

## Cucuteni figurines and energy patterns

Notes by Christopher Castle

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I should note my gratitude and immense respect for the work of archaeologist Marija Gimbutas in shining unprecedented light on the entire world of the anthropomorphic figurines of Old Europe. She opened a doorway to the vast realm of the earth goddess in prehistoric cultures.<sup>1</sup>

In this study I wish to go beyond the interpretation that often classifies the Cucuteni figurines as primitive representations of a Goddess or simply as “ritual objects” or “idols”. It is a work of imagination and speculation but one which I believe has importance within the field of archaeology. It is in particular a search for meaning within the structure of incised line work covering the surface of Cucuteni figurines.



The figurine under discussion here is from the Piatra Neamt Cucuteni Museum. It is identified as coming from Raucesti, from the Cucuteni A period, approximately 4300 BCE.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*. Gimbutas. Thames and Hudson. 1974

Looking at the front of the figurine several layers of pattern, several “registers,” can be seen arranged in a vertical series (A lower – E upper) with distinctly defined patterning:

- A. the trace of the legs. The break is at the top of the legs.
- B. the belly to belt area
- C. the lower to middle torso
- D. the upper torso/chest
- E. the shoulders and neck.

There can be no doubt that at a certain level of formal perception the repeating lines of the markings can be seen as a pattern of energy, expansion, contraction, a wave formation, movement.

### Registers A and B



register A.

First, there are traces of converging parallel lines at top of the thighs that would have repeated down the thighs in a V configuration. These suggest a vibratory pattern, originating at the belly in Register B or from the pubic area, linking the main body in relationship to the lower world, the earth

Register B.

The lines we see form the lower boundary of the belly which is bounded by a lozenge shape

Horizontal lines cross the belly interrupted by a mark for the navel, and two other depressions, gradually shifting to the upper border of the lozenge. The overall form of this section suggests *expansion* and *opening*. This opening/expanding is abruptly halted by a horizontal line. We shall discuss the indentations below.

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## Register C



register C.

The next section up can be seen in two ways:

A diamond form defined by a five-lane meander centered on the solar plexus area of the chest extends with parallel lines downwards and across the two flanks in V form to meet the horizontal line bordering the belly. The diamond shape suggests *opening*, wider and at a different rhythmic frequency than the belly. Pulsations *from* a source or drawn *into* the source. The register B lozenge is more enclosed, more intimate, quieter. The ascending diamond meander is public, opens wide, announces the center of the figure like an emblem. Tracing the lines we can go inward or outward from the center of the diamond. The expansion from the source, its center, is enhanced by the downward extending rippling lines, again suggesting *opening*. There is a “breathing,” inwards and outwards.

But this diamond form also rises and, with another abrupt change, intrudes upon the horizontal lines of the next register above.

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## Register D



register D.

The fourth part of our image is defined by evenly incised horizontal lines, seven on the figure’s right side and eight on its left. The lines are slightly asymmetrical, offset one side from the other, suggesting movement and a chest firmly wrapped with bands. Lines first appear to encircle the figure. They are layered and also suggest an extension of the horizontal out beyond the figure, linking her upper body to the surrounding space. These are layers into which the diamond form below rises.

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## Register E



register E.

The top register brings another shift. A V at the neck extends with similarly angled parallel lines across the two sides of the shoulder. The rising lines, though seeming to disappear under the horizontal lines of register D do not reappear lower down. Projected downward the lines have a source, a focal point *from which* they radiate, or *to which* they converge, at an area of the lower torso, the lower part of register C. The central V connects with the topmost point of the register C diamond. Two chevrons or perhaps a meander within the lines on the neck area are lost at the break across the neck.

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Other marks:

The back of the figurine has so far been unavailable. In all cases the markings continue over all sides of the image. I will include this information when I am able to access it. See below for image added 2021

A necklace of shallow circular holes seems to have been added after the incisions. Arranged to approximately coincide with the converging lines of register E but overlapping onto the top of register D. Two further roughly circular depressions appear on the shoulder.

There are three depressions also at the lower abdomen area (B), asymmetrically arranged. In one of these is a small pellet, its shape like a grain or seed.

