

# Reproduction of the Sacred Significance of the Ritual “Binocular” Plastic Arts of the Trypillia Culture

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## Abstract

The article deals with the analysis of the religious component in the manifestations of ritual plastic arts of the Trypillia ethno-cultural community. The author brings into consideration one of the “visiting cards” of the Trypillia civilization—“binocular” (biconical) ceramic plastic arts, which became one of the most characteristic visual markers of the culture.

## Keywords

Trypillia Culture, Trypillia “Binocular”, Ritual, Temple, Sacred Ritual, Prehistoric Religion

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## 1. Introduction

Binocular ware (biconical, doubled, binary)—a form of cult ceramics of Trypillia culture—is known from the early stage of development of agricultural ethno-cultural community and to the final stages of its existence (end of Trypillia A, first half V millennium BC—end of Trypillia CI—beginning C II, second half IV millennium BC) (Zavalii, 2020: p. 325). This shows that their idea belongs to the ancient ethnic substratum of the territory of the modern Ukraine, formed exclusively on the local soil. This is an indicator of a gap in creative achievements in comparison with other peoples.

The article proves that the Trypillia “binoculars” should be attributed to the ceramic plastic arts of cult purpose, as such plastic arts were not appropriate for domestic purposes. At the same time, archaeologists find such plastic arts in Trypillia sanctuaries, places of worship and dwellings. Binary wares were discovered during excavations of the first Trypillian temple near the village of Ne-

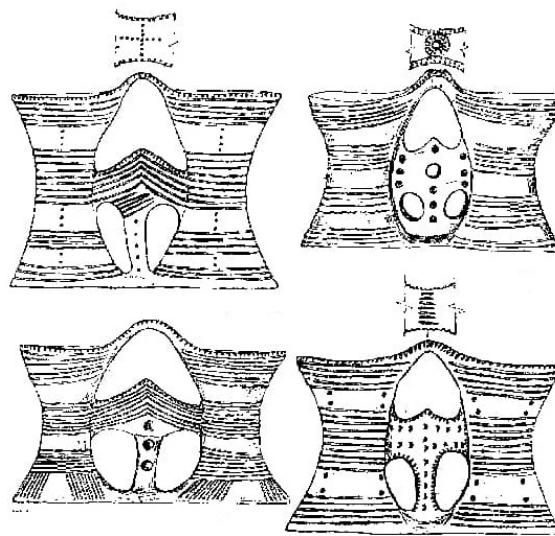
belivka in 2012 (Ukraine). Here the remains of such wares were found near one of the temple altars, which may testify to its sacral importance. In general, these ritual plastic arts can be traced to the places associated with the sphere of fire—the altars of fire. “Binocular” in the space of the altar hearth was probably an attribute of ritual actions, which required involvement of visible symbolic forms. The probable task of such a form is a symbolic expression of the idea of a holistic year, harmoniously divided in half from equinox to equinox.

On the basis of the study, it was established that relics of ritual “binocular” ceramics remained in ritual use by modern Ukrainians.

## 2. General Characteristics of the Study Object

For the first time Trypillian “binoculars” were introduced into scientific circulation by archaeologist V. Khvoyka. He sketched this unique ceramic plastic and in 1913 placed it on the title page of his work *Ancient inhabitants of the Middle Dnipro region and their culture in prehistoric times*. After summarising all the archaeological materials, V. Khvoika was amazed by the discovery and proposed that Trypillian settlements should be defined as “sacred, ancestral places” (*Trypillia Culture*, 1940: p. 24), whose descendants still inhabit these lands. Thus, the double ritual plastic arts, together with Trypillia culture, were opened to a wider audience **Figure 1**.

“Binoculars” have the appearance of two hollow bowls mirrored together vertically and with or without through-holes. The bowls and the middle sections of the cylinders are connected by lintels. There are also “binoculars” with two or three lintels. The middle lintels sometimes have anthropomorphic shapes, the shape of an equilateral cross, triple waves or a rhombus. The bowls and bases were ornamented with rows of short lines, triangles and festoons. The inner surfaces of the bowls were sometimes painted in the form of comets, infinities or lines. Typical Trypillian “binoculars” are shown in **Figure 2**.



**Figure 1.** Sketches of Trypillian “binoculars” from V. Khvoika’s excavations.



**Figure 2.** Specimens of Trypillian “binoculars” discovered on the territory of Ukraine.

“Binoculars” are found during the research of Trypillia sanctuaries, production complexes and buildings. There were cases of finds of such wares with internal filling with grain (Britskaya & Yesyunin, 2015: p. 156), burnt fragments, among which there were arrowheads (Bibikov, 1953: p. 147). There are finds with calcined animal bones and ashes (Burdo & Videiko, 2007: p. 388).

