

# HORSE TRAPPINGS: AN INTERREGIONAL STYLE OF DECORATIVE OBJECTS WITH THRACIANS AND SCYTHIANS

## 1. Local schools of Thracian toreutics

In two articles and in his book on Thracians the first of the authors tried to distinguish several local schools of Thracian toreutics (Bouzek 2005a, 95-104; Bouzek 2005b). As these projects were made directly for the customers who furnished the rare metals, the structure reflects the pattern of local Thracian rules, for whose courts these specialists worked. Drinking for brotherhood strengthened relationships between the leader and his followers. Gold and silver vessels were part of royal treasures, they played role in the exchange of gifts among rulers and in presenting powerful men to the king; in such cases the precious vessels were a pledge of promised fidelity (cf. also Mapáзов 1978, 129-137).

The coastal zone of Thrace adopted soon the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Graeco-Macedonian koine and only in few cases kept some particularities. Of other areas, the nearest to Greek art was the Bithynian school. The Panagjurište hoard was found in central Bulgaria, but it was made by a Greek master in Lampsacus, probably for a Thracian ruler in Bithynia. The weight system used in the vessels corresponds to the system of Lampsacus, as Ivan Venedikov has discovered (Venedikov 1961; cf. also Svoboda, Cončev 1956, 117-172; Dörig 1987), and the iconography of the mythological scenes (Paris' Judgement, Amazons) shows the demands of the customer in Bithynia. Some elements of the style (such as emphasized eyes and muscles, dramatic expression of the face) go beyond standard Greek art. The master probably adapted his own style to Thracian fashion although less so than those who worked for the Scythians. The rhyta are best represented in the Panagjurište set. They were the most popular drinking vessels in Thracian treasures. The nearest parallels to the Panagjurishte vessels are kept in the G. Ortiz collection in Geneva. Of the two rhytons with the head of a hind, one shows Ariadne and Dionysus in the centre, with two satyrs and one maenad, and the second two groups of soldiers fighting each other. They seem to date from the first to second quarter of the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., as does the other rhyton with Janus head – one of the faces is male and the second female. The reputed provenance is 'from the Black Sea area' and they may well have come from northern Turkey, from an area not far away from the production centre of the Panagjurište vessels (Ortiz Collection 1993, nos. 152-154); even if the bearded Dionysus can also be compared with vessels made for

the Scythians. The bowl with Heracles and Auge from the Rogozen treasure can be compared with the style of the Panagjurište treasure, and for stylistic and iconographic reasons it fits well into the Bithynian school (Cf. Ognenova 1987, 47-55; Shefton 1986, 82-90).

The Odrysian school of toreutics (south of Haemus) is characterized by a closer relation to North Greek models, but its figural representations are more graphically rendered and the details, like eyes, are more emphasized. The rhyton from Rozovec shows Silen with two satyrs, Heracles fighting a lion are depicted on several phalerae from destroyed graves at Panagjurište, resembling the decoration of Greek mirrors, as does the Auge bowl from the Rogozen treasure. All of them, as well as other items, show that the rendering of anatomy, even in dramatic movements, caused no problem to toreuts working for Odrysean rulers<sup>1</sup>. As fragments of moulds and punches have been found at the emporium Pistiros, one of the production centres of Odrysian toreutics could well have been there<sup>2</sup>. The floral decoration of a large part of the Rogozen pitchers and calyces may well represent the main style of the Odrysian school. Of other drinking vessels with more modest decoration, calyces and similar cups were especially popular, besides phialae, which started already earlier. Pitchers or jugs, like those from the Rogozen treasure, were also among the most popular shapes in the Odrysian toreutics. The names of Odrysian kings are inscribed on many silver vessels, also on those found in the Rogozen treasure. The whole series of Odrysian and Bithynian art propagates keeping order, law and traditional religion, fulfilling duties towards the society, aristocracy, the king, and keeping traditional Thracian virtues. This propaganda resembles the program of Roman art at the time of Augustus. South Thracian myths depicted in the Odrysian toreutics were near to Greek mythology and they are better understandable for us than the art of northern Thrace.

