

# **ACTA TERRAE SEPTEMCASTRENSIS**

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**“LUCIAN BLAGA” UNIVERSITY OF SIBIU  
FACULTY OF HISTORY AND PATRIMONY  
INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY AND VALORIFICATION OF THE  
TRANSYLVANIAN PATRIMONY IN EUROPEAN CONTEXT**

# **ACTA TERRAE SEPTEMCASTRENSIS**

## **X**

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**Sibiu, 2011**

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**Contact adress:** „Lucian Blaga” University of Sibiu, Faculty of History and Patrimony, *Institute for the Study and Valorification of the Transylvanian Patrimony in European context*, B-dul Victoriei Nr. 5-7, 550024 Sibiu, România; tel. / fax. 0269 / 214468; 0745 / 366606; e-mail: [sabinadrian.luca@ulbsibiu.ro](mailto:sabinadrian.luca@ulbsibiu.ro), [ins.arheologie@ulbsibiu.ro](mailto:ins.arheologie@ulbsibiu.ro); web: <http://arheologie.ulbsibiu.ro>.

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**TĂRTĂRIA:  
A RITUAL-GRAVE TO CONSECRATE A NOVEL ANCESTOR  
IN A NEOLITHIC MEDIUM-SCALE COMMUNITY**

**Marco MERLINI**

*EURO INNOVANET – Prehistory Knowledge Project, Rome, Italy;*

*”Lucian Blaga” University – IPCTE, Sibiu, Romania;*

*Archaeomythology Institute, Sebastopol, USA*

[marco.merlini@mcmlink.it](mailto:marco.merlini@mcmlink.it)

**Abstract.** *In the Middle Neolithic of Southern-Central Europe, not every corpse received individual and partial secondary burial in a sacralized pit-grave. Even rarer was the re-deposition of a hybrid body made of selected skeletal/artifactual fragmented remain packed together with three inscribed tablets which were the only complete items. At Tărtăria - Groapa Luncii (Transylvania, Romania), this happened as part of a pre-planned and multi-stage mortuary program aimed to consecrate a newly-created ancestor. The article documents significant funerary liturgies reflecting the deceased, “Milady Tărtăria”: an elderly, disabled and ill revered woman with a pivotal magic-religious role in an inclusive mid-size Vinča A community. Post-mortem, the ritual practitioner continued like when she was alive, supporting the community in striding across the gap limping between life and death, with one foot in each world, and exploiting exceptional skills in rituals concerning the sovereign mysteries of vitality connected with sexuality and fecundity.*

*Milady Tărtăria’s dying was a slow process of transition from a spiritual state into another, empowering her with supernatural but immanent faculties and assuring her beneficial influence on the living. A key point was the creation of an alien bone/clay/spondylus/stone skeleton suitable for an ancestral state. Other fragments of her original body possibly circulated as relics among people. The two principles of fragmentation and accumulation worked together thereby reinforcing distinctive social relations and community identity. A “great feast” marked the re-deposition of Milady Tărtăria. She was subjected to final interment inside the pit-house where she had spent her life and it became an ancestral space blessed by spiritual wealth and inserted within a system of place-value and exchange. The Danube script was utilized as a key component of social reproduction strategies based on ancestral ideology of lineage within a kinship-based society. The calibrated age of the bones found at Tărtăria is 5370-5140 BCE. The cultic complex belongs to the Vinča A2 or the Vinča A3 stages (contemporary with the Starčevo-Criș IVA horizon).*

**Key words.** *Vinča culture; Ancestry; Mortuary program; Danube script; Symbolism*

*Sacred signs were incised on plaques and deposited in a secondary deposal of human bones*

The Tărtăria tablets are the best-known Neolithic objects with signs to an audience out of the specialists on writing technology (Fig. 1). They have been recovered from

the site of Tărtăria - *Groapa Luncii* (Transylvania, Romania) in 1961, almost half a century ago. According to the report of the discoverer, Nicolae Vlassa, the hoard of offerings which accompanied them consisted of scorched, disjointed, and partially broken human bones, 26 burned-clay statuettes – or their fragments - with triangular head and cylindrical-or-prism-shaped body, two Cycladic-like alabaster idols and a *Spondylus* shell bracelet. This package of fragmented bones and artifacts composed a cultic offering deposited at the bottom of a “ritual pit” which was located in the deepest cultural layer. It was evidently a ritual pit or “magical-religious complex” filled of ashy earth. The dead person was someone involved in magic and religion who was cremated during a sacrificial ritual (Vlassa 1962; 1963; 1976; 1977).



Fig. 1.

However, certain inadequacies in reporting by the archaeologist in charge caused a bitter discussion on the exceptional discovery of the Tărtăria tablets. It involved the conditions in which they were found and the archaeological context to which they originally belonged. In particular, the deficiencies are related to:

- I. The rumors on their finding circumstances
- II. The “second finding” of the tablets in the laboratory of the Muzeul Național de Istorie a Transilvaniei in Cluj-Napoca

- III. The unsure location of the “ritual pit” on the ground plan
- IV. The uncertain setting of the pit inside the stratigraphy of Vlassa’s dig
- V. The vague stratigraphic position of the inscribed finds inside the “ritual pit”
- VI. The gossip about their radiocarbon-dating
- VII. The cultural and chronological belonging of the pit and the objects discovered within it.

In 2004-2010 research, thanks to new information, Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini solved the most problematic points. They published the in progress results through several studies (Merlini 2004; Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini 2005; Merlini 2006; 2008; Merlini and Lazarovici Gh. 2008; Merlini 2009a; 2009b; Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini forthcoming). The circumstances of the discovery have been completely revised and the precise location of the deposition has been established. The stratigraphy of the trench where the pit was unearthed has been settled. Plan and profile of the excavation has been reassessed. Speculations that intrusive deposits from later periods have damaged or disturbed the primary context of Tărtăria remains have been documented as inconsistent, whereas the “closed” nature of the burial context has been evidenced.

I do not want to return on these preliminary and necessary issues, but investigate instead on the emerging scenario: the dynamic of mortuary ritual; the identity of the deceased and its social role within a mid-size<sup>1</sup> Middle Neolithic community that developed in Transylvania; how the survivors coped with the emotional and social loss of that person; the involvement of corporate, lineal descent group<sup>2</sup>; the spatial patterning in the location of the disposal pit; the expression of symbolic themes; and distinct cultural milieu, which included philosophical-religious beliefs and worldviews. In order to frame the deposition of the inscribed tablets within the arrangement of a ritual grave that consecrated an

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<sup>1</sup> The site is nowadays more than 3-4 hectares and it is actually not disturbed for more than 40-50% of the surface.

<sup>2</sup> Since Lewis Henry Morgan ([1851] 1922; [1877] 1982), anthropology refers to a “corporate group” as a kinship or descent group with rules of membership/exclusion and collective ownership and/or control, and/or utilization, and/or access to crucial but restricted assets (e.g. agricultural land, natural resources, irrigation wells, etc.) by means of lineal ancestry from a distinct dead (Saxe 1970; Murphy 1989:118). The largest descent group unit can be recognized as a lineage, or a clan. It utilizes a common ancestor to mark the social unity and identity of its members, differentiating them from other groups (Fowler K.D. 2004:95).

The corporate group, typically a lineal descent group, has also been identified as a valuable unit for archaeological analysis on prehistoric social organizations. However, little theoretical modeling has been attempted (Freeman L. 1968, 262–267; Saxe 1970; Goldstein 1981; Hayden and Cannon 1982, producing an ethno-archaeological analysis of over 150 households in the Maya Highlands; Hayden, Spafford 1993; Hayden, Bakewell, and Gargett 1996; Hageman J.B. 2004, 63–74). The investigation of the distinct conditions under which these corporate groups emerged and operated in the early farming communities of the Danube civilization is of theoretical significance to the entire discipline of archaeology.



elderly and ill female ritual specialist as a revered ancestor, I am going to recognize mortuary data and program, i.e. the planned and sequential series of mortuary events as resulting in the context of discovery such as treatment of the corpse, interaction and manipulation after the process of decomposition, choice of the place for a secondary burial, ceremonial re-deposal of the dead, etc. (see Lovis 1992; Schroeder 2001, 85-87; Eastman, Rodning 2001, 86,113; Fowler K.D. 2004, 7; Robb 2007, 287; Stutz 2008, 22).

This social transformation followed a dominant principle in the Neolithic Balkans, i.e. the link with ancestral dead (Chapman R. 1994; Jones 2005). Consistency of their cult is evidenced by the very small number of people who were chosen for symbolic retention among the living after the death (Chapman J.C., Gaydarska 2007, 12). I will record the Tărtăria inscribed artifacts as indication of a mainly non-language related script: the Danube script. It developed in the Vinča culture, like in other cultures of the Danube civilization<sup>3</sup>, as a component of social reproduction strategies supporting the ancestral ideology of kinship-based communities.

The inquiry on the mortuary behavioral chain (Bartell 1982, 53) and its determinants will be made applying the balanced, holocultural and multidisciplinary approach, as much as it will be possible within lack of data, advocated by Carr (1995, 107, 120), Schroeder (2001, 77) and others. Both categories of social organization (Binford 1964; 1971, 7, 16, 23, 25; Saxe 1970; 1971; Saxe, Gall 1977; Brown 1971; 1981; Peebles, Kus 1977; Tainter 1978, 107; Braun 1979; Greber 1979, 38; Rothschild 1979, 660; Goldstein 1981.59; O'Shea 1984; Byrd, Monahan 1995) and socially institutionalized philosophical-religious themes and belief system as well as worldview assumptions (Hertz 1960; Tainter 1978, 121; Huntington, Metcalf 1979; Pearson M.P. 1982; 1993; Hodder 1982; 1984; Penney 1983; Barrett 1990; Morris 1991; David 1992, 187, 195; McGuire 1992; Sugiyama 1993; Carr 1995; Carr, Neitzel 1995; Chapman R. 1995; 2003; Gillespie 2001; Sullivan 2001; Harke 2002; Carr, Case 2005) will be put on play and interrelated. Indeed, specific mortuary behavior and practices are affected by a wide range of referent factors and meanings.

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<sup>3</sup> The term "civilization" is used by the author to indicate a complex society with overarching ideologies that possesses a high cultural core (see Yoffe et al. 2005, 253). "Danube Civilization" is an over-arching term for the Neolithic and Copper Age societies of Southeastern Europe that flourished from c. 6400 to c. 3500-3400 BCE (Childe 1929; Haarmann 2002, 17-19.; Merlini 2004). This terminology is coherent with the acknowledgment that the Danube River and its tributaries favored the emergence of an institutional, economic, and social network of developed cultural complexes, cultures, and cultural groups that shared several features over a wide territory. They were characterized by extended subsistence agrarian economies and lifestyles, urbanism, refined technologies (particularly in weaving, pottery, building and metallurgy), long distance trade involving status symbol artifacts, complex belief systems, sophisticated patterns of religious imagery, and effective systems of communication by means of symbols and signs (the Danube Communication System) which included the technology of an archaic and mainly non-language related writing.

The treatment of Milady Tărtăria's cadaver was related not only to the identity of the person in life and her role within the community but also, and not less, to broader social and cosmological ideals of what she was going to be in the afterlife (Brück 2004). It is significant that, when applying the "materialist-ecological" (Carr 1995, 114) and "neo-evolutionary" (Morris 1991, 163) view for example to the coeval Linearbandkeramik / LBK culture (c. 5600-4900 cal. BCE), fragmentation, defleshing of bodies, and secondary burial are generally classed as low status of the dead or as utterly deviant and expressing a profound crisis. On the contrary, the different treatment of the dead, comparing with depositions into LBK ordinary cemetery, actually reveals not difference in status, but symbolic propensities concerning the dissolution of a composite person constituted by flows of goods and substances (Hofmann 2009).

One of my primary concerns is to advance working hypothesis in order to define the research agenda and drive the pursuit and extraction of new and firmer data from a rich, but uneven excavation. New evidence will come from the just now starting excavations at Tărtăria held by the Lucian Blaga University - IPCTE at Sibiu and led by Sabin Adrian Luca. The first campaign was carried out in September 2010. For the previous excavations see Luca 1997, 2001, 2003a, 2003b, 2005.

### *The riddle of the corpse dating and identity*

From the analysis carried by the Laboratory of the Department "Scienze della Terra" of La Sapienza University, Rome (Rome – 1631/human bones:  $6310 \pm 65$  yr BP), the calibrated age of the bones found at Tărtăria is 5370-5140 BCE (Merlini 2004, 289; 2006; 2009). If one compares this data with the chronostratigraphic sequence of Transylvania and Banat sites, one can place the Tărtăria complex into the early Vinča period (Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini 2005). It may belong to the Vinča A2 or Vinča A3 culture as at Liubcova I<sup>4</sup> (Mantu 1995; 1998a; 1998b; 2000; Schier and Draşovean 2004) or, less probably, to the Starčevo-Criş IVA culture (contemporary with the Vinča A2), as those from Cârcea, Banat culture I (Mantu 1998a; 1998b; 2000; 2002).

In the previous literature, the bones found in the "ritual pit" were originally assumed as belonging to an adult man about 35-40 years old (Whittle 1996, 101). It has been suggested that he was a shaman, a spirit-medium (J.C. Chapman 1983), a priest, or a high dignitary based on the associated artifacts and a cremation ritual designed for an out of the ordinary person. Confident to have under observation the burned remains of a sacrificial ceremony, the excavator jumped to the unproven conclusion that a cannibalistic ritual had taken place in Tărtăria (Vlassa 1963, 492; 1976, 31). This hypothesis was based on a weak circumstantial evidence but not so weird, because a number of anthropophagous ceremonies have been documented in the same region. They were performed to communicate with divinities and spirits.

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<sup>4</sup> At Liubcova, level Vinča A1-A3 occurs, but a Vinča C1-C2 stratum is also present.

