

Human Sacrifice?

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The spiritual life of the Getae-Dacian world, the aspects related to the funeral ritual, human or animal rites and sacrifices etc., stir the interest of the archaeologists¹.

We hope that, the data presented by us, would be a modest contribution to the efforts made by the researchers looking for the "key" of a rite, of a symbol, of a myth or, more exactly, of a conception about Getae-Dacians religious beliefs and representations, about their mythology.

We have to admit this big and unique truth, that no generation would ever say that it completely solved the great unknown "phenomenon of the history".

The soul contains the truth about the things that exist or existed, about virtue, justice - injustice, formalism. The human soul is immortal, dies and revives in time and it can never be destroyed.

Rădulescu Motru, in his study *The soul's power* said that, although the "human being is so unique and fragile in comparison with other animals, it is so delicate and weak, like a reed from the nature - still, it surpasses the outside world by his upright gait that aims to the sky, by the symmetry of his body, by the finess of his organic nature, by the ability of his movements and especially by his spiritual nature, imposing himself as the king of the Universe".

It isn't yet a most exciting matter like this one, which concerns the man and his soul after death, after his last gleam of life before returning into the ground, which was his friend.

The death touches only the material part, but not the soul, which remains intact, above the others with whom he lived for so long, for better and worse and for the human love.

The philosophers, no matter how it was their way of thinking, inevitably got in touch with the evolved human being, both as concerns its biological manifestation and those of social relationships.

Each philosophic-historical school has the colour of the scientific laws to which it obeys and, on the other hand, of course, the imagination and own feeling of the respective researcher with, or without passional bias, which reflects another way of thinking, another ideal or, why not, a vanity.

The anthropology tries to surpass all the drawbacks concerning man in all its biological and social conditions. It is the science that deals with the study of the human being and of all its reports with the cosmical and social environment, with its functions and manifestations of this human being - MAN.

According to the German anthropologist R. Martin, anthropology is the natural history of man, in all his spatial and historical extend.

What we will try to do in the following lines is to find the way of establishing by anthropological research, the data referring to the human nature, to its social-religious behaviour in the society, according to the examples which will give a more clear understanding of the individual factor, of the individual variability, of the characteristic notes or, why not, the researcher's search for variation or for the common features existing in some ethnic groups. Inside each ethnic group, we find the predominance of one of the constitutional types, independent of racial characters, because the constitution is the one which, from somatical viewpoint, points out the nation or ethnic specificity, with all its variations.

Man depends by his physical and intelectual structure, on his ancestors (heredity) and on the environment in which he lives, both components influencing each other. The heredity entirely corresponds to the morfological achievements that the descendant inherits from his parents but, we have to point out also the exceptions, when the parents don't transmit all their characters to the offspring, the similarity children-parents never getting to identity. There are cases of hereditary transmission of a special character. The individual characters, could be divided into two big categories:

- some have a germinal origin, sometimes occurring mutations which are transmitted from one generation to another (we refer to the general features of the individuality);

- the others, are achieved by the *soma* in its lifetime, produced by different influences that acted in a positive way upon the individual during his evolution (grow) and which disappeared at the moment of his death.

We won't insist too much upon heredity, although the breeding between people of different rases, lead to the interruption of the hereditary continuity of two pure races.

On a certain hereditary stock, can appear many phenotypic variations, but with certain limits, the most important factor of the individual and social evolution remaining the heredity, because the physical and social environment couldn't emphasize anything else but inborn individual features (I. Balaban). Besides the general ones, we also find human manifestations that vary from one ethnic group to another, as concerns the material, physical and social life, starting from the moment of the new belonging to the group or from its old belonging. They will create the background of a new activity, with increasing complexity, because this is directly or indirectly connected with survival.

We should not forget that a new or old material life refers to the house, adornments, clothing, preparation and conservation of food, acquiring the means of existence in older and newer conditons - the work of the field or in the forest, the

hunting, the self-defence, survival, prevention means of the human groups, animal domestication for work. All these depended also upon the geographic environment in which the human group had lived and upon the economical and political conditions. Each individual has a special place and role in the society and is an important factor of the group to which he belongs.