There are also so-called monocles (single form) and trinocles (triple form). It should be noted that among the general mass of Trypillian pottery, these items are extremely rare and date back to a later period. Most likely, such single and triple pottery is a late innovation in the worldview system of Trypillian ethnos, which took its symbolic meaning from quite widespread doubled products—“binoculars”.

### 3. Modern Studies of Trypillia “Binoculars”

The analysis of the last studies and publications on the specified problematics shows a certain diversity and considerable variability in an origin and meaning of the mysterious double crockery. Among versions of reproduction of sacral contents of the Trypillia “binoculars” ceramics there are both constructive and frankly mythological ones. For example, let us cite known to us probable versions of the Trypillia “binoculars” purpose: ash scatters, ritual drums, sacred wares for performing ritual watering of the Earth, wares for suggestion of rain, lamps, incense holders, candle holders, ritual ware, which was involved in magical practices, a space harmonizer, a resonator, the world’s first device for observing celestial processes, a seeder-fan, a watering can. According to the Soviet academician B. Rybakov, “paired” binocular funnels could serve to pour sacred water into them, thereby watering the earth (ritual watering of the earth) (Rybakov, 1965: pp. 16-17). I. Meianychuk regarded the “binoculars” as a reflection of the myth of the two sisters—ancestresses and patronesses of the phratries (Meianichuk, 1990: pp. 141-142), and V. Markevych suggested that paired structures are imitators of human figures (Spiritual world). In the publicist literature a popular theory was formed about the land-tilling ritual of Trypillians, during which a seed was sown by handfuls into one funnel of “binoculars” and water was poured into the other. Moreover, water was poured with small clay ornamented scoops and accompanied by magical incantations—voloshba (witchcraft) (The secrets). Here it seems that form tries to prevail over the content. A confirmation of this can be seen in the group of Trypillia binocular wares, which

do not have through-holes in their structure. For example, the binocular wares of Tomashivka group do not have through-holes, but they retain all the traditional iconography. In this case they are not suitable for shedding or spilling any materials. The question arises: do the marked wares lose their sacred meaning in such a case?

N. Nikolova proposed to consider Trypillia “binoculars” from the position of “all-seeing eyes” capable of “considering”, “invisible” mechanisms of the Universe movement: “... turning “binoculars” by 180°, we begin to distinguish the contours of human face in place of the usual lintel. Therefore, according to this symbolic logic, the true “face” of the Universe “emerges” (becomes visible, perceptible) only when a man guesses, comprehending the hidden laws of the world order, to turn the existing visible “picture” of the world “upside down” (Nikolova, 2011: p. 55)—N. Nikolova believes.

The narrow understanding of agricultural double ceramic plastic, as a ware for placing someone or something in it, or frankly occult variants, where the ceramic inventory turns out to be a kind of magical telescope, in the opinion of the author - is the mortification of the cult symbol-image of the Trypillia civilization to the level of an object. Understanding the Trypillia “binoculars” by the regularities of the main features of religious consciousness of Eneolithic man, it will be able to leave the object-material field, reaching the sacramental. There will be a place to spill water through it, and for someone it will be a “ritual drum”. In this paragraph of the article we would like to emphasise that form cannot prevail over the essence.

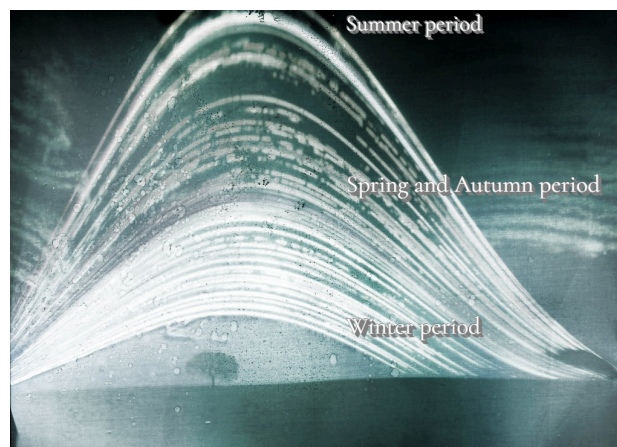
Unfortunately, there are still no grounds to consider one or the other opinion as proven. Nevertheless, in the study of the phenomenon of the Trypillia culture there is an increasing emphasis on shifting the emphasis from purely material concepts to their philosophical and conceptual comprehension. This is what can already be attributed to the sphere of religious studies. Complex and comparative analysis of archaeological monuments, knowledge about religious and mythological views of Trypillians, parallels with the myths of Indo-European ethnic groups and findings of modern religious relics allow to approach the sacral significance of Trypillian ritual plastic arts in a new way.

