

THE GREAVES(?) FROM AGIGHIOL (ROMANIA) AND VRATSA (BULGARIA) RECONSIDERED

DILYANA BOTEVA

Abstract: The following text analyses four Thracian silver greaves with a human face on the kneecap. They all were found in rich tumular graves: one - in the town of Vratsa, Northwest Bulgaria; two - at Agighiol, Tulcea region (Southeast Romania), and one - near the villages of Malomirovo and Zlatinitsa, Yambol region in Southeast Bulgaria. All four of them appear as one piece, not in pair. The widely accepted association of these greaves with the representation of a greave on the visible horseman's left leg on the famous appliqué from Letnitsa (North Bulgaria) is rejected because of the obvious fact that the right leg of the Letnitsa horseman (invisible for us) might have also been protected by a greave. If one takes into consideration such a possibility, one has to deal with a quite different type of greaves: they are bronze, appear usually in pairs and are adorned with Gorgon or a face on the kneecaps. The later, however, show several important features differing substantially from what is attested on the four silver monuments under discussion. These peculiarities allow questioning if the four items were produced to be thought about as greaves at all.

The whole reasoning presented in the article urges a re-consideration of all four silver items - they could be regarded as images of the dead representatives of the Thracian elite, produced for the needs of the funeral ceremony. Accordingly, their different decorations could be grounded with the personal experience, the different social and religious status as well as the military achievements of each one of them.

Keywords: anthropomorphic figures; Great Goddess; horseman; rich tumular graves; serpent cult; silver greaves; Thracian imagery language; Thracian toreutics.

Three Thracian silver greaves with a human face on the kneecap have ranged among the most impressive and important monuments of the Thracian toreutics for the last almost half a century. These are the greave from a tomb, excavated in 1965-1966 in the town of Vratsa, Northwest Bulgaria (Pl. I/1-2)¹ and the two greaves from Agighiol, found back in 1931 but published only in 1969². They originate from a tomb near the village of Agighiol, Tulcea region (Romania), not far from the Danube

¹ Venedikov 1966, p. 10, fig. 3. Since its publication, the greave from Vratsa has often been discussed in the literature: Venedikov, Gerassimov 1973, p. 111; Venedikov 1975, p. 23-30; Marazov 1980; Marazov 1998, p. 159; Ognenova-Marinova 2000, p. 21; Theodossiev 2000, p. 34, figs. 93; 105, cat. no. 248; Torbov 2005, p. 59-60, 134-135. Here I would like to express my gratitude to Dr. Narcis Torbov (Head of the Department "Archaeology", Regional Historical Museum Vratsa) for providing me some needed photos.

² Berciu 1969, p. 217-219 with pls. 112-114. See also Berciu 1969a (= Berciu 1974, p. 52-55, 104-122).

delta (Pl. II/3-4)³. Recently, the “collection” of the Thracian silver greaves was enriched with a fourth one. It was found in 2005 in a same context as the others – in a very rich tumular grave. The new element here is that it originates from the lands lying south of the Balkan Range: the tumulus is situated near the villages of Malomirovo and Zlatinitsa, Yambol region in Southeast Bulgaria (Pl. III/5-6)⁴. The new find confirmed the impression that these items appear as one piece⁵, despite the logical expectation that they should be in pair⁶. This circumstance should be regarded as most significative when trying to interpret these four artifacts.

Because of this I am not inclined to connect undisputedly “our” greaves with the representation of a greave on the visible horseman’s left leg on the famous appliqué from Letnitsa (Pl. IV/7)⁷. Such an association is widely accepted in the literature⁸, despite the obvious fact that the right leg of the Letnitsa horseman (invisible for us) might have also been protected by a greave⁹. If one takes into consideration such a possibility, one has to deal with a quite different type of greaves: they are bronze, appear usually in pairs and are adorned with Gorgon or a face on the kneecaps. Probably the most famous among them are these from Ruvo, in Apulia, South Italy (Pl. IV/8)¹⁰. Recently, a new pair came to light in the ancient Thracian lands. It was found during the excavations of a very rich tomb in the Golyamata Kosmatka tumulus near the town of Shipka, Bulgaria (Pl. V/9)¹¹. The kneecap of the new greaves is decorated with the head of Athena. They do, however, confirm some important features differing substantially from what is attested on the four silver monuments here under discussion:

Firstly: Obviously enough the ancient bronze greaves were supposed to fit the leg and the calf muscles perfectly¹². As a result they give the impression of differentiated

³ Recently V. Sirbu (Sirbu 2008) also published a short report of this site. For an analysis of the so called “greave no. 1” from Agighiol see for instance Farkas 1981, p. 45–46; Alexandrescu 1984, p. 96–97 and many others. Marazov 2010, *passim*, discusses the two greaves from Agighiol.

⁴ For a preliminary report see Agre 2006, p. 180–181.

⁵ Referring to the greaves from Agighiol as a pair is obviously incorrect – cf. Farkas 1981, p. 38 (“The chief finds at Agighiol were ... a pair of silver greaves...”), p. 40, fig. 21 (“... one of a pair from tomb at Agighiol”), Marazov 1998, p. 159 (“A pair of silver greaves found in 1934 in a burial at Agighiol ...”) and Ogdenova-Marinova 2000, p. 21.

⁶ Venedikov’s supposition (Venedikov 1975, p. 23) that in the Vratsa tomb the greaves were a pair, the second one being stolen in the antiquity, is obviously inconsistent.

⁷ Letnitsa is a village in Lovech region, Central North Bulgaria. Its name is connected with one of the most spectacular Thracian treasures ever found – see Venedikov, Pavlov 1974; Alexandrescu 1983, p. 52–54, 59–66, fig. 4/1–6; fig. 5/1–2; Venedikov 1996; Kull 1997, p. 207–209; Marazov 1998, p. 160–171; Boshnakov 2000, p. 68–140; Boshnakova 2000; Reho, Ilieva 2006, p. 41–50 etc. For a possible approach to it with some alternative “readings” of the representations see Boteva 2004 and Boteva 2008.

⁸ Berciu 1974, p. 111; Marazov 1980, p. 92; Knauer 1993, p. 244; Marazov 1998, p. 159; Ogdenova-Marinova 2000, p. 21; Theodossiev 2000, p. 53, 77, 92–93 etc.

⁹ Most significantly E. Knauer (Knauer 1993, p. 243) describes the “hunter” on the Letnitsa plaque as wearing κνημιδες, not a κνημῖς.

¹⁰ www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/LX/Greaves BMGR1856_12_26_615.html (visited on 27.04.2010). They are dated to 550/500 BC and are now in the British Museum, Upper floor, Room 73 (accession number GR 1856.12–26.615; Cat. Bronze 249).

¹¹ The town of Shipka is situated in Central Bulgaria to the south of the Balkan range and is famous for the numerous Thracian tombs and rich graves excavated in its vicinity. On the Golyamata Kosmatka tumulus see Kitov 2005.

¹² See for instance Rusu 1969, p. 278 with fig. 6 on p. 280, who publishes a pair of bronze greaves

products not only from pair to pair (Pl. V/10; VI/11) but even within one pair. An eloquent example in this direction was brought to light during the excavations of the Great tomb at Vergina (North Greece), where a pair of gilded unequal greaves (the left is shorter than the right by 3.5 cm) was found (Pl. VI/12), considered as an evidence of owner's leg injury¹³. When comparing "our" four items with the greaves found usually in pairs the difference in this respect is clearly recognizable.

Secondly: The bronze greaves which usually appear in pair, both with (Pl. IV/8; V/9) and without (Pl. V/10; VI/11-12) a face on the kneecaps, have a lower edge going straight downwards. The silver ones which so far appear as a single piece have a lower edge turned outside or even lightly upwards (Pl. I/2; III/5). This detail could be explained, in my opinion, with some functional differences between the two groups.

