ritual practices was characteristic of ancient cultures, where sacrifice was seen as a necessary condition for maintaining cosmic order (Eliade, 1958-a, p. 96-97).

In conclusion, it can be asserted that Stele 18, through its iconographic program, demonstrates a deep understanding of the principles of cosmic unity by the ancient builders of Göbekli Tepe. In this system of beliefs, the human and divine, the celestial and the earthly, life and death exist in an inseparable interconnection. This complex symbolic structure makes Stele 18 a unique source for understanding the cosmological concepts of early Neolithic societies.

## **5. Religious Parallels Between the Symbolism of the Stelae of Göbekli Tepe and the Trypillia Culture**

A comparative analysis of the religious symbolism of Göbekli Tepe and the Trypillian culture opens new perspectives for understanding the development of sacred concepts in ancient societies of Southeastern and Eastern Europe and the Near East. Despite the significant chronological and geographical distance between these cultures, their religious systems exhibit important parallels that warrant detailed investigation.

Particular attention should be paid to the symbolic language of both cultures, expressed through the architectural elements of temple complexes, their ornamentation systems, the use of zoomorphic and astral symbols, and cult objects.

In the author's work "From Göbekli Tepe to the Nebelivka Temple: A Comparative Analysis of the Structural Components of the Oldest Temple Complexes in Asia and Europe," fundamental parallels between these cultures have been partially uncovered. Specifically:

- The shared spatial organization of temple complexes, based on astronomical observations and linked to the movement of the Sun in the annual cycle;
- The use of triadic symbolism, manifested both in architectural planning and ritual objects, particularly in comparison with the symbolism of Stele 43 from Building D at Göbekli Tepe;
- Similarities in the use of zoomorphic imagery and its symbolic significance in the context of calendrical cycles and cosmological beliefs.

In the author's work "Comparative Analysis of the 'H'-shaped Symbol from Göbekli Tepe and the Ritual 'Binocular-shaped' Ceramics of the Trypillia Culture in Light of Ancient Farmers' Cosmological Beliefs," deeper parallels between the symbolic systems of these cultures were explored, specifically:

- A connection was identified between the H-shaped symbolism of Göbekli Tepe and the binocular-shaped artifacts of the Trypillia culture;

- It was established that these symbols may have reflected complex astronomical observations related to the annual movement of the Sun;
- An interpretation was proposed that the Trypillian binocular artifact represents an evolutionary continuation of the H-symbolism of Göbekli Tepe, embodying the concept of a complete year divided into two halves by the equinoxes.

The identified parallels have allowed for the hypothesis of a shared cosmological worldview that developed over millennia alongside the spread of agriculture. This tradition evidently encompassed not only practical agricultural knowledge but also a complex system of worldview concepts, reflected in sacred architecture and ritual objects. The commonality of fundamental cosmological concepts, expressed through similar symbolic forms, may indicate the preservation of core religious ideas as they adapted to new cultural contexts.

In light of the current study, we now have the opportunity to expand upon existing interpretations by focusing specifically on the iconographic features and analysis of the stone stelae at Göbekli Tepe.

### *5.1 Unity of the Solar-Lunar Cult in the Sacred Architecture and Symbolism of Göbekli Tepe and Its Manifestations in the Trypillia Culture*

An in-depth analysis of the iconography of Stelae 18, 33, and 43 at Göbekli Tepe revealed a complex system of symbols reflecting the unity of solar and lunar cults in the religious worldview of ancient farmers. This duality of celestial bodies, embedded in the monumental art and architecture of the Göbekli Tepe temple complex, has clear parallels in the sacred structures and ritual objects of the Trypillia culture.

In both cultures, there is not merely a parallel existence of solar and lunar cults, but a deep interconnection and complementarity between them. This unity is manifested on several levels: in the spatial organization of temple complexes and their decoration, in the system of calendrical observations reflected through specific numerical symbolism, and in the iconographic elements where solar and lunar symbols form cohesive compositions.

A comparative analysis of these phenomena in two geographically distinct early agricultural cultures allows for tracing not only the commonality of basic cosmological concepts but also the evolution of ways in which they were materially embodied. Of particular note is the transformation of symbolic forms from the monumental stone architecture of Göbekli Tepe to the refined architecture of the Nebelivka Temple and the ceramics of the Trypillia civilization.

In the Nebelivka Temple of the Trypillia culture, the unity of the solar-lunar cult is embodied through a system of seven altars, symbolically divided into two sacred zones of the temple complex: four altars in the sanctuary and three in the main ritual hall (Zavaliy, 2024-a, p. 275-276). This spatial organization reflected fundamental cosmological concepts of celestial time, where the number four was associated with the main phases of the Moon, and the number three with the key positions of the Sun over the eastern horizon throughout the year.

It is noteworthy that in the Nebelivka Temple, the sacred space began with the room

containing four altars, meaning it started with the lunar cult. A similar practice can be traced at Göbekli Tepe, where a "U"-shaped stone entrance (the doorstone according to K. Schmidt), associated with the symbol of the horizontal crescent, led to the central Building C. This entrance marked the beginning of the "dromos" (Schmidt, 2011, p. 152) – a tunnel or passage that had to be traversed to reach the main circular sanctuary of the solar cult. Thus, in both early agricultural temple complexes, the path to the sanctum sanctorum, the space dedicated to the solar cult, was preceded by an area associated with the lunar cult.

In this context, the lunar temple space may have been perceived as a transitional zone. Just as the Moon, in ancient beliefs, served as an intermediary between heaven and earth – changing its phases and connecting the nocturnal and diurnal spheres of existence – so too could the initial space of the temple, marked by lunar symbolism, function as a sacred threshold. Passing through this threshold symbolized a transition from an ordinary state of consciousness to a higher spiritual level necessary for entering the main sanctuary of the solar cult.

Such an architectural design may reflect ancient conceptions of cyclical time and cosmic order, where the lunar phases precede and prepare the way for the Sun, just as night precedes dawn – the most sacred moment of the day in the religious consciousness of early farmers. The main temple mysteries likely took place at dawn, particularly on the days of the solar equinoxes and solstices. At these moments, the first rays of the Sun, penetrating through specially designed architectural elements, created a unique atmosphere within the sacred space. Therefore, the sequential arrangement of temple spaces – from lunar to solar – embodied the fundamental principle of cosmic order and the logic of interaction between day and night, where architectural elements facilitated the reenactment of the cosmic drama of renewal.

The continuum of day and night, which in the Trypillia culture found a vivid expression in the ratio of three to four (three solar events and four lunar phases), is reflected not only in the organization of the sacred space of the Nebelivka Temple but also in other significant elements of Trypillian material culture.

At the same time, the number seven, formed by the combination of the solar and lunar cycles and symbolizing the completeness and wholeness of the cosmic cycle, became a universal expression of spatial-temporal unity. It represented not only the temporal rhythms of the celestial bodies but also the spatial coordinates of the cosmos, creating a coherent system of sacred reference points. The number seven emerged as a perfect number, integrating three fundamental aspects:

- Temporal (three solar events and four lunar phases);
- Spatial (four cardinal directions and three levels of the universe);
- Cosmological (the unity of the celestial and the terrestrial).

