

# “Trypillian Altars” as a Religious Phenomenon of the Ancient World

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## Abstract

The “Trypillian altars” are important and diverse group of Eneolithic religious objects discovered by archaeological science during the last century in the vast territory of the Cucuteni-Trypillian cultural community. To date there has been a considerable accumulation of information which is in need of a proper systematization and religious understanding of this phenomenon. Trypillian altars, as elements of the Trypillian religious system, have so far remained outside the scope of comprehensive study. However, they are undoubtedly of great importance as a source of information on the ritual and mythological system not only of the Cucuteni-Trypillian community, but of prehistoric societies in general. The altars discovered in Ukraine during the excavations of the Nebelivka Temple (Trypillian culture) in Kirovohrad region of Ukraine are of particular importance for the study, as they are among the largest temple altars of their time in the entire oikonomia of the ancient world, and their design and iconography are well preserved. These sacred objects are also the earliest type of altars in world history that were part of the celebration of archaic temple rites (approximately 4000-3900 BC). The paper deals with typological, iconographic, chronological and ideological questions concerning Trypillian altars from the territory of modern Ukraine, Romania and Hungary. The function of altars in places of worship—sanctuaries and temples of the Trypillians, as well as in domestic and public spaces—is of particular interest. As a result, the religious and social function of the “Trypillian altars” is revealed by the author of the paper.

## Keywords

Eneolithic, Cucuteni-Trypillia, Ukraine, Ancient Europe, Altars, Cross, Symbols, Religion, Cosmology

## 1. Introduction

The fourth millennium BC in modern Ukraine is considered the beginning of the

Eneolithic period and the heyday of one of the first European agricultural civilisations, the Trypillia proto-civilization (Cucuteni-Trypillian culture). This ancient population of the European continent, in the vast territories of its existence, shared a number of common elements in its material and spiritual culture. These elements persisted throughout the entire historical existence of this community, despite its significant time presence on the map of Ancient Europe (according to modern estimates, approximately 2700 years of existence of the Trypillian cultural community (Videiko, 2015: p. 449)). One of the most important religious phenomena, characterized by cultural stability, and which characterizes the religious system of the ancient farmers in general, is the use of altars, sacred objects where archaic rituals involving the element of fire were performed.

According to the Great Electronic Ukrainian Encyclopedia, an altar is a place of sacred worship, a believer's connection with God through offering ritual gifts, which is common in most of the world's religions, including numerous archaic cults, Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism, Shintoism, Neopaganism, various magical practices, etc. (Altar). Another definition of an altar is a structure where sacrifices or other religious offerings are made, or another sacred place where ceremonies are performed. Altars are usually found in sanctuaries, temples and other sacred places (Cengiz, 2007). In general, the altar can also be seen as a place of contact between believers and the spiritual world, a place to pray or to worship God or Goddesses. It is a place for discussing, dialoguing and spiritual exchange. The main means of exchange in the space of altar rituals were sacrifices, offerings, libations, incense, ritual cooking, etc.

From the beginning of its existence until its decline, the Trypillian proto-civilization practiced the cult of fire. This was mainly realized through the use of altars. The proto-cities and small villages were provided with ritual altars, from the household to the sanctuary and the temple. Fire altars were built in the open air. Portable and miniature altars were also used. There are known cases of the construction of temporary clay altars. These were thin clay platforms that remained after the ritual, usually in ritual pits (Cucuteni and Ancient Europe, 2016: pp. 45-48). Such a religious expression can be considered as a confirmed general cultural phenomenon. It represents for us an important religious meaning of pre-historic people who imagined the divine world through their own filter of natural perception of the time. Furthermore, in order to finally reconstruct the religious and social function of the "Trypillian altars", the aim of all our efforts is to find the keys to the "consecration places" that were used for ritual actions. At the same time, it is a certain cultural identification of the world view of the European ethnos. This can be seen in such cultural objects as altars. In the author's opinion, such a religious object as an archaic altar carries a collective memory and associations. These are common cultural and spiritual values of many peoples.

In spite of the fact that almost a century has passed since the discovery of the first "Trypillian altars", their religious significance is still poorly understood and generally fragmentary. It can be said that the subject has not been dealt with

comprehensively in the scientific works. This fact encourages a thorough academic study of such a religious phenomenon as the ancient altars of the agricultural ethnic group. This study is based mainly on archaeological materials, which today constitute a significant body of information.

The role of the archaic religions as an important factor in the social and spiritual development of the autochthonous peoples has been completely underestimated up to now. Recent scientific discoveries and the use of new empirical materials provide qualitatively new, modern opportunities to study the Eneolithic agricultural religion and its specific manifestations—the “Trypillian altars”. It is necessary to broaden the field of research to include the results of related sciences: archaeology, ethnography, archaeoastronomy, and art history, in order to conduct such research within the framework of modern religious studies. The general scientific principles of historical, dialectical and logical analysis, objectivity and systematicity are also the basis of this research work. Therefore, the study of the altars of the Trypillian religion reaches an interdisciplinary level. This increases the general significance of the work.

Archaeological sources—actual material monuments associated with ancient altars—are the methodological basis of this study. It is the archaeological findings that are the most vivid illustration of these specific religious objects of the ancient world. In the course of the study, new hypotheses and systematic conclusions were formed on the basis of such empirical data.

In order to achieve the research results, the author of the article solved the following research tasks:

- to highlight the general typology of “Trypillian altars”;
- to carry out a systematic study of household altars in Trypillian dwellings;
- a systematic study of the altars in Trypillian sacred buildings has been carried out;
- the peculiarities of the appearance of miniature and portable altars are analyzed;
- the artistic expression of the altar of the Trypillian culture with its ideological context, represented on a unique ceramic vessel of the Trypillian period, is revealed;
- a hypothetical reconstruction of the rituals of the building of some Trypillian altars;
- on the basis of the formed research array of information the author draws appropriate conclusions about the religious and social functions of the Trypillian altars.

The logic of research, the nature of the subject and the objectives determine the structure of this work. The order of the above-mentioned research tasks corresponds to the structure of the chapters of the research paper.

## 2. General Typology of “Trypillian Altars”

With regard to the general typology of Trypillian altars, there is now sufficient

material for their identification and confirmation. In the last few decades, archaeological science has discovered new monuments. These monuments have significantly contributed to the knowledge of the ancient “Trypillian altars”.

In general, the entire Trypillian altar complex can be divided into altars used in sacred buildings (sanctuaries, temples), domestic altars reflecting individual/family cultic activities, public altars found in general ceremonial pits and public buildings (workshops, meeting houses, etc.), and portable and miniature altars (altars with censers). It is also possible to divide them into fixed altars, temporary altars and portable altars. The latter because of their small size were probably used at home or in camps. They could also have been used as attributes in open-air funeral ceremonies or as votive objects.

### 2.1. Forms of “Trypillian Altars”

Archaeological science has discovered rounded (Tsvek, 2001: pp. 25-27), (Lazarovici & Lazarovici, 2008: p. 14), rectangular (Tsvek, 2016: p. 19), (Passek, 1949: p. 83) and cruciform “Trypillian altars” (Rassamakin, 2012: p. 195), (Lazarovici & Lazarovici, 2008: p. 14). Portable “Trypillian altars” were similar in shape to fixed altars. Their construction was supported by four legs on stands (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004a: p. 40, 92). Miniature altars were usually circular and cruciform in shape, without pedestals.

In the opinion of the author and the vast majority of published archaeological material, the most common form of Trypillian altars is a cruciform altar. This resembles a Greek cross, an equilateral cross or a “clover leaf”, if we draw an analogy with the plant world. Such altars are well known from ceramic models of Trypillian culture buildings (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004b: pp. 330-331) (Figure 1), (Figure 2) and are one of the main interior features of Trypillian sacred buildings, which will be discussed in this paper.

Ceramic models of sanctuaries and dwellings with a cruciform altar type have been discovered on the territory of Ukraine, in Popudnia (Figure 2), at the settlement of Cherkasiv Sad, Sushkivtsi, as well as from the well-known model from the PLATAR collection (Figure 1) (Kovacs, 2016: p. 247).



**Figure 1.** A ceramic model of a dwelling of the Trypillian culture with a cruciform altar along the central axis of the building (from the private collection of PLATAR (Ukraine)). Approximately IV millennium BC.



**Figure 2.** A ceramic model of a dwelling of the Trypillian culture with a cruciform altar along the central axis of the building (artifact from the Trypillian settlement of Popudnia (Ukraine)). Approximately IV millennium BC.

It can be said that cruciform altars and altars of other types are an element of a sacred place or a place of worship. In reaching this conclusion, we take into account their actual location in the buildings and the fact that “Trypillian altars” are most often associated with large Trypillian settlements where religious behaviour is already clearly defined.

## 2.2. Materials from which “Trypillian Altars” Were Made

Altars were made of clay, with or without impurities. They could be stationary, temporary or portable. For example, pure clay without impurities was used to build seven altars in the Nebelivka Temple (Ukraine) of the Trypillian culture (Videiko, Chapman & Gaydarska, 2013: p. 109). An identical feature of clay altars was discovered during the excavations of the Trypillian ritual centre in the Oleksandrivka tract (Ukraine) (Burdo & Videiko, 2007: p. 101), which may be indicative of a certain sacred tradition of the construction of altars in sacred buildings in accordance with certain canons. The outer surface of the altars was usually covered with a thin layer of clay, and their surface often shows traces of restoration or periodic repairs.

Another material used to make altars was stone. Miniature altars made of stone are known (Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization, 2004a: p. 73). Undoubtedly, given the production tools of the time for working stone surfaces, the production of such objects of worship required a long time and special perseverance. The production of such unique and labour-intensive objects could be justified by religious beliefs, which are often irrational.

## 2.3. Artistic Design of Altars

The surfaces of the altars were painted yellow or red (Kovacs, 2016: p. 258). Most of the documented cases of open altars have traces of red paint (Kovacs, 2016: pp. 247-248), (Videiko & Burdo, 2015: p. 325), which defines their traditional visual canon. Ochre, red limestone and other natural dyes were used for colouring.

“Trypillian altars” were decorated with artistic motifs in the form of painted ornaments and sacred symbols. There are altars representing a swastika in a cir-

cle (Chernovol, 2008: p. 174), complex wavy and circular ornaments (National Museum of the History of Ukraine, 2018) and solar scrolls. There are even examples of the lunar calendar. For example, the Odesa Archaeological Museum of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine has a portable altar table with a lunar calendar. It was found in the Trypillian settlement of Berezivka (Figure 3).

The ritual altar table was found by V. Tsybeskov in a Trypillian dwelling among a group of ritual objects: bowls on an anthropomorphic tray, monacles, etc. The altar table is in the form of a round disc with a low rim resting on four cylindrical legs. The disc is covered on both sides with spiral ornaments. The lunisolar calendar system discovered on the materials of the Black Sea Eneolithic monuments of S. Dvoryaninov, objectively allows us to distinguish on the undamaged surface of the Berezivka find a set of lines and pits of 7, 84 and 112 elements (respectively  $\frac{1}{4}$  of the annual cycle of the visible moon, in a solar year), which have a calendar value (At the Eastern Border of Old Europe, 2015), (Ukrainian Sky 2, 2016: pp. 22-24).

Sometimes there were recesses in the centre of the “Trypillian altars”, which might have the symbolic meaning of a conditional centre, a kind of mundus, from which the sacred space unfolded, the centre of which was the religious altar itself (Figure 1, Figure 11). Such central depressions could also be arranged to accommodate ritual vessels. This is also studied on the basis of ceramic models of Trypillian structures (Figure 4).



**Figure 3.** The Berezivka portable altar depicting the astronomical calendar. 1. Top view. Traced image and photo. 2. Bottom view. Drawing and photo. Approximately the end of the third millennium BC.



**Figure 4.** A cruciform altar with a bowl in the centre. Ceramic model of a Trypillian dwelling from the private collection of PLATAR (Ukraine). Approximately IV millennium BC.



