

Mihai-Bogdan Marian

The Institute for Advanced Studies in Levant Culture and Civilization,
Bucharest

On the Thracians and Thracology. A brief foray

Abstract:

The Thracians represent one of the mysterious peoples of Antiquity whose roots go back to prehistoric times, placing them, along with other nations such as the Hellenes, Illyrians, Celts, Germans or Slavs, among the primordial peoples of Europe. The aura of mystery that surrounds the Thracians' world is mainly owed to the paradox that, although the writings of ancient historians and Greco-Latin mythology alike abound in references to the Thracians (where they are recorded as an extremely numerous people), the information we have on the Thracians does not come from themselves, but from third-party sources. These sources are primarily Greek and Roman, or stem from archaeological research that, once again, sheds light on the fact that the Thracian world had developed a complex culture, confirming the accounts of ancient authors. Given the fact that the epicenter of the Thracian world was the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic and Balkan areas, Romanian and Bulgarian researchers have naturally been interested in Thracian culture and the Thracian civilization. Thus, through the efforts of Bulgarian professor Alexander Fol and Romanian professor Dumitru Berciu, as well as those of other researchers from the two countries, a new field of scientific research was established under the title of 'Thracology'. Since the beginning of its existence, Thracology has aroused a lively interest among many researchers from other parts of the world, this aspect being visible in the countless scientific international panels and the vast number of publications that have appeared in this relatively new field during the half-century since its establishment.

Keywords: Thracians, Dacians, Getae, Thracology, Eneolithic, Bronze Age, Antiquity

Preamble

The earliest traces of the Thracians go beyond the beginnings of written history. They descend beyond the diaries of the historians of Greco-Latin Antiquity regarding the south-Danube land of the Thracians conquered by the Persians (ca. 500 BC), which later became a Macedonian (ca. 341 BC Hr.) and then a Roman province (46 AD)¹, or those concerning the North-Danubian Geto-Dacians Herodotus² described as “the bravest and most righteous of the Thracians”³. They go down into prehistory, to a time when the age of polished stone met the age of metals (Eneolithic / Chalcolithic). A time where the tangible material reality revealed by archaeological excavations intertwines with the hypotheses of scientific research that still await new discoveries to be validated to be able to give us as faithful as possible an image of certain worlds either long gone or, as the case may be, metamorphosed into new forms of culture and civilization with the passage of time.



Fig. 1. “The Thracian Knight”, funerary stela,
Constanța National History Museum, Romania

Source:

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Cavalerul_trac_Muzeul_din_Constanta_2013_01.JPG, accessed at 25.11.2021

¹ In this regard, see Hornblower, Spawforth, 1999, pp. 1514-1515.

² The Greek historian Herodotus of Halicarnassus, also called “The Father of History”, lived between ca. 484-425 BC.

³ Herodot (Herodotus), 1961, vol. I, p. 345.

Thus, the first mentions regarding the Thracians we found in **Homer's** *Iliad*, where they are omnipresent in the great Trojan War; indeed, from the description of the great bard of early history, the city of Troy itself appeared to be a bastion of a population of Thracian origin⁴. However, Homer only lived sometime between the 9th and 8th centuries BC, while the events of the Trojan War, to which he made us witnesses over the millennia by way of his *Iliad* seem to have taken place several centuries earlier – sometime between the 14th and 12th centuries BC, as the archaeological discoveries made in the 19th century by the German archaeologist **Heinrich Schliemann** in the present-day territories of Turkey and Greece⁵, corroborated with other sources and descriptions of ancient historians, would reveal⁶. Given these aspects, the presence of the Thracians in the Balkans and the Carpathians must have preceded the events associated with the “Trojan War” by at least a few centuries. In this sense, referring to the writings of Herodotus that mention the Agathyrsi who arrived inside the Carpathian Arch around 700-500 BC as being “a kind of Thracians”, the renowned Romanian historian and archaeologist **Vasile Pârvan**⁷ pointed out that the Agathyrsi, “in order to have Thracianised themselves, they must have found the Thracians here. However, if the Thracians were in the Carpathians around 700 BC, they must have been here for a very long time, because the analysis of the historical facts

⁴ “[...] But why do you ask me and want to know everything? Do you want to reach the Trojan camp? The Thracian warriors have arrived from afar and are now at the edge of the camp. At their head is Rhèsos, the offspring of Eionèus. The fairest horses I have ever seen are the mares of Rhèsos, whiter than snow, swifter in flight than the breath of the wind. With gold and silver is his iron chariot beautifully adorned. Rhèsos is clothed in all gold; his weapons are marvels, and are not the same as those of mortals - rather, they seem to the measure of the gods of the deathless.” (Homer, 2002, pp. 163-164). It might reasonably be assumed that several populations, in certain regions of Asia Minor such as Bithynia, Mysia, Phrygia, Troas and Lydia, would likely have been of Thracian origin. They would have descended from the Carpatho-Balkan area southwards in successive waves during the 13th -11th centuries BC at the cusp between the Bronze and Iron Ages, i.e. in the reference period for the events associated with the “Trojan War”. For more on this, see D.M. Pippidi (coord.), 1976, p. 580.

⁵ In the 1870s, the German researcher discovered the ruins of Troy in Anatolia, and the remains of the ancient Mycenaean civilization, unknown at that time, in the Peloponnese.

⁶ With reference to the Egyptian and Hittite texts dating from the second half of the 13th century BC (mainly the “Milawata” and “Tawagalawa” letters) but also some aspects mentioned in Greek mythology.

⁷ Vasile Pârvan (1882-1927), Romanian historian, archaeologist and epigraphist, became a full member of the Romanian Academy in 1913.

developed above shows us that, from 700 going back at least until 1400 BC, the culture of the Carpathians was uninterrupted”⁸. Thus, Vasile Pârvan concludes, “around 1000 BC the Carpatho-Danubian countries were [already] inhabited by Thracians from the north”, and that “the civilization that still dominated there was also that of bronze, whose last and most brilliant period (IV) was just beginning”⁹. Similarly, with reference to the Geto-Dacian branch of the Thracians, starting from the same records of the “Father of History”, historian **Hadrian Daicoviciu**¹⁰ also shows that “they were not only here from the 6th century, but from much earlier. It is not known exactly to what extent the populations of the Polished Stone Age (Neolithic) participated in the formation of the Daco-Getae; it is certain, however, that around 1700 BC, at the beginning of the Bronze Age, the Carpatho-Danubian lands were inhabited by a population that was not yet Daco-Getic, but from which the Daco-Getaes would be born”¹¹.

