KONSTANTIN PRESLAVSKY UNIVERSITY OF SHUMEN
FACULTY OF HUMANITIES
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THE BESSI IN THE ROMAN EMPIRE

edited by
Ivo Topalilov and Svetlana Nedelcheva

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Introduction

The *Bessoi* attracted the attention for more than two millennia and despite this and the intensive research devoted to them for a century, many problems concerning their place in the antique and Late antique history still remain unclear and many questions are unanswered yet. The obscurity includes basic questions such as origin, political development, territory etc. which is due not only to the specifics of the ancient literary sources which reveal the prejudices of the ancient authors mostly relying on the tradition that existed at the time, but also to the level of the archaeological study. In this volume of Studia academica Šumenensia, which is dedicated to the problems related to the study of the *Bessoi* within the Roman Empire, scholars of different fields have been invited to participate - historians, archaeologists, epigraphists, etc. in order to achieve as mush as possible a comprehensive analysis of all available and different in nature material, be it archaeological, epigraphic, historical, etc. or suggest and trace another approach to the considered issues. This logically led to the diversity of the topics discussed in the volume concerning *Bessoi*'s identity, location, military history, religion, Christianization, etc.

In his article Mustafa Sayar is dealing with the origin and importance of the people called *Bessoi* in the literary sources. Being prophets of Dionysios' oracle as well as a priest clan among the *Satroi*, the author argues that the name *Bessoi* has gradually replaced Satrai and passed on to the other Thracian tribes. It seems, however, that this group of people has been presented and known in the literary sources by other names who left their mark in the historical development of the Balkans in pre-Roman, Roman and Late Roman time. These and other problems concerning the identity, identification and the location of the *Bessoi* are the topics of the next two contributions by Alienor Rufin Solas and Vasilis Evangelidis. Using a historiographical approach combined with the analysis of the literary sources, Solas reopens the debate and suggests that the territory of 'this Thracian *ethnos*' was much larger than it was usually assumed. Based on the numismatic evidence some aspects of their military history are discussed underlying Bessic importance not only for the Thracian history but also for the ancient Greek history as a whole. The Bessic ethnic identity and what it might have meant in the Roman Empire's context is the main topic of Evangelidis' contribution and how all this might had reflected on the archaeology. As the Bessi case is more or less well-documented in comparison with the rest of the Thracian tribes that remained less known, the article discusses some

theoretical issues as well as the implementation of the results obtained to the problem of seeking the identity of the other Thracian groups in the Aegean littoral.

The contribution by Todor Uzunov deals with the localization of the Great sanctuary of Dionysos which played significant role in the life of the *Bessoi* as well as in the antique world. Based on analysis of the literary sources as well as on terrain work he not only proposes the exact place of the sanctuary but also reveals a kind of religious continuity of the place through the ages.

Dan Dana's article deals with the earliest personification of Thrace in Roman art based on the allegories of the Bessi at Aphrodisias and Valentia. Although not finding their place in Augustus's *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, their importance is revealed by the two personifications which precede the conquest and provincialization of Thrace. They depict an idealized figure suggesting the submission of a warrior nation, but also reveal the universal domination of Rome over the enemies.

Svetla Petrova's article is dealing with a problem that has received much scholarly attention recently – that of the foundation of *Nicopolis ex Bessia*. The critical review of already expressed hypotheses as well as the complex analysis of all the evidence available such as literary sources, archaeology and epigraphy allow Petrova to suggest that the foundation of the city is linked to the suppression of Bessi's revolt by the united forces of the Thracian Odrysian-Sapaeian dynasty and the Roman army, lead by Lucius K. Piso. Besides, relying on the archaeological material and epigraphic monuments she is inclined to assume that the newly founded city replaced an aristocratic or even royal residence which later will become the residence of strategos Flavius Dizalas. This way the development of Nicopolis may be traced trough a Thracian residential place to a Late Hellenistic city, and finally to a real Roman city.

The article proposed by Lucreţiu Mihailescu-Bîrliba deals with a case-study about the presence of the Bessi at *vicus Bad[---]* located near modern Mihai Bravu in north Dobrudzha, Lower Moesia. It concerns a military diploma issued on April 5th, 71 AD for a veteran of the Ravenna fleet called the Thracian Tarsa. Given the fact that the communities of *Bessi consistentes* are known in the rural milieu of Istros, and Thracians are attested epigraphically at nearby Ibida, Mihailescu-Bîrliba logically assumes that the aforementioned Tarsa was also a Bessian sailor. The military diploma asserts that in Claudius' or Nero's time when he was recruited, the Thracian community was already in northern Moesia Inferior.

The last three articles deal with the religious matters of the Bessi and the problem of their Christianisation. Slavtcho Kirov deals with the

importance of the cult of the Thracian horseman from the beginning of the fourth century BC to the end of the fourth century AD. The case with Egypt which this cult reached via the Thracian mercenaries suggests a possible way to understand its development in *Thracia* itself. It is also assumed that its worship continued up to the Christianisation of the area.

The next article by Dimitar Dimitirov is devoted to the spread of Christianity among the Thracians population denominated usually as Bessi (Bessoi) in Late Antiquity after the name of one of the Thracian tribes. Special attention has been paid to the missionary activity of Nicetas of Remesiana. Being predominantly urban phenomenon, Christianity found its adepts outside the cities as well, especially from the late fourth century onwards when ecclesiastical leaders, preachers and monks succeeded in permeating the rural areas among whom was the aforementioned person. Dimitorv believes that they developed their own liturgical language along with Latin and Greek which was obviously quite restricted in the Balkans and probably far more spread among the Bessic communities in the monasteries of the Middle East in the fifth and sixth centuries as may be assumed from the presence of the Bessic monks in the monasteries of Palestine and Syria.

The last article in the volume by Ivo Topalilov is a primary publication of the main results of the archaeological excavation of the Early Christian monastery complex located near the village of Dragoinovo, some 40 km SE of Philippopolis. By its date of late 4th - beginning of 5th century, it turns to be among the earliest similar complexes in Thrace. The study reveals that initially its architectural features are based predominantly on the basilicas located in and around Philippopolis, but in the second construction phase in the third quarter of 5th century when the complex expanded, its specific features show its close connection with the Christian temples and complexes in the Rhodope Mountains rather than in Tharce. In fact, the complex is one of those that have been built in late 4th - beginning of 5th century at the outskirts of the Rhodope Mountain which have their mention in one of the letters of Paulinus of Nola as being the places where the Bessic priests lived at that time.

Ivo Topalilov, Svetlana Nedelcheva

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Bessoi

Mustafa H. Sayar

Abstract: *Bessoi* were perhaps a clan whose roots extend to the Phrygian tribes and who reside between Orbelos and Rhodope. They were described as the wildest among the other Thracian tribes living in the upper part of the Hebros riverbed. The *Bessoi* tribe was also referred to as bandits by their neighbors, who themselves are also looters. Many members of the *Bessoi* tribe were recruited for the Roman army. During the civil war between Pompeius and Caesar, the tribe supported the Roman troops that remained loyal to Pompeius.

Key words: agriculture, clan, oracle, priest, *strategia*, territory, tribe

Резюме: Бесите са род, чийто корени се простират до фригийските племена и който живее между Орбелос и Родопите. Те са описани като най-дивите сред тракийските племена, живеещи в горното течение на река Хеброс и се определят като бандити от техните съседи, които също са грабители. Много от членовете му са рекрутирани в римската армия. По време на гражданската война между Помпей и Цезар бесите подкрепят римските войски, които остават верни на Помпей.

The *Bessoi* tribe was a Thracian tribe settled around Rhodope Mountain, and Hebros (Maritsa) river is thought to be the core region for this tribe (fig. 1). The cities of Uscudama and Bessapara were the main settlements of the *Bessoi* tribe. Ptolemaeos mentioned a *strategia Bessike*.[1]

[1] Cl. Ptolemaeos 3.11.6: Στρατηγίαι δὲ εἰσὶν ἐν τῇ ἐπαρχίᾳ /πρὸς μὲν ταῖς Μυσίαις καὶ περὶ τὸν Αἶμον τὸ /ὄρος ἀρχομένοις ἀπὸ δυσμῶν <Δανθηλητικὴ, /Σαρδικὴ, Οὐσδικησικὴ, Σελλητική>· /πρὸς δὲ τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ τῷ Αἰγαίῳ πελάγει ὁμοίως στρατηγίαι Μαιδικὴ,<Δροσικὴ, /Κοιλητικὴ, Σαπαϊκὴ, Κορπιλικὴ>, /<Καινική>·καὶ ὑπὲρ μὲν τὴν Μαιδικὴν <Βεσσικὴ>, ὑφ' ἣν <Βεννικὴ>, εἶτα <Σαμαϊκή>· παρὰ δὲ τὴν ἀπὸ Περίνθου πόλεως μέχρις Ἀπολλωνίας παράλιον ἡ <Ἀστικὴ> στρατηγία; fort the stragey of Bessike, see Kalopotakes 1893, 15; Jones 1971, 14; Fol 1975, 77-83; Detschew 1976, 57-59; Tacheva 1997, 205-206; Parissaki 2009, 338, 351; Zahariade 2009, 137, 20, 31-32, 38.

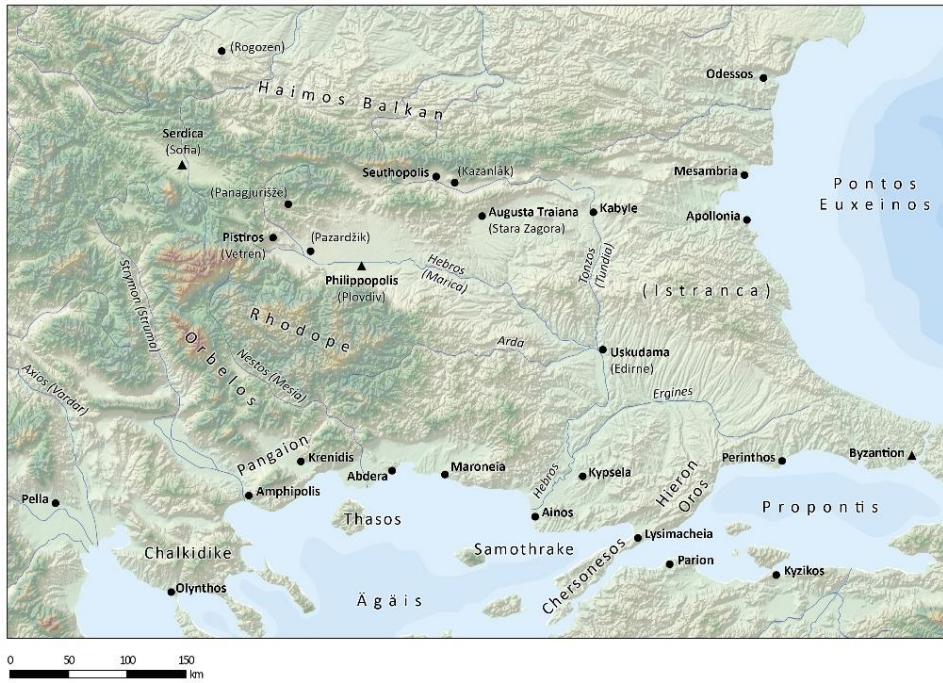


Fig. 1. Ancient Thrace (cartography: Susanne Rutishauser /University of Bern).

According to Herodotos, the *Bessoi* tribe was a clan or a group of the *Satrai* people.[2] Could *Bessoi* be seen only as temple personnel? *Bessoi* was perhaps a clan whose roots extend to the Phrygian tribes and who reside between Orbelos and Rhodope.[3] It is claimed that Dionysiac cult in Thrace was born from this Phrygian cult component. The rituals of this cult were created by the *Bessoi* priests.

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[2] Herodotos 7.110-111: Ταύτας μὲν δὴ τὰς πόλις τὰς παραθαλασσίας τε καὶ Ἑλληνίδας ἐξ εὐωνύμου χειρὸς ἀπέργων παρεξήιε· ἔθνεα δὲ Θρηίκων δι' ὧν τῆς χώρης ὁδὸν ἐποιέετο τοσάδε· Παῖτοι, Κίκονες, Βίστονες, **7.110.5** Σαπαῖοι, Δερσαῖοι, Ἠδωνοί, Σάτραι. Τούτων οἱ μὲν παρὰ θάλασσαν κατοικημένοι ἐν τῇσι νησὶ εἵποντο· οἱ δὲ αὐτῶν τὴν μεσόγαιαν οἰκέοντες καταλεχθέντες τε ὑπ' ἐμέο, πλὴν Σατρέων οἱ ἄλλοι πάντες πεζῇ ἀναγκαζόμενοι εἵποντο. **7.111.1** Σάτραι δὲ οὐδενός κω ἀνθρώπων ὑπήκοοι ἐγένοντο ὅσον ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν, ἀλλὰ διατελέουσι τὸ μέχρι ἐμέο αἰεὶ ἐόντες ἐλεύθεροι μοῦνοι Θρηίκων· οἰκέουσί τε γὰρ ὄρεα ὑψηλά, ἴδῃσί τε παντοίῃσι καὶ χιόνι συνηρεφέα, καί εἰσι τὰ πολέμια **7.111.5** ἄκροι. Οὗτοι οἱ τοῦ Διονύσου τὸ μαντήιόν εἰσι ἐκτημένοι· τὸ δὲ μαντήιον τοῦτο ἐστὶ μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν ὀρέων τῶν ὑψηλοτάτων· Βησσοὶ δὲ τῶν Σατρέων εἰσὶ οἱ προφητεύοντες τοῦ ἱροῦ, πρόμαντις δὲ ἡ χρέωσα κατά περ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, καὶ οὐδὲν ποικιλώτερον.

[3] Graninger 2015, 26-27.

It is assumed that there is a connection between *Satrai*, *Dii* and *Bessoi*, thus it is stated that there is a single Thracian tribe under different names. The expression βησσοὶ δὲ τῶν Σατρέων, used by Herodotos, may represent part of the *Satrai* group.[4] The historian defines *Satrai* as a clan but does not consider it as a separate group. However, *Bessoi* were only part of the *Satrai* clan and they were prophets of Dionysios' oracle.[5] In line with these comments, it is understood that another group named *Bessoi* in the *Satrai* tribe emerged as a priest clan.[6] The *Satrai* group is identified with the *Bessoi* and *Dii* tribes as a common public name. Undoubtedly, the tribe of *Bessoi* had a great popularity among their kindred tribes and the name *Bessoi* should have gradually replaced *Satrai* and passed on to the neighboring Thracian tribes. Although there is a connection between *Satrai* and *Bessoi*, it is not possible to claim that they are exactly the same. Another group, the *Diobessoi* emerged as a combination of small Thracian tribes in a later period.[7] It is understood that *Bessoi* are a strong clan and a group holding the power of priesthood and they are thought to be identical to *Orbelioi*,[8] who were subjugated by Philipp II by force. Alexander also fought against a free Thracian tribe called the *Triballoi*.[9]

Strabo argues that the group named *Tetrachoritai* is identical with the *Bessoi* tribe and states that they can also be described as *Tetrakomai*.[10] It is

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[4] Vasilev 2015, 178-180.

[5] Nilsson 1967, 566.

[6] Tomaschek 1893, 72-79; Detschew 1976, 57-59.

[7] Plinius, *NH* 4.40: Thracia sequitur, inter validissimas Europae gentes, in strategias L divisa. populorum eius, quos nominare non pigeat, amnem Strymonem accolunt dextro latere Denseletae et Maedi ad Bisaltas usque supra dictos, laevo Digerri Bessorumque multa nomina ad Mestum amnem ima Pangaei montis ambientem inter Haletos, Diobessos, Carbilesos, inde Bri<g>as, Sapaeos, <O>domantos.

[8] Polyaen. 4.2.16: Φίλιππος ἐνέβαλεν εἰς τὴν Ὀρβηλίων χώραν· ἡ δέ ἐστι φαραγγώδης καὶ δασεῖα. καταδυομένων τῶν βαρβάρων ἐς τὰ ἄλση καὶ τοὺς θάμνους, θηρευτικὰς κύνας πολλὰς ἐξήγαγεν, αἳ τοὺς πολεμίους ἐξιχνεύουσαι τοὺς πλείστους αὐτῶν ἐθήρευον.

[9] Arrianos, *Anabasis* 1.2.1: Ἀλέξανδρος δὲ τὴν μὲν λείαν ὀπίσω ἀπέπεμψεν ἐς τὰς πόλεις τὰς ἐπὶ θαλάσσῃ, Λυσανίᾳ καὶ Φιλώτᾳ παραδοὺς διατίθεσθαι·αὐτὸς δὲ τὸ ἄκρον ὑπερβαλὼν προῄει διὰ τοῦ Αἴμου ἐς Τριβαλλούς, καὶ ἀφικνεῖται ἐπὶ τὸν Λύγινον ποταμόν.

[10] Strabo 7.5.12: Ὤικησαν δ' οὗτοι παρὰ τὸν Ἴστρον διῃρημένοι δίχα, οἱ μὲν μεγάλοι Σκορδίσκοι καλούμενοι οἱ δὲ μικροί· οἱ μὲν μεταξὺ δυεῖν ποταμῶν ἐμβαλλόντων εἰς

probable that the *Bessoi* tribe, identified as looters, is due to their resistance against the Roman invasion in 1st century BC.[11]

Bessoi is described as the wildest among the other Thracian tribes living in the upper part of the Hebros riverbed.[12] The *Bessoi* tribe is also referred to as bandits by their neighbors, who themselves are also looters. In 183 BC, Philipp V launched a military operation against the *Odryssai*, *Bessoi* and *Dentheleti* tribes in the Rhodope Mountains and reached Philippopolis.[13] He captured the city, but after he has left, the garrison which he left behind could not protect the city, and the city fell into the hands of the Thracians again. In the second half of 2nd century BC, he campaigned to Thrace several times and fought against the tribes of *Odryssai*, *Bessoi*, *Dentheleti* and *Maedi*.[14]

τὸν Ἴστρον, τοῦ τε Νοάρου τοῦ παρὰ τὴν Σεγεστικὴν ῥέοντος καὶ τοῦ Μάργου (τινὲς δὲ Βάργον φασίν), οἱ δὲ μικροὶ τούτου πέραν, συνάπτοντες Τριβαλλοῖς καὶ Μυσοῖς. εἶχον δὲ καὶ τῶν νήσων τινὰς οἱ Σκορδίσκοι· ἐπὶ τοσοῦτον δ' ηὐξήθησαν ὥστε καὶ μέχρι τῶν Ἰλλυρικῶν καὶ τῶν Παιονικῶν καὶ Θρᾳκίων προῆλθον ὀρῶν κατέσχον οὖν καὶ τὰς νήσους τὰς ἐν τῷ Ἴστρῳ τὰς πλείους, ἦσαν δὲ καὶ πόλεις αὐτοῖς Ἑόρτα καὶ Καπέδουνον. μετὰ δὲ τὴν τῶν Σκορδίσκων χώραν παρὰ μὲν τὸν Ἴστρον ἡ τῶν Τριβαλλῶν καὶ Μυσῶν ἔστιν, ὧν ἐμνήσθημεν πρότερον, καὶ τὰ ἕλη τὰ τῆς μικρᾶς καλουμένης Σκυθίας τῆς ἐντὸς Ἴστρου·καὶ τούτων ἐμνήσθημεν. ὑπεροικοῦσι δ' οὗτοί τε καὶ Κρόβυζοι καὶ οἱ Τρωγλοδύται λεγόμενοι τῶν περὶ Κάλλατιν καὶ Τομέα καὶ Ἴστρον τόπων. εἶθ' οἱ περὶ τὸ Αἷμον καὶ οἱ ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ οἰκοῦντες μέχρι τοῦ Πόντου Κόραλλοι καὶ Βέσσοι καὶ Μαίδων τινὲς καὶ Δανθηλητῶν. πάντα μὲν οὖν ταῦτα λῃστρικώτατα ἔθνη, Βέσσοι δέ, οἵπερ τὸ πλέον τοῦ ὄρους νέμονται τοῦ Αἵμου, καὶ ὑπὸ τῶν λῃστῶν λῃσταὶ προσαγορεύονται, καλυβῖταί τινες καὶ λυπρόβιοι, συνάπτοντες τῇ τε Ῥοδόπῃ καὶ τοῖς Παίοσι καὶ τῶν Ἰλλυριῶν τοῖς τε Αὐταριάταις καὶ τοῖς Δαρδανίοις. μεταξὺ δὲ τούτων τε καὶ τῶν Ἀρδιαίων οἱ Δασαρήτιοι εἰσὶ καὶ Ἀγριᾶνες καὶ ἄλλα ἄσημα ἔθνη, ἃ ἐπόρθουν οἱ Σκορδίσκοι μέχρι ἠρήμωσαν τὴν χώραν καὶ δρυμῶν ἀβάτων ἐφ' ἡμέρας πλείους ἐποίησαν μεστήν; see also Steph. Byz. 618.8-9: Τετραχωρῖται οἱ Βεσσοί, ὡς Στράβων ἐβδόμη. οὗτοι λέγονται καὶ Τετράκωμοι; for Tetrachoritai and Tetrakomoi in Strabon see Boshnakov 2003, 103, 109, 286, 308 and 316.

[11] Boshnakov 2003, 301.

[12] Tomaschek 1893, 72-79.

[13] Polybios 23.8.4: διελθὼν δὲ διὰ μέσης τῆς Θρᾴκης ἐνέβαλεν εἰς Ὀδρύσας (καὶ) Βέσσους καὶ Δενθηλήτους; Livius 39.53.12: Avertendos etiam animos a suspicione talium consiliorum ratus, mediam per Thraciam exercitum in Odrysas et Dentheletos et Bessos duxit; Badian 1940, 346; Errington 1986, 188.

[14] On the Dentheleti and Maedi see Delev 2013, 367-377; 2014, 228-237, 338-356.

Although the remaining Thracian tribes existed in the Greek and Roman periods, only their names have survived. The members of the *Bessoi* tribe are mentioned mostly as servant in some oracle centers in Thrace.[15]

The core settlement area of *Bessoi* is in the Rhodope Mountains. They are described as the *Bessoi* tribe of the high plateaus.[16] When the mountain tribes are mentioned in the Thrace region, the first thing that comes to mind is the *Bessoi* tribe.[17] Due to the geographical location of Bessapara (Beşikara) in Sinitovo, south of Pazardzhık, it is believed that the actual habitat of the *Bessoi* tribe is located to the east of Thrace. Perhaps the tribe of *Bessoi* had, over time, shifted from its original settlements to the eastern plateaus.[18] This can be followed through the local government unit called *Bessike*.[19] βεσσική was strategically founded and probably included many sub-governing units. It is understood that the actual commercial and political center of the *Bessoi* tribe is Bessapara in the upper Hebros region. The eastern border of this strategia is located in the west of Beroe and about 70 km east of Philippopolis. The center of this region was Bessapara.[20] However, Bessapara served as an *emporion* after the establishment of Philippopolis.[21] The tribe of *Bessoi*, which was first mentioned in Herodotos, lived for a long time under the leadership of their tribal chiefs. In 72 BC, the Romans defeated the *Bessoi* tribe under the command of Marcus Terentius Varro Lucullus, largely eliminating the military threat.[22] Lucullus, who was the governor of Proconsul in Macedonia, defeated the *Bessoi* tribe, seriously threatening the Roman domination in Macedonia at that time, and conquered the cities of Uscudama = Hadrianoupolis and Kabyle, destroying the resistant city of Apollonia on the Black Sea coast. Lucullus reached the Danube river with the troops under his command and also captured the other Greek cities on the Black Sea coast,

[15] Katsarov 1924, 31-47; Tacheva 1997, 199-210; 1999a, 863-872; Delev 2012, 6-65.
[16] Danov 1976, 111.
[17] Danov 1976, 120.
[18] Danov 1976, 113.
[19] Cl. Ptolemaues 3.11.8-10; Tacheva 1997, 205-206; Parissaki 2009, 338, 351.
[20] For Bessapara, see Soustal 1991, 206 s. v. Besuparon.
[21] Danov 1976, 113; 1979, 132.
[22] For the role of Bessoi tribes during the Mithridatic wars in the southern Balkan Peninsula, see Zahariade 2009, 47-49.

Kallatis, Tomis and Istros.[23] This comprehensive military operation of Lucullus did not provide permanent peace for the Romans and C. Octavius Octavianus, father of Octavianus Augustus, organized a new campaign against the *Bessoi* tribe in 60 BC and defeated them.[24] It is understood from his visit to the oracle of Dionysus that he has entered the nucleus of the *Bessoi* tribe. Governor L. Calpurnius Piso supports *Odryssae*, another Thracian tribe, against the *Bessoi* tribe. Rabocentus, the chief of the *Bessoi* killed without questioning.[25] The victory of Calpurnius Piso over the *Bessoi* tribe is considered a remarkable innovation in Rome, as it contributed to the process of understanding the Thracian lifestyle by the Romans.[26]

During the civil war between Pompeius and Caesar, the *Bessoi* tribe supported Roman troops that remained loyal to Pompeius.[27] They partly served as soldiers in auxiliary troops and received a salary, partly commanding

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[23] Eutropius 6.10: Alter autem Lucullus, qui Macedoniam administrabat, Bessis primus Romanorum intulit bellum atque eos ingenti proelio in Haemo monte superavit. Oppidum Uscudamam, quod Bessi habitabant, eodem die, quo adgressus est, vicit, Cabylen cepit, usque ad Danubium penetravit; Amm. Marcellinus 27.4.11: aduenit post hos imperator Lucullus, qui cum durissima gente Bessorum conflixit omnium primus, eodemque impetu Haemimontanos acriter resistentes oppressit; Soustal 1991, 59; Ivanov & Bülow 2008, 12; Marcus Terentius Varro Lucullus granted a triumphal procession for this successfully expedition in 71 BC. He brought a part of the booty to Rome, including a statue of Apollo from Apollonia, which was given to the temple of Iuppiter Capitolinus.

[24] Suetonius, *Octavian* 3: namque Bessis et Thracibus magno proelio fussis ita socios tractavit; see also Zahariade 2009, 51.

[25] Cicero, *in Pisonem* 34.84: Idemque tu Rabocentum, Bessicae gentis principem, cum te trecentis talentis regi Cotyi vendidisses, securi percussisti, cum ille ad te legatus in castra venisset et tibi magna praesidia et auxilia a Bessis peditum equitumque polliceretur, neque eum solum sed etiam ceteros legatos qui simul venerant; quorum omnium capita regi Cotyi vendidisti; Oppermann 1984, 171.

[26] Strabo 7.1: Παῦλος μὲν οὖν ὁ τὸν Περσέα ἑλὼν συνάψας τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ καὶ τὰ Ἠπειρωτικὰ ἔθνη εἰς τέτταρα μέρη διέταξε τὴν χώραν, καὶ τὸ μὲν προσένειμεν Ἀμφιπόλει, τὸ δὲ Θεσσαλονικείᾳ, τὸ δὲ Πέλλῃ, τὸ δὲ Πελαγόσι. παροικοῦσι δὲ τὸν Ἕβρον Κορπῖλοι καὶ Βρέναι ἔτι ἀνωτέρω, εἶτ' ἔσχατοι Βέσσοι.

[27] Cicero, *in Pisonem* 34.84; see n. 24; Caesar, *Bellum civile* 3.4; Lucanus 5 vers.441; sic stat iners Scythicas astringens Bosporos undas,/cum glacie retinente fretum non inpulit Hister,/inmensumque gelu tegitur mare; conprimit unda/deprendit quascumque rates, nec peruia uelis/aequora frangit eques, fluctuque latente sonantem/orbita migrantis scindit Maeotida Bessi; see also Zahariade 2009, 52.

auxiliary troops in conflicts. In AD 43, Brutus fled to Macedonia and accused the *Bessoi* tribe of looting.[28] In the period of Augustus, in 28 BC, M. Licinius Crassus received help from the *Odryssae* tribe while defeating the tribes on the Macedonian border, and after taking control of the area, he gifted the Dionysus' sanctuary which was previously under the control of the *Bessoi* tribe to the Odryssian tribe.[29] In 13 BC, Vologaises, the leader of the *Bessoi* tribe, was also the Dionysian cult priest. Although M. Lollius managed to defeat Vologaises, the revolt of the *Bessoi* tribe spread over a wide area. Emperor Augustus instructed L. Calpurnius Piso to suppress the *Bessoi* revolt, which rapidly and aggressively developed. Piso defeated the *Bessoi*

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[28] Cassius Dio 47.25: ὁ δ' οὖν Βροῦτος ὡς τά- χιστα τήν τε τοῦ Ἀντωνίου τοῦ Μάρκου πείρασιν καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἀδελφοῦ αὐτοῦ σφαγὴν ἔμαθεν, ἔδεισε μὴ καὶ ἄλλο τι ἐν τῇ Μακεδονίᾳ παρὰ τὴν ἀπουσίαν αὐτοῦ νεωτερισθῇ, καὶ εὐθὺς ἐς τὴν Εὐρώπην ἐπειχθεὶς τήν τε χώραν τὴν τοῦ Σαδάλου γενομένην παρέλαβεν (ἄπαις γὰρ τελευτῶν τοῖς Ῥωμαίοις αὐτὴν κατέλιπε), καὶ ἐς Βησσοὺς ἐμβαλών, εἴ πως ἀμύναιτό τε ἅμα αὐτοὺς ὧν ἐκακούργουν, καὶ ὄνομα ἀξίωμά τε αὐτοκράτορος, ὡς καὶ ῥᾷον ἐκ τούτου τῷ τε Καίσαρι καὶ τῷ Ἀντωνίῳ προσπολεμήσων, περι- βάλοιτο, ἀμφότερα διεπράξατο, Ῥασκυπόριδός οἱ δυνάστου τινὸς ἐς τὰ μάλιστα βοηθήσαντος; see also Zahariade 2009, 53.

[29] Cassius Dio 51.25: πράξας δὲ ταῦτα ὁ Κράσσος ἐπὶ τοὺς Μυσοὺς ἐτράπετο, καὶ τὰ μὲν πείθων τινὰς τὰ δὲ ἐκφοβῶν τὰ δὲ καὶ βιαζόμενος, πάντας μὲν πλὴν πάνυ ὀλίγων, ἐπιπόνως δὲ δὴ καὶ ἐπικινδύνως κατεστρέψατο. καὶ τότε μέν (χειμὼν γὰρ ἦν) ἐς τὴν φιλίαν ἀνεχώρησε, πολλὰ μὲν ὑπὸ τοῦ ψύχους πολλῷ δὲ ἔτι πλείω ὑπὸ τῶν Θρᾳκῶν, δι' ὧν ὡς φίλων ἐπανήει, παθών· ὅθενπερ γνώμην ἔσχεν ἀρκε - σθῆναι τοῖς κατειργασμένοις. καὶ γὰρ καὶ θυσίαι καὶ νικητήρια οὐχ ὅτι τῷ Καίσαρι ἀλλὰ καὶ ἐκείνῳ ἐψηφίσθη οὐ μέντοι καὶ τὸ τοῦ αὐτοκράτορος ὄνομα, ὥς γέ τινές φασιν, ἔλαβεν, ἀλλ' ὁ Καῖσαρ μόνος αὐτὸ προσέθετο. ἐπεὶ δὲ οἱ Βαστάρναι ταῖς τε συμφοραῖς ἀχθόμενοι, καὶ μηκέτ' αὐτὸν ἐπιστρατεύσειν σφίσι πυθόμενοι, πρός τε τοὺς Δενθελήτας καὶ πρὸς τὸν Σιτᾶν αὖθις ὡς καὶ αἰτιώτατον αὐτοῖς τῶν κακῶν γεγονότα ἐτράποντο, οὕτω καὶ ἄκων ἐξανέστη, καὶ σπουδῇ χωρήσας ἀνέλπιστός τε αὐτοῖς ἐπέπεσε, καὶ κρατήσας σπονδὰς ὁποίας ἠθέλησεν ἔδωκεν. ὡς δ' ἅπαξ τῶν ὅπλων αὖθις ἥψατο, ἐπεθύμησεν ἀμύνασθαι τοὺς Θρᾷκας τοὺς ἐν τῇ ἀνακομιδῇ τῇ ἐκ τῆς Μυσίας λυπήσαντας αὐτόν·καὶ γὰρ τότε χωρία τε ἐντειχιζόμενοι καὶ πολεμησείοντες ἠγγέλλοντο. καί σφων Μαίδους μὲν καὶ Σερδοὺς μάχαις τε κατακρατῶν, καὶ τὰς χεῖρας τῶν ἁλισκομένων ἀποτέμνων, οὐκ ἀπόνως μέν, ἐχειρώσατο δ' οὖν·τὰ δ' ἄλλα πλὴν τῆς τῶν Ὀδρυσῶν γῆς κατέδραμε. τούτων γάρ, ὅτι τῷ τε Διονύσῳ πρόσκεινται καὶ τότε ἄνευ τῶν ὅπλων ἀπήντησάν οἱ, ἐφείσατο καὶ αὐτοῖς καὶ τὴν χώραν ἐν ᾗ καὶ τὸν θεὸν ἀγάλλουσιν ἐχαρίσατο, Βησσοὺς τοὺς κατέχοντας αὐτὴν ἀφελόμενος.

tribe just returning from looting.[30] The rebellion ended in 11 BC.[31] Marcus Minucius Rufus defeated the *Bessoi* tribe near the frozen Hebros (= Meriç) river.[32]

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[30] Cassius Dio 54.34.5-7: οὗτοι μὲν δὴ ταῦτ' ἔπρασσον·ἐν δὲ δὴ τοῖς αὐτοῖς τούτοις χρόνοις Βουλογαίσης Θρᾳξ Βησσός, ἱερεὺς τοῦ παρ' αὐτοῖς Διονύσου, προσεποιήσατό τινας πολλὰ θειάσας, καὶ μετ' αὐτῶν ἀποστὰς τόν τε Ῥασκύποριν τὸν τοῦ Κότυος υἱὸν νικήσας ἀπέκτεινε, καὶ τὸν θεῖον αὐτοῦ τὸν Ῥυμητάλκην μετὰ ταῦτα ἀμαχεὶ γυμνώσας τῶν δυνάμεων τῇ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ δόξῃ φυγεῖν ἐποίησε, καὶ αὐτὸν ἐπιδιώκων ἔς τε τὴν Χερρόνησον ἐνέβαλε καὶ δεινῶς αὐτὴν ἐλυμήνατο. ὡς οὖν οὗτός τε ταῦτ' ἐποίει καὶ οἱ Σιαλέται τὴν Μακεδονίαν ἐκακούργουν, Λούκιος Πίσων ἐκ Παμφυλίας, ἧς ἦρχε, προσετάχθη σφίσι καὶ προαναχωρησάντων οἴκαδε τῶν Βησσῶν ἐπειδὴ ἐπυνθάνοντο αὐτὸν προσιόντα, ἔς τε τὴν γῆν αὐτῶν ἀφίκετο, καὶ ἡττηθεὶς τὸ πρῶτον ἀντεπεκράτησε, καὶ ἐκείνην τε καὶ τὴν τῶν προσχώρων τῶν συνεπαναστάντων σφίσιν ἐπόρθησε. καὶ τότε τοὺς μὲν ἐθελοντὰς προσθέμενος τοὺς δ' ἄκοντας ἐκπλήξας, τοῖς δὲ καὶ ἐκ παρατάξεως συνενεχθείς, πάντας αὐτοὺς ὑπηγάγετο, καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο νεοχμώσαντάς τινας αὐτῶν αὖθις κατεδουλώσατο. καὶ αὐτῷ διὰ ταῦτα καὶ ἱερομηνίαι καὶ τιμαὶ ἐπινίκιοι ἐδόθησαν; Tacit. *Annales* 6.10: Per idem tempus L. Piso pontifex, rarum in tanta claritudine, fato obiit, nullius servilis sententiae sponte auctor et quoties necessitas ingrueret sapienter moderans. patrem ei censorium fuisse memoravi; aetas ad octogesimum annum processit; decus triumphale in Thraecia meruerat. sed praecipua ex eo gloria quod praefectus urbi recens continuam potestatem et insolentia parendi graviorem mire temperavit; Velleius Paterculus II, XCVIII: Dum ea quae praediximus in Pannonia Germaniaque geruntur, atrox in Thracia bellum or- tum, omnibus eius gentis nationibus in arma accensis, L. Pisonis, quem hodieque diligentissimum atque eundem lenissimum securitatis urbanae custodem habemus, uirtus compressit – quippe legatus Caesaris triennio cum his bellauit gentesque ferocissimas plurimo cum earum excidio nunc acie, nunc expugnationibus in pristinum pacis redegit modum – eiusque patratione Asiae securitatem, Macedoniae pacem reddidit. De quo uiro hoc omnibus sentiendum ac praedicandum est esse mores eius uigore ac lenitate mixtissimos et uix quemquam reperiri posse, qui aut otium ualidius diligat aut facilius sufficiat negotio, et magis quae agenda sunt curet sine ulla ostentatione agendi; Florus 2.27: Thraces antea saepe, tum maxime Rhoemetalce rege desciverant. ille barbaros et signis militaribus et disciplina, armis etiam Romanis adsueverat; sed a Pisone perdomiti in ipsa captivitate rabiem ostendere. quippe cum catenas morsibus temptarent, feritatem suam ipsi puniebant.

[31] see Zahariade 2009, 55; Delev 2018, 21-23.

[32] Livius, *Per.* 65: Q. Caecilius Metellus cos. duobus proeliis Iugurtham fudit totamque Numidiam vastavit. M. Iunius Silanus cos. adversus Cimbros infeliciter pugnavit. legatis Cimbrorum sedem et agros, in quibus consisterent, postulantibus senatus negavit. M. Minucius pro cos. adversus Thracas prospere pugnavit. L. Cassius cos. a Tigurinis Gallis, pago Helvetiorum, qui a civitate secesserant, in finibus Nitiobrogum cum exercitu caesus est. milites, qui ex ea caede superaverant, obsidibus datis et

Bessoi tribe members are found in the inscriptions on the grave steles of the soldiers serving in the Roman army.[33] They are documented in the

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dimidia rerum omnium parte, ut incolumes dimitterentur, cum hostibus pacti sunt; Frontin 2.4.3: Minucius Rufus imperator, cum a Scordiscis Dacisque premeretur, quibus impar erat numero, praemisit fratrem et paucos una equites cum aeneatoribus praecepitque, ut, cum vidisset contractum proelium, subitus ex diverso se ostenderet iuberetque concinere aeneatores: <re>sonantibus montium iugis species ingentis multitudinis offusa est hostibus, qua perterriti dedere terga; Ammianus Marcellinus 27.4.10; Eutropius 4.27; Fest. 9; Florus 1.39: Post Macedonas, si dis placet, Thraces rebellabant, illi quondam tributarii Macedonum; nec in proximas modo provincias contenti incurrere, Thessaliam atque Dalmatiam, in Hadriaticum mare usque venerunt; eoque fine contenti, quasi interveniente natura, contorta in ipsas aquas tela miserunt. nihil interim per id omne tempus residuum crudelitatis fuit in captivos saevientibus: litare dis sanguine humano, bibere in ossibus capitum, cuiuscemodi ludibriis foedare mortem 1.39.10 tam igne quam fumo, partus quoque gravidarum mulierum extorquere tormentis. saevissimi omnium Thracum Scordisci fuere, sed calliditas quoque ad robur accesse- rat. silvarum et montium situs cum ingenio consentie - bant: itaque non fusus modo ab his aut fugatus, sed – simile prodigio – omnino totus interceptus exercitus quem duxerat Cato. Didius vagos et libera populatione diffusos intra suam reppulit Thraciam. Drusus ulterius egit et vetuit transire Danuvium. Minucius toto vastavit Hebro, multis quidem amissis, dum per perfidum glacie flumen equitatur. Volso Rhodopen Caucasumque pene - travit. Curio Dacia tenus venit, sed tenebras saltuum expavit. Appius in Sarmatas usque pervenit, Lucullus ad terminum gentium Tanain lacumque Maeotin. nec aliter cruentissimi hostium quam suis moribus domiti. quippe in captivos igni ferroque saevitum est; sed nihil barbaris atrocius visum est quam quod abscisis manibus relicti vivere superstites poenae suae iubebantur; Jordanes, *Rom* 219; about Minucius see the inscriptions, which were found in Delphi and Europos,
SEG 41, 516: Syll. 710 A (107 BC)
Μάαρκον Μι|νύκιον Κο[ΐντου υἱὸν Ῥο]ῦφον, στρα-
[τ]ηγὸν ὕπα|τον Ῥωμαί[ων, νικήσ]αντα τὸν πρὸς
[Γ]αλάτας Σ|κορδίστας [καὶ τὸ]ν πρὸς Βέσσους
[κ]αὶ τοὺς λ|οιποὺς Θρᾶι[κας π]όλεμον, ἁ πόλις
[τ]ῶν Δελφ|ῶν ἀρετᾶς ἕνε[κεν] καὶ εὐργεσίας τᾶς
[εἰ]ς ἑαυτὰ|ν Ἀπόλλωνι.
SEG 41, 570: Europos/Macedonia:
[Μάαρκον Μινύκιον] Κοΐντου υἱὸν [Ῥ]οῦ[φ]ον σ[τρ]ατηγὸν vacat.
[ὕπατ]ον Ῥωμαίων νικήσαντα τὸ[ν] πρὸς Γαλάτας Σκορδί-
[στας] καὶ Βέσσους καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς Θρᾳικας πόλεμον
[τὸν αὐτ]ῶν εὐεργέτην ἀρετῆς ἕνεκεν καὶ εὐνοίας
vacat Εὐρωπαίων ἡ πόλις vacat
see also Zahariade 2009, 44-45.
[33] Zahariade 2009, 137, 150.

inscriptions by their local names as well as their later Latin names.[34] Romans trained an important part of the *Bessoi* tribe as navy soldiers. Names of soldiers of *Bessoi* origin can be seen in many inscriptions found in the Navy bases of Ravenna and Misenum.

