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THE IRANIAN ELEMENTS IN THE THRACIAN ART FIRST MILLENIUM B.C.

Thrace and Iran are quite distant territories situated on two continents. While the Thracians in the beginning of first millennium B.C. inhabited the Eastern part of Balkan peninsula, at the same time some Iranian tribes already found their place on the periphery of the Assyrian-Babylonian world. Thanks to the warlike history of this region, these tribes were in the close contact with Cimmerians and with Scythians, who inhabited the North of Black Sea (including the Crimean peninsula). In spite of Herodotus (I, 103; IV, 11–13), who wrote that Cimmerians had been pulled out of their territories by Scythians on the North of the Black Sea, there is still a lack of archaeological evidence and proof. And so, this information can be treated in the category of legendary tradition only.¹ The relations between these tribes were characterised by constant wars and military cooperation. On the other hand, West of Iranian tribes (in Asia Minor) flourished another important culture region, created by Phrygians, who came from the Southern Macedonia.²

There is no doubt of the close relations (in the first half of the first millennium B.C.) between Thrace and Anatolia, Scythia and Greece. Nevertheless, from the archaeological point of view we can say nothing about the contact with Iranian tribes before the Graeco-Persian wars. As concerns the Thracian art, the so-called zoomorphic style (presented both in Thracian and Scythian art) had its analogies in Mesopotamia. There is no much information in modern literature which concerns the Thracian-Iranian relations in art. Moreover, there are more questions than hypotheses. Nevertheless, we

¹ KETD 1993, p. 145–146.

² Venedikov 1969, p. 5; Thracians and Phrygians 1998.

can trace some elements in Iranian art which are present also in Thracian art. For the pre-Achaemenid period the most important are discoveries made in 1928 in Luristan Region (in Iran).³ There were found many Bronze objects, which can be dated on the first quarter of the first millenium B.C. Also very important was the discovery of very rich treasury in Ziwyé (Iranian Kurdistan), which contained many objects made of gold, silver and ivory. Both some bronze objects from Luristan and some objects from treasury from Ziwyé had closer or more distant analogies in Thrace, which testifies the existence of some cultural region between Thrace and Iran.

The well-known Bulgarian scholar I. Venedikov was the partisan of influence of Persian art (as the idea) on the Thracian art.⁴ In his opinion many objects, which were attributed by some scholars to Scythians and by others to Thracians, were made by Thracian craftsmen, under the influence of Persian and Achaemenid art.⁵

The Persian rule on Balkan peninsula did not lasted too long – at about 30 years only; starting with at about 510 B.C. when the Macedonian king Amyntas I surrendered to Persians. „Achaemenids ruled over Macedonia and Thrace up to 479 B.C. and this epoch marked in the history of Balkan peninsula because consolidated these tribes”.⁶ The Persian invasion not only unified Macedonia but also stimulated the origin (in the Black Sea area) of two new states, namely the Odrisian Kingdom⁷ and Bosporian Kingdom.⁸

The Thracian-Iranian relations in respect of arts can be presented in case of the following objects.

Cult Axes

The first analysed in this article category of objects is formed by decorated axes. These tools can be dated on the third millenium B.C. and are well known from the area of Asia Minor. Firstly it were very simple decorated. Just at about 10th century B.C. the Iranian craftsmen introduced some new decorative elements, such as representation of animals (lion, griffon, horse) and representation of persons or perhaps rather of gods. The place of decoration (it means blade) and the form of such the tolls testified that there were cult objects and not used in ordinary life.

³ Venedikov 1969, p. 5 and cited bibliography.

⁴ Venedikov 1976, p. 52.

⁵ Venedikov 1969, p. 7.

⁶ Olbrycht 2004, s. 20.

⁷ Archibald 1998.

⁸ Hrapunov 2005.

I. Venedikov presents six axes from the area of Thrace. The first three of them derive from Teteven (see Phot. No 1), Karlukovo and from Stara Zagora. In the opinion of the Bulgarian scholar these axes have no practical significance at all; only some religious symbols. The other three axes derive from Kamenopole, Rilski monastery and from an unknown place. In the case of last mentioned object G. Kitov shows the village of Chomakovci as the place of founding.⁹ Thanks to the analogy with axes from Macedonia such the objects in Thrace can be dated on 7th century B.C. The similar axes are known also from the areas inhabited by Celts. So, such the tools could be interpreted as the symbol of religious power or probably also as the sign of kingly power. In the opinion of I. Venedikov these objects were transported to Thrace from Iran (by Asia Minor) and so in their shape were preserved Irano-Asiatic forms.

