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THE THRACIANS “HEADHUNTERS”¹

Stefan YORDANOV

Abstract: The initiatory head-hunting is a very specific phenomenon, linked to the functioning of the archaic age-set stratification. The spread of this phenomenon among the Celtic peoples represent its classical example in the epoch of Antiquity. Together with this the data registering this practice among many other peoples, including ancient Thracians, are evidenced. The cult of the cut-off human head which is a part of this phenomenon, is represented for the ancient Thracians by the example of the Orpheus’ propheting head. Another artifact of this Thracian phenomenon is added to the data elucidating the practice of initiatory head-hunting presented on the Letnitsa applications – the image on the golden plate from Kurdjip, Caucasus. An reactualization of this phenomenon’s illustration by the image of a Thracian goddess bearing a cut-off head on a marble plate near the village of Konush, made by Bulgarian scientist Yanko Todorov, is also included.

Key words: initiatory head-hunting, age-set stratification, Orpheus’ propheting head, Letnitsa applications, golden plate from Kurdjip, Yanko Todorov, Hristo Danov, Ivan Marazov.

Траките „ловци на глави“. Резюме: Инициационният лов на глави е много специфичен феномен, свързан с функционирането на първобитната полово-възрастова стратификация. Класически пример за този феномен в епохата на древността е практикуването му от келтите, налице са обаче данни и за разпространението му у редица други народи, в това число и за древните траки. Свързаният с този феномен култ към отрязаната човешка глава е засвидетелстван у древните траки чрез примера на пророчестващата глава на Орфей. Към данните за практикуването на инициационен лов на глави от изображенията върху апликациите от Летница в статията е добавен още един изобразителен документ за този и тракийски феномен – изображението върху златната пластинка от Курджип, Кавказ. Реактуализирано е също така илюстрирането на този феномен чрез изображението на тракийска богиня, държаща отрязана човешка глава, от релеф върху мраморна плоча от село Конуш, осъществено в публикация на Янко Тодоров.

Ключови думи: инициационен лов на глави, първобитна полово-възрастова стратификация, пророчестваща глава на Орфей, апликации от Летница, златна пластинка от Курджип, Янко Тодоров, Христо Данов, Иван Маразов.

The ethnology of Ancient Thrace is a highly varied subject-matter, which has strongly drawn the attention of the researchers since the dawn of the Thracology as a scholarly discipline. The problems connected with the institutional system, which secured the life cycle of the individual in society – the *age-set stratification*, an important part of its mytho-ritual base were the so-called *initiations*, – are in the centre of the present text. Among the Bulgarian researchers who have devoted their efforts to the elucidation of those problems I would mention the names of Ivan Venedikov and especially that of Ivan Marazov. Besides, on one or another occasion there are also other authors who have added some observations in its research. Here I will mention among them only the name of one of the doyens in the creation of the Thracology as a discipline, Professor Hristo Danov. The ethnology of Ancient Thrace is a subject-matter which remains in the background of his main studies but in some cases our all-round researcher approaches the analysis of the source data on the basis of the comparative-historical methodology, which uses the ethnology data as well. Thus, in regard to the Thracian maternity customs Hristo Danov draws for analysis Herodotus’ data comparing them with a similar practice

¹ Translated by Pavlin Atanassov. Reviewed by the author.

among the ancient Aztecs from Mesoamerica. In principle, the ethnological approach to Herodotus' data is an important methodology, which has been used comparatively widely in its analysis [in this respect see for example: **Клингер, В.** 1903; **Али, В.** 1921; **Толстой, И. И.** 1966, p. 29–31]. In an attempt to continue researching the age of antiquity in the Balkan-Anatolian region on the basis of the cross-cultural and, unavoidably, the cross-temporal comparative-historical methods, the effectiveness of which can be stated in the short observation made by Hristo Danov², here I will dwell on a little part of the relatively plentiful data, testifying to the active functioning in the potestary-political system of the paleo-Balkan and the ancient peoples of Asia Minor of the so-called *age-set stratification* and the so-called *initiations*. It must be noticed that the customs connected with the life cycle take an important place in every ethnic culture and for that reason it is not a surprise the exceptionally big place their study takes in the publications of another of our remarkable contemporary researchers of the ancient Thracians' past, Professor Ivan Marazov. These problems are covered in details in his generalizing works³ as well as in many of his other researches. Here I will dwell on one aspect of the *initiatory mytho-ritual complex* among the Thracians, using some of Professor Marazov's observations. Having examined from many sides the initiations – that important phenomenon of the ancient Thracians' spiritual culture and social and political life, at the same time Professor Ivan Marazov is the leader, direct or indirect, of the "initiations" in the researches in Thracology made by many followers of his interest to the Thracian past. I have the honour of dedicating to him a research on a subject, which is in the core of his studies⁴.

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A peculiar phenomenon within the framework of the initiatory mytho-ritual complex among many peoples is the so-called "headhunting". In principle, the "headhunting" took an important place within the framework of the warriors' ordeals from the mytho-ritual complex of the initiations. With this regard it turned out that the Thracians were also such endemic headhunters as were those tribal and traditional societies where that element of the warriors' ordeals was widely practiced. In principle, the presence of the initiatory headhunting or of the ritual decapitation among the Thracians is partly studied in the scientific literature. In an article discussing the information of the Byzantine authors about the use of the Emperor Nikephorus' skull as a cup by Bulgarian ruler Krum, Veselin Beševliev briefly touches the question of this phenomenon's presence among the old population of Bulgarian lands⁵. Mentioning shortly the spread of the decapitation among Ligures, Celtes and Greeks, he exemplifies the same Thracian practice by a very demonstrative case. He cites the Titus Livius' statement that "*ante alios Thracum insolens laetitia eminebat : cum cantu enim super fixa hastis capita hostium portantes redierunt*" [**Т. Лив.**, XLII, 60]. A little earlier Yanko Todorov commented this information of Titus Livius in an exposé on the Thracian military customs and mythology, even illustrating them with a picture of a Thracian goddess surrounded by cut-off heads [**Тодоров, Я.** 1944, p. 129–130].

² Hristo Danov makes a comparison between the Thracian custom to lament over the new-born child, because of the hardships it was about to face during its lifespan, according to **Herodotus'** evidence [V, 4], with the analogous custom among the Aztecs. See **Данов, Х.** 1969, p. 207 and note 27 on p. 207, for the Aztec custom referring to: **Soustelle, J.** 1955, p. 193. Presented in such a way, though isolated, the example of application of cross-cultural and cross-temporal methodology of analysis by Prof. Danov was of great importance for me as a valuable example of usefulness of that methodology of work, which would unavoidably and increasingly help the Thracological researches as well. Unfortunately, because of the age difference, my personal contact with Prof. Hristo Danov was very short. But yet, Prof. Hristo Danov was one of the mentors of my "initiations" as he took part in the discussions of the first versions of my dissertation work, while my epistolary connection with him includes just one letter, in which he encouraged me in my analysis of the phenomenon of the "high-haired" Thracians, as well expressing his opinion about the Thracian ethnolinguistic affiliation of the ethnonym **Abantes**. See a reference to that letter in my book: **Йорданов, С.** 2000, p. 95, note 42.

³ See for example: **Marazov, I.** 1992; 1992 a; 1994; a brief historiographical reference on his contributions in that subject: **Йорданов, С.** 2000, p. 14 and p. 26, note 49.

⁴ The current work represents the first publication in English of the partially reached version of my article, initially published in honour of professor Marazov under the title "Траките – „ловци на глави“" [**Йорданов, С.** 2012; online version in Bulgarian: <http://www.academia.edu/1870833/>].

⁵ **Beševliev, V.** 1962, 17–21. The archaeological finds of similar cups made by skulls show how old was this practice, probably not only in the Celtic area from which I cite the instances such as 15 000 years old cases from England and France (Magdalenian era), 7000 years old case from Germany, 4000 years old case from Spain – elucidated as well through a cross-cultural and cross-temporal parallels with the same type of practice in Africa. See a popular exposé on such kind of finds in: **Coupes de crânes...**, p. 25.