This concept of the sacred number seven as an expression of spatial-temporal integrity found its embodiment in the Trypillia civilization on multiple levels – from the planning and

construction of the Nebelivka settlement to the iconography of the main temple altar and the astronomical calendar discovered in the altar space (Figure 8).

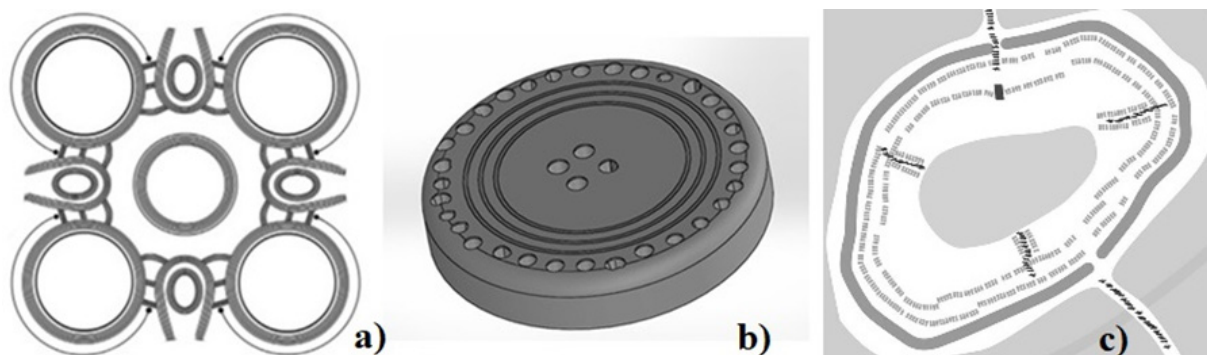


Figure 8. Representation of the Three-to-Four Principle in Various Forms of Trypillia's Material Culture (Zavaliy, 2024-a, p. 282): a) Schematic depiction of the main fire altar of the Nebelivka Temple; b) 3D model of the Nebelivka calendar disc; c) Layout scheme of the Nebelivka settlement, illustrating the circular organization of residential structures around the central temple

The illustration demonstrates the embodiment of the cosmological three-to-four principle at various levels of Trypillian society's organization. The Trypillian mega-settlement of Nebelivka, covering approximately 300 hectares (Khlibovska, Kryzhanovska, Naumchuk, 2023, p. 38) was configured to demonstrate the sacred unity of the number seven through a complex spatial arrangement. The central temple and the surrounding residential sectors were precisely aligned with the cardinal directions and key astronomical points. The settlement's structure clearly shows two concentric circles of residential buildings, with a symbolic ditch encircling the entire settlement, completing this composition into a sacred triad (Early Urbanism, 2020, p. 439-440).

The mega-settlement had four main entrances aligned with the cardinal directions, forming a symbolic cross with the central temple, which was oriented along the east-west axis. This spatial organization corresponded to the iconographic features of the main temple altar at Nebelivka. Its blades were positioned at a 45-degree angle (Kovacs, 2016, p. 245-246) relative to the temple's east-west axis, synchronizing the iconography of four circles with the placement of the four sanctuary altars (lunar altars), while the four lateral ovals of the altar corresponded to the cardinal directions. The three lines uniting the entire sacred composition of the fire altar were evidently symbolic representations of the temporal aspect of the solar year.

The Nebelivka disc (Figure 8, b) complements this system of sacred symbols, displaying a similar concentric structure divided into four sectors. Its central part, featuring four openings, corresponds to the four ovals of the temple altar and the four altars of the Nebelivka sanctuary, while the three outer rings may reflect the circular arrangement of the settlement itself (Figure 8, c). This triadic system – altars, the calendar disc, and settlement planning –

formed an integrated complex where cosmological concepts were embodied at various levels of sacred space.

Examining the stone stelae of Göbekli Tepe, which encapsulated the ideological program of the temple and its architectural features, a similar practice can be observed in the temple iconography of Nebelivka. Just as at Göbekli Tepe, the altars and artifacts of the Nebelivka temple functioned as "architectural icons," where the fundamental principles of sacred space organization – both of the structure and the settlement – were encoded in miniature form.

The Trypillia culture preserved examples of cultic sculpture that reflect cosmological beliefs about the interaction of day and night, as well as solar and lunar cults. Particularly illustrative is a ritual vessel analyzed in the author's article "Trypillian Altars as a Religious Phenomenon of the Ancient World," where this concept is expressed through a complex system of interconnected symbols (Zavali, 2024, p. 276). The temporal dimensions of this artifact are represented by the sacred numbers three, four, and seven, forming a comprehensive cosmological program.

The Trypillian understanding of the world's proportionality through the principle of trinity within fourfold time represented a significant advancement in comprehending the foundations of the universe. This discovery extended beyond mere worldview concepts, becoming a driving force in the development of both material and spiritual culture – from agriculture and architecture to religious practices and art.

The principle of triadic unity within a fourfold temporal structure found practical application not only in the religious system but also in the agricultural activities of the Trypillians. Their deep understanding of the cyclic nature of natural processes, expressed through the interaction of three solar events on the eastern horizon with four lunar phases, enabled them to develop an efficient farming system synchronized with natural rhythms. This integration of cosmological knowledge into economic practices ensured the sustainable development of the Trypillian civilization for millennia.

Thus, in both Göbekli Tepe and the Trypillia culture, we can observe a consistent evolution of cosmological concepts, embodied in the architecture of temple complexes as well as in ritual artifacts, reflecting the fundamental unity of the Year Universe. This demonstrates the ancient farmers' profound understanding of cosmic harmony and their ability to reproduce these sacred principles in various forms of material culture.

### *5.2 Comparison of the Circle with a Horizontal Crescent Symbol at Göbekli Tepe and Its Trypillian Counterparts*

The symbol of a circle with a horizontal crescent finds its manifestation in numerous ceramic artifacts from the Trypillian period, characterized by the distinctive combination of solar and lunar symbolism. This iconographic tradition, first recorded in the monumental art of Göbekli Tepe, takes on new – and sometimes nearly identical – forms of artistic expression in the Trypillian culture.

In Trypillian ceramics, this symbol appears in ornamental compositions where the circle (a

solar sign) is combined with arc-shaped elements (lunar symbolism). Particularly significant are ritual vessels, where such compositions are placed on the upper part of the artifact or form its central motif.

Striking examples of this symbolism include a Trypillian pot published in the "Encyclopedia of the Trypillian Civilization" (Figure 9) (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004-a, 254), and artifacts with a similar symbolic combination found in the excavation area of the Nebelivka Temple and at the Trypillian settlement of Grebeni (Figure 10).



Figure 9. Painted vessel from the "Encyclopedia of the Trypillian Civilization." Collection "PLATAR."