During the Flavian period, two equestrian troops were formed for Moesia Inferior and Moesia Superior: *cohors I Flavia Bessorum* and *cohors Flavia II Bessorum*.[35] The second *Bessoi* cohort did not have a fixed headquarters in the province of Moesia inferior. Soldiers were recruited from the indigenous people of the Moesia region. The Roman imperial military diplomas also show that many *Bessoi* members served in the auxiliary units of the Roman army. *Bessoi*, as other Thracians, used Cognominas derived from Thracian strategia as Ethnonym until the Flavian period. The *origo* of the *Bessoi* is correlated either with the word Bessus or with several other variants: *domo Bessus, natus Bessus, natione Bessus*.[36] Recruiting from the *Bessoi* tribe continued during the Antonine era.[37] Until AD 158, soldiers from the Bessica region used the name *Bessus* to indicate their origin.[38] In the time of Septimius Severus, the use of the name Bessoi continued to indicate origin in military diplomas. This practice ends with *Constitutio Antoniniana*, published in AD 212.

After a long time, the name *Bessoi* appears again in connection with their Christianization by Niceta, the bishop of Remessiana. Perhaps the reason behind the disappearance of the name was the fact that the *Bessoi* members achieved significant success against the Romans in various wars, and then also attracted attention as gifted fighters in the Roman army. As documented by an inscription found in Libya, from the 3rd Century AD, many members of the *Bessoi* tribe were recruited for the Roman army.[39]

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[34] Tacheva 1997, 199-210; 1999a, 877-884; 1999b, 191-199.
[35] Zahariade 2009, 71-72, 116, 137, 150, 211.
[36] Zahariade 2009, 76-77.
[37] For the resistance against Roman invasion in Thrace, see Tacheva 1988, 246-252.
[38] See Zahariade 2009, 79.
[39] CIL VIII 9381; also a vetranus of the first rider unit from the tribe of the *Bessoi*. *Sex(tus) Iul(ius) Iulianus* commmanded a 1000 men unit (*iuniores Bessos*) from the Provincia Thracia in die Provincia Mauretania Tingitana.

Ovidius who was sent into exile to Tomis, describes the *Bessoi* tribe as the real Thracian people.[40] Plinius also talks about the *Bessoi* tribe.[41] Iulius Africanus mentions Thracians, *Bessoi* and *Dardanoi*. The names of the cities Uscudama (= Hadrianopolis) and Pulpudeva (= Philippopolis), settled by the *Bessoi* tribe, are taken from the Thracian language.[42] Apart from animal husbandry, agriculture and especially viticulture and related wine production are among the important daily activities of the *Bessoi* tribe. *Bessoi* also showed great skill in reaching underground deposits and especially in extracting mines such as iron, gold, silver copper which were used for military purposes.[43]

CIL – *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin 1863-.

SEG – *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Leiden-Amsterdam, 1923–.

Syll – W. Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, I-IV, Leipzig, 1915-1924.

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[40] Ovid. *Trist.* 3.10.5: Sauromatae cingunt, fera gens, Bessique Getaeque, quam non ingenio nomina digna meo! and Ovid. *Trist*. 4.1.67; Zahariade 2009, 35-36; Danov 1979, 132, n. 443.

[41] Plinius, *NH* 6.217: Sexta comprehensio, qua continetur urbs Roma, amplectitur Caspias gentes, Caucasum, septentrionalia Armeniae, Apolloniam supra Rhyndacum, Nicomediam, Nicaeam, Calchadonem, Byzantium, Lysimacheam, Cherronesum, Melanemsinum, Abderam, Samothraciam, Maroneam, Aenum, Bessicam, Thraciam, Maedicam, Paeoniam, Illyrios, Durrachium, etc.

[42] Tacheva 1999b, 191-199.

[43] Vegetius 2.11; 4.24; Velkov 1988, 70.

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Pre-Roman Bessoi

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Abstract: Poorly documented, the Pre-Roman *Bessoi* have been the subject of many unsolved questions related first to their identification and to their location. Using a historiographical approach combined with the analysis of the literary sources, this contribution reopens the debate and suggests that their territory was much larger than usually assumed. It also aims at shedding a new light on the history of this Thracian *ethnos* by analyzing the warlike exchanges in which the *Bessoi* were involved, especially through a numismatic study. The analysis stresses the key role of the *Bessoi* not only in Thracian history, but also in ancient Greek history.

Key words: *Bessoi*, *Dioi*, Thracian ethnonymy, Thracian Numismatics, Thasos, Athens

Резюме: Лошо документирани, предримските беси са били обект на много нерешени въпроси, свързани с тяхната идентификация и местоположението им. Чрез историографски подход, съчетан с анализ на литературните източници, настоящото изследване ни връща към тази дискусия и допуска, че тяхната територия е била много по-голяма, отколкото обикновено се предполага. То също така има за цел да хвърли светлина върху историята на този тракийски *етнос* като анализира бойните им действия, главно чрез изследване на нумизматиката. Анализът подчертава ключовата роля на бесите не само за историята на Тракия, но също така и за гръцката история.

The few lines dedicated to Pre-Roman *Bessoi* in Ancient literature gave rise to many unsolved questions which go beyond those, often debated, of their location.[1] The difficulties archaeologists, historians and anthropologists have to face when it comes to understanding ancient Thracian societies may be explained, on the one hand, by the scarcity, incompleteness and dispersion of our documentary sources and, on the other hand, by the external origin of our textual sources and the representation biases developed over time about them.

The *Bessoi* were first mentioned in the fifth century BC: Herodotus (7.111) describes them as a part of the Thracian Satrai in the narrative of the

[1] See Delev 2014, 167-185.

Persian campaign which led the armies of Xerxes to South-Western Thrace in 480 BC. Then their name disappeared from our data up to the second century BC (Pol. 23.8.4; Syll. 3 710 A). Their importance later increased in proportion to their involvement in the wars against the Romans. The *Bessoi* thus gained a considerable renown from the end of the Hellenistic period onward, their name being finally used to designate the Thracians in general[2]. The phenomenon sharply contrasts with the description of Strabo, at the time of Augustus's reign, depicting them as an obscure Thracian people dreaded only for the brigandage they practiced intensively: the *Bessoi* were '*called brigands by the brigands themselves*' (Strabo 7.5.12). Although this judgment must be replaced in the Roman context of long and difficult fights with the *Bessoi*, it seems to have weighed heavily on the perspective of the historians until our days on these people and even on the interpretation of the sources allowing to locate them. The difficult identification of Thracian peoples is closely related to complex geopolitical contexts whose analysis, together with the reopening of the discussion about the location of the *Bessoi*, give rise to new historical considerations about a powerful and lasting actor in ancient Thrace.

Identification and naming

So far, neither the onomastic nor the archaeological data have helped identify or locate the *Bessoi* in Thrace. There are no proper Bessic names, and D. Dana stressed that the presence of the ethnic denomination *bessus* in later documentation, being used as a synonym of *Thrax*, is of no help to identify a precise ethnicity.[3] As for the use of archaeological material in an attempt to specify locations by attributing the remains to distinct Thracian tribes, it poses serious methodological problems,[4] all the more that the different Thracian groups exchanged, collaborated and mingled with each other. Between the peoples of this region, the conflicts were intense and their interrelations, certainly hardly known, seem to have been eventful.

The Thracian ethnic geography is difficult to follow, not so much because of the migrations of peoples, of which the literary documentation gives some examples, than because of the multiplicity of Thracian ethnonyms used in our literary sources. The Greeks considered the Thracians as a whole as an *ethnos*,[5] a term they also used to designate the different Thracian

[2] Jord. *Getica* 75; Symeon Metaphrastes, PG 114, 505c.
[3] Dana 2012, 237-238.
[4] Cf. Hall 1997; Venedikov 2000; 2004; Malkin & Muller 2012, 25-37.
[5] For instance, Hdt. 5.3.1.

peoples. During Augustan Age, Strabo records twenty-two Thracian *ethne* (Strabo 7 fr. 47 and 47b). However, the names of these *ethne* appear in ancient literary sources under various and variable names which sometimes also designate groups of peoples bearing various names themselves.[6] In addition, a name initially attached to what appears to have been a clan, or a people, is sometimes found later to designate a larger social group, a people or a group of peoples. This was probably much the case with the *Bessoi*, reflecting the ascendancy they may have taken within the group called *Satrai*, whom Herodotus described as excelling at warmongering. The name *Satrai*, which disappears after Herodotus from our documentation, could likewise have come from the name of a prior dominant group. The *Bessoi* do not appear however in Thucydides, but the Athenian historian mentions the *Dioi*, later associated with the *Bessoi* in an ethnonym quoted by Pline the Elder (4.40-41), *Diobessoi*. During the reign of Philip of Macedon, the name of the *Bessoi* is still missing in our sources, but we find mentions of fights with Thracians called 'Tetrachoritai',[7] identified with the *Bessoi* in a fragment by Strabo (7, fr. 47). The many problems posed by the Thracian ethnonymy are largely linked to geopolitical dynamics: according to military history and to the enforcing capacities of a king or the leaders of given clans, tribes or tribal groups, ethnonyms could disappear and, in certain cases, reappear.[8]

But we may also consider the phenomenon from an external point of view, focusing on the origin of our documentation: because they made themselves known as formidable enemies of Rome, the name of the *Bessoi* may have spread to several peoples and assumed increasing importance in ancient historiography.[9] Yet, this process may be at least partly disconnected from the effective relations between the Thracian groups, reflecting only remotely the local realities. The ethnonymy transmitted by ancient authors is indeed sometimes misleading. What the Greeks wanted to designate by using one ethnonym did not always correspond either to the exact ethnic geography of Thrace, nor to its contemporary state: they could use names that would not have been used by the peoples of the area concerned. A major example of this phenomenon is the fact that the Greeks designated as 'Medes' in the 5th century BC those they should have called Persians instead.

The modern representations associated with the word 'tribe' may also have played the role of a distorting filter to understand the Thracian realities

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[6] Cf. Danov 1976, 90, differentiating *unterstämme*, *stämme* and *stämmengruppen*.
[7] Polyaenus 4.4.1.
[8] Cf. Venedikov 1982; von Bredow 2001, 13-36.
[9] Plin. *NH* 4.18. 1; Jord. *Getica* 75; *Patrologia Graeca* 114, 505c. Cf. Danov 1976, 111-116; Sarafov 1974; Fol & Spiridonov 1983, 24-25, 116; Delev 2002.

and the Bessic people in particular. The Bessoi are indeed commonly presented, in modern literature, as a tribe. This ethnological notion may provide some useful theoretical model to understand the Thracian social structures: composed of smaller local communities such as bands or villages, the tribes may have aggregated into higher-order clusters. But as the word was used to describe the cultures encountered through European colonization since the 19th century, it has also carried some lasting misleading representations about these societies, especially through the view of an unilineal cultural evolution in which the tribes have been held for a stage prior to the state.[10] This contemptuous representation, combined with the very depreciating image of the *Bessoi* in Roman literature, constitutes a prism of negative deformation which invites to step back and perhaps prefer a more neutral term to designate the Thracian *ethne*, such as 'peoples'.

The very controversial question of the location of the *Bessoi* may have been altered by these representations, to the point that the geographic indications given by Strabo, although based on reliable sources and rigorously exposed, have been questioned.

Location

Herodotus (7.111) associates the *Satrai* with the high mountains in the south west of Thrace and especially the highest, where the *Bessoi* were responsible for interpreting the oracles of Dionysus. These lines have been extensively commented on[11] but the information given by Herodotus is insufficient to locate the sanctuary with certainty. However, the distortion of what we could draw from Herodotus' testimony on the location of the *Bessoi* and the information given by Strabo a few century later, associating the *Bessoi* with a much larger region, from the heights of the Haimos to the Rhodopi, and on the west to the Peonia, is still to be explained.

Thracian historiography has penalized the *Bessoi* on two levels. Firstly, their fierce resistance to the Romans surely helped to darken their image in Latin literature, as Strabo shows in his description of the Bessi 'living in huts and living a miserable life' (7.5.12). Secondly, these people suffered in Modern historiography from Odrysian competition. Most of the exceptional archaeological finds between the Balkan mountain and the Rhodopi have been attributed to the Odrysians, not only better documented than the *Bessoi*, but also better suited, with their named kings and their domination on most of Thrace, in Bulgarian proto-national historical narrative. In other words, to accept that the *Bessoi* were extended on the great Bulgarian plain amounts

[10] See von Bredow 2000, 81-89.
[11] Lastly, see Delev 2014, 167-185.

not only to reducing the territorial extent of the Odrysian domination, but would also possibly challenge the interpretation of some major archaeological sites, which may explain the reluctance.

Parmenion and Antipater's campaigns against the *Tetrachoritai*,[12] probably in 340 BC,[13] offer the first association of the *Bessoi* with the central plain of Thrace, between the Rhodopi and the Haimos. Later on, Polybius mentions the *Bessoi* in his narrative of the Thracian campaign led by Philip V in 183 BC (Polybius 23.8.3-7). The route of this campaign draws a long diagonal from the southeast to the northwest of Thrace. Philippe left with an army reinforced by the soldiers of the garrisons evacuated on the Aegean coast, starting with the country of the Odrysians, crossed the great plain then arrived, towards the plain of Sofia, in the land of the *Dentheletai*, situated near the upper course of the Strymon. Polybius makes it clear that the *Bessoi* were settled somewhere between these two other Thracian peoples. If we accept that the Odrysians were at that time located east of Hebros,[14] this text would confirm the association of the *Bessoi* with the central plain of Bulgaria. Strabo places the *Bessoi* in the vicinity of the Odrysians and the Sapaians, the latter being settled in the hinterland of Abdera and in the mountains on the left bank of the Nestos. It is not clear how far they were towards the upper course of the Hebros, but we know their domination had been extended under Roman protection.[15] Strabo also locates the *Bessoi* in the great central plain of Thrace, in a paragraph whose accuracy has been questioned but which is perfectly consistent (7.5.12): after having first described from west to east the region between the Danube and the Balkan mountains, the geographer presents, from east to west, the peoples located below, in the mountains and in the great plain to the Black Sea. Strabo associates the Bessoi with a very large region, from the heights of the Haimos to the Rhodopi, and west to Peonia. We must exclude a corruption for the word 'Haimos', an homonymy with another unidentified mountain, as well as a confusion of Strabo's with the Rila or the Pirin,[16] because the description follows the mountain to the Pontic coast and has no meaning otherwise.[17] The *Dentheletai* are also associated with the upper Strymon valley, and the

[12] Theopompus F 217-218 (*FGrH* no.115), Polyeanus 4.4.1; Strabo 7 fr. 51b; cf. Errington 1990, 57.
[13] Bosworth 1980, 231.
[14] Rufin Solas 2013.
[15] Strabo 12.7. fr. 43; 3.20; Appian 4.87.35.
[16] Delev 2002, 15-16, n. 32.
[17] The *Koralloi* mentioned by Strabo in this paragraph are located in the coastal part, east of the great plain.

Maidoi, who are located further south in the valley of this river, may have settled around Mount Rila not only in the direction of the river to the west and to the south, but also to the north towards the upper Isker valley. We also deduced from Strabo that the *Bessoi* were located towards the sources of the Hebros (7, fr. 47: Παροικοῦσι δὲ τὸν Ἕβρον Κορπῖλοι καὶ Βρέναι ἔτι ἀνωτέρω, εἶτ' ἔσχατοι Βέσσοι· μέχρι γὰρ δεῦρο ὁ ἀνάπλους).[18] Strabo specifies here that the *Bessoi* were located between the *Brenai* and the highest navigability point of the river, i.e. the region of the current city of Septemvri and the site of Pistiros, before the heights of Rila Mountain.

The tribal geography certainly evolved between the 5th century BC and the time of Strabo, but these geographic considerations make the *Bessoi* good candidates for the attribution of the tombs of Duvanli. I would suggest that those of the so called 'Valley of the Kings', located at the foot of the Balkan Mountains, which the *Bessoi* occupied, may also be attributed to them. The testimony of Herodotus, unprecise and focusing for narrative reasons on South-Western Thrace, may have masked the extent of the land occupied by the *Satrai*/*Bessoi* in the 5th century BC. As for the tombs of Duvanli, the tendency of the last decades is to associate them with the Odrysians. But previous scholars had another opinion about it. G. Mihailov[19] in particular attributed them to the Bessoi, and A. Fol summed up the general opinion this way: 'the Duvanli necropolis is usually attributed to the *Bessoi* who inhabited the Rhodopi mountains'.[20] M. Tatcheva was among the first to suggest associating the Duvanli necropolis with the line of King Teres,[21] an opinion she later developed by suggesting nominative attributions to certain tombs.[22] K. Kissiov followed her, further considering that the so-called 'Tsepina' ceramics, whose distribution stops west of Duvanli, would define the Bessoi territory.[23] However, the schematic map of the finds draws a center near Velingrad and the upper Mesta valley (Nestos), not even reaching Pazardzhik; this territory could certainly belong to the Bessoi, or to one of the tribes which were attached to them, but it does not correspond to that which Strabo attributes to this people.

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[18] The translation of the text is: *The peoples bordering the Hebros are the Korpyloi, higher up the Brenai, and at the end the Bessoi: we can navigate the river up to this point*.

[19] Mihailov 1972, 50; 1980, 21.

[20] Fol 1979, 179.

[21] Tacheva 1987, 4-5.

[22] Tacheva 1990, 66-67, attributes the Golyamata Mogila tomb to Sparadokos and those of Bashova Mogila to his son Seuthes I. See also Tacheva 1994; Tatcheva 2006.

[23] Kissiov 2004, 73-77 and fig. 20 (diffusion of the Tsepina ceramics). See also Delev 2002 on the geography around the middle Mesta.

Conflicts and exchanges linked to war

The numismatic sources as well as the anthropological and geopolitical contexts may help enlighten the best documented aspect of the history of the *Bessoi* even before Hellenistic times: their integration into external armies and the exchanges linked to war. The military aspects of the *Bessoi* history could actually help understand the persistence, over a very long term, of an ethnonym associated with cultural responsibilities within a larger ethnic group and which came to designate all Thracians.

The first literary testimony about the *Bessoi*, Herodotus 7.110-111, mentions the *Satrai* as the only example of people who could not be forced to increase the army of Xerxes in 480 BC between the Nestos and the Strymon rivers.[24] We encounter here an essential feature of our documentation: the Thracian peoples are mostly evoked in warlike context. War played a primary role in Thracian societies, as Herodotus stressed it (5.6). War consequently appears to be the best approach to enlighten the history of these societies, through the exchanges and the structural changes alliances and warrior collaborations led to. In the 5th century BC, a very complex geopolitical situation is reflected in the number of the Thracian ethnonyms related to the region of Pangea and its surroundings, as well as in the immense difficulty of localizing these different peoples because of both the lack of the literary testimonies and their apparent inconsistencies, especially that of Herodotus.[25] However, war appears as the essential factor explaining the shifting contours of this tribal geography: the capacity of a chief to gather warriors of his clan, his tribe or the neighboring tribes defined the extent of his power and, subsequently, may have determined the evolution of ethnonymy. In this context, the arrival of the Persians represented a major factor redefining the local powers, as illustrated by the narrative of the king of the *Bisaltai*, who made the eyes of his six sons put out for joining the armies of Xerxes against his will in 480 BC (Herodotus 8.116). Some chiefs may have disappeared from the historical scene, either because they died or took refuge at some height, while others may have emerged or strengthened their power by collaborating with the Persians. Another major factor in the redistribution of power in southwestern Thrace were the conflicts over the mining resources, which were intense in the decades that followed.[26] Whatever happened made the name of the *Satrai* disappear from our documentation while the *Bessoi* started a three centuries withdrawal from the historical scene. But the provisional disappearance of the *Bessoi* is a source effect, considering the

[24] Hdt. 7.110-111; Zanni *et al*. 2007.

[25] See especially Delev 2002 and Zannis 2014, 267-317.

[26] Picard 2000.

privileged relationships established between the Athenians and the *Dioi* during the Peloponnesian war, and probably before as the comparative analysis of the coinages circulating in Thrace shows.

The first known Odrysian coinage (didrachms: fig. 1, drachmas and diobols in the name of Seuthes) cannot be prior to 424 BC, date of the beginning of the reign of 'Seuthes I', and it is even more likely to have been issued by the dynast of the late 5th-early 4th century BC: 'Seuthes II'.[27]



Fig. 1. Silver coin of Seuthes, 8.46 g. (didrachma)
(Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Monnaies, médailles et antiques, Luynes 1807).

Yet Thucydides reports that at the time of the great campaign of 429-428 BC against Chalkidiki and Macedonia - therefore before the first strikes attributable to one or another of these kings - the Odrysian king Sitalkes recruited independent warriors of the Rhodopi against the promise of wages (*misthoi*), which implies that these men had to be paid in money.[28] Thucydides specifies that they were warriors of the *ethnos* of the *Dioi*, like the Thracian mercenaries recruited fifteen years later by the Athenians for the expedition to Sicily in 413 BC.[29] Besides, among those who constituted the immense army of Sitalkes, these warriors seem to have been the only ones recruited that way. This innovation in Thracian practices could therefore also have been an exception. This exception may be due to a local tradition of paying mercenaries with coins dating back to several decades and in which Athens played undoubtedly a determining role.

The Odrysians did not dominate the people from the heights of the Rhodopi, nor those of the Pangean regions.[30] Thus, the recruitments made in

[27] Rufin Solas 2018.
[28] Thucydides 2.96.2: Παρεκάλει δὲ καὶ τῶν ὀρεινῶν Θρᾳκῶν πολλοὺς τῶν αὐτονόμων καὶ μαχαιροφόρων, οἳ Δῖοι καλοῦνται, τὴν Ῥοδόπην οἱ πλεῖστοι οἰκοῦντες: καὶ τοὺς μὲν μισθῷ ἔπειθεν, οἱ δ᾽ ἐθελονταὶ ξυνηκολούθουν.
[29] Thucydides 7.27.1.
[30] Thucydides 2.96.3-4.

these two regions by the Athenians during the Peloponnesian War can be explained by the existence of personal networks, established perhaps by the Thasians who, subjected by Athens in 463 BC, traded in the interior of Thrace, or even directly by Athenians, thanks to an already long history of combats and warlike collaborations in this southwest region of Thrace (as opposed to what Z. Archibald had suggested, explaining these recruitments by their relations with the Odrysians).[31] During the conflicts that led to the departure of the Persians, the Athenians relied in this region on Thracian allies, while other Thracians fought either on their own account, or alongside the king of Macedonia or the Persians. All this draws very complex geopolitics, which makes it difficult to interpret the treasures of silver coins minted in the Pangean region and buried further north after 470 BC, especially those of the Derronians. Whether these coins were struck for the Persians or -most probably- for the Athenians to pay mercenaries, they show that settling military exchanges by currency already was, at the time of Sitalkes, a tradition in which the Athenians largely participated even if the owls (*i.e.* the Athenian coins) did not circulate in the region.

Coins are very sensitive to geopolitical upheavals, which they sometimes help us to measure. Regarding the coins of Thasos, when the city escaped in 412 BC from the Athenian domination, they carried out subtle but very clear modifications of their types, while their area of circulation on the continent was reduced. It was then limited to the Pereus and its borders, whereas before 412 BC it has reached the interior of Thrace, particularly the high Maritsa valley, between Plovdiv and Sofia. Based on such observations, I have suggested a new hypothesis.[32] To maintain themselves in a region highly coveted because of its gold and silver wealth and in which hoplitic armies badly defended themselves against hordes of looters who could surge from the mountains, the Athenians had to rely on the local resources: in the period between 463 BC and the Sicilian disaster, they may have used Thasian coins to recruit in the interior of Thrace and thus contribute to the success of these monetary types in the region, which continued to be used in the form of imitations after 412 BC. The military value of the *Dioi* seems to have been exceptional. But this is not the reason why Sitalkes recruited these warriors giving the promise of wages, especially if we admit that this king did not issue currencies. These men probably demanded to be paid in coins, as they were used to. This would mean that the *Dioi* had previously been recruited as mercenaries by the Athenians, probably for some operations in southwestern Thrace. It is very possible that in 429-428 BC Sitalkes planned to pay these

[31] Archibald 1998, 120.
[32] Rufin Solas 2018.

warriors with Thasian staters supplied by Athens, insofar as the latter had negotiated with him the establishment of this army. These Thasian coins from the period 465-412 BC included didrachms aligned with the Attic standard to pay war and tribute indemnities to Athens (fig. 2).



Fig. 2. Thasian stater, 463-412 BC. Argent, 9.17 g. (didrachma)
(Bibliothèque nationale de France, département Monnaies,
médailles et antiques, AA.GR.10228).

The Thasian staters being taken on the spot by the Athenians, we can hypothesize that they were partially redistributed in the region: the use of the Thasian coinage in Thrace by the Athenians undoubtedly explains why the owls did not circulate there and why the city of Thasos escaped the prohibition, imposed on the allies in 425 BC, to strike coins. It is moreover remarkable that the activity of the Thasian merchants in inner Thrace, attested in the inscription of Pistiros in the 4th century BC, was not accompanied by the circulation of Thasian coins, with the exception of small fractions (hemihekta): the circulation of the staters thus seems linked to war exchanges and particularly suited to warrior wages, at the rate of one drachma per day and per man, more than to trade.

These analyses thus reveal the major role of Athens in the monetarization of the warlike exchanges in the region: the first evidence of a *misthos* paid by an Odrysian king to Thracian warriors, the *Dioi*, is in line with this regional tradition of recruitments initiated by the Athenians with Thasian staters. This not only explains the standard chosen for the coins of Seuthes, but also brings out the warlike uses of abundant coinages exclusively circulating in the interior of Thrace and imitating with a lower weight the Thasian staters to the type of the silenus ravishing a maenad (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Imitation of a Thasian stater (AR, 6.33 g., 19 mm).
(Pecunem, online auction 38, 6/12/2015, lot 95).

Any later specific warrior recruitment of the *Bessoi* before the 2nd century BC would be pure speculation. But the reign of Philip of Macedon initiated a Thracian policy, imitated by Alexander, then by his Hellenistic successors, based on war demonstrations and warlike alliances with local chiefs - with the major exception of the Odrysians.[33] The only fights recorded under the reign of Philip between the Rhodope and the Haimos concern the Thracians whom the Greeks called *Tetrachoritai*: the military operations in the depths of Thrace kept Philip II and his generals busy for years, especially in the late 340s BC, but they did not result in a systematic conquest, by far. The campaigns of Philip V are better documented, especially his great Thracian campaign in 183 BC. Polybius names three Thracian peoples, who were the most powerful at that date: the *Dentheletai*, the *Bessoi* and the Odrysians, with whom the king of Macedon had an alliance before setting out again towards Macedonia by the valley of Strymon, where he founded the city of Perseis west of the river, in Peonia, near Stobi. His action followed the Thracian politics of Philip and Alexander. The same method: the king surges with his armies, assaults some targets aiming at displaying his military power. The same results: the king meets the representatives of the surrounding tribes, including those who had not experienced defeat, all of them seeking for an alliance with the Macedonian. From the Macedonian point of view, the process was a time and effort saver. It significantly increased the strength of the Macedonian war machine and it proved to be significantly more effective than a military conquest - as the difficulties later encountered by the Romans in the region show. From a Thracian point of view, an alliance, even deeply unequal, certainly was the best possible choice for a warrior group like the *Bessoi*.

[33] Rufin Solas 2014; 2016.

Such is the broad historical context in which the name of the *Bessoi* reappeared. Interestingly, it shares common features with the situation of their withdrawal: a geopolitical context favorable to a redistribution of powers due to the intervention of dominant external powers. Whether they were militarily opposed or recruited by external armies, the war was without a doubt for the *Bessoi,* as for the other Thracian groups, an essential aspect of their economy as well as of the structuring of powers. Relations with external armies therefore played a fundamental role in the sustainability of the Thracian and Bessic war structures in particular.

The external character of our documentation (we only rely on Greek and Latin texts), as well as the exaggerated place that modern historiography has given to the Odrysians in the history of ancient Thrace explain the distortions between the representations and the probable realities of a people which was definitely not the backward people described by Strabo. In a different civilizational context, the example of the Xiongnu of Mongolia offers an enlightening parallel, insofar as archeology has revealed a society much more advanced than that described in the Han sources from the neighboring Chinese, who waged difficult battles against them and provided the only literary testimonies.[34] Archaeology should certainly contribute to a better knowledge of the *Bessoi* and the other peoples this name also designnated in pre-Roman time, taking into account the methodological risks linked to the ethnic identification of material remains and based on a re-evaluated historical geography.

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'Thracian' Identities in the time of Rome: Bessi and others

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Abstract: The Bessi and the brutal force that they were often treated with by the Romans provides a very alluring story of the interaction between the Roman administration and local groups during the years when the Roman state was continuously expanding or tried to secure its imperial authority over lands and people. With its turns of barbarity, heroism and mysticism this was a narrative predominated by a mixture of ethnographic, and idealized stereotypes of barbarism. The case of Bessi is illustrative of a historical narrative that revolves around the existence of a homogeneous social group, a tribe which managed to survive through the imperial period due to its martial abilities. The scope of the paper is to discuss some considerations regarding identity issues focusing mostly on the notion of ethnic identity and what it might have meant in the imperial context. Assessing identity of well-known groups like the Bessi entails a number of issues and considerations that must be taken into account. Then what can we say about other, less well known groups of Thracians like for instance the groups of people living on the Aegean shore? Due to lack of credible textual sources, can archaeology (acknowledging all the pitfalls that such a process entails) provide the means to approach and understand different layers of identity of the Thracians living in the lands south of Rhodope?

Key words: Bessi, ethnic identity, archaeology, Aegean Thrace, nested identities

Резюме: Бесите и грубата сила, с които те често са били третирани от римляните, предлагат много примамлива история за взаимодействието между римската администрация и местните групи през годините на непрекъснато разширение на римската държава или при опита ѝ да осигури своята имперска власт над земите и хората. Със своето варварство, героизъм и мистика това е разказ, доминиран от смесица от етнографски и идеализирани стереотипи на варварството. Случаят с бесите е показателен за исторически разказ, който включва хомогенна социална група, племе, което е успяло да оцелее през имперския период поради своите бойни способности. Обхватът на статията е да дискутира някои от въпросите на идентичността, като се фокусира най-вече върху понятието етническа идентичност и какво би могло да означава в имперския контекст. Оценката на идентичността в добре познати групи като тази на бесите води до редица въпроси и мнения, които трябва да бъдат взети под внимание, тогава какво можем да кажем за други, по-малко известни групи траки, като например групите, живеещи на брега на Егейско море? Поради липса на достоверни текстови източници, може ли

археологията (признавайки всички подводни камъни, които един такъв процес съдържа) да осигури средствата за подход и разбиране на различните слоеве на идентичност на траките, живеещи в земите на юг от Родопите?

Bessic narratives and methodological considerations

Now these tribes are very brigandish themselves, but the Bessi,
who inhabit the greater part of the Haemus Mountain,
are called brigands even by the brigands.
(Strabo 7.5.12 Loeb transl.)

Despite their fragmentary character, ancient sources like Strabo provide us with the basic building block for the traditional narrative behind the image of the ancient Bessi.[1] Ferocious among the Thracians, these free-spirited people produced first class foot soldiers[2] who repeatedly – during the late Hellenistic period – clashed with the Roman troops that were situated in Macedonia. From the beginning of the 2nd century BC, the Bessi along with other groups like the Maedi and the Scordisci of Celtic origin posed – with their plundering raids – a constant danger for the stability of the area; a danger that culminated in the great uprising of the years 13-11 BC,[3] when under the leadership of an apocryphal figure, the priest Vologaesus they slayed in battle one of the client kings (Rascuporis) and razed the lands of southern Thrace.[4]

The Bessi and the brute force that they were often treated by the Roman men of power like the praetor of Macedonia Marcus Minicius Rufus or later by M. I. Brutus[5] provide a very compelling story of the interaction

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[1] see especially (for English) Delev 2012, 6, note 2 for earlier bibliography on Bessi; see also Tacheva 1997; Katsarov 1924.

[2] see the description of Caesar for the participation of a Bessic contingent of foot soldiers in the Battle of Pharsalus on the side of Pompeius (Caes. *Civ*. 3.95).

[3] Delev 2012, 14-31.

[4] Cass. Dio 54.34.5: *Vologaesus, a Bessian from Thrace and a priest of the Dionysus worshipped by that people, gained a following by practicing many divinations, and with these adherents revolted. He conquered and killed Rhascuporis, the son of Cotys, and afterwards, thanks to his reputation for supernatural power, he stripped Rhoemetalces, the victim's uncle, of his forces without a battle and compelled him to take flight. In pursuit of him he invaded the Chersonese, where he wrought great havoc* (trans. E. Cary).

[5] There is a long list of Roman praetors like Marcus Terentius Lucullus (73 BC) or Lucius Calpurnius Piso (55 BC), who repeatedly dealt with the Bessic problem. For Marcus Minicius Rufus the earliest known praetor who have faced Bessi see Delev 2012, 16, note 18. His large-scale operations of the year 110 BC earned him a triumph in Rome. Two honorific inscriptions from Europos and Delphi in Greek and Latin

between the Roman administration and local groups during the years that the Roman state was continuously expanding or tried to secure its imperial authority over lands and people. With its turns of barbarity,[6] heroism and mysticism this was a narrative that entailed many literary topoi that they were both admired and despised by the Graeco Roman audience.[7] Similarly, to the description of other ethnic groups like the Gauls or the Germans it is a story predominated by a mixture of ethnographic, and idealized stereotypes of barbarism;[8] barbarism which was thought to be dictated by an environmental determinism.[9] This became the primary tool that the Roman and before them the Greeks used to define the barbarians as the other.[10] In this context ethnic traits, which included physical appearance, social and cultural characteristics were highlighted in order to produce a picture of a distinct singularity: a tribe unique for its martial ability[11] and the close link to the cult of Dionysus.[12]

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mention his victories against the Scordisci and Bessi. The case of Brutus (see the account of Cass. Dio 47.25.1-2) is illustrative for the way the tribe was often treated by Roman administration. It is interesting that the impression someone gains from the account of Brutus involvement with the Bessi is that he fought against them in order to gain the title of *imperator* – so necessary for propagandistic reasons – just before the decisive battle of Philippoi.

[6] Valerius Flaccus *Agr*. 2.231 is characteristic about '*the inhuman troops of Bessi*'.

[7] Cruelty, human sacrifices, drinking out of human skulls, and inhumanity can be found in the description of Florus, in the late 2nd c. CE who summarized the Thracian wars (Flor. *Epitome* 1.39 and *Epitome* 2.27).

[8] see for instance the mystical aura surrounding the name of Bessi that is reflected in the poem that Antipater of Thessaloniki dedicated to L. Calpurnius Piso: '*To you, desploiler of Thracia, Thessalonica, mother of all Macedonia, sends me. I sing of the Ares of the Bessi, subdued beneath you, collecting all that I learned by reading*' (Antipater of Thessalonica 9.428).

[9] McLaughlin 2015, 106-107 about the connection between mountain living and barbarity. See for instance the quote of Strabo (7.5.12 C 318): *The Bessi live in huts and lead a wretched life* (Loeb transl).

[10] About notion of barbarity see Hall 1989; Isaac 2004; Lampinen 2012. See the characteristic quote of Ovidius, *Tristia*.3.10: *Sarmatians fierce nation surrounded by the Bessi and Getae, such names are not worthy of my inspiration*! (transl. by E.S. Kline).

[11] Strabo 7. frag. 47(48): *All these [Thracian] tribes are given to brigandage, but most of all the Bessi* (Loeb transl).

[12] Two elements of this pre-Roman Bessic identity that feature most prominently in the literature are their martial ability and their close connection to the cult of Dionysus, to whom they served possibly as a ritual clan already from the early classical period (Hdt.7.111.1-2). For the cult of Dionysus in Thrace see the recent Guzmán 2018.

It is exactly this mythical allure that surrounded the tribe that earned Bessi a place in the Sebasteion in Aphrodisias[13] among other exotic nations like the Iapodes or the Antizeti who were used as examples of the power of the imperial ideology of assimilation and incorporation. The mural paintings in a large house (conventionally called the 'House of Terpsichore') in Valentia[14] in Hispania, where the female personification of Bessi appear next to other exotic groups like the Indians, indicates not only the wide distribution of these notions of Roman dominance and superiority but also that by the 2nd century AD the Bessi were well established in Roman imagery as the stereotypical idea of the Thracian native.[15]

The story of Bessi though, hides another frequently encountered topos in the process of assimilation of previously hostile or 'bandid people':[16] the transformation of the once fierce opponents of Rome to its faithful soldiers. Textual evidence, coming mostly from epigraphical sources[17] in which soldiers from the auxilia or the navy make up the greater percentage of all known inscriptions erected by the Bessi can be indicative that the tribal name could have become synonymous with military virtues which in themselves was an important source of pride. Although there is no direct evidence that the Romans consciously accepted the concept of martial races,[18] it is difficult not to draw parallels[19] between groups of people like the Bessi and other martial groups in colonial contexts like the Nepalese Gurkas or the Punjabi Sikhs who provided the backbone of the British imperial military and played a vital role in defending and extending colonial authority in India.[20]

This reading of data and the predominance of military context suggests probably that there was a strong military imprint on Bessic society (built upon the prior existence of a warrior culture), which was further promoted in the context of the Roman army.[21] Ideas of Bessic distinctive identity are closely bound together with images of the Bessic male, alternately as a fierce warrior or Roman soldier. Stories of exodus like immigration or deportation (as reflected in the movement of Bessi in the Dobrudzha area)[22] seem to underline the unruly, rebellious character of the group. One result of these

[13] Smith 1988, 66-67, pl. IV.
[14] Hoz 2007.
[15] Smith 1988, 70-77.
[16] McLaughlin 2015, 107.
[17] Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Dumitrache 2012; Dana 2013.
[18] Roymans 2004, 221-234.
[19] Simon 2011, 146.
[20] Rand & Wagner 2012.
[21] Zahariade 2009; Tacheva 1999.
[22] Ovid. *Trist.* 3.10; 5.4. 1.67; see Avram 2007.

theorizations has been the idea that what is reflected in the distinctive appearance of Bessi in the epigraphical record during the imperial period is a continuity of identity from the Classical to Late Roman period.

The case of Bessi is illustrative of a historical narrative (whether in academic accounts or fiction) that presents the recorded in ancient sources or in the epigraphical record tribal names as a clear reflection of a homogeneous social group with dominance over well-defined territories which continued (more or less) to exist after the Roman annexation. The adoption by the provincial administration of the pre-existing tribal organization and the fossilization of hierarchies, land allocations and names are widely believed to be reflected in the catalogue of strategiae of Thrace mentioned in the work of Claudius Ptolemy.[23] The survival of tribal names down to the Early Christian period, as the explicit reference to Bessi by Paulinus of Nola in relation to the missionary action of Nicetas of Remesiana in the late 4th or early 5th century AD[24] demonstrates, furthered the argument of continuity of homogeneous groups.

