

# EPHEMERIS NAPOCENSIS

XXV

2015

**ROMANIAN ACADEMY**  
INSTITUTE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORY OF ART CLUJ-NAPOCA

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În țară revista se poate procura prin poștă, pe bază de abonament la: EDITURA ACADEMIEI ROMÂNE, Calea 13 Septembrie nr. 13, sector 5, P. O. Box 5–42, București, România, RO–76117, Tel. 021–411.90.08, 021–410.32.00; fax. 021–410.39.83; RODIPET SA, Piața Presei Libere nr. 1, Sector 1, P. O. Box 33–57, Fax 021–222.64.07. Tel. 021–618.51.03, 021–222.41.26, București, România; ORION PRESS IMPEX 2000, P. O. Box 77–19, București 3 – România, Tel. 021–301.87.86, 021–335.02.96.

**EPHEMERIS NAPOCENSIS**

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DTP și tipar: MEGA PRINT  
Coperta: Roxana Sfârlea



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Calea 13 Septembrie nr. 13, Sector 5, București 76117  
Telefon 021–410.38.46; 021–410.32.00/2107, 2119

ACADEMIA ROMÂNĂ  
INSTITUTUL DE ARHEOLOGIE ȘI ISTORIA ARTEI



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EDITURA ACADEMIEI ROMÂNE



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**PREHISTORIC SIGNS AND SYMBOLS IN TRANSYLVANIA (2).  
“THE SACRED PAIR” AND “THE BIRD OF THE SOUL”.  
THE NEOLITHIC AND AENEOLITHIC SETTLEMENT  
FROM TĂRTĂRIA-GURA LUNCII (ALBA COUNTY)**

**Sabin Adrian Luca, Florentina Mărcuți, Vasile Palaghie**

**Abstract:** *The authors base their assertion on the archaeological discoveries that resulted after the preventive researches from the Neolithic and Eneolithic site from Tărtăria, the campaign from 2014. It can be noticed the importance, for the domestic cult (domestic altars, divinities chosen for protecting the family – the house) and the existence of the sacred pair (he-she), but also of the importance of the presence of the bird in correlation with this cult.*

**Keywords:** *Neolithic, domestic cult, sacred pair, the bird of the soul, Tărtăria-Gura Luncii, Romania*

The settlement from Tărtăria-Gura Luncii it is very well known in the specialized literature there for it doesn't need a separate presentation.<sup>1</sup> Anyhow, we have done it several times before, and I believe that the last presentation is being edifying.<sup>2</sup>

When publishing *The “secret” tablet from Tărtăria* belonging to Petrești culture (the preventive excavations campaign from 2014) we also shown the existence, in front of the piece we consider to be the main one, of a motif called either “flag”, “roof” or having other interpretations.<sup>3</sup> This can be – symbolically and accepting the idea – also a human pair. I launch this supposition having the following arguments, extracted from the same site and research campaign.

The archaeological materials from the area of dwelling L XII and pit C LX have give us many arguments in this direction, but also in the common rituals – after all the probabilities – for the entire Neolithic epoch.

### **Dwelling LXII**

Delineated at 1.05 from the south-western profile (▼–0.55 m – CFR (Romanian Railroads) stone and slag), orientated towards north-south, having an irregular shape, it has been partially researched due to the danger represented by the weight of the railroad embankment over the safety of the work of the employees. It is being destroyed, in most of the parts, by the pits and brick pylons belonging to the old CFR canon. The soil in which was grayish, compact, mixed with river stones, massive pieces of adobe, grinders, ceramic, stone and bone materials. The pit component of L XII dwelling in which it was discovered the piece we shall describe,

<sup>1</sup> OROSZ 1908; ROSKA 1942, 21, nr. 77; HOREDIT 1949, 44–57; VLASSA 1962, 23–30; VLASSA 1963, 485–494; VLASSA 1976, 28–43; LUCA 2002;

<sup>2</sup> LUCA/MĂRCUȚI 2015.

