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ΣΚΥΘΙΣΤΙ ΧΕΙΡΟΜΑΚΤΡΟΝ: SOPHOCLES' RECORD OF THE EXTRAVAGANT SCYTHIAN CUSTOM

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The age-long contacts between the Aegean Greeks and barbarians of the north-eastern margins of the populated universe undoubtedly influenced all the “actors” of these reciprocal relations. The Greek culture absorbed elements of foreign cultures. This process of assimilation exerted a strong influence on ancient Greek art (especially iconography), language and literature. The examples of such acquisitions are numerous. The most significant ones have already been examined by Classical scholarship.¹ However, many of them remain disputable. I will focus on the records offered by the Classical Greek drama concerning a unique phenomenon of barbarian Scythian culture: “scalp-towels” – *cheiromaktrons*.

I

Europe learned about scalping in the modern age after America had been discovered.² This cruel custom, which was practised by certain tribes of the North

¹ See e.g. Zahn 1896; Waiß 1903; Jüthner 1923; Bacon 1961; Grecs et barbares 1962; Bengtson 1974; Raeck 1981; Long 1986; Nippel 1990; Hall 1991; Skrzhinskaia 1991; 1998; 2010; Romilly 1993; Dihle 1994; Detel 1995; Bäbler 1998; Harrison 2002; Savostina 2004; 2011; Pallantza 2005, esp. 297–310; Mitchell 2007; Sinitsyn 2008a, 279 ff.; 2011a, 626 ff.; 2011b; 2011c; Kuznetsova 2011; Zavoikin 2011. See also the articles in the new collection *Antichnoe nasledie Kubani* 2010–2012.

² On scalping practised by peoples in America and Eurasia see the classical work by Friederici 1906. Of new research: Larsen 1997; Borodovskii, Tabarev 2001; 2005 (with literature); Murphy, Gokhman, Chistov, Barkova 2002; Smith 1995; Pererva, Luk'iashko 2011, 378–380; see the articles in the collection: Chacon, Dye 2007 and other works listed below in notes 4–5.

American continent,³ deeply affected the first colonists from Spain, England and France. One may well imagine how shocked the civilised Europe was when it heard the stories told about the savage ways of the Natives of the New World. It is also known that it was the European invaders themselves (the English and the French), who encouraged the Indians to tear scalps by paying bounties for them.

The term “scalping” must have come into use at the beginning of the 18th century, and subsequently it was adopted by many European languages. The words *scalping*, *scalp* (*skalpieren*, *Skalp* – German; *scalper*, *scalpe/scalp* – French; *scalpo* – Italian; *escalpar* – Spanish; *skalpere/skalpera*, *scalp* – Danish, Swedish; *скальпировать*, *скальп* – Russian) denote the removal of all or part of the scalp, with hair attached, from an enemy’s head. Initially, the European conquistadors had no words to describe this “barbaric” rite and the “trophy” itself. It should be emphasised that with the discovery of America, when the Old World learned about scalping *again*, these terms came to signify one of the ancient military customs already known to many nations.

Owing to archaeological discoveries made in various parts of the Eurasian continent over the last decades, contemporary science has learnt much about the habit of scalping in Europe and Asia, which was practised by various tribes and nations from the Neolithic period to the Middle Ages.⁴ As is well known, this rite was also common to the Scythian tribes, which inhabited a vast territory between eastern Europe and southern Siberia as well as Central Asia.⁵ Narrative sources speak of the scalping of slain enemies, of various objects made of human skin and scalps procured by the Scythian warriors. These war “trophies” – heads, scalps, jaws, skin of the (right) hand and the like – ranked among special military “honourable distinctions” and served as adornments for the clothes of the “steppe horsemen” and for the harness of their horses (saddle and breast pendants).⁶

³ Scalping of enemies has also been observed among certain tribes of South America (e.g. in Paraguay, Argentina); see: Friederici 1906, 30 ff.; Klein 1961, 107 f. (with examples of similar customs practised by other peoples in different parts of the world); Owsley, Berryman 1975; Williams 1991; Miller 1994.

⁴ See Klein 1961; Dieck 1969; Anger, Dieck 1978; Borodovskii 1997; Ortner, Ribas. 1997; Mednikova, Lebedinskaia 1999; Knauer 2001a; Knauer 2001b; Mednikova 2000; 2001; 2003; Borodovskii, Tabarev 2001; 2005; Karacharov, Razhev 2002; Murphy, Gokhman, Chistov, Barkova 2002; Pererva 2005a; 2005b; Chacon, Dye 2007; Ortner, Frohlich 2008; Razhev, Poshekhnova 2009; Pererva, Luk’iashko 2011.

⁵ About this: Rudenko 1948, 53 ff.; 1949, 100, 108; 1951, 81 ff.; 1952, 134 ff.; 1953, 264; 1970, 221; Müller 1972, 101–131; El’nitskii 1977, 230; Dumézil 1978, 253 s.; Hartog 1980, 173 ff.; Rolle 1980, 91, 93 f., 117; 1991, 115 f.; Mednikova 2000, 59, 60, 64–65; Murphy, Gokhman, Chistov, Barkova 2002; Pererva 2005b, 41 ff.; Parzinger 2007, 49, 105.

⁶ See e.g.: Meliukova 1964, 32–34; Stepanov 1973; Rolle 1979, 86. Anm. 133; 1980, 89 (ill.), 90, 91, 93–94; Riedlberger 1996; Khlobystina 1999; Bergeman 2001, 122, 124, 130; Ol’khovskii

The Hellenes must have been aware of the scalping of enemies, the rite common to the barbarians, since their first clashes with the “uncivilised” peoples which inhabited the areas lying to the north of the Aegean. The Pontus region colonists must have had first-hand knowledge of it; some of them fell victim to their bellicose neighbours, and the nomads of the steppe took pride in parading with the scalps as war trophies, which they won in their frequent “intercultural conflicts” with the warriors from Greek settlements. The relations between the Pontic Hellenes and the various barbaric tribes were close, but partly hostile.⁷ Iu.A. Vinogradov paints the following picture of “the Graeco-barbarian co-existence” in the northern Black Sea Region: “During the Greek colonisation of the northern shore of the Black Sea, it was Scythians who ruled in the steppes [...] these bellicose nomads were a constant threat to the settlers, their bands would rush out of the steppe, sack the settlements of land tenants and retreat into the vastness of the steppe”.⁸ After successful raids, dashing horsemen would return with many spoils, the most valuable being heads and scalps. Herodotus (4.64–66) testifies to the Scythian practice of chopping off enemies’ heads, which they took to deliver to their king. These “trophies” ensured that the warriors would get their share of the spoils of war (Hdt. 4.64.1) and a seat of honour at the tribal feast for the distinguished warriors (ibid. 4.66).

The barbarian rite of beheading and scalping of vanquished enemies must have shocked sedentary settlers and given rise to rumours of how savage their Scythian neighbours were. Such were the stories about the steppe nomads that Greek merchants and travellers brought to the poleis of Asia Minor and the Balkans from the Pontic colonies to satiate the interest of their compatriots in barbarian wonders. The Hellenic world, long before the Scythians reached it, had spawned legends of their savagery and ruthlessness; it was here that the *xenomyth* of their blood-thirstiness was born.

