

The Transformation of the Cult of the Virgin Goddess in Ancient and Modern Mythology

In recent years the study of gender in both Russian and Classical literature has moved to the forefront of scholarly research, although some significant lacunas still exist, in particular in comparative analyses of the evolution of gender representations across the two cultures. The present article will contribute to filling this gap by taking as its focus the myth of Actaeon and Artemis/Diana and studying the representation of gender in the only Russian dramatic rendition of the myth: Nikolai Gumilev's play *Actaeon*. Despite its poetic excellence and marked innovation in relation to preceding literary tradition, Gumilev's one act play, composed in 1913, has attracted surprisingly little scholarly attention. In most extended studies of Gumilev's poetry his mythological play is either not addressed or mentioned in passing alongside his other, more famous plays.¹ The aim of this article is to rectify this lack of scholarly interest by conducting a detailed analysis of *Actaeon* on the levels of its structure, use of scenic detail and physical and psychological representation of its characters, through the prism of masculinity and femininity.

For any comprehensive study of the evolution of gender roles from ancient to modern cultures, the Classical myth of Actaeon and Artemis/Diana is pivotal in that it represents a rare exception to the canonical distribution of narrative weight.² The legend of Actaeon recounts the unhappy fate of Actaeon, who, while hunting with his dogs, encounters the goddess Artemis bathing in a spring with her nymphs. The goddess, angered that a mortal man had seen her naked, splashed water on Actaeon and transformed him into a stag, robbing him of the ability to speak. To complete her punishment, Artemis sent the hunter's dogs after the stag to tear him apart. Traditionally, in Classical literature and mythology the cultural role

¹ Gumilev composed eight plays, of which three especially have received a fair amount of scholarly attention: Гондла (1917), 'Отравленная туника' (1918), Дитя Аллаха (1918).

² Other exceptions include Orpheus and the Furies, Pentheus and the Bacchae, Artemis and Adonis, Artemis and Orion, all of which function as exempla of mortal male hubris punished by female divinities.

of a male hero is that of an active ‘hunter-like’ figure, while the female character is his passive object of prey.³ Numerous examples of women subjected to male violence can be found across all genres of Classical literature: Penelope is beset by scheming suitors (*Odyssey*); Hecuba is taken captive by the Greeks (Euripides’ *Trojan Women*); Andromache is raped by Neoptolemus (*Trojan Women*); Helen is seduced and abducted by Theseus (Plutarch’s *Theseus*) and later by Paris (Herodotus’ *Histories*); Daphne is hounded to death by the lustful Apollo (she was turned into a laurel tree cf. Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*). In contrast to the traditional female role of a victimised sufferer, male characters are traditionally portrayed as developed either in terms of intelligence or physical strength (or often both, e.g. Odysseus). They appear in the hypostasis of a learned sage, e.g., Tiresias (Sophocles’ *Oedipus*), Phoenix (*Iliad*), or Nestor (*Odyssey*); a powerful warrior, e.g., Achilles, Ajax, or Hector (*Iliad*); or a skilled hunter, e.g., Orion (Ovid’s *Fasti*) or Hippolytus (Euripides’ *Hippolytus*). Male and female roles thus form two sides of stable scales, each side of which is determined and ‘conditioned by [the] other’:⁴ female passivity and physical/mental confinement is counterbalanced by male activity and social freedom. In other words, masculinity and femininity are cultural concepts which are ‘inherently relational’.⁵

This conventional balance between masculinity and femininity can be seen in the traditional binary representation of gender relations as ‘the hunter and the hunted’:⁶ the motif of hunting is transposed from man *versus* animal onto man *versus* woman, with the female figuratively depicted as ‘the hunted’ and the male as ‘the hunter’⁷ (e.g. Daphne and Apollo (Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*); Ariadne and Bacchus (Catullus’ Poem 64)). In the ancient tradition this canonical distribution of gender roles is almost never reversed: the female remains the ‘hunted’ victim and the male the dynamic ‘hunter’. Even the murderous Clytemnestra of

³ Burkert, 111.

⁴ Nielson, 49.

⁵ Connell, 35.

⁶ Burkert, 111.

⁷ Burkert, 111.

Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, a woman who notoriously oversteps the boundaries of traditional female passivity and inspires Aegisthus to set a hunter-like trap for her husband (a net), is initially given the role of a victim (she loses her daughter by Agamemnon's hand). However, in the myth of Actaeon and Artemis/Diana a complete gender reversal, pivoted around the traditional motif of the 'hunter and hunted',⁸ unfolds: Actaeon is denied the male role of active hunter and assumes the role of a 'hunted' victim, whilst Artemis/Diana is displaced from a passive female role (represented by her initial vulnerable nudity) and becomes the determining factor of the male character's fate. This gender reversal is maintained throughout the scarce references to the Actaeon myth in ancient literature: all extant sources (Callimachus' *Hymn V*, Stesichorus' lost poem summarised by Pausanias (ix.2.3), Diodorus of Siculus *Bibliotheca Historica*, Euripides' *Bacchae*, Nonnus' *Dionysiaca*, Hesiod's *Catalogue of Women* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*) represent Artemis/Diana as the numinous goddess of hunting and Actaeon as the passive victim of her rage.

Traditional gender canons (reversed in the myth of Actaeon and Diana) are reflected in 19th and 20th century European culture: gender-determined behaviour, defined by the balance of the male and female spheres and manifested primarily in male activity and female passivity, is both 'enduring and remarkably stable'.⁹ Traditionally masculine aspects such as physical desire for power ('hegemonic masculinity'¹⁰), corporal strength (the warrior mentality of defending oneself and one's lands, as in WWI¹¹), wisdom, competence in public speaking and assertiveness (a necessary trait in a male ethos) all find their parallel in later European cultures.¹² The cult of masculinity is especially characteristic of the poetry of Nikolay Gumilev, a man famed for 'self-fashioning'¹³ in relation to the canonical

⁸ Burkert, 111.

⁹ Clements, 3.

¹⁰ Kaufman, 142.

¹¹ Gilmore, 226.

¹² Clements, 4.