<sup>3</sup> LUCA 2001, 87, fig. 26/5; LUCA/MĂRCUȚI 2015.

has the sign C XL. In this area, at about 1.5 m towards north also appeared some *Lumea Nouă* ceramic fragments. L = 3.40 m; l; 2.60 m (the dimensions of the excavated part of the dwelling).

Between the archaeological materials discovered in Vinča horizon, phase A<sub>3</sub> (maybe older, but our arguments in what concerns the analysis of the pottery are being influence by the reduced excavated surface and the excessive “kneading” caused by the construction of several floors/overlapped dwellings that have contributed to the additional mixing of the archaeological materials) it can be noticed a “picture” cut out from a large size pot. This one (fig. 1; photo 1) came from a pot burned in red (probably from the fire that has destroyed the house). The ceramic recipe belongs to the usual type preserves some remains of light colored engobe, partially vitrified. In the mixture of the paste there is also gravel. The recipe seems to have been destroyed since the ancient period, on purpose. This is how it can be explained to the “drop-off” or the character or symbol placed in the superior side of the scene (maybe a portion of another pair in movement or, more likely, a bird with mythical attributes<sup>4</sup>). The dance of the pair is being impetuous and it seems to be formed of a feminine character and a masculine one.<sup>5</sup> We believe that the characters are being submerged until their middle into water, this is how is being explained the belt formed of three parallel incisions, continuous, displayed in zigzag in the middle of the characters. An association between water and the characters – or other liquid – we also found while publishing the table from Turdaş<sup>6</sup>, but also from the libation expressed by pouring the liquid into the vase, relevant by the discovery of the statuettes from Liubcova (The statuette from Liubcova I<sup>7</sup> and II<sup>8</sup>).

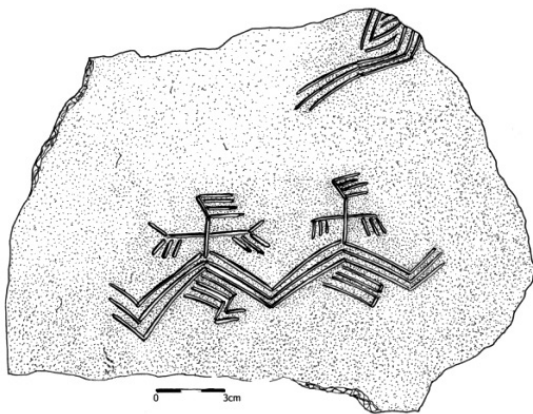


Fig. 1. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii, Alba County, 2014. Dwelling L XII. Ceramic fragment ornamented with incised signs.



Photo 1. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii, Alba County, 2014. Dwelling L XII. Ceramic fragment ornamented with incised signs.

The dimensions of the piece are: H = 17.2 cm / l = 24.5 cm. The piece of the pot is being strongly burned, secondary, in the moment of destruction of the dwelling. Even though it represents

<sup>4</sup> As in Çatal Hüyük – the scene with the birds decapitating humans XXX 1964; analogies SCHWARZBERG 2011, Abb. 79/2 – Tarnaméra: with a single character; MERLINI 2009, 149, nr. 287; another exemplification of the relation bird/human at: WILLIAMS/PEARCE 2009, Nevali Çori, 30, fig. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Analogies: ROSKA 1941, Taf. XCII/9–10 (10 is the closest one), 12; CX/2, 12; CXXVIII/12, 21; CXXIX/13; CXXXIV/9, 11–16, 20, 24; CXXXVI/9 (almost identical), 13–17; CXLI/6–7 (incision and plastic application); as “ideogram”: WINN 2009, DS 190.

<sup>6</sup> LUCA 1993; LUCA ET ALII 2009.