Yanko Todorov introduced as an illustration a rare monument of a warlike Thracian goddess, presented on a marble plate, bearing in the right hand a cut-off head and a kind of sword in the left hand, seven cut-off heads lying at her legs as well as a body of a decapitate woman. The monument was discovered near the village of Konush, the region of Assenovgrad. [Тодоров, Я. 1944, p. 130 (see fig. 3)]. However, the present work is not devoted to a systematization of the data on that matter; I will discuss a more specific example of registering of that phenomenon among the Thracians⁶ – namely, an example of registering of that practice by a monument of ancient art. To the evidence for that practice by the *Letnitsa* applications can be added a new evidence of the same kind – the evidence by the image on the golden plate from the mound at *Kurdjip* in the region of the River Kuban, which is categorized by L. A. Bulava as an object made by the Thracians or under the Thracian influence. L. A. Bulava accepts that object as a close analog to the *Letnitsa* applications as regards both its style and workmanship⁷.

The observation of L. A. Bulava, poorly known to the Bulgarian thracology, is definitely contributory. The interpretation of the images on the golden plate as a military plot reflecting the ritual judicial combats practiced by the Scythians, or by the Cimmerians respectively according to Herodotus' data about them [Hdt., IV, 11, ed. C. Hude] in principle explains the military nature of the plot correctly. Herodotus' source evidence is interpreted in that direction by E. A. Grantovskij [Грантовский, Э. А. 1981]. However, its explanation as reflecting initiatory warriors' raids for trophies – cut-off human heads – would be more precise. It is even asserted in the literature that among the peoples living along the Northern Black Sea coast the cult of the cut-off head existed, the archeological traces of which have retained under the form of images both on the golden plate of *Kurdjip* and on the rhyton of *Karagodeuash* [Карагодеуаш], where beheaded corpses are lying under the hooves of the god and king's horses.⁸ In this respect I. Y. Schaub pays attention to the fact that the cut-off head played an important role in the sacrifices devoted to the goddess Deva from ancient Taurica, which can be traced back to finds connected with her cult from the River Don's valley in the European part of the Kingdom of Bosphorus, in the Taman peninsula, along the River Kuban, in the North Caucasus and Taurica (*Elizavetovskoe gorodishte* (Елизаветовское городище), *Iurat* (Иурам), etc.). I. Y. Schaub [1987, p. 16] thinks that probably two forms of the cult to the cut-off head among the barbarians along the Black Sea and the Azov coasts co-existed: ecstatic "female", which was also characteristic of the analogous cults from the Eastern Mediterranean (the satyr-like head in the hands of a snake-like goddess, presented on the metal plates from *Kul-Oba*, *Taman* and from *Chersonesus*) and warrior's "male" (the already mentioned golden plate of *Kurdjip* and the rhyton of *Karagodeuash*). It is worth considering to what extent the functionality of the Great Mother-Goddess as a protector of the initiations, which is well evidenced, is not the functionality throwing over a bridge between the "female" and the "male" form of that cult.

Along with what was written by I. Y. Schaub, we can also add the evidence for the mytho-ritual complex of headhunting among the Scythians through another monument of the Scythian art. I mean the golden plate of the Romanovich collection, on which are probably presented the initiatory warrior's exploits of a mythical hero, as on the left side of the plate the mythical hero has beheaded an enemy and carries the cut-off head on a sword, a short spear or other weapon, supporting it with its left hand [Ильинская, В. А. 1978, p. 91, picture 1; p. 96, picture 7]. Since the plate from the Romanovich collection was accepted as a forged document, at first that image was used in the literature for discrediting of the golden plate of *Kurdjip* and the image presented on it. Quite the contrary, V. A. Ilyinskaya [Ильинская, В. А. 1978, pp. 90–100], proving

⁶ After the publication in Bulgarian language of the article, many new researches on the phenomenon of initiatory headhunting and on the decapitation as a military manner have been published. Together with this the researches on the phenomenon was only partly consulted by me, presumably the publications discussing the parallels to the Thracian practice among the peoples of ancient world, such as Celtes, Scythians and others, but only partly among the tribal societies around the world. Here I will add just some new references to the literature on that phenomenon. See, for instance: Шнирельман, В. А. 1994, pp. 130–146 (§ IV. „Охота за головами как особый вид вооруженной борьбы“); Дмитриев, С. В. 1997, pp. 212–219; Кнауэр (Кезия), Э. Р. 2001, pp. 200–215; Gardeia, L. & Kajkowski, K. (eds.), 2013, и др. The initiatory headhunting among the Scythians: Масленников, А. А., Бужилова, А. П. 1999, pp. 174–183; Вергінко, Г. В. 2016, pp. 51–72, and other researches. The initiatory headhunting among the Vilings and Germanic peoples: Gardeia, L. 2011, pp. 36–71, and other researches.

⁷ Publication and primary analysis of the find: Булава, Л. 1987; publication of the materials of the excavations from the funeral complex at *Kurdjip*: Galanina, L. K. 1980.

⁸ For more information about the so formulated cult see for example: Шауб, И. Ю. 1987; 1987 а. Cf. for some other archeological monuments, evidencing the cult of the cut-off head in the North Black Sea Region: Винокуров, Практика человеческих жертвоприношений..., pass. By the way, one of the examples, given by N. I. Vinokurov, has been already discovered and published by Гайдукевич, В. Ф. 1958, p. 41 sqq. Vinogradov and Goroncharovskiy interpret the scenes in artifacts from *Kurdjip* and *Karagodeuash* as a phenomenon belonging to the sphere of military rites without elucidating their typology. See Виноградов, Ю. А., Горончаровский, В. А. 2008, p. 60, 62.

the originality of the golden plate of the Romanovich collection, accepts the both golden plates as mutually supporting their scientific “rehabilitation” in their capacity of original artifacts of the archaic Scythian culture. Moreover, she also adduces as an additional argument the fact that the cut-off head plot, the headhunting respectively, is typical of the Scythian art. In this regard, among the examples she enumerates are: the image of *Kul-Oba* golden plate, in which a snake-like goddess in *kalathos* headdress holds a cut-off bearded head and a sword; the image of a golden plate, decorating a quiver from the *Chervonyy perekor* (Червоний неперкон) mound, in which a panther, tearing a human head with a beard and shortly cut hair, is presented; the image of the rhyton from the *Karagodeuash* mound showing a scene of investiture, where horsemen in Scythian clothes are presented, whose horses tread on the beheaded enemies (which has already been mentioned above) and, finally, an image on a find from the *Necropolis of Tli*. The last example is from an image of a hunting scene, showing two warriors, one of them riding a horse and the other walking, and, besides, there is a cut-off human head hanging to the bridle of the figure of the horseman [Ильинская, В. А. 1978, p. 99, picture 8]; the image is forged in the style and technology of the *Kuban archeological culture* on a bronze belt from grave № 76 in the *Necropolis of Tli* in North Ossetia, being this necropolis dated back to the 7th century BC and connected with the historical Cimmerians as showing a point of their migration to Asia Minor, of which **Herodotus** [I, 103; IV, 11, 12] gives information⁹. In conclusion, V. A. Ilyinskaya puts in **Herodotus**’ evidence [IV, 64] of the decapitation practice as particularly typical of the Scythians and, respectively, widely used by them, while when it comes to the analyzed golden plate of the Romanovich collection, she ascertains that it was most probably part of a head adornment [Ильинская, В. А. 1978, pp. 98–99; pp. 99–100].