Some primitive industries, like weaving of baskets and wood, preparation of textiles and their weave, the pottery-making and metallurgy, the creation of wooden, clay, or metal jewelry, as well as of the anthropomorphic figurines have been the starting point of some specialized human manifestation, which brought a substantial contribution to the development of civilisation and to its first organisation in primitive specialized crafts.

Many arts had been related with handicrafts, so that the artist introduced values in his creation, which the nature doesn't know; they are his strict personal creation, his imagination being free, thus representing an image of the mentality and own taste.

The dance has magical-religious causes, at the primitive people being considered the preparation of the war, or a test of solidarity. The music has its origin both in the magical-religious manifestations, in work and dance, or even in war, by the transmission of the ceremonies. The belief in survival makes the condition of the will of survival, of winning in war situations.

The search on Dacia's spiritual area, of all the religious forms, from the oldest times up to the modern ones, had led us to the richest and stable sources, regarding the continuity of the local carpatho-danubian population, namely "of that syncretic population with an absorption base, assuring its stability, in a certain historical span, that we call today the Romanian people"².

It has to be made a new cultural grouping: mythological, religious, folk-philosophical with a linguistic background, structured on stages, sensibly very different from chronological viewpoint, according to the latest discoveries on Getae-Dacian substrate, with the determination of the foreign influences, or even with their transformation and determination of the Thracian-Dacian pure or influential elements.

The need of correlation and integration of the data from all sciences and the particular fields "that study man and his manifestations, had lead to the emergence of some new terms, discussing the reports and possibilities of integrating the data of the physical anthropology, with those of the cultural anthropology on one hand, and with the historical, archaeological and ethnographical ones on the other hand" (Dardu Nicolăescu-Plopșor).

In the light of these considerations, we'll try to tackle the funeral rite and ritual, with their implications on historical heritage and, of course, with their controversies. Without assuming ourselves the discovery of a criterion of ethnic assigne-

ment, we'll decently limit ourselves to point out some findings which, up to the study of a greater number of similar cases, will be given a preliminary character - even if, by this date, it is a unique discovery as concerns the detailed funeral practice.

The topic of our study reports about the discovery of three skeletons in two rounded pits, in a non-funerary context, in the "Șura Mică" settlement. Their inventory places them within the 1st c. B.C. - 1st c. A.D. period. The discovery belongs to Ioan Glodariu, from the Cluj-Napoca University, who allowed us to communicate the preliminary archaeological data, together with our anthropological ones³.

We'll permit ourselves to give some data from the publication of I. Glodariu, in order to make the situation more clear: "The Dacian epoch was well represented. Here, as well as in other contemporaneous Dacian settlements, in an extremely great number there were the pits, most of them funnel-shaped, with more or less sloped walls⁴.

Initially, being provision pits, they were arranged by the now known system and ended by becoming domestic pits, which explains both the variety and extreme richness of the existing archaeological material contained in some of them.

Among the mentioned pits, filled shortly after their digging in antiquity, our attention has been drawn by some, namely not by their natural filling with black earth, but by the constant composition in which it was constantly mingled sterile earth (pits no. 107, 108, 116, 118). Some of them didn't contain anything else but ceramic fragments and pieces of charcoal⁵. In turn, others contained animal skeletons (inside one being remnants of a colt; in another one two dogs, together with the head of a third one) and in other two pits three human skeletons: in the first (G. 108) a skeleton in crouched position, with an iron silver plated garnish belonging to a belt, together with ceramic fragments; in the second pit (no. 119) there were two human skeletons, charcoal and ritually broken dishes. The inventory of those two pits belongs to the Dacian period, the one out of the two human skeletons being dated in the second half of the 1st century B.C.-the first half of the 1st century A. D. The significance of such burials, where none of the skeletons had all bony segments, it just follows to be established"⁶.