¹³ Greenblatt, 1.

prerequisites of physical and mental dynamism. Gumilev's biography reveals his preoccupation with typically masculine activities, in particular travel (cf. epic hero-travellers such as Odysseus and Aeneas): by the age of twenty-four the poet had visited four exotic countries, Africa, Egypt, Sudan and Abyssinia.¹⁴ During his travels Gumilev developed an interest in hunting¹⁵ (another traditional skill of ancient male heroes, cf. Odysseus, Theoclymenus (Euripides' *Helen*)): in his journals the poet describes his fight with a shark, a leopard and a hyena and his unsuccessful attempt to overcome a lion. In addition to the traditional male activities of travelling and hunting, Gumilev's masculinity is revealed in his conduct in war:¹⁶ he had an illustrious military career and was decorated with two St George Crosses for outstanding service during WWI.¹⁷ Like the greatest of epic heroes (Achilles, Diomedes, Ajax), Gumilev appears to have regarded military combat as a 'personal adventure and grandiose spectacle', an attitude 'unique among Russian intellectuals'.¹⁸

Gumilev's 'masculinity' is reflected not only in his biography but also in his impact on the Russian literary arena of the 20th century: in response to the Symbolist tradition, which the poet regarded as weak¹⁹ and, as Basker suggests, 'feminine'²⁰, he introduced a new literary movement, Adamism or Acmeism, which he defined by its masculine, dynamic impetus ('мужественно-твердый и ясный взгляд на жизнь', 'a masculine, firm and clear view of life'²¹). Gumilev characterises his new movement by a certain bestiality or violence, aspects directly derived from canonical, active masculinity ('Как адамисты, мы немного лесные звери и... не отдадим того, что в нас есть звериного, в обмен на неврастению', 'We Adamists are a little bit like wild animals... and we will not surrendour this animalistic

¹⁴ Sampson, 29.

¹⁵ Petrone, 131.

¹⁶ Petrone, 131.

¹⁷ Sampson, 30.

¹⁸ Petrone, 132.

¹⁹ Гумилёв, 1913.

²⁰ Basker, 516.

²¹ Гумилёв, 1913.

aspect of our nature in exchange for neurosis,²²). This inherently masculine approach is put into practice in the personae which Gumilev adopts for his first poetic collection ‘Путь конквистадоров’ (1905)²³ and poem ‘Капитаны’ (1909), both of which are focused on the exotic travels and courageous exploits of superhuman male heroes.

Consequently, it can be suggested that the poet’s interest in the myth of Actaeon and Artemis/Diana could have been sparked by its potential for the masculinisation of the main character and the restoration of canonical, cultural gender roles. The myth’s striking de-masculinisation of the leading male character gives scope for Gumilev to apply his Adamist principles to an ancient hero well-known for his passive, female-like role. Gumilev’s choice of the Actaeon myth as the basis of his play could have also been prompted by the traditional visual representation of Actaeon and Diana, which stresses the passivity and vulnerability of the male character. A painting of Diana and Actaeon by Ercole Graziani, which, in accordance with the mythological and Classical distribution of gender roles, depicted Diana as a powerful goddess (she and her nymphs are in the foreground of the composition) and Actaeon as her passive victim (he is miniscule and located in the distant background) had been exhibited in the Imperial Hermitage since 1859.²⁴ It can be suggested that the canonical visual depiction of a female-like, passive male could have inspired the Russian poet to choose a plot charged with potential for the rehabilitation of masculinity.

Gumilev’s innovations in his treatment of the myth, striking in comparison with both his visual and literary predecessors, have sometimes been accounted for by his ignorance of ancient literature,²⁵ rather than by a conscious decision to transform the myth.²⁶ However, recent studies of Gumilev’s biography have revealed the depth of his education in Classics.

²² Гумилёв, 1913.

²³ Sampson, 31.

²⁴ Всеволожская, 66-67.

²⁵ Terapiano, 3.

²⁶ Basker, 501.

Although he studied old French at the Sorbonne,²⁷ the poet's schooling in ancient languages and literature began at the age of ten (1896) at the St. Petersburg Gurevich gymnasium, where, according to his biographers,²⁸ he studied Latin for forty-two hours a week and Ancient Greek for thirty-three hours a week.²⁹ Gumilev continued his work on Classical languages and literature at the Nikolaevskaya gymnasium in Tsarskoe Selo in 1903-1906, where Innokenty Annensky, a notable Classicist scholar, was Director at the time.³⁰ Given Gumilev's specialised education at two of St. Petersburg's leading schools, it is certain that he was equipped with sufficient knowledge of ancient literature and languages to have a detailed understanding of 'traditional mythological accounts'³¹. Consequently, his adherence to or departures from earlier renditions of the Actaeon–Artemis/Diana myth must be regarded as purposeful decisions to rework the Classical myth, rather than mistakes or chance digressions.³² This article will attempt to show, through a detailed evaluation of Gumilev's echoes with the Classical representation of the legend, that the Russian poet was following the deliberate agenda of transforming the ancient plot by the masculinisation of Actaeon through his psychology. A two-plane approach (the macrocosmic pertaining to the compositional structure of the play, and the microcosmic relating to the central characters of the myth), will be used, in order to determine the nature of psychological variation, and the level of Gumilev's reallocation of agency between Artemis and Actaeon.

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The extent of Gumilev's reliance on preceding traditions and the location of his own innovations in the representation of gender can be analysed on the macrocosmic level of the play, which encompasses both its compositional structure and its use of scenic setting.

²⁷ Strakhovsky, 13.

²⁸ The most notable is Зорина (2002), who focuses on the poet's Classical education.

²⁹ Зорина, 37.

³⁰ Николаев, 590.

³¹ Basker, 501.

³² Basker, 502.

Although Gumilev adopts what has been called the ‘unalterable kernel’³³ of the myth, pivoting his play around the two schematic markers of the transformation of Actaeon into a deer and his brutal slaughtering by his dogs,³⁴ he adds a structural element absent from earlier renditions: an opening scene featuring Cadmus, Agave and Echion.³⁵ The inclusion of this scene disrupts the traditional chronology of the Cadmus cycle: whereas in the Classical tradition Cadmus begot his sons (Pentheus and Actaeon) long after the erection of Thebes, Gumilev synthesises the motif of building the city with the tragedy of an already grown-up Actaeon.³⁶ The purpose of this dramatic shift in chronology is to juxtapose the spiritual Actaeon and his father, the ‘royal architect’ Cadmus,³⁷ and so facilitate the revelation of the former’s mental superiority, used by Gumilev to restore his masculinity (as discussed shortly). Although some scholars regard the juxtaposition of Cadmus and Actaeon as contrasting a ‘hardworking’ and a ‘lazy’ individual,³⁸ and propose that the play is in fact centred around the conflict of a noble, ‘visionary’ father and his worthless son,³⁹ it can be argued that the two characters are contrasted in a different manner: Cadmus is a trivial, mundane man of action, whereas Actaeon is spiritually and intellectually compelling.

