

Dwelling No. 2 from the Settlement of Cucuteni-Dâmbul Morii, Iași County, Romania.

Radu-Ștefan BALAUR¹

Abstract. *The archaeological research carried out in the settlement of Dâmbul Morii led to the discovery of 16 dwellings dated to the Cucuteni A-B phase. The present study centers on dwelling no. 2 not only due to its position within the settlement but also due to the complexity of the discoveries. According to the general plan of the settlement, we distinguish the central position of this dwelling in a group of structures arranged in the southwest area of the promontory. The archaeological research clearly revealed the presence of rituals that can be associated with those of the foundation of the dwelling and at the hearth level, but also the existence of cult complexes with related paraphernalia (altars, hearth-altars, cult tables, etc.). Moreover, the successive restorations of the hearth, as well as the two deposits of vessels in the central hearth area, support the continuity of this dwelling over a longer period and its attribution to the category of domestic sanctuaries, which refer to the religious, private life of a family, in which both elements with domestic functionality and those specific to the performance of rituals are present.*

Rezumat. *Cercetările arheologice în așezarea de față A-B de la Dâmbul Morii au dus la identificarea a cel puțin 16 locuințe atribuite fazei A-B. Studiul de față pune accentul pe locuința nr. 2, nu numai prin poziția acesteia în cadrul așezării, cât și prin complexitatea descoperirilor asociate cu aceasta. Conform planului general al așezării constatăm poziția centrală a acesteia într-un grup de locuințe dispuse în zona de sud-vest a promontoriului. Cercetarea ei a surprins clar prezența unor ritualuri ce pot fi asociate cu cele de fundare ale locuinței, cât și la nivelul vetrei, dar și existența unor complexe de cult cu paraphernalia aferente (altare, vetre-jertfelnic, măsuțe cult etc). Mai mult, refacerile succesive ale vetrei, precum și cele două depuneri de vase în zona vetrei centrale susțin continuitatea acestei locuințe pe o perioadă mai îndelungată, și atribuirea ei categoriei sanctuarelor casnice, ce fac referire la viața religioasă, privată a unei familii, în care sunt prezente, atât elemente cu funcționalitate casnică, cât și cele specifice desfășurării unor ritualuri.*

Keywords: Dâmbul Morii, Cucuteni A-B phase, ritual deposits, cult table, sanctuary.

Introduction

The Cucuteni culture, one of the great European civilizations of the Copper Age, offered numerous objects and masterpieces related to religious life for the prehistoric spirituality of Europe. From the researchers' point of view, studying temples and sanctuaries, their content, and their historical, cultural, and religious context, but especially the role, location, and functionality of the sanctuary or parts of a sanctuary, is a current necessity. They were distinguished from the rest of the residential structures within a settlement by both construction and inventory. These magical-religious manifestations include a whole range of formulas that sometimes concern the entire community or only a certain group: cult complexes, foundation pits of a settlement or a dwelling, ritual or cult-like pits, and ritual deposits (ceramic vessels, stone objects, bone tools, horn, and statuettes). It is assumed that the sanctuaries, but especially the altars identified in the settlements of the Precucuteni-Cucuteni

¹ "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University of Iași, Institute of Interdisciplinary Research, Department of Exact and Natural Sciences, Arheoinvest Centre, Iași, Romania; radu_balaur@yahoo.com

cultural complex, suggest religious practices that are much less magical than commonly believed².

In a simple definition, temples represent cult buildings dedicated to divinities that include several altars or sanctuaries dedicated to the performance of ritual and spiritual activities, such as prayer, rite, or sacrifice, equipped with special furniture, dedicated vessels, and a cult officiant³. Instead, sanctuaries are defined as special parts of a settlement, also associated with the conduct of religious community activities, distinguished from temples by their smaller size, sometimes equipped with columns, hearths, stella, bull heads or bucrania, benches, platforms and ovens. The sanctuary can be both a smaller segment of a temple or a separate building⁴.

The inventory indicates that there are two types of sanctuaries in the Precucuteni-Cucuteni area, based on their location within the site or the structures they contain: large constructions, roomy for religious ceremonies and rituals, with hearths, which are considered domestic sanctuaries, and community sanctuaries featuring monumental constructions such as altars, columns, or anthropomorphized slabs, which are regarded as temples⁵. Domestic sanctuaries are often a dwelling in which the officiant lives with his family but needs a room with a social character, in which he carries out ritual activities, such as dwelling no. 61 from Trușești. Among the ritual activities carried out are mentioned libation, initiation, cultic grinding, birth and baptism, oblatio, etc.⁶.

Such structures interpreted as sanctuaries appear as early as the Precucuteni phase. We recall here the constructions with hearths and various complexes, such as dwelling no. 36 from Poduri-Dealul Ghindaru, Bacău county⁷, or dwelling no. 1 at Isaiia-Balta Popii, Iași county⁸, or altars, such as the one in dwelling no. 11 at Târgu Frumos⁹. The first two settlements, although located at a great distance from each other, are notable for two similar cult complexes, called the "Council of the Goddesses," consisting of 21 statuettes and 13 burnt clay thrones, the difference being made by the number of burnt clay pieces; at Poduri only 2 were discovered, compared to the 42 clay pearls discovered at Isaiia¹⁰.

Regarding the Cucuteni culture, most of the identified sanctuaries are associated with phase A. The settlement at Trușești is noteworthy for its several sanctuaries, of various sizes, which appear to be concentrated in a small square located in the central area of the settlement, with combustion installations and monumental structures¹¹. From the initial phase of habitation, dwelling no. 61, which features two worship tables and an altar, regarded as a community house, draws attention. In the second phase of habitation, the sanctuary dwellings (no. 24, 38, 40, and 60) were characterized by monumental pieces, representing oranta-type

² LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2008, 9-10; MANTU LAZAROVICI 2002, 47; DIACONESCU 2012, 14-15; BALAUR 2023b, 46.

³ KOVÁCS 2016, 16; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2006b, 65.

⁴ KOVÁCS 2016, 18-19.

⁵ LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2006a, 561-562; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2007, 219; KOVÁCS 2016, 18-19; LAZAROVICI *et alii*, 2019, 39.

⁶ LAZAROVICI *et alii*, 2019, 39-40.

⁷ MONAH *et alii* 1983, 15; MONAH *et alii* 2003, 34; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2006a, 561; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2008, 17.

⁸ URSULECU, TENCARIU 2006, 39-56; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2008, 14-15; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2006a, 561.

⁹ URSULECU *et alii* 2002, 37-38; URSULECU *et alii* 2001-2002, 62-64; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2006a, 562-563; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2008, 16-17.

¹⁰ LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2006a, 561-562; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2008, 15-17; MANTU LAZAROVICI 2002, 49.

¹¹ MANTU LAZAROVICI 2002, 51-52; PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA *et alii* 1999, 67, 85-89, 117, 160.

idols, sometimes with a cup-shaped head¹². Among other sanctuaries, we mention those at Scânteia (dwelling no. 1), with 75 anthropomorphic female and male idols and 30 zoomorphic idols, as well as fragments from altar-type tables¹³, Târpeşti (dwelling no. 5), with 34 anthropomorphic statuettes, miniature chairs¹⁴, or Mărgineni-Cetăţuia, with a large fragmentary idol¹⁵.

