

# **MEGALITHIC CULTURE IN ANCIENT THRACE**

**SOUTH-WEST UNIVERSITY "NEOFIT RIJSKI"**

**UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CENTER FOR ANCIENT**

**EUROPEAN AND EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN CULTURES**



# MEGALITHIC CULTURE IN ANCIENT THRACE



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SOUTH-WEST UNIVERSITY “NEOFIT RILSKI”  
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FOR ANCIENT EUROPEAN AND EASTERN  
MEDITERRANEAN CULTURES

MEGALITHIC CULTURE IN ANCIENT  
THRACE

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# Preface

The International Scientific Seminar Dionysus in Thrace. Megalithic Culture in Ancient Thrace was held in August 2014 (26-29) in Zlatograd. Sponsor of the seminar was the University Research Center for Ancient European and Easterly Mediterranean Cultures at South-West University "Neofit Rilski" in partnership with the Regional Ethnographic Museum of Plovdiv and the Space Research and Technology Institute, Branch of Stara Zagora at Bulgarian Academy of Science.

The seminar was attended by senior Bulgarian and foreign scientists who explore different aspects of the megalithic culture in the Pirin, Rila and Rhodope Mountains and Central Sredna Gora.

*Carl A. P. Ruck* (Boston University, USA) presented the problem of the connection between the *Mushroom Stones* and the cult of Dionysus, Orpheus and other creatures from classical mythology, which are depicted as anthropomorphic mushrooms.

*Alexey Stoev* and *Penka Muglova* (Space Research and Technology Institute, Branch of Stara Zagora, BAS Bulgaria) expounded *Arhaeoastromical Aspects of Thracian Megalithic Temples in the Eastern Rhodopes*, with a major emphasis on the rock sanctuary in Tatul and the cave womb *Tangardak Kaya*.

*Angel Yankov* and *Grozdelina Georgieva* (Regional Ethnographic Museum of Plovdiv, Bulgaria) have traced the ethnographic aspects of the megalithic culture in the Eastern Rhodopes and in particular the traditional rituals related to healing practices carried out in our days at the rock known as The step of St. George in Zlatograd and the healing rock that involves squeezing through it in the megalithic complex The Crocodile near Kirkovo, and at the Dupcheniya kamak (The pierced stone) near Rakovski, etc..

*Alexey Gotcev* (National institute of Archaeology with Museum, BAS Bulgaria) presented the archaeological aspects of megalithic temples in the Western Rhodopes. Vassil Markov (South-West University "Neofit Rilski" Bulgaria) has explained the problem of cultural heritage of megalithic sanctuary Krastilski Vrah in the valley of the Struma River, associated with traditional folk festival honoring the Feast of Ascension.

Doctoral students from the Department of Cultural Studies at South-West University "Neofit Rilski" have discussed the themes of megalithic thracian sanctuaries from *Prefecture* of Evros, Greece - *Stavros Kiotsekoglou* (Greece, South-West University "Neofit Rilski" Bulgaria); Thracian megalithic temples of Central Sredna Gora - *Nikoleta Petkova* (South-West University "Neofit Rilski" Bulgaria) and Anthropological aspects of megalithic Thracian sanctuaries in the Western Rhodopes - *Anton Genov* (South-West University "Neofit Rilski" Bulgaria).

This compendium is the result of international scientific seminar and includes seven texts presented by the participants. The collection is computerized and is published on the website of the University Research Center for Ancient European and Easterly Mediterranean Cultures <http://satrae.swu.bg>.

Dimitriya Spasova

# The Mushroom Stones: Dionysus, Orpheus and the Wolves of War

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**Carl A.P. Ruck**

*Boston University USA*

Throughout the region of ancient Thrace, natural rock formations, sometimes modified to enhance their likeness to mushrooms, show evidence of sanctification, and similarly rock paintings suggest fungal anthropomorphisms. Since most scholars have assumed that mushrooms bizarrely were unnoticed in Classical antiquity, it should be pointed out that many Greek and Anatolian tombstones from all periods survive in the shape more correctly recognized as a mushroom. The authoritative study of Greek burial customs identifies them as mushrooms:

It would be easier to accept these as phalloi if any one of them bore the slightest resemblance to the organ with which the Greek artists were so well familiar. The only group of objects, which all these phalloi can be said to resemble, is fungi, mushrooms and toadstools. The asymmetry of the glans, the duct, and the testicles are never shown, and the knob is often flat or spherical.

The deity of the tombstones was Dionysus, presiding over the psychoactive alternation of consciousness appropriate for the mediation with the realm of the dead. Thus some sites combine the mushroom stones with rock formations carved to serve as a wine press. The god's name is a translation from the Semitic *Bakuy* into the Sanskrit equivalent as *Diounsis*, the perfect passive participle of the Sanskrit root *div-* for 'lament.' Both names survive into Classical Greek as Bacchus and Dionysus. This thus an assimilation into Classical antiquity of the widespread religious paradigm of the lamented male consort of the Great Goddess, whose many names include Petriyah (PTR, Hebrew for 'mushroom'), whose consort was Ba'al, demonized in Christianity as Beelzebub, the 'Lord of the Flies.' In Greek she became Cybele and her consort Attis. They both were called with many other names. The association with flies probably suggests a particular mushroom, whose name and folkloric traditions associate it with flies, the *Amanita muscaria* (fly agaric), well documented as the fairytale mushroom.

Moreover, many fanciful figures from Classical mythology can be seen as fungal zoomorphic creatures or anthropomorphized mushrooms. None is clearer than the Gorgon Medusa, whose head the hero Perseus harvested like the magical 'Golden Apple of the Hesperides' with a pruning hook, an unlikely weapon for anything except a botanical specimen. After plucking the Gorgon head, he placed it in an apple picker's bag called a *kibisis*. Perseus is specifically cited as the founder of Mycenae at the spot where he plucked a mushroom,



renaming it for the *mykes*. There could be no event more central to the identity of the Indo-European migrants from the Asiatic highlands of the mythical Hyperboreans into the lands of Greece.

Thus the Indo-European Mycenaean Age Greeks share in the whole mythopoeia widespread throughout Europe of Druidism, the sanctity of the oak tree and its symbiotic parasites of the mistletoe hanging from its branches and the mycorrhizal fungi as the fruits sprouting at its base. This includes the myth of Ixion, named for the mistletoe or ‘urine-twig’, which suggests the common theme of the mushroom’s psychoactive metabolite in urine; and the assembly of fairy creatures and fungal-capped gnomes, with fairy food and tables, who materialize from the toadstools at the base of the sacred trees. The figure of Psyche, whose name means ‘butterfly’, is traditionally depicted with fairy wings. Since the Gorgon Medusa is such a fairy anthropomorphism of the mushroom, even she can be imagined with butterfly wings.

Athena, herself, testifies to her past involvement in the fungal metamorphosis by wearing the Gorgon head as a commemoration of her former self. She was born anew as the daughter of her father Zeus when he swallowed the goddess Metis just as she metamorphosed into a fly. The Athena/Gorgon complex survived into medieval folklore as the fairy mushroom queen Melusina, from whom the ruling dynasties of Europe claimed empowerment. Zeus is further implicated in the lore of the fly agaric mushroom by his amorous escapade with the cow maiden Io, tormented by the estrus sting of the cow fly, which is the ghost of her tender Argus.

Thus Zeus and his most beloved daughter are central to the Druidic complex. Zeus was worshiped in the ancient oak grove at Dodona, and Athena bore the iconographic emblem of the olive tree as a transmutation of the fungal sacrament. Heracles harvested the olive for the sacred grove of the Altis at Olympia among the Hyperboreans, where it was the zoomorphic golden antler of a reindeer, notorious for its fondness for the shamanic flight induced by the sacred mushroom, and the urine metabolite. The theme persists in European hagiography and folklore, so that the motif of the deer hunt connotes the search for the psychoactive mushroom.

As with Mycenae, there could be no figures more central to the Classical Greek identity than Zeus, Athena, and Dionysus. The birth of Zeus into his Hellenic manifestation in the Dictaeon Cave on Crete makes his mother Rhea an analogue of Cybele and her Mesopotamian, Semitic, and Anatolian sisters. The creatures that materialized from her fingers as Rhea grabbed the ground in parturition are additional fungal anthropomorphisms as capped dancers, dactyls, and weird little men of the Mysteries of the Kabeiroi. The Indo-Europeans from Hyperborea encountered mushroom cults already well established in Europe and the Mediterranean since, as shamans testify, the plants themselves communicate their indwelling spiritual prowess directly to the gifted herb gatherers. The arrival of the migrants from the north, moreover, was probably anticipated by the earlier spread of the Persian *haoma* cult by the Magi Zoroastrian

priests, who may have been operative as early as the mid second millennium BCE. The cult would eventually become Mithraism in the Roman Empire.

Ancient Thrace was seen as the origin of the cult of Dionysus. Thrace was known for its wine whose potency was of epic proportions. In the *Odyssey*, it required dilution with twenty parts water to tame its intoxication. In the Roman period, it still was so potent that the consul appointed to the region reported that it required eight parts of water for dilution to render it safe to drink.

Odysseus used it to intoxicate the Cyclops Polyphemus among the Thracian Cicones. As late as the fourth century BCE, the Thracian King Kotys got so drunk on it that he rushed to his bedchamber to sleep with the goddess, Kotytto, after whom he was named. She was a Thracian version of Athena, who was more like her pre-Hellenic antecedent as the Gorgon Medusa than her pacified versions celebrated in the cities of the south. The sexual shamanic rapture with the goddess empowered the king and the warrior brotherhoods by a communion with the indwelling spirit of the wine's powerful intoxicant.

Since the potency of wine is limited by natural fermentation to approximately ten to fourteen percent alcohol, the Thracian obviously was greatly fortified with herbal additives. When Trajan was fighting the Dacians, a large mushroom was brought to him supposedly inscribed with a warning to cease his campaign against them. Apparently as late as the second century CE, this sacrament of divine empowerment and wolf-warrior brotherhoods was a mushroom. The scabs on the Amanita's cap are often seen as strange writing. Trajan is said to have commented that because of the mushroom cult the Dacians go more confidently than other men to their deaths since they believe in a blessed continued existence in the afterlife. The ensign of the Dacian warriors was Draco, a serpent with wolf's head, dating back to end of the second millennium BCE. It identifies the soldiers as a fraternity of wolves, who shared the wolf sacrament. The wolf-headed serpent can be traced back to elite warriors among the Persians called the *haoma*-wolves, and as late as the fifth-century BCE, a Greek doctor recorded that the Persian king drank urine to access ecstasy, like that of King Kotys.

These Dacian/Thracian (Scythian, Persian) warriors partake of the same tradition of the mushroom-induced battle fury documented for the Nordic berserkers, indicating a cult widespread throughout Europe. These warriors metamorphosed into wolves or bears on the battlefield, a tradition associated with the Thracians in antiquity.

The Thracians had a very ancient tradition of a drug-shaman in residence in a cave in the sacred mountain. He advised the king, still active at least until the first century CE, and bore the generic title of deity as Zalmoxis, named for the bearskin in which his mother wrapped him as an infant. Paris, the prince of Troy is a Greek version of this figure, as are the mythical twin founders of Rome.

The ecstatic deity who presided over these cults was known in fifth-century Athens and survived into Imperial Rome. In Aristophanes' *Wasps* (422 BCE), the obscene routine of two

Thracian slaves identified the comic phallus with the Thracian mushroom as the sacrament of the Persian warrior cult. The rites involved a revel or orgy, with much running about, buzzing deep-sounded brass wooden flutes, frenzy-inducing clanging of brazen cymbals, the shrill twanging of strings, miming of bulls bellowing, drumming like rolls of subterranean thunder—wonderful horror and terror. The women were called *Bassarides*, named for their Thracian fox head caps, complete with ears or the entire animal, and they materialized as wolves, as well, the two animals being interchangeable in their symbolism as canines. The fox head was stylized as the Thracian/Phrygian cap.

The revel was associated with Dionysus/Bacchus in his persona representing the wild mushroom, which would be domesticated as the fungal growth responsible for fermentation, and the other wild plants like ivy, bryony and smilax, which resemble the grape vine, but are toxic in their natural state, yielding psychoactive tropane alkaloids and certain lysergic acid amides. These all were among the additives commonly added as fortifying agents to wine, which was seen as a cultivated mediator between the primitive toxic antecedents that predated the art of viticulture. It is these variable ingredients that account for the highly intoxicating properties of wine, even in small amounts and commonly drunk diluted with three or four parts water over a period of many hours.

The advent of the god Dionysus with his gift of the cultivated intoxicant of wine was opposed by mythical figures like Pentheus of Thebes and the Thracian Wolf-man Lycurgus. In these myths, the deity's opponents represent the primitive toxins that predated the art of viticulture, and the involvement of the wolf symbolism identifies them as manifestations of the darker aspects of Apollo in his pre-Olympian association with lycanthropy and the magical mushrooms fancifully called the 'apples' of Apollo. The motif survived into European folklore in fairytales like *Little Red Riding Hood*, whose red tripping cap is a survival of the Thracian fox head hat. The urine metabolite became an alchemical secret reserved for the elite, either as a secret sacrament or an occult symbol for some of the most prestigious orders of knighthood.

Apollo's lycanthropic involvement as a wolf-god (*lykos*) was given a false etymology, not derived from the 'wolf', but from the 'light' of the sun and its solar illumination. *Lykios* was fancifully associated with the Latin *lux* for 'light' and Greek *leukós* for 'white', and Apollo's epithet is explained as derived from 'the sun shining and making everything white.' This is a blatant whitewash. The god's tenuous claim to the light of the day, however, is reflected in the word for the dangerous marginal time of the dawn and the twilight as the 'wolf-light' (*lykóphos*), a theme that has entered popular culture. Similarly, the dangerous time when werewolves are abroad, the 'wolf-walk' (*lykábas*), is forced to mean the 'path of the sun' and glossed as a period of time, perhaps a year.

The darker Apollo is the warrior god honored by the temple at Bassai and involved in the lycanthropy of the Spartan elite at the cave at Taenarum for the annual war declared against their Helot slaves, as reflected in the dog Cerberus and the lycanthropy of Euripides' *Herakles*

(416 BCE). The Spartans also had a cult of lycanthropic warriors and a shamanic tradition of the Wolf-man Lyncurgus. The Spartans euphemistically reinterpreted Apollo's lycanthropy, invoking him as the protector of their flocks from the depredation of wolves. The deadly twanging of his poisoned arrows was harmonized as the spell cast by the strumming of his lyre, and he was summoned as 'striker' to alleviate the stroke of plague.

The Greeks, however, saw in his name the title of 'Destroyer', and Apollo is implicated in his pre-Olympian identity with the offering of human victims. The victim is sacrificed in the persona of the deity, thus cleansing Apollo of his darker identity. Such is most clearly demonstrated in the myth of Oedipus, who represents the fungal anthropomorphism that is the antithesis of the god who presides over the oracle at Delphi.

The notorious linkage of Apollo with his half-brother Dionysus partakes of this paradigm. Dionysus can be called upon to cleanse his brother of his pre-Olympian contamination, as in assuming patronage of the bacchanalia celebrated at Delphi at the original site of the oracle at the Corycian Cave, which was discovered by a pack of wolves from the wolf land of Lycia. In reciprocal fashion, Apollo's favorites stand in as surrogates for Dionysus in his psychoactive manifestations that predate the art of viticulture.

In the myths of the opponents to the advent of the cult of the wine, the enemies of Dionysus stand in as ritual victims to the forces of primitivism, personified as Apollonian surrogates, cleansing Dionysus of his pre-Olympian identity. The women of the mountain revels are bacchantes; they are never called Dionysiads, with its connotations of Dionysian transcendence. Nor do they ever drink wine.

The clue to what the maddened women of the revel were doing is the emblem of the rite, the thyrsus, a hollow reed stuffed symbolically with ivy. It was the container for the wild magical plants plucked by the root cutters or herbalists. The thyrsus was also called a narthex, the latter transparently signifying the container for the narcotic. Narthex survives as the portal or porch of a church, signifying that the entrance to sacred space is through the medicine cabinet. In common Latin culinary nomenclature, the stipe of a mushroom was called its thyrsus. Thus the mushroom itself was seen as the prototype of the herb gatherer's narthex, since the psychoactive toxins of the *Amanita* species are confined mostly to its cap, which now by this metaphor represents the ivy or other wild toxic plants gathered into the narcotic receptacle of the root-cutter's narthex, the stipe or 'trunk/stalk' of the reed-container.

The gathering of magical plants requires ritualized etiquette to address the indwelling spirits, often involving sexual mimesis and sacrificial restitution for what has been taken. Dionysus materialized among the maenads, dressed as a woman, and the devotees were sexually assaulted by satyrs who materialized as personifications of the deity's spirit inherent in the wild plants that predated the advent of viticulture. Amid a multiplicity of herbalist fantasies, ultimately the plant picked was a sacrificial victim, as a surrogate for what had once been a

slaughtered human, representing the forces of primitivism and prototypically the mushroom, whose head was placed atop the thyrsus.

This means that ‘suffering’ Pentheus and the ‘wolf-man’ Lycurgus represent the wild antecedents to viticulture, personified representatives of the pre-Olympian Dionysus or the darker image of Apollo resident in the wolf sacrament of the primordial mushroom. In Euripides’ *Bacchae*, the god taunts Pentheus, saying that he doesn’t know who he is, and Pentheus answers correctly with his name, unaware that he is the agony against which the ecstasy is measured.

The figure of the Thracian Orpheus can be traced back to the mid-second millennium and he appears in mythical tradition dated in the generation before the Trojan War. He was probably originally the traditional shaman in residence on the holy mountain of the Thracians/Dacians, empowering their chieftains and warriors with the wolf sacrament of the sacred mushroom.

Orpheus, however, is not known to the Homeric and Hesiodic tradition (recorded in the eighth century BCE), and he emerges into prominence in the sixth century associated with the philosopher Pythagoras of Samos as part of the Ionian Enlightenment, which reflects greater contact with the Persians and Mesopotamian science and astrology. The Persian Magus Zaratas (Zoroaster) initiated Pythagoras himself into the *haoma* sacrament in Egypt. Pythagoras was largely the source of what became the religion of Orphism, derived from visionary journeys from sacred caves through the agency of the wolf sacrament. This gave a new interpretation to the Thracian cult, which included reincarnation and aspiration for spiritual purity.

The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice evolved in this sixth-century context, and Orpheus is an analogue of Pentheus and Lycurgus as an enemy of the bacchants and another personification of the wolf sacrament, whose death liberates Apollo from his darker persona and mediates the transition to the Dionysus of the cultivated fungus and viticulture. The harvested head of Orpheus became oracular sites in a cave on Lesbos and in several sacred caves on the holy mountains throughout Thrace. The message was read off of the head, like the mushroom presented to Trajan.

Eurydice was originally one of the bacchants who tore Orpheus to pieces, personified as the sufferer like Pentheus in the figure of his brother Linos. Like the maenads whom Lycurgus hunted from the sacred mountain, Eurydice was a dryad, daughter of the druidic sacred oak. Eurydice is a persona of Persephone and the failure of Orpheus to resurrect her from the netherworld is a misogynist repudiation of the Eleusinian Mystery, which promised a blissful continuance in Elysium as guests of the netherworld deities. In contrast, Orphic initiates sought an eventual transcendence to the empyrean.

The imputed misogyny of Orpheus is reflected in the tradition that he invented homoeroticism by so enchanting the men of Thrace that they abstained from sex, an antifeminism detectable also in Pentheus of Thebes and probably practiced as a spiritual

asceticism by the Orphics, as also by the followers of Mithras as an aversion to physical incarnation.

Although the Eleusinian Mystery itself was inaugurated in the mid-second millennium BCE as an import from Minoan Crete, the rite as we know it reflects a seventh-century assimilation of Indo-European Thracian traditions. Thus the founding priesthoods were backdated to the time of the mythical Orpheus, and the mushroom cult became the Lesser Mystery, which commemorated the abduction of Persephone by the sacred marriage of the titular Queen of Athens to Dionysus in the ancient bull-stall Temple.

The potion for the Greater Mystery initiation, like every sacred drink, was a mediation between the prototypic wild plant and its cultivated hybrid, which in this case was the ergot fungus grown on barley, a source of the psychoactive LSA.

The drink of Dionysus/Bacchus/Iacchus was paralleled with the grain of Demeter as the liquid and dry foodstuffs of mankind. The Mystery signified the final stabilizing of the Indo-European Olympian deities' dominance over Greek culture through the martial union of Zeus' daughter Persephone by his sister Demeter to his chthonic brother Hades.

# Thracian Megalithic Sanctuaries in the Eastern Rhodopes Archaeoastronomical Aspects

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Alexey Stoev, Penka Maglova

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Eastern part of Rhodopes is one of the places in Ancient Thrace where a great number of rock-cut monuments could be seen. Archaeoastronomical investigations reveal that many of them are oriented in space and are used for astronomical observations. Tatul and Tangarduk Kaya are two very impressive sanctuaries (Fol 1990: 52-54, Fol et al. 2000: 171-173) from the East Rhodopes. They can be considered as examples of sites used for observations of solar extreme rises and meridional culminations – (Stoev et al. 2007: 63-70.), (Fig. 1.).

