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– SUMMARY –

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**MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, RESEARCH, YOUTH AND SPORT
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**THE MAJOR SYMBOLISM
OF THE NEOLITHIC AND ENEOLITHIC
ANTHROPOMORPHIC FIGURINES
OF THE CARPATHIAN-DANUBIAN-PONTIC SPACE
IN LIGHT OF THE NEW RESEARCH**

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KEYWORDS: Neolithic, Eneolithic, prehistory, archaeology, sign, image, symbol, symbolism, symbolic structure, symbolic system, anthropomorphic figurines, miniature human representations, anthropomorphism, hybridism, semiotics, semantics, religion, rite, ritual, magic, cult, sacred, sacrifice, Mother Goddess, myth, mythology, communication, prehistoric art, prehistoric society, archaic society, anthropology, ethnology, transdisciplinary approach, multi-perspective approach, culture, the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space.

SUMMARY

The topic of the present thesis is extremely vast and complex, covering large cultural and geographic areas where its local features and manifestations are specific. Comprising 218 pages (plates included), this thesis is structured in three main parts based on rigorous documentation. The bibliographic materials correspond with the thesis' title, purposes and content, illustrating the most recent issues approached in order to attempt the deciphering of the prehistoric symbols.

The prehistoric religious phenomenon was noticed from the very beginnings of the archaeological studies. The current research records many controversial issues regarding this vast and fascinating field, which is extremely difficult to interpret in an efficient way. We are aiming at finding new ways of interpreting the above mentioned symbols by analyzing the anthropomorphic figurines in a detailed manner, both typologically and stylistically, indicating the corresponding symbols for each separate artifact. The subsequent statistical facts presented are meant to bring an additional (and hopefully useful) „tool” for deciphering the mysterious signs and images covering usually much of the surface of the figurines' bodies.

Studying the anthropomorphic figurine and their symbolism is one way of reconstructing the Neolithic and Eneolithic religion, as these human-like artifacts were frequently used in various rituals and cultic ceremonies. Moreover, the symbols on the figurines could tell us more about the ways of communication between individuals and human groups and the differences in the social status within the community. We should not ignore the abilities of artistic expression the small human figurines show us. The anthropological and ethnological approaches as well as the mythological aspects and the correlation of their common fundamental constituent parts could help us identify “roots” of certain realities thought long vanished.

The Neolithic and Eneolithic anthropomorphic figurines in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space are covered with various signs that astonish, impress and intrigue. The complexity of these symbols, which were created as early as the Upper Paleolithic, is still a riddle which cannot be solved by the archaeologists.

The mythical imagery and religious ceremonialism are complex expressions of the spirituality of the Neolithic and Eneolithic human communities. The related semiotic elements could indicate common issues like pieces of clothing

or tattoos, but they could also have much deeper connotations such as cosmological conceptions or survival strategies of the communities that created those elements. The Neolithic and Eneolithic anthropomorphic figurines and their characteristic symbolism keep and reflect past realities which cannot be easily perceived. We hope that the current and future scientific approaches will bring more data and new methods of investigating them.

The first part of the thesis, the *history of the research (I.1)* refers to the beginnings of the studies regarding the anthropomorphic figurines in works of Romanian authors. The first discoveries of Neolithic and Eneolithic figurines in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space were recorded as early as the nineteenth century and continued during the twentieth century due to the efforts of great scientists such as I. Andrieșescu, I. Nestor, Vladimir and Hortensia Dumitrescu, Radu and Ecaterina Vulpe, Gh. Ștefan, D. Berciu, D.V. Rosetti and others. Even though the anthropomorphic figurines discovered in those times were not given much attention and interpreting them was not the top priority of their finders, those artifacts are extremely useful today as they are very numerous and usually have rich ornaments.

