Anthropomorphic Representations in the Cucuteni-Tripolye Culture

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Cover image: The 'Council of the Goddesses' cult complex from Poduri. Photo by C. Preoteasa

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Acknowledgements

The idea of this English edition on the Cucuteni-Tripolye anthropomorphic plastic art was born of a series of lectures I delivered in the UK in 2001, at the suggestion of my good friend John Chapman. John, who knew my activity and was also familiar with my study of the anthropomorphic plastic art that I had already published in Romania (Monah, 1997), came up with the idea to organise a cycle of lectures on the religious ideas of the Cucuteni-Tripolye tribes, to be delivered at conferences in Durham, Cambridge, London and Oxford. I held the first lecture on the 16th of October 2001, in the cordial setting provided by the Research Centre for the Archaeology of Central and Eastern Europe, within the University of Durham. On account of its very favourable reception by the audience, which also consisted of outsiders, the conference was a success. Encouraged by the feedback I received in Durham, I headed to London, where, on the 23rd of October I delivered the lecture entitled *Religious Beliefs as Reflected in Cucuteni Neolithic Anthropomorphic Figurines*. The conference was held at the University College London — Institute of Archaeology, masterfully organised by Professor Stephen Shennan. The unexpectedly numerous and interested audience brought me great joy and satisfaction. I was asked numerous questions, and several observations were made concerning aspects of the lecture. The following stop was at Cambridge University — the McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, on the 29th of October, where the conference was organised by Professor Colin Renfrew. The lecture was attended by numerous students and PhD candidates who seemed quite interested in the conference. Finally, I delivered the last lecture at the University of Oxford — the Institute of Archaeology, in a conference chaired by the quaint Professor Andrew Sherratt.

My deepest gratitude is directed to all those who contributed to the organisation and success of the abovementioned conferences cycle.

In 2003, on the occasion of a research trip to Cardiff, I had the opportunity to encounter Professor Douglass Bailey I had known for some time after we met in Romania. The colleague from Cardiff gave me a first edition of his book on the Neolithic figurines (Bailey, 2005a). I was rather surprised by the interpretations set forth by Professor Bailey and, during the passionate discussions we had, I furnished numerous and highly relevant examples from the Cucuteni-Tripolye area that contradicted his hypothesis. He then told me that Cucuteni and Tripolye were exceptional cases. Indeed, in the book he published soon after our discussion, in the chapter dedicated to the Cucuteni-Tripolye cultures (Bailey, 2005a: 88–121) the author seemed more open to the traditional interpretation of the anthropomorphic figurines and statuettes. I am grateful to D. Bailey, though he failed to convince me, for the interesting and highly useful discussion we had in Cardiff. With John Chapman I discussed on several occasions in Romania and in the UK about his interesting theory regarding fragmentation in archaeology; we also tackled some of the hypotheses I set forth in my work on the Cucuteni-Tripolye anthropomorphic plastic art. I made the most of these discussions and, as such, I am grateful to him.

During the research stages I conducted in Great Britain, in the framework of the Romanian-British inter-academic exchanges, I had the opportunity to further my research in the vast field of prehistoric religions. To the individuals who made these stages in the exceptional British libraries possible, to the Romanian and particularly to British Academy, I pay my sincerest gratitude. On the occasion of several research trips to the Republic of Moldova and to Ukraine, but also of some scientific symposiums organised in Piatra Neamț, I had the chance to discuss about the anthropomorphic plastic art and the religion of the Cucuteni-Tripolye tribes with Tamara G. Movsha, Elena Tsvek, Vladimir G. Zbenovich, Vladimir A. Kruk, Mikhail Yu. Videyko, Natalya V. Burdo (Ukraine), and Veaceslav M. Bicbaev (Republic of Moldova). I equally assure them all of my full gratitude.

Thanks to a sponsorship from Professor Romeo Dumitrescu, president of the 'Cucuteni for the 3rd Millennium Foundation' from Bucharest, I recommenced in 2000 the excavations of the Chalcolithic tell from Poduri–*Dealul Ghindaru*. The new investigations, unfortunately discontinued after only a few years, produced a number of interesting discoveries that brought new arguments for the interpretation of the Cucuteni-Tripolye statuettes as sacred objects. For all his help, I warmly thank Professor Romeo Dumitrescu and the 'Cucuteni for the 3rd Millennium Foundation'.