## **The Tatul Rock Sanctuary**

The Tatul rock sanctuary is situated at an elevation near the village of Tatul, Momchilgrad Municipality (Nikolov et al., 1988:28-31), (Fig. 2.). The highest part of the rock is cut in the form of a truncated pyramid. There is a composite equipment on the top of the sanctuary – sarcophagus, trap-door, outfall, connecting the “sarcophagus” (Fig. 3.) with a vaulted niche beneath it, which contain a second “sarcophagus” with the same orientation and a possibility of closing with a trap-door (Fig. 4.). The axis of the “sarcophagus” is oriented towards the sunrise during a winter solstice.

There is an artificial, East-West oriented trench with about 2.5m length and 0.8m width at the ends, at the south part of the main rock. It is narrowed in the middle and resembles the letter “X” if we watch in the horizontal plane. In the middle of the “X” one can see a vertical aperture with 8-10 cm width and 50cm depth. The line of sight through this aperture is directed to the Sunrise during vernal or autumnal equinox. There are also different “thrones”, which could be considered as places for observation of natural or artificial marks on the horizon.

Large amount of solar symbols – circles of different size hewn out in the rock – have been discovered in the region of the Tatul sanctuary.

We can suppose that observation of the Sun during vernal and autumnal equinox had been used for determining the active agricultural period. Orientation of the sarcophagus’s main axis towards the sunrise during the winter solstice is probably connected with a cult festival (Muglova et al. 2007: 409-411).

“Sarcophagus” is oriented towards winter solstice sunrise in the epoch 1500 – 1200 BC. It is supposed that it is connected with cult towards the Sun – it dies and come into the world again. This mention end of the old year and the beginning of the new one.

During archaeological excavations, Cult figurine of Orpheus and stairs, hewn out of the rock has been found on the territory of the sanctuary (Fig. 2). They are probably connected with the Orphic mysterial rites.

After the excavations, a monumental temple from the Early Antiquity was revealed.

It is an evidence of the continuous use of the rock sanctuary – from the Late Eneolithic Age to the Late Antiquity.

There are also a lot of sacrificial altars and a huge sacred well for gifts keeping, coated with red.

After the archaeological excavations in 2008, the Tatul rock sanctuary is preserved with shelter constructions and restoration and conservation activities are going on (Fig. 5). There is also Visiting centre in the village of Tatul (1km from the sanctuary).

### **Tangarduk Kaya Cave Sanctuary**

Tangarduk Kaya cave sanctuary is placed near the village of Ilinitza, Kardgali district. The Tangardak Kaya cave is formed in a separate Karst rock massif, close to the ridge of the Ilinitza elevation (Fig. 6). The rocks are Triassic limestone. They have been subject to the strong influence of the endogenous forces (tectonic movements). The processes of physical and chemical weathering have led to the formation of an entrance in a widened tectonic fissure, in the base of which there are several small terraces (Stoev et al. 2001: 226-235), (Fig. 7).

There are two niches on the left wall before the entrance of the cave and other two niches on the wall to the right.

An artificial gallery was created, following the main tectonic fissure. The gallery is 22 m long and has an average width of 1.5 m. In the foundation, following the fissure a very sloped corridor had been created. This corridor leads to the entrance of the cave.

At the ground level of the cave the entrance opening of the gallery is widened in its foundation. The vertical section, looked at from the inside, has the form of the ellipse with a big eccentricity.

The cave's bottom had been formed especially to fulfill the role of an altar. Small terrace is hewn out of the rock underneath the altar (Fig. 8).

Also, there are two neighbour zones with almost elliptic section in the middle of the gallery. The gallery's ceiling has a clearly expressed vault form (Fig. 9). One registers sound increase as well as significant reverberation (a loud noise repeated as an echo) and very long echo in the focuses of the vaults. Maximal increase of the sound intensity and reverberation time are in the region of lower sound frequencies.



The astronomical azimuth of the cave's main axis is  $A=15^{\circ}08'12''$ . Analysis of the cave's horizontal plan shows that the main axis follows the development of the tectonic fissures in the Karst massif.

The clearly expressed orientation of the cave's main axis, which is near the main meridian (North-South), as well as the quality of the entry opening (Fig. 10) to project itself maximally along the gallery one hour after noon, gives a reason to seek astronomical meaning in the geometric sizes, orientation and morphology of the cave.

The equation  $h_{max} = 90 - \varphi + \varepsilon$  is executed in the point of the summer solstice (where the solar declination  $\delta$  is at its maximum, and equals the slope of the ecliptic  $\varepsilon$ . For the contemporary epoch, for which  $\varepsilon = 23^{\circ} 26' 24''$ , the distance between the peak of the entrance projection and the altar's foundation is 10,60 m. In the point of the winter solstice the solar declination  $\delta$  is negative and at its maximum, and equals to  $-\varepsilon$ . The equation  $h_{min} = 90 - \varphi - \varepsilon$  is executed and the distance between the peak of the entrance projection and the altar's foundation is 1,10 m.

Considering that the astronomical azimuth  $A$  of the cave's main axis is approximately  $15^{\circ}$ , the height of the Sun will decrease with one more degree ( $1^{\circ}$ ). Consequently, the projection will come 0,25 m closer to the altar's foundation. Sun culminates high above the horizon during the summer and the higher outer contour of the entrance opening is projected on the floor of the gallery. During the winter, when the Sun culminates at lower heights, the lower inner contour of the entrance opening is projected (Stoeva et al. 2004: 99-108), (Fig. 11).

Slope of the ecliptic decreases with time. This means that in the past the solar height at noon during the winter solstice would have become smaller and smaller; meaning the light from the entrance's projection would have crept closer and closer to the altar. For example, between 2000 B.C. and 1500 B. C. the projection of the entrance opening did reach up to 0.4 m from the altar's foundation. That is why we can suppose that the Tangarduk Kay cave sanctuary is created during the period of Late Eneolithic and Early Bronze Age.

The results of this research demonstrate that this cave-sanctuary can be related with the profession of the cult to the Great Goddess-Mother. Once per year solar rays penetrate into the altar, embodying the sacred marriage between the Goddess-mother and the God-Sun.

Besides, the sanctuary Tangardak Kaya could serve as an instrument for determining the length of the year and its beginning with sufficient accuracy. Systematic observations of the positions of the entrance projections during the daily solar culminations allows one to count the days between the winter and the summer solstice. This procedure would greatly facilitate the creation and usage of a primitive calendar and time reckoning with units larger than a day. This usage is intrinsically related with the economic, religious and daily requirements of the socium of that epoch.

## **Conclusion**

These two sanctuaries from the East Rhodopes – Tatul and Tangarduk Kaya – are in the frames of temple complexes.

They are examples of observations of solar extreme rises and meridional culminations.

Cult ceramics and solar symbols are evidence of their continuous using.

Sanctuaries are socialized – they are included in many tours of the Kurdjali Archaeological museum and touristic firms.

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## Illustrations



**Fig. 1** Displacement of the Tatul and Tangarduk Kaya rock sanctuaries in the East Rhodopes



**Fig. 2** Tatul rock sanctuary



**Fig. 3** *The highest part of the sanctuary and the “sarcophagus” with an axis oriented towards the sunrise during a winter solstice*



**Fig. 4** *Vaulted niche beneath the top of the sanctuary, which contains a second “sarcophagus” with the same orientation and a possibility of closing with a trap-door*



**Fig. 5** *Tatul rock sanctuary after the archaeological excavations in 2008*



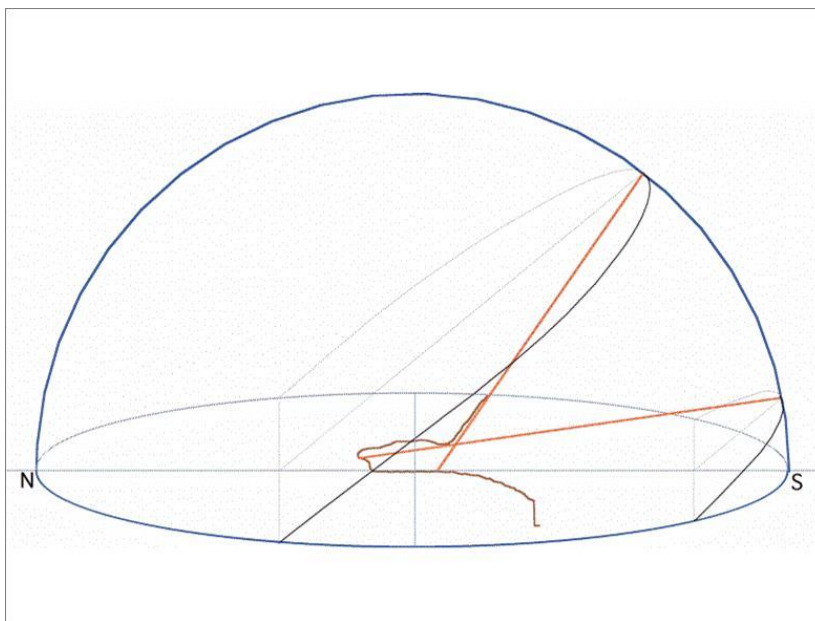
**Fig.6** *The separate Karst rock massif of the Tangarduk Kaya cave sanctuary*



**Fig. 7** *Entrance of the Tangarduk Kaya cave sanctuary*



**Fig.8** Altar of the Tangarduk Kaya cave sanctuary



**Fig. 9** Vertical plan of the Tangarduk Kaya cave in the meridional plane. Solar beams at culmination of the sun, at summer and winter solstices and the maximal projections of the entrance are evident





**Fig. 10** *Vertical projection of the cave entrance*



**Fig. 11** *Projection of the Takgarduk Kaya cave entrance on the floor, at noon*

# Thracian Megalithic Sanctuaries from the Eastern Rhodopes. Ethnological Aspects

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In the autumn of 2013 and the summer of 2014 we conducted two field surveys of megalithic sanctuaries in the Eastern Rhodopes. The studied locations were mainly on the territory of Zlatograd and Kirkovo Municipality in Kardzhali Region. Apart from the main locations we visited Momchilgrad Municipality and Northern Greece – the region south to Zlatograd in particular where we explored the villages Dzhuvantsi (old Koruch, present Kotani), Memkovo (present Medousa) and Ladzhite (present Termes). On the territory outlined above are situated numerous megaliths, some of which are popular, others almost unknown to the field researchers. Our team visited more than 20 of these sites.

Today the region is inhabited by ethnically mixed population – Bulgarian and Turkish or Christian and Muslim. In Kardzhali District prevails Turkish speaking population while in the region near Zlatograd, including the lands south of the border most of the population is Bulgarian Muslim. Most intriguing for us was the fact that many of those ancient sanctuaries are worshiped by local people to this very day. With time different ethnic groups settled at those lands and they professed different religious doctrines but a unique continuity at revering the megaliths is at hand. They are sacred places for all the residents regardless of their religion and ethnicity. Being associated to specific landscape and locations, many ancient beliefs and ideas survived in time presumably because they are also linked to particular cult and ritual practices. Some of them were Christianized, some were Islamicized and others which were denounced from both worldly religions have reached us in highly altered state.

Another reason for the continuity of old beliefs and concepts is their relation to the most vitally important, namely the health of people. This is one of the reasons for the popularity of provirachki passages in the vast area of the Rhodope Mountains. Usually these are rock arches remnants of larger megalithic complexes or ancient monuments later used by local people for magical healing purposes.

In the region of Zlatograd several healing provirachki are known. They are connected to celebrations of St. George's Day (May 6th) which was once the first day of the traditional New Year. In the ravine of Kushleva padina (a quarter in Zlatograd) there is the *St. George's step* (Fig. 1). According to the legend "St. George passed through that ravine on his white horse

when he was on his way to engage with St. Catherine and his horse stamped on the stone and so this step remained there.”<sup>1</sup> St. Catherine’s chapel is not far up the path. Once near *the Step* there was a white stone provirachka but it was crushed and since then people pass through the roots of a great walnut tree just above the spring. People used to run a cloth through the White stone to cure headache. They would also put through the stone babies who get sick easily or cry a lot. The local sorceress Baba Veska puts through the roots of the walnut tree children suffering from whooping cough, stutter and enuresis. It is believed that on St. George’s Day drinking water from the spring and passing through have magical powers and help the ill. Everyone sip from snail shell three sips of spring water and wash themselves with spring water and the ill pass through the roots of the walnut tree. The Baba ties an *upeto* (chanted token) like a martenitza on the hand of the children who have passed through the provirachka. The people who attend the holiday light candles and throw bunches of geranium, sing songs, wash themselves and drink three sips of spring water. Then they go back home to cook lamb and to celebrate.

Only a sorceress who has *izin* (allowance) can chant and pass people through the provirachka. Baba Veska inherited her skills from her mother and she got some human bones from the local priest. With them she chants in more severe cases – oncological or gynecological diseases. She chants only on sunset. The same woman reads a prayer against fear, evil eye, and etc.<sup>2</sup>

In the lands of Dedets not far from Benkovski village along the very road there is an enormous rock cult complex. Nowadays it is known as “The Crocodile” because of the rock’s remarkable resemblance to the reptile (Fig. 2). On the upper side of the cliff there is an opening. Steps, carved into the rock lead to an entrance to the sacred space. The surface of the rock abounds in basins, grooves, delves, pits, spouts and ritual sites. There is an ayazmo (sacred spring), a large cave, rock crevices and niches. It is a complete sacred complex.

People still go to that stone because of the provirachka which is believed to cure various diseases in children and adults. To pass through the stone one has to descend into the opening, leave a gift at the tree (clothes, shreds, threads, etc.) and then climb the stairs to the sacred place. Three holes – a large one and two smaller ones surround the provirachka.

There is another provirachka, known as *Dupchenija kamak* (The Holed Stone), above Veslets quarter of Benkovski village. It is a solitary rock with an ancient tomb carved in it (Fig. 3). It is assumed that the dome was carved later thus forming the provirachka. The holes on the rock surface might have been made to hold an upper construction.

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<sup>1</sup> Informant Veska Pilicheva, 90 years, Zlatograd

<sup>2</sup> Informant Veska Pilicheva, 90 years, Zlatograd

Passing through the provirachka here is also through vertical descent. A seat is formed near the upper opening to ease the passing to the central part which resembles womb. Getting out is from the second opening to the south (lower position) where a step was made to ease people. Ritual passing is made thrice and then near the exit parts of the clothes are tied on the old pear tree. There are many woman clothes (bras, pants, tops, blouses, threads, stc.) and also baby clothes (socks, rompers, etc.). It resembles the birth process. The seed of the fetus is sent down from God, passes through the womb and when ready, comes out underneath. The reason this provirachka is used mostly by childless women is the similarity between the act of birth and the descent into Earth's holy womb.

In the eastern part of Kayaloba village there is another rock formation known as *The Elephant* because of the similarity between the shape of the rock and that animal (Fig. 4). It is situated at the highest part of the area. Two huge cylindrical rocks to the southwest mark the entrance to that sacred space. The figure of the Elephant is composed of sedimentary rocks. A rock arch between the trunk and the body is used as provirachka. A niche for the gifts is formed at the base of the cliff on the west side and on the east side are the trees for tying clothes and threads.

According to local people this provirachka cures children suffering from pox, erysipelas and other skin diseases<sup>3</sup>. The ritual constitutes making three circles around the Elephant, passing through the arch beneath its trunk and tying a cloth, thread or ill child's clothing. Walking is in horizontal direction from west to east. Niches for coins are carved at the base of the provirachka and on the body of the Elephant. There are children clothes and shoes, pacifiers and hair bands scattered all over the place. The branches and trunks of the trees around are adorned with cloths and threads.

Not far from Podkova in the lands of the tiny village Starejshino is *Damla Kaya*, The Dripping Rock (Fig. 5). It is a magnificent view. The sanctuary is surrounded by steep rocks and the only access is from the bed of the river below. The complex has a water source – a waterfall with well formed bathing pool, above it is the Dripping Rock and on the top is the provirachka. The rocks are red because of the iron compounds in their structure and this explains the deification of the place.

Before dawn on May 1<sup>st</sup> and especially on 6<sup>th</sup> many people come here to pour some of the water, which is believed to be “*strongest*” on that day. Water is dripping from several places and then it is collected in large basins. This water cures mainly children illnesses – stuttering, difficult speaking, enuresis and eye problems. People scoop water with cups and bottles and pour it on the children. On two of the deciduous trees near the rock people tie clothes, cloths

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<sup>3</sup> Informant Dencho Parvanov, 53 years, Zlatograd

and threads for health. What is interesting here is that the gifts are related to the water and not to the provirachka. Maybe there is a certain degree of importance to each element in the complex. Since the Dripping Rock here is the strongest component of the sanctuary a gift should be tied near it to leave the illness there<sup>4</sup>.

Women bathe down in the pool under the waterfall hoping for the magical powers of water at this time of year to bring them children. A comfortable sitting place formed like a throne is carved into the rocks opposite to the pool. The Dripping Rock was earlier visited only by women but now men also go there. The only restriction for men is when women are bathing.

Kurban, a sacrificial food offering pilaf is distributed on St. George's Day, Hadarlez. It is prepared by those who have pledged a vow. They can sacrifice a lamb there and daub the children with its blood for health.

A few hundred meters from Damla Kaya is *Kaya Bunar*, the Stone Well, where childless women go to seek healing. It is an old domed tomb in which water springs in two pools connected by a furrow. Though the flow is constant, on rainy days there is more water. Women wash their eyes and face believing that the water has miraculous properties. Then they pass thrice through the stone provirachka and leave coins next to it. They tie clothes and cloths on the nearby trees. This place is also visited mostly on May 1<sup>st</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> – Hadarlez.

Those sacred places are not bound to the official Muslim religion and hodjas do not go there but since old times many people do. Today the flow of people has grown significantly. Here come many Christians and Muslims hoping for miracles.

In *Dambala* (Crying Rock) district above Momchilgrad is another sanctuary related to water's healing power (Fig. 6). It is believed that at midnight before St. George's Day, Hadarlez when the oak forest rustles healing water seeps from the rock. Thousands of people both Christian and Muslim come to that place with the hope of healing. A legend tells about a Christian monastery that was built on Dambala but it was later demolished and an Alevi teke was built there. Nowadays people from both religions live together peacefully.

On the night before May 6<sup>th</sup> the place is overcrowded. Rich feasts are arranged and everyone anticipates the 12<sup>th</sup> hour when the "live water" comes. After midnight people dip or bathe children with speech difficulties. Water seeping from the rock is collected in a small pool and several stone basins. People take from that water to drink and wash. The water seeping from the rock collects in a small pool and several stone beds. After washing people tie cloths and threads on near bushes and trees<sup>5</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Informant Aishe Mehmed, 57 years, Starejshino, Kirkovo district

<sup>5</sup> Informant who wished to remain anonymous from Gluhar village, Kardzhali district

Most people spend the night on a meadow near the rock. Those who cannot stay there till the morning come back especially to pour water and then go back home in the evening. Dambala just as Damla Kaya is visited through all the year by men and women seeking cure for various diseases.

The greatest attraction in Podkova village is the wooden Mosque of the Seven Virgins (Yedi kızlar Camisi). It was built in 1428 which makes it one of the oldest mosques in Bulgaria. Not a single nail was used in its construction. Legend has it that it was built by seven maidens whose fiancées never returned from war. The virgins sold their entire dowry and in one night built the mosque. No one ever saw them again. Muslims from Podkova still use the old necropolis near that mosque.

Traditionally on May 6<sup>th</sup> people from all around the region gather to *mevlid* (festival). They make kurban sacrificial offering in the yard of the mosque and read prayers and excerpts from the Koran. In the necropolis behind the Wooden Mosque there is a provirachka and a healing stone. People go there all the year round but on the holy day the place is crowded (Fig. 7).

The provirachka is made of a door from Thracian tomb – an entrance to another world. Now people pass through it for health and its usage shows a continuity of tradition over time. Local people call this provirachka *paratir* (window) because of its rectangular shape. The stone was broken by soldiers in the 1940s. Later a new provirachka identical to the first one was carved in the stone. The ritual includes making three circles around the stone and kneeling before it to pass through the opening. All of these are repeated thrice. The tree for tying cloths for health near the provirachka was cut several years ago<sup>6</sup>.

The healing stone has a prismatic shape and is erected as a menhir. On both sides there are stones for people to sit on. Above the prism there are three pits for gifts from the pilgrims. There they lay coins, walnuts and dried fruits. According to the informants the pits stand for the Pillars of Islam – Allah, Mohammed and Ali Hazreti. People come here believing that the stone will take away their pain. When they sit, they touch the stone with the sore part of their body (waist or head) and say thrice: “Bismillah” (With God’s help!)<sup>7</sup>.