In the dwelling B2/1994 at Orăștie–Dealul Pemilor, only a few kilometers from Tărtăria, remains of roasted human bones and crushed big bones for extracting the marrow have been discovered. They belong to the Turdaș culture (Luca 2001, 48). Fragments of cranial skullcaps attributed to cannibalism have been found also at the Turdaș settlement itself (Luca 2001, 49). In 1999 at Bolgrad (northwestern Black Sea area), in an excavation funded by Newcastle University, a large fragment of a human skull was found among potsherds and animal bones in a semi-subterranean dwelling belonging to the Gumelnița Culture. Preliminary examinations at the Laboratory of the Institut de Palaeontologie Humaine identified three artificially perforated holes and grooves on the surface of the skull interpreted as evidence of cannibalism (Dolukhanov 2000). Fuelled by the case of the LBK enclosure at Herxheim, near Landau in the Rhine Valley, further evidence of anthropophagous practice in the wide area of the Neolithic in Southeastern Europe is under discussion (Orschiedt, Haidle 2006; Gronenborn 2006; Golitko, Keeley 2007; Price, Wahl, Bentley 2008; Koutrafouris 2008.191; Boulestin et al. 2009, 968-982; Haack, Arbogast, Bauer, Boulestin, Coupet, Denaire, Jeunesse, Schimmelpfennig, Turck, van Willigen, Zeeb-Lanz 2010). It crosses the narrative imported from ethnography (Brown, Tuzin 1983; Goldman 1999; Lindenbaum 2004) concerning endo-cannibalism, the volitional ingesting all or part from the corpse of a group member, mainly in the form of mortuary or funerary consumption, as a passionate act of affection and reverence (Glasse 1963, 1967; Lindenbaum 1979; Conklin 2001), or for group renewal and reproduction (Hertz 1960, 32-33; Gillison 1983, Meigs 1984) vs. exo-cannibalism, i.e. eating someone from outside the group as an action of aggression or an apotropaic procedure against misfortune, often in the context of warfare (Knauft 1999, 103; Ernst 1999, 144; Yi 1993; Sutton 1995).

Nevertheless, even if osseous remains are actually fragmented and anatomically incomplete, at Tărtăria neither a conflagration, nor a sacrificial ritual, and nor a cannibalistic ceremony happened (see evidence and documentation in Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini 2005; Merlini 2006; Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini forthcoming). First, in case of both ritual and secular cannibalism some selected remains occur, in particular from head, arms, and legs. Regarding Tărtăria, we have found a too wide range of bones and many are useless as food. Second, in a banquet the bones are scattered on the ground among the remains of meals, sometimes refused in domestic waste zones or crushed by dogs. In Tărtăria, they were packed and accompanied by ritual artifacts that belonged to a very respected person in the community. Third, the bones were broken in a natural way and not, for example, crushed to sever muscles or to extract the marrow as at Orăștie–Dealul Pemilor. Finally, the bones are not burnt. The fragments of the big bones have traces of spongy/foamy and show a dark brown color; therefore, it was legitimate to suppose it was the consequence of a thermic stress suffered by them. It could have implied the partial or total carbonization of the collagenous converting it, by charring, into elementary carbon. On the contrary, chemical tests at the Laboratory of the Department “Scienze della Terra” of La Sapienza University of Rome have excluded processes

of converting the bones into carbon. The dark brown color is due to the absorption of oxygen hydrate and insoluble humates coming from the burial place.

Concerning the identity of the very special buried person, according to the anthropometric analysis of the bones it was a *female* of Mediterranean type, very old for the standards of that time (50-55 years old). Palaeopathological markers have established that she was very ill and in pain for a degenerative-arthritis process causing malformation from an early age. She had a severely curved posture forming a > (an arrow) due to a decalcified and fragile vertebral column. She limped on her right leg since youth, because of her thicker, ankylosed and shorter right femur and leg. The tendency to angle towards the right was accentuated by a scoliosis that deformed the right side of the chest and the right shoulder.

It is evident that since childhood this person was not self-sufficient, disabled to the extent to be not capable to carry tasks others may take for granted, especially with regard to the procurement and production of food. Since the times of meta-cultures, physical abnormality was sometimes considered not a social handicap, but "a sign of distinction" to activate on the "other side" of the world, i.e. preferably on the exploration of uncommon powers. Hence, the connection between physical disabled people and the sphere of otherworldly powers to guide the destiny of human beings who are normal and equal, i.e. without any sign of differentiation. In particular, lameness appears in a number of myths and rituals documented in Mediterranean and Continental Europe, the Americas, and China. All are apparently linked to seasonal transitions i.e. day and night are always in unbalance, being one shorter or longer, some distinctive moments apart (Ginzburg 1989). Carlo Ginzburg, in *Ecstasies*, analyses the recurrent motif of the limping shaman, the sorceress with one hoof, the child with a limp leading werewolves, the one-sandaled hero, or even Cinderella and the lost of her single glass slipper. According to his documentary research, the person with injured or missing feet appears to be an intermediary figure between the world of the living and that of the dead or the spirits, because anyone who goes to and returns from the nether world is marked by such an asymmetry (Ginzburg 2004).

The ambulatory unbalance that characterizes gods such as Hermes, Hephaestus and Dionysus has been deciphered as a symbol of temporary or permanent association with the world of the dead. The related ritual of the *askoliasmos*, a game played at winter celebrations in honor of Dionysus Lene to enhance the regeneration of the vegetation god, consisted of hopping around on the skin of a sacrificed goat filled with air and smeared with oil by keeping balance on one foot. The contestant, who could keep for the longest time his place on it, was the winner (Hyginus ii. 4; Dyer (1891) 2001, 108 concerning Icarus contribution; Adrados 1975, 325; Eliade vol. I 1976; Kerényi 1996, 324; Rist 1997). The verb *askoliazein* indicated the crane habit to stand on one leg. It is not for a case that a ritual crane dance (*Geranos*) was practiced at night in Delos and Crete. According to Plutarch, Theseus and the rescued Athenian youths, after they slew the Minotaur and landed in the island of Delos, performed for the first time the famed Cretan Crane Dance (with harps for accompaniment) during which they went through the imitation of threading the

Labyrinth. This dance is mentioned by Homer in the *Iliad* (Plutarch 1914; Lawler 1946; Temporini, Haase 1992, 4124). Avian transformation and Crane Dance have very remote roots. Wings of Common Crane (*Grus grus*) have been discovered from the East Mound (space 73, unit 1347) at Çatalhöyük in Anatolia. They have been used to compose a ritual costume (Lloyd 1956, 53; Lewis-Williams, Pearce 2005, 159; Hodder 2006, 49). Russell and McGowan interpreted the find as coming from a spread wing to be attached to the shoulder of a dancer and used in rituals possibly connected with the celebration of marriage (Russell, McGowan 2003). The earliest depiction of a Crane Dance comes from Göbekli Tepe on stela 33. (Fig. 2)



Fig. 2.

Even if far in time and distance from Tărtăria, it is significant the evidence of a female shaman burial turned up at Tachtit Cave, near the Sakhnin (Lower Galilee, Israel). She lived in a Natufian community and had unusual physical characteristics, probably congenital malformations that very likely led to a life-long limping or foot dragging (Grosman, Munro, Belfer-Cohen 2008).

Crossing the recognition in literature concerning the part played by persons with a limp in religion and rituals with the analysis of such a distinct human remains from Tărtăria belonging to an individual who needed the support of the community for decades and the occurrence of a ritual pit and its cultic context, one has to comment upon a priestess, shaman-woman or dignitary-woman. I prefer to refer to her as “Milady Tărtăria,” indicating her as a “terrific and revered holy woman” who

strode across the gap limping between life and death, one foot in each world. She had therefore a pivotal role as ritual specialist in an inclusive community capable of only moderate formation of leadership and policy (Merlini 2004, 289, 2006; Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini 2005, 208-209; Merlini and Lazarovici Gh. 2008; Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini forthcoming).

Even in the Middle Neolithic of Southeastern-Central Europe people were 'enchained' through their genealogy (Appleby 2010, 47). At Tărtăria, the number of older people would have been very low. As an aged ritual specialist with many social relations, Milady Tărtăria was the only physical link between family/corporate group/community and past events. This occurred within a newly and unsettled literate context that exploited signs mainly for liturgical purpose. As one of the oldest members of a mid-scale settlement and capable to deal with magical signs, she would have provided the only available connections to the ancestors, elucidated common roots and narrated past episodes. Her importance did not lie merely in her ability to illuminate questions about the relationship between past and present, but in her physical embodiment of this linkage as an interconnected entity within a temporal and genealogical network. An unpublished Neolithic female figurine, host by the National Archaeological Museum in Athens, can give an idea of the disabled features of Milady Tărtăria. (Fig. 3)



Fig. 3.

### *Treatment of the body and disposal program*

The post-mortem treatment of Milady Tărtăria body is an open window on the visceral corporeity of the Neolithic existence. Funnel shape and extent of the pit, 31-40 cm. high X a diameter of 40 cm. (Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini forthcoming)



indicate that the custom was not the placement of a corpse into a *burial*, but the packed deposition into a pit-grave of *part* of the disarticulated skeletal remains *after the defleshing* process.

Primary treatment, celebration and burial were given the deceased. Postmortem handling and processing of the corpse would have been a demanding task in both an emotional and organizational sense. The corpse was first allowed to decompose in a place for that purpose. An excarnation by processor corpse dismemberment has to be excluded.<sup>5</sup> There are no clear signs of razor, blade, bird beak, claw or animal fang.<sup>6</sup> The act of depriving or divesting from flesh was made by the simple decarnalization of the body on the first burial stage (through temporary internment or covering the corpse with earth or stones until the soft issue has decayed completely) or exposing it to natural events possibly on a platform protected by scavengers but allowing the flesh to rot away.

Since there are many possible methods to accomplish this, it is impossible at this stage of the research to say how this portion of the disposal program was executed. Absence of cut marks or other forms of bone modification indicate that decomposition was likely complete. Removal of soft tissues with a cutting tool was not necessary. Of course, we do not know which was the time necessary for the body decarnalization, depending on season, contextual features (e.g. characteristics of soil), and cultural norm. We cannot argue even if the length of the intermediary period was prolonged by several factors, such as the necessity to accumulate a surplus to conduct the feast connected to the re-interment (Hertz 1960; Miles 1965; Metcalf 1981). However, from absence of cut marks related to the removal of the last traces of ligaments through careful scraping of the skeleton remains, one can infer that the lapse of time was enough for the bones to become dry and free of decaying flesh via natural putrefaction.

The separation of flesh and bones by rotting put Milady Tărtăria's corpse to rest and allowed her spirit to leave the material world (Hertz 1960, 86; Thomas 1999, 136). It was a problematic and apprehensive step of discontinuity in a multi-event process aimed supporting the esteemed deceased into the undertaking of the passage from the world of the living to the land of the ancestors. As evidenced by anthropological and ethnographic evidence, during this intermediate phase, a

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<sup>5</sup> A similar situation was recognized at Mesolithic Vlasac (on the Iron Gates). Here deliberate disposal of individual human bones occurred. For example, human remains to north of the structure comprises: an articulated adult skeleton without skull in grave M52, a pair of articulated lower legs/feet in grave M55, and a pair of articulated lower legs without feet in grave M56. Among articulated skeletons, numerous disarticulated bones of individuals have been recovered. It is under discussion if they are disturbed older burials or intentional burials of defleshed bones and body parts. However, there is not persuasive evidence for the practice of depriving or divesting the flesh (Bonsall 2009, personal communication).

<sup>6</sup> In the same area, excarnation – the removal of the flesh from a corpse leaving only the bones - was present for a long time. Excarnation was even typical in tumuli of the Late Coțofeni culture (Lazarovici Gh., Meșter 1995).

cadaver suffers putrescence and formlessness, until only dry, white, hard and imperishable bones remain. If bone and flesh are complementary in the living human body, they become in opposition after the passing. The cadaver occupies a liminal state between that conjunction of bone and flesh that is considered "life" and that separation of these substances that is considered "death" (Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 115). A corpse that is still fleshed represents a conceptual anomaly. Its condition is unstable, dangerous and polluting (Van Gennep 1960; Douglas 1966; Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 34). The sterile and dry order of bone has to take dominance over the decaying vitality of the wet flesh. In parallel, the mortal is neither alive nor finally dead.

During this period called "intermediary" by Hertz (1960), the fate of the spiritual component of the human being is modelled on the fate of the body: the soul needs time to convert itself into a spirit worthy of the land of the dead, even as the corpse needs time to become dry skeleton. When the decaying cadaver is formless and repulsive, so the non-material component of the dead person is neither able to reanimate it because decomposition has already begun, nor ready reaching the society of the dead and gaining admittance. Therefore, it is miserable, homeless and wandering. It leads a pitiful existence in unfamiliar spirit regions or on the environs of human habitation, near the decomposing corpse (Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 90). In its discomfort, the spiritual component of the dead person is demanding care and is pitied by the survivors. However, it is liable maliciously and vindictively to inflict misfortune or sickness upon the living (Hertz 1960). It is not difficult to imagine that at Tărtăria even a respected former magic-religious adept who supported the community for a long time had to suffer the horrible fate of the intermediary period. Therefore, elaborate observances were required to divert her hostility and placate her aggressiveness. A series of mourning rituals drew attention to the continuing and ambivalent presence of both the rotting corpse and the hovering spiritual component of Milady Tărtăria, giving care to them and shielding against their potential danger. The corpse and the non-material component of Milady Tărtăria were likewise the object of fear, as well as of solicitude and protection (Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 94). The magic-religious powers that she had when alive, on the one side inspired great fear to the survivors, but on the other side encouraged hope to exploit them in a benign way if proper metamorphosis of her spiritual component was achieved. The challenge was the replacing of the malice of the recently dead with the benign support of the long dead transmuted into an ancestral dead.

Exhumation and collection of Milady Tărtăria's bones after defleshing process followed. If one follows Kuijt indications concerning MPPNB, this process was undertaken / witnessed by household members, ritual practitioners and the general community (Kuijt 2008.175, fig. 2). Analyzing the double burial in the contemporary Inner Mani communities, Seremetakis (1991, 188) suggests that the re-encounter with the dead persons through exhumation of their bones after 3-5 years is intended to bring them back, in a new and alien form, into the world of the living. These ancestors are recently departed individuals and they belong to families



who welcome them back through small-scale and intimate disinterment of what Hertz (1960) termed the new body of the dead.