The Great Greek colonisation established close contacts between the inhabitants of continental Greece and the people of the north-eastern periphery of the populated universe, thereby opening up the barbarian *terra incognita* for Western civilisation. This is shown by narrative records, epigraphic evidence and archae-

2001, 154–155, 160 (ill.); Knauer 2001a; Knauer 2001b, 287 ff. (in both articles Elfriede R. Knauer provided a review of sources and literature and a judicious selection of illustrations on the topic); Pererva 2005b, 41–44; Raev 2007, 378; Parzinger 2007, 105 f.; Corcella 2007, 628–629; Pererva, Luk’iashko 2011, 386 ff., 393 ff. (this work analyses the rite of scalping performed by ancient peoples as described in numerous narrative sources and corroborated by many archaeological finds, the latest discoveries included).

⁷ Of the new research, meticulously and vividly: Vinogradov, Goroncharovskii 2009, 14 ff., 17, 25 ff., 31, 33, 46 ff. et al. (with a list of literature for the topic). See also: Tolstikov 2011.

⁸ Vinogradov, Goroncharovskii 2009, 17.

ological finds – mainly, the mass import of Attic ceramics in the 6th–5th centuries BC, accounting for the development of trade between Athens and the North Black Sea Region.⁹

In the mid–5th century BC, the notorious Scythian ways became proverbial: for one, the phrase “get scythed” (σκυθίζειν / ἐπισκυθίζειν), meaning “get drunk the Scythian way”, i.e. “drink undiluted wine” or “drink heavily”.¹⁰ While relating the legend about the Spartan King Cleomenes I’s propensity for drinking the way the Scythians did (6.84.1,3), Herodotus says that having adopted the Scythian fashion, the king went out of his mind, and since then, the Spartans, when feeling like partaking of fortified wine, would say, “pour out the wine the Scythian way” (ἐπισκύθισον).¹¹

It is noteworthy that the ancient Greeks related the rite of scalping to a particular ethnos, namely, the Scythians.¹² In Old Greek, this is demonstrated by derivatives of the root σκυθ-. For example, the forms of the verbs σκυθίζειν, ἀποσκυθίζειν and περισκυθίζειν in the active and middle voices mean to “scythe” or “get scythed”, or the even more emphatic (with the prefix ἀπο-) “scythe off”, i.e. “remove (= cut off, rip off) the hair from the human head together with the skin”, “to scalp”; these verbs can take passive forms – “to be scythed” by somebody, that is, “to be shorn”, “deprived of hair”, “scalped”.¹³

⁹ Of the extensive research into the topic, see: Grakov 1939, 231–315 (a review of the narrative sources), 174–181 (review of epigraphic evidence), esp. 231–233; 290 ff., 293, 306 et al.; Brashinskii 1963, 35–48, 56 ff., 86; Skrzhinskaia 1986; Bouzek 1990; Bähler 1998, 163–174; Boardman 1999; Savostina 2004; Braund 2004. See also the articles in the collection *Scythians and Greeks* 2005 and the multi-author book *Greki i varvary* 2005.

¹⁰ Anacreon *fr.* 11b, 1–5 *PMG*, Page = Athen. 10.427a–b; Achaeus *fr.* 9 *TGF*, Snell = Athen. 10.427c; Hieronym. *fr.* 2 Hiller = Athen. 11.499f (καὶ τὸ μεθύσαι σκυθίσαι); Plato *Leg.* 637e; Athen. 10.428d–e; 438a; Latyshev 1900, 361, 626–627. See: Pape 1908, I, 980, s.v. ἐπισκυθίζω; Liddell, Scott 1996, 657, s.v. ἐπισκυθίζω; 1616, s.v. Σκυθίζω (1), and literature: How, Wells 1912, II, 97–98, ad loc. 6.84.2,3; Lissarrague 1990a; 1990b, 146 ss.; Scott 2005, 310, ad loc. Hdt. 6.84.3 (“drink neat wine”).

¹¹ Hdt. 6.84.3; cf.: Chamaeleon *fr.* 10, Wehrli = Athen. 10.427b–c; 436e–f; Ael. *Var. Hist.* 2.41. See: Stein 1896, III, 183, ad loc. Hdt. 6.84; Macan 1895, 341, ad loc. Hdt. 6.84; Hartog 1980, 176 ss.; Lissarrague 1990b, 146 ss.; Braund 2004, 38; Scott 2005, 309 f.; Welwei 2007, 50 f.

¹² Stein 1896, 64, ad loc. Hdt. 4.64.2; Klein 1961, 107; Dovatur, Kallistov, Shishova 1982, 302–303, note 408 (with reference to H. Stein); Rolle 1980, 93 f.; 1991, 115; Skrzhinskaia 1985, 144; Riedlberger 1996, 53, 56; Murphy, Gokhman, Chistov, Barkova 2002, 8; cf.: Sinitsyn 2008a, 281 f.; 2011a, 629 ff.

¹³ See the following entries: Pape 1908, I, 325, s.v. ἀποσκυθίζω: “nach Scythen Art die Kopfhaut mit dem Haare abziehen”; II, 591, s.v. περισκυθίζω: “die Haut des Hirschschädels nach skythischer Art abziehen, scalpieren, τινά, übh. die Haut abziehen, entblößen”; II, 906, s.v. Σκυθίζω: “das Haar nach skythischer Sitte beschneiden, es glatt wegscheeren”; Passow 1993, I.1, 358, s.v. ἀποσκυθίζω: “die Kopfhaut mit dem Haare nach skythischer Sitte abziehen, scalpieren, bis auf die Haut kahl scheeren”; II.1, 872, s.v. περισκυθίζω: “die Haut des Hirschschädels nach skythischer Art abziehen, scalpieren” and “die Haut oder das Fell abziehen, entblößen”; II.2, 1469, s.v. σκυθίζω (c):

The extant corpus of works by the Attic tragedians contains two instances of these forms referring to the ferocious Scythian manners, namely, those of Euripides.¹⁴ Numerous post-ancient and medieval lexicons have preserved this specific meaning of “ethnically” marked verbs.¹⁵

The colonists in the Black Sea region, who maintained close contacts with their nomadic neighbours, and the Hellenes from mainland Greece, were impressed by the stories of outrageous barbarian ways, and as a result started to refer to the terrifying Scythian “trophies” as χειρόμακτρον.¹⁶ In Old Greek this was a common word which meant “towel”, “hand wiping cloth” (the first stem being χεῖρ – “hand”, so, more adequately, a “hand towel”), as well as “kerchief”, “head-scarf”.¹⁷ The literary sources from the archaic and classical periods normally use the word without any exotic and ethnic connotations,¹⁸ but by the mid-5th century BC this word had acquired this specific connotation.