Such Trypillian miniature plastic is fully consistent with actual finds from Trypillian settlements. It is known that in the Shkarivka sanctuary two altars with sacred recesses were found turned to the east (Mozgovyi, 2019: p. 36).

## 2.4. Dimensions of “Trypillian Altars”

In terms of size “Trypillian altars” can be divided into smaller domestic altars and altars in temples and sacred buildings, which were among the largest in the entire oikonomia of the ancient world. In diameter domestic altars were usually 1.6-1.8 m in diameter, sometimes reaching 2 m (Rassamakin, 2012: p. 195). In the Nebelivka Temple of the Trypillia culture, opened in 2012, the largest altar reached the diameter of 5.3 meters, which is a religious phenomenon of the ancient world. The smallest Nebelivka Temple is estimated at 0.5 meters (Videiko & Burdo, 2015: p. 325). The ancient Hanan square altars with a diameter of 8 meters are known in world culture, but such cultic manifestations belong to the Late Bronze Age (Waszkowiak, 2014: p. 44).

“Trypillian altars” were usually raised above ground level by approximately 0.1 to 0.3 meters. In the Trypillian settlement in Volodymyrivka, altars were discovered that were 0.35 meters high (Burdo, 2005: p. 59) (Figure 5).

## 3. Altars in Trypillian Dwellings

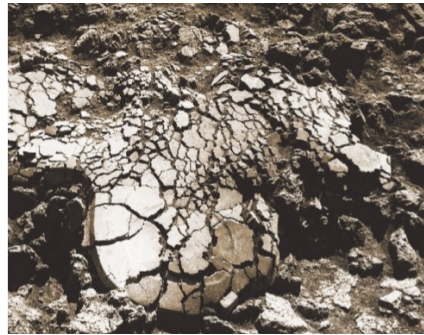
The altar or credence, precisely because of the connotations associated with the use of fire, is one of the most important features of buildings in all ancient cultures. The fire altar was the centre of worship. It was a manifestation of daily piety.

In addition to heating devices (stoves), almost every house in the Trypillian proto-cities had altars for ritual needs. For example, in one of the giant proto-cities of the Trypillian world, Talianky, altars were found in almost every house (Rassamakin, 2012: p. 195). It is this feature of the interior of the Trypillian huts (Figure 6) that indicates that an oven was used for domestic chores and the altar was the center of domestic sanctity. In general, up to 90 percent of all excavated Trypillian dwellings of any size had an oven or an altar (Burdo, Videiko, Chapman, & Gaydarska, 2013).

The widespread use of home altars in Trypillian settlements, where religious behaviour was already clearly established, reflects their role in popular religion and shows that fire altars were important in family ceremonies. Credences undoubtedly became idealized places for rituals in Trypillian times and seem to have played an important role in the well-being of all family members.

### 3.1. Location of Altars in the Residential Area of the Trypillians

Domestic “Trypillian altars” in buildings were always placed against the back wall of the living area, near a rounded window, opposite the entrance to the room. This is particularly evident in the surviving clay models in the form of open platforms on legs, which also served as cult objects (Krvavych, Ovsyichuk, & Cherepanova, 2003: p. 61) (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 7, Figure 8).



**Figure 5.** A cruciform altar was discovered in the Trypillian settlement of Volodymyrivka (Ukraine). Approximately IV millennium BC.



**Figure 6.** An artistic reconstruction of the interior of a Trypillian hut. Artist V. Rudenko.



**Figure 7.** A ceramic model of a Trypillian dwelling with a cruciform altar (from the private collection of PLATAR (Ukraine)). Approximately IV millennium BC.

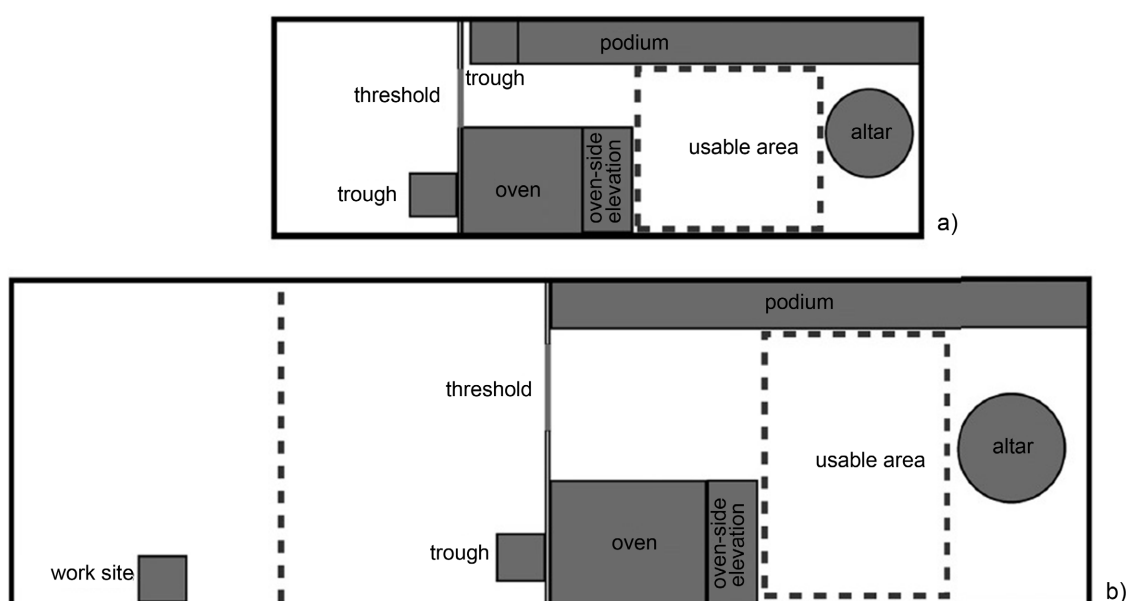


**Figure 8.** A ceramic model of a Trypillian dwelling with a cruciform altar from the settlement of Sushkivka. Approximately the end of the IV millennium BC.



It is worth mentioning that recent archaeological excavations of Trypillian houses in the settlements of the Tomashivka local group confirm a single type of construction with a standard set of parts. Altars were always placed along the central axis of the house near the back wall of the living area, opposite the entrance (**Figure 9**).

According to the documents mentioned above, in the actual living area of the Trypillians there was always a stove to the right of the entrance to the building, a podium with ceramic dishes to the left of the entrance and a fire altar opposite the entrance near the back wall. The fact that settlement construction was a collective activity probably explains this high degree of standardization. The existence of a series of ideological taboos that prohibited deviations from the accepted rules (Chernovol, 2012: p. 200) should not be ruled out. According to the archaeologists who have excavated the residential buildings of the Trypillian settlements: “Altars are common features of most Trypillian dwellings, located near the shorter wall of the dwelling and the oven to the right of the entrance” (Chernovol, 2012: p. 202) It is worth noting that the altar always occupied a central position in the living space. This probably emphasizes its importance as a compositional centre in the life of the family. From the above archaeological material, it is clear that the ceramic models do indeed correspond to real Trypillian dwellings in terms of general interior features. Therefore, there is no reason not to trust this source of knowledge, which conveys in miniature the characteristics of Trypillian dwellings and, most importantly for our study, the characteristics of “Trypillian altars”. Therefore, we can conclude that ceramic miniatures of Trypillian buildings (including temple miniatures) are of great research interest. They are one of the most reliable sources of the Trypillian past.



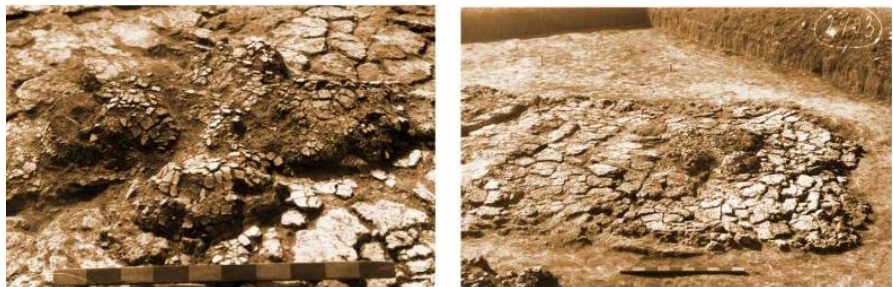
**Figure 9.** Layout of Tripolye houses (Talianki giant-settlement): (a) residential area; (b) residential area with annex (outhouse) attached to the entrance area (porch) on the left hand side.

### 3.2. Religious Tradition of Building Domestic Altars

We can observe a religious network of fire-sacrificial places of worship located in different parts of the Trypillian world, but built according to the same principle, using the example of the “worldview standard” according to which fire altars were built in Trypillian dwellings. This indicates that the Trypillians were the part of a complex process of social relations, united on the basis of religious beliefs and able to keep the population in certain religious ideas for a significant historical period and over large territories, even by modern standards. An example of this is the Cucuteni-Trypillian altars in the Ukraine and Romania. These altars are separated both in time and by hundreds of kilometers (**Figure 10**, **Figure 11**).

Other areas of the Cucuteni-Trypillia world confirm the religious tradition of building fire altars in the form of a cruciform pavement. The discovery of an identical Cucuteni altar is in Hungary. There the cruciform hearth is described as a “corner clover leaf”. A rounded depression had been placed in the centre of the altar. This altar underwent successive stages of restoration. In the last phase of its functioning, it acquired an oval shape (Kovacs, 2016: pp. 246-247).

It is a well-known fact that centralized associations always leave behind traces of common standards and of a cultural and technological unification. In the case



**Figure 10.** Cruciform fire altars excavated at the Trypillian settlement of Volodymyrivka (Ukraine). Approximately IV millennium BC.



**Figure 11.** Cucuteni-Trypillia cruciform fire altars discovered on the territory of modern Romania: (a) Altar from Poduri; (b) Reconstructed residential cruciform altar (from the Museum of Botoshani County).

of Trypillia and its religious sphere, we want to use the example of ritual objects such as the altar of fire to study the traces of such unification and the phenomenon of spreading common religious standards over large areas. They may not have had a single administrative centre, but they were probably able to create a religious and social institution of a supra-territorial nature. This was based on the ability to keep the population in stable religious beliefs. In any case, the fire altars of the Cucuteni-Trypillia community, found in dwellings in different places of their residence, remind us of this today. The existence of domestic fire altars among the Trypillians undeniably testifies to the level of their religious mentality. It also contributes to the formation of knowledge about the place of the family in Eneolithic society.

The meaning of the home altar is still close to almost all peoples. The hearth is the sacred centre of the home. It is a symbol of the family. “Parental hearth”, “ancestral hearth” or “family hearth” are all good epithets for the well-being of the home and family unity. In addition, it seems that the concept of “fire” rather than enclosed space or walls should immediately follow at the beginning of any organization of living space and according to the psychological aspect of the archetype “home”. It seems that this is an innate feature of the human psyche. We need to keep warm. Furthermore, the red sphere of fire is associated with human blood, which continues to live. Thus, among the peoples of the world, fire and its immanent altar remain a sacred phenomenon.

## 4. Altars of Sacred Trypillian Buildings

It is not known which was the original tradition to build fire altars in sacred buildings or in their own homes. However, these religious objects were present in the life of the Trypillians in both cases and had the same symbolic expression. Given that Trypillian temples or sanctuaries were usually located in the centre of the settlement in the case of small settlements, and in the eastern part of the settlement with an eastern entrance in the case of large settlements, and that sacred buildings determined the general layout of the entire settlement (Zavalii, 2023), we can assume that the official, public altars of religious buildings influenced or inspired the creation of domestic altars by their form. A similar analogy can be found in ancient Egypt, when Pharaoh Amenhotep III reigned at Malkata. There the practice of building domestic altars in the image of official temple altars was introduced. This is consistent with the idea that the state religion and the growth in importance of religious festivals may have encouraged people to address the gods personally on home altars (Weiss, 2009: pp. 193-208). Here we should also consider L. Mumford’s thesis that the sanctuary is essentially the germ of the village and the city, which, besides having a religious function, also served as a place for people to communicate and exchange with each other (Schmidt, 2011).

