

# THE HELLENISTIC BIG ROCK HUMAN HEAD FROM BULGARIA

**Abstract:** The subject of this paper is the impressive in its size rock image of a human head from the rock sanctuary located in the area Gradishteto, near the modern village of Dolno Dryanovo, Blagoevgrad region, Bulgaria. The place in that area is defined as a prehistoric and Thracian rock sanctuary and one of the oldest megalithic sanctuaries in Southeastern Europe. The attention here is focused only to the big rock head from the sanctuary of Dolno Dryanovo and an attempt is made to identify this remarkable image as well as its dating, and also to answer the question – who exactly has ordered making it to this place. According to the detailed observations of the magnificent rock portrait image and having used the most suitable parallels, including gold and silver coins, as well as two marble portrait images and one made of a black basalt, kept respectively in three major world museums, the conclusion was formed, that the big rock human head from Bulgaria in fact is a magnificent portrait image of Ptolemy I Lagos, king of Hellenistic Egypt. According to the author of the paper here, this quite large in size and majestic rock portrait of the king of Hellenistic Egypt, Ptolemy I, was made in the lands of ancient Thrace by order of the king of the Celtic/Galatian kingdom in Thrace, Kavaros. Because it was already found that the king Kavaros was the grandson of Ptolemy I on the side of his mother. It was made around the middle of the 3rd c. BC as an apotheosis of the king of Egypt. Only in this historical context can be explained making this grandiose rock portrait image of Ptolemy I in the lands of ancient Thrace – now in present-day Bulgaria. In fact, this is the greatest portrait image of the deified king Ptolemy I Soter, ever seen in the world.

**Keywords:** *rock human head, rock sanctuary, megaliths, Ptolemy I, king of Hellenistic Egypt, king Kavaros, Celtic/Galatian kingdom in Thrace.*

The subject of this study will be particularly the impressive in its size rock image of a human head from the rock sanctuary complex located in the area Gradishteto, near the modern village of Dolno Dryanovo, municipality of Garmen, not far from the town of Gotse Delchev, Blagoevgrad region, Bulgaria. The approximate dimensions of this three-dimensional rock human head are: about 9 meters high and about 16 meters long. The rock sanctuary is located to the right of the road from the town of Gotse Delchev to the town of Dospat and was identified as a settlement or fortress for the first time during an archaeological expedition for field research by a team led by the late Mechislav Domaradski, but was mentioned among the sites on the territory of the neighbouring village of Gorno Dryanovo.<sup>1</sup> Years ago, the site was visited and described in greater detail by the enthusiast and mathematician Prof. T. Boyadzhiev.<sup>2</sup> In 2008, for the first time, archaeological excavations were carried out at the same site in this rock complex, during which excavations were found various archaeological materials – mainly ceramics dating in a very wide range of time – from prehistory – from the late Chalcolithic period, until the Hellenistic period – from the 4<sup>th</sup> – 3rd centuries BC, and even from

<sup>1</sup> DOMARADSKI et alii 1999, 87, No. 7.

<sup>2</sup> [https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Градище\\_\(Долно\\_Дряново\)](https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Градище_(Долно_Дряново))

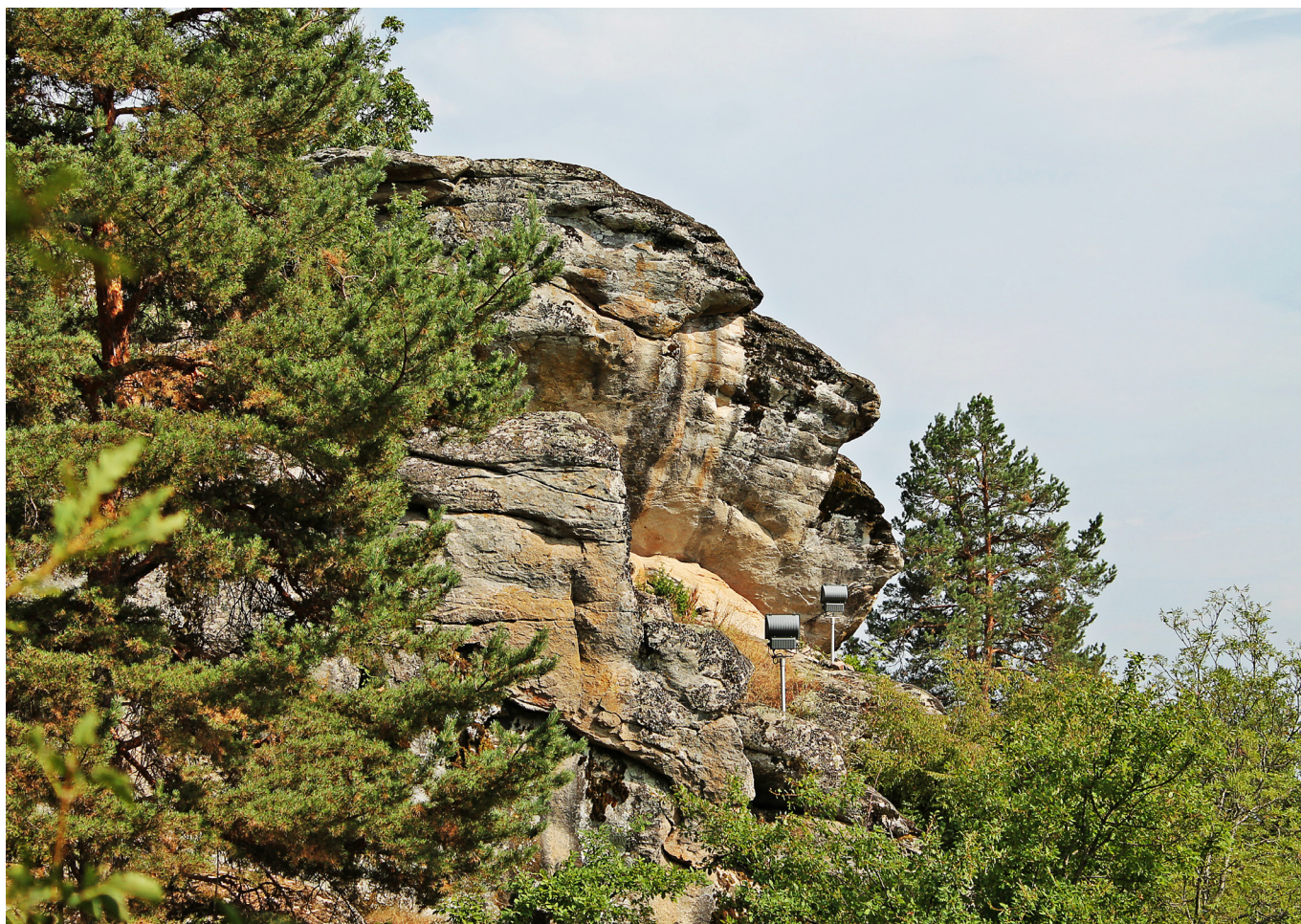
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**Fig. 1.** The big rock human head from the sanctuary at Dolno Dryanovo, Bulgaria.  
(Photo: Ivo Filipov; image source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Head\\_Dolno\\_Dryanovo\\_BG.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Head_Dolno_Dryanovo_BG.jpg))