An old sanctuary attracted the interest of our expedition. It is *The Stone* above Dzhuvantsi village (Tur. Koshnalar, Gr. Kotani), which is situated 10 km south of Zlatograd and today it is located in Northern Greece. In some old descriptions it is also named *Cherveniya*

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<sup>6</sup> Informant Rozalin Hadzhiev, 50 years, Zlatograd

<sup>7</sup> Informant Rozalin Hadzhiev, 50 years, Zlatograd

*Kamak*<sup>8</sup> (The Red Stone) or *Tolpa* as local people call it. It is a large granite stone resembling a huge mushroom on a slender base (Fig. 8).

*The Stone* is a place for religious worship since ancient times. For this reason there are numerous ceramic pieces scattered around the stone. Even today when people go there they must break off a piece of the rock with bare hands not using a tool. These pieces are taken for health, luck and happiness and they are believed to protect people from evil eyes. In the past when young men from the village went to war their mothers would sew such rock pieces to their clothes as a talisman. Childless women go to the Stone to pray for children and hope that their most desired wish would come true<sup>9</sup>.

People say that during the Civil war in Greece a group of andartes wanted to demolish The Stone and roll it down the steep hill. They propped their rifles like a pyramid and pushed hard but just at that time gunshots were heard and they ran in panic<sup>10</sup>.

Near The Stone there is a *tyulbe* – an Alevi sanctuary where women light mums (tallow candles). Earlier only women went to the *tyulbe* but now men can also enter it. The legend of the *tyulbe* tells of a wounded soldier who died there. A local woman found him by the blood trail he had left and cared for him for a long time. Later he died by that stone and there the *tyulbe* was built. This is another legend trying to differentiate official Muslim religion and pagan superstitions about the Stone.

Between the Stone and the *tyulbe* there was a *provirachka*. Local hodjas did not approve of the reminiscent of old pagan beliefs and practices so they blocked the *provirachka* with stones to prevent people from using it.

Under the *provirachka* there is a rock with basin, spillway and furrow for healing water that are carved in it. According to local people “*The Saint bathed on this rock. That is the reason for the basin to be shaped so large*”<sup>11</sup>. People come to this place in summer to make offerings and kurban from large animals – cows and male goats. One year they omitted the ritual and a heavy hail demolished their village. People still remember a man who wanted to sell animals for the kurban on a very high price but people refused to buy them. Shortly after that a wolf strangled eight of his sheep that were destined for the kurban. For this reason the tradition is strictly followed till nowadays. Many people gather from villages close and distant.

Those rituals are sound and endure regardless of dogmas and morals of the official religion. Therefore treatment through the *proviracki* persists for it is firmly grounded in folk beliefs and still exists along with other rites: a special prayer in the church or a mascot from the

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<sup>8</sup> See Shishkov, St. Materials from Daradersko In: Rhodopski Starini, book 4, 1892: 14 p.

<sup>9</sup> Informant: Ayshe Huskova, 70 years, Kotani village, Miki municipality

<sup>10</sup> Informant Dzhamil Huskov, 72 years, Kotani village, Miki municipality

<sup>11</sup> Informant Dzhamil Huskov, 72 years, Kotani village, Miki municipality



hodja but also a touch to the powers of Mother Nature in the form of a rock. People try everything in search for healing believing that “better safe than sorry”. Some of the sanctuaries have the strongest healing power and strength on a particular day of the year. Such is St. George’s Day or Hadarlez (e.g. Kushleva Padina in Zlatograd, Kaya Bunar and Damla Kaya near Stareyshino village, Dambla over Momchilgrad and the necropolis near the Wooden Mosque in Podkova village). The other healing rock sanctuaries that we have researched do not have a particular holiday. People go there all the year round according to their necessities – to stay healthy or to heal.

## Illustrations



**Fig. 1** *St. George's Step, Zlatograd*



**Fig. 2** *Rock Cultural Complex "The Crocodile" Dedets village, Kirkovo Municipality*



**Fig. 3** *Dupchenija kamak (The Holed Stone) Benkovski village, Kirkovo Municipality*



**Fig. 4** *Rock formation "The Elephant" Kayaloba village, Kirkovo Municipality*



**Fig. 5** *Damla Kaya (The Dripping Rock) Starejshino village, Kirkovo Municipality*



**Fig. 6** *Dambala (Crying Rock) Momchilgrad Municipality*



**Fig. 7** *Provirachka and healing stone near the wooden mosque in the village of Podkova, Kirkovo Municipality*



**Fig. 8** *The Stone above Dzhuvantsi village (present Kotani) Miki Municipality*

# A Newly Discovered Megalithic Sanctuary of the Struma River

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The churchyard St. Spas is located about 4 km northwest from Krastiltsi village, municipality of Sandanski. It is situated on a conical peak, with a well shaped rock massif on the very top. A well maintained and passable dirt road leads to it. The top of the peak offers a beautiful and majestic view to all directions of the world. To the East can be seen Middle Struma River and the Pirin Mountain, to the West – Maleshevska Mountain and Ograzhden, to the South – Belasitsa Mountain (Fig. 1,2). The legend relates this sacred place with Krali Marko. According to it, the hero flew on his winged horse from the top of the Pirin Mountain, flew over the valley of Struma and its front legs stuck on the rock of St. Spas peak. People here show the traces of both legs, the body, and tail of the horse, marked on the rock. These are rock cuts – megalithic altars from the epoch of Thracian antiquity likened by the Bulgarian folk beliefs to the steps of the horse – as well as two roughly shaped pieces of natural rock. It refers to three specific codes, by which the ancient myth of the Thracian male, horse deity was attached to the terrain. There are numerous other pits on the observed rocks, much more hollow, but probably also once functioned as megalithic altars.

Special attention should be paid to the functions of the rock-cut altars (Fig. 3). Usually, they retain rainwater for a long time during the year. In many of the monuments, such as Markov Kamak (Marko's stone) in Strandzha, Markova Stapka (Marko's step) near Palatski peak, Ograzhen mountain, Markov Kamak (Marko's stone) near the village of Dolen, Western Rhodopes and Govedar Kamen near the town of Stip, this water is sacred and healing. Perhaps, this is an artifact of the ancient Indo-European concept of rain, as the heavenly soma - divine drink bestowing fertility and immortality, sent to earth by the God of the storm (Yelizarenkova 1989:462-463; Markov 2007:131-134)

There is another thesis - that in these altars was libated wine - the sacred drink of the Thracian Dionysus, which substituted in the Mediterranean cultural-historical area the Indo-European drink of immortality – soma (Marazov 2000:10).

The sacred place of peak St. Spas, near the village Krastiltsi was sacralized in the Thracian antiquity, judging by the observed materials on the surface of the churchyard. The sacral territory is structured in two levels. At the highest level is situated a natural rock platform, with approximate dimensions of 100 m to 25 m. It is oriented north-south. The southernmost

part is slightly raised and is the highest point on the peak. There are rock cuts - cited as evidence of the horse of Krali Marko. Krali Marko, who in the Bulgarian Thracology scientific literature is considered to be the folklore successor of the supreme male deity in Thrace - The Thracian Dionysus (Teodorov 1999:239-252).

From the west and south, the peak is surrounded by a second, narrow, up to 5 meters wide platform, which appears to be the lower level of the sacral Thracian sanctuary. On both platforms was observed a cultural layer, as at the lower it reaches 1.80 m depth (Fig. 4, 5).

As a result of the treasure hunters' invasion, which unfortunately has affected the entire peak, on the surface can be found a great amount of fragmented Thracian, Roman and late antiquity pottery. It allows the sanctuary to be dated as early as the time of the Late Bronze Age XV - XII century BC (Fig. 7-10). It functioned during the entire pre-Roman era of the 1st millennium BC, until III-IV century AC. Afterwards, the old Thracian sanctuary was Christianized and became a Christian churchyard, as it exists today.

In practice, we have a religious monument, which has been functioning for over 3500 years and should definitely be assigned to the unique group of "living" Thracian sanctuaries in the region of Southwest Bulgaria, such as those of Lyaski peak in Pirin mountain, Skribina in the Western Rhodopes, Palatski peak in Ograzhen mountain, St. Panteleimon in the mountain Kozhuh and many others (Markov 2012:263-275).

The studied sacred place is also unique for being one of the few in the region, associated with the legendary cycle of Krali Marko, where still are being performed religious and ritual practices. The research results of the National Project "Thracian sanctuaries from the Western Rhodopes, Pirin and Rila" of the research center for Ancient European and Eastern Mediterranean Cultures at SWU "Neofit Rilski", and the International project "European Tales and Legends. Following the footsteps of Krali Marko" of Association "Euni Partners" have shown that it is a demiurgic ancient Thracian myth preserved by the Bulgarian folklore. It shows that the home of Krali Marko, the successor to the Thracian Dionysus, is located at the top of the sacred in Thrace Pirin Mountain. From here the hero throws huge stones. From here he jumps with his enormous horse to the surrounding mountains and his steps are marked on the peaks. He withdraws, pursued by the antagonist, along with his mother, in the foothills of Pirin Mountain, in Chelnya rock (Thracian sanctuary, now known as St. Panteleimon churchyard, near the village of Levunovo). He withdraws even further to the west, towards the sunset and death, to the mountain Ograzhen in the area Markovi Kladentsi (Marko's wells) - also marked with a Thracian megalithic sanctuary (Markov 2010:221-156).

In the middle of the rock platform of the churchyard of St. Spas near the village of Krastiltsi has recently been built a small chapel. It has inherited the old chapel, which was destroyed by treasure hunters (Fig. 6). Early in the morning on day Spasovden, here, a sacrificial animal is slaughtered. In the old times it was a ram, and in the last few years - a bull. One day, about ten years ago, lightning struck one of the animals of the shepherd who grazes his flock

around the ancient sacred place. Since then, the korban and the feast on the hill have been restored after a long break. The sacrificial animal - a bull is provided by the shepherd and is done for the animals' health. Mutton is boiled on site and the joint table is set. Then, people dance horo (ring dance). In the old times, there was also wrestling. It was organized below, in the village of Krastiltsi. The mandatory food on this feast were eggs, pork fat and oriznik (made of rice). Traditionally, wine and grapes spirit are drunk. The presence of the egg, as a code in the ritual food should be specifically mentioned. Except as a sign, part of the Easter ritual cycle, here should be taken into account that it also represents a major symbol of the Orphic demiurgic myth (Batakliiev 1985:117).

Spasovden is the largest folk calendar feast for Krastiltsi. On this day the village organizes its fair. Usually, many people from the neighboring villages participate in it, which gives it a regional character. People go riding a horse or a mule to the sacral peak St. Spas for the holiday (Fig. 11-14). This folk tradition very much resembles of the custom to compulsorily go on a horse to the feast in the churchyard of St. Ilia near the village of Dolen in the Western Rhodopes, and to the feast of Holy Spirit in village Staro Lyaski in Southern Pirin, which have also inherited ancient Thracian sanctuaries (Yankov 2003:47-63, Yankov, Markov 2004:45-60). Tradition, which can be traced far back in time, and perhaps is also associated with the ancient Thracian religious-ritual practices - the worshiper to follow the image of the worshiped horse deity in Thrace – the Heros.

Another folk legend, relating Krali Marko, again, with this sacred place explains why there is no water on the terrain. Krali Marko's wife sent the hero to Markovi Kladentsi in Ograzhen Mountain to bring water for the feast with two casks. He went, but ordered his wife not to leave for the peak St. Spas before he returned. Marko delayed and his wife decided not to wait any longer, but to go up to the peak. When he came from Markovi Kladentsi, (visible to the southwest) Marko saw that his wife did not obey. Angry, he shot and crashed the casks with the water in the southwestern foothills of the peak St. Spas. This is how the springs appeared at the foothills of the peak. There, and up to now, appears to be the closest water to the churchyard of St. Spas by the village of Krastiltsi.

This legend also has a demiurgic character, explains the occurrence of natural phenomena on the field in the primordial mythological time. Most likely, the springs were also sacralized in Thracian antiquity, but in order to clarify this, additional research is needed in the field.

Here we need to pay attention to an important detail - Krali Marko "shot" to crash the casks with water. In this image he very much reminiscences of the folk, paganized image of St. Ilia of the Bulgarian folk belief, who shoots and thunders in the sky, shaking and pouring the vats of water, causing rain. It is particularly close to the God of the storm from the ancient Thracian and ancient Indo-European religion. In this respect, we need to return to the folk beliefs, related to the top of the rocky Pirin Mountains, as a home of Krali Marko. "Perin", as



the local people call the mountain and within which root lies the syllable "Per". It is the basis for one of the names of the Thracian horse deity "Perkos" or "Perkonis." It also stands at the root of the Hittite God of the storm and at the same time God - rock – Pervata Popov 1999:218-232; Gemkrelidze, Ivanov 1984:556).

Judging by the size of the sacred place and the depth of the cultural layer, the examined monument represents an ancient Thracian megalithic sanctuary with exceptional cultural and historic value. Most probably, it is the central or one of the most important religious centers of the Thracian Maedi. The Thracian tribe, whose chieftain Spartacus became the leader of the largest slave revolt in Rome. In this regard, its preservation from the barbaric treasure hunters' invasion, for science and as cultural-historical heritage for the purposes of cultural tourism is essential, not only on national, but also on European level.

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# Illustrations



**Fig. 1**



**Fig. 2**



**Fig. 3**



**Fig. 5**



**Fig. 4**



**Fig. 6**



**Fig. 7**



**Fig. 8**



**Fig. 9**



**Pic. 10**



**Fig. 11**



**Fig. 12**



**Fig. 13**



**Fig. 14**

# Thracian Megalithic Sanctuaries from the Prefecture of Evros Greece

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The stone mushrooms in the Aegean Thrace, that were located in Southern Evros, Kirki, Potamos, central Evros (Petrotopos, Kotronia, Lagyna, Dadia, Kornofolia) constitute a common phenomenon of Thracian megalithic sanctuaries that have the mushroom as a totemic symbol. With this form Thracians used to portray the omnipotent deity they worshipped. Usually a sculptured anthropomorphic niche next to it represents an earthy female deity that is co – worshipped. These forms take advantage of pre-existing natural geological features and you can find them in various geological environments.\* Their material varies from conglomerates with silica matrix in the Kirki area to a soft argilized breccia dyke in the Lagyna area (all of them are of the local bed rock). In some of them the human intervention to the natural rock is clear.

## **Introduction**

My presentation shall focus on certain cosmic Epiphaneies that have been found by the EPOFE Research Team in the Aegean Thrace, revealing the divine on various cosmic levels: the Earth, the Water, the Rocks. These Epiphaneies describe the dialectics of the sanctuary as well as the structures it is placed at a certain historical point underlining the primitive Thracian people's way of thinking according to which the stone or the water is linked to sanctity. The solidity, the roughness, the duration of the matter represents an Epiphaneia in the religious consciousness. The water sublimates, rebirths, heals, prophesies, reassure the eternal life, absorb the evil due to the absorptive and decomposing power. Water and stone-rock emerge in one and result in an Epiphaneia and are the main elements of the sacred place.

The most ancient sacred monuments we are aware of take the form of a microcosm, where one can trace stones, forests, water (springs, streams, rivers), paintings of animals or plants. All the above-mentioned are totemic centers of the ancient sacred places. The popular belief according to which the animal or plant worshipping preceded that of anthropomorphic gods is corroborated in Thrace. This corroboration relies on the fact that totemism as an original form of religion leads us to the system of belief in which animals and plants functioned as forerunners of the ancient Greek gods, that is animals-gods and plants-gods (Burkert 1993:151). In Thrace of the Early Iron Age (1050-7<sup>th</sup> century BCE) and in the following years, the sacred places are revealed on engraved stone mushrooms and even the presence of anthropomorphic niches depict the deity of the Earth, the Mother Goddess, Demeter or Cybele. The main and

basic element of these sacred places is either the totemic symbol, which determines the totemic center or anthropomorphic stone carvings and menhirs.

Geological Approach: General. If you walk along the hills and the mountain valleys of the Aegean Thrace, there is a great probability to fall upon some stone monuments of the Thracian people who lived in the area in ancient times. You will be certainly intrigued by the shape of some of these monuments which resemble mushrooms. Why this form was chosen by the Ancient Thracians has or will be defined by archaeologists. The problem that a geologist has to resolve is this one are these mushroom shaped stones genuine artifacts or are they natural occurred.

The only way to be absolutely certain about this is to find a mushroom of a non local rock, a rock different than the rocks you find in the area. In few words I will give you a summary of the geology of the region.

*Geology of the region.* At the bottom of the rock formations there is a basement complex which forms the Rhodope Massif. This comprises meta-sediments, gneisses and amphibolites, thought to be of Palaeozoic age. The rocks show multiple phases of deformation and metamorphism and occur in a series of thrust sheets and isoclinal folds.

Unconformably overlying the Massif is a sequence of metamorphosed Mesozoic rocks which form the Circum-Rhodope Belt. This sequence largely comprises meta-sedimentary and meta-volcanic series that are thought to represent a series of island arcs related to underlying subduction-related magmatism. The series were folded, metamorphosed and thrust onto the Rhodope Massif during the Alpine Orogenesis, in late-Cretaceous times, creating a larger basement block which subsequently acted as an integral unit.

During the Tertiary, the collision of the African and Eurasian plates resulted in the development of subduction-related volcanic activity along an 800 km island arc which extended westwards from northern Turkey, under the Rhodope Massif and curved northwards towards Yugoslavia. A number of volcano-sedimentary basins bounded by syn-sedimentary normal faults formed in areas of divergent stress within the Massif, such as that in the Sappes area. A basal series of Middle Eocene age comprising conglomerate with marl and nummulitic limestone, and an Upper Eocene series of conglomerates, shales, sandstones and interlayered volcanics were deposited within the basins. During Oligocene times, volcanic activity resulted in the development of a series of andesites, dacites and rhyolites emplaced as tuffs, volcanic breccias and domes, and sub-volcanic rhyolitic porphyry dykes and granitoid plutonic stocks.

A widespread series of Neogene and Quaternary sediments, comprising both terrestrial and marine facies overlie the earlier formations.

## Worshipping

How do we determine on the sanctuary or the sacred place? The Homeric Hymn which is dedicated to Demeter and is dated back to the 7<sup>th</sup> or the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, narrates incidents that had occurred in the Mycenaean period, long before it was composed. As one can see in lines 270 to 273 the construction of a temple in Eleusina is under request: “Come! and build, for Demeter a splendid temple, and an altar too, above the Kallichori source on top of the prominent hill.” The temple, the altar and the presence of water are thus the main characteristics of the sanctuary of the prehistoric and historic times, all of which we shall trace in the open air sanctuaries that are to be described. In the archaeology of religion what is deemed to be necessary is the religious ritual that presupposes cult acts to the deity or the supernatural being, as Colin Renfrew and Paul Bahn mention. The four main categories are: 1) focusing of attention, 2) the boundary zone between this world and the next, 3) the presence of the deity, 4) Participation and offering (Renfrew-Bahn 2001:425-428). Therefore “The stone mushrooms of Thrace” and the anthropomorphic niches are accepted as sanctuaries or sacred places since they fulfill several of the above mentioned criteria.

### The sacred stone mushroom (Epiphaneia) of Lagyna Nr.1

Geographical Coordinates 41° 06' 07.001'' 26° 15' 54.221'' The photograph was taken on: 11-10-2008

Photograph Companion: 1. Dimensions: Height 4 m. stem perimeter 5 m. Found by Angelos Nalbandis

At the area around Lagyna village you can see a stone hillock standing upright on a slope with its upper part resembling a pointed shape (Fig.1). The rich morphology of the adjacent stones and rocks and the bizarre outlines had an important significance for the religious consciousness of the primitive man, who shaped a lower mushroom-like hill turning it into a more intense mushroom-like stone. Its sanctity stems from the view of the surrounding landscape, the impression that the geography of the area creates and the fact that the rays of the sun illuminate the top of the stone mushroom once they have been over the pointed top. All the above influence the primitive man's religious consciousness.

Hand-made pottery has been found 300 m. southern within the enclosure and dates back to the Iron Age (9<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> cent. BCE).

GA: This is a breccia dyke, clasts and matrix are the same rock and it is intensively argilised (dyke is a column of rock; the breccia is comprised from angular clasts and matrix that connects these clasts). The surrounding rock was eroded away and a part of the dyke stood free. It was easy for the ancient sculptor to shape it according to his wishes due to the softness of the rock.

### The stone sanctuary of Lagyna with the anthropomorphic niche Nr.2

Geographical Coordinates 41° 10' 75'' 26° 27' 19'' Altitude: 178 m. Photograph Companion: 2.

Found by Stamatis Palazis. The photograph was taken on: 20-05-2010



On the south slope of the “Psilokorifi” hillock at the Lagyna area we can see two elongated niches carved on the rock with anthropomorphic facade (Fig. 2) acknowledges an open air Thracian sanctuary dedicated to a female earth deity, the Mother Goddess, Demeter, Cybele or Bendis. A stone basin with stone-cut channel had been carved over the anthropomorphic niche, fact which allows the interpretation of the existence of an altar to honour the chthonic Mother. House foundations and winepress have been found underneath the anthropomorphic niche.

The sacred stone mushroom (Epiphaneia) of the Petrotopos, Kotronias area Nr. 3

Geographical Coordinates: 41° 08' 29.567'' 26° 04' 00.354'' Altitude: 559 m. Dimensions: 1,40 m.