For Cucuteni A-B phase, there is a lack of information about the existence of sanctuaries. This scarcity may be attributed to either the small number of studies conducted or the likelihood that cult activities were performed outside of sanctuary-type structures. This situation is particularly evident in the Tripolian settlements located along the Middle Bug¹⁶. The discoveries from the site of Iablona (Cucuteni A-B2/Tripolie BII) are significant, featuring 711 whole or fragmentary anthropomorphic statuettes. Researchers have concluded that this indicates the presence of a powerful cult center. It is notable in hut no. 36, which contains 54 statuettes, believed by the researchers to be associated with the existence of a person responsible for cult activities¹⁷.

Also, for the Cucuteni B phase, information is scarce. The discoveries at Ghelăieşti-Nedeia¹⁸ and Buznea-Târgu Frumos¹⁹ are mentioned, where in constructions without a platform, cult complexes were discovered consisting of four statuettes arranged in a cardinal direction, with six containers around them, associated with the hearth or altar, with two models of open sanctuaries, which contained several statuettes, as well as others in a fragmentary state. In both cases, the existence of protective large vessel is noted²⁰.

Using the information we have acquired thus far, we intend to present discoveries and circumstances associated with dwelling no. 2 that may indicate the existence of a presumed sanctuary within this settlement.

The site of Dâmbul Morii: history of research

Dâmbul Morii settlement is situated in the southeastern region of the village of Băiceni, in the Cucuteni commune of Iaşi county, between Pârâul Morii stream to the west and Recea stream to the east (Figure 1/A-B). To the south, it has visibility towards the major riverbed of the Recea/Valea Oii stream. The site is located on a promontory with a maximum height of about 10 m, oriented NW-SE, with gentle slopes, somewhat steeper towards the southwest (Fig. 1/C). The prospect of a marshy area around the promontory is not excluded²¹. When it is included in the physical-geographical units of the region, the Cucuteni-Băiceni microzone is situated on the border between the Moldavian Plain and the Suceava Plateau. Based on

¹² MANTU LAZAROVICI 2002, 51-52.

¹³ MANTU, ȚURCANU 1999, 13; MANTU LAZAROVICI 2002, 49-50; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2008, 13-14; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2006a, 220.

¹⁴ MARINESCU-BÎLCU 1981, 73-74; MANTU LAZAROVICI 2002, 51; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2007, 222.

¹⁵ MONAH 1978, 36-40; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2008, 13; MONAH 1991, 298; MONAH 1997, 36, 39; LAZAROVICI *et alii* 2009, 130.

¹⁶ LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2008, 9; MANTU LAZAROVICI 2002, 51; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2007, 222; TSVEK 2001, 27.

¹⁷ SOROCIN, BORZIAN 2001, 167-202; MANTU LAZAROVICI 2002, 52; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2007, 222-223.

¹⁸ CUCOȘ 1973, fig. 5-7; CUCOȘ 1993, 59-65; CUCOȘ 1999, 48-50; MONAH 1997, 41; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2007, 224-225.

¹⁹ MIHAI, BOGHIAN 1977-1979, 429-431; BOGHIAN, MIHAI 1987, fig. 2-8; MONAH 1997, 42.

²⁰ MANTU LAZAROVICI 2002, 53-54; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2007, 224-225.

²¹ DINU 2006, 33; DINU 2009, 106; NICU 2013, 113.

hydrographic criteria, it is a part of the Valea Oii Basin, which is a tributary of the Bahlui River, located centrally west of the Bahlui River basin²².

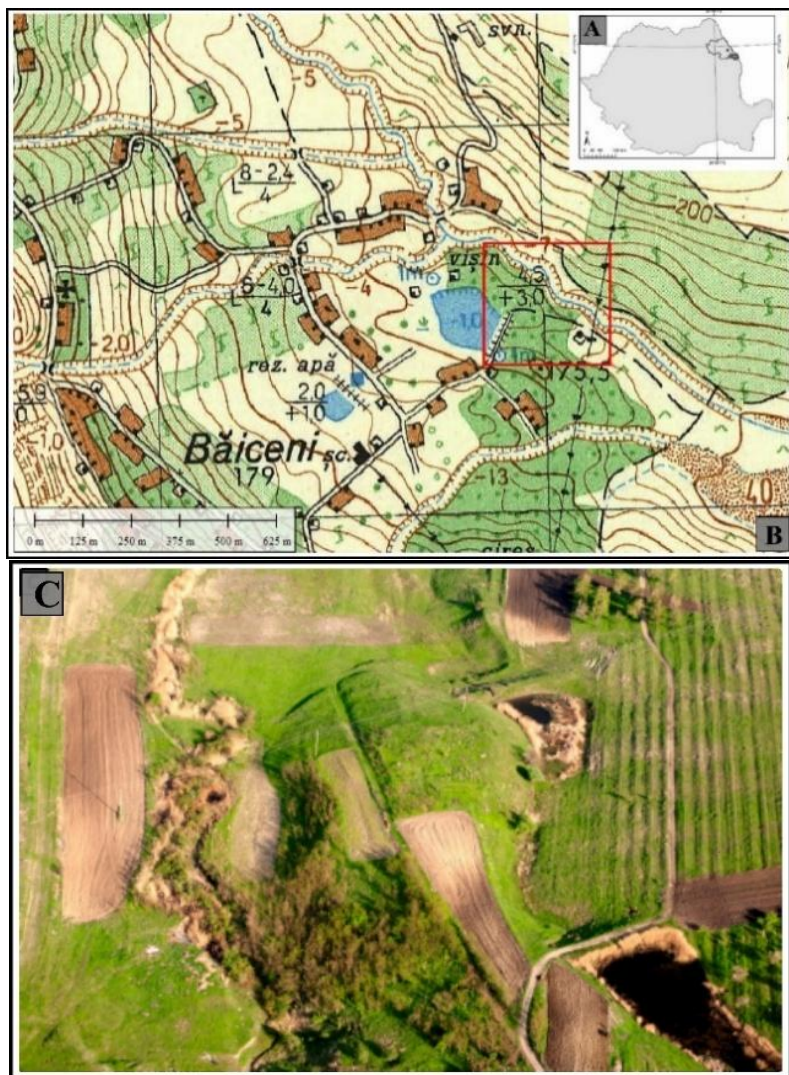


Figure 1. Location of the Cucuteni-Dâmbul Morii settlement in Romania, Iași County (A) and topographic map, scale 1: 25000 (B); oblique aerial photo (C) (after Asăndulesei et alii 2020, fig. 7).