The spreading area of the pits with human bones buried in non-funerary context, indicates the South and Eastern part of Transylvania and the extra-Carpathian zone. In majority of cases, the pits with human bones have a rounded shape, in their content being discovered one or several skeletons, placed on different layers. Their position varies from one case to another, being either in anatomical position or not, in a lateral or dorsal *decubitus*, crouched or, in very few cases vertically placed (3 cases at Orlea, Căndești - A. Florescu in 1983 and one case at Dulceanca - Suzana Dolinescu-Ferche in 1974 - information from the authors).

Their position varied, according to the moment of inhumation, if the individual had been buried right after his death, after the cadaver's rigidity disappeared, or while he was still alive. In the same way, as well, it could be possible that the deceased could be exposed on the ground for a longer period and then, entirely or just in parts (segments), he could be put on the bottom of a pit or higher, on another layer of the same pit, succeeding a more recent burial of other individuals, without neglecting the kinship or ethnical belonging of those people, or the supplementary sacrifice of other individuals, in the memory of the first deceased.

We frequently find burials with human bones, with a deposition that shows the care of the family, but there are some also, out of which some segments of the skeletons are missing with, or without traces of brutal intervention of a specialized person. The means of suppressing the individuals were very different and, in the case of the victim, the priests were the only ones that could interfere with their experience, while the suppressing means, in most cases, were hardly identifiable, given the employed subtleties.

Two seemingly antagonistic divinities, are complementary by their attributes: Gebeleisis as god of the sky, of the sun, and Zalmoxis, god of earth, of death and immortality. From the cult of Gebeleisis remained just the shooting with arrows into the clouds that covered the shining of the sun. Also, from this cult, there have been maintained the human sacrifices, initially on the stakes, brought at the same time with the funeral cremation practise.

As concerns the sacrifice of the young man elected as Zalmoxis's messenger, the periodical sacrifice made once in four years, took place in the circular sacred precincts from the Dacian hieropolis of Sarmizegetusa, in front of the great potif and king, with a special suite consisting in representatives of the prelates and of the army. The message for Zalmoxis was secretly pronounced by the great priest to the messenger. Four warriors, especially chosen, had to throw the messenger upwards, so that he would fall right on the spear points, without touching the ground. This barbarian rite lasted also during the wars between Decebal and Trajan.

The customs were the result of the Dacian religiosity and of their vanity, for their everyday life. At the Getae there was the custom that the woman should be killed on the man's grave, as a sign of great honour (the important examples would be those at Orlea, Căscioarele, Sighișoara-Wietenberg)⁷.

To Mars, the god of the war, there were brought great, cruel sacrifices, by killing the war prisoners (e.g. at Berea).

After setting the foundation of a dwelling, the same like in the material from Chimnogi, which we received from George Trohani for being studied, a child has been sacrificed, over which there were put some parts of animals that became offerings on that occasion⁸.

In the writings of Herod, Pomponius Mela, Eustathius, we find detailed explanations concerning this custom. The sacrifice of children is very frequent, the examples from Celei, Poiana, Orlea, Grădiştea, Sfântu Gheorghe-Bedehaza, are very explicitly striking, the late Prof. K. Horedt mentioning about those skeletons that they had traces of blows on the skull (cranial trauma) with hurtful objects, as well as sectionings of the limbs⁹.

The cult of the skull was subject of many controversies. There were found skulls depositions in pits, which could very well belong to some personalities, who had been taken as prisoners or, in some cases, to some forefathers, like those from Brad, Piscul Crăsanilor, Poiana, Popeşti¹⁰.

The sacrifices of couples could be the result of breaking the unwritten rules of the human group, of living together, or a ritual of fertility, benefic to the whole community in which they had lived (e.g. Căscioarele).

We won't discuss here the reports and inter-conditionings among the human and animal sacrifices. It is a too vast issue that has to be separately tackled, given the materials gathered both by archaeologists, anthropologists and zoologists.

As concerns the exposing of corpses on the ground, this could be a ritual practise of the respective community and not a sacrifice. It might be a religious mentality, well expressed in the life of those groups. This fact must not be generalized, until we will not have new data to support it. Not once, the rite and rituals, depended upon the social position of the deceased individual, but not upon his sex, emotional condition of the family or upon religious mentality¹¹.