If, as we have seen, **Herodotus** called the Getae¹² “the most valiant and just of the Thracians,” he also argued that, “after the Indians, the race of the Thracians is the greatest of all peoples; if they had but one leadership, and were united in thought, they would, in my opinion, be invincible, and by far the strongest of all the tribes of the earth. But their union is impossible and it cannot be accomplished; therefore, they are weak. Thracians go by many names”¹³. In addition to Herodotus’ description of the Thracians, **Mircea Eliade**¹⁴ and **Ioan P. Culianu**¹⁵ provided us with further details:

⁸ Pârvan, 1967, p. 55.

⁹ Pârvan, 1967, p. 59.

¹⁰ Hadrian Daicoviciu (1932-1984), Romanian historian, archaeologist and epigraphist.

¹¹ Daicoviciu, 1965, p. 14. See also Giurescu, 2000, p. 34.

¹² The names *Getae* or *Dacians* refer to one and the same people, belonging to the North-Danubian branch of the Thracians and inhabiting the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic space. The Romans assigned the name *Dacians* to the population of Thracian origin that they encountered inside the Carpathian Arch, further west, while the moniker of *Getae* was given by the Greeks to the same North-Danubian Thracians whom the latter encountered in the space between the Carpathians and the Black Sea, further east (hence the combined name of *Geto-Dacians* or *Daco-Getae*). See also Daicoviciu, 1965, pp. 13-17; and Giurescu, 2000, p. 38.

¹³ Herodot, 1964, vol. II, p. 31.

¹⁴ Mircea Eliade (1907-1986), historian of religions and Romanian philosopher, Professor at the University of Chicago since 1957.

¹⁵ Ioan P. Culianu (1950-1991), historian of religions and Romanian philosopher, Mircea Eliade’s disciple and Professor at the Chicago Divinity School, affiliated to the University of Chicago.

“The term *Thrakes*, in ancient Greek, denoted the inhabitants of the north-east of the Balkan Peninsula, including about two hundred tribes bordering the Scythians to the East, the Pannonians, Dalmatians and Illyrians to the West, the Balts and the Celts to the North. To the south of the Danube was the demarcation line between two linguistic and cultural areas: the southern Thracians and the northern Thracians (Geto-Dacians)”¹⁶.

The historical perspective regarding the Thracians and the area they occupied is completed by historian **Constantin C. Giurescu**¹⁷, who argues “the Thracians spread over an enormous area, from the Aegean Sea and from western Asia Minor to the marshes of Pripyat and from the Bohemian quadrilateral to beyond the Dniester. And, if we also count the Cimmerians as Thracians, as seems likely, then their eastern limit must be extended beyond the Sea of Azov, the area inhabited by the Thracians including, in this case, the entire northern shore of the Black Sea. They were divided into a multitude of nations or tribes that were in enmity with each other. Because of this, they could not even defend themselves properly, and were subjected to different conquests”¹⁸. In addition to the Daco-Getae, other important Thracian tribes were the Triballi, the Odrysi, the Bessi, the Crobysi and the Moesi¹⁹.

¹⁶ Eliade, Culianu, 1993, p. 265.

¹⁷ Constantin C. Giurescu (1901-1977), historian and member of the Romanian Academy since 1974.

¹⁸ Giurescu, 2000, pp. 38-39.

¹⁹ See Giurescu, 2000, p. 39: “Among the more important tribes of the Thracians, we must mention the *Odrysi*, living south of the Balkans, in the region between the shores of the Black Sea and the river Hebrus (present-day Marița). At one point, in the 5th century, under their King Sitalkes, they managed to establish a powerful state with a large army [...]. Another important Thracian race were the *Bessians*, who inhabited the upper basin of the Hebrus River, between the Balkan Mountains and the Rhodope, and had *Bessapara* as their most important centre. Some of these Bessi later lived in Dobrogea. We meet them here, in the villages around the fortress of Histria and the fort at Ulmetum, in some inscriptions from the 2nd century. Also in Dobrogea, in its southern part, between Callatis (Mangalia) and Odessos (Varna), lived the *Crobys*, another Thracian race. The *Moesi* were settled between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains, especially in the western half of this region. From them took its name the land that has been called, until today, *Moesia*.” For further details, see also Pippidi, 1976, pp. 580-581.



Fig. 2. The spread of Thracian tribes in the 5th —2nd centuries BC.
 Source: Boamfă Ionel (2017). „Are the bearers of the name of Carp the descendants of the ancient tribe of the Carpi?” in *Proceedings of the „Dimitrie Cantemir” Geographic Seminar*, vol. 45 (31.10.2017), pp. 125-150, DOI: 10.15551/lsgdc.v45i0.10.

Considering not only the above, but also the fact that references to the different branches of the Thracians can be found, beyond Herodotus, in the works of practically all the great geographers and historians of Antiquity (for example, **Hecataeus** (ca. 550 BC-ca. 476 BC), **Thucydides** (460 BC-390 BC), **Strabo** (ca. 64 BC.-ca. 24 AD), **Ptolemy** (ca. 100 AD-ca. 170 AD) or **Trogus Pompeius** (1st century AD), and that knowledge of

the Thracians has animated the work of countless historians, geographers and archaeologists from all over the world and continues to do so today, we can conclude, for the moment, that the Thracians were extremely numerous, occupying an extensive area ranging from Asia Minor in the south to beyond the Carpathians to the north and from Central Europe in the west to the Dnieper and even further, towards the Caucasus, in the east. Moreover, the remote origin of the Thracians, which descends beyond historical times to the Bronze Age and even earlier, to the Eneolithic, places the Thracians – alongside the Illyrians, Hellenes, Celts, Germans and Slavs – among the primordial peoples of Europe, which is still an intensely disputed research topic in specialized circles. In this sense, in what follows we will also conduct a brief review of the main research hypotheses and theories regarding the origin of the Thracians.

The origin of the Thracians, a subject still debated in specialized research

Before referring to the dominant issues regarding the origin of the Thracians, some clarifications are required regarding the origin of the ethnonym of *Thracians* (*Θρακιῶτες* or *Thrakiótes*).

In this sense, the connection between the ethnonym *Thracians* and the toponym *Thrace* is very interesting. This toponym roughly denoted that part of the area inhabited by these peoples that would later become a province of the Roman Empire roughly corresponding to the southeastern half of modern Bulgaria, extending southward to the coastal portion of the northern Aegean and the Sea of Marmara. According to Greco-Latin mythology, Thrace appears to us as the daughter of Oceanus and Parthenope and, at the same time, as the sister of Europe, being considered the eponym of the region with the same name in both Greek and Roman sources²⁰.