The set of objects discovered in a tumulus from Dolna Koznica, distr. Kjustendil (Ancient Gold 1997, 104-117, nos. 7-27, by L. Staikova), in south western Thrace shows another previously unknown local school of Thracian toreutics. The magnificent animal combat on no. 7 and especially Heracles fighting lion on no. 20 are masterpieces derived from Macedonian models in a way different from other provinces of Thracian fourth century B.C. art. These items, however, represent a royalty with not less monumental heroic dignity of the deceased than those in found in other parts of Thrace.

Several tombs excavated recently by Daniela Agre in the Strandja area in SE Bulgaria show a particular school, in a way standing between the Bithynian and Odrysian schools, while some links with the South Getic region can also be traced here.

The area between Haemus Mountains and the Danube is less influenced by Greek imports, except for the direct vicinity of Greek Pontic towns. A few excep-

<sup>1</sup> Cf. also the new ones from the graves near Kazanlak, Ancient Gold 1997, nos. 1-7.

<sup>2</sup> For Pistiros cf. Lazov 2002, 243-247.

tions, like the golden ear-rings and wreath from a woman's grave in Vraca in north-west Bulgaria (Venedikov 1975; Marazov 1980; Венедиктов, Герасимов 1975, fig. 196-197), can best be explained as part of a dowry of Greek princess married to a far away king in one of the usual interdynastic marriages such as that of the Getic Meda married to Philip II. Vessels in a style less influenced by Greek art come from the area north of Haemus; they were apparently made for the aristocracy of the Triballoi. Besides Greek influence reflections of Persian art are also apparent.

The most important set of silver vessels from the area of the Triballoi was found at Rogozen village, distr. Vraca. The treasure was probably hidden in a hurry during a time of great danger; it contained 165 silver vessels, 31 of them are gilded. In total it weighs twenty kilograms (Fol 1989; Fol, Nikolov, Hoddinott 1986; Gergova 1989; Bouzek 2005b; Kull 1997; Marazov 1996). The bowls (phialae) are the most common shape; 108 bowls, 54 pitchers and three cups were part of the hoard. The set may have served two groups of 54 members drinking together, each sharing a pitcher with his partner. The set was probably put together over several generations. It contains objects produced in the 5<sup>th</sup> century (the earliest vessel dates from the time of the Persian occupation of Thrace), while most of them date from the 4<sup>th</sup> century, and several vases from its end. The hoard probably belonged to the ruler or to sanctuary and it was hidden probably at the time of the Celtic invasions around 300, or in 279 B.C. It belonged to a sanctuary dedicated to a female deity. Among the figural vessels representations of goddesses predominant; she may well be Bendis. Large part of the undecorated vases and the jugs with leaf calyx derive from the Odrysian school; some of the bowls bear names of Odrysian rulers

The golden juglet from the Vraca grave in the same area depicts twice Apollo driving a quadriga; it is a Triballian parallel to the Apolline scene on one of the Panagjurište rhyta (Vendikov 1975; Marazov 1980). The model for the greave was the Greek cnemidae with the head of Gorgon, but the elaboration is in totally different spirit; the stylisation has parallel in greaves from the princely grave in Agighiol in Romania. The hoard from Bukjovci comes from the territory of the Triballoi as well and can best be ascribed to the school of this area.

The treasure found at Letnica, distr. Loveč, in the central part of northern Bulgaria consisted of small silver plaques which originally came from a horse harness (Венедиктов 1996, for drawings Kull 1997). On eight of the plaques a rider (predecessor of Thracian Hero) is depicted together with other symbols, among them with the head of a female companion or deity. On other plaques there are male and female deities; the sacred marriage and a woman feeding a snake with three heads. On other plaques from northern Bulgaria predators are shown attacking herbivores. Similar plaques were part of the treasure from Lukovit (distr. Loveč), where Thracian Hero-Rider is again depicted (Чичикова 1980; Ancient Gold 1997, nos. 42-49). In a barrow in Kravevo (distr. Tărgoviște) the fight of gryphon with lion stands out; it is close to Scytho-Greek adaptations of the motif of

animal fights in a barrow in Kralevo (distr. Tărgoviște) The Letnica set was found in the area of the so-called “democratic” Thracians, those who lived without a centralized monarchy, and its masters, though closely related to the artistic school of the Triballoi, have shown here some particularities in execution and style.