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In regard to the cult of the cut-off head and the initiatory “headhunting”, the example of the Celts from the age of antiquity, is classical. Naturally, the use of the Celtic data to elucidate the Scythian and, respectively, the North Black Sea phenomenon¹⁰ adds some interesting additional features to the description of that initiatory mytho-ritual complex. Besides, the description of that custom in one of the publications, quoted in note 10 to the current text, is worth quoting here: “*Une coutume gauloise visiblement très répandue a stupéfait les observateurs grecs et romains: prélever sur le champ de bataille la tête de son ennemi mort au combat et la rapporter précieusement chez soi, accrochée à l’encolure de son cheval, pour l’exposer ensuite en bonne place.*” [Les Gaulois font la tête..., pass.] As indisputable source evidence that during their military campaigns the Celts also practised “headhunting”, Elisabeth Rousseau [Rousseau, É. 2000, p. 286] uses two pieces of data – the first one belongs to Polybius [Polyb., Hist., III, 67, 2–3: “*And finally, having cut their heads off, they went home...*”] and the other to Titus Livius [Tit. Liv., X, 26, 10–11: “*Postumus himself died while fighting in order not to be captured. The Boii took his head away triumphally in their most sacred temple.*”]. However, what is of particular interest to us is **Diodorus**’ statement [V, 29, 4–5] that “*when they kill their enemies, the Gauls cut off their heads and fasten them on the reins of their horses, [...] making trophies of them, all covered with blood, and singing paeans over them.*” **Strabo** gives almost the same piece of information [Geogr., IV, 4, 5] which is based on Posidonius; the author quoted by Strabo had personally seen the cut-off heads of the defeated enemies, hooked to the neck of the horses. Those data confirm the Celtic practice, which can be seen on the pictorial artifacts¹¹. Thus, we can find an entirely corresponding parallel between the images of the Celts and the plates of Letnitsa – it seems that the cut-off head, put aside from the figure of the horseman, is represented in such a way in order to suggest what he carries as an initiatory trophy. Therefore, those applications for horse-trappings should be interpreted exactly in such a way – they show what kinds of exploits the owner of the horse had made, perhaps some Thracian ruler or aristocrat, in order to pass the initiations and to occupy the respective *social status by age*; the

⁹ About the *Necropolis of Tli* and the ethnolinguistic belonging of its creators, except for the literature, indicated by V. A. Ilyinskaya (1978, c. 98, бел. 22), see more: Техов, Б. В. 1980; 1980 а, etc.

¹⁰ In that case I use the exposé of: **Культ Великой богини...**, pass.; see more the publications quoted in it: Reinach, A. 1913; Lambrechts, P. 1954, p. 29 sqq.; cf. also the more detailed study of Reinach: Reinach, A. 1913 а; also: Benoit, F. 1970; Rousseau, É. 2000; Les Gaulois font la tête..., as well as Des trophées humains..., pass. (in those electronic publications – and the rich illustration of the archeological evidence of the Celtic cult of the cut-off head, including the mentioned initiation headhunting), etc. For the evidence of the trophy headhunting among the Celts by archeological data see also Rousseau, É. 2000.

¹¹ See for example the image of the relief, representing a Celtic horseman in: Des trophées humains..., pass.

initiatory headhunting, where the cut-off heads were used as trophies just the same way as with the Celts, was also among those exploits.

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In connection with that matter an interesting opinion has been expressed that among the Celts the cut-off human heads could easily be transformed into masks of *satyrs*¹²; I. Y. Schaub, who was the author to focus on that aspect of the style of depiction in the Celtic art, attracts the attention to a statuary with several versions, representing a horseman god in a scene of combat with a snake-like giant, depicted with a huge head [Lambrechts, P. 1954, p. 91–92, fig. 38]. Schaub compares that huge head, at one moment bearded, at another beardless, with the heads of satyrs from the coins of *Panticapaeum*, at the same time underlying that among the Celts there also existed an *ethnogenic legend*, analogous to the Scythian one [with regard to this he quotes Fontenrose, J. 1959, p. 149]. The *satyrs* are mythological initiatory communion and for that reason I accept Schaub's assumption as well-grounded to some extent although there are still many unclear points in it.

The cut-off head is able to make prophecies as well – a mythological theme, one of the most indicative examples of which is the Orpheus' cut-off prophesying head [see more: Deonna, W. 1925; Coman, J. 1938; Brisson, L. 1978 (the exposé entitled “La tête qui vaticine”, p. 117–122); Marazov, I. 1995; Dimitrokallis, G. 2002 [2010]; Koch, R. *Orphée...*; etc.]. A similar idea has been evidenced in the Celtic peoples' beliefs [see for example: Westropp, T. J. 1916, & 3. The Legend of Downpatrick Head].

According to the records of the ancient narrative tradition, Orpheus died with a dismembered body, its parts were gathered and buried by the muses who were in mourning for him, and it was only his head that was taken away by the Thracian river of *Hebros*, which continued to sing. As it was floating, the singing head was brought to the shores of *Lesbos* or maybe to the mouth of the river *Mélès* (the researchers are hesitant about its real location which is either in Ionia or in *Pieria*), from where it was taken by the fishermen who reburied it in a grave, which became a place of worship as a hero's tomb¹³.

¹² Reinach, A. 1913, p. 46, non vidi. See a similar idea on the myths of cut-off heads thrown at the water as well as on the cultic head's images in Greek and respectively in Scythian religion in a research of Vjacheslav Ivanov: Иванов, В. 1989, p. 342. He exemplifies this topic by the case of the narration about the foretelling head of *Orpheus* in *Lesbos*; by the case of the narration about the floating head of *Osiris*, every year landed in *Byblos*; by the case of the narration about the head of *Corymbanthos*; by the case of the narration about the head of *Pentheus* festively introduced at *Thebes* on the tyrsof of *Agave*; by the case of the narration about the *Issedones*, honouring the deaths's skulls, and by the cases of the narrations about cultic images made by olive of these and others heroes and gods. Here I cite the text of Vjacheslav Ivanov treated this topic without translation in English language and without references to the ancient records used by him: „Голова Орфея пророчествует на острове Лесбосе, в Дионисовом храме. Миф о голове приурочивается там же и к самому Дионису: рыбаки в Мефимне (на Лесбосе) находят в сетях изображение головы бога, сделанное из масличного дерева. Голова Осириса, – он же для греков Дионис, – приплывает ежегодно по морю из Египта в Библиос. В этом круге преданий влияния культов Адониса и Аттиса (предметом одной родственной легенды служит голова Корибанта) переплетаются с исконными дионисийскими представлениями: оторванная голова Пенфея торжественно вносится в Фивы на острие турса Агавы. По аргивскому преданию, Дионис умерщвлен отсекаем головами – Персеем. Культ головы, иногда одаренной силою оракула, приплывающей по морю или иначе явленной, есть, очевидно, элемент Дионисовой религии. По свидетельству Геродота, фракийские Исседоны, почитатели Диониса, позлащают черепа мертвых и рассматривают их как идола (ἰδόλα). Что обожествлялись изображения божественной головы, не скрывает сам миф: голова Диониса – Кефаллена (т. е. Головаря, – скорее, чем Фаллена) в Мефимне вырезана из маслины; но это изображение-фетиш не различалось от бога. Род дерева в фетише не безразличен: как мы видели на примере двух Дионисовых масок острова Наксоса. Исследование роли маски в вакхической религии поможет нам в дальнейшем изложении вполне осмыслить культ отделившейся от туловища головы.“ [Иванов, В. 1989, p. 342]. An idea about a connection between the deities such as the Slavic Triglav and the initiatory mytho-ritual complex of headhunting among the Slavic peoples: Kajkowski, K. 2013; 2014, pass., and other researches; on the functioning of the phenomenon among the Baltic peoples: Wadyl, S. 2013, pp. 264–280, and other researches.

¹³ The main source evidence: Canon., *Narrationes*, 45 (Photius, *Bibliotheca*, III); Hygin., *Astronomia poetica*, II, 7 [editions of that work written by Hygin: Hygin., *Astronomia poetica*...; Гигин., *Астрономия*...]; in that case I use the reference of Koch, R. *Orphée...*, with lit. See also the reference of R. Koch to Kern, O. *Orphicorum Fragmenta*, 1922 [1963] (quoted from the first issue), testimonia 113–135, containing the main source data about the death of Orpheus' magic head; about Orpheus' death see also: Reinach, A. 1902/11, non vidi, quoted in: Dimitrokallis, G. 2002 [2010], pass. For some images, presenting the prophesying head of Orpheus – without in that case any thoroughness of the introduction of this plot to be searched in the ceramic art as well as the other arts see for example: De Puma, R. D., and Guthrie, W. K. C. 2001; *La tête oraculaire d'Orphée...*; etc.

