This article is an experience of interpretation of the concrete data obtained while studying three books from collection No. 6731-1, 2, 3, 4. This work was facilitated noticeably by the fact that they had been studied by an outstanding specialist in Batak manuscripts, literature and folklore Prof. P. V. Voorhoeve (Holland). He identified their contents and for the last, the 4th book, he gave a full transliteration of the text given at the end of the article. In connection with this I want to express my gratitude to P. V. Voorhoeve for his help.

The books are a necessary attribute of Batak priests. Priests themselves write them, copy them and constantly use them in their activities. From the books one can learn even the names of their compilers and owners. The book No. 6731-2 had belonged to two priests: a mentor called Su Djuwangan ni adji and his apprentice called Ama Si Mordombut. The book No. 6731-3 had also belonged to two different owners and is even written in two different handwriting. It was started by a mentor priest called Gru Tumurun, and continued by his apprentice called Ama Sl Talbe. From the fourth book we not only learn the name of its compiler and owner — the priest Sl Rajobin, but also his ethnicity. He comes from the Batak tribe Simalungan. This information can be found on pages 11 and 32.

The first of the considered books (No. 6731-1) is dedicated to two themes: (i) predictions by the heavenly cord (poda ni rambu seporhas); (ii) the rules of preparing antidotes, remedies for different diseases and bad influence (tabar). The heavenly cord is a special type of oracle that is usually addressed during military conflicts. Before we explain this type of predictions, it is necessary to give short characteristics of the priests' activity on the whole.

Among Batak priests there is a "specification" in a certain type of magic, and, correspondingly, each of them has special titles: datu panaor — healing priest, doctor; datu pormangmang — conjurer-priest; datu pangatihatorus — clairvoyant priest, the interpreter of signs; datu porsisean — mentor-priest; datu pormangsi lopian — calligraphy-priest; datu panusur di bisara na godang — priest who specializes in eliminating the magical power of the enemy; datu panudju — priest predicting the weather, etc. [1]. Until recent time the Batak were constantly at war, and military magic played an important part in the activity of priests. When starting off for a military campaign the Batak had to know which places are particularly dangerous for the warriors of their community and where the enemy's spirit is. Only a datu could answer this question, and not every datu, but only the datu puroguru who masters the skill of predicting and telling fortune by the heavenly cord. One of the methods of such prediction is the following: the priest moulds two lizard heads from the mixture of wax and wood tar and puts pearls in their mouths, and glass beads in their eyes — white in one lizard's eyes and red in the other's. Wax must be taken from a wide bees' hive with stings glued to it (puli na morporhas). The lizard with the eyes made of red beads is called porhas. Porhas is an object which has been struck with lightening so it is worshiped in a special way. The lizard with eyes made of white beads is called sibangke, which means "dead body". Then the priest takes one meter of black cord twined from the hair of a palm tree (idjuk) and attaches it to the lizard heads. This is the heavenly cord. It is kept in a special bamboo box covered with a piece of tiger skin or with idjuk and bamboo bark. The priest refers to the cord as to the "expert on danger and victory". Before each use of the cord sacrifices are made to it, incenses are burnt, incantations are pronounced and spirits, that act through it, are asked to give favourable predictions. The priest turns the box several times and then opens it. If it turns out that the head of the porhas lizard hit against the head of the sibangke lizard, it means that the village will win and the warriors will return unhurt. The priest also predicts if the enemy's commander will be captured or only his subordinates [2].

The text of the book is divided into the description of meanings and functions of separate parts of the cord (rima ni rambu) and the list of signs revealing the meaning of different positions of the cord (pandjaitan). Such book was transliterated and translated into German by I. Winkler [3]. The books from the MAE collection No. 381-D 5 (precept 4) and 855-216 (precept 1) are also of similar contents.

Book No. 6731-1 contains illustrations: three lizards in red paint, a black lizard (fig. 1) and a drawing showing different positions of the cord (figs. 2a,b). In this book the traditional drawing of decorative character which performs the function of a headband or marks the beginning of a new precept (chapter) is also lizard-shaped (fig. 3). This drawing is called bindu matoga.

There are also other ways of predicting by the heavenly cord. A priest takes the cord out of the box, puts it on the ground and, having stepped on its middle throws out its two ends with lizard heads. If the end with the porhas lizard head twists or is above the other end, this means the