After exhumation of the already purified white skeletal remains of Milady Tărtăria, procedures for secondary deposal started, i.e. the intentional and socially sanctioned recovery, manipulation and reburial of human osseous remains into a permanent resting place (Metcalf and Huntington 1991, 97; Schroeder 2001, 77).<sup>7</sup> In particular, a portion of them was selected, fragmented and gathered for secondary disposal. Selective disposal of disarticulated, incomplete and broken bones is characteristic of secondary internment (Hertz 1960; Harrisson 1967, 167; Quigley 2001, 251; Kuijt I. 2008, 175, fig. 2), even if it is not sufficient in itself to define a re-deposit and one has to keep count of the risk that some of the skeletal remains have been forgotten by the archaeological excavation. Anthropological expertise of Georgeta Miu is working to sort out if there is an understandable rationale in the selection of the fragmentary bone elements.

Due to the 'closed' nature of the burial context, the fragmentation of the bones occurred before the secondary deposition. We have therefore to grasp the family/community reactions to the dead and the meaningful and expressive criteria that motivated the re-placement of the corpse through a process of secondary and partial interment into a sacralized space (viz. Huntington, Metcalf 1979, 1).

Primary and secondary mortuary practices were possibly linked and perceived by their performers as parts of a broader belief system and a liturgical chain (Kuijt I. 2008, 175). Probably two funeral rites have been performed. The first began immediately after the death of the admired ritual practitioner and ad as a hub the deposal of her cadaver for temporary storage. The ritual performed during the re-burial commemorated the transfer of the remains to their final resting place and conducted properly Milady Tărtăria to the society of ancestors.

If one follows Krum Băčvarov's suggestions about Bulgarian Neolithic reburials as the conclusion of a two-stage process of post-mortem body handling (Băčvarov 2003), the Transylvanian re-deposition might have been based on some kind of public rite of devotion or initiation performed while accommodating in the pit-grave three kinds of items. They were a selection of the fragmented bones, the core part of the grave goods after a ritual breaking up, and the inscribed tablets kept as the only complete items. The key aspect of this mortuary tradition is that the deceased is not considered properly buried until a second ceremony of interment is held after proper treatment of the cadaver.

At Tărtăria, this process seems to comprise the sorting of the skeleton remains, the fragmentation of the relics, the beautification of them, and the removal of one or more parts of the body. This v s i o n of th e ritu d that hap p e d at Tărtăria is reinforced by the identity of the deceased as a magic-religious adept. Main tasks of the ritual performed during the re-burial was the giving of specific instructions to Milady Tărtăria as to howto prepare for the journey to the land of the ancestral

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<sup>7</sup> For the utilized terminology, see Sprague 2005.

dead and how to make it (Metcalf 1982, 190-230). Then she was conducted soul along the path to the residence of the ancestors.

A window on the emphatic and complex ceremonies performed during the reburial can be opened by a scorching animal bone that was mixed with the human bones (Lazarovici and Miu 2004). Animal and human bones might have been placed together during the secondary inhumation process, possibly in relation to a feast and rituals concerning the worship of a person who possessed some special and/or secret knowledge. It was part of a high-profile public ceremony, which can therefore be viewed as a spiritual and symbolic act with social, political, and personal meanings (Kuijt I. 2008, 175). Inclusion of animal bones at this stage of the mortuary program is another typical indicator of re-deposition.

Secondary human burials are connected with beliefs relating to rites de passage that the deceased have to undergo after the separation from life in order to achieve incorporation into the world of the dead traveling through the phases of separation, segregation, and integration (Hertz 1960, 86; Van Gennep 1960; Turner). According to a rich body of ethnographic data recording the connections between secondary burials, ancestor worship, social memory, and identity, the re-deposition is often portrayed as a joyous occasion, a time for celebration not grief as in the first interring ritual (Bloch 1982, 214, 216; Kan 1989, 192, 296; Wiessner, Tumu 1998, 21-22.). This is when death is negated by the symbolic rebirth into the eternal collectivity of the ancestors (Larsson 2003, 164). Weiner indicates these events as "moments of spectacular visual communication" (1976, 61).

To sum up, the "great feast" (Hertz 1960) was an intensely communal affair that terminated the miserable liminal period. Guests were possibly summoned from far and wide to attend. The communal eating provided an opportunity for renewed contact with the sacred dead and gave a moment of consummate glory to the individual identity of the holy woman remembering her skills and successfulness. It honored her now dry bones mixed with fragments of emblematic artifacts and confirmed that the ritual was properly conducted in order to guarantee the arrival of her spiritual component in the land of ancestral dead and the welcome of the "colleagues". Finally, the great feast activated the benign influence that the new ancestor had to exercise upon its descendants (Hertz 1960). Consistently with the magic-religious system of the Vinča A culture and its mytho-logic, the mortuary procedures into play at Tărtăria excludes the belief of a disembodied soul (Hertz 1960, 86; Cederroth et al. 1988; Taylor 2002) supported by the living in a no-return departing from their society in order to be admitted into the realm of the other incorporeal souls. The Transylvanian rite of re-burial was linked with eschatological beliefs, related to the tasks of the living, in order to achieve that Milady Tărtăria safely transformed, in a satisfied manner, into what it was believed that she had finally to transform (Helms 2004). So she continued to operate successfully (in another form) among the society of the living bridging it with the sphere of the dead and the ultramundane powers.

In addition, the secondary burial of Milady Tărtăria and related feast constituted a conduit for collective memory and reaffirmation of identity and community

membership (Kuijt I. 2008, 186). It served as public marker to affirm that thread of the unquiet and potentially dangerous dead was passed and she was reintegrated within the community. The sacredness of the moment and the genuine festivity allowed the participants restoring normal relations among the survivors and reconstructing the social order after the dramatic event of her death and the long transitional period for transforming her into an ancestor conceived as a sort of guardian spirit (Downs 1956, 31-2). The final deposal lend an occasion to bring about meaningful practices that were apt for individuals and groups at reasserting and renegotiating their identities and reassert their visions for the future in the community (e.g., Weiner 1976; Feeley-Harnik 1989; George 1996; Kan 1989; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Schiller 1997). Therefore, the final funeral ceremony was possibly scheduled at a prearranged time that on the one side did not conflict with other collective tasks such as for example the harvest (Hertz 1960; Metcalf and Huntington 1991) and on the other side facilitated participation to an event that crosscut kin, generation, and household lines (Downs 1956; Hertz 1960; Hudson 1966; Metcalf and Huntington 1991).

*Other cases of Neolithic deceased individuals that were revered magic-religious adepts while alive.*

In the Middle Neolithic of Southeastern-Central Europe, the *secondary* treatment and *partial* inhumation of osseous remains from a *single and non-cremated elderly person* was not a typical practice (Chapman J.C. 2000, 146). Isolated adult re-depositions occurred preferably outside the domestic frame (Perlès 2001, 279), in simple pits or in ditches dug within or near the settlement (Weinberg 1970, 579, 593-594). Anza IV (5400-5100 BCE) yielded bone deposits (Gimbutas 1972). In the Vădastra culture (5100-4800 BCE), skulls fragments and isolated bones have been recovered at the eponymous site and at Crusovu (Romania) (Comşa 1974). At Mandra (Thessaly, Greece with a time span of 4940-4550 BCE), two single secondary burials were found in pits and cavities dug inside the ditch that surrounded the settlement. The limbs of a middle-aged female were removed at a later stage from the original internment to be reburied in another pit (Souvatzi 2000; 2088, 190, 191). In the phase I of Makriyalos settlement (Macedonia, Greece, 5200-4900 BCE), dozens of mature individuals are represented in secondary burials, mainly inside the large perimetric ditch (Triantaphyllou 1999). In a number of instances, originally articulated burials are suggested by assemblage of bones covered with stones. Blegen recovered a secondary burial in a Neolithic oval cist grave on the southeastern slope of the hill where the Neolithic village near Hageorgitika (East Arcadia) occurred (Blegen 1932, 661; Angel 1945.36, table 1; Edwards, Gadd, Hammond 1970, 594).<sup>8</sup> In a rock shelter at Prosymna (Argolid), three skulls and scattered bones were found as secondary deposition in the upper stratum, dating to the MN or LN period; (Blegen 1937, 28; Coleman 1977, 103).

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<sup>8</sup> However, according to a subsequent study of Angel (1971, 27) the skeleton, with its Basic White Al skull, might have derived directly from the Early Neolithic population.

Individual secondary burials of adults in pits within houses, as at Tărtăria, are very rare. A noteworthy instance is the finding from Mandalo (near Pella, Macedonia, Greece). Here a reburial of an adult in a pit lined with mud bricks and a clay floor has been recovered (Souvatzi 2088, 187). A secondary single inhumation or a formal partial inhumation individuates a grave in household space at Golokut in Srem (Republic of Serbia). Here the upper half of an otherwise articulated skeleton was discovered under the floor of a dwelling (Báčvarov 2003). At Podgoritsa, bones from a minimum of 15 human beings were included in dozens of large pits found cut into subsoil or cultural layers (Angelova 1983, 11). John Chapman conjectures that the apparent absence of refittings among the bones might indicate that human body parts were regularly taken off-site and moved to other, neighboring settlements to maintain social relations (Chapman J.C. 2000, 143). In the settlements of the Kremikovci group<sup>9</sup> from the Sofia Basin, scattered skulls and mandibles were buried under house floors with or without goods inventory (Báčvarov 2003, 91). In the phase II of Makriyalos settlement (4900-4500 BCE), the domestic space was utilized for inhumation as evidenced by two occurrences in the rubbish pit of a habitation (Triantaphyllou 1999, 129, 131-2). At Ayia Sofia (Thessaly), the secondary depositions of an adult and a child were placed in the corners of two overlying houses after their abandonment (Milojčić et al. 1976, 6-7). Even if it is a primary deposition, a significant case is the foundation burial of an adult female under the floor of a dwelling at Turdaș (Transylvania, Romania) (Torma 1879, 133-134; Roska 1941; László 1991, 40; Luca 2001, 22). Scattered skulls and mandibles have been discovered under floors of Late Neolithic and Early Copper Age houses from central and southwest Anatolia (Báčvarov 2003.112).

Grave goods are mainly absent in the instances mentioned above. Instead, Tărtăria is typified by secondary treatment and partial inhumation of skeletal remains from a single special individual (an old female) in a distinct and dedicated pit within her habitation and associated to a cache of her fragmented tools and personal objects, which comprised a spiritual wealth.

Current research on coeval skeletons and burials is offering individual portraits of some ritual specialists comparable with "Milady Tărtăria" and her mortuary program of individual re-deposition. Archaeological evidence and literary references point to some analogous features from the possibly secondary deposit of bones belonging to a single individual that was discovered on the shore out of the Franchthi Cave (Argolid, Greece). Here a Middle Neolithic burial yielded a 39-40 year old woman (Fr 59) whose scattered skeleton was put into a pit probably through a secondary burial (Jacobsen and Cullen 1981; Perlès 2004, 66). The grave goods found with her were mainly tools and were exceptional comparing to the ones found on the same site: a complete well-worn and mended carinated monochrome pot, six worked bone points, three obsidian blades and possibly a burin spall of obsidian (Vitelli 1993, 70). The stock may have been her personal possessions. In particular, the bowl appears to have had a substantial life-use before becoming a

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<sup>9</sup> It is a variant of the Early Neolithic Starčevo-Criș (Körös) assemblage.

burial good, which is evidenced by mend holes near the rim (Fowler K.D. 2004, 28). The type of tools in the burial and their exceptional number (11) may indicate that she had some “special” status in the community as a craftsperson. The anthropological examination of the remains and the woman’s skeletal pathology (the considerable wear of the incisor) suggested thread biting and spindle holding, all activities connected to spinning and weaving (Angel n.d.; Smith and Cook 1991). The pathological evidence connected with the hands and the shoulders indicates the woman may have been a potter. Consistently, it was advanced that the grave goods found with her represent a pot-making tool-kit or a portion of one (Fowler K.D. 2004, 29). The hypothesis is based on Vitelli’s statement that potters during the Early Neolithic, and possibly the Middle Neolithic, may have been more than just artisans. The transmutation of clay to pottery may have been perceived as an active participation to the natural transformation processes, such as the changing of the seasons, day to night, and life to dead. Knowledge of these transformative tasks is associable to the esoteric expertise of shamans. Thus, Vitelli proposes that pottery making was initially the secret art of a few and that potters may have acted as shamans (Vitelli 1999, 100).<sup>10</sup>

The Franchthi remains do not illustrate unequivocally a secondary deliberate deposition after a ritualized selection of skeletal remains (Cullen 1999, 168-169).<sup>11</sup> In addition, the inference of the deceased’s occupation from the funerary equipment is quite speculative (Talalay 2000, 11). Nonetheless, evidence indicates high amount of energy expenditure and a ritualized selection of a lavish group of useful objects that such a special dead possibly utilized while alive. The unique attributes of this woman’s mortuary treatment circumstantially support the assumption that she was a shaman (Fowler K.D. 2004, 29), although this recognition of potters is based on a loose definition of ‘shaman’ as someone who practices ritual or symbolic actions known only to a restricted portion of the society. In this case, the artisans who by chance discovered a new technique can be defined as shamans simply because they did not understand at first the processes of ceramic production and kept them secret, probably supposing the intervention of supernatural forces (Vianello 2005, 3).

Great caution concerning the identification of the woman from Franchthi as a ritual specialist (as a ‘shaman’ in the above weak definition) is generally taken due to the common supposition that this burial is “the only burial of its kind in the entire Neolithic period” (Fowler K.D. 2004, 29). However, the highly comparable mortuary data and burial program with Milady Tărtăria support the hypothesis that both might have acted as magic-religious adepts.

Another ritual specialist coeval with Milady Tărtăria (5300-5210 BCE)<sup>12</sup> might be indicated in the LBK culture. The burial 15/75 from Vedrovice - *Siroká u lesa*

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<sup>10</sup> For a distinction between shamans, associated with hunter-gatherer societies, and priests, generally associated with agricultural societies, as well as the possible occurrence of shaman-priests who combine traits of both, see VanPool (2009).

<sup>11</sup> According to Talalay, it was a primary intramural burial (Talalay 2000, 11).

<sup>12</sup> It is dated 5600-5400 BCE, according to Kruta and Humpolova (2009).