Photograph Companion: The photograph was taken on: 21-11-2008. Found by Angelos Nalbandis

At the area of Petrotopos, a place on the stone mountain range of Rhodope, they have found monumental tombs, dolmens, which enrich the challenging chapter of the Thracian prehistory, aiding to a better understanding of the esoteric secrets (Triandaphyllos 1980:152, Fig. 10. Τριαντάφυλλος 1994:42).

Nearly thirty dolmens and burial cysts cover the area of the small plateau on the north elongated side of which a small stream flows. In a place above the stream where local schist was vaguely resembling a mushroom, Thracian artisans carved it to what we see today (Fig. 3). The carving of the stone mushroom, i.e. a totemic symbol, turned the rock into an Epiphaneia which is not a worldly object anymore; it acquires a new dimension, that of sanctity (Eliade 1981:54-56).

It goes without saying that the mushroom comprises the expression of immortality, the birth with no seeds (parthenogenesis) and the continuous rebirth, fact that surprised the ancient people even more when the consumption of some entheogenic mushrooms caused visions, inspiring thus the religious sentiment to the man who felt restricted by new invisible powers, that were interpreted as contact with the deity.

GA: This is comprised entirely from schist and is criss-crossed by quartz veining. The schist is part of the Circum-Rhodope Belt. Initially a part of the schist slipped along the schistosity plane and was cut from the main rock body. This produced a vaguely mushroom shape and the ancient sculptors gave it the form we see today.

The sacred stone mushroom (Epiphaneia) of Dadia Nr. 4

The photo was taken on: 30-06-2011. Photograph Companion: Found by K. Pistolas

At the area “Duo Vrahi” (Two Rocks) near the Dadia village and specifically on the southeast side of one of these two rocks we witness elongated (Fig. 4) and semicircular burial niches that have been carved on the rocky side with an iron tool as well as an alley for easier access to the top of the hillock and the carved tombs. A menhir in shape of a mushroom has been carved on the left hand side of the above mentioned rock (Fig. 4), the existence of which

stands along to the burial niches in Petrotopos and Kirki reassuring the dead that their god, the stone mushroom deity will not leave them in the inglorious darkness that the non-initiated shades dwell.

The east side of the second rock bears basin carvings around the two burial niches that were possibly for offerings to the buried dead. On the back side of the rock you can see a ledge that had been carved with anthropomorphic characteristics.

#### The stone sanctuary of Kirki with the anthropomorphic niche Nr. 5

Geographical Coordinates: 40° 58' 48'' 25° 48' 25 '' Altitude: 219 m. Photograph Companion. Found by St. Kiotsekoglou. Date: 20-01-2001

We can see a characteristic Thracian necropolis that belonged to the Cicones 1300 m to the northeast of the Kirki village on a wide stone hillock. There are two streams flowing through the rocky hillock from north to south and are supplied with water from the springs on the slopes of the Panigiri mountain. On the west and east side of the rocky hillock we can see carved tombs – niches and basins on the tombs, which were used for offerings to the buried dead. On the east side of the rocky hillock we can see a carved anthropomorphic niche (Fig. 5). 15 meters further north than the anthropomorphic niche there exists an oval rock carved in shape of a table with a flat top surface. A natural rock stands between the stone table and the anthropomorphic niche and the basin-like shape on top corroborates its usage as an altar. Smaller burial niches lie underneath the anthropomorphic niche. The presence of water, the anthropomorphic Mother Goddess, Cybele, Demeter or Persephone and the stone table all document that besides a burial space it was also a gathering worshipping place, that is a “sacred place”, reassuring an open-air Thracian sanctuary in honour of a female deity as depicted on the silver- and gold-plated tablets bearing facial characteristics (Fig.6) that have been found at Demeter’s sanctuary at the Zoni (- Mesimvria) site (Βαβρίτσας 1973:70-86, πίν.93β).

The archaeological investigations at the site of Kirki provide us with interesting facts about the Iron Age (1050-7<sup>th</sup> cent. BC). My hypothesis on the chronology of the anthropomorphic niche after the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE is based on the fact that Greeks established the Zoni (- Mesimvria) colony towards the end of 7<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of 6<sup>th</sup> BCE. Their worshipping of anthropomorphic gods influenced the Thracian tribes (Τριαντάφυλλος 1994:36).

#### The sacred stone mushroom (Epiphaneia) A of Kirki Nr.6

Photograph Companion: Dimensions: Height 1.40 m. Found by Alexander Hennig & Stavros Kiotsekoglou Date: 23-03-09

A stone mushroom carved on the natural rock stands upright 50 meters to the north of the open-air sanctuary with the anthropomorphic niche (Fig. 8). Small basins have been carved on the rock next to the stone mushroom and they were used as a place for offerings to the deity

the mushroom depicted. A stream flows before the stone mushroom and the basins and is supplied with water by the Panigiri mountain springs.

At this open-air sanctuary with the mushroom as its totemic symbol, the offerings to the seminal deity took place in October, when the mushrooms appear in large numbers. Two feasts were celebrated in Dionysus' honour: the spring Anthesteria and the autumn Dionysean Mysteries, also known as Ambrosia (=the gods' food) In October they celebrated the bacchic feasts in Thrace and Thessaly, the Ambrosia, named after the autumn Dionysean feast, at which the hallucinogenic mushroom inspired divine madness (Graves 1998:235, 446). A tomb monument from Dascyllus, ancient Bithynia, on the south coast of the Black Sea informs us about the symbolism of the mushroom as a sacred mediator with the world of the dead (Fig. 13). The dead Lysandra is depicted seated between two butterfly-souls on the carved niche on the cap of the mushroom, whereas Hermes the psychopomp is depicted carved on the stem of the mushroom among dag drawings. Hermes was just a sacred mediator, a messenger between the world and the Underworld. "Hecate's chthonic dogs and the soul depictions suggest that Lysandra had been initiated to some mystery religion, probably the great Eleusinian rite. Or judging by the splendid tomb monument she may have been a priestess who had tried the special mushroom communion, which was intended for the chosen only" (Ruck 2009:63). The mushrooms of Kirki (Fig. 7, 8, 9,) with the carved niches intended for the first fruits offerings assuredly reveal their worshipping purpose.

GA: The head is a silica matrix conglomerate. The upper part of the body is a soft rock in the process to become sandstone. This rock is abundant in the area; it is a river-stream deposit, soft and easily eroded- weathered. The lower part of the body is also a conglomerate. The shape was produced once again by erosion –weathering and the effect was intensified by the work of the ancient sculptors.

#### The sacred stone mushroom (Epiphaneia) B of Kirki Nr. 7

Photograph Companion: Fig. 8. Dimensions: Height 2.5 m. Found by Antonis Roussis, St. Kiotsekoglou, Stylianos Tziamtzis. Date: 23-02-2004

The stone mushroom is situated 500 m far from monuments Nr. 5 and 6. The 2.5 m. high rock carved in shape of a mushroom (fig. 8) is straightforward associated with the water element. A small stream supplied with water by a nearby spring flows on the left hand side of the menhir and on the right hand side, 30 meters far from it a river flows through the level and large plateau of Kirki. As I have already mentioned the association spring (water) – stone defines the most ancient sacred place (Eliade 1981).

#### The sacred stone mushroom (Epiphaneia) C of Kirki with the burial niche Nr. 8

Photograph Companion: Fig. 9. Dimensions: Height: 3.70 m. Burial niche length: 1.35m. Width: 0.75 m. Found by Alexander Henning and Stavros Kiotsekoglou. Date: 30-03-2008

The stone mushroom was carved on the already existent rock on its north and west side as it is apparent nowadays and there exists a carved burial niche as well as a basin on the stem for offering rites to the buried dead people (Fig. 9). The association stone mushroom – water – burial niches has become known through the megalithic mushroom of the dolmens monumental cemetery at Kotronias (Nr. 3), Dadia (Nr. 4) and the stone mushroom at the necropolis of Cicones at Kirki (Nr. 6). The similarity and the association of the Thracian deity-mushroom with Dionysus and the ruler of the realm of the dead clearly show that the Cicones worship a seminal god, who is the God of the rebirth of life and also protector and mediator with the Underworld at the same time. It is now comprehensible why people used to honour the dead people at several main festivals, such as the Anthesteria and the Agrionia. The privileged dead (be it male or female) of the burial niche asked god for a unification with him, reassuring the existence of the future of the dead god, the victory over death, the resurrection and their triumphal apotheosis (Λεκατσά 1999:237-238).

We find similar mushroom-like burial spaces at the burial monuments of the megalithic culture in South India called “hood-stone” (Fig. 22) and are associated with the worshipping of the dead (Samorini 2002:67-76). We also witness similar mushroom-like burial spaces at burial urns at Etruria, ancient Tarquinia at Tuscan, Italy (Fig. 21).

GA: This comprised by a silica matrix conglomerate head with a softer ferricrite matrix conglomerate body and it is in situ. Both rocks are found locally. The mushroom shape was the result of the differential erosion – weathering (the ferricrite body was more readily eroded weathered than the silicified head) and it was enched by the work of the ancient Thracians who saw a rock looking like a mushroom and sculpted it in order to give a more intense look. This is supported also by the existence of the burial conch in the side of the mushroom. The ceiling of the conch follows the dip of the rock but the floor is cut against the dip creating an oval shape.

#### The Dionysus Sabazius sanctuary at Magazi (Ancient Zirinia, Zirinis or Zervae) Nr. 9

Geographical Coordinates: 26° 30' 60" 41° 13' 5" Altitude: 16 m. Photograph Companion: 10,11,12. Found by Stamatis Palazis. Date: 20 -04-2010.

At the Magazi area which is situated near Kornofolia village, the ancient springs and the road network of the Roman period imply the existence of the ancient town called Zervae or Zirinis which had functioned as a station on the North-South artery route which intersected ancient Via Egnatia near Aenus (Sustal 1991, 504-505. Tab. Peutinger. Seg. VIII 4. Γουρίδης 2006). At the above mentioned site we have found a relief mushroom on a flat rock next to two carved solar disks (Fig. 10, 11), which may have been used as a worshipping gathering and rites place, which is reassured by the small wine press (Fig. 12), the product (must) of which they used to mix with the entheogenic plant and was the necessary drink for the Dionysus Sabazius

rituals (Ar. Vesp, 9-30). The carved solar disks imply worshipping of the Sun since carving or cutting on rocky hillocks is a usual practice in the whole region of Thrace.

The symbolic co-existence of the solar disks and the relief mushroom at the Magazi area confirms the unification of the two worshipping practices, after the mythological Lycurgus' conflict with Dionysus. The two worships, the solar and the chthonic were opposed to Dionysus' final winning over Lycurgus, the new religion and the unification of the two elements. Homer provides us with this piece of information (Od. 9, 196-199) since Maron, who was Apollo's (God of the Sun) priest, offers Odysseus twelve amphorae of wine, a symbol of Dionysus and the historic period. Also Macrobius refers to the Thracians worshipping some God Sabazius, who merges Dionysus and Sun (Macrobius Saturn. 1, 18, 11), documenting thus the existence of an open-air sanctuary dedicated to Dionysus Sabazius. The existence of the relief mushroom at the Magazi area did not only symbolize the plant expression of rebirth and the chthonic god it represented, but it also stood as a symbol of the entheogenic plant, which held the "god property" within its subject matter. Its consumption by the faithful or the ritual participants would lead them beyond the boundaries of this world, within the "Divine Presence".

GA: Conclusion. None of stone mushrooms examined was made from rocks transported from other areas. Every one of them was made from local rocks in situ and each of them more or less was sculpted by the worshippers. This work is more obvious in the Lagyna and Kotronia mushrooms. I made no reference to the mushroom glyph at Mangazi because I don't believe that anyone can really dispute its human origin. There is no way that nature could create this.

### The Great Mother Goddess and Dionysus Sabazius

#### Thrace

The co-existence of stone mushroom and anthropomorphic niche (anthropomorphic – deity) at the rocky sanctuary at Kirki, Lagyna and Dadia area depict the co-existence of a Thracian deity-mushroom (Sabazius), whom the Thracians used to worship and a female deity, the Great Mother Goddess at the same time (Strab. Geog. 10, 15), fact which is confirmed through both Homer's and Hesiod's work, according to which the gods beared human characteristics and properties. The Greek colonists who settled the Zoni area believe in such a religious notion and it was at this exact same place where researchers have found Demeter's sanctuary with the known tablets on which the Thracian earth goddess's facial characteristics are illustrated. The relief mushroom as well as the solar disks at the Magazi site (Nr. 9) corroborate the fact that an open air sanctuary built in honour of an ecstatic deity, which is symbolized by a chthonic and a solar symbol and could be no other than Dionysus Sabazius (Κιοτσέκογλου 2012).

## Macedonia

Along with the political deities trinity (Zeus, Hercules, Asclepius), in those days they used to worship a great female deity with her two aspects and properties both the maternal and the virgin one merged in one; that is the Mother Goddess at times and also the duality mother-daughter, such as Demeter and Persephone. They used to worship a male deity, who during the Classical and Hellenistic period bore the figure and name of Dionysus (Hatzopoulos 1994:52-53 and 60-61).

## Amanita Muscaria

The ethnomycologists Gordon and Valentina Wasson in their book titled *Mushrooms, Russia and History*, Pantheon, New York 1957, assisted by the prominent French mycologist R. Heim and based upon mainly in linguistic data from Sanskrit support that the enigmatic Soma (found in the sacred ancient Vedic Books and referred to at the pantheon of gods) was not (as it has been deemed to the present day) some kind of plant such as Ephedra vulgaris, Asclepias acidum etc., but the Amanita muscaria mushroom (Fig. 14).

Some of the traits of the sacred mushroom that are mentioned in the ancient religious Indian literature Rig Veda have led Wasson to identify it to the Agaricus mushroom, since the Soma grew in the mountains, it was red, juicy and fleshy, had no leaves, roots, seeds or flowers. Its consumption strengthened power, wisdom and perceptiveness, raised religious energy to excitement to the boundaries of sacred inebriation. According to a Vedic Hymn (Samorini 2002, 18):

*“We drank the Soma and transformed to immortal,  
We reached light, Gods revealed before us  
Who can harm us anymore, what dangers can touch us now  
O! Immortal Soma! (...) Drink penetrated into our souls  
Immortal to us, the mortal”*

## Dionysus Sabazius: The God of Ecstasy in ancient iconography

If we have a closer view, it is attested that the ecstatic experience which stems from Dionysian festivals differs from the alcoholic inebriation, of the symptoms of which we are all aware. Wine consumption, but for extremes, does not create hallucinations. The features of the Dionysian ecstasy are enraged stimulation, sexual arousal, remarkable muscular strength, prophetic vision, identification with the deity. Dionysus in his original form was not the god of wine, the image and the properties of this strange deity underwent numerous alterations, before and during his slow entering to the Olympic Gods coterie, until Dionysus transformation to his final form, the god of wine, whom we are aware of, in the way the classical writers had described and bequeathed. The most ancient Dionysian myths included only few hints about

the role he should have had during the introduction and invention of the wine. However, no reference was made to Dionysus regarding the origin of the wine and the vine. From his introduction, this deity was directly associated with hallucinogenic plants, the identity of which is subject to much debate and research (Fig. 15). According to the Greek literary tradition, Dionysus was a deity coming from the north and several mythic motifs placed him in the Indo-European religious tradition. Some writers think that Dionysian hallucinogenic substances that preceded the wine and vine are included in the ambrosia (water and honey) and in fermented from wheat and other cereals drinks. However the possible association with the Indo-European cultures creates a direct link of this ecstatic deity to the hallucinogenic mushrooms and especially the Indo-European mushroom *Amanita Muscaria*. For some writers Dionysus is a Hellenized version of the Thracian-Phrygian Sabazius, whose worship has significant common elements to the Haoma and Soma worships (Wohlberg 1990, 333-342). Several illustrations of Dionysian topic depict wine and clusters of grapes. The frame of these clusters in some cases looks more like a mushroom than a cluster (Fig. 16).

A hypothesis exists that there is a moment in the Greek civilization that the ancient entheogenic Dionysian mushroom becomes a religious taboo and hides under a layer esoteric symbolism. At this time a unification of both symbols, the mushroom and the cluster takes place. The escorts of the God – some of them initiated in Dionysian mysteries – intentionally tried to conceal the occult knowledge especially that of the mushroom, behind widely recognizable interpretative forms. Thus they created images that were subject to dual reading – interpretation, one the sacred (mushroom) and the other the non religious (cluster of grapes) (Samorini - Camilla 1995:307-326).

In figure (17) we can see the bearded Dionysus, wearing a himation and holding a sprig with a cluster of grapes that in a strange way resemble and have the shape of a mushroom. The God offers Persephone who is sitting on a throne a drinking cup (kantharos). Persephone is holding a rooster and an ear of corn, which are fertility symbols of the animal and the plant world respectively. The irregular shape of the clusters and the regular allocation of the dots on their surface intentionally reminds us of the *Agarius* mushroom. As it is shown in the above mentioned illustration, we are at the moment of the unification of these two symbols, which are characterized as Dionysus' special symbols (Orsi 1909, 424, Fig. 7. Samorini 1998:60-63).

All the above verify that the special power of the pure wine (with no water in it) attests to the fact that the Greek wine had plant additives, especially the wine used at rituals because it supposed to lead to insanity (Diog. Laert. 3, 39).

On the short relief from Farsala, Thessaly which is dated back from the second half of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE and is now exhibited in the Louvre museum (Fig. 18) Demeter and Persephone, the two goddesses of the Eleusinian Mysteries are shown exchanging plants that are acknowledged as mushrooms. It is possible that on this votive relief the various sources of hallucinations and the Eleusinian visions are depicted. It is also considered that the mushrooms

belong to the Dionysus' sphere and their presence on the votive relief refers to a final period of the Eleusinian worship and psychopharmacology· it is thus possible to deem the presence of the mushrooms as Dionysian influence, an influence recognizable after a point in the history of the Eleusinian worship.

One of the three illustration on the outer side of the marble pot (Fig. 19) we can see an hierophant (it may be Eumolpus, the first Hierophant in the history of Eleusis) pouring water onto the small pig which is to be sacrificed, whereas in his other hand he is holding a plate, on which we can clearly discern three objects, that were defined as opium poppy seeds by Lovatelli. The opium poppy had been the plant of the Eleusinian deities (Lovatelli 1879, 5 ff). According to Ruck the width of the stalks is too thick to be a poppy and the shape of these plants resemble more the shape of mushrooms.

Across the Thrace mainland, where the open-air sanctuaries have been found, there is the island of Samothrace and the known Cabeiri Sanctuary where religious activity is documented even from the 7<sup>th</sup> century BCE. It was considered that through the Samothrace Mysteries they achieved safety from sea dangers and fruitful journeys, whereby to face the danger of death and the encountering with the gods of the underworld mainly aimed at protection from death itself. Is it possible that at the initiating rites they used sacred drinks with entheogenic properties so that they could bring humans at the threshold of death and the world of visions? The answer to this question is provided by the illustrated message on the pot (Fig.20) which is exhibited in the Thebes Museum and depicts comic figures surrounded by vine, from which we can see hanging huge mushrooms instead of grapes. The dynamic mushroom-like shape of these vines implies a lot, even it is found in the general frame of “schematic representation” of the real clusters, which the researchers acknowledge as a “simple and pure” graphic development. The direct association of the pot with the rituals at the Sacred Cabeiri Sanctuary is documented by the certain bowls that have been found at the Thebes Cabeiri Sanctuary and had been used at similar rituals in relation to the Cabeiri worship.

Six formal criteria are used to establish the identity of Soma with Dionysus (Sabazius) (Wohlberg 1990:333-342):

- 1) Both cults had the same aim (to cause ecstatic behavior);
- 2) Both cults required the attainment of the same spiritual state (purity);
- 3) Both cults had an idiosyncratic myth in common;
- 4) Both cults showed the identical word root in the name of the worshiped god;
- 5) Both cults had identical zoological and botanical associations with their god;
- 6) The alcoholic god (Dionysus) was depicted as having the same physical effects on human beings as that of the ancient non alcoholic god (Soma).

The worship of Sabazius, a Thracian-Phrygian god, was known across Greece from the 5<sup>th</sup> century, whereas in Phrygia they used to worship him as Zeus Sabazius and in Asia Minor



in general, where even earlier, from the Pre-Christian years they had identified him with Attis and Mithras. It was also associated with the worship of Cybele, the Mother-Goddess and Artemis. The tablets on which the god is depicted are mainly small metallic or bigger marble ones, which show him at a hieratic posture, blessing using one or both hands (Fig. 23, 24, 25). The characteristic movement of his fingers is of the same hieratic posture when blessing (*benedictio latina*). The snake dominates the bronze hand which was found in Edessa and it was the snake that was considered as embodiment of the Sabazius. The snake rolled around the wrist and ended to the basin (Καραμανώλη Μ. Σιγανίδου 1967:149-155), from which he might have drunk the “intoxicating” drink of his rites. Another symbol Sabazius bears is the fir cone – the fir was considered the sacred tree and is illustrated among the three fingers on the hand of Edessa and also on the similar hands that have been found to the present day. The fir and the birch are the botanical bonds of the mushroom the apotheosis of which resulted in Haoma - Soma god.