Thirdly: Noteworthy is also a third very important feature. Most of the bronze greaves are without any holes (VI/11-12)¹⁴ and it is universally accepted that they were "held to the shin solely by means of the elasticity of the metal"¹⁵. On the other hand, the silver artifacts here under discussion have small clearly visible holes on their four edges - a feature definitely attested for all four of them (Pl. II/4; III/6)¹⁶. So far, to the best of my knowledge, only one pair of bronze greaves, which is without a face on the kneecaps, is "supplied" with such holes¹⁷, and they have led to the supposition that "the greaves have four holes each for tying them with two straps above ankle and below the knee"¹⁸. Occasionally holes are attested on other bronze greaves as well but they do show apparent difference both in location and in number¹⁹. All such holes are too fine to be used for a lacing²⁰, grounding the idea that they were used for the soft lining, needed with the bronze greaves²¹. The fact that all four silver greaves are featured with the fixed position of their four holes each imposes a different approach

found in a rich tomb at Ciumești (Romania). E. Knauer (Knauer 1993, p. 238) asserts that "... most greaves from the early sixth century on ... imitate the underlying anatomy". She explains this phenomenon with "the complex idealizing message of the concept of heroic nudity".

¹³ See Andronikos 1984 and most recently Palagia 2008. The problem is thoroughly discussed by A. Riginos (Riginos 1994, p. 103-104, notes 1-2 with the literature).

¹⁴ The greaves from Golyamata Kosmatka, Bulgaria (Kitov 2005, p. 46 does not discuss the existence or absence of holes on these greaves; however no holes exist on the edges); from Derveni, North Greece (Loukopoulou, Hatzopoulos 1980, p. 64-65, fig. 43); from Vergina, North Greece (Loukopoulou, Hatzopoulos 1980, p. 226, fig. 128) etc.

¹⁵ See for instance Fortenberry 1991, p. 623 and Maaß 1995, p. 151 with earlier literature. The idea was put forward already by Engelmann (Engelmann 1882, p. 26) who explicitly insists that no thongs were needed.

¹⁶ See http://www.thracians.net/index.php?option=com_datagallery&Itemid=76&func=detail&id=188 (visited on 19.03.2011) for a 3D image of the Malomirovo-Zlatinitsa greave. A relevant photo of the same monument is given by Marazov 2010, p. 10. For the greaves from Agighiol see Berciu 1969, p. 218-219, pls. 112-113.

¹⁷ The pair of greaves from Ciumești (Rusu 1969, 278 with fig. 6 on p. 280).

¹⁸ Knauer 1993, p. 240, footnote 18.

¹⁹ See e.g. the greaves from Assenovgrad, Bulgaria (Marazov 1980, p. 42 with fig. 32), from Ilyinetska-ya barrow, Ukraine (Piotrovsky, Galanina, Grach 1986, fig. 216) and others.

²⁰ Compare the much bigger holes of the Roman greaves undoubtedly used for lacing (most recently Zerbini 2009).

²¹ Koenigs-Philipp 1980, p. 100. See also Fortenberry 1991, p. 623: "some of these holes still retain fragments of leather thongs by which the metal would have been attached to a backing of perishable material".

to them. An observation that the ancient bronze greaves found in present Bulgarian lands are restricted number in contrast to the large number of ancient bronze helmets²², makes less probable an existence of a settled Thracian tradition in producing greaves²³. This entire complex of reasoning should lead in my opinion to a search for a specific function of the four silver greaves.

Fourthly: When comparing the two types of items here under discussion in regard of the proportion of the size of the face on the kneecap to that of the entire artifact one sees a striking difference. The face represented on all four silver greaves takes up a disproportionately large ca. 1:3.73 to ca. 1:3.88 of the monuments respectively. However, the face on the bronze pairs covers just ca. 1:6.25 of the greave. This fact could possibly also reflect some functional differences between the two types of items.