(Moravia, Czech Republic) yielded male remains (DNA T2 LUP) with unusual burial position. The person was of local origin and died in his early 30s. The head was injured and subjected to trepanation at the point of the wound - a remarkably example of early surgery. He was buried on his left side, his hands placed close to his temples as if to relieve the pain. The rich grave equipment included a jug and a bowl that were probably his eating and drinking vessels in life. It comprised also personal adornments such as spondylus shell pendants and bracelets from the Mediterranean Sea, marble beads, two pair of stag teeth, and four perforated deer teeth. Some tools accompanied the dead: a stone adze imported from the Bohemian Massif or Western Carpathians or the Balkans, a flint blade from the Krakow Jura, a stone tablet, and two grinding stones. A large amount of red ochre was recovered around his upper body and under his skull (Podborský V. et al. 2002, 264, obr., 15 a, b and tab. XVI). Zvelebil and Pettitt concluded that the deceased was a ritual specialist (Zvelebil and Pettitt 2009).

At Tărtăria, as well as in the compared Peloponnese and Moravian burials, preparation and treatment of the body, typology of grave goods, disposal program and high levels of energy expenditure to accomplish these tasks reflect a deceased that was a magic-religious adept with elevated social position in an inclusive community.<sup>13</sup> If the evidence mentioned above on ritual behavior is sufficient to individuate Milady Tărtăria as an esteemed religious adept, there is no basis to suggest her high hierarchical social position established upon hereditary status, wealth or institutional power. There is no substantial documentation about the social organization of the Tărtăria settlement to assess a rank grading analysis. The mortuary data alone do not provide any independent evidence concerning the occurrence of institutional elite or the ascription of hereditary status (Fowler K.D. 2004, 66). Anyhow, the scenario is explicable as collective recognition of a person with exceptional spiritual power whose social esteem and responsibility were largely a result of individual achievement. This acknowledgment acted in tandem with practices considered appropriate to religious concerns about afterlife, ancestors' realm, and their obligations and responsibilities relating to the living community (Fortes 1953, 31; Hertz 1960; Huntington and Metcalf 1985).

*Grave furnishing: liturgical paraphernalia, personal adornments, and funerary anthropomorphic marks*

Even if any strict connection between funerary equipment and individual identity is contentious and associated with the "materialist-ecological view" (Carr 1995, 114) that dominated American archaeology up to the early 1980s and was put

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<sup>13</sup> For the high correlation between amount of energy expenditure in mortuary treatment and social position of the deceased in a community, even if only certain forms of energy expended on funeral activities and disposition of the body consistently indicate the social rank of the dead, see Tainter (1975; 1978, 121, 126-128); McGuire (1992); Carr (1995, 165).



under criticism by the post-processual archaeology,<sup>14</sup> the interpretation of Milady Tărtăria as a magic-religious specialist important in her community is confirmed by typology, quantity and treatment of the funerary goods. Carr's survey of cross-cultural ethnographic data correlates the kind of grave furniture at most with the personal identity of the deceased and in addition with its gender and vertical social position. It documents the quantity of grave goods to be determined most commonly by the deceased's ranking and age, even if it cannot be taken as a strong indicator of vertical social position, which is more explained by the overall amount of energy expended on disposing the body, grave construction (i.e. form), and kind of grave furniture (Carr 1995, 178–180; Carr, Case 2005, 276). This pattern supports Tainter's (1975; 1978, 12) survey result that the social rank is infrequently reflected by the quantity of furniture in the grave (Carr, Case 2005, 331).<sup>15</sup> In Tainter's model, the status of the deceased is symbolized much more often by other mortuary customs. In particular, it is reflected by the measurable communal effort and energy expenditure invested in the mortuary practices and rites. Both of these surveys covered a large number of societies of diverse social complexity and agricultural intensity (Carr 1995, 126), but not the farming and pastoral Neolithic societies that would be positioned between the "complex hunter-gatherers having substantial leadership positions" and the "horticultural tribe with head man". Concerning the Transylvanian case, we have enough elements to identify the grave goods as in part liturgical tool utilized by Milady Tărtăria while alive, in part emblematic personal adornments, and in part her funerary anthropomorphic marks. It is not inferable they served as marks of rank or social prestige.

The most significant funerary goods are three inscribed tablets. The archaeologist in charge made note in the excavation report that one tablet "bears a (hunting?) scene, and the two others extremely curious signs placed on several registers" (Vlassa 1962, 26-27; 1963, 490). He interpreted the signs incised on rows on the tablets as "a rudimentary writing... at least the rudiments of an ideographic notation" (Vlassa 1962, 26-27; 1963, 492).

Concerning the other liturgical paraphernalia, one can observe that most of the artifacts from the ritual pit-grave belong to cults related to virility, fertility and fecundity, their sovereign mysteries and female hypostasis. Most of the grave goods are human statuettes. Gh. Lazarovici and Merlini have identified six figurines

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<sup>14</sup> In the paradigm driven by social organization, the intentionally deposited goods in the grave have often been seen to reflect image or symbolize the dead individual's social persona. According to Saxe (1970; 1971), Binford (1971) and Brown (1971) the wealth in graves corresponded to the deceased's social identity and position in life. "Status was most commonly symbolized by status-specific 'badges' of office and by the quantities of goods contributed to the grave furniture" (Binford 1971, 23). The statement was strong critiqued within the post-processual archaeology (Hodder 1984; 1990; Thomas 1991; 1999; Morris 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Carr's statement that quantities of grave furniture rarely indicate the vertical social position of the deceased is turned by some scholars in to the unreliable reference that, according to him, ranking tends not to relate to quantity of grave goods (Bacus 2006, 108).

belonging definitely to the pit-grave (Merlini and Gh. Lazarovici 2008). Any of them has a distinct shape and wears an elaborate mask that possessed, impersonated, and conveyed its resident power during ceremonial rituals. It might express a mythological creature, a human or totem ancestor, a divinity or another being possibly believed to possess mastery over the living. Some of the figurines are painted with red ochre.

The singular features of some figurines pose stimulating questions concerning Milady Tărtăria "ritual specialization". One can note at a glimpse that two statuettes show a phallus-like shape with accentuation of a masked face over the glans.<sup>16</sup> One has breasts and emphatic buttocks divided by a deep vertical split. A female figurine in phallic shape expresses clearly the encounter of the male-female duality in the same body.

Two figurines exhibit a hole intentionally positioned on the far lower area of the mask or under it, upon the chin, resembling an opening mouth. On a third statuette, the craftsman started to drill a hole on the far lower area of the mask, but then changed his/her mind and the orifice is only a hint. What is the reason for the presence in a ritual grave of speaking, singing or mourning figurines?

The masks of three statuettes are asymmetrical towards the left. Was their disfigured shape a conscious representation of unusual mythical personages? In the ethnographical record, masked and deformed figurines occur that, employed in ceremonial rituals, depict mythological beings, the spirits of dead ancestors as well as other creatures believed to possess supernatural power. Alternatively, was the deformation of the Tărtăria figurines the result of a practice that we nowadays

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<sup>16</sup> Masked figurines with cylindrical shape are well known from Vinča A and early Vinča B1 cultural groups. Statuettes that are coeval with the Tărtăria finds were recovered at Gornea, in the Vinča A stratum (Lazarovici Gh. 1979.pl. XX/A 4, 10, 11, 15), at Limba - Șesu Orzii (Alba, Romania) (Florescu C., M. Gligor, P. Mazare 2007, 99, fig. 2, with a dating of c. 5500-5200), at Zorlențu Mare, in Vinča A3-B1 level (Comșa and Răuț 1969. fig. 3, 6; Lazarovici Gh. 1979, pl. XXD/1, 2, 3, XXE/2) and at Miercurea Sibiului - Petriș, level Ib, corresponding to the Vinča A3/B1 period (Luca, Diaconescu, Suciu 2007). Subsequent similar statuettes were discovered at Zorlențu Mare, in Vinča B2 context (Lazarovici Gh. 1979, pl. XXI/B5), at Balta Sărată, in Vinča B1/B2 level (XX/K5) and at Parța, Banat culture (XXI/GG 1, 3, 11). Phalloid statuettes were found at Turdaș (Roska 1941, pl. 137, 13, and 138, 7). The second figurine from Turdaș is more or less similar to the Tărtăria one. Similar statuettes and coeval with the Transylvanian finds were discovered in Vinča A2/A3 level, at a depth of 8.9 and 8.4 meters, in the eponymous settlement of the Vinča culture (Vasić 1936 III, pl X, 38; XIII, 62). Also Potporanj (Brukner 1968, pl. IV. 1) and Žabalj in the Voivodina (Brukner, Jovanović, Tasić 1974, fig. 42) yielded Vinča figurines with cylindrical shape. A comparable figurine type was found at Orlovo settlement (South East Bulgaria), but it is without a clear chronology (Gaydarska 2009, personal communication). The V ornament along the jaw has analogy at Gornea in the Vinča A culture (Lazarovici Gh. 1979, XX/A4), in Vinča A3-B1 level at Zorlențu Mare (XX/D9), Vinča A3-B1 at Balta Sărată (XX/I 5), and Vinča A3/B1 at Miercurea Sibiului-Petriș (Luca, Diaconescu, Suciu 2007).



consider typical of malevolent actions made during rituals that nowadays are considered of “black magic”?<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 4.



Fig. 5.

According to an oral communication from the archaeologist in charge, mentioned by Höckmann, the grave goods were found in the pit among the shards of a clay vessel (Höckmann 1968, 65, 66). After a revision of the material from the Tărtăria excavations<sup>18</sup> and checking the register recording the collection of the museum, Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini discovered that shards from a Vinča A3 high-pedestal bowl have been inscribed inside the range of the finds from the ritual pit. Vlassa recreated the vessel discretionally. It is fine, well executed, in blacktopped technique, hard fired and very well polished. The vessel was very much used during its life and then intentionally broken smashing it from inside with a tool such as a mace or a stone. Therefore, it was ritually fragmented. It was possibly the cup employed during the ceremony performed after the death of Milady Tărtăria or acted to celebrate her second interment.

The social life of the paraphernalia for worship had two phases: before and after the death of Milady Tărtăria. While she was alive, they have been utilized as ritual tools and have been possibly surrounded by taboos as sacred items. It is evidenced by the unusual compound generated by the possibility of overlapping the rectangular and circular tablets that both bear a round hole and are divided into cells. They were worn or hung, one over the other, and the resulting combination

<sup>17</sup> F. Draşovean collected a series of twisted and mutilated Vinča artifacts, mainly figurines, that he ascertained to “black magic” rituals (Draşovean 2005)

<sup>18</sup> The Neolithic site at Tărtăria-Groapa Luncii was discovered on 15 July 1906 by Endre Orosz and studied during four stages by various scholars.

may have created a relationship of overt (seen) and esoteric (hidden) signs (i.e., the signs on the upper register of the circular tablet would have been covered). After the decease of Milady Tărtăria, the paraphernalia have been intentionally and meaningfully broken (not the tablets), possibly during the early steps of the mortuary treatment or when the skeletal remains have been interred in the ritual pit. Only a small part of the liturgical equipment has been deposited inside the ritual pit-grave. Most of the osseous and goods remains might have been widespread among kinship and (family or spiritual, local or non-local) descendents that shared a common heritage.



Fig. 6.

If we add to the list of the funerary goods a grey with a yellow angoba, quite refined pendant-amulet resembling consecration horns, we are in presence of a ritual pit-grave with religious motivation linked to vitality and sexuality. The low consumption of the hole for suspension testifies that the pendant-amulet was worn (by Milady Tărtăria?) for a short period.

Another emblematic artifact is a *Spondylus gaederopus* armlet that was worn (by Milady Tărtăria?) for a long time. Nieszery suggests that armrings were conferred an individual at an early age and continuously worn (Nieszery 1995, 85). The diameter of the children's armlets was very small. Probably, during an initiation ceremony in late childhood these small jewels were broken and substituted by larger ones, again continuously worn thereafter. Adult identity of Milady Tărtăria was possibly embodied in feeling and observing the arm band made of non-local *Spondylus* becoming even tighter around the arm, and then loosening as

muscle substance decreased in older age (Hofmann, Whittle 2008, 294). The *Spondylus* armband attests also for long-distance trade and exchange, evidencing that the Tărtăria community was involved in a broad sphere of interaction. Milady Tărtăria armring was broken down exactly in the middle through an abrupt action, possibly during the funerary ritual.



The distorted shape of some statuettes, asymmetric towards left, mirrors the deformations of Milady Tărtăria. In one instance, the mask of a Vinča A prismatic figurine was deformed under a deliberate torsion from its right to left as though a knock disturbed the clay when it was still soft. The twisting pushed the nose into the centre, de-squared the oblong fissure of the eyes from the same horizontal line (its left eye is higher than the right), but did not distort the outline of the mask. The statuette was intentionally fragmented having been broken horizontally at a place that is one of the strongest parts of the body: under the chest and above the waist. Initially its height was 20-25 cm. After the high-pedestalled bowl, this is the biggest discovered object. The material is not very fine and includes little shards and mica. The sculpture was made in a rush. It was hard fired for a long time, uniformly cooked, and not polished but just clean with hands or leather. The craftsman started to drill a hole on the far lower area of the mask. Very interesting are the holes over the armpits, because they were possibly filled with a stick in order to raise and sustain orante arms that might have been broken during a ritual.

The prismatic figurine seems to be asexual because of absences of distinct indications concerning the gender. The outline of the breasts is not evident at all. According to our contemporary standards, the statuette wears female accessories (probably earrings) and clothes (a striking tunic with Vs patterns in front and on back). It was completely painted, mainly in red. On the left eyebrow and on the top of the head there are traces of red painting. On the left side of the mask and the torso, there are traces of yellow ochre painting as well as seldom on the body. In the

decorative incisions on the mask, on the body and on the right eye, there are traces of black color. The red color, and in particular the use of red ochre, has symbolic significance in the mortuary rituals of many ancient cultures (Morphy 1994). In archaeological literature, its utilization in funerary occurrence is often viewed as rendering life and its renewal, marking the transformation and passage from one life to another (Gallis 1982, 243). The red color, reminiscent of blood, preserves and sustains the energy of life, providing magical force for the route to the world beyond (Zagorska 2008, 115). On the statuette under analysis, the red is just the predominant color within a technicolor frame that has to be considered part of the normative mortuary program. It is not without significance that the mask is bicolor and pigmented with incrustated painting.



Fig. 9.