### 4.1. Altars of the Trypillian Sanctuaries

The “Trypillian altars” of fire in a religious building were discovered for the first time by archaeological science during excavations in the Kolomyishchyna tract

near the village of Halepia (Trypillian Culture, 1940: p. 18) (Kyiv region, Ukraine). Between 1934 and 1938 the Institute of the History of Material Culture of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian Socialist Soviet Republic and the Academy of Sciences of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics excavated an ancient Trypillian settlement, in the centre of which were discovered the two largest structures of the settlement, 140 m<sup>2</sup> and 90 m<sup>2</sup> in area, and all the other dwellings were apparently subordinate to these structures, facing the central entrances to them. These rooms were recognized as granaries for the storage of grain (Trypillian Culture, 1940: p. 16) according to Soviet scholarship. According to modern science, these rooms are recognized as sanctuaries of the Trypillian settlement of Kolomyishchyna (Zavalii, 2021c). In the center of one of these sanctuaries, three cruciform clay altars (Figure 12) and two grain mills for grinding grain were discovered (Trypillian Culture, 1940: p. 488).

The sanctuaries of the Trypillian settlement of Kolomyishchyna occupied the central square, forming a conditional centre from which residential buildings spread out in a circle. The religious buildings were oriented with their main entrances towards the sunrise; on the same side of the world, the residential buildings of the settlement were absent in relation to the sanctuaries, probably in order to ensure cult and ceremonial functions related to the sunrise. Today we know that the public buildings of the Trypillians, such as temples and sanctuaries, were located in pre-determined places. They were associated with the cult of the sun (Zavalii, 2023).

A public altar was also discovered in the Trypillian settlement of Sabatynivka (Ukraine), in a building that appears to have been of a cultic nature. A large altar and sixteen female figures sitting on miniature clay chairs with “horned” backs were found in the building. At the back of the building, opposite the main entrance, there was a rounded clay altar. The layout of the Early Trypillian structure under investigation and its features suggest that it was a temple where the magical rite of grinding grain and baking sacred bread from its flour was performed (Ukrainian Sky 2, 2016: p. 19). Probably the fire altar in this temple or sanctuary could have played an additional role in the preparation of sacrificial bread (Figure 13).



**Figure 12.** A cruciform altar from a sanctuary at the Trypillian settlement of Kolomyishchyna (Ukraine). Approximately the first half of the III millennium BC.





**Figure 13.** A graphic reconstruction of the interior of the Cucuteni-Trypillia sanctuary from the cover of A. Kovacs “Temples, sanctuaries, altars in the Neolithic and Copper Age from Southeast Europe”.

#### 4.2. Temple Fire Altars and Their Archaeoastronomical Significance

The opening of the Nebelivka Temple near the village of Nebelivka in the Kirovohrad region (Ukraine) in 2012 marked a qualitatively new stage in the study of Trypillian religious buildings and their altars (Videiko, 2015: pp. 231-233). This religious building became the largest in the area of the Cucuteni-Trypillian cultural complex (Videiko & Burdo, 2015: p. 310).

Throughout history, a temple has been a structure designed for ritual actions such as prayer, ritual or sacrifice. A temple is furnished with special furniture, relics, sacred utensils and various equipment, as it is a sacred area. The temples are usually run by the ministers of the cult they belong to. Because of the importance of temples in archaic societies, they represent the highest level of architectural skill achieved by a particular community (Kovacs, 2016: p. 16).

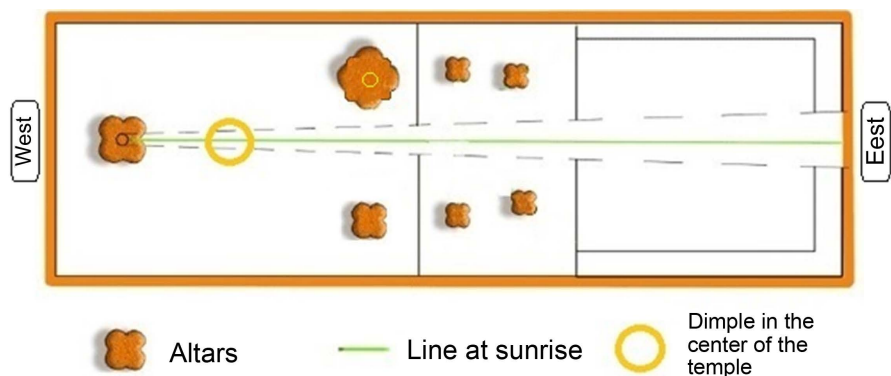
In the Nebelivka Temple of the Trypillian culture seven altars were discovered at once. Traces of fire were found on the surfaces of these altars in prehistoric times. There are striking similarities in the design of the altars of the Nebelivka Temple if we compare them with the altars of other Trypillian sacred buildings and their everyday expressions.

The seven altars of the Nebelivka Temple were of the cruciform type. Traditionally they resemble all other known Trypillian cruciform altars, which vaguely resemble a clover leaf (Figure 14).

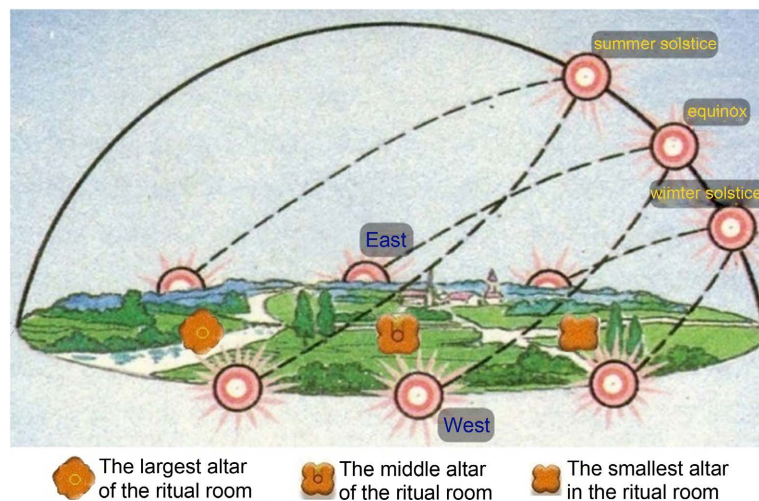
The altars in the space of the Nebelivka Temple were divided in a ratio of 3 to 4: the three largest altars were located in the main ritual hall; four smaller altars were located in the sanctuary in front of the entrance to the main ritual hall of the temple. The diameter of the largest altar was 5.3 meters in the main ritual hall. The smallest temple altar was located in the sanctuary of the temple complex. It was estimated to be 0.5 meters in diameter. The surfaces of the altars were raised about 0.30 meters above the ground. All seven altars were painted red (Videiko & Burdo, 2015: p. 325).



It is probable that the “Trypillian altars” of the Nebelivka Temple, divided in the ratio of three to four, carry archaic ideas about the structure of the universe and metaphorically express the idea of its structure. Thus, the author noticed that a logic of dimensionality connected with the points of the main solar and annual astronomical phenomena above the eastern horizon is present in the three altars of the ritual hall in the interior of the Nebelivka Temple. It’s about the visible points of sunrise and sunset at the time of the annual equinoxes and solstices, which established the spatial order of the world. The largest of the altars of the Nebelivka Temple is located in the north-eastern part of the temple, the part of the world and the building where the sun rose above the horizon on the longest day of the year (21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> of June). The medium-sized altar of the main ritual hall is located exactly on the “east-west” world axis and was oriented in space to the point of sunrise on the days of the equinoxes (21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> of March and 22<sup>nd</sup>-23<sup>rd</sup> of September). The smallest altar of the main ritual hall is located in the south-eastern part of the temple, facing the point on the horizon where the winter solstice was recorded (21<sup>st</sup>-22<sup>nd</sup> of December) (**Figure 15**).



**Figure 14.** The floor plan of the Nebelivka Temple, according to the level of the first floor.

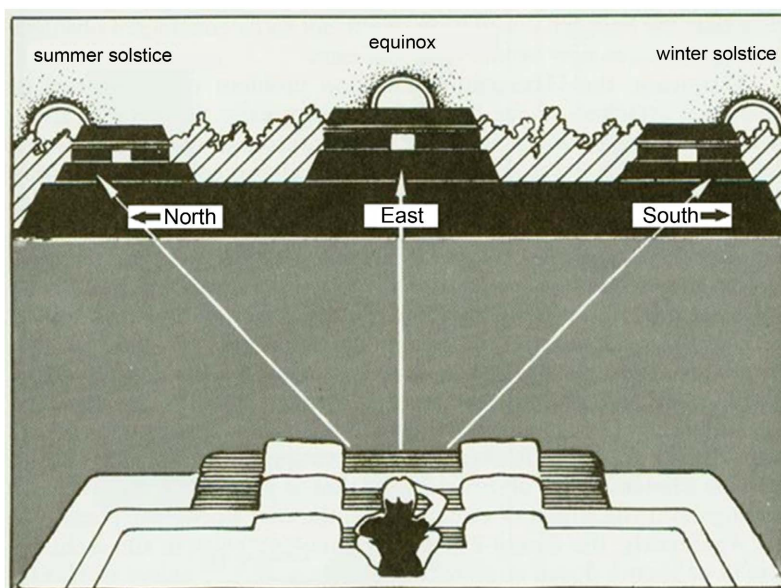


**Figure 15.** The visible path of the sun at the key points of the year in relation to the dimensions of the altars of the main ritual hall of the Nebelivka Temple.

Given the symmetry of the celestial rotation, the altars of the main ritual hall of the Nebelivka Temple harmoniously correspond to the logic of dimensionality and their position in the religious complex. Since the entire temple complex faced the point of sunrise at the equinox, the left side of the main ritual hall and its largest altar were on the north-east-north-west world axis, determined by the points of sunrise and sunset at the solstice. On this day the sun made its largest circle in the sky. It rose and set in the northern part of the world. The middle altar was on the east-west world axis, and the smallest altar was on the south-east-southwest axis, and was placed in the left part of the temple, at the point in space and time when the Sun outlined its smallest “time circle” of the year. Let us recall the Vedic wisdom that emphasizes: “If you want to understand the nature of God, look at the Sun”. Even Plato emphasized the need to study the movements of the heavens, for in the harmonious symmetry of the celestial rotations lies spiritual perfection to which the human mind has direct access. Thus, the Trypillian temple gives us every reason to be convinced of this.

It should be noted that organizing sacred space according to the yearly continuum in sacred buildings, or organizing the buildings themselves according to solar and astronomical points above the horizon, is not a unique phenomenon of the Trypillian culture (although such a religious phenomenon is recognized as the oldest in world culture). As an example, it is worth mentioning the space-time religious buildings of the Maya culture, namely the archaeological site of Vashaktun, founded in the VIII-VII centuries BC. (Felix, 1989: pp. 54-57) (Figure 16).

This example reveals certain regularities of the cosmological type of the world view of the archaic peoples, similar to the organization of the altars of the Nebelivka Temple.



**Figure 16.** Schematic plan of the Mayan temple and astronomical complex in Vashaktun.

A hidden astronomical meaning is also created by the placement of the largest and smallest altars of the main ritual hall and the central recess (**Figure 14**). The imaginary angle is about  $80^\circ$ , which corresponds to the angle of sunrise between the summer and winter solstices at the latitude of Nebelivka, if a straight line is drawn from the center of the temple, from the recess, to the two altars. This fact shows that the builders of the Nebelivka Temple had a clear understanding of astronomy, geometry, and mathematics 6000 years ago.

As for the four altars of the Nebelivka Temple, which were in front of the entrance to the main ritual hall, they could be an indication of the number of the moon cult, since four, as an ancient concept of time, comes from the four phases of the moon (new moon, first quarter, full moon, third quarter), which was also expressed in various ideograms of the Trypillian cult. Such a genesis of the Nebelivka Temple can be supported by the fact that the four altars were located in a completely closed two-storey hall divided into two parts by a “sun corridor” (**Figure 14**). At the same time, the three largest altars of the temple were located in a ritual hall partially open to the sky, which could symbolize the division of the temple complex into world-view zones. The dark room symbolized the night and the four phases of the moon—four altars each, the light room symbolized the day and three main solar and astronomical phenomena, which were emphasized by three altars oriented in space according to these phenomena. These seven astronomical phenomena of day and night organize the entire space-time continuum of the year. They probably correspond to the altars of the Nebelivka Temple and its various parts. It is known that in the Trypillian culture there are correspondences of the above assumptions in the pictorial tradition, where night and day are marked with white and black squares and the sacred numbers three, four and seven are at play. The plot of a cult pot from the private collection of the “Religion of Trypillia” is known to have such a representation (**Figure 17**).