Moreover, according to the same mythology, the name of the Thracians has a filiation that leads to Ares, the god of war (known as Mars to the Romans), a direct allusion to the warrior traits specific to the Thracians. Therefore, according to certain sources, the Thracians took their name from *Thrax* (or *Traxe*, which means naught but Thracian), who was the son of Ares and none other than the primordial ancestor of the Thracians²¹. From a mythological perspective, however, the connections of the Thracians with the god of war do not stop only at Thrax, as Ares was also the father of "Diomedes the Thracian", the king of the Bistonians (a people from

²⁰ Ferrari, 2003, p. 842.

²¹ Ferrari, 2003, p. 93. See also Lemprière, and Wright, 1949, p. 387.

Thrace) and the master of mares whom Hercules defeats when he performs his eighth labor²². According to other sources, Ares was the father of *Thrassa*, whose mother was the nymph Tereine, the daughter of the river Stryma (Struma on the territory of today's Bulgaria), which crossed the territory where the Thracian tribe of the *Triballi* lived²³.

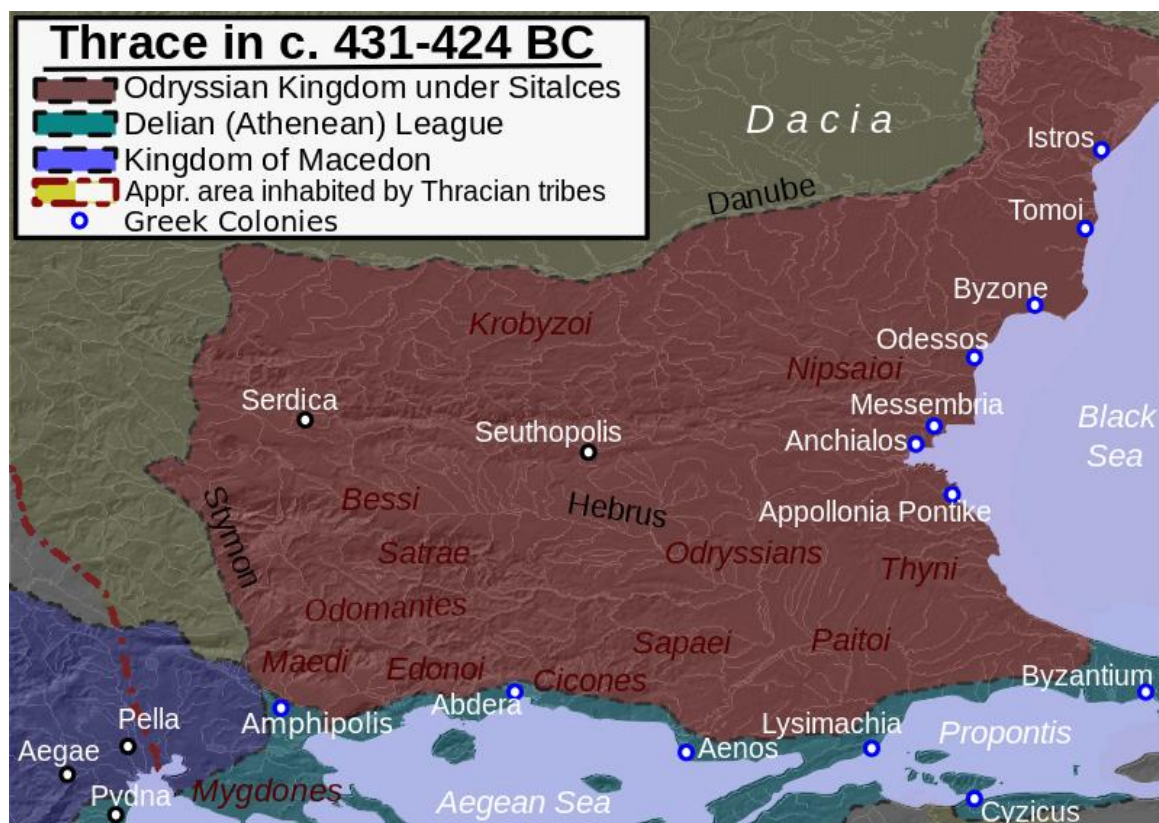


Fig. 3. Thrace (ca. 431-424 BC), highlighting the water courses of the Strymon (Struma) and Hebrus (Marița)

Source: <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Odrysian.svg>, accessed on 11.11.2021

Beyond these mythological references that strictly concern the origin of the ‘Thracian’ ethnonym, it is also necessary to emphasize the fact that, in a broader sense, stories involving the Thracians abound in Greco-Latin mythology. As such, they are likewise omnipresent in the great myths, as would be expected from a people as numerous as Herodotus described.

²² Ferrari, 2003, p. 93, p. 290.

²³ Celoria, 1992, p. 77. Available online at <https://documents.in/document/metamorphoses-of-antoninus-liberalis.html>, accessed on 11.11.2021.

However, to return to the issue regarding the genesis of the names of Thrace and the Thracians: these have involved the connection between a powerful male deity and a fantastic female being, such as naiads (nymphs of rivers and springs) or sirens. Here, we can see that all these mythological references appear to be suspiciously convergent, as **Marija Gimbutas**²⁴ points out. They reveal an interaction between populations belonging to different cultures; namely, one indigenous to the area of reference, with strong feminine accents, and another, more recently arrived, with a patriarchal tradition²⁵. Thus, the horizon that the mythological references regarding the origin of the Thracians open for us, corroborated with the observations of Marija Gimbutas, directs us to search for the roots of the Thracians concretely towards the time of the first Indo-European migrations in the Carpathian space and the Balkans.

On the other hand, however, as the 1st-century historian, **Flavius Josephus**²⁶ points out, it is also relevant that both the name 'Thrace' and the name 'Thracians' were assigned by the Greeks to the territory and to the people in question, respectively. Moreover, Flavius Josephus appears to indicate a lineage of Thracians that goes back to Noah. In this, the author brings the history of the Thracians into the realm of biblical myths, which in many cases also turned out to be highly reliable sources, like Greek

²⁴ Archaeologist and anthropologist Marija Gimbutas (1921-1994), a Professor at the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) since 1964, was famous for patenting the concept of "Old Europe" to designate the Neolithic and Eneolithic cultures of south-eastern Europe, as well as for issuing the "Kurgan hypothesis" (tumulus graves) and for placing the origin of the Indo-European populations in the area of the North-Pontic steppes.