As indicated in literature, first, Orpheus' head as a mythological image has numerous analogs in many Indo-European peoples' traditions, including its mythological conception, and, second, the magic power of a head or a skull, severed from the body, is not only an Indo-European, but a universal idea as well; that idea of the "vital head" is also universally spread in the folklore, where it corresponds to the motif E 783 from the catalogue of the Aarne – Thompson folklore motifs¹⁴. Ivan Marazov added some interesting aspects to the analysis of the image of Orpheus' cut-off head, using even wider cross-cultural parallels to the cut-off head motif, abandoning the circle of the Indo-European peoples and showing that we can speak about almost a universal conception of the image of the cut-off head in shamanism [Marazov, I. 1992, p. 313]. He defines decapitation as a motif, which is the most typical of shamanism, in the framework of the mythical biography of Orpheus in regard to the mythological conception of head as a seat and a sign of a spiritual power, which is transformed through and after the decapitation and, touching the hereafter, acquires the talent for making prophecies. [Marazov, I. 1994, p. 168, 170]. The Bulgarian scholar refers to that mythological image repeatedly; in a later publication he sees both of those "corporal toposes/topoi" – *Eurydice's* legs, bitten by a snake and the severed head of the singer, continuing to live even after his death, as markers of the "female" and "male" principles making a binary opposition [Marazov, I. 1995, pass.; cf. Marazov, I. 2010, p. 12]. Here I would like to pay a special attention to the fact that Ivan Marazov also makes his inference, presented in such a way, on the basis of cross-cultural and cross-temporal parallels – research methods, which at the beginning of the current exposé we have illustrated as an approach through the example of a short note on the socialization rituals of one of the doyens of the Bulgarian Thracology, Hristo Danov, but actually that approach in the Thracological researches, and namely of the initiatory mytho-ritual complex, has its earlier pre-history, for example in G. Katsarov's researches. Marazov's contributions in that subject-matter enrich further that fertile field in the researches.

We find one of the most interesting pieces of information about Orpheus' cut-off head in Pseudo-Plutarch's work *On the names of the rivers and mountains* [Plut., *Peri potamon...*, III, 3–4 (p. 641)]. It literally states the following: "3. In the river before mentioned, grows an herb not much unlike to origanum; the tops of which the Thracians cropping off burn upon a fire, and after they are filled with the fruits of Ceres, they hold their heads over the smoke, and snuff it up into their nostrils, letting it go down their throats, till at last they fall into a profound sleep. 4. Also upon the mountain Pangaeus grows an herb, which is called the harp upon this occasion. The women that tore Orpheus in pieces cast his limbs into the river Hebrus; and his head being changed, the whole body was turned into the shape of a dragon. But as for his harp, such was the will of Apollo, it remained in the same form. And from the streaming blood grew up the herb which was called the harp; which, during the solemnity of the sacrifices to Bacchus, sends forth a sound like that of an harp when played upon. At which time the natives, being covered with the skins of young hinds and waving their thyrsuses in their hands, sing a hymn. [...]"¹⁵ That text is important because it tells us not only one *aition* (αἴτιον) about the emergence of a Thracian religious ritual, but also a short citation from the Thracian cosmogonic myth – to some extent the elements of the Universum were built using the body members of a primordial victim. In this connection it also needs no explanation why the account about a cosmogonic act and an initiation death are interpenetrating narratives; as is well-known, the cosmogony, the New Year's feast and the initiatory mytho-ritual complex are usually in inseparable unity [about that see for example: Eliade, M. 1994, p. 63 sqq.].

As we ascertain, thanks to some examples from the art of Ancient World – Old Greek, Etruscan, Italic – as well as from some explicit source evidence, the head, the cut-off head respectively, is apprehended as a material analog of the human soul¹⁶. In my opinion, the initiation ritual also accounts for that – the cutting-off of the human head and its taking away was obviously interpreted as conquering and subjugation of the alien, hostile soul, respectively. The ability of the primordial victim's head to prophesy is an invariant motif¹⁷ – the

¹⁴ Briefly on that matter see for example: Nagy, J. F. 1990, p. 214, and the references to the concrete researches on them mentioned there.

¹⁵ Quoted in Торшилов, Д. О. 1999, p. 319 (the original text in Old Greek), p. 320–321 (the translation of D. O. Torschilov). The English translation: *Plutarch's Morals*, 1874, p. 5. – < <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2008.01.0400%3Achapter%3D3> >.

¹⁶ For more details, including lit. and sources, see: Dimitrokallis, G. 2002 [2010], pass.

¹⁷ The other examples of the cut-off prophesying head by the antique authors (I cite them using the publication of Dimitrokallis, G. 2002 [2010], pass., with references to sources and lit.): *Polycrite's son in Aetolia*, during the war of the Aetolians with the *Acarnanians*, was torn to pieces by his father and it was only his head that remained, which foretold his compatriots' defeat (most probably – a historicized initiation myth). After the battle of the region of Thermopylae the

mythological hero from the divine world, attending the world of the living by the medium of the heroised head-soul, sometimes introduces the living people to his knowledge of the wisdom from the hereafter, including the ability to prophesy. Headhunting is an initiation ritual; so was the dismemberment of Orpheus' body – that accounts for the place of the cut-off human head in both of the close, invariant mytho-ritual complexes. However, there is other categorization of the ritual, represented on the golden plate of Kurdjip and on one of the applications of the Treasure of Letnitsa, and namely – that of the ritual of “cephalophoria”, that is to say the demonstrative carrying of the enemies' heads, cut off during the initiation warriors' campaigns; therefore, it is an *ethnological* and not *mytho-epical cephalophoria*, although both of them are realia, prototypical to each other¹⁸. By the way, the possibility to make a mutual inference from the ethnological and the mytho-epical realia respectively is well-evidenced by Nonnus of Panopolis's poem *Dionysiaca*. According to that mytho-epical narrative in one of the battles with the Indians the enemies' heads were cut off by Demeter's weapon, by sickles, and they were compared with the first reaped wheat-ears of the crop, offered to Dionysus; the battle itself was called Ares' ritual, and the blood-tinted sword – a bloody victim for libation to Lyaeus [Nonn., *Dionysiaca*, II, XVII, 153–159 (p. 40–45)]. In the course of that battle the Corybant Mimas cut off his enemies' heads by a deadly axe, and in so doing instead of offering bulls and libation with wine as a sacrifice to Dionysus, he made libation with blood [Nonn., *Dionysiaca*, II, XXVIII, 297–300 (p. 366)]¹⁹.

Of course, that mytho-epic text entangles itself in the imagery of the agrarian cult and the vegetative principle in the death-and-resurrection circle, but at the same time it reflects how that imagery and ideological content has influenced the socio-political practice of warfare, determining the usual character of the enemy's trophy decapitation and the ostentatious cephalophoria. In this regard, we should also note that Greek archaic or – in order to avoid confusing it with the name of the respective period of the Ancient Greece's history, although it is likely that the custom was familiar and practised at that time – rather, in the Greek mytho-epic society, a phenomenon was also developed, known from the study of a series of the so-called traditional societies, namely – the number of victories over the enemies, revealed by the trophy heads-“souls”, was a guarantee for the corresponding higher social status and, respectively, for the transition from the adolescence to the age of maturity [more: Nagy, J. F. 1990; cf. McGovern, B. L., and Montgomery, J. B. 1922, p. 111–112, etc.]. And in the same way as in the so-called traditional societies the potlatch as a demonstration of wealth and a way of economic commitment of people of lower material means was accessible mainly to the chieftains in order to organize it, in the world of antiquity gradually the perpetuation of the initiation trophies

Roman commander Publius, struck by madness, announced to his soldiers that he was going to be torn by a big red wolf; the wolf came, Publius allowed to be torn except for the head, which began prophesying, declaring that the wolf, Apollo's servant, would take it away in the eternal world. The Romans built a temple and an altar, devoted to Apollo Lycegenes at the place where Publius' head was buried. The third example was that of Gabienus, the brave Caesar's seaman who was slaughtered by Sextus Pompey. Detailed analyses of those examples: Deonna, W. 1925. More details about the story of Polycrite: Brisson, L. 1978. Brisson [*ibid.*, p. 118–119] also adds to those examples the case of the head of a priest of Zeus of Caria who was killed; according to Aristotle's account his cut-off head mentioned the name of the murderer. It seems that this case has a little bit different typology.