In the subsection named *Multiple links and mutual influences between the main cultural areas and horizons in light of the new research (I.2)*, we present the links between the cultural areas and horizons of the present-day Romanian territory in the Neolithic and Eneolithic. When relevant for the anthropomorphic figurines, the distant cultural influences will also be presented. The interaction between human communities in the Neolithic and Eneolithic is a stated fact; the cultural elements taken from the neighboring areas were integrated and then transmitted in other receptive areas. In many cases a local adaptation of the new cultural elements can be noticed.

The Neolithic and Eneolithic cultures of the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space referred to in the present thesis are: Starčevo-Criș, Vădastra, Boian, Hamangia, Vinča, Precucuteni, Cucuteni and Gumelnița. The number of their archaeological artifacts unearthed during the past century is enormous.

The characteristics transmitted to the figurines prove that the above mentioned cultures were in contact and mutually exerted influences on one another. Correlating the cultural aspects with facts from the Aegean and Asia Minor region are valid for the Neolithic and Eneolithic of the Lower Danube region.

The Near Eastern cultures played a clearly important role in the neolithisation process in the Balkans (Özdoğan 1999, 9). The south-eastern cultures received eastern influences through the Danube valley and the chronological parallels between Anatolia and the Balkans (Hacılar I – Karanovo I – Sesklo – Starčevo II) were illustrated following the vastest systematic diggings in Anatolia (Mellaart 1975, 244 ff.). The resemblances between local artifacts and artifacts from distant regions as the Near East were confirmed by the archaeologists up to the present times. The recent literature grants a special

attention to the local background and the adaptations of the foreign elements that reach these cultural areas.

The second chapter, *The Neolithic and Eneolithic anthropomorphic figurines of the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space (II)* has three subchapters. The first includes theoretical aspects: *Recent notions, concepts and terminologies in the current literature (II.1)*. The first evaluations of the signs noticed on the prehistoric artifacts' surface, more than a century ago, were rather simplistic and generalizing. The anthropomorphic figurines and their symbolism is extremely important as is their presence in sacred contexts and their power of symbolizing the worlds of religious ideas, and beliefs and the mythology created by the prehistoric communities.

In this paper we used a series of essential notions, concepts and terms such as: symbol, symbolism, rite, ritual, scared, cultic, religious, figurines. The meanings of these notions and concepts (and others) are defined in this theoretical subchapter. The thorough knowledge of their signification and the adequate use of the special terminologies are necessary in the rigorous scientific studies on prehistoric spirituality. It's not the old terminologies, but the new ones that are stirring fierce controversy (the *feminism* and *feminist studies*, for instance).

From the Greek term *symbolon* ("sign of recognition"), the Latin *symbolum*, the French *symbole*, the English *symbol*, the German *Symbol*, **the symbol** is a fundamental notion frequently used in archaeological, anthropological and ethnological studies. Many "ornaments" are reconsidered today and named *symbols*.

A recent concept in the modern archaeological research is the **visual culture**¹ in prehistory, where the anthropomorphic figurines are seen as message conveyers ("vehicles" that transmit messages). The visual culture is a way in which both images and rituals and the entire cultic framework suggested by those images help configuring norms within society. What could not be seen had to be transposed into images. The Neolithic and Eneolithic images are symbols and/or series of symbols structured in specific ways.

The special terminologies were – and still are – controversial. One of these debated subjects is the very definition of the small scale human representations. These artifacts are known under several names: "anthropomorphic figurines", "idols", "statues", "statuettes", "miniature tridimensional human-like representations". The recent terms of *anthropocentrism* (even in the context of human/animal *hybridism*) (Naumov 2010), new notions linked with the contentious cult of the Mother Goddess such as *matristic*, *matrifocal*, *matricentric* (Rountree 2001) and even the "*semiotic matrix*" created in order to penetrate the semantic depth of the anthropomorphic figurines (Merlini 2007) are all comprised in the new terminologies.

¹ The visual culture is seen as a part of the material culture, so is not an equivalent of the spiritual culture; in most of the older studies, the artifacts were assigned either to the material or the spiritual culture.