My gratitude also goes to my colleagues Veaceslav Bicbaev (Chișinău), and Dumitru Boghian and Sorin Ignătescu (Suceava), discoverers of the interesting vessels with human silhouettes from Sofia (the Republic of Moldova) and, respectively, Fetești–*La Schit*, who consented to illustrating the artefacts in my study.

Prior to elaborating this edition meant for the English-speaking readers, I published in Piatra Neamț the second edition, revised and supplemented, of the volume on the Cucuteni-Tripolye anthropomorphic plastic art (Monah, 2012), in which I attempted to assimilate the newest discoveries in the Cucuteni-Tripolye area, and to draw some conclusions on the Neolithic anthropomorphic plastic art. The publishing was made possible by the invaluable help lent by Gheorghe Dumitroaia, director of the Neamț County Museum Complex, and by our younger colleague Daniel Garvăn. I thank them both and I assure them of my deepest gratitude.

Obviously, this edition, addressed to the foreign readers, differs from the Romanian edition published in 2012. On this occasion too, my colleagues Gheorghe Dumitroaia and Daniel Garvăn provided me with invaluable support, for which I am extremely grateful.

Introduction

Engaging in the study of prehistoric religions is, beyond any doubt, a brave and even hazardous endeavour 'since the archaeological documents present to us a fragmentary and even mutilated perspective of life and religious thinking' (Eliade, 1981: 52). But more so, I find the quest over the shifting sands of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic symbolism and iconography of the Neolithic in Southeastern Europe, without relying on a set of pre-elaborated rules of investigation, to be a senseless and doomed enterprise from the scientific point of view. Yet closely watching the Romanian, Soviet, and, more recently, Ukrainian literature dedicated to the prehistoric religions, we notice the adoption of mainly two methods (Eliade and Culianu, 1993: 241): dismissal of any model, with the author building his interpretation on the impression left by the object or situation discovered, an impression determined, at a subliminal level, by the author's cultural heritage; the second method consists of the comparative use of ethnographic religions, as well as of those recorded in ancient times. Obviously, the first method does not suit us, and I will therefore adopt the latter, which seems to be scientifically motivated (Eliade, 1994a: 91–116) and which offers more chances to get closer to the prehistoric ideas and mentalities. But even for this approach I will propose a minimal set of rules grounded on rationales adapted to the respective phenomena, as well as on the experience I've gathered so far.

Through this catechism, subject to debates and amendments, I try to eliminate as much as possible of the subjectivity and voluntarism, so tempting for a researcher. I admit to not being touched by the materialistic and reductionist interpretations, and by the so-called scientific atheism to which I have been subjected my entire life. Nevertheless, I do not deny the credit of the Marxist analyses that imbued the study of the religious phenomenon with elements from the economic and social sphere and which can sometimes shed some light in the labyrinth of religious ideas. I subscribe to Mircea Eliade's contention that '... a religious phenomenon will not unveil itself if not considered in its own modality that is studied at religious level' (Eliade, 1992a: 15). And this can be done only through confrontation with the less obscure religious sources. Nevertheless, we have to take into account the fact that each religious belief is unique and that religion, as a human phenomenon, includes social and economic elements, and a certain lifestyle (foraging, pastoral, sedentary agrarian, etc.) that determines specific behaviours and religious representations.

A first rule that should be strictly observed by any archaeologist, not only when studying the religious phenomenon, is to not start an investigation with preconceived ideas. To consider, on grounds of its age, that a population is incapable of performances unknown to archaeological research means to cancel from the very beginning the motivation behind the investigation.

In my opinion, the researcher should adapt his interpretations to the archaeological realities and should not forget that even the religious practices of the contemporary 'primitives' are part of a coherent and elevated system of thinking, although we, as modern Europeans, find their non-Cartesian reasoning absurd. We have no reasons to consider the prehistoric religious systems as simple, primitive, or undeveloped. This type of prejudices can only reveal the investigator's poor intellectual thinking and will not contribute to the expansion of our knowledge of prehistoric religions.