Figure 10. Comparison of the circle with a crescent symbol at Göbekli Tepe with corresponding symbols from the Trypillian civilization. Fragments of Trypillian ceramics discovered in the cultural layer near the Nebelivka temple complex are presented (Chapman, Gaydarska, Nebbia et al., 2018). The depicted Trypillian pot was found at the Trypillian settlement of Grebeni (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004-a, p. 132)



A comparative analysis reveals a distinct similarity between the crescent with a circle symbol depicted on the stelae of Göbekli Tepe and its counterparts in Trypillian culture. It is important to note that Trypillian ornamentation predominantly features the horizontal crescent, while vertical variations are rare (Moiseenko, 2006, p. 19). The persistence of this iconographic tradition indicates the existence of a shared symbolic language among ancient agricultural communities and the preservation of this symbol's semantic meaning over millennia.

Particular attention should be given to the symmetry of the presented compositions and their hierarchical structure, as observed both in the representations at Göbekli Tepe and in Trypillian symbols. Solar signs (circles) are consistently positioned above lunar signs (crescents), reflecting the agricultural hierarchy of celestial interactions. This organization of symbolic space has direct parallels with the architectural structure of ancient agricultural temples, where the lunar zone preceded the sanctum sanctorum of the temple complex – the solar zone.

In the Trypillian culture, the specific embodiment of circular symbolism with a horizontal crescent was realized in temple structures and their sacred counterparts – miniature ceramic temple models. Of particular significance are the Trypillian closed-type temple models, where the compositional combination of these two key symbols is clearly evident.

Archaeological findings from the Nebelivka Temple suggest that the temple facade can be symbolically represented as a combination of two key symbols – the circular or oval central entrance (a "solar passage," aligned with the notional equinox point (Zavalii, 2023)) and the horizontal crescent symbol, which in Trypillian closed-type temple architecture was positioned above the circular "entrance" of the facade.

This symbolic program has a clear correspondence in the representations of Trypillian temple miniatures. The facades of these miniatures typically feature a circular or oval entrance in the lower part and a crescent symbol in the upper part, positioned with its horns facing upward above the entrance. Notably, in most cases, the crescent symbol appears twice on temple miniatures: once on the facade and again at the top of the temple's roof structure.

Of particular significance is that this duplication of the lunar symbol is not accidental but rather reflects profound cosmological concepts related to the complete phases of the Moon. The lunar cycle of Earth's satellite begins with a visible crescent (first quarter) and completes its full cycle with another crescent shape (last quarter), forming a metaphor for the beginning and the end. Thus, the two crescents depicted at the entrance and the roof of Trypillian temple complexes likely embody a holistic cosmological concept in which the temple serves as a model of the temporal cycle (Figure 11).



Figure 11. Trypillian Closed-Type Temple Miniatures from the Museum Fund of Ukraine

In this symbolic system, the crescent at the entrance marks the beginning of the sacred path, similar to the appearance of the young moon, while the crescent at the temple's culmination symbolizes the peak of spiritual ascension, akin to the nocturnal celestial body completing its cycle. This architectural program transforms the temple structure into a kind of time portal, where movement through the temple reflects not only physical transition in space but also spiritual transformation.

In some cases, additional symbolism is observed on Trypillian temple models in the form of a bucranium (a depiction of a bull's head), which semantically originates from the Star Bull cult within the Trypillian religious complex (Zavaliy, 2022-b, p. 202-204).

The symbols of the bucranium and the horizontal crescent are thematically interconnected, as the bull's horns visually resemble the young moon, although they hold distinct meanings in the artistic tradition of that time. Particularly noteworthy is the position of M. Koenig, who argued for the primacy of the lunar cult over the bull cult, asserting that the moon embodied time, while the bull's head symbolically echoed the moon (Korol, 1999, p. 91). The "horns" were associated with the lunar crescent and also served as an iconic representation of divinity (Cooper, 1987, p. 84).

In this way, the image of the celestial bull was closely intertwined with the lunar cult, as the Star Bull constellation also functioned as a celestial marker for measuring time (Figure 12).



Figure 12. Cultic Depictions from Göbekli Tepe and Trypillia: (Right) Interaction of the Bull with the Moon in Trypillian iconography (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004-b, p. 158); (Left) Relief depiction of the Bull with a serpent (a symbol of calendrical cycles, particularly lunar) on the stone stela 20 from Building D at Göbekli Tepe (Peters, Schmidt, 2004, p. 190)

This illustrates the evolution of the ancient symbol of the circle with a horizontal crescent from the monumental forms at Göbekli Tepe to the more complex symbolic system in Trypillian culture, where the original cosmological concept is enriched with additional sacred meanings.

Such transformation of the symbol reflects an important process in the development of religious consciousness, where the evolution occurs not through the replacement of old symbols with new ones, but through their synthesis and mutual complementarity. While at Göbekli Tepe, the symbolic combination of the circle with the horizontal crescent primarily functioned as a calendrical marker and a representation of the unity of solar-lunar worship, in the Trypillian tradition, it is integrated into a more advanced religious system, where the calendrical symbolism is additionally combined with the cult of the astral Bull.

In this context, the horizontal crescent in Trypillia retains its traditional placement under the solar symbol (including in the open-type temple miniatures (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004-b, p. 40), as seen at Göbekli Tepe, while also acquiring a new placement above the solar sign, likely adapted for the closed-type temple architecture.

It is worth noting that the symbolic combination of the circle and horizontal crescent forms

the foundation of ancient agricultural temple complexes. This universal formula serves as a kind of "architectural icon," where the integration of solar and lunar symbols creates a cohesive cosmological program. Such a universal language of sacred symbols reflects the fundamental principles of human perception of cosmic order, where the interaction between solar and lunar principles forms the basis for understanding the cyclicity of time and the spatial organization of the world. It is a symbol of "entry into primordial time," a kind of cosmological code that allows one to connect with the sacred moment of the creation of the world through the temple space. These symbols presumably permeate the entire religious history of humanity and continue to manifest in human culture to this day.

### *5.3 Parallels Between the Serpent Symbolism of Göbekli Tepe and Trypillia*

All the art from the Trypillian period is imbued with the sacred motif of serpent-spiral ornamentation. The image of the serpent has been known since the beginning of Trypillia's existence and remains an integral element through the final stages of this culture's development (Burdo, 2005, p. 203). At Göbekli Tepe, serpents and serpent groups are among the most widespread motifs in prehistoric art (Peters, Schmidt, 2004, p. 183). They appear not only on the T-shaped pillars but also on separate stone tablets. This is one of the most significant symbols, which made a considerable contribution to the art of early agricultural communities.

It is notable that this symbolic tradition demonstrates exceptional resilience, continuing into the cultures of subsequent epochs. In particular, its echoes can be traced in early Slavic traditions, where serpent symbolism retains its sacred significance, manifested in belt buckles with depictions of serpent heads (Bosyi, 2004, p. 33-35). This attests to the deep-rootedness of serpent symbolism in the religious consciousness of ancient agricultural societies and its ability to adapt to new cultural contexts.