¹⁸ See more: Halm-Tisserant, M. 1989. In order to explain the phenomenon of the mytho-epic cephalophoria in general, let us remind one of the examples: Agave from the poem of Nonnus of Panopolis, carrying as trophy the head of her son, Pentheus, in the same way as it used to happen in the Dionysian and Orphic rituals, “*como paradigma de este tipo de rituales o procesiones que tan a menudo encontramos en el dionisismo y en el orfismo*” (in fact according to the account of the tradition she killed him in a Bacchic madness during the orgies; except for Euripides' *Bacchae* see also Ovid., *Metamorph.*, III, 513 sqq.). Hernández de la Fuente indicates as the most famous images of that ritual those of the hydriadating back to circa 500 BC from the Berlin State Museum, from vase 2268 of Villa Julia, originating from Falerii and dated in the period from 430 to 425 BC, and finally, from the Etruscan vase PD469 from the Archeological Museum in Florence [see Hernández de la Fuente, D. A. 2001, p. 91 et suiv.]. The examples of cephalophoria, analyzed by Halm-Tisserant, are: the cephalophoria of the heads of Pentheus, Orpheus, the Gorgon, Dionysus himself. The character and the conception of the cephalophoria is different from the Christian point of view; see more at Saintyves, P. 1931, p. 219 ff. The motif of cephalophoria can be also found out in the Bulgarian mytho-epic tradition. See Димитрова, Ц. 2009; etc. In our folklore it has a Christian origin; as Tsvetelina Dimitrova notes [Димитрова, Ц. 2009 а, с. 20], the hagiographical motif of sacral cephalophoria, connected to *St. John Vladimir*, was later “attached” to the legends about *Tsar Ivan Shishman*'s death in the field of Samokov. The legends of Bulgarians of Muslim confession and the Turkish legends of such a type in the Balkans more often folklorize literary re-creation of the motif [see Малчев, Р. 2011].

¹⁹ Н. И. Винокуров [Практика человеческих жертвоприношений..., pass.] quotes one old research – that of Воеводский, Л. Ф. 1874, in connection with the place of the *initiatory headhunting, cephalophoria* and respectively *encephalophagy* in the Dionysian-Orphic practice of Ancient Greece.

became accessible only to the upper social strata. What I mean is the circumstance that perhaps very skilful Thracian warriors were able to fulfill such initiation exploits, but it was only the rulers who could leave for the generations to come material monuments recording that they had passed initiation ordeals, including the initiation “headhunting” – material monuments of the kind of the Letnitsa applications. By the way, according to Joseph Nagy the archeological evidence corroborate that “the numerous heads in the myths of the Indo-European peoples are related to the cult to the cut-off head and the headhunting” [Nagy, J. F. 1990, p. 214, basing his argument on Sterckx, C. 1981].

* * *

Beside the close parallel with the Thracian practice that can be detected in the chronologically and ethnoculturally close Scythian practice of “headhunting”, we find out similar in its typology phenomenon in the tribal societies of Mesoamerica and South America as well²⁰; that undoubtedly speaks about the typological character of the such outlined cross-cultural and cross-temporal parallel, which, beyond doubt, confirms clearly the initiation character of that mytho-ritual complex. Among the classical examples of initiation headhunting is the practice in the traditional societies in New Guinea [among the rich sources see for ex. van der Kroef, J. M. 1952]; that practice is also known in Assam and Taiwan [see for ex.: McGovern, B. L., and Montgomery, J. B. 1922, p. 109 sqq.; Hutton, J. H. 1928; etc.] and in Indonesia [Downs, R. 1955, pp. 40–70]. In some cases initiation practices of the headhunting type are evidenced by archeology (in the images of military deeds of valour on ceramic vessels) and also for the so-called *moundbuilders* in North America [see the references at Milner, G. R. 2004, p. 154; fig. 95 on p. 139 is especially indicative]. As Edward Curtis puts it, “astonishment has been expressed that headhunting existed among the North American Indians”, although each of the European discoverers of the North American coast of the continent has mentioned about that ancient custom, described by that classic of the American ethnology in a book with already more than a hundred-year-history of publishing²¹. The evidence about headhunters, drawn in by the ethnology, are quite indicative about the character of the phenomenon, as without using them it cannot have convincing interpretation based only on the written and archeological data of the Ancient world²².

Of course, among the various mythological ideas, that have determined initiation and warrior’s practice of “headhunting” and cephalophoria there were some ideas, connected with the special attitude towards the full or partial loss of the head or the forelock. Judging by the cross-cultural ethnological parallels, it was believed that within the head, the forelock respectively, not only the human vitality was concentrated but the spiritual basis of man’s very existence – a necessary element of his future resurrection. Their loss turned into an insurmountable obstacle for the dead’s departure for the after-life, which at the same time meant deprivation of the worldly status²³.

However, it seems that the phenomenon is also registered among the ancient Romans in historically early times, namely the Regal period and the age of the Early Republic²⁴. By the way, Poucet himself declares that his study has been inspired by Jean-Louis Voisin’s research “Les Romains, chasseurs de têtes” [Voisin, J.-L. 1984] and that of Claude Sterckx “Les mutilations des ennemis chez les Celtes préchrétiens” [Sterckx, C. 2005]; we draw the readers’ attention to that because of the parallelism in the title of the current exposition and the title of Voisin’s research. The entitlement of the current work “The Thracians “headhunters” came before our acquaintance with the aforementioned article of Voisin (“Les Romains, chasseurs de têtes”, *sic!*),

²⁰ For the functioning of that practice in the societies of Amazonia see for ex. Karsten, R. 1923; 1935; Up De Graff, F. W. 1938 [2003]; Zikmund, M., and Hanzelka, J. 1963, pass.; Harner, M. J. 1973, p. 182 sqq.; Kapfhammer, W. 2012, 46–61; Straus, A., et al., 2015, pass., with lit.; a little bit different aspect of that mytho-ritual complex: Goulard, J.-P. 1992; for the traces of such a ritual practice in the evidence about the archeological places in Nazca in the Andes: Proulx, D. A. 1999; 2001; Straus, A., et al., 2015, pass., with lit. The headhunting was presented as an initiatory practice among the population of the Wari Empire and of the Tiahuanaco civilization too. See Tung, T. A. 2007; 2008, quoted in Березкин, Ю. Е. 2013, p. 95. Trigo Rodríguez, D. E., and Korpisaari, A. 2018, pp. 189–213.

²¹ Curtis, E. S. 1915 [1975]; the quoted place: p. VII. About this book see: Curtis Meets The Head Hunters..., pass.

²² On that ethnological phenomenon, with additional historiographical references to the literature about it, see in brief: Yordanov, S. 2009, p. 117, the exposé of paragraph IV.4.4.3.; among the encyclopedic presentation and popular science literature on the phenomenon: Headhunting...; Headhunting, Wikipedia; Head-Shrinking and...; etc.

²³ For that cf.: Frazer, J. 1986, p. 224 sqq., p. 635 sqq.; Медникова, М. Б. 2001, p. 176 sqq. I take this bibliographical reference from Винокуров, Практика человеческих жертвоприношений..., pass.