II

The earliest sources in which the word χειρόμακτρον occurs to denote the Scythian scalping is the fourth book of the *History* by Herodotus and Sophocles' tragedy *Oenomaus*. The former gives a detailed, expert account of this military custom (Hdt. 4.64), the other (Soph. *fr.* 473 *TGF*, Radt) merely ‘alludes’ to it,

“das Haar nach skythischer Sitte beschneiden, d.i. es glatt wegscheeren”; Liddell, Scott 1996, 218, s.v. ἀποσκυθίζω (1): “scalp [as the Scythians did]”; 1386, s.v. περισκυθίζω (1): “scalp in Scythian fashion”; 1616, s.v. Σκυθίζω (2): “from the Scythian practice of scalping slain enemies”. Also literature: Hudson-Williams 1912, 122; Hartog 1980, 173; Dovatur, Kallistov, Shishova 1982, 302 f.; Rolle 1991, 115 f.; Riedlberger 1996, 55 ff.; Corcella 2007, 629: “to remove the scalp”.

¹⁴ Eur. *El.* 241: καὶ κράτα πλόκαμόν τ' ἔσκυθισμένον ξυρῶ (“Both the head and the locks had she shorn the Scythian way”); Eur. *Tr.* 1026: κράτ' ἀπεσκυθισμένην (“...the Scythian way deprived of her hair”); see Skrzhinskaia 1985, 144; 1998, 149; Rolle 1991, 115; Riedlberger 1996, 55 f.; Sinitsyn 2008, 281.

¹⁵ E.g.: Ael. Herodian. *De prosod. cathol.* 62, 13 Lentz; Hesych. *Lex.* A 6638; Σ 1157 Schmidt; Steph. Byz. *Ethn.* 578, 16 Meineke; Phot. *Lex.* A 2658 Theodoridis; Suda. A 3062; 3533; Π 1287 Adler; Mich. Psell. *Poem.* 6.292 Westerink; *Etym. Magn.* 125, 55–57 Gaisford.

¹⁶ P. Riedlberger tried to show that χειρόμακτρον means not a “napkin” (as this word is usually interpreted by the authors of dictionaries, translators and commentators), but an “ornamental cloth” used by the Scythians to decorate their horses (Riedlberger 1996, 60: “dieses Wort nicht als ‘Handtuch’ wiederzugeben ist, sondern man es als ‘Schmucktuch’ auffassen sollte”).

¹⁷ See: Mau 1899; Pottier 1904; Pape 1908, II, 1346, s.v.; Passow 1993, II.2, 2438, s.v.; Liddell, Scott 1996, 1985, s.v.; Riedlberger 1996, 54, 55–56; Hirschmann 1999.

¹⁸ Examples: Sappho. *fr.* 44 *PLG*, Bergk = Athen. 9.410e; Hecat. *fr.* 358 *FGrH* 1 Jacoby = Athen. 9.410e; Hdt. 2.122.1 = Athen. 9.410e–f; Aristoph. *fr.* 502 *CAF*, Kock = Athen. 9.410b; Xen. *Cyr.* 1.3.5 = Athen. 9.410c.

but it must have been the same rite. "The Father of History" describes abhorring military customs performed by Scythians as yet another oddity with an abundance of sickening details:

Hdt. 4.64: (1) τὰ δ' ἐς πόλεμον ἔχοντα ὧδέ σφι (sc. Σκύθαι) διακέεται· ἐπεὰν τὸν πρῶτον ἄνδρα καταβάλλῃ ἀνὴρ Σκύθης, τοῦ αἵματος ἐμπίνει· ὅσους δ' ἂν φονεύσῃ ἐν τῇ μάχῃ, τούτων τὰς κεφαλὰς ἀποφέρει τῷ βασιλεί· ἀπενείκας μὲν γὰρ κεφαλὴν τῆς λήϊης μεταλαμβάνει, τὴν ἂν λάβωσι, μὴ ἐνείκας δὲ οὐ. (2) ἀποδείρει δὲ αὐτὴν τρόπῳ τοιῷδε· περιταμῶν κύκλῳ περὶ τὰ ὦτα καὶ λαβόμενος τῆς κεφαλῆς ἐκσεῖει, μετὰ δὲ σαρκίσας βοῶς πλευρῇ δέψει τῆσι χερσί, οργάσας δὲ αὐτὸ ἅτε χειρόμακτρον (corr. χειρώμακτρον¹⁹) ἔκτῃται, ἐκ δὲ χαλινῶν τοῦ ἵππου, τὸν αὐτὸς ἐλαύνει, ἐκ τούτου ἐξάπτει καὶ ἀγάλλεται· ὅς γὰρ ἂν πλείστα χειρόμακτρα (corr. χειρώμακτρα) ἔχῃ, ἀνὴρ ἄριστος οὗτος κέκριται.²⁰

“(1) As to war, these are their customs. A Scythian drinks the blood of the first man whom he has overthrown. He carries to his king the heads of all whom he has slain in the battle; for he receives a share of the booty taken if he brings a head, but not otherwise. (2) He scalps the head by making a cut round it by the ears, then grasping the scalp and shaking the head out. Then he scrapes out the flesh with the rib of an ox, and kneads the skin with his hands, and having made it supple he keeps it for a napkin, fastening it to the bridle of the horse which he himself rides, and taking pride in it; for he is judged the best man who has most scalps for napkins”.²¹

Herodotus describes the scalping of a dead man, the fleshing, the tanning of human skin, and the making of *cheiromaktrons*.²² The contemporary historian was never an eye-witness either to the production of such articles, or to “towels” made of human scalps suspended from the harness. The first European “ethnographer”, Herodotus, learned about this particular custom, and the other Scythian ones, second-hand. Aldo Corcella, the author of a commentary on Book IV by Herodotus, notes, “perhaps Herodotus is recording the impression of the witness

¹⁹ On variants of the word χειρόμακτρον / χειρώμακτρον see: Hoffmann 1898, 365, and cf. Frisk 1960, II, 1083–1084.

²⁰ The text of the source is cited from the last Teubner edition by H.B. Rosén (*Herodotus* 1987, 386).

²¹ Translated by A.D. Godley (*Herodotus* 1928, 261, 263).

