

# Thracology and Archaeology: Some Problems of Culture-Genesis and Socio-Genesis

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Already Herodotus, who stood at the very source of historical science, was of a high opinion concerning the people called Thracians and their country, Thracia. In his fifth book, *Terpsichore*, he writes: "After the Indoi, the people of Thracia are the most numerous on the earth. Were the Thracians but united and under the authority of one sovereign, they would be invincible and much more powerful than other nations. However, they could never behave unanimously, and this was their weakest point. In every area, tribes have particular names". Among these tribes, e.g. the Getai played a significant role in history.

The Thracians and Thracia played such a role indeed, in the history first of all of the Balkan Peninsula, but also of some neighbouring countries. Several generations of scholars were engaged in research of their history and cultural heritage. Special centres were organized for this. Among them, the Centre of Thracology in Bulgaria and the Institute of Thracology in Romania are well known. The latter is working extensively now due to the enthusiastic activity of professor Petre Roman, who is its present head. Inside the wider sphere of Thracology several special disciplines have emerged, from linguistics to the study of religious beliefs. The Thracian texts themselves did not survive and all that we know of Thracian language is several dozens words and names. The excellent information is contained in different written sources from works of the Ancient authors to epigraphic materials. Numismatics provides some additional data. Nevertheless, the archaeological sources are especially numerous and unlike written ones, their number increases after every field season of the research.

Archaeological materials, just as all the other categories of sources, possess some peculiar characteristics of their own. Unlike written texts, the objects found by archaeologists were created not for preserving and transmission of information. They are a result and byproduct of different processes that had taken place in pre-historic societies and that are connected first of all with material culture. So, they contain but an indirect evidence about some aspects of life in the respective societies. Some other aspects are out of their scope and an attempt to extract information that the sources do not contain leads to crisis situations in science. That is why the working out of the very procedure of the study of archaeological materials needs a paramount attention. E.g. archaeology does not contain evidence concerning the languages of the people who had produced the respective objects and sites.

Their ethnic attribution can be supposed but on the basis of indirect evidence and in a hypothetical way.

I believe that, pursuing an aim to improve the methodological foundations of Thracological studies in the sphere of archaeology, it is necessary at a certain stage of research to use a series of notions that reflect informative potential of the source. The conception of *The Thracian World* is among such ideas. It can be applied not only to the cultures whose ethnic attribution presents no doubts, but also to other cultures and sites, which demonstrate common traits with the former but whose ethnic attribution is not possible to be determined with certainty. At the same time, some peculiar cultural traits suggest their belonging to the greater unity that can be defined as the Thracian World. The Thracian, in a proper sense, cultural norms could play the role of models and standards for the inhabitants of rather remote areas. Another notion is *The Thracian Epoch*, that is convenient for labelling of a great stretch of time according to its most striking phenomenon. Such is the label of Scythian Epoch for the period when different tribes occupied the steppe zone. However, only the Scythians were the arbitrator of fashion and of cultural standards.

Thanks to the nature of its informative potential, archaeology enable us to express opinions first of all about the prehistoric cultural processes. The conceptions of *migration*, *influence* and *borrowing* are usually used in the study of the processes of culture-genesis. However, they reveal but the simplest phenomena and have a somewhat mechanical nature. The idea of *transformation* is more complex and is present in its two modifications: *spontaneous transformation* and *stimulated transformation*. *Cultural integration* was an important phenomenon of cultural history. It signifies the assimilations of different cultural components into a homogeneous culture.

Let us concentrate on some aspects of culture-genesis and socio-genesis of the archaeological materials under study in the sphere of Thracology. The starting cultural layer for the culture of Balkan-Carpathian region, the cultures of Protothracian sphere among them, are the early agricultural societies of the 5<sup>th</sup> - 4<sup>th</sup> millennia B.C. Optimal results in the cultural and intellectual development were achieved here. It seems possible to speak in the sociological sense of the word about early complex societies that were involved into the non-urbanistic evolutionary trajectory. The weak development of the military function did not stimulate the process of institutionalization of power. The problem of ethno-linguistic interpretation of these early agricultural societies is a vivid example of the severe problems that emerge in connection with such kind of interpretations based on the archaeological materials alone. The hypothesis about the Balkan centre of the Indo-European dispersal is popular among some scholars. E.g. Igor M. Dyakonov speaking about the transmission of language "by relay", argues that such conditions for the Indo-euro-

pean glotto-genesis existed in the Balkans in the 5<sup>th</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> millennia B.C. The logically elaborated constructions of Colin Renfrew include the Indo-European definition of the early agricultural cultures of the Balkans. However, all such constructions can find a purely archaeological support, but to a minor degree.