Nevertheless, rigid theorizations of identity, namely concepts of homogeneous bounded tribal entities and theories of continuity, have been heavily criticized in the context of post-colonial (processual and postprocessual) discourse[25] primarily for their dependence on unreliable sources. It is now widely accepted that what the classical authors reflected in their scripts was nothing, but a partial and fragmented impression of people and lands not very well known.[26] In this narrative context proper use of names, toponyms and designation of areas was often a source of confusion which resulted in misnomers and misinterpretations. It is exactly this ambiguity that appears in sources like Strabo, Ptolemy or Dio Cassius which render an accurate account of Thrace almost impossible[27] and have caused a long debate about the identification and location of the individual tribes.[28] It also should be noted that many of the ancient writers who provided the basis for understanding the socio-cultural geography of pre-roman Thrace were nothing else

[23] Ptol. *Geogr*. 3.11.8-10. For the *strategiae* see Parissaki 2013; 2009; Delev 2009.
[24] Dimitrov 2011; Dumanov 2015.
[25] There is a long list of publications raising criticism about theories of historical continuity. Fenton 2003; Gillet 2002; Chappell 1993; Derks & Roymans 2009.
[26] Hall 1989; Nicolet 1991**.**
[27] P. Delev (2012, 36) presents very eloquently cases of possible misinterpretations in Strabo and Pliny like the possible misnomer that lies behind the reference of Strabo to Pontus which instead of the Black Sea might refer to the river Strumitsa.
[28] The location of στρατηγία Βεσσική (Ptol. *Geogr*. 3.11.6) is one of these cases. A brief summary of the different opinions can be found in Topalilov 2013, 259-258. See also Zahariade 2009, 20.

but epitomizers from late antiquity, by which time the meaning of names and lands had changed considerably. The reference to *Haemimontani* by Ammianus Marcelinus (27.4.11-12) in relation to the events of the subjugation of Bessi by Luculus is illustrative of the problem since the Latinized tribal name is clearly a construct – derivative from the name of the province in the years of Diocletian, almost 200 years after the period when the events took place.[29]

Clearly – as the above example demonstrates – the very nature of literary evidence which is characterized by great inconsistency adds serious limitations on interpretation. As rightfully noticed by P. Delev[30] one of these limitations is the inability to discern the difference between ethnonymic reality that is reflected in the literary sources and ethnic reality. Since there is no way to know whether the names given by the ancient authors are the actual names that people identified themselves with, we can only wonder whether ethnic identity can reliably be deduced from enigmatic textual evidence like the famous passage of Herodotus about the highland sanctuary of Dionysus.[31] Passages as such can create an endless series of unanswered questions. Was Bessi a name belonging to a client tribe of the Satrae or just a name attributed to a ritual clan of priests operating in the famous sanctuary of Dionysus?

The reluctance to answer questions driven solely by the written sources has led to rethinking the evidence and reassessment of grand narratives. One important outcome was that concepts like tribe[32] (as a homogeneous bounded entity) were closely scrutinized in terms of definition and perception. In a recent article T. Moore highlighted the need for detribalizing late Iron Age Britain.[33] Moore comments on the danger to base assumptions on tribal identities centered on classical sources. The ancient sources could tell us interesting things about the stereotypes circulating in the imperial period and about the compiler's agenda but they can hardly be used as precise tools to map local societies. Elements of facts might lie within them

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[29] see also Fest. *Brev*. 9.3-4: *Marcus Lucullus per Thracias cum Bessis primus conflixit. Ipsam caput gentis Thraciam uicit, Eumolpiadam quae nunc Philippopolis dicitur, Haemimontanos subegit…Uscudanam in dicionem nostrum redegit, Cabylen cepit.* [Through Thrace, Marcus Lucullus first clashed with the Bessi. The head of our race conquered Thrace herself. He subjugated the Haemimontani, Eumolpiada – which is now called Philippopolis – , Uscudama – which presently is called Hadrianopolis – he brought under our sway, he took Cabyle (transl. T. M. Banchich and J. A. Meka)].

[30] Delev 2014, 4.

[31] Delev 2012, 6.

[32] Fried 1975.

[33] Moore 2011.

but there is no way to identify them or to know whether they have been correctly placed in sequence. According to this theorization tribe and tribal territories is no more than an external concept quite often based on the attribution of generic titles such as the name Brigantes (Tac. *Agricola* 17.2), which means upland people. Although the tribe is one of the well documented tribes of Roman Britain, as noted by Moore, the name could be nothing else but a generic title attributed to all NW groups. Considerations as such may also apply in the case of Bessi where ethnicity has been largely determined by historical sources that provide contradictory data. One for instance may wonder whether the name Bessi (a possible derivative from the Greek word βήσσα[34] which means generally the highlands) may have been used (or attributed) as a generic name including different tribal subgroups living in the mountains. This interpretation could have explained the reference in the sources of confederation schemes like the *Tetrachoritai*[35] or reference to otherwise unknown groups like the *Sialetai* which followed the Bessi in their raids.[36] By forging a common ethnic category, these highland people could have created a social and political force that had far greater strength and influence than individual tribal units. However, it is difficult not to infer that the idea of Bessi as a homogeneous ethnic group was an external concept which came from the contact with the Greeks and later the Romans.[37]

The other valuable lesson taught by modern social anthropology is that ethnicity is nothing but a fixed set of values and attitudes.[38] Ethnic identity is now understood as flexible and mutable, a set of features which form under specific circumstances and can be manifested in multiple ways. The nature of ethnicity according to Friedman can be understood only in the specific social and historical context in which it was generated.[39] This thesis might be seen in conjunction with research on the ethnicity of ancient people suggesting that fluidity is the basic framework to understand the formation

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[34] Delev 2012, 42, note 74; Sarafov 1974.

[35] Polyaen. strat. 4.4.1. *Tetrachoritae*, a confederacy (as is evident by the name) of people appears in relation to the military activities of Antipater during the 4th century BC. Stephanus Byzantius links the *Tetrachoritae* with the Bessi - see Delev 2012, 10-12, note 9.

[36] Cass. Dio 54.34.6.

[37] Graninger 2015, 27: '*there is no sense that we have recovered anything other than an outsider's perspective on the Bessi*'. See something similar in modern colonial Africa as presented by Worby 1994.

[38] Barth 1969; Chappell 1993; Cornell & Hartmann 1998; Fenton 2003.

[39] Friedman 1992, 837, 841.

of identities.[40] This is best manifested in the work of J. Hall (1998) who – dealing with the 'Dorian invasion' – saw ethnicity as a contingent phenomenon shaped in response to current needs. Being a Bessus might have meant something different around the mid imperial period (when most of the inscriptions date) from what it meant around 15 BC, the years of the great uprising; at any time it could have meant different things to different sorts of people. During the late Hellenistic period notions of ethnicity might have been stimulated by reaction to the expanding policy of the Roman state[41] and rivalry with the pro Roman groups like the Odryssae. Inequalities between the different ethnic groups based on the manner and degree of involvement in the exercise of power might have further fostered collective identity and a sense of 'we-ness' in peripheral groups like the Bessi.[42] In this sense the notion of ethnicity could have become (intentionally or unintentionally) axial to the devices used by the Romans for the annexation and control of the area.

On the other hand, during the imperial period, the projection of ethnic identity can be seen as a direct corollary to imperial aspirations. In colonial contexts groups of people could have manipulated imperial aspirations by constantly redefining their identities.[43] When imperial authorities defined certain identities as more acceptable local groups adopted their identities accordingly. N. Roymans for instance has shown that Batavian identity was the product of imperial aspirations appropriated by the positive reactions of the community itself.[44] According to this model, communities or individuals were not passive in the formation of identities. On the contrary as shown by Nagel[45] 'the construction of ethnicity is an ongoing process that combines the past and the present into building material for new and revitalized identities and groups'. The development of the Bessic identity could have followed the same path: Romans and possibly before them Greeks attributed to these people a set of characteristics like fighting prowess, tenacity, courage, and self-sufficiency.[46] In this way people previously considered as hostile or dangerous could be transformed after their incorporation and

[40] Jones 1997.
[41] See something similar happening to the Lower Rhine area Roymans 2004, 4.
[42] see Woolf 1998 about similar reactions in Gallic societies.
[43] Mattingly 2004.
[44] Roymans 2004; see also Derks 2009, 263-269 about how the label Batavian became synonymous with military values.
[45] Nagel 1996, 19.
[46] Pl. *Leg*. 4.435e, emphasizing the courage (θυμοειδής) of Thracians. Plato believed that Thracian women cultivated the land and raised cattle and sheep, while the men devoted themselves to war, Pl. *Leg*. 7.805.

employment in the army into useful units, fit for commemoration. This is very close to the theory developed by P. Weinreich[47] who claims that ethnic self-identity is not a static process but one that changes and varies according to particular social contexts. If it was the case the Bessi would be a good example of a group reasserting their identity in a new context. Interestingly this identity, as was the case with the auxilia could have been more often expressed outside one's specific region than within.[48]

Another crucial point is that ethnicity must be understood as a consciously manipulated tool. Qualities attached to ethnicity were constantly being negotiated and people could have had several layers of identity. Bessus could have meant one thing in a military context and another (or none) in a political or social context. Heather Streets[49] for instance discussing the social aspects of recruiting martial races in Victorian England has shown that race was flexible and sometimes deceitful with recruits. For example, recruits from the Scottish Lowlands or even the English midlands could be reconstituted as highlanders. The use of the name does not suggest necessarily a rigid ethnic affiliation but rather an association with a name that came to have specific connotations. This may be an alternative explanation behind recorded cases of massive recruitment like the case of the 1000 *iuvenis Bessos* (mentioned in the funerary epigram of S. I. Iulianus) that were sent from Thracia to Mauretania Tingitana[50] to strengthen the local units. Since the real Bessic population group could have been too small[51] to satisfy the demands of recruitment on this scale we can imagine that people from other groups could have been listed as Bessi.

The discussion so far should have raised the issue of the complexity and the problematic assumptions that are underlying any attempt to detect ethnicity in ancient groups. The overriding impression (and the prism through which we should view cases like that of the Bessi) is that there were no rigid boundaries in ethnicity. The ancient sources provide no exhaustive definition of Bessic identity while there were no clear-cut lines between the different groups during the imperial period.

Nonetheless more moderated views of this socio-anthropological stance deserve attention.[52] An alternative twist on the fluidity thesis has been proposed with the suggestion that there are constraints in the fluidity of

[47] Weinreich 1986.
[48] Topalilov 2013, 262.
[49] Streets 2004.
[50] Speidel 1977.
[51] Despite the references in ancient sources of a populous Thrace Hdt. 5.3.1; Strabo 7. frag. 47(48); Pomp. Mela 2.16.
[52] Barth 1969, 25.

identity and that even marginal identities can exert a powerful affective force.[53] For I. Malkin[54] for instance ethnic identity (regardless of its social content) can become primordial if it persists for some centuries and keeps functioning historically. This may include a notion of a homeland, common experiences, collective myths, rituals or ancestry. It is in this light that we can probably understand the reaction and the ferocity of the uprising in 15 - 11 BC. Clearly for the Bessi the link to the cult of Dionysus and to the sacred grounds of the cult was an important qualifying attribute for membership in the group. Thus, when M. Licinius Crassus deprived Bessi from their sanctuary (Cass. Dio 51.25.5) giving it to their enemies, he tried to dissolve a basic element of the identity of the clan and make it difficult for its members to act in concert.

The ways that people perceive their identity are complex. Political and social advantage (as shown by Roymans) are crucial but self-awareness and origins play an equally important role.[55] The reference to ethnic affiliation might reflect many things but foremost the projection of the person itself.[56] The emotional significance attached to a membership in a group is, according to H. Tajfel, a very important constituent of ethnicity.[57] Thus, one cannot ignore the fact that the Bessi provide the most examples of self-identification on tribal term.[58] Even when Roman onomastic conventions are employed[59] the overall message and meaning of epigraphic evidence like the funerary epigram of Caecilius Donatus from Chester[60] with the characteristic formula *natione Bessus*[61] or the military diploma of a Bessus veteran with a wife and five children,[62] all speak to the conception of tribal self-awareness. On the other hand, the possibility of the abstract use of the name as representative

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[53] Graningen 2015, 27.

[54] Malkin 2014, 283.

[55] Knapp 2001; Demetriou 2012; Levine's (1999, 168) working definition can provides us with the theoretical framework: '*Ethnicity is that method of classifying people (both self and other) that uses origin (socially constructed) as its primary reference*'.

[56] Fowler 2004; Hill 1989.

[57] Tajfel 1981.

[58] Zahariade 2009, 72-81, and fig. 10,372.

[59] See for instance RMD IV, 236 where the recipient of this diploma with the characteristic Trajan's gentilicium, Ulpius Valens, son of M[...I us(?), is identified along with his unnamed son as Bessus.

[60] Wright & Richmond 1955, no.66.

[61] Markova 2017.

[62] RMD IV, 235, 461-462. The wife, the name of which has been lost, daughter of Lucozis, is also ethnically identified as Bessae. Of the three sons and two daughters survives only the name Gaius.

of all Thracians[63] and the effect that Roman bureaucratic practices might have had on the choice of ethnic formulas (as indicated by M. Speidel)[64] can be illustrative that the epigraphic record represents only one aspect of an ensemble of practices through which ethnicity could have been manifested.

A last issue to be stressed is the inability to define groups like the Bessi in a nuanced archaeological way. Although many theoretical approaches have largely deconstructed ethnicity as an archaeologically defined concept,[65] issues of ethnicity and identity predominate much of the modern archaeological literature and attempts to correlate material culture assemblages to ethnic groups are omnipresent. Following a cultural – historical approach that originates from the work of G. Childe[66] it is almost an archaeological axiom that if one can determine distinctive culture traits, he/she can inevitably trace ethnic identity. These assumptions lie behind the reading of funerary evidence like the one coming from the burial grounds of the lower flow of Juzna Morava river,[67] where a number of circular and rectangular base *kernoi* have been associated with the presence of Bessi in the imperial period. Originally an archaic form, these *kernoi* continued to be made until at least the mid imperial period exclusively for funerary use. But whether it signaled a Bessic identity or it was simply a localized funerary custom of some Thracian groups can only be guessed.

Despite attempts - as the above mentioned - to correlate archaeological material to specific ethnic groups, archaeology has not yet discovered this 'emblemic style' or 'emblemic objects' (as P. Wiessner (1983) called them in her seminal work about the Kalahari Sans) that can distinguish one Thracian group from another. Based on the existing evidence it appears that there is little evidence to suggest that there were objects or styles actively signaling the Bessic ethnic identity. The task is becoming even more difficult if we try to locate these objects in the material culture of the interconnected world of the Roman empire.

Although the relationship between archaeology and ethnic identity is highly problematic, there is no absolute consensus on the issue. S. Shennan[68]

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[63] Dana 2013, 245-246; Zahariade 2009, 291; contra Topalilov 2013, 261.

[64] Speidel 2017, 41 notices the possible effect of Roman bureaucratic practices that might have dictated the choice of formula.

[65] see an overview in Curta 2014.

[66] Childe 1935.

[67] Bulatović 2015.

[68] Shennan 1989, 18, 20; Jones 1997, 115. The idea is also analyzed in Ian Hodder's theory of entanglement (Hodder 2011, 6-10). In Hodder's view humans and material culture exist in codependent relationship.

for instance developed the idea that specific cultural artefacts can occasionnally serve as indicia of ethnic identity while J. Hall, despite his reservations, seems to agree that material culture can convey some messages about ethnic affiliations. Further expanding this thesis C. Antonaccio[69] stated that ethnicity can be incorporated progressively through an exploration of the performative practices of production, consumption, and presentation of culturally specific objects. The idea that aspects of a person's or groups' identity can be reflected in material culture is thus important because it entails the fact that people can externalize their identity to things which is archaeologically tangible. This notion will be of central importance in the section that follows.

Thracians on the coast: seeking the identity of Thracian groups in the Aegean littoral

Bearing in mind all these caveats and concerns let us consider identity issues in other more 'obscure' (at least in the literary record) groups than the Bessi. The scanty evidence provided by the ancient authors show that by the later Hellenistic period there were still clearly various recognizable groups of non-Greeks inhabiting the area of the littoral (fig. 1); although the reference to some of them like the Bistones (around the lake Bistonis)[70] or the Kikones (around mt Ismaros) is clearly more of an antiquarian character than historical reality.[71] Of the active groups during the republican and imperial period the *Sapaioi*[72] might have covered an extensive area reaching from Nestos to lake Vistonis while to the east of them lay other less known groups like the Korpiloi[73] or the B(r)ennoi along the lower flow of Hebros. Possibly for the early Greek colonists each group was just unintelligible as the other so they were all lumped into one generic racial/ethnic category, the Thracians,[74] which in cases like the use of the term πλησιόχωροι (Diod. Sic. 15.36.3) or πρόσοικοι (Dem. 50.26) was mildly derogatory.[75]

Till recently the archaeology of the area was generally pressed into service of the unavoidable conclusion that Aegean Thrace was significantly Hellenized and that the local groups of people were gradually absorbed or

[69] Antonaccio 2009.
[70] Delev 2014, 15.
[71] Veligianni – Terzi 2004, 14, note 21; Delev 2014, 14-15.
[72] Delev 2014, 416-418.
[73] Parissaki 2018, 16; Delev 2009, 246.
[74] Graninger 2015, 27-30.
[75] Veligianni – Terzi 2004, 15 who sees the term πλησιόχωροι as a generic term for all Thracians living near the Greek cities. Graham 2001, 276-9.

lost.[76] This is what we should expect given the influence that the colonies exercised on a political and cultural level.[77] Anyone who attempts to synthesize the archaeology of the area usually proposes a process of gradual acculturation, interrupted only by conflicts or invasion.[78]

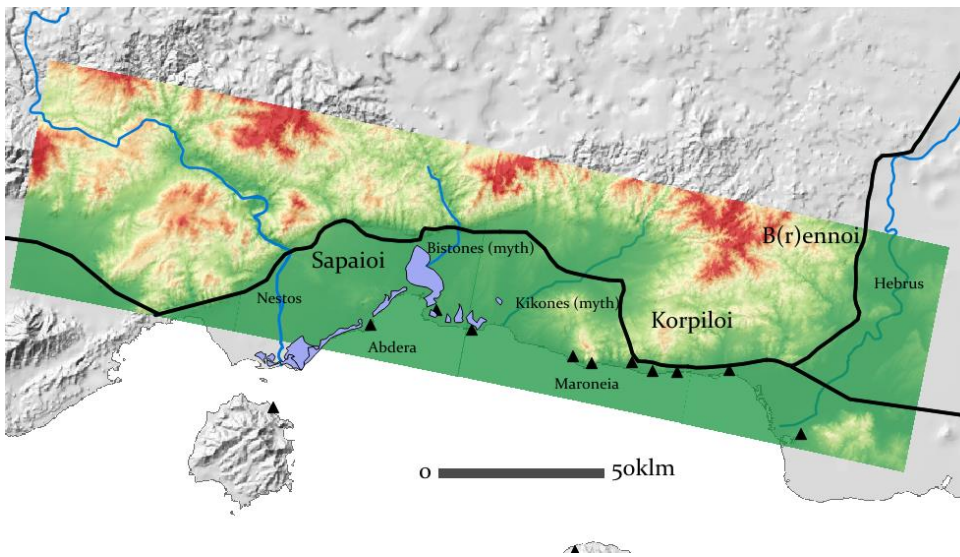


Fig. 1. Greek cities and Thracian tribes in Aegean Thrace (map: V. Evangelidis).

Although the results of the contact between the Greeks and the Thracian tribes of the littoral have not yet been clarified in full detail, the concept of unidirectional Hellenization is now widely recognized as an inadequate and inaccurate representation of the relationship between Greeks and local populations.[79] Socially, culturally and possibly politically it seems to have been a certain form of symbiosis between one and the other. There are however grounds for thinking that as late as the imperial period these local groups retained and shared cultural features which defined a distinctive identity.

This distinctiveness is reflected for instance in the use of names and place names which can be important markers of identity, social norms and ethno-cultural customs that have developed over generations. In this field

[76] Veligianni – Terzi 2004, 15; for a critical view of the theory see Baralis 2008, 114.
[77] Tiverios 2008, 103.
[78] Quintessential in this respect remains the work of D. Samsaris (Samsaris 1980; 1993).
[79] Shepherd 2014, 116.

important work has been done on the corpus of inscriptions from the broader area. This culminated in the publication *Inscriptiones antiquae partis Thraciae quae ad ora maris Aegaei sita est* (IThrAeg) by L. Loukopoulou and other members of NHRF[80] which catalogued all the Greek and Latin inscriptions and the Prosopography and Onomasticon of Aegean Thrace by M.G. Parissaki.[81] What the epigraphical record shows is that although self-ascription with Thracian names is common (quite often mixed with Greek and Roman naming patterns), ethnic or tribal affiliation is rare. Nevertheless, characteristic Thracian names like Teres,[82] Mokaporis or Daroutourmi[83] which are recorded in inscriptions of the imperial period indicate the perseverance of social naming practices, which occur only within a specific ethnic, cultural and spatial context. A rare exception of ethnic affiliation is that of the Sapaians, Hesbenus Dulazeni and his son Doles, the military diploma of whose have been discovered in the ruins of Maximianopolis.[84] It is of importance that the affiliation appears in a military diploma while it remains unknown if the use of the ethnic affiliation would have had the same validity outside the context of the army where skill and martial virtues had a certain cachet.

Like personal names, place names and toponyms can also make out a part of one's identity both as linguistic expressions and as identifiers of the landscape. Toponyms like the Thracian village Mousterdes[85] can highlight ethnicity and can convey values that stake claims to territory through naming processes.[86] For instance, the clearly Thracian names (like Rouptoulos) of the villages around the new urban center of Traianopolis[87] not only indicate the existence of a Thracian rural population substratum but also an important urban – rural dichotomy in naming practices. Interesting is also the use of

[80] Loukopoulou *et al.* 2005 (IThrAeg).
[81] Parissaki 2007.
[82] IThrAeg, 483 (E 384). Interestingly Teres is father of the Greek named Herakleidis, the person who dedicated the decorative column to the characteristic Thracian god Zeus Zibelthiourdos (Διί Ζβελθιούρδω).
[83] IThrAeg, 485 (E 387). Names recorded in the funerary stele of the general Rhoemetalkes that was found in the village Dyme near Komotene.
[84] IThrAeg, 487.
[85] IThrAeg (E 396), 494 for the construction of a monument by Aurelius Kronion, son of Ezvenis in his village Mousterdes or Sterdes.
[86] According to D. W. Meinig (1979, 164) '*Every mature nation has its symbolic landscapes. They are part of the iconography of nationhood, part of the shared set of ideas and memories and feelings which bind a people together*'.
[87] For the Severan inscription of Traianopolis that refers to works of maintenance of the city's road network, allocated among the various phylai see IThrAeg, 535-538, (E 433).

terms like χωρίου Ἐρεσην[ών][88] or ἀγροῦ Σικοτι[νών ?][89] which indicate micro regional (or local) identities. The strong emphasis on local identities that it is often evident in the epigraphical record indicates the high importance of local context in assessing identity issues.

Onomastics are not of course without limitations. One such limitation of name based ethnic classifications is that they do not necessarily correspond to an individual's subjective identification with an ethnic group, especially in contexts of increased ethnic mixing and integration.

On the other hand, archaeological evidence, despite its own issues of interpretation, can provide some complementary perspectives on identity and ethnicity issues.[90] Archaeology may not be able to prove that a specific ethnicity like the Bessic can be represented in the material culture but it can still be possible to show that material culture can have certain features that can demonstrate layers of ethnic identity of the people who produced it.[91] Examining for instance how people dealt with death can be instructive to see how they put their different identities into practice.[92] The tumuli burial custom[93] which continued to be practiced in the area during the imperial period is in its context and form entirely analogous to that employed for centuries in the hinterland.[94] Its popularity and nature are incapable of a satisfactory explanation without invoking issues of identity which is based upon a close connection with tradition.[95] This was bolstered by the discovery

[88] IThrAeg, 481 (E 382).

[89] IThrAeg, 482 (E 383).

[90] Curta 2014; Babić 2005.

[91] New studies (focusing on settlements and material culture) have changed considerably our understanding of Roman Thrace. As well as new finds and sites the archaeology has changed in its interpretations with new emphasis given to local – native see for instance Andrianou 2017; Baralis 2008.

[92] Bartel 1982.

[93] Milisauskas 2002. see also the introduction by S. Alcock in the collective volume Tumulus as Sema (Alcock 2016, 1-8).

[94] For tumuli in Bulgaria see Kitov 2005; For tumuli in Aegean Thrace see Terzopoulou 2013, 99-100; Triantaphyllos & Terzopoulou 1996. More than 150 tumuli (individual mounds) have been found in the prefectures of Hebrus (145), Rhodope - Komotene (48) and Xanthi (53) see Terzopoulou 2013, 102. Most of them date to the imperial period. However, raising a tumulus is not exclusively a Thracian custom. The Greek cities of the area were surrounded by mortuary landscapes consisting of clusters of burial mounds (see Panayotova 2007; Lungu 2007; Kallintzi 2006 for the area of Abdera). Nevertheless, it must be noticed that the custom didn't survive after the Hellenistic period.

[95] About the link between funerary rites and tradition see Bouzek & Domaradzka 2007. In Aegean Thrace some of the most impressive finds have been discovered in

of particular finds like horse burials, wagons or swords which were viewed as markers/features that drew a clear distinctive line between 'Thracian' and 'Greek' practices.

Animal remains for instance can play an active role in the depiction of identity, ethnicity, myth or social organization. The fundamental importance of horses to Thracian cultures is reflected in horse burials, a custom that can be taken as indicative of a particular cultural milieu. In the great tumulus of Doxipara in Northern Hebrus (fig. 2) no less than 15 young horses have been

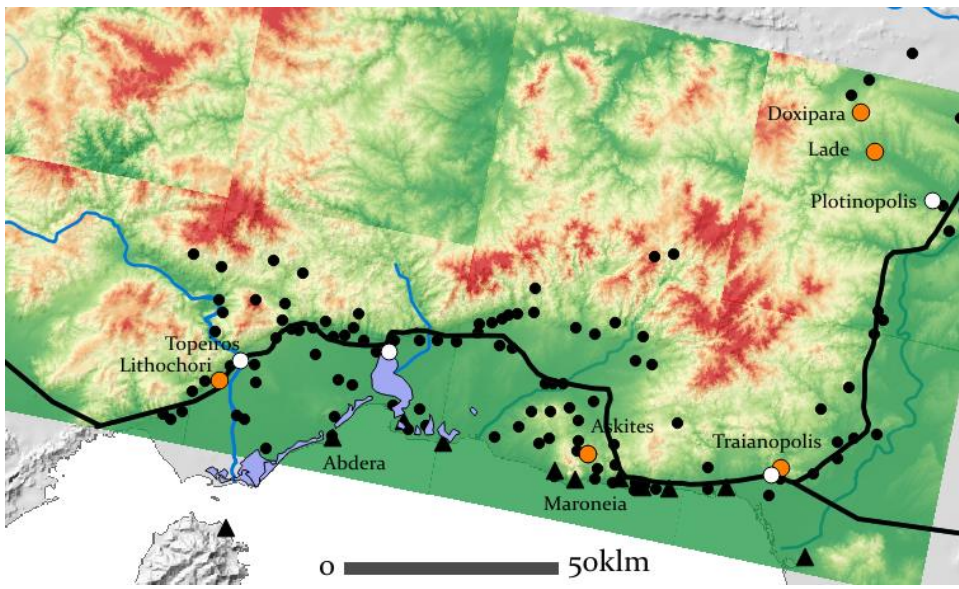


Fig. 2. Roman period sites in Aegean Thrace and sites mentioned in the text (map: V. Evangelidis).

interred in the burial grounds[96] while of the ten large imperial period tumuli that have been discovered in the area of Northern Hebrus, three contain the remains of horses with gear.[97] The burial of (Tumulus B in Lade) an adult horse with its gear (something that would have been expected in a male burial) next to the grave of a small child (3-4 years old)[98] indicates the key roles that these animals played in myth, cosmology and social organization.

deposits for burial tumuli in Hebrus, the most remarkable being the great wagon – cart from Mikri Doxipara (Terzopoulou 2013; Triantaphyllos & Terzopoulou 2003).

[96] Trantalidou 2010.

[97] Terzopoulou 2013, 117-130.

[98] Terzopoulou 2013, 124.

The same can be said for other grave goods like weapons[99] which have been found in many male burials, followed by ceramic, glass vessels and adornments. However, it is likely that all these grave goods had many more connotations besides religion or tradition.[100] C. Fern[101] for instance who has researched the role of the horse in Anglo-Saxon belief and culture proposed that horse culture and funerary ritual cannot simply be considered as a 'passive inheritance' of earlier tradition, but rather as a custom purposefully re-enacted as a means for the creation of social identity. It is in this context that the act of horse burial or the laying of weapons performed a specific communicative function (during the pre-burial rites) which served to create and strengthen allegiances with gender and social rank.[102] By considering horses, swords and elaborate wagons not in isolation or solely as inclusions based on religious belief or ethnic identity but in the wider social context of the Thracian littoral, alternate interpretations can be made focusing on social rank, gender or the military experience.[103] Besides a generic ethnic or racial attribution these finds might have proclaimed particular identities associations within imperial period Thrace. When deployed in public rituals they could have showed links with martial virtues or social status. Someone can also support that what the burial tumuli reflected is simply the representation of the identity of the most prosperous within local groups. These individuals (or their kins) made explicit use of symbolism underscoring mainly their position in the new order rather than ethnicity. These must be seen in terms of inter community competition rather than as an expression of a common Thracian identity.[104]

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[99] Weapons (swords, lances, knives and occasionally shield bosses) have been discovered in different tumuli burials like in Thyrea, Orestiada, Region, Kyane, Lade (Terzopoulou 2013, 338 with bibliography) and Traianopolis (Triantaphyllos 1991a).
[100] Leifsson 2012, 190-191.
[101] Fern 2012.
[102] Lucy 1996.
[103] Terzopoulou (2013, 340) does not see the presence of weapons (which consist only a fraction of the burial good) as an indicator for a military identity for the deceased but rather as items of symbolic importance in a culture that appraised military values. The analysis of the weapons in the tumulus of Doxipara (Terzopoulou 2013, 342-346) has not produced conclusive results about their typology. It seems though that – despite some typological differentiation – they confirm well established styles of Roman weaponry. Unfortunately for the rest of the weapons that have been found in different burial complexes across Aegean Thrace a synthetic study is missing.
[104] Bouzek & Domaradzka 2007.

The burial grounds at Lithochori,[105] a site very close to the new Roman city of Topeiros (fig. 2) is a good example. The small settlement that was discovered during the construction of the modern Egnatia motorway consisted of the remains of what seems to be a peristyle building and an extensive burial ground with a lifespan (interrupted in the Late Hellenistic period) from the 5th century BC to the 3rd century AD. There during the 2nd century AD, a Romanized Sapaian, the remains of whom have not been found, received the rite of a wealthy burial whose grave goods amongst others included, a two-wheeled wagon (along with its horses), which was elaborately decorated with a metal frieze bearing archaizing mythological scenes. A second, partially preserved wagon and two separate horse burials that have been discovered in proximity might have belonged to the same burial context. The deceased was a certain T. Gaius Sitas, the name of whom was found engraved on the boss of a Roman style shield that was found interred with one of the horses. The burial has been interpreted – on a totally speculative basis – as that of a high ranking official (possibly a strategos according to the excavators) of the *strategia Sapaiake*.

Perhaps more interesting than concrete identifications is the possibility provided by such finds to explore the relationship between identities at different scales or nested identities.[106] The selection of grave goods, especially the horse burials and the interment of expensive ritual wagons shows the projection of an identity along traditional lines but at the same time the Roman shield and the elaborate headpiece that decorated the second horse may be testament of an identity strongly connected with the army. Instead of clear reflections of ethnic identity, the burial goods, convey messages about social status, gender, individual past (military service), religion or personal values (virtus).[107]

Based on cases such as the one in Lithochori we are entitled to wonder whether burials can really represent a fundamental advance in detecting the ethnicity of a site's occupants. However, we cannot ignore the fact that they relate to real presence of archaeological material that is difficult to be ignored. The absence of similar finds in the necropoleis of the Greek cities speaks about the existence – well into the imperial period – of some clearly distinguished lines between Thracians and Greeks. Although material culture objects cannot provide a sure guide to the particular ethnic identity of the

[105] Poulios & Mengidis 2007.
[106] See for instance the pioneering work of S. Hakenbeck (2011) on early medieval burial grounds in Bavaria. According to Hakenbeck ethnicity is one element of the nested identities communicated through the material culture of the cemeteries.
[107] Lucy 1996.

people who used them and may not always represent all active identities associated with one individual they can to a certain level reveal hierarchical ranked layers of identity, among which we can class generic ethnic/racial classifications.

Conceptualizing the indigenous cultures through material culture might be difficult but new approaches highlighted new means. Landscape and built environments for instance can also be seen as an externalization of individual and collective identity since they are related to experience and culturally influenced meaning giving processes.[108] The spectrum of cognitions anchored to landscape can include symbolic meanings or memories related to cultural distinctiveness, cultural continuity and social interaction. Landscape can thus become an integral part of identity and can be linked to emotions like pride or ideas of personal belonging or a sense of home.[109]

Elements in the landscape can become identity reference points or what Ray calls cultural markers.[110] Research paid much attention to identifying these cultural markers as a first step to shed light on regional identities. The markers can include ritual sites (like the Thracian open-air sanctuaries for the Hero Equitans),[111] features of the landscape like the tumuli but even habitation sites/settlement patterns like the dispersed native settlements that dotted the foot of the Rhodope mountains. Clusters of houses, extensive burial grounds and tumuli, areas of metallurgic activities and great concentrations of pottery that have been investigated on the lowlands of the foot of the Rhodope (fig. 2) range indicate the existence of dispersed native settlements with an amazing longevity which in some cases goes down to the Byzantine period.[112] They all speak of the existence of rurally orientated communities which continued to live in a largely traditional space. This rural landscape – based on existing evidence – does not seem to

[108] Cifani & Stoddart 2012.

[109] Herb 1999. According to M. de Certeau and S. Rendall (1984) territorialisation enables personal and subjective experiences and to form and connections with that place to develop.

[110] Ray 1998, 3-20.

[111] Triantaphyllos 1991b; 1995/1998; 1997, 373. About the cult of Thracian horseman see Boteva 2011, 85-87.

[112] A very thorough documentation of the rural settlements in the area of Xanthi and ancient Abdera can be found in Kallintzi 2011. As supported recently Tsiafakis & Evangelidis (forthcoming) this was a settlement strategy dictated by environmental parameters like the avoidance of floods, mosquito zones and alluvial soil but also due to the nature of the local economy which was based on low intensity farming and cattle herding.

change radically in the imperial period.[113] Most importantly it is a landscape with distinctive characteristics identifying it from a cultural perspective. Therefore instead of a rational Romanized landscape characterized by villas and organized agricultural activities (an idea that seems to predominate in the archaeological literature), someone travelling along via Egnatia would see a landscape dotted by features that speak of the continued importance of traditional space.

Similarly to landscape, architecture can also be imbued with meanings that can reflect cultural distinctiveness. At Askites[114] (fig. 2) for instance, the mountainous settlement that has been discovered at the south side of the rocky promontory Germi Kaya (near to an important ritual and burial site) consists of an agglomeration of stone built buildings which based on pottery finds are dated to the LH – Roman period. These are rectangular houses each one of which had its own court surrounded by thick walls made by rough stones. The site at Askites in its character, architecture and construction techniques diverges from the usual Greek models and demonstrates that this settlement form, which more often than not is classed as prehistoric was still in use during the imperial period.

Notions of identity could have resulted from interdependencies between physical or manmade landscape, landscape related actions and their evaluative perceptions over time. The (difficult) question that remains to be answered is what such direct or indirect indicia of identity mean in term of self-perception (awareness).[115]

Epilogue

Despite the critique, and the skepticism on part of many scholars, as to whether ethnicity can be recognized in the literary or the archaeological record, the case of Bessi can be very instructive for the methodological problems, the limitations, the uses and abuses that someone can face when assessing ethnic issues in contexts of integration and mixing. A great deal of ink has been used to show how flexible and changeable was ethnic identity and how unreliable the written sources to map ethnicity can be. In particular, those favoring circumstantialism argued that individuals and groups claim

[113] Although a detailed mapping of sites is missing and site classification is not always accurate, it seems that rural sites that can be securely identified as large villas or estates are few see Evangelidis forthcoming.

[114] Triantaphyllos 1978, 307.

[115] Revell 2009, 115: '*we can never get into the minds of the people of the past, so we can never hope to "prove" archaeologically what they actually believed, or how strong that belief was. However, that raises the question of how far the idea of "belief" is appropriate in this context'*.

ethnic or racial identities when these identities are in some way advantageous.

Understanding that ethnic identity is socially constructed is important, but it is not adequate to fully explain the complexities of these affiliations. Experience suggests that old identities exercise a strong impact at a personal level especially when they are interwoven with notions of homeland, religion, language or they are linked with markers like names and traits. The Bessic example supports this volitional aspect of ethnicity but at the same time demonstrates the adaptability to external aspirations. The epigraphical records of the Bessi who served in the imperial army are very interesting in this regard because they show that an individual's affiliation and identity (once it is acquired) is as described by J. Nagel[116] 'a dialectic between internal identification and external ascription'. Although the boundaries shift and the meaning of being a Bessus, might have changed over time a sense of difference from others could have remained.

At the other end of the spectrum the different identities of the indigenous people living on the coast of the Aegean are more difficult to be discerned since the sources give us nothing more than the slightest hint of how these identities came about. Archaeology has not provided evidence yet for separate material groupings which might represent the different tribal units mentioned in the sources. Due to the permeable character of the cultural boundaries between the different groups of people inhabiting the area (e.g. Greeks and Thracians) and the clear existence of an area of 'in-betweenness' that changed according το circumstances, social context, and time period it is difficult to draw conclusions about self-identity or precise ethnic affiliation based on material culture.[117]

What archaeology has managed to show however is the existence of some essential common traits (linked to the arrangement of habitus)[118] in certain aspects of the material culture of the native inhabitants of the coastal area and the foot of Rhodope which survived well into the imperial period. Whether this is an indicator for ethnic, racial or cultural categorization remains open to discussion since we are always in danger of assuming that there was a fixed one to one relationship between particular features of material culture and Thracian identity.[119]

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[116] Nagel 1996, 21.

[117] This process is described as *cultural brocilage* by N. Terrenato 1998.

[118] Bourdieu 1990. Central role in Bourdieu's theory of habitus hold a system of durable, transposable dispositions, which are inculcated into an individual's sense of self at an early age and can be transposed from one context to another.

[119] Ethnographic and ethnoarchaeological research (Hodder 1982) have demonstrated that ethnic identity must be understood as something different to cultural identity.

The imperial period has been largely envisaged as characterized by extensive acculturation (or cultural fusion) among multifarious groups of people, a process in which local identities, traits and features have gradually been substituted by a 'Roman' one. As shown by G. Woolf and D. Mattingly (in order to refer to two of the many scholars that have dealt with the issue) reliance on dualisms (Roman/indigenous), rigid characterizations (Romanized/non Romanized) and grand theories (Romanization – acculturation) can obscure more complicated reactions or paradoxes that have sprung out of the process of the incorporation into the empire. One of these paradoxes according to N. Roymans is that many people continued to be more familiar with a local sense of self perception rather than (what L. Revell calls) a 'sense of Romanness'.[120] In the case of Bessi the survival of their specific ethnic designation well into the imperial period speaks about the continued importance of their local identity. A notion of this identity may not always be manifested in clear ethnic terms but through the traditions, rites, material culture or even the landscape that comprises the habitus. To be a 'Thracian' probably involved a spectrum of identities which included tribal, religious or even local affiliations that could emerge out of an encounter between metropolitan driven processes and local responses.

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[120] For L. Revell (2009, xi) for instance 'Roman' identity is not a fixed entity, but rather '*a discourse of possibilities, that it could have a myriad of potential interpretations*'.

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The Great sanctuary of Dionysos. An attempt of localization in the context of new findings and the information by Pseudo-Aristotle

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Abstract: The present study addresses issues related to the location of the Great Sanctuary of Dionysos, mentioned by Herodotus and several other ancient authors. Their information is related to the campaign of Alexander III the Great and his visit there, as well as the visit of Gaius Octavius, which determined the fate of Emperor Octavian Augustus. In his defense, the author cites a significant megalithic site, very close to the description left by Pseudo-Aristotle about the structure and character of this sanctuary. In the course of the research the meaning of some ethnonyms, such as that of the people of the Satrae, is clarified, as an attempt is made to specify the location of their sub-tribal groups. A new hypothesis has been proposed for a new interpretation of Herodotus' text related to the campaign of the Persian king Xerxes, which mentions the location of Mount Pangaion that is of key importance to the location of the sanctuary of Dionysos and all this in the context of Pliny the Elder's information about this region in southwestern Thrace.