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#### General observations:

- The overall impression of the figurine is one of excitation and animated energy, all contained within an hieratic, symmetrical, emblematic pattern that somehow also conveys profound stillness. Paradoxically within the fields of enlivened surface there is an overall form that invites focus and concentrated contemplation.
- Each one of the five visible registers of markings suggest a different flow of directional energies, rising, expanding, halting, rising, spreading and contracting, descending, and so on. Each may be associated with a conceptual framework such as an equivalent of chakras, the subtle energy centers of Hindu/Buddhist yoga cosmology coinciding with root, belly, heart chest, throat. Topmost and bottom layers of this sequence are now missing, perhaps deliberately and ritually broken as suggested by archaeological analysis.
- The registers' qualities interact at varying rhythmic frequency with light: rippling, flickering, shimmering, pulsing evenly or throbbing. These indicate a highly developed sense of the body's subtle energies.
- The registers are overlaid in sequence so that each layer above disappears behind the preceding lower register suggesting that each register continues behind the previous one, though never reappearing.
- The differences in dynamics between contained areas of lozenge/diamond shapes and repeating parallel lines gives each register its own vibratory frequency and when associated with that part of the body may have properties that when handled in the designated manner would promote a healing flow of energies to that part, directed by the practitioner, priestess, medicine person.

The relation, yet distinctness, of the layers, the registers, depends on a developed perceptual discernment and a holistic sense of *the body as one*, the perennial understanding of the body's integration with nature and the importance of maintaining the harmony between the two.

#### Images and possibilities

##### The form:

The form of the object is clearly a human figure. Based on the many other Cucuteni figurines of similar design we can say with certainty that this one corresponds to a female interpretation. The contours are overall svelt and narrow hipped suggesting a youthfulness. The narrowing of the waist is very slightly asymmetrical and lends the figure the delicate movement of a slow flowing dance.

Again based on our experience of other Cucuteni figurines the figure would certainly have had a lower section depicting legs, usually conjoined in such a female figurine, also marked with incised grooves. These connect the figure downward or upward in an exchange of energies body-to-earth and earth-to-body.

Before the breaking of the figurine there would be a minimally modeled head, suggested by either a rounded stump, or a round disc-shape, sometimes with pinched, simplified facial features, often with holes as eyes or perhaps as a means of suspending the figurine.





### **The markings:**

Various interpretations that have often been suggested regarding the surface markings, amongst them:

- Layered clothing
- Folds in clothing or draped cloth
- tight wrapped bands for mummification
- Scarification
- Tattooed or painted marks

Some of my own suggestions are

- Object of contemplation with central concentric diamond shapes focused on the heart. The layers may correspond or have some conceptual relation to the ancient Hindu and Buddhist chakra system:  
A = base; B = belly; C = heart; D = chest; E = neck and head
- Correspondence of registers to the classical elements in tantrism<sup>2</sup>  
A = earth, B = water, C = fire, D = air, E = ether (increasingly refined energies from A to E).
- Notation for a sign or emblem: abstraction of the goddess, pubic triangle, feminine quality, birth, death, transformation. See Gimbutas
- Concentric or meandering marks are a layered doorway. A portal for the spirit to pass through to a transformed world or to a renewal.
- Signs for vibratory patterns – could be used in healing practices
- Animation in flickering light of torches in a dark space, etc., by visual stimulation of the retina, creating a dramatic and enlivened oracular “puppet,” spirit beings participating in a drama.
- Object of contemplation: entoptic patterns that correspond to transformed altered states of consciousness – signs for these, reminders or actual invocations to induce the altered state.
- Tribal identity marking, distinctive variations indicating specific grouping.

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<sup>2</sup>*Psycho-Cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupa*. Govinda. Dharma. 1976.

## The presence of the figurines

The act of modelling the local clay into the iconic form of the female figure had a function in the process of their overall “lifespan” and use. The small scale, usually just a few inches tall, means that the images were intimate creations that fit into the palm of the hand, could be held easily.

Thousands of such figurines have been found by archaeologists and represent a cultural marker defining the area of Cucuteni habitation and activity that extends from present day central Ukraine westward across the Republic of Moldova into Romanian Moldavia and over the Carpathian range into Transylvania, the most concentrated area being in Moldavia. The form is remarkably consistent for a long period of Cucuteni development starting with simple forms around 5,200BCE and running through more refined and sophisticated variants to about 3500BCE. The inscribed or painted markings that often cover the small sculptures are similarly consistent, mostly repeating hatched lines.

What occurs when a figurine is introduced to a particular space?

Sculpture concerns space. A 3-D form occupies space and creates a negative space surrounding it. The presence of an image affects the entire place. The overall form has its own presence and, together with cultural associations of meaning, potentially makes a shift in the kinetic and geometric dynamics of the place. This would be particularly strong in an enclosed space. Focusing consciousness (of participants in a ritual, or just generally as an icon bringing the presence of a constant spiritual significance).

The highly energised surface carvings similarly function to animate the space. The markings can be seen to extend beyond the object – the figurine – into the atmosphere, the space, both physical and emotional/psychological/spiritual being activated by the patterning, the wave frequency of the lines, their direction. The figurine itself is a concentrated mass of focused attention, encapsulating the intention of the “sculptor” and hence the energy of the creative moments of its original manifestation, producing its specific tones, colors, textures that radiate and unleash their transformations on the world.