In contrast to Cadmus’s building endeavours, which can only be characterised in terms of physical dynamism, Actaeon displays the other necessary male attribute: spiritual complexity. While Cadmus believes that the gods require tangible evidence of his proximity to them (he is building a temple: ‘Для храма’, ‘for the temple’), Actaeon conceptualises a human relationship with the divine sphere through an understanding of the natural world.⁴⁰ The superiority of Actaeon’s religious beliefs is further revealed by a series of violent images

³³ Heath, 196.

³⁴ Heath, 196.

³⁵ Шелогурова, 121-131.

³⁶ Basker, 502.

³⁷ Graham, 509.

³⁸ Комаров, 55-61.

³⁹ Basker, 503.

⁴⁰ Комаров, 55-61.

signifying the sacrilegious aggression with which Cadmus and Agave treat the natural world⁴¹; the Theban king is directly addressing the mother of all gods, Gaea, with insults and abuse ('cursed carcass, deaf whale / stubborn hag...'). Cadmus believes that he can create 'order out of chaos'⁴², but is at the same time unable to perceive that this 'chaos' is nature itself, a medium made up of living divinities (the trees are Dryads and the Earth is the goddess Gaea). His attempt to establish order is thus nothing more than a violent aggression against the gods.⁴³ Unable to understand the divine spirit in nature, Cadmus destroys life itself, whereas Actaeon, who perceives and treasures the soul in every natural phenomenon (be it a stream, a well, the woods or even the radiant sun), advocates life. Although remaining alive in his 'joyless Thebes', Cadmus signifies darkness and death, whereas Actaeon, who is doomed to physical death, aspires to transcend mortal bounds and attain 'Блаженство вечное', 'eternal bliss'.

Both Cadmus and Actaeon aspire towards a proximity to the gods, but conflict in their understanding of how this can be achieved.⁴⁴ On the one hand, Cadmus believes that Actaeon errs in his veneration of nature and so can never attain a divine status ('И к богам тебе заперты двери!', 'The doors to the gods are barred for you'), whilst Actaeon maintains that his father's 'materialistic' approach to religion is abhorrent to the gods: 'И бог вовеки не сойдет / В твои безрадостные Фивы' ('No god will ever come down / to your unhappy Thebes').⁴⁵ Although Gumilev offers no explicit answer as to where the truth lies (Actaeon's philosophy brings him to see the goddess Diana, but results in his death,⁴⁶ whereas Cadmus' belief precludes him from divine presence, but earns him the praise of Diana:

'благородн[ый] Кадм', 'noble Cadmus'), the psychological complexity which the poet allots

⁴¹ Шелогурова, 121-131.

⁴² Бакулина, 52.

⁴³ Шелогурова, 121-131.

⁴⁴ Бакулина, 51; Basker 499.

⁴⁵ Шелогурова 121-131.

⁴⁶ Комаров, 55-61.

to only one of his characters determines the sympathy of the audience: Cadmus remains flat, whilst Actaeon's mental powers are revealed by his gift of perceiving the gods' presence in nature. Actaeon's sophisticated masculinity must have had a special, personal appeal to the Russian poet since he paralleled himself to the ancient hero ('И я, новый Актеон', 'I am a new Actaeon').⁴⁷

The second component of the macrocosmic plane (the scenic setting) further serves to illuminate Gumilev's transformation of gender roles in the myth of Actaeon and Artemis/Diana. Since, as is shown below, *Actaeon's* scenic details (the external, visual level), are drawn almost verbatim from his primary source, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 3.138-251⁴⁸, they signal to the audience that Gumilev's main innovation will most likely be concentrated on another level, not the external, but the internal and psychological. In his treatment of scenic detail, Gumilev subordinates the visual aspect of the myth to its other, deeper psychological dimension. The first stage direction contains seven specific details about the opening setting of Gumilev's play: 'Место действия – **долина Гаргафии**, покрытая тёмным **кипарисовым** лесом. В глубине – пещера **аркой**. **Направо** – **светлый** источник бежит по **зелёной** лужайке', ('The action takes place in the valley of Gargaphie, which is covered in a dark cypress forest. In the deep part of the forest there is an arched cave. On the right hand side, a bright stream runs along a green meadow.'). Each of these seven details corresponds closely to the poetic setting of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*⁴⁹, an almost bucolic '*locus amoenus*'⁵⁰: 'There is a **valley** (1. **Vallis**, '**долина**') called **Gargaphia** (2. **Gargaphie**, '**Гаргафии**'), sacred to Diana, dense with... **cypress** (3. **cupressu** '**кипарисовый лес**'), where an **arch** (4. **arcum**, '**арка**') ... was hollowed out. Upon the **right** (5. **dextra**,

⁴⁷ Переписка Н.Гумилева с Л.Рейснер (8.11.1916).

⁴⁸ Basker, 501.

⁴⁹ Basker, 501.

⁵⁰ Segal, 34.

‘Направо’)... a **bright** (6. **perlucidus**, ‘светлый’) pool edged with tender **grass** (7. **gramineo**, ‘зелёная лужайка’)’ (155-162).⁵¹

Gumilev’s replication of specific details from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* can be interpreted as signals which directly lead his contemporary audience, well-versed in Classical mythology and literature (especially Ovid), to his primary source.⁵² The poet composed his play for an audience capable of perceiving a work of art on what can provisionally be termed a ‘double stage’: *Actaeon* could be simultaneously perceived as a text in its own right and in the context of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Thus it can be concluded that at the macrocosmic level both the specific topical landmarks and the schematic plot-line of the myth (with the exception of the opening scene) are retained, in order to emphasise the psychological complexity of Actaeon as compared to other mortals. In doing so Gumilev indicates that his authorial contribution is not confined to the visual sphere of the myth, and invites his readers to prepare themselves for innovations in another sphere: the psychological.