The existence of cult axes in Thrace is a fact and there is quite probably the similarity with such the objects from Iran. But perhaps in this case the above-mentioned objects had been to close related ethnically and to certain attributed to the given tribes.

Zoomorfical appliqués from horse' harness

The most of appliqués deriving from horse' harness found in Thrace and dated on 5th and 4th century B.C. have many zoomorphic ornaments. Quite often there is presented a scene of fight between animals, as for example on one appliqué derived from a treasure from Letnica, which presents the fight of lion with giffon.¹⁰

The good example of animal scene is presented by open-work appliqué from Brezovo, which represents the presentation of a horse (see Phot. No 2).¹¹ here is the so-called „rotational” plate, well-known in the area of Thrace.

The very characteristic horse ornament in Thrace there are certainly the so-called „rotational” plates. „Rotational” plates form the decorative element of horse harness were quite often on the territory of ancient Thrace. Usually they were made of a gilded silver and presented four horse heads. The similar objects are known from the territory inhabited by Scythians. In the opinion of some scholars we can speak of Iranian influence but in the other opinions this was local production. In spite of the certain Thracian-Scythic relations and contacts¹², we have to distinguish between Iranian Scythians and

⁹ Kitov, *Agre* 2002, 182.

¹⁰ Venedikov 1996.

¹¹ Filov 1916–1918, s. 9.

¹² Frako-skifskite 1975.

Iranians from Achemid Persia. The Polish scholar J. Kubczak made the conclusion that „Thracian decorations this time (4th century B.C.) seem the result of a long development of an animal style, which has no prototypes or the intermediate forms in the native area, but is similar to Scythians achievements from 5th and 4th century B.C.”¹³

Pectorals

The other group of objects probably connected with some Eastern influences can be formed by pectorals. There were golden and silver plates of different shape rhomb, ellipse, six-flank and semicircular. There were used both by men and women who belonged to the upper circles of Thracian society. On the territory of Thrace these objects can be dated from the end of 6th up to the first decennials of 3rd century B.C.¹⁴ Of course such the objects are known from other territories too – not only from Thrace. On the area of Greece these objects can be dated on Mycean period and the youngest objects on this area (including Greek islands) can be dated on 8th century B.C. The Pectorals are known also from Urartu, Assyria, Phoenicia and also from above-mentioned treasury from Ziwyé in Iran. Amongst pectorals found in Thrace the most important (from our point of view) are pectorals semicircular shape. This shape is the connection with Iranian influences. The best example is formed by pectoral derived from tumulus Bashova mogila (the end of 5th century B.C. – see Phot. No 3) near Duvanlii. The lion's head seen from above on this object is presented typically as in Achemenid art. And so, in the opinion of I. Venedikova „Pectoral from tumulus „Bashova mogila” testifies the strong Persian influence on Thracian artistic craftsmanship”.¹⁵ Two other golden pectorals from Thrace derive from tumuli: Goliamata mogila (also from Duvanlii) and from the village of Dálboki (near Stara Zagora). The golden pectorals from Thrace can be dated on the second half of 5th century B.C. On the other hand on the second half of 4th century B.C. can be dated three semicircular silver pectorals from: Mezek, Vrbica and Jankovo. In the opinion of I. Venedikov three golden pectorals from Thrace forms the part of an armament. On the other hand the pectorals made of silver (in the opinion of this scholar) bear the signs of toreutic under the strong Eastern influence. This influence can be presented not only in shape but also in the mode of decoration of above-mentioned objects.

¹³ Kubczak 1984, s. 75.

¹⁴ Venedikov, Gerasimov 1978, p. 49–51.

¹⁵ Venedikov, Gerasimov 1978, p. 50. See also: Venedikov 1969b, p. 21–33.