Thus, in the upper part of the present jar, along the circumference of the neck, there are three lines made in the traditional style of “sun sweeps” or “sun arcs” that circle the sky during the day. It is significant that there are three of these arcs, because, as we have already mentioned, this is an enlarged symbolic and numerical indicator of the annual mystery over the eastern horizon. From the neck of the



**Figure 17.** A cult pot of Trypillian culture from the private collection of the Religion of Trypillia denomination (Ukraine). Approximately IV millennium BC.

jar four vertical lines can be seen. In the middle of these are black and white equilateral squares that alternate in a chessboard pattern, giving the context of day and night that alternate. It is important to note here that the path of the squares from the top of the composition to the very bottom of the archaic artefact has a numerical value of thirty. On both sides of the pot, which is equally divided by this “chessboard”, there is such a path of black and white squares. If we take one black and one white square of the chessboard per day (day and night), such pairs make up a total of thirty days. This corresponds to a complete lunar cycle. We can therefore assume that the four lines, which conventionally contain sixty black and white squares, are nothing other than the four phases of the moon, in which 30 calendar days of the moon are concealed. The composition then unfolds towards the centre of the pot with seven curved lines (aren’t there three solar events along with four lunar phases?), combined with a complex spiral circle that forms the basis of the entire plot of the iconic Trypillian pot. The central circle itself is a numerical indicator that can have a connection with the metaphor of the year. This circle was made by ancient craftsmen from ten spirals, curls or labyrinths. In the light of research into the Trypillian calendar system based on the Nebelivka disc, the authentic calendar system of the Trypillian world (Zavalii, 2021b), the decimal system of the year is revealed. In other words, the Trypillian year (at least that of the local group of the Trypillian culture in Nebelivka) was divided into ten equal periods of 36 days each. Therefore, we can assume that the sacredness of the year in its main sun-moon calendar landmarks with the numerical indicators three, four, seven, ten and thirty was represented in the central plot of the cult pot from the private collection “Religion of Trypillia”. All this is worth mentioning in order to return to the topic of the Trypillian altars of the Nebelivka Temple. These altars probably represent the key moments of the solar and lunar phenomena and convey the numerical indicators three to four, i.e., the sacred seven. The author sees in this idea the well-known orphic principle of “what is above is below”—the human being is a microcosm that creates on the earth the equivalent of the heavenly world. Therefore, in the ancient cosmological religion, the sacred architecture of the temple of Trypillia was probably formed by the eternal regularity of the visible celestial symbols.

The entire altar complex of the Nebelivka Temple was created by the ancient wise men in such a way as to convey the same principle of cyclicity. However, the altars were actually placed in two halls. It is worth noting that all of the seven altars of the Temple were placed in such a way that there was an imaginary connection between them. The four altars of the sanctuary in front of the entrance to the main sanctuary were placed asymmetrically to each other, but in a harmonious order. If we connect them with the three altars of the main sanctuary, we can see that they are connected to each other (Figure 14). In other words, if you draw a conditional invisible line in a large circle between all the altars of the temple, then in that order they will be united in a conglomerate of fire altars in a symbol that can convey a circular cyclicity. Perhaps this explains why the organization of the four altars in the almost square sanctuary of the Nebelivka com-

plex did not transfer the dominance of symmetry and cruciform balance in the Trypillian sacred world. Thus, all the “Trypillian altars” of the temple are structured elements. They should be considered as an indivisible pictorial field.

In the Nebelivka Temple the six cruciform altars were also arranged in such a way that their blades were not oriented towards the cardinal points. Instead, they were oriented towards them at an angle of  $45^\circ$ . The blades of the seventh and largest altar were aligned with the cardinal points. This altar is not only different in size but also in position and shape. The Nebelivka Temple complex and its main entrance were clearly oriented towards the eastern side of the world. This determines a certain spatial dependence in the placement of temple altars in relation to geographical coordinates. The same spatial dependency in placing cruciform-equilateral altars is known to us from Romania, found in the county of Botoshani. There was a Cucuteni cruciform altar turned at an angle of  $45^\circ$  to the central axis of the building in a public building near the back wall of the building (Kovacs, 2016: pp. 245-246) (Figure 18).

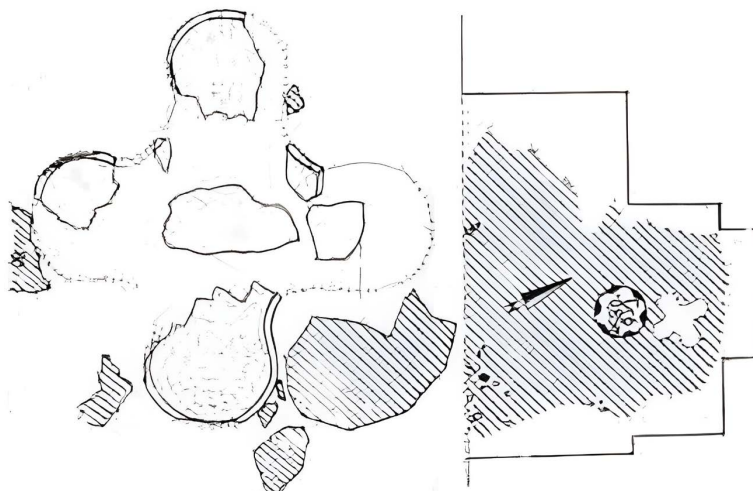
There is evidence of the same altar arrangement in some ceramic models of Trypillian buildings (Figure 19).

It is known that the whole of the Nebelivka Temple complex and its main entrance (the solar corridor) were oriented towards the rising of the sun, that is towards the point on the horizon where the celestial light of the spring and autumn equinoxes rose. This spatial arrangement of the altars, together with the cardinal points to which the temple was tied, could have synthesized the idea of the third symbol, which was generated by three derivatives: The cross of the altar, a conditional cross according to the cardinal points, and the orientation to the sunrise at an angle of  $45^\circ$ . We can see here that on the days of the solar equinoxes, when the sunlight entered the temple and set the interior in motion (the light effect of the sun’s movement in a darkened room), the altar cross received its conditional “revival”—its blades were “animated” by the clockwise movement, which supposedly started its rotation. This optical effect was probably enhanced by the ritual lighting of the altars. This was an impressive religious phenomenon in the world of that time. Such a phenomenon and the symbol it created in the imagination of the Trypillians could demonstrate a transcendental attitude towards reality. It could convey a symbol of universality, comprehensiveness and cosmic rotation. Perhaps an equilateral cross at an angle of  $45^\circ$  to the sunrise on the equinox was the starting point for the formation of the swastika symbol. The swastika has been known to us since Trypillian times (Figure 20, Figure 21).

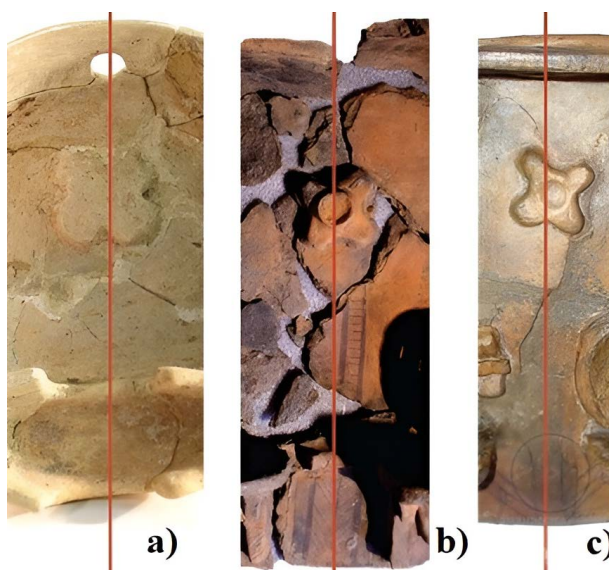
Ancient Trypillian artefacts clearly show that a static equilateral cross can be transformed into a dynamic cross, some kind of cosmic vortex or cosmic rapid motion. Probably the same cosmic phenomenon as the image of the vortex cross ideograms in rapid motion was the visible movement of the sun through the blades of the cruciform altars in religious buildings illuminated by the fire element. It can be said that the cyclical cosmos itself began to “turn” the cross of the altar. From the material presented, it is clear that the tradition of building Trypillian cruciform altars at  $45^\circ$  to the cardinal points could be an embodiment



of cosmic movement, visibly reproduced and involved in ritual actions within the walls of an archaic temple at equinoxes.



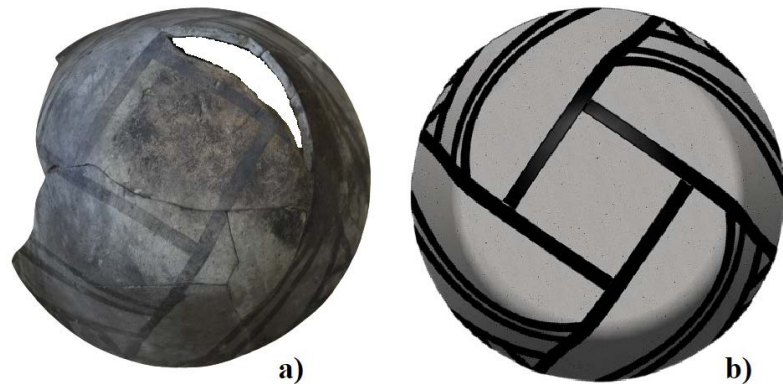
**Figure 18.** The cruciform altar from the Cucuteni building is placed at an angle of 45°.



**Figure 19.** Orientation of cruciform altars on ceramic models of Trypillian structures: (a) Model from Cherkasiv Sad (Ukraine); (b), (c) Models from the private collection of PLATAR (Ukraine).



**Figure 20.** Trypillian swastikas from ritual vessels.



**Figure 21.** Image of a prototype swastika on a Trypillia ritual vessel from the private collection of the Religion of Trypillia denomination (Ukraine). Approximately IV millennium BC (a) Photo of a Trypillian ritual vessel; (b) 3D reconstruction of a ritual vessel.

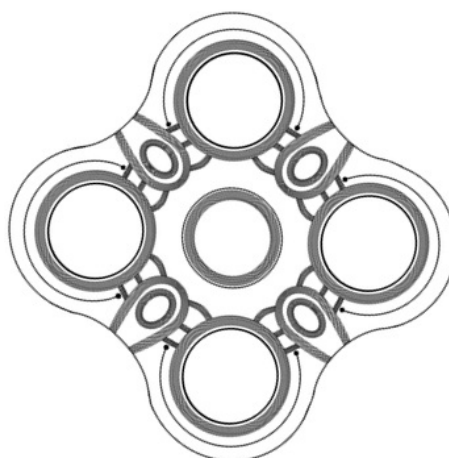
As noted above, the entire Nebelivka Temple complex and its main entrance (solar corridor) were oriented towards the sunrise, when the celestial light of the annual equinoxes appeared. This is probably where the main altar was built. Of all the seven altars of the temple, it was centrally located on the “east-west” axis in relation to the whole building. In relation to the main temple entrance (sun corridor), it was directly opposite it, near the rear or western wall of the temple. All the first archaeological data known to us on the Nebelivka Temple of the Trypillian culture allow us to state that on the days of the equinox, the religious building provided a passage of sunlight along the “temple corridor” to the centre of the temple, where the main temple symbol—the Religious Tree, (Zavalii, 2021a) (on the site of a depression in the centre of the temple (Figure 14) and the probable main temple altar were situated. This is a clear expression of the archaic idea of the concentration of sacred symbols in the centre of the world, which in ancient societies was imagined to be the centre of the temple. It is significant that in the monograph by the German scholar G. Baudler “Das Kreuz. Geschichte und Dedeutung” states: “The idea of being at the centre of the universe can be expressed through the symbol of the tree, which is closely related to the cross and can even be equated with it” (Baudler, 1997: p. 57). In the Cucuteni-Trypillian complex, a cruciform altar was found in a public building, in the centre of which (according to the archaeologists) a rounded trace of a pillar or column was found. In the light of religious studies of archaic religious cults, this could indicate the cult of the tree, near which rites were performed on a cruciform altar (Kovacs, 2016: pp. 245-246). The echoes of the “sacred tree” in the space of the temple altar and the temple itself partially found their later manifestations in the cultures of the world in recreating altars depicting trees (Gunn, McNutt, Mein, & Camp, 2002: pp. 233-249). Thus, the landmarks of the structure of the sacred time of the Nebelivka complex were the sacred tree and the temple altars.