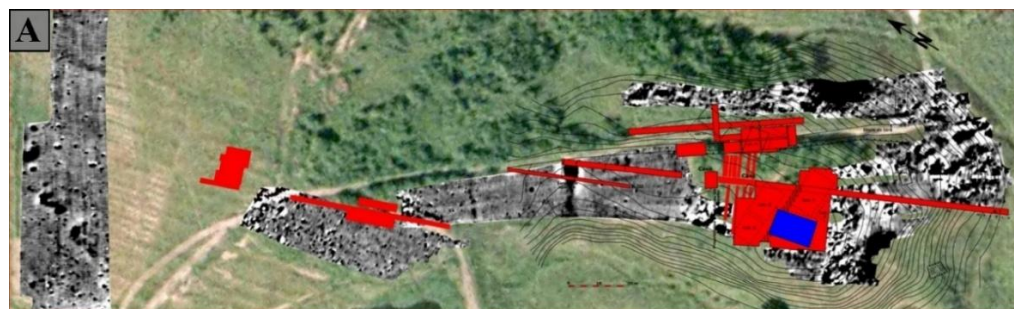
The first mention, under the name "*Talsiedlung* – The settlement in the Valley", was made by H. Schmidt, who also carried out the first archaeological research on this site. Afterwards eight archaeological campaigns were carried out between 1961–1964, 1966, 1977–1978, and 1989 for the research at *Dâmbul Morii*, under the leadership of Professor Mircea Petrescu-Dîmbovița, with assistance from Professor Marin Dinu, who would eventually take charge of the

²² PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA, VĂLEANU 2004, 40; NICU 2013, 7.

excavations²³. M. Dinu presented the excavations until 1966 and mentioned 10 dwellings that were investigated from the Cucuteni A-B phase, as well as the defensive system of the settlement²⁴. New dwellings were identified and researched during the resumption of excavations in 1977 and 1978, with a final campaign in 1989. After careful consultation of excavation plans and the site notebooks, a total of 16 Cucuteni dwellings were investigated in two sectors, separated by a defensive ditch²⁵. Recently, to obtain detailed underground data for the site, we used geophysical surveying. Thus, we identified a series of anomalies associated with dwellings and three ditches with similar trajectories linked to the settlement's defensive system. These were found in the SE sector, where we can see a cluster of archaeological structures (Fig. 2/A), probably overlapping levels of occupation that make it difficult to determine an organizational model. Most of these structures also display thermoremanent magnetism, showing that they were subjected to intense fire. Small circular anomalies that can be assigned to pits were identified as we moved towards the NW beyond the settlement's defensive system. Further in the same direction, a series of large anomalies characterized by thermoremanent magnetism was identified. These anomalies can be attributed to burnt or partially burnt dwellings, as well as a few circular anomalies associated with pits. The rather confined area surveyed in the NW sector precludes any hypotheses regarding the organization of the dwellings²⁶. The general plan together with the magnetic map allowed us to get a first idea of the settlement's layout. We can see that there are two circular groups of dwellings arranged around a central dwelling, specifically dwellings no. 2 and 11 (Figure 2/B).

Dwelling no. 2: archaeological description

Although there are findings that can be associated with the presence of sanctuaries or dwellings with arranged spaces for religious activities, this study will focus exclusively on dwelling no. 2 (marked in blue in Figure 2), studied during the campaigns of 1962 and 1963²⁷. I chose this structure due to various reasons, including the specific stratigraphic situation, the central location within a group of dwellings, and the detection of complexes or artefacts linked to cult activities.



²³ BALAUR 2020, 172; 2023a, 62; DINU 2006, 33; SCHMIDT 1932, 3, 12-13.

²⁴ DINU 2006, 33-34; 2009, 106-107; ASĂNDULESEI *et alii* 2020, 324.

²⁵ BALAUR 2020, 172-176; 2023a, 64-69.

²⁶ ASĂNDULESEI *et alii* 2020, 328-330.

²⁷ BALAUR 2020, 172-173.

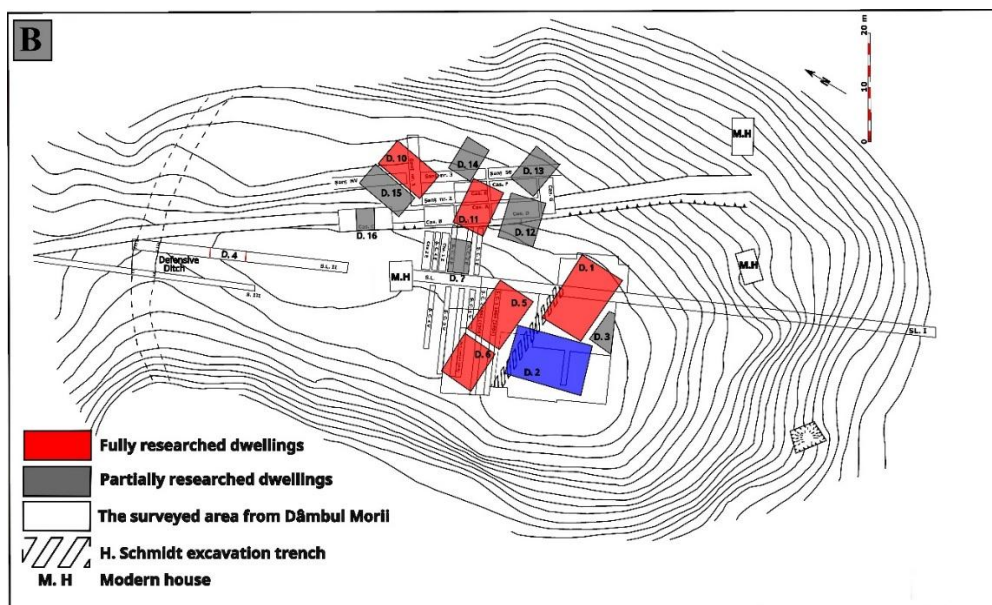


Figure 2. Magnetometric map (after Asăndulesei 2015, fig. 121C), with the areas investigated according to the excavation plans (A); Excavation plan (B) (adapted after Dinu 2006, 43, with additions).

Dwelling no. 2 (Figure 3) was characterized by a compact mass of daub at a depth of 10-20 cm from the ground surface. The exact size is not known, as it is affected towards the ESE corner and in the VSW corner, where only very few traces of the platform were preserved. Also, H. Schmidt's investigation caused disturbance towards the northern limit. We only know that the southern part was captured between meters 0 and 10, and had the same orientation as dwelling 1, namely E-W²⁸.

The platform appears to be made of a split wood structure with a N-S orientation interrupted right next to the central hearth. An interesting stratigraphic situation was documented right next to the central hearth, where, under the unitary remains of the platform, there was a layer of earth, about 3-5 cm below which there seems to be a second platform, attributed to a second level of habitation. We don't have a documented profile to support this situation, nor do we have any concrete information to enable dating on this new platform. What we do know is that a pit with Cucuteni A₃ materials was discovered underneath it. The author of the excavations believes that this dwelling was abandoned at the time of the arrival of the new occupants, the land being prepared for the construction of the new one²⁹.

²⁸ BALAUR 2024, 48-52.

²⁹ PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA 1966, 33; BALAUR 2020, 180; 2024, 48-52.