One has to contemplate the possibility that this statuette was not a magic-religious paraphernalia utilized by the remarkable religious adept while alive, but a marker of her passing away modeled after her death, probably resembling her features and acting for her rebirth. This working hypothesis is corroborated even by the closed eyes depicted by large stroke-fissures and the absence of mouth, which are both traits reminiscent of the death. It is reasonable to state that this disfigured, masked and full-colored statuette, as well as its deliberate fragmentation, marked the death of Milady Tărtăria.



Fig. 10.

In a process that transforms matter into being (Merlini 2009b, 538; 2009c, 80), it is possible that this figurine was manufactured at the time of Milady Tărtăria death, or throughout the defleshing process, or even at the ceremony of secondary burial. Then it acted in a ritual to represent the deceased. Once the spirit of the religious adept was freed, or during the reburial process, it might have been broken and sacrificed connecting the living to the power of the prominent and terrific holy person and, by doing so, asserting a political claim of continuity as being still part of the community. The funerary anthropomorphic mark has been interred with her pile of ritually fragmented tools, personal adornments - pendant-amulet and armring – and bones, which became a compound spiritual wealth.

In conclusion, the burial goods that accompanied Milady Tărtăria into the pit-grave are spiritual in nature and not utilitarian. Their choice and treatment have to be considered somewhat out of the ordinary. They indicate profound reverence for the deceased, being affected by high regard in the community due to age and occupational role as a magic-religious adept with gender as a structuring principle and the mystique of virility, fertility and fecundity as ritual specialization. Selection and handling of burial equipment recognize Milady Tărtăria imbued with social responsibilities while alive as well as post-mortem. Liturgical tools and emblematic adornments interplayed with her while she was alive participating to her identity display. During the disposal program, they have been reached by funerary



anthropomorphic marks. The artifacts have been broken and in part mixed and packed with her mortuary remains to be buried. Even after the death, Milady Tărtăria identity as magic-religious adept was expressed by the interplay of her body and personal objects. Her physical structure was not a passive medium in death rituals on which predetermined and performed social norms were inscribed, but acted actively within them. Tărtăria case study sheds light on the cultural statute that religious beliefs and liturgies shape individual actions, while individual actions also serve to reproduce religious beliefs and liturgies.

### *Mortuary facility*

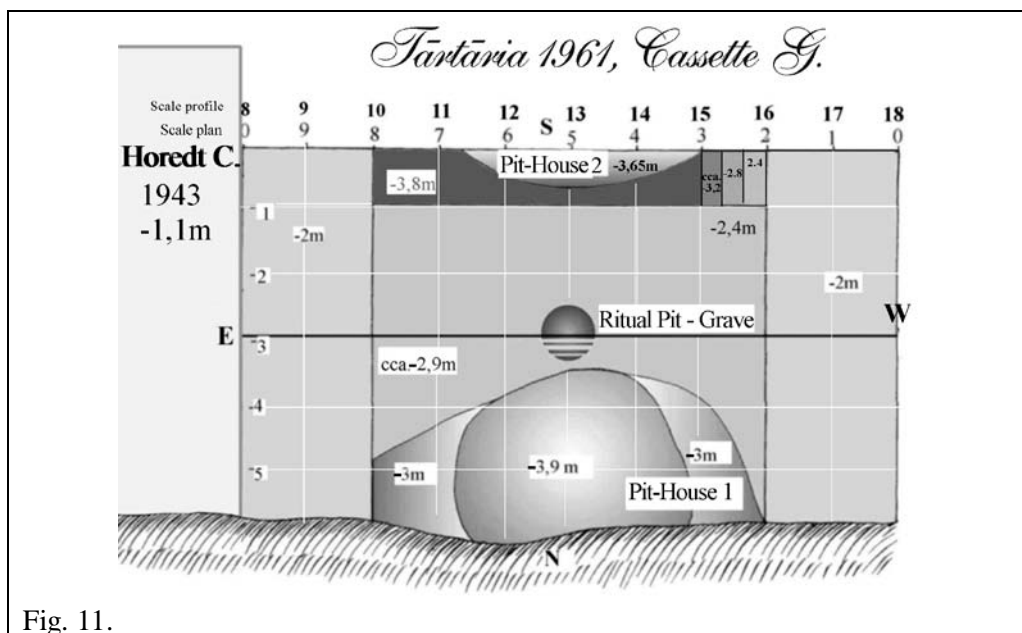


Fig. 11.

The ritual pit-grave was discovered between two pit-huts that were coeval to a certain extent and contemporary with Milady Tărtăria lifespan. It is difficult to verify if one of the pit-houses was Milady Tărtăria's above. C14 data, stratigraphy and plan of the excavation point toward the pit-house B1. Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini verified the close relationship by comparing the radiocarbon data of the human bones from the ritual pit-grave and the animal bones from a pit-house (pit-house B2) that is coeval and adjacent to the pit-house (pit-house B1), which is stratigraphically (level h16+h17) and positionally connected to the ritual pit-grave. The radiocarbon date for the animal bones found at the bottom of the pit house is Rome - 1655 = 6215 ± 65 yr BP (1σ, 5.280-5.060 CAL BCE) (Merlini 2004). If radiocarbon data sustain that the ritual pit-grave and the pit-house B2 pertained to the same time, graphic reconstruction evidences the ritual pit-grave and the pit-house B1 belonged to the same archaeological complex: they were under the same

roof and were functionally connected. However, up to now we do not have information regarding the archaeological material within the pit-house B1.

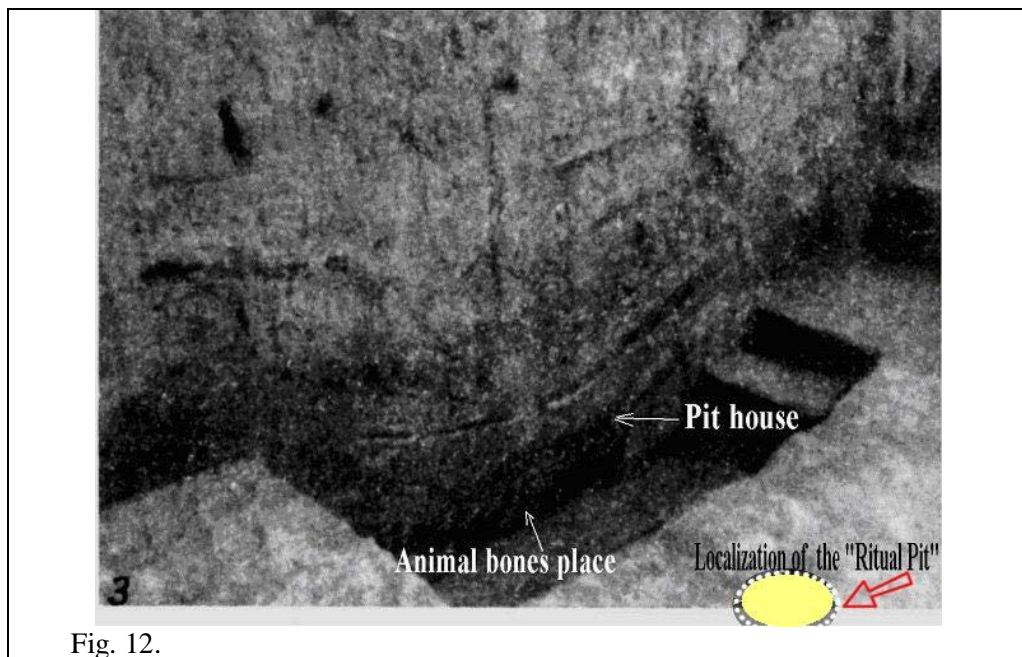


Fig. 12.

If Milady Tărtăria lived in a pit-house (possibly pit-house B1), we do not know if she kept the sacral paraphernalia inside the “ritual pit,” as a sort of box with magic-religious tools that was located under the same roof and provided magical protection for the abode. However, the liturgical associations functionally connect the inscribed tablets and the ritual paraphernalia, and relate both to a dwelling with a special function occupied by a magic-religious adept. Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini postulate the existence of special dwellings belonging to an old holy lady, often related to the numerology of the 7. Such hypothesis is sustained by the religious discoveries from Poduri and Isaiia (in Moldavia, Romania), both containing 42 pieces (Lazarovici Gh., Merlini 2005).

Milady Tărtăria’s abode might have had a distinct cult area as evidenced in a number of Middle Neolithic examples. At the settlement of Parta (Banat, Romania), one or two corners consecrated to liturgies have been identified in every “block” of two-stage houses comprised of 4-5 rooms located under the same roof. They yielded remnants of monumental statues (bas-reliefs, busts for bull skulls, steles or columns with bullheads, and altars) utilized either as totems of the related enlarged families, or as domestic altars (Lazarovici Gh., Draşovean, Maxim 2001; Merlini 2009b). The main artifact placed in the cult corner of a Transdanubian Linear Pottery dwelling discovered at Biatorbágy-Tyúkberek (Pest County, Hungary) was a bottle-shaped vessel that forms a stylized human figure representing the embryo within the womb whose face is framed by an “M”-shaped line. The vessel was utilized during

virility, fecundity and fertility rituals and was deliberately broken into fragments after it had fulfilled its function. It belongs to the Zsely phase (5200-4900 BC) (Kalicz 1998; Raczky, Anders 2003; Virág 1998; 2000; Merlini 2009 b, 212).

A number of buildings identified in earlier excavations as “shrines”, such as those at Achilleion, Sesklo in Greece, Cașioarele in Romania, etc., present the internal separation of cult finds and the concentration of worship in such an apparent area. They can be re-interpreted as dwelling houses with cult corners (Bánffy 1997, 72) or as domestic sanctuaries (Lazarovici C.-M., Lazarovici Gh., Țurcanu 2009, 61), because only this distinct spot is related to cult finds and phenomena. A corner of a Late Neolithic house from Vésztő-Màgor (Hungary) has been recognized as regularly utilized for ritual purposes (Hegedűs, Makkay 1987). In the Late Vinča culture, at Jakovo (a suburban neighborhood of Belgrade, Republic of Serbia) a closed liturgical assemblage was found in a cult area (Bánffy 2002). According to Bánffy, cult corners were so spread in the dwellings of the Lengyel culture that altarpieces and figurines were not positioned for ornamenting their interior, but they were kept in use, as active participating objects in some series of action, in the dedicated ritual areas (Bánffy 2005).

This typology characterizes also the Cucuteni - Trypillia cultural complex. At Poduri - Dealul Ghindaru (Romania) 2 fireplaces connected to cult complexes (21 idols, 13 chairs, 2 small objects and a small pot, a chair, 7 idols) have been recovered in a dedicated area of a Precucuteni II dwelling (house 36) only partially investigated (Monah et al. 1982, 9-22; Mantu, Dumitroaia, Tsaravopoulos 1997, 179-81; Monah et al. 2003; Monah 2005). At Trușești – Țuguia (Romania), the Cucuteni - Trypillia buildings 38, 61, 86 have been interpreted as dwellings that belonged to persons holding a religious role, possibly domestic sanctuaries or “priest’s houses” (for a survey see Lazarovici C.-M., Lazarovici Gh., Țurcanu 2009, 61-63). At Alexandrovka II (Ukraine), the central area of dwelling D1 is characterized by two special structures one facing the other: an offering place and an altar (Chitic 2008). The Cucuteni A.B pit house 36 excavated at Iablona (Republic of Moldova) concentrated numerous anthropomorphic statuettes and was assigned by the archaeologists in charge to a ritual specialist (Sorochin, Borziac 2001). See for comparison the internal organization of several clay models from Cucuteni - Trypillia dwellings (Lazarovici Gh., Lazarovici C.-M. 2003; Lazarovici C.-M., Lazarovici Gh. 2006; 2008). Particularly significant is a house model from Sabatinovka (Ukraine) that shows figurines all grouped in one corner on a clay bench (Makarevič 1960.290-301; Gimbutas 1974, 26, 73). This kind of dwelling started from the Precucuteni level under Vinča influences and can be noticed until the end of the Cucuteni - Tripolye civilization (Lazarovici C.-M. 2010).

The cult corner occurred even within Early Neolithic dwelling houses. In the two Karanovo I-II buildings discovered at Stara Zagora – *Hospital* (Bulgaria) a bucranium was placed close to the fireplace (Dimitrov, Radeva 1980; Kalchev 2005). A Körös building from Szolnok-Szanda (Hungary), that yielded several idols and clay altars in form of bull horn, was interpreted by the archaeologists in charge as a dwelling house with both sacral (cult) and profane (domestic) purpose (Kalicz,



Raczky 1980-81). In conclusion, in the single-room houses, the ritual spot was most probably situated in a corner. In the Late Neolithic multi-room houses, the cultic area was in one of the outside rooms. Inventory of cultic objects positioned in the domestic area devoted to liturgies includes mainly miniature altars, anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines, bucrania and vessels. In several cases, the non-profane part of the building was in proximity of the fireplace. The cultic corner was utilized by family members to perform private religious activities. The coexistence of consecrated and secular areas in the same dwelling evidences both the importance of domestic ritual and the inexistence of a sharp border between sacred and profane sphere (Bánffy 1997, 72-74; Merlini 2009c). In a number of cases, it is documented that this typology of dwelling belonged to eminent persons involved in ritual practices that were performed in it (Lazarovici C.-M. 2010).

It is possible that a substantial corner of the dwelling from Tărtăria might have been devoted to magic-religious rituals while the rest might have been associated with daily life, albeit an everyday routine that was permeated full time and with any action by the spiritual path of the initiate (Schwarzberg 2003, 81). Anthropologic comparison assimilates Milady Tărtăria's abode to the present-day ashrams of sadhus in Hindu culture (a holy person carrying an ascetic lifestyle). They are one-room dwellings for both living and retreating that are characterized by a corner area consecrated to liturgies. Sometimes, a second room or an open space is set apart and specialized for cult purposes.

*The scenario: a consecrated pit-grave of a newly-created ancestor for a corporate group and not a household votive deposition*

A crucial point for interpreting function of the tablets and meaning of the signs within the mortuary context is that the discoverer and most of the scholars still consider the Tărtăria pit to be a cultic sacrificial hollow filled with a votive hoard, a dedication deposit<sup>19</sup>, a pile of "sacrificial offering" (Vlassa 1962; 1963) or a foundation offering like at Platia Magoula Zarkou in Thessaly (Whittle 1996, 88, 101). Anyhow, it is actually a ritual pit-grave connected to ancestor veneration (Cauvin 1978; 1994), even if the term has to be used with caution (Bonogofsky 2005; 2006; Croucher 2010, 11), within the frame of a corporate group (see note 2).