²² I will not dwell on either the semantic meaning of this word or the military custom performed by the Scythians. Contemporary scholars tend to relate the sources and the meaning of scalping to the initiation rite common to ancient warring societies. This custom is considered to reflect the archetypical ideas of the magic power of head/hair (see: Friederici 1907; Mednikova 2000; Chacon, Dye 2007; Pererva, Luk'iashko 2011).

who said that he had seen the skin".²³ D.S. Raevskii, a Russian Scythologist, regards this Scythian account of Herodotus as "deriving from the Scythian folk tradition proper".²⁴

The modern literature regards Herodotus' story about the Scythians making peculiar hand-towels from scalps as the first evidence of military trophies of such kind. In 1996, the *Klio* journal published an article "Skalpieren bei den Skythen" by Pieter Riedlberger (as far as I know, this is the latest research paper devoted to Herodotus' description of this Scythian custom). The author leaves no doubt that Sophocles relied on the historian's ethnographical knowledge. Riedlberger's argument runs as follows: any attempt to date Sophocles' *Oenomaus* is doomed to failure, so, if to consider the dating of these two pieces of evidence of scalps, "auch ohne es an der Zeitfolge beweisen zu können, leuchtet es ein, daß hier eher der Dramatiker vom Ethnographen Einzelheiten übernommen hat als umgekehrt".²⁵ Moreover, the German researcher argues that the evidence provided by the "Father of History" actually became the ultimate source for all the post-Herodotean ancient writers who referred to scalping as the Scythian custom (*sic!*). Riedlberger arrives at the conclusion that «die Sitte des Skalpierens wird den Skythen *zum ersten Mal* in Herodots Skythenlogos (Hdt. IV,64) zugeschrieben; alle weiteren Erwähnungen *hängen wohl von ihm ab*. Auch die σκυθίζω-Bildungen mit der Bedeutung "dem Kopf die Haare nehmen" *tauchen erst nach der Publikation der Historien auf*» (emphasis added. – A.S.).²⁶

A similar opinion can also be found in dozens of works written by philologists, historians, archeologists, and anthropologists, as well as other experts in the studies of the Ancient World and the Scythians.²⁷ This viewpoint is

²³ Corcella 2007, 629, ad loc. Hdt. 4.64.2–4.

²⁴ Raevskii 2006, 350. See also: Dovatur 1957; Zuev 2011.

²⁵ Riedlberger 1996, 55.

²⁶ Riedlberger 1996, 60.

²⁷ See, e.g.: Stein 1896, 64, ad loc. Hdt. 4.64.2 («ἄτε ("als") χειρόμακτρον (in this passage of Herodotus. – A.S.): hiernach wahrscheinlich Soph[okles]»), with reference to the verse of the drama *Oenomaus*); Rasch 1912, 21 sq.; 1913, 20–22, 123; Höfer 1929, 168; Zelinskii 1914, 256; Sophocles 2009, II, 127; Lattimore 1958, 77; Bacon 1961, 77–78, 80; *TGF*, Radt, 382; Kiso 1984, 53–54; Skrzhinskaia 1985, 144; 1991, 118 сл.; 1998, 141 сл.; Rolle 1991, 115; Miller 1994, 211; Riedlberger 1996, 53, 54, Anm. 15, 55, 60; Mednikova 2000, 59, 60; Murphy, Gokhman, Chistov, Barkova 2002, 5, 8; Pererva 2005, 41; Corcella 2007, 629, ad loc. Hdt. 4.64.2–4. The authors of contemporary lexicons frequently collate these two pieces of evidence of Scythian *heiomaktrons*: Pape 1908, II, 1346, s.v. χειρόμακτρον (1); Passow 1993, II.2, 2438, s.v. χειρόμακτρον (1); Liddell, Scott 1996, 1616, s.v. Σκυθιστί (IV. 1): with reference to our sources. In another entry in the dictionary H.G. Liddell and R. Scott directly relate the two references to *heiomaktrons* and point to their interdependence: "the Scythians used scalps as χειρόμακτρα, Hdt. (4.64); hence Σκυθιστί χειρόμακτρον ἔκκεκαρμένος, Soph. Frag. 473" (Liddell, Scott 1996, 1985, s.v. χειρόμακτρον (I)).

based on the conviction that Sophocles borrowed many subjects, realities and terms of ethnological character from Herodotus' *History*,²⁸ in particular, from Book IV – "The Scythian Logos".

There is no doubt about it, that the influence of Herodotus' historical and ethnographic stories on the Athenian historiography and culture and the Greek literature was very meaningful. Yet, it is hardly proper to speak about "orientomania" of the Athenians only because of their knowledge of the work written by the explorer from Halicarnassus. Here I would like to refer to the opinion of V.G. Borukhovich, who observed that "infatuation with the oriental exotica and, especially, with the oriental cults was quite common in the Athens of the classic age".²⁹

In several articles on this topic³⁰ I tried to contest certain "parallel passages" and cast doubt on the assertion that the coincidence of lexical and phraseological texts can be interpreted as a topos of loaned words and idioms, especially for direct citations. I also do not agree that Sophocles learned about barbarian eccentricities from Herodotus. It goes without doubt that the Greeks had known about the Scythians long before Herodotus from different sources. The evidence of their amazing customs could have come with merchants and explorers who had frequented the Pontic lands.

²⁸ Proceeding from the fact that the works of Sophocles and Herodotus are abundant in parallel passages (indeed there are many of them; see, e.g.: *Tabula locorum* in Rasch 1913, 124; cf. my set of coincidences most frequently referred to: Sinitsyn 2008b, 158–159; 2008c, 377–378), most of my colleagues uphold the hypothesis that the relations between them were close. They usually argue that both writers belonged to the "Pericles' circle", or they refer to a dubious anonymous verse somehow occurring in Plutarch (*Moral.* 785b), or (*nota bene!*) they find similarities in the world outlooks of the playwright and the historian, who were "like-minded representatives of the Old-Greek culture". The number of published works upholding this viewpoint is legion. The most essential literature illustrative of the problem is: Gomperz 1898; How, Wells 1912, I, 7, 70; Zelinskii 1912; Rasch 1912; 1913 (with a critical review of the previous research into the problem, esp. pp. 1–6, 125 sq.); Jacoby 1913, 232–237; Fohl 1913, 1 ff.; Zelinskii 1914a, LII ff.; Wells 1923, 181, 183 f., 186; Schmid, Stählin 1934, 317 ff., 569 ff.; Perrota 1935, 25 f.; Lur'ie 1947a, 19 ff., 23; 1947b, 100, 113 f.; Ehrenberg 1956, 35 f., 68 f., 70 f., 169 f., 195; Egermann 1957, 37 ff., 70 ff.; 1962; Strasburger 1962, 575; Riemann 1967, 2 ff.; Lesky 1971, 314, 323, 349; Diller 1979, 51 f., 69; Hart 1982, 31 ff, 159, 168, 175, 190, 205, 207; Ostwald 1991, 143 f., 145, 146 f.; 1992, 333 ff.; Müller 1996; Nielsen 1997, 46–49; Zellner 1997; Gimadeev 1999; West 1999; Dorati 2000, 19; Bichler, Rollinger 2001, 112 f.; Saïd 2002, 117 ff.; Surikov 2002, 143, 242; 2007, 163; 2008a, 34; 2008b, 376; 2009, 160–161, 211, 344; 2010a; 2010b, 78; 2010c; 2011a, 59; 2011b, 45 f., 101, 152, 173 f., 220, 249 f., 259, 336–361, 395, 409, 437; Dewald, Kitzinger 2006; Griffin 2006; Hornblower 2006, 306 f.; Pozdnev 2010, 153; Strogetskii 2009, 348 f.; 2010, 111, 122, 139 f.; Lombardi 2010, 133.

²⁹ Borukhovich 1972, 29; cf. Borukhovich 1974; Long 1986; Hall 1991.

³⁰ Sinitsyn 2006; 2008a; 2008b; 2008c.