The material that we received for being studied, belongs to the category of burials in non-funerary context and it was discovered in the archaeological site at Şura Mică.

According to the desire of the research team, each subject has a name, instead of number, as they usually have.

For the study, had been employed the international methods, those of the Romanian anthropological school, besides, being used the modern methods of Robert P. Charles. The populational systematics, the prototypes created by him, the results of the indices variation and segregation of types and their group belonging¹².

The first case - Amadeo.

In the eleventh section, pit 108, of 0.98 m x 0.93 m in diameter, at a depth of 0.25 m, on the bottom of the pit, on a bed of stones of 0.25 m height, it was deposed a man of 35-40 years, in a right side *decubitus*, crouched for a better adjustment into the dimensions of the pit, with the left lower limb bent over the abdomen and thorax. The right upper limb was set in a right angle, outside the burial. The left clavícula was fractured, with a "splinter" consolidation and the upper limb entirely missing, without any trace of cutting or brutal intervention which could be noticed on the bone.

As concerns the skull, it could be noticed that the facial masif was very ill preserved, some segments being completely destroyed. The round, big orbits, had probably delimited a nose with short and broad bones (estimated). The upper maxillary has a paraboloid palate with the dentition existing between I.1-M.2. The mandible has a broad chin, with prominent and rounded menthon. The *gonion* was slightly protruding outwards from the vertical branch. It could be observed a slight alveolary prognathism. The dentition I.1-M.2, present on the mandible, as well as at the level of the upper maxillary, has no carries, only a dental wear of the 4th degree, in some cases getting up to the neck.

The cranial vault is narrow, up to medium as width and length, with a mesocranian skull index - 78.14 at the upper limit with the brachycranian category - 79.9. The reliefs are of 3rd-4th degree. A special mark appeared on the third inferior part of the sagittal suture, near the *lambda*, where exists a strong retraction of the bony tissue, as a consequence of a very old and strong blow, which determined the deformation of the occipital.

Post cranial skeleton. The first impression is that we are facing a short individual, who was harmoniously built. The metrical data showed that his stature was of 1.59 m by E. Bretinger. We mentioned that the relief of the muscle insertions on the right upper limb was very strong, due to their overwork. The left upper limb is entirely missing, being eliminated by dislocation and *post-mortem* sectioning. The confirmation of that situation came from Ion Balaban. Because Amadeo had very frequently practised horse riding, he has a special (specific) deformation of the coxal bone.

Ioan Glodariu had mentioned that in Amadeo's inventory there was a silver plaque of a belt garnish and behind the skull it was an iron buckle of belt, bronze plated. Over Amadeo it was put some earth, burnt somewhere else, and some ceramic fragments from the filling earth. Datation: 1st century B.C.

The second case - Gipsy and Marco.

In the twelfth (XII) section, pit 119, which was visible at 0.80 m depth, of 1.40 m x 1.25 m in diameter, whose bottom was at 1.37-1.40 m depth from the actual level of the soil, there were found two male skeletons, at different levels and in different zones of the same pit.

In the left-west part of the pit, it has been placed Marco, being at the age of 25-30 and in the right-eastern part. Under his level, but 25 cm lower, on the bottom of the pit, in a larger space, there was Gipsy, aged at 15-17.

Gipsy

It has been put on the bottom of the pit, in the right-eastern area, thus being opposite to the inhumation zone of Marco. His position was in dorsal *decubitus*, with the skull turned to the right side, upper limbs fallen aside from the body, in a V-shape, due to the moment of deposition. The lower limbs were set in the form of

a rhombus, the distal extremities of the tibiae and fibulae being slightly overlapped.

We found the hand missing from the right arm and the foot from the left leg. We don't confirm the presence of sectioning traces on bones or blows, whatever it was the nature of the object.