Milady Tărtăria's bones underwent a thorough defleshing process that could have required an elapsed time that cannot be determined (from a few months to some years). After the removal of the flesh from the bones, the ritual fragmentation of skeletal remains and their mixing with her identifier artifacts, the secondary burial of Milady Tărtăria might have returned her to where she had spent her life. Association of burials with habitation structures, especially interments made under the floors and inside dwelling places, was an obvious trend in the Neolithic of Southeastern Europe (Bailey 2000, 116-117). It is possible that, during the time lag between first and second deposal, Milady Tărtăria's house was taken out of use. The

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<sup>19</sup> See categorization in Bradley (1990, 198).

practice to inter people within abandoned buildings is well documented in Early and Middle Neolithic. See for example at Nea Nikomedia (Angel 1973). Focusing on the British Bronze Age, Brück (2006) maintained that the edifices may have had a lifecycle. The decease of the person was related in some way to the death of the construction.<sup>20</sup> One can relate the lowest filled levels of the pit to this period (Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini 2005; Merlini and Lazarovici Gh. 2008).

The evidence of a grave blessed by spiritual wealth, instead of the occurrence of a dedication deposit, indicates that the pit and the pile of objects - including the tablets bearing script signs - cannot be commented in a straightforward manner in terms of giving direction to an otherworldly power for supernatural returns (votive deposition). They should be interpreted primarily as actors of socially significant death liturgies reflecting social standing and magic-spiritual expertise of the deceased. At Tărtăria, the human body and its associated artifacts constituted a form of devotion and a means to facilitate communication with supernatural powers *only* though distinctive funerary rituals and periodical ceremonies performed after the secondary burial. This figure is confirmed by the nature of the funerary goods and at the same time corroborates it. They were not gifts to the deceased, but her personal belongings that accompanied her re-birth into an ancestral state and marked the descendant's new status (Oestigaard 2000; Oestigaard & Goldhahn 2006).

The commented mortuary practice reflected conscious decisions made by the members of the community and corporate group about customary and effective social behavior considered suitable to express and exploit relationships with such a revered deceased. The secondary burial of Milady Tărtăria with her liturgical tools, personal adornments and funerary anthropomorphic marks within the context of a dwelling that she previously occupied as a magic-religious adept expressed not only her preeminent status and persona, but was consistent with her transformation into a novel ancestor with a continuity in recognized duties and responsibilities to serve the social unit.

This milieu leads us to imagine the multistage and ritualized secondary mortuary practices<sup>21</sup> related to Milady Tărtăria as an extraordinary process of events for expenditure of resources, effort, time and dedication. Through it, the corporate group transferred the relationship, functions and obligations that closely united it with the religious adept at more effective level, amplifying the symbolic meanings in relation to social cohesion and protection against natural and supernatural phenomena (Fortes 1976, 13; Huntington and Metcalf 1985).

Since we know that these were precisely the operational domains of the ancestral dead, we can infer that such a circumstance happened at Tărtăria. We might therefore conclude that a distinct funeral orchestration was put on play by the community to establish the worship of a new ancestral power. Therefore, Milady Tărtăria was not just a forebear that was notorious and had to be remembered

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<sup>20</sup> Even in Late Neolithic Mesopotamia, after the burial of the dead within buildings they were abandoned (Campbell 2007-2008, 14).

<sup>21</sup> See Kuijt I. 2008, 175.

(Bloch 1996), representing another dimension of the past (See Whittle 1996, 369 concerning LBK burials).

*Corporate involvement with the ritual pit-grave as foci for group identification*

Funerary program and final inclusion of Milady Tărtăria within a distinct burial space and the peculiar location of her deposition are both significant indicators concerning corporate group membership and identity having household as a sub-level. Her secondary interment in a habitation structure supposedly reinforces the principle of a concentration of finds and rituals in the domestic domain, even if one has to remember the above-mentioned particularities of her dwelling. However, Tărtăria case study denies the picture according to which individual graves can be considered in some way as standing for the notion of the house or household (Hofmann, Whittle 2008, 293).<sup>22</sup> The scenario is even not conceptually linked to Hodder's key distinction between the domestic (*domos*) and the wild outside the community (*agros*) and his consequent proposal that household was the centre of social life and symbolic elaboration, expressing the more general concept of securing and nurturing (Hodder 1990, 32-42).

Even if Milady Tărtăria was re-buried under the floor of her abode, features of her mortuary program point not to a household cult,<sup>23</sup> but to a communitarian ceremony performed by ritual practitioners and conceived as an experience of collective representation and emotion (Inomata, Coben 2006, 23). It happened according to the bronze communication rule that the secondary mortuary practices are in general *deliberately* held in highly visible public contexts to maximize participation in this shared experience in a meaningful way (Kuijt 2000, 148). Secondary mortuary rituals differ from primary burial of individuals, as these ceremonies often crosscut kin and household lines, thereby emphasizing the community over the individual (Kuijt 2000, 145). The funerary ceremony performed at Tărtăria was a means to promote and legitimize corporate group solidarity. Therefore, it might have acted as protective device both for the dead and for the living to ensure the continuity of the community and ancestral heritage. Elaborate corporate symbolism as reflected by the mortuary practice evidences mutual obligations set up with kin and non-kin and indicates promotion of social solidarity (even if not deleting competition within the community). We cannot know if Milady Tărtăria's secondary burial played also at a third level, being part of an intense intercommunity or inter-lineage competition. The gathering of a wide community for the re-deposition possibly created opportunities for individuals and groups to reaffirm and renegotiate social roles.

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<sup>22</sup> For a critical analysis of this statement, see Fowler C. 2004, Brück 2004; 2006; Fahlander, Oestigaard 2008; Stutz 2008.

<sup>23</sup> It therefore challenges the pavlovian view that for necessity "intra-mural burial emphasizes both the social and spatial proximity of the individual deceased to the household within the great village community" (Chapman J.C. 2010, 42).

I do not define the corporate model against the house model, which is also a corporate entity with a group identity and sometimes with an ancestral venerate dead (Lévi-Strauss 1982; 1987). I simply highlight the productiveness of the corporate group model interpreting the burial from Tărtăria as well as the usefulness of this case study to contribute establishing a firmer corporate group model for the Danube civilization.

Expanding upon the subject of the pit-grave, the continued significance of a distinctive blessed place was consecrated or at least symbolized by the possibly association of the funerary program with socialization of the dead and ancestor reverence, constituting a place devoted to the exchange between the living and the recent ancestral being.<sup>24</sup> Milady Tărtăria's pit-grave may have been a means of connecting descendants with her and enlisting her good will toward the living. This may confirm that the relationship between the living and the newly-created ancestor was deeply imbedded within daily life and that it was a core feature of the community's belief system.

The placement of Milady Tărtăria in relation to her habitation provides supplementary clue as to where Middle Neolithic people thought their ancestral dead inhabited and how they should be integrated into the community of the living. They did not occupy a separate realm from the live people and had a solidarity relationship with them (Freedman 1958, 85; Fortes 1976, 5; McAnany 1995, 85). Milady Tărtăria resided in the ground within an abode structured like abodes of the living. She was placed into Mother Earth's body, which womb governed the repeated cycles of life and death (Gimbutas 1999, 55). Thus, all ritual events with the pit-grave as a hub had possibly an essential part marked with libations to the earth through the pouring of liquid onto or into the ground, feeding the ancestral dead in this way.

Formal burial such as a pit was used to house the remains of the deceased. If her interment in the ritual pit-grave linked individual and collective identities and anchored her ancestry to a specific blessed locality, the mortuary practice did not create a highly visible grave. The pit had limited measures. Lazarovici Gh. and Merlini calculate that several strata of it (ca. 1/4 of the whole) have been destroyed during archaeological excavations, i.e. 7-10 cm. in high. It means that, as mentioned before, originally the pit was about 30-40 cm. deep with a diameter of about cm. 40. In addition, no funeral architecture was evidenced by the archaeological excavation. Vlăssă did not find traces of stones, slabs, etc. It is inferable that the highest level of labor expenditure was exhibited not for the grave, but for the body treatment and correlated liturgies (feast included). In the Middle Neolithic of Southeastern-Central Europe, funerary architecture did not give shape to space. However, it is likely that the burial was marked by the pit-house that served as a visible territorial marker. Its positioning within the village would have been a constant reminder to people of the

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<sup>24</sup> The instance is more about representation than symbolism. Ginsburg (2002, 72) describes the case of a dead ruler that was buried twice at two different locations. One grave contained the body, while the other held a material representation of the ruler. It was the grave with the representation that was considered the "real" one (Fahlander, Oestigaard 2008, 3).

custodian ancestor and linkages between the communities factions such as kin, other families, corporate group, and other groups connected through webs of social, economic, ritual, and political obligations.

If the final burial was introductory to the rebirth of Milady Tărtăria as newly-created forefather to be venerated and if she was interred into Mother Earth's womb, the funneled pit itself, as container for the hybrid fetus made of bone/clay/spondylus/stone<sup>25</sup> may have represented the womb for the regeneration of Milady Tărtăria or even her transfigured body itself, being the walls of the cavity a sort of chthonian skin. In addition, the ritual pit-grave was a "cultural womb" (Kemp 2006, 69) for the descendants within the context of intergenerational transmissions.

If the pit-womb metaphor has not to be uncritically applied, however it helps understanding the meaning for the placement of Milady Tărtăria under her house floor within a communitarian framework. The pit-grave within her habitation structure reincorporated tangibly the dead in the world of the descendants. The burial locus was the focal point from which descendants had access to the spirit of the ancestor securing them that Milady Tărtăria continued participating in their social actions, influencing the living through memory, affecting them with socially expected behavior, and supporting the well-behaved persons with supernatural powers (or interceding with supernatural powers) connected with procreativity and prosperity. The sacralization of these structures embodied social cohesiveness and continuity within corporate group and community (with household as a sub-horizon of them).

A key reason to expand energy for mortuary activity and interment in the ritual pit-grave was possibly group identification associated with legitimization of the corporate ownership, control and/or access to the area. Consistently, corporate members might have gathered periodically here to celebrate rites of unity (Watson 1982, 597), ancestor veneration, inalienable corporate property (on agricultural land in primis) and access to natural resources. According to the archaeologist in charge, the bottom of the ritual pit was located in the deeper layer, in the sterile loess (Vlassa 1963, 490). There was the necessity to touch the ground as in a foundation ritual? It will be important if the archaeological excavation from the Lucian Blaga University - IPCTE at Sibiu will be able to verify if this deposition may have played a crucial role in the sanctification of an ancestral space at an early stage of settlement occupation, establishing ancestral rights on a newly occupied place.

As mentioned above, the patterns of the special pit-grave conveyed role and procedures of the corporate group within the community. In search of sociological significance for burials, Saxe (1970, 119, 233-4) stated that such social groups with rights on certain valued and restricted resources through attainment and/or legitimation by means of lineal descent from the dead (i.e., lineal ties to the ancestral dead), maintain either discrete cemeteries or portions of them. He also

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<sup>25</sup> The category of the hybrid or compound body generated by re-combining fragments of a human body with pieces of funerary goods is not contemplated in the types of 'deviant' burials recently elaborated by J. C. Chapman (2010, 32-34)

advanced the hypothesis that, conversely, the emergence of formal disposal areas was caused by increasing competition for access to vital resources and indicates the occurrence of such descent groups which tried to control those resources. In this context, the placement of an ancestral dead or a group of them can become a highly political negotiation (Pink et al. 2008). Goldstein's survey on 30 societies worldwide (1981, 61) validated only the converse of the controversial Saxe's hypothesis to be usually true: if there is a formal bounded disposal area, used exclusively for the dead, then we are probably in presence of a society that has a corporate group structure in the form of a lineal descent system. Corporate groups symbolize and ritualize their corporateness by many means, only one of which may be the maintaining of permanent and bounded areas for the exclusive disposal of a social group's dead (Carr 1995, 122). Saxe/Goldstein assumption has been heavily criticized because it restricts causation to the single dimension of material interest (Hodder 1980; 1982, 196-9; 1984.53; Shanks, Tilley 1987, 43-4; Pearson R. et al. 1989, 3-5; Chapman R. 1990.2-6; Morris 1991, 147).

Having in mind that control over vital resources does not exist independently from the ideas and perceptions of prehistoric actors and that the issue has to be located within the broader cognitive structure of the particular society under study (Morris 1991, 147-8), corporate group presence fits the Middle Neolithic societies of Southeastern-Central Europe and the Vinča A community of Tărtăria within this frame. In those villages networking at local and regional level, such descent groups had residential coherency living on the same plot of agricultural land, engaged in quotidian face-to-face interactions, joined in collective activities as a daily work group and jointly owned inalienable economic resources and property (or rights to corporate property) within a lineage. Under this frame, the influence of ancestors and the territorial control through their burials were pivotal. Milady Tărtăria's burial possibly eased inter-generational transfers of rights to vital resources. Even if the persons associated with her did not constitute necessary a permanent and closed corporate descent group (Bloch 1971, 114-120; Scheffler 1985, 9, 10; Kuper 1988), a question has to be posed. Was the genealogical distance from her a criterion to establish, within the lineage, individual and household differential access to resources and benefit from corporate property (Freedman 1958, 34, 127)?

The presence of figurines in an exceptional corporate mortuary context supports ancestor worship and strengthens the argument that some of them may have acted as images of the recent ancestor. Paraphrasing some suggestions from Talalay's research on Kephala, one can state that at Tărtăria the prismatic and technicolor statuette from the ritual pit-grave might have been used as corporate social, economic and territorial symbol, and representation of ties to a novel community's ancestral spirit (Talalay 1991, 49). This intentionally fragmented and buried figurine served as portrait of the ancestor that chartered ancestral rights to the territory though the place-value of the sacralized pit-grave. Talalay's arguments are based on anthropological literature and we lack key information on Tărtăria community. Therefore, the explanation of social, economic and territorial employment of corporate symbols in form of figurines tied to ancestral dead cannot



be directly invoked. However, it opens up a stimulating possibility for interpreting the links between the kinship structure of the community and such a ritual specialist, her pit-grave, and her abode.