the late Roman period, from the 3rd to the 4th century AD.<sup>3</sup> In 2011, new excavations were carried out at the same site, which confirmed the previously established findings that the site was used as a cult complex since the time of the late Chalcolithic, and the materials from the Hellenistic period are dated generally in the 3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC and it is mentioned again that some of the archaeological materials date back to 3<sup>rd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> c. AD.<sup>4</sup>

The place in the Gradishteto area near the village of Dolno Dryanovo is defined as a prehistoric and Thracian sanctuary and one of the oldest megalithic sanctuaries in Southeastern Europe, which is a separate complex of different larger or smaller rock three-dimensional anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images, among which the most significant place is the huge human head with portrait features, and in the area around it can be recognized a number of other strange figures, resembling different animals.<sup>5</sup> The rock sanctuary from Dolno Dryanovo until recently was not known and therefore not included in the large summarizing volumes of megaliths in ancient Thrace issued years ago in Bulgaria.

In recent years interest in the megalithic monuments and complexes in Bulgaria is much larger, with a significant

number of publications on this issue.<sup>6</sup> So far the best known and studied is the rock sanctuary Perperikon in the region of Kardzhali, presented in a number of publications, suggesting that at this place was the long sought after ancient Thracian sanctuary of Dionysus.<sup>7</sup> Recently, this sanctuary and other rock complexes from the Rhodopes were presented in a summarizing book.<sup>8</sup>

The attention here will be focused only to the big rock head from the sanctuary of Dolno Dryanovo, and an attempt will be made to specifically identify this remarkable image as well as its dating, and to answer the question – who exactly ordered making it to this place. One thing is certain, and it is that this image cannot be perceived as a creation of nature, but rather as the work of human hands. In this regard, it is worth mentioning the Wikipedia article, which published one of the best photographs of this impressive in its size rock image (**fig. 1**)<sup>9</sup>. Elsewhere it is stated that even the late mathematician Prof. T. Boyadzhiev has determined this impressive rock representation of a human head as The Ruler<sup>10</sup>.

The enormous rock image of a human head so far has

<sup>3</sup> BOZHKOVA/TODOROVA 2009.

<sup>4</sup> BOZHKOVA/TODOROVA 2012.

<sup>5</sup> [https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Градище\\_\(Долно\\_Дряново\)](https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Градище_(Долно_Дряново))

<sup>6</sup> See for instance the recently published: MEGALITHIC MONUMENTS AND CULT PRACTICES 2016.

<sup>7</sup> OVCHAROV 2005a, 199-200.

<sup>8</sup> OVCHAROV 2005b.

<sup>9</sup> [https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Градище\\_\(Долно\\_Дряново\)](https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Градище_(Долно_Дряново)).

<sup>10</sup> See <http://www.desant.net/show-news/28428/>.

been primarily of public interest and has not been the subject of a scholarly publication. It has been commented mainly on various web sites by various enthusiasts, even anonymously – without figuring out who is behind a comment. One of these comments will be quoted here verbatim because this comment corresponds most precisely to my vision and perception of this remarkable rock image, and my intentions are to seek answers to the very questions posed in this very successful presentation. This comment literally said the following: *“The hand of the ancient sculptor has cut into the rock the face of a real person. This is not a stylized, impersonal sculpture. In the stone face are printed character traits of that person. From the head radiates a greatness, wisdom and tranquility. Who is immortalized in this rock? A wise ruler, a brave warrior or an initiated priest? This is unknown to us. From the proportions of the face, the method used by phrenology could draw a psychological portrait of this person. This would throw light and answer the question of the time when the majestic “Ruler I” lived... No doubt this head is the work of human hands, the head is not a whim of rain and wind from the Rhodopes”*<sup>11</sup>.

I also think that this huge rock sculpture is not a creation of nature and is not impersonal and generalized, but presents to us a magnificent portrait of a real person in the antiquity. Of course, the most important question is – can we understand today exactly who this person is. I will propose here my attempt to identify this impressive rock portrait image, unknown in the way of its making from antiquity and its huge size elsewhere in Europe. It should be explicitly pointed out that in order to identify a portrait image if the personality portrayed with a strictly individual portrait was supposedly a ruler then in this case the most appropriate and accurate portrait images in the antiquity were presented on the coins of the various rulers – as the coins of the rulers of different countries in the familiar world inhabited in pre-Roman times, as well as the coins of the Roman emperors. The portraits presented on the coins of various rulers have always been the most certain and reliable comparative material in analyzing and identifying portraits of specific historical figures made of marble, bronze, or other material.

Before proceeding to the specific identification of this rather expressive and magnificent rock portrait, I will say that the rock complexes and sanctuaries in Bulgaria have so far only been associated with the Thracians, which seems reasonable as these complexes are located in the lands of ancient Thrace. In this regard, one may assume that the magnificent rock portrait image is an image of a Thracian ruler. But whether any of the Thracian rulers had the opportunities and the financial resources to order such an impressive rock image? We shall see what the situation is.