Of the entire complex of seven altars, the most likely main altar of the Nebelivka Temple was the best preserved. Therefore, the quality of its construction, design and restoration was the subject of special attention. Its decorative design has sur-

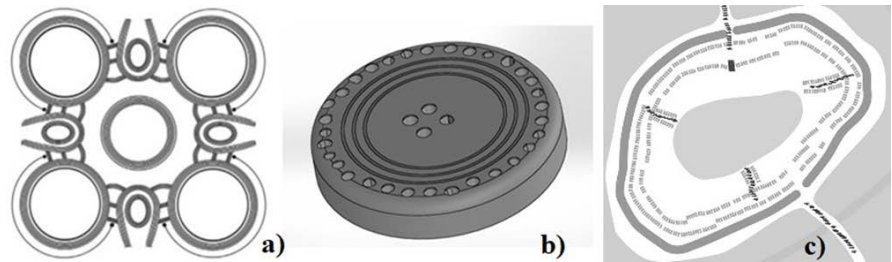
vived a period of six thousand years. The surface is decorated with a complex ornamental composition. Five circles and four ovals are connected by three lines. One of the circles is at the centre of the composition. The others are symmetrically arranged on the four lobes of the altar (**Figure 22**).

To this day special decorations, drawings and paintings are one of the main characteristics of sanctuaries and temples. A means of deepening religious experience is the ornamentation and decoration of elements of religious buildings and sacred art in general. In most cases the ideology that was present within the walls of the religious building itself can be expressed and represented through the presence of artistic expressions of the sacred. In this case we are dealing with a religious and artistic idea represented on one of the largest altars of its time in the entire oikumene of the ancient world, and an artistic and religious expression of the place where archaic rituals with fire were performed. We are presented with an ancient religious painting on an “altar cloth”, which can be a good guide to the knowledge of the Trypillians in the cosmological and mythological spheres.

The presented altar ornament immediately reminded the author of the article of the iconography of the relic of the Nebelivka temple, which was found near the most probable main altar. It is worth noting that in most sacred buildings, religious relics are placed in the chancel. This is probably because it is the most protected place in the building. For example, near the ritual fire altar in the western part of the Nebelivka Temple, the Nebelivka disc (Zavalii, 2021b: p. 103) was found. It is now recognized as the astronomical calendar of the Trypillian culture. Like the altar, it has a multi-component ornamental composition in its structure. In both cases it conveys a four-sided structure connected by three circles. Furthermore, we find the same symbolic dependence, but already embodied in the planning of a gigantic living space, when we consider the development plan of the Trypillian proto-city of Nebelivka itself, in whose oikumena the religious objects and artefacts in question were actually located (**Figure 23**).



**Figure 22.** The ornamentation of the probable main altar of the Nebelivka Temple.

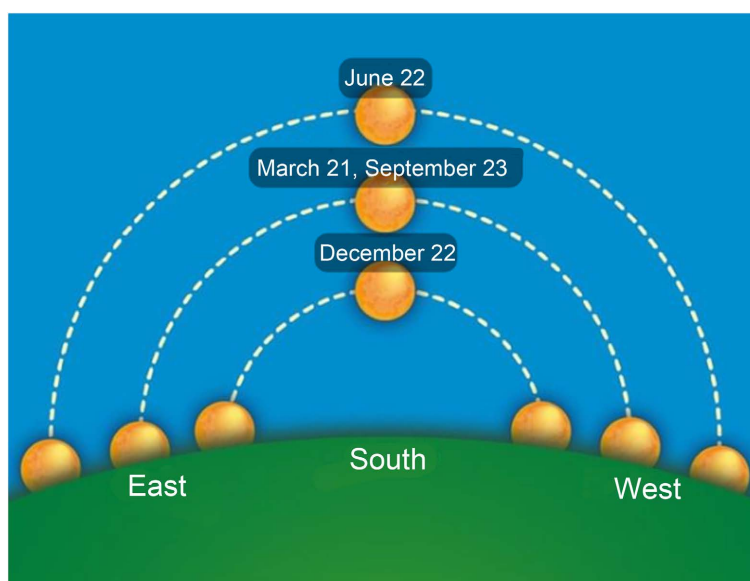


**Figure 23.** The interdependent sign-symbolic ornamental systems are embodied in various forms of sacred life of the Trypillian ethno-cultural group: (a) Ornamentation of the probable main altar of the Nebelivka Temple; (b) Ornamentation of the Nebelivka disc found in the Nebelivka Temple; (c) Graphic reconstruction of the development of the Trypillian proto-city of Nebelivka based on geomagnetic surveys in the area.

The 275-hectare proto-city of Nebelivka, with more than 1,500 buildings of various sizes, was planned and built with obvious signs of a gigantic cultural plan. It is worth noting that Nebelivka was bounded by a moat several kilometres long. The ancient architects clearly tried to fit it into the symbol of a circle. We can say this with confidence, considering the smaller Trypillian settlements, which were built according to a clear circular layout. Archaeologists report that such a moat around the Nebelivka settlement probably had a symbolic meaning (Chapman & Gaydarska, 2015: p. 81). In (Figure 23(c)) we can see how the houses and public buildings, which were also organized according to the principle of a circle in two visible rows, spread out from the boundaries of the moat towards the centre of the settlement. The four cardinal points corresponding to the geographical coordinates east, west, north and south were the main entrances to the proto-city. It was one of the largest settlements in the world at that time. It was designed and built in such a way as to emphasize the sacred triple circle orientation to the four cardinal points. In those ancient times it was possible to observe such a large-scale phenomenon of sacred planning and architecture from the highest point of the settlement's plateau. This is exactly where the Nebelivka Temple was located. We can even imagine the view from the walls of the temple, given that it is two storeys high and approximately twelve meters in height (Videiko, 2018: p. 125). This makes it clear that the temple of the Trypillians is a sacred structure. It is integrated into a series of other sacred objects.

We conclude that the plan of the settlement itself, temple relics and other religious objects were symbolically conveyed in the ornamental composition of the probable main ritual altar of the Nebelivka Temple. Here we can speak of a kind of “coordinate system of the world view” that encompassed the world of the Trypillians. Places like Nebelivka were probably created to convey sacred meanings. The gigantic settlement itself confirms this idea in its layout.

It is worth pointing out once again that the Trypillian universe was conceived as having three sides in the vertical plane (the world axis) and four sides in the horizontal plane, i.e., as being determined by a universal spatial order. According to the author, the images of nature and space were crucial for the design of such Trypillian architecture. They were derived from the mystery of space and time (Figure 24).



**Figure 24.** At key points in the year the visible path of the sun across the southern horizon.

How can we fail to recall the masterpiece of world literature of the Kyiivan Rus and the heroic poem of the late twelfth century, *The Story of Igor's Campaign*, in which we find the following, hitherto somewhat incomprehensible narrative expression: "The sun is bright, threefold! It is warm and red for everyone!" (*The Tale of Igor's Campaign*). Isn't the sacred trinity of the sun above the eastern horizon reflected in the ancient expression "The sun is bright, threefold"? Given that Kyiivan Rus developed on the same historical territory as the Trypillian proto-civilization, the answer to this question can be unequivocal. To date, the existence of historical parallels and connections between certain elements of the religious beliefs of the ancient Trypillians and Ukrainians has been proof (Zavalii & Bazyk, 2023).

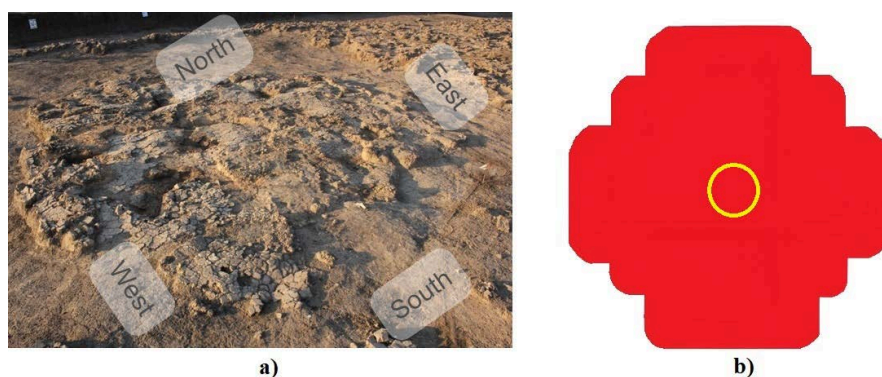
The sacred triplets of lines that we are studying in the religious life of the ancient farmers reflect the visible annual solar mystery in its main astronomical passages at the solstices and equinoxes. According to the author, a higher cosmological principle consistent with the modern concept of the Universe or Cosmos is the essence of the Trypillian year as a religious phenomenon of the ancient world. This supreme essence is conveyed to us by the symbols of the circular construction of the Trypillian settlements, the iconography of the main temple altar of Nebelivka, the ritual sculptures, the objects of the "sun spirit" with infinite lines and infinite dots, and the Trypillian calendar, which depicts the relationship of the Trypillians to the sacred Year. Such archaeological material is a clear indication of what human life might be like from the point of view of the world defined by time. And it would be nothing more than giving another name to the archaic laws of the universe if we were to call the religious phenomenon of the omnipresent and all-encompassing Trypillian Rock Universe God. It is important to note that the English word "God", Dutch "God",



Danish “Gud”, Icelandic “Duð”, Norwegian “Gud”, Swedish “God” and German “Gott” refer to the general concept of God and are generally translated as “God” or “Year”. “God”, “Gud”, “Gott” [...] come from the common Indo-European or pre-Indo-European “god̥” —which originally meant “time” or “year”. The very etymological meaning of the Temple, such as “Temple” (English), “Tempel” (German), “Templum” (Latin), and its derivatives “tempus”, “temporum”, “terrarum”, “terrae”, “terra”, “orbis temporum”, “temporelles”, “temporary”, “temporal”, “time”, etc.—refer to the Indo-European linguistic meanings of sacred place, space, season, sky, circle, earth, and the cycle of time. Thus, we can identify a certain pan-European paradigm of the sacredness of the Year / God, embodied in the Indo-European language and operating with the philosophical categories of space and time. Perhaps a solution to the problem of the Trinitarian understanding of God, embodied in the doctrine of the Holy Trinity, should also be sought here.

Moving on to the altars of the Nebelivka sacred complex, it is worth paying attention to the largest altar not only of the Trypillian culture but of the entire ancient world at the time of its religious and ritual function. The cruciform altar, almost five and a half meters high, was located in the north-eastern part of the church, at right angles to the cardinal points. It stood out from the rest of the altar complex in terms of size, shape and position in relation to the cardinal points (**Figure 25**).