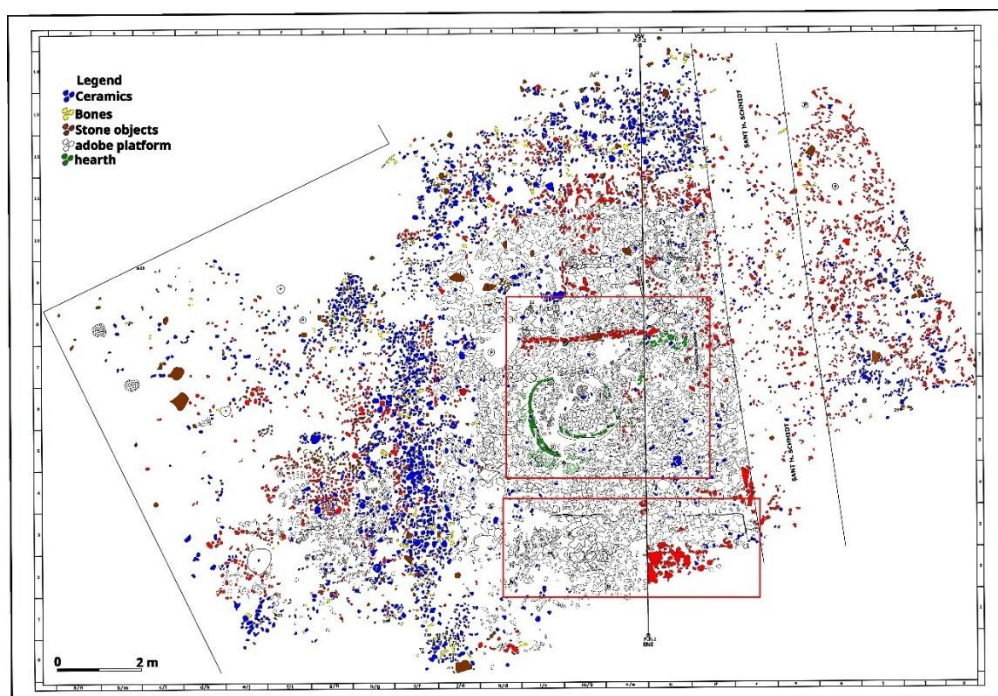


Figure 3. Dwelling no. 2. Excavation plan
(adapted after the plans from the manuscript *Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii* – Nootbook no. 1, The 1962 Excavation Campaign).

Inside the dwelling, the excavation notebook recorded the presence of three hearths, which varied in size, all equipped with U-shaped raised chime. These were constructed either directly on the ground (hearths 1 and 2) or atop a layer of ceramic shards (hearth 3)³⁰. On the excavation plan of dwelling no. 2, the existence of a possible fourth hearth is also observed, west of the central one. Two of these hearths are noteworthy, to which we will return later.

As for the interior arrangements, we have no information other than the existence of a storage area, to the WSW of the central hearth, suggested by the presence of fragments from a large vessel, which seems to have been included in the platform. Such vessels are also found in other settlements of the Cucuteni A-B phase, such as at Traian-Dealul Fântânilor. A little further to the NW of this vessel, a possible grinding area was also reported, attested by the presence of stones of different sizes³¹.

The inventory consists mainly of ceramic fragments present along the walls of the dwelling, a relatively large number of animal bones as well as some plastic representations. Another possible area where certain domestic activities could have been carried out was identified at the southern limit of the dwelling, where a large stone was discovered, and many osteological fragments, especially large deer antlers. In this area it seems that the platform was damaged³².

³⁰ BALAUR 2024, 48-52; *Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii* – Nootbook no. 1, The 1962 and 1963 Excavation Campaigns.

³¹ BALAUR 2024, 48-52.

³² BALAUR 2024, 48-52.

Depending on the location and position of archaeological objects or complexes, some situations can be interpreted as foundation rituals of the dwelling, or even for the combustion facility. The same rituals are also found in the case of restoring hearths. Usually, they are located in the center of the dwelling, within the foundation, or even beneath it³³.

Ritual depositions

Discoveries such as ritual depositions, sacrifices, offerings, and others complement the aspects of ritual character in the Cucuteni culture area. In addition to the founding and abandonment rituals, other rituals involves celebrating certain periodic events or deities whose goodwill had a positive impact on the community's well-being³⁴.

In the Cucuteni culture one such category refers to foundation rituals, renovation or even the abandonment rituals of dwellings, or hearths within these structures. The first scenario discussed refers to the placement of items such as anthropomorphic or zoomorphic figurines, vessels, altars, stone or flint tools, animal bones, etc., as part of such rituals. These deposits were identified in more or less complex formulas, either simple deposits or in pits, under the platform of the dwellings or inside the floors, or in the structure of the hearths. The place and meaning of these objects are also important³⁵.

Such situations are documented at Drăgușeni-Ostrov³⁶, Preutești-Cetate³⁷, Dumești-Între Pâraie³⁸, Traian-Dealul Fântânilor³⁹, Vorniceni-Pod Ibăneasa⁴⁰, Ghelăiești-Nedeia⁴¹, Poduri-Dealul Ghindaru⁴², Fetești-La Schit⁴³, Cucuteni-Cetățuia⁴⁴.

At Dâmbul Morii, deposits of objects related to foundation rituals were observed within dwelling no. 2. Thus, under the platform, we have documented situations in which deposited vessels were discovered. In the initial investigation, a vessel that was preserved *in situ* with its mouth down was found on the southern side, in the southeast corner, shielding a bovine bone from the wrist (Figure 4, a). Based on similar discoveries, researchers argue that we can identify a ritual involving offerings or the consumption of meat in particular magical-religious manifestations. This hypothesis is further corroborated by the presence of many bone fragments from domesticated animals and mature deer antlers, which were sourced from hunting, all found on the same side⁴⁵.

Such deposits are also documented near the central hearth. To the east, at an equal distance between the central hearth and the one with holes, a broken vessel was discovered, which in the opinion of the excavation author, was probably buried ritually under the platform (Figure 4/b), in a possible pit⁴⁶, on which we will return to later. Another deposition is attested

³³ LAZAROVICI 2009, 224.

³⁴ LAZAROVICI 2009, 223.

³⁵ LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2007, 172; SZTÁNCSEJ 2015, 250.

³⁶ MARINESCU-BÎLCU, BOLOMEY 2000, 25, 32-35, 37-38; LAZAROVICI 2009, 226.

³⁷ URSULESCU, IGNĂTESCU 2003, 29; LAZAROVICI 2009, 225.

³⁸ ALAIBA 2007, 23; LAZAROVICI 2009, 225.

³⁹ BEM 2007, 132-150; LAZAROVICI 2009, 227-228.

⁴⁰ DIACONESCU 2012, 17-18; LAZAROVICI 2009, 226.

⁴¹ NIȚU *et alii* 1971, 59; CUCOȘ 1999, 48; LAZAROVICI 2009, 227-228.

⁴² MONAH *et alii* 2003, 37-40, 99; LAZAROVICI 2009, 227; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2007, 173.

⁴³ BOGHIAN, IGNĂTESCU 2009, 1-20; BOGHIAN *et alii* 2004, 229; BOGHIAN *et alii* 2005, 335, 337, 341, fig. 7/3, 10.

⁴⁴ PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA, VĂLEANU 2004, 78-79, 83; LAZAROVICI 2009, 228.

⁴⁵ BALAUR 2023b, 47; DIACONESCU 2012, 15.

⁴⁶ Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii – Nootebook no. 1, The 1962 Excavation Campaign.

in the western edge of the central hearth, under the platform of the dwelling. It appears that a complete Cucuteni C-type vessel has been laid down here, and it would have broken after the hearth collapsed (Figure 4/c). Remnants of the same vessel were also discovered among the external rubble of the same hearth. A little further west of the central hearth, in an area with remnants of a possible fourth hearth, the rest of another vessel were discovered beneath; according to the excavation author, it appears that this vessel was also intentionally deposited⁴⁷.

At the end of the 1962 campaign, the authors of the research raised the issue of the existence of a possible ritual pit, as I mentioned above. On the northern side of the dwelling, to the east of the central hearth, a shallow pit was identified (unfortunately, it was not included on the plan). Under the platform, a partially burned vessel was discovered to the point of slag formation, which seems to have been ritually buried under a layer of ash (Figure 4/b). It is also important that in the immediate vicinity there was a hearth with perforations (one central, four aligned with the cardinal points). We should mention that in the same area, after the removal of the second platform, a pit with ceramic materials belonging to the Cucuteni A₃ phase was also discovered⁴⁸.