Typology, still held in high regard by archaeologists, is based on the assumption of an evolution from simple to complex, a phenomenon lacking a proven logical foundation, as well as on the analysis of the form and details of the artefact. It was expected for the dominant method in archaeology, also under the influence of historical materialism, to prevail in the analysis of the religious ideas and representations. This consequently led to the classification of religions into a hierarchy that culminates with monotheism. If for the objects from the sphere of the material world an evolution from simple to complex can, with caution, be accepted, a similar evolution of the religious phenomenon, as Mircea Eliade argues, cannot be proven (Eliade, 1992a: 16).

Surprising was the fact that, when describing and interpreting the artefacts related to the religious phenomenon, the formal analysis, the tyrannical ruler of the archaeological world, to which other categories of objects are usually subjected to, was not applied with the same expected rigour. Even if there are numerous statuettes simultaneously displaying the male sex organ and breasts (female secondary sexual element), and this detail has been noticed by archaeologists, its significance has not been discussed until recently, the 'correction' of the drawings being sometimes preferred instead. The method consisting of 'thickening', completing and 'rectifying' the image was once used at rather large scale for the Palaeolithic cave paintings, but also by Arthur Evans and Émile Gilléron for the Minoan frescoes. Unfortunately, even today when scientific rigour is so often invoked, undesired 'rectifications' are still practised. Needless to say, this 'research' method is inadmissible. The risks of such 'drifts' can only be mitigated by the strict compliance with the iron rule of

archaeological research, namely carefully registering the images and discovery conditions even if this contravenes our logic as modern people.

It is interesting, surprising and even amusing to find among prehistorians, reputed as 'tough' and adventurous spirits, a great shyness, an 'intimidation' (in the sense provided by George Bernard Shaw's hero, Mr Doolittle) when faced to the new and the novel. The unjustified 'shyness' of the archaeologists is often translated into the mechanical rush after analogies, most of the time irrelevant (Gramatopol, 1982: 18-19). The key to the interpretation and explanation of certain items and situations in the sacred sphere is to be found, in my opinion, only in the analysis of the mythologies preserved.

The reflex of the East-European archaeologists is to avoid the apparent shocking representation of the hermaphrodite, by resorting to a childish explanation, ignoring, in establishing shares, the fact that most statuettes are fragmentary. Nevertheless, theme of the androgynous deity occupies an important place in the history of religions. The strategy of avoiding the apparently weak points does not contribute to the progress of this discipline and we sometimes have to substitute our modern European logic and rationalism by a good knowledge of the universal mythology. In order to regain the optimism shaken by the above critiques, to quote Eliade again, '... we should not forget that religions constitute a polymorphous and sometimes chaotic mass of gestures, beliefs and theories ...' (Eliade, 1992a: 16) that are sometimes contradictory and cannot be classified according to modern reasoning. Faced with this discouraging paradox, all we can do is understand the fact that archaeology has some limits we should be aware of and respect. We will never be able to recreate the mythology and nomenclature of the pantheon of illiterate peoples. As such, it is meaningless to invent mythologies and names of gods. But even if the Neolithic and Chalcolithic myths and rituals are irremediably lost, their traces are still found in ancient mythologies and folk beliefs (Eliade, 1981: 144–145; Cauvin, 1994: 268–270). To not try to make use of them would mean renouncing a good part mankind's history.