According to my detailed observations of the magnificent rock portrait image over the last few years since this rock image became known I came up with very important conclusions about its identification that I will present now. After the parallels of this portrait image and attempt of the specific identification of the depicted person, I will give the probable historical context, thus also answering the question of the time of its making. Because, after my

proposed identification of the enormous rock portrait image, an impressive in its style and size work of art in ancient times, certain new questions will arise immediately – by whose desire and on whose order was made the remarkable rock portrait image, when exactly or approximately in time it happened, and why was this image made exactly in the lands of ancient Thrace? After the proposed concrete identification of the rock portrait image will be explained and new questions.

From my observations and comparisons with images of different coins and other portraits, known from different museums around the world, I came to the conclusion that the magnificent highly individualized rock image is actually a portrait of the king Ptolemy I. After the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BC and after the Babylon settlement in the same year, Ptolemy I had become first satrap, then – from 306 or 305/304, and ruler with the titles of King (*basileus*) and Pharaoh of Hellenistic Egypt.<sup>12</sup> My reasons for such a conclusion are based on several known portrait images of this ruler, as especially his portrait image is known from the large number of his gold and silver coins, and his portrait image was also placed on the coins of his successors. Fortunately, today science has two of his portraits made of marble and an image of basalt kept in various major museums around the world. First, however, one silver and one gold coin of Ptolemy I will be presented with his portrait image on their obverse, which in my view shows the closest similarity, compared directly with the rock portrait image from Bulgaria (**fig. 2** and **fig. 3**).

It must be explicitly pointed out that the scholars



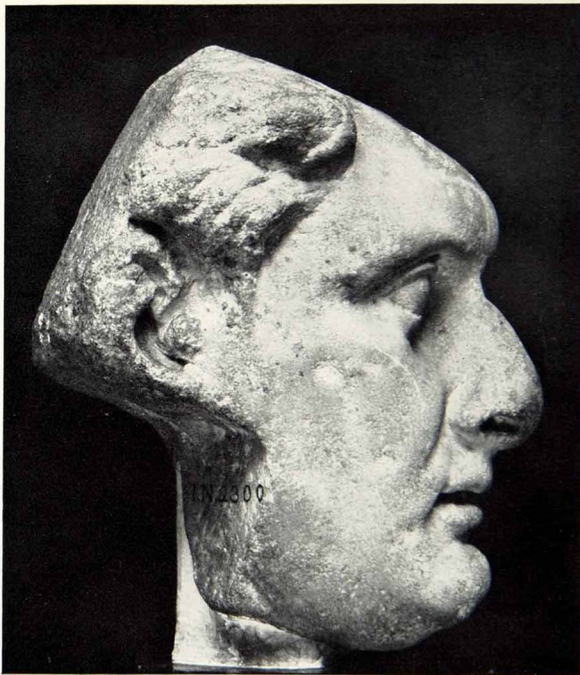
**Fig. 2.** Silver tetradrachm of Ptolemy I Soter. (Photo after CNG Auction, Triton VIII, 2005, Lot: 577; with permission of: [www.wildwinds.com](http://www.wildwinds.com)).



**Fig. 3.** Gold pentadrachm of Ptolemy I (struck 305 – 283 BC). (Photo with permission of: [www.wildwinds.com](http://www.wildwinds.com))

<sup>11</sup> Anonymous blogger (2008) – administrator of the site: <http://www.balkanmysteries.com/bg/>.

<sup>12</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 79-86; 89-91; 147-162.



2. Marble mask of Ptolemy Soter.  
Ny Carlsberg, Glyptothek.

**Fig. 4.** Marble head of Ptolemy I – profile view. (Ny Carlsberg Glyptothek, Copenhagen) (Photo: Ole Haupt; Credit line: Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen; IN: 2300; image source: <https://www.periodpaper.com/products/1941-print-marble-mask-ptolemy-soter-lagides-macedonian-profile-pharaoh-egypt-203588-xhe3-005>)

numismatists who worked with the coins of the rulers of Hellenism and especially those of the direct Successors of

Alexander the Great – the Diadochi, found that the king Ptolemy I Soter was the first of Alexander’s Successors who, after has adopted the title *basileus* in 305/304 BC, a few years later, he began to put his own portrait image on his coins.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, the tradition of placing the portrait of the founder of the new dynasty in Hellenistic Egypt, Ptolemy I, on the obverse of the silver tetradrachms, has been continued by his son and successor Ptolemy II Philadelphus, as well as by the subsequent rulers of this dynasty.

Another important image, identified as a portrait of Ptolemy I, is a marble head, kept in the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen (**fig. 4**). Presented in profile, it is very close to the general appearance and the portrait features of the rock image represented here from Bulgaria. In my view, however, the most accurate parallel, which gives the greatest similarity to the peculiarities of the presented rock portrait image, is the marble bust of Ptolemy I, which is kept in the Louvre Museum in Paris (**fig. 5**). In the presented image of the Louvre Museum in profile, one can see the greatest resemblance to the general expression, as well as the specific portrait features of the rock portrait image from Bulgaria, which is why the two images will be represented side by side (**fig. 6** and **fig. 7**). The resemblance between the two images is noticeable both in the general outline of the face and equally shaped nose. All presented here as parallels