²⁵ Regarding this process of synthesis, Marija Gimbutas opines: "The 'Old European' religion centered on the worship of female deities had become clandestine and was continued by the subjugated population, primarily by the grandmother and the mother of the family. [...] The parthenogenetic and asexual goddesses (born by themselves, without the help of male insemination) gradually changed into brides, wives and daughters, becoming «erotized», bound by the principle of sexual love as a result of the patriarchal and patrilineal social system of Indo-Europeans. The Greek goddess Hera, the likely heiress of the "Old European" snake-goddess, became the wife of Zeus. Moreover, Zeus would seduce hundreds of other female deities and nymphs to impose himself. All over Europe, Mother-earth has lost her ability to give life to plants without the union with the god of thunder - only after the first thunder does the grass start to grow and the water is purified." (Gimbutas, 1989, pp. 118-119; for more details, see pp. 76-123).

²⁶ Titus Flavius Josephus, born Yosef ben Matityahu (ca. 37 AD-ca. 100 AD), Roman historian of Hebrew origin, one of the most important chroniclers of the 1st century AD, who provided descriptions regarding the tensions and conflicts between Israelites and Romans during that period.

mythology, of great importance in providing clues to solving some of mankind's great past enigmas. In this sense, Josephus mentions that "The sons of Noah had, in turn, sons who honored their memory, the names of the fathers being given to the peoples wherever their land belonged to them. Seven sons were born to Japheth. The territory under their rule began from the mountains Taurus and Amanus, stretched in Asia to the river Tanais, and in Europe to Gadira. As these lands occupied by them had not been inhabited before, their names were given to the peoples settled there. [...] After the leader of Thiras, they were called Thirii, whose name the Greeks changed to Thracians. These are the nations that had the sons of Japheth as their progenitors"²⁷.

Thus, Flavius Josephus' clarifications based on Biblical histories also seem to suggest certain migrations and settlements of populations from time immemorial that would have immediately followed the alleged Biblical flood, offering some clues regarding the traceability of these processes which, as we have seen, also concern the Thracians. What is interesting, however, is the fact that a number of researchers and authors have come to support the veracity of certain phenomena that could circumscribe the image of a "biblical flood" of smaller magnitude. This was a regional, rather than global flood, with correspondences in the "Epic of Gilgamesh"; a flood that would have deeply marked the development of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea areas, and which would have been capable of inciting larger population movements in certain periods that might be dated towards both the beginning of the Neolithic period in the Balkan region (ca. 6500-5500 BC) and towards its end (ca. 4000-3500 BC)²⁸.

In addition to Josephus, **John Gill D.D.**²⁹ offers further details about Thiras the ancestor of the Thracians, noting that a river called Athyras³⁰ flowed in Thrace. Part of this river's name was Thyrras, sometimes

²⁷ Flavius Josephus, 1999, pp. 23-24. In addition to what Flavius Josephus mentions, the editors specify, in three footnotes, that the mountain of Amanus separated Syria from Cilicia; that the river Tanais is identified with today's Don, and that Gadira is the city of Cadiz in southwestern Spain.

²⁸ See Williams, and Pittman, 1998. For further details, see also Voinea, 2009, pp. 21-46. For an alternative hypothesis regarding major changes recorded on Earth during the period between ca. 7600 BC- 3100 BC, this time due to impacts with celestial bodies, see Knight, and Lomas, 2002, pp. 67-72.

²⁹ John Gill D. D. (1697-1771), English Baptist theologian and Biblical scholar.

³⁰ The Athyras River, called *Karasu* ("Black Water") in Turkish, *Nestos* in Greek or *Mesta* in Bulgarian, originates in the Rila Mountains and crosses the border between the current territories of Bulgaria and Greece from north to south, flowing into the Thracian Sea (the northern Aegean). Through the pass near Nikopolis, it connects the valley of the Struma (Strymon) and Marița (Hebrus) rivers.

called Thuras - who would be the same as Odrysus, none other than the Ares or Mars whom the Thracians worshipped³¹.

Whether myth or legend, or whether we try to discern realities prior to the historical period based on contemporary scientific findings that offer some degree of certainty, archaeological research has clearly revealed significant mutations in the population structure and cultural profiles throughout the Balkan area and the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic space during the transition to the Bronze Age. Notably, this occurred exactly in the period in which the Thracian people seem to find their roots, according to the oldest accounts corroborated with the clues resulting from archaeological excavations.

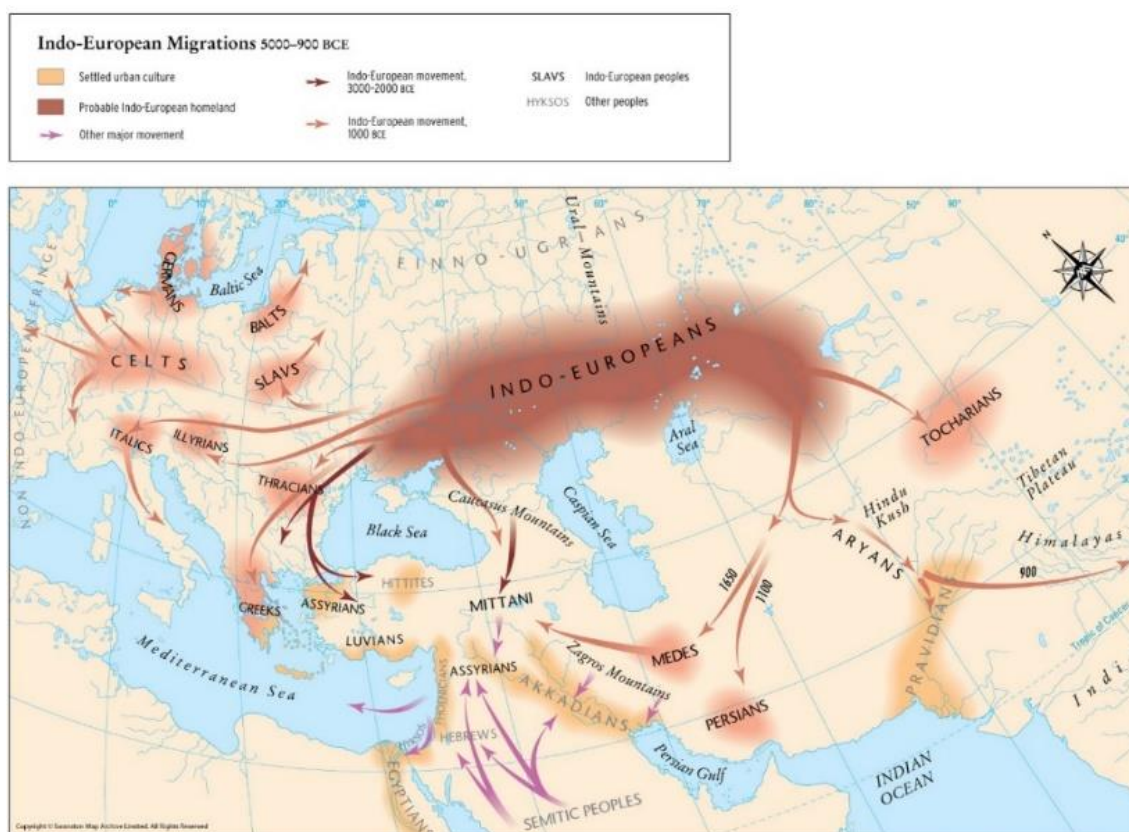


Fig. 4. Indo-European migrations (ca. 3000-900 BC)

Source: *themaparchive.com*, available online at <https://mapsontheweb.zoom-maps.com/post/612485544020197376/indo-european-migration-5000-900-bce>, accessed on 11.11.2021

³¹ Gill (ed.), 2018, p. 114. Also available online at https://issuu.com/davidclarke81/docs/genesis_19_issuu, accessed on 17.11.2021.