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The microcosmic level of the play (pertaining to the central characters of the myth) serves to complete the revelation of Gumilev’s agenda, the masculinisation of the canonically passive, feminine-like Actaeon (as represented in antiquity), by dichotomising the physical and spiritual aspects of the two leading characters. On the one hand, as at the macrocosmic level of his play, Gumilev closely adheres to Ovid, his Classical source in the external, physical representation of Diana and Actaeon; on the other hand, in the internal, psychological representation of his characters he departs from the myth’s canonical gender role distribution: Actaeon as a paradigm of female-like passivity and Diana as a manifestation of traditionally masculine mental dynamism.

⁵¹ Original Classical texts and translations are taken from LOEB editions. (See Bibliography).

⁵² Basker, 501.

Gumilev's adherence to Ovid's physical representation of Diana and Actaeon can be analysed on the level of type-scenes constructed of phraseological units and concrete lexemes. Gumilev's type-scene of a goddess' undressing, potentially known to his educated audience through the *Homeric Hymn to Aphrodite*, contains several details which follow Ovid's treatment of the same scene. Basker lists a series of such similarities (as in 'Diana's first speech, with its reference to the bathing of limbs, to sandals, to cloaks, and to the goddess' attention to her hair before the bath'⁵³), but does not accompany them by a systematic analysis or suggest their potential implications. In contrast to scholars who pass over such analyses as 'unnecessary'⁵⁴, this article will attempt to show that a detailed evaluation of parallels between Ovid and Gumilev serve to reveal the Russian poet's agenda: the masculinisation of Actaeon through his psychology.

Traditionally the type-scene of Diana's undressing, present in both Ovid's and Gumilev's bathing scenes, contains reference to the nymphs who attend the goddess. In both the Latin and the Russian rendition of the myth, one nymph is shown as more skilful than the rest and so is allowed to arrange the goddess' hair (Gumilev: 'Всех ты искусней, Ранис; распусти мне, пожалуйста, **косы**', 'Ranis you are the most skillful of all; undo my plaits please'; Ovid: 'but Crocale... more skilful than her sisters, gathered up the goddess' scattered **locks**' (**capillos**')). Another characteristic feature of the undressing type-scene, constructed by the enumeration of Diana's body parts and items of her clothing, is also present in Ovid and Gumilev.⁵⁵ Ovid includes references to feet (*pedes*), sandals (*vincla*), hair (*capilli*), a garment made of cloth (*pallae* – 'mantle') and arms/shoulders (*bracchia*) which are employed in the syntactical function of objects to predicates, expressed by finite verbs used in the indicative mood (*subiecit*, *demunt*, *colligit*):

⁵³ Basker, 501.

⁵⁴ Basker, 502.

⁵⁵ Basker, 502.

Diana... gave her **mantle (3)** which she took off her **shoulders (5)** to another nymph... two others loosed the **sandals (2)** from her **feet (1)**; but Crocale... gathered up the goddess' scattered **locks (4)**' (165-170)

In Gumilev's play the type-scene of the goddess' disrobing consists of exactly the same details⁵⁶ used also as objects to predicates and expressed by finite verbs in the indicative and the imperative mood (расстегните, сбросьте, распусти, войду):

‘Время нам **ноги (1, in Ovid ‘pedes’)** омыть, расстегните ремни у **сандалий (2, ‘vincla’)**, Сбросьте лёгкую **ткань (3, ‘pallae’)** с ваших измученных **плеч (5, ‘bracchia’)**. Всех ты искусней, Ранис; распусти мне, пожалуйста, **косы (4, ‘capilli’)**’.

‘It is time for us to wash our feet, undo the buckles of your sandals, throw off the flowing fabric from your wearied shoulders. Ranis you are the most skillful of all; undo my plaits please’.

In her body Gumilev's Diana is no different from her Roman counterpart; her nudity is perceived as a sign of female vulnerability both by Ovid (‘Quickly gathered they to shield Diana with their naked forms,’ 179-181), and by Gumilev, who, according to Basker, imitates Ovid's description of the nymphs' behaviour: ‘Стеною станем вокруг богини / И бедной наготой своей / Прикроем вечные святыни’ (‘Let's stand around the goddess in a wall / and with our poor naked bodies / conceal her immortal holy form’). Both texts stress the need to protect the virginal nudity of the goddess (‘texere’ in Ovid,

⁵⁶ Basker, 501.

‘прикроем’ in Gumilev) with the naked forms of the nymphs (‘corporibus’ in Ovid, ‘бедной наготой своей’ in Gumilev). With their beautiful, unclothed bodies the nymphs form a visual tableau worthy of a sculpture or Attic vase, but do not reveal any psychological conflict: they, like their mistress, remain on a purely physical level. The proximity of details in Gumilev’s type-scene of the goddess’ undressing to Ovid’s original thus suggests a further signal to the Russian poet’s audience that, since Gumilev’s creative authorial contribution is not located in the visual plane, it will most likely be concentrated on the psychological representation of the goddess.

Gumilev exhibits a similarly close adherence to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* in his physical representation of Actaeon. Both Ovid and Gumilev have the young man enter on stage after a hunt with his friends,⁵⁷ introducing a type-scene of a hero’s return. Both Ovid’s and Gumilev’s Actaeons address their comrades with a speech: ‘our nets and steel are stained with slaughtered game, the day has filled its complement of sport...’ (Ovid), ‘Идите, товарищи, в этот вечер / Мне хочется быть одному. / Мы славно охотились...’, ‘Go, my friends, I want to be alone this evening / We had a good hunt...’ (Gumilev). Finally, in both texts the main theme of the hero’s speech is the expression of fulfilment gained through the sport of hunting. The two poets represent Actaeon’s behaviour in a similar fashion: he wishes to remain alone and takes leave of his friends in preparation for his ordeal. Thus, as with Diana, Gumilev maintains the physical aspect of Ovid’s representation of the hero: he is young, he is a hunter, he is first surrounded by a band of friends and then left alone.

Two reasons can be suggested for this stability in the physical representation of Actaeon and Diana, as analysed on the level of type-scenes. Any authorial alteration in the visual representation of the two characters in relation to the original source would focus the interest of Gumilev’s audience on the external level of the play and distract its attention away from

⁵⁷ Basker, 502.

psychology, an aspect central to the poet's interpretation of the myth. In addition to this a less obvious explanation can be suggested: Gumilev, adhering to the 'unalterable kernel' of the myth⁵⁸, cannot change its physical manifestation of gender roles (mauled victim/active persecutor), but is able to introduce a psychological aspect to his character's behaviour, which is not prescribed by the scheme of the myth. While maintaining the traditional balance of Actaeon's physical passivity and Diana's physical activity, Gumilev concentrates on endowing the male character with the other canonical masculine attribute: autonomy.