Key words: Dionysos, sanctuary, Pangaion, Satrae, Bessi, Carbilessi

Резюме: Настоящото изследване разглежда въпроси, свързани с местоположението на Голямото светилище на Дионис, споменато от Херодот и още няколко антични автори. Техните сведения са във връзка с похода на Александър III Велики и неговото посещение там, както и с посещението на Гай Октавий, определило съдбата на император Октавиан Август. В своя защита авторът привежда един значим мегалитен обект, твърде близък до описание, оставено от Псевдоаристотел за структурата и характера на това светилище. В хода на изследването е изяснен смисъла на някои етноними, като този на народа на сатрите, както е направен опит за уточняване на местоположението на техните подплеменни групи. Предложена е една нова хипотеза за ново тълкуване на Херодотовия текст, свързан с похода на персийския цар Ксеркс където се упоменава местоположението на планината Пангей, ключова за локализацията на Дионисовото светилище и всичко това в контекста на сведенията на Плиний Стари за този район на Югозападна Тракия.

The beginning of the search for the location of the 'sanctuary of Dionysos' was set in 1870 with Stefan Zahariev's work.[1] His book 'Geographical-historical-statistical description of Tatar-Pazardzhik kaaza' finds an unexpectedly good response. Konstantin Irechek gave a flattering response at that time and recommended it to anyone 'interested in the Illyrian Peninsula'.[2] This is what Prof. Marin Drinov did as well.[3] The authority of the above-mentioned researchers serves as an endorsement to authors such as Karel Shkorpil and Hermengild Shkorpil,[4] who did not actually visit the sites and did not have a better source to trust. S. Zahariev explains that on the highest peak, Gyoz Tepe, there were 'marble buildings lined with mosaic' and other bizarre things that should not belong to anyone else but the Thracians and that this should be the 'oracle' mentioned by the ancient authors. Thus, he made the first steps for the future generations in discussing the almost eternal topic 'The Great Sanctuary of Dionysos'.[5]

Vasil Mikov was the first historian to visit the southwestern Rhodopes for the same purpose. Climbing Videnitsa Peak, he analyzes the visible structures and pottery scattered on the ground; he suggests that this is the renowned large sanctuary, mentioned in the sources, but he recommends that archaeological excavations should prove it. In the course of the accumulated new field research, he offers a new option - this site was situated on the peak 'Enihan Baba' in Prespa Mountain.[6] The same is stated by Pavel Deliradev.[7] The area of this part of the Rhodope Mountains is also visited by Ivan Velkov, who claims: 'At the very top, where stroms are brewing, not much can be seen now, apart from scattered pieces of pottery which speak of a disappeared settlement'. Amazed by the view, however, he added in a wonderful poetic style: 'It is as if nature itself has taken care to descend this peak from the heavens, as if an altar had fallen from the skies, here the spirit is eternally enlightened and free. Only on these steep and high peaks, only here between the freedom-loving Bessi, could such a sanctuary of Dionysos have existed, a sanctuary of a god who moved and excited the human soul'.[8]

What unites the research of the mentioned scientists and the main reason for their conclusions is the expression 'the highest peak', mentioned

[1] Zahariev 1973, 9.
[2] Irechek 1884, 15.
[3] Drinov 1971.
[4] Shkorpil & Shkorpil 1892, 28-29.
[5] Zahariev 1973, 9.
[6] Mikov 1929, 330.
[7] Deliradev 1953, 56.
[8] Velkov 1947, 9.

and repeated in a number of ancient sources: the union with god could take place only from the highest place! Anastas Primovski agrees only with this claim.[9] He does not share the hypotheses of the previous ones and states that the oracle of Dionysos was located near the villages of Bahan and Leshten, in Shishkovtsi mountain range, Mashergidik, located to the north of today's Gara Buk (Paranestion), located in the southern part of the Tisovska Valley. Apart from Bahan's phonetic closeness to Bacchus and the presence of ivy, one of the symbols of Dionysos, he introduces another unknown to the equation, - the route taken by Alexander the Great - a question as difficult as the first one. According to him, this is exactly the route he took - an ancient road coming from Philippi, passing Rafka Boaz pass and starting to ascend from Paranestion to the northeast in the direction of Ustovo.

In more recent times, Tosho Spiridonov presents his hypothesis, again related to the route of the march by locating the sanctuary on Mount Kom, near the present-day village of Arda; he makes the stipulation that this may be only one of the sanctuaries of Dionysos in the Rhodopes.[10] The remains of buildings described by him as sanctuaries are disputed by Rumyana Georgieva, who believes that these are remains of seasonal settlements and cannot be a sanctuary.[11] In what has been said so far, in addition to the 'highest peak', there is also the 'road' - the disputed route of Alexander, the task of locating becomes more and more complicated, and not the other way round. Flavius Arrianus's account is as follows:

'As the spring was approaching (335 BC), he (Alexander) marched towards Thrace, into the lands of the Triballians and Illyrians, because he was certain that these nations planned a change of policy; and at the same time, he thought it inexpedient, when he was about to start on a campaign so far away from his own land, to leave them behind him without being entirely subjugated. Setting out from Amphipolis, he invaded the land of the people who were called independent Thracians, having on his left side the city of Philippi and mount Orbelus. Crossing the river Nessus, they say he arrived at mount Haemus on the tenth day'.[12]

This information, in addition to introducing a new element – 'independent Thracians', also mentions important geographical places that serve as guidelines for the localization of the campaign. It is inseparable from the following information where Alexander again has a key role. It is left to us by Guy Suetonius Tranquillus, who tells us about the delay of Guy Octavian -

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[9] Primovski 1973, 8.
[10] Spiridonov 1992, 10-11.
[11] Georgieva 1983, 77.
[12] Arian. *Anab*. I.1.7-10.

father of Octavian Augustus, to the Senate due to the birth of his son. This happened on September 23, 63 BC:

'... Publius Nigidius, upon hearing the occasion of his coming so late, and the hour of his wife's delivery (of Octavian), declared that the world had got a master. Afterwards, when Octavius, while marching with his army through the wilderness of Thrace, consulted the oracle about his son in Dionysos' forest in a barbarous ritual, he received the same answer from the priests; when they poured wine upon the altar, so prodigious a flame burst out that it ascended above the roof of the temple, and reached up to the heavens; it had never happened to any one but Alexander the Great in his sacrificing at the same altar'.[13]

By adding an 'altar' and fortune-telling with 'wine flames', he says that during his campaign Alexander was there to make sacrifices and receive answers, something he does at other important places of worship, such as Dodona. This choice, and given that we talk about two of the greatest personalities in history, shows how great this sanctuary was for the ancient world.

Everyone involved with history has at least once discussed the topic of the route of the march, or at least has an idea of the complexity of this issue. Different interpretations are possible due to the scarce information given by Flavius Arrianus. Margarita Tacheva, for example, believes that the march passed through the Parilska Saddle on a road that enters today's Nevrokop field from the south, from here along Nestos river, Alexander reached the present town of Yakoruda, and then along Cherna Mesta river went to Sofia field.[14] Apart from the fact that there is no road for an army there, this thesis does not take into account the words 'to the left of Philippi', which is located east of today's city of Drama. Spiridonov's route has already been described, but it offers an impossible route for an army due to the narrow roads and especially the great deleveling. N. Ovcharov's thesis 'Perperikon' considers the possibility that the great general went on the coastal road then to the north-northeast, reaching lands that were ruled by Koilaleti and Asti, but too far from Satrae and Bessi.[15] Also, the necessary height for the 'highest peak' is missing due to the fact that Perperikon is only 470 m above sea level. D. Gergova's thesis that it was on Ostrets peak[16] is only possible if the Satrae lived in a very wide area at the expense of the Bessi which is not easy to accept because of several available Roman military maps where Bessica covers a specific large part of the Western Rhodopes, uniting the previous Zraika and

[13] Suet. *Aug*. 94. 6.
[14] Tacheva 1986, 28
[15] Ovcharov *et al*. 2004, 1-36.
[16] Gergova *et al*. 2011, 184-186.

Atiutika strategies.[17] And yet, so far, the latter thesis has the most grounds for credibility, due to the correct situation of at least one of the tribes, namely that of the Bessi. The hypothesis was first stated by M. Domaradski.[18] The proposed localization competes with a new one, expressed by P. Delev, who believes that the sanctuary was located a little to the east, on Syutkya peak, and in support of this statement is the archaeologically studied sanctuary of Asclepius, near the village of Batkun from the 1st century AD,[19] which has been proven not to have existed in the time of Herodotus. It is worth mentioning a completely new thesis by D. Boteva that the sanctuary was located in Sredna Gora and it was the object of exchange between Bessi and Odrysians.[20] The argument does not take into account one very important fact, namely that in the discussed period these lands already should not have been inhabited by the Bessi due to the expansion of the Odrysian kingdom and their strained relations for this reason.

From what has been said so far, it is clear that the location of this sanctuary is unclear. The problem rests on an insufficient understanding of the character of the tribes, their specific history and political relations. Due to the difficulty of finding their location and possessions, it is necessary to compile a map to arrange them in a clearer way, which would help this or that hypothesis, related to both Alexander's campaign and the location of the Great Pan-Thracian sanctuary of Dionysos. There is no lack of data for this, because we have several fairly reliable transcripts of Roman military maps, as well as written sources related to the military campaign of the Persian king Xerxes in 480 BC. Herodotus mentions the tribes by name: 'And the Thracian tribes through which he passed (Xerxes) are the following: Paitoi, Cicones, Bistones, Sapaioi, Dersaioi, Edonoi, Satrai. Some of them, who live by the sea, followed Xerxes by ships; all the others who live in the interior, and have already been enumerated by me, have been compelled to follow him by land, except the Satrae'.[21] And immediately afterwards he goes on to explain the fortified places of the Pieres tribe: 'His way was here by the fortresses themselves; on the right he left Mount Pangaion, large and high, with gold and silver mines used by the Pieres, Odomantes, and chiefly the Satrae' (fig. 1).[22]

[17] See S. Petrova's article in this volume.
[18] Domaradski 1994, 126-136
[19] Delev 2014, 185.
[20] Boteva 2013, 92.
[21] Hdt. 7. 110.
[22] Hdt. 7. 112.



Fig. 1. Map of tribes' locations, according to the ancient maps and historical sources (author: T. Uzunov, 2007).

In the straits of the former Chersonese, Xerxes rebuilt a pontoon (the first was destroyed by a storm) and entered the territory of Southeastern Thrace, passing through the lands of the Apsinthi and the Paitoi. He led a huge army. The local Thracians probably followed him for some payment, which they did in many foreign military campaigns. Thus, he untroubled crossed the Korpilski Straits (a passage between the Ovcharitsa and Peperuda mountains) where Ciconesi and Korpili lived and entered the lands of the Sapaioi. On the north side are the foothills of today's Rhodopes, but once, at least according to Appian, who described in detail the march of Rascouporis in the service of the Republicans Brutus and Cassius, this part of the mountain was called Sapaean Mountain.[23] To the west it reaches the Sapaean Straits, according to the same author, which are a passage at the narrowest point between it and Mount Presian (Chal dag). Xerxes passed by Lake

[23] App. *Civ.* 4.13. 105; Dermendzhiev 2015, 29-44.

Biston, where the Bistoni lived, and crossed the delta of Nestos River (Mesta), heading for Acontisma, a narrow passage between the sea and Mount Presian, on the eastern side of which the Dersaioi lived. Thus, he entered the lands of the Edonians, and from the northern side appeared Balakro mountain (in Greek today it is called Falakro). From the right to the northwest, according to Herodotus, lived the Pieres, the Odomantes and the Satrae. The heights there revealed Cherna gora, a small subdivision of Slavyanka mountain cluster (Ali botush, Kitka). This mountain is mentioned on several maps as Orbeli. It and Balakro together, seen from the field, create the impression of the 'high snow peaks' of the Rhodopes. Slavyanka connects with Balakro through the mountain Cherna gora, which has as its southern part the mountain Zmiyanitsa. Zmiyanitsa, Cherna gora and Balakro are a natural barrier to enter the territory of the Satrae, which creates the image of the unconquered and 'independent Thracians'. This is where the problem arises! Why does Herodotus point to Pangaion on the right side of Xerxes and at the same time talk about gold and silver mines, Odomanti, Pieres and Satrae if it was to his left? Today's Pangaion (Kushnitsa) is a coastal, narrow mountain, south of the main route to Amphipolis and Aeon, which is by no means famous for the resources mentioned in the text. It is too far to the southeast to be a source of livelihood for the three above-mentioned mountain tribes located far and northwest of it. The field to the north of it was Edonian territory, as the author rightly mentions, and crossing it for mining is more than illogical, even impossible.

Data from the late Ottoman-Turkish period for metal mining refer to Cherna gora and its center - Gorno Brodi.[24] Due to some generalized inscriptions on maps indicating the Rhodopes and the whole mountain range, north of the coast under the common name Pangaion,[25] which many scholars consider profane, there is one possibility - it should be a generalized name of the mountain range from Orbeli to Balakro, at least until trade relations have entered such a phase that there is a need for specific mention of each small subdivision - names which they undoubtedly had for the local population. Subsequently, Pangaion[26] as a name remained only for the first mountain, visible from the sea, on the Aegean coast, and all the others were already legitimized with the familiar names Orbeli, Balakro, Sapeyska mountain and

[24] Bazhdarov 1929, 7-8.

[25] Ortelij 1585.

[26] Pangaion (Kushnitsa), together with Presian (Chal dag) are today geographically considered to be the last part of Mount Balakro, which is a prerequisite for their identification with each other in antiquity under the name Pangeus mont - Otelij 1585.

Rhodope. In this case, Herodotus is right when he points out that Croesus passed by the fortresses of the Pieres because they lived in the semi-mountainous region of Zmiyanitsa and Cherna gora, and below Pangaion in this case should be considered the massif to the north, not today's Pangaion mountain to the south, which is not famous for gold and silver mines unlike the first northern arm of Chalcidice. Purely in terms of geography, it is still a subdivision of Mount Balakro. This makes logical the story of Pliny the Elder, who at a later stage, describing in detail the tribes in the inner region of the Seletica strategy, mentions a mountain with this name there, and he definitely does not refer to today's Pangaion/Kushnitsa mountain on the Aegean coast. The accuracy of such naming, both in a historical source and on a geographical map, is directly related to the author's knowledge, as well as his specific historical interest. The same could be related to the generalization of tribal groups into a common one, until the interest deepens and there is a need to differentiate them. Thus, the well-known Satrae, for the convenience of some of the researchers, are put in the population of Bessi, and there are also attempts in the opposite direction, depending on the convenience to defend one or another hypothesis about the location of the Great Sanctuary of Dionysos. This is a key aspect in a text again by Herodotus, that says:

'The Satrae, as far as we know, have not yet been conquered by anyone; only they of all Thracians have retained their freedom to this day, because they live in high mountains covered with various forests and snow, and are warlike. They rule the oracle of Dionysos, which is located in the highest mountain; the prophets are the Bessi, a tribe from the Satrae; there is a priestess who gives the answers, as in Delphi; there is nothing else special here'.[27]

The expression 'a tribe from the Satrae' gives reason for many to identify for convenience the two tribes in both directions. But we must assume that this is the result of the same rule discussed above with regard to the names of the mountains. These two tribes have been described thoroughly in different military campaigns, therefore they cannot be considered identical. The administrative unit of Bessica from the Roman era is so large as an area that it cannot be part of territory of the Satrae, but rather the opposite. The logical conclusion is that they are neighboring tribes, apparently too close in religious and cultural terms. Both tribal groups can be said to have had a more complex composition and consisted of sub-tribal groups, with separate names from the common ones, separated within the boundaries of interfluves and watersheds.

[27] Hdt. 7.111.

We have to summarize what has been said so far, related to the tribes and the campaign of Alexander. D. Cheshmedzhiev[28] accepts the opinion of the German military historian Lt.Col. Count M. York von Wartenburg,[29] supported by G. Katsarov.[30] Based on what Flavius Arrianus mentions and his own research as a military officer, he believes that Alexander headed east, crossing Nestos delta (Mesta), and then turned north-northwest along its bed, thus entering Nevrokopsko field - at that time lands of the Satrae. Then, up a completely surmountable slope, he went northeast to the present-day region of Satovcha and from there went through the long pass to today's Batak, Peshtera and Plovdiv (Philippopolis). Sections of this road are well described by S. Petrova in her study of the Roman road network,[31] which, according to her, inherited an existing, older road network from the Thracian times. Late confirmations of this route can be found only in the Turkish archives where Satovcha is called – 'Sadoviche and derbent', i.e., a point that served as a pass to the 'Great Pass'.[32] Here I will make a necessary addition to the question: why did Alexander set out to cross Nestos Delta to the east and not take the route through Rafka Boaz pass, which passes between the last section of Balakro - Golumbar and the Presian Mountains? The route would have shorten the army's path by a day. The reason for this is the season of the march. In the spring, the waters of the Nestos are so high that crossing in this narrow section was impossible. It is no coincidence that the river there was called Hermos. Thus, bypassing Sapaean Straits, he entered the former Tisovska Valley, which in this era was probably inhabited by a sub-tribal group of the Satrae, and crossing the river again in a convenient section (which is also the route of today's modern road) headed for the Nevrokop field. The deleveling to Satovcha is only 300 m. It is fair to consider an alternative route: being in the Tisovska valley, he could have taken a direct route to the north, through today's Elatiya - Buynovo plateau and from there to Kemera (Borino), but in this season this was completely impossible, and if we add the huge deleveling of 1,200 m to Kainchal Peak (1815 m above sea level), it is unthinkable.

As for the tribal location, the route through the Field of Nevrokop was the most convenient also because the Satrae participated in Philip's paid campaigns, and accompanied Alexander as guards to India and Babylon, which is described in detail by Quintus Curtius Rufus, Plutarch and Titus

[28] Cheshmedzhiev 2001, 69.
[29] von Wartenburg 1897. Translated in Bulgarian by Katsarov 1899, 1134.
[30] Katsarov 1905, 129, 5; 1909, 469.
[31] Petrova 2018, 45.
[32] Popov 2010, 246.

Livius.[33] This is also supported by the many silver Alexander tetradrachms found in burials in the area, which due to their high value cannot be interpreted as a sign of trade relations. Only they could be intermediaries with the Bessi for the crossing of the 'Great Pass', because the former held the gates and the latter - the road. Of course, this must have been done for a fee and with due respect. Such a thesis is supported by the lack of any information about military conflicts with the two tribal groups. If Alexander III stopped by to make a gift and to have his future predicted, then the sanctuary of Dionysos, described by Herodotus, should be sought somewhere there, at the edge of the field and the first mountain ranges.[34]

If we look for the boundary between Satrae and Bessi, it is exactly there. This is evidenced by the presence of dozens of tribal necropolises, in some of which weapons and burial inventory typical of the Satrae were found.[35] All the artifacts directly speak of trade, social and military contacts with the Macedonian kingdom. Probably the territories of the Bessi, in their southernmost point, started on the ridge of the mountainous area Beslet, in the direction of Videnitsa peak, as the former Dospat valley was their possession – more specifically it belonged to the Diobessi (fig. 2).

In addition to the familiar geographical concepts, the map indicates the location of five significant sites - probably sanctuaries of a local nature. This means that whichever of them was a candidate for the 'Great Sanctuary' mentioned by Herodotus, the others functioned in parallel with it as local ones. Such a thesis is perfectly acceptable, because the tribes with their many centers, later divided into strategies, certainly had their local sanctuaries, like the great monasteries today. Such would be those in Seletika, Atiutika, Zraika,[36] or in Benika, Sapaika, Korpilika and Koylaletika. But let's look at those of the Satrae.

On the far right is the already mentioned Videnitsa peak, on which, unfortunately, no real archaeological excavations have been made to this day.

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[33] Curt. Ruf. 8.5; Liv. 31.39; Plut. *Aem. Paul*. 18. 3; Katsarov & Dechev 1949, 228.

[34] If we take a historical retrospective, we will see that this geographical area (today's Nevrokop field) was strategically important in all known times. The chain of mountains from the south has created a sense of security since the time of the Eneolithic. In the Mycenaean era there was an increased influence of this culture along Mesta, to the present day Razlog field. At the end of the Early Iron Age it was the territory of the 'independent Thracians', and during the Roman era it was a separate administrative unit - the Seletica strategy. Immediately after the campaign of Kavhan Isbul in 837 it was annexed to Bulgaria at that time, and in the Ottoman-Turkish period it was a separate kaaza.

[35] Stoyanova-Serafimova 1975, 41-50; Gergova 1981, 26; Gergova & Kulov 1982, 33.

[36] See S. Petrova's article in this volume.

To the west of it, just above Rata River (Harpezos), there is an equally impressive site – Visoka mogilitsa, which I visited in 1997. On its top there are remnants of an architectural plan, unfortunately ruined by actions of the Bulgarian Army, which cleared the area in order to make a radio relay station due to the convenient height. For this reason, the place was inaccessible for a long time. The building material (stones - dry masonry) was reused for the construction of a huge protective wall on the north side of the site.

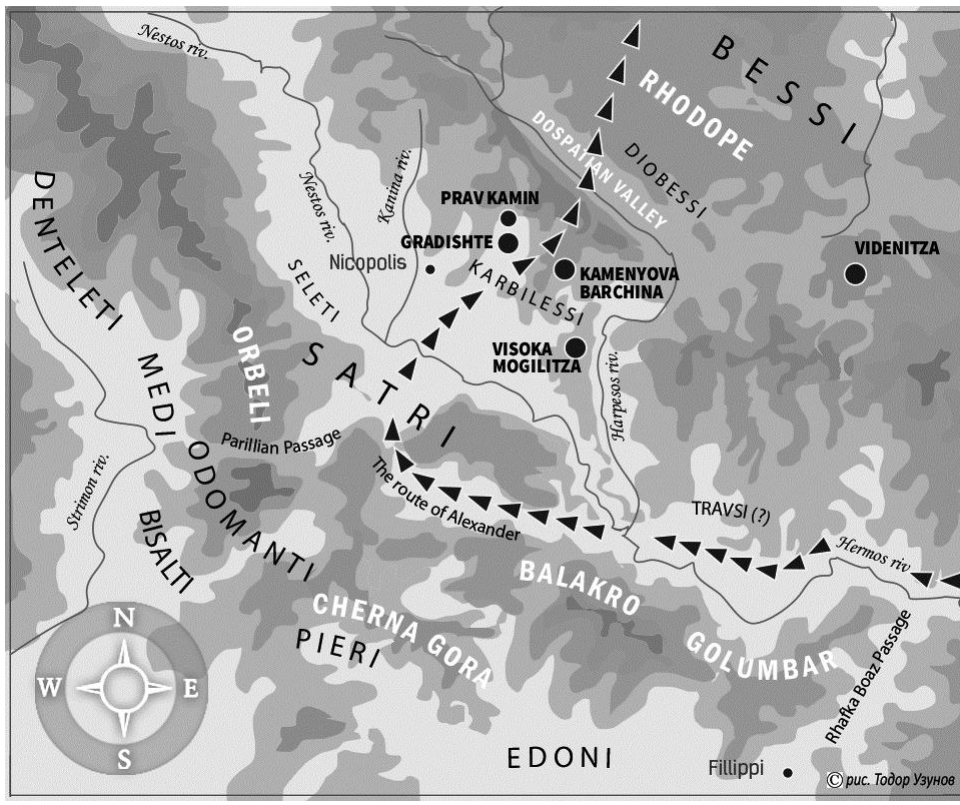


Fig. 2. Map with location of the tribes and toponymy of the region; the route of Alexander's campaign; location of the discussed sites.

Fifteen km to the west of it in Sivek locality, Satovcha, there is another site – Kamenyova barchina. It was registered and described in regular archaeological research by M. Domaradski and studied by D. Gergova with the participation of the archaeologists I. Kulov and M. Grebska.[37] It is located near the mound necropolises dating from the 3rd to the 2nd century BC. It is

[37] Gergova 1981, 26.

a large stone circle, which has its parallel in the area 'Babata', Velingrad region. M. Domaradski's opinion is that it is either a sanctuary or a place where cremations were performed. The site was later visited by Al. Fol.

Another 15 km to the west is the rock complex 'Gradishte', archaeologically studied by A. Bozhkova.[38] To the north of the line thus outlined, along the heights of Beslet ridge, with a view to the south, there are several smaller rock cult sites, registered and described in detail by V. Markov. They are Vishteritsa, Kayaliyskite skali, Kara kaya, Vratata and Pobit kamak.[39] They are all different in their purposes, scattered at almost equal distances from each other, creating the feeling of a cult area that we can call the 'Holy Mountain' of the megaliths. As a necessary deviation, it can be said that regardless of their different altitudes, all of them have equally striking natural landscapes around (fig. 3).



Fig. 3. Videnitsa Peak (Gyoz Tepe) (Photo: T. Uzunov).

[38] Bozhkova & Todorova 2012, 147.
[39] Markov 2007, 130.

Videnitsa is an impressive peak with a suitable location, but the problem with it is the lack of information. The revealed buildings with a southern location can easily belong to temporary settlements or those from the end of the Bronze and Early Iron Ages. The lack of information in this case becomes 'evidence', because in 42 BC, to the south of it, going around Kainchal Peak, passed the campaign of Rascouporis and Lucius Bibulus, described in detail by Appian. If it was the sanctuary cherished by the Sapaioi, Appian would have never missed to describe it as a landmark! The same applies to Visoka mogilitsa (fig. 4). The march of the Roman detachment turned 15 km to the east of it along the left bank of Harpezos river (Rata) and would have certainly been mentioned. The peak is dotted with rich burials, rock tombs and remains of settlement life - unfortunately completely unexplored to this day.



Fig. 4. High mound (Photo: T. Uzunov).

Kamenyova barchina, 15 km on the west, still remains with an unclear purpose similar to the site in 'Babata' locality, Velingrad region. It is completely admissible that both cases this is a fence of a mound; in the first case an

embankment was made, in the second, in Babata, only a stone circle, i.e., surrounding of a sacred space.[40] They are round in shape, similarly to the - altar that is sought, but the 'altar' is missing.

The sanctuary Gradishte is a rock ridge with weathered stone blocks with peculiar shapes; some of them create a profile of a colossal human head, recognizable as such from a certain visual point (fig. 5). Apparently, it is a natural phenomenon, without any human intervention in its formation or imitation. A clay eschara has been discovered in the middle of the rock massif, which indisputably for the sites listed so far, speaks about the function of the site as a sanctuary. The ridge is situated from north to south and overlooks the small Bukurovska valley. On the northwest side of the complex there is a Thracian necropolis from the Early Iron Age, recklessly and criminally ruined by modern research on stone mining.



Fig. 5. Thracian sanctuary 'Gradishte', Dolno Dryanovo (Photo: T. Uzunov).

[40] The meaning of enclosing a sacred space, by means of stones and water rituals, is to pray for a certain area where the burial should take place, without this being considered to pollute Semela-Zemel. This explains the isolation of the corpse with stones at cyst graves or the placing of the dust in an urn. It also clarifies the need for re-ossification, because only the flesh was considered unclean. Probably this is the reason for choosing such natural stone sites for places of worship (An)(Ru 2008, 95.)

In 2007, on the north of the crest of Gradishte before conducting archaeological surveys here, I found another little object, which in my opinion was an integral part of the sanctuary, but today is separated by the modern road that crosses the ridge. It gives the place the same name, Prav kamin. It is a round, natural stone platform, at the eastern end of which an adjacent dolmen-like facility is situated. Its entrance is limited on the left and on the right by huge, again natural, stone blocks, which organize a kind of path - a passage. It is very logical to conclude that it is the entrance to the facility. Climbing it and passing (penetrating) through the entrance, you come out on the stone platform, at the northern end of which is a flat stone block facing east, with a height of 4.50 m and a base of 4 m (fig. 6).

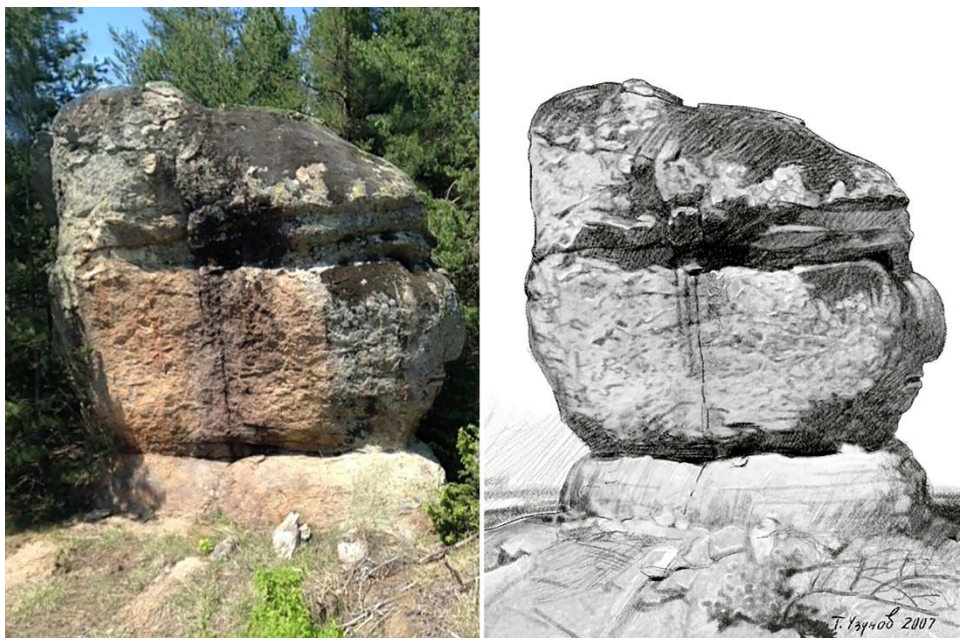


Fig. 6. 'Prav kamin'. Photography and drawings - T. Uzunov, 2007.

It immediately makes an impression that it is not a natural phenomenon, but it is set in a pre-prepared hole with collective efforts. The block itself is sculpted in the shape of a human head, resembling a nose, mouth, eyes and a Phrygian-type hat.[41] At the base a pedestal is formed, resembling a neck. At a height of 70 cm from the base of the block, huge burns and a very

[41] The original height of the block was about 5.50 m; 1 m long piece has been broken off and fallen on the right, behind the obelisk itself. Probably it served as an element of the shape of the corbylos of the hat.

visible temperature crack can be seen. In the middle of the stone walkway is a fallen, rounded stone, which was apparently in an upright position. The pottery found at the site corresponds to the results of archaeological research in the area, published in the period 1981-2012.[42]

Of particular importance is the understanding of this site in the context of the information by ancient authors. And here is the place to emphasize the great efforts of the prominent Bulgarian thracologist Prof. Alexander Fol for the localization of the Dionysian oracle, which is his personal passion and the subject of many years of research. Dealing in detail with the political organization of the so-called Pangaion-Rhodope region of southwestern Thrace, he is of the opinion that this sanctuary should be sought in the Southwestern Rhodopes![43] In defense of his thesis, he cites a new piece of information attributed to Aristotle, entitled 'On the Heard Miracles'. Due to doubts about the authorship, it is defined as information by Pseudo-Aristotle. Here is what it says:

'It is said that in Crestonia, near the lands of the Bisalti, the captured rabbits have two livers, and that there is **a place there, one pletar long** (about 33 m), in which whatever animal **enters, it** dies. **They also have a large and beautiful sanctuary of Dionysos**, where, they say, the **feast of sacrifice** was held. When god intends to give a fertile year, a great light of fire appears and this is seen by all who dwell around the sanctuary. If god decides to send a barren year, this light does not appear, and darkness covers the place, as in other nights'.[44]

The place described above (Prav kamin) is exactly 33 m long axiometrically. It has a round stone platform, which is natural and only in its southwestern part it is likely that the blocks are arranged. If the rounded block in the middle, now toppled, was upright, we would certainly consider it important or even - omphalos. The road to the entrance and the passage are important for this site, but the spectacular element in this case is the huge, upright altar. Due to its resemblance, it probably repeats *The head* - a natural phenomenon from the sanctuary Gradishte and definitely personifies the main deity, which makes it the only deliberately sculpted megalithic altar in Thrace. 70 cm burns from the base upwards indicate its use as an aid facility - an altar. The information by the ancient author describes the situation correctly, separating the mentioned site from the sanctuary, as the current location - the altar and the platform are located 200 m away and high

[42] It is from the Late Eneolithic, Bronze Age, Early Iron Age, Hellenistic period, and Late Antiquity, respectively – Gergova 1981, 26; Bozhkova & Todorova 2012, 14.
[43] Fol 1989, 71-80.
[44] Fol 1989, 73-74.

above the sanctuary. At the beginning, I defined this site as a place for purification, but probably its main function was a place for rituals based on prophecies, inaccessible by the uninitiated. The entrance corresponds to the expression 'whatever animal enters', and 'dies' in the spirit of 'the miracles' can easily mean the ongoing transformation - change: people still use such places to treat various diseases and ailments, believing that the stone 'takes their pain', or they 'leave it there'.[45] It is now located in a young pine forest, but once these and the surrounding hills were completely planted with vineyards. If this is a matter of tradition, then we can accept the information of ancient authors about the burning of wine vapor as completely reliable. Although it is not necessary, when trying to locate the Great Sanctuary, it is good to keep in mind the absence or presence of vineyards which are directly related to the rituals of Dionysos feasts, something that would definitely be missing in the interior of the mountain.

The text gives us another key piece of information about the festival, unnoticed so far by Bulgarian science due to the lack of sufficient clarity about the translation and meaning of the word 'Satri'. The oversight comes from a repeated interpretation of Hecataeus, retransmitted by St. Byzantios and Herodian, who derived by pure analogy the word *Satri* (Satroken-te/Satri/Satrae/Σάτροι) from *satyr*. This suggests that the language Hecataeus spoke did not have a direct translation of the word. And it, Sāttra (**सत्त्र**)[46] is a word from Sanskrit and is associated with the performance of sacrifices. In this case, what we adopted as an ethnonym is actually a definition - a nickname, for a group of people who at that time had a **sacrifice day**.[47] There

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[45] As such, the site in the Skribina locality, a few kilometers east of 'Prav kanin', is still used today. One of the explanations for the attenuation of these functions is the change in the religion of the people nearby and the struggle of Islam with these practices, especially related to wine. In addition, the people who settled in the nearby village of Dolno Dryanovo are not local, but people displaced by force from the village of Bukorovo, probably at the end of the First Bulgarian State, when the latter ceased to exist.

[46] 'Sattra n. 'session', a great Soma sacrifice (lasting accord to some, from 13 to 100 days and performed by many officiating Brāhmans), Monier-Williams 1998, 1138; Shiv Ram Apte 1991, 1063.

[47] In this region (Nevrokopsko field) to this day similar animal sacrifices are performed, the most striking being that dedicated to St. Elijah (most of the high holy places today are named Ilinden, associating the saint with thunders). As a sign of significance, it was on this day that the uprising of the same name was planned - the Ilinden-Preobrazhensko uprising. The second such holiday is St. George's Day. Satrism as an ethical issue is preserved in Nepal today, where on a certain day, a number of sacrificial animals are offered in honor of the goddess Gadhimai.

could be at least two possible reasons for this designation. The first and more realistic is related to the arrival of the Persians in southwestern Thrace in 492 BC in several successive military campaigns led by Megabazus, Mardonius and Xerxes. This is a considerable period of military and cultural influence, which inevitably has left its mark on toponymy, means of payment and on some personal names known to us as Saratok. It is important to note that the 'ethnonym' Satrae came to Herodotus through Hecataeus (who was the first to make an attempt at the etymology of the word), who accompanied the retinue of Darius the Great through Odrysian Thrace in the march to the Scythians in 513 BC.

The second possibility is the arrival in the region of Macedonia and Chalcidice, in a pre-Darian period, of peoples condemning the sacrifices, as a clear sign of their social and cultural supremacy. These could be our well-known people with necropolises from Trebenishte and Sindos, and it is clear to the former that they were expelled during migratory movements from the Peloponnese. Let's say that with the disappearance of this 'religious conflict', the notion of the Satrae became meaningless, and later they disappeared from the historical chronicles with this name. The issue of the clash of Orphism with the old orgiastic cults, such as that of Dionysos, is well traced and logically understood by Al. Fol,[48] but this thesis is uncertain because it cannot explain the Sanskrit origin of the word, which is of key importance in this matter. Giving a role of the Bisaltai, who inhabited the lands northeast of Crestonia, is definitely arbitrary and only shows the direction to the mountain tribes, known by another definition - Orbilesi. The information certainly does not belong to Aristotle, because he was born in Stagira, (Chalcidice), on the Gulf of Orfano and would not have made such a mistake; his involvement as a local should have served as a guarantee for the authenticity of this story. But it already, ironically, turns out to be true!

The 'disappearance' of the Satrae, the owners of the sanctuary,[49] from the annals is not a historical moment directly related to the Roman punitive or conquest campaigns against them, but to the exploration of this inland region and the people living in it. Thus, according to Pliny the Elder,[50] the Haleti (Seleti/Sialeti) appear on the historical stage, occupying the lands on the west of the middle course of Mesta River. They had their share of the regional economy by managing the very important Paril Pass, directly connecting the region of Macedonia with the Nevrokop field and Inner Thrace.

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[48] Fol 1972, 42.

[49] Hdt. 7.111.

[50] Plin. 4.40: '... ad Mestum amnem ima Pangaei montis ambientem inter Haletos, Diobessos, Carbilesos, inde Brisas, Sapaeos, Odomantos'.

East of the river, at the foot of Dospati, were the Carbilesi, who controlled the entrance to the Great Rhodope Pass. This assumption is convincing because it is explained by the meaning of the ethnonym itself – 'Carbilesi'. It comes from the characteristic protective armament of these people - the bronze helmet with kirbazia (Κόρβιλος),[51] a shape we also see in the stone altar.

To the south of them, along the river Nestos/Mesta and after the confluence of Rata/Harpezos in it, where it takes the name Hermos, a new valley with rich trade glory is formed. It also has its approaches to the interior of the mountain, but definitely of seasonal nature due to its difficult terrain with large deleveling. Although Pliny mentions the Odomantioi, who were supposed to be Orbilesi and tribes behind the Pieres, referring to Herodotus' early information about the Trausi along Lower Mesta and their customs of celebrating birth and death, I would suggest this place belonged to them. It is detached and has a direct exit through the Sapaean Straits to the mouth of the river at the Aegean coast where the Dersaei had their territory and justifies the information about them, according to Herodotus, who placed them along the lower reaches of Mesta. According to this new idea of the location of the tribes, now even for us the concept of Satrae becomes unnecessary because we already know them by name. Thus, Alexander set out from the Edonian lands, passing Philippi on his way to the Acontisma Pass and Nestos Delta, with Orbeli on his left. Crossing the river, he entered the lands of the Bysaltae, the Trausi (?), the Haleti, and the Carbilesi, and was met in the Dospat Valley by the Diobessi, probably the first Bessi tribe to escort and guard the pass to Pistiros or Philippopolis with Genevra as an intermediate station. These socio-political relations, dependent on economic benefits, between Satrae and Bessi, have their natural end in religious partnership as hosts and fortune tellers in a common sanctuary. The movement of goods and people to Inner Thrace led to the emergence of many megalithic sites in the vicinity of the Great Sanctuary as a means of additional income from gifts for a successful journey and trade. This created an understandable envy among the Sapaei, the eastern neighbors of the Satrae. As a necessary note, it should be mentioned that if the Sapaei from the Sapaei Mountains

[51] The word is erroneously defined as 'Persian', although it is not known in the languages of Central Asia. With such a cap the Sasanian satrap Baydād – Bagadates I from the 3rd century BC is shown on the averse of a coin. Probably its origin and use are imposed there through the Phrygians, who migrated to Anatolia in the Early Iron Age, whence comes the generally accepted definition of 'Phrygian cap'. The model is also known to the Scythians in a local version. A connection with 'korpilos' (from the Greek *πῖλος - hat*) is possible - the name of a tribal group in the Eastern Rhodopes, which also guarded a pass – 'the Korpilski Pass'.

wanted to take a Bessi sanctuary, it would not be possible that they were the Bessi from the Ostrets region for one simple reason, namely, the huge intermediate territory that divides them diagonally. Among them is the great strategy of the Bioleti (Beni) - the late Benika, which spread in Roman times south all the way to the Hermos River and completely cut off the access of the Sapaei to the northwestern regions of the mountain. This conflict and aspirations could be possible only in the area of today's Nevrokop field, which in Roman times was named after the eponymous Seleti - Seletica, and the neighboring area to the east by the name of the Sapaei - Sapaika.