As clearly visible, the only common feature between the two types of greaves mentioned above - such of silver appearing as only one piece (Pl. I-III) and such of bronze appearing usually in pairs (Pl. V/9) - is the existence of a face on the kneecap, but even it differs essentially when a comparison is made between the two types. However, despite the plenty of fundamental differences, the conclusions concerning the latter type of greaves have been transferred to the first as well. The result of this approach could be clearly illustrated with the following quotation:

*"... A female mask ...is depicted on the part that covers the knee. [...] The greave [from Vratsa, D.B.] is almost identical in shape to bronze examples that have been found throughout the ancient world, many of which are decorated with a Medusa mask and snakes that follow the curves of the muscle. [...] The images were probably intended to be apotropaic (evil averting), invoking their magical power to make the protected body part invulnerable. [...] The figure on this Thracian greave is probably a deity similar in type to the Scythian "snake-legged Goddess" mentioned by Herodotus. [...] The forms that resemble snail shells represent the goddess's breast, while the snakes represent her legs and arms"*²⁴.

I find this interpretation problematic not only because of the stated identity between two different types of monuments. Equally unacceptable sounds to me the idea that an ancient craftsman could represent female arms as if coming out of the breast - this is exactly what comes out of the statement quoted above when compared with the monument which it is supposed to describe (Pl. I/1). It further remains unclear why is the face of the Vratsa greave stated to be definitely female²⁵ - an idea, introduced by the excavator²⁶, which has been universally accepted²⁷.

²² Ognenova-Marinova 2000, p. 21.

²³ L. Ognenova-Marinova (Ognenova-Marinova 2000, p. 21 with earlier literature) puts forward the hypothesis that one of the pairs bronze greaves found in inner Thrace was produced in Messambria Pontica.

²⁴ Marazov 1998, p. 159. See also Marazov 1980, p. 93: "The very shape of the greave is reminiscent of the Greek leg armor which bears the mask of Medusa at the knee".

²⁵ See also Torbov 2005, p. 59 (with English abstract on p. 134) and footnote 50 here below.

²⁶ Venedikov 1966, p. 14; Venedikov, Gerassimov 1973, p. 111.

²⁷ Several years ago I tried to open a discussion on this issue (Boteva-Boyanova 2000, p. 109-118 with English abstract on p. 166). Despite the existing opinion that the greave no. 2 from Agighiol represents a male face (see here below), the tradition to define all the four faces as female still continues (cf. Marazov 2010, p. 30).

Many questions appear also when reading the proposed interpretation of the greaves from Agighiol. The human face on the so called greave no. 1 has been identified as a female (Pl. II/4)²⁸ because of the jewelry²⁹, while the one on the greave no. 2 – as a male mostly due to the lack of jewelry (Pl. II/3)³⁰. The earrings and the necklace however could not be entirely decisive in this respect, as clearly indicated by the finds from the Great tomb at Vergina³¹.

When trying to find an acceptable answer to all these questions, one has to evaluate the entire available information both from the artifacts here under scrutiny as well as from the ancient literary sources. We have to start with the crucial information that all four monuments were found single, not in a pair. Of course, in ancient times many men might have fought with just one greave as attested for instance by the finds in Denda, tomb no. 12³². However, in our case explaining that each of the four silver greaves is found single, not in pair, because it was a part of a parade armament³³ is, in my opinion, not convincing enough³⁴. Personally I could not imagine that a ruler would appear with a parade helmet but wearing greave on one of his legs only. While the archaeological contexts both in Agighiol and Vratsa were problematic and there was some space for uncertainty³⁵, now after the find from Malomirovo-Zlatinitsa, unearthed in regular archaeological excavations, I incline questioning if these items were produced to be thought about as greaves at all³⁶. Because of this further in the text when referring to them as greaves I shall always put a question mark³⁷.

Taking even a further risk I would speculate that all four silver monuments here under discussion do, of course, have a greave shape, but one could also easily recognize in them a very schematic anthropomorphic figure. Logically a question comes

²⁸ Berciu 1969, p. 218; Berciu 1974, p. 52; Alexandrescu 1984, p. 96.

²⁹ Kull 1997, p. 294; Sirbu 2008, p. 269–270.

³⁰ Berciu 1969, p. 219; Berciu 1974, p. 54; Sirbu 2008, p. 270.

³¹ Cf. Andronikos 1984.