In light of the above, **Marija Gimbutas** described the process of infiltration of the nomadic, pastoral and patriarchal populations coming from the North-Pontic steppes – the so-called ‘Indo-Europeans’ – into the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic space and the Balkans. This took place over three successive waves (I., approx. 4400-4200 BC; II., approx. 3400-3200 BC; III., approx. 3000-2800 BC) and had two main consequences. On the one hand, it caused the dislocation and amalgamation of the old cultures in this area pushing them further westward and southward; on the other hand, it occasioned the synthesis between two large categories of populations with different cultural profiles – a characteristic, it seems, of a logic of confrontation and conquest of the natives by the newest arrivals³². The aspect is best visible in the Cernavodă³³ and Ezero³⁴ cultural complexes, situated in present-day Romania and Bulgaria. These present some of the most interesting correspondences with the Troy complex³⁵ (located in modern Turkey) which opened new cultural horizons that they are markedly distinguished from the autochthonous Eneolithic cultural funds of Tripoli-je-Cucuteni-Ariușd and Gumelnița-Karanovo VI, over whose area they had overlapped, favoring the transition to cultures specific to the Bronze Age³⁶.

³² Gimbutas, 1989, pp. 197-236.

³³ The Cernavodă cultural complex represents “a group of prehistoric cultures known from the research of three settlements located on Sofia Hill, which includes: the Cernavodă I culture (late Eneolithic), characterized by pottery decorated with cord impressions, with analogies to the populations of the northern Pontic steppe; the Cernavodă II and Cernavodă III cultures, from the transition period between the Eneolithic to the Bronze Age (approx. 2500 BCE-2000 BCE). Cernavodă III belongs to a large cultural complex alongside the Ezero (Bulgaria) and Boleraz (Hungary) cultures.” Pippidi, 1976, p. 157. While the Cernavodă II culture shows differences that highlight a new infusion of population from the north-Pontic steppe area that displaces the Cernavodă I culture as well, the Cernavodă III culture shows similarities with Cernavodă I that indicate it as a continuation of the latter in the Bronze Age. See also Mallory, and Adams (eds.), 1997, p. 104.

³⁴ The Ezero culture (ca. 3300-2700 BC) is an early Bronze Age culture that covered almost the entire territory of present-day Bulgaria. Together with the Cernavodă culture, it formed part of a larger cultural complex that extended from the Central European Baden culture and the northern Romanian Coțofeni culture to northwestern Anatolia, at the *Troy* complex. The habitation at Ezero shows traces of occupation since as early as the Eneolithic period (approx. 4000-3700 BC), but with an interruption of several centuries until the discovery of bronze. (Mallory, and Adams, 1997, p. 188).

³⁵ For further details, see Liuşnea, 2007, pp. 77-106.

³⁶ Gimbutas, 1989, pp. 197-236. See also Chiriță, and Boghian, 2003, p. 103: “Toward the end of the 4th millennium B.C./beginning of the 5th millennium BC, the Kodža-dermen-Karanovo VI culture suffered a strong restructuring process,

However, it was precisely this sudden shift in the native cultural background, characterized, on the one hand, by the emergence of new elements and the assimilation of pre-existing ones, corroborated with a relative cultural homogeneity that seems to have quickly spread over an extended area from the Carpathians to northwestern Anatolia, and, on the other, reflecting a phenomenon of migratory populations in the area of reference, that was highly likely to give rise to broad controversies and debates among the specialist circles regarding the origin of the above-mentioned cultures in the transitional period between the Eneolithic and the Bronze Age, as well as in terms of their place and role in the process of Thracian ethnogenesis. Thus, for example, reviewing a series of archaeological discoveries and emphasizing certain distinctive notes between the North Pontic and Aegean-Anatolian influences, **Marin Dinu**³⁷ concludes by stating that: “The new discoveries seem to strengthen our previous hypotheses regarding the antiquity of the Thracians, in formation since the period corresponding to the transitional cultures of the Classical Eneolithic to the Early Bronze Age within which the local background, with some influences (especially southern Aegean-Anatolian), constituted, in our opinion, the defining factor in the ethnogenesis of the Thracians”³⁸. Although the assent of Professor Marin Dinu is reinforced by other reputable researchers from Romania, Bulgaria and elsewhere, a number of other, no less prestigious researchers support other hypotheses³⁹.

part of its communities being conquered and assimilated by the carriers of the North-Pontic pastoral horizon of the Petro Svistunovo-Suvorovo-Cainari type, and the Pevec/Cernavoda I culture was formed, which still preserved some previous elements [...]. Other communities retreated to hilly and mountainous areas, continuing the tradition of Kodžadermen-Karanovo VI, or penetrated into the environment of neighboring civilizations (Krivodol, Cucuteni-Tripolie). On this background, a series of civilizations specific to the late Eneolithic and Bronze Age of the eastern Balkan Peninsula (Ezero culture) were formed.”

³⁷ Professor Marin Dinu (1925-2012), historian and archaeologist, “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University from Iași (for details, see <https://journals.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/index.php/amold/article/view/29294/22968>, accessed on 19.11.2021).

³⁸ Dinu, 1998, pp. 32-43.