In my article on Sophocles and Herodotus' "Scythian Logos"³¹ I put forward a hypothesis that it was not Herodotus who referred to the scalps-cheiromaktrons for the first time ever, but that it was Sophocles in his *Oenomaus*. Drawing on the hypothesis of W.M. Calder who argued that the Sophoclean drama was written much earlier than usually held, I substantiated the idea with additional arguments. In my opinion the drama was composed during the early period of Sophocles' life, in the second half of the 460s BC when the young playwright set out on his theatrical journey. The public readings of selected passages from his works in Athens are usually dated in the mid-440 BC. The Athenian tragedian and his countrymen must have heard of the stories about the Scythians long before Herodotus.³²

I.E. Surikov supported the hypothesis of an earlier date for Sophocles' *Oenomaus*. In his paper³³ Surikov agreed with my assertion that Herodotus' and Sophocles' references to *cheiromaktrons* do not show any trace of mutual exchange. Surikov referred, the author's choice of the subject for his tragedy to the political events in Elis at the turn of the 470–460s BC, and argued in favour of an earlier date of Sophocles' play about Pelops and Oenomaus.³⁴ In spite of many essential differences in our opinions, I agree with Surikov in general terms.

Athenaeus, the author flourishing in the 2nd–3rd centuries AD, was the first to collate the evidence of the eccentric *cheiromaktron* provided by Sophocles and Herodotus. Elaborating on the washing and drying of hands, and Greek words for napkins and towels, Athenaeus cited a line from Sophocles' lost drama to illustrate the word χειρόμακτρον meaning "hand towel", "napkin":

Athen. 9.410b, c: χειρόμακτρον δὲ καλεῖται ὃ τὰς χεῖρας ἀπεμάττοντο ὠμολίνῳ... <...> Σοφοκλῆς Οἰνομάῳ· Σκυθιστὶ χειρόμακτρον ἐκκεκαρμένως³⁵. καὶ Ἡρόδοτος ἐν δευτέρῳ.³⁶

The author of *The Deipnosophists (The Learned Banqueters)* must have missed the point, since the word χειρόμακτρον used by both the playwright and the historian means a special kind of "towel". Thus, the scrupulous erudite grammarian somehow disregarded both the unique pieces of evidence of Scythi-

³¹ Sinitsyn 2008a.

³² See Sinitsyn 2008a, 271–279; 2011a (examination of the literary evidence of Scythians in Athens in the 5th century BC).

³³ Surikov 2010; 2011b, 341–346.

³⁴ Surikov 2010, 136 f; 2011b, 342 ff.

³⁵ Corr. Σκυθιστὶ χειρόμακτρον ἐκδεδαρμένως: Herwerden 1862, 21; after it: TGF, Nauck, 234–235; Blaydes 1894, 51, 284; Höfer 1929, 168. Remarks: Sophocles 2009, 127; TGF Radt, 382 sq. ad Soph. Frag. 473, 473a.

³⁶ The text is cited from the edition by G. Kaibel: Athenaeus 1985, 394.

an *cheiromaktrons*, vaguely referring to Herodotus' *History*.³⁷ Athenaeus (or the fellow banqueters in his writing) must have been engrossed in particular culinary and hygienic topics – words and phrases denoting various ways of washing and drying hands before (or after?) a meal quoted from literary sources; or he missed the specific connotation of the word *χειρόμακτρον* adduced by Sophocles and Herodotus (?). The author of the *Deipnosophists* did not apparently understand the word properly and misused *χειρόμακτρον*. However, he was right in collating the word's connotations, which he found in both texts. It is noteworthy that Athenaeus cited the unique verse from Sophocles' tragedy, and corroborated it with the reference to Herodotus.

III

Sophocles was the first Greek author to mention the Scythian “hand-towels” (on the stage of the Athenian theatre). What did he want to illustrate by referring to the weird, awful and abhorrent (not only for the civilised Hellenes) phenomenon of the barbarian culture? Why did he use the simile *σκυθιστί*, “the Scythian way”? Let us examine the content of the extant verse from *Oenomaus* and a possible context which may hint at the Scythian scalping.³⁸

It is evident from many narrative sources and pieces of art that the myth of Oenomaus, his daughter Hippodameia and Tantalus' son Pelops, was a popular subject in ancient literary accounts and works of art.³⁹ Pelops appears in Homer's *Iliad*, where he is called “the horse tamer” (*πλήξιππος*, II.104); the legend about the valiant charioteer is related by Pindar in the first *Olympic Ode* (and the scholia). Apollonius of Rhodes, Apollodorus, Hyginus, Diodorus of Sicily, Pausanias and many others retell the “biographies” of Oenomaus and Pelops.⁴⁰

³⁷ Herodotus speaks of the scalps-hand-towels in Book 4, the so-called “Scythian Logos”, and not in Book 2, as pointed out by Athanaeus, for “The Egyptian Logos” speaks about the golden towel given to Rhampsinitus by Demeter: Hdt. 2.122.1. See Casaubonus, Schweighaeuser 1804, 279.

³⁸ See comments on this fragment: Casaubonus, Schweighaeuser 1804, 278 sq.; *TGF*, Nauck, 234 sq.; Sophocles 2009, II, 127; *TGF*, Radt, 382 sq. (with reference to *Lexicon* of Hesychius; see below); discussion: Welcker 1839, 354; Ribbeck 1875, 438; Rasch 1912, 21 sq.; 1913, 20 sqq., 123; Robert 1919, 386 f.; Höfer 1929, 168; Riedlberger 1996, 55.

³⁹ They are assembled in the fundamental edition of *LIMC*: Triantis 1999a, 7.1, 19–23; 7.2, 17 f.; 1999b, 7.1, 282–287; 7.2, 219–223; see entries in the classical lexicon by W. Roscher: Höfer. 1884–1890; Weizsäcker 1897–1902; Bloch 1897–1902.

⁴⁰ Apoll. Rhod. 1.752 and Schol. ad loc.; Apollod. *Epit.* 2.3–9; Lycophr. *Alex.* 154 sqq.; Hyg. *Fab.* 84; Diod. 4.73; Paus. 5.1.6–7; 5.10.6–7; 5.13.1–7; 5.14.6–7; 5.17.7; 5.20.6–8; 6.20.17–19; 6.21.6–22.1; 8.14.10–12; Philostr. *Imag.* 1.17.

It is next to impossible to reconstruct the myth of Pelops and Oenomaus in Sophocles' drama, because the play has been poorly preserved; only seven excerpts – 17 incomplete lines – have reached us through several “mediators”.⁴¹ Some classical philologists have ventured to reconstruct the plot and structure of the tragedy *Oenomaus*.⁴² It is highly possible that the love story of Pelops and Hippodameia was one of the plots, of which the largest passage is extant – *fr.* 474 *TGF*, Radt and, possibly, two other small passages *fr.* 475 and 477. Unfortunately nothing seems to allude to the theme of this heroic tale – the contention between Oenomaus and Pelops.