³² See Fortenberry 1991 with this and other examples. D. Fortenberry (Fortenberry 1991, p. 626) speaks about “the practice of wearing a greave on only the right leg” explaining it with the fact that “a shield would have provided protection to the left side in battle, leaving the right side of the body more vulnerable and in need of reinforcement”.

³³ Most recently see Marazov 2010 *passim*. See also Berciu 1974, p. 120, who offers two possibilities: “Les cnémides d’argent provenant des sépultures sont des pièces de parade ou peut-être elles ont un caractère funéraire ...”. D. Fortenberry (Fortenberry 1991, p. 627) suggests that “a single metal greave was worn on the right leg as a symbol of status or rank”.

³⁴ An alternative possibility has been offered by T. Taylor (Taylor 1987, p. 128) according to whom “the objects... were used during hunting and its attendant feasting and drinking, to which the scenes on them directly relate”.

³⁵ On Vratsa see Torbov 2005, p. 118–124. See also note 6 here above.

³⁶ Modern research thinks of them as greaves even if there are some doubts how exactly they were used. Marazov 2010, p. 31 points out that the Malomirovo-Zlatinitsa greave is too small for the big size of the deceased and puts forward the supposition that “the greaves had a different, both a cultic and a symbolic meaning (translation D. B.)”. He further speculates that these greaves “mark the military function of the hero, especially when they appear as one specimen only, because they indicate him in such a way as asymmetric (one-legged, crooked) (translation D. B.)”. Theodossiev 2000, p. 53 interprets the Vratsa greave “as an insigne”, insisting that “this type of greaves was used as regalia and symbols of the Great Goddess, the deceased aristocrats’ doctrinal mother”.

³⁷ The image of the appliqué from Letnitsa (Pl. III/6) could not be relevant here because the represented horseman might have had a second greave – see note 9 here above.

whether the small holes mentioned above were not needed for some kind of nails. It will mean that these silver artifacts were covering not someone's leg, but something made of wood. The silver head from the tomb at Peretu (Romania)³⁸ with a small hole in the neck offers a similar case: according to A. E. Farkas this hole suggests that this silver head "was attached to something, perhaps a wooden pole"³⁹. Such a possibility concerning the silver greaves(?) could be rejected or confirmed only with very precise observations on the archaeological site and context of the discovery, as well as with a suitable analysis of the rests around the holes⁴⁰. Obviously this is a wish addressed to an eventual new find in the future.

A research into the myriad of problems related to the four discussed silver items should, of course, handle in details their decoration. Of a high importance seems to me the fact that all four of them are featured with two coiled snakes, represented in a similar way just below the human face⁴¹. Formally, they could be seen as an echo of the spiral bands ending with two opposite volutes beneath the kneecap of an archaic greave from Olympia (Pl. VI/13)⁴², but obviously they are expressing a disparate idea. Though the snake motive is a frequent embellishment of the bronze greaves from the archaic period⁴³, there it differs from the two serpents beneath the face of the four silver items. The two coiled "Thracian" snakes look so uniformly on all four silver greaves(?) that they leave the impression of a fixed image in the Thracian thinking. Even more striking is the fact that this fixed Thracian image is twice narrowly correlated with a horseman (Pl. II/4; III/6).

Probably the most impressive feature of the discussed silver items is the decoration with gilt lines on the faces of two of them (Pl. I/1-2; II/3)⁴⁴. Modern scholarship differs in their definition - some speak about "tattoo marks"⁴⁵, others - about "stripes"⁴⁶. This uncertainty of how are the lines on the human face to be understood is clearly shown by N. Theodossiev, whose definition is with a question mark: "tattooed(?) face"⁴⁷. It is obvious that these differences are not just terminological; they

³⁸ Moscalu 1989, 144-147; 162-164.

³⁹ Farkas 1981, p. 39; Moscalu 1989, p. 162. The idea that the head from Peretu used to be a part of a wooden statue appears already in Marazov 1980, p. 52.

⁴⁰ See Fortenberry 1991, p. 623 who discusses the holes at the edges of the greave from Denda tomb no. 12: "Some of these holes still retain fragments of leather thongs ...".