#### Concluding

1. Sabazius, who the Cicones of the Early Iron Age worshipped embodied into an entheogenic mushroom god, *Amanita Muscaria*, which is the same as Haoma – Soma, the god of the ancient Idian – Iranian people. Haoma – Soma was also the source of the sacred immortality drink. The plant entheogenic mushroom-deity they used to worship in Thrace and was called Sabazius, was adopted and incorporated in the deity the Greeks called Dionysus, that is *di-wo-nu-so-jo*, as it had been first read out on the steles in Pylos (Xa06) and Knossos, dated back from 1450-1200 BCE.

2. The above mentioned stone mushrooms-deities (Nr 3, 4, 6, 8) are found in cemeteries, fact which denotes the association of the mushroom-deity with the buried dead people. This is not to surprise us since the *Anthesteria* festival, a Dionysian festival was actually an ecstatic festival which had to do with visions of the dead.

# Illustrations



**Fig. 1** The sacred stone mushroom of Lagyna Nr.1



**Fig. 2** The stone sanctuary of Lagyna with the anthropomorphic niche Nr.2



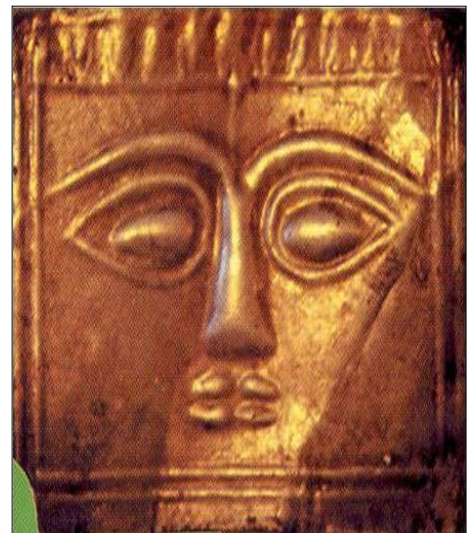
**Fig. 3** The sacred stone mushroom (Epiphaneia) of Petrotopos, Kotronias area Nr.3, which dominates the dolmens



**Fig.4** Symbolic depiction of menhir stone mushroom in the elevation (Nr.4) near the rock cut tombs of Dadia



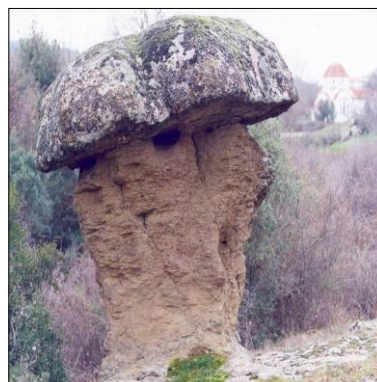
**Fig.5** Anthropomorphic niche of Kirki Nr.5



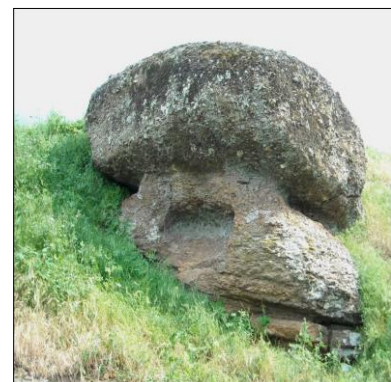
**Fig. 6** Metal sheet with anthropomorphic characteristics that was found in Sanctuary of Demetra in the area Zoni.



**Fig.7** The sacred stone mushroom (Epiphaneia) A of Kirki Nr.6



**Fig.8** The sacred stone mushroom (Epiphaneia) B of Kirki Nr.7



**Fig.9** The sacred stone mushroom (Epiphaneia) C of Kirki Nr.8 with the burial niche



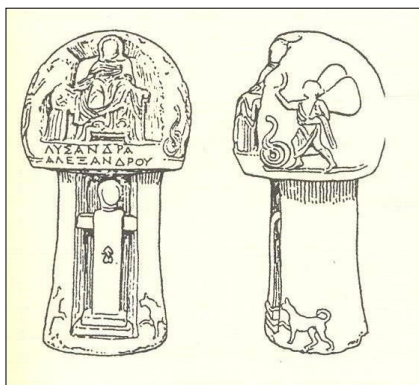
**Fig. 10** Bass relief mushroom at Magazi Nr.9



**Fig. 11** Two carved solar disks with bass relief mushroom



**Fig. 12.** Wine-press near the relief



**Fig. 13** Tomb monument of Lysandra from Dascyllus ancient Bithynia



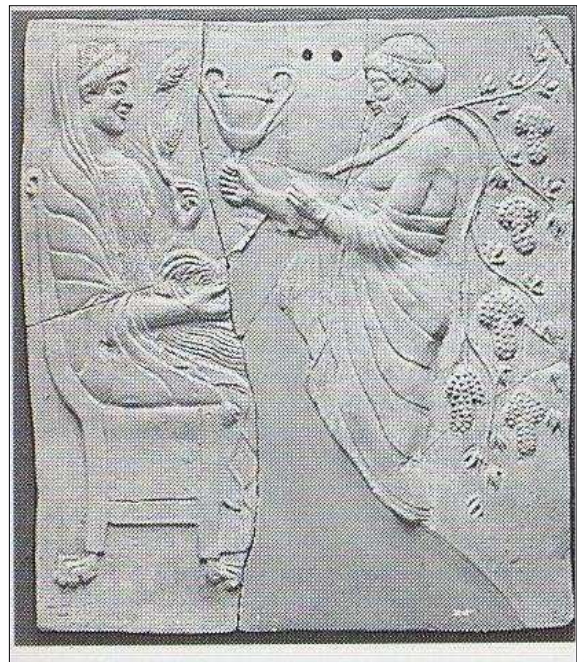
**Fig. 14** Amanita muscaria var. Flavivolvata



**Fig. 15** Black-figure vase depicting mushrooms between Dionysus and Satyr



**Fig. 16** Red-figure crater with Semeli, Dionysos and Hermes representation, late 4th cent. BC., Tampa. Florida



**Fig. 17** Pinax from the sanctuary of Persephone at Locri, first half of 5th cent. BC., Reggio Calabria Museum



**Fig. 18** Relief from Farsala (Thessaly) 5th cent. BC., Louvre



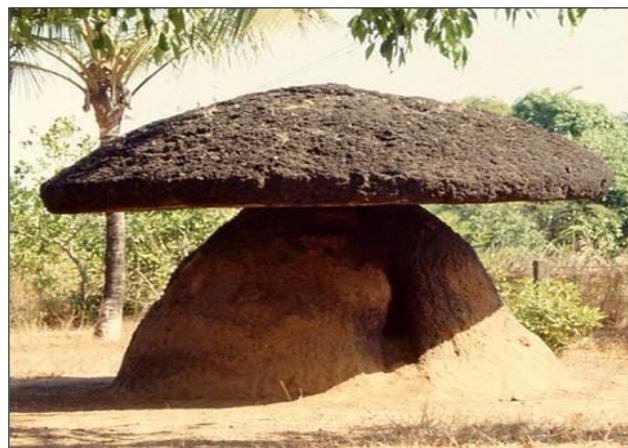
**Fig. 19** "Urna Lovatelli", with theme related to the Eleusinian Mysteries (2nd cent. AD)



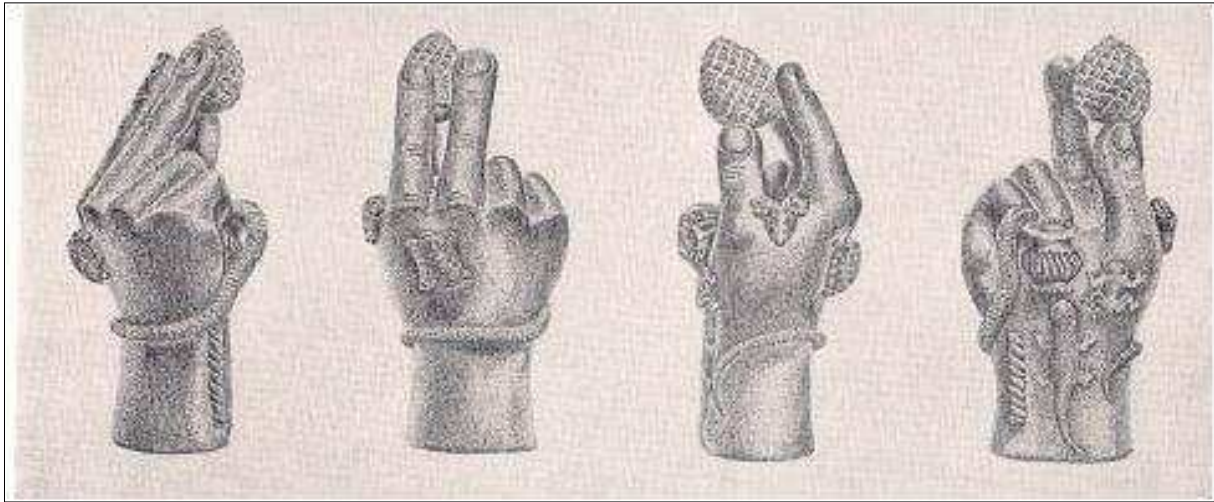
**Fig. 20** Skyphos from Cabeirion of Thebes decorating with mushroom formations. Late 5th cent. BC., National Archaeological Museum of Athens



**Fig. 21** Stone urn from Etruria shaped in form of mushroom (700 B.C)



**Fig. 22** Kuda-kallu ("umbrella-stone") from Cheramangad, Kerala, India



**Fig. 23** *The hand of Sabazio from Edessa, Arch. Mus. Thessalonica*



**Fig. 24** *One of the „hands of Sabazio” a god of Thraco-frygian origin, very popular in the roman empire. Mus. Melburn*



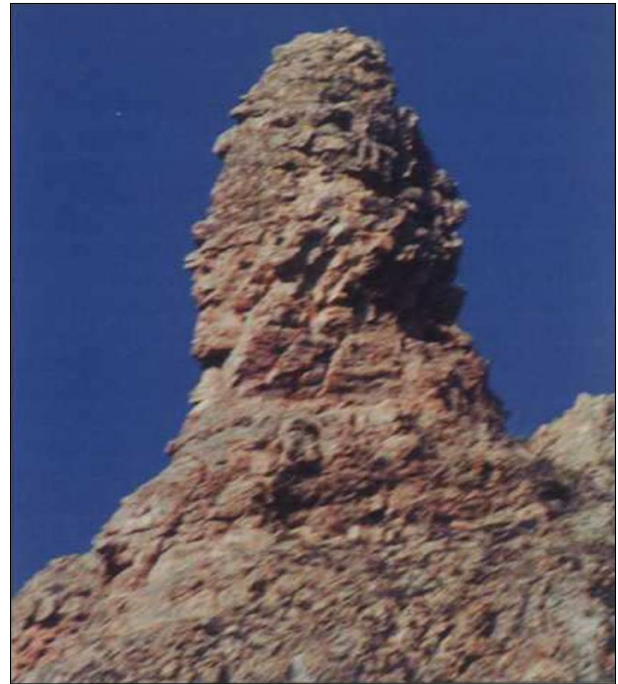
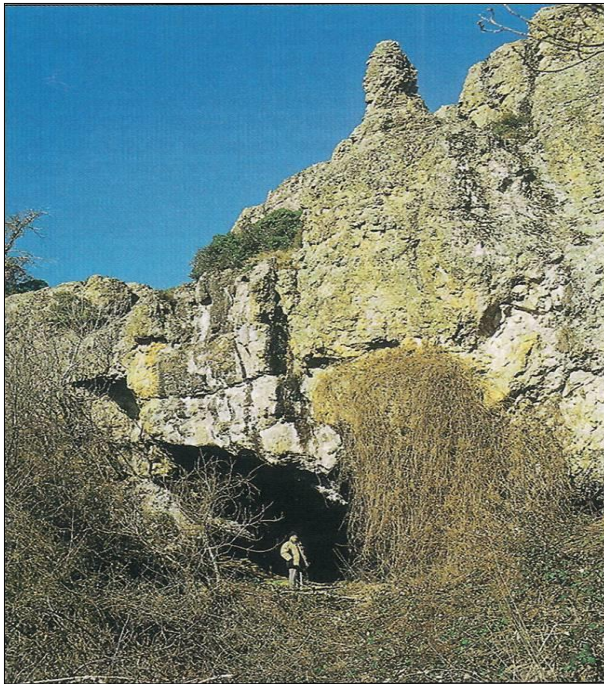
*Εικ. 13. Διδυμότειχο. Ανάγλυφο Ηρώα-Ιππέα (2ος αι. μ.Χ)*

**Fig. 25** *Relief hero-horesman Sabazios (2 sent.A.D.) from Didymotejho*

## OTHER THRACIAN MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS

**Monument:** Cavern big “Vuva Lefkimis” of Prefecture Evros

**Description:** On Gerakina hill, lying at the borders between the villages Lefkimi and Dadia, a cave known as “Great Vouva” was created by nature. A small stream flows from the top, whereas next to it an abstract phallus-shaped stone column was carved of about 2.5 m. The interior of the cave involves two non-equivalent chambers, which are separated by a natural rocky dividing wall. In the center of the big chamber the stone was carved providing thus a raised even place, in the background of which a shallow burial niche was carved, bearing two traverse hole on the right hand side most probably for offers. The superficial pottery within the cave involves hand-made fragments of the prehistoric times, as ceramics the Hellenistic and later Byzantine period (Κιοτσέκογλου 2005:104-106).



**Commentary:** The interpretation of the abstract stone column lies between the following: 1) it is a symbol associated with the worshiping of a goddess, 2) it is a monument of a dignitary mortal person who is specially honoured 3) a monumental building in honor of a dignitary person signaling his tomb at the same time. The scientific community as a whole draws a liaison between those monuments and religion and rituals. The interrelation of the burial niche and the stone column is the most likely version of this monument, that is the monumental building to honour a dignitary dead as well as a signal of their tomb, without totally excluding the worshiping of a goddess within the cave.

**Monuments:** Three megalithic rock-cut tombs in top of elevation near the Chapel of prophet Elias

**Description:** There is a stone hillock and an isolated rock lying on the northwest of the village Avantas, near the crossing of Avantas-Profitis Ilias - Kirki areas and stands out among the other peaks on the ridge. The whole rocky hillock is a burial monument, since three burial niches are carved according to the following orientation: the first to the east (Fig.1), the second to the northeast (Fig.2) and the third to the north. A stone tombstone lies on the inclined rock three meters away from the niches. The front of the tomb has been shaped respectively, so that a place for the covering stone would be created. This stone was held by the upper protuberance of the rock, which was carved in the inner side by a channel or a flange to retain it (Fig.4).



**Fig. 1** *First rock-cut Tomb*



**Fig. 2** *Second rock-cut Tomb*



**Fig. 3**



**Fig. 4**

On the northeast and north side of the stone hillock, lower than the first tomb, there can be found two further elongated spacious niches carved on the gradient of the rock, which were



made use of for burial ceremonies, as shown by the smaller cases which were carved around each tomb on the outer or inner side for offers (Fig. 2). The way the first tomb was constructed vertically on the stone hillock compared to the two tombs on the gradient lower than the first, as well as its orientation, which is not to the east proves that the buried dead people were of lower social ranking and significance compared to the dead person in the first tomb. It is very likely that the aforementioned tombs contained relatives of the dead people (spouse) or even servants. The first tomb is more meticulously constructed. The dead person is protected by the tombstone, fact which attests special and meticulous interest concerning the burial ceremony. In case the dead person was not of royal origin or leader of some community, there certainly should have been a noted personality of their tribe.

On top of the tomb, two cavities are carved, of which the biggest collected rainwater as well. Around the cavity two channels were carved with bladed article, as well as two parallel lines that are cut through by two curved lines forming thus an incomprehensible shape (Fig.3) (Κιοτσέκογλου 2003:55-60).

Another tomb is carved on the rock near the village of Kirki (Kiotsekoglou 2003 [α]) and bears the same characteristics with the aforementioned tombs (Fig.5).



**Fig. 5** *Rock-cut tomb of Kirki*

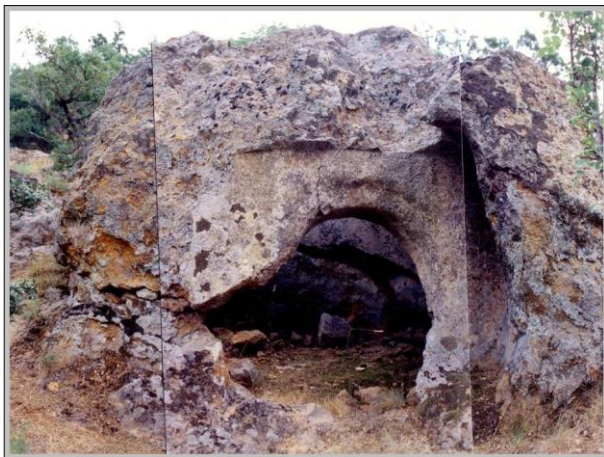
**Commentary:** The widespread religious practice of carving cavities on the rock, which is common among all peoples is attributable to the primitive piety to the deity of nature, especially the Goddess-Mother, the beginning and support of any manifestation of life, a life which when it comes full circle, it ceases and returns to the womb, where it stems from. The cavities on and around the rocks were carved by the worshippers so as to be able to offer libations in memory of those who have died, as well as to their tutelary deity, whose supernatural presence, inculcated and enriched the structure of the rocks. These ones lay magisterial and lonely above the daily world. The stone acts as a form of cover between the deity and the worshippers, who in turn attempted to destroy this cover by intervening on the rocky surface and approach the inner divine being as much as possible. The divine being provided the passive rock with a mystery force of life, which due to the carvings transformed

into a vivid rock. The dead people of the first tomb as well as the ones of the further tombs “asked” for the protection of the Goddess-Mother or for the identification with Her, in the context of piety and respect to the deity.

**Monument:** Megalithic Thracian rock-cut tomb or rock-cut cave temple, in the village Nipsa of Evros

“Seven not very large rock-cut caves have been documented in the eastern Rhodope Mountains, each of which has two entrances, one a horizontal, i.e., a “door”, and a second one on the roof of the dug chamber” (Fol 2003:241). According to the typology of Director of Thrakology Institute Valeria Fol, one still monument in the village Nipsa of Prefecture of Evros, brings the himself characteristically that the himself describes.

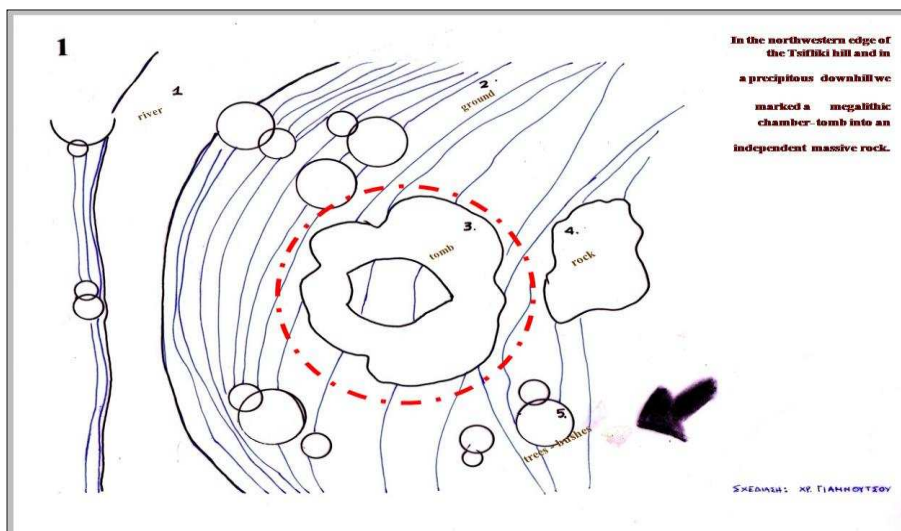
The monument, that is found near river, located and published by Dr Thanasis Kougoulios, has northwest orientation, a particularly elaborate façade, a main chamber, an entrance and a second opening in the roof (Κούγκουλιος 1992-1994:131-133).