It is hard to judge what Sophocles actually knew about the exotic *cheiromaktrons*. The verse cited by Athenaeus must have been the only reference to the playwright's knowledge of this ghastly Scythian rite.⁴³ It is interesting to notice that the term *χειρόμακτρον* denoting the Scythian trophy is referred to as ἄπαξ in all the ancient verses. The word *χειρόμακτρον*, in its usual meaning of “towel” or with its ethnic connotation of “scalp towel”, was regarded as unsuitable for the language and style of the art of tragedy. In Classical drama, the word occurs in the passage of Aristophanes' lost comedy the *Tagenistai* (*Masters of the Frying-pan*). For the Athenian comedy dramatist, the word *χειρόμακτρον* meant “a hand towel” used as intended, to wipe one's hands after washing (after a meal):

φῆρε, παῖ, ταχέως κατὰ χεῖρὸς ὕδωρ, // παράπεμπε τὸ χειρόμακτρον.⁴⁴
 “Here, slave, water over the hand, and quickly! // Bring along the towel”.⁴⁵

The passage drawn from Sophocles' *Oenomaus* presents certain difficulties and seems rather unclear.⁴⁶

In the old French edition J.-B. Lefebvre de Villebrune (1789) left the word *χειρόμακτρον* without translation: «Sophocle dit, dans son *Oenomaüs*: “C'est un cheiromactre, car il est rasé comme un Scythe”». ⁴⁷ It is possible that Lefebvre de Villebrune either wanted to show that *χειρόμακτρον* was a Greek term that conveyed the Scythian realia, or he missed the specifically “ethnic” meaning of the word *χειρόμακτρον*, which related to the barbarian military practice (?). The latter is more likely: the French translator used the participle “rasé” (from the verb “raser” – “shave”, “shave off”, “shear”), such was his understanding of

⁴¹ Soph. *fr.* 471–477 *TGF*, Radt, 380–385.

⁴² E.g. Welcker 1839, 352–357 (§ 62); Ribbeck 1875, 431–444; Calder 1974, 205–211.

⁴³ Cf. Ellendt 1872, 783, s.v. *Χειρόμακτρον*.

⁴⁴ Athen. 9.410b = Aristoph. *fr.* 502 *CAF*, Kock.

⁴⁵ Translated by C.B. Gulick: Athenaeus 1969, 357.

⁴⁶ I cite the available translations.

⁴⁷ Athénée 1789, 559.

Sophocles' phrase: "shaven-headed like a Scythian", and he adds the following explanation: "Ceci est dit d'un homme rasé si près, que sa peau paroît aussi lisse qu'un fin lin".⁴⁸ In the Latin version of this passage cited by Athénée in the edition by I. Casaubonus and I. Schweighaeuser, the polysemic word χειρόμακτρον is rendered as "towel" (mantile),⁴⁹ and the participle ἐκκεκαρμένος is rendered as "shorn" (*detonsus*): «Sophocles, Oenomao: «Scythico more detonsus, mantilis vice fungens»». ⁵⁰ It is obvious that the authors of these translations do not take into consideration that these words refer to the scalping and the use of trophies-*cheiromaktrons* by the Scythian nomads. Some researchers in the 19th – early 20th centuries questioned the credibility of Herodotus' accounts of the Scythian practice of scalping.⁵¹

V.V. Latyshev (1900) translated the following line from the Sophoclean drama, cited by Athenaeus: "Остриженный по-скифски, как ручник (?)" ("Cropped in the Scythian way, like a hand-towel"),⁵² and put a question mark there (*sic!*). It is hard to say what puzzled Latyshev; the sentence seems clear if collated with Herodotus' evidence of *cheiromaktrons*⁵³ (this is exactly what the author of *The Deipnosophists* did). N.T. Golinkevich's translation of this verse by Sophocles, published in the new Russian edition of Athenaeus (2010), defies all grammar and logic: "По-скифски полотенце обкорнав" ("Having cropped the towel in the Scythian way").⁵⁴ Firstly, ἐκκεκαρμένος is rendered as the participle in the active voice and agrees with χειρόμακτρον, which is wrong. Secondly, the translator interprets this verse in the way that allows us to conclude that Sophocles' play spoke about "cropped towels": somebody behaved like a Scythian "having trimmed" ("cropped", "shortened") a towel (?). Golinkevich added a note which puts everything in a total mess: "That is, close to the skin" (*sic!* – *A.S.*).⁵⁵ This translation and the related note mean that it was the Scythian custom to crop towels, that is, to make them (or something else) "closely shorn". This is an absurd rendering.

⁴⁸ Athénée 1789, 559, note (**). On other occasions J.-B. Lefebvre de Villebrune translates the term χειρόμακτρον as 'hand-towel', 'napkin' ('essuie-mains', 'serviette'), see *ibidem*, 558 ss.

⁴⁹ F. Ellendt in his *Sophocles' Lexicon* treats this word as monosemantic: *mantile* (Ellendt 1872, 783, s.v. Χειρόμακτρον).

⁵⁰ Athenaeus 1803, 519; see commentary by I. Schweighaeuser: "Appellat χειρόμακτρον, *hominem propius cutem detonsum*; quae dicebatur *Scythica tonsura* vel *Thracica*" (Casaubonus, Schweighaeuser 1804, 278).

⁵¹ Weiss 1860, 553 ("...vielleicht deshalb von Hdt IV, 64 irrthuemlich als aus gegerbter Menschenhaut verfertigt, bezeichnet"); see Klein 1961, 107, note 16: with references to A. Hansen 1844, H. Weiss 1860 and Dissertation A. Grassl 1904 (*non vidi*).

⁵² Latyshev 1900, 626 = Latyshev 1948, 290 (V.V. Latyshev's emphasis).

⁵³ Hdt. 4.64 (see above); cf.: Latyshev 1890, 27.

⁵⁴ Afinei 2010, 62.

⁵⁵ Afinei 2010, 448, note 136.

In the classical English translation of *The Deipnosophists* done over one and a half centuries ago, C.D. Yonge (1854) interprets this passage in the following way: "Sophocles, in his *Oenomaus*, says – 'Shaved in the Scythian manner, while his hair // Served for a towel, and to wipe his hands in'".⁵⁶ I think that the translation of this verse, which appears in the third volume of the *Complete Works of Sophocles*, compiled by Th. Zelinskii a century ago (1914), offers a better reading. Likewise C.D. Yonge, the Russian philologist understands ἐκκεκαρμένους as "cut", "cut off", "trim" hair,⁵⁷ but Zelinskii's translation is undoubtedly more accurate, concise and poetic: "По-скифски волосы содрав у них // На утиральники" ("The Scythian way, having ripped off their hair // for towels").⁵⁸

A similar translation appeared in a recent edition of Sophocles' passages published in *The Loeb Classical Library* (1996). However, its translator Lloyd-Jones simplified the meaning: he used the past participle passive of the verb "scalp", thereby making the phrase clear, unambiguous, but, in my opinion, the original meaning is more sophisticated than it was suggested by Lloyd-Jones' rendering: "...scalped for a napkin in Scythian fashion".⁵⁹ In a new English edition published in the same series *Loeb*, S.D. Olson (2008) completely ignored the problem in his translation χειρόμακτρον: "With his head sheared so that it looked like a *cheiromaktron*, Scythian style".⁶⁰ The same series of editions of classical sources features the translation of this passage by Ch.B. Gullick (1930): «Sophocles in *Oenomaus*: "With head shorn in Scythian fashion to make a towel"». ⁶¹

The English publisher and commentator of Sophocles' passages, A.C. Pearson (1917) gave a word for word translation of this line: "shorn for a napkin in the Scythian fashion".⁶² Another interpretation of Sophocles' passage can be found in R. Lattimore's work *The Poetry of Greek Tragedy*: «handkerchief of skin, Scythian-fashion»,⁶³ – the translation is not literal, it points to the Scythian custom Sophocles referred to (according to Lattimore, the playwright had

⁵⁶ Athenaeus 1854, 647.