The region around Sveštari and Sborjanovo was apparently the centre of the Getic kingdom, and several toreutic works from north-eastern Bulgaria form a particular group showing another kind of splendour, nearer to Greek art than the two previous schools situated north of the Haemus, but their style again has its particularities, and the details of anatomy, while being more expressive, are generally more schematically rendered than in the Odrysian figural art. The most important set comes from the hoard of Borovo (Ancient Gold 1997, nos. 173-177). The first rhyton shows Dionysiac scene in two rows the figures in the lower register remind one of the Scythian representations. Satyrs and maenads in the upper register can also be compared to some North Pontic items from Scythian tombs. The three other rhytons, with head of Sphinx, of horse and of bull are in identical style and they resemble also the famous rhyton from the Adygei<sup>3</sup>. The bowl with two handles and griffin in the centre is reminiscent of the plaques with griffins from the Kralevo hoard (Ginev 1983; Ancient Gold 1997, nos. 37-40), which is otherwise characteristic by its filigree bordure, similarly used also on other plaques from the same hoard, four of them with the head of Heracles and other with rosette, while this is also used as decorative motif on the item decorating the horse's forehead from the same hoard. The Pegassos from Vranovo, distr. Razgrad (Ancient Gold 1997, no. 61; Gabrovski, Koljanov 1980, 77-82), expresses a monumentality well comparable to the vessels from the Borovo hoard.

North Getic art is known from four rich graves and from sixteen hoards, one of them being only intrusion in the otherwise different milieu in the Rogozen hoard (Alexandrescu 1983, 1984; cf. also Bouzek 2005b). The Getic art has a handful of earlier predecessors, like in the Gârčinovo matrix and its character shows that most of its models were in woodcarvings. But Getic silverware was produced only from the middle third of the 4<sup>th</sup> to the beginnings of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. It ended apparently at the time of the Celtic campaigns.

North Getic art is closer to the Persian and Scythian tradition than the arts of central and southern Thrace, but it developed an autonomous style which differed from all its neighbours. Not only that the movements are stopped here and models schematised against the more naturalistic Scythian Animal Art, but also the elements taken over from Iranian art were transformed and re-stylised (Venediktov 1969, 5-43).

The most popular subject in North Getic art is the horseman-hunter, the hero of the royal hunt. The physical training of a hunter was a necessary part of education even in Macedonia, where the son of the king could rest on a kline (no more on a throne with women) after he had killed a boar by his own hand. On the

<sup>3</sup> Last survey Bouzek 2003, 138f. figs. 1-2.

Agighiol helmet a row of mounted warriors is depicted; on the Poiana helmet the hero kills a ram in the position similar to the pictures of Mithra killing the bull. Our royal hero also uses to drink from a rhyton (on the Baiăceni helmet), on the Agighiol greave he is represented as a rider, as a banqueteer, and with an eagle or similar bird of prey, who in other scenes attacks a hare. In other representations an animal predator attacks grass eaters. Many predators and other beings consisting of animal and human parts resemble Near Eastern representations in Persian Pre-Achaemenid art. Of other animals, the eight-legged stag is especially characteristic. Stag was the totem animal of several Eurasian nomads. The double number of legs symbolizes the swiftness of its running – such stag must have been the fastest animal in the world.

Most of the monuments of North Getic art served, as in the south, to represent the king and his most important followers. North Thracian art, reflecting a less stabilized state of affairs, stresses notably the military and hunting skills of the kings. But this is only one level of explanation. North Getic silver armour was used in ceremonies, North Getic silverware for ritual feasts. The apotropaic signs were to protect the bearer of the armour in the rituals, where he represented the divine Hero. The Geti emphasized the military qualities of their kings not only because of their less settled state of their affairs, but also because of their close relations to the Iranian religion and to the Eurasian shamanism, usual with the Scythians.

## 2. Scythian artistic schools

Scythian art derived from the earlier Geometric art of the Pontic steppe and Siberia, it took much from the Near Eastern art especially during the time of Scythian alliance with the Assyrians (Bouzek 2001; Damerji 1999). The Ionizing period of Scythian art starts in the third quarter of the 7<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Among the first clear examples are the mirror and the rhyton from Kelermes. The lions, the sphinxes and the Potnia Theron on the mirror, the griffon, goats and centaur on the rhyton can be compared with Late Protocorinthian and Middle White Goat II styles. Ephesian art, now better known, shows a mixture of Greek and Anatolian elements (Bammer 1988; cf. Галанина 1997; Isik 2001). A group of objects in Early Scythian gout from the Greek and Lydian towns (Boghazköy, Sardis, Ephesus etc.) represent a more sophisticated artistic level of the Early Scythian style. They were probably made in Ionian cities; they are much superior to what is known from Tli, Norsuntepe and Irmiler (fig. 1). They represent the style preferred by the Scythians and used by them<sup>4</sup>.