There are some terminological issues in the Romanian literature due to the lack of equivalence of certain terms from English into Romanian. Thus, words like *imagery*, *corporeality* and *gender*² cannot be flawlessly translated into Romanian in order to impeccably describe the archaeological facts and contexts. The term “gender” often has the role of emphasizing nuances when discussing the figurines’ sex and/or sexuality.

*Mother Goddessism*³ is a phrase having a rather depreciatory sense today. It derives from the “Mother Goddess”, who was seen until recently as the main feminine divinity of the Neolithic and Eneolithic. A century ago she was named “Mother Earth” (Dieterich 1913, *passim*), “The Mother Goddess”, “The Great Goddess” and most researchers did not question the existence of a supreme female deity of the predominantly agricultural Neolithic and Eneolithic communities.

The two sides, the supporters and the opponents of the Mother Goddess theory, are continuing their dispute on the issue. The supporters of this theory are accepting a Neolithic pantheon of female deities, while its opponents reject this version and usually do not assign sacred features to the anthropomorphic figurines. The scientists who question the existence of a Neolithic and Eneolithic pantheon are trying to redefine certain terms and to “destroy” their adversaries’ interpretations (Talalay 2000a; 2000b; Tringham 1994; Conkey, Tringham 1995; Bailey 2002; 2005a; Meskell 2005; Meskell, Preucel 2007; Voss 2008; Mithen 2006 etc.). Those who are trying to expose facts in a more detached manner, after identifying the “two distinct discourses” (Rountree 2001, 2003) and underlining the pluses and the minuses of each “side” (Hutton 1997, 96-97) are few.

The other two subchapters of the second chapter are ***Ordering the anthropomorphic figurines typologically and stylistically (II.2)*** and ***Ordering the main symbols discussed in the literature (II.3)***. The figurines’ typological and stylistic ordering is correlated with their semantic content. We selected those specific Neolithic and Eneolithic figurines which, due to their semantic content, could have a special meaning either spiritually, socially or cognitively (for instance, as proofs of an incipient communication system).

The figurines’ degree of fragmentation – either intentional or not – is a serious obstacle in the way of interpreting them. The ritual habit of destroying artifacts (anthropomorphic figurines among them) is still a hot issue (Chapman 2001, Biehl 2006, 201 ff.). When different body parts of the figurines are missing, we restrained to indicating the features which could be established based on the remaining fragment.

² Into Romanian „gen”; this is a partially equivalent notion of the English term, *archaeologically speaking*.

³ In this way, a number of scientists would like to prove some others wrong and to underline the „numerous errors” (not infrequently by ridiculing those who still support the existence of a central female deity in the Neolithic and Eneolithic religion).

Typological and stylistic ordering criteria for the anthropomorphic figurines:

A. Position: A₁-A₃ (vertical, seated, diverse)

B. Sex: B₁ - Feminine; B₂ - Masculine; B₃ - Bisexual; B₄ - Indeterminate

C. Body: C₁-C₃ (cylindrical, flat, other types)

D. Head (with the physiognomic details): D₁-D₆ with subtypes (triangular, pentagonal, irregular, covered by masks etc.– with complete or partial physiognomic elements (eyes, nose, mouth) respectively without the physiognomic elements)

E. Arms: E₁-E₄ (raised, extended at shoulders' level, along the body of the figurine, missing or stumps)

F. Legs: F₁-F₃ (F₁ - undifferentiated: F_{1a} - cylindrical; F_{1b} - conical; F_{1c} - flat, F₂ - differentiated through an incision (or groove) and F₃ - separated).

The signs and symbols on the anthropomorphic figurines, simple or elaborate, make us think they were not created randomly. Dots, sequences of dots, lines (straight, broken, wavy, zigzags or spirals etc.) and geometrical figures (especially circles, triangles and quadrilaterals) appear separately or in various combinations, as basic elements of the prehistoric *visual culture*.