⁵⁷ τρίχες, κεφαλή, τρίχες κεφαλῆς, etc. – the Classical literature is abundant of such examples, see: Liddell, Scott 1996, 935, s.v. κείρω.

⁵⁸ Zelinskii 1914b, 256.

⁵⁹ Sophocles 1996, 245; the note *a* to this verse from the *Oenomaus* offers a mistaken reference to the passage in Herodotus' Book IV – 4.52 instead of 4.64 and ibidem, 244 equally mistaken reference to Athen. 9.410c.

⁶⁰ Athenaeus 2008, 419.

⁶¹ Athenaeus 1969, 359.

⁶² Sophocles 2009, II, 127, ad loc. *Soph. fr.* 473.

⁶³ Lattimore 1958, 77, note 29.

learned this from Herodotus⁶⁴). C. Friedrich in the German version of *The Deipnosophists* (1999) chose to give up a poetic translation in favour of the semantic accuracy: ‘Sophokles im “Oinomaos”’: “Ein Handwischtuch aus abgeschornem Kopfhair nach der Skythen Art”’.⁶⁵

The masculine form of the participle ἐκκεκαρμένος does not agree with the noun of neutral gender in this phrase χειρόμακτρον. I believe the last word here can be regarded as the *accusativus respectivus*, so the state expressed by the perfect participle relates to the logical subject. While ἐκκεκαρμένος is a form of *participium perfecti passivi* (here it is rather the passive than the medial voice) of the verb ἐκκείρω should be rendered as "shorn", "deprived of hair" (somebody by somebody), or even have this word in quotes – "shorn", as it was done by W. Willige (1966) in the German version: "Skythisch “geschoren”, gab sein Haupt ein Handtuch ab",⁶⁶ is not suggestive of the cutting of hair in its direct sense, but of the Scythian fashion of scalping the vanquished. And the *cheiromaktron* is surely the connotation of a "hand-towel".

The above-cited Herodotus' story about the Scythians who made and used the "hand-towels" (4.64) can help us to understand the meaning of the Sophoclean' verse. Hesychius' Lexicon offers a description of the specific "*Scythian cheiromaktrons*":

οἱ Σκύθαι τῶν λαμβανομένων πολεμίων τὰς κεφαλὰς ἐκδέροντες [ῆσαν] ἀντὶ χειρομάκτρων ἐχρῶντο.⁶⁷

“Scythians ripped off the skin (together with the hair) of the heads of their enemies' and used it as a hand-towel”.

Hesychius, who found it difficult to interpret a rarely used phrase σκυθιστὶ χειρόμακτρον, adduced a popular "bogey-story" about the morals of the Scythians. The meaning of Sophocles' line becomes clear: it refers to a man (clearly, a dead man), whose head was scalped to make a "hand-towel", as was the fashion with the Scythian warriors; or it speaks about the head of a scalped man or about the *scalp-cheiromaktron* used in the Scythian way.

The ambiguous verse from *Oenomaus* can be rendered as "the Scythian way for a hand-towel shorn". The unfortunate suitor of Hippodameia's, whose head was "shorn" and whose hair and skin was next used as a *cheiromaktron* must have been the logical subject. Thus, according to Sophocles, Oenomaus took trophies of scalps of those who failed to win.

⁶⁴ See above note 28.

⁶⁵ Athenaios 1999, 230.

⁶⁶ Sophokles 1966, 331.

⁶⁷ Hesych. *Lex.* Σ 1157, 1–2 Schmidt.

Speaking about somebody "shorn for a hand-towel", the playwright realizes that scalping a victim is the phenomenon of Scythian culture, so to characterize the phenomenon he knows of he uses an adverb σκυθιστί.⁶⁸ It should be noted that this word does not occur in any other extant verses of Sophocles. σκυθιστί occurs three times in the "Scythian Logos" by Herodotus⁶⁹ and in all its occurrences it appears only as an adverbial modifier "the Scythian way" = "in Scythian".⁷⁰

The "Father of History" did not call the custom of using enemies' heads and scalps as trophies Scythian, and probably did not regard it as singularly Scythian. In the passage on the Issedones, he tells of the operations performed on the skulls of the dead: they are stripped of skin, gilded and kept as a sacred objects (Hdt. 4.26). Yet, if we can believe Herodotus, the purport of the rite was different: the relatives of the diseased act in this way to show their piety.

IV

Oriental novelties introduced into Athens served as "a special device enhancing the attractiveness of this, still new, art" in the Athenian drama of the 5th century BC.⁷¹ The extant passages of Sophocles' plays are full of evidence of barbarian realities and customs (Egyptian, Carian, Lydian, Persian, Scythian, Thracian, etc).⁷² From all appearances, this evidence in Sophocles' works was meant not as an interesting digression capable of attracting the audience, but as a building material for his plots.⁷³

Now, let us apply the following logic: the Athenian playwright related scalping to the particular ethnos, so the Athenians (and not only) who watched Sophocles' *Oenomaus* performed on the Athenian stage should have taken it in the same way. Sophocles wanted to arrest the audience's attention by referring to this barbarian rite. The playwright, a participant of the *agon*, anticipated the response of the audience. Otherwise, why should he have cited this seemingly irrelevant

⁶⁸ Cf.: Ellendt 1872, 687, s.v. σκυθιστί: 'Scytharum more'.

⁶⁹ Hdt. 4.27; 52.3; 59.2.

⁷⁰ Powell 1977, 334, s.v. σκυθιστί: "in Scythian"; Pape 1908, II.2, 906, s.v. σκυθιστί: "in scythischer Sprache" (with examples from Herodotus).

⁷¹ Borukhovich 1972, 24.

⁷² As H. Bacon noted, "Sophocles' fragments provide more information about objects of foreign use than all the foreign plays of Aeschylus put together" (Bacon 1961, 78). Skrzhinskaia's article is devoted to Sophocles and the North Black Sea Region (Skrzhinskaia 1985); also: Kiso 1984, 53 f.; Skrzhinskaia 1991, 118 f.; Hall 1991, 166–170; Sinitsyn 2011b; 2011c; 2012.