#### **4. Reproduction of the Sacred Significance of the Trypillia “Binoculars”**

The duration of the mentioned ritual plastic arts to the places connected with sacred actions—sacred places of the Trypillia culture is traced. “Binoculars” in the space of the altar hearth, undoubtedly, were an attribute of ritual actions, which required the involvement of visible symbolic forms.

The significance of the double ware was significantly strengthened with the discovery of the Nebelivka temple of the Trypillia culture. On one of the seven altars of the temple, archaeologists find fragments of so-called “binoculars” (Archaeologists told). Moreover, these “binoculars” were placed on the altar itself (Videiko & Burdo, 2020: p. 248), as if they were the main sacral symbol. It

should be noted once again that the temple building itself was destroyed during the Trypillian ritual of cyclic burning/renovation, and the inventory during the rituals was arranged in the same way as it was used in the permanent practice. From this it is clear that the temple “binoculars” were one of the main attributes of the temple’s sacred actions and were used in the most sacred place - directly on the altar of fire. It is important to emphasize that the binocular ritual plastic arts was placed on the probable main temple altar, oriented to the point of the annual equinoxes and was located on one line with the “solar corridor” through which the sunlight of the annual mysteries passed. In the same place, the Nebelivka Disk (astronomical calendar of Trypillians) was found with a group of chips to it. Such concentration of special temple relics at the altar of fire, which in the structure of the temple was aimed at the sacral-spatial event of the solar energy entry at the equinox, suggests a certain connection of artefacts with the altar, which accordingly is transferred to the meaning of annual events in the structure of the temple itself. According to the author, it is worth paying attention to the fact that both the temple altar, the calendar “Disk”, and the Trypillia binoculars have interrelated symbols in their structure, which may implicitly point to the “year circle” sacralised in the Trypillia society. Such a mutual symbol seems to be the “three circles” drawn on the surface of the altar and the “Disc”, which in the volumetric axonometry of molded clay “binoculars” received the expression of three lintels. The genesis of this three-syllable symbol is probably hidden in the visible path of the sun over the horizon in summer, winter and spring and autumn. The whole sacred Trypillian Year (like the modern one) can be divided into four seasons (in the geographical latitudes of spread of the Trypillia culture) and also into three milestones of the solar way over the horizon: in the summer the Sun over the horizon marks its highest way, the first, conventionally biggest circle; in the autumn and spring the Sun over the horizon marks the middle of the horizon, the conventional middle circle; in the winter the Sun descends to its lowest position, thus marking the smallest circle. And so on forever. In order to visualise the process described, we include **Figure 3** in the structure of the article, which depicts the process presented.



**Figure 3.** Visible path of the Sun above the horizon for a year (Solography).

The division of the annual Trypillian sky into three conditional sectors can also be confirmed from other Trypillia ritual artefacts. For example, in the Spiritual Centre of the Religion of Trypillia there is a ritual Trypillian dish in the form of a circle divided in half, which seems to be carried by two Aurochs, and the entire composition is arranged on four legs. It is indicative that through all the conventional circle of the ritual bowl, three ribbons are clearly drawn that connect the entire composition. According to the conclusions of the religious organization it is nothing but an artefact of calendar interpretation, and three lines through all composition of the artefact are the visible way of the Sun above the horizon in its main astronomical passages on the solstice and equinox (The secret code). Such lines (as well as three lintels of “binoculars”, which are sometimes supplemented in the overall composition also by four conditional holes **Figure 2**, which can be interpreted as the four seasons) served for the ancient Trypillians as doubtless evidence of God’s intervention in the affairs of people, even the Trypillian settlements were built of three circles **Figure 4**, or surrounded by three moats.

There are known cases of the use of doubled rings in buildings and doubled ditches around settlements (as well as two lintels of “binoculars”), which, transferred to cosmological landmarks, could denote the path of the sun in the two main annual positions above the horizon - summer and winter. It is also a quite revealing that the plot from the Trypillian plastic arts, where a person is depicted near a Tree (probably the World Tree), and the whole composition is enclosed in three-syllable and four-syllable wavy lines (Khvoyka, 2010: p. 68) **Figure 5**.