*The elaborate façade*



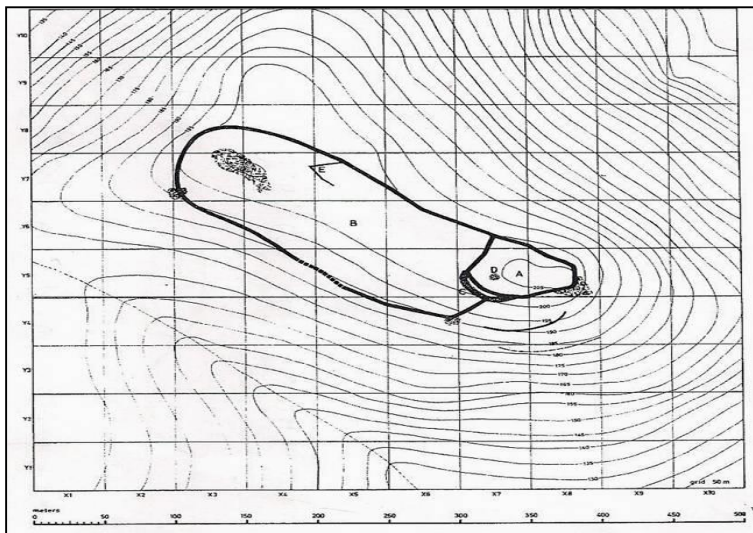
*The second opening in the roof*



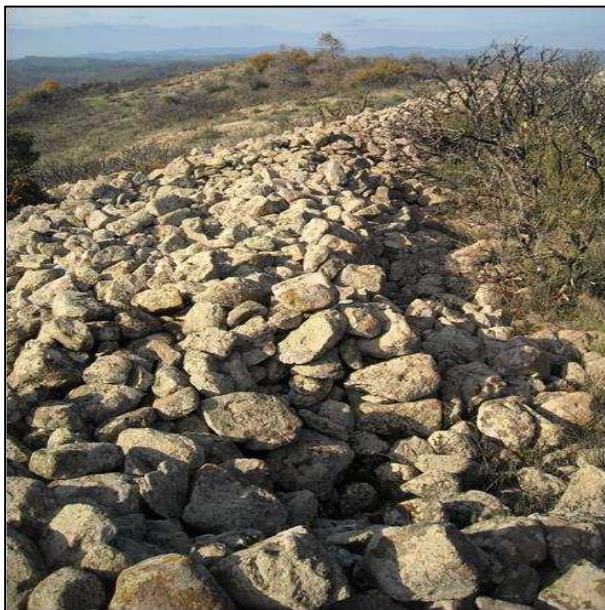
**Monuments:** Dolmens and fortification in village “Kila” of Evros

About 1600 m north to Kila village (Evros Prefecture) on a small hill, named Kale, one can trace the ruins of a small castle. Even though the hill is not high (205 m.) one can control the whole valley which spreads below to the East as well as the peaks of the surrounding hills.

On top of the hill, the remaining ruins (plan 1, Fig 1) consist of a precinct of an elliptic shape, which surrounds the peak of the hill and is the lower acropolis (plan 1, B) whereas another smaller acropolis can be found further down on the southeast peak of the hill (Τσιμπίδης-Πεντάζος, 1971: 94-97).



**Plan 1**



**Fig. 1** Precinct south side of the lower citadel



**Fig. 2** Remains of a stone pile in the upper citadel

The lower acropolis precinct survives in form of a stone pile from freestones (Fig.1). The upper acropolis (plan1, A) precinct is at a very good condition. Its width is 3 m. and is of maximum surviving height of 2 m. the northern side which is at a better condition on the external side and is built with roughly processed stones of irregular shape without any

connection matter and with smaller stones in between. The overall perimeter of the walls of the lower acropolis is about 740 m. and that of the upper acropolis is about 200m.

Within the upper acropolis one cannot find ruins but for a stone pile of circular shape (plan 1, D and Fig. 2) which may stem from the ruins of a hut of a circular shape. The Kale acropolis in the area of Kila, is of significant importance and lies at a salient spot from which one could control an area of 4-4.5 km to the West and Northwest up to the peaks of Sauksu (260 m.), Germutzileri (386 m.) and Kotza andra (277 m.) at which fortifications may exist. One also could control an area of 9-10 km to the North and East. At the foothills streams entrench the hill which may have satisfied the residents' needs in siege warfare.

### **The Thracian monumental cemetery of Kila**

To the northwest of the castle is a limestone hill, at the foothills of which lies a group of monumental megalithic graves (Dolmen) which date back to the early Iron Age between the 11<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Such equivalent monuments are noticed at the areas of Derio and Kotronias (Τριαντάφυλλος 1973:241-255), that is on the southeast part of Rodopi. Such constructions can be found in the eastern Rodopi area, in Bulgaria as well as in the mountain ranges of Stranza and Sakar (Tsonev, Kolev, Dinchev 2012:182-193). Equivalent monuments are to be found in the areas of East Thrace (European Turkey) (Beksaç 2012:24-38).



**Fig. 4** Dolmen oriented E-W, with vestibule and opening to the west



**Fig. 5** Dolmen oriented NW-SE



**Fig. 6** Cyst oriented E-W

None of the burial monuments is at a good condition, since some of them are destroyed and some have been excavated by illicit traders of antiquities. Here I present three types of

megalithic monuments that are located in the cemetery: Dolmen with a hallway (Fig. 4), without a hallway (Fig. 5) and cists (Fig. 6) are found. On the whole, the observations alone certify that the orientation of the graves is NW-SE and E-W, and most have stone platform.

\* I would like to thank the geologist, Spyros P. Pangalis, for his interdisciplinary approach to the monuments.

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## **Abbreviations**

AΔ = Αρχαιολογικό Δελτίο

AnnMusRov = Annali dei Musei civici di Rovereto

BCom = Bullettino della Commissione archeologica comunale di Roma

ΓΤΠΑΜΘ = Γενική Γραμματεία Περιφέρειας Ανατολικής Μακεδονίας και Θράκης

EntR = Enteogen Review

JPD = Journal of Psychoactive Drugs

NSc = Notizie degli scavi di antichità

ΠΑΕ = Πρακτικά Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρίας

# Thracian Megalithic Sanctuaries from Central Sredna Gora Mountain

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In recent years the area of the city Strelcha is subject of field studies of a joint expedition between the South-West University "Neofit Rilski", Institut of National Archaeological Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Institute of Space Research and Technologies at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences - affiliate Stara Zagora and National Observatory "Yuri Gagarin". As a result of these field studies was located 9 sanctuaries, which are located along the ridge of the mountain, its slopes on hills etc. Covers the space of highest peak west of Koprivshitsa, namely Bunay to low down in the valley, to the bed of River Luda Yana.

## ***Thracian Megalithic Sanctuary Kulata***

Located on the ridge of the watershed ridge oriented north-south, a steep slope to the south. On the east side borders the road **Strelcha - Koprivshitsa**, the western is steep, wooded slopes that descend to the ravine, south gently descends to the localities Gerginski giol and Isara. The high part is relatively flat platform from which to see the whole Strelchanska Valley, tops Bunay, Stramonos the west and the Vlak and Bogdan east (Fig. 1). Cutting the rocks are mainly round and oval with approximate dimensions of 0.05 m. 0.50 m. diameter, the depth varies from 0.07 to 0.18 m.

Dominant height altar is situated on two massive stone blocks. Shaped like a circle with a diameter of 0.90 m. Like lower portion has a width of 0.80 m, length 0.65 m and a depth of 0.55 m. (Fig. 2). Facility can be assigned to the group of so called "thrones", known by many sanctuaries in the Eastern Mediterranean. "Throne" is located on the main axis to the point of sunrise on the day of the winter solstice. In the southern periphery is carved into the rock big step in human type "Markova step." Step is left, and it carved out rock chute that pours the southwest. The upper part of the altar is covered by numerous cuts, with only the north will rain leakage (Fig. 3-5).

Well shaped arch rock arch seen in the southern part of the site. Is abducted by one of the needle rocks that support the throne. Height in daylight is 1.87 m. Wide and 1.60 m. was oriented to the southeast, i.e. to the vernal and autumnal equinox. Recess formed by the left side probably served to place gifts (Fig. 6-7).



Massive rock unit occurs north of the arch. Stone slab resting on several smaller rocks, forming a shelter. Bottom is carved and shaped saddle, thus was formed "tooth" with a height of 0.50 m. Length 2.35 m. This tooth is affixed to the southeast and east support. The facility is a "pirustiya" and "set foot" four boulders, which are well-formed. Education facility reaches a height of 1.65 meters. Northwestern In support of circular cutting depth of 0.50 m. diameter of 0.12 m. In the present situation of the roof slab is impossible for her cutting, suggesting secondary cover of the facility (Fig. 8-9).

Northeast of it is situated rock hewn Court - Botros, length 1.50 m., Width 1.05 m. 0.55 m and depth. On the south side is an opening, 0.10 m wide. 0 and long 25 m. (Fig. 10-11).

The east side of the monolith covering almost its entire height observed carved arrow / arrowhead in positive. Its height is 8.40 m. And is formed by indentation of the rock mass below the top thereof, and thereby to the base and flanks. The tip is slightly bisected in half, because it is squared by the two pieces of stone (Fig. 12).

The rock arch down south descends steeply down pass, length 5.30 m., and a width of 1.20 m. 2.40 m. was flanked by two boulders, the maximum height is 2 m. and the lowest point is 1.10 meters. At the beginning of the passage is formed thrlit by a large boulder located on Earth & rocks that form the dromos. In the middle of the passage occurs altar with multiple cuts on it.

East to a small area formed at the end of the passage is located less pirustiya, length 2.40 m. Wide and 2.40 m. 'Standing' is on one large and two smaller stones, the height is in daylight maximum of 0.30 m. (Fig. 13).

In the southern foot of the rock group formed trilit in which the upper block has a size of 3.10 meters. Of 3.30 m. Height is 1.60 m. (Fig. 14).

About 150 m. away from already described equipment is a monumental stone menhir. Situated on a rock platform, while opening before him had placed lower stones, forming a semicircle. Following the invasion treasure hunters, they are taken out of their beds and scattered along the slope. The height of the menhir is 4.95 m., and width of 4.20 m site. Foundation stone was laid on two levels, the difference between them is 1 m. The peak is weathered and has lost its shape. Basically form square width 1 m. Difference between countries is maximum 0.05 m. (Fig. 15).

### ***Thracian Megalithic Sanctuary Skumsale***

Skumsale archaeological site is located on the ridge of the watershed ridge oriented north-south, with a slope to the south. On both sides there are steep, wooded slopes that descend to the valleys. To the south road Strelcha - Koprivshitsa. The northern boundary is not clearly defined - here the slope rises gradually to pass into the central ridge of the Sredna Gora Mountain.

Megalithic Thracian sanctuary Skumsale a complex monument of impressive dimensions - length 1300 m, a width of 600 m., Which consists of multiple, consecutive isolated rock groups (arrays or rocks) that rise and dominate the surrounding terrain. Each of them is "associated" to the monument in a different way, they formed rock arches throne pirustii, rock platforms, ovoid shaped facility, etc. Concentration of cuts is impressive. It is practically impossible to present all because of that stop only the most pronounced and specific facilities.

The northern part of the sanctuary is formed around lawn with approximately 25 acres. The rock group, which is located on the north side of the hill represents the central group, around which are arranged the rest. Is surrounded by a moat in the form of a crescent, which is artificial. In the eastern part of the massif **dominates rock "throne" oriented to the northeast**. At the top is smoothed observed playground oriented to the south (Fig. 16, 17).

From the west side, are two groups of rock, at a small distance from each other. The first Northwestern group observed many well-formed rock arch type "trilit." Located on the west side of the array, it actually appears and supporting east wall of the facility. Western support is well-formed of upright block, relatively rectangular shape. About 5 meters from the arch shaped grotto two large monolithic blocks in contact at the top and on the inside has expanded the site by logging. Thus was formed grotto (Fig. 18, 19).

The second group northwest occur several facilities. The first one is a rock carved arch, which is located in the eastern part of the group. The lower stone is polished, which is irrefutable proof of its frequent use. Rock dromos leads us to logging, type "Botros" diameter 2.20 m. Situated in the northeastern part of the rock group, at a height of about 3 meters. Outflow opening of the northeast part, and the whole height of the monolith formed complex system of gutters and round cuts reaching earth embankment at the foot (Fig. 20-21).

The first rock group from the northeastern side is a monolithic block with a height ranging between 4 and 6 months. Divided by the passage of two parts - north and south. Length of the apparatus is 52 m., the width from 10 to 12 m. Upper part is smoothed and lined with incisions associated with channels in complex configurations. Interest is placed in the western part of the altar of the "throne." On the northern part of the facility are monitored carved into the rock graphite marks. The working hypothesis is that it was carved arrow. Southern part of the monument is crossed by dromos rock oriented northeast-southwest, which separates the site of West and East. The western part is more and more cuts. This is set by our central altar of the sanctuary (Fig. 22).

From the meadow to the south observed number of rock groups arranged approximately in a straight line. Interest is one of them, located on a small hill. The top is reached thanks to rock dromos oriented southwest-northeast, 6 m in length. At the end is shaped playgrounds in the southern part of which is a facility of the type "pirustiya." It is based on a three stone thus formed two education. In the southern Rhodope clearance observed, and from the west - Rila.

The upper plate is flattened and covered with deep and complex as the round shape cuts (Fig. 23).

In shaped site on which there are three monolithic rocks of relatively small distance to each other, the sanctuary is divided into two "sleeves" - southwest and southeast. In field studies, right here we found a fragmented ceramics. Unfortunately, most of these rock groups was destroyed in modern quarrying.

Rock groups of the southeastern part three. On two of them occur in different size and shape cuts as their concentration is not high. There are no more special architectural solutions. The first of these, located near the assemblage point on both sleeves is shaped complex facility resembling a snake's head, oriented north-south. On the south side there is logging, which crosses the entire monolith and clearance forms. Of interest are formed at the bottom of the roof slab cuts that resemble honeycombs - element of beehives. Facility on a well-shaped incisions - one in a symmetrical form a sheet and two cuts a "Markova steps" (Fig. 24).

Last rock group from south-west side is located on the hill. Impressive concentration of facilities registered here. On top of the hill is carved circular altar (eschara?). Unfortunately, half of it was destroyed by the trenches. At the northern foot is registered facility that resembles a semicircular pool, oriented east-west. Its southern part is carved vertical and north is formed by a smooth arc with a wall thickness of 0.20 m. Clearly evident east side of the facility, Western is hidden underground (Fig. 25).

Interesting rock monument was recorded in the eastern part of the hill. Represents a single boulder, whose body is carved pit a slightly irregular, oval, much resembling the shape of an egg. It is oriented north-south, the larger part is to the south. The walls are smooth, well formed. East damaged by tree grow - can be seen two huge pieces of it misplaced in the field. Bottom of this equipment is horizontally cut smoothly as under. The device is not maintained in its upper part and thus the question of its possible cover remains open. **In the southern part are preserved two steps, no doubt artificially processed to resemble coarse ladder or equipment area.** The composition of the rock in this facility is fragile, there are natural processes of erosion, where the shape of stone, sometimes smoothly curved. In this case, these processes have been extended by the activities of people to form the flat, horizontal floor, smooth walls and peculiar "throne" in the southern part of the facility. The length of the facility is 3.80 m., and a maximum width of 2 meters. From its southern end, preserved height is 1.80 m. (Fig. 26).

On the south side of the hill is situated altar measuring 3 to 5 m. Thereon formed a complex system of cuts circular, elliptical, and irregular shape, which are associated with channels and grooves together.

Interest is the fact that some of the rock groups of the complex are not working on them or very small concentration of cuts. This supports the idea that using only those arrays that are directly related to ritual practices.

In 2011, excavations were conducted at the site. Wells were set in three places - the point of connection of the two arms in the southern part of the central altar and the central rock group from the northern part of the sanctuary. Ceramics discovered relates generally to the first millennium BC. Fragments are mostly bottoms, estuaries, handles or vessel walls decorated. Interest are so-called Tokens, which the researchers defined as gifts typical Thracian megalithic sanctuaries. When drilling discovered several metal objects - parts of fibula and bracelet. In 2012, we continued with drilling in the gathering place of both sleeves. Findings found here consist of clay tokens, short iron sword loom weights, parts of fibulae belonging to the late Iron Age. In drilling the top of the rock group, located in the northern part of the sanctuary found a layer of the Late Chalcolithic. Fragmented pottery found here is compelling evidence in support of opinions expressed begun much earlier processes of sacral scale. The question remains open for the development of the sacral area in time and space (Fig. 27).

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Thracian megalithic temples in the land of Strelcha are located along the ridge of the Central Middle forest and its southern slopes. Common is excellent exposure to the field, the visual connection between them, and Frog mound in the valley. Another pattern is the location of the various facilities at the points of sunrise over a day of the year.

It is essential that the fact that on homogeneous rocks located in close proximity to each other are registered various concentrations, is no exception and the complete absence of traces of human processing. This supports the idea of different levels of absorption of sacred space, and largely excludes the theory of the natural occurrence of logging.