⁷³ See Bacon 1961, 79.

comparison? Only a familiar phenomenon can excite emotions. It was crucial for Sophocles to consider the awareness and ability of the audience to respond. Otherwise, his hint at scalping practiced by the Scythians would not have worked if it had been unknown to the audience.⁷⁴

What was the meaning of Sophocles' words? In my opinion the Scythians could not have exerted any influence either on Sophocles' tragedy or on the myth of Pelops. Pelops of Lydia, the son of Tantalus was a single foreigner in the story of Oenomaus, the king of Elis. I think, however, that Sophocles must have had in mind a different "*xenomorth*".

The ancient literary sources describe the mythic king of Pisa as a ruthless and violent person. Oenomaus used to cut off the heads of his daughter's suitors, if they lost the race. He also used to exhibit the heads of his victims on the façade of his palace. In this way Oenomaus got rid of the twelve suitors.⁷⁵

Pelops, who came to ask for Hippodameia's hand, was provided with Poseidon's winged chariot. He also had to rival Oenomaus in the deadly chariot contest and he defeated the haughty sovereign and got Hippodameia and the kingdom. According to the Elean legend,⁷⁶ Pelops raised a mound to commemorate all his predecessors, Hippodameia's suitors, and established the practice of annual sacrifice rites. The myth of Pelops, a foreigner from Asia Minor, and Oenomaus the king of Elis became a foundation myth for the Olympic Games.⁷⁷

The reference to σκυθιστὶ χειρόμακτρον in the tragedy implies that Sophocles substituted the scalps, the fatal "hand-towels, for Oenomaus" "trophies", which were skulls or heads of the slain either (other authors featured κρανίου or κεφαλή). It can be noticed that the playwright "refreshed" some elements of the traditional version of the original story (both in the literature and folk tale). No one except for Sophocles tells the story of Oenomaus and his terrifying collection of human skulls.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ On psychology of classical art see a new thorough work: Pozdnev 2010.

⁷⁵ Apollodorus speaks of 12 suitors (*Epit.* 2.5); other sources point out that before Pelops they had been 13 (Pind. *Ol.* 1.79; cf.: idem. *fr.* 135.1 Snell–Maehler; Philostr. *Imag.* 1.17.4); Pausanias (6.21.7, 10–11) gives the names of 18 suitors).

⁷⁶ This legend is retold by Pausanias (6.21.9, 11).

⁷⁷ Literature: Berger 1935; Lacroix 1976; Burkert 1983, 93–103; O'Brien 1988; Brulotte 1994; Instone 2007, 76; Ekroth 2007, 109 ff.

⁷⁸ Pearson's commentary: "Sophocles appears to be the only authority who asserts that Oenomaus scalped his daughter's suitor" (Sophocles 2009, II, 127, ad loc. *Soph. fr.* 473). Cf. Zelinskii's note: "On scalps of the slain suitors, which the barbarian king used to wipe his hands with. These scalps, by the way, (instead of the traditional heads) constituted the novelty Sophocles introduced clearly under the influence of Herodotus IV.64" (Zelinskii 1914b, 256).

Conclusion

The terrifying Scythian ritual referred to in the *Oenomaus* of Sophocles emphasised the king's primitive and brutal character. The simile σκυθιστί seems to equal the ethical condemnation of Oenomaus' wild and cruel behaviour.⁷⁹ The audience of Sophocles was expected to compare the way of life of the savage Scythians with that of the civilised Greeks. Oenomaus became illustrative of the Scythian barbarity.

If I am right, the Sophoclean quotation is not baseless. The sense of the words must have been clear to Sophocles himself and to his Attic audience, which must have heard about the Scythian scalps. This corroborates my thesis that the popular Scythian “*xenomyth*” emerged in the first half of the 5th century BC.⁸⁰

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⁷⁹ See Sinitzyn 2012.

⁸⁰ This article is an offshoot of the research into the problem of Sophocles and “Scythian Logos” by Herodotus (Sinitzyn 2008a). Various aspects of the problem were presented in reports made at the international conference “The Word and the Artifact: Interdisciplinary approaches to the study of Ancient History” held in 2008 at Saratov State University, at the conference in Staraja Ladoga (“Ladoga and Northern Eurasia”, 2010) and in 2011 at the international conference “The Bosporan Phenomenon: Population, Languages, and Contacts” (St. Petersburg, The Institute of History of Material Culture and the State Hermitage) (see Sinitzyn 2011a). I express my gratitude for consultations given to me during the work on this article and useful criticism to V.A. Lopatin, N.M. Malov, V.N. Parfenov (Saratov, Russia), Z.A. Barzakh, D.A. Machinskii, D.A. Shcheglov, A.Ia. Tyzhov (St. Petersburg, Russia), A.V. Mosolkin, A.V. Podossinov, I.E. Surikov (Moscow, Russia), T. Polański (Kielce, Poland), M.V. Skrzhinskaia (Kiev, Ukraine), Harijs Tumans (Riga, Latvia). I am very grateful to R.V. Lapyrenok (Bonn, Germany), V.P. Nikonorov (St. Petersburg) and M.J. Olbrycht (Rzeszow, Poland) for providing me with literature on this topic.

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Abstract

The barbarian custom of beheading and scalping vanquished enemies must have looked awesome to the civilized colonists in the North Black Sea Region. Greek merchants and travellers brought horrible stories about steppe nomads to poleis of Asia Minor and the Balkans to satiate the interest of their countrymen in tales of foreign oddities. It was here that legends of savage and unbridled barbarians were born; here the "*xenomyth*" of the bloodthirsty ferocity emerged. The Greeks related the scalping – removal of skin together with hair from heads of slain enemies – to a particular ethnos, namely, the Scythians. The extravagant "trophies" taken by Scythian warriors were called χερρόμακτρον. In Athens in the 5th century BC, they were so well aware of Scythians that the words of the σκυθ- root became part of the Attic language and permeated the poetry. The earliest literary record of the Scythian custom of scalping slain enemies and turning the ripped off scalps into peculiar "hand-towels" must be attributed not to the shocking story told by Herodotus (4.64.2) but to a fragment from Sophocles' tragedy *Oenomaus*, referred to by Athenaeus (Soph. *fr.* 473 *TGF*, Radt = Athen. 9.410c) (see Sinitsyn 2008a): "*the Scythian way for a hand-towel shorn*". The reference in *Oenomaus* to σκυθιστὶ χερρόμακτρον proves that the playwright replaced Oenomaus' "trophies", which hitherto were either skulls, or heads of slain rivals, by outlandish and awesome "hand-towels" – *cheiromaktrons-scalps*. Referring to this barbarian phenomenon Sophocles wanted to arrest attention of his audience. The Scythian eccentricity exhibited in *Oenomaus* emphasized the ferocity of the main hero of the tragedy, who had gone to far in his "merrymaking". By σκυθιστὶ Sophocles shows that Oenomaus' conduct was unworthy of Hellenes; the acts he performs testify to his "barbarity", to his being a true "Scythian". In no way does Sophocles' reference to the extravagant Scythian custom look absurd and far-fetched.