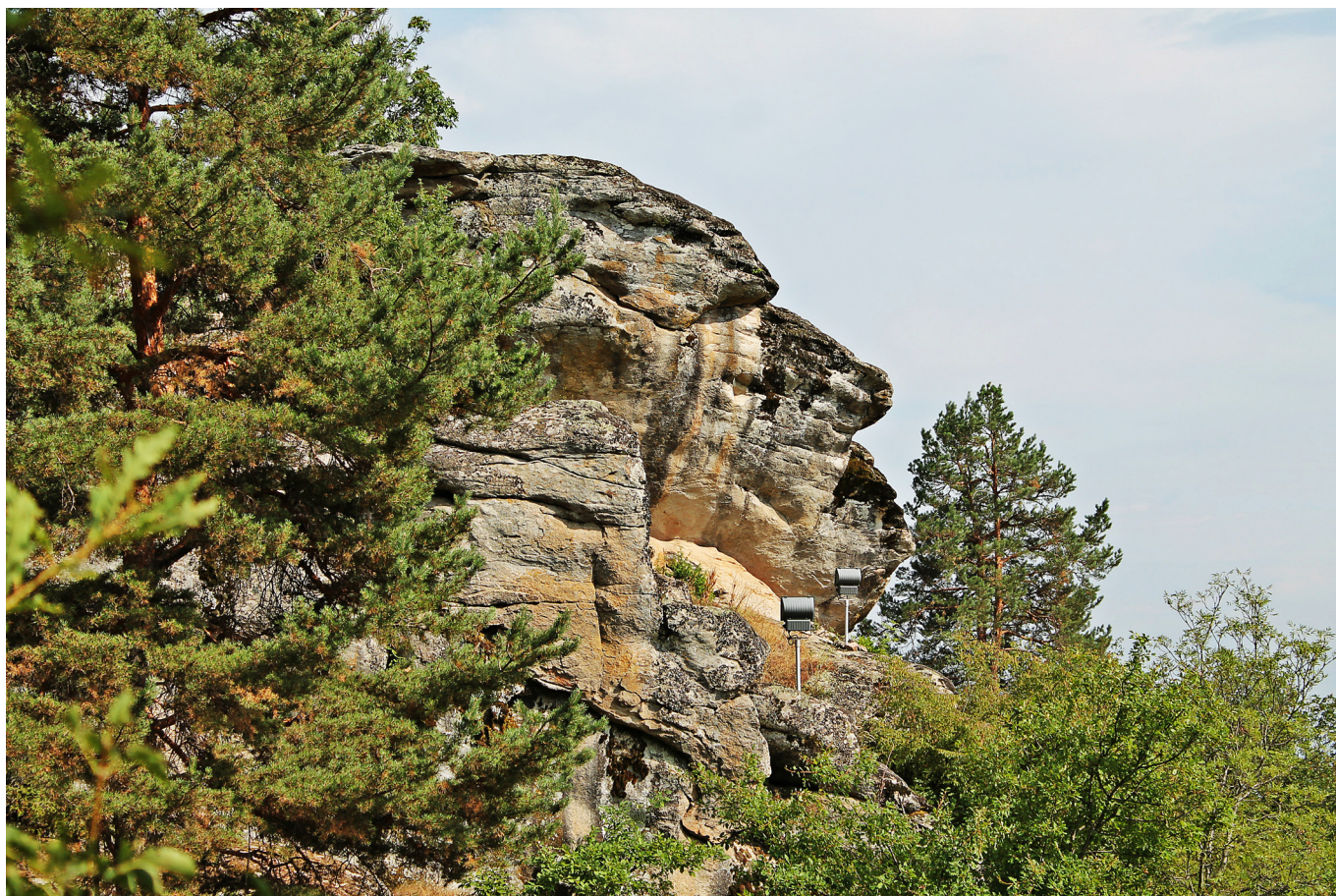
portraits of Ptolemy I Lagos give me the greatest reasons to conclude that the immense impressive rock portrait in the rock sanctuary of Dolno Dryanovo, Bulgaria, is a grandiose, majestic and incredibly expressive portrait of the king of Hellenistic Egypt – Ptolemy I.

Supporting this identification may also serve the additional images I noticed. The first of these additional images, which are an integral part of the rock portrait image, is the clearly visible image at the top of the head, standing above the forehead of the rock portrait image. At the top of the rock human head, one can see a clear zoomorphic image with long ears looking to the right, which I define as an animal – in this case a hare (rabbit). Why is this zoomorphic image? In my opinion, the answer to the question lies in the following fact – in the Old Greek language, the word “rabbit” in the Attic dialect is written as λαγῶς, and in the Ionian and Doric dialects it is written in the variant λαγός. And, according to various ancient authors, it is known that the name of Ptolemy I’s official father was Lagos (Paus. I,



**Fig. 5.** Marble bust of Ptolemy I Soter, king of Egypt (305 BC – 283/282 BC) and founder of the Ptolemaic dynasty. The identification is based upon coin effigies. (Louvre Museum, Paris, France; Inv. No. MR 457 / Ma 849). (Photo: Marie-Lan Nguyen (2011); source/link to the image: [https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Птолемей\\_I#/media/File:Ptolemy\\_I\\_Soter\\_Louvre\\_Ma849.jpg](https://bg.wikipedia.org/wiki/Птолемей_I#/media/File:Ptolemy_I_Soter_Louvre_Ma849.jpg))

<sup>13</sup> LORBER 2012 with ref.



**Fig. 6.** The big rock human head from Bulgaria. (Photo: Ivo Filipov; image source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The\\_Head\\_Dolno\\_Dryanovo\\_BG.jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_Head_Dolno_Dryanovo_BG.jpg))

6, 2; Lexicon Suda On Line, s.v. Λάγος).<sup>14</sup> Therefore I think that depicted thus zoomorphic symbol rabbit gives a direct allusion to the name of the official father of Ptolemy I. Thus, the identification of the represented rock portrait image will be unambiguous and will not be confused with any other person from antiquity. However, according to the widespread rumor of ancient times, the informal and real father of Ptolemy I was in fact the Macedonian ruler Philip II, not Lagos, which is explicitly presented by reports of Pausanias and Curtius Rufus (Paus. I, 6, 2; I, 6, 8; Curt. 9, 8, 22). Besides, in my opinion, behind the ears of the rabbit, at the back and top of the rock human head, another zoomorphic symbol is delicately depicted and this is probably the head of an eagle. These two zoomorphic images seem to be presented in manners taken from the Celtic tradition. However, when I looked at the nose of the sculpted head more closely, I was able to see that the end of the nose was formed with a relief of another animal with a slightly open mouth, one eye and one ear clearly visible, and a curved horn barely visible behind the ear. I define this image as an image of a ram, which is presented in the traditions of art in ancient Egypt, and the ram is considered to be the symbol of the god Ammon. Why is there a combination of images that have been made and according to Celtic, and according to Egyptian traditions, we