Generic terms such as decoration, decorative/ornamental motifs were used to define what now are the constituent parts of an obvious symbolic system. Its fundamental components are (at a rate of over 90%) dots, lines, circles etc. which we categorized as *basic geometrical shapes* (the dot and the line), *closed geometrical shapes* (the circle, the ellipse, the triangle and the quadrilateral) and a narrower category of *various shapes*.

Classification of the main symbols that cover the bodies of the Neolithic and Eneolithic anthropomorphic figurines:

BASIC GEOMETRICAL SHAPES:

1. THE DOT. Modes of representation: **1a.** isolated; **1b.** sequences of dots: **1b₁**, strings: **1b_{1,1}** vertical; **1b_{1,2}** horizontal; **1b_{1,3}** oblique; **1b₂**, groups (*clusters*); **1c.** associated with geometrical shapes: **1c₁**, within the geometrical shapes (enclosed); **1c₂**, outside the geometrical shapes (in their vicinity)

2. THE LINE. Modes of representation: **2a.** straight: **2a₁**, vertical; **2a₂**, horizontal; **2a₃**, oblique; **2b.** broken: **2b₁**, „V"-shaped; **2b₂**, zigzags („M"-shapes also); **2b₃**, crosses („X"-shapes also); **2b₄**, swastikas; **2c.** curved: **2c₁**, arcs; **2c₂**, spirals; **2d.** stripped lines: **2d₁**, parallel: **2d_{1,1}** straight: **2d_{1,1,1}** vertical; **2d_{1,1,2}** horizontal; **2d_{1,1,3}** oblique; **2d_{1,2}** wavy: **2d₂**, radial (rays); **2d₃**, nets.

CLOSED GEOMETRICAL SHAPES:

3. THE CIRCLE. Modes of representation: **3a.** isolated: **3a₁.** simple (without associated symbol(s)); **3a₂.** including other symbols; **3b.** adjacent to other symbol(s): **3b₁.** simple (without associated symbol(s)); **3b₂.** including other symbols; **3c.** groups of circles: **3c₁.** simple (without associated symbol(s)); **3c₂.** including other symbols; **3d.** concentric circles.

4. THE ELLIPSE. Modes of representation: **4a.** isolated: **4a₁.** simple (without associated symbol(s)); **4a₂.** including other symbols; **4b.** concentric ellipses.

5. THE TRIANGLE. Modes of representation: **5a.** isolated: **5a₁.** simple (without associated symbol(s)); **5a₂.** including other symbols; **5b.** adjacent to other symbol(s): **5b₁** simple (without associated symbol(s)); **5b₂** including other symbols; **5c.** groups of triangles: **5c₁.** connected: **5c_{1.1}** „wolf teeth”; **5c_{1.2}** „the hourglass”; **5c₂.** separate; **5d.** nested triangles.

6. THE QUADRILATERAL. Shapes and modes of representation: **6a.** the square: **6a₁.** isolated: **6a_{1.1}** simple (without associated symbol(s)); **6a_{1.2}** including other symbols; **6a₂.** adjacent to other symbol(s); **6a₃.** nested squares; **6b.** the rectangle: **6b₁.** isolated: **6b_{1.1}** simple (without associated symbol(s)); **6b_{1.2}** including other symbols; **6b₂.** adjacent to other symbol(s); **6b₃.** nested rectangles; **6c.** the lozenge: **6c₁.** isolated: **6c_{1.1}** simple (without associated symbol(s)); **6c_{1.2}** including other symbols; **c₂.** adjacent to other symbol(s); **6c_{2.1}** simple (without associated symbol(s)); **6c_{2.2}** including other symbols; **6c₃.** nested lozenges; **6d.** „the chessboard”.

The subsequent correspondent and statistical analyses of the anthropomorphic figurines present their typological and stylistic characteristics *in association with the symbol(s)*, the frequency of certain symbol(s) on (a) specific body part(s), the repetitive structure of the symbols and other features that can prove relevant in trying to interpret the semantic content of a small human-like figurine which is covered with various signs.