²⁴ See for example Huet, G. 1913; Voisin, J.-L. 1984, etc., as well as the detailed Jacques Poucet’s study, the analysis of which is based on many ethnological parallels: Poucet, J. 2007; 2007 a.

but, as it is obvious, the ancient inhabitants of Bulgarian lands were also among the ancient and new, respectively traditional peoples – “headhunters.” As **J.-L. Voisin** points, more than 50 titles, published in the course of over 70 years, take away from the “headhunting” its glory of an exclusively Celtic phenomenon and present it as something practised by the *Israelites*, *Thracians*, *Scythians*, *Massagetae* and even the *Ancient Greeks*²⁵. Some interesting aspects of the phenomenon are revealed by the question if among them, except for the “Barbarian” Celts, there were also the Romans during the “heroic epoch” of their history. While commenting the properly Celtic practice, Elisabeth Rousseau, for example, draws as its source evidence **Titus Livius**’ narrative [I, 55] for discovery of a cut-off head during the buildings at the Capitoline Hill in Rome, in relation to which Titus Livius concludes: “*Beyond all question this discovery announced that this place would be at the head of the empire and at the forefront [the head] of the world; such were the augurs’ prophecies – among them were also those who had come from Etruria in order to make the things clear.*” At the sight of that evidence of Titus Livius and with reference to Jean-Louis Voisin’s article, Elisabeth Rousseau reminds that the decapitation was practised in Rome as a form of capital punishment for the citizens [**Rousseau, É.** 2000, p. 286, n. 7]. I pay attention to that example as it illustrates well the sacred status of the cut-off head, quite high in the religious ideas of the Ancient Italy as well – perhaps not only among the Romans, but among the Etruscans. But the case of the cut-off head, found out at the Capitoline Hill, has a little bit different character compared to the mytho-ritual complex of headhunting, although it is possible for them to have close co-relations.

In this regard – let us draw some observations from Jacques Poucet’s analysis of the phenomenon [**Poucet, J.** 2007; 2007 a]. The first part of Poucet’s research is devoted to the ethnographic parallels of the phenomenon with the so-called traditional peoples. He pays attention on the fact that among a number of these people military campaigns were held with “headhunting” as their purpose, which played an important, even leading role in their social life. In particular, they were entwined in the initiatory rituals, marking the transition

²⁵ **Voisin, J.-L.** 1984; quoted in **Poucet, J.** 2007 a, pass. An initiation practice of such a type with the Ancient Greeks was evidenced by those records, according to which that was a wide-spread custom among them in a relatively ancient epoch – the Homeric and Archaic periods. The custom of decapitation of the enemy can be found out in the Greek mytho-epic tradition as well; for example, it was presented in a battle scene on a crater of Tamassos (Cyprus, Archaic epoch), in which a warrior in “Ionian” (?) accoutrements holds his enemy’s cut-off head [see more: **Hermay, A.** 1991, p. 167 ff., esp. 171, fig. 4]. Besides, while elucidating the custom, reflected in that scene A. Hermay uses an example from Cyprus from the Archaic epoch – of a picture on a vase, in which two beardless cut-off heads are hung to the shaft a chariot [**Karageorghis, V., et Des Gagniers, J.** 1974, p. 30]. That second example is quite typical, as it evidences namely the trophy character of the cut-off heads, which corresponds to the initiation practice of headhunting; while the Thracian aristocrat, who owned the *Treasure of Letnitsa*, demonstrated his participation in the initiation headhunting on the applications of horse-trappings, perhaps in Archaic Crete it was practically done on the chariot itself, in the same manner as the Celts hung the cut-off heads to their horses’ necks. On the other hand, while elucidating the essence of the image of Tamassos’s crater A. Hermay refers not only to the researches of that phenomenon that had already been accomplished [**Gnoli, G., et Vernant, J.-P.** 1982, p. 45–76 et surtout p. 68–69; **Vermeule, E.** 1979, p. 107–108, and about the iconographic aspects – the already quoted in our exposition above **Halm-Tisserant, M.** 1989], but also to the numerous examples of decapitation in the Homeric epics (Agamemnon – Hippolochus’ head, **Hom., II.**, XI, 146–147; Ajax – Imbrius’s head, **Hom., II.**, XIII, 202–204; Peneleos – Ilioneus’ head, **Hom., II.**, XIV, 496–500, while Hector nearly beheaded Patroclus’ corpse, **Hom., II.**, XVII, 126; other heroes declare that they want to behead their enemies: Euphorbus – Menelaus, **Hom., II.**, XVII, 39–40; Hector – Patroclus, and Achilles – Hector, **Hom., II.**, XVIII, 176–177 and 334–335, not counting the cases of Diomedes, **Hom., II.**, X, 455–457, and of Achilles, **Hom., II.**, XX, 481–482, who killed Dolon and Deucalion, which had different character, according to Hermay). However, it was rather the case of 498 BC, which had different character – then the residents of *Amathonte* hung up the head of the leader of the failed siege of the city [**Hdt.**, V, 114–115], it is similar to the Roman examples of ostentatious decapitation without initiation character, even though further back in the Greek or Persian practice there is ritualization of the act of elimination of the political enemies. But the examples of the Homeric epics as well as of the fixed by the ceramic art mytho-epic tradition most probably reflect the initiation headhunting, indirect proof of which is the circumstance that, as it had already been ascertained by **L. Gernet** [1936 [1968/1976], p. 160 ff.], the Greeks and the other peoples in front of Troy were a mytho-epic image of an initiation warrior campaign. As D. Briquel states, the ancient Greeks had been still keeping “l’aspect sauvage d’une “chasse aux têtes” of the initiations [**Briquel, D.** 1982, p. 460]. According to L. Gernet’s observation : « La chasse aux têtes est une pratique assez connue, dont la Grèce par ailleurs n’a pas tout à fait perdu le souvenir, et qui est bien attestée chez certains peuples “indo-européens” comme les Celtes et les Scythes. Elle est un rite obligatoire pour un nouvel initié, dans les “sociétés secrètes” qui sont normalement des confréries à masques animaux. On sait que les mêmes sociétés sont organisées, à l’occasion, pour la guerre et que leurs déguisements mêmes, à cette fin, sont considérés comme efficaces; le nom même de Dolon (le Rusé), qui est à peine un nom propre, ce nom sur lequel Euripide joue non sans raison, est en rapport avec cette pratique et cette croyance.» [**Gernet, L.** 1936 [1968/1976], p. 161].

from one age-set stage to another, providing for the respective age-set group fertility and eternity. Within the framework of those initiatory rites, determined by the respective mythological view of the world, the practice of encephalophagy was widespread as sometimes the victims' brain was consumed. Poucet even gives a larger list of the peoples that practised this type of initiatory rituals: except for the *Jivaro tribe* of Amazonia and some tribes of New Guinea (*Marind-Anim, Asmat, Kerewa*), he also mentions the Japanese, the *Dahomeyans* in Africa and along with the Celts, among the examples of the antiquity the *Israelites* and the *Assyrians* in the Near East as well as the Scythians and their neighbours. Examining all the ethnographic material, Poucet ranks the *Tauri* among the Scythians; according to **Herodotus** [IV, 103], they had the custom to cut off their enemies' heads and to take them away, stuck in a long pole, and then to place that pole high above their dwellings, preferably above the smoke-vent. These cut-off heads were, as the *Tauri* said, guardians, who watched over the whole dwelling from their high place²⁶. What is more important is Poucet's conclusion, for which he gives more detailed reasons in his second article, where with his typical French wit he appeals for avoiding to put "*toutes les têtes coupées dans le même panier*".

Jacques Poucet [Poucet, J. 2007 a, pass.] implements what some of the authors he analyzes do not – a careful overview of all the evidence of the decapitation practice with the ancient peoples, including the Romans, and it is namely what precisely carried out analysis of the examples that made him not to put "all cut-off heads in one basket" but to orientate them to one strict classification. He differentiates well the cases of initiation "headhunting" from the common decapitation during wars, which was made for intimidation and as trophies of war having no connection with the ritual practices; the use of decapitation as punishment, which was applied in some legal systems in the antiquity; the presence of decapitation in some mytho-ritual complexes of Dionysian-Orphic type. At the end of his analysis of the evidence for the presence of initiatory headhunting among the Romans, which Poucet fulfills in the second part of his research, he comes to conclusions, which allows him to make common cause with D. Briquel who criticizes Jean-Louis Voisin's article. According to D. Briquel the evidence of Rome cannot be categorized in the same way as those for the ethnologic examples or as the Celtic data of one systematic, common "headhunting". The heads that the Romans took away and showed off, were those of the leaders, and with all cases like that we can find the usual symbolics of the cut-off head, which was also proved by the legend of discovery of a head at the foundation of the Capitoline.