<sup>14</sup> Lexicon Suda On Line: [http://www.stoa.org/sol-bin/search.pl?db=REAL&search\\_method=QUERY&login=guest&enlogin=guest&userlist=LIST&page\\_num=1&searchstr=lagos&field=hw\\_eng&num\\_per\\_page=100](http://www.stoa.org/sol-bin/search.pl?db=REAL&search_method=QUERY&login=guest&enlogin=guest&userlist=LIST&page_num=1&searchstr=lagos&field=hw_eng&num_per_page=100)



**Fig. 7.** Marble bust of Ptolemy I Soter – profile view (Louvre Museum, Paris, France; Inv. No. MR 457 / Ma 849). (Photo: Ilya Shurygin .© 2013. Link to the image: <http://ancientrome.ru/art/artwork/sculpt/figure/ptolemy-1-soter/pto002.jpg>)



**Fig. 8.** Fragment of a basalt Egyptian-style statue of Ptolemy I – profile view (The British Museum, London, UK; Museum number: EA 1641). (Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum; link to the image: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details/collection\\_image\\_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=36907001&objectid=122802](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details/collection_image_gallery.aspx?partid=1&assetid=36907001&objectid=122802))

will see below.

The eagle is considered to be a personal symbol of Ptolemy I.<sup>15</sup> It is no coincidence that the image of an eagle standing on thunderbolt is the most characteristic image on the reverse of most of the Ptolemy I coins, and is recognizable as an emblem not only of Ptolemy I but also of the other rulers named Ptolemy of the Ptolemaic dynasty in the Hellenistic Egypt until the conquest of Egypt by Rome in 30 BC (see fig. 2 and fig. 3, reverses). This symbol is probably also a confirmation of the rumor that the king Ptolemy I is directly connected with the Argead dynasty in ancient Macedonia, as the son of Philip II and the half-brother of Alexander the Great.<sup>16</sup> Not surprisingly, this symbol – an eagle standing on thunderbolt, is also known by certain types of coins of Alexander the Great.<sup>17</sup> However,

<sup>15</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 9 with ref.

<sup>16</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 9 with ref.

<sup>17</sup> PRICE 1991, Pl. CXLIII, Nos. 142 and 142b – tetradrachms; Nos. 33-95; 96-153 – drachmae.

the legend of the divine origin of Ptolemy I, who after his birth was protected by an eagle (i.e. the eagle of Zeus), when as a newborn child he was placed under an open sky upon a bronze shield by his father Lagos, is best represented in the already cited above information in the lexicon Suda, which legend explains practically why the personal symbol of Ptolemy I was an eagle.

It should be noted another fact. The rocks that lie just before the image of the big head, if viewed at a certain angle, it appears that they also have an additional role in the overall appearance and impression of the great rock head. At the beginning, when I was trying to identify this portrait image, I ignored them and seemed not to notice them. But my new observations made recently realized that probably just through these rocks is delicately presented another very important attribute characteristic of the rulers of Egypt, which was also adopted by Ptolemy I, because besides the title of King as the ruler of Egypt, he also received the title of Pharaoh.<sup>18</sup> Therefore I believe that through these smaller rocks right in front of the upper edge of the stone head is probably represented the idea of pharaonic Egyptian headdress, known in Egypt as *nemes*. In the direction of this assumption, a bust may be used – in fact, an upper part of a statue made of a black basalt, which is now kept in the British Museum in London, identified as an image of King Ptolemy I, which depicts Ptolemy I as a Pharaoh of Hellenistic Egypt (**fig. 8** and **fig. 9**).

We may ask why the spectacular portrait image looks to the sky, as it also looks to the southwest. The most logical answer may be that the majestic rock portrait looks at the sky because this person was no longer in this world when his



**Fig. 9.** Head and upper torso of a black basalt statue of the king Ptolemy I wearing the pharaonic nemes – frontal view (The British Museum, London, UK; Museum number: EA 1641).

(Photo: © The Trustees of the British Museum; link to the image: [http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/collection\\_object\\_details.aspx?objectId=122802&partid=1](http://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=122802&partid=1))

<sup>18</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 160-162.

image was made and he is looking at eternity. In addition, the image looks southwest, and I think the rock portrait image of the ruler is probably looking at ancient Macedonia and its capital, Pella. For once Ptolemy I grew up in Pella together with Alexander the Great and went from there with him in the great campaign to Asia, to become later – after Alexander's death in Babylon in the summer of 323 BC, first satrap, and from 306 – 305/304 BC – King and Pharaoh of Egypt.<sup>19</sup>

The life and political activity of this remarkable ruler of Hellenism – Ptolemy I, are presented in a number of publications like that of Bengtson<sup>20</sup> and are known two more significant summarizing monographs issued in recent years that are specifically dedicated to the king Ptolemy I.<sup>21</sup> Ptolemy I Lagos founded in Hellenistic Egypt a new dynasty, whose reign lasted for a period of three centuries – the longest-lived dynasty of Hellenism.<sup>22</sup> Ptolemy I developed the architectural designs of the city of Alexandria in Egypt, founded by Alexander the Great in 331 BC, and in uncertain exactly a year – probably in 314 BC,<sup>23</sup> made it the capital of Hellenistic Egypt, so Alexandria became the largest and most civilized city in the known ancient world – the biggest symbol of the Ptolemaic grandeur and wealth.<sup>24</sup> Ptolemy I was the king who had ordered the making of the most important scholarly institution of antiquity – the Museum (*Mouseion*) in Alexandria, having attracted to this Museum the most prominent scholars of his time who developed the most important sciences. At this Museum on the orders of Ptolemy I was built and the largest Library in the ancient world, developed by his son and successor Ptolemy II.<sup>25</sup> Furthermore, on the order of Ptolemy I, the construction of the famous huge lighthouse on the island of Pharos was begun – right in front of Alexandria, considered to be one of the seven wonders in the ancient world, completed in the time of his son and successor Ptolemy II Philadelphus.<sup>26</sup> After the death of Ptolemy I in 283 BC, he was deified as *Theos Soter* by his son and heir to the throne, Ptolemy II, and a special cult was organized to the king in Alexandria in Egypt, similar to the one which Ptolemy I himself had created in honour of Alexander the Great.<sup>27</sup> And last but not least – on the orders of King Ptolemy I was made a special tomb-mausoleum (*sema*) in Alexandria for the body of Alexander the Great.<sup>28</sup>