³⁹ Liuşnea, 2007, p. 78 mentions: “Bulgarian archaeologist V. Mikov believed that in the second half of the 3rd millennium BC the area of southern Bulgaria, together with Asia Minor, the islands of the Aegean Sea, the Thracian coast and Macedonia were parts of the great Aegean-Anatolian cultural and ethnic koine, a theory also supported by G. I. Georgiev following discoveries at the settlements of Karanovo and Dipsiska Moghila (Ezero). They supported the idea of the existence of a sedentary population, with agricultural occupations, evolving within certain



Fig. 5. Cernavodă culture
(ca. 4000-3200 BC)

Source:

J. P. Mallory & D. Q. Adams (eds.)
(1997) *Encyclopedia of Indo-European
Culture*. Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers,
London and Chicago, p. 103

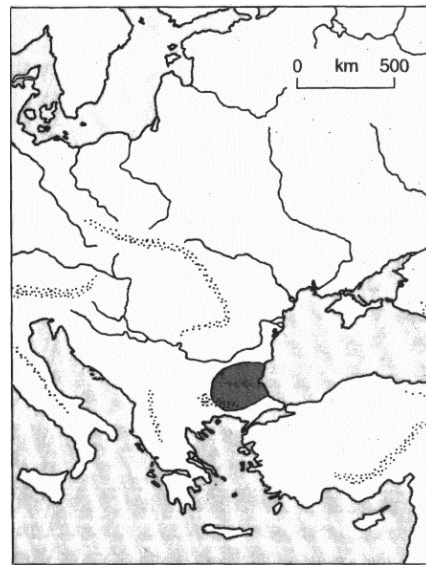


Fig. 6. Ezero culture
(ca. 3300-2700 BC)

Source:

J. P. Mallory & D. Q. Adams (eds.)
(1997) *Encyclopedia of Indo-European
Culture*. Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers,
London and Chicago, p. 189

Summarizing this dispute from the perspective of the process of Thracian ethnogenesis, **Constantin C. Giurescu** points to the existence of two distinct theoretical currents: one that supports an organic evolution of the Thracians from the autochthonous Neolithic background in the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic space and the Balkans, and another that, on the contrary, believes that their origin can be traced to the North Pontic populations who migrated southward to the Balkan Peninsula at the beginning of the Bronze Age:

cultural limits. However, at the same time, in the north and center of Anatolia, there was a change that has been attributed by some specialists to displacements of populations from southeast Europe, the first phase of the Early Bronze being explained, at least in part, as being the result of such influences. It is likely that the movement of herders from the North-Pontic area who reached Anatolia could trigger the migration of agricultural communities from the Balkan Peninsula to the East. This phenomenon is documented in Anatolia and the Caucasus through the existence of «*symbiotic cultures*» that are based on other European traditions, the archaeological discoveries in Anatolia and Greece highlighting infiltrations of Eneolithic communities from the northern Balkan region. Thus, the Anatolian cultures of the Troy I circle relate to the central European Baden culture, and the direction of influence is from Europe to Anatolia and not the other way around.”

“To which race do the creators of this Eneolithic civilization belong? A certain answer is difficult to give, at the current stage of research; however, the hypothesis that attributes this civilization to the Thracians does not seem unfounded, the name Thracians being understood in a broad sense, i.e. including the northern branch - the Dacians or the Getae - and the southern branch - the Thracians proper. The German scholar Carl Schuchardt characterizes the Eneolithic civilization of painted pottery as «higher» (hochstehend) and attributes it decisively to the Thracians, considering it as a brilliant age of their race, an age that the Homeric Greeks remembered only in legend and with wonder. On the other hand, the learned French anthropologist Eug. Pittard states (...) that «nothing prevents us from assuming that the inhabitants, who erected the funerary huts of Moldavia in the polished stone age, are those who later received from the old historians the names of Dacians or Getae». Finally, among our scholars, Mr. Andriesescu shares the same opinion. (...) Against this opinion there is another, also supported by scholars who believe, on the contrary, that the inhabitants who gave birth to the remarkable Eneolithic civilization are other than the creators of the bronze civilization. According to this last opinion, there would have been an overlap of peoples in our regions, following some catastrophic struggles, the newcomers destroying the civilization of their predecessors. This would have happened to the people of Bronze, who destroyed the previous Eneolithic civilization; so, they suffered, in their turn, from the people of the Iron Age, who came, some from the region of the Alps, descending to the southeast, others from the east of Asia, to southern Russia. The Dacians [that is, the North-Danubian Thracians - n.n.] would, in the view of these scholars, be precisely the population over which the people of the Iron Age invaded. In any case, even in this last hypothesis, it is still admitted that the Dacians or Getae inhabited our lands from around 1800 BC”⁴⁰.

In the area of confluence between the two previously mentioned hypotheses, however, we also find a third – ‘middle’ – possibility, which seems to be confirmed by some recent archaeological discoveries. In this perspective, it can be assumed that the ethnogenesis of the Thracians

⁴⁰ Giurescu, 2000, pp. 31-34.

really did take place in the Carpathian-Danubian-Pontic space and in the Balkans, but with the participation of both autochthonous elements and those of North-Pontic origin, aspects somewhat revealed by the Cernavodă-Ezero culture and its extensions.

The mystery surrounding the origin of that “most numerous people after the Indians” in ancient times, coupled with the fact that its homeland overlaps almost perfectly over the ancient and impressive Neolithic civilizations of Europe that Marija Gimbutas used to refer to by the phrase “Old Europe” (see Fig. 2 and Fig. 7) and with the sudden and apparently inexplicable transition of the Thracians into the realm of myth and legend at the beginning of historicity, in spite of the abundant references by the authors of Antiquity who portray them as a special race and the abundance of traces of their material culture that archaeological research has revealed, constitute the foundation of the scientific research concerns that are gathered under the broad umbrella of **Thracology**.



Fig. 7. “Old Europe” (Danube Civilization). Source: Merlini M. (2005). “Semiotic approach to the features of the «Danube Script»”, in *Documenta Praehistorica* XXXII (2005), pp. 233-251, esp. 235)⁴¹

⁴¹ Available online at https://www.researchgate.net/publication/237618040_Semiotic_approach_to_the_features_of_the_%27Danube_Script. accessed on 19.11.2021.

Thracology, a science dedicated to the Thracians

The three-volume study by Professor Wilhelm Tomaschek⁴² penned in the last decade of the 19th century, “Die alten Thraker. Eine ethnologische Untersuchung” (“The ancient Thracians. An ethnographic study”), would rekindle researchers’ interest in the world of the Thracians and their mysterious past, especially given that the period in question was characterized by a strong interest in discovering the roots of European nations, subsequent to a wider process of building national identities on the “Old Continent” and justifying the borders of the young national states by resorting to so-called “historical rights”⁴³. Unfortunately, the combination of political passions and scientific interest have not infrequently had a negative impact on academic debates and specialized research, polarizing two antagonistic scientific currents which either manifested the tendency to exaggerate the importance of the Thracians in the history of Europe, or to minimize the existence and role they played in ancient times.