The largest altar of the Nebelivka temple had a complex cruciform shape with a recess in the centre, which is also found on other altars of the Trypillian religious complex. In the days of its ritual function it was painted red and decorated with ornamental recesses. Time has destroyed them forever and they are lost to us. Its religious significance in the whole complex of altars is determined by its orientation to the summer solstice. As we have already mentioned. This phenomenon could look like a kind of “celestial ascension” in the space of the temple, since the celestial body rises to its highest point along the ecliptic at the time of the highest sun of the year (the azimuth of the sun on this day is about 80° in the coordinates of Ukraine). In fact, sunlight entering the darkened room of the ritual hall through the partially open temple roof formed a beam of light from the mountain. Taking into account the movement of the sun over the temple during the summer solstice (**Figure 15**), the beam of light probably hit the central-northern part of the hall around noon. This is where the main temple symbol and the largest altar were actually located. It is likely that such an action in the temple room would have been perceived as the descent of heavenly power, of divine providence, and of the light of faith that comes from the highest natural virtues. In addition, the pillar of light at an angle of 80° (or so) in the temple space could be perceived as a visible confirmation of the point of the Centre of the World or the Navel of the Earth. This was commonly referred to in Indo-European mythology as the “World Tree” or the “Tree of Life”.



**Figure 25.** The largest altar of the Nebelivka complex. (a) Archaeological remains of the altar in the main ritual hall; (b) Graphic reconstruction of the altar on the basis of archaeological materials.

On the day of the summer solstice, the celestial body over the Nebelivka Temple had its almost “direct ascent”. This could also clearly shape the orientation of the blades of the corresponding altar according to the cardinal points. The altar in the sacred building was oriented to this astronomical phenomenon as the sun rose above the horizon during the solar equinoxes and moved clockwise at an angle of about  $45^\circ$  above the horizon. The same can be said of the altar that is oriented towards the winter solstice in the sacred space of the temple. There is therefore a clear logic of dimensionality and orientation to the cardinal points of the Cosmic Order in the orientation of the blades of the altars of the main ritual hall of the Nebelivka Temple.

Important places in our national history are the altars of the Trypillian sacred buildings. They are an expression of the community’s togetherness, its collective efforts and the extremely high level of its cultural and religious identity. It has also taken considerable collective effort to keep the fire altars and the places where they are located in good condition. Temple altars can be seen as a kind of manifestation of the community’s capabilities. They probably impressed both their countrymen and their neighbours. Therefore, temple altars or altars of sacred Trypillian structures can be considered as national altars. They were the places where the power, influence and religious gatherings of the people were exercised in ancient times. Places of this kind are the social, cultural and spiritual centres of the old Europe.

## 5. Miniature and Portable “Trypillian Altars”

The miniature and portable altars of the Trypillian culture represent a specific group of artefacts that should be classified as religious objects. Such mobile religious equipment usually took the form of stationary altars, standing on four legs or having a flat base, and were made of clay or stone. They were probably used in domestic and camping ceremonies, possibly as amulets or votive objects, because of their small size and mobility. It is possible that some of these miniature objects were used as incense burners. They were used to burn different kinds of incense during rituals and ceremonies. In any case, we can talk about this thanks to the research carried

out by the Oxford University. They analysed the vessels from the Nebelivka Temple in the laboratory. The analyses showed that the Trypillians kept aromatic substances in some of the small cups ([Archaeologists Told about the Faith of the People of Trypillia Culture](#)). In various religions of the world, the burning of incense is one of the common features of ritual practices. It is likely that the Trypillian temples and sanctuaries were no strangers to the use of incense to create a sacred atmosphere. This is evidenced by the traces of incense burning on miniature and portable altars.

If we draw analogies with Ancient Egypt, where miniature altars made of clay and bronze were used as smoking altars in funerary cults ([Rosenthal-Heginbottom, 2008](#)), we can assume that the ancient Trypillians were also able to include such cult objects in rituals related to the cult of the ancestors and funerary rites. It is generally accepted that the Trypillians had a cremation rite for burying the dead. This coincides with the cult of fire and altars. Such rituals and ceremonies may therefore have involved portable altars.

### 5.1. Miniature Ceramic Altars and Altarpieces

The same symbolic forms were used in the production of portable Trypillian altars, in accordance with the forms of temple and domestic altars. There are round, rectangular and cruciform miniature altars ([Figure 26](#), [Figure 27](#), [Figure 28](#), [Figure 29](#)).



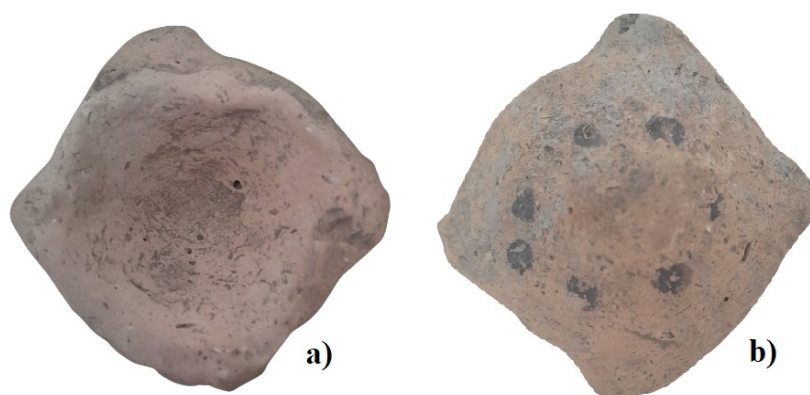
**Figure 26.** A round-shaped portable altar from the settlement of Berezivka (Ukraine). Approximately late III millennium BC. (a) Top view; (b) Side view.



**Figure 27.** A round-shaped portable altar from the settlement of Berezivka (Ukraine) with a calendar. Approximately late III millennium BC. (a) Top view; (b) Side view.



**Figure 28.** A rectangular portable altar from the settlement of Oleksandrivka (Ukraine). Approximately the end of the III millennium BC.



**Figure 29.** A cruciform-rounded miniature altar from the private collection of the Religion of Trypillia denomination (Ukraine). Approximately IV millennium B.C. (a) Top view; (b) Reverse view.

A miniature cruciform round altar from the private collection of the “Religion of Trypillia” denomination (**Figure 29**), which is probably a derived manifestation or derivative of the cruciform public (national) altar from the sacred buildings of the Trypillians, reduced to a miniature, attracts attention. Personal interviews with the leaders of the religion of Trypillia reveal that this artefact comes from the Nebelivka local group of the Trypillia culture. Its age is estimated to be in the fourth millennium BC, which corresponds to the period of existence of the proto-city of Nebelivka and its main temple.

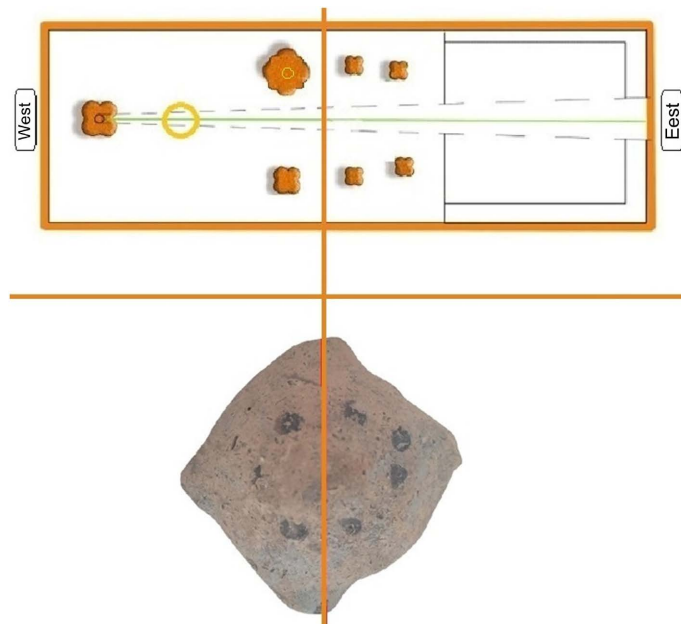
The back of this miniature altar shows seven dark circles, oval in shape, around the conditional centre of the artefact. The author of the article suggests that the position of these dark circles in relation to the sides of the equilateral cross of the altar, and the oval filling of the space of the product, give the impression of conveying some information related to the sacredness of the number seven. Given the location of the altar and its age (the period of the Nebelivka Temple), the rare miniature artefact was used to compare the spatial arrangement of the seven altars of the Nebelivka Temple. This provided an important research result (**Figure 30**).

In such a comparison understanding one part of the sacred essence provides a way of understanding the other. Their sum is an important element of religious

reconstruction. In the miniature equilateral altar, we can study the reproduction of the spatial connection with the Nebelivka Temple. This is shown schematically in the figure above. Obviously, the Trypillians had an established tradition of building altars in a special sacred order. This tradition was so significant that it influenced derivative forms of cult plastic. As a religious imitation of the original meaning, the cruciform miniature altar of the Nebelivka local group could have been used. In other words, it could have communicated the sacredness of the Nebelivka Temple in its main cultic features: the cult of fire, since the object itself is a miniature of the fire altar; the cultic orientation to the cardinal directions, that is, the cruciform nature of the miniature altar; the holiness of the number seven; and the distribution of the altars in the ratio of three to four, as seen in the figure above. In this context, the Trypillian temple can be seen as a system integrated into the social structure for the acquisition of religious knowledge. This knowledge could then be recorded by such small “media”. The sacred spatial organization of the Trypillian temple, symbolically represented in the miniature in question, was probably known to the owner of such an altar or to its creators, priests, etc. From the point of view that the temple and the miniature artefact existed in the same local group and at the same historical time, the coincidence of such a discovery cannot be considered.

## 5.2. Miniature Stone Altars

The Trypillians had another group of relics. These were associated with the cult of cruciform altars. These were small copies of the cruciform altars that were made of stone (**Figure 31**).



**Figure 30.** A spatial comparison of the arrangement of the seven altars of the Nebelivka Temple to the seven circles of a miniature cruciform altar from the private collection of the “Religion of Trypillia” denomination.





**Figure 31.** Probable Trypillian stone miniature altars or their amuletic expressions. Approximately 4400-4100 BC.

It is worth noting that archaeological science classifies such objects as military weapons, namely maces. Maces are cold steel weapons used for striking. For example, in the “Encyclopedia of the Trypillian Civilization”, in the section “Classification of weapons and the way they are used”, one of the above products is published with its “combat” characteristics, namely: diameter  $92 \times 72$  mm, height 30 mm (*Encyclopedia of Tripillian Civilization*, 2004b: p. 484). In this case, the diameter of the hole for the shaft is 10 - 15 mm, which of course raises significant questions about the combat capability of such a mace, even considering that real Trypillian copper-stone combat and household tools (axes, picks, hammers, etc.) had much larger dimensions and the diameter of the hole for the handle for striking. It is difficult to ascribe such stone products to the symbolic meaning of weapons. In this case, there must be real fighting prototypes that are not known today. The sacred complex of objects of the Trypillian ethno-cultural group did not generally include weapons. They were hardly ever depicted in artistic manifestations, nor were they cultically decorated. There are no images of hunting raids or of wounded animals and of any other scenes of organized violence. This also confirms the low importance of war in Trypillian communities (*Early Urbanism in Europe*, 2020: p. 515). It should be recognized that without proper comparative approaches and religious knowledge, the classification of such miniature stone objects as “weapons of war” was made. Now, it is necessary to consider such objects from the point of view of the Trypillian religion and the cult of altars in order to draw final conclusions about the purpose of the “stone crosses”.

At first glance, such Trypillian works show that their formation took a long time, given the production tools used to work stone at the time. The Trypillian “stone cross” shows traces of a shaped, sequential formation using a rotating beam drill for drilling the central hole. The cross is well polished and the ends of the projections show traces of having been polished. The craftsman undoubtedly needed creative thinking, a sense of symmetry and knowledge of the craft to transform the raw material into such a symmetrical, three-dimensional cruciform object. Since a single blow against a hard surface could destroy months of work, the labour intensity invested in this object does not correlate with economic or military motives. It should also be noted that Trypillian stone weapons and household implements are usually found already destroyed by the stresses they received in antiquity. At the same time, all known Trypillian “stone crosses” have been found intact and without defects, which casts doubt on their use as

impact weapons in the ancient world. For this reason, it is worth considering an alternative to their use.