After the identification of the enormous rock portrait image as the image of the Hellenistic king Ptolemy I Lagos, the question arises as to why such a spectacular image was made precisely in the lands of ancient Thrace today in Bulgaria, and who has ordered it? In my opinion, this quite large in size and majestic rock portrait of the king of Hellenistic Egypt, Ptolemy I Lagos, was made in the lands of ancient Thrace by order of the king of Thrace, Kavaros. Because it was already found that the king Kavaros was the

grandson of Ptolemy I on the side of his mother, Berenice,<sup>29</sup> well known by that name so far only by the Seuthopolis inscription as the second wife of Seuthes III.<sup>30</sup> It was found that she was a daughter of Ptolemy I Lagos and Berenice I, and the sister of Ptolemy II and Arsinoe II.<sup>31</sup> In fact, she is the same person also known as Philotera.<sup>32</sup> It was found that Philotera was an alias of Berenice.<sup>33</sup> When the Celts/Galatians came to Thrace in 279 BC, Seuthes III had gone from this world that same year, and the father of the future king Kavaros took as his wife Berenice and thus in 279 BC the Galatian or Galatian-Ptolemaic kingdom in Thrace was founded.<sup>34</sup> Already in detail the situation was presented that the king Kavaros (257 – 218 BC) was the greatest ruler not only of Thrace, but also he was one of the greatest kings of Hellenism at all.<sup>35</sup>

And when exactly this spectacular rock image was made? In my opinion, this grandiose magnificent rock portrait, representing the majestic apotheosis of the king of Egypt, Ptolemy I, was probably made by order of the king Kavaros in 257 BC – the year of his enthronement as the king of the Galatian-Ptolemaic state in Thrace and Galatia in Asia Minor.<sup>36</sup> As a direct grandson of the great ruler of Egypt during the Hellenistic period, Ptolemy I Lagos, king and Pharaoh of Egypt,<sup>37</sup> this image was made by order of Kavaros, the king of Thrace, who also received the title of Pharaoh,<sup>38</sup> precisely because of the fact that he was the grandson of Ptolemy I Lagos, the founder of a new dynasty in Hellenistic Egypt, which lasted for about 300 years. With this majestic rock portrait depiction, the king of Thrace, Kavaros, has perpetuated the personality and deeds of his grandfather Ptolemy I. Only in this historical context can be explained making this grandiose rock portrait image of Ptolemy I in the lands of ancient Thrace – now in present-day Bulgaria.

Another question arises quite naturally – why is this huge portrait image made straight into the rocks? Perhaps the decision of the ruler who ordered the making of this enormous portrait was such because the rocks are actually millions of years and they will remain strong and intact even millions of years. And this portrait image will certainly remain for millions of years to be astonished by the future generations of this magnificent image of the king and Pharaoh of Egypt – Ptolemy I, made by order of his grandson Kavaros – the king of Thrace and of an enormous state, located in Southeast Europe and parts of Asia Minor, along with the lands on the shores of Propontis and the Black Sea.<sup>39</sup>

I think that the materials found during the archaeological excavations of the rock sanctuary in the

<sup>19</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 147-162.

<sup>20</sup> BENGTON 1982, 29-58.

<sup>21</sup> ELLIS 1994; WORTHINGTON 2016.

<sup>22</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 212.

<sup>23</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 124 with ref.

<sup>24</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 139; 146.

<sup>25</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 139-144 with ref.

<sup>26</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 144-146 with ref.

<sup>27</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 204 with ref.

<sup>28</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 132 with ref.; 203.

<sup>29</sup> MANOV 2017, 92; 187.

<sup>30</sup> MIHAILOV 1964, No. 1731.

<sup>31</sup> MANOV 2017, 67.

<sup>32</sup> BENGTON 1982, 56. See also <http://www.tyndalehouse.com/egypt/ptolemies/philotera.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> MANOV 2017, 67.

<sup>34</sup> The term Galatian-Ptolemaic state (kingdom) in Thrace was introduced for the first time by me (MANOV 2017, 93). On the name of the father of the king Kavaros, who was the founder of the new Galatian or Galatian-Ptolemaic kingdom in Thrace, see MANOV 2017, 64-69.

<sup>35</sup> MANOV 2017, 172-188.

<sup>36</sup> MANOV 2017, 92-93.

<sup>37</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 160-162.

<sup>38</sup> MANOV 2017, 92.

<sup>39</sup> MANOV 2017, 185-186 with fig. 79.

Gradishteto area near the village of Dolno Dryanovo, not far from the town of Gotse Delchev, Blagoevgrad region – especially those dating back to 3<sup>rd</sup> – 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC,<sup>40</sup> as well as an ornamented eschara from the same sanctuary, dating back to the late Hellenistic period in the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> or the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> c. BC,<sup>41</sup> similar to such escharas, known from Seuthopolis and elsewhere in the lands of ancient Thrace, are in support of the date given here for making the huge rock portrait image around the middle of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

In fact, from the lands of ancient Thrace from the Hellenistic period, some specific artifacts, which are related to the Ptolemaic Egypt, are known and identified and date back exactly from the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. Among these artifacts are already known several bronze rings with portrait images of representatives of the Ptolemaic dynasty. Such is a bronze signet ring from the area of the rock sanctuary Perperikon, with a portrait of a Ptolemaic ruler, identified as an image of Ptolemy II.<sup>42</sup> Another similar bronze ring is embossed with an image of a Ptolemaic queen found during archaeological excavations of a site in the town of Kiten, Burgas region, with materials dating from the Archaic to the Hellenistic period.<sup>43</sup> More recently, another bronze ring has been published, which was found many years ago in the area of today's Svishtov on the Danube, and is now kept in NIAM-BAS, which has a high relief image of female bust, identified as most probably an image of the Ptolemaic queen Berenice II – the wife of Ptolemy III Euergetes.<sup>44</sup> In the same publication<sup>45</sup> is clearly represented the situation that the rings of the