The Roman occupation of Macedonia affected the political and trade status quo. This disrupted trade flows and depopulated roads, possibly leading to a sharp drop in financial revenues for the Seleti, Carbilesi and Diobessi over a long period of time. Rome had its reasons for identifying the independent Thracians as the primary enemy, which only united the mountaineers. In 72 BC, the first serious battle with the Bessi took place in the northern part of the mountain along Hebros River. The reason was the anti-Roman coalition led by them in support of the Pontic king Mithridates VI Eupator and the opposition to the Roman wars against Pontus. Twelve years later, according to Suetonius, Gaius Octavius waged a military campaign against the independent Thracians and nothing is known about it, except that the army probably entered the mountains after he visited the Great Sanctuary of Dionysos, where he was prophesied about the future of his son. In 56 BC, according to a speech by Cicero in the Roman Senate, Lucius Calpurnius Pison Caesonius made a huge mistake! Trying to instigate a quarrel between Odrysians and Bessi, and also led by his personal financial interests, he ordered the slaughter of the Bessic prince Rabokent and his entire retinue, giving the heads to King Kotys, who was accused of paying him three hundred silver talents.[52] Eight years later, we find mountaineers involved in the Roman Civil War, probably with payment, on the side of Pompey, according to Gaius Julius Caesar himself.[53] This could not be interpreted as a sign of agreement, because in 47 BC Mark Brutus entered Europe with his troops to stop the invasions of the Seleti in Macedonia.[54] He was assisted by the Odrysian Rascouporis, son of King Kotys, who five years later would again be on the side of the Republicans Brutus and Cassius in the Rhodope campaign and the battle of Philippi against Mark Antony and Octavian. In 29 BC, however, the Bessi and Satrae suffered an impressive defeat by the proconsul of Macedonia, Marcus Licinius Crassus. He first conquered the

[52] Cicero, *In Pis*. 34-35.
[53] Sarafov 1970, 147-150.
[54] Dio Cass. 47.25.1-2.

Moesi, the Getae, and the Bastarnae, and the following spring subdued the Serdi, the Medi, and the Bessi. Dion Cassius mentions that he spared only the Odrysians because they were worshipers of Dionysos and gave them the land where the Bessi worshiped the god.[55] This strained to the extreme the relationship of the mountaineers with Rome and the collaborators – Odrysians. Only 11 years after this fact, during the attacks of the Scordisci in Macedonia, the mountaineers saw a chance to regain the sanctuary and revolted. Rhoemetalces, who could not cope on his own, asked for help Octavian Augustus, who in turn sent Marcus Lollius to quell the revolt. The status quo was restored, but only for a short time, because in 11 BC the mountaineers revolted again, led by a famous historical figure - the priest of Dionysos Vologez about whom Dion Cassius says:

'At the same time the Thracian of the Bessi tribe Vologez, a priest of Dionysos, who is worshiped by them with numerous prophecies, won a few on his side, revolted with them, defeated and killed Rascouporis, the son of Kotys, and then without a fight only with his fame as a prophet, he took his uncle Rhoemetalces' army and forced him to flee. Chasing him, he broke into Chersonese and devastated the land terribly'.[56]

This provoked a quick reaction from Rome, which sent Pamphylia's viceroy Lucius Piso to deal with the uprising. And it was successfully suppressed as 'because of his merits a feast of gratitude was arranged in his name and victorious honors were given to him'.[57]

From what has been said so far, using the chronological order, the following conclusions can be drawn about the location of the Great Sanctuary of Dionysos:

The independent mountaineers, deprived of prosperity, became the main pillar of the Roman resistance in Thrace, in the conditions of very strained relations with the Sapaean-Odrysian dynasty. Ancient authors did not find it necessary to clarify this aspect, but when their texts refer to the Odrysians, it must be related to the Sapaean dynasty of the Odrysian kingdom which began with Kotys and his sons.[58] This is a very important point because it clears a path for political and military relations necessary for correct conclusions in cases where these things are not well clarified by the respective author. And thus, the location of the historical figure Vologez becomes unclear because many modern scholars taking advantage of the lack of explicit mention, transfer him to the northern part of the Rhodope

[55] Dio Cass. 51.25.5.
[56] Dio Cass. 54.34.5.
[57] Dio Cass. 54.34.5-7.
[58] King Kotys – father of Rascouporis and Raskos.

Mountains and even along Hebros. However, this does not correspond in any way to events such as the entry of Gaius Octavius into the mountains and the sanctuary itself. If it was somewhere in inner Thrace, then the story would have some other necessary information about the lands through which he passed. The lack of such details leads to the conclusion that from Macedonia he entered the Southwestern Rhodopes through one of the three possible roads - through the Paril Pass; through the Sapaean Straits and a third possibility, through today's Predela Pass. And if this, due to doubts about the authenticity of the story, is devoid of sufficient evidence, the information about the campaign of Marcus Licinius Crassus for subduing the Serdi, Medi and Bessi puts things in a logical order. They are located successively, in a southerly direction, and if he had reached the Medi, occupying the region of Middle Struma and immediately at the entrance of the Paril Pass, then 'Bessi' should be the tribes beyond and to the east of Orbeli, namely in the Nevrokop valley, inhabited by Satrae, with Diobessi as northern neighbors. Here it is necessary to clarify that, unlike Pliny the Elder, by 'Bessi', Dion Cassius, and other Roman authors, mean the independent mountaineers as a general concept, and by 'Odrysi', the Sapaei of the Sapaean-Odrysian dynasty. If we go back to Marcus Brutus's campaign, we will see a picture in the western direction because he was greeted by the Sapaean Rascouporis, who will appear in his native Sapean lands in the next military campaign. They are located on the Aegean coast, not in inner Thrace.

I hope that all this will contribute to a better clarification of the historical situation by adding information about the location of the tribes and the etymology of some ethnonyms, hitherto unknown. I will end by standing behind Alexander Fol's view that this sanctuary should be sought somewhere to the east of Struma and west of Mesta, and with gratitude to Pseudo-Aristotle without whose contribution this study would have been impossible, and the altar of Gradishte (Prav kamin) would have remained unexplained.

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Allégories du peuple des Besses à Aphrodisias et Valentia: premières personnifications de la Thrace dans l'art romain (Allegories of the Bessi at Aphrodisias and Valentia: earliest personifications of Thrace in the Roman art)

Dan Dana

Abstract: Among the *ethnē* subjugated by Augustus and depicted in the exceptional complex of the *Sebasteion* of Carian Aphrodisias, the people of the Bessi is identified by an inscribed basis (Gen. ἔθνους Βεσσῶν), surmounted by a panel displaying a relief statue of an idealized feminine figure personifying the Thracian population. Another female personification of the Bessi, identified by a Greek legend in Genitive case (Βεσσῶν), occurs in a complex of frescoes from Valentia (Hispania Tarraconensis), as a witness of more iconographic programs celebrating Roman and in particular Augustan victories over various *gentes*.

Key words: allegory, Aphrodisias, Bessi, *Sebasteion*, Thrace, Valentia

Резюме: Сред *ethne*, подчинени от Август и изобразени в изключителния комплекс на Себастейона в Афродизия в Кария, бесите са идентифицирани чрез основа с надпис (Gen. ἔθνους Βεσσῶν), увенчана с панел, показващ статуя-релеф на идеализирана женска фигура, която персонифицира племето на траките. Друга женска персонификация на бесите, посочена от гръцка легенда в родителен падеж (Βεσσῶν), се открива във фреските от Валенсия (Испания Тараконензис), като свидетелство за повече иконографски композиции, ознаменуващи римските и по-точно Августовите победи над различни *gentes*.

Plusieurs études ont présenté et commenté l'impressionnant complexe, partiellement conservé, qui ornait à l'aide de statues, de reliefs allégoriques et d'inscriptions très soignées le *Sebasteion* d'Aphrodisias, l'importante cité de Carie, dans la province d'Asie. Ce bâtiment monumental destiné au culte impérial était placé à l'est du centre-ville, près de l'agora septentrionale, dans

un complexe de sanctuaires dédiés à la déesse-patronne, Aphrodite Promètôr, et aux empereurs de la dynastie julio-claudienne. Dès les premières publications, la plupart des inscriptions et des reliefs ont été mis en rapport avec l'époque julio-claudienne, en particulier les expéditions d'Auguste, puisqu'ils évoquaient des peuples vaincus par le premier *Princeps* – tels les Trumpilins, les Rhètes, les Besses, ainsi que les Daces au nord du Danube.[1] L'ensemble a été récemment publié en entier et magistralement analysé dans la monographie de Roland R. R. Smith. Cette notice concerne la première personnification conservée de l'allégorie de la Thrace dans l'art romain,[2] sujet pour lequel nous n'avons plus accès qu'à des bribes.

Le complexe du *Sebasteion*, remanié vers le milieu du I^er^ s. de notre ère, est constitué d'une série (incomplète) de reliefs figurant soit des personnalités dynastiques, soit des *ethnê* de l'Empire, soit des mythes grecs. Le portique sud présente, dans sa partie supérieure, des images d'empereurs et de divinités, alors que des scènes d'inspiration mythologique ornent la partie inférieure. Quant au portique nord (fig. 1), il met en scène dans la partie supérieure, sur les panneaux tombés, des allégories des peuples vaincus ou récemment annexés à l'Empire, alors qu'en dessous, sur les bases correspondantes, des inscriptions grecques identifiaient ces peuples soumis au pouvoir de Rome.[3] Pour ce dernier ensemble, les statues frontales, réalisées en relief, étaient placées sur des bases décorées de guirlandes et de masques; les figures féminines des allégories sont différenciées par le drapage, la pose et divers attributs. Ont été trouvées 14 bases inscrites nommant les peuples (*ethnê* vaincus), en rapport évident avec les victoires d'Auguste;[4] un petit groupe d'autres bases nomme trois îles de la Méditerranée (Sicile, Crète, Chypre), entrées sous la domination de Rome avant Auguste, mais qu'il a récupérées lors des guerres civiles. Voici la liste des 14 peuplades, en transcription latine,

[1] Les inscriptions ont été d'abord publiées par Reynolds 1981 (Pl. IX-XIII); cf. BÉ, 1982, 356. Sauf mention contraire, toutes les dates sont d'avant notre ère.

[2] Cf. deux brèves notices: Triantaphyllos 1997 sur la personnification du pays des Thraces (l'éponyme *Thrakè*) dans l'art romain (fresques et mosaïques); Houghtalin 1997 sur la figuration de la province de Thrace (en particulier les monnaies), attirant l'attention qu'elle ne suit pas le modèle idéalisé de *Thrakè*, mais le type d'une femme demi-barbare, en chiton court, *bracae* et chlamys. Tel est le cas des sesterces de bronze d'Hadrien, inscrits ADVENTVI AVG THRACIAE (RIC II.3 1799-1800); devant l'empereur, on aperçoit l'allégorie de la province en train de sacrifier, une patère au-dessus d'un autel.

[3] Smith 2013, 71-122 («North Building: Nations of Empire»).

[4] Smith 1987.

de l'ouest vers l'est: *Callaeci*, *Trumpilini*, *Raeti*, *Iapodes*, *Pirustae* (fig. 2), *Andizetes*, *Dardani*, *Daci* (fig. 3), *Bessi* (fig. 4), *Bosporani*, *Iudaei*, *Arabes*, *Aegyptii*, [*Aithiopes*?]. Si le nom des îles apparaît au nominatif, pour les peuples la formulation est toujours au génitif, du type ἔθνους –ΩΝ.[5] Le choix d'une personnification féminine afin de figurer ces nations (en grec, on sous-entend le neutre ἔθνος ou γένος) se rapporte naturellement au féminin latin *gens*/*natio*, termes utilisés par ailleurs à l'époque pour désigner ce genre de représentations (voir ci-dessous). R. R. R. Smith a montré à plusieurs reprises la manière dont l'ensemble monumental d'Aphrodisias se donne à lire comme une illustration sélective de l'Empire mondial romain, transposant l'étendue géographique de la domination romaine dans un inventaire visuel de l'Empire d'Auguste; cette transposition est même temps en rapport avec les allégories universelles du temps et de l'espace, comme il ressort des reliefs figurant Héméra et Okéanos.[6]

Comme l'ont souligné divers commentateurs, le complexe d'Aphrodisias n'est point un phénomène singulier, mais s'inscrit dans une série de représentations de *gentes devictae* et de provinces de l'Empire qui ont été systématiquement mises en scène lors du long règne d'Auguste:[7] 14 *nationes* dans le théâtre de Pompée;[8] une série de *simulacra gentium*, avec la figuration de toutes les nations vaincues, érigées par Auguste dans la *Porticus ad Nationes*, qui doit son nom précisément à ces statues;[9] un relief fragmentaire avec de petites figures ethniques sur l'*Ara Pacis* (dédiée en 9 de notre ère); des *tituli* de l'«Hispanie et d'autres *gentes*» dans le forum d'Auguste;[10] enfin, des images avec toutes les *nationes* vaincues auraient été portées en procession lors des funérailles d'Auguste (14 de notre ère).[11] Un programme iconographique et propagandistique similaire apparaît plus tard sur les reliefs qui décoraient le temple d'Hadrien à Rome, dédié en 145 ap. J.-C. par Antonin

[5] Ce qui implique, dans notre cas, la traduction «(image/*eikôn*) du peuple des Besses».
[6] Smith 1990, 95; 2013, 121.
[7] Littérature plus ancienne et plus récente: Bieńkowski 1900; Jatta 1908, 28 (la Thrace sur les monnaies); Ostrowski 1990; 1992; Liverani 1995; Rodgers 2003. Pour l'ensemble d'Aphrodisias, voir Smith 1988; 2013, 113-118; Scott 2015, 24-32. Sur le culte impérial à Aphrodisias, voir aussi Reynolds 1986.
[8] Pline l'Ancien, *NH* 36.41; Suétone, *Nero* 46.
[9] Servius, *ad Aen*. 7.721: *Porticus enim Augustus fecerat in qua simulacra omnium gentium conlocaverat: quae porticus appellabatur «Ad Nationes»*); Pline l'Ancien, *NH* 36.39.
[10] Velleius Patercullus 2.39.2.
[11] Dion Cassius 56.34.2; Tacite, *Ann.* 1.8.4.

le Pieux, en rapport direct avec les séries monétaires consacrées aux provinces, émises sous Hadrien[12] et son successeur.[13]

Le monument d'Aphrodisias qui nous intéresse a été décrit et illustré à plusieurs reprises:[14]

A. Base quasi complète (115 x 144 x 36 cm), trouvée à l'est du bâtiment septentrional, ornée d'un masque masculin barbu (figure d'une divinité fluviale, ou similaire à l'allégorie de l'Océan), sous une guirlande pourvue d'une boucle au-dessus de la tête;[15] ses deux côtés présentent des traces de réparation. Dans la partie supérieure de la base, entre les deux moulures, a été gravée une inscription grecque élégante (lettres hautes de 4 cm, pourvues d'*apices*), sur deux lignes:

ἔθνους
Βεσσῶν.

«(image) du peuple des Besses».[16]

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[12] Au sujet des personnifications des provinces sur les monnaies d'Hadrien, voir Vitale 2012. Les images de la Thrace dans l'iconographie monétaire mériteraient une étude spéciale.

[13] Voir récemment Juhász 2018. Parmi les reliefs du *Hadrianeum*, une figure féminine barbare portant une *sica* dans sa main gauche a été parfois identifiée à la Thrace, mais elle doit représenter la Dacie (voir Juhász 2018, 86, fig. 4), avec le même attribut que sur des monnaies.

[14] Reynolds 1981, 326, n° 18, photo Pl. XIII.d (SEG XXXI 927; AÉ 1982, 892 *m*) et mention SEG XXXV 1082; BÉ, 1982, 356; Erim 1982, 120 (fig. 121); Smith 1988, 55 (n° 4), 60 et pour la description 66-67 (n° 4), Pl. IV (statue) et VIII.1 (base inscrite); Wiegartz 1996, 177 (Pl. 20.1); Ostrowski 1990, 214; Nicolet 1991, 46 (fig. 21); Liverani 1995 (Pl. 59, fig. 1-2, photos du relief et de la base inscrite); Paz de Hoz 2007, 145, fig. 7ab (photos du relief et de la base inscrite); Smith 2013, 93-95, avec un dessin (94, fig. 49) et des photos (Pl. 30, relief sur la base, B3; Pl. 31, détails: tête de la personnification, attribut, tête barbue); Graninger 2015, 27; Iliev 2015, 139, fig. 5 (photo de la base inscrite); Scott 2015, 30-31 (photo du relief p. 31, fig. 5); IAph 9.9. Reynolds date l'ensemble du II^{e} s. de notre ère, ce qui est trop tard.

[15] Des masques et des guirlandes apparaissent également sur les bases des autres peuples.

[16] Zahariade 2009, 85, qui mentionne à Aphrodisias «an inscription [that] records explicitly an entire community of Bessians (ἔθνος Βησσῶν)», ne cite pas l'article de Reynolds 1981 mais la compilation naïve de Samsaris 1990, ce qui confirme qu'il n'a pas vérifié la référence. Ce dernier donnait une interprétation tout à fait fantaisiste: «Une dédicace à un empereur, trouvée à Aphrodisias de Carie, située au cours supérieur du fleuve Méandros, mentionne la nation (tribu) des Thraces *Bessoi* (ἔθνος

B. La base était surmontée d'un panneau (172 x 125 x 45 cm), trouvé en 1984 hors contexte (en remploi), et dont il manque un morceau du coin inférieur gauche; par endroits, des craquelures sont visibles. On reconnaît la personnification d'un peuple vaincu, sous la forme d'une statue en relief, assez bien conservée; R. R. R. Smith donna dès la première publication du panneau une lecture dionysiaque de l'iconographie de la figure féminine, en associant le panneau à la base inscrite «des Besses». Cette première suggestion d'identification s'est avérée correcte, car en 2006 le montage physique du panneau sur la base inscrite confirma l'hypothèse. Quelques accidents ont légèrement abîmé la figure et affectent le bras droit, le pied gauche, le nez, la bouche et une partie du sein. Similaire à l'allégorie des Pirustes (fig. 3), le poids sur la jambe droite, la jambe gauche pliée en avant, la figure féminine regarde légèrement vers la gauche, tenant son bras droit hors du corps, sans doute avec un quelconque attribut (malheureusement perdu). Elle est vêtue d'une robe longue unie, dépassant ses pieds, ceinturée à la taille et attachée sur les épaules, comme un péplos sans *kolpos*; enfin, une cape est posée sur sa tête, avec un petit repli sur le dessus. La tête énergique est dotée d'un visage idéalisé et d'une coiffure régulière. L'ensemble tête-visage, cheveux et en particulier le front ceint d'un ruban évoquerait, selon R. R. R. Smith, l'iconographie dionysiaque, car ce bandeau est présent chez Dionysos, les Ménades et Ariane. Au sol, à gauche de la figure, on remarque un attribut, sans doute un grand chapeau, doté d'un bord moulé convexe, et fermé en haut, où deux banderoles sont attachées et flottent; ce chapeau conique évoquerait ainsi les bonnets des régions orientales et septentrionales.

Or, la personnification des Besses, et donc par extension du peuple des Thraces, n'est pas singulière. Un complexe iconographique dont l'inspiration est similaire a été découvert en 1989 en Hispania Tarraconensis, à Valentia, pourtant dans un contexte beaucoup moins spectaculaire – une maison somptueuse du II^e^ s. de notre ère, sans doute d'un dignitaire, dans un secteur proche du forum.[17] Seules trois fresques murales ont été conservées, sur des

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Βησσῶν); c.-à-d. nous avons ici une présence thrace en masse, peut-être des vétérans (ou de leurs descendants?)» (Samsaris 1990, 11).

[17] La «Maison de Terpsichore», d'après la mosaïque qui recouvrait le sol (IGEP 249), sur le site du Palacio de Benicarló, qui abrite l'ensemble des Cortes de Valence. Pour les inscriptions et l'iconographie du complexe, voir Paz de Hoz 2007 (et IGEP 246-249). Étant donné le choix du sujet, on peut toutefois supposer que ce programme iconographique d'inspiration augustéenne est antérieur au II^e^ s. de notre ère.

panneaux à fond rouge séparés par des candélabres décorés de grappes de raisin et de fleurs; ce sont des allégories féminines de provinces et de peuples, fort heureusement identifiées par des inscriptions grecques dans la partie inférieure – alors qu'on est dans une province latinophone, ce qui est un signe de distinction:

(1) une figure féminine devant un éléphant (fig. 6), avec la légende Ἰνδῶν («du peuple des Indes»);[18]

(2) Αἴγυπτος,[19] l'allégorie de l'Égypte, avec un crocodile derrière ses pieds;

(3) une inscription peinte sous la partie inférieure d'une représentation féminine; en bas à gauche, un objet blanc bordé d'or assorti au vêtement a été identifié à un chapeau (larg. 9 cm), et semble avoir le même modèle qu'à Aphrodisias. L'inscription (ht. des lettres 1,2-1,7 cm) identifie cette allégorie au peuple des Besses (fig. 5), toujours au génitif,[20]

Βέσσων.

Malheureusement, l'emblème des Besses n'a pas été conservé à Valentia, tout comme à Aphrodisias. Sans doute d'autres découvertes vont un jour apporter un exemplaire complet de l'allégorie, avec l'attribut manquant et l'intégralité de l'objet identifié à un chapeau.

Revenant à la figure d'Aphrodisias, il est important de rappeler que l'association avec le peuple des Besses s'est faite en raison de l'interprétation en clé dionysiaque. R. R. R. Smith pensait tout d'abord à l'association avec Dionysos de la fière et farouche tribu des Besses, puisque le sanctuaire de Dionysos Thrace se trouvait sur leur territoire et qu'un passage de Dion Cassius attribuait la révolte des Besses à un prêtre de Dionysos, Boulogaisès.[21]

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[18] AÉ 2007, 820 = IRVT² 147 (et photo) = IGEP 248.

[19] AÉ 2007, 818 = IRVT² 145 (et photo) = IGEP 246 (et photo).

[20] Paz de Hoz 2007, 132 (n° 2) et 135-136 (photo p. 143, fig. 2) (HispEpigr 16, 2007, n° 581; AÉ 2007, 819); IRVT² 146 (et photo); IGEP 247 (*epsilon* et *sigma* lunaires, *ômega* cursif) (photo p. 246); Graninger 2015, 27. M. Paz de Hoz privilégie la même interprétation dionysiaque de l'allégorie des Besses.

[21] Sur le culte de Dionysos en Thrace, voir en dernier lieu Oller Guzmán 2018, qui insiste sur l'association grecque entre Dionysos (mythe de Lycurgue) et la Thrace, association largement suivie les savants modernes. Au sujet de l'imaginaire de ces derniers sur la religiosité des Thraces, et en particulier l'association avec Dionysos, comprise par leur plupart dans un sens orgiastique et mystérique – au point de soutenir pendant longtemps l'origine thrace de ce dieu, ce qui est désormais infirmé par les tablettes mycéniennes –, voir Dana 2014a (en partic. 520-538); Dana & Ricci

Je préfère toutefois exprimer des réserves quant à l'interprétation dionysiaque de cette figure d'Aphrodisias, motivée par des sources littéraires.

Peuplade thrace sur laquelle les sources littéraires sont assez nombreuses,[22] les Besses (Βησσοί/Βεσσοί/*Bessi*) sont mentionnés pour la première fois par Hérodote 7.111 comme chargés d'être des interprètes au sanctuaire de Dionysos parmi les Satres. Ils habitaient à l'intérieur de la Thrace, dans la haute vallée de l'Hébros, donc dans le Rila et le Pirin, ainsi que dans les Rhodopes occidentales, à l'est des Denthélètes – à leur tour entraînés dans des conflits avec le pouvoir romain dans la Macédoine voisine. Dans sa description de la Thrace, Strabon évoquait des peuplades thraces (Coralles, Besses, certains des Maides et des Denthélètes) qui «ont tous au suprême degré le brigandage dans le sang» (πάντα μὲν οὖν ταῦτα λῃστρικώτατα ἔθνη), au point que les Besses, «qui peuplent la plus grande partie de l'Haimos, sont appelés brigands par les brigands eux-mêmes» (ὑπὸ τῶν λῃστῶν λῃσταὶ προσαγορεύονται).[23] Un peu plus tard, Pline l'Ancien (*NH* 4.40) mentionnait *Digerri Bessorumque multa nomina* sur la rive gauche du Strymon vers le Mestos, alors qu'une stratégie Βησσική est citée par Ptolémée (*Geogr*. 3.11.8-10) parmi les 14 stratégies de Thrace.[24] On reconnaît sans doute le même élément dans plusieurs anthroponymes de la série en βεσ(σ)ο-;[25] l'ethnonyme donna naissance à au moins un toponyme, Βεσσοπαρα («village des Besses»), situé sur le territoire de Philippopolis, qui est attesté aussi bien par les sources littéraires et dans deux inscriptions.[26]

2014, 524-525. À l'époque impériale, la divinité «classique» qui est la plus populaire comme figure d'association des divinités de l'espace thrace n'est pourtant pas Dionysos, mais Apollon, aussi bien selon les inscriptions et l'iconographie.

[22] La plupart des mentions littéraires et épigraphiques des Besses sont répertoriées par Oberhummer 1897 et Detschew 1957, 57-59 (pour la partie latine, voir TLL, II, 1933-1934) et bénéficient de commentaires historiques chez Delev 2007; cf. aussi Graninger 2015, 26-27. Il est plus prudent de ne pas suivre les spéculations étymologiques de Detschew 1957, 59 («gebunden an etwas»), Russu 1969, 111, et Sarafov 1974 («sages/éclairés/cultivés/habiles»).

[23] Strabon 7.5.12 (C. 318) (trad. R. Baladié); voir aussi F 47 du livre VII de Strabon (provenant d'une épitome byzantine).

[24] Voir Parissaki 2009, 337-338; sur cette stratégie, voir Delev 2009, 7-8; Topalilov 2013.

[25] Dana 2014, 33-34.

[26] Itin. Ant. 136,3 (*Bessapara*); Itin. Hieros. 568,2 (*mansio Basapare*); Procope de Césarée, *Aed.* 4.11 (Βεσούπαρον). Cette *mansio* localisée à Sinitovo (cf. IGBulg III.1 178; Gizdova & Martinova 2012; Iliev 2014) se composait en réalité de deux villages, «d'en haut» et «d'en bas», Βεσσοπαρηνοι οἱ ἄνωθεν καὶ οἱ κάτωθεν (IGBulg III.1 947). Le même ethnique apparaît dans une épitaphe récemment trouvée à Radilovo (dép. de Pazardžik): Επταλα[ς] Βειθυος Βεσαπαρηνός· Βειθυς Βειθ<υ>ος τῷ ἀδελφῷ κτλ.

Si l'on s'intéresse aux rapports entre Rome et les Besses, les sources conservées permettent d'établir toute une série d'interventions et victoires romaines, à partir de la fin du II^e^ s., la plupart impliquant les gouverneurs de la province de Macédoine, qui constitue le fer de lance de l'expansion romaine dans les Balkans centraux et septentrionaux:[27]

– le proconsul de Macédoine M. Minucius Rufus (cos. 110) mena des campagnes à l'intérieur des Balkans en 109-106,[28] recevant un triomphe complété [*de Scordisteis et Thraecibus*] par les éditeurs des *Acta triumph. Capitol.* (InscrIt XIII.1 1); il fut honoré pour ses exploits militaires à Delphes, pour citer l'inscription bilingue,[29] [νικήσ]αντα τὸν πρὸς [Γαλάτας Σ]κορδίστας [καὶ τὸν] πρὸς Βέσσους [καὶ τοὺς λ]οιποὺς Θρᾶι[κας π]όλεμον/*Galleis Scordisteis et Besseis [devictei]s*, et à Europos, en Macédoine, ou le texte grec est presque le même, νικήσαντα τὸ[ν] πρὸς Γαλάτας Σκορδί[στας] καὶ Βέσσους καὶ τοὺς λοιποὺς Θρᾳικας πόλεμον (SEG XLI 570). Bientôt, en 101, le préteur T. Didius annexa des régions proches de la Chersonèse Thrace à la province de Macédoine (Jordanès, *Rom*. 219).

– en 72, le proconsul de Macédoine M. Terentius Varro Lucullus (cos. 73) vainquit entre autres les Besses[30] et reçut un triomphe en 71.[31]

(Manov 2010, photo Pl. XXX, cf. BÉ, 2012, 292; avec la relecture de Dana 2014, s.vv. *Bithus* et *Eptala*).

[27] Sur la conquête romaine de la Thrace, voir brièvement Iliev 2015; pour plus de détails, concernant les rapports des Besses avec Rome, voir Delev 2007, 16-35.

[28] Tite-Live, *Perioch*. 65: *adversus Thracas*; Frontin 2.4.3; Ammien Marcellin 27.4.10; Eutrope 4.27; Rufius Festus 9; Florus 1.39; Jordanès, *Rom*. 219.

[29] Syll.[3] 710A = FD III.1 526 (grec); CIL III 14203,23 = ILS 8887 = Syll.[3] 710B = ILatGraecia 153 (latin).

[30] Cf. Tite-Live, *Perioch.* 97: *Thracas subegit*. Ce récit perdu doit constituer la base des historiens tardifs: Eutrope 6.10: *Bessis primus Romanorum intulit bellum atque eos ingenti proelio in Haemo monte superavit. Oppidum Vscudamam, quod Bessi habitabant, eodem die, quo adgressus est, vicit, Cabylen cepit, usque ad Danubium penetravit*; Rufius Festus 9: *Marcus Lucullus per Thracias cum Bessis primus pugnavit; ipsamque caput gentis Thraciam vicit: Haemimontanos subegit, et Eumolpiadem, quae nunc Philippopolis dicitur; Vscudamam, quae modo Hadrianopolis nominatur, in ditionem nostram redegit: Cabylen cepit*; Ammien Marcellin 27.4.11-12: *Advenit post hos imperator Lucullus, qui cum durissima gente Bessorum conflixit omnium primus eodemque impetu Haemimontanos acriter resistentes oppressit*); Jordanès, *Rom*. 221: *si quidem primus in Thracia contra Bessos pugnans eos qui in fortitudine famaque praeibant devicit Emimontiosque debellans, Pulpudeva, quae nunc Philippopolis, et Vscudama, quae Adrianopolis vocitantur, in Romanorum redegit dominio*.

[31] Cf. Jérôme, *Chron*. Ol. 177: *M. Lucullus de Bessis triumphavit, capta Cabyle, et Tomis, et caeteris vicinis urbibus*.

– en 59, C. Octavius, père du futur Auguste, vainquit les Besses, cf. Suétone, *Aug.* 3.2 (*namque Bessis ac Thracibus magno proelio fusis ita socios tractavit*) et 94.5 (où il est question de sa visite à un sanctuaire de Dionysos).

– un autre proconsul de Macédoine, L. Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus (cos. 58), s'est illustré par l'assassinat du chef besse Rabocentus, vers 57-55 (*Rabocentum, Bessicae principem*).[32]

– des contingents de Besses ayant des statuts variés se trouvaient du côté de Pompée à la bataille de Pharsale en 48;[33] cinq ans plus tard, le républicain M. Iunius Brutus, impliqué dans les conflits en Thrace, combattit les Besses.[34]

– un autre proconsul de Macédoine, M. Licinius Crassus (cos. 30), reçut un triomphe en 27 *ex Thraecia et Geteis*;[35] en 29 et 28, il envahit la Thrace, sauf la contrée des Odryses, auxquels il donna le sanctuaire de Dionysos,[36] ce qui entraîna vraisemblablement la révolte ultérieure des Besses (voir ci-dessous).

– M. Lollius (cos. 21), protecteur du royaume-client de Thrace, assujettit les Besses avant l'an 17, selon Dion Cassius 54.20.3 (ἔν τε τῇ Θράκῃ πρότερον μὲν Μᾶρκος Λόλλιος Ῥυμητάλκῃ θείῳ τε τῶν τοῦ Κότους παίδων καὶ ἐπιτρόπῳ ὄντι βοηθῶν Βησσοὺς κατεστρέψατο).

– L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi (cos. 15), gouverneur de Macédoine, fut envoyé par Auguste de Galatie et Pamphylie en Thrace afin de mater la grande révolte de 13-11. Cette révolte éclata sous la direction du Besse Boulogaisès,[37] prêtre de Dionysos, dépeint par Dion Cassius comme un prophète inspiré et charismatique. Le roi client Rescupor II (fils de Cotys V)

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[32] Cicéron, *In. Pis*. 34. Le nom est légèrement corrompu, car les occurrences épigraphiques de ce nom thrace sont *Raebucentus*, *Rebocenthus* et Ρηβουκενθος (Dana 2014, 289).

[33] César, *BC* 3.4.5: *Bessos partim mercennarios, partim imperio aut gratia comparatos*.

[34] Tite-Live, *Perioch*. 122; Dion Cassius 47.25.1-2.

[35] *Acta triumph. Capitol.*, dans CIL I², p. 50; cf. aussi *Tabula trimph. Barber*., dans CIL I², p. 77: *exs Traechia et [Gete]is*; en accord avec les mentions de Tite-Live, *Perioch*. 134: *bellum adversus Basternas et Moesos et alias gentes a M. Crasso referuntur*, 135: *bellum a M. Crasso adversus Thracas*.

[36] Dion Cassius 51.25.5.

[37] Son nom est francisé en «Vologèse» et anglicisé en «Vologaesus», depuis l'émendation Οὐολογαίσης de Reimarus. En réalité, le nom, tel qu'il apparaît chez Dion Cassius 54.34.5: Βουλογαίσης Θρᾷξ Βησσός, ἱερεὺς τοῦ παρ᾽ αὐτῶν Διονύσου, est très probablement corrompu, du moins dans sa première partie (cf. les noms grecs en Βουλο-), car il ressemble trop à un nom royal parthe (lat. *Vologaesus*). Dans la seconde partie on pourrait néanmoins reconnaître la série des noms en -κησης (var. -γησης) (voir Dana 2014, 71).

est tué, †Boulogaisès arrive à s'emparer de l'armée de Rhoimétalkès I qui, renversé, prit la fuite vers la Chersonèse Thrace, région ravagée par les révoltés. La révolte prit fin après trois années et plusieurs campagnes de Pison, qui reçut un triomphe.[38] Antipatros de Thessalonique, auteur d'un poème sur les campagnes du gouverneur, l'envoya à l'ancien consul avec une épigramme conservée dans l'*Anthologie Palatine*:

«À toi, vainqueur chargé des dépouilles de Thrace, Thessalonique, la mère de toute la Macédoine, m'a envoyé. Je chante l'Arès des Besses par toi dompté, tout ce que j'ai appris de cette guerre, ayant tout recueilli».[39]

Finalement, après d'autres interventions romaines et révoltes de certaines peuplades,[40] le royaume thrace cessa son existence en 46 de notre ère, quand Claude créa la province de Thrace.[41]

Les interventions romaines contre les Besses se font donc plus pressantes pendant le règne d'Auguste.[42] Cette hégémonie de la tribu des

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[38] Tite-Live, *Perioch*. 140: *Thraces domiti a L. Pisone*; Dion Cassius 54.34.5-7; Velleius Paterculus 2.98, qui évoque les trois ans de guerre contre les Thraces: *atrox in Thracia bellum ortum, omnibus eius gentis nationibus in arma accensis, L. Pisonis, quem hodieque diligentissimum atque eundem lenissimum securitatis urbanae custodem habemus, virtus compressit (quippe legatus Caesaris triennio cum iis bellavit gentesque ferocissimas plurimo cum earum excidio nunc acie, nunc expugnationibus in pristinum pacis redegit modum)*; Sénéque, *Ep*. 83.14: *huic* (*L. Pisonis*) *divus Augustus dedit secreta mandata, cum illum praeponeret Thraciae, quam perdomuit*. Voir aussi le résumé de Florus 4.12.17: «Les Thraces avaient souvent déjà fait défection, mais la plus grave eut lieu alors, sous le règne de Rhoemetalcès. Celui-ci avait habitué les Barbares aux enseignes militaires, à la discipline et même à l'armement des Romains. Mais, entièrement soumis par Pison, ils montrèrent leur rage au cours même de leur captivité, car c'est en essayant de mordre leurs chaines qu'ils se punissaient eux-mêmes de leur sauvagerie» (*sed a Pisone perdomiti in ipsa captivitate rabiem ostendere ; quippe cum catenas morsibus temptarent, feritatem suam ipsi puniebant*) (trad. P. Jal).

[39] *Anth. Pal*. 9.428: Σοί με, Θρηικίης σκυληφόρε, Θεσσαλονίκη | μήτηρ ἡ πάσης πέμψε Μακηδονίης | ἀείδω δ' ὑπὸ σοὶ δεδμημένον Ἄρεα Βεσσῶν,| ὅσσ' ἐδάην πολέμου, πάντ' ἀναλεξάμενος.| κτλ. (trad. P Waltz, G. Soury). Le triomphe de L. Calpurnius Piso Frugi est également mentionné par Tacite, *Ann*. 6.10.3: *decus triumphale in Thraecia meruerat*.

[40] Subdivisions sous Auguste et Tibère (Tacite, *Ann*. 2.64-67); révoltes en 21 et 26 de notre ère, des Coelalètes, Odryses et Dioi, *validae nationes* (Tacite, *Ann*. 3.38-39), puis d'autres Thraces (Tacite, *Ann*. 4.46-51).

[41] Voir brièvement Dana 2018.

[42] Une allusion chez Appien, *Illyr*. 16.

Besses à l'intérieur des terres thraces, au moment des confrontations décisives et répétées avec les armées du dernier siècle de la République et sous Auguste, entraîna une généralisation du nom de *Bessi*, par les Romains, à l'ensemble des populations thraces, au point qu'à l'époque impériale *Bessus* arrive à fonctionner comme un terme générique pour les «Thraces», à l'instar du banal *Thrax*. Cette généralisation explique pourquoi on rencontre d'innombrables *Bessi* dans l'épigraphie funéraire des soldats d'origine thrace, ainsi que sur les diplômes militaires; or, s'il faut encore le souligner, ces *origines* ne sont presque jamais en rapport avec la tribu des Besses, ou avec la stratégie Βησσική, malgré les raccourcis commodes de nombreux savants, notamment bulgares et roumains.[43] La coexistence sur les diplômes militaires des ethniques génériques *Bessus* et *Thrax*, en fonction du choix de l'administration militaire lors de la *probatio*, est confirmée par des désignations précieuses comme *Nicopolis ex Bessia* sur les diplômes des marins, c'est-à-dire *ex Thracia*, afin d'éviter la confusion avec l'homonyme Nicopolis ad Istrum (en Mésie Inférieure).[44] La même logique d'équivalence est manifeste quand des soldats recrutés aux extrémités de l'espace thrace sont identifiés sur des épitaphes par le même ethnique, sans aucun rapport avec le territoire habité par les Besses *proprie dicti* : ainsi, un cavalier de la garde impériale, *T. Aur. Gaius*, dont l'*origo* est *Fl(avia) Scupis, nat(ione) Bessus* (CIL VI 3205 = Speidel 1994, 134), étant donc originaire d'une autre province, la Mésie Supérieure; un autre soldat du même corps d'élite, *P. Ael. Bassus*, défini comme *nat(ione) Bessus, Claudia Apris* (CIL VI 3177 = Speidel 1994, 83), donc du territoire d'une colonie située dans l'actuelle Turquie européenne; dans un autre corps d'élite, *Aur. Abitus, mil(es) coh(ortis) X pr(aetoriae)* (…),

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[43] Ainsi, Tacheva 1997; Tatscheva 1999; Zahariade 2009, 76-77; en dernier lieu, Lozanov 2020, qui pense encore que *Nicopolis ex Bessia* concerne la tribu des Besses. Voir la discussion chez Dana 2013, 245-246, avec un tableau des ethniques générique *Bessus* et *Thrax*: sur les diplômes, le terme *Thrax* domine entre 71 et 91, ainsi qu'entre 157-160, tout le reste étant dominé par l'ethnique générique *Bessus*; il existe pourtant des années ou les deux ethniques cohabitent sur les diplômes (80, 88, 101, 158), ainsi que d'assez larges périodes pour lesquelles on ignore les ethniques employés. Les nouveaux diplômes publiés depuis ont apporté, entre autres, des occurrences de *Bessus* en 111 et 135.