Gumilev's masculinisation of Actaeon can be seen primarily in his choice of psychological motivation for his hero's intrusion in the scene of Diana's bath. In preceding literary traditions several different explanations for Actaeon's demise were offered: chance, sexual desire and '*hubris*'⁵⁹, none of which concern Actaeon's psychology. The first of these explanations can be found in Callimachus's *Hymn V*, where Actaeon stumbles upon Diana against his will: 'when, albeit unwillingly, he shall behold the beauteous bath of the goddess' (5.111-114).⁶⁰ Actaeon's male active hypostasis as hunter, indicated in Callimachus by the contextual tautology of 'the chase' ('*δρόμος*') and 'archery' ('*ἐκαβολίαι*'), is subservient to his passivity as a victim of chance. Callimachus' Actaeon has no will of his own, but rather follows where his fate directs him.

Ovid draws upon the same tradition, suggesting, like Callimachus, that Actaeon's transgression was chance, represented by fate and the goddess Fortuna: 'His sorrow was the crime of Fortune and not his guilt – for who can say mistakes are crimes?' (141-142); 'Actaeon...with steps uncertain wandered as fate directed,' (175-176).⁶¹ In Ovid Actaeon is no 'intruder'⁶² with a will of his own, but rather an 'uncertain wanderer' ('*non certis... errans*'), whose only reason for seeing the female Diana undressed, was a 'mistake' ('*error*').

⁵⁸ Heath, 196.

⁵⁹ Schlam, 82.

⁶⁰ Lacy, 30.

⁶¹ Schlam, 95.

⁶² Schlam, 95.

Although the motivation of ‘chance’ in ancient sources (Callimachus, Ovid) rehabilitates Actaeon from the role of sacrilegious transgressor, it also robs him of two canonical attributes of a male role: independence of mind/purpose and physical vigour. Thus, Fate or chance as an explanation for Actaeon’s demise locates him firmly within the boundaries of a feminine role.

The second motivation offered by ancient renditions of the myth is sexual desire. Although this motivation retains some form of physical dynamism, it precludes any possibility of Actaeon’s development beyond the limits of the body to which traditional female representation is restricted. The motivation of ‘erotic pursuit’ is directed towards two different women: Semele and Artemis.⁶³ Stesichorus (6th century BC), Hesiod (*The Catalogue of Women*, 7th century BC) and Acesilaus (6th century BC) maintain that Actaeon was punished by Artemis for his desire to seduce Semele, beloved of Zeus.⁶⁴ Artemis is given the active function of Zeus’s avenging agent, whilst Actaeon is reduced not only physically (he is killed) but also emotionally to a passive role: he is an incarnation of corporal lust.

Actaeon’s passion for Artemis appears to have arisen as a later motif, expounded by Diodorus Siculus (1st century BC) and later by Nonnus of Panopolis (5th century AD), the creator of the most detailed ancient account of the Actaeon and Artemis/Diana myth (260 lines).⁶⁵ Nonnus regards Actaeon’s passion in wholly physical terms: he desires only the goddess’ body, ‘he had seen the **whole body** of the Archeress bathing...he surveyed **inch by inch the holy body** of the unwedded virgin ... he stared with stolen glances on the **unclothed shape** of the queen.’ (5.303-09). Nonnus conceptualises Actaeon as passive both in body and mind: his physical dynamism amounts to nothing more than sitting in the boughs of a tree (‘for...he sat up in a tall oak tree amid the spreading branches,’ 302), whilst his psychological development, as in the earlier motif of his passion for Semele, remains limited: he can only

⁶³ Schlam, 106.

⁶⁴ Schlam, 83.

⁶⁵ Schlam, 82.

lust after the goddess's body, her mind and divine status have no interest for him. A similarly physical manifestation of Actaeon's desire is offered by Diodorus Siculus: 'he proposed to consummate marriage with Artemis at the temple of the goddess', (4.81.4).⁶⁶ Since Actaeon's motivation for seeing Artemis/Diana remains wholly on the level of physical, sexual desire, there is no scope for psychological development or internal conflict: if Actaeon's concern is with Artemis' body, then he also must remain on the same corporeal level.

The final explanation for Actaeon's demise can be defined as arrogance, or a hubristic desire to surpass the goddess in her hunting powers.⁶⁷ This explanation is presented both by Diodorus Siculus as an alternative to sexual desire ('according to others, it was because he represented himself as superior to Artemis in skill as a hunter' (4.81.4)) and by Euripides in the *Bacchae*.⁶⁸ Both Diodorus and Euripides depart from the traditional scene of Diana's bath⁶⁹, dispensing with any potential eroticism associated with seeing the unclothed goddess and focusing wholly on Actaeon's sacrilegious ambition. In both sources Actaeon's transgression manifests itself in his desire to displace Artemis, the goddess of hunting, from her traditional, cultic role and assume the male cultural role of hunter: 'The wretched fate of Actaeon, who was torn apart... having boasted that he was superior in the hunt to Artemis' (*Bacchae* 337-40). In effect, Actaeon attempts to reverse the distribution of gender roles prescribed by the Classical rendition of the myth (male and active to Artemis, female and passive to himself), but fails because ultimately he lacks the necessary attributes of a male role: physically he is a passive victim 'torn apart... by blood-thirsty hounds' (*Bacchae* 339) and psychologically he is limited by his lack of due respect for a divinity and by his desire to overcome the goddess in only one, physical aspect (hunting).

⁶⁶ Lacy, 42.

⁶⁷ Schlam, 82.

⁶⁸ Schlam, 82.

⁶⁹ Schlam, 82.