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Let us take these ideas and go further with an imaginative exploration of their implications.

I understand these energies as having importance for healing, linking consciousness and understanding to the prevailing tendencies of change. A key to the doorway to prophetic vision, and even specific healing needs.

The markings convey a sense of the *Li* pervading the locale. *Li* is the pattern, according to ancient Chinese Taoist cosmology, that shows the dynamics underlying the manifestation of natural form. The *Li* is a dynamic process, constantly shifting but specific to every place and is generally described by pointing to such phenomena as the way wind blows through long grass, the shimmer on rippling water, the glitter of the sky through trees, and so on. These are visual images that demonstrate the presence of *Li*.

Contemplation of *Li* will give rise to a trance state, viz people standing by the ocean spell-bound as their eyes drift in and out of focus. They could also be linked to such visual phenomena as *entoptic* patterns seen with eyes closed with a strobe light for example, or under the influence of ingested entheogenic substances<sup>3</sup>, or even the electrically created visual disturbances of migraine.

Similarly the Cucuteni patterns also reflect particular sources in nature. The very making of the marks would be a manifestation from a particular moment by a particular maker and would reflect that very moment as, in a sense, do all art expressions. The event of the figurine’s creation would be located in time and space with the particular creator drawing in his/her own energies and intentions together with specific

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<sup>3</sup> *The Long Trip*. Devereux. Penguin. 1997

influences from the surroundings. This would make a figurine the vehicle of prophetic insight as all environmental and personal forces are focused, creating something transpersonal and universal.

In their ancient context such a dream-like trance state, perhaps in conjunction with the ingestion of some consciousness-altering substance, or some repetitive activity such as drumming or chanting, could give the shaman access to profound modes of experience and “seeing” beyond the veil of appearances into the workings of nature and hence to healing (making whole) faculties. The energy field thus set up by the figurine would be enhanced and amplified by the intense attention of the healer, extending to the wider space and enabling adjustment by the powers of the shaman.

The form of the figurines generally, being consistent over long time periods, becomes *iconic*. That is to say the form has become an image that is based in tradition with associated cultural memories and understanding. The predominance of female figurines found at Cucuteni sites cannot be ignored. Male figurines occur but are a small proportion of the total number. Devotion to a female entity, a female principle in the world and mythos of the culture is indicated. The symbolic aspect of female power and creativity, birth, nourishment and transformation through death and dissolution must certainly be a key to the iconic form. The markings similarly would have their traditional meaning. These visual interpretations are not possible to reconstruct without much more information as to context.<sup>4</sup> We can however have a direct experience of the form and marking of the figurines. In studying them the additional practice of entering states of expanded consciousness can potentially open layers of significance beyond the rational analysis of measurement, statistics, etc.

Alternative ways of accessing such deeply embedded information from the past might be through deep meditation. When stilled by the certain well established practices, such as those developed in Tibet, the mind becomes hyper-sensitive and super-conscious capable in an experienced practitioner of insights beyond the normal modes of perception. Emptying the mind of thoughts consciousness takes on a clarity that enables entry into normally hidden comprehension. Application of such a practice may offer deeper penetration of the meaning of the Cucuteni icons and their original use.

[To be continued . . . . This is a draft]

Footnotes and references:

- 1) *The Goddesses and Gods of Old Europe*. Marija Gimbutas. Thames and Hudson. London. 1974.
- 2) *Psycho-Cosmic Symbolism of the Buddhist Stupa* Lama Anagarika Govinda. Dharma Publishing. Emeryville, CA. 1976.
- 3) *The Long Trip*. Paul Devereux. Penguin Books. London. 1997.

also:

*Cucuteni. A Great Civilization of the Prehistoric World*. Ed. L.Stratulat. Palatul Culturii Publishing House. Iasi, Romania. 2009.

*Interacting with Figurines*. Harald Haarmann. Full Circle Press. West Hartford, CT. 2009.

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<sup>4</sup> Interacting with Figurines. Haarmann. Full Circle. 2009



The front and reverse sides of the Raucesti figurine





Cucuteni Emergence 4 - Raucesti  
Chalk on paper. 22" x 15". 2014.  
Christopher Castle



## **Who were the Cucuteni?**

*The Balkan and Carpathian area of Southeastern Europe has a rich ancient prehistory. Several Neolithic and Chalcolithic (new stone age and copper age) cultures have been detected and established by archaeological investigation stretching from earlier than 6,000 BCE to 3,500 BCE. Such names as Sesklo, Starcevo-Cris. Boian, Hamangia, Vinca, Gumelnita, Karanovo, Tisza and Cucuteni are modern archaeological names given to separate cultures in the huge area. Though distinct, there is no doubt that they influenced each other across geographical and temporal boundaries. In particular, evidenced by their technologies of material culture and their symbolic systems, it is apparent that they held parallel cosmologies that included a profound honoring of the earth. In her extensive studies of these cultures the late Marija Gimbutas conceived of a continuum of beliefs and understanding expressed in the archaeological record that she named "Old Europe".*