There is also a series of graphs regarding the frequency and repetition of a number of semiotic elements proportional with the total number of pieces shown in plates. The statistical graphs can be applied at any time on different situations and (recommendable) to a higher number of figurines and fragments of figurines. The necessary criteria for these graphs can be easily modified (and detailed at will) according to the type of information needed to be extracted from a given data set.

The limitations of these graphs are given by the proportionally reduced number of figurines taken into account (a number of 180 figurines shown in plates). The relevance on the above mentioned analyses will be greater when the number of analyzed item increases (thousands of anthropomorphic figurines and other anthropomorphic representations could be analyzed this way).

An important section of Chapter II is *The distinction between the semantic elements and pieces of clothing (corporal accessories, respectively)*. Not all

symbols and combinations of symbols are necessarily religious items, socially significant features or cognitive codes: some of the symbols are obvious pieces of clothing and/or accessories such as necklaces, pendants or other types of adornments, belts etc. In the Romanian literature, this is the case for some traditional piece of clothing (Mateescu 1961, 60: „fota”; Comşa 1995, 77 ff.), or adornments (Comşa 1995, 94 ff.; Marinescu-Bîlcu, Bolomey 2000, 136), as well as tattoos (certain signs, especially on the trunk) or different types of hairstyles (for the linear features on the head).

Another anthropomorphic figurine has clothes both on its body and legs (the figurine from Liubcova-Ornița: Luca 1998); this figurine is a truly amazing artifact (pl. X/6). Clothing pieces and different accessories could be found on other figurines as well (pl. II/2; IV/1; VI/4; VIII, 2; XXIII/4; XL/1 etc.).

We would like to point out an interesting fact about the presence of the pieces of clothing and accessories on the *masculine figurines*. The masculine figurines have three remarkable particularities: (1) they are very scarce as compared with the feminine figurines, (2) the graphic elements on the masculine figurines are very „sketchy” and (3) in the majority of cases, the male human representations show pieces of clothing and/or different accessories, either functional or cultic (?) (pl. XXII/4, 6; XXXI; XXXII; XXXIII).

The ***Cultural-historical and anthropological ways of interpreting the symbols*** represent the third chapter of the thesis (III). We think we managed to approach the difficult but fascinating field of the Neolithic and Eneolithic symbolism from multiple perspectives, which is a step forward in the Romanian literature regarding this subject. This last chapter is divided in two subchapters: ***Multi-perspective approaches of the symbolism of the anthropomorphic figurines in the recent literature*** (III.1.) and ***The symbols of the anthropomorphic figurines of the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space and their potential meanings*** (III.2).

The III.1 subchapter has, in turn, 8 insightful subsections in which the anthropomorphic figurines are regarded from various perspectives: religion, cognitive evolution, social issues, mythology and mythical stories, anthropological or ethnological research or the artistic means of expression.

In ***Preliminary aspects*** (III.1.1), we state that, unfortunately, the prehistoric symbolism is a subject of dispute between researchers and regardless of the perspective one adopts he or she will receive harsh critics from one „side” or another. There are not yet any „standards” in this field (and they may never appear). Thus, the fierce disputes should be replaced with honest research and collaboration between scientists.

In ***The religious function of the symbols*** (III.1.2), we state that the prehistoric system of beliefs included magic and religious practices based on the ideas people had about their surrounding universe and their own place in it. The relation between human and supernatural forces was very important: the man was convinced that these forces constantly influence him as well as the entire nature (Knudson 1978, 393). According to several opinions (which the recent research

label as „outdated”), it is possible that some of the cults originated from the „lack of a mental equipment”, which would have led to the interpretation of certain natural phenomena in a superstitious way and thus the superstition became divine (Bernand, Gruzinski 1998, 48). The richly decorated figurines were considered “works of art” and played an important role in reflecting life and religious beliefs (Kalicz 1970, 15). Under their different forms, the mystic and religious tendencies could be seen as universal attributes of the human culture (Conkey 2001, 274; van Huyssteen 2010, 120).