In contrast to ancient renditions of the myth, which limit Actaeon's transgression to the physical, Gumilev proposes a motivation which is developed further, into the sphere of psychology: Actaeon's contact with Diana is caused by his spiritual desire to transcend mortality and achieve deification ('Я буду спать, не закрывая глаз, / И, может быть, проснусь на утро богом', 'I will sleep, without shutting my eyes / and in the morning I may wake up a god'). Although Gumilev does not wholly depart from earlier renditions of the myth by referring to chance and sexual desire as potential motivations for Actaeon's transgression,⁷⁰ he makes these factors subservient to a new cause which he introduces himself. Thus, although a number of images in Actaeon's speech are erotically charged ('Луна... / Исполнена девической тревоги, /... Серебряные, маленькие ноги. / Я вижу чуть открытый красный рот, / ... И розовые груди... А живот / Похож на опрокинутую чашу.', 'The moon.../ filled with maiden trepidation,/ ... silver, little feet./ I can see parted ruby lips, /... and rosy breasts... a stomach / like an overturned chalice '), he does not explicitly direct them at the body of Diana, but rather at the personified moon, whom he regards in abstract terms as a 'maiden'⁷¹ ('Луна... / Исполнена **девической** тревоги'). The Russian poet was certainly aware of a later cultic tradition in which Diana was associated with the moon (her brother Apollo being linked to the sun), and so by transferring Actaeon's amorous thoughts from Diana (as in Nonnus and Diodorus) to the moon, which is related to the goddess only by association, Gumilev relegates the sexual aspect of Actaeon's motivation to the background. It is the moon, rather than Diana herself, who is represented in Gumilev's play as a virgin, anxious for her maidenhood, and it is the celestial body who simultaneously tortures and delights Actaeon by her nudity.

Diana's punishment of Actaeon is thus not motivated by his 'erotic pursuit'⁷², and his aspirations are not limited by physical lust after a female, but are rather directed towards the

⁷⁰ Бакулина, 51.

⁷¹ Зорина, 43; Basker, 504.

⁷² Schlam, 106.

realm of the spiritual, i.e. the achievement of deification. Unlike his counterparts in earlier renditions of the myth, Gumilev's Actaeon is given the power to imagine: his desire is not physical but spiritual and revolves around the conscious desire to become a god.⁷³ Even the physical description of Diana's body that Actaeon delivers upon waking up and seeing the goddess is given through a self-reflective prism, expressed in the concentration of repeated personal and possessive pronouns (мне, я): 'И **мне** лишь губ этих мёд, / Иного **я** пить не мог. / И **мне** снега этих рук, / ... И **мне** этот сладкий звук', 'The honey of these lips are mine / as are her snowy arms, / and that sweet sound'. Actaeon wants to possess the beautiful goddess only as 'confirmation of his own divinity'⁷⁴: he, being a god, is entitled to have a goddess for his wife. The conclusion of his speech 'Я знал, что я тоже бог... Я знаю, я стал крылат' ('I know, I am a god as well... I know, I have wings') confirms Actaeon's aspirations: his real desire is to transcend his human status and only then to possess what is rightfully his⁷⁵, not, as in Classical renditions, to sacrilegiously snatch what cannot belong to a mortal.

Fate also plays only a minor role in Actaeon's discovery of the bathing Diana, since he happens to fall asleep in the place where the goddess washes: 'Ложится.... Входит Диана в костюме охотницы; за нею нимфы', 'He lies down... Diana enters in the costume of a huntress; the nymphs follow behind her'.⁷⁶ The motif of chance remains on the periphery since Gumilev, unlike Callimachus and later Ovid, does not insert a verbal confirmation into his text to highlight the error of Actaeon. Instead, the Russian poet makes it explicit that Actaeon's demise is caused primarily by his own aspiration to transcend the boundaries of humanity. Although Diana kills him physically (albeit indirectly; Gumilev adheres to the schematic plot of the myth which dictates that Actaeon is torn apart by his own dogs), it is

⁷³ Комаров, 55-61.

⁷⁴ Basker, 409.

⁷⁵ Basker, 505.

⁷⁶ Бакулина, 52.

Actaeon who destroys himself spiritually: he cannot live among humans because of his sense of superiority, and yet he cannot join the gods because he is mortal.⁷⁷ In essence Gumilev's Actaeon aspires to an ultimate heroic transformation like Hercules or Prometheus and yet cannot attain it contrary to his own fate. The hero is trapped in a world of illusions, created by the power of his own imagination and so fragmented by reality: by the physical world around him (his bow, which he believes has turned to gold, is in reality fragile (“Мой лук, он стал золотым.” Поднимает свой лук, тот ломается и падает с сухим треском’, “My bow has turned to gold.” He raises his bow, it brakes and falls with a dry crack’)⁷⁸) and by his own physically weak, mortal body, dictated by the schematic plot-line of the myth. A psychological conflict of mind and body,⁷⁹ of physical and spiritual, absent from earlier renditions of the myth, is thus introduced and made responsible for Actaeon's destruction. Gumilev lifts Actaeon from his traditionally passive, ‘female’ role, determined by a lack of mental and physical vigour, and allots him one attribute of a male role, an independent, assertive mind. Although physically Actaeon must remain a victim and must be killed by Diana because his aspiration to divinity is futile, the psychological element brings on the reversal of his customary role.

In contrast to Actaeon's highly-developed psychology, Gumilev's Diana is partially deprived of the mental and physical dynamism traditionally allotted to her in earlier literary renditions of the myth. In ancient literature Artemis/Diana is invariably portrayed as an active, numinous goddess, who avenges any slight to her honour: she punishes Oeneus by sending a ruinous boar to ransack his city (*Iliad*); she fills the marriage chamber of Admetus with snakes when he neglects to honour one of her rituals (Apollodorus); she kills Orion when he attempts to take possession of her (Aratus' *Phaenomena*); she destroys the nymph Callisto, punishing her for her union with Zeus (Apollodorus); she demands the sacrifice of

⁷⁷ Комаров, 55-61.

⁷⁸ Бакулина, 51.

⁷⁹ Комаров, 55-61.

Iphigenia as punishment for Agamemnon's slaying of her hind (Euripides' *Iphigenia at Aulis*). Artemis/Diana is simultaneously the goddess of hunting, which is an active and traditionally masculine pursuit, and of dichotomised femininity: she is the goddess of virginity and childbirth. In the myth of Actaeon and Diana both these spheres of patronage are put into play: her role as huntress ('ἄγγορέα') conditions the manner of Actaeon's death, and her virginity requires the privacy which Actaeon violates. Consequently, it can be suggested that the two attributes of physical and mental dynamism, prerequisites of a male role, are introduced into the myth through her two functions: her hunting skill confers physical vigour, while her sacred virginity inspires her to devise a suitably cruel punishment for her profaner.