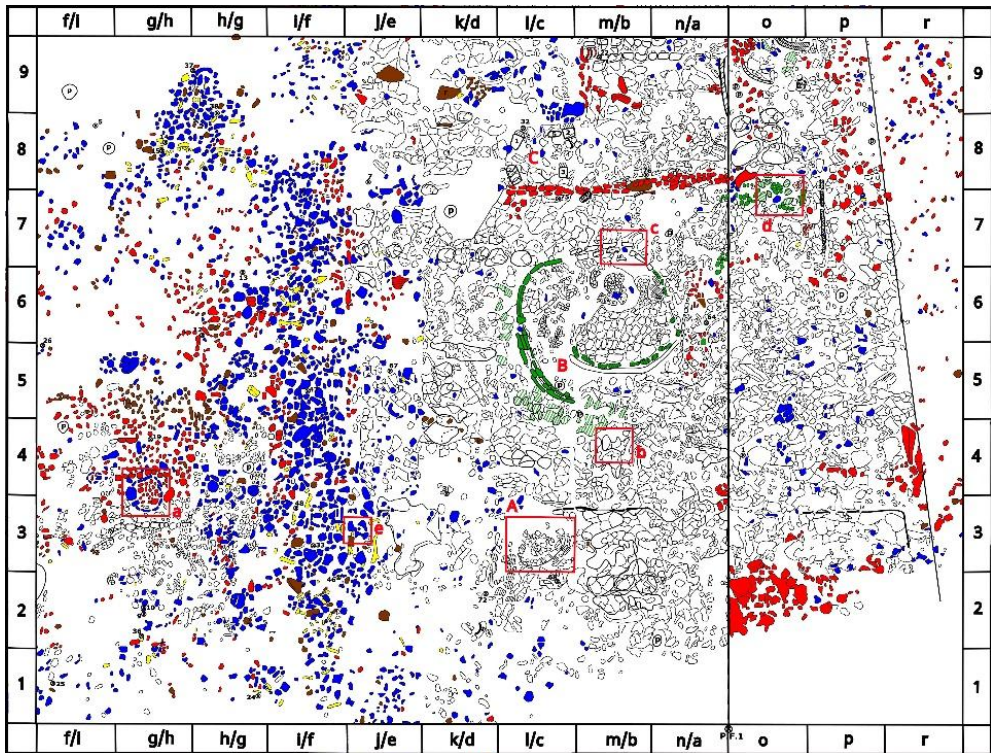


Figure 4. Detail from dwelling no. 2 plan, with the layout of the cult complexes:
a-e) deposits of objects or vessels; A-C) constructions of a cult character
(adapted after the plans from the manuscript *Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii* – Nootbook no. 1,
The 1962 Excavation Campaign).

⁴⁷ Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii – Nootbook no. 1, The 1962 Excavation Campaign.

⁴⁸ Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii – Nootbook no. 1, The 1962 Excavation Campaign.

Cult facilities

The discovery of cult facilities, which may have been used in specific ceremonies or rituals, is also noteworthy at *Dâmbul Morii*. On the northern side of this dwelling, there was a hearth that was preserved in fragments and had a raised kerb, rounded corners, and an opening to the west (Figures 4/A and 5/a-c). This hearth is distinct from the others discovered at *Dâmbul Morii* because it features four holes ("indents") on its surface. Three of these holes are arranged in a straight line oriented north-south, while the fourth hole is located to the east and forms a diagonal line with the central one (Figure 5/a-c). If we follow the principle of symmetry, we should not exclude the possibility that this hearth had five indents, arranged somewhat rhomboidally, four at the corners and one in the middle. In this area, the author of the excavations speaks of the existence of two rows of platform that appear to form a corridor leading from the dwelling to the hearth⁴⁹ (Figure 4; 5/a). We were unable to provide any additional information about this situation, but we do not rule out the possibility that it could be a case of systematic platform reconstruction.

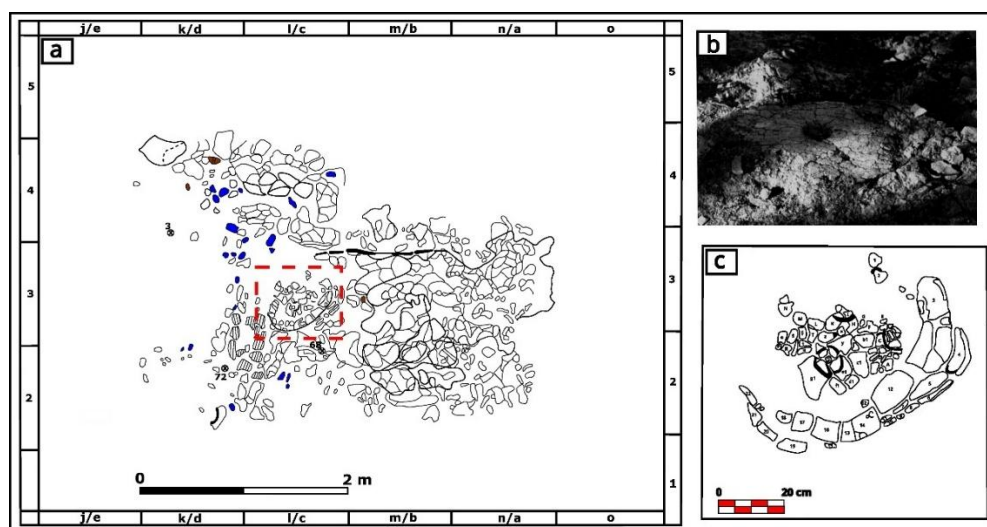


Figure 5. Hearth with perforations from dwelling no. 2. a) detail from the excavation plan; b) photo of the hearth (after Petrescu-Dîmbovița 1966, fig. 32); c) plan of the hearth.

The large central hearth also attracts attention, with clear traces of restorations and enlargements. Initially, the hearth was restored on the same surface, after which it was enlarged (Figure 4/B). Two rows of strongly burned sandy plastering were observed, one of which is older, reddish, and has larger mosaic cracks, which were restored. Later, the hearth was enlarged, suggested by the upper level of yellowish clay, with very small mosaic cracks. It looks like the original hearth appears to have had a kerb, built on a row of clay, which it was not known whether were part of the platform. At the time of the expansion, this kerb was covered. This chime has four rows of clay plaster⁵⁰. As mentioned earlier, this fireplace is connected to

⁴⁹ BALAUR 2023b, 48; Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii – Nootebook no. 1, The 1962 Excavation Campaign.

⁵⁰ Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii – Nootebook no. 1, The 1962 Excavation Campaign.

two deposits (Figure 4/b-c) located to the east and west, which are considered ritual. A similar situation is documented for dwelling no. 2 at Poduri, where hearth no. 2 displays complete vessels or fragments of vessels that can be restored, all within the immediate vicinity and showing three levels of restoration⁵¹.

From the same dwelling also come two parallelepipedal structures (Figure 4/C; 6), made of clay mixed with chaff, with approximately equal dimensions at the base, about 14.5 x 14 cm, considered by the author of the excavations to be altars⁵². It's possible that these are among the five pieces marked on the excavation plan (pieces 2 and 3 in the group marked 1-5) close to the central hearth.