In the light of this study, such sacred iconography can be understood as the unity of man with the natural world and the sacred Year, which in this case is metaphorically represented by wavy lines: three lines represent three key positions of the Sun in the horizontal projection over the eastern horizon in a year;



**Figure 4.** Magnetic survey of a part of Trypillia proto-city of Maidanetske (Ukraine) with three building lines shown.



**Figure 5.** Fragment of the Trypillian sacred iconography with the plot of a man, the World Tree and wavy lines.

four lines represent the four seasons. Such a plot can be understood as the unity of man with nature, where human essence does not oppose or exceed the laws of nature, but is rooted in them. Consequently, the eternal regularity of visible celestial symbols probably formed the corresponding sacred iconography in ancient religion of the cosmological type, which obviously did not bypass the Trypillia “binoculars” we are studying. It is known that in early cultures there was a widespread view of the world “as above, so below”. The Trypillians were probably no exception. We find every reason to link their spatial cosmology with the expressive symbols of religious culture. Moreover, such a system establishes a simple and clear relationship between astronomical phenomena, observations of the sky and the counting of time on earth. From this it may also arise the semantic solution of the later motifs common in European folklore of the reliance of the earth on three animals: keeping the earth on three whales, three elephants, bulls, boars, etc.

In the hymns of the Rigveda, the God of the year is chanted, whose head consists of two parts. In the Mahabharata we find a riddle which deals with three hundred and sixty cows giving birth to one calf (360 days of the archaic year). It is allowed to feed on milk only twice a year (Guseva, 1996: p. 20). Here it is also appropriate to recall the “day of the gods” of Vedic literature dedicated to half of the year (Guseva, 1996: p. 23). All this clearly represents the archaic ideas of a holistic year, harmoniously divided into two halves of the year.

The above evidence may suggest that the Trypillia binoculars could serve as a kind of symbol of calendar events or a symbol of the whole annual circle harmoniously divided by the equinoxes - two bowls, in half. In general, the “binoculars” often repeat the symbolism inherent to the calendar artefacts - infinities, spiralled “comets”, numerical indicators, which in the light of the study of Nebelivka Disk of the Trypillia culture (Zavalii, 2021) indicate the year system (for example, five lines on each bowl leading to a year of ten periods, or circular depressions, which also give a total score of ten). In addition, it is noticed that the upper lintel of “binoculars” was predominantly performed by a wave, i.e. the symbol with which the Sun draws its visual movement above the horizon.

Fragments of “binoculars” were also found in the cultural layer around the Nebelivka temple (Cultural heritage), that is, during the existence of the sacred construction and conducting services in it, some amount of this ritual plastic arts was broken, probably during the rituals associated with the passage of “reference points” of the annual circle possibly the New Year. On the verge of the Old and the New Year both space and time lose their former structure, “break off”, there remains only a united space-time point which becomes the embryo of the future space and the future time. Therefore old objects are ritually destroyed at this space-time boundary. In any case, the destruction of sacral objects to mark the passing or leaving “old time” is quite common archaic practice, including in the Trypillia ethno-cultural complex and can be attributed to the destruction of the Trypillia “binoculars”.

The proposed model of the cult Trypillian plastic arts suggests the existence of a kind of cosmic order in the religion of ancient farmers – a universal cycle, which can best be expressed by duality (equality of two opposites), which simultaneously helps to cognise the One. The harmonious symmetry of Trypillian double pottery pieces in the figurative perception awakens a state of balance, as if the “binoculars” are ancient scales, the scales of which hold the Universe itself in its original steadfastness. Here, it seems that the sacred power of the Universe brings Heaven and Earth into interaction, unites the four seasons together with the three milestones of the solar path from equinox to equinox, and these forces unavoidably rule the course of all things. This is how the silent Trypillian plastic art is “read”, which was probably based on the religious idea of eternal cosmic movement.

## 5. Relicts of Trypillia “Binocular” Wares in Ukrainian Culture

The tradition of using doubled wares in New Year rituals and special sacred acts reaches modern Ukrainians. Thus, a fundamental work by V. Shukhevych’s *Hutsulshchyna* provides data on the use of “kononovka” (aka “twin”—doubled ceramic wares) by Hutsuls during New Year’s rituals: “At the very moment of the New Year, at night from Malanka to Vasyl, the Hutsuls go out into the courtyard and look up into the sky... At midnight, a man goes with bread and a mug,



and pours bread into the water three times, saying: ‘Not bathing bread in water, but me in health and strength; then he pours water into the mug’ and invokes: ‘I take no water, but honey and wine!’” (Shukhevych’s, 2018: p. 823). Kononovkas were also used for ritual purposes by girls on the Jordan holiday (Shukhevych’s, 2018: p. 829).