To summarize, the mortuary pattern of Milady Tărtăria is structured by a distinctive norm concerning both treatment of deceased according to fragmentation/accumulation principle and in-house location of the re-internment. It can be evaluated both as indicator of individual identity vs. collective identities as well as corporate vs. community concerning the social reproductive strategies.

We do not know if Milady Tărtăria secondary burial was followed by the reutilization of the pit-house as abode or not. Ethnological documentation suggests that in some cases “homes” devoted to holy life are occupied by religious adepts who follow the spiritual line of the deceased and are bound into a cycle of ancestral veneration. In other occurrences, they become memorial shrines. It is not infrequent that they are abandoned when the devotional memory of the departed spiritual teacher fades. The secondary mortuary practices performed at Tărtăria required the living be aware of where, when and according to which procedures Milady Tărtăria was interred into the ritual-pit, life histories describing her performances as successful ritual adept as well as narrative and expectations about her otherworldly powers. The sacralized spot mobilized through time this awareness as a form of collective intergenerational memory. It served not only to commemorate the individual identity of the dead ritual specialist, but also facilitated intergenerational links among past, present, and future conduit for collective memory and reaffirmation of identity and community membership. Although the dead is no longer present, it does not belong in the past: rather, they reside among the living but in another place (Kuijt I. 2008, 176). “Within two generations memories, events, and objects associated with her might have been transformed from experiential and personal to referential and abstract by the means of a process of remembering the collective and forgetting the individual” (Kuijt I. 2008, 186) or simply disappeared.

The just now starting excavations at Tărtăria will situate the burial in the structure of the settlement and social landscape.<sup>26</sup> In particular, it will clarify if the corporate group included physically the ancestral dead into the boundaries of the area used by the community (settlement), however segregating Milady Tărtăria in a “mausoleum” that assured her as part of the living, but qua separated from daily life spaces. Unfortunately, regular cultivation and erosion have damaged part of the archaeological site and the area of the pit-grave. The Neolithic settlement of Tărtăria-*Groapa Luncii* is located on a small promontory 300-350 meters long and 150 wide that is 15 meters high on the Mureș River. The river once ran underneath the site before eroding a side of it. The archaeological area is intensely cultivated and, unfortunately, the amateurs do not need to rummage the soil in order to take out potshards, parts of statuettes, and fragments of altars.

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<sup>26</sup> Viz. in Campbell (2007-2008) analysis and debate relating ancestral dead to place. According to him, the burial of the dead within buildings changes the nature of activities and beliefs surrounding them, with close correlation between the deceased and the transformation of the settlement (Campbell 2007-2008, 14).

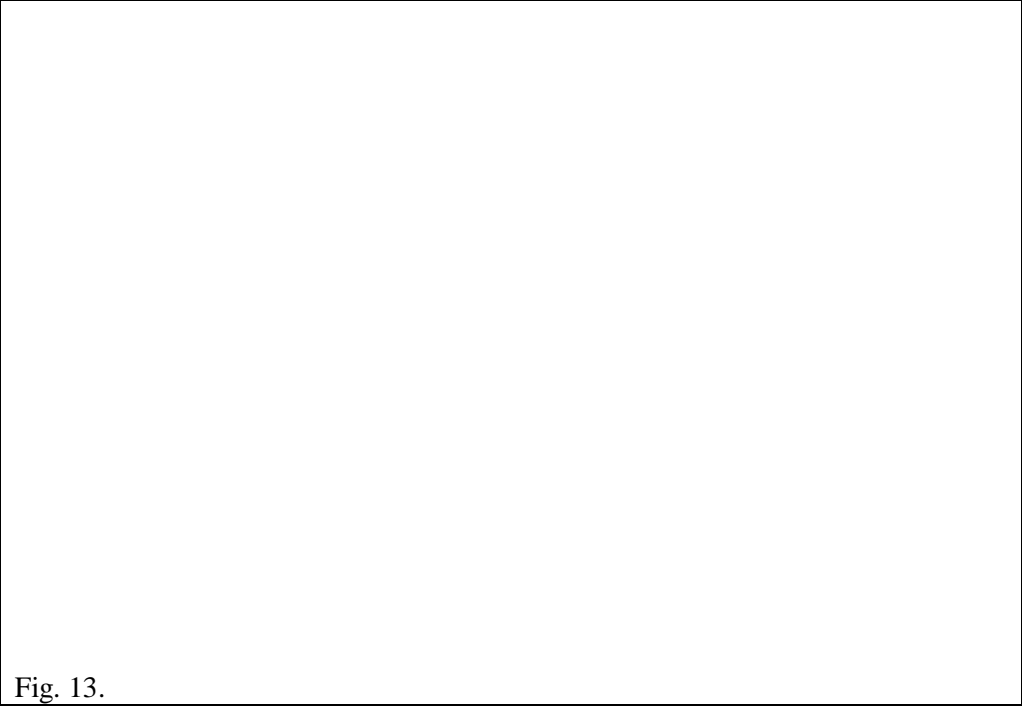


Fig. 13.

Even if it is possible that the new ancestor was not physically incorporated into a dwelling utilized by the living, she was in any case part of the living society. This symbolic contradiction concerning how Milady Tărtăria was re-integrated into the community of the living aligns well with the above interpretation of mortuary data as reflecting her spiritual role and collective reverence within a non-hierarchical and inclusive frame of social organization. The context indicates a passionate spiritual life with elaborate symbolism and intense ceremonialism developed within a medium size community engaged in early farming.

*A mortuary procedure hinged on the interworking of the two principles of accumulation and circulation*

As a result of intentional fragmentation and reduction (bodily dismemberment and breakage of emblematic objects), at Tărtăria the two principles of accumulation (selecting, grouping and interring together fragments of both body and artifacts) and circulation (distribution and sharing of relics from both kinds among people within a circuit that was not necessarily restricted to the mortuary arena) worked together thereby in the mortuary procedure through multiple episodes, reinforcing distinctive social relations and identity. The practice occurred possibly at ancestral lineage level within the community sphere and having household as a sub-level. Relationships expressed by means of fragmentation and after that collection / storage of core fragments in a consecrated place, on one hand, and socialization



processes among (kin, lineage or spiritual) descendants, on the other hand, involved skeletal material, magic-religious tools, personal adornments and funerary anthropomorphic marks of the revered and terrific holy lady.

Expanding upon the subject of the bones, future inventory and analysis of skeletal relics mentioned above will verify the possible deliberate patterning with regard to both the bone fragments selected for stocking in re-deposition and the portions of the body from which they were taken. The skull is missing. Only some pelvic fragments remain. Many minor bits and pieces of bones have not been found by Vlassa (in particular elements from the hands and feet). The absence of fragile bones might be the result of the hypothesized natural processes of defleshment and disarticulation (Lazarovici and Meşter 1995). These elements are the most susceptible to decay. Besides, it is well known that mice and rats quickly devastate these parts of cadavers. The absence of the smaller bones might be derived also from a possible transfer of skeletal material (Sarkar 1951, 23). We cannot know if the skull received special attention.

The metabolization of the deceased from a recognizable body to single bones and bone fragments, their treatment and the selection of portions of the remains imbued with specific meaning were important steps in establishing social memory and gaining an ancestral state to Milady Tărtăria. This process served to re-establish and maintain contact between the living and the dead persona (Chapman 2000; Thomas 2004; Fowler C. 2001; 2004; Brück 2001; 2005). A portion of the bone fragments that the archaeological excavation did not find in the pit-grave might have been removed during the secondary disposal and utilized to connect the most recent ancestor, Milady Tărtăria, with her living descendants and/or might have been passed on to connect a third party.<sup>27</sup> As noted by Thomas (2000, 662), this distribution can be viewed as a flow or pathway. It involved the recirculation of these objects through multiple events (Garfinkel 1994; Griffin, Grisson, and Rollefson 1998; Kuijt I. 2008, 182). The disposition in not anatomical order of selected portions of the post-excarned body was considered sufficient to represent and sanctify the presence of the deceased within the grave.

Adding information on the objects that participated to Milady Tărtăria's identity when she was alive (liturgical tools and personal adornments) and after death (her funerary anthropomorphic marks), they have been submitted to an intentional fragmentation (not the inscribed tablets) possibly in a ceremony performed during the primary burial or, more likely, the re-deposition. Careful examination can establish that these objects have not been broken accidentally or by misuse. They have been "killed" and interred ritually. Firstly, one has to observe that the occurrence of magic-religious tools and exotic, non-functional, precious items (as an armring made of *Spondylus* shell) would mark an inappropriate pattern for a discard collection. Secondly, these artifacts have been fragmented carefully and deliberately according to a methodical and selective breaking process. The figurines

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<sup>27</sup> Viz. the selective collections created by removing skeletal elements during the process of secondary burial in several Megalithic tombs (Shanks, Tilley 1982; Damm 1991, 45). They included most frequently the skull and major leg bones (Baxter 1999).

made of clay have been truncated into two parts not at their vulnerable points and junctures, but retaining the entire upper part (head included) to be buried in the pit, the blacktop was smashed from inside with a club or a stone, the armlet was broken down exactly in the middle. Thirdly, funerary goods were deposited not only broken, but also incomplete and never restorable to completeness. Even if some pieces might have been lost during archaeological excavations, the phenomenon of missing parts is a good indicator of deliberate object breakage (Chapman J.C., Gaydarska 2007, 3). To summarize, the deposition of incomplete ritual objects inside the pit-grave was not an attempt to discard them as rubbish because of their broken state, but functioned as a distinct liturgy of fragmentation followed by accumulation / circulation of relics.

At the first stage, the ritual enacted through the fracturing of the emblematic objects into pieces might be connected to the rupture of the relations between their owner / represented person and the life sphere. Subsequently, a memory device based on both distribution and place-value was put on play. Some fragments of the intentionally broken artifacts may have circulated among the living as a way of contacting the newly-created ancestor and securing her support, or as a source of more generalized benefits, as well as to solidify the group. The distribution might have occurred along two not mutually excluding channels: a) an 'enchainment' procedure based on the sharing of blessing fragmentary objects among kinsfolk, corporate members, acquaintances and associates in order to establish a magic "fill rouge" between the newly dead and the (kin, corporate and spiritual) descent group based on a mutual commitment (Chapman J.C. 2000, 140; discussion of the concept in Brück 2001; 2005; Fowler C. 2001; 2004); b) the spread of some consecrated fragments throughout the settlement and fields to guarantee fertility (Chapman J.C. 2000, 226; 2001). Any circulating material item acted as a fractal (Chapman J.C. 2000, 39; Chapman J.C., Gaydarska 2007, 9), expressing the whole identity of Milady Tărtăria embodied in them and her immanent enchainment relationship of exchange with the descendants at whatever the scale of the phenomenon (size of each shard as well as extent of circulation circuit). Anyhow, the core part of every sacralized object was not dispersed, but collected and associated with the three inscribed tablets to compile a spiritual treasure that has been interred in the discrete (individual) pit-grave (Arnold 1995, 43) during a devotional or initiation (in case of spiritual descent) ceremony. At Tărtăria, if the movement of fragments cannot be falsified but is equally not yet supported by a solid body of data, their concentration as incomplete items is indicated by their re-disposal into the pit-grave. Joanna Brück (2001, 157; 2006, 88) offers a different reading of fragmentation that could be a useful tool to interpret the Tărtăria case. As with other rites of passage the destruction of the old social persona through the breaking up of cadaver and objects is necessary for the creation of a new identity, e.g., regeneration and new life.

The complex ritual process of fracturing and then accumulating / circulating was based on the acts of selecting and handling the pieces of bones and artifacts to be gathered in the burial site or to be spread among people and places. The operations on osseous remains and artifacts were accomplished in convergent pairs,

realizing distinct compound entities made-up of blessed and blessing tokens: human remains and clay/spondylus/stone elements.<sup>28</sup> Spiritual synecdoches (where any part stands for the whole) were mobilized for partible exchange relations. The most significant synecdoche was deposited in a funerary complex in connection with death rituals according to which it performed not simply as “item of faith” directed to communicate with supernatural powers in hope of a return from a spiritual investment (e.g., magical protection, success, health, wealth, the flourishing of crops, animal fertility or family fecundity), but primarily triggered the elevation of Milady Tărtăria to the ancestral sphere.

People in the relatively small village of Tărtăria would have known each other, were likely to be biologically and economically interrelated, and were aware of the physical appearance of the residents. Thus, memory of the recently deceased individuals was direct and personal. Echoing Kuijt’s suggestions concerning plastered skulls of persons in positions of leadership in MPPNB, it has to be put under scrutiny the possibility that the hard-working construction of Milady Tărtăria’s bone/clay/spondylus/stone skeleton attests the coexistence of two procedures. On the one side, it was a physical and symbolic way to distinguish the newly-created ancestor from others reputable members of the community. On the other side, the individualization process coexisted with a community-oriented *modus operandi* of mnemonics dealing with the dead aimed to transform her physical remains as means of an indirect and referential memory about her within a collective ancestry (Kuijt I. 2008, 179). These two routes together celebrated both the historical terrific magic-religious adept and the community past and present. In addition they effected the transformation from experiential memory, focused on named persons, to referential memory, concentrated upon the symbolic collective (Kuijt I. 2008, 185). However, the mortuary program followed at Tărtăria made a great effort to make people aware for a long time of the identity as well as acts and status of the venerated ancestral dead who, while alive, was a revered ritual specialist.

The cultic context indicates that Milady Tărtăria personhood had a double stage as her packed osseous and artifactual synecdoches had, as well. In life, she was a cult leader and perhaps a revered full-time specialist. After death, she became a recognized ancestor rendered through a culturally significant, yet tangible form. Her representation was compact, motionless and stable in the burial; it was disarticulated, in motion and nomadic among the hands of individuals or scattered in the village or fields. Concentrating and circulating, the venerated ancestral dead settled at the centre of a network supported by collective memory and reinforced social relations. These two ways of representing the ‘person’ are in tension from the early Mesolithic onwards and they denote one of the central problems of human identity (Chapman J.C. 2000, 146). Chris Fowler has recently defined and applied the concept of the fractal person, composed of elements around, more broadly to

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<sup>28</sup> Significant is the discussion of Grave 3 from Hódmezővásárhely-Kökénydombról (Hungary) where a vessel containing a net weight replaced the head of the dead (DeLeonardis 2000).

archaeology (Fowler C. 2008). Brück (2009) refers to the Bronze Age body as a combination of elements that are represented by and constituted through artifacts.