The skull has the facial masif ill preserved. The orbits are rounded and big. The nasal area is destroyed. The malars are slightly broad, relieved and in a fronto-temporalized position. The upper maxillary is partly destroyed. The subnasal spine is profiled to be of 2nd degree. The shape of the *apertura piriformis* is antropine. The mandible has the menthon slightly prominent, with a sketched notch. The *gonion* points protruded outwards from the vertical branch of the mandible. Slight alveolar prognathism. The existing teeth are I.1-M.2, with a wear of 2nd degree, without carries.

The cranial vault is medium in length (g-op=181 mm) and very narrow in breadth (eu-eu=134 mm). The cranial index is dolichocranian - 73.2, with a slight mezocranian tendency - 74.9. The bony reliefs are of 2nd-3rd degree. The parietals are moderately arched. The frontal is narrow towards medium, at both extremes, with the *glabella's* relief and superciliary arches profiled on 2nd degree. The occipital is more emphasized in the *inion-opistion* areas. The mastoids are short, narrow, broad, strongly relieved.

Post cranial skeleton

It is a gracile individual, with beheaded epiphyses, has segments of smaller dimensions, giving the impression of a short individual. He has an extremely harmonious constitution, with balanced forms, including the skull.

The metrical data point out a stature of 1.55 m (by E. Breitingner).

For the other individuals, the form and dimensions of the skull are jarring with those of the post-cranial skeleton.

By dislocation and *post-mortem* sectioning, there had been detached the hand of the right arm and the foot of the left leg (confirmed by I. Balaban).

Over Gypsi it was put earth and then earth mingled with charcoal.

Marco

Marco had over it a stratum of earth of 1-8 cm, mixed with charcoals, especially in the region of the skull. At that level, we found also broken pots, ritually broken somewhere else. The individual's bones had been spread in a very restrained area, on the western side of the pit. But, as he couldn't be arranged in a semicircle, due to his cadaveric rigidity, he was firstly cut in the region of the neck (cervical), then in the one of the thorax, afterwards at the pelvis and lower parts of the femori. There are totally missing the hand segments of the right arm, starting from the lunate bone and up to the third phalanx and the entire left arm, from the humerus up to the third phalanx. At the level of the broken segments there are no traces of sectioning, or brutal interventions.

The cranium has a bad preserved facial masif. The orbits are big, rectangular, with rounded corners. The nose had broad and long bones, with a prominent nasal spine (3). The malars are fairly wide, relieved, in a fronto-temporal position. The canine fosa is deep (4), just like at Gypsy, who has also the fosa of 3-4 degree. The upper maxillary has a paraboloid palate, the same like in the previous two cases. There is an alveolar prognathism of 3rd degree. The multiple granulomas, produced the loss of some teeth but, for the rest, the dental formula is complete, with a wear of 3rd degree. The mandible is fairly straight (the chin having this aspect), with well emphasized basal tuberculi. Its body is slightly masif, having a relief of 3rd degree.

The skull calote has a length of 187 mm and a breadth of 140 mm. The cefalic index is mezocephalic - 76.47. The parietals are moderately arched and the frontal is slightly flat towards bregma, the same like in the case of Amadeo. The bony reliefs are of 3rd towards the 4th degree. Cryptozigy.

Post-cranial skeleton

We have the same impression like in Amadeo's and Gypsy's case, that he was a not a tall person, namely he had short lower and upper limbs. None of the individuals was tall. Marco is more robust, the muscle insertions suggesting us certain permanent occupation. The metrical data give us a stature of 1.5967 m (by E. Breitingner) for this skeleton. The right hand and the left arm are missing by dislocation and *post-mortem* sectioning (confirmed by I. Balaban).

As concerns the Marco and Gypsi skeletons:

The first inhumation was the one of Gipsy then, at 25 cm higher, but in a left-west position, in oposition to Gipsy, had been brought here Marco, from another pit, or from the place where he was exposed for a very long time. He had been deposed with very much care, because the ribs have been placed upon him on a distance of 60 cm, in semicircle. Marco was extremely ill preserved and destroyed by its long stay in the soil.