The ibex is the most common animal represented, the boar takes second place, while there are also figures of wild cat (lynx?), hare and a winged monster. Most of the items are of bronze and bone, a few of silver (fig. 1). P. Amandry has shown Greek predecessors of this style, known in Late Geometric art, and thus also this preparation for later Scythian art (Amandry 1965). The gold plaque in repoussé

<sup>4</sup> Their list was composed by P. Amandry (1965) and enlarged by R. Stucky (1985, 1987), while new finds from the Austrian excavations in the Artemision of Ephesus have been published by A. Bammer (1988).



Fig. 1. Scythian-gout Ionian figurines, partly decorating horse trappings. 1 - Zürich, cll. Mildenberg, 2 and 5 - Ephesus, 3 - "Luristan", 4 - Sardis, 6 - Amlash, 7 - Ionia. Ivory and bronze (after Bouzek 1997).

with a monkey and a bird from the Melgunov tumulus and the ivory lion heads with amber-inlaid eyes from Smela are other examples of Archaic works probably made directly for upper class Scythians, in this case probably in early 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. Most of the colonies in the Black Sea were founded by the Milesians, partly in alliance with their more northern Ionian compatriots. The Kostromskaja stag and the Kelermes panther may be quoted among the most characteristic examples of this 6th century B.C. art, besides some objects known from Hungary and Romania (cf. Bouzek 2001; Kossack 1983, 1987). The most sophisticated items found further west came from the Witaszkowo (Vettersfelde) treasure kept in Berlin are also their work. The famous fish from there is the work of an Ionian artist from c. 540/530 B.C. (Alexandrescu 1997; Boardman 1994) and its Etruscan parallels only document how, after the troubles with the Persians around 540, This early

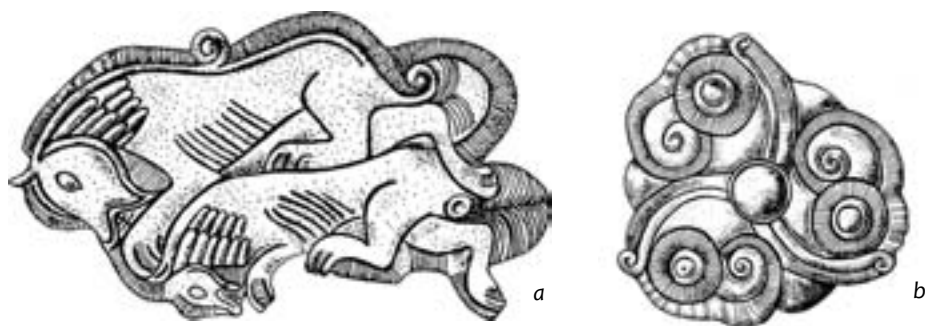


Fig. 2 ab. Vraca, Mogilanska mogila, plaques decorating horse harness (cheek. pieces, silver) (after Bouzek 2005).

Ionizing period of Scythian art ended in early 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., when Attic masters took over the role of the Ionians (Bouzek 1990, 116f., 1991).

The 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. is not well represented in Scythia, but the Animal style continued. The Maikop plaque with bird predator and fish from Maikop, Žurovka, the jewellery from the kourgans of the Seven Brothers and from Nymphaeum are good examples of this stage. Attic pottery replaced the Ionian in the Scythian milieu already at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup> century in the area, but the art of gold jewellery kept more of the Ionizing tradition, while its more 'barbarian' variety shows only few traits of Greek inspiration.