On one of the “stone crosses”, scientists were able to study the remains of red ochre. This immediately indicated the possible cultic nature of the object (*The Museum of History*). This is an important message for current scientific research, and we draw parallels with the Trypillian altars, which were indeed painted red. The central opening of the “stone crosses” corresponds well with the known recesses in the centre of the Trypillian altars, and the peculiar shape of the “clover leaf” is a common feature in both cases. From the above it is clear that the “stone crosses” could be related to the religious life of the Trypillians, namely to the cult of altars. This is in contrast to the hypothesis that they were used in the military sphere or as a symbol of the mace, whose fighting prototypes have not been found in the Trypillian settlements. At the same time, one has to take into account the peculiarity that such miniature altars could not have been used as a direct analogue of household or temple/national altars, as is the case with ceramic miniature representations. It is impossible to use them directly in fire rituals because when they come into contact with the fire element, the stone quickly collapses due to thermal expansion. A solution to the purpose of such cruciform stone plastics should be sought on another ideological level.

One design feature of such stone crosses is noteworthy because it may reveal their ideological nature and purpose in the ancient world. One of the sides of the stone product had a convex shape. This was a kind of stand on which the whole product could be installed and would have a stable position on a horizontal plane. The design of such an equilateral cross gives the impression that the ancient masters were trying to give it the greatest possible form of stability and uniformity, which would guarantee the harmony of the balance (*Figure 32*).

Observations of such stone products have shown that the convex parts of them show signs of abrasion, as if they had slipped on hard surfaces while they were in use. The author of the article suggests that such models of possible miniature altars could have been used for certain rituals, mysteries or for existing mythological beliefs. The rotation on one of the convex sides of such a cult plastic would form a cycle of rotation through the cruciform wings. This could be associated with the cult of the Year and the repetition of the cycle of Cosmic rotation. In other words, such a stone cross could have been a code for a system



**Figure 32.** Trypillian stone crosses / miniatures of altars. Approximately 4400-4100 BC.

of knowledge about the universe and Trypillian mythology. In this case, the cruciform temple altar, which was “animated” by the movement of the sun in a darkened room at the equinox, is conditionally the same as a miniature stone altar, which received its movement with the help of a person. The optical effect of the rotation of the red stone cross would produce the same secondary symbol as the temple altar at the moment of the sun’s rapid movement in the east. And this is the symbol of Trypillian universality and omnipotence. In the modern world it is known as the Trypillian swastika.

A good argument in favour of the above hypothesis is another rotating sacred object of the Trypillian world, namely ceramic spinning wheels and the symbolism they represent. The sacred symbolism of spinning wheels is associated, in particular, with their rotating while spinning (Burdo, 2020). The cross symbolism and the swastika crosses are studied on such miniature objects of the Trypillian world (Figure 33).

The spinning and weaving of cloth were probably a sacred part of the economic life of the Trypillians. It had a highly symbolic character, often associated with the symbols of the cross and the swastika. It is likely that in the process of thread making, analogies were drawn between the thread and cosmogenesis, so that the thread was compared to the cosmogonic situation of “beginning” and functioned in the sphere of household ritual as a mythological “first thing”. The process of fabric production expresses a symbolism that corresponds to the mythological creation of the World, associated with the idea of “first thing” and cyclical renewal. At the same time, the rotation of the yarn on the spindle gave the corresponding symbolism of dynamic movement. This fitted the technological process into the existing picture of the world. From this point of view, this economic activity, correlated with the universal mythological scheme of the Trypillian ethnos, sanctioned the cosmic order. It reproduced the transformation of chaos into an ordered cosmos (nesting on a thread).

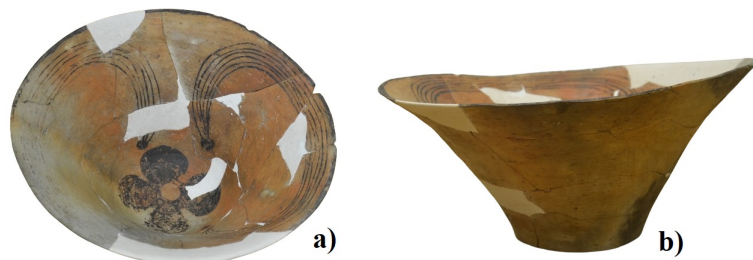


**Figure 33.** The spinning wheels of the Trypillians with the variable symbols of the crosses and the way in which they were used in spinning.

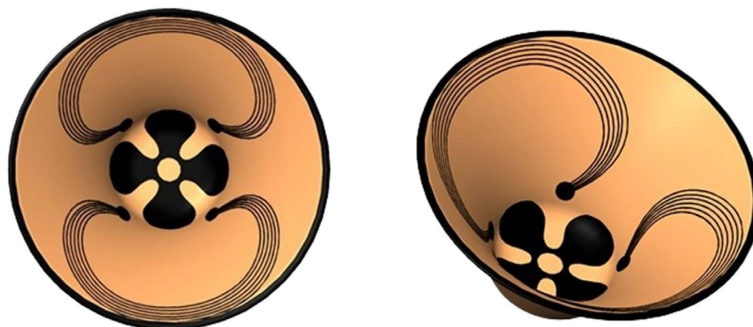
The mentioned above confirms that the equilateral cross and the Trypillian swastika derived from it were associated with the rotation or movement of the universe. In the Trypillian religious complex, such a specific product as the miniature “stone crosses” probably had a demonstrative function. It was painted red and rotated around its axis. It was probably associated with the same thing as the rotating spindles with the corresponding symbols. In such small relics of the ancient world, the knowledge system of the universe and mythology of the time can be encoded. This implies that the altar cross was integrated into another kind of knowledge system, which was animated by fire and the movement of the sun within the temple walls on certain days of the year. This is yet another confirmation and definition of the “Trypillian altars” as a significant and multivalent religious phenomenon of the ancient world.

## 6. An Artistic Expression of the Altar of Trypillian Culture

The author adds to the complex of the study of “Trypillian altars” perhaps the only artistic manifestation of the Trypillian altar known today. It is depicted on a ceramic bowl of the Trypillian culture. The artifact is a tall, plate-shaped ceramic plastic. In the center of the plastic there is a well-known attribute of the religious life of the ancient Trypillians—a cruciform fire altar. The image of the altar is complemented by artistic expressions and details. In the modern world they serve as important information about the religious ideas associated with the place of worship of the ancient agrarians (Figure 34, Figure 35).



**Figure 34.** Ceramic bowl of Trypillian culture with an image of an altar (from the private collection of the Religion of Trypillia denomination (Ukraine)). Approximately 3900-3400 BC. a) Top view; b) Side view.



**Figure 35.** A graphic reconstruction of a ceramic bowl of Trypillian culture depicting an altar.

The artifact under study is kept in a private collection of the Religion of Trypillia denomination (Ukraine) and, according to its leaders, comes from the western world of the Trypillian culture (modern territory of the Ternopil region, Ukraine). The monument belongs to the late stage of the CI culture (according to the periodization and absolute chronology of the Trypillian culture it is 3900-3500/3400 BC. (Videiko, 2015: p. 447).

A high level of craftsmanship is evident in the artistic qualities of this piece. The vessel can be considered as one of the best examples of a specific religious expression of the vase painting of the Trypillians. The artifact bowl is perceived as a well-organized work of art. It is a religious image of the ancient world painted on a “ceramic canvas” by the hands of artists of the time.

A possible transmission of the religious expression of the place and meaning where archaic rituals associated with the cruciform altar were performed is the artistic intention embodied in this “ancient icon”. In the center of the picture there is a well recognizable attribute of religious life—the “Trypillian altar” with its peculiar central recess or place where ritual bowls or donations were placed. Such a center can be perceived as the “navel of the earth” and as a kind of sacred “mundus” from which the order of the world has unfolded. In the Vedic texts, we find that in addition to the four major directions, there is a fifth direction—the center, and the earth, like the altar, takes shape (Atharvaveda, 2005: p. 24, 175). Cosmological symbols of the movement of the celestial bodies—solar lines or scans—emphasize the images of the four shovels of the altar. The Sun itself is represented in the four corners of the altar with dark circles, as if it were rising from there. This corresponds well with the data presented in the article on the placement of public and household altars at an angle of 45° to the sunrise. At the same time, since the major holidays fell on the four points of the annual equinoxes and solstices, the theme of the ritual bowl is fully consistent with the annual cycles. Such an artistic idea emphasizes the spatial patterns and rhythms embodied in the Trypillian altars, creating a dialectical unity of form and content. Here we can also say that the will of the agricultural people and their psychological attitude towards the natural cosmos is expressed in this primitive painting. They want to reproduce the cross that gets its rotation from the movement of the sun.

It is worth noting that the structure of the “altar plate” contains seven conventional linear signs—six of which come from the “solar scan” of the altar itself, and the seventh runs along the entire contour of the product, forming a circle. The sacred significance of the number seven, which is emphasized in the Nebelivka Temple we are studying, may be indicated by this context.

Thus, the master artist of Trypillian antiquity, a kind of “creator of the great style” of the Eneolithic era, directed his and collective religious knowledge and all artistic talent towards realizing a painting that clearly corresponds to the ideological standards of the “Trypillian altars” studied. The understanding of the Trypillian cosmography as a certain cultural text of the prehistoric civilization contributes to the ontological essence of such an ancient artistic idea. Such artifacts were probably included in the system of primitive education and upbringing.



ing or were objects of religious knowledge or worship.

## 7. Building Rituals of “Trypillian Altars”

To date there have been several cases of hypothetical ritual actions in connection with the construction of stationary altars in the Trypillian culture. All of them can be divided into rituals related to burying broken and whole sculptures inside the altars or in the ground underneath them, and to constructing altars from pure clay without any impurities.

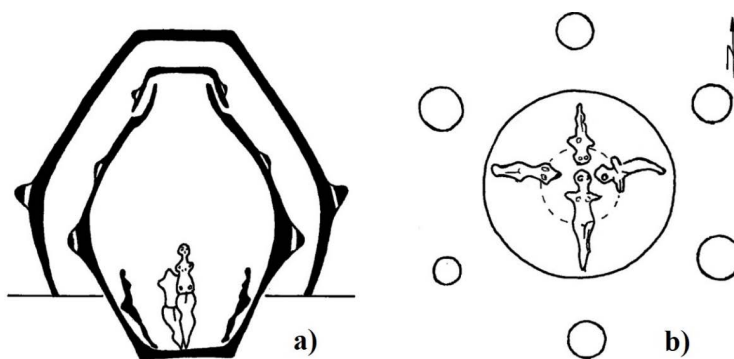
### 7.1. Rituals Related to the Placing of an Anthropomorphic Image-Sacrifice on the Altar

The archaic fire altar was undoubtedly associated with sacrifice. There are cases of broken or whole anthropomorphic images being placed inside during the construction phase. There is evidence of a similar case in the sanctuary of the Trypillian settlement of Konovka (approximately 3900 B.C.) (Videiko, 2015: pp. 225-226). An identical case is found in the Cucuteni-Trypillia complex at Gelaesti, near the town of Neamt, Romania. During excavations in 1973, the archaeologist Sh. Kukosh discovered a public sanctuary, under the floor of which seven vases were embedded in the altar area. One of the vases was placed in the centre, while the others circled around it. The central vase was turned upside down and covered another vessel with a lid. Four anthropomorphic figures of Goddesses, arranged in a cross and facing the four cardinal points, were found inside. Two female figures had their heads and legs painted black (Hoti, 1993: pp. 190-191). A similar ritual phenomenon in the Cucuteni-Trypillia complex is found at the Buzna-Silishte site in Romania. During the research in 1971-1973, a rectangular house was discovered in the centre of the settlement, which was recognized as a local sanctuary. Inside the house an altar and a cult complex were found. Four anthropomorphic clay figures (three female and one male) were found lying cross-legged on their backs. All the figures were oriented towards the cardinal points. The group of figures was covered by an upside-down painted vessel, with six smaller vessels evenly spaced around it. The only male figure was seated and facing east. The female figure, facing west, is notable for the fact that her head and legs are missing, having been broken off before she was placed in the jar. The damaged figure was painted with red paint (Hoti, 1993: p. 193) (Figure 36).