<sup>7</sup> LUCA 1990; LUCA 1991; LUCA/DRAGOMIR 1987; LUCA/DRAGOMIR 1989; LAZAROVICI/LAZAROVICI 2014, Fig. 18a-b; 19.

<sup>8</sup> LUCA 2001A; LUCA 2002; LAZAROVICI/LAZAROVICI 2014, Fig. 18c.

a piece from a very large pot, commonly used – as the facture, the interior and exterior parts are being carefully finished. On the exterior a slip was applied that after the secondary burning became whitish. In the mixture, the ceramic fragment presents clay and gravel, the initial burning being very good. The incisions were made with precision on the unburned soft clay.

Even from the oldest Neolithic period there are exemplifications of characters, applied on the clay pots, executing ritual moves, dances. The examples are numerous and we shall mention only some synthesis approaches.<sup>9</sup> This kind of dances are being reproduced, by incision, in Europe<sup>10</sup> or by painting in Thessaly<sup>11</sup> or Mesopotamia<sup>12</sup>.

That the scene is being about a pair of humans is being a pertinent observation.<sup>13</sup> There are some analogies for the representation of some human characters by incision or bundle of incisions.<sup>14</sup> Following we shall see that at *Tărtăria-Gura Luncii* the pair representing the feminine and the masculine characters is being worshiped in a particular way. The small differences between the two characters exemplify this affirmation – the one of the pair, he-she – **of course sacred in this hypostasis**, in our opinion. The incised pairs are though – very rare.<sup>15</sup> Same as for the ones applied on the pot.<sup>16</sup>

Singular, without being in pairs, there are many representations. This one exists, most of the times, in the cultures of Developed Neolithic from Parța area<sup>17</sup>, Suplacu de Barcău<sup>18</sup>, Zorlențu Mare<sup>19</sup>, in the Early Aeneolithic from Turdaș<sup>20</sup>, Chișoda Veche<sup>21</sup> or in the Developed Aeneolithic, Cucuteni culture<sup>22</sup>, observing a higher degree of schematization and diversity. The same for Nová Ves<sup>23</sup>, Slatina-Sofia (Bulgaria)<sup>24</sup> or in Mesopotamia<sup>25</sup>. Complete syntheses were published in recent papers.<sup>26</sup>

In the superior-right side it is being represented – in our opinion – an incised bird, fragmented unfortunately, “the soul bird”. The symbol of the bird was less remembered and noticed by the researches of the Neolithic period. We can mention some sites (Donja Branjevina<sup>27</sup>, Trestiana<sup>28</sup>,

<sup>9</sup> MAKKAY 1971; MAKKAY 2006; SCHUSTER 2011; ILIEVA/SHTARBANOVA 2005; URSU/ APARAS-CHIVEI 2014 – for Precucuteni culture representation.

<sup>10</sup> MERLINI 2009a, Fig. 8–9; BECKER/DĚBIEC 2014, Fig. 10.6.

<sup>11</sup> NIKOLOV 2009, Fig. 3.1.

<sup>12</sup> NIKOLOV 2009, Fig. 3.4.

<sup>13</sup> Ca la: ILIEVA/SHTARBANOVA 2005, p. 6 (painted); and at LAZAROVICI 2005, fig. 14 – only painted woman.

<sup>14</sup> Synthesis after MAKKAY 1969; MERLINI 2009, Fig. 4.15a/6/20 and 9/2, 5, 4.15d/21–22; very good at Fig. 4.15.f/33, 35–36; 120, Fig. 4.18.c/166–169; BECKER 2014, Fig. 6/6; BECKER/DĚBIEC 2014, 77–78, Fig. 10; LAZAROVICI/LAZAROVICI 2014, 207, fig. 35; 218, fig. 56; 220, fig. 59; 222, fig. 62.

<sup>15</sup> In Mesopotamia, for example: NIKOLOV 2009, Fig. 3.7, 9 (three characters) – incised or 3.6 – painted.