The end of the Chalcolithic in Southeastern Europe was followed by a transition period during which the economic, social, and certainly the religious structures were greatly disturbed. Nonetheless, there is nothing less scientific than to accept theory of catastrophes and believe that such brilliant civilisations could have disappeared without leaving profound and persistent traces discernible in the conscience of the succeeding populations. Even the area's geographic configuration opposes such an interpretation. The mountain chains (the Carpathians, the Balkans, the Dinaric Alps, the Rhodopes, the Rila, and the Pindus, etc.), the Danube Delta and particularly the numerous forested massifs provided the ancient population with natural strongholds in which they were able to preserve their cultural and especially religious identity. The remarkable demographic density of the Cucuteni culture, in particular, worked as a supplementary factor for the persistence of the Neolithic *Weltanschauung*. Beyond any doubt, the newcomers, who found themselves in a better ecological relationship with the natural environment at the end of the Atlantic, corrupted the old populations to their lifestyle (Monah and Cucoș, 1985: 184–185) and exerted a strong influence on their religious beliefs. But, as shown by Pierre Lévêque in the case of Greece, this influence was not exerted unidirectionally. The strong Chalcolithic substratum reacted in force and, according to the French scholar, determined '… la catastrophe des structures indo-européennes dans la religion greque' (Lévêque, 1972: 179). A similar phenomenon can be assumed to have taken place in Southeastern Europe. In support of the French scientist's theory comes the observation that Neolithic substratum survived up to the Modern Age, especially in the Balkan Peninsula, in Romania and in the entire Southeastern Europe. This interpretation is supported and contended by R. Vulcănescu (1985). Even though of the many examples proposed by the author some interpretations and hypotheses are, from an archaeological point of view, doubtful, R. Vulcănescu succeeds in highlighting the existence of a prehistoric, mostly Neolithic, substratum in Romanian mythology. Adrian Poruciuc (2010) has recently tackled this issue and brought into discussion certain prehistoric themes and symbols surviving in the folklore of Southeastern Europe and particularly in the Romanian one.

Few scientists succeeded in revealing the documentary value and the persistence of the historic tradition more than Gheorghe Brătianu (1980: 16–48), Mircea Eliade (1970: 9–11) and Al. Busuioceanu (1985), and particularly the survival of ancestral beliefs and religious rituals (Dumézil, 1974: 10; Eliade, 1957: 22). Nothing is more instructive and convincing than the 'adventure' of the Getae-Dacian myth of Zalmoxis, transplanted and perpetuated for hundreds and hundreds of years in a country, namely Spain, in which the substratum from which it sprung does not exist.

The results of the investigations performed by archaeologists and historians of religions certify as acceptable the idea that the Neolithic religions, at least in the Near East and Southeastern Europe, were rather uniform, with similar manifestations. Since the religious beliefs are mental creations of certain individuals accepted by one or more communities, we will also notice many differences especially with respect to rituals. The doctrinal basis, if I can refer to it this way, will be rather uniform.

Without entering into further explanation regarding the emergence of the religious ideas and beliefs, I should

point out that the Neolithic Revolution was probably determined by a revolution of symbols, a religious upheaval (Cauvin, 1994) bringing to the fore the mystery of birth–death–rebirth and the entire agrarian mythology. E. Neumann's research, based especially on the concept of archetypes, embraced by M. Eliade and J. Cauvin, explains to a large extent not only the unity of the Anatolian-Balkan spiritual world but also the similarities with geographic areas with which cultural exchanges are excluded (Central America, Africa, Polynesia). In order to highlight the spiritual unity of the Neolithic world of the region in question, I also invoke the genetic relationship (in the Starčevo-Vinča horizon) between the East European Neolithic and the Anatolian one, a relationship proven from an archaeological point of view. The issue of the mechanism (acculturation or migration) leading to the emergence of the European Neolithic falls outside the purpose of this volume. The spiritual (read religious) unity of the two regions is more important at this point.

As previously stated, extremely though-provoking is the issue of continuity, of transmitting the Neolithic religious ideas and beliefs, of certain myths specific to the later ages, a phenomenon on the basis of which we can attempt to decipher symbols that passed on.