⁴¹ Coiled snakes are seen also by Farkas 1981, p. 45, and by other authors, while an identification of this motive as snakes coming out of "snail shells" is to be found in Marazov 1998, p. 159.

⁴² Mallwitz, Herrmann 1980, p. 100-101 with pl. 62, no. 1. See also Maaß 1995, p. 149: "die Beinschiene aus dem thrakischen Schatzfund von Wratsa (sic) zeigt sowohl im Knieschmuck als auch in den Schlangengliederungen deutliche Anklänge an solche archaischen Vorbilder".

⁴³ On the decoration of the bronze greaves see Koenigs-Philipp 1980, p. 100-101, pl. 62, no. 1 and pl. 63; Kunze 1991, p. 72-75.

⁴⁴ The gilt lines on the human faces remained undiscussed in one of the recent publications on the matter (Sirbu 2008).

⁴⁵ See for instance Marazov 1980, p. 94 ("The gilt bands which decorate the right half of the goddess' face should be viewed as tattoo marks."), Farkas 1981, p. 45 ("a tattooed face"), Oppermann 1984, p. 119 ("Streifenätowierung") etc.

⁴⁶ Venedikov 1976, p. 66. See also Berciu 1969, p. 219: "Goldstreifen" und Berciu 1974, p. 54: "la face porte des raies".

⁴⁷ Theodossiev 2000, p. 34.

do reflect different understanding of the Thracian culture. In the first case we have to deal with permanent marks, while in the second – with removable ones which could be connected with some special (repeating) occasion(s) in the life of the respective community. Because of this the issue is of a high importance and a correct explanation should be sought for.

When turning to the ancient literary sources one finds at least two reports that might be relevant to the pointed issue. They both date to the 5th century BC and when dealing with their translations one confronts the same lack of uniformity. An eloquent example is Herodotus' information in his book V chapter 6. Back in 1860 it was translated by G. Rawlinson as follows: "*Tattooing among them [the Thracians, D. B.] marks noble birth, and the want of it low birth*". Exactly this understanding of the quoted Herodotus' text is to be found in the authoritative dictionary of H. Liddell and R. Scott, where one finds however a strict distinction between four meanings of the Greek verb στίζω, used by Herodotus in this report. Within the first semantic group the word is translated as "*to mark with a pointed instrument, to prick...*", while within the second semantic group three different meanings are given: "*1. to tattoo, as the Thracians used to do (Hdt 5, 6)...*; *2. to brand, as a mark of disgrace (Hdt 7, 35)...*; *3. merely for the purpose of marking as one's property...*"⁴⁸. No wonder then that in 1890, G. C. Macaulay introduced a translation which reads: "*To be pricked with figures is accounted a mark of noble rank, and not to be so marked is a sign of low birth*". However, recently the "tattoo translation" was revived by D. Grene, who offered the following understanding of Herodotus report: "*Being tattooed is among them [the Thracians, D. B.] a mark of high birth and being free of such marks is for the lowerborn*"⁴⁹.

Hesychius quotes and comments the play "Babylonians"⁵⁰ allowing us to broaden and specify Herodotus' information just presented. It becomes clear that in Antiquity "*those living by the Istros*" were known for tattooing their faces and for wearing pried clothing. The peculiar "*Istrian foreheads*" are described by using the same word we find in the discussed Herodotus' text (στίζω). Despite the certain unclarity concerning the exact meaning of the verb in question, the impression is dominating that these both reports refer to some kind of permanent marks on the faces of the Thracians with high birth living by the Istros River. Such a conclusion coincides with the archaeological material originating precisely from territories of the Istros as it seems reasonable in my opinion to connect the literary evidence with the two greaves(?) with tattooed faces (Pl. I/1; II/3).

If my reasoning is correct, we would be allowed to see in these faces not the Great Goddess as traditionally accepted⁵¹, but Thracians of noble rank, which opens new interpretative possibilities. It is highly indicative that within the group of the

⁴⁸ Liddell, Scott 1897, p. 1431.