Therefore, considering the data that has reached us through the ages about the Odrysian Kingdom (latter half of the 5th century BC) and the Dacian Kingdom (approx. 1st century BC – 1st century AD), placing the homeland of the former in the current territory of Bulgaria and the hearth of the latter in that of Romania, the interest in the Thracians and the Thracian world has found a particularly fertile ground among (but has not been limited to) Bulgarian and Romanian researchers. Thus, the Bulgarian professor **Alexander Fol**⁴⁴ would establish the *Institute of Thracology* within the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 1972, which he would coordinate, as Director, until 1992. Later, the Institute of Thracology established by Alexander Fol became the *Centre for Thracology*. Since 2010, it is part of the “Prof. Alexander Fol” *Institute of Balkan Studies & Thracology Center* at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences⁴⁵. On a similar note, in 1979 another

⁴² Wilhelm Tomaschek / Vilém Tomášek (1841-1901) Austrian geographer, historian and ethnographer of Czech origin, Professor of Geography at the University of Graz since 1877 and member of the Vienna Academy of Sciences since 1899.

⁴³ For further details, see Marinov, 2013, pp. 10-117.

⁴⁴ Professor Alexander Fol (1933-2006) Bulgarian historian, archaeologist and thracologist, founder of the Institute of Thracology within the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (1972), whose director he was until 1992, and organizer of the first six International Congresses of Thracology. At the same time, he was the Secretary General of the International Council for Indo-European Studies and Thracology. He was also a member of the *Accademia Medicea* in Florence, Italy, a member of the German Institute of Archaeology, a member of the Leibnitz Society in Berlin and a member of the House of the Academy in Paris, France.

⁴⁵ See <https://balkanstudies.bg/en/struktura.html>, accessed on 22.11.2021 (for further details, see <http://www2.hu-berlin.de/leibniz-sozietaet/vorgestellt/2002/fol.htm>).

Institute of Thracology was established in Romania within the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the University of Bucharest⁴⁶, whose first Director, was Professor **Dumitru Berciu**⁴⁷ between 1979-1992. Later transformed into the *National Institute of Thracology*, the Bucharest institute would also become an academic institution, being subordinated to the Romanian Academy in 2003 under the title of the *Center of Thracology within the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archaeology* of the Romanian Academy⁴⁸.



Fig. 8. Alexander Fol (1933-2006)

Source:

<https://milnakatosheva.files.wordpress.com/2012/10/1401.jpg>, accessed on 22.11.2021



Fig. 9. Dumitru Berciu (1907-1998)

Source:

<https://afnews.ro/2021/02/11/dumitru-berciu-descoperitorul-perechii-de-la-cernavoda/>, accessed on 22.11.2021

⁴⁶ The Institute of Thracology in Bucharest was established by Decree of the State Council of the Socialist Republic of Romania no. 256 of July 6, 1979 (Official Bulletin no. 57 of 7 July 1979), available online at <http://legislatie.just.ro/Public/DetaliuDocument/22589>, accessed on 22.11.2021.

⁴⁷ Professor Dumitru Berciu (1907-1998), historian and archaeologist, director of the Institute of Thracology in Bucharest (1979-1992) and honorary member of the Romanian Academy since 1997. He is the discoverer of “The Thinker and the Sitting Woman” pair from Hamangia (1956). Since 1980, he was also a member of the International Thracology Committee (for details, see <http://afnews.ro/2021/02/09/dumitru-berciu-o-viata-inchinata-arheologiei-romanesti-iii/> and <https://afnews.ro/2021/02/11/dumitru-berciu-descoperitorul-perechii-de-la-cernavoda/>, accessed on 22.11.2021.

⁴⁸ By Decision of the Government of Romania no. 334/2003; see also <https://muzeu.unibuc.ro/ro/fpu30-institutul-de-tracologie/> and <https://iabvp.ro/centrul-de-tracologie/>, accessed at 22.11.2021.

The two institutions in Bulgaria and Romania focusing on the research of the Thracian world would become veritable pillars of support at the national and international level for scientific research in the topic, research that would increasingly shape its distinct profile under the name of *Thracology*. Thus, as was defined from the beginning by its founder, Professor Alexander Fol, *Thracology* would evolve as a specific field of research entirely dedicated to the Thracians, to their past and their culture. On the one hand, this fact would place it in the sphere of interest of ancient historians and archaeologists; on the other hand, it would fall in the area of confluence and interference between several disciplines such as linguistics, religion, mythology, art, geography or ethnography, giving it a pronounced interdisciplinary character.

In the field of research assumed by Thracology, beyond the apparent interest in what the Thracian world meant in a broad sense, both Bulgarian and Romanian researchers would pay special attention to the Thracian branches that settled and established political-administrative units in the territories that today correspond to Bulgaria and Romania in the past. Thus, Bulgarian researchers would prefer to focus on researching the south-Danubian branch of the Thracians, while their Romanian counterparts would primarily focus on researching north-Danubian Thracians, i.e., the Daco-Getae. The polarization of research interest between the two countries, even beyond other distinctive notes worth mentioning between the north-Danubian Thracians and their southern counterparts⁴⁹ was greatly aided by the distinction the ancient Roman administrative system made between the provinces of Thrace and Dacia, as reflected in the works of ancient historians. This fact has sometimes led Romanian Thracology studies to instead be defined by the term *Dacology*. This preferred (but not exclusive) reorientation of the research of the Thracian past towards their own national territory would very often expose researchers from both Bulgaria and Romania to accusations of protochronism⁵⁰, with the exception of certain obvious exaggerations that deserve their negative label, unjustifiably referring to the archaeological evidence and the conclusions formulated on the basis thereof.

⁴⁹ See Daicoviciu, 1965, pp. 11-24.

⁵⁰ For an exposition on the issue of Bulgarian protochronism, see Marinov, and Zorzin, 2017, pp. 85-110, or online at http://archaeologiaexnovo.org/2016/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/6_Marinov_Zorzin_Ex_Novo_2.pdf, accessed on 23.11.2021. Regarding the label of 'protochronists' attributed to some Romanian researchers, see Măndescu, 2013. available online at https://www.academia.edu/3688832/DACII._Despre_amagirea_protocronismului_i_alte_mistificari, accessed on 23.11.2021.

Beyond the polemics and controversies which represent a natural characteristic of any field of scientific research, the passion, the engagement and academic rigour of the studies undertaken by researchers from Bulgaria, Romania and elsewhere allowed Thracology to secure its place on the international scientific agenda as a field of first-rate scientific research over its five decades of existence. It has managed to offer an extremely generous investigation base and a broad spectrum of thematic research, while its development potential is still far from exhausted. During this period, an extremely large number of specialist works have been published, in addition to a number of scientific journals dedicated to the themes and topics it subsumes⁵¹. Moreover, several scientific events dedicated to the Thracians (symposiums, congresses, exhibitions etc.) have been organized at both national and international levels, most notable among them the International Congresses of Thracology that have come to represent a beautiful tradition of the field.