* * *

In the case of the Thracians it can be said that, anyhow, it is the typical initiation "headhunting" that comes into question. Two quite general but obvious accounts prove namely that. I was directed to them by the article written by N. I. Vinokurov. Having mentioned the information of those accounts, concerning "monstrous manipulations" with the heads of the captives, about which they inform, he declares: "*Без содрогания такие материалы читать невозможно*" (*It is impossible to read such materials without shudder*) [Винокуров, Практика человеческих жертвоприношений..., pass.] Indeed, the data of the antiquity put an accent on the customs, startling with their cruelty, as in principle the suggestion was enhanced how savage the barbarian people were, but in two of those accounts some relatively exact ethnological information can be find out: the Thracians, though not known exactly who they were, but it seems that they were those from the Rhodopes, as well as the Scordisci, except from decapitation also practised encephalophagy [see **P. Orosii Historiarum Adversum Paganos**, V, 23, 17–19 (p. 182); **Flori Epitome de T. Livio Bellorum omnium annorum DCC**, I, XXXIX (Bellum Thracium, p. 52–53)]. As Jacques Poucet notices [Poucet, J. 2007, pass., with references to the literature], as well as we have mentioned above, the practice of encephalophagy was also frequent with the traditional peoples within the framework of the initiation "headhunting".

The ethnological materials also suggest some other characteristics of initiation "headhunting" and cephalophoria. Yet, the situation which needs additional specification clearly enough binds the idea of the head as a bearer of life and fertility, the headhunting and the construction of buildings such as the dolmens; the *Naga* people of Assam are an example of that. On the other hand, here within the framework of one historical-geographical region we have tribal communities, among which *Naga* practice that custom particularly intensively, while its intensity and cultural-historical aspect are different with other peoples [Hutton, J. H. 1928, p. 406]. It shows that a direct connection exists between the cult of fertility and the initiation headhunting and where one of them is available, very often the other can be found out as well. However, obviously it is possible for

²⁶ For that cf. also the short evidence of **Ammianus Marcellinus** [XXII, 8, 34].

cultural-historical differences to exist in the same historical-geographical region – one tribe can have that mytho-ritual complex in greater extent while another can develop some other of its aspects, etc. The base of that mytho-ritual complex are the religious concepts, which can conceive the invariant ideas of decapitation, the primordial victim, which has been cut (= *the Hainuwele mythologem*) and for that reason it is not spread all over among the antique peoples, including the Thracians, for example. And yet the general typology of the custom with the peoples, living far away one from the other, is striking and indicative; here I would show the resemblance, which Hutton describes additionally, between the Naga Hills and the societies of the Oceania by such indices as combination of the headhunting: with the sacralization of stones with ithyphallic form, as well as the custom to erect menhirs and dolmens; with the custom to erect soul-figures for the deceased; with the idea of the holiness of the head; with the idea of putting the head separately from the body in the grave; with the practice the cut-off heads to be exposed in special places or in special premises, connected with the cult of ancestors, etc. [Hutton, J. H. 1928, p. 407] Perhaps that connection of the initiatory headhunting with the construction of dolmens and the cult of dead should be used in the analysis of the appearance and development of the dolmens in the Ancient Thrace, that is to say where the Thracians – “headhunters” lived, according to the sources. Were the rock niches places for exposing of trophy heads? The answer of that question should be positive at least partially, as far as in the accounts of the antique authors, concerning the veneration of the mythical hero Orpheus’ bones, it is mentioned that the urn containing them was put in such a manner that it can be lit up by the sun²⁷. The cenotaphs of Varna Chalcolithic Necropolis and the mask burials in the same necropolis respectively can also be clarified by similar practice, which in that case might have functioned in a different in chronological aspect Thracian ethno-cultural environment; therefore, except for cross-cultural parallels in its elucidation to some extent the headhunting can rely on the ethno-historical methodology of analysis as well. As far as Pausanias’ evidence [Paus., *Greciae Descriptio*, IX, 30, 5 (p. 109)] about Orpheus’ grave in *Leibethra* (or *Libethra*), constructed in such a way that the sun’s rays can reach the urn with the bones, which we have mentioned above in regard to the possibility for analysis of the rock niches as places for exposing of trophy heads during the initiation feasts, we should by all means base our arguments on its analysis made by Ivan Marazov. He broadens the comparative analysis of that evidence by drawing as explanatory parallel about the prophetic dream of the shepherd, who fell asleep at Orpheus’ grave, the belief of some traditional peoples, that everything connected to death – bones, graves – can become a shaman’s spirit [Marazov, I. 1992, pp. 312–313; 1994, p. 168]. As it is seen, the information from the pictorial monuments like the plate of Kurdjip and the applications of Letnitsa, is included in a range of complementing it written and archeological data, which final clarification is about to be done, so here I do not insist on the assumptions, formulated in such a way. But I. Marazov’s interpretation of the data underlines once more the opportunities given by their cross-cultural and cross-temporal analysis.

The possibility for the applications of Letnitsa and the golden plate of Kurdjip, which have been introduced by L. A. Bulava in the analysis as a possible Thracian pictorial monument, to illustrate initiatory warrior campaign for trophy heads, realized practically during the initiation period or in a course of military operations, is what would give us reasons the Thracians to be qualified as headhunters by Strabo [Geogr., XI, 14, 14], literally as *σαραπάραι* “Kopfab scheider”. Dechev has included that word among others in his compendium of Thracian language relics, that is to say those words, which are defined as Thracian in the sources, which was made by Strabo in that case. However, in its analysis he begins from its qualification as Iranian by ethnolinguistic belonging at P. A. de Lagarde²⁸. D. Dechev slightly develops the analysis, suggested by de

²⁷ On the rock niches and the suppositions for their use, see: Кузманов, М. 2001. The interpretation of the rock niches as places for displaying the trophy heads, gained during the initiation warrior campaigns, does not contradict to the evidence by Pherecydes of Syros, which is used in their analysis [ap. Porph. *De antro nympharum*, 14 (p. 65–66), cit. by Th. Taylor’s translation: Taylor, Th. 1917, pass.], according to which formations like rock crevices, caves and other natural or artificial “gates” on the rocks were a way for the souls to come (to be born) and to leave. As was already mentioned, the soul-head, going to the hereafter was a part of the images, that the mytho-ritual complex of decapitation, including decapitation during the headhunting, maintained.

²⁸ See de Lagarde, P. A. 1866, S. 281 and S. 291. Strabo’s evidence literally said: “φασὶ δὲ καὶ Θρακῶν τινὰς τοὺς προσαγορευομένους Σαραπάρας οἷον κεφαλοτόμους, οἰκῆσαι ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἀρμενίας πλησίον Γουρανίων καὶ Μήδων, θηριώδεις ἄνθρωποι καὶ ἀπειθεῖς ὀδυνόους περικυλιστάς τε καὶ ἀποκεφαλίστάς· τοῦτο γὰρ δηλοῦσιν οἱ Σαραπάροι.” Paul Anton de Lagarde pays attention to that lexeme in part V of his book, entitled “Einige bemerkungen über êrânische sprachen ausserhalb Erân’s”, S. 251 sqq. He analyzes 36 Thracian glosses [S. 278 sqq.], including the word which is of interest to us. Literally translated, his conclusion is the following: “... bei den Thrakiern durch *σαραπάρης*

Lagarde, elucidating it as a compound word, consisting of components, clarified by the Avestan *sērah*- “Κορφ” and the Zend (one of the Iranian languages) *par-* “durchbohren, durchschneiden”²⁹. I accept that etymological explanation for quite possible decision of the questions about the meaning and ethnolinguistic belonging of the lexeme. I do not know new attempts at the clarification of the lexeme to have been made. However, de Lagarde and Dechev’s explanation puts a question that needs at least a partial elucidation. That explanation presents the lexeme as having an Iranian ethnolinguistic belonging, and, as it is known, the language of the Thracians belongs to other group of the Indo-European languages; it is not Iranian. I would only notice that the Iranian peoples, including the Scythians, as we have seen above, know the headhunting. We also find the headhunting among the Iranian-speaking peoples in Central Asia. Thus, according to Philostratus’ accounts [*Philostrati Heroica*, V, 3 (704, p. 128–129)] Cyrus, who had launched a military campaign against the *Massagetae* and the *Issedones* beyond the Istros – but, as I. V. Kuklina [*Куклина, И. В.* 1985, p. 121] notices it is not the European Istros, but the Central Asiatic Arax – he was killed by their women-ruler who cut his head off as a trophy. And Strabo himself, to whom we owe the information about the lexeme *σαραπάραι*, associates that custom, more particularly, with some Iranian people, besides, from the mentioned by him *Guranii* (a tribe in Armenia) and *Medes*, indisputably Iranian-speaking are Medes.