The rituals (as defined in the previous chapter) refer to primary realities: sexuality, conflict, sacrifice, death etc. The leaders, the dead (often the ancestors) and, of course, deities had important places in the rituals. The existence of deities (or superior forces) was not a tangible one: they existed in a world where the prehistoric man did not have access (except during sacred experiences!). The objects used in rituals and the ritual “formulas” and the constant exchanges between the two worlds (the real one and the ideal one) ensured a necessary or even vital contact in those times.

Regarding *The communicative function of the symbols (III.1.3)*, the anthropomorphic are not – and cannot be – artifacts used solely within religious rituals or other magical or cultic practices with exclusively sacred signification. These small-scale human representations can structure, in given contexts, the relationships with other individuals or groups of individuals through the symbolic content they possess and transmit. Sometimes, the combinations of symbols can transmit real “sacred texts” that can not be deciphered at the present time. (For instance, some of the figurines could be the mythical ancestors, *presented otherwise than verbally*). The symbol is considered the fundamental part of the communication, both verbal and nonverbal, as any type of communication “has a message in its centre, that is information presented in a symbolic way” (Vlăsceanu 1998, 123).

We should not overlook the *Social function of the symbols (III.1.4)*. From a social point of view, we notice that the societies where life is still archaic have conventional „luxury (or *prestige*) items” because possessing them gives a certain social status (usually privileged). Some of these items could be the anthropomorphic figurines, richly and carefully ornamented, maybe covered with different pigments. Some special figurines could even influence the hierarchy of the society (Andreescu 2002, 91).

Associating the semiotic content of the Neolithic and Eneolithic anthropomorphic figurines with the social function within the human communities and the lack of a clear delimitation from the religious sphere are current problems the new research is confronted with (Carr 1995; Fowler 2005, 111-112; Whittle 2006, 9; Arias 2007, 66; Kuijt 2008; Nanoglou 2008, 329). The search for new efficient ways of grasping the real meanings of the figurines continues through analyzing these interactions.

In studying the Neolithic and Eneolithic anthropomorphic figurines in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space one can easily notice *The artistic function of*

the symbols and their aesthetic and ornamental expressivity (III.1.5). The first artistic manifestations were considered the elementary forms of sacred idea and objects, which did not reach a symbolic level yet. In the beginnings, art was closely connected with magic and then the sacred art and the profane art will separate (Hauser 1999, 6).

As a reaction to the “empirical” approaches of art historians regarding the symbolic significance of various signs on the prehistoric artifacts, a number of archaeologists tend to minimize the artistic aspects of the anthropomorphic figurines’ symbols (Brown 2004, 21-22). Nevertheless, the artistic expressions revealed by the anthropomorphic figurines should not be neglected: some of the figurines were modeled with special care and their creators clearly wanted to achieve aesthetic, even “refined” results. Some of the prehistoric “works of art” are questionable (Clark 1969, 61) or their connotations are more complex than they seem on a first impression. “Art for art’s sake” is debatable even for the Upper Paleolithic times (Currie 2009, 16 ff.). Thus, it’s also questionable in the Neolithic and Eneolithic, when the human cognitive evolution increased (Mithen 1998a, 128 ff.; Becker 2007, 122). The art objects are closely related to their capacity of transmitting information, as “vehicles” of communication (Preziosi 1998, 15). The prehistoric art does not have the *aesthetic* values which define modern art; in prehistoric times, art was rather “functional and religious” (Herva, Ikäheimo 2002, 96).

From an aesthetic point of view, a ***colour symbolism***⁴ (Filipescu 1998, 537) was noticed. Some of the scientists think colours have both aesthetic and symbolic attributes (Jones 1999, 339). The most frequently used colours for decorating the figurines (and other artifacts as well) in the Neolithic and Eneolithic were *red*, *white* and *black* (Radovanović 1996; Viklund 2004; Debois, Otte 2005; Petru 2006; Cooper 2010; Stutz 2010); *yellow*, for instance, was rare (Merlini, Lazarovici 2008, 142).