<sup>16</sup> SAMPSON 2009, Fig. 3.

<sup>17</sup> LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 194, fig. VIIC.47.

<sup>18</sup> LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 199, fig. VIIC.55.

<sup>19</sup> MAXIM ET ALII 2009, Cat. 93; LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 208, fig. VIC.72b.

<sup>20</sup> MARLER 2008, 98/bottom; 99; 107; 128/top; MAXIM ET ALII 2009, Cat. 88–89; LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 195–196, fig. VIIC.48a-c.

<sup>21</sup> LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 199, fig. VIIC.54.

<sup>22</sup> LAZAROVICI C.-M. 2009, fig. 11.2, 12.5, 12.7.

<sup>23</sup> BECKER 2014, Fig. 6.6.

<sup>24</sup> NIKOLOV 2009, Fig. 2.2–3 – painted.

<sup>25</sup> NIKOLOV 2009, Fig. 3.8 (cartridge) or 3.10 – incised.

<sup>26</sup> LAZAROVICI 2009, Table B1, 6a-b, 11; LAZAROVICI 2009, fig. 9 – incised/painted; fig. 10 – painted, feminine characters; fig. 15 – painted, masculine characters (Cucuteni culture); BECKER/DĚBIEC 2014, Fig. 10.1–5, 7–8.

<sup>27</sup> KARMANSKI 1968, T. XXII/1; BRUKNER 2009, Fig. 3/down, the third sign from left to right.

<sup>28</sup> LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 192, fig. VIIC.42 (right-up).

Vinča-*Belo Brdo*<sup>29</sup>, Parța<sup>30</sup>, Turdaș<sup>31</sup>, Ditrău<sup>32</sup>, Brânzeni III<sup>33</sup>, Buznea<sup>34</sup>, Žvanec<sup>35</sup>) or synthetic papers<sup>36</sup> in which this symbol was published in different forms of schematization. Among the oldest symbols of this kind, painted, is the one from Cristian I (photo 2), maybe that also in a “reel” as the Oriental examples from above.<sup>37</sup>

This matter, of the association “he-she” – its pair – it is also being “told” by a “weight” from feature C LX (associated, after we have affirmed before, with dwelling L XII). We have placed inverted commas because many of this “weights” seem to be, more likely, candle stands, necessary for illuminating that as parts of the loom or for the fishing net – as so many times they are mentioned in the specialized literature.

The piece was made of a well kneaded, black, with well smashed mica in the paste, well burned and compact. On it, in the lateral side there are incised with firm, deep lines, a pairs – this time essentialized (a triangle with the point down, the feminine part<sup>38</sup> and a geometrized U – the masculine part, a sign that is often used to exemplify the bull).<sup>39</sup>



Photo 2. Cristian I. Starčevo-Criș culture. Phase I. Painted bird placed on the pot's neck. The sanctuary formed of ritual pits. Pit C<sub>64</sub>.

We publish more images of the piece because the two symbols – the masculine and feminine one – are being represented reverse one to another (fig. 2; photo 2–9). For us the feminine sign is being significant, as a direct interpretation, feminine, with the point of the pubic triangle facing down. In this case, the sign for the bull-virility is being represented upside down with 180° – maybe part of a ritual “game” proposed by the author of the signs (photo 4)<sup>40</sup>. But this observation is being valid for the interpretation from our level of civilization, not the Neolithic one.

<sup>29</sup> LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 208, fig. VIIC.71.

<sup>30</sup> LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 193, fig. VIIC.43; VII.C44a1-a6.

<sup>31</sup> MAXIM ET ALII 2009, 142, 153–155, Cat. 107–114, 116–119; LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 193, Fig. VIIC.44.b-c; VIIC.44d-e.

<sup>32</sup> LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 194, Fig. VIIC.44, D16.

<sup>33</sup> LAZAROVICI 2009, Fig. 26.1.

<sup>34</sup> LAZAROVICI 2009, Fig. 26.2; 26.4.