However, other scholars are more conscious as to the Persian origin of Thracian pectorals as testifies the following quotation: „The lion motif on this ornament may have derived from provincial Persian art, and parallels from the Ziwiye treasure may also be mentioned, but the lion's head seen from above, which also appears in early Thracian jewellery, has good parallels on early Lesbian billon coins”.¹⁶

Rythons

The rythons are one of the most common utensils in Thrace (see Phot. No 4 and No 5).¹⁷ There were made of different materials, also of gold or silver. Perhaps the best known Thracian rythons belong to the treasury from Panagiurishte.¹⁸ Other examples can be formed by rython from the village of Borovo¹⁹ and Zlatinica.²⁰ Such the objects are well known also from the other territories and from different times – also from Iran.²¹ The example of rython found in Transcaucasia can be formed by rython found in the village of Erebuni in Armenia.²²

On the example of rythons the influence of Iranian art on Thracian one is perhaps best testified in comparison with the other artistic objects. Perhaps the only one example is worth mentioning – namely from Duvanlii, where I. Venedikov see the connection with Iran in silver amphora – rython from the tumulus of Kukuva mogila. And so this object is one of the best examples of Achemenid torentics.²³

Appliqués from shields from Rozovec and Panagiurishte

From the foundings from Rozovec we known eight appliqués and from Panagiurishte only five (see Phot. No 6 and No 7). In each case the collection is consisted of one appliqué quadrangle in shape and of several

¹⁶ Bouzek, Ondřejová 1987, p. 69.

¹⁷ Marasov 1976; Marazov 1978.

¹⁸ Venedikov 1961.

¹⁹ Ivanov 1982.

²⁰ The tumulus of Zlatinica, which contains very rich sepulchral objects was not so far described by archeologists. There are only press and internet information.

²¹ Ghirshman 1962.

²² Markarjan 2002.

²³ Venedikov, Gerasimov 1978, p. 42.

round. The characteristic decoration of these appliqué is umbo in the central part. While the appliqués from Rozovec do not have any decorations, the appliqués from Panagurishte have in full animal and floral decorations. There are some analogies, some scholars see them in Kuban but others see some similarities in the treasury of Iranian Ziwyé. The appliqués from Rozovec can be dated on the first half of 4th century B.C. but the appliqués from Panagurishte on the second half of this century. Perhaps the appliqués derived from the territory of modern Bulgaria can be traced also in the Iranian art.

The sepulchral architecture

Some scholars see some relations (both direct and indirect) between Iran and Thrace also in the area of sepulchral architecture. The Bulgarian scholar Julia Văleva made a proposition that the tomb-cult complex under the tumulus of Ostrusha mogila (Phot. No 8) in the Kazanlak Valley (Bulgaria) was perhaps based on the tomb of Cyrus II the Great in Iran in Pasargadai (Phot. No 9).²⁴ In her opinion the similarity between these two objects is based on the fact that rather small monolithic grave chamber (in both cases) is situated on the a lot large platform. On the other hand there are many differences between these two tombs, which the Bulgarian scholar describes by the different economic possibilities and different esthetic views. In the case of tomb of Ostrusha mogila the tumulus is completely on the whole grave construction and the monolithic grave chamber was just one room in the vast cult complex.²⁵ But in the opinion of J. Văleva perhaps in Ostrusha mogila at first existed only the monolithic grave chamber and other rooms were built later. Perhaps also the tumulus (in Thracian – Macedonian tradition) was made later. And this could be the reason of above-mentioned differences. The Bulgarian scholar made a hypothesis (or this is a kind of science fiction) that perhaps during the expedition of Alexander the Great on East the Macedonian king was accompanied by any high ranking Thracian who simply saw the tomb of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadai and transferred this idea to Thrace. But she wrote next that the tomb of Cyrus was well known in the ancient world even before the Hellenistic times, which can be testified by such the sepulchral objects from Asia Minor like (dated on 5th century B.C. and transferred to British Museum) Nereid Monument (Phot. No 10)²⁶ from Xanthos (the capital of

²⁴ Văleva 1994, p. 61.

²⁵ Kitov 1994a; Kitov 1994b.

²⁶ Bean 1978, p. 60.

Likia – modern Kinik in Turkey) or the famous mausoleum of Mauzolos in Halikarnas (modern Bodrum in Turkey). The sculptures from Bodrum were transferred to British Museum as well. And so, the idea of such the type of tomb in Thrace perhaps did not derived from Persia but from any other tomb from Asia Minor, which was much closer to Thrace (both in geographical and cultural terms) than Iran. In the capital of Likia Xanthos there are many great tombs derived from different times, both earlier and later that tomb from Ostrusha mogila, where can be find any similarities with the tomb of Cyrus the Great (See Phot. No 11 and No 12). But perhaps the tomb of Cyrus the Great was based on any other tomb from Anatolia and the idea that the tomb of Ostrusha mogila perhaps was based on the tomb of Cyrus the Great would be falsified.