Figure 6. Parts of some cult structures (photos by the author).

Cult objects

Artifacts connected to cult practices were also found during the excavations at *Dâmbul Morii*. The first category of objects under discussion refers to **cult tables**. Presented in the specialized literature under various terms, such as 'altars', 'miniature altars', 'cult tables', 'offering platforms' or 'altar-tables', the role and functionality of these objects are widely discussed. The most discussed assumptions are related to their use for lighting, ritual lighting, for storing fire, for use during rituals for burning offerings at different events or celebrations, during ceremonies, or for protection against natural disasters or disease, for illuminating a space, etc.⁵³. The association of terms such as 'cult' and 'spiritual' in discussions suggests a religious function; however, their presence in normal dwellings suggests a domestic use, or they are seen as miniaturized replicas of real religious structures, used to create a cult space within the domestic sphere⁵⁴. Usually, they consist of a quality paste that has been fired to brick-red or brick-brown, or coarse, and contains various inclusions. Rarely, it features a central circular opening, which has an outwardly turned lip. The most likely role of this opening was to support a miniature vessel, as shown by analogies within the Criș or Vinča cultures⁵⁵.

⁵¹ KOVÁCS 2016, 250; PREOTEASA 2013, 102-103.

⁵² BALAUR 2023b, 48.

⁵³ MIREA 2011, 42; MAXIM 2000, 121-122.

⁵⁴ MIREA 2011, 42; SCHWARZBERG 2003, 79, 128; CHAPMAN 2000, 82.

⁵⁵ BALAUR 2023b, 49; BOGHIAN 2004, 157; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2012, 337; COMȘA 1980, 34-36.

From dwelling no. 2, a complete cult table (Figure 7/a) was discovered under the platform, along with fragments of two others (Figure 7/b-c). These fragments include only partially preserved legs and parts of the top. The precise context of their discovery is not specified. The first table, broken in two and later restored, appears to be made of a paste mixed with fine sand, well-smoothed, and modeled in two parts (table and goblet). In the center, the table features a perforation. The rectangular table had slightly arched sides and four cylindrical legs connected through small, slightly asymmetrical triangles. The upper part (goblet), missing in this case, probably had a truncated vessel. The surfaces are well smoothened (they show traces of painting), oxidant burning, with a brick-red-yellowish colour. A similar piece was discovered in the inventory of dwelling no. 16 from Păuleni Ciuc-Ciomortan/Vârdomb-Dâmbul Cetății⁵⁶ (Figure 7/e). The second table, which has only one leg and a small portion of its top, appears to have been made in a similar manner (Figure 7/b). Compared to the previous pieces, the third table, also fragmentary (Figure 7/c), had triangular-shaped legs joined at right angles at the corners. We are unable to determine the precise context of discovery for these last two pieces, but we do know they came from dwelling no. 2.



Figure 7. Cult tables: a-d) Cucuteni-Dâmbul Morii; e) Păuleni Ciuc-Ciomortan/Vârdomb-Dâmbul Cetății (without scale, after Buzea, Lazarovici 2005, Pl. XX/4).

⁵⁶SZTÁNC SUJ 2015, 250; BUZEA, LAZAROVICI 2005, 43, Pl. XX/4; BUZEA 2006, 135, Pl. VIII/1; Plate IX/1.

The most widely recognized category of artifacts that are associated with spirituality is anthropomorphic art. Although we have recorded some figurines from this dwelling, they were discovered in a fragmentary state, from unclear contexts. Among the small pieces from archaeological discoveries that suggest a certain role in cult practices, **conical idols** have also been indicated. While some researchers consider them stylized cult pieces that represent masculinity, others have included them directly among the so-called phallic and phalloid representations. Other hypotheses suggest that these small artifacts may represent game pieces, chips, accounting instruments, tattoo stamps, etc.⁵⁷.

Only one such piece comes from dwelling no. 2 at *Dâmbul Morii*. It was modeled from a light brown paste, about 2.1 cm high, a circular base with a diameter of about 1.3 cm. Its upper part is rendered as a conical column and features small punctures⁵⁸. This idol was found in the same location as the cult table discussed earlier (Figure 4/e). It's possible that they were deposited together.

Discussions

Within the chalcolithic communities, magico-religious practices are defined by well-individualized complexes. The complexity of spiritual structures can be expressed through their manifestations, whether they appear in simple or sophisticated forms. The deliberate placement of various objects at the foundation of a building, whether domestic or communal, was intended to gain the goodwill of the absolute divinity, for protection against natural or anthropogenic calamities⁵⁹.

From those discussed above, it is evident that the spiritual practices of the Cucuteni A-B community at *Dâmbul Morii* are well-documented through a diverse array of artifacts, such as figurines, cult tables, conical idols, and more, along with various cult complexes and evidence of rituals observed within both dwellings and the settlement itself. We chose to discuss dwelling no. 2 for various reasons, its central position within a group of dwellings in the southwestern part of the promontory and the number of complexes or objects associated with different cult practices.

Within this dwelling space, we can clearly identify rituals associated with the foundational practices of both the household and the hearth, alongside the existence of cult complexes equipped with related paraphernalia such as altars, hearth-altars, and cult tables. Furthermore, the repeated restorations of the hearth, involving multiple layers of plastering, along with the two pottery deposits associated with the central hearth, indicate that this dwelling has been continuously occupied for an extended period. This suggests that the hearth was intentionally placed in a location that was sought after and maintained over time, serving as a "family center". Additionally, their sacralization, which links to the consecration of the entire space they heat, explains the deposits below the hearth⁶⁰. The association of terms like 'cult' and 'spiritual' in discussions about ceramic tables suggests that their presence in ordinary homes indicates a domestic use, or they may be viewed as miniaturized replicas of actual religious structures designed to create a cult space within the household⁶¹. Additionally, it is noteworthy

⁵⁷ BALAUR 2023b, 50; BOGHIAN 2004, 158.

⁵⁸ BALAUR 2023b, 51.

⁵⁹ DIACONESCU 2012, 21; LAZAROVICI, LAZAROVICI 2006a, 192; KOVÁCS 2016, 198.

⁶⁰ KOVÁCS 2016, 333; URSULESCU *et alii* 2002, 36; PREOTEASA 2013, 105.

⁶¹ MIREA 2011, 42; SCHWARZBERG 2003, 79.

that the entire cult table, along with the conical idol, was found placed beneath the platform close to the hearth, aligned in a straight line with it.

In conclusion, the archaeological evidence from *Dâmbul Morii* allows us to go beyond the label of a 'possible' sanctuary. Dwelling no. 2 represents a paradigmatic example of a domestic sanctuary, where the boundaries between the utilitarian and the sacred were fluid. Unlike communal temples, which served the broader group, this structure reflects the micro-ritualism of the family unit. The deliberate foundation deposits, the ritualized maintenance of the central hearth through successive plastering, and the presence of specific paraphernalia (cult tables, conical idols) confirm that the inhabitants actively managed their spiritual protection. Thus, Dwelling no. 2 was not merely a shelter, but a spiritually charged space, maintained through a continuous cycle of rituals spanning from its foundation to its abandonment. The family leader is responsible for administering domestic religious activities that aim to achieve fertility and prosperity, which are two important elements for survival⁶².