Translated by Nikolay Nanev

# Illustrations



Fig. 1



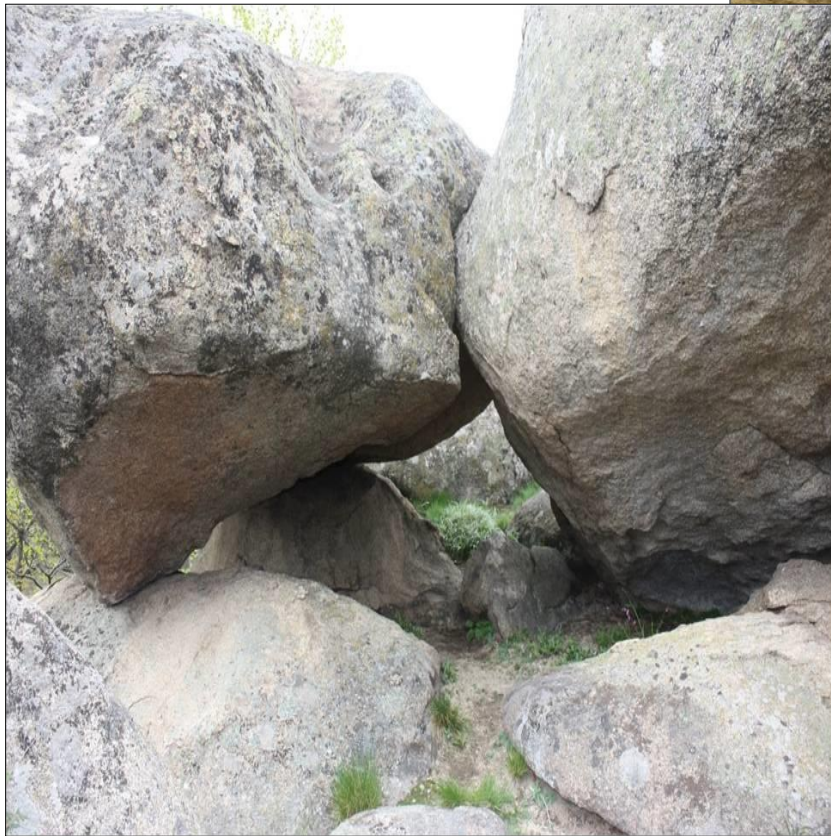
Fig. 2



**Fig. 3-5**



**Fig. 6-7**

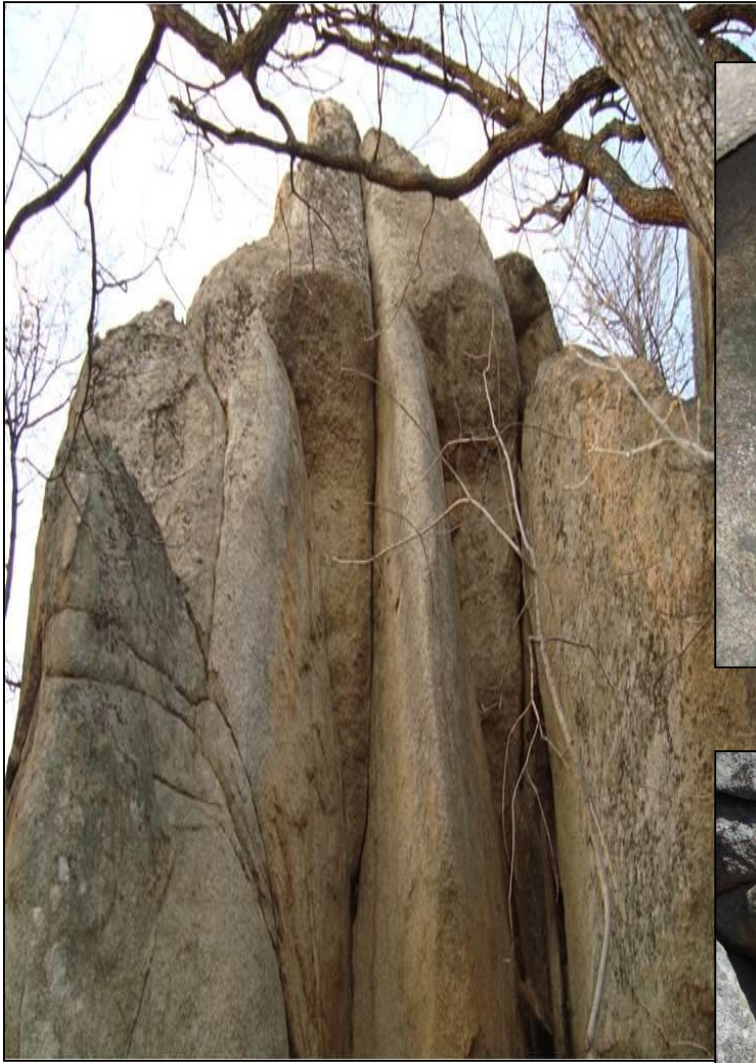


**Fig. 8-9**



**Fig. 10-11**





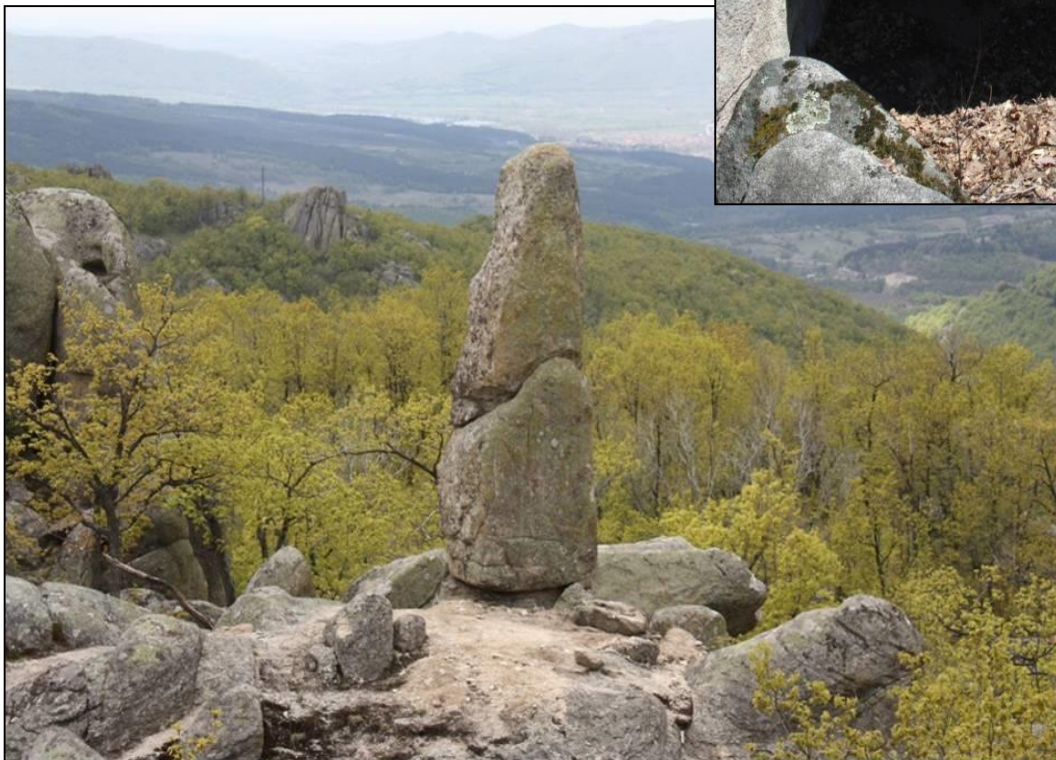
**Fig. 12**



**Fig. 13**



**Fig. 14**



**Fig. 15**



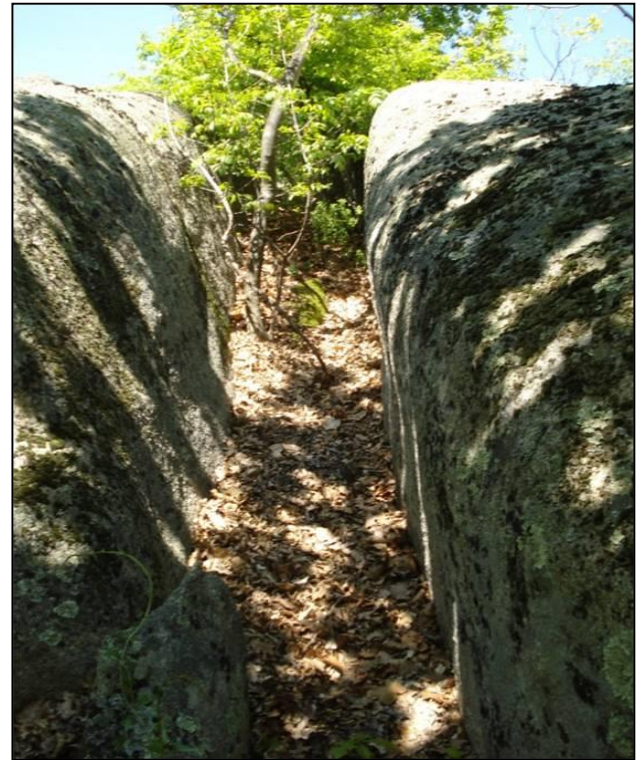
**Fig. 16**



**Fig. 17**



**Fig. 18**



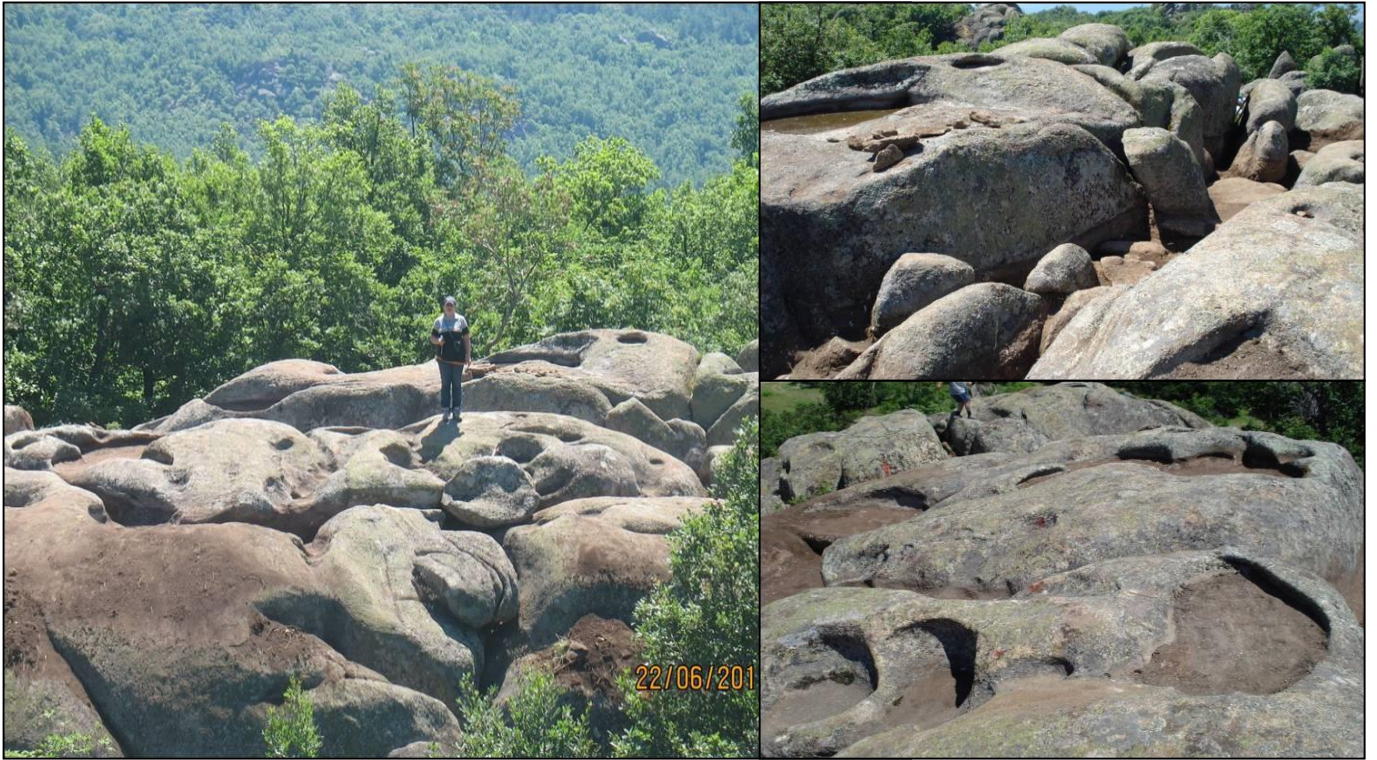
**Fig. 19**



**Fig. 20**



**Fig. 21**



**Fig. 22**



**Fig. 23**



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26



Fig. 27

# Cultural Heritage of Sacred Territory along the Struma and Mesta Rivers

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During conducting research in the territory of Southwestern Bulgaria an impressive presence of similar natural code was registered in the places described by the local population as rock sanctuaries and Christian holy places. They stand out with several important components:

- A river, spring or cave at the foot of the place.( Markov 2009: 32-62);
- Selection of high grounds which present majestic views;
- Rocks of different shapes and sizes, which were extremely important in the ritual practices of the primitive societies (Frazer 1989:240-267).

This were the reasons for the sites to be identified as sacred, to be distinguished from the surrounding terrain as the center of the world and to suggest contemplation of the divine essence of nature (Eliade 1994:20-27).

Struma and Mesta rivers with their beautiful gorges pass through the mountainous territory of southwestern Bulgaria and inclose between their valleys the alpine terrain of Pirin mountain.

In all ancient cultures mountains are seen as a sacred space and place for communication with the gods (Gomez 2008:97-104). Mountain is pictured as the center of the world, from where its creation starts (Eliade 1994:20-27). That reveals the following mythological picture:

In the center is the sacred mountain - the Pirin Mount, seen as abode of the god of thunder. At the foot of the mountain, are the river gorges. Dozens of rocks on the river banks reveal views to the peaks that can be viewed as local religious centers presenting a smaller version of the sacred mountain. In this regard Eliade reached the conclusion that people from pre-modern societies aspire to live as close as possible to the center of the world. They know that the Temple/Mounts are the real centers of the world and want their own home (territory) also to be located close to that.

Whole series of myths, symbols and rituals point out how difficult it is to reach the Center. On the other hand it becomes available to everyone via the sacred sanctuaries and its similarities exist in every community. The road that leads to the "Centre" is fraught with difficulties, but in the imagination of the population, every city, church, each residence is located in the center of the universe (Eliade1998:51).

In this line of thoughts, it is appropriate to highlight the ethnographic evidence for massive pilgrimage movement and sacrifices in the area of Popovo Lake - Pirin. There is evidence that it had the status of the holy land of Jerusalem. The rituals there were practiced until the end of XIX and beginning of XX century. As a reason of its disappearance is seen the end of nomadic livestock (Markov 2009:158-159).

The sacred space of the local sanctuaries has proved more sustainable over time. There still could be seen evidence of practices and rituals connected with the health and the livelihoods of people in the region. These are areas traditional way of life, beliefs and habits, which enclosed in the isolation of the mountain community, have not undergone major changes since ancient times (Markov 2010:62).

Recognized as sanctuaries in the tribal territory of traditional communities, Christianized sacral areas can provide invaluable information about the structure and ritual practices of the pagan temples in antiquity. Studies show that these sacral places have mostly: protective functions; health giving functions; functions related to the livelihood of the population and ensure fertility; functions associated with the cult of dead. Very often, these functions are intertwined and are interpreted according to the needs and understanding of local populations.

That is the reason much of the feasts along the Mesta and Rodopean slopes to be bound by the saints connected with herds. Along Struma River there are has saints protectors of the vineyards. One such place is the sanctuary of St. Trifon, placed above village Ilindentsi. It has the necessary outline and material evidence to be regarded as a successor of an ancient sanctuary. From the perspective of socialization and preservation of tradition there are many interesting rituals practiced on it, like selecting the king of wine. It is also important to mention that the actual place of the ritual is a rock above the village. It completely covers the characteristics of sacral area described earlier, and the fact that on side can be found fragments of ancient pottery is an important proof.

Similar is the ruined church of St. Elijah in village Mechkul. It is also situated at the outskirts of Pirin Mountain and overlooks the picturesque Kresna Gorge. We can make a connection between the towering Mount Pirin, which name is associated with the ancient pagan god of thunder, and St. Elijah, who is also seen as a ruler of thunder and a protector, in that case of the vineyards. It is interesting to note, that the area near the churchyard is named "Cellars" because wine was produced, stored and traded there. It confirms a traditional local practice of winemaking.<sup>1</sup>

Opposite to the sanctuary of St. Elijah, on the other side of the Struma River, there is a rock called the "Maiden rock". It is linked to the legend of a girl who wanted to escape from the Turkish invaders and jumped into the river.<sup>2</sup> There is a similar legend about a gorge of

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<sup>1</sup> Inf. Hristo Dimitrov mayor of Mechkul and Senokos

<sup>2</sup> Inf. Hristo Dimitrov mayor of Mechkul and Senokos

Mesta River in a locality named "Maiden Tower", against which is the sanctuary worshiped by the Bulgarian-muslims from the village Bukovo. Legends for "maiden stones" and gorges, are very common throughout the country. Undoubtedly they are remains of antique beliefs, which whisper for disappearance of mythological female person in an "underworld" kingdom. When considering the stories of these legends, it should be noted that similar myths are found in Greek mythology, such as "Pan and Syrinx" and "Apollo and Daphne".

The similarity in comparison of the images of maidens in Bulgarian folklore and Greek mythology is that both flee from their captors and in both cases the action takes place on the riverside. However, one important difference is noteworthy. Devas from Greek mythology pursued by the gods emit a certain helplessness, while those from the Bulgarian folklore are presented in a heroic regal bearing and radiate courage. This is particularly clearly perceptible in some legends, such as the brave maiden from the village of Dolen, Gotse Delchev, who lifted and carried a huge stone cross; or the damsel from the village of Momina Klisura, Pazardzhik, who was the leader of the fortress and controlled the entire gorge. This information makes us think that the image of the above mentioned maids is a folklorized version of a female deity with protective features - like the Phrygian Mother Goddess, who is known to have attributed protective functions. Some of her later images have survived, which show her wearing a crown in the shape of a fortress wall (Brendt-Erzos 2006: 152).

Sacred places from the Western Rhodopes, almost without exception, reveal views to the peaks of Pirin. A similar picture is also revealed from places on the other side of the mountain, in the valley of Struma river, like Palatski peak, Krastilski peak Komatinski rocks etc.

There are spots where rituals are not performed, but they have an important role in local cosmological notions. Those places are bound, with legends associated with primordial mythological time. They are mostly impressive rocks formations, which stand out from the daily life of traditional man, but they represent his explanation of the origin of the world. For example there is a rock named Kupena (translated as pile), located on the river bank of the Mesta River, at the foot of the village Bukovo. The legend says that there was a haystack, collected by a woman with a baby. It was so long ago, when heaven and earth was not separated. The woman wondered what to do with the dirty nappies of the baby, and decided to throw them in the sky. This angered the God and he divided the sky from the ground, lifted it up high, and petrified the haystack of the woman. In this regard, Frazer explores many myths from various primitive societies, where a woman, or a woman and a child, try to reach the sky as a result of which, they turn to stone. The chapter in which it is mentioned, generally presents understanding of the vertical model of the world and the place that connects all three levels, which is mostly seen as a rock, tree or a combination of both (Frazer 1989:240-248).

This place is linked to the symbolism of the center in the minds of the people of Bukovo (Eliade 1994:20-27). It is another proof of how primordial sacred territory is imagined in the archaic thinking - as a rock protruding from the water.

Further evidence is found in the rock-cut complex Skumsale north of the town of Strelcha, where one of the central rocks is surrounded by water. The shape of the water-trench shows that it is artificial, possibly made with a ritual purpose, to achieve the familiar mythological combination- water, rock, peak. At the very top of the rock, after excavations were found materials from the Chalcolithic era (Petkova Gocev Genov: in press).

The findings included numerous fragments of pottery, votive objects, large pieces of clay plaster, and traces of leveling the upper part of the rock via fillings of rubble. All this indicates that the place was used for ritual activities.

In all ancient societies rocks were worshiped and used as a place for sacrifice and communion with the gods.

In many of these rocks the ancient saw the gods themselves. In many of the shrines there are rocks resembling human faces, with a clearly standing out profile on the rock surface. Others show whole mythological stories that come to us via folk beliefs and legends for petrified weddings, like in the villages Osenovo and Banichan (Spasova 2010:105-106).

Another rocks recognized as a petrified wedding is, the "Gostunska wedding" known also as Grashishka or Graishka rock. There are no rituals preserved and the legends about it are fading away but by location and shape it is a real sanctuary. That is evident from the archaeological materials found there, also from a complex system of cups and channels dug on the surface of the rock.

One of the most interesting cuts is an ellipse with a length of about 30 cm. When it is filled with rain water and reflecting the sun, it resembles an eye whose pupil is the solar disk. From both angles of this ellipse start channels that descend down the cliff. Another important thing on this object is the narrow slit in the eastern part of the rock. It resembles a high dark corridor oriented North-South. When one goes inside, the east wall opens a window cut into the rock overlooking in easterly direction another sanctuary called "Mitrovica". It is possible, at a certain day of the year the place to be used for ritual greetings of sunrise.

The Sanctuary "Mitrovica" itself can be defined as a rock hewn mega-complex, in which the top and slopes are abundant with archaeological materials. It is indicative that in folk memory the peak continues to be considered a sacred place that honors St. Dimitar. A place in the saddle at the foot of the eastern slope of the sanctuary is specified as the richest of archaeological materials. The area is called "Padala" and has been a "testing ground" of the local treasure hunters for years. Despite the destruction caused, there is a clearly outlined circular stone heap above the ground with a diameter of about 10 meters. This facility can be defined as an altar for offering gifts.



Mitrovica respectively reveals a visual link to many other rock peaks, in my opinion a very significant and well studied one of which is the relationship with the located north sanctuary Kara Kaya (Black Rock in Turkish). Kara Kaya is a high rock, which is located at the highest compared to listed sites, it is a dominant hill in this part of the Rhodope Mountains and reveals a view of 360 degrees. This fact supported by the notion of the sacred space, ruling over a certain territory, can give valuable information about the religious and political organization of the ancient population in this region. The name is also noteworthy - it is known that toponyms are one of the most constant forms of language, and that even in the change of the population; they persist or get translated literally. Taking that into account, when the cult of Cybele was transferred to Rome, it's image was conveyed as well. It is described by some ancient authors as "baitylos"; a more specific description is that it presents an aniconic ie unformed sacred rock with a dark color (Brendt-Erzos 2006: 199). Another interesting fact about Kara Kaya, noted by the archaeologist Alexei Gotcev is a visual connection with the sanctuary of Mount Babyashka Chuka and possibly with other sanctuaries.

We know from numerous other sites that the rock sanctuaries bear the marks of the ancient astronomical knowledge. Another characteristic feature of them is their relation to mining and metallurgy. Citing Eliade, V.Fol considered the ores and minerals represented the fruit of the Great Goddess Mother Earth (Fol 2007:108-109). This connection between ore, mining and sanctuaries is proved by researchers of the sanctuary of Mount "Babyashka Chuka". It is one of the best studied sites of this type (Gocev, Tonkova 2004:95-111). Thanks to artifacts found there it is possible to determine typical materials for that kind of places. This information helps to be recognized cult objects on unexplored territories.

The characteristics of such kind of place are recognized on the territory around the chapel of St. Mina, in the village Mechkul. The first things that implicate the possibility it was an ancient sacred place are some impressive rock formations. On several of them can be found rock-carved cups. One of them is known as a footprint of the mythological person Krali Marko and the accumulated rain water in it is considered curative.<sup>3</sup>

Another interesting structure is the stone relief resembling a solar circle on the south wall of the rock near the old chapel. The old cemetery is also a sign of the sacred continuity. On the territory of the sanctuary, are plenty of antique ceramic fragments. On the slope towards the gorge can be found some fantastic rock formations with many walls between them. On top of one of the rocks stands a round stone. It forms a thraliton with its opening oriented northwest-southeast. Nearby is the so called "Big rock", or "Bear Rock". In the trenches beside it were found two pieces of loom weights, a large piece of molten ore and many pottery fragments. One of them has been deliberately smoothed to become circle (a clay token). These findings are typical characteristics of a cult object (Gocev, Tonkova 2004:95-111).

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<sup>3</sup> Inf. Slavtcho Marinchev 70g. shepherd s.Mechkul

At the foot of the cliff, is a cave named "Batalenova hole", presumably it can be an ancient mine.<sup>4</sup>

All this, and the fact that the place is still referred as a sacred shows an accumulation of beliefs from antiquity. In this line of thinking it is interesting to mention the belief saying, that if you want to find a missing person you must sleep on the sanctuary and you will dream what happened with them.

Dream is one of the oldest prophetic practices (Gomez 2008:196-199). Frazer describes a number of mantic and healing practices of ancient Greece, where the deity gives a dream of his devotee, and inspires healing (Frazer 1989:240-248).

Such practices are known from many holy places in Bulgaria, some of which are cited as the most sacred cloisters of Christianity. This raises questions about the pre-Christian past of sacred place of Krastova Gora. In favor of this idea are the facts that the symbol of faith is sought in images of small pebbles collected from there as amulets, as well as the visual connection with the sanctuaries Karadjov kamak /Karadjov stone/ and Belintash. Sleeping over ritual for health is known by many other local shrines, some of which is performed in a rock environment like in the churchyard of St. Panteleimon in the village of General Todorov. Sleeping over was performed in the day of the "kurban" /ritualistic blessing, sacrificing and eating the meat of an animal/ of St. Iliya in the Rhodope village of Dolen, in the churchyard of St. Marina chapel in Satovcha, also at many other holy places where the ritual is preserved remaining while bearing artifacts to more ancient origins.