[44] Cf. trois copies de la constitution du 1er août 142 pour la flotte de Ravenne, pour des marins *Nicopoli ex Bessia* (RMD IV 264; V 392, 394). Des populations thraces en Scythie Mineure (Dobroudja), sans doute installées par les Romains, sont désignées par le même terme dans le dossier de dédicaces érigées par les magistrats de plusieurs *vici* – des communautés mixtes de colons thraces (*Bessi consistentes*) et de *cives Romani consistentes*, chacune avec leurs magistrats (Zah & Suceveanu 1971; Bounegru 1997).

nat(ione) Bessus, natus reg(ione) Serdica, vico Magari (CIL X 1754 = ILS 2043), donc dans une région qui n'était pas peuplée par les Besses. Enfin, ce terme générique de «Besse» est encore utilisé dans l'Antiquité tardive pour qualifier les personnes originaires de Thrace, aussi bien des soldats[45] que des prêtres et des simples particuliers,[46] au point de synthétiser le caractère belliqueux attribué aux Thraces – ainsi dans les glossaires tardifs, qui expliquent *Bessi homines in Thracia belligeratores* (cf. TLL, II, 1933).

Dans le même registre d'équivalence, on peut citer une épigramme funéraire du Ier s. de Mésambria, sur la côte ouest-pontique, honorant l'un de ses citoyens; Aristôn est couronné par le peuple, pour avoir péri dans un combat contre les Besses, ethnonyme devenu déjà un terme poétique pour les Thraces: πο[λ]λάκις ἀντιπάλους κτείνας ἐνὶ προμάχοις | ἐχθομένοις Βεσσοῖσιν ἐναντί' ἐδάϊ' Ἀρίστων.[47]

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Le programme d'Aphrodisias est en lien manifeste avec les *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, l'extraordinaire rapport laissé par Auguste, connu par ses copies épigraphiques. Si les deux inscriptions de Rome ont disparu, des copies plus ou moins fragmentaires, en latin et en grec, ont été découvertes en Asié Mineure à Ankyra, Apollonia de Pisidie, Antioche de Pisidie et Sardes.[48] Entre autres conquêtes, le rapport insiste sur la soumission des peuples pannoniens (*Pannoniorum gentes*) et l'extension de la frontière de la province d'Illyricum jusqu'au Danube (30.1). Deux peuples de l'Illyricum (*Iapodes* et *Pirustae*) et un autre de Pannonie (*Andizetes*) sont par ailleurs représentés dans le complexe d'Aphrodisias; la personnification des Pirustes, bien conservée, porte un casque et un petit bouclier rond (fig. 3).[49] En revanche, les Besses n'apparaissent pas dans les *Res Gestae*, mais eux et d'autres peuples sont reconnaissables dans le paragraphe suivant: «J'ai agrandi les frontières de

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[45] À Oxyrhynchos, dans des comptes pour les *bucellarii* (nommés au datif), Βοραιδῃ Βέσσῳ et Ζημαρχῳ Βέσσῳ (P. Oxy. XVI 1903, l. 9, en 561 ap. J.-C.).

[46] Marcellinus, *Bessorum in partibus ortus* (CIL V 6733 = ILCV 3441, Vercellae). Cf. aussi une épitaphe chrétienne à Korykos, en Cilicie: Σωματοθήκη | Μηνᾶ Βέσσου (MAMA III 592); voir le commentaire de Dagron & Feissel 1987, 223, n° 592. Pour les occurrences tardives, voir Beševliev 1970, 75-79, 84-87.

[47] IGBulg I² 344 (avec le commentaire de G. Mihailov); Robert 1959, 219 (= OMS V, 249); BÉ 1960, 245.

[48] Pour la dernière édition critique commentée, voir Scheid 2007.

[49] Voir à présent Kovács 2006; 2014, 58-62. Sur la commémoration de la victoire d'Auguste sur les peuples balkano-danubiens (*Iapodes*, *Andizetes*, *Pirustae*, *Dardani*, *Daci*, *Bessi*), voir Grbić 2011 et Mesihović 2018.

toutes les provinces du Peuple romain, dont étaient voisines des nations qui n'obéissaient pas à notre pouvoir».[50]

Les deux premières personnifications de la Thrace dans l'art romain semblent donc précéder la conquête et la provincialisation de l'espace thrace. L'allégorie des Besses sur le relief d'Aphrodisias met en scène une figure idéalisée, apaisée, suggérant la soumission d'une nation guerrière, dans un ensemble cohérent qui met en scène, par des images standardisées, l'assujetissement des peuples ennemis et la domination universelle de Rome.

AÉ – *Année Épigraphique*, Paris.

BÉ – *Bulletin Épigraphique* (dans la *Revue des Études Grecques*, Paris).

FD – *Fouilles de Delphes*, 1902-.

HispEpigr – *Hispania Epigraphica*, Madrid.

IAph – Inscriptions of Aphrodisias (http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007/).

IGBulg – G. Mihailov, *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae*, I-V, Sofia, 1958-1997.

IGEP – M. P. de Hoz, *Inscripciones griegas de España y Portugal* (Bibliotheca Archaeologica Hispana 40), Madrid, 2014.

ILatGraecia – M. Šašel Kos, *Inscriptiones Latinae in Graecia repertae. Additamenta ad CIL III,* Faenza, 1979.

ILCV – E. Diehl, *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veterae*, I-III, Berlin, 1925-1931.

ILS – H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, I-III, Berlin, 1892-1916.

IRVT – J. Corell, *Inscripcions romanes del País Valencià*, I-VI, Valence, 2002-2012.

LIMC – *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae*, Zurich-Munich-Düsseldorf, I-VIII (1981-1997), *Indices* (1999), *Supplementum* 1-2 (2009).

MAMA – *Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua*, I-XI, Manchester-Londres, 1928-2013.

OMS – L. Robert, *Opera Minora Selecta. Épigraphie et antiquités grecques*, I-VII, Amsterdam, 1969-1990.

P. Oxy. – *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Londres, 1898-.

RE – A. F. Pauly, G. Wissowa *et alii*, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*, I-LXVI, Stuttgart, 1894-1980.

RIC – *Roman Imperial Coinage*, Londres, 1923-.

RMD – Roman Military Diplomas, Vol. I-III (ed. M. Roxan); Vol. IV (eds. M. Roxan and P. Holder); Vol. V (ed. P. Holder). Londres, 1978-2006.

SEG – *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, Leiden-Amsterdam, 1923–.

[50] *Res Gestae Divi Augusti* 26.1 (trad. J. Scheid).

Syll³ – W. Dittenberger, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Graecarum*, I-IV, 3e éd. par F. Hiller von Gaertringen, Leipzig, 1915-1924.

TLL – *Thesaurus Linguae Latinae*, 1893-.

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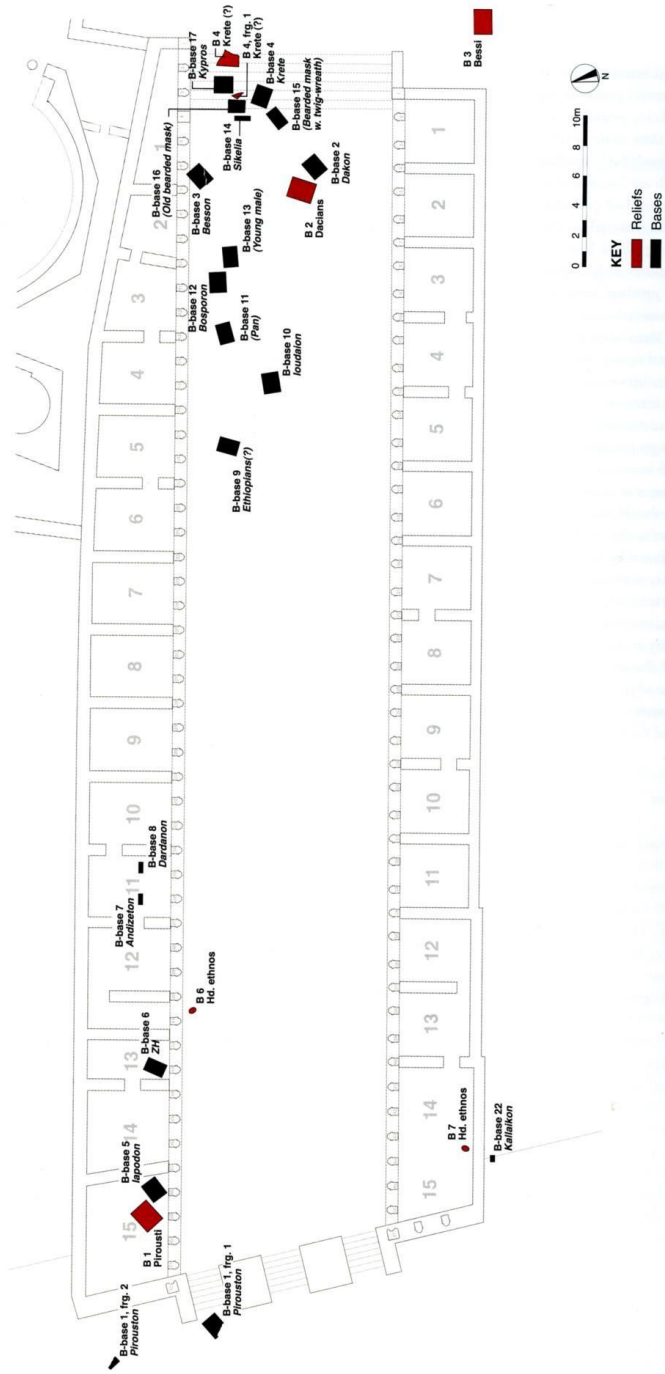


Fig. 1. Portique nord du *Sebasteion* d'Aphrodisias (Smith 2013, 88, fig. 46).



Fig. 2. L'allégorie du peuple des Daces au *Sebasteion* d'Aphrodisias (Smith 2013, Pl. 28).



Fig. 3. L'allégorie du peuple des Pirustes au *Sebasteion* d'Aphrodisias (Smith 2013, Pl. 26).



Fig. 4. L'allégorie du peuple des Besses au *Sebasteion* d'Aphrodisias (Smith 2013, Pl. 30).



Fig. 5. L'allégorie du peuple des Besses, fresque de Valentia
(Paz de Hoz 2007, 143, fig. 2).



Fig. 6. L'allégorie du peuple des Indiens, fresque de Valentia
(Paz de Hoz 2007, 143, fig. 3).

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Nicopolis ex Bessia

Svetla Petrova

Abstract: In the article, after the analysis of already existing hypotheses about the date of foundation of Nicopolis ad Nestum, a new date is proposed. It is connected with the revolt of the Thracian tribes of Bessi and its suppression by the united forces of the Thracian Odrysian-Sapaeian dynasty and the Roman army, lead by Lucius K. Piso, which gave the possibility of founding 'the city of the victory over the Bessian Ares'.

The artifacts from pre-Roman times discovered under the site of the ancient Nicopolis suggest that here, even before the transformation of Thrace into a Roman province, there was a settlement, with probablly aristocratic or even royal residence, turned after 11 BC into 'the city of the victory over the Bessian Ares'; inhabited decades later by strategos Flavius Dizalas.

It is assumed that the settlement close to Nicopolis in the 'Gradishteto' locality, near the village of Dabnitsa is possibly the original aristocratic residence of the Thracians-Bessi; as well as the site of the founded / restored sanctuary of Artemis; i.e., this is the settlement of Keirpara mentioned in the inscription of the strategos Flavius Dizalas. The analysis of the strategies in the inscription of Flavius Dizalas shows, that they have been listed in the direction from south to north; from west to northwest; and finally from east to southeast. We follow the connection of the strategies, governed by Dizalas, with the strategy of Bessika, mentioned by Claudius Ptolemy, and the place of Nicopolis ad Nestum in it.

Key words: Nicopolis, Flavius Dizalas, Bessi, strategy Bessika

Резюме: В статията, след анализ на **с**ъществуващите хипотези относно датата на основаване на Никополис, се предлага нова дата. Тя се свързва с въстанието на бесите. Неговото потушаване от обединените сили на одриско-сапейската тракийска династия и римската армия, предвождана от Луций К. Пизон, предоставило възможността да се основе „град на победата над беския Арес".

Разкритите под терена на античния Никополис артефакти от предримско време предполагат възможността тук, още преди превръщането на Тракия в римска провинция, да е съществувало селище, с вероятен характер на аристократична, възможно и царска резиденция, превърнато след 11 г. пр.Хр. в „градът на победата над беския Арес"; обитаван десетилетия по-късно от стратега Флавий Дизала.

Предположено е, че разположеното в близост до Никополис селище в м. „Градището", до село Дъбница, е възможната първоначална аристократична резиденция на траките-беси, както и мястото на основаното/възобновеното светилище на Артемида, т.е., че това е споменатото в надписа на стратега Флавий Дизала селище Кейрпара. Анализът на стратегиите в надписа на Флавий Дизала показва, че те са изброени в

посока от юг на север; от запад – на северозапад; и накрая от изток – на югоизток. Проследена е връзката между управляваните от Флавий Дизала стратегии, със стратегия Бесика спомената от Клавдий Птолемей, както и мястото на Никопол на Места в нея.

Name and foundation of the city

Although known for science, the city was originally sought after in various places in the Nevrokop field. K. Jireček identified it with the locality 'Gradishteto' ('Momina kula') also near Nevrokop.[1] V. Kunchov determined its ruins at the village Isirluk (Hissarluk) and Marchov chiflik.[2] At the beginning of the 20th century P. Perdrizet published autonomous coins of Nicopolis ad Nestum minted under the emperors Commodus, Geta and Caracalla and other artifacts, found in Hissarluk near the village of Garmen, defining correctly for the first time the ruins there as belonging to Nicopolis ad Nestum.[3] During the Balkan war prof. B. Filov studied the region and described the visible then walls of the fortress of Nicopolis.[4] However, the identification of Nicopolis ad Nestum with the ruins at the village of Zagrade[5] does not give a clear answer to the question about the date of its foundation. In literature the different researchers propose various foundation dates of Nicopolis ad Nestum from 32 BC up to AD 116-117.

The latest date is proposed by I. Lozanov,[6] who connects this event with the victorious campaigns of Trajan in the Dacian and Parthian wars. As possible period this author points the one between the summer of AD 107 and the spring/summer of AD 116.[7] It is stated that probably the city has been founded in order to celebrate the victory in the Parthian war, the first news about which has reached Rome at the beginning of AD 116.[8] This idea is unacceptable for me for several reasons. First of all it is a too long period, almost 9 years, for the foundation of any Roman city. Also it is not a solid argument to connect the foundation with the military diplomas of veterans

[1] Jireček 1974, 448.

[2] Kanchov 1894, 253-254.

[3] Perdrizet 1906, 217-233. The modern research proves that the coins of Emperor Commodus 'minted' in Nikopol on Mesta are in fact counterfeits made in the 17th century. See Hristova 2003, 117-130.

[4] Filov 1993, 85-89.

[5] In 1934 the village of Hissarluk is renamed to Zagrade. On its turn, it became in the 70s of the 20th century a part of the village of Gurmen.

[6] My article was already in print when this article of Lozanov has been published.

[7] Lozanov 2020, 55-73.

[8] The author compares the foundation of Nicopolis with that of Parthicopolis, the latter receiving this name between 117 and 120 as a result of triumph in the Parthian war. For details see Petrova 2012, 96.

from AD 142 (i. e. after 26 years in service), which means that the beginning of their military service and the foundation of the city was in AD 116). The tribal belonging of the veterans from Nicopolis ex Bessia shows only that they inhabited the city itself or its territory. It is known that the Thracians (the Bessi) have been recruited in the Roman army before the creation of the Roman province of Thracia as revealed by a military diploma issued on 11 December 52 AD[9] and that the float of Ravenna and of Misenum has been recruited from the Thracian population of the most undeveloped regions in the Thracian Kingdom.[10] But the inscription of Flavius Dizalas reveals that he did not live in an 'uncivilized' place, but in a possible city, inhabited before him by his father, the strategos Esbenis, and by his grandfather Amatocos.

Lozanov accepts the fact that a settlement called Nicopolis could be founded without any connection to a military victory, giving as an example the city of Emmaus, renamed in AD 223 to Nicopolis. However, in reality all cities of victory with the name Nicopolis,[11] founded by the Romans, do have a connection with a victory, military or another, as is the case with the city of Emmaus. Elagabal has renamed it to Nicopolis as a symbolic form of a victory, although not military, having in mind the religious beliefs of this too excentric Roman emperor.[12] That's the reason for me not to accept the thesis of I. Lozanov that the name 'Nicopolis' is not to be obligatory connected with

[9] CIL XVI 1 (Misene Fleet).

[10] CIL XVI 3; AE 1930, 72; Tacheva 1997, 276-296.

[11] Cities with the name 'Nicopolis', have been founded already in the Hellenistic period. Such is Nicopolis in Cilicia, founded near the place of the battle at Issa in 333 BC, today the city Islahiye in Turkey; the city known to the Hetts as Hapanuva, conquered later by Alexander III, and renamed after his death to Akronion or Nicopolis, ruled by the Selevkids, Alexander's successors, now the city of Afyonkarahisar (only Afyon up to 2004). Concerning the Roman cities with the name of Nicopolis, all of them are connected with victories: Nicopolis in Lesser Armenia (Armenia Minor) has been founded by Pompeius in 63 BC after the third war with Mithridades; Nicopolis in Epirus has been founded in 31 BC at Actium, the place where Octavius has positioned his armies and fought the famous battle; the founded by the same emperor Nicopolis in Africa was situated 3 km east of Alexandria, also the place of the battle with the army of Marcus Antonius and Cleopatra; Nicopolis in Vithinia, north and not far from Chalkedon. As a whole, these are nine cities with the name of Nicopolis, all founded as a result of a victory: 5 of them in Asia (2 of them being from the Hellenistic age), one in Africa and three on the Balkans in Europe. It is impressive that although Roman, these cities do not use Latin, but Greek to denote the city of victory. This is due probably to the fact that on the territories of these cities the language used is Greek and the tradition is borrowed with the aim to serve the Roman propaganda as a necessary gesture to the local population and cultures.

[12] See Cass. Dio. 80.1-21.

a victory, rather as an attempt of the Romans to stimulate the social and economic development of the region aiming to 'civilize' it.[13]

P. Perdrizet is the first to offer the hypothesis and to connect the date of the foundation of Nicopolis ad Nestum with Trajan and his victory over the Dacians.[14] It is based on the epithet *Ulpia*, which is struck on the coins of the city from AD 211-212.[15] For a long period this opinion of Perdrizet was dominating in literature, with the date of foundation in 106 by Trajan on the occasion of his victory in the Second Dacian war, which has led to the creation of the province of Dacia.[16] In his analysis of the urbanistic policy of this emperor, who has founded in Thracia seven new cities,[17] V. Velkov introduces something new: he considers Nicopolis ad Nestum as an old Thracian settlement, which received the status of a city by Trajan. That's the reason not to consider the city as newly founded,[18] but only as receiving officially the rights of a city by an imperial act. To its name was added ad Nestum to differentiate it from Nicopolis ad Haemum / Istrum, also in Thracia, connected with the real military battle of the emperor, also as to make topographically and geographically concrete the localization of the city of the victory on Nestos river.[19]

M. Zahrnt is much more skeptical to the date of foundation of Nicopolis ad Nestum in AD 106, considering this as an additional act to the urbanisation of the Thracian lands by Trajan.[20] His skepticism is supported

[13] Lozanov 2020, 66-67.

[14] Perdrizet 1906, 221. The name of the city on the coins is written as Ulpius Nicopolis on Mestos, and not on Nestos, announced as such a hundred years ago.

[15] Except Perdrizet, other authors also have accepted and diffended the hypothesis of the foundation of the city during the period of Trajan: See Oberhummer 1936, 518; Danov 1979, 123; Velkov 1980, 57; Poulter 1995, 8-10; Dimitrova-Milčeva 2002, 311; Lozanov 2020, 55-73.

[16] Vaklinova 1985, 143; Jones 1987, 107; Melamed 1993, 196; Bredow 2000, 935; Dimitrova-Milčeva 1992, 257-262; 2002, 311-317.

[17] Nicopolis ad Istrum, Marcianopolis, Augusta Traiana, Plotinopolis, Traianopolis, Remesiana and Ulpiana. The next five older cities (Serdica, Pautalia, Nicopolis ad Nestum, Topiros and Anchalo, have received such rights adding the gentile name Ulpius of Trajan to their names. The two colonies Oescus and Ratiaria added also the same gentile name (Velkov 1979, 307). According to D. Boteva seven cities have received it, adding to the mentioned five Ulpia Bizye and Ulpia Tonzos. She also considers as disputable the problem who in fact has founded Augusta Traiana – Trajan or Hadrian (Boteva 2014, 197 and cit.lit.).

[18] See Boteva 2014, 195-204.

[19] Topalilov 2018, 340-349.

[20] Zahrnt 2002, 51-67.

by H. Komnick, who offers an earlier foundation before the Dacian wars of Trajan.[21]

W. Tomascheck is the first to offer the earliest date of the foundation, connecting it with the victory of Brutus and Cassius in the battle of Philippi in 42 BC.[22] His thesis has been developed further by D. Boteva, according to whom Marcus Antonius has founded the city of Nicopolis in 32 BC, celebrating the 'decennia of the victory'.[23] In her opinion, by the foundation of the two cities with the name of Nicopolis, Octavian has tried to hide the information about the foundation of Nicopolis by Marcus Antonius as an answer in the so-called by her 'propaganda war'. In her analysis of the names of the cities created in Thracia during the period of Trajan as politia of the Greek type or *coloniae* with epithet *Ulpius*, Boteva points to their connection with the names of the members of the imperial family or with the battle at the place of the future Nicopolis ad Istrum.

Only Nicopolis ad Nestum cannot enter this scheme. First of all, Trajan has confirmed its old name as Nicopolis and secondly, he has differentiated it from Nicopolis ad Haemum / Istrum: i.e. he 'refounded' the city as an additional step in his Roman urbanization program of the Thracian lands. Some other historical data also confirm it: Trajan has never visited the lands of the Upper, Middle and Lower Mestos, which are very far from the military events he has been involved in, and that's the reason for the absence of any mentioning in the sources. The location of the city is too far from any military action known to us from Roman history so far; too far from the military attention and interest of the emperor to be called the city of victory, in the farthest southwest corner of the province. At that period[24] the city was also far from the basic/the most important arteria crossing the field of Nevrocop, near to the fortified Thracian settlement at Koprivlen in north-northwest direction.[25] There certainly exists a connection with a military battle on the place of Nicopolis ad Nestum; Trajan accepted the Hellenic name of the river – Nestos.[26] The name Mestos is only on the commemorative coins from AD 211-212. The city is rarely mentioned in the epigraphic and historical sources after the middle – second half of 2nd century AD as 'Nicopolis' or 'Nicopolis

[21] Komnick 2003, 4-91, Taf. 1-3.
[22] Tomaschek 1867, 719.
[23] Boteva 2007a, 80-85; 2007b, 187-196 with references.
[24] The period after the Dacian and the Parthian wars of Trajan.
[25] See on the map of the road infrastructure in Petrova 2018, fig. 1.
[26] Claudius Ptolemy writes of the city as 'Νικόπολις ή περί Νέσσον' (Cl. Ptol. *Geogr.* 3. 11. § 13).

in Thracia'. What was this victory and why the sources are usually silent about the city? What can be found about the existence of a pre-Roman settlements in the region of the Nicopolis ad Nestum?

Supporting the pre-Roman date of foundation of the Nicopolis ad Nestum, there may be offered other historical events, battles and a victory in the region of this city than the battle at Philippi, explaining more adequately and plausibly the genesis of its name. For this purspose it is necessary to observe the artifacts and the archeological structures in the field from Nicopolis ad Nestum to all directions and to connect its existence with the Thracian settlements here in the pre-Roman period. Nicopolis ad Nestum is surrounded from northwest and west by the rivers Kanina and Mesta/Nestos. The Nevrokop field (hollow) reaches to the north - northeast to Rhodope mountains. The ancient city is opened to the south to the vast fruitful field, following Mesta downstream. Numerous Thracian settlements from the pre-Roman, Roman and Late Antique period have been localized during the archaeological investigations and on the base of casual finds in the immediate hinterland of the city.[27] These settlements can be conditionally classified as belonging to three groups: downstream river Kanina; downstream river Mesta;[28] and alonside the permament Thrans-Rhodopeian way east of Nicopolis (fig. 1).

[27] Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987.

[28] The Thracian settlement at the village of Marchevo is one Roman mile far from Nicopolis; less than a km further has been localized another settlement, a mound necropolis and a watching tower at the village of Ognyanovo; a third ancient settlement, still unpublished, I have found between the villages of Ognyanovo and Baldevo. To the north, on the ancient road connecting the settlements alongside Kanina river with the northern part of the Rhodopes and the Thracian low-lands, village of Skrebatno is situated, very important for the history of the region. Here a treasure of Hellenistic coins has been found and a very early for Bulgaria Roman portrait of Antonia Minor (36 BC-37 AD), the mother of Emperor Claudius. To the south and southeast downstream of Mesta the Thracian settlements at the villages of Gospodintsi, Banichan and Dolno Borovo are localized, together with the extremely important for the region rock sanctuaries and the sanctuaries of deities from the Greek Pantheon, as well as the emporium at the village of Koprivlen. Sanctuaries are known also at the villages of Debren and Dolno Dryanovo to the northeastern direction following the permament pre-Roman road from the Aegeans through the Rhodopes, i. e. the Western Trans-Rhodopeian way. Several more sanctuaries have been discovered in the vicinity of the village of Pletena and Satovcha, also connected with a hughly developed road net. See Petrova 2012b, 289-361; 2018, 37-56; 2020, 201-226.

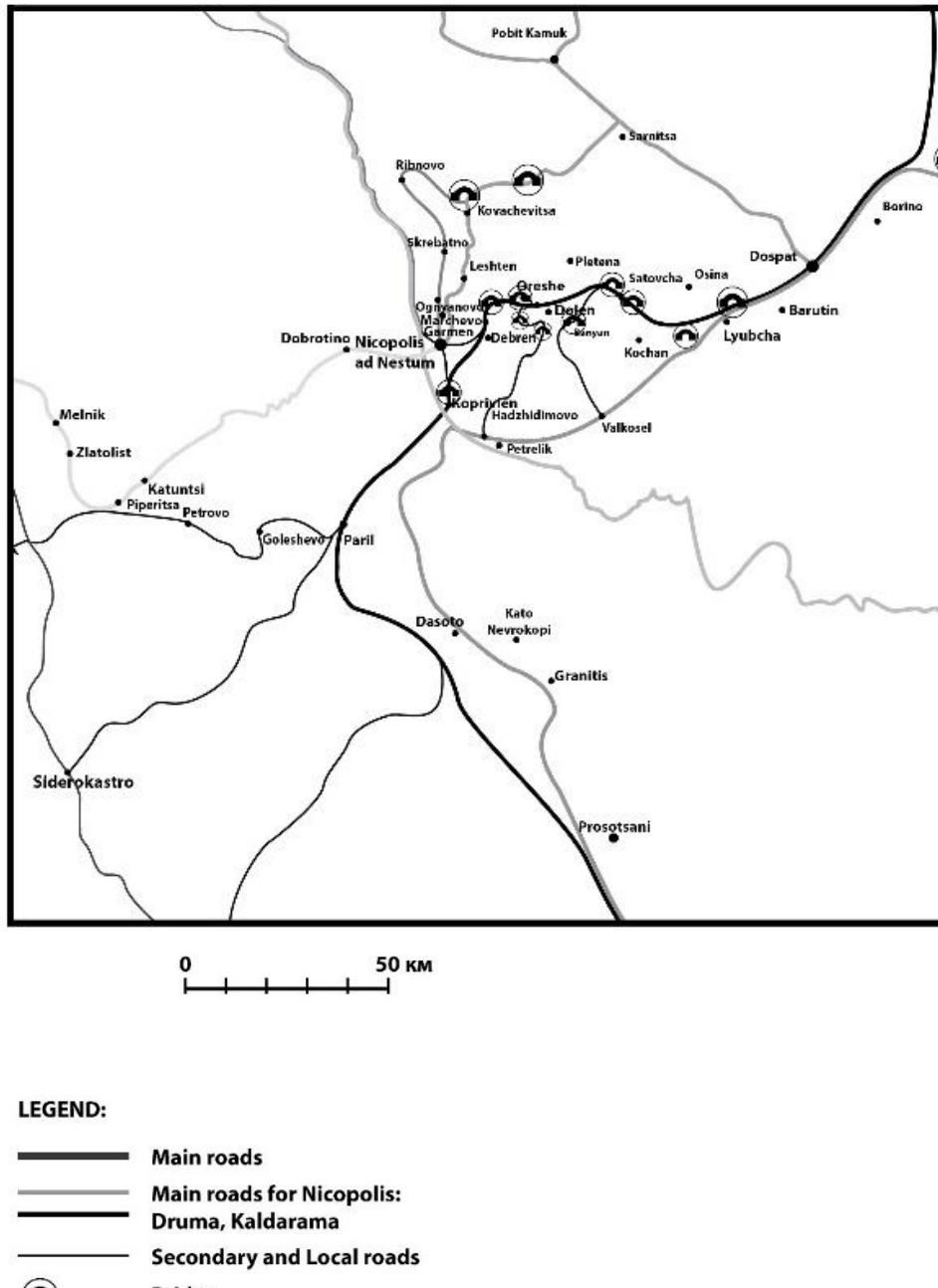


Fig. 1. Map of the ancient road infrastructure of Nicopolis (ad Nestum). Settlements, main, secondary and local roads (author: S. Petrova).

Although to the present moment are absent archaeological structures and generally architecture from the pre-Roman period under the level of Nicopolis ad Nestum, the coins and other finds from the lower layers point to the existence of a Thracian settlement far before 2nd century AD.[29] Such artifacts have been excavated in the southeastern part of the fortified city and date from the period between the second half of 3rd century BC and 1st century AD, confirming its existence in the Hellenistic and Early Roman (for the Balkans) period, before the foundation of Nicopolis.[30] Very signatory are also the occasional finds of Brutus coins in the vicinity of Nicopolis: the treasures from Garmen and Ognyanovo, as well as separate coins from the Nevrokop field[31] reveal that the Thracians from these settlements maybe have served in the auxiliary republican Roman troops in 42 BC, and that these coins were part of their salary. It is also possible that part of the survived soldiers from the legions of Brutus and Cassius after the battle at Philippi have escaped to the north and settled in these territories.[32] Here they probably felt safe because at the time of the battle and afterwards these lands have not been included in the Roman province of Macedonia. In this way, the lands close to the battle of Philippi proved safe to shelter part of the republican soldiers.

The place where Nicopolis (ad Nestum) has been founded is located in the most northwestern part of the Nevrocop field. From the descriptions of the ancient historians and geographers it follows that up to 32 BC from topographic and political aspect it does not belong to the Roman state. At that moment its borders are the south and the regions close to the Aegeian coast, later known under the name of Eastern Macedonia. The eastern border of the Roman state at that moment is the downstream of Nestos river (now Mesta),[33] while the middle and the upperstream are situated on the territory

[29] The hypothesis of existing Thracian settlement on the site based on numerous coins from the pre-Roman period and the coins from 27 BC of Octavian August, named at that time *Pater Patriae*, has been proposed for the first time by me. See Petrova 2012b, 292, 306-307. It was further developed in the research on the road infrastructure of Nicopolis ad Nestum, revealing the comaparative isolation of the region of Nicopolis from the road net, more strongly developed in the south direction of the city. See Petrova 2018, 37-56.

[30] M. Vaklinova and Ts. Komitova also date the foundation of Nicopolis in the 2nd century AD. See Vaklinova & Komitova 2019, 276. In the previous archeological investigations, they have found also a golden pectoralia together with a coin of Demetrius II (239-229 BC). See Vaklinova & Komitova 2013, 312.

[31] Boteva 2007b, 192-193 and cit. lit.

[32] For escape see Cass. Dio 47.48.

[33] Strabo 7, fr. 33.

of the Thracian kingdom. Because of these facts it is impossible for the Romans to found a city Nicopolis in the Thracian lands of the Nevrocop field, commemorating a victory without military actions in a foreign territory, which does not belong to the Roman state.

The inscription of Flavius Dizalas (IGBulg. IV 2338), 'found in Nicopolis',[34] demonstrates undoubthfully that here existed a settlement with a possible character of an aristocratic residence, maybe of the local Thracian king, before Thracia had been transformed to a Roman province in AD 46, after the Odrysian kingdom had been obliterated. In the period 42-32 BC, the lands around the future Nicopolis belonged to the Thracian tribe of Bessi[35] and the Roman forces were not in a position to impose their military and political influence as to found 'a city of the victory'. At that period the Bessi in the region are most probably vassals of Rome, but still not conquered. It is a fact that the lands of the neighbouring Maedi in the field of Sandanski and Petrich (the Middle Strymon valley) in Eastern Macedonia have been submitted to the Romans of Marcus Crassus only in 29-27 BC. This demonstrates eloquently that arround 32 BC, valley of Middle Mesta, the future Nicopolis, was neither 'Roman' nor 'defeated'.

The picture of the densly inhabited territories between Nestos and Strymon is described by Herodotus, who has left in his book 7 and 8 a very reliable and relatively full story of the tribes in the lands of Southwestern Thracia during the march of Xerxes. The same is the picture of the tribes between Nestos and Strymon, described by him consecutively, and inhabiting the coastline and the lands to the mountains to the north. The strongest attention has been paid by him to the Satrae, who in his opinion have never been conquered by anybody; they were bellicose, inhabitting the

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[34] The inscription has been found in 1886 on the land of the village of Garmen, which was situated east of the modern settlement at the end of 19th century. The land of Garmen then was to the east, today with the two villages of Novo Debren and Dabnitsa. The ruins of Nicopolis ad Nestum occupy part of the village Hissarluck in former times. The area of Nicopolis itself belonged to the peasants of Hissarluck and particularly to the so-called Marchov chiflik (Marchov farm). That's the facts because of which I don't accept the previous information that the inscription has been found in Nicopolis, i. e. on the land of Hissarluck. The strategos dwelt in Nicopolis in my opinion, while the inscription has been probably put either in close proximity or in the sanctuary of Artemis itself.

[35] For the territories inhabited by the Bessi alongside the upper and middle stream of Mesta and in the Rhodopes – sources and historiography see in Delev 2014, 153-171, with references. Although he is placing the Bessi too far to the north; in my opinion they lived in the Western Rhodopes, and the name 'Bessi' later became a collective noun for the Thracian tribes.

high mountains, and owned the famous sanctuary of Dionysos, in which the Bessi were soothsayers and fortune-tellers.[36] The intervention of Rome in the governing of the Thracian kingdom, intensifying in the second half of 1st century BC, and particularly after the battle at Philippi, resulted in the grandiose uprising of the Bessi, announced in the sources.[37]

The reason and the concrete cause of the uprising was the famous sanctuary of Dionysos, which the Romans have taken away[38] through the Sapaeian-Odrysian dynasty, which at that moment was ruling over the Thracian client kingdom, with the Bessi put under the control of the Odrysians.[39] Cassius Dio is retelling in details about the fearful dimensions of this Bessian revolt with Vologez at the head, the main priest of the sanctuary of Dionysos.[40] It is famous as the biggest revolt of the Thracians during the period of the Roman aggressive conquer of these lands. The rebels have killed Rhescuporis[41] and also joined the army of Rhoemetalces I[42] while he escaped to the Thracian Hersonessos being pursued by the Bessi. However, the uprising has been cruely suppressed by Lucius K. Piso Pontifex[43] with the

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[36] Hdt. 7.110, 111.

[37] According to the information of Herodotus, the sanctuary of Dionysos was situated on the land of the Satrae and the Bessi served there as priests. Marcus Licinius Crassus in 29 BC deprived the Bessi of it and gave to the Odrysians: 'and he also granted them the land in which they magnify the god, taking it away from the Bessi who were occupying it'. See Cass. Dio 51.25.5.

[38] In fact the revolt has been provoked by Marcus Lolius. Cassius Dio, retelling the events in 16 BC, describes that the latter '... while aiding Rhoemetalces, the uncle and guardian of the sons of Cotys, had subjugated the Bessi' (Cass. Dio 54.20.3).

[39] Katsarov 1924, 2, 37.

[40] Cass. Dio 54.34.5-7. According to P. Delev, the uprising is not correctly dated between 15 and 11 BC, with duration of more than one year. See Delev 2014, 144, 174, with references.

[41] Rascupor is son of Cotys and niece of Roemetalces I.

[42] Gaius Julius Rhoemetalces (Rhoemetalces I) was the son of the Sapaeian (para)dynast Rhescuporis, the brother of Rhascos (known from the Battle of Philippi in 42 BC). Rhoemetalces I was at the beginning ally of Marcus Antonius at the battle of Actium in 31 BC, but soon he deserted this army, thus gaining the political friendship of Octavian August. Roemetalces I was the brother of king Cotys, killed later by his paradynast Rhescuporis. On his turn, the latter was the tutor of the children of the preceding king Cotys II. Rhoemetalces I was also taking part in the war against the Getae at Egisos and in crushing the Pannonian revolt, together with Rhescuporis, the future killer of his brother Cotys.

[43] His father Lucius Calpurnius Piso Caesoninus is famous with an act with a dismal end for the Bessi, namely the murder of the Bessian dynast Rabokentus, who went to the camp of Piso to negotiate, suggesting a military support of the Bessi, alliance and

help of contigents from Pamphylia. Thus, in 11 BC the Bessi were finely defeated, and Rhoemetalces returned to the throne. Although Piso became famous as the 'conquerer of the Bessian Ares', the next events in the Thracian history have shown that the Thracian god of war was still not finally defeated.[44]

After the revolt of Vologez has been defeated, one part of the captured Bessi have been sold on the slavery markets of the Roman empire, while the other one has been interned outside the area of the Rhodope mountains,[45] the greater part of which is in nowadays Northeastern Bulgaria. In this regard, A. Orachev supposes that '...the Bessi themselves rejected to submit to the Odrysians and moved to the lands of today Dobrudja'.[46] In my opinion, such a willful movement was impossible in reality. No doubt that after their crushing in 11 BC and in the years after it the Bessi were subjects of the Odrysian kingdom, vassal of Rome. Naturally, at the beginning the migration was forcible and compact,[47] affecting the priests and their relatives. Only later began the process of joining of the followers descending from different tribes from all Thracia. The accumulation of the Bessi in one place, far from the old fireplace of the traditional cult, probably assisted the control over them, that's the reason the Romans have allowed it. Ovidius, who was sent to exile to Tomis, mentions already in 9 BC the Bessi living in the lands close to the city. The early presence of the Bessi here reveals very eloquently that the so-called 'migration' has begun already after the crush of the Vologez' revolt. Thus, in 11 BC the Bessi have been subjugated and Rhoemetalces put back on the throne.[48] Later on the name of the unruly Bessi has been imposed the practice of *damnatio memoriae*.[49]

The cruely crushed uprising followed by their forcible moving to the north of Hemus mountains makes it possible to suppose that the triumph of the ruling Odrysian-Sapaeian dynasty together with the Roman army has been commemorated by founding 'the city of Victory' and the defeat of the

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significant help of the Bessian infantry and cavalry. See Delev 2014, 173, with references.

[44] After 26 BC, the Bessi again have risen in rebellion together with the Dii and other Thracian tribes. During the period of Tiberius, the rule of the Romans again was in danger. This time, those who revolted were the Coelaletae, the Odrysians and the Diis, 'who still have not get used to the Roman rule'. Part of them crossed Hemus mountains in order to make also the far-living tribes rise. Tacheva-Hitova 1974, 21-22.

[45] Serafimova *et al*. 1988, 27.

[46] KETD 1993, 39.

[47] Flor. *Epit*.2.27/cf.n.42.

[48] Tacheva-Hitova 1974, 21-22.

[49] Boteva 1999, 188.

Bessian resistance. This officious and obedient to Rome dynasy and aristocracy has seen such a possibility for naming the city concretely with this name, because the Odrysian and the Sapaeians have been in a constant battle with the Bessians on the side of Rome. This is the possible reason the initiative of foundation of Nicopolis to be theirs, but with the military and political support of the Roman emperor, including even the Greek language and the way of forming the name of the new city. Summarizing the facts supporting the hypothesis that Nicopolis (from the time of Trajan Nicopolis ad Nestum) has been founded in order to commemorate the defeat of the Vologez' revolt, we should especially underline some of the most important of them.

Nicopolis is a too outlying from the battle field of Philippi, around 70 km or 37 Roman miles, equal to three days army march. The habitual practice in Antiquity, especially from the Hellenistic and Roman period, is to found a new city at or in the close vicinity of the battle, and never in such a distant place like in the case of Nicopolis. Such are all the examples already mentioned.