Mircea Eliade somehow regrets that, although the cult of the bull is attested in the Danube regions, it does not provide evidence for its sacrifice, as it does in Crete and the Neolithic cultures of the Indus River. He also claims that '... god representations or the Mother Goddess – Child iconographic ensembles, so common in the East, are relatively rare in the Danube regions' (Eliade, 1981: 50). Unknown to Eliade, this evidence exists, a result of the research carried out over the last four decades, to be presented and discussed in the following pages. Special attention should also be paid to the hierogamies in which the women are associated with bulls, as revealed by an exceptional Gumelnițan item and by symbolic representations on Cucutenian ceramics, a topic I will briefly touch in this work. As far as bull sacrifices are concerned, the sanctuary with bull heads discovered at Poduri–*Dealul Ghindaru* (Monah *et al.*, 1982: 10) provides some answers. To this we can add more ritual pits attesting the sacrifice of the bull (Cotiugă and Haimovici, 2004: 320). The accumulation of information resulting from archaeological research has lately accelerated, and therefore the elaboration of definite conclusions is not yet possible.

But, returning to the issue of the persistence of some religious beliefs under the cover of mythology, although I am only interested in the validation of the method I intend to use, I will also bring to attention some exciting archaeological discoveries for which I found striking analogies between the ancient mythology and the Romanian and Balkan folklore.

The bone plate in the shape of a bucranium with an engraved feminine silhouette from Bilche Zolote (Bilcze Złote) is well-known and it can be corroborated with Tripolye discoveries of feminine silhouettes placed on bull skulls. In the same circle of hierogamic representations of the bull we can place the splendid Gumelnița item published by Vl. Dumitrescu (1977: 577–583, fig. 1 a–b) depicting the goddess seated on the forehead of a bull, with her hands grasping onto the horns (Fig. 45/7a–c).

Although I don't intend to analyse here the continuity of certain Neolithic mythological themes, I are forced to notice their demonstrated persistence in the Southeastern European area (Poruciuc, 2010: 18–23). Faced with the Cucutenian and Gumelnițan bull hierogamies, even the greatest sceptics are forced to reflect upon the presence, within the same area, of the legend relating Europa's kidnapping by Zeus and the numerous 'maidenhood' carols in which the female character swings in a swing suspended by the horns of the bull (Buhociu, 1979: 146). The Olt River, the Dniester and even the Black Sea are crossed by bulls holding girls between their horns and the frequency of this folkloric motif can only be the reflex of an extremely powerful archaic belief. How old this belief is and whether it is rooted in the Neolithic period is an issue open to debate, but a prudent approach to the problem of continuity of certain ideas and religious beliefs cannot be avoided.

The existence of a powerful Neolithic substratum, which is not the main focus of this volume, can be proven even at the present state of archaeological research. Instead, I aim to carry out an analysis as comprehensive as possible of a limited segment of the Chalcolithic spirituality, namely the anthropomorphic representations of the Cucuteni-Tripolye culture.

In the analysis of the religious phenomenon, the archaeologist is forced to work on iconographic fragments, on abstract symbols, images with contradictory interpretations. In this analysis, the impression left by the object or situation discovered is overwhelming and irreplaceable. It can only be attenuated by a minute comparative analysis and, as a last resort, by an empirical statistics. At this point, additional explanation is absolutely necessary. I am not in favour of using statistics in the analysis of the religious phenomenon, since it is not governed by objective necessities and there is no rule of proportionality between the number of representations and the importance of the mythological character or its position in the pantheon. Still, many archaeologists continue to carry out statistical analyses, limiting their research to anthropomorphic statues and figurines. The most widely used statistics concerns the gender of the statuettes and figurines, divided into masculine and feminine representations, the latter prevailing over the former. All the statistic studies are presented as rigorous,

although the material analysed is fragmentary and, very often, the gender of the representation cannot be indicated. The androgynous representations, although noticed by archaeologists, are not included in the statistical assessments (Pogozheva, 1983). Moreover, not even the synecdoctic representations, using the *pars pro toto* principle, are taken into consideration. It is obvious for any observer that the feminine representations are more numerous than the masculine or androgynous ones, but in order to acknowledge this fact there is no need for percentages with two decimal places, but only for an assessment in the empirical terms of more or less. Statistics cannot be used in the analysis of the religious phenomenon and it is not indeed relevant for assessing the importance of some mythic or sacred characters. Still, I do not dismiss the importance of a quantitative appreciation, which can bear some relevance.