The hieratic character of some anthropomorphic figurines leads to stylization, following certain previous traditions (Dumitrescu 1968, 56; Lazarovici 1988, 23). The anthropomorphized objects (highly stylized) such as a bone needle (Comşa 2001, 166-167) or a ladle (Monah 1997, fig. 260/1) are very difficult to interpret; thus, they are commonly labeled as “art objects” due to the current limitations of the research.

Cultural-anthropological and ethnological perspectives of the symbolic studies (III.1.6) are still valuable for archaeologists: the anthropological studies bring many relevant data from the contemporary archaic societies.

From an anthropological point of view, the human evolution manifests itself by an increase in the brain capacity, a higher intelligence and a consequent symbolic activity (Fuentes 2010, 518). The symbols are omnipresent and the religion and rituals are major topics of research in cultural anthropology. The ritual

⁴ We referred to the colour symbolism in this section because the colours grant an aesthetic aspect to the artifacts they cover (even though their significance is far more complex).

practices as well as the social role of the religion represent the main focus of modern anthropology. It has been said that religion is somewhere “between magic and philosophy” (Augé 1995, 34-35). Moreover, the religion and the myth would be ways through which „the primitive societies deploy their power in order to remain undivided” (Clastres 1981, 159).

There are still empirical, ethnographic studies on the archaic societies, but also larger perspectives that focus on their rituals and symbolic culture (Barnard 2004b, 6). Romanian ethnologists identified religious myths and beliefs having very deep roots in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space (Pavelescu 1998, 64) and the “mytho-symbolic valorization of plants and animals” (Oişteanu 1989, 12).

Several less evolved contemporary populations (such as the Tshokwé population in north-eastern Angola) use anthropomorphic figurines in magical-religious ceremonies. The Tshokwé think these artifacts possess a powerful force of their ancestors, even of the “mythical ancestor” (Lima 1971, 19). Within this society, figurines were part of the “ritual inventory” which includes various other artifacts. We could say the same about the Neolithic and Eneolithic anthropomorphic figurines if we take into consideration the numerous artifacts which were assigned a cultic function in prehistory (ritual vessels, altars, anthropomorphized objects etc.).

The relation between archaeology and socio-cultural anthropology is very complex and it ranges with the regional traditions (Dietler 2010, 56). The newest anthropological studies try to avoid certain durkheimian „ clichés” (Boyer 1999, 580-581; Keen 2006, 527), without undermining the importance of the anthropological remarks in the archaeological research field.

The *Mythological aspects* (III.1.7) can be relevant for the interpretation of the anthropomorphic figurines’ symbolism. For the archaic societies, myths were vital for the human existence and saw the real, tangible world as part of an ideal, intangible, superior world.

Myths are generally considered sacred by the human communities. Thus, the symbolism of the cosmic axis (the *axis mundi*), is frequently encountered in different archaic cultures, in entire Europe as well as in Asia or America in astonishingly similar forms. The *axis mundi* is a form of uniting the transcendent with the non-transcendent, the sacred with the profane, in which the cosmic tree is part of the real world but with its roots in the underworld and its top touching the sky/the ideal world of the divinity (Oişteanu 1989, 130; Eliade 1992, I, 50; 1997, 449; Monah 1997, 33-34; Lopiparo 2002, 85-86; Lahelma 2005, 40-41). One of its variants is the so-called „tree of life”, a prehistoric graphical representation with religious connotations, kept until the present days in certain cultures (Golan 2003, 372-373).

In the mythical world there is no strict separation between past and present: the societies have a *cyclical time*, where the dominant factor is the present, which includes both the past and the future (Hesjedal 1995, 203). One could not reach the divinity or his ancestors by himself, but only through intermediaries,

usually small anthropomorphic figurines used in rituals where supernatural forces are invoked (Lima 1971, 385).