References

- ALAIBA, R.E. 2007. *Complexul cultural Cucuteni-Tripolie. Meșteșugul olăritului*, Iași: Junimea.
- ASĂNDULESEI, A. 2015. *GIS (Geographic Information System), Fotogrametrie și geofizică în arheologie. Investigații non-invasive în așezări Cucuteni din România*, Iași: Editura Universității „Al. I. Cuza” din Iași.
- ASĂNDULESEI, A., COTIUGĂ, V., BALAUR R.Ș., TENCARIU, F.A. 2020. Revisiting “the settlement in the valley”. New insights from Cucuteni-Dâmbul Morii, Iași County. In: A., Melniciuc, B. P., Niculică, S., Ignătescu, S.C., Enea (eds.), *Eternitatea arheologiei. Studii în onoarea profesorului Dumitru Boghian la a 65-a aniversare*, Cluj Napoca: Mega, 319-331.
- BALAUR, R.Ș. 2020. The Cucuteni A-B Settlement of Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii. History of Research. *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica*, XXVI/2: 169-183.
- BALAUR, R.Ș. 2023a. Noi date despre cercetările din așezarea Cucuteni A-B de la Dâmbul Morii. Campaniile de săpături din 1977 și 1978. *Carpica*, LII: 61-81.
- BALAUR, R.Ș. 2023b. Așezarea Cucuteni A-B de la Dâmbul Morii. Practici rituale, complexe și obiecte de cult. *Cercetări Istorice (S.N.)*, XLII: 45-60.
- BALAUR, R.Ș. 2024. *Așezarea cucuteniană de la Cucuteni-Dîmbul Morii*, Teza de doctorat, Academia Română, Școala de Studii Avansate a Academiei Române Institutul de Arheologie, Iași.
- BEM, C. 2007. *Traian-Dealul Fântânilor. Fenomenul Cucuteni A-B*, București-Târgoviște: Cetatea de Scaun.
- BOGHIAN, D. 2004. *Comunitățile cucuteniene din Bazinul Bahluiului*, Suceava: Editura Bucovina Istorică - Editura Universității „Ștefan Cel Mare” Suceava.
- BOGHIAN, D., IGNĂTESCU, S. 2009. Rites and rituals of founding the Cucuteni dwellings and domestic installations in Fetești-La Schit site (Adâncata commune, Suceava county). In: G. Bodi (ed.), *In media res praeistoriae. Miscellanea in honorem annos LXV peragentis Professoris Dan Monah oblata*, Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iasi, 1-20.
- BOGHIAN, D., IGNĂTESCU, S., MAREȘ, I., NICULICĂ, B. 2004. O locuință Cucuteni B de la Fetești-La Schit, jud. Suceava. *Memoria Antiquitatis*, XXIII: 223-239.

⁶² KOVÁCS 2016, 19.

BOGHIAN, D., IGNĂTESCU, S., MAREȘ, I., NICULICĂ, B. 2005. Les découvertes de Fetești–La Schit parmi les stations cucuteniennes du nord de la Moldavie. In: Gh. Dumitroaia, J. Chapman, O. Weller, C. Preoteasa, R. Munteanu, D. Nicola, D. Monah (eds.), *Cucuteni. 120 ans de recherches. Le temps du bilan / Cucuteni. 120 Years of Research. Time to sum up*, Bibliotheca Memoriae Antiquitatis XVI, Piatra-Neamț: Editura „Constantin Matasă”, 333-352.

BOGHIAN, D., MIHAI, C. 1987. Le complexe de culte et le vase à décor ornithomorphe peint découverts à Buznea (dép. de Iasi). In: M. Petrescu-Dîmbovița (ed.), *La Civilisation de Cucuteni en contexte européen. Session scientifique dédiée au centenaire des premières découvertes de Cucuteni (Iași-Piatra Neamț, 24-28 septembre 1984)*, Bibliotheca Archaeologica Iassensis I, Iași: Université „Al. I. Cuza”, 313-324.

BUZEA, D. 2006. Models of Altars and Miniature Tables belonging to the Cucuteni–Ariuşd Culture, discovered at Păuleni Ciuc-Ciomortan „Dâmbul Cetății”, Harghita County, *Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis*, V: 127-158.

BUZEA, D.L., LAZAROVICI, Gh. 2005. Descoperirile Cucuteni-Ariuşd de la Păuleni Ciuc-Ciomortan „Dâmbul Cetății”. Campaniile 2003-2005. Raport preliminar. *Angustia, Arheologie-Etnografie*, 9: 25-88.

CHAPMAN, J. 2000. *Fragmentation in archaeology: peoples, places and broken objects in the prehistory of south-eastern Europe*. London: Routledge.

COMȘA, E. 1980. Despre obiecte de mobilier din epoca neolitică de pe teritoriul României. *Pontica*, XIII: 32-56.

CUCOȘ, Ș. 1973. Un complex ritual cucutenian descoperit la Ghelăiești (județul Neamț). *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche*, 24(2): 207-215.

CUCOȘ, Ș. 1993. Complexe rituale cucuteniene de la Ghelăiești, județul Neamț. *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie*, 44(1): 59-80.

CUCOȘ, Ș. 1999. *Faza Cucuteni B în zona subcarpatică a Moldovei*, Bibliotheca Memoriae Antiquitatis VI, Piatra Neamț: Editura „Constantin Matasă”.

DIACONESCU, M. 2012. Aspecte ale unei practici magico-religioase în așezarea cucuteniană de la Vorniceni, Pod Ibăneasa, jud. Botoșani. *Acta Moldaviae Septentrionalis, Secțiunea 1: Istorie veche și arheologie*, XI: 14-25.

DINU, M. 2006. Principalele rezultate ale cercetărilor de la Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii, com. Cucuteni (1961-1966). In: N. Ursulescu, C.-M. Lazarovici (eds.), *Cucuteni 120-Valori universale. Lucrările simpozionului național, Iași, 30 Septembrie 2004*, Iași: Sedcom Libris, 31-56.

DINU, M. 2009. *Cucuteni – Dâmbul Morii*. In: C.-M. Lazarovici, Gh. Lazarovici, S. Țurcanu (eds.), *Cucuteni: a great civilization of the prehistoric world*, Iași: Editura Palatul Culturii, 106-108.

KOVÁCS, A. 2016. *Temple, sanctuare, altare în Neoliticul și Epoca Cuprului din sud-estul Europei*, Suceava: Editura Karl A. Romstorfer.

LAZAROVICI, C.-M. 2009. Ritualuri de fundare, ritualuri de abandonare din cultura Cucuteni. In: G. Bodi (ed.), *In media res praeistoriae. Miscellanea in honorem annos LXV peragentis Professoris Dan Monah oblata*, Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, 223-238.

LAZAROVICI, C.-M., LAZAROVICI, Gh. 2006a. *Arhitectura neoliticului și epocii cuprului din România. Vol. I – Neoliticul*, Iași: Editura Trinitas.

LAZAROVICI, C.-M., LAZAROVICI, Gh. 2007. *Arhitectura neoliticului și epocii cuprului din România. Vol. II – Epoca Cuprului*, Iași: Editura Trinitas.