⁴⁹ Herodotus (1987), 358.

⁵⁰ Aristoph. Babylon., fr. 90 – see Aristophanes (2007), 156–157.

⁵¹ Marazov 1980, p. 93; Theodossiev 2000, p. 34; Torbov 2005, p. 155; Agre 2006, p. 181; Marazov 2010, passim. Few alternatives have been proposed so far. Mostly because of the ivy wreath, B. Kull thinks about the possibility to define the Vratsa greave as Dionysos (Kull 1997, p. 294). She inclines also to interpret the two greaves from Agighiol as if they represent a couple (Kull 1997, p. 294).

four silver greaves(?) two very distinctive sub-groups are observable: 1) without gilt lines on the face; 2) with gilt lines on the face.

The faces **without** gilt lines (Pl. II/4; III/5) are represented with a necklace of pendant beads, which is almost identical on the two monuments and is not attested on the items with gilt lines on the face. In fact, the same necklace appears also on the silver head from Peretu⁵², indicating most probably a sign of status or rank. A further feature of this sub-group are the human, semi-human and animal figures represented on the lower part of the two monuments. There is a scene which is common for both items – a horseman facing a serpent. It is noteworthy that this scene is among the most popular within Thracian imagery language⁵³. Some obviously meaningful differences between the two artifacts of this sub-group should be underlined. On the one hand, both sides of the *greave(?)* from *Malomirovo-Zlatinitsa* are decorated with human, semi-human and animal figures. Along the left side (viewer's standpoint) a centaur is holding an animal (possibly a young goat) as if offering it to the coiled serpent⁵⁴; under this scene a bird of prey is clutching a rabbit⁵⁵. A horseman, holding a *rython*⁵⁶ and facing the other coiled serpent is represented on the right side (viewer's standpoint) of the *greave(?)*; below, a female figure⁵⁷ is seated holding a cup and a spindle while a maid-servant is standing behind the throne⁵⁸. On the other hand, only the left side (viewer's standpoint) of the *greave(?)* from *Agighiol* is decorated with human figures: above is represented a horseman holding aloft a bow and facing the coiled serpent; below appears a seated male figure holding a bird of prey and a horn or a horn-shaped *rython*⁵⁹. The right side (viewer's standpoint) of this monument lacks of any scenes. It is decorated with a fantastic creature whose body is slim and very long; its identification remains uncertain⁶⁰.

The sub-group representing a face **with** gilt lines (Pl. I/1; II/3) also shows some important common features as both of them are dominated entirely by serpents and dragon-like monsters, neither of the two being decorated with human figures or scenes. Noteworthy is however a slight but meaningful difference between the embellishment on the two sides of the *Vratsa greave(?)*: on the left side (viewer's standpoint) below the tattooed part of the face the dragon-like monster is grasped by a bird of prey, while on the right side the dragon-like monster is imaged with wings. The snake/dragon layouts of these items are traditionally seen as muscle stylizations⁶¹, due to the

⁵² Marazov 1980, p. 52; Farkas 1981, p. 39; Moscalu 1989, p. 147, 163.

⁵³ Boteva 2006, p. 78; Boteva-Boyanova 2006, p. 15.

⁵⁴ This scene is differently read by the researchers. D. Agre (Agre 2006, p. 181) sees it as "a centaur strangling a boar", while according to I. Marazov (Marazov 2010, p. 11) the centaur "is handing a rabbit to the horseman, represented on the right side [of the greave, D. B.] with a *rython* in his hand (translation D. B.)".

⁵⁵ Agre 2006, p. 181.

⁵⁶ According to Agre 2006, p. 181, this is "a representation of the king drinking from a *rython*".

⁵⁷ D. Agre (2006, p. 181) and I. Marazov (2010, p. 12) interpret it as a Goddess.

⁵⁸ Marazov 2010, p. 12-13.

⁵⁹ Marazov 2010, p. 41 describes this male figure as holding "an eagle and a phiale (translation D. B.)".