The decline and disintegration of the early agricultural cultures of the Balkans are a clear example of the rhythmical character of the culture-genesis. The type of early complex societies characteristic of the Chalcolithic of the Balkans had exhausted its potential, which led to stagnation and then to disintegration.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium B.C. was an important period of culture-genesis and ethno-genesis. It seems to manifest itself already at Cernavodă, one of the early post-Gumelnița complexes. Some cultural elements of Cernavodă suggest connections with the Eastern European steppe zone. As I have seen during the Symposium in Krakow in November 1995, *Das Karpatenbecken und die osteuropäische Steppe*, many scholars are sceptical about such an idea. Only Jan Lichardus from Slovakia is its active supporter, indeed. This scepticism is less of all understandable as regards the Yamnaya culture. The burial mounds with a peculiar funeral goods that are widespread up to Hungary leave no doubt as about the moving in Western direction of a considerable bulk of the steppe population. The evidence suggests that it was an important stage of the ethno-genesis that had proceeded the ethno-genesis of the Thracians *stricto sensu*. It is disappointing that these sites have not been, for a long time, under the study of Romanian archaeologists.

Cultural and economic progress that was stimulated by the development of the metallurgy of bronze was accompanied by the powerful influence of cultural standards and models of the Mycenaean civilization. The active process of formation of the early complex societies with the developed traits of social differentiation is under way in the Balkan-Carpathian region. The development of the military function stimulated the emergence of powerful leaders. The Otomani culture with its fortified settlements and rich complexes that include objects of gold is here a brilliant example. The formation of a complex of weaponry of the Thracian type that is usually characterized by its high artistic value was an outstanding achievement of the Bronze Age. This weaponry was not only for fighting but for the ceremonies as well.

The retrospect of cultural tradition seems to allow us to speak in connection with this period of the Thracians as of the particular ethnic group in its formative stage and of the emergence of the Thracian World. The Mycenaean and possibly some Oriental influences contributed to the process of stimulated transformation.

Some specific traits of local cultural tradition in the early Iron Age make it possible to speak about the particular Thracian Hallstatt. Though the moving of tribes is usually mentioned as a preferable cause of the widespread of Hallstatt standards, the processes of cultural integration begin to play a perceptible role. For the militarizing Europe with its well-defined function of military leaders and their

fighting men, the Hallstatt standards in weaponry and other prestigious spheres were just highlights of their epoch.

The stimulated transformation and cultural integration play since that time an especially important role in the development of the culture of the Thracian World. Along with the mechanism of the direct penetration of the Scythian tribes and of the Greek colonists, the process of cultural integration was defining in a significant way the cultural face of the epoch, without eroding, however, the independent significance of the Thracian centre of ethno-genesis. The development of the North-western Pontic area in the 4<sup>th</sup> - 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C. supplies us with a convincing evidence of such a view. Along with motion of people and military-political stresses, urbanization was another factor of historical process that was exercising its stabilising effect. The original cultural layer of the Thracian Hallstatt, the Scythian and Celtic components were becoming the constituents of the urbanistic culture. Accordingly, the development of cultural integration goes along. The adoption of the developed standards of Greco-Roman urban culture becomes a stable tradition. This fashion influences first of all the elite culture and its spread is often subject to selection.

A new stage comes with the Roman epoch. It is well known that the Roman Empire was characterized by significant ethnic diversity. That is why standards of urban culture played there an important integrative role and were intentionally introduced. The process of superintegration was going inside a huge territory. All this played an important role in the Thracian integration. The significance of the Roman standards found its place in three major spheres: urbanization, weaponry and fortification ("means of violence"), and the elite subculture. It determined, however, in a significant way, also the colour of everyday life that is studied by archaeology. After the formation of the Roman province of Dacia, despite all the colonization and deportation, cultural integration achieves its acme. Local centres of Roman provincial culture emerge. As it was in other parts of Roman Empire, the process of ethnic consolidation intensifies inside the borders of the urbanized provinces. The urbanized stereotypes consolidate multicomponent populations. Just these phenomena were defining the major trajectory of historic development and not the wars, military campaigns, and predatory expeditions, so numerous at this time. It is not by chance that the cultural disintegration and the regress in ethno-genesis and culture-genesis coincide with the decline of the urban centres. Thracology accomplishes the study of the earliest sources of modern nations. The Medieval epoch brings with it new regularities both in culture-genesis and in glotto-genesis and ethno-genesis.

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