It is particularly significant that both cultures exhibit similar ways of depicting serpent symbols and reveal identical semantic contexts. The serpent symbol and compositional representations featuring serpents act as universal markers, reflecting several key aspects of ancient agricultural religious systems:

- Calendar-time aspect. The sinuous forms of serpents symbolize the cyclical nature of time. In both cases, there is an association with both lunar and solar time;
- Cosmological aspect. Vertical depictions of serpents mark the world axis. Often, the animal or its distinctive-symbolic features were depicted at the threshold between worlds;
- Sacred-magical aspect. Serpent symbols were likely endowed with special protective functions. This is vividly evident in the Trypillian culture, where serpent depictions are found at the entrances to temple miniatures and on thresholds and doorways of residential buildings.

The most striking example of the kinship in the depiction tradition of serpent motifs between the two cultures is the use of an ornament that can be conditionally called "serpent scales." This pattern, which imitates the natural design of serpent skin, can be found both on Trypillian pottery and on the stelae of Göbekli Tepe, where a similar net-like pattern covers

the surface of monumental columns (Figures 13, 14).



Figure 13. Trypillian vessels with an ornament that imitates the natural pattern of serpent skin (Burdo, 2022, p. 67). In the center, a fragment of natural serpent scales is depicted



Figure 14. Serpent symbolism in the architectural elements of Göbekli Tepe: (left) T-shaped column 1 from Structure A with a diamond-shaped "serpent scale" pattern (Peters, Schmidt, 2004, p. 194); (right) a stone slab with a relief depiction of interwoven serpents forming the "serpent scale" ornament (Dietrich, Köksal-Schmidt, Notroff et al., 2014, p. 16)

It is particularly important to note that in both cases, the serpent ornament is used on sacred items – ritual vessels in Trypillia and architectural elements at Göbekli Tepe. This indicates a similarity in religious-mythological concepts associated with serpent symbolism.

Significantly, in both cultures, not only the visual similarity of the ornaments can be observed, but also the commonality of their compositional arrangement – the "serpent scales" usually cover large areas of the artifacts, creating a coherent symbolic field precisely along the conditional line of transition between the upper and lower worlds. This spatial organization of the ornament further supports the hypotheses put forward in this work regarding the symbolism of the serpent as an intermediary between worlds and its role in protective functions at "threshold" locations (entrances to temples, homes, and transitions between cosmological zones of existence).

It is noteworthy that in the upper parts of the presented Trypillian artifacts with "serpent scales," clear lunar symbolism is evident in the form of a horizontal crescent and a full moon, from which spiral curls and arcs emanate. Such compositions, together with serpent motifs, emphasize the interdependence of two symbolic systems, where lunar and serpent symbols form a unified system of calendar-time markers. In these depictions, the serpent symbolism embodies the idea of continuous renewal and transformation, as serpent skin, through periodic shedding, serves as a natural prototype for cyclical renewal.

This natural process may have been perceived by ancient agriculturalists as a tangible embodiment of the universal law of periodic renewal, manifesting both in the changing lunar phases and in the cycles of the agricultural calendar. Just as a snake sheds its old skin and is reborn renewed, the Moon passes through phases of waning and rebirth, creating a parallel between earthly and celestial cycles. This explains why the combination of lunar and serpent symbolism acquired such importance in the sacred art of ancient agricultural societies.

In the author's view, the deeply archaic "serpent scale" ornament found its continuation in the specific forms of Trypillian ritual pottery, where the diamond-shaped net completely covers the body of the vessels (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Trypillian ritual vessel with a diamond-shaped ornament from the Museum Fund of Ukraine (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004-a, p. 329, 574)

The presented artifacts demonstrate a unique variation of this ornament – a continuous coverage of the surface with a diamond-shaped grid, creating a visual impression of serpent skin. Both vessels display a clear geometric structure in the ornament, where the diamonds form a regular network, covering the entire central part of the vessels, leaving space for the upper world.

The vessel on legs with a lid is an exemplary case and illustration of the hypotheses presented above. In this complex ritual artifact, the combination of the lunar cycle cult and the serpent image is most fully realized. This is reflected in the clear compositional structure of the vessel, where the round vessel is supported by four legs – likely representing the four main phases of the Moon. On both sides, protrusions in the shape of a crescent moon are placed, similar to the decoration on closed-type Trypillian temple miniatures, while the center of the composition imitates serpent skin. All these elements form a cohesive cosmological program and demonstrate the intellectual capacity of the agricultural society to adapt key religious-mythological systems into various forms of ritual vessels, creating a unified sacred program through the synthesis of form and ornament.

The filling of such sacred vessels with liquids could have been associated with cosmic waters and lunar cycles that govern the fertility of the earth. It can be assumed that these rounded vessels were used in rituals related to the lunar cycles, where the level of liquid inside the vessel might symbolically reflect the phases of the Moon or its waxing and waning.

From this, a consistent continuity of serpent symbolism can be traced from the ancient temple complex of Göbekli Tepe to the developed sign system of the Trypillian culture,

demonstrating the universality and vitality of these symbols in ancient agricultural societies. The identified shared ornamental motif of "serpent scales," common to both cultures, is of particular significance, as it reveals not only visual similarity but also unity in its semantic content and compositional arrangement.

## **6. Prospects for Further Research on Religious Expressions in Early Agricultural Societies of the Near East and Europe during the Neolithic-Eneolithic Period**

A comparative analysis of the stelae of Göbekli Tepe and their parallels with the religious symbolism of the Trypillian culture provides a methodological foundation for the systematic study of religious expressions in early agricultural communities of the Neolithic-Eneolithic period. A detailed examination of individual artifacts, objects, and their symbolic systems revealed profound structural similarities between geographically distant cultures, enabling the development of an appropriate methodological toolkit. Despite the primary focus being on specific monuments, the patterns identified and the approaches developed open broad prospects for further scientific investigations. This section outlines potential directions for future research that may significantly expand our understanding of the religious expressions and cosmological views of early agricultural societies.

In recent decades, unique communal structures have been discovered in early Neolithic settlements across modern-day Turkey, Jordan, and Syria, significantly reshaping our understanding of the development of early agricultural societies. Notable examples include complexes such as Nevalı Çori, Karahan Tepe, Sefer Tepe, Boncuklu Tarla, Gre Filla Höyük, and Guzir Höyük (Turkey), Wadi Faynan (Jordan), and Tell Qaramel (Syria). Simultaneously, within the territory of present-day Ukraine, Moldova, and Romania – regions associated with the Cucuteni-Trypillia cultural complex – over 100 sacred structures of ancient farmers have been documented, some of which have already been studied. As of 2020, magnetic surveys have identified more than 110 "mega-structures." (Videiko, 2020, p. 230-238). All of these findings create opportunities for a more extensive comparative analysis of the religious traditions of Neolithic-Eneolithic Asia and Europe.

Even a preliminary analysis of the archaeological materials indicates a significant similarity between these ancient cultures. As an example, we present images that demonstrate the likeness of religious and cultic artifacts and objects from different regions (Figure 16, 17, 18, 19).