Before ending the introductory chapter, I must state my position regarding some important aspects. In the communist period, the prehistoric cultures were secretly considered 'national assets', thus alluding to connections with the modern nations. Although the majority of the prehistorians did not consent to such an approach, in some cases, because of censorship, self-censorship and isolation of the researchers, some prehistoric cultures, though they most often spread beyond the national borders, were studied as discrete entities. From this point of view, the Cucuteni and Tripolye cultures made no exception. The discoveries on Romanian territory were called Cucuteni, and those from Ukraine, including those made on formerly Polish lands and in Bessarabia, were called Tripolye. In the interwar period the discoveries made in Bessarabia were called Cucuteni, but after the ware they were again called Tripolye by the winner, which annexed the area between the Prut and the Dniester.

The archaeological reality is nevertheless a lot more complicated, and, consequently, I shall continue to use the term 'Cucuteni–Tripolye cultural complex', which includes, according to some Romanian researchers, the Precucuteni, Cucuteni and Tripolye A-C_I cultures. Generally, Romanian researchers consider the Tripolye $C_{II-\gamma II}$ phase as being a post-Cucuteni manifestation with strong steppe influences. For reasons of style, the stiffer syntagma 'Cucuteni–Tripolye cultural complex' is sometimes replaced with 'Cucuteni–Tripolye culture' (Sorochin, 1994: 28). Sometimes, Cucuteni and Tripolye are considered a single archaeological culture (Vl. Dumitrescu, 1963a and 1963b; A. László, 2008: 15) although Romanian archaeologists also distinguish a Precucuteni culture. As far as I'm concerned, I regard, along with other researchers (Vl. Dumitrescu *et al.,* 1954: 520, 531; Monah, 1993: 151–153; Burdo, 2005: 75–84), the Precucuteni culture to be a manifestation organically connected to the Cucuteni culture, practically a phase of the Cucuteni cultural complex. For a number of reasons, I did not carry out a detailed analysis of the Precucuteni anthropomorphic plastic art and representations. My PhD thesis, the starting point of the two editions, published as *The Anthropomorphic Plastic Art of the Cucuteni-Tripolye Culture* (in Romanian, Piatra Neamț, 1997 and 2012) was limited to the Cucuteni culture and the integration of the Precucuteni plastic art; besides increasing the size of the work, the inclusion of such an analysis would have created other complications as well. A paper analysing the Precucuteni anthropomorphic representations, both from Romania and from Bessarabia and Ukraine, is welcomed and hopefully it will be published in the near future. An attempt in this sense has already been made (Pogozheva, 1983) but, unfortunately, the colleague from Novosibirsk did not have the possibility to conduct a research stage in Romania and therefore many of the discoveries from here are not discussed in her work.

In the first edition I included the discoveries from the Tripolye region, the B1, B2 and CI phases, although I believe, also from Victor Sorochin's opinion, that in this case we can also talk about two archaeological cultures: Cucuteni and Tripolye, the former spanning between the Carpathians and the Dniester, while the latter between the Bug and the Dnieper (Sorochin, 1994: 28). According to the same author, 'the region between the Dniester and the Southern Bug can be considered an area of cultural interference where elements of both cultures meet' (Sorochin, 1994: 28). The late colleague from Chișinău, a specialist in the archaeological realities of the area, does not clearly state whether we can talk about two distinct cultures or two cultural aspects. Although he does not support the existence of a cultural complex Cucuteni-Ariușd-Tripolye (in short, Cucuteni-Tripolye), Nicolae Ursulescu refutes the existence of two different cultures and holds that '... it is a typical example of the inadequate way in which the notion of archaeological culture was contaminated by contemporary ethnic overlapping' (Ursulescu, 2007: 9). On the other hand, Elena Tsvek and Yuri Rassamakin from Kiev distinguish between an eastern Tripolye area, namely the Tripolye culture area east of the Dniester, and a Cucuteni area west of the Dniester characterised by high percentage (60–80%) of painted ceramics (Tsvek and Rassamakin, 2005: 175).