There is no indication of post-interment activities on osseous remains or fragmented goods such as further processing or handling. After filling the pit-grave with them and ending of the funerary rite, the place developed as a central cult place. It is conjecturable that rituals on the residence of the ancestor were observed, but they did not yield enduring material apart the bone of the cooked animal above mentioned.

If there is no evidence that the top of the pit-grave had been deliberately covered in any fashion, by stones or a slab. Gh. Lazarovici and Merlini documented that it was never reopened in more recent times and there are not intruder artifacts into the early Vinča layer (to which the pit-grave belongs) from later and higher levels (Merlini, Gh. Lazarovici 2008). From two photos shot in 1961 by the archaeologist in charge, one can check the dark, thick undisturbed layer of 0.5 m above the mouth of the pit, at least 1 m. under the Copper Age Coțofeni level (Vlassa 1963, fig. 3, 4). As already mentioned, part of the pit was destroyed not in prehistoric time, but during archaeological excavations made by K. Horedt or N. Vlassa. Because of this damage, some pieces of artifacts and bones might have been lost making even harder the decoding of the rationale for their selection. However, the systematic attendance of the head plus upper torso from the figurines and the absence of the low half part from the same figurines would not to be considered a strange coincidence.

In short, at Tărtăria the act of accumulating and circulating after fracturing and selecting can be compared to a coin with two sides, and yet it is always the same object. In the same light, the achievement of an ancestral state made it necessary that fragments of skeleton and objects have to be shared among descendants, and that the deposited parts of the whole were so distinctive that the whole was obviously represented, making up a spiritual treasure.

### *The question of the sacred script*

Under this scenario, if the ritual artifacts were broken and buried in the pit-grave as incomplete even if fractal items, the three inscribed tablets were the only objects left intact and interred as complete items. Even if in the Danube civilization there are cases of deliberate breakage of artifacts with signs and their circulation denoting some form of social relationship (Chapman J.C. 2001), at Tărtăria the inscriptions might have been considered inviolable, inhibiting the breakup of the tablets. A key issue for future research is the exploration of the interaction between fragmented and complete items in both the ways. The first is the interplay at Tărtăria between incomplete items without signs and complete items bearing signs. The second is the comparison in textual information and archaeo-semiotic context of the Danube civilization between the Transylvanian intact tablets and the numerous Neolithic inscribed artifacts that have been intentionally fragmented.

Sometimes objects were broken in particular places because the signs were present at those places. In addition, a pattern of multiple ceramic fragmentations of vessels was in use: in the first stage, the inscribed artifact was broken, while in the second stage the part of it with signs was itself broken. The breaking of the shards happened across the signs (Chapman J.C. 2001, 226). Not aware that the script occurred in previous cultures, Chapman stated that ritual link of individuals or households through fragmentation of incised signs was an important innovation of the Vinča culture (Chapman J.C. 2001, 233).

Conversely, the Tărtăria tablets emphasize the practice of depositing complete special finds when they bear a sequence of sacred and magical signs that was recognized as carrier of apotropaic powers by the believers independently from the capability to read it. Even if part of the descendants of Milady Tărtăria had not been able to understand the real significance, the semantic meaning, of the inscriptions engraved on tablets, they have interpreted them as “deposits” of superhuman powers put in play through magic-religious rituals. Fixing formulas on matter made the liturgy “perfect.” The codified act of tracing distinctive and sequential marks through a rite obliged the miraculous powers to be attentive, triggered divine manifestations or interventions, maintained communication with the supernatural sphere even after the conclusion of ceremonies, and endorsed a contract between human and superhuman beings.

Tărtăria tablets provide evidence that the *Danube script* – the archaic, essentially logographic system of writing (not capable of encoding extended speech or long narratives because phonetic elements are not rendered) developed by the Danube civilization - had mainly a sacred nature and was employed in liturgies and to express magic-religious beliefs. Even if profane functions of signs or/and pictograms incised on pots are not denied, the Danube script was not primarily used for commercial transactions or for recording administrative documents, but for communicating with the super-human forces (Gimbutas 1991; Haarmann 1995; 2005; 2008; Merlini 2001; 2004; 2005; 2007; 2008; 2009b; 2010; Merlini and Gh. Lazarovici 2008; Marler 2008; Winn 2008; Luca 2009; Marler, Robbins Dexter 2009; Maxim, Marler, Crișan 2009).

The burial procedures that occurred at Tărtăria are not the only case in which writing technology was ritually connected with the deliberate interment of artifacts and other materials associated with a dead person. For example, in the previous developing stage of the Vinča culture sacred signs were employed at Mostonga (Republic of Serbia) on the valve of a *Spondylus gaederopus* L. that was positioned as intact item on the pelvis of a deceased deposited in contracted position. The signs have been interpreted as constellations that have to escort the dead through the beginning stage of the afterlife journey (Karmanski 1977; Séfériadès 2003.366; Siklósi 2004; Merlini 2009b). The likeness between the possible asterisms in the *Spondylus* engravings and some of the signs from the rounded and the holed rectangular tablets from Tărtăria poses questions about the nature of the inscriptions deposited with Milady Tărtăria and the role of the script in burials of “special” persons.

### *Conclusions*

In the Danube civilization, not every corpse received individual and partial secondary burial in a sacralized pit-grave. In fact, it was a very rare event. And even rarer was the re-deposition of a hybrid body made of the skeletal/artifactual fragmented remains together with three inscribed tablets kept as the only complete items. In the present article, I have attempted to provide insights in order to establish a framework within which to assess the plausibility that about 7300 years ago a standing magic-religious adept was consecrated as a novel ancestor in a Middle Neolithic medium-scale farming community that developed along the Mureş River. The indication is corroborated by the socially and culturally (beliefs and worldviews) driven aspects of a normative and emotional funerary process that transformed the corpse of this “kin” religious adept into the body of an “ancestor”. At Tărtăria, personhood was commemorated more by the transformation of the dead through the mortuary program and subsequently by interactions between the sacralized pit-grave and people than through attention afforded to burial or static display (Brück 2004; Fowler C. 2001; 2004; Williams 2004). Achieved an ancestral state, Milady Tărtăria resided not solely in the corpse treatment and sacralized pit-grave, but also in the exchanges created between the living and her during mortuary practices and commemorative rituals after the re-deposition.

Even if the extremely heterogeneous character of behaviors connected to the Transylvanian re-deposition and the difficulties in interpreting them have to be underlined (Duday 2009, 90), the present article has presented enough evidence to identify what happened at Tărtăria not being a mere secondary deposit of human bones. It was actually a single, partial, non-cremation and packed burial of secondary character. Protagonist was the body of an elderly, disabled, terrific and revered holy woman who post-mortem continued, as while she was alive, striding across the gap limping between the world of life and the land of the ancestral dead as well as exploiting exceptional skills in rituals concerning the sovereign mysteries of vitality connected with sexuality and fecundity.

Milady Tărtăria's death was not experienced as instantaneous by the community. It was a slow process of transition from one spiritual state to another because the dead still somehow inhabited the physical remains. The re-deposition was the key passage of a multi-stage process that had high symbolic value, was pre-planned, involved multiple households, was intergenerational, and required extraordinary community involvement (Downs 1956; Metcalf and Huntington 1991; Kuijt I. 2008, 175). Primary internment or protected exposition of the intact corpse in a place of temporary storage to disaggregate enabled the dead person to rest and allowed her spirit to leave the material world (Thomas 1999, 136). It was necessary to eliminate the decadent flesh from the skeleton before Milady Tărtăria could join the community of the ancestral dead (Thomas 1991, 112; 1999, 136). Exhumation after decomposition of the soft tissue, leaving only the bones, reintroduced her, in a new and alien form, into the world of the living. Ritual disarticulation / breakage of



the mortal remains and selection of key fragments followed. A parallel procedure fragmented and sorted out her liturgical paraphernalia, personal adornments, and funerary anthropomorphic identifiers.

The association/incorporation of broken liturgical tools, personal ornaments, and effigies with the skeletal remains of Milady Tărtăria was a fundamental passage, being consistent with the transformation of her corpse into a hybrid bone/clay/spondylus/stone skeleton suitable for an ancestral state and its insertion within a system of place-value and exchange. The partial, admixed and packed burial at Tărtăria challenges the presumption that all human bodies are central and pivotal to the burial rite, whereas goods play a secondary and supportive role. It represents a typical case of the Middle Neolithic in Southeastern-Central Europe in which an individual does not begin and end at the boundary of its body, reconsidering the many dimensions of being a person in prehistory beyond the body (Whittle 2003; Fowler C. 2004; Jones 2005; Appleby 2010, 46).

The secondary, individual and partial burial of the compound body was the topic moment for Milady Tărtăria's identity to end the state of liminality moving from the position of "respected and admired ritual specialist" to the status of "venerated ancestor". The passage was symbolically represented by the transfer of the bones from the location of initial storage to the place of final deposal. A ritual feast signed the re-interment of Milady Tărtăria, celebrating her rebirth into the eternal collectivity of the ancestral dead. Large amount of energy and dedication expanded in preparation and treatment of Milady Tărtăria's cadaver (not in the grave construction and architecture) confirm her as a much respected person in the community and corporate involvement in mortuary ritual.

The admix body made of the skeletal/artifactual remains was deposited in a single permanent resting place together with three tablets bearing sacred script signs kept as the only complete items. Only a small part of the osseous elements as well as of the liturgical equipment, personal adornments, and identity representations has been buried inside the ritual pit-grave. Most of the bones and goods remains might have circulated as relicts among kinship and (familial or spiritual, local or non-local) descendents that shared a common heritage.

If liturgical tools (tablets with sacred script included) and emblematic adornments interacted with Milady Tărtăria while she was alive participating to her identity display as a magic-religious adept, they continued interplaying with her as a newly-created ancestor and by doing so, asserting a political claim of continuity as being still part of the community. Therefore, the mortuary program appears to have focused on the re-combined body of the ancestral dead as a signifier of social relations that even post-mortem were imbued with social responsibilities. Coexistence of accumulation/deposition and circulation/sharing of physical relicts and artifactual remains created and maintained lasting bonds between the newly-created ancestor and persons/groups. Small portions of Milady Tărtăria's skeleton, powerful equipment, personal adornments, and effigies reunited components of the family, corporate members, devotees, and other individuals by concentrating them into the sacralized grave together with the inscribed tablets and circulating / being in

their possession to exert an influence over the physical world. From the point of view of the construction of personhood of the newly-created forefather, her empowering with supernatural but immanent faculties governed two ancestral representations of Milady Tărtăria: an undivided bone/clay/spondylus/stone individual deposited in the blessed burial; and a dividual, partible, fractal, and permeable person (Bloch 1988; Strathern 1988; Wagner 1991; Busby 1997; Bird-David 1999; Chapman J.C. 2000; Fowler C. 2004; 2008; Brück 2009) who was nomadic, and circulating. The ancestral persona of Milady Tărtăria emerges precisely from that tension between individual and dividual aspects/relations (LiPuma 1998, 57).

The whole mortuary program reflects conscious decisions made by the community and corporate group (her family within it) concerning the recommended and customary social behavior considered appropriate to express and exploit relationships with such a revered deceased. Milady Tărtăria was an elderly and ill person. Her death was not sudden and unexpected. The community had time to plan ahead for the prescribed funeral procedures that on the one side recognized her vital role within the social unit, and on the other side channeled the efforts aimed marking her passage from one life to another, providing magical force for the route to the world beyond and guaranteeing her rebirth as novel ancestral dead to be venerated. Consistently, the out of ordinary funeral chain was intended to achieve the change in nature of Milady Tărtăria's persona and to confirm that death did not end her active participation in the life of the community. Re-burial and re-birth initiated a not very different mode of contribution from her continuing to look after the living through magic-spiritual expertise that has been strengthened by appropriate liturgies and has to be maintained by periodical ceremonies performed after the final burial. The statute of her powers when she was alive included distinctive ties with the extra-human world and outstanding expertise in liturgies concerning the sovereign mysteries of human, animal and vegetal reproductivity. We can interpret the elaborate and multistage funerary ritual performed at Tărtăria as a process to transform the deceased from a revered member of the living world into a spiritual being that was reincorporated into society through her ancestral state. She assumed the privileged position and responsibility to bridge the two spheres (supernatural circuit and human arena) in order to assure prosperity and fertility to living members of the household, the corporate group and the community.

The choice to locate the pit-grave in Milady Tărtăria's abode, which was within the boundaries of the village, reincorporated tangibly her in the world of the descendants and had religious motivation being aimed to sustain fertility and prosperity of the people who resided on the land of the ancestors via exploiting her otherworldly but immanent powers. From this perspective, the pit-grave might be comprehended as a context where concepts of the ancestral dead were cited and negotiated through a dialogue between the living and the dead rather than being interpreted as a direct index of the individual identity of that interred within it. Its location within Milady Tărtăria's habitation structure reflects a household context encapsulated within the corporate and community frames. The consecrated pit-

grave was planned as holy and powerful foci for group identification, internal unity and strength, being imbued with the sacred quality of a common ancestor (Vogt 1976, 99). Place-value of the sacralized pit-grave was symbol of endurance and token of assurance that land and/or other inalienable resources were held in trust by the living for those not yet born. Through the installation of a powerful guardian, Tărtăria society took the dramatic opportunity to recreate itself.

The Danube script was utilized at Tărtăria as a key component of social reproduction strategies based on ancestral ideology of lineage within a kinship-based society. *Ars scribendi* functioned as a powerful mnemonic device strictly connected with the cult and social memory of a recent ancestor, linking generations and possibly communities.

Material traces of the presented ritualized mortuary practice document that at the Vinča A settlement of Tărtăria a quite complex kin-based social structure occurred, based upon biological differences, social-professional ability, kinship ties, and corporate involvement. On the one side the funerary ritual was driven by a shared corpus of social guidelines and, on the other side, it substantiated them. In parallel, it had roots and gave added strength to people's beliefs about magic, ancestry, and supernatural. The inferred motivations provide input to understand better organizing principles, life ways, philosophical-religious credo, and worldviews of the mid-size early farming communities of Southeastern-Central Europe. Finally, Milady Tărtăria's case study can contribute establishing a firmer corporate group model for the Middle Neolithic in the Danube basin, capturing on the ground some hints about fixed sense of the descent group.

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