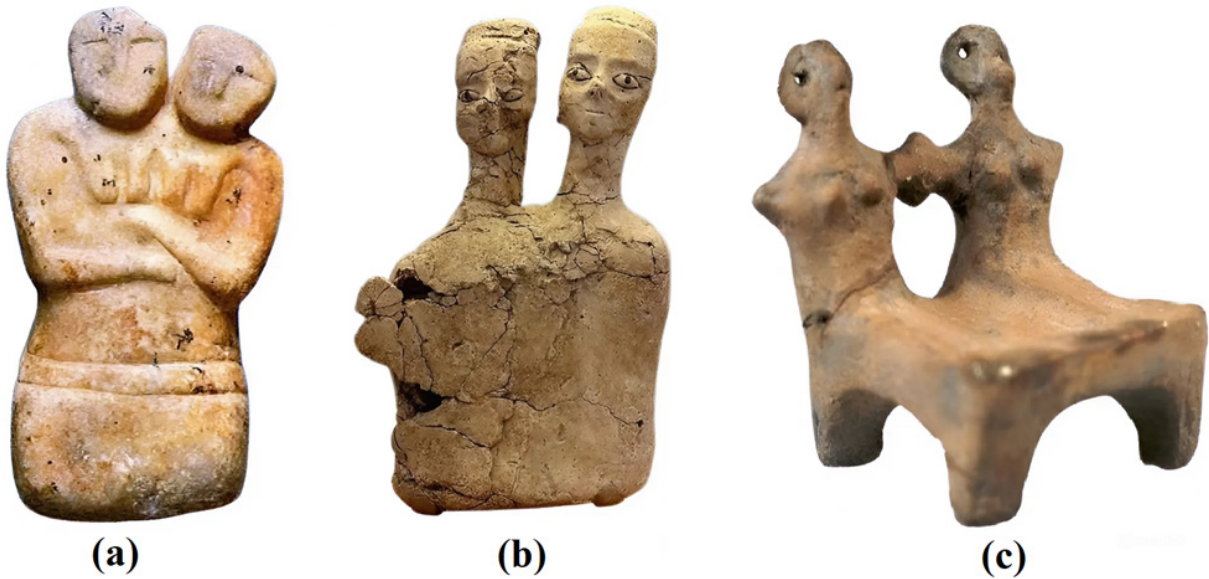


Figure 16. A typical cult of the Double Goddesses in early agricultural cultures of the Near East and Europe: (a) Twin Goddess from Çatalhöyük (Turkey) (Pyrgies, 2020); (b) Statue of Ayn Ghazal (Jordan) (Jordan Archaeological Museum); Trypillian Twin Goddesses (Ukraine.) (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004-b, p. 393)

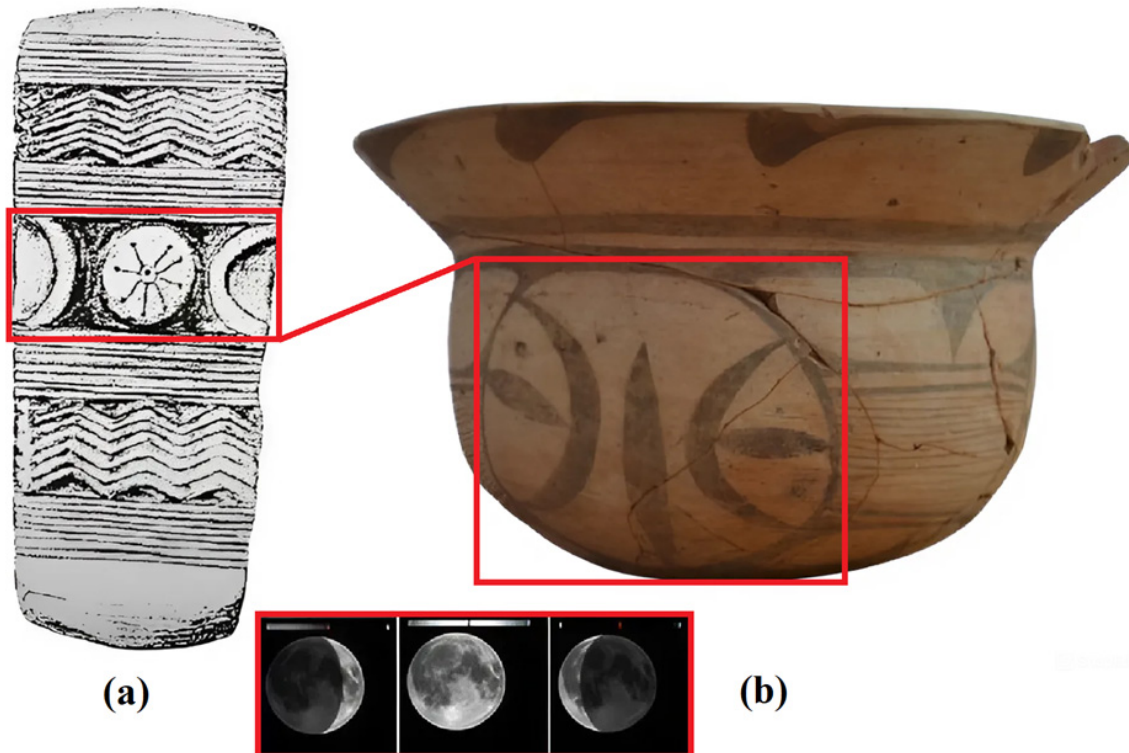


Figure 17. Identical manifestations of cultic-moon symbolism on a stone tablet and a ceramic form compared to the actual phases of the Moon: (a) Stone tablet from Tell Qaramel with a lunar motif (Syria) (Usacheva, 2020, p. 9); Trypillian lid on a pot with lunar-numerical symbolism (Zavali, 2024-d, p. 29, 86)



Figure 18. Cultic arrangement of ritual spaces using symbolism of paired aurochs: (Left) Ritual platform with the horns of two aurochs in the sanctuary of the Çatalhöyük settlement (Akin, Esgici, 2015, p. 34); (Right) Paired aurochs skulls from the ritual pit of the Trypillian settlement of Maidanetske (Zavaliy, 2021-b)



Figure 19. T-shaped (bucraea?) amulets of ancient farmers: (a) Amulets found at the Kortik Tepe settlement (Turkey) (Black, 2024); Amulets of the Starčevo-Krivodol and Trypillian cultures (Bulgaria, Romania, Ukraine) (Rișcuța, Ferencz, Bărbat, 2015, p. 11), (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004-a, p. 14)

The presented archaeological materials represent a small part of the early agricultural complex, which preliminarily demonstrates a significant similarity in the cultic traditions of ancient agricultural societies of the Near East and Southeastern Europe. Such systematic similarity across various aspects of material culture is unlikely to be coincidental. It suggests the existence of close cultural connections between early agricultural societies or a common origin of fundamental religious concepts that spread along with the expansion of agriculture. At the same time, each region developed its own distinct features within the general paradigm, creating a complex picture of cultural interaction and the development of religious consciousness.