In sum of the above-mentioned opinions concerning some similarities (on some examples) between the sepulchral architecture of Iran and Thrace we have to be very prudence. Perhaps the more systematic archeological investigations on the area of ancient Thrace on ancient sepulchral architecture will verify or falsify our hypotheses.

There are many theories concerning the origin of a Thracian art. The well known modern scholar G. Kitov see many connections between Thrace and Mycenae. In his opinion „The Thracian art. as a whole, especially as concerns the architecture and toreutic, is result of early and deep cultural unity between Thrace and Mycenae”.²⁷ As concerns the connections with Scythian and Persian art he tries to diminish its significance. He rather speaks of „Eastern traditions” in Thracian art. G. Kitov this Eastern influence sees by the influence of old Greek art in the second quarter of the first millenium B.C. – thanks to the relations with Asia Minor and as a result of Achemenid invasion on Balkan peninsula during the Persian wars.²⁸ And so, only in this last case we can speak of the direct Persian influence.

The Czech scholars J. Bouzek and I. Ondřejová describe the different territorial relations of Thracian art. between Thrace, Macedonia, Iran and Scythia in the 4th century B.C.²⁹

In this article there were reminded (in a general form) such the categories of objects from the territory of ancient Thrace which are connected (in opinion of some scholars) with the Oriental or even Iranian influences. In many cases the comparison of form of such arts' objects seems to be logical but it could not be treated as certain. Quite often the similar motives were used not only in Thrace and Iran but in Transcaucasia, Greek islands

²⁷ Kitov, *Agre* 2002, s. 201.

²⁸ Kitov, *Agre* 2002, s. 201.

²⁹ Bouzek, Ondřejová 1987.

and first of all in Anatolia. Perhaps better would be a hypothesis of a certain cultural unity of the area between Thrace and Iran in the first millennium B.C. than building of some theories lacking of evidence.

There is no doubt that the Persian rule on Balkan peninsula (although quite short) was very significant in different areas of the human life. First of all we have to underline the process of consolidation and inner changes amongst some Thracians, which culminated in the beginning of the Odrician kingdom. Also the model of power in Thrace was certainly different from the Athenian democracy but it was different as well from the Persian autocratic power.³⁰ On the other hand there were some Persian influences also in terms of power. We can be in common with saying that: „Achaemenid Persia was the model of political system and some habits”.³¹ The model for Thrace was certainly also Persian habits, army and its organization. The important is also the Persian influence on Thracian coins.³²

Moreover, we have to remember that many Thracians served in the army of Alexander the Great. Without their contribution the Macedonian army would be considerably weaker. Some of them stayed in Asia for long as colonists. On the other hand, these who returned to Thrace, took with them both some concrete objects and their ideas, which afterwards flourished in the form of similar art' objects.³³ We can see many similarities between Persia and Thrace (in the area of army, state institutions or habits), which seem to be quite obvious. On the other hand the relations in area of art are still difficult to establish and there is a strong need for further archaeological and historical investigations. Certainly there was some influence of Iranian art on the Thracian art, but there is still the question was it strong? Also unclear remain relations in the area of sepulchral art (as was written above).

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³⁰ In the older books the town of Seuthopolis was named as the proof of autocratic power, where the seat of the ruler (together with the temple) was isolated from the rest of a town by a strong defensive wall.

³¹ Olbrycht 2004, p. 20–21.

³² Picard 2000.

³³ In this place I would like to thank to M. Olbrycht (Rzeszów Univ.) for his very valuable remarks concerning the Iranian-Thracians relations.

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Elementy irańskie w sztuce trackiej pierwszego tysiąclecia przed Chr.

Streszczenie

Tracja i Iran to terytoria dość odległe od siebie, znajdujące się na dwóch kontynentach. W czasie gdy Trakowie na początku I tysiąclecia przed Chr. zamieszkiwali już północną część Półwyspu Bałkańskiego, plemiona irańskie dopiero osiedliły się na peryferiach świata asyrobabilońskiego.