Then what is it all about – a borrowing from the Thracians of the lexeme itself? The cultural-historical phenomenon of influencing in the field of initiation customs – along with the borrowing of some part of its terminology – is known to ethnology; the phenomenon is spread among some of the so-called traditional peoples. It is one possibility. There is another possible explanation, which is connected with the problem of the belonging of the Odrysians, respectively of their system of personal names, to the Iranian-speaking peoples, which is still not resolved convincingly. But the localization of the mentioned by Strabo Thracians, who practiced headhunting, in the region of Armenia, with other words among the Thracians of Asia Minor, transfers that practice to another region of the huge territory, where the tribes of the Thracian-Pelasgian language community lived. And the Treasure of Letnitsa is perhaps Odrysian or post-Odrysian, being a treasure of a paradynast, on which an initiation headhunting is presented. The Iranian-speaking Odrysians – if they are really such by their ethnolinguistic belonging, dominating in relations of ethnic super-stratification over the numerous Thracian-speaking population – could have used the same word for designation of the initiation practice concerned. But one way or another, the lexeme was fixed in another localization in the Thracian land and it is rather a proof of another region, inhabited by the Thracians, where the initiation warrior headhunting is met as a phenomenon with the same typology as those which is evidenced by the Treasure of Letnitsa and the golden plate of the area of the River Kuban in the North Black Sea Region. But what creates a great impression is the fact that in the both historical-geographical regions – the Balkan and the Anatolian – the belonging to the Iranian-speaking community within the framework of the Thracian ethnolinguistic population is explicitly evidenced. Moreover, in the age of antiquity the Thracian ethnolinguistic population borders on Iranian-speaking peoples both in the north and in the east, and it is possible for influences, including linguistic, to exist. However, we also have evidence of infiltrations of Iranian-speaking enclaves in its territory. Therefore, at least as far as the question concerned, the things are unclear without additional information which can give more precise directions for its decision. One uncertain hypothesis would bind the appearance of the custom in the Balkans and the region of Armenia with the Cimmerians – a people most likely having Iranian ethnolinguistic belonging. It seems to me that it can be proved to some extent by an image of a warrior, from the neck of whose horse a cut-off head is hanging on a vessel from *the mound of Tli*. As it is known, some authors associates that archeological monument namely with the Cimmerians – a point during their migration movement through the Caucasus, about which Herodotus narrates, as was mentioned above. Thus, the appearance of the custom in the both regions is reasonable – and in the both regions it is a result of the Cimmerians, explained by the antique authors as a Thracian phenomenon, because of the settlement of the Cimmerians in a predominantly Thracian ethnical encirclement in the both regions, it would elucidate the belonging of the Odrysian rulers to the Iranian-speaking community, as well as the appearance in the toureutics of examples of a specific ethnological phenomenon that functioned among the Odrysians – the initiation headhunting.

und ζάλμοις, bei den Phrygiern durch ἀδάμνα und wohl auch durch Κόρβαντ-êrânische abstammung erwiesen ist.” [*de Lagarde, P. A.* 1866, S. 191]. There is a great possibility that in his conception about the character of the Thracian language, underlying its proximity to the Iranian languages, D. Dechev to have been influenced by de Lagarde’s book.

²⁹ See *Detschew, D.* 1976, S. 423. On proto-iranian **śarah-* (old Indian *śiras-*) ‘head’: *Pokorny, J.* 1959, S. 574; *Эдельман, Д. И.* 2009, с. 53. Cf. *Вертієнко, Г. В.* 2016, p. 63–64, note 28.

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Abbreviations

ИБИД – Известия на Българското историческо дружество. София. [Izvestia na Balgarskoto istoricheskoto druzhestvo. Sofia.]

МИА – Материалы и исследования по археологии СССР. [Materialy i issledovaniya po arheologii SSSR.]

СА – Советская археология. Москва. [Sovetskaja arheologija. Moskva.]

АА – American Anthropologist. Washington.

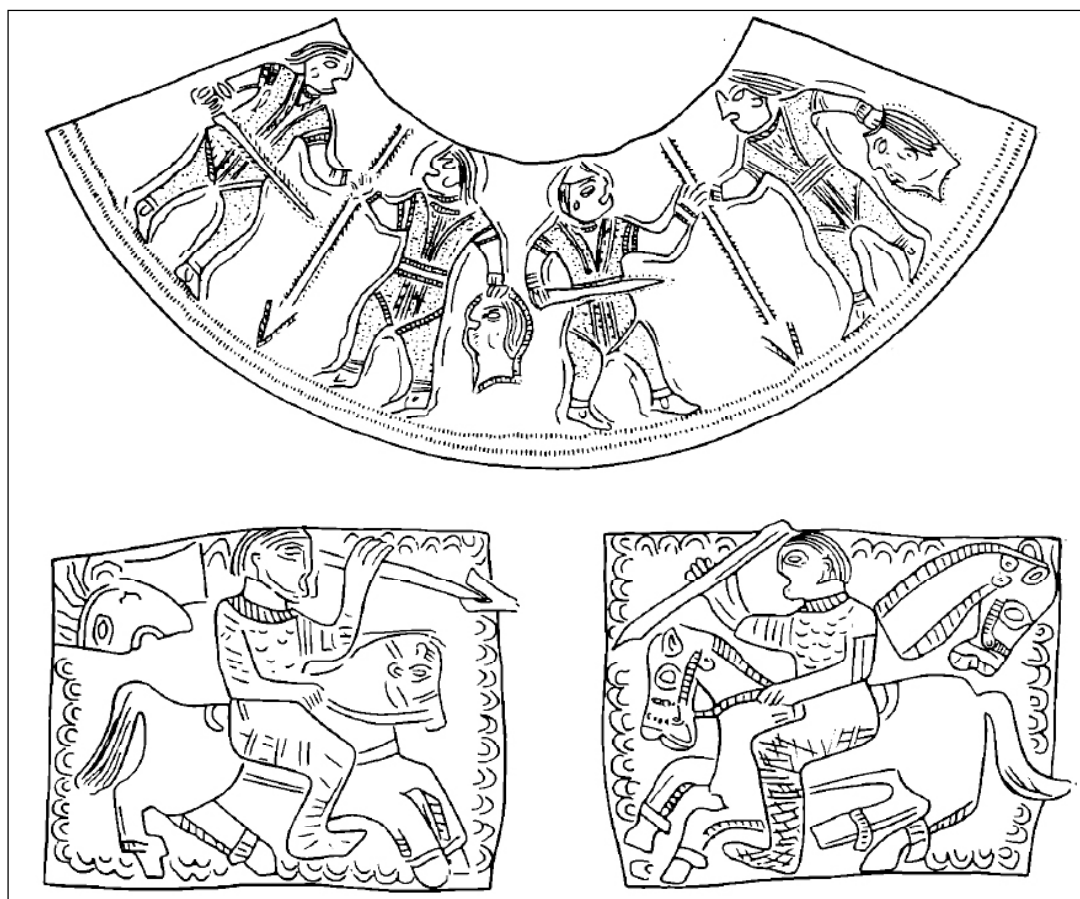


Fig. 1. The images from the plate of Kurdjip, Caucasus, in comparison with the images from Letnitsa applications, North Bulgaria (after L. Bulava)



Fig. 2. The image from the girdle from the necropolis of Tly, Caucasus



Fig. 3. The image on a marble plate from Konush, near Asenovgrad, South Bulgaria