In 1972, following the establishment of the Bulgarian Institute of Thracology, Professor Alexander Fol and his colleagues organized the First International Congress of Thracology in Sofia. At this event (which enjoyed a wide international participation), Romania was represented by a large delegation of first-rate researchers, among them Dumitru Berciu, Radu Vulpe, Sebastian Morintz, Alexandrina D. Alexandrescu and Eugen Comşa. A brief but eloquent perspective on the scope and proceedings of the Congress was offered by one of the Romanian participants in the event, Professor **Sebastian Morintz**⁵²:

“Between July 5th and 8th 1972, the proceedings of the first International Congress of Thracology were held in the capital of Bulgaria. The merit of the initiative and the excellent organization of this new and important scientific event belongs to the Bulgarian National Thracology Committee, led by Academician Vladimir Georgiev. The Congress was included among the important actions sponsored by the International Association of Southeast European Studies, with the aim of deepening the knowledge of the history of the Balkan peoples and their civilization. Over 270 scientists from 23 countries, from Europe, Asia and America,

⁵¹ The periodicals *Thraco-Dacica* and *Symposia Thracologica*, founded and coordinated by Dumitru Berciu until 1992 and 1998 respectively, represent an eloquent example in this sense.

⁵² Sebastian Morintz (1927-1997), researcher, professor and archaeologist at the “Vasile Pârvan” Institute of Archeology in Bucharest.

were in attendance. From Romania, a delegation of 20 historians, archaeologists and linguists participated, led by Professor Dumitru Berciu. In total, approximately 130 papers were presented, which gave rise to numerous and interesting discussions. In the absence of general reports to be discussed in the Congress' plenary, the communications were presented by section, as follows: 1. *archeology and art*, 2. *linguistics*, 3. *history and the history of the Thracian civilization*. The thematic area of communications included issues regarding the history of the Thracian nations, their spread, the language and the Thracians' material and spiritual culture. The Thracians' connections with other peoples or nations (Greeks, Illyrians, Scythians, Persians) were also discussed, with emphasis on the role of reciprocal influences in their historical and cultural evolution. The elements transmitted by the Thracians to today's peoples in southeastern Europe were also highlighted"⁵³.

The following Second International Congress of Thracology was organized in Bucharest in 1976⁵⁴. Seen to enjoy broad interest among specialized researchers worldwide, the series of International Congresses of Thracology would continue every fourth year. These events were organized not only in Bulgaria and Romania, but also in Austria, Holland, Russia, Spain, the Republic of Moldova, Greece or Turkey; respectively, in Vienna (1980), Rotterdam (1984), Moscow (1988), Palma de Mallorca (1992), Constanta/Tulcea/Mangalia (1996), Sofia/Yambol (2000), Chisinau (2004), Komotini/Alexandroupolis (2005), Istanbul (2010), Târgoviste (2013) and Kazanlak (2017).

Organization of the proceedings of the 14th International Congress of Thracology under the title "THRACing the Past: From Bronze Communities to Iron Kingdoms", originally scheduled to take place in May 2020, in Deva (hosted by the Deva Museum of Dacian and Roman Civilization) was unfortunately disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, and the event had to be postponed⁵⁵. Over 128 researchers with over 90 specialized publications had initially announced their participation⁵⁶.

⁵³ Morintz, 1973, pp. 359-360.

⁵⁴ For details about the proceedings of the Congress, see Vulpe, 1980.

⁵⁵ For details on the organizational issues related to the event, see <https://thracology2020.com/>, accessed on 24.11.2021.

⁵⁶ Dates mentioned according to the organizers; see <https://thracology2020.com/sermon/a-treia-circulara/>, accessed on 24.11.2021.



Fig. 10. Promotional banner for the 14th International Congress of Thracology

Source: <https://www.facebook.com/pg/International-Congress-of-Thracology-Deva-2020-XIV-edition-116495056422896/posts/>, accessed on 24.11.2021

The previous two congresses, organized in Romania and Bulgaria respectively, concerned topics circumscribed to the themes grouped under the titles “The Thracians and their Neighbors in the Bronze and Iron Ages” (Târgoviște, 2013)⁵⁷ and “Ancient Thrace: Myth and Reality” (Kazanlak, 2017)⁵⁸. The two events also enjoyed broad international participation.

In lieu of conclusions

The Thracians prove to have been one of the primordial peoples of the European continent. Moreover, looking to the abundance of references regarding them found in the works of ancient historians and in Greco-Latin mythology, and taking into consideration the richness of the testimonies revealed by archaeological research about their existence, we can resolutely argue that the Thracians were in the midst of all the great events occurring in the ancient world, from the early Bronze Age (if not before), to the Roman conquest of the North Danubian kingdom of the Geto-Dacian branch of the Thracians. The fertile land of Neolithic “Old Europe” (defined by the Carpatho-Danubiano-Pontic space, the Balkans

⁵⁷ For details, see the two volumes in which the Congress proceedings were published, edited by Schuster, Cîrstina, Cosac, Murătoareanu (eds.), 2013.

⁵⁸ For details on the proceedings of the Congress, see the *13th International Congress of Thracology*. “Ancient Thrace: Myth and Reality,” available online at <https://pdfcoffee.com/summariespdf-pdf-free.html>, accessed on 24.11.2021.

and the Aegean archipelago) which practically offers us the first sample of European civilization, was also the hearth wherein the powerful Thracian polities were born both south and north of the Danube: the Odrysian Dacian Kingdoms.

Under these circumstances, it was only natural that the Thracians' past, their world and culture would quickly become extremely attractive and exciting subjects of scientific investigation for Bulgarian and Romanian researchers. And just as attractive have they proved to be to a multitude of scholars from other parts of the world who have expressed interest in unraveling the events of Antiquity that are related to the very roots and evolution of what we today call the European culture and civilization. Therefore, through the passion and efforts undertaken by the Bulgarian Professor Alexander Fol, the broad scientific interest in Thracian research materialized into a distinct field of research with an interdisciplinary profile, corresponding to all academic rigours, which was given the name of Thracology. For half a century, Thracology has had an upward evolution at the international level, through the work and dedication of countless researchers and scientists (among them Dumitru Berciu, Vladimir I. Georgiev, Radu Vulpe, Margarita Tacheva, Ion Niculita, Georgi Kitov, Iosif Constantin Drăgan, Henrieta Todorova, Sebastian Morintz and many others). It succeeded in bringing to light a part of what 'the Thracian world' once meant. However, far from being able to entirely dispel the mystery that surrounds the Thracians, Thracology is described, to this day, as an extremely generous field of scientific research that offers multiple research perspectives, the most diverse of development potentials and, certainly, many more surprises waiting to be discovered by those who delve her depths.

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