In the Romanian literature, the diverse Neolithic and Eneolithic “cosmological” myths are thought to have led to the numerous representations of the Mother Goddess in her various hypostases (Dumitrescu 1979, 73). This is the research field of *archaeomythology*, created by Marija Gimbutas. The logic and the coherence of the symbolic systems which illustrate old mythological aspects can be assumed but not proven at this moment.

About the *Current trends and limitations in interpreting the symbolism of the anthropomorphic figurines (III.1.8)*, we can say that the *visual dimension* of the material culture has a maximum importance for the symbolism of the anthropomorphic figurines today. For human beings, the visual component is very important, sometimes even deciding for collecting and transmitting information about their known universe. Thus, the signs, images and symbols had a great importance in the ritual practices, various social events etc. The archaeologists, art historians, anthropologists, ethnologists, sociologists and historians of religion underlined the significance of images in the life and religious sphere of different populations as well as the difficult identification of this significance.

The symbolic significance of the images are obvious but still not “decoded” due also to the lack of efficient methodologies. The visual symbols and their multiple possible meanings are fascinating and intriguing but remain hidden. They cannot be easily classified or submitted to different types of statistical analyses (Forth 2010, 717). Scientists say that human past “is the conjunctural and emergent product of social [...], symbolic, and historical interactivities” (Fuentes et al. 2010, 512). The previous statement can also be supported by the semiotic and semantic particularities of the Neolithic and Eneolithic anthropomorphic figurines of the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space.

The symbols of the anthropomorphic figurines of the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space and their potential meanings, representing the content of the subchapter **III.2**, is an analysis of the 180 figurines found in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space and illustrated in the present thesis. These anthropomorphic figurines could have been used in all the various contexts we referred to in the previous subchapters. Certainly, there are several issues (such as mythological aspects or ancient traditions) that we cannot grasp yet in order to state anything in that direction.

The analyses carried out from different perspectives in the present thesis are not meant to be *imposed*, but *suggested* to those that will approach the complex symbolism of the Neolithic and Eneolithic anthropomorphic figurines. They could prove very useful especially when applied of a large number of items: the possible analogies corroborated could lead to interesting conclusions regarding certain aspects which are still ambiguous today.

The **conclusions** are the final part of the thesis. Here we notice that, after the creation and large-scale use of the symbol-bearing artifacts, man ceases to live

in a mere physical, material universe and is granted access to a symbolic universe which has language, art and religion as constituent parts.

The prehistoric symbolism is such a vast subject that it would be impossible for a single discipline of study to launch compelling statements in a direction or another. Archaeology should be supported – and perhaps corrected and completed – by approaches from other related disciplines.

We think that *the symbol can be considered a bond* between the various spheres of human existence within the same community, between several communities within the same cultural area or even inter-culturally, in certain conditions.

At the present time, we can state that the anthropomorphic figurines covered with symbols can be rightly associated with magical and/or religious practices but they cannot be dissociated from the social and communicative attributes they possess.

A valuable help in analyzing figurines will be the new technologies as for instance, the computer-based reconstructions of artifacts and different prehistoric contexts and structures. Dynamic debates including heuristic studies of the alternative hypotheses should prove helpful in making further deductions on the symbolism of the Neolithic and Eneolithic anthropomorphic figurines.

The notions, concepts, habits and ways of living change considerably during ages according to the spatial and temporal conditions, but some aspects remain as permanent and constant markers in the communities' lives. Covering the anthropomorphic figurines with symbols is such a marker. Apparently, this strict necessity of keeping tradition was due to certain religious and social connotations which were fundamental for the prehistoric man.

Divinity has - and apparently always had - effective means of communicating with human beings. After the appearance of writing and the composition of the main religious works, we learn that *God is called the Word*⁵. The prehistoric man could not pass his stories on to us by written words: his symbols were his only means of expression. For the Neolithic and Eneolithic times, we could say that *Divinity was Symbol*.

⁵ *In the beginning was the one who is called the Word. The Word was with God and was truly God.* (John 1:1).

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