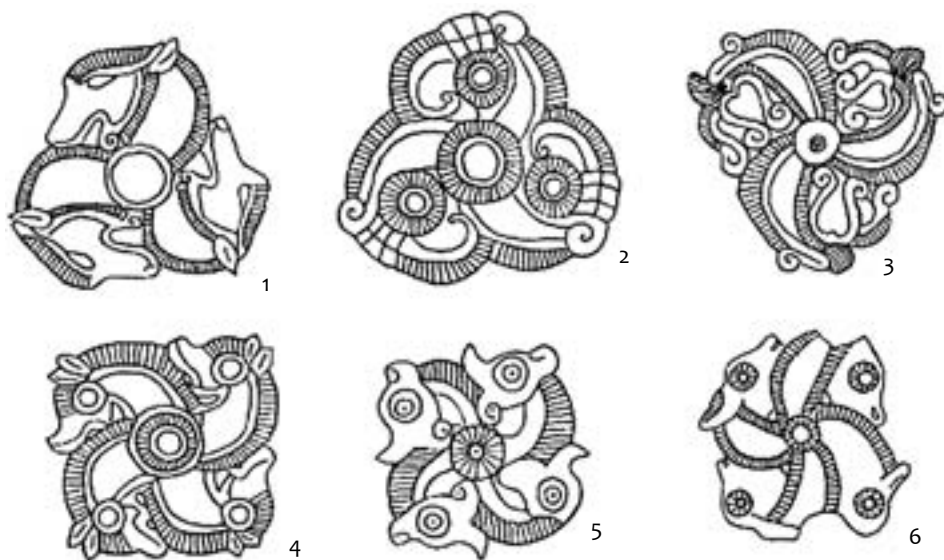


Fig. 3. Decorative plaques of horse harness from Thrace and SW Scythia. 1, 3-5 - Craiova, 2 - Letnica, 6 - Kurgan Kozel (after Bouzek 2005).



Fig. 4. Gold plaque, decoration of a cup, from Zavadskaja mogila 1, Ukraine (after catalogue *Gold der Steppe* – Archäologie der Ukraine, Schlesswig 1991).

Among the first oeuvres of the Graeco-Scythian art of the 4<sup>th</sup> century is the comb from the Solokha barrow, well comparable with the Dexileos stele in Athens. Most of the stylistic features can be compared with the Attic 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. style, though some elements may speak also for North Greek and Macedonian participation among the artists working for their Scythian customer. The best 4<sup>th</sup> century artistic objects produced for the Scythians by leading Greek masters are usually divided into several workshop groups called after the best-known examples: Groups of the

Kul-Oba pectoral, of Kul-Oba Sphinx bracelet (with few Scythianizing traits), of the Čertomlyk amphora and of Kul-oba torques with Scythian riders. Another group is around the Solocha phiale and scabbard; it is usually followed by the group of scabbards and goryta with representations of Achilles' life, etc. (cf. Schiltz 1994; Artamonov, Forman 1970; Rolle et alii 1991).

The number of workshops of this spectacular art hardly exceeded ten, while other workshops were more modest and they worked in traditional nomadic Animal Style. The scenes with Achilles and the ex-vota in Achilles' sanctuaries in the NW corner of the Black Sea (Leuke Island and several near Olbia) show that the hero was also admired and worshipped by the Scythians. The Herodotus' version on the origin of the Scythians from Heracles and the Snake Goddess is reflected also on the Kul Oba vase. According to the refinement of chronology of Scythian royal tombs by S. Monachov (mainly based on revision transport amphorae) (Монахов 1999), these burials ended at the end of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, while only few of them are later than the defeat of Scythian king Ateas by Philip II in 339 B.C.



Fig. 5-6. Two cheek-pieces from Binjova mogila near Kazanlak, gold (after the preliminary publications by G. Kitov).





Fig. 7. Horse front decorative plaque, Ostruša mogila, silver (after the preliminary publications by G. Kitov).



Fig. 8. Horse front decorative plaque in Prague, from eastern Serbia, silver (after Bouzek 2005).

### 3. Horse trade

A class of decorative parts of horse harness, with some Greek inspiration transmitted via Thrace and in Scythian by the more indigenous Animal Style, is known in western Scythia and Thrace. It consisted from decorative sheets, of ornaments decorating the front of horse's head, of lateral parts of horse-bits, of other items decorating the bridle, crossings of straps and other plaques. The Thracian decorative plaques show less sense for the integral treatments of the animal body. Details are more emphasized, individual parts of the body separated; legs, heads, protomae and even the hind parts of the body appear also



Fig. 9. Kazanlak tomb, horses with decorative trappings (after Bouzek 2005).