Particular attention should be given to the fact that the presented materials demonstrate a clear correlation with the spatial-temporal sequence of the spread of early agricultural societies from the Fertile Crescent to the territory of Europe (Figure 20).

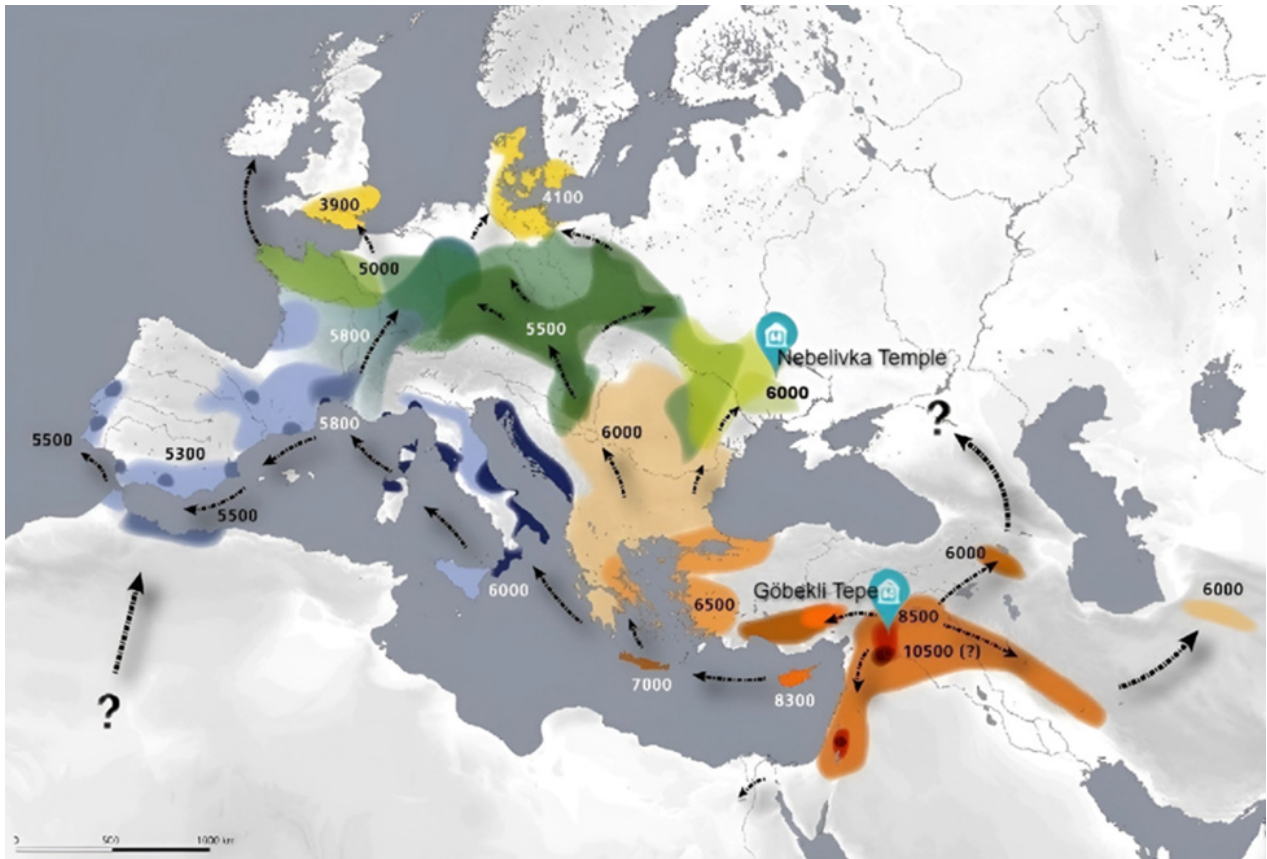


Figure 20. A map revealing the migratory distribution of the first agricultural societies in Western and Eastern Eurasia, along with the dates of major episodes of human migration (in years BCE) (Parzinger, 2016, p. 71)

The chromatic differentiation on the map reflects the successive stages of the spread of agricultural traditions: from the earliest center in the Fertile Crescent region through the Anatolian region to the Balkans and further to Central and Northern Europe. This sequence correlates with archaeological datings and material evidence of the spread of agricultural culture.

The presented cartographic model of the spread of early agriculture confirms observations regarding the similarity of cultic traditions over vast territories, as demonstrated by the previously discussed archaeological materials. This suggests that along with the migration of agricultural communities, the fundamental elements of their religious and cultic traditions were also transferred. These elements, while retaining their core features, underwent local modifications influenced by the cultural contexts of different regions.

In this context, it is appropriate to consider and introduce the term "Neolithic agricultural

religion" into the studied religious system, which may be more suitable for describing the beliefs and practices of early agricultural societies so distant from us in time. This also highlights the evolutionary nature of the development of religious concepts and practices within the context of the history of religion.

Such a definition requires special attention, as the historical period during which the religious artifacts and objects under consideration existed coincides with the Neolithic period and the "Neolithic Revolution" (according to V. Gordon Childe), when humanity transitioned to an appropriate mode of subsistence. This period spans a significant length of time across Asia and Europe: from the 10th millennium BCE (the emergence of the Göbekli Tepe complex) to the 4th millennium BCE (the time of the Nebelivka Temple's existence).

The definition of "Neolithic agricultural religion" or early agricultural religion in this context allows us to emphasize the close connection between the historical development of agriculture and the corresponding type of religion. The use of these terms not only reflects the historical context but also creates a conceptual "framework of religion" within which the identity of agricultural communities was formed, as well as their relationship to the land, nature, and the cosmos.

Therefore, the conducted research opens broad prospects for further study of early agricultural religious expressions, which requires a comprehensive interdisciplinary approach and the involvement of a wide range of specialists from various fields. Special attention should be given to the development of new methodological approaches and theoretical models that will enable a deeper understanding of the processes of the formation and development of religious consciousness during the establishment of the first agricultural societies in Asia and Europe.

## **7. The Actualization of the Cosmological Heritage of Early Agricultural Societies in the Contemporary Context**

The study of cosmological aspects of prehistoric cultures is crucial not only for understanding the historical development of human civilization but also for addressing modern challenges and issues. Identified parallels and common worldview principles across cultures of Asia and Europe can offer several important strategies in the present day.

### *7.1 Ecological Consciousness and Sustainable Development*

The cosmological beliefs of ancient farmers demonstrate a profound understanding of the interconnection between natural cycles, the cosmos, and human activity. Their perception of time as a sacred substance and its integration into the religious system of the respective type reflects a holistic approach to interacting with the natural environment.

The perception of time as a cyclical process, characteristic of the cultures under study, contrasts with the modern linear understanding of progress. The cyclical model of time, linked to natural rhythms and eternal return, may encourage a more restrained approach to economic development and resource use, taking into account the need for the periodic restoration of natural resources and the preservation of ecological balance. In such a

worldview, human activity is viewed not as a linear process of constant growth and expansion but as part of a broader natural meaning that requires balance and responsibility for the future.