Datation - the ceramics is dated at the end of 1st century B.C. and in the first half of the 1st century A.D.

The up mentioned individuals have belonged to the same ethnic group, being fairly homogeneous in features, with similar stature. We tried, in collaboration with I. Balaban, to make a projection with the computer, especially meant for a better fixing of the type and separately, a study of paleopathology, which, at first sight is striking at Amedeo.

The archaeological research shows that, in this time span (mentioned above), we don't have necropolises attested, there are not found spaces especially reserved, delimited, for burials. The funeral space is separated from the habitation space, out of psycho-religious considerents. The sacrifices had a well determined rationing; they are a religious manifestation, of the superior institutions of the

antique world, with very precise purposes.

Of course, one can ask many questions in the limits of the decorum and of the actual information, namely:

- Where were deposited those so perfectly removed segments?
- Were they sacred relics brought to the ancestral ground of the family?
- Given the perfect removal of the segments, they became messengers to the gods, it was a veneration, a gratitude of the family, considering that all three were men?

- Because the three skeletons were all part of the same ethnic group, it could be assumed their belonging to some social rank?

And questions may continue to be asked.

We don't think that this would have been a human sacrifice, but a type of burial that is specific to a period when there were no necropolises. Even from demographic point of view, the data published up to now and referring to the mentioned time span, support this theory.

Similar situations, but of a different kind, have mentioned and issued the Romanian anthropologists: O. Necrasov, D. Botezatu, G. Miu, L. Georgescu and E. M. Georgescu (by three new cases requested for study), D. Nicolăescu-Plopșor and C. Rîșcuția. In the actual stage of research, there are still many aspects to clear up, by a correct work, considering each situation, without exaggerating.

In his paper, *The funeral discoveries and their significance in the context of the classical Getae-Dacian culture*, Mircea Babeș¹³ makes an extremely correct list of the papers issued by that date and tries to give a proper and non-biased interpretation of the published discoveries (SCIVA, t. 39, 1). The author mentions also the idea of Alexandru Vulpe and Eugenia Popescu that, at the time when took place the inhumation of the individuals mentioned by M. Babeș, it is also possible to have occurred a "substantial change starting with the 2nd century B.C., by adoption and adaptation of a new cult" (A. Vulpe and Eug. Popescu, *Dacia*, N.S., 16, 1972). The literary sources provide us all the reasons, for speaking of a religious sacerdotal reform of Deceneu" (V. Lica, *Istros*, 1, 1980).

In his paper, intitled *Beliefs and religious funeral practices and magic in the Getae-Dacian world*, written by Valeriu Sârbu, it was made a synthesis of the discoveries. It is mentioned, among others, that "the number of individuals found in non-funerary contexts is much bigger than the other kind of Getae-Dacian grave types, their proportion being of 200 to 40. The practise of sacrifices and of that kind of burials it is attested by the archaeological discoveries and by the written sources of the antiquity"¹⁴.

Together with the formation of the Dacia province, we will notice that the human sacrifices had disappeared there, as well as in the range of the free Dacians. After the disappearance of the Dacian state, the power of the clergy which had

been very well organized, authorian, had ceased to exist. From the first decades of the 2nd century A.D., one could talk about normal funeral practices. But, the archaeologists and historians would focus their interest upon such situations, in collaboration with anthropologists and ethnoarchaeologists.

The spiritual life of the Thracian world is fantastic and full of surprises. The human sacrifices, god's messengers, acquired a metaphysical message in connection with the so-called doctrine of the immortal soul, the sacralization of happiness, the egalitarian position in the Kingdom of the sky. The great pontiffs, the military chiefs, made pilgrimages every year, at solstices and equinoxes, on the mountain paths, between the rise and set of the sun, for magical-religious recollection¹⁵.

Rich, but contradictory literary information, says Ligia Bârzu, give details about the beliefs nature of the Dacians.

In fact, the religious act is a formal determination of the religiosity degree, of soul's functioning for the individual and for the community.

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NOTES

1. We wish to thank Ioan Glodariu for this material.
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