O ile bliskie kontakty w pierwszej połowie I tysiąclecia przed Chr. pomiędzy Tracją a Anatolią, Sycyją i Grecją nie podlegają żadnej dyskusji, to o kontaktach z ludami irańskimi sprzed okresu wojen grecko-perskich, z archeologicznego punktu widzenia, niewiele możemy powiedzieć. Na gruncie sztuki trackiej wskazywano jedynie na fakt, że tak zwany styl zoomorficzny, który występował zarówno w sztuce trackiej, jak i scytyjskiej, swe analogie posiadał także w Mezopotamii. Do dnia dzisiejszego literatura fachowa dotycząca kontaktów tracko-irańskich w dziedzinie sztuki nie jest jeszcze zbyt obfita, a poszczególne hipotezy stawiają wiele znaków zapytania. Można jednak i należy się pokusić o wskazanie pewnych elementów w sztuce irańskiej, które odnajdujemy również i w sztuce trackiej, co też stało się przedmiotem niniejszego artykułu.

Dla okresu przedachemenidzkiego szczególnie istotne są odkrycia dokonane w roku 1928 na terenie Iranu w regionie Luristan. Znaleziono tam dużą liczbę brązowych przedmiotów, które datuje się na pierwszą ćwierć I tysiąclecia przed Chr. Nie mniej ważne okazało się też odkrycie niezwykle bogatego skarbu w miejscowości Ziwyé (irański Kurdystan) zawierającego wiele przedmiotów wykonanych ze złota, srebra oraz kości słoniowej. Zarówno brązy z Luristanu, jak też niektóre przedmioty ze skarbu z Ziwyé – jak się okazało – mają swe bliższe lub dalsze paralele w Tracji, co świadczy o istnieniu pewnej, dużej obszarowo, wspólnocie kulturowej, która obejmowała tereny pomiędzy Tracją a Iranem.

Związki tracko-irańskie na gruncie sztuki archeolodzy próbują rozpatrywać analizując wybrane kategorie wytworów, typu: siekiery kultowe, aplikacje zoomorficzne pochodzące z uprzęży końskiej, pektorały, rytony, aplikacje z tarcz z miejscowości Rozovec oraz Panagjuriszte, a także wskazując na pewne niewielkie podobieństwa, których można się doszukiwać w architekturze sepulkralnej.

Reasumując rozważania dotyczące pewnych podobieństw (dokonanych na wybranych przykładach) niektórych wytworów luksusowych, jak też związków w architekturze sepulkralnej Iranu i Tracji, należy jednak na obecnym etapie badań zachować w wysuwaniu wniosków daleko idącą ostrożność.



1. Cult Axe from Teteven



2. Appliqué from Brezovo



3. Gold pectoral from Bashova mogila



4. Silver vase from Kukuva mogila



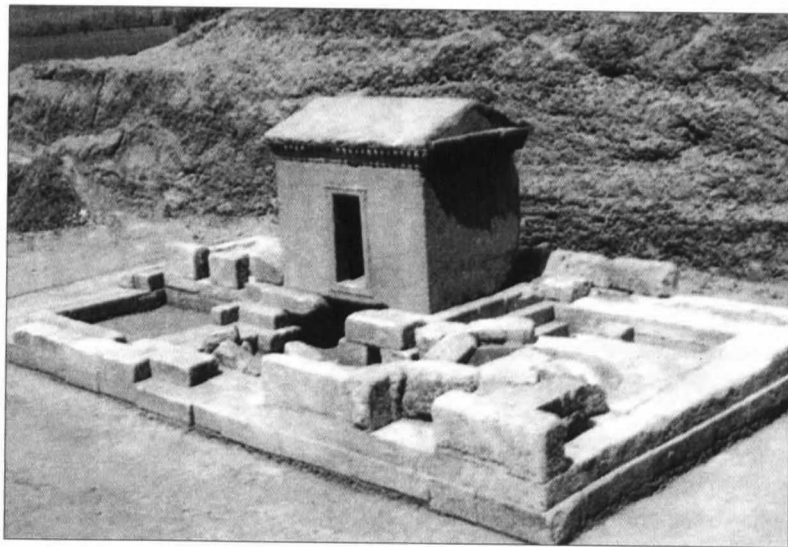
5. Rhyton from Bashova mogila



6. Silver appliqué from Panagirishte



7. Silver appliqué from Panagirishte



8. Ostrusha mogila
(Phot. Kitov, Agre 2002, s. 162)



9. The tomb of Cyrus the Great in Pasargadai
(Phot. Olbrycht 2004)



10. Xanthos, the place where once stood the Nereid Monument
(Phot. J. Hatlas)



11. Xanthos – Free-standing house tomb beside the Roman agora
(Phot. J. Hatlas)



12. Xanthos – Free-standing house tomb beside the Roman agora
(Phot. J. Hatlas)