Although this is not the right time and place to analyse the highly complex issue concerning the existence of two cultures or two cultural aspects, I find it necessarily to point to the fact that between the two areas there are obvious differences, also noticed by our Ukrainian colleagues. In the Cucuteni area, between the Carpathians and the Dniester, painted ceramics reach and even exceed 60%, whereas in the area located between the Bug and the Dnieper it rarely toes 5% of the entire ceramic inventory. The construction and use of surface dwellings becomes generalised as early as the

beginning of the Precucuteni culture in the area between the Carpathians and the Prut. Only in the area between the Prut and the Dniester are pit-houses widespread, surface dwellings prevailing only later (Lazarovici and Lazarovici, 2006: 549–566). East and north-east of the Dniester, pit-houses predominate in the Tripolye A and B1 phases, and only later does the trend and use of surface dwellings becomes mainstream (Lazarovici and Lazarovici, 2007: 181–220). Differences can also be observed with respect to the plants cultivated, the communities in each area having their own preferences (F. Monah and Monah, 1997: 297 *et seq*.). In my opinion the differences between the two areas, Cucuteni and Tripolye, are due to the different Neolithic substrata of the two regions. Unfortunately, precisely this Neolithic substratum is insufficiently explored and known east of the Dniester (Kotova, 2003). Nevertheless, over the last years, some progress was made west of the Prut in the research of the Starčevo-Criș (Ursulescu, 1984-1985: *passim*; Popușoi, 2005: *passim*) and Linear Pottery (Ursulescu, 1984-1985: *passim*; 1990: 13–47) cultures. Insufficiently explored is also the phenomenon of diffusion of the Precucuteni culture which seems to be due in particular to the migration of some Precucuteni communities, but also to the acculturation of the old Neolithic communities with which those coming from the West came into contact (Monah and Monah, 1997: 43; Dergacev, 2010: 231–232).

As regards the Cucuteni culture, it seems to have evolved as follows. A new decoration technique emerges in the western stretches of the Cucuteni region: painting prior to firing, which had been known, on a smaller scale, since the Precucuteni II phase (Monah, 1982). Around 4700 CalBC (Mantu, 1997: 246) this new technique begins to rapidly spread eastwards over the entire area between the Carpathians and the Dniester, and then crossing the Dniester (Monah, 1993: 154). In the area between the Dniester and the Dnieper, and especially between the Bug and the Dnieper, the production and use of painted ware is far more limited than in the area west of the Dniester. If painted ceramics represent 60% of the inventory of the settlements located between the Subcarpathians and the Central Moldavian Plateau, with a rather high percentage in Bessarabia as well, east of the Dniester and especially in the area between the Bug and the Dnieper painted ceramics reaches only 4–5%.

Many high-profile voices have underlined the remarkable unity of the Cucuteni-Tripolye civilisation. Nevertheless, we should take into account the fact that this statement reflects an impression and is not based on detailed, well-documented studies. This perception of a cultural unity arose from a cursory comparison of the prestige goods, especially painted ceramics, and I have to agree it is not an unsubstantiated position. Nevertheless, we should also take into account the obvious differences between the two areas. I will only point out some of the most obvious ones. The pit-houses are used on a rather large scale in the Tripolye B_1, B_2 and even C_I phases. Moving on to ceramics, although there are shapes of common species, and probably also some 'imports' from the Cucuteni area, most often the ceramic vessels have conical bottoms, which is definitely a steppe influence. I should also mention the fact that the so-called 'Cucuteni C' ceramics appear as early as the Tripolye A phase and reaches high percentages during the more recent phases. A series of differences can be also noticed for the flint and bone tools, which admittedly can be explained by the remarkable area covered by the Cucuteni and Tripolye communities. But if the inventory retrieved from Tripolye dwellings allows us to claim the existence of an archaeological culture closely related to the Cucuteni culture, in the case of the artefacts considered to belong to the religious sphere there is a much more obvious unity. This leads us to infer the existence of two related archaeological cultures, Cucuteni and Tripolye, but of a single Cucuteni-Tripolye religion with a remarkable unity.

On account of being addressed to Anglophone readers, this volume, a version of earlier editions (Monah, 1997; 2012) has been edited to fit their needs, by removing a number of sections and paragraphs, and by providing explanations for certain notions familiar to Romanian readers.