- LAZAROVICI, C.-M., LAZAROVICI, Gh. 2012. *Ruginoasa-Dealul Drăghici. Monografie arheologică*, Suceava: Editura Karl A. Romstorfer.
- LAZAROVICI, C.-M., LAZAROVICI, Gh., ȚURCANU, S. 2009. *Cucuteni. A Great Civilisation of the Prehistoric World*, Iași: Editura Palatul Culturii.
- LAZAROVICI, Gh., LAZAROVICI, C.-M. 2006b. Despre construcții neo-eneolitice de cult din sud-estul Europei: tehnici de construire, organizare spațială, scurte interpretări. Partea I-a. In: N. Ursulescu (ed.), *Dimensiunea europeană a civilizației eneolitice est carpatice*, Iași: Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” din Iași, 65-104.
- LAZAROVICI, Gh., LAZAROVICI, C.-M. 2008. Sanctuarele culturii Precucuteni-Cucuteni. *Angustia*, XII: 9-40.
- LAZAROVICI, Gh., LAZAROVICI, C.-M., MISCHKA, D., MISCHKA, C., ȚURCANU, S., OANCĂ, M., KOVACS, A., HONCU, Ș., BERZOVAN, A. 2019. Un sanctuar casnic sau comunitar la Scânteia. Studiu de etnoreligie, etnoarheologie, arheologie. *Acta Musei Tutovens. Istorie Veche și Arheologie*, XV: 35-76.
- MANTU, C.M., ȚURCANU, S. 1999. *Scânteia. Cercetare arheologică și restaurare*, Iași: Helios.
- MANTU LAZAROVICI, C.-M., 2002. Sanctuarele Precucuteni-Cucuteni. *Arheologia Moldovei*, XXV: 47-67.
- MARINESCU-BÎLCU, S. 1981. *Tîrpești. From Prehistory to History in Eastern Romania*, British Archaeological Reports, International Series 107, Oxford: Archaeopress.
- MARINESCU-BÎLCU, S., BOLOMEY, A. 2000. *Drăgușeni. A Cucutenian Community*, București: Editura Enciclopedică.
- MAXIM, Z. 2000. Altars from the Starčevo-Criș and Vinča cultures. *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica*, VII: 121-130.
- MIHAI, C., BOGHIAN, D. 1977-1979. Complexul cucutenian de cult descoperit la Buznea (orașul Târgu Frumos), județul Iași. *Memoria Antiquitatis*, IX-XI: 429-452.
- MIREA, P. 2011. Between Everyday and Ritual Use-‘Small Altars’ or ‘Cult Tables’ from Măgura ‘Buduiasca’. *Buletinul Muzeului Județean Teleorman. Seria Arheologie*, 3: 41-57.
- MONAH, D. 1978. Datarea prin C¹⁴ a etapei Cucuteni A₂. *Studii și Cercetări de Istorie Veche și Arheologie*, 29(1): 33-41.
- MONAH, D. 1991. Influences on traditions Vinča dans la plastique anthropomorphe de Cucuteni – Tripolie. *Banatica*, 11: 297-304.
- MONAH, D. 1997. *Plastica antropomorfă a culturii Cucuteni-Tripolie*, Bibliotheca Memoriae Antiquitatis III, Piatra Neamț: Editura „Constantin Matasă”.
- MONAH, D., CUCOȘ, Ș., POPOVICI, D., ANTONESCU, S., DUMITROAIA, Gh. 1983. Cercetările arheologice de la Poduri-Dealul Ghindaru. *Cercetări Arheologice*, VI: 3-22.
- MONAH, D., DUMITROAIA, Gh., MONAH, F., PREOTEASA, C., MUNTEANU, R., NICOLA, C.D. 2003. *Poduri-Dealul Ghindaru. O troie în Subcarpații Moldovei*, Piatra-Neamț: Editura „Constantin Matasă”.
- NICU, I.C. 2013. *Analiza riscurilor geomorfologice care afectează siturile arheologice eneolitice din bazinul hidrografic Valea Oii (Bahlui). Studiu de caz. Teză de Doctorat*, Universitatea Alexandru Ioan Cuza din Iași.
- NIȚU, A., CUCOȘ, Ș., MONAH, D. 1971. Ghelăiești (Piatra Neamț) I. Săpăturile din 1969 în așezarea cucuteniană „Nedeia”. *Memoriae Antiquitatis*, III: 11-64.
- PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA, M. 1966. *Cucuteni*, București: Editura Meridiane.
- PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA, M., FLORESCU, M., FLORESCU, A.C. 1999. *Trușești, monografie arheologică*, București-Iași: Editura Academiei Române.

PETRESCU-DÎMBOVIȚA, M., VĂLEANU, M.C. 2004. *Cucuteni-Cetățuie. Monografie arheologică*. Bibliotheca Memoriae Antiquitatis XIV, Piatra Neamț: Editura „Constantin Matasă”.

PREOTREASA, C. 2013. Rituri de fundare cucuteniene legate de sanctuarul cu etaj de la Poduri (județul Bacău). In: A. Stavilă, D. Micle, A. Cîntar, C. Floca, S. Forțiu (eds.), *ArheoVest, Nr. 1, În Memoriam Liviu Măruia. Interdisciplinaritate în Arheologie și Istorie*, Vol. I, Szeged: JATEPress Kiadó, 91-114.

SCHMIDT, H. 1932. *Cucuteni in der oberen Moldau, Rumänien. Die befestigte Siedlung mit bemalter Keramik von der Steinkupferzeit in bis die vollentwickelte Bronzezeit*, Berlin u. Leipzig: Verlag Walter de Gruyter.

SCHWARZBERG, H. 2003. On problem in identifying ritual pottery: the example of the so-called “cult tables”. In: L. Nikolova (ed.), *Early symbolic system for communication in southeast Europe*, British Archaeological Reports, International Series 1139, Oxford: Archaeopress, 79-84.

SOROCHIN, V., BORZIAC, I. 2001. Plastica antropomorfă a așezării cucuteniene Iablona I, jud. Bălți. *Memoria Antiquitatis*, XXII: 115-136.

SZTÁNCSUJ, S.J., 2015. *Grupul cultural Ariușd pe teritoriul Transilvaniei*, Cluj-Napoca: Mega.

TSVEK, E.V. 2001. Certain aspects of world view of the tribes of the East Tripolian culture. *Interacademica*, II-III: 24-38.

URSULESCU, N., BOGHIAN, D., COTIUGĂ, V., MERLAN, V. 2001-2002. Noi date privind complexele de cult din cultura Precucuteni. *Sargeția. Acta Musei Devensis*, XXX: 61-78.

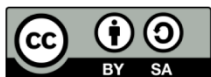
URSULESCU, N., BOGHIAN, D., HAIMOVICI, S., COTIUGĂ, V., COROLIUC, A. 2002. Cercetări interdisciplinare în așezarea precucuteniană de la Tg. Frumos (jud. Iași). Aportul arheozoologiei. *Acta Terrae Septemcastrensis*, I: 29-54.

URSULESCU, N., IGNĂTESCU, S. 2003 *Preutești-Haltă. O așezare cucuteniană pe Valea Șomuzului Mare*, Iași: Casa Editorială Demiurg.

URSULESCU, N., TENCARIU, F.A. 2006. *Religie și magie la est de Carpați acum 7000 de ani. Tezaurul cu obiecte de cult de la Isaiia*, Iași: Casa Editorială Demiurg.

Manuscripts

Băiceni-Dâmbul Morii – Nootebook no. 1, The 1962 and 1963 Excavation Campaigns.



© 2024 by the authors; licensee Editura Universității Al. I. Cuza din Iași. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons by Attribution (CC-BY) license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).