<sup>35</sup> LAZAROVICI 2009, Fig. 26.3.

<sup>36</sup> WINN 2009, symbols: DS 188–189, 199, 218–219; LAZAROVICI 2009a, Table B2; B6–7; LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2011, 192, 193–194; LAZAROVICI 2009, 105, Fig. 25; BURDO 2014, 334, “Virgin-Bird”.

<sup>37</sup> LUCA 2015, 74, photo 43.

<sup>38</sup> For the triangle: MERLINI 2009, 459, DS 029.0 (with the point down) or DS 029.1 (with the point up); variants: LAZAROVICI 2009a, Table B9; as a sign: LAZAROVICI/LAZAROVICI 2014, 222, Fig. 62, sign 82.3.

<sup>39</sup> MERLINI 2009, 456, DS 09.0 (with the horns towards down) or DS 09.3 (with the horns towards up).

<sup>40</sup> For the bull: MERLINI 2009, 129, Fig. 4.20.g/OE 164 (with variants OE 165–167); 143, nr. 149b-f, 208d.



Photo 3. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii,  
Alba County, 2014. Feature C LX.  
Weight with incised signs.



Photo 4. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii,  
Alba County, 2014. Feature C LX.  
Weight with incised signs.



Photo 5. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii,  
Alba County, 2014. Feature C LX.  
Weight with incised signs.

In the inferior on, and more likely, in the superior one, it presents also other intentional interventions from the author. First, there can be distinguished the marks of finger tips slightly printed in the soft paste, as the table of Tărtăria previously published, also from the same excavations<sup>41</sup>. This seems to be, though, the result of previous intentions, being distanced at relatively equal parts. On the macro photography it can be noticed also incisions, both on the lateral and superior side (a V and other disparate signs) – associated, here, with deep and small in diameter imprints, placed at equal distances (photo 6–9).



Photo 6. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii, Alba County,  
2014. Feature C LX. Weight with incised signs.



Photo 7. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii, Alba County,  
2014. Feature C LX. Weight with incised signs.



Photo 8. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii, Alba County,  
2014. Feature C LX. Weight with incised signs.



Photo 9. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii, Alba County,  
2014. Feature C LX. Weight with incised signs.

The diameter of the “weight” (more likely a stand for a candle) is of 6.6 cm, and the thick is 2.8 cm. The mixture of the artifact is fine, tempered with gravel and slit, dark-brown and very well burned.

<sup>41</sup> LUCA/MARȚIȘ 2015.