In both cases it can be said that the rituals of erecting the shrines and altars presented—their obligatory attributes—were accompanied by a kind of sacrifice of ceramic images. Cutting off body parts, placing them in a container and burying them in the ground seem like very cruel rituals. However, the ancient peasants made a projection of the human body on ceramic counterparts. In particular, they made female images with their arms outstretched to the side (the pose of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross). The image of a woman was involved in the organization of such rituals, probably because of the sacredness of the temporal manifestations of the female body, such as the monthly cycles and the cycle of childbirth.

This is why, especially in the western part of the world, images of broken women have been associated with death and the end of a cycle, a period. It is worth noting that many religious phenomena are based on the belief in the magical transfer of supernatural powers by manipulating objects (ritual figures, images, relics, or transferring powers by touching). In Christian practice, for example, relics can influence people by touching them: The Virgin's girdle cures people of infertility, or touching the relics of saints takes over their power and grace. This would seem to be nothing more than one of the more archaic ways of transferring the power of magic to a particular object. In this respect, a woman's universal ability to magically transmit her productive, life-giving power, which according to the law of contact magic can be transferred to an object or person through certain influences, is indicative. Therefore, the image of the female goddess in Trypillian religious buildings should not be perceived as a material phenomenon, but as an exchange of "essences", breaking them, associated with the end of a cycle or period.

In the course of research into the cult of the cross in Ukrainian ethnoculture, important evidence has been found which, in general, partially coincides with the Trypillian ritual of building a cruciform altar. For example, when children were ill, women would place a specially spun thread under a cross outside the village (the Ukrainian tradition of placing roadside crosses on the outskirts of villages). In this case, such a thread can be semantically approximated by the image of the "Cosmic Umbilical Cord" that connects all the zones of the cosmos at a given point as the symbolic Centre of the World (Bosyi, 2004: p. 42). Such a rite can be understood as an attempt, through the connection to the cosmological centre represented by the corresponding symbolism, to regain integrity with the world and to recover or restore loved ones. This peculiar variant of the sacrifice on the cross, performed by a woman in order to preserve her family, is very similar to the Trypillian ritual reconstructed in this article. It is associated with a cruciform altar and the female essence, its nature and the image placed in the centre of the altar. This points again to the presence of certain archetypal images in Ukrainian ethnic culture since Trypillian times. These images, when actualized, act as a catalyst for the ritual actions described above.



**Figure 36.** Finds from the Cucuteni-Trypillia cult complex correlated with sanctuaries and construction rituals. a) A set of finds from Gelaesti (Romania); b) A set of finds from Buzna-Silishte (Romania).

Anthropomorphic images in the ritual complex of cruciform altars point to the dependence of the archaic cult of the cross on the cult of sacrifice, which has survived in Christianity to the present day. However, the sacrifices at the fire altars in the Trypillian religious buildings were mainly related to plant sacrifices, as evidenced by the infrastructure of the buildings themselves, which are associated with grain mills, places for storing grain, places for baking and storing bread, and vessels for storing and burning incense. Grains, fruits, bread, drinks, flowers and incense were probably the basis for the performance of agricultural rites in the sanctuary of sacred buildings. However, the placing of the image of the victim at the stage of building altars was probably one of the ritual phenomena of their religious life.

### **7.2. Rituals related to the Construction of Altars of Clay Without Impurities**

There are known cases of altars in Trypillian religious buildings being made of special clay, namely pure clay without any impurities. Upon closer examination of the material from which the Nebelivka Temple altars were made (Nebelivka Temple complex, Ukraine), archaeologists noticed a difference in the composition of the clay used in their construction compared to the clay used in the construction of the main structures. The clay for the temple structures had various impurities. It was taken not far from the temple, leaving a pit in the ground that was visible even on magnetic imaging (Videiko & Burdo, 2015: p. 313). At the same time, the temple altars were made of pure clay without impurities (Videiko, Chapman, & Gaydarska, 2013: p. 109). The same feature of clay altars was discovered during the excavations of the Trypillian ritual centre in the Oleksandrivka tract, Ukraine, (Burdo & Videiko, 2007: p. 101) which makes it impossible that the sacred tradition of the construction of clay altars without impurities is accidental. The clay for the construction of the Nebelivka altars was taken directly from the site where the main ritual hall was built, from a pit that archaeologists believe had been filled in after the construction of the building (Videiko, Chapman, & Gaydarska, 2013: p. 114). In this way one can trace a certain ritual of temple and altar building. The material for the construction of sacred objects is taken from the centre, from the purest place in space. This reveals the metaphysics of the birth of the “House of God” from the “Navel of the Earth”, from Mundus, where a new spiritual substance is born at the point of contact between Heaven and Earth/Father and Mother. It is worthwhile to compare such ideas with the later legends of the world in which the first human beings, the progenitors of humanity, emerge from clay, from the earth, from “dust”, etc.

## **8. Religious and Social Function of Trypillian Altars**

Of particular interest is the question of the religious function of Trypillian altars in public and domestic rituals. It is also important to define and understand their ideological and social function.

The widespread use of altars in the public and private religious life of the archaic community is evidenced by the Trypillian examples of altars and the places where they were located. Their public character is manifested in temple worship, and their domestic function is emphasized by their central place in houses and the figurative expressions of altars.

The altar in its pure physical form is an artefact that allows us to explore and reconstruct the religious past and ritual experience. First of all, Trypillian altars are altars of fire. The traces of combustion on their surfaces and their placement in residential areas near windows to remove the products of combustion are well studied.

From the mental point of view of an archaic person, the burning of gifts or sacrifices on altars of fire is primarily associated with heat and light, which are vital elements in the life of people of the Neolithic era. In addition, the altar is one of the ways of manifestation of the Great Mother, Mother Earth, from whose womb a sacred object emerges. “Born” in purity (the ritual of building altars from pure clay), it was painted red, representing warmth, maternal protection and new life. The element of fire on the surface of the altar represents the mother’s contact with the celestial forces, the paternal principle, the interaction of which creates the whole living world. The locals synchronized fire sacrifice with ritual observation of the cosmos and the sky they saw at the top of the hill where the Nebelivka Temple and its seven altars were located. This ceremonial centre was open to the infinite cosmos, stars, constellations and the Sun. This seems to be the best support for the hypothesis of celestial and terrestrial contacts. Therefore, cosmic and celestial phenomena played an extraordinary role in the design and functioning of Trypillian altars. This expression of sacred significance to the natural world is also known from other religious artefacts of the Trypillian world.

The shape of the altar can be seen as an important informational message. Since it is predominantly cruciform, this symbolic manifestation spread to other Cucuteni-Trypillian ritual plastics and was transmitted to the Indo-European and Slavic spiritual world as an important religious symbol. The proportions of the sacrifice on the cruciform altar correspond well with the later Christian “crucifixion on the cross”. This should be studied in more detail in a separate work.

The study documents the use of Trypillian altars in calendar cults. This is confirmed by actual paintings and engraved ornaments on the surfaces of the altars, as well as by the astronomical order in which the altars of the Nebelivka Temple were built. These altars can be called “cosmological altars”. They encoded the concepts of time, space and creation.

The function of the temple altars is linked to a liturgical calendar based on nature, in terms of the central ritual and its physical reconstruction. The physical arrangement of the built altars in the Nebelivka Temple and the temple balconies on the second floor specially designed for the contemplation of fire rituals (Zavalii, 2021: p. 6) allow us to reconstruct how the congregation passed through

the temple in a circular movement in observation of the sacred action. The division of the physical space in the Nebelivka Temple along the main ritual hall was in line with the cosmography of the circular settlement itself (Nebelivka Hypothesis, 2004) and thus may have created a hierarchy between different sectors of the community on the basis of their position or proximity to the altars, the main symbol of the temple and the actual ritual activities. Here we see that the hierarchy of the agricultural proto-city was not achieved through the size of the palaces built or through authoritarian rule. It was achieved through proximity to the sacred, something that had to be won in a large collective.

Since fire altars were found in almost every Trypillian house and were an indispensable feature of sanctuaries and temples, we can say that they were the basis of relationships, contact and an indicator of common identity. The inhabitants of the settlements transformed the landscape into a sacred geography with the help of altars. Altars could function simultaneously in each house under certain religious circumstances. They organized the space of the settlement and of each of the houses in such a way as to establish a direct link with the highest being. In this way, they sought to harmonize their existence with the forces that govern the cosmic rhythm and thus their lives, which are part of this rhythm. Altars could be seen as the “cornerstones” of the world and the cosmos. They were used to build social order and stable relationships. The system of public and domestic altars could have been a deep “cosmological web” based on models of cosmic behaviour and rhythms that governed all aspects of life in perfect harmony and gave meaning to ancient life. Therefore, the social function of the Trypillian altars is also being studied, in addition to their religious function.

## 9. Conclusion

Penetrating the spiritual depths of Eneolithic culture is a difficult task, since the concepts of modern man’s thinking do not coincide to a large extent with the thinking of man at the beginning of his civilized life. However, the sources of modern archaeology sufficiently “document” such a religious phenomenon as the “Trypillian altars”. This allows us to determine their typology, the specifics of their ritual purpose and their religious and social function.

In the example of the “Trypillian altars” we have seen another feature of the spiritual life of the bearers of the Cucuteni-Trypillian culture, which in the modern world is associated with the autochthonous population of the European peoples. Despite the fact that the “Trypillian altars” constitute a diverse group of religious objects in terms of size, shape, purpose and artistic design, the study has established a certain uniformity and consistency. Thus, a tradition in their construction and design has been established. A kind of “cathedral” character is evidenced by the typology of these spiritual creations and their prevalence in ancient settlements. It should be noted that the most common form of “Trypillian altar” is a cruciform fire altar. Such an altar form, in its figurative perception, was probably transferred, or perhaps borrowed, from later world religions.



However, the original symbolic function and worldview ideas embedded in such a “sacrificial cross” should be sought in the ancient religion of the agricultural type. It is important that this issue be further explored in separate works.

From the context of the official (national) temple altars, the Trypillian custom of building domestic fire altars in residential buildings may have been introduced. It was therefore a specific type of altar. It was transferred to the domestic sphere. It can be said that in the life of ancient settlements and proto-cities, fire altars played an important religious role. This is consistent with the idea that the Trypillians participated in a complex process of social relations united by religious beliefs. This cultural process can be seen in the assertion of an autochthonous people on their own land. This is evidenced by the widespread consecration of their territory through fire rituals on ancient altars.

The national or temple “Trypillian altars” refer to the fact that they were situated in characteristic or specially located places of public worship at a clearly defined point in time. The theme of the ritual altar fire in Trypillian temples and sanctuaries is fully correlated with annual cycles and lunar-solar calendar periods. We can say that the altar was integrated into time and space. It was this very presence in its place that made it sacred. The whole world order would be violated if this condition were violated. This thesis can also be supported by the fact that the cruciform “Trypillian altar” received its “revival” when sunlight entered the temple space, in fact the optical rotation was formed by the organized temple infrastructure and the movement of the sun across the sky. It is likely that the ancient farmers could see in their temple a “living” symbol of the rotation of the red fiery cross, created in the conditions of ritual. The altar’s visible connection with the natural world would have been disrupted by any disturbance in its orientation. As a microcosm of the unfolding of life, the “Trypillian altar” is revealed.

A unique and highly artistic phenomenon of the Eneolithic period is the religious art and miniatures of Trypillia, which represent the idea of “Trypillian altars”. Possessing the power of abstraction and a highly developed ability to reproduce an imaginary cosmography, the Trypillians created “ceramic” paintings. These paintings have not lost their relevance in the modern world. Such artifacts should be considered as objects of presentation of certain religious ideas that were used in ritual actions or were part of the primitive system of education and upbringing.

Using the example of religious objects such as the ancient fire altars of the agricultural ethnic group, and based on their experience, we can understand how to orient ourselves in the world according to the true structure of the Universe. Perhaps it is this example from the depths of history, that shows us how we can live a more meaningful and more peaceful life in the overall order of existence.

## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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