The Greek-speaking Thracians have borrowed this practice from the Hellenistic rulers. The same is true for the Romans; the cities of Victory were called Nicopolis. That way the Roman culture demonstrated its ability of syncretism as a whole, also as a media of the imperial propaganda and involving other people and tribes in the sphere of the Roman policy and culture.

The Bessi have been an awful antagonist of Rome for more than 150 years, after the latter first conquered the close area of Eastern Macedonia and then planned to continue further into the Southwestern part of the future province Thracia, inhabited by the Bessi. By founding Nicopolis specifically in the Bessian lands, their Thracian opponents Odrysians and Sapaeians, but also the Romans confess that the Bessi were very dangerous antagonists and a serious obstacle for the enlargement of the Roman Empire in that part of the Balkans. It is a fact that after the defeat of their revolt, the Bessi never recover enough to organize a significant resistence to the Romans. In the later periods the name 'Bess' stands for any Thracian.

At the time of its foundation, the name of Nicopolis did not need clarification, because it was the only 'city of victory' in Thracia. But in the case of the second Nicopolis in Thracia founded by Trajan to commemorate his victory over the Dacians, in order to distinguish both cities, Nicopolis I received ad Nestum/or Mestum and Nicopolis II – ad Haemum / Istrum. For Trajan, the significance of his victory over the Dacians i.e. Northern Thracians was as great as the one over the Bessi.

The foundation of Nicopolis was during the early period of August, but his participation and generally of the Roman state in it is hidden under the veil of military actions. His aims coincided at that period with the aims of the Odrysian-Sapaeian dynasty and they acted hand by hand, army to army against the Bessi of Vologez. The previous events with Marcus Antonius at Actium, the fierce and long resistence of the Bessi and the godforsaken area of the battle have been combined in the policy of August to hide his ambitious plans of conquering all Thrace and to advance step by step, taking advantage of the disagreement among the different Thracian tribes. That's why it only seems that the initiative of founding Nicopolis belongs merely to the Odrysians, maybe to their king Rhoemetalces, supported during the battles by Lucius Calpurnius Piso Pontifex leading the Roman army.

In 11 BC this territory became a part of the Odrysian kingdom, vassal to Rome. The south border of this already enlarged kingdom went far to the south of Nicopolis.[50] But the frequence of repeating these foundation acts of 'cities of Victory', with the name Nicopolis on the Balkans and elsewhere by the Romans in 1st century BC, and especially during the period of August, shows that it was in fact a purposeful policy of the Early Roman Empire.

Very essential is the problem of localizing Nicopolis in 11 BC – 1st century AD. In the light of the still rarely found artifacts under Nicopolis from Trajan to Late Antiquity, it can be proposed that the earliest Nicopolis is covered by that classical Roman city ad Nestum we know from 2nd century onward. The earliest Nicopolis of 1st century BC – 1st century AD was also a very important settlement on the former territory of the Bessi, but subordinate to the Odrysian kingdom. The votive inscription of Flavius Dizalas[51] found eastern of the village of Garmen supports such a hypothesis. It shows that he was a Romanized Thracian, dwelling in his residence here as a hereditary strategos, probably descending from the Thracian royal. The plate with the inscription was found in an area with a huge mound necropolis, consisting of single and group tumuli situated alongside the local road connection with the Western Trans-Rhodopean road. A high hill known as 'Gradishteto' or 'St Archangel' is rising east of the necropolis. The finds from the slopes and the peak (architectural structures, fortress walls, coins, pottery, metal objects, etc.) show that this was a settlement from ancient times to 14th century, including finds from the Hellenistic period.[52]

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[50] See Strabo 7, fr. 33, 35.

[51] The old village was situated east of the modern one and close to the tumuli complexes, with preserved today about 15 mounds.

[52] The monument is registrated under No 78/21, DV 32/1965, but has not yet been studied archaeologically. The treasure-hunters have seriously drilled all the surface

The high and elongated peak is oriented to the northeast-southwest.[53] The low parts reach the suburbs of the village of Staro Debren (Old Debren), its western part is washed by the streams of the river Varbitsa.[54] Both in its eastern and western part the hill is encircled by steep slopes tunring into deep ravines. The visible structures show the settlement is fortified with a possible citadel and water basin (reservoir).[55] The city is about 500 m directly to the north with the center of the village of Dabnitsa, circa 3.5 km from Nicopolis ad Nestum, 1.5 km from the eastern parts of the village of Garmen and less than a kilometer from Staro Debren. The settlement covers about 80-100 acres, maybe even more. This is the biggest Thracian settlement in close proximity to Nicopolis ad Nestum,[56] identified by the researchers also as a Late Antique and Medieval fortress.[57] The fortress has been built on a huge mound embankment.

At the present, two fortified circles are visible. Parts of the outer one are preserved on some places, high up to 2-4 m. The walls follow the configuration of the terrain and that explains the irregular shape of the fortress. The inner circle is strongly destroyed, with some preserved parts at the eastern side, the wall with direction northwest-southeast. A natual rising ground with the surface of 35 acres is placed in the middle of this relatively high platform. A tower in the northwestern corner is partly covered by earthwork of the treasure-hunters. The inner fortress wall is 10 m inwards of the outer one. Very possibly a sanctuary has been built on the very top, later this sacred place inharited by an Early Christian church, and according to the

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of the hill and have left Hellenistic pottery with firnice coat, ancient, late antique and medieval pottery, fragments of glass vessels, mortar and fragments of building terracotta. The local connoisseur of the history of the area T. Uzunov have discovered on the top of the hill a stone mobile altar of proto-Bulgarian type and related it to the lapidarium of Nicopols ad Nestum.

[53] See Dremsizova-Nelchinova 1987.

[54] The river is also known as Oreshka Varbitsa, taking its source from Atlitsa locality, then passing through the villages Oreshe, Staro Debren and Dabnitsa, after that running into Mesta.

[55] Now it is known as the chapel St. Archangel Michail. It is a rectangular room with half-cylindical vault. A hagiasma is situated in one of its corners, and it usually, with several exceptions, is not drying up and not freezing over in wintertime.

[56] Probably the settlement continues also in the flat country of the terrain to the northeast, in direction to Staro Debren. Here have been found significant remnants of an Early Christian basilica and other buildings, whose architectural decoration is scattered around the village yards or built in its walls.

[57] Georgieva 1960, 12-14; Stoyanova-Serafimova 1965; Mihailov 1969, 158-162; Dremsizova 1987, 69-70, № 121-122.

local inhabitants also a monastery exited here. This strategical hill of Gradishte has beem appreciated by the Bulgarians too, and a fortress was built to guard the roads and the Nevrocop field and to keep an eye on the sporadic raids from the south to the mountain area.

The presence of the chapel supposes that the sacredness of the old pagan cult place has been retained. The very fact of finding the plate with the inscription of Flavius Dizalas not far from the hill St. Archangel and closely to the tumuli complexes, also the hill with the mound on top points that probably a representative of the Thracian king dynasty has been buried in it.[58] Dizalas most probably ruled the strategies mentioned in the inscription from Nicopolis, and in this place - high and with visibility to the whole Nevrokop field and the mountain roads to the south and northeast he founded the sanctuary of Artemis, i.e. this is the village of Keirpara mentioned in the inscription, possibly destroyed and abandoned during the uprising.

It belonged to the Bessi and existed long before 11 BC as the most important settlement on the border of the field and the mountain part of the area, controlling according to the road map the most important parts of the region and the local roads in the Middle Nestos valley, the Western Rhodopes and its Westestern Trans-Rhodopean road.[59] It seems that the importance of Keirpara incited the foundation by Dizalas of the sanctuary of Artemis exactly here. After the defeat of the revolt, it has been destroyed together with the settlement Keirpara and northwestern of it in the flat field the city of the victory founded.

We can suppose that two important for the Bessi and the area settlements existed in a close distance in 1st century BC – 1st century AD: Keirpara[60] on the hill, planned, built and named in the Thracian way, together with its sanctuary of Artemis atop, both destroyed during the defeat of the Vologez' revolt and temporarily abandoned; and the new settlement of Nicopolis, built on the plain and named in the Hellenistic-Roman way, maybe also influenced somehow by the plans of the contemporary Roman cities. Amatokos,[61] the grandfather of Dizalas, maybe has established himself the newly founded city as a victor, possible paradynast of the Odrysian king

[58] I am grateful to T. Uzunov for the information that in fact atop St. Archangel there is a huge Thracian tumulus.

[59] Petrova 2018, 37-55, fig. 1.

[60] Where the sanctuary of Artemis was either restored or founded.

[61] This name is connected with the Odrysians, and as a whole with the king's dynasty. See Detschev 1976, 14-16.

and first governer of the 'city of victory over the Bessian Ares'. His son Ezbenis may have taken the helm from him, most probably in the 30s – beginning of 40s of 1st century AD, according to the catalogue of the 33 strategoi of Topiros,[62] then transferring it to his son Dizalas during the Flavian period. This reality is quite possible since it is concerning circa 90 years and three generations, descending from the lineage of the Thracian kings. The refounding of Nicopolis by Trajan on the same place was much easier to do both politically and from topographical aspect, because the place met all the demands of a Roman city, formulated by Vitruvius: on a plain, with good climate, impetuous waters, fertile soil, and developed road system. Of course, the Romans added some new roads and ameliorated the old ones in many aspects.[63] Politically, the time of Trajan and his victories were the next to propagandate the might of the Roman emperor and his empire in the summit of its enlargement. The new fame of Trajan as conquerer of the Dacians, who were the new variant of the Bessi, has been added to the old one of August, being for him ideal in all aspects. Once again the allegorical victory over the Bessi was comfirmed by the act of refounding Nicopolis and giving him the city rights.

Flavius Dizalas, the strategy of Bessika and Nicopolis ad Nestum

The votive inscription[64] of the strategos Flavius Dizalas reveals his and his family's participation in founding sanctuary of Artemis. Prof. B. Gerov dates it in the period AD 87-90, at the end of the Domitian's ruling.[65] Prof. Mihailov supports this opinion, and on the base of the inscription from Svrljig[66] considers that the inscription of Dizalas is t.p.q. AD 79.[67] In the opinion of M.–G. Parissaki, the date should be related to the time of Vespasian, possibly at the beginning of his rule.[68] The inscription says:

'Good luck! Flavius Dizalas, son of Ezbenis, son of Amatok, strategos of Olyn(th)ia, Roeimeletika, Dressapaika, Tukyusidanthika, [---]seletika, Zraika

[62] Lazaridis 1955, 235-244.
[63] Petrova 2018, 37-56.
[64] The first publication of the inscription was by K. Nikolov in Minalo journal – Nikolov 1911, 174-177. It was discovered in 1886, on the land of the village of Garmen, which was then located to the east of the modern village of Garmen. According to K. Nikolov, the inscription was found in the vicinity of Nicopolis ad Nestum. It was a slab measuring 55-60 x 34-35 cm, currently lost. See IGBulg. IV 2338.
[65] Gerov 1960, 545-552.
[66] Dumont 1892, 317.
[67] IGBulg. V 5928, 421-423.
[68] Parissaki 2009, 329-330, 335 – II / 17.

(?), Atiutika and Bioletika; he and his spouse Reptaterkos (?), daughter of Herak(li)des devoted the tri(pod) and the xoanon[69] *on the commission of the Mistress Artemis. He was the first to defy the offerings and the (fe)asts, sacred for the Mistress Artemis in Keirpara, after the goddess has arranged and ordered to make a sacrifice, after Flavius Dizalas and his spouse R(ep)ta(t)erkos, daughter of Heraklid, have prayed (for themselves) and for their daughter Aidezyuris, by making a bird-augur---, also his brother Teres (?), as well as their mother Di---, also Ezbenis, son of Teres, their nephew, besides---,... and it is allowed (to sacrifice) also sheep and goat---'.* [70]

Although the records has been lost, a not very precise copy of it was published, later also lost, eight names of strategies can be read to which Flavius Dizalas was a former or a current governor.[71] Except the strategies of Olynthia and Seletika, all the other ones from the inscription appeared for the first time.[72] As to clarify the problem, of the time of founding of Nicopolis, on whose territory and strategy is situated the later Roman city and the connection of the strategies of Dizalas with the strategy of Bessika, I shall analyze in short the last four ones: Seletika, Zraika, Atiutika and Bioletika.

It is accepted that the strategy was the basic element in the administrative organization of the Thracian kingdom. The strategies exist from the middle of 1st century BC up to the first decades of 2nd century AD, disappearing then as a result of a vast program of urbanization begun by Emperor Trajan, and continued by his heir, Emperor Hadrian. Three historically determined periods can be followed in the administrative organization and development:[73] the first one continues from the middle of 1st century BC till AD 46, practically in the middle of this century; the second period can be traced from the moment of creating the Roman province of Thracia in AD 46 till the first years of the rule of Vespasian (AD 70); the third one lasts from the Flavians to the period of Trajan and Hadrian, when the system of strategies has been replaced by the system of the cities and its territories.

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[69] In the original the word 'ξόανον' is written, but N. Sharankov translates it as 'a statue'. See Sharankov 2015, 70 and note 27.

[70] Sharankov 2015, 70-71.

[71] Nikolov 1911, 174-177; Beshevliev 1945, 201; Gerov 1961, 215, with references; Mihailov 1997, 421-424=IGBulg. V 5928; Sharankov 2015, 70-71. This concerns eight strategies from all 50 'mini-strategies', mentioned by Pliny the Elder, revealing the administrative structure of Thracia in the first quarter of 1st century AD (according to Parissaki in AD 77 - see Parissaki 2009, 319-357, with lit.).

[72] Beshevliev 1945, 25.

[73] Parissaki 2009, 319-357 and cit.lit.

According Pliny the Elder,[74] the strategies at the beginning of 1st century AD were in general 50, but unfortunately he does not list them by name.[75] Instead, he pointed at about 36 ethnonyms (gentes), part of which inhabited Moesia (i.e. the lands outside Thracia itself). In the opinion of M. Tacheva, these data of Pliny for the tribes in Thracia reach to the rule of the first representatives of the Rhescuporis dynasty because of the fact that the Getaes and the Moesi at that time about AD 12 have been included in Thracia. Hence, at the time of Pliny the Elder the strategies do not cover the tribe territories and objectively do not respond to the dimentions of the Odrysian Kingdom. In relation to the 50 strategies he also mentions two more regions, Asthika and Kenika, using older information from the map of M. Vipsanius Agrippa and the so-called *formula provintiae,* a legal document of organizing the provinces.[76]

The second source of the names of the Thracian strategies is Claudius Ptolemy. Chronologically, the strategies ruled by Flavius Dizalas precede the description of Claudius Ptolemy, who in his work was already writing of 14 strategies and their locations. This text is among the few historical ones containing information on the tribes and the administrative division of Ancient Thracia in the Hellenistic and Early Roman periods. This text has been discussed many times in the Bulgarian and the foreign historiography causing various contradictive interpretations.[77] According to Jones, Ptolemy has mechanically recreated the names of the strategies from an older list (source?), without making connection with his own later information. Jones also concludes that this list proves the existence of an earlier administrative system in Thracia.[78]

New names have appearead in Claudius also after the creation of the province of Thracia in AD 46, and these are the strategies Astike, Seletike and

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[74] Plin. *HN* 4.18.40: *Thracia sequitur, inter validissimas Europae gentes, in strategias L divisa. populorum eius, quos nominare non pigeat, amnem Strymonem accolunt dextro latere Denseletae et Maedi ad Bisaltas usque supra dictos, laevo Digerri Bessorumque multa nomina ad Mestum amnem ima Pangaei montis ambientem inter Haletos, Diobessos, Carbilesos, inde Bri<g>as, Sapaeos, <O>domantos. Odrysarum gens fundit Hebrum accolentibus Carbiletis, Pyrogeris, Drugeris, Caenicis, Hypsaltis, Benis, Corpilis, Bottiaeis, Edonis*.

[75] Dimitrov 1932/1934, 125.

[76] Tacheva 2004, 117-118.

[77] Dimitrov 1932/1934, 123-146; Mihailov 1967, 31-48; Jones 1971, 10-16; Fol 1975, 60-92; 1985, 142-144; Tacheva 1983, 5-8; Delev 2009, 245-253.

[78] Jones 1971, 12.

Danteletike, the second one being mentioned in the inscription of Flavius Dizalas. It should be noted that almost all names of strategies in the inscription can be met as contemporary geographic names of detached mountain areas, including bigger or smaller plain parts with suggested adequate administrative centers. Each area possessed a specific kind of economy. Already B. Gerov has noted that 'the location of these strategies is in the mountains, still not cultivated regions of Thracia'.[79] It has been found out during my research that the listing of the strategies in the inscription of Dizalas begins from the south to the north, then to the west, north and east/southeast.[80] The most important strategies for the foundation of Nicopolis and the existence of the later Bessika strategy, mentioned by Ptolemy, and the possible connection and localization with Nicopolis ad Nestum, are the last four strategies (fig. 2). *Seletika* is mentioned as the fifth strategy in the list of Dizalas. I suppose that it occupied the Nevrokop field, particularly the region of the ancient city, today the area of Gotse Delchev and the area of Marvashko. The little space in front of the name Σηλητικής allows some scholars to offer another reading.[81]

The possibility of using words such as 'mountain', 'plain' etc. are rejected and accepted is the reading Σηλητικής, i. e. the known name Seletika. The same opinion is shared also by G. Mihailov and T. Ivanov, however they claim that Apolonius Eptajkent was probably the governer of the 'plain' Seletika (πάσης Σηλητικής) in nowadays Noreastern Bulgaria.[82] He is mentioned with the names of three strategies he was governing in three inscriptions from the period of Roemetalces II (from the beginning of 2nd century AD), descending from Visa in Turkey, And Abritus and the village of Atanassovo near Burgas, Bulgaria.[83] In two of them there is no problem to

[79] Gerov 1970, 123-132.

[80] The study of all strategies ruled by Flavius Dizalas, is the subject of a separate work. Here I dwell only on the ones connected with Bessika.

[81] Beshevliev 1945, 204-205.

[82] Ivanov 1955, 167-168, 173.

[83] Ognenova 1962, 200; Mihailov 1967, 33. The inscriptions with the name of 'Apolonius, the son of Eptaikent', are to the moment already 7: two monumental altars, two statue bases, a column, devoted by his spouse Leontho and two more built altars found in June 2015 in Aquae Calidae, now kept in the Regional Historical museum of Burgas (Sharankov 2015, 54-65). Only on five of the monuments the names of the strategies are preserved.



Fig. 2. Map with the location of the strategies Seletika, Zraika, Atiutika and Bioletika, ruled by the strategos Flavius Disalas; and Bessika, Drossika and Benika (mentioned by Claudius Ptolemy) (author: S. Petrova).

read the names of the strategies Anchialo[84] and Ryusikke,[85] which are not met elsewhere. In these inscriptions separate letters have remained from a third strategy, which all researchers following Ptolemy are identifying unanimously,

[84] Anchialo has recived the city status only after Dacia has been annexed by Emperor Trajan. The Thracian element was actively present in this city. The evidences for that are given by the ancient authors, the epigraphic monuments mentioning the strategy with the same name Anchialo and the vast Thracian mound necropolis. The boundaries of the city territory of Anchialo obviously coincide with the ones of the early strategy Anchialo. To the south the boundary reaches the Burgas lakes, to the west to the Aytos/Burgas mineral baths, and to the north to the river of Aheloy.

[85] G. Mihailov determines the city of Abritus as the center of the strategy Ryusike (Mihailov 1967, 45). In his view, the idea of T. Ivanov, L. Ognenova and M. Lazarov that Seletika was including the region of Razgrad, is not acceptable. Also acording to Mihailov, during the reorganization of Trajan the mountain part of Seletika has been attached to Anchialo, while the plain one – to Marcianopolis, the boundary passing 'somewhere on the slopes of Hemus'. According to M. Tacheva, the strategia Ryusike includes the riverside of Rositsa (feeder of Yatrus, Yantra), and later it has been absorbed by the city of Nicopolis ad Istrum (Tacheva 2000a, 33-38).

but in my opinion wrongly, as Seletika. Actually, it concerns an absolutely unknown strategy, whose name ends in *-κης* (in the inscription of Abritus) and in *-λητικις* (in the case of Atanassovo). This wrong identification with Seletika in the cited early inscriptions would probably remain in literature as 'absolutely sure' unless the same name was not mentioned in the inscription of Flavius Dizalas from almost the same time. At that time the 'mountain' Seletika was obviously situated in the mountain regions of Southwestern Thracia, on the boundary with Macedonia. The strategies ending in *-λητικις* in all three inscriptions from Eastern Bulgaria, may be Seletika, however not the mountain one, but the mini-strategy similarly to the inscription from Garmen, which later has become eponym of the bigger, mega-strategy, the 'plain' Seletika, known in Ptolemy without explanation, only as Seletika.

The well-grounded question that deserves attention is why the strategy of Seletika appears first in the Western Rhodopes, and only after 40-50 years it has been placed by Claudius Ptolemy in nowadays Northestern Bulgaria. It has been accepted in scientific literature that Seletika was occupying the territories among the cities Nicopolis ad Istrum and Marcianopolis (in the view of Gerov and Mihailov – in the city of Marcianopolis). M. Tacheva expressed the opinion that this strategy has been divided around AD 55-60 into mountain and plain one (= IGRR I 677), the latter having as center Abritus, where the next inscription of Appolonius Eptaikent has been found (IGBulg II 743). During the time of Trajan this strategy has been erased and that's why according to Tacheva only the mountain one was left in Ptolemy, which earlier also was in Thracia. Usdikesika also has been destroyed by Trajan similarly to the stategy of Ryusike and the strategy of plain Seletika, and also added to lower Moesia, maybe during the period of Hadrian after his visit of Thracia.[86] Obviously, the mountain Seletika was only that one in the Western Rhodopes, mentioned in the inscription of Svrljig (IGR I 677) and the one from Garmen.

The migration of the Bessi has begun from this Seletika after the defeat of the Bessian uprising to the other, the plain Seletika in nowadays Northeastern Bulgaria. The new strategy could not be called 'Bessika' in the known inscriptions, because the name of *damnatio memoriae* has been put over the Bessi. In fact, Claudius Ptolemy mentions Bessika, but such a name is not discovered on the epigraphic records, a most possibly, this situation

[86] Tacheva 2000a, 71. In my view, this localization of the mountain Seletika is unsubstantiated, first, because the lands around Marcianopolis (Devnya) cannot be determined in any way as mountain, and second, concerning the heights around, they are not higher than in the area of Abritus.

will be preserved in the future too. The information from the diplomas of the Bessi veterans[87] support the hypothesis that Bessika was situated in the area of the Rhodopes, but later its territory has been divided between Nicopolis ad Nestum and Philippopolis.[88]

The name Seletica comes from the tribe name *seleti (sialeti, silaeti*). Retelling about the great uprising of the Bessi, led by Vologez, the priest of Dionysos, and defeated around 11 BC, Cassius Dio mentions also the sialets. While the Bessi were besieging Rascuporidis, the son of Cotys at Philippopolis and were in pursuit of his uncle Roemetalces up to the Thracian Hersonessos, the great scale invasion of the sialets brought into ruins Macedonia. Pliny the Elder also speaks of them when describing the tribes in Thracia, but from his text it rather comes out that they are located in the Upper Moesian plain. In the search of their localization, P. Delev connects the sialets with the tilatei of Tukidid, placed upperstream of Oskios, i.e. in the area of Sofia.[89] D. Dechev, who has determined them as a Bessian tribe, probably has in mind their action coinciding in time with the Bessian revolt.[90] However, it can be thought of them as being neighbours of the Bessi somewhere in the western confines of the occupied by them territory. Such localization except drawing them closer to the location of the *tilatei*, seems much more appropriate also as an initial position for invasion to Macedonia.[91] These data provide the possibility of placing Seletika and the sialets on the boundary with Macedonia. Another argument for the localization of the sialets in proximity to Macedonia is the information of Pliny the Elder, who has placed the sialets along Hebros river, however before the priantes, inhabiting the Prianthian field, today the field of Gyumurdjina to the east of the Biston lake, i.e. outside the indigenous Sapeian lands;[92] in the source the sequence of listing is: '...Sialeths, Prianths, dolonki, thini'.[93] The Sialeths of Pliny were probably occupying vast areas of the interior of the Rhodopes, northwestern of the Prianths. In fact, he does not mention them among the

[87] RMD IV 264; V 392-394, 422; Topalilov 2013, 10-19 and cit.lit.
[88] Topalilov 2013, 19.
[89] Thuc. 2.96.4; Steph. Byz. s. v. Τιλαταῖοι; Delev 2014, 437.
[90] Detschew 1957, 440: 'bessische Tribus'.
[91] Delev 2014, 437.
[92] Herodotus also mentions the area Briantika (Hdt. 7.108). Its name descends from the Thracian βρια – 'city' (Venedikov 1982, 133), maybe in connection with the contrast among the rural mountain areas to the north and the overbuilt with cities seacoast of the Rhodopes. The same field is known by Titus Livius under the name Priaticus campus (Tit Liv. 38.41).
[93] Plin. *NH* 4.11(184).40.

tribes alongside Nestos (where Seletika is located according to the inscription of Dizalas), but this may be because the Seleti cover the ethnonym Bessi, while all tribes mentioned by Pliny alongside the river of Nestos (Haleths, Carbilessi, Diobessi etc.) are called 'Diggers-Bessi, i. e. 'sifters of magnetite sand - Bessi'.

B. Gerov describes the Sialeths on the ground of the information of Cassius Dio and Pliny the Elder as a 'branch of the Bessi inhabiting the neighbour of Macedonia'. Because of geographic considerations B. Gerov dos not accept the connection of these Selets with the strategy Seletika of Ptolemy in nowadays Northeastern Bulgaria.[94] In the scientific literature on Thracia, the Sialeths are connected with the idea of sacronymon, characterrizing the population around a really existing 'Thracian Dodona',[95] from where the name Σελλοι has spread over all the Hellenes.[96] If judging the meaning on the ground of the Dodona in Epirus, the Thracian Dodona cannot be anything else except the pan-Thracian sanctuary of the Bessi.[97] Two late records, which reveal the connection between the Samothracian cult and Dodona, probably show the way the ethnonym 'Seleti' has migrated towards Thracia (from Dodona to the 'zone of the Bessi', i.e. the Western Rhodopes.[98]

Concerning the relocation of the Seleti (i.e. of the Bessi) to Northeastern Bulgaria, there is no doubt, that after 11 BC they subjugated to the Odrissian kingdom, vassal to Rome.[99] The ethnonym 'Bessi' in my opinion is

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[94] Gerov 1980, 7-8.

[95] Koledarov uses for the wrong location of the 'Thracian Dodona' in Strandja mountain only one source - tabula IX from the maps attached to the manuscript of the Geography of Cladius Ptolemy (dated, by the way too late in 1602), see Koledarov 1985, 70-72).

[96] Strabo *Geogr*. 1.2.20.

[97] It is interesting to note that the helms of the 'Thracian type', except in the Western Rhodopes, also in Dodona (Zhuglev 1991, 21). As Dodona is called χωρίον των Υπερβορέον (Lazova 2001, 17), it can be logically supposed that the hypoborreian gifts have passed, at least in mythologic-literature context, through the sanctuary of the Bessi (i.e. through the 'Thracian Dodona'), something prof. A. Fol insisted.

[98] The sanctuary of Dodona in Epirus is destroyed by the Romans in 167 BC, as a revenge for the union with Perseus. Later emperor August ordered it to be reconstructed. In 74 BC, during the war of the Roman with Mithridad VI, the Bessi and their allies support this dangerous Roman opponent with cavalry and provisions (Serafimova *et al*. 1988, 23-26). In the late parables on the Samothracian cult, the devoted in the second degree first have been brought to the sanctuary of Dodona, as to be washed, or purified (Fol 1990, 128-129).

[99] KETD 1993, 39.

religious, and not an ethnic characteristic, because of that at the end of the Roman period becomes a common name for all Thracians; synonym of the most faithful to the religious doctrine Thracians, who have passed through the devotional rituals, adhering to a definite way of life and concentrated by their own will in one place. The Bessi from the plain Seletika in the area of Abritus in today's Northeastern Bulgaria have formed a closed society, a religious confraternity, similar to that of the Essei at the Dead Sea.[100]

At the end of 1st – beginning of 2nd century AD. As a result of these migration processes, and not only due to 'the forcible deportations' as Condurachi supposed,[101] there appeared Bessi and Seleti in North Dobrudja. The replacing of the name Seletika in the lands in Northeastern Bulgaria is the final result of a long process of collective and single migrations of the devoted (i.e. of Bessi) – to the new center of their cult.[102] The mountain Seletika still existed obviously and was named the same way in the areas of Gotse Delchev and Murvashko in the inscription of Flavius Darzalas before the appearance of the strategy Drossika in Ptolemy. The name Seletika here on the boundary with Macedonia seems to be preserved at least to the beginning of 2nd century AD. The disappearing of the mountain Seletika in his Geography means that there was left only one Seletika, which really didn't need the attribute 'plain'.

The final replacing of Seletika far to northeast has freed space for Ptolemy for two new strategies in proximity to the boundary with Macedonia – Drossika and Bessika. He claimed that Bessika spread over Zraika and Asyutika of Flavius Dizalas. The revival of the name of Bessika, moreover in the sheer zone of the Bessi, is probably to be explained by the distance of 150 years dividing the event from the defeat of the Bessi in 11 BC. As noted before, the strategy of Bessika is not mentiontioned in any epigraphic record; Flavius

[100] In the period of the Early Christianity, according to *Vita Sancti Theodosii Coenobiarchae* (423-527) by Simeon Metaphrastes, 'the Bessi' had their temple in the monastery in the locality 'Kutila' at the Dead Sea, where they had services in their Bessian language.

[101] Condurachi 1966, 95-104.

[102] In a number of monuments from the territories of Tomis and Histria dating from the middle of 2nd up to the middle of 3rd century, *Bessi consistentes* are mentioned. As immigrants, they had detached settlements, in one of which (Vicus Quintionis) are found furnaces for iron treatment. It should not be forgotten in that connection that in the inscription from Garmen, Seletika includes the area of Murvarshko, known with its iron extraction already functioning from the beginning of the Iron Age. The well known Ulmetum was also inhabited by the Bessi (KETD 1993, 39, A. Orachev).

Dizalas also replaced it with two geographic names, Zraika and Asyutika, i.e. Thracia and Kamenitsa.

The strategy Zraike was situated north of Seletika and occupied most probably the kettle of Razlog.[103] *Θρήϊκες* were the Thracians of king Rhesos, coming to help the Troyans in the Illiad.[104] Homer does not specify from which part of Thracia has come 'the ruler of the Thracians', but in the drama 'Rhesos' of Euripides is pointed the area of Strymon river.[105] Later information of Philostratus,[106] places Rhesos in the Rhodopes as the main priest in his own big sanctuary.[107] The main sanctuary of the Bessi mentioned by Herodotus should be located in northwestern Rhodopes;[108] on the boundary of two strategies Zraike and Atiutika, ruled by Flavius Dizalas.

According to Macrobius, the peak on which the famous sanctuary was situated was called Zilmisos. A. Fol states that Zilmisos is a *koruptela* of Zalmoxis.[109] The name θράϊκες (Thracians), in the view of Kretschmer, is derivative from the tribe name τραυσοί, this tribe being mentioned by Herodotus in the southwestern parts of the Rhodopes.[110] The same tribe[111]

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[103] It impresses that in the names Zraike and Razlog have the consonants 'z, r and g (к)', although in different consequence. That's the ground to suppose continuity from antiquity. Linguists have made an attempt of resolving the issue. According to D. Yaranov, 'razlog' means a 'locality situated on a mountain slope' (Yaranov, 1932, 73). Etymologically, it is most natural to associate this name with the verb decompose. Razlog is mostly a kettle formed by the decomposition/division of three surrounding mountains Rila, Pirin and Rhodopes.

[104] Homer. *Illiad*. song X, verse 434. See Vlahov 1968, 32.

[105] Porozhanov 2017, 90.

[106] Philostr. 3.16-17.

[107] According to Pausanias, in Olympia the priests called '*bas--lai*' (i. e. kings) made sacrifices to Kronos on the hill with of the same name (Paus. 6.20.I; Nilsson, without year, 217).

[108] D. Gergova proposes the thesis that the sanctuary has been situated on the peak Ostrets – see Gergova *et al.* 2011, 184-186. According to T. Uzunov, the sanctuary is on the Western Trans-Rhodopian Road near Nicopolis. This sanctuary was discovered by him, known as the 'Prav kamin'. See T. Uzunov's article in this volume.

[109] Macrob. 1.18.11; Fol 1990, 189; Popov 1995, 22. In linguists' opinion, the name Zilmisos can be translated as 'water dragon', the one guarding the underground sweet waters. Similar is also Zilmyudrainos, the epithet of Asclepius from the sanctuary at Batkun, coming from Zilm – 'dragon' and yudrainos – 'water' (Marazov 1994, 22). These data can be discovered also in the legend of the valley of Velingrad, according to which in the old times a 'water dragon' lived in the closed lake there.

[110] Kretschmer 1896, 214; Vlahov 1968, 32. According to the information of St. Bizantines, the Trausi were a Scythian tribe called also Agathyrsi (Steph. Byz. 632.1-2).

[111] B. Tomaschek supposes that similarly to all Thracians, they have come from the area of the Carpathian Mountains. See Tomaschek 1980, 70-71; Yordanov 2010, 290.

together with the Getae and, 'those who live opposite the Crestones', is distinguished by Herodotus for their belief in immortality. They should be located in the strategy Zraike, whose main center is the pan-Thracian sanctuary of the Bessi, and Zraike is in the highest mountains among the Rhodopes, Rila and Pirin in the field of Razlog, where the lands of the Satrae are localized.[112]

It is accepted that in the almost unknown Thracian language the vocals next to 'm', 'r' and 'l' can disappear, for instance Sparadok –Spartok-Spartakos; Buridava-Burkentios etc.[113] In this sense, it is possible that the name Zraike to appear in the Thracian lexis also under the form of Zeraike. In the Thracology long ago has been established the connection between the name of the Derrones (Deroni) and the ethnos Zeranii,[114] on the base of the typical for the Thracian language transition from 'z' to 'd' and vice versa.[115] Consequently, Zeraika could easily be transformed in Deraika and ultimately in the tribal name Derrones,[116] known for their coins found in the area of Upper Mesta, and connected with the so-called 'amphictyony' around the central sanctuary of the Bessi.[117] The god's epithet *Zerania (Derainos)* characterizes many deities of the Thrace-Macedonian southwest. The name

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In these mountains south of the passage Dukla, the tribe of Bieses is witnessed, supposed to be congenial to the Thracian Bessi. According to K. Vlahov, the name 'Thracians' comes from the root θρασ-, present in the Greek words for brevity, courage, boldness, while the suffix ικ (in θρήϊκες) is alien to the Greek language (Vlahov 1968, 40-41).

[112] As far as I know, the Satrae were not subjugated to anybody. Only they from the Thracians have managed to keep their liberty up to the present, because they were bellicose and lived in high mountains, covered with various forests and snow. They control the prophecy-place of Dionysos, but it is situated at (or around) the highest mountains, and the prophets of the temple are the Bessi from the Satrae, and there is a priestess giving the answers, alien in Delphi, and not more different (or more complicated?)] (Hdt. 7.111.1-2). The translation into Bulgarian is by Y. Iliev, see Iliev 2013, 8.

[113] Gerov 1961, 147, n. 2; Besevliev 1945, 208; Dechev 1952, 42.

[114] Danov 1968, 63, n. 67, 215, n. 50.

[115] Georgiev 1977, 37. The transition of t, th in d is 'something quite usual in the Thracian language'. See Venedikov 1982, 104.

[116] The identification Zeranii = Deroni (Derrones), accepted almost by all researchers, has been proposed for the first time by Chr. Danov. See Danov 1968, 63, n. 67 and 215, and n. 50.

[117] On the coins of the Derrones see Gerasimov 1937, 249-257; 1955, 576-578; Mitrovich 2005, 58-88; 2008, 9-11; Delev 2012, 61-72 and cit.lit.

Derainos (Zerynthius)[118] of the Thrace-Greek deity Apollo in Abdera[119] is identical to the tribal name D*eroni*.[120] The same but slightly changed epithet ηρινθία[121] has also the Samothracian Artemis-Hecate (also Aphrodite), and Hesychius announces of Θραικιά Αφροδίτη (Aphrodite Thracian).[122] Although the Zerinthian deities have been worshiped in many places of Thracia and Macedonia, it is established that after Samothrace, the most important religious center of the Thracians was the sanctuary of the Bessi. The priests in Delphi were called 'thrakidi', on the island of Chios there existed a *collegia* of priests called γένος θραικίδαι.[123] Obviously they were followers of the nymph Thrake, who was enchanting in 'Thracia', i. e. in Thraike/Zraike. She 'was keen on muttering and medical herbs and could wane *suffering by herbs on the one hand, and on the other hand, she could cause them… The country that was formerly called Perke also seems to have been named after Thrake'*.[124]

Claudius Ptolemy records in his work a place name – Pergamos,[125] which should be placed in the Western Rhodopes. It is considered that this Pergamos of Ptolemy is placed not exactly and is possibly identical to Pergamos in Pieria of Herodotus.[126] N. Ovcharov and D. Kodzhamanova connect it with Perpericon, identified by them as 'the sanctuary of the

[118] Tit Liv. 38, 41, 4; See Fol 1975, 15.
[119] Danov 1968, 215, n. 50; Detschew 1976, 184; KETD 1993, 1; Fol 1995, 45.
[120] IITT 1, 76, n. 24.
[121] The data on Zerintia are listed in Detschew 1976, 184-185. According to him and Tomaschek, the name of the area Zerania descends from the epithet of the deity (Zerania/Zerinthia), while A. Fol is has the opposite point of view; the gone toponyms and ethnonyms have been preserved in the names of deities, which pass over into 'local epithets'. See Fol 1975, 15. Hesychius speaks about ζειρά, a kind of a Thracian dress (mantle). It is possible that this dress is in connection with the name Zerani because the people worked as shepherds alongside Upper Mesta and the Western Rhodopes. See Fol 1980, 28.
[122] Marazov 1992, 151, with references; Vlahov 1968, 40.
[123] Fol 2004, 61.
[124] Arian. *Byth*. Fr. 13; Marazov 1992, 234. For the Thracians themselves, the name Thracian meant a person doing initiation, sorcery, and is bent on the Thracian religion/beliefs. In that sense, it is very natural the 'Thracian Delphi or the 'Thracian Dodona' to get in the lands of Thracia/Traike/Zraike, i.e. the strategy with the same name. And if in Thracia the priests are named 'Bessi', or 'believers (in the general sense), in the cases of Delphi and the island of Chios outside Thracia, they are called 'thrakidi', i.e. 'Thracians'. See also Yordanov 1981, 52; Popov 1989, 52-54.
[125] Cl. Ptol. *Geogr*. 3.11. § 13.
[126] Hdt. 7.112; Yanakieva 2009, 39.

Bessi'.[127] However, in my opinion, this should be rather the peak Ostrets in the Western Rhodopes.[128] The settlements from the map of Ptolemy put on the modern geographic map show that the interior of Thracia in the line Pautalia-Serdica-Philippopolis is placed much more to the west. Here, between Serdica and Philippopolis the *punkt* Terta[129] is placed (the later Sarto from the *Tabula Peutingeriana* and Sparata from other guide-books), which should be identified with today's Vakarel, on the place of an ancient *mansio* on the Diagonal road.[130] The identification of Terta with Vakarel is of decisive significance for the localization of Pergamos with unknown location till now on the real geographic map. Considering the correlation curves and the geographic latitudes and longitudes of Philippopolis, Terta, Presidion, Serdica, Pautalia and Nicopolis ad Nestum, Pergamos should be located at Ostrets. The 'swelling' to the west removes Pergamos from the area of Devin-Batak, otherwise falling in ideal coincidence of the correlation curves with the modern ones and is fixed in the Northwestern Rhodopes. It can be said that in spite of the *damnatio memoriae* over the Bessi, Claudius Ptolemy intentionally or unintentionally has noted on the map the main sanctuary of the Bessi under the name of Pergamos.