⁶⁰ Farkas 1981, p. 45 describes it as "a snake-headed monster"; the head of the monster however does not resemble a snake.

⁶¹ Ogenova-Marinova 2000, p. 21 ("la façon de souligner les muscles des jambes, notamment par des dragons marins"; she speaks also of "le monstre marin ... ketos (κῆτος)"); Farkas 1981, p. 45 ("the muscle stylizations are elaborated into a snake-headed monster") etc.

obvious formal similarity with a greave from Olympia (Pl. VI/13)⁶². However a question expects a convincing answer: why does the motive labeled as a muscles stylization appear two sided on silver greaves(?) only with a tattooed face? And why this motive either do not appear at all on a silver greave(?) without gilt lines, i.e. without a sign of tattoo, or appear just one sided?

All these numerous correlations are doubtlessly not a result of a pure coincidence and their thorough research is waiting still its time and correct approach. A crucial point for their understanding would be to try establishing whether these silver artifacts were produced to be thought about as greaves or not. In favor of a possible negative answer speaks in my opinion also their place within the grave: close to the head⁶³. If D. Berciu was right when recognizing among the finds from Agighiol some beads as similar to those represented on the greave(?) without gilt lines on the face⁶⁴, logically emerges the possibility that the greave(?) in question is imaging the deceased. Such a conjecture is supported by the easily recognizable, though very schematic, anthropomorphic figure in the four of them. Because of the whole reasoning presented here above, I incline to see in all four silver items images of the dead representatives of the Thracian elite, produced for the needs of the funeral ceremony⁶⁵. Accordingly, I would prefer speaking not of silver greaves(?) but of silver figures of the deceased, grounding their different decoration with the personal experience, the different social and religious status as well as the military achievements of each one of them.

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⁶² See note 41 here above.

⁶³ Such information is available for both Malomirovo-Zlatinitsa (personal information from the director of the excavation, D. Agre, whom I express my gratitude) and Vratsa (Venedikov 1966, p. 11: at a distance of ca. 60 cm from the head; note however that according to Venedikov a bronze helmet - on it see Torbov 2005, p. 135 with pl. IX, no. 10 - had been broken to pieces during the burial and covered up with stones close to the legs).

⁶⁴ Berciu 1969, p. 218; Berciu 1974, p. 52.

⁶⁵ The funeral character of the silver greaves(?) was supposed also by Berciu 1974, p. 120.

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Dilyana BOTEVA

Department of Ancient History

University of Sofia, Bulgaria

boteva@clio.uni-sofia.bg;

botevadilyana@yahoo.com



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Pl. I. 1. The greave(?) from Vratsa (after Marazov 1997, p. 159); **2.** The greave(?) from Vratsa as discovered (after Torbov 2005, p. 59).



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Pl. II. 3. Greave(?) no 2 from Agighiol (after Berciu 1969, pl. 112); 4. Greave(?) no. 1 from Agighiol (after Berciu 1969, pl. 113).



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Pl. III. 5. The greave(?) from Malomirovo-Zlatinitsa (after Agre 2006, p. 181); 6. The greave(?) from Malomirovo-Zlatinitsa, detail (after National Geographic Bulgaria, December 2006, p. 67).



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8

Pl. IV. 7. The appliqué from Letnitsa (after Venedikov 1996, fig. 15); 8. The greaves from Ruvo, Apulia (after www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/LX/Greaves BMGR1856_12_26_615.html visited on 27.04.2010).



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Pl. V. 9. The greaves from Golyamata Kosmatka (photo St. Dimov; courtesy of D. Dimitrova); 10. Greaves from the tomb of Denda, South Italy (after www.mlahanas.de/Greeks/LX/GreavesSA4330.html visited on 27.04.2010).



Pl. VI. 11. Greaves from Derveni (after Loukopoulou, Hatzopoulos 1980, p. 64-65, fig. 43);
 12. Greaves from Vergina (after Loukopoulou, Hatzopoulos 1980, p. 226, fig. 128);
 13. A greave from Olympia (after Mallwitz, Herrmann 1980, p. 100-101, pl. 62, no. 1).