Ptolemaic type are of a great scholarly interest, and on their characteristics, origin and distribution in the lands along the Black Sea coast and especially in the lands of the Bosphorus or, generally, in the Northern Black Sea area, some special studies are presented.<sup>46</sup> These rings, mainly found in the area of the northern shores of the Black Sea, have been interpreted as possibly related to the most mobile part of the population – merchants, sailors and mercenary soldiers.<sup>47</sup> In addition, some artifacts identified with certainty as imports from the workshops of Alexandria in Hellenistic Egypt, have been attested in recent years by archaeological finds in the Greek cities of the western Black Sea coast – Histria and Callatis – mainly different faience and alabaster items.<sup>48</sup> Also during archaeological excavations in the western and northern shores of the Black Sea have been found and some clay hydrias of the specific type, defined as the Hadra type after the name of a necropolis of Alexandria in Egypt, which are considered important signs of the Egyptian influence in the western and the northern shores of the Black Sea in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.<sup>49</sup> A general overview of archaeological artifacts with proven origin from the Ptolemaic Egypt, found in the areas of northern and western shores of the Black Sea, as well as of some examples from Thrace, was made recently, with various assumptions about the nature of the contacts of these lands with Egypt of the Ptolemies.<sup>50</sup>

Faience vessels made in Alexandria in Egypt during the Hellenistic period were also found in the ancient Odessos – today's city of Varna.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps in the near future, these specific artifacts associated so far with a direct influence of



**Fig. 10.** Silver tetradrachm of Ptolemy II (285 – 246 BC), with an image of Celtic shield on the reverse. (Photo after CNG Auction 59, 2002, Lot: 65; with permission of: www.wildwinds.com)

<sup>40</sup> BOZHKOVA/GEORGIEVA 2009; 2012.

<sup>41</sup> BAYRAKOV 2013, 81.

<sup>42</sup> OVCHAROV 2005b, 111.

<sup>43</sup> PANAYOTOVA et alii 2013, 429, fig. 3.

<sup>44</sup> TONKOVA 2017.

<sup>45</sup> TONKOVA 2017, 557 with ref.

<sup>46</sup> NEVEROV 1974; TREISTER 1985; LITVINENKO 1991.

<sup>47</sup> TONKOVA 2017, 557-558 with ref.

<sup>48</sup> DAN 2011, 218-219; TONKOVA 2017, 559 with ref.

<sup>49</sup> LUNGU 2007; TONKOVA 2017, 557-560 with ref.

<sup>50</sup> ARCHIBALD 2007.

<sup>51</sup> TONCHEVA 1972; MINCHEV 2007, 91.



**Fig. 11.** Gold pentadrachm of Ptolemy II, with an image of Celtic shield on the reverse. (Photo after Numismatica Ars Classica, Auction 96, 2016, Lot: 1139).



**Fig. 12.** Bronze coin of Ptolemy II (d. 27 mm), with an image of Celtic shield on the reverse. (Photo after CNG Auction 69, 2005, Lot: 723; with permission of: www.wildwinds.com)

the Ptolemaic Egypt in the Black Sea area will be even more easily understood when the real reasons for the intense political, economic and cultural contacts of the lands around the Black Sea and especially of Thrace with Egypt of the Ptolemies during almost all the third century BC are already known. Because, in fact, the lands around the Black Sea were in the state of the king Kavaros, and this king was a relative of the Ptolemies.<sup>52</sup>

As further evidence of the direct connection of the state of the Galatians in Thrace to the Ptolemies in Hellenistic Egypt must also necessarily be discussed some coin emissions

<sup>52</sup> MANOV 2017, 92-93; 186-188, with fig. 79.

of the heir of Ptolemy I – Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285 – 246 BC), who was appointed for a joint-king by his father Ptolemy I as early as 285 BC.<sup>53</sup> These coin issues have an oval shield image on their reverse, but they have not yet found the most plausible explanation. Such coins with an oval shield image are known to be struck of all three metals – silver, gold and bronze. The oval shield symbol is well known in a large series of tetradrachms struck during the reign of Ptolemy II Philadelphus (**fig. 10**), as well as gold coins (**fig. 11**), and is also well known by a significant number of bronze coins (**fig. 12**) issued by the same king. The identification of this shield

<sup>53</sup> WORTHINGTON 2016, 203 with ref.

image, as well as its interpretation, has long been the subject of various disputes in science. Several scholars numismatists from Switzerland within a few years in particular have dealt with this issue. First H. Voegtl<sup>54</sup> is concerned with clarifying this question by presenting and defining the depicted shield on the coins of Ptolemy II Philadelphus as a definite Celtic shield and linking it to Pausanias' account (Paus. I, 7, 2) for the punished by Ptolemy II rebellious Celtic mercenaries he left on a deserted island in the Nile River, which event is usually dated ca. 275 BC. This hypothesis is supported by H. W. Ritter<sup>55</sup>, and he also believes that the Celtic shield on various coins of Ptolemy II Philadelphus, struck of different metals, must be directly linked to the victory of Ptolemy II over Celtic mercenaries. Later, however, this hypothesis was denied by another numismatist from Switzerland, D. Salzmann,<sup>56</sup> who sought other explanations for the possible local Egyptian origin of the shape of this shield, but on the other hand he perceived it as a personal symbol of Ptolemy II, related to the legend represented in the lexicon Suda about the newly born Ptolemy I exposed upon a shield, which was mentioned above. This author believes that the legend was created only during Ptolemy II's reign, which is why this shield was not depicted on Ptolemy I's own coins.<sup>57</sup> The discussion about the importance of the appearance of such an oval shield, which in any case is definitely Celtic of its kind, was presented with various comments by G. Nachtergaele, who ultimately believes that the depicted shield on the coins of Ptolemy II Philadelphus can be considered as a dynastic symbol that is inseparable from the eagle symbol, designed to recall the divine origin of the royal family, reflected as a legend in the famous information from the lexicon Suda.<sup>58</sup> G. Nachtergaele also believes that perhaps Ptolemy II had chosen to insist on his divine origin instead of boasting too formally with a small victory over his own mercenaries.<sup>59</sup> One of the greatest connoisseurs of Hellenistic coinages, O. Mørkholm, says he believes the shield on the coins of Ptolemy II is Celtic and probably a personal emblem of Ptolemy II, though its Celtic connotations are far from clear, by forwarding the readers to all three scholars from Switzerland.<sup>60</sup>