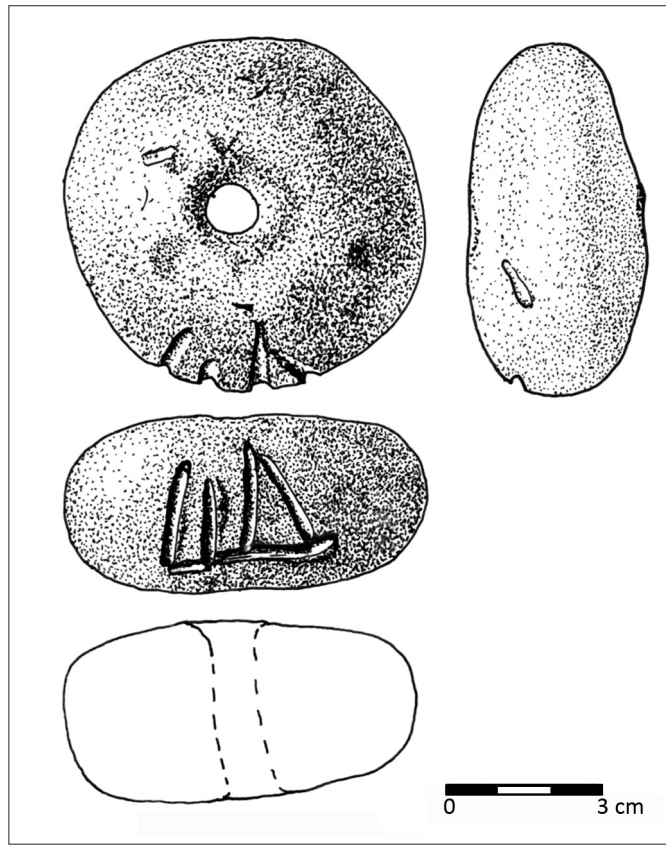


Fig. 2. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii, Alba County, 2014. Feature C LX. Weight with incised signs.

We notice the fact that the described piece is part of the same feature (L XII; C LX) as the first ceramic fragment, the connection between them being obvious in what concerns the cult of the “sacred pair” from Tărtăria. If the large size pot – in our opinion – has a porpoise connected with the daily cult, usual, homely and preponderant solar, the second piece has a foundation role, connected with the nocturne cult, chthonian, more subjected to the fertility and fecundity rules. So, we see the foundation *versus* the use of architectural features as the Neolithic people considered to transmit us.

Even more!

That is exists a cult of the sacred pair in the settlement from Tărtăria-Gura Luncii it is made obvious by a double statuette exemplified at fig. 3, photo 10. Discovered in feature C VII the piece is was made of very fine clay, brick-like – yellowish, very good burned. The inferior part was broken in the ancient period. The pair representation show us in the left side (as we look at the illustration) the masculine face and in the right side (as we look at the illustration) the feminine one. We base on the obvious sexual deforms, used by the one who made this piece in order to separate on sexes the characters, after which the masculine body is being more developed in size as the feminine one.

The dimensions of the piece are: H = 8.7 cm, length 5.8 cm, and the thickness 3.6 cm.

### Feature C LVII

Delineated at ▼ -2.20 m towards the north-western profile, irregular shaped, it wasn't integrally researched because it came out of the perimeter reserved for the preventive excavations. Its filling was made of a brown soil, loose, with successive layers of ashes and burning,

fragments of unburned floor, adobe, coal pigment, ceramic, stone and bone materials. In this pit it is being abruptly tapped a part of the dwelling L XVIIA. L= 3.10 m, l= 1.14 m, ▼-0.64 m (photo 12).

### Feature C LVIIA

Delineated at 2.20 m towards the north-western profile, circular shaped, it wasn't integrally researched because enters in the south-eastern profile, at the middle of S1. The filling was made of a brown soil, loose, with successive layers of ashes and burning. L= 1.70 m, l= 1.09 m; ▼-1.00 m. The pit starts, maybe, higher from the point it was clearly noticed (photo 13).

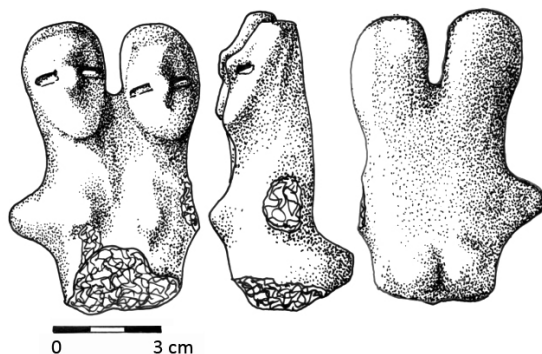


Fig. 3. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii,  
Alba County, 2014. Feature C LVII.



Photo 10. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii,  
Alba County, 2014. Feature C LVII.

Both of the features seem to be cellar-pits (photo 12–13) of the surface dwelling L XVIIA (photo 11) relative dated in phase A of Vinča culture.