During the author’s field research, relics of doubled wares, which are used exclusively for ritual purposes and once a year during the consecration of meals and ritual dinners, were found in museums in Hutsulshchyna (Ukraine). In this ethno-cultural Ukrainian region they are called Easter wares (paskivnytsia). Thus, in the village of Kryvorivnia (Verkhovyna district) in Ivan Franko Literary Memorial Museum unique pieces of wooden Easter wares of the 19th century are preserved. What attracts attention is that two preserved items have symbols that do not correspond to Christian canons, but rather display symbols of the ancient periods of spiritual life of Ukrainians. The following can be distinguished from the basics: four-sided compositions marked squares (the symbol of the world, expanding in all directions), thunders (perunytsia), octagonal stars, popularly called Alatyry, circles with marked centres, the symbolism of trees (the World Tree or Tree of Life). In the centre of each of the “binoculars” is a new moon (the Moon), in contrast to which the symbol of the Sun is depicted diagonally—this recalls one of the oldest Eneolithic dichotomies—day/night. According to the curator of Ivan Franko Literary Memorial Museum, this duality in the ritual Hutsul crockery was necessary for the consecration to carry food in different baskets, to divide the meat and bread. Contrary to this version in the Hutsul museum (Verkhovyna village), a local historian and one of the museum founders Yu. Krechuniak (Krechunyak, 2019) reported that such dual ritual wares divided the dish for donations for the church and for the family consumption of consecrated food. The third version of the purpose of the “wooden binoculars” was obtained by the author of the article at the Kosiv Museum of Folk Art and Life of Hutsulshchyna. Here the young guide explained the purpose of the double “basket” by explaining that traditional families were large, so the dish for the consecration had to be carried in large volumes. Having received information from various parts of the Hutsul region, it became clear that the double ritual “basket” was particularly old. So old, in fact, that it is impossible to remember its true origin and purpose.

The traditions of carrying kutia and uzvar in twin pots (Posivaylo, 1993: p. 210), have also survived to our time in the Left Bank Ukraine, and the famous twin cups, designed for carrying dishes to the reapers in the field, do they trace their ancestry from the most ancient cosmological symbol of Trypillia “binocular”? Such formulation of the question does not raise doubts in a positive answer, because as there are no analogues of such archaeological plastic arts in the world, and there are no analogues to the doubled ritual “paskivnytsia”- “kononovka”. Consequently, the mental and spiritual heredity from the Eneolithic ancestors to the modern Ukrainians can be traced clearly and distinctly enough.

## 6. Conclusion

On the basis of the study, it is established that the probable task of the Trypillia “binocular” form is to express the symbolic idea of a holistic Year, harmoniously divided in half from equinox to equinox. The semantic load of such an artefact can perfectly illustrate aspects of Trypillian religion. We should expect that their religion played a key role in prehistoric, economic and social life and, therefore, in the creation of an “archaeological record” of this type.

Trypillian society followed its own spiritual path, creating and developing ideas that have come down to us in the form of such symbolic artefacts. The doubled wares are not mere ritual objects, not a mere archaeological monument, but a unique vision of the world which the Trypillians understood and portrayed perfectly. The ritual manipulation of such a doubled image in the course of archaic sacred acts could consecrate the meaning of the cyclic Year (Year-Universe) as a universal symbol into which everything is included and all is included. The above iconographic example of the symbolic combination of the Trypillian man with the system of the Year (**Figure 5**) may further support such a hypothesis. From this, it is assumed that one of the highest (supreme) cosmological principles of the Trypillian religion can be the so-called holistic “Year-Universe”—a religious phenomenon of the ancient world, which is consistent with the modern concept of the Universe and with which at certain points of the Year (holidays) archaic man entered the state of the One.

As part of the general concept of the Trypillia “binoculars” is gaining strength in its understanding as a cosmological reflection of the sacred Year (eternal cosmic rotation), a spiritual substance, with the potential to awaken archetypes of consciousness, which with a certain actualization can act as a catalyst to “recall” the experience of our distant historical ancestors.

Ukrainians are the nation that has managed to preserve the cosmological symbolic relics of doubled crockery in their own culture, which are still reproduced in different parts of Ukraine.

## Conflicts of Interest

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

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