Of all the ancient sources analysed in this article, Ovid's *Metamorphoses* provides the fullest account of the goddess' masculine power in both body and mind: she is formidable in her physical appearance, she has power and determination of action and she has the mental capacity to devise a fitting punishment for the intruder.⁸⁰ Diana's appearance in Ovid is unmistakably that of a goddess: 'she stood head and shoulders taller than her guards, as clouds bright-tinted by the slanting sun' (183-184). Ovid draws specific attention to her size as compared to the nymphs who are lesser deities, signifying her superior strength even at a corporeal level. Her physical power is reaffirmed further by the description of Actaeon's transformation into a stag: '**she** fixed the horns of a great stag firm on his sprinkled brows; **she** lengthened out his neck; **she** made his ears sharp at the top; **she** changed his hands and feet...and **she** covered him with dappled hair' (193-197). In the description of Actaeon's newly assumed bestial guise, including the parts of his body (brows, neck, ears, hands, feet, legs, arms, hair) and hence mirroring the type-scene of Diana's undressing (mentioning feet, shoulders, hair etc.), Ovid stresses the agency of the goddess. It is explicitly she who changes

⁸⁰ Schlam, 106.

every part of Actaeon's body and so, of the two characters, performs the dynamic and consequently male role.

Diana's dynamism is further expounded in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* by her assumption of the second aspect of a male role, mental autonomy. Upon realising that she is deprived of her armour and so cannot use her physical power to kill Actaeon with her traditional bow and arrow ('oh, how she wished her arrows were at hand!', 188), Diana employs her active and vengeful mind to elect a suitable punishment for him: the transformation of 'the hunter into the hunted'.⁸¹ The 'harshness of Diana's divine vengeance'⁸² is further augmented by the taunts which she directs at her victim in affirmation of his passivity: 'Go tell it, if your tongue can tell the tale, how your bold eyes saw me stripped of all my robes' (192-193).⁸³ In describing Diana's vengeance, Ovid stresses Actaeon's deprivation of speech, an aspect which in ancient cultures is traditionally associated with a female role. In earlier versions of the myth⁸⁴ Diana's punishment of Actaeon pivots around his inability to speak: she lays a curse on him that he would turn into a stag only if he should utter a single sound, emphasising that his physical and mental passivity is directly linked with a lack of verbal ability.

The psychological dynamism of Artemis/Diana is likewise present in the account of Nonnus, where the goddess does not content herself with transforming Actaeon into a stag, but makes sure that he suffers as much as possible: 'the dogs were to tear Actaeon slowly to pieces with their jaws little by little, while breathing still and in his right mind, that she might torment his mind even more with sharper pains' (5.332-335).⁸⁵ The stress in Nonnus is that Actaeon retains his consciousness but not his body, which is used by Artemis to aggravate both his physical and mental pains. It is not enough for her to prevent Actaeon from

⁸¹ Burkert, 111.

⁸² Basker, 503.

⁸³ Schlam, 96.

⁸⁴ Schlam, 98.

⁸⁵ Schlam, 98.

profaning her sacred body by making him mute and then destroying him physically; instead Artemis reveals her mental development and physical activity by devising and executing the most effective torture for her victim. Thus, in the portrayal of Artemis/Diana, both Nonnus and Ovid adhere to the mythological tradition in which the goddess is allotted an active, male role: in both her mind and body Artemis/Diana is powerful, while Actaeon is unequivocally passive.

In contrast to the Classical representation of Diana/Artemis as superior to Actaeon both in mind and body, Gumilev, while maintaining the goddess' divine powers, inverts this traditional balance between the two characters. Although Diana retains her physical vigour, manifested in her ability to transform Actaeon into a stag ('Актеон откидывается и, когда выпрямляется, видно, что у него голова оленя', 'Actaeon leans back, and when he stands upright, one can see, he has the head of a deer'), her decision to inflict punishment is no longer autonomous or independent.⁸⁶ Gumilev signals this innovation on two separate occasions, first through the words of Cadmus at the start of the play and the second time in Diana's speech addressed to Actaeon.⁸⁷ The first of these instances occurs in the scene of Cadmus' and Actaeon's confrontation, when Cadmus curses his son for his laziness: 'Так будь счастлив, / Как травы, может быть как звери', ('So be happy, / like grass, and maybe like animals'). Cadmus gives three factual details concerning Actaeon's fate, his transformation into an animal ('как звери', 'like animals'), his subsequent interest in grass ('А какая вкусная трава' ('what tasty grass') in 'Как травы' ('like grass')) and finally his body parts scattered on the ground/grass by his own hounds. At this stage Gumilev leaves it ambiguous as to whether Cadmus is foretelling Actaeon's fate as a seer, or is actually prescribing it to him.⁸⁸ This ambiguity is resolved in Diana's own speech, where she signifies that her action of punishing Actaeon has been predetermined by someone else: 'Будь, чем ты

⁸⁶ Бакулина, 51.

⁸⁷ Бакулина, 52.

⁸⁸ Basker, 500.

должен быть!’, ‘Be what you must be!’. Whether Diana is fulfilling the curse of Cadmus⁸⁹ or the decrees of Fate, Gumilev removes the goddess’ traditional free agency, the autonomy of her decision to transform Actaeon into a stag (Ovid) and her desire to extend his suffering (Nonnus) and substitutes them with a new ‘female’ passivity of implementing male behests (be it of Cadmus or of Zeus, the guardian of Fate).