It can be noticed – obviously – the fact that the idea of a pair (he-she) represents one of the favorite themes of the general mythology of the Neolithic and Aeneolithic settlement form Tărtăria-Gura Luncii. In fact, we can notice a larger preoccupation than in other places / settlements / cultures of the Neolithic and Aeneolithic from South-eastern and Center Europe for surprising **man** in more realistic poses.<sup>42</sup> The small clay representations (modeled or incised) from Tărtăria show that the domestic altars are numerous<sup>43</sup> and that the divine image borrows human features.<sup>44</sup> Some large Vinča culture settlements are noticed by the abundance of the plastic arts, among which the eponym settlement<sup>45</sup>. In Transylvania we do not know – besides the settlement from Turdaș-Luncă<sup>46</sup>, later than this level, Turdaș culture representing Early Aeneolithic – other with such a richness of anthropomorphic and zoomorphic representations.

We conclude with the observation that also the domestic altars from Tărtăria are being dedicated in some cases – to the divine **pair**.

<sup>42</sup> At Tărtăria, during time, were discovered extremely many pieces modeled of clay or stone. We mention some publications: ROSKA 1942, 21, nr. 77; HOREDȚ 1949, 44–57; VLASSA 1962, 23–30; VLASSA 1963, 485–494; VLASSA 1976, 28–43;

<sup>43</sup> Tărtăria: LUCA 2002a; LUCA 2003. Home altars: LAKÓ 1977, 43; LUCA/DRAGOMIR 1987; LUCA, DRAGOMIR 1989; LUCA 1990; LUCA 1991; LUCA 1993; LUCA 1993a; LUCA 1995; LUCA 2001a; LUCA 2002.

<sup>44</sup> The mask, the one that “transforms the man into god”, has the features of human physiognomy: for Starčevo-Criș: **Zăuan-Dâmbul Cimitirului**: LAKÓ 1977, p. 44, fig. 3/1; **Cristian I**: LUCA ET ALII 2012, cover; LUCA ET ALII 2013, 11–12, fig. 1; LUCA ET ALII 2013a, 38, fig. 3; in Early Aeneolithic: **Uivar**; or in Late Copper Age: **Balatonószöd**: HORVÁTH 2015.

<sup>45</sup> VASIĆ 1936.

<sup>46</sup> ROSKA 1928; ROSKA 1941; LUCA 2001.



Photo 11. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii,  
Alba County, 2014. Dwelling L XVIIA.



Foto 12. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii,  
Alba County, 2014. Feature C LVII.



Photo 13. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii,  
Alba County, 2014. Feature C LVIIA.

The same signal gave us also the few analogies for the piece. In some of the most important Vinča culture sites from Banat and Serbia were discovered also parts of domestic altars representing double statuettes, he-she, **the sacred pair**. These ones were discovered at Vinča<sup>47</sup>, Zorlențul Mare<sup>48</sup>, Liubcova<sup>49</sup> or Gomolava<sup>50</sup>.

In this lines we have tried to draw the attention to the existence of the cult of the **sacred pair** also through the sacred altars, not only through sanctuaries (as it is the one from Parța).<sup>51</sup>

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 Fig. 2. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii, jud. Alba, 2014. Complexul C LX. Greutate cu semne incizate.  
 Fig. 3. Tărtăria-Gura Luncii, jud. Alba, 2014. Complexul C LVII.

<sup>47</sup> MERLINI 2008, fig. 14; WINN 2009, Fig. 4c.

<sup>48</sup> With human attributes: LAZAROVICI 1979, 93, fig. 7/14, pl. XX/G 9; LAZAROVICI/LAZAROVICI 2014, 208, Fig. 36/IIb1; 211, Fig. 42/a; 227, Fig. 76/1-3.

<sup>49</sup> With animal, not anthropomorphic attributes: LUCA 1990; LUCA 1991; for reconstruction see LAZAROVICI/LAZAROVICI 2014, 194, Fig. 10.

<sup>50</sup> XXX 1968, photo 1, T VIII –Vinča pit, number 20.

<sup>51</sup> LAZAROVICI ET ALII 2001.

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