It is particularly relevant to understand the connection between different elements of the ecosystem as perceived by ancient societies. Their cosmology, reflected in temple architecture and symbolism, demonstrates an awareness of the unity between celestial cycles, earthly processes, and the human and animal worlds.

It is important to emphasize that in the early agricultural worldview, animals occupied a special place, not as resources for exploitation, but as an integral part of the sacred cosmic order. They played the role of intermediaries between the human and divine worlds, which is vividly reflected in religious art. A notable example is the Trypillian culture, where, according to recent studies of their diet, meat consumption accounted for only about 10%, while the staple foods were agricultural crops (Arponen, Ohlrau, Kerig, 2024, p. 9). This balance in diet reflects not only the economic structure but also the likely worldview principles of the society, where respect for the animal world was embodied in practical aspects of life.

In the context of the current ecological crisis and mass species extinction, this holistic approach to understanding the interconnections between different forms of life becomes particularly relevant. It reminds us of the need to restore the balance between human activity and the needs of other living beings with whom we share the planet.

An important aspect of ancient worldviews was the sacred relationship with trees, expressed through their veneration and endowment with a special cosmological status. This religious practice likely created a powerful mechanism for environmental protection through a system of taboos, rituals, and restrictions. A striking example of this is the cult of the sacred tree, which gained particular significance during the operation of the Nebelivka Temple Complex, where the tree became a central religious symbol integrated into the sacred space of the main ritual hall (Zavaliy, 2021-a, p. 103). A material confirmation of this sacralization, within the scope of this work, is the archaeological artifact presented in Figure 11, where a ceramic model of a Tripillian temple shows the characteristic "solar passage" – a hole through which the symbol of a stylized tree is visible. This architectural symbolism reflects the profound worldview concepts of early agricultural societies about the tree as a sacred mediator between the earthly and celestial worlds, shaping ethical principles toward the plant world based on the awareness of its sacred role in maintaining cosmic harmony. This created an additional layer of environmental protection through religious taboos and restrictions. In the modern context, this could transform into ethical principles and norms regulating human interaction with nature.

The implementation of principles where the cosmic, plant, animal, and human worlds are perceived as interconnected elements of a single sacred system can become an important guideline for shaping modern ecological ethics. This pantheistic approach of ancient farmers to understanding the structure of the world and the sacred offers an alternative to the contemporary model of a consumerist attitude toward nature, emphasizing the need for the

harmonious coexistence of all forms of life. In practical terms, this could contribute to the formation of a more sustainable and ecologically responsible civilization. This does not imply a rejection of technological progress, but rather calls for its rethinking in the context of ecological sustainability and the reality of the resource base shared by all living beings on the planet.

At the same time, it is important to note that the implementation of these ancient principles in the modern context requires their creative rethinking and adaptation to new technological and social realities. However, the fundamental values – respect for plants, animals, one another, and the world of the sky and earth in the cyclical processes – remain relevant and can serve as a guiding principle for the development of modern ecological consciousness.

### *7.2 Intercultural Dialogue and Religious Tolerance*

The religious experience of ancient agricultural societies reveals a unique model of interaction that is particularly relevant in the contemporary globalized world. Research uncovers enduring parallels in the symbolic systems of geographically distant cultures of Asia and Europe, indicating the existence of a universal language of sacred symbols, relevant to many cultures, including modern ones. This shared symbolic language is manifested in the fact that the descendants of ancient followers of the global "Neolithic religion" have historically become adherents of Abrahamic religions, preserving and reinterpreting fundamental archaic agricultural concepts.

This continuity can be traced in numerous key elements of Abrahamic religions: the concept of the Trinity, symbols such as the crescent moon, the cross, and the "All-Seeing Eye," the cult of the sacred tree and bread, solar-lunar calendars, the dating of the birth (resurrection) of religious heroes and saints at the time of equinoxes and solstices, concepts of sacred space and time, and the astronomical orientations of religious buildings toward the sunrise and cardinal directions. This multi-layered continuity demonstrates the deep connection between early cosmological manifestations of the sacred and later religious systems, where basic archetypes and symbols retained their significance, acquiring new interpretations within the context of monotheistic traditions.

It is important to emphasize that this historical continuity does not diminish the uniqueness of each religious tradition. On the contrary, it showcases the richness and diversity of human spiritual experience, where each tradition finds its own unique ways of expressing universal spiritual truths. Understanding these deep connections can serve as a foundation for developing a more inclusive and tolerant approach to religious diversity in the modern world, where different traditions can engage in constructive dialogue based on the awareness of shared roots and universal symbolic structures.

In practical terms, this contributes to:

- A deeper understanding of the shared prehistoric roots of different religious traditions;
- A better comprehension of the mechanisms of adaptation and transformation of religious symbols in different cultures;

- The identification of universal patterns in the spiritual experience of humanity through the lens of different epochs;
- The development of a tolerant attitude toward various forms of religious self-expression;
- The formation of new constructive approaches to interreligious dialogue.

In the context of contemporary challenges related to religious intolerance and intercultural conflicts, the experience of ancient societies offers important lessons on the possibility of harmonious coexistence of different spiritual traditions. The study of shared symbolic structures can contribute to the development of innovative approaches to intercultural dialogue, based on the recognition of the unity of the human spiritual experience while preserving and respecting cultural diversity.

### *7.3 The Convergence of Science and Religion*

Particular attention should be given to the ability of ancient societies to integrate scientific and spiritual worldviews. Their capacity to combine precise natural observations with religious systems demonstrates the possibility of a holistic approach to understanding the world.

A notable feature is the absence of a supernatural perception of the sacred in ancient agricultural cultures. For them, the sacred was immanently present in natural phenomena and cycles, which made their systematic study possible and facilitated the integration of this knowledge into religious practice. The cosmos was seen as a single living system, where natural laws were simultaneously manifestations of divine order or of God itself. This understanding allowed for a harmonious integration of empirical observations with religious experience without contradictions between them.

In the modern context, this experience can be particularly valuable for overcoming the artificial division between scientific and religious worldviews—the natural and supernatural worlds. It demonstrates the possibility of creating an integrated system of knowledge, where rational study of nature is complemented by a spiritual comprehension of its deeper meaning.

The scientific completeness of the reality of the world through the lens of cosmological religion is perceived as a path to deeper harmony and the orderliness of the sacred. This opens up prospects for a new synthesis, where scientific discoveries can enrich religious understanding of the world, and religiosity can guide scientific research in an ethically responsible direction.

Such a paradigm could become the foundation for a new understanding of the interaction between humans and nature, where technological progress is not opposed to spiritual development but serves as a tool for deeper knowledge and responsible use of natural resources. This becomes particularly relevant in the context of contemporary global challenges, which require both technological solutions and a fundamental rethinking of humanity's relationship with nature and its place in the cosmic order.

In the long run, this approach could contribute to addressing many contemporary issues –

ranging from the ecological crisis to the development of artificial intelligence – that demand both technological innovations and deep ethical reflection.