In another publication, discussing some bronze coin issues of the same type and the same additional symbol – oval shield, this symbol is defined unambiguously as Galatian shield.<sup>61</sup> A significant number of silver tetradrachms of Ptolemy II with this symbol – oval shield, is recorded in the big coin hoard from Meydancikkale in today's Turkey,<sup>62</sup> and two tetradrachms with this symbol are identified as probably struck even by Ptolemy III Euergetes in Tarsos in Asia Minor.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, these Ptolemaic coin issues are not marked with the special dating regnal years – with Greek letters, as other tetradrachms of Ptolemy II, which is

<sup>54</sup> VOEGTLI 1973.

<sup>55</sup> RITTER 1975.

<sup>56</sup> SALZMANN 1980.

<sup>57</sup> SALZMANN 1980, 39.

<sup>58</sup> NACHTERGAEL 1977, 188-190 with ref.

<sup>59</sup> NACHTERGAEL 1977, 188-190 with ref.

<sup>60</sup> MØRKHOLM 1991, 101 with note 2.

<sup>61</sup> WOLF, LORBER 2011.

<sup>62</sup> DAVESNE/LE RIDER 1989, Pl. 120, no. 3815 – Pl. 125, no. 3974; Pl. 152, no. 5057-5066; Pl. 154, no. 5146-5157; Pl. 155, no. 5158-5169; Pl. 156, no. 5197-5198.

<sup>63</sup> DAVESNE/ LE RIDER 1989, 216 and Pl. 156, no. 5189-5190.

why so far presented only theoretical dating of these coin issues and there are assumptions that some of the issues of tetradrachms of Ptolemy II with an oval shield were probably struck between 261/260 and 257/256 BC.<sup>64</sup>

Thanks to a recently published study in which it was found that the first ruler of the state of the Galatians in Thrace and the father of the future king Kavaros, took as his wife a daughter of Ptolemy I, who was a sister of Ptolemy II,<sup>65</sup> another explanation for the appearance of this oval shield, mainly on coins of Ptolemy II, can now be given. The appearance of a Celtic shield on some issues of gold, silver and bronze coins of Ptolemy II can now be interpreted as a symbolic demonstration of the assistance provided to the Egyptian king by troops of the Galatian state in Thrace for the various wars he led, and especially for the help given to Ptolemy II in the Second Syrian War (260 – 253 BC).<sup>66</sup> Moreover, with this symbol – the Celtic shield, placed on coins of the three different metals, has also been demonstrated and the kinship of Ptolemy II with the rulers of the Galatian state in Thrace, and especially with the king Kavaros, because it turned out that Ptolemy II was actually the uncle of the king of Thrace – Kavaros.<sup>67</sup>

The presented and identified majestic rock portrait image, by its size and impression, could be compared to the Sphinx in front of the great pyramids of Giza in Egypt. Another rock phenomenon from the Balkans – a head with human features, is also known from the lands of present-day Romania – the so called Sphinx from the Bucegi Mountains – a part of the Carpathian Mountains, but it is usually thought to be a creation of nature.<sup>68</sup> After the identification of the big rock human head from Bulgaria with the necessary and most important parallels, it can already be stated with complete grounds that this is the greatest portrait image of the deified king Ptolemy I Soter, ever seen in the world, which was made in the lands of ancient Thrace – in present-day Bulgaria. No matter how modernistic it sounds, I think that by its design and its way of making, the huge rock human head from the rock sanctuary from the region of Dolno Dryanovo, Bulgaria, presented with clear portrait features, with its majestic expression and inspiration, as well as its impressive huge sizes, can be compared to the huge rock images of the founders of a new state – the portrait images of presidents on the Mount Rushmore in the USA. But the king of Thrace – Kavaros, who had ordered the creation of this spectacular rock portrait in the lands of ancient Thrace, apparently reached this idea more than 22 centuries earlier, to perpetuate a founder – in this case the founder of the longest-ruling dynasty in the period of Hellenism – Ptolemy I Soter, who became King and Pharaoh of Hellenistic Egypt.

And as to the artist who made this great work of art directly into the rocks, in my opinion, the most likely author was the best artist of the Hellenistic period, who worked at the court of the king Kavaros<sup>69</sup>.

A real idea of the scale of this spectacular rock

<sup>64</sup> DAVESNE/ LE RIDER 1989, 275-277; 280-295; 292.

<sup>65</sup> MANOV 2017, 67.

<sup>66</sup> MANOV 2017, 100.

<sup>67</sup> MANOV 2017, 67; 188.

<sup>68</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sphinx\\_\(Romania\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sphinx_(Romania))

<sup>69</sup> On the name of the best artist, working at the court of the king Kavaros, see MANOV 2017, 175-178.



**Fig. 13.** A sitting woman on the rocks in front of the big rock human head. (Image source: <http://www.balkanmysteries.com/bg/?p=87>)

portrait image can be obtained by comparing it with the size of a sitting woman on the rocks (actually she is sitting on the rock image of the *nemes*) in front of the big rock head – in the last figure enclosed here (**fig. 13**)<sup>70</sup>.

The proposed attempt to identify and date the making of the huge rock portrait head from the rock sanctuary near the village of Dolno Dryanovo in Bulgaria will remain open for further discussions. There are other megalithic anthropomorphic and zoomorphic images in Bulgaria that expect their interpretation in the future.

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<sup>70</sup> <http://www.balkanmysteries.com/bg/?p=87>

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