Once Diana’s psychological power is removed, Gumilev continues to ‘lower’ her overall representation⁹⁰, gradually completing her reversion to a more conventional female role. Unlike the goddess of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, Diana does not have a traditionally divine appearance: she arrives on stage dressed as a huntress (‘Входит Диана в костюме охотницы’, ‘Diana enters in the costume of a huntress’). No mention is made of her height, and the nymphs have no explicit difficulty in shielding her from the eyes of Actaeon: ‘Прикроем вечные святыни’, ‘conceal her immortal holy form’. Furthermore, Diana’s retinue is represented as pointedly mundane: the nymphs appear on stage gossiping about their respective suitors (‘Ранис: (недоверчиво) Как, Марс тебя любит? Хиале: В тущобы / За мной он зашёл далеко. Ранис и Крокале: (с интересом) Настиг? Хиале: (скромно) Нет, конечно....’, ‘Ranis: (suspiciously) So, Mars loves you? Chiale: He followed me deep into the thicket. Ranis and Crocale: (with interest) Did he catch you up? Chiale: (modestly) Of course not...’) and attempting to flatter Diana with recollections of her hunting skill: ‘Крокале: Перестань! Открыла, настигла, убила Диана’, ‘Crocale: Stop! Diana noticed it, caught and killed it’.⁹¹ Both Diana and her band of nymphs are represented as psychologically inferior to the spiritual Actaeon: they are limited by the boundaries of the mundane and the predefined, whereas Actaeon in his thoughts aims to transcend the borders of humanity. Diana is deprived of one of her traditional masculine attributes, psychological dynamism, whereas Actaeon is endowed with it. The goddess’s other masculine attribute, physical

⁸⁹ Basker, 500.

⁹⁰ Бакулина, 52.

⁹¹ Бакулина, 52.

vigour, which is prescribed by the schematic plot of the myth, is undermined by her lack of mental autonomy (manifested in her predetermined actions). Although in Gumilev's play Diana can tear apart Actaeon's body (as in earlier renditions of the myth), she cannot destroy his spirit: Actaeon aspires beyond the fate of a mortal, whereas Diana can act only within her prescribed role of a goddess, who by definition has more power than a mortal.

* * *

The analysis of the representation of gender roles in Gumilev's *Actaeon* has shown the poet's remarkable deviation from the Classical tradition, in his inversion and ultimate rejection of the canonical distribution of gender roles, prescribed by ancient sources of the Actaeon and Artemis/Diana myth. With the help of the two-plane approach (macrocosmic and microcosmic) it has been revealed that Gumilev's deployment of earlier renditions of the myth points to his primary sphere of interest: the masculinisation of Actaeon through the exploration of his psychology. By maintaining both the scenic details of his literary predecessor Ovid and the 'unalterable kernel'⁹² of the mythological plot (complementing it with an additional scene, whose function is to characterise Actaeon's psychological superiority to other mortals), Gumilev employs the 'visual' aspects of the myth to attract the attention of his educated audience to the introduction of a psychological motivation for his hero. The Russian poet develops the psychological element of his play, and rehabilitates Actaeon from his passive role as victim by allotting him developed, superhuman aspirations. Simultaneously, by limiting the degree of her autonomy, Gumilev recasts Diana from her customary masculine role, determined by physical and mental dynamism, to a more traditional cultural role of a woman.

Gumilev removes the didactic function of the myth of Actaeon and Artemis/Diana with its conventional message of a warning to revere the gods and pay them due respect,⁹³

⁹² Heath, 196.

⁹³ Schlam, 82.

and deprives the myth of its exemplary role, which consists in showing the need to sacrifice to a numinous divinity⁹⁴ (two aspects which would have been perceived as anachronistic by his audience). Instead the Russian poet converts the traditional dichotomy of mortal (Actaeon) and goddess (Artemis/Diana), into superhuman male and divine female, transforming the ancient myth into a contemporary revelation of human psychological suffering. By drawing attention to the psychological plane of his characters' representation, the Russian poet restores a traditional distribution of gender roles to the myth of Actaeon and Diana, endowing the prince with the male role of a courageous hero aspiring to achieve the impossible, and consigning the goddess to a female role, in which she performs the functions prescribed to her by powerful males (Zeus and the Theban King Cadmus). Even while the myth dictates that Actaeon must remain a physical victim, in his masculinisation of Actaeon, Gumilev endows the hero (within the boundaries of the myth which dictates that he must remain a physical victim) with an attribute of masculinity, mental dynamism, approximating him as closely as possible to the Adamist ideal of a dominant male and consequently rehabilitating the concept of masculinity in the myth of Actaeon and Artemis/Diana.

Reflections of Gumilev's masculinising agenda, manifested in his treatment of the Classical myth, can be noted in his impact on the Russian literary arena of the 20th century: in response to the Symbolist tradition, which the poet regarded as weak⁹⁵ and, as Basker suggests, 'feminine'⁹⁶, he introduced a new literary movement, Adamism or Acmeism, which he defined by its masculine, dynamic impetus ('мужественно-твердый и ясный взгляд на жизнь', 'a courageously firm and clear outlook on life'⁹⁷). Gumilev characterises his new movement by a certain bestiality or violence, aspects directly derived from canonical, active masculinity ('Как адамисты, мы немного лесные звери и... не отдадим того, что в нас

⁹⁴ Heath, 196.

⁹⁵ Гумилёв, 1913.

⁹⁶ Basker, 516.

⁹⁷ Гумилёв, 1913.

есть звериного, в обмен на неврастению’, ‘Being Adamists, we are a little like wild animals and... won’t surrender our bestial traits, in exchange for neurosis’⁹⁸). This inherently masculine approach is put into practice in the personae which Gumilev adopts for his first poetic collection ‘Путь конквистадоров’ (1905)⁹⁹ and poem ‘Капитаны’ (1909), both of which are focused on the exotic travels and courageous exploits of superhuman male heroes.

Consequently, it can be suggested that the poet’s interest in the myth of Actaeon and Artemis/Diana could have been sparked by its potential for the masculinisation of the main character and the restoration of canonical, cultural gender roles. The myth’s striking demasculinisation of the leading male character gives scope for Gumilev to apply his Adamist principles to an ancient hero well-known for his passive, female-like role. Gumilev’s choice of the Actaeon myth as the basis of his play could have also been prompted by the traditional visual representation of Actaeon and Diana, which stresses the passivity and vulnerability of the male character.

A painting of Diana and Actaeon by Ercole Graziani, which, in accordance with the mythological and Classical distribution of gender roles, depicted Diana as a powerful goddess (she and her nymphs are in the foreground of the composition) and Actaeon as her passive victim (he is miniscule and located in the distant background) had been exhibited in the Imperial Hermitage since 1859.¹⁰⁰ It can be suggested that the canonical visual depiction of a female-like, passive male could have inspired the Russian poet to choose a plot charged with potential for the rehabilitation of masculinity.

This work was supported by the

Arts and Humanities Research Council

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⁹⁸ Гумилёв, 1913.

⁹⁹ Sampson, 31.

¹⁰⁰ Всевожская, 66-67.

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