#### *7.4 The Spiritual-Psychological Potential of "Neolithic Religion" in the Contemporary Context*

In the context of the current civilizational crisis, characterized by the loss of spiritual direction and a disconnection from traditional forms of world perception, the cosmological beliefs of early agricultural societies have gained particular relevance as a source of wisdom and psychological resilience. Their holistic understanding of the connection between cosmic cycles, natural rhythms, and human life offers an alternative to the modern fragmented worldview.

Such spirituality, based on the recognition of the sacredness of the natural world and cosmic rhythms, can help overcome the crisis of meaning, especially characteristic of technocratic society with its type of spirituality that exists in a parallel, purely supernatural dimension. The meaning of life and spiritual potential in the context of ancient religion are directed towards creating harmonious conditions and relationships in the naturalistic realm, where every ending is the beginning of a new cycle of existence. This perspective offers a more harmonious understanding of life and death, where individual existence gains meaning through its inclusion in larger natural and cosmic cycles.

An important aspect of this worldview is the understanding of immortality not as the individual continuation of existence in an afterlife, but as part of the continuous process of cosmic and natural renewal. This can contribute to the development of a more mature attitude toward life and death, where the focus shifts to the quality of life and responsibility "here and now," rather than "later and in a parallel world."

From a psychological perspective, the agricultural form of spirituality can help overcome existential anxiety and the fear of death that are characteristic of modern society. In this context, actions (including destructive ones) carried out in the name of an illusory better afterlife can be reinterpreted. Such an approach helps counter the dangerous tendency of devaluing real life for the sake of an imagined "higher" existence, which is often used to justify violence, self-sacrifice, or the disregard for one's own and others' lives.

In contrast, understanding life and the afterlife as a unique opportunity to be part of natural cycles can promote a more responsible attitude toward one's actions and their consequences in the real world. This takes on particular importance in the context of countering various forms of religious extremism, where the notion of the afterlife can be used to manipulate consciousness and incite destructive actions.

Thus, the study of the cosmological aspects of ancient cultures not only enriches our understanding of the past but also offers important insights for addressing contemporary problems and challenges. Turning to the cosmological heritage of early agricultural societies can become a valuable resource for spiritual renewal and psychological adaptation in the modern world, offering a holistic model of worldview that combines ecological consciousness with profound spiritual meaning.



The integration of this ancient knowledge and these practices into the modern context can contribute to the development of a more balanced and sustainable approach to the future of human civilization. This does not imply a return to the past, but rather a step forward into the future, where more resilient and harmonious models of societal development must be ensured.

## 8. Conclusions

The conducted study of the cosmological aspects of the stelae at Göbekli Tepe and their parallels with the religious symbolism of the Trypillian culture allows for the following general conclusions:

- A detailed analysis of the iconography of the Göbekli Tepe stelae has revealed a coherent system of cosmological concepts, where through a complex symbolic language, the ancient agricultural societies' understanding of the unity of solar and lunar cults, the cyclical nature of time, and the interconnectedness of different levels of the cosmos is reflected;
- It has been established that the architectural organization of the Göbekli Tepe temple complex correlates with the iconographic program of the studied stelae, forming a unified system of sacred symbols and creating a kind of "architectural text," where each element has its defined place and meaning.

Deep parallels have been identified between the symbolic systems of Göbekli Tepe and Trypillia, which manifest in their main forms as follows:

- Commonality of basic cosmological symbols (circle with a horizontal crescent, three-part signs of the solar year, lunar symbols, N-shaped sign);
- Similarity of architectural principles in organizing sacred space;
- Unity in approaches to reflecting calendar-time aspects;
- Similarity in serpent symbolism and its functional use.

Of particular significance is the fact that the identified parallels concern not isolated individual symbols, but comprehensive semantic complexes that include:

- Architectural principles for organizing sacred temple space;
- A system of calendar-astronomical observations;
- Sacred numerical symbolism;
- Zoomorphic and astral imagery;
- Specific geometric shapes and their compositions.

The evolution of religious-symbolic forms has been traced from the monumental art of Göbekli Tepe to various expressions in the material culture of the Trypillians, particularly in temple architecture, where primary cosmological concepts are enriched with new sacred meanings, while retaining their fundamental significance.

The study confirms the existence of a shared symbolic language in ancient agricultural cultures and demonstrates their capacity for complex abstract thinking, embodied in material form.

The calendar system of Göbekli Tepe may have been unique for its time and region. The time periods reflected both in the architecture of the temple complex and in the iconography of the stelae likely represented not so much literal "months" but sacred segments of the year, tied to a particular understanding of the cyclical nature of time in the context of agricultural religion. Given the antiquity of Göbekli Tepe, this system may have been one of the earliest attempts to structure the annual cycle, which later evolved into other calendar traditions. This understanding of time likely became the foundation for the development of later, more precise calendar systems, such as the one adapted for Trypillian times in the Nebelivka disc system.

It is particularly significant that the calendar concepts of ancient agricultural societies were not limited to practical functions but were deeply integrated into the religious-mythological system, where time was perceived as a sacred substance, and its measurement had a ritualistic nature.

The discovery of a complex calendar-astronomical system of ancient agricultural societies may indicate that the origins of many later calendar traditions, including the Christian Paschal cycle, date back to deep antiquity. It is particularly significant that in the earliest temple complexes, the principle of determining sacred dates through the combination of solar and lunar cycles is already evident – the same principle that underlies the determination of the date of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. This parallel emphasizes not the coincidence, but the deep regularity in the development of religious consciousness, where the observation of celestial bodies has always played a key role in forming the sacred worldview. This further confirms the profound unity of human experience in understanding the sacred and the universality of certain fundamental principles of religious beliefs.

The results obtained open new perspectives for understanding the processes of cultural interaction and the evolution of religious consciousness during the formation of early agricultural societies. The identified parallels between the symbolic systems of Göbekli Tepe and the Trypillian culture testify to the existence of a shared cosmological worldview that developed and spread over millennia, in parallel with the expansion of agricultural traditions.

This continuity of religious-symbolic forms demonstrates that, alongside practical agricultural knowledge, a complex religious system spread, which found its reflection in the architecture of temple complexes, ritual objects, ornamental compositions, and other material forms. Significantly, basic cosmological concepts were not merely copied, but were creatively reinterpreted and enriched with new meanings according to local cultural contexts.

Further research into the cultic-religious parallels between the early agricultural communities of the Near East and Europe can significantly enhance our understanding of the pathways of cultural interaction and the mechanisms of the evolution of religious consciousness during the Neolithic and Eneolithic periods.

Thus, the early agricultural cosmological religion remains relevant in the context of seeking answers to the global challenges of the 21st century. Its holistic model of worldview, based on the understanding of the unity of cosmic, natural, and human processes, offers alternative approaches to comprehending and addressing contemporary issues. Particularly valuable is its potential in shaping a new ecological ethic, fostering more harmonious social relationships, overcoming psychological crises, and creating forms of spirituality that meet the current needs of humanity, while remaining grounded in the natural foundation of existence.

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