*My own work with archaeological sites and art is based on my interest in the early development of consciousness, an artistic, spiritual and scientific exploration that I have pursued through my whole life as a professional artist. I believe that looking to the past we can gain useful insights into our contemporary circumstances especially vis-à-vis our relationship to the environment, the sphere of male-female relations, power differentials, and other self destructive imbalances.*

*In 1989 I met Marija Gimbutas. She became a friend and a mentor reinforcing the substance of the conceptual basis of my art work. I found out about the Cucuteni from her work. Later in 2010 the opportunity to visit Romania came as an unexpected surprise. A fortunate set of circumstances gave rise to the invitation to spend time at an artists' residency in Moldavia, the northeastern province of Romania. And it happened to be located in the middle of the Cucuteni area.*

*Cucuteni is the name of the village in northeast Romania where in 1884 the first discoveries were made of the rich prehistoric culture that would be henceforth named after this place. Since archaeology proceeded over the next century in the various countries (Moldavia in Romania, Moldova and Ukraine in USSR), more or less academically isolated, the same culture was called Tripolye in Russian, named after the place of its first discovery in Ukraine. Over the past 130 years hundreds of Cucuteni-Tripolye sites have been explored extensively by archaeologists in Ukraine, Moldova and Romania. The culture has been characterized by the unique and sophisticated quality of its ceramics and by the finds of numerous clay anthropomorphic and zoomorphic figurines. Settlement sites are profuse, often intervisible across the landscape, with remains of houses arranged either in more or less circular or linear layout on raised promontories overlooking rivers. Central buildings were often larger with evidence of designated sacred areas, shrines and altars, defined by symbolic attributes, often associated with a kiln or hearth. Indeed the patterns and images signal a culture that was based on a reverence for earth and the feminine heart of creativity, lived out daily and experienced in conception, birth, life nourishment, death and transformation. The life force of nature is graphically demonstrated in the spiralling designs and other elements incorporated into the surviving art. An organic form of sacred geometry underlies the pattern making following these natural prototypes of Nature.*

*Figurines have been interpreted as images representative of a goddess, an idea reinforced by numerous small animal (zoomorphic) sculptures that, given the altar-like context of their discovery, indicate practices that might include gratitude, fertility rites, ritual sacrifices, purification or healing customs. The creation itself of the figurines was a ritualized practice with indications that magico-religious power for shamanic healing may be inferred. Female figurines outnumber male images by a large proportion, perhaps 95% to 5%, suggesting an emphasis on a feminine-based idea of the sacred. The later figurines followed a consistent iconic form only changing slightly over many centuries.*





*They are almost always found broken, and usually in a way that must have been deliberate, not necessarily the way they would break under the force of nature. The suggestion is that they were made for specific ritual use and broken once that was accomplished. There is however much that is difficult to interpret. My own efforts proceed through my drawing and printmaking since I believe there are insights to be gained from close observation of the archaeological material and by graphic exploration of the markings that these ancient and now mysterious peoples made to express their sense of the world.*

*It is remarkable that so much has been unearthed from such distant times. Development of ceramic technique parallels the advancement and flowering of farming with husbandry and agriculture that was being established alongside settlement. Cucuteni ceramic art developed from its earliest forms based on even earlier cultures from the region. Over the period, starting with the “pre-Cucuteni” from about 5,200BCE and unfolding over about 1500 years through a series of visible stages called by archaeologists Cucuteni A, A-B, B, the establishment of settled farming, ceramic production and ritual/ceremonial practice became increasingly sophisticated.*

*The sudden disappearance of signs of Cucuteni culture around 3500BCE points to waves of invading tribes from the East called Kurgan people by Marija Gimbutas after the Slavic word for burial mound. The new horse-riding, mound building, bronze weapon-wielding invaders seem to have quickly eradicated the long established indigenous population and much of the sacred Earth-based knowledge was lost to the new solar and male dominated cosmology. All of this development, from the first settlement to its destruction, can be read from the rich archaeological record.*

*My own practice relies on opening to a heightened and sensitized symbolic sensibility to the subtle energies of the environment. Such a mode of consciousness is demonstrated holographically in the surviving fragments of Cucuteni culture.*

*My exploration of this material in my work visually transports me across the spirals of passing millennia and takes me into the sacred territory of transformed shamanic consciousness. It is a process of discovery of mysterious and revelatory modes that despite their apparent distance in time, I understand as crucially relevant to our knowledge today.*

*Christopher Castle. 2021.*

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