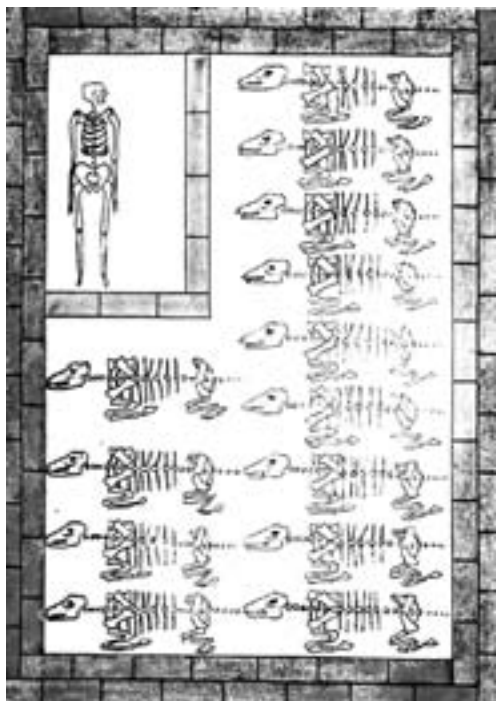


Fig. 10. Bratroljubskij kurgan, interment with horses (after Minns, Scythians and Greeks).



Fig. 11. Cheek-piece of horse-bit, fragment, Pistiros, mus. Septemvri.



Fig. 12. Silver rhyton in Prague, reputedly from Bulgaria (after Bouzek 2005).

as isolated items changed into spirals and similar ornaments showing torsion. Spirals and triquetra composed of animal protomae or heads are popular here, as well as other combination of elements, where the original animal can hardly be recognized any more. This artistic style of decorative plaques of horse's harness started in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and continued during the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and even later. Though the ornaments of horse's forehead and the plaques are basically of the types identical with decorative pieces of armour from all parts of Thrace, the particular style of the group of objects differs in many traits from the local schools discussed above. Details are more emphasized, individual parts of the body separated; legs, heads, protomae and even the hind parts of the body appear also as isolated and changed into spirals and similar ornaments showing torsion. Spirals and triquetra composed of animal protomae or heads are popular here, as well as other combination of elements, where the original animal can hardly be recognized any more (figs. 2-3, 5-8). This artistic style of decorative plaques of horse's harness started in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and continued during the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., and even later. Though the ornaments of horse's forehead and the plaques are basically of the types identical with decorative pieces of armour from all parts of Thrace, the particular style of the group of objects differs in many traits from the local schools known as yet.

This Scytho-Thracian koine of ornaments of horse trappings can best be explained by the horse trade between the Thracians and Scythians. For all nomadic people there was the question of prestige to get the possibly best horses even from distant areas. Caesar wrote how much the Celts cared to procure good horses, all sources about later nomads in the Pontic steppe, up to the Mongols and Tatars, mention developed and sophisticated horse trade. Thracians and Scythians were much interested in good horses – for practical reasons and for prestige as well. Much effort was given to decoration of horse trappings (figs. 1-3, 5-8), as represented also in the Kazanlak wall painting (fig. 9). Graves with sacrificed horses were typical for Scythians (fig. 10) and Thracians as well. Tradition in horse trappings was kept very long, as shown by the Pistiros cheek-piece of bridle reminding one of much earlier Thracian Geometric bronzes (fig. 11) (Lazov 2002).

But these peoples and their neighbours shared also their interest in representing animals in dynamic curves, the Animal Style, though the Thracians showed more inclination to geometrisation and dissolution of the animal body (cf. figs. 2-6). Another phenomenon was also the common drinking habits, notably drinking from rhyta, which influenced also the Greeks who took over this Oriental drinking vessel into their repertory (fig. 12) (Svoboda, Cončev 1956; Маразов 1978).

As in later times, Moldavia was a country through which most of these links between the North Pontic steppe and the Balkans were transmitted, and its archaeology has yielded already much evidence showing this position in more detail. For this knowledge we all are to a large extent grateful to Prof. Niculița, to whose rounded birthday this volume is devoted<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. esp. *Фрако-скифские культурные связи 1975*, (Studia Thracica II), София and the acts of the 9th international congress of Thracology in Valul lui Vodă (Niculița, Zanoci, Băț 2004).

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