Very often the dream shows where the temple needs to be placed. An example of this is the monastery of the Assumption in the village of Banichan (Spasova 2010:104).

Similar is also the legend of the sanctuary "Kopana carkva" (excavated church) in the village of Dobarsko, where the altar is placed at the base of an ancient mound.

Dream is a way to legalize a sacred space. Very often people realize that the place is sacred, but cannot define its holiness otherwise than by an inspiration of God. In this way, Frazer explains Jacob's Dream on the stone at Bethel, where a sanctuary existed long before the arrival of the Jews (Frazer 1989:240-248).

The notion of stone, which was possessed by deities, or other powerful spirit, is not specific just for ancient Israel. In ancient times the Greeks worshiped rough stones, not statues. In Thessaly was worshiped a stone, on which they sacrificed victims and made libation with oil (Frazer 1989:240-248).

After this clarification of the role of stones in ancient societies rises the question how they selected these sacred rocks which are sometimes discovered at the most amazing places. Frazer tells us how exactly this happens in a study about worshiping stones in the primitive societies of Melanesia. He says:

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<sup>4</sup> Inf. Slavtcho Marinchev 70g. shepherd s.Mechkul

“Anyone can find a stone in which he sees something unusual and therefore associated with spirit... His neighbors understand that he has such a thing, and its growing wealth comes from there. Then they come to gain his help, and the best services of the spirit with which he is familiar. Over time some stones become more popular than others, raise and fund pilgrims, gifts, and so can form a whole sanctuary (Frazer 1989:240-248).” From this fact come the difficulties to classify such places. Valeria Fol notes: “...they will always be more than the ones sorted by number the number will stay undetectable because many of them are strictly personal and are not marked by generally accepted criteria” (Fol 2007:12).

In a sanctuary can be found stones with different functions. One of them can help for richness and fertility, others have healing properties.

Interesting is the question about the functions of the rock-cut cups. In science they are seen as altars for libation. In favor of this statement are reported Fraser’s reports that in the highlands of Scotland there are stone carved bowls in which shepherds do libation with milk for the ghost keeper of the herds.

Some legends and healing practices say that many of the larger stone-cut cups serve to collect rainwater, on which miraculous properties are attributed. Invaluable testimony of making sacral a natural structure is the well studied sacrifice of a black ram at sunrise of Lyaski peak (old name St. Duh /St. Spirit/), where the animal's blood had to flow in a karst deep hole in the ground (Markov 2010: 89-90). With healing rituals are also associated other types of facilities, where squeezing through rocks was practiced. This ritual can be viewed as a symbolic renewal and rebirth (Markov 2003: 69; Genov 2010: 109-116). Such facilities are the megalithic sanctuary Gradishteto in Dolno Dryanovo locality; Skribina area near Kribul village and others. The composition of these facilities varies, but a mandatory component is a narrow stone slit, which creates a sense of squeeze to the person who goes through the stone as if tightly pressed. A common structure is the trilith. As interesting parallels can be identified practices related to megaliths in different parts of Europe. Impressive here is Men- an- Tol (a stone with a hole) UK<sup>5</sup>. The same type of structure, but with no recorded evidence of rituals is the megalith U'Kampanaru near Palermo - Sicily ('U Campanaru, Archeologia viva N 156 Nov / Dec 2012: 50). The interesting fact about it is that at the bottom of the hole is cut a rock bed.

Interesting is the combination between raw thrilithons with rock-cut cups (altars) on the upper stone. It raises the hypothesis of a sacrificial libation of fluid, and anointing of one who passes under the stone. Such places are the sanctuary "Salakov buk" (Markov 2007:302), arch in locality "Isara" Strelcha area (Petkova 2012:302-310), "Pirostiyata" near village Turia, and many others. Such an object exists on the sanctuary of St. Marina in the village of Senokos. The upper stone was probably collapsed by earthquake. Perhaps this has helped carved forms

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<sup>5</sup> The Mên-an-Tol <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/M%C3%AAn-an-Tol> (26.03.2015)

to stay in a very good condition. What makes it unique is the network of zigzag grooves, starting from two rock-cut cups and ending at the edge of the stone. Two similar stones with crossed network of channels are known to us from two stone sanctuaries in Strelcha. The unique in this case is that the form probably is a destroyed trilithon in combination with blocks for divination. It is also important that the place is connected with the cult of St. Marina, which is saturated with symbols characteristic of prehistoric deity seen as the Great Mother-Goddess.

In Bulgarian folklore saint Marina is also associated with healing waters springing from the ground, as well as with sacred caves that had until recently rituals with the pre-Christian character performed in them.

This brings us back to the previously mentioned code-water cave-rock. In many places where one of these components is missing, it was created artificially. There are a lot of rock hewn caves, some of which are just at the foot of a rock sanctuary. In this respect, a good example is one of the latest discoveries made by the expedition "Rhodopes 2013" held by the University Research Centre for European and ancient Eastern Mediterranean cultures to SWU "Nefit Rilski". At the basis of a sacral rock along the Matan Dere (a tributary of Mesta river) was localized an extensive rock hewn niche.

Before proceeding to summarize and to hypothesize about the rituals performed at the rock sanctuaries it should also be mention the image of god Sabazius. A silver plate found near the rock sanctuary Belintash is a significant artifact. The iconography of the found plate and the records of the ancient authors give information about the nature of the god and his origins. Alexander Fol also concluded in his research that in sanctuaries of a similar type Thracians worshiped a deity known as Sabazius (Fol 2001: 80-90). It is also important to consider saturated with symbols and images votives known as the hands of Sabazius. In them can be seen similarities with some of the symbols of the rock sanctuaries.

If when viewing them is applied the three part model, we see that at the bottom of Sabazios hands is often depicted a cave or an oval niche - as it appears in the bottom of the sacral rocks. In the displayed niche lies a human figure in some cases recognizable as an image of a woman with a baby; in one of the images of Pompei stored in Melbourne Museum, an eagle is perched on her.<sup>6</sup> In the middle of the votive, on the palm is usually represented a ram or bull head (probably sacrificial animal) on which is standing a god depicted as a bearded man in a Phrygian cap. Usually in the center of the sacral rocks there is also a large altar. The small and ring finger of the hand are depicted bent down together and above them winds a snake or a dragon crawling on the back of the hand. Sometimes on the middle finger and index finger is perched an eagle, and on the thumb has always placed a cone, it is protruded thus resembles the phallic symbolism of the thyrsus. On one of the rocks of the Matan Dere sanctuary was also found a relief resembling a thyrsus. Very often the rocks of the sanctuary, separated by narrow

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<sup>6</sup> <http://museumvictoria.com.au/melbournemuseum/discoverycentre/pompeii/objects/sabazius> (30.06.2015)

corridors resemble the fingers of a hand and their upper part is like animals, people or whole mythological themes. It is possible similar votives to have been placed on the rocks in shrines. Perhaps some sacral rocks have been seen as the essence of the deity, or rather the unity between chthonic earth-goddess's nature and the heavenly male deity whose core is united in the image of Sabazius. In favor of this statement is the statement of Pindar to the sacrifice made by the Argonauts of the Thracian coast, which Fol claimed to have been made on a stone altar with "concave sacrificial pools, literally" palms of hands "- typical facilities of Thracian megalithic culture (Fol 1991: 32-37). It is not easy an extinct religion acted and upgraded for millennia to be understood and recreated only on the basis of fragmentary artifacts. The matter is further complicated because it concerns a mystery cult. With satisfaction, however, it can be noted that thanks to the efforts of many scientists from different fields year after year more pieces of the puzzle are added to the understanding of the Thracian culture.

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# ALBUM



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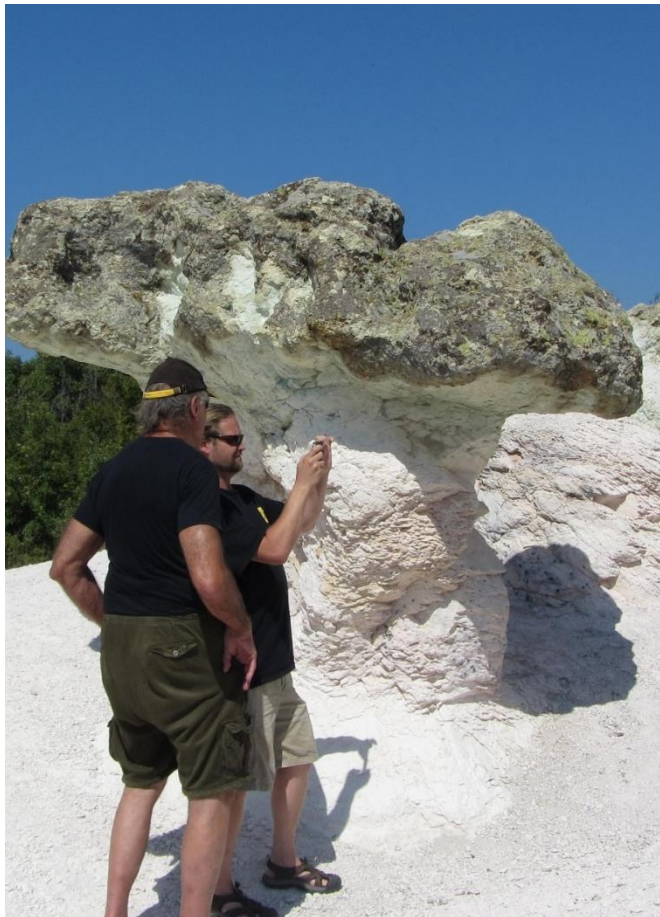


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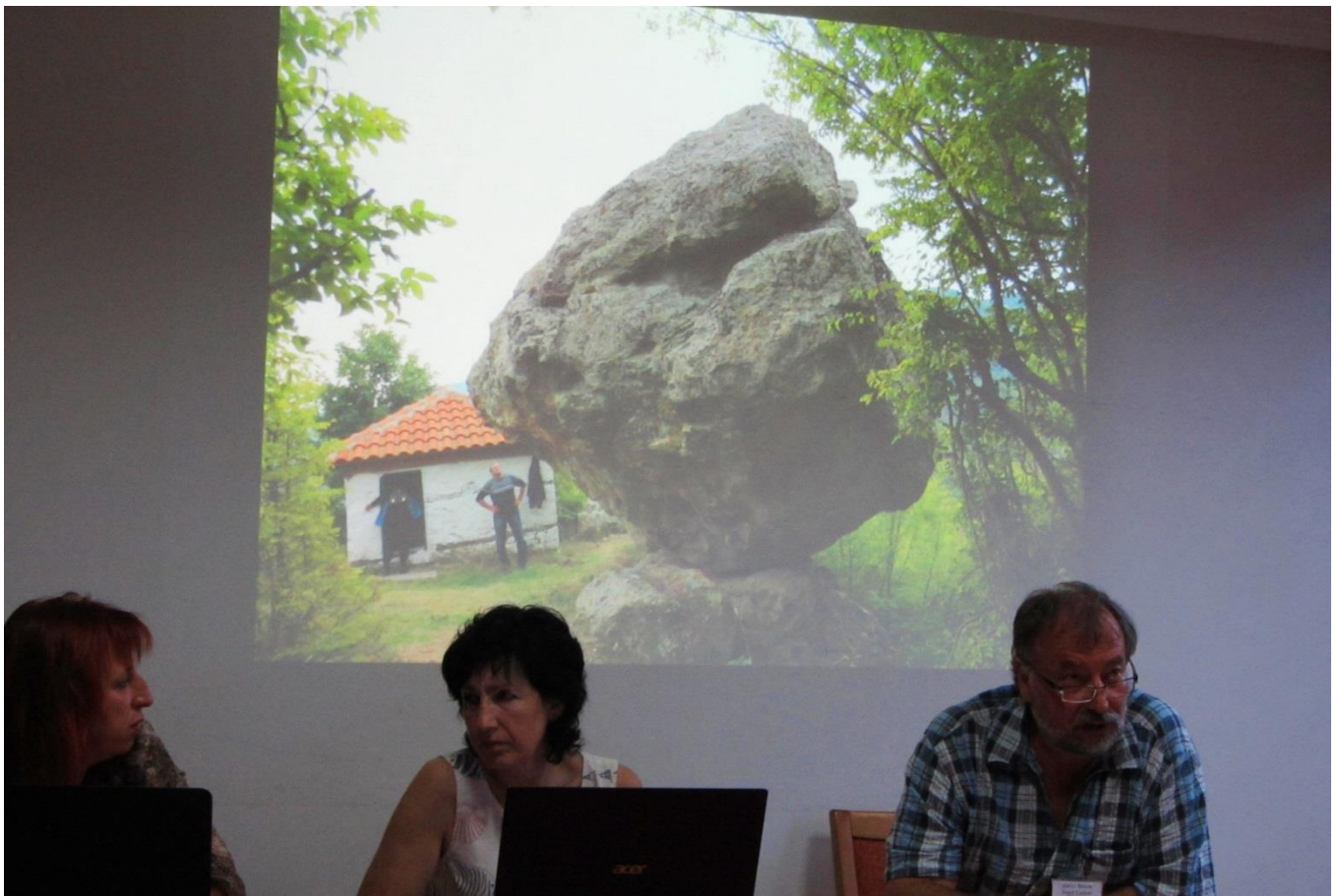


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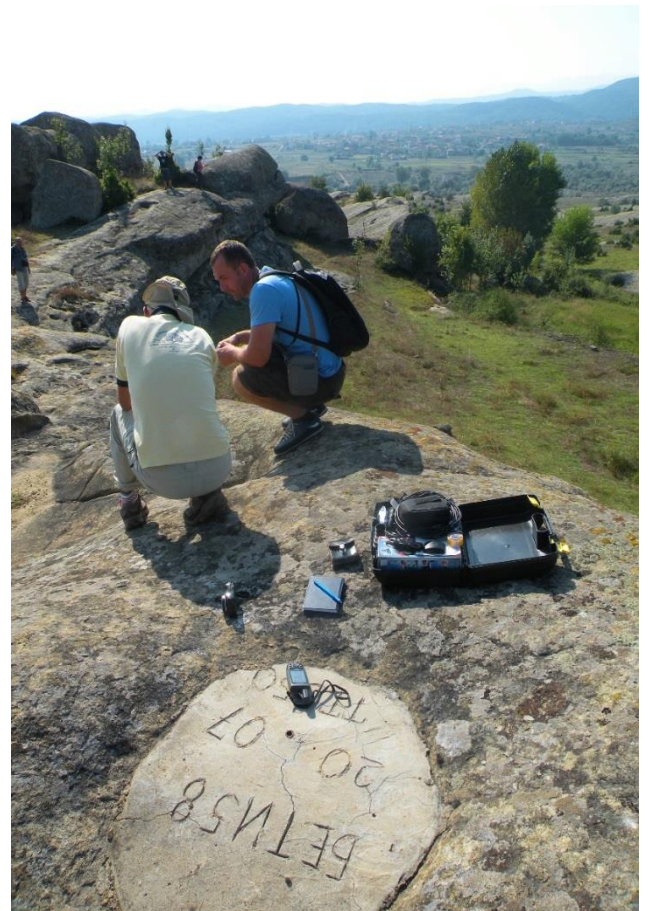
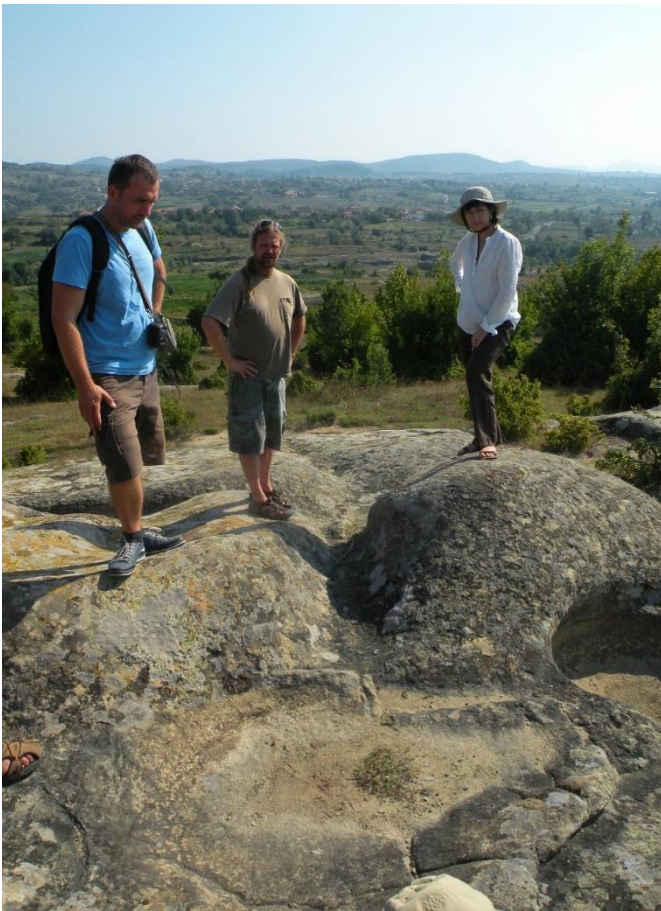


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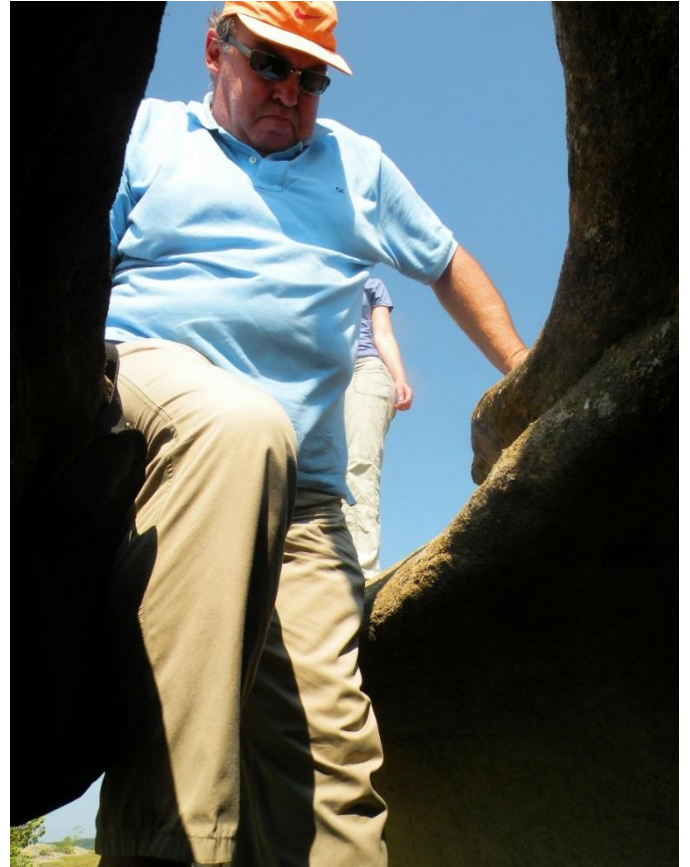


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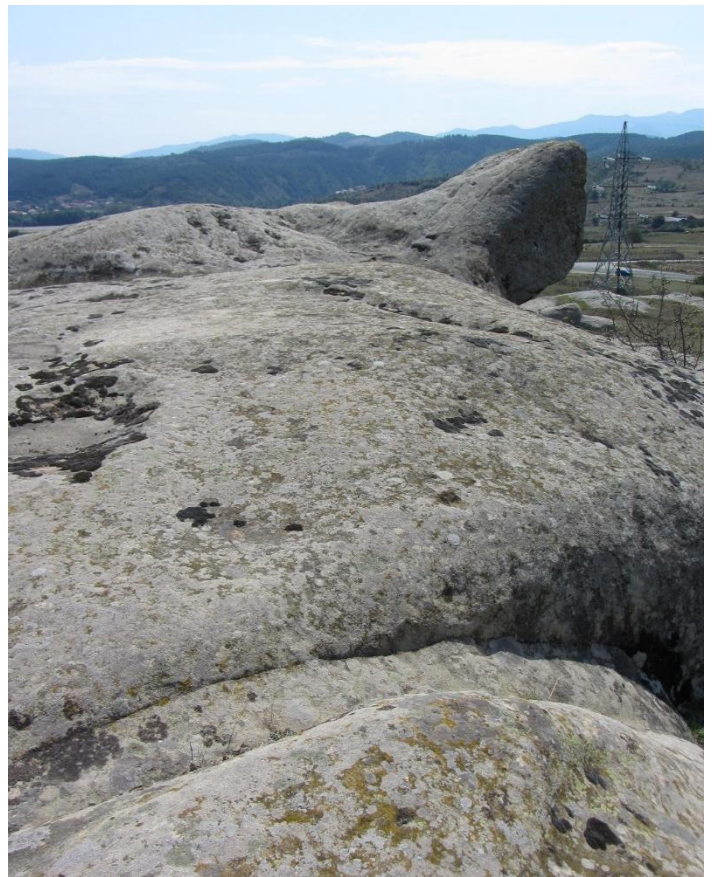


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MEGALITHIC CULTURE IN ANCIENT THRACE

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