The strategy *Αθιουτικής* (Athiutika/Asyutika) is the seventh one in the inscription of Flavius Dizalas. Its name is mentioned also in three different inscriptions-devotions of their strategoi, found in various places. Besides that of Flavius Dizalas, the second inscription is from the sanctuary near the village of Batkun, near Pazardjik, where some 'Dizalas, son of Cotys', represents himself as strategos of 'Σ.....καί *Ασουτικής*'.[131] The single sigma (Σ) at the beginning is supposed by some scientists as remaining from 'Seletika'or 'Serdica'. More possibly this may be a destroyed 'dzeta' (Z), and including it,

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[127] Ovcharov & Kodzhamanova 2007, 1-36.

[128] It seems that to denote a city as a cult center of the Thracian tribes with the C. Ptolemy is not a precedent. On the same map in Northeastern Thracia, he marks the *punkt* Dausdava, 'the city of wolves' identified by D. Gergova with the cult center 'Sboryanovo'. Dausdava is ethnonym of the strategy Daotika from a recently found inscription from Balchik. See Sharankov 2015, 62-63). Pergamon in the Pelassgian language means 'citadel, tower'. 'Pergamon' is the acropolis of Troy with all sanctuaries of the main deities of the city.

[129] Cl. Ptol. *Geogr*. 3.11. § 12.

[130] Marking of a punkt / point not being a city but only a *mansio* is not an exception with Ptolemy. For instance Vala (= Pale from the *Itinerarium Burdigalense* = mansio west of Harmanli and Drissipara (= Drizipara from the itinerarium of Antoninus Pius = mansio at today's Buyukkarastiran next to Çorlu.

[131] Tsontchev 1941, 20, № 5; Mihailov 1967, 38; IGBulg. III/1 1116; Sharankov 2016, 320-321, who also supposes, besides Serdica, Zraike as a possible reading.

the result is the more harmonic reading of 'strategos of Zraika and Asyutika', i. e. of the original lands of *strategia Bessika* (in Ptolemy). However, this is a question of a revision of the inscription.

The third inscription belongs to the collection of B. Radev, with unknown place of finding, presumably from the valley of Mesta and probably from the area of Nicopolis ad Nestum.[132] According to D. Dana, who also studies the records, the devotion is '*To the Lord Kerdyupyuros, the great heros Arbizenos'; … the inscription descends from the 'Upper Mesta', the place of the future Nicopolis ad Nestum; the name of the strategy is hapax'Mougike*'.[133] The identification of the two last inscriptions with *Αθιουτικής* from the inscription of Garmen is, in my opinion, incontestable. The one from Batkun is related to one of the consuls of Trajan and can be dated either in 100, or in 101, 103 and 112,[134] while the one from Mesta – in the second half of 1st or in the 2nd century AD. This means, that the strategos M… son of Demosthenos should rule his strategy immediately post or a little bit after Flavius Dizalas. It is needless to comment the identity of the names of the strategy during the rule of Dizalas and of M… son of Demosthenos, but the strategy-hapax Mugike was to that moment unknown. Much closer in sound is the name Medike and in that case we should really accept that the fragment with devotion has been found in the area of Parthicopolis (now Sandanski). If accepting the reading of M. Manov, then the similarity between the names of the strategy Atiyutika in the inscription of Dizalas, in that one of M… son of Demosthenos, and of strategy Asyutike, ruled by Dizalas, son of Cotys, is obvious.[135] Apparently Flavius Dizalas and Dizalas, son of Cotys are two different persons, ruling over the strategy Atiyutika/Asyutika consequently, without knowing their exact chronological sequence, moreover in the different format of the included mini-strategies.

If we draw a direct line on the map connecting the two places, the inscriptions with the name of Atiyutike/Asyutika are coming from Garmen, the riverside of Mesta and Batkun, this line will cross the peaks Malka and Golyama Syutkya.[136] This strategy, named after the name of the highest

[132] Manov 2008, 134-135, № 199.
[133] Sharankov 2015, 71. He suggests that the boundary between the strategy Mugika and the strategies of Dizalas was between Ribnovo and Garmen; Dana 2016, 110-114.
[134] Sharankov 2016, 319.
[135] V. Beshevliev cites different examples and notes that the alternation of 'θι' with 'σ' in the Thracian names is a well-known phenomenon, i.e. it speaks of one and the same name, written in two different ways and with a different spelling. See Beshevliev 1945, 204.
[136] The idea of drawing it in order to prove the hypothesis Syutkya-Asyutika, belongs to N. Dermendzhiev. The peak Big Syutkya (Golyama Syutkya) is the third among

mountain in the area (Syutkya/Asyutika) should include the surrounding areas of Velingrad, Rakitovo and Batak. The name Asyutika probably can be drawn from the ancient Pelasgian and Thracian name of stone – 'assa'.[137] It coincides with the Rhodopeian and Dacian 'karpa'/ – 'rock'. Exactly the same region has been inhabited by the Thracian tribe *Karbilessi* according to Pliny the Elder in his description of the tribes alongside upper Nestos, and also *Karbileti,* described again by him alongside upper Hebros (Maritsa). D. Dechev makes the generalization that Pliny is speaking of one and the same tribe, located almost accurately in the Northwestern Rhodopes.[138] The administrative center of the strategy Asyutika, no doubt, was at the modern town of Velingrad, with its numerous hot and called thermal waters and Karst springs.[139]

The eighth strategy *Biolethica* is the last one in the list of Flavius Dizalas. It should be located in the area of Devin-Dospat, i. e. in the heart of the Western Rhodopes. It is situated in the lands north of Dresapaika and Roeimelethika and to the southeast of Asyutika.The etymology of the name comes from the ancient Greek βήω and the ending -lethika', ponting to a category of population specialized in a definite farm activity, paying taxes to

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the highest ones in the Rhodopes (2186 м above sea-level), and only 5 m lower than the Rhodopeian leader Golyam Persenk (2191 м over sea-level). However, the ancient Thracians obviously were not aware of that and probably have considered that Syutkya is the highest mountain in the Rhodopes. Two etymologies are offered for the name in 'The guide in the Rhodopes': from 'syut kaya' – 'milk stone' and from 'su kaya' – 'water stone'. See Panayotov & Strashimirov 1982, 109. The second 'water' hypothesis coincides with the characteristic of the mountain massive as important hydrographic source from which many rivers originate. T. Balkanski mentions in the same Syutkya massive a locality called 'Aisyutska water' (Balkanski 1998, 135). This is almost a full coincidence with the original ancient name. Very interesting is the analysis of S. Yanakieva in connection with the 'Aisyutska water' on the ground of names from a vast area, formed on the base of Αισ- with different suffix elements (Yanakieva 2009, 182). Only the dropping out of the front 'a' divides Asyutika from Syutkya, similarly to the case with Astibos-Shtip.

[137] Georgiev 1997, 197.

[138] Delev 2002, 276, with references; 2014, 309. The name of the area has been given according to the 'stone' (asa, karpa), characterizing the local mountain terrain, not only in antiquity. In the Middle Ages Kamenitsa, now being part of the town, was the previous name of Velingrad.

[139] Tsepina, most probably Kaseira in Procopius of Caesarea in the Rhodopes, was the main fortress defending the area from Northeast during the Iron Age, the Antiquity and the middle Ages.

Rome.[140] Obviously, Biolethika is a strategy of shepherds, or of moving nomads, wondering in summertime with their numerous flocks the high parts of the Western Rhodopes. The form of the verb in transitive βαίνω is obviously connected with Benika mentioned by Ptolemy: 'behind Bessika is Benika and Samaika'.[141] Most probably he speaks of one and the same strategy Biolethika, enlarged and named later by this author as Benika. His Samaika reminds the modified name of Sapaika/Sapeika, because in Ptolemy the veritable and well-known mega-strategy is noted at the beginning of the text in the zone alongside Macedonia and the Aegean Sea. The name Samaika is shortened from Dresapaika, but instead of – Sapaika and probably not to repeat it, Ptolemy or his source has changed this letter from 'p' to 'm', and instead of Sapaika, which is the second in the list, it is written as Samaika.[142]

At the first sight, these two new identifications, pointed above, contain a big contradiction. Cl. Ptolemy particularizes 14 mega-strategies: in the list there are also two mini-strategies (the first one is Biolethika, part of the mountain Seletika, later replaced in Ptolemy with Drossika; the second one is the mountain Sapaika, i.e. Dresapaika, in Ptolemy called only Samaika. Biolethika/Benika and Dresapaika/Samaika are strategies from the unknown for the ancient geographers interior of the Rhodopes, in which, including the Mediaeval Ages, no big city centers were established. Cladius Ptolemy speaks of Benika and Samaika under the name of Bessika, which is also a mountain area, but because of its name, probably having a special status of governing due to its remoteness from any city. The inhabitants of these mountain spaces have been transhumant shepherds since the Bronze Age, in summertime in the mountain, and in wintertime descending to the Marble Sea in Sapaika, Korpilika and maybe Kenika, where the flocks spend the winter. Because of that Stephan of Byzantium mentions 'the Beninian bay' on the Aegean Sea, and, according to Venedikov, the main city of Benika is Gyumyurdjina, today Komotini.[143]

Coming out of the chronology of the strategies during the time of Fl. Dizalas, it may be supposed that Benika of Ptolemy was possibly attached administratively to Nicopolis ad Nestum, already announced as a Roman city

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[140] The ancient Greek verb βήω is coniunctivus aoristus II from βαίνω – pace, walk, step, and in transitivum meaning of 'to lead', 'to ride', 'to bring to' (especially for horses), i. e. in more general sense to lead, bring domestic animals.

[141] Cl. Ptol. *Geogr*. 3.11. § 9.

[142] The same intentional change in the spelling, in order not to repeat the name, makes also Pliny the Elder. He mentions once *Karbileti* alongside the upper stream of Nestos, and then *Karbilesi* alongside the upper stream of Hebros.

[143] Venedikov 1982, 60.

at the beginning of 2nd century AD and associated later with a big territory.[144] Indisputable fact is that as a result of this study we may argue that the earlier mountain Seletika with its center Nicopolis, founded after 11 BC, included Biolethica/Benika. The reason for the mini-strategy Biolethica under the name of Benika in Ptolemy, to get away from Drossika (which replaced in Ptolemy the already disappeared mini-strategi Seletika) and to constitute itself as a separate strategy again in Ptolemy, was the orientation of its population of shepherds not to the area of Nicopolis and Nevrokop field at Gotse Delchev, but to the Aegean zone. Samaika of Ptolemy was also not situated near big city centers. During his time, this strategy obviously occupied bigger territories in the southern and eastern Rhodopes, with a tendency even to the downstream area of Hebros/Maritsa at Aenos, having in mind that Pliny the Elder mentions the *Benii* next to the *Hypsaltes*, known from Titus Livius as *Kypselt*s, i.e. next to the inhabitants of Kypsela.[145]

Hence, during the period of F. Dizalas, at the end of the 70s of 1st century AD, Bioletika (Benika of Ptolemy) and Dresapaika (Samaika of Ptolemy) were mini-strategies of the Rhodopes. Bioletika was part of the Bessian strategy mountain Seletika. Dresapaika was part of the Sapeian strategy Sapaike, to which during the period of Trajan have been attached many other mountain lands, with the tendency to occupy entirely the Rhodopes, except the northern slopes and parts of the mountain; from Dospat to the west; up to the downstream of Hebros to the east. In this case, the strategy Bessika in Ptolemy (= Zraika and Asyutika) would occupy the Northwestern Rhodopes, possibly the south slopes of Rila mountain and the northeastern shirts of Pirin. The old Biolethika has been 'enlarged' by including new mountain lands, and already as Benika covered entirely the Western and Central Rhodopes, but without the lands on the northern slopes of the mountain and the ones included in Bessika on the northwest. This is the kingdom of the seasonal shepherds, the high mountain lands without constant population. That is why Benika is projected, secondly, in the lands of the Aegean Sea near Gyumurdzina (the Bay of Beni). The population of this strategy used to dwell there in wintertime. Jones suggests that the *Breni* of

[144] M. Tacheva placed wrongly Nicopolis ad Nestum as an administrative center of the strategy Medike (Tacheva 2000, 33-38). The zone of the Maedi (the area of Sandanski, Petrich, Bregalnitsa, Blagoevgrad and Dupnitsa) has been in fact divided between the strategy Orbelia in the province of Macedonia and Denteletika in the province of Thracia. The Maedi, similarly to the Bessi, were for many years a great problem of the Romans in Macedonia. For that reason, after the conquest its lands were 'torn' and attached to different administrative regions in different provinces, namely Thracia and Macedonia.

[145] Venedikov 1982, 60.

Strabo[146] are the *Beni* and localizes them in the valley of Hebros/Maritsa between the *Bessi* and the *Korpili*: 'The *Korpili* live alongside Hebros, even higher live the *Breni*, and finally the *Bessi*, because the river is floatable up to here'.[147]

Concerning Samaika at that time, it is formed by adding to the earlier and smaller Dresapaika the relatively well inhabited parts of the southern and most of all the eastern Rhodopes.[148] Probably also a part of the 'settled' population of Samaika was 'transhumant', i.e. it also used to migrate. By the way, nowhere in the sources the tribal name Samai can be met. On the one hand, it speaks of an enlarged and distorted notion of '*Sapaei'*; on the other hand, because the nomadic part of this 'settled' otherwise population was characterized with the already interpreted here notion of '*Beni' (Biolethi*). In this way, we reach the following paradox: the *Cypsels-Hypsaltes* of Pliny the Elder have instead the *Samai* the *Beni* as neighbours,[149] who should be placed much further to the west.

Nicopolis ex Bessia

Pliny the Elder wrote also about the *Bessi* in his history, announcing the following in the paragraph about Thracia: 'Now followeth Thracia, among the most valiant Nations of Europe, divided into 52 Regiments (strategias) of Soldiers. Of those People in it, whom it does not grieve me to name, the Denseletes and Medi inhabit near the River Strymon, on the right Side, as far as to the Bisaltæ above-named: on the left, the Digeri, *and many Names of the Bessi, to the River Nestus*, which environeth the Bottom of the Mountain Pangæus, between the Eleti, Diobesi, and Carbilesi; and so forward to the Brysæ and Capæi. Odomanta, a Nation of the Odrysæ, poureth out the River Hebrus to the Neighbour borderers, the Carbiletes, Pyrogeri, Drugeri, Cænici, Hypsalti, Beni, Corpilli, Botiæi, and Edoni. In the same Tract are the Selletæ, Priantæ, Diloncæ, Thyni, Celetæ, the greater under Hæmus, the less under Rhodopæ: between whom runneth the River Hebrus. The Town situate beneath Rhodopæ, before–time named Poneropolis; soon after by the Founder, Philippopolis; but now, from its Site, Trimontium'.[150]

In the only information on the strategy Bessika of Ptolemy its location is described as 'Bessika is above Maedika'.[151] According to G. Mihailov, it is

[146] Strabo 7, fr. 48.
[147] Mihailov 1967, 44.
[148] It is a paradox that a big city center has never been formed in these inhabited regions, including them in its territory.
[149] Venedikov 1982, 60.
[150] Plin. *HN* 4.11 – Thracia (ed. 1848/1849, vol. II, 14).
[151] Cl. Ptol. *Geogr*. 3.11.9(20).

between Razlog and Pazardzhik,[152] in the area of the C*arbiletes*/*Carbilesae*. P. Delev localizes Bessika to the north of the mountain,[153] and Koilalethika in the area of Razlog-Velingrad,[154] criticizing the opinion of I. Venedikov,[155] that the name of *Koilalethes* responds to the upper Thracian plain, surrounded by mountains.[156] However, there are many epigraphic records from the middle of 1st century AD on. The ethnonym *'Bessi'* can be seen on some military diplomas, dominating over the generalizing meaning of a 'Thracian'. It is considered that the greater part of the recruit from Thracia has been formed by the *Bessi* having in mind their martial spirit. Parallel to the process of the almost forcible recruit of the *Bessi*, but on the lowest positions as oarsmen in the Roman military float or in the auxiliary units, after the defeat of their revolt in 11 BC, is the process of interning them in their 'new' Bessika in the strategy Seletika in nowadays Northeastern Bulgaria.

The information about the Bessi and the other Thracians recruited in the Roman float before the foundation of the province Thracia in AD 46, in which the Bessi have been included, point that they should descend from the lands conquered by Crassus and controlled by the Macedonian provincial governors.[157] From the published military diplomas, several kinds of the ethnonym Bessi are mentioned; i.e. the *origo* of the veteran as well as his lands/house of origin '*ex Bessia*'. In three diplomas is mentioned *Nicopolis ex*

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[152] Mihailov 1967, 43.

[153] Delev 2014, 30, 166 considers it to be to the north of the Rila mountain. He supposes that Bessika has been created as an administrative unit in the Odryssian Kingdom after the defeat of the Bessian revolt, which marks 'the end of their history as independent ethnopolitical formation'. To some degree, their homogenous core will preserve its identity by creating at that time of the Strategy Bessika as administrative unit within the framework not only of the last period of existing of the increased in its territory Odryssian Kingdom with the Roman support, but also of the Roman province Thracia at the initial period of its existence after AD 46. The evidences of the authors from the period of the Early Empire on the Bessi and the strategy Bessika are of particular interest with its data offering the localization of the Bessian territories' (Delev 2014, 175).

[154] The Great Coilaletae are in the kettle of Razlog and the small Koilaletaes alongsides the runway of the Chepinska river, around Velingrad (Delev 2014, 311-312).

[155] Venedikov 1982, 63-64.

[156] According to Pliny the Elder, '*The river Hebros runs across the land of the Odryssian tribe, alongside the river dwell the Karbilethes, Pyrogeres, Drugeres, (Caenici), Hypsaltes, Beni, Botiaei, Edoni. In the same area are the Sialethes, the Priantes, the Dolongi, the Thyniae, the great Koilalets situated under Hemus, and the small Koilaletes under the Rhodopes*' (Plin. *NH* 4.2.40-41).

[157] Tacheva 2000, 50; Delev 2014, 30, 166, 174-180,

Bessia identified as Nicopolis ad Nestum[158] as a tribal home of the veterans. Consequently, the city is in the territory of the Thracian Bessi, in the area of Middle Nestus/Nestos/Mesta, where after the defeat of their revolt 'the city of the Victory over the Bessian Ares' has been founded.

Usually in the Bulgarian historiography is accepted that the information of Ptolemy about the Balkans concerns the years around 150 BC. In the recent research it has been proved that the information is earlier and rarely passes AD 133;[159] B. Gerov even considers that the strategies and the cities in Thracia in Ptolemy belong to a pre-Hadrianic source.[160] The analysis reveals that in 1st century AD from the very beginning two kinds of strategies functioned in Thracia. The first type is the mega-strategy like 'peri-Anchialo' of Appolonius Eptaikent, the mountain Seletika, Sapaika etc. The second one is a mini-strategy, forming in a group of four the big mega-strategy. In the view of G. Mihailov, the Romans 'initially parcel out the strategies status quo, including the ones in lands not being directly controlled by the Thracian kingdom, like the ones alongside the river Struma'.[161] The aim was to form numerous small strategies in order to satisfy the power-loving ambitions of the manageable part of the old Odryssian aristocracy. The aggressive politics of Rome has always estimated the support of the local notables and for that reason in 1st century AD, because of pure political concerns, many strategies and their *strategoi* appeared on the map of Thracia.[162] Together with the obviously artificial parceling, many strategies can be met ending on –letika,

[158] The diplomas are from the summer AD 142 issued to the sailors from the Ravenna float, 26 years in service, beginning from 116. See Lozanov 2020, 55-73 and cit.lit.

[159] Tacheva 2000, 23-24.

[160] Gerov 1970, 131. In the historiography earlier dates of the work of Ptolemy can also be met. See Tacheva 2004, 120, n. 11.

[161] Mihailov 1967, 34.

[162] At her analysis, M.–G. Parissaki pays attention to the fact that in the 'Catalogue'of the strategoes of Topiros their number is 33, divided into two groups. 23 persons with Roman citizenship belong to the first group, and to the second group 10 with Thracian names and without Roman citizenship. According to her, the almost contemporary information of Pliny on the existing of 50 strategies is supported by the 33 strategoes of strategies without mentioning their names. The study of the names and particularly of the connections in the prosopography of the strategoes from the second group, direct us '...to the south part of Thracia, which was the first to open to the Roman influence from the middle of 2nd century BC...The strategoes from the second group, at least some of them descend from parts of Thracia which have belonged to the province Macedonia before, and have been included in Thracia after the creation of the new province'. See Parissaki 2009, 329-330. This hints at the possibility a strategos to have ruled over more than a single strategy, also seen in the inscription of F. Dizalas.

which were only formal names of geographic areas. The foundation of the many strategies after the foundation of the province Thracia was aiming, at least at the start, to create the impression that these lands are governed 'independently' by the local Thracians.

The boundaries and the tribal territories traced by Pliny without the established later additions, repeat entirely the cartographic data known since the era of August. The history of Pliny the Elder with the latest addendum and corrigendum, have been ended not later than AD 79.[163] The map of Agrippa was probably the main source for the boundaries of Thracia, supplied also with comments under it in the form of an accompanying book. This map has been finished during 7 BC by August and exposed at *Porticus Vipsania*.[164] The shown boundaries by Pliny the Elder of Thracia are its ethnic ones before forming the province Thracia. They can be discovered also in some Greek and Latin authors before Pliny, and beyond doubt the same were on the map of Agrippa. Pliny does not reveal any interest in the land boundaries of Thracia and has left its appearance the same as on the map of Agrippa.[165] The western border goes along Struma river, and the touching point with the Aegean Sea is at the mouth of Mesta river.

In the newly formed Roman province of Thracia, the *strategoi* could be of foreign (Roman) origin, of mixed one and of pure Thracian birth. The foreigners mark only the mega-strategy governed by them, while the Thracian strategies almost all the time do not miss mentioning their numerous mini-strategies subjected to them. An important peculiarity that should be noted obligatory is that the names of some mega-strategies, such as Seletika, Sapaika and Anchialo, are also names of mini-strategies, and that each mega-strategy usually has a mini-strategy with the same name. This inner division was aiming at satisfying the ambitions of the Thracian Odryssian and Sapeian aristocracy. Because of pure religious and propaganda reasons, also as to feed up his self-confidence of a significant governor of the Thracian southwest, Flavius Dizalas lists the names of eight strategies with their exact geographic names, with the exception of the ones ending in –letika, showing rather a professional-taxis purpose. For the present, this is the only strategos governing at one and the same time two mega-strategies (Sapaika and mountainSeletika), i.e. eight mini-strategies.

[163] Gerov 1980, 3. Pliny himself informs us at the beginning of his Historia Naturalis, which has been published in AD 77 during the reign of Vespasian. See Parissaki 2009, 337.
[164] Strabo 2.5.17.
[165] Gerov 1980, 3, n. 6, 4-6.

Their listing is not *cursus honorum*, i.e. he rules consequently two mega-strategies. Most of all it should be connected with the victory of the Odryssian and the Sapeians over the Bessi supported by the Romans. They have been subjugated, their lands added to the tribal territories of the victors. This act was possible for Dizalas, and possibly for his father, Ezbenis, only after the Roman strategos from mentioned in the inscription found at Svrljig[166] resigned as strategos of mountain Seletica.

The valley of the river Nestos was the most troublesome zone of Thracia in the last decades of 1st century BC; a zone with strongly spread Thracian religious fundamentalism, which was suppressed and isolated in the remote outlying districts of the Getae. As a result of this struggle, the mountain Seletika was replaced to the Balkan northeast and changed to a plain one; the period is also characterized with the existing of both Seletikae. Following this changes, the place of Seletika from the inscription from Garmen has been freed for Drossika. Bessika is formed already from Zraika and Asyutika, but it is known only from the work of Claudius Ptolemy,[167] and not from any inscription. This fact speaks of the active practice of *damnatio memoriae*, nevertheless not *post factum* (i.e. erasing of already existing inscriptions and obliteration of images), but from the very beginning as a preventive censorship and auto-censorship; intentional lack of notes on the epigraphic records. Although a Romanized Thracian descending from the last Odryssian kings,[168] Dizalas lists all eight mini-strategies forming Sapaika and mountain Seletika.

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[166] The inscription from Svrljig of the strategos Tiberius Cladius Theopompus from the triba Quirina, son of Theopompus, is dated to the time of emperor Claudius (AD 41-54), i.e. before the gathering of the 33 *strategoi* in Topiros in AD 55-60, where Ezbenis is mentioned, the father of Flavius Dizalas, son of Amathok. It is obvious that by putting prepositions/explanatory notes before the names of the strategies (περί, ὀρεινῆς, πεδιασίας) this always means the mega- strategies, ruled by one strategos. However, already during the time of the last Roemetalces, another way of representation appeared by listing the separate geographic districts, called strategies. At that listing, the name of the big strategy would mean only the narrowest territory envelopment of the lands around it, i.e. the immediate territory around the administrative center (compare Anchialo, Seletika), although still it is not proved with direct evidences that the institution of the strategos existed in Thracia before the middle of 1st century BC. See Nikolov 1995, 30.

[167] The expression of Ptolemy '*... and above Medika is Bessika*' corresponds exactly to the location of the Bessian core namely in the mountains 'over the Medi', i.e. behind the mountains Rila and Pirin in the valley of Nestos, and in the Northwestern and the Western Rhodopes.

[168] He noted this kinship in the inscription, and after his name, he communicated this to his father and especially to his grandfather Amatok, a royal name associated centuries ago with the creation of the Odrysian kingdom.

The ananlysis of the epigraphic data by G. Mihailov reveals that the new rulers, the Romans, had at the beginning divided the established strategies, and those situated in the lands not controlled directly by the Thracian kingdom, e.g., the ones in the valley of the river Strymon.[169] The aim was to form numerous small strategies,[170] satisfying the power ambitions of the old Thracian aristocracy supporting the Romans.

It should be reminded that from the period 16 BC to AD 21 was marked by the continuous riots and Roman military interventions in the Southwestern Thracia. This has lead to the submission of the Bessi, to the victory over the Bessian Ares and the foundation of Nicopolis, also to the permanent settlement of the representatives of the Odryssian-Sapaean dynasty in the lands of the Bessi as strategies. The recruiting in the years before and after the establishment of the province of Thracia from the Bessian population dwelling in the Western Rhodopes and the Bessian Nicopolis show that these territories, the foundation of the strategy Bessika at Ptolemy, have been divided. In this way, the northern part of the strategy has been incorporated in the territory of Philippopolis, and the southern part in the territory of Nicopolis ad Nestum.[171]

The disappearing of the strategies is connected with the foundation of the new Roman cities or the transformation of the old Hellenistic ones into Roman on the territory of Thracia, which has lead to the necessity of vast city territories.[172] The eight strategies of F. Dizalas should constitute the later established urban territory of the Roman city of Nicopolis ad Nestum. On the southwest it borders with the provincial boundary of Macedonia and the city territory of Parthicopolis; on the west with the territory of Tristolos and Pautalia; on northwest with the territory of Serdica; on the north with that of Philippopolis; on east and southeast with the urban territories of Hadrianopol/Plotinopol and Topiros; on the south should be again the boundary with Macedonia, in close proximity to the colony of Philippi.

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[169] It seems according to G. Mihailov that some lands were not included in the Thracian kingdom. These were the territories west of the Gates of Trajan, inhabited by the Maedi, Denteletae and Serdi. Their relative independence can be supported by the fact that the Dentheletae had a king named Sitas, who has been supported by Marcus Licinius Crassus in 29 BC in their campaign against the Bastarnae. No doubt that this situation lasted till the final elimination of the Thracian kingdom in AD 45. During its existence, these west territories either were independent or only nominally dependent on the Thracian kingdom. See Mihailov 1967, 34.

[170] In the epigraphic materials at our disposal the names of about 16 such strategies can be discovered. See Nikolov 1995, 30.

[171] In the way supposed by I. Topalilov, see Topalilov 2013, 10-19.

[172] Dimitrov 1932/1934, 124.

Being the first city named Nicopolis, and the only one before the Roman expansion and the creation of the province of Thracia, this city at the beginning in 1st BC – 1st century AD did not need any specification. Its location was strategic at the moment of its foundation and the connections with the Roman Empire. This brought about the possibility of establishing a settlement of a new type – a city planned according to the Roman urbanistic requirements, with the help of the vassal Thracian kingdom and as a sequence of a military victory. At that time and up to the beginning of 2nd century AD, there was no need to add the hydronym Mesta/Nestos to the name of the city, because it was the only Nicopolis in Thracia. Although its location is peripheral and it is not generally mentioned in the sources, this does not exclude its existence as a city before the Roman conquest and constituting the province Thracia, because decisive events have happened here in the last decades of 1st century BC. This determined the temporary enlargement of the Odryssian kingdom and after half a century its abolishment and the final including of Thracia in the Roman empire. The last event and the foundation of Nicopolis ad Haemum / Istrum, also at that period belonging to Thracia, has caused the necessity of adding to the first Thracian Nicopolis the hydronym 'ad Nestum'. The very complex tribal, political, military and settlement story of Nicopolis and its area from 1st century BC till the 2nd century AD reveals dramatic and tragic moments in the history of the Thracians and Thracia and more specifically the development of Nicopolis from probably a Thracian residential place to a Late Hellenistic city, and finally to a real Roman city.

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CIL – *Corpus Insriptiones Latinarum*, Berlin, 1853-.

DV – *Darzhaven vestnik*, Sofia.

IGBulg – G. Mihailov, *Inscriptiones graecae in Bulgaria repertae*, 5 vols. Sofia, 1958-1970, 1997. Vol. 5. *Inscriptiones novae, addenda et corrigenda* (1997).

IGR I – R. Cagnat *et al., Inscriptiones graecae ad res romanas pertinentes*, 3 vols. Paris, 1911-1927. Vol. I, 1911. Reprint: Chicago: Ares, 1975.

KETD – *Kratka Entsiklopediya Trakiiska Drevnost*, Sofia (1993).

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The *Bessi* at Mihai Bravu (Moesia Inferior): An Overview[1]

Lucreţiu Mihailescu-Bîrliba

Abstract: The article analyzes the texts in which the name of *Bessi* at Mihai Bravu (northern Lower Moesia) is attested. It seems that one of the oldest mentions of Bessi to the north of the Roman province of Moesia Inferior is a military diploma issued by Vespasian for Tarsa, at Mihai Bravu. This research tries to explain the early presence of the Thracian tribe in this part of the province.

Key words: *Bessi*, Mihai Bravu, Moesia Inferior, *vicus Bad[---]*, rural life

Резюме: В статията се анализира контекста в който се открива присъствието на беси в Михай Браву (северна Долна Мизия). Изглежда, че едно от първите споменавания на беси в северната част на римската провинция Moesia Inferior е във военна диплома, издадена по времето на Веспасиен за Тарса, открита в Михай Браву. Изследването се опитва да обясни ранното присъствие на това тракийско племе в тази част на провинцията.

1. Introduction

The village of Mihai Bravu is located in the northern half of present-day Dobrudzha (Tulcea county) (fig. 1). In Roman times, the area was part of the province of Lower Moesia and later, beginning with Diocletian, of the province of Scythia. Previous archaeological research was carried out by K. Škorpil and A. Opaiţ,[2] who observed and excavated a Late Roman *quadriburgium*, which is located between the villages Mihai Bravu and Turda, on a small hill on the left side of the road 229 (fig. 2).

The structure (40 × 34 m), built in the 4th century AD most likely under Constantine, comprises four circle-angled towers.[3] Ca. 50 m south from the

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[2] Opaiţ 1989, 364; 2004, 109; Opaiţ *et al*. 1991, 192, nt. 1; 1992, 107; Băjenaru 2010, 30, 154, 171; Lungu 2015, 35.

[3] See Băjenaru 2010, 78, 172-173, 227.

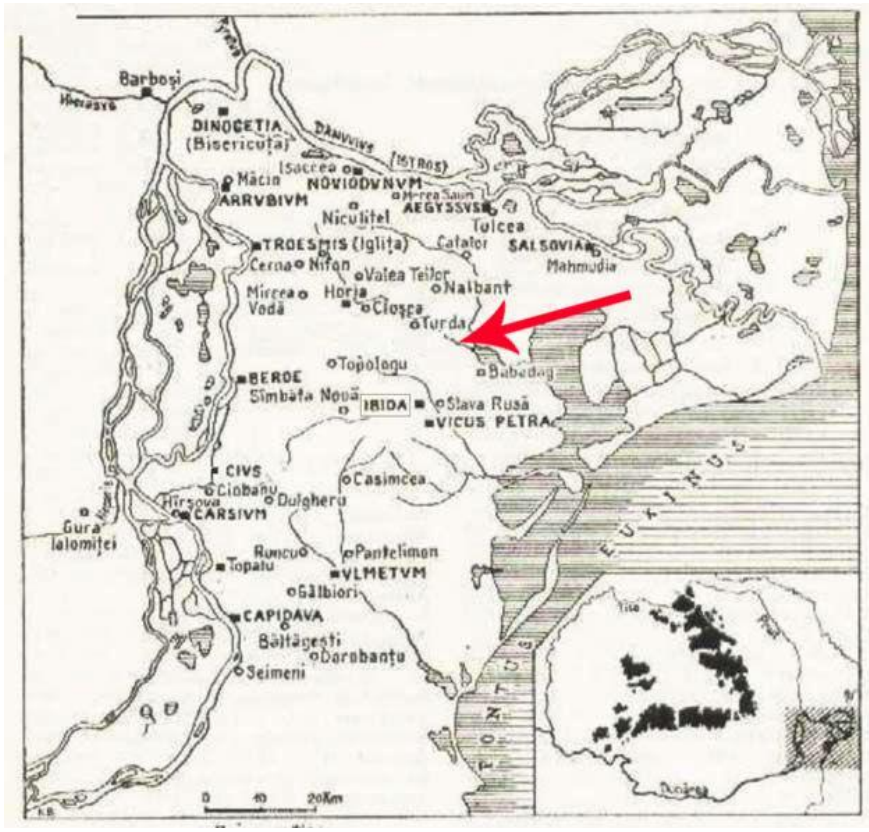


Fig. 1. Localisation of Mihai Bravu in northern Moesia Inferior (author: Ştefan Caliniuc).

hill, field surveys have identified a quite large rural settlement (approx. 800 × 800 m), dated to the 1st–4th century AD. At the end of the 4th century, probably after the battle of Adrianople, the *quadriburgium* and the *vicus* were abandoned. Beginning with the 5th century, part of the rural population of the province of Scythia moved into fortified towns, hard to be captured to the Goths.[4] The archaeological information is scarce,[5] but around a dozen of inscriptions have been found, most re-used in the Late Roman fort.[6] The texts

[4] Băjenaru 2010, 23, 185; Poulter 2013, 63-76, especially 73-74; Lungu 2015, 34-35.

[5] Opaiţ *et al*. 1992, 107; Vizauer *et al*. 2001, 144–145; Opaiţ 2004, 109; Aparaschivei 2010, 107. Mihaela Iacob identified coins dated between the reign of Claudius and the 4th century AD.

[6] A field survey carried out by M. Iacob, A. Ibba and D. Paraschiv revealed through the structure of the *burgus* the fragments of a limestone column, belonging probably to a public building. I am grateful to A. Ibba for this information.

were published by myself and my colleague A. Ibba,[7] and contain important information on the social life and institutions of this *vicus*, part of the rural landscape to the north of Moesia Inferior.[8]



Fig. 2. The Late Roman *quadriburgium* at Mihai bravu (photo: Antonio Ibba).

In this paper I discuss the presence of *Bessi* at Mihai Bravu, focusing on two inscriptions, one published recently and the other 14 years ago. Before studying these texts and discussing the presence of *Bessi* in this rural area, a brief overview of the population in Mihai Bravu is useful.

2. The population from Mihai Bravu in the Early Roman Empire: an overview

The *tituli* inform us about the population and social structure, cults and social life. The Roman citizens are represented by the Aelii (Aelius

[7] Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Ibba 2020, 17-42. For the texts, see also a short presentation (uncommented) in Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2018, 84-90.
[8] Bărbulescu 2001, 88-96.

Carinus),[9] Iulii (Iulius Epiphanes and his family, Iulius Silvanus),[10] Flavii (Flavius Onesimus),[11] and Claudii (Claudius Metrodorus, who commemorates his son, Claudius Fuscus).[12] The Greek *cognomina* (Epiphanes, Metrodorus, Onesimus, Sura) suggest that some of them could have come from the Greek-speaking towns, but their bearers had had Roman citizenship for a long time. Very likely, the wife of Claudius Metrodorus, Sura, who possibly bears the same *gentilicium*, was his freedwoman. Atidius, who honoured Jupiter Dolichens, can be a freedman or a person originating from a Greek-speaking province.[13] With respect to Dolichenus' cult in Mihai Bravu, noteworthy are two vows to this divinity, which point to the existence of an adepts' community in this *vicus*.[14]

At the end of the 2nd century, a *statio* of *beneficiarii* is mentioned in the proximity of the village.[15] It was undoubtedly an army control point on the road from Ibida to Noviodunum. The *beneficiarius*, *T. Caelius Cat[us]*, is assigned to the office of governor. Thus, the social structure of the village was amplified by the military element.

The texts from Mihai Bravu (*vicus Bad[---]*, as we shall see from one of the texts), provide us with precious information on the settlement's organization, on the social structure and on the historical frame in which the village developed. I reconstituted a partial image of this rural organization (together with A. Ibba), putting it into connection with the general view of the rural landscape in Moesia Inferior.[16] Accordingly, they provide precious information on spatial organisation, social structure and the historical context in which the village developed. This information is provisional, given the limited number of available sources. Nevertheless, it furnishes a partial image of the settlement's organisation that can be integrated into a wider image of the rural life of Moesia Inferior in the Early Roman Empire.

3. The *Bessi*

The first historical text from Mihai Bravu is a military diploma granted to the *tesserarius* Tarsa, son of Duzius, who was discharged on April 5th, 71 AD. I have published a fragment, together with C. Chiriac and I. Matei (fig. 3),

[9] Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Ibba 2020, 19-20. See also Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2018, 84.
[10] Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Ibba 2020, 26-27. See also Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2018, 86.
[11] Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Ibba 2020, 27. See also Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2018, 86.
[12] Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Ibba 2020, 26. See also Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2018, 85.
[13] Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Ibba 2020, 24-25.
[14] See also Alexandrov 2009, 142.
[15] Doruţiu-Boilă 1985, 197-203.
[16] Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Ibba 2020, 17-42.



Fig. 3. Fragment of a Roman military diploma found at Mihai Bravu (photo: L. Mihailescu-Bîrliba).

while C.C. Petolescu and A.-T. Popescu published another fragment of the same copy.[17] Tarsa was a sailor from the Ravenna fleet, very likely a *Bessus* after the restitution proposed by Petolescu and Popescu;[18] he had a son,

[17] Chiriac *et al*. 2004, 265-269; Petolesu & Popescu 2007, 157-149.
[18] On Tarsa, Detschew 1957, 492-494; Moretti 1978, 39; Mócsy 1983, 282; Solin 1995, 436; Eck & Pangerl 2004, 261.

Macedo, who bears a Latin name. I will not give all the details of this military diploma, since this was done with its first publication. It is worth noting, however, that the document belongs to more imperial *constitutiones* granted by Vespasian for the sailors of Misenum and Ravenna as a reward for their support in the civil war (from February 26th, 80 to April 5th, 71 AD).

It is obvious that the sailor, who reached the rank of *tesserarius*,[19] returned to his homeland. Though the diploma was found at Mihai Bravu, we cannot be absolutely sure that this village was his home; however, the presence of Thracians and particularly the *Bessi* in the rural milieu of Moesia Inferior is common. In this respect, I mention the communities of *Bessi consistentes* and *Lai consistentes* in the rural territory of Istros[20] and Tomis. Petolescu and Popescu have proposed, for the second diploma's fragment, the restitution *Besso*, which seems very probable. The dating of the document indicates that Tarsa was in the region at least during Nero's reign before his recruitment. There are other Thracians mentioned in the military diplomas starting with this reign: Sparticus, son of Diuzenus, sailor in the Misenum fleet, was discharged in AD 54;[21] Tyraesus[22] and Dules, the latter son of Datus[23], finished their military duty in the *legio I Adiutrix* in AD 68 and, respectively, AD 70, with the legion having been formed by ancient sailors. Hezbenus, son of Dulazenus, soldier in the Misenum fleet, was discharged on February 9th, 71 AD.[24] The soldier Tyraesus likewise returned home.

It follows from the place of discovery of the diploma that Tarsa returned to a Thracian community, very likely from Mihai Bravu or its vicinity. In this respect, another text is relevant that informs us about the status of the ancient settlement from Mihai Bravu. A fragmentary limestone slab, today exhibited in the Museum of Tulcea, likely represents a votive dedication, perhaps with an additional health vow for the emperor (fig. 4). The inscription was set by the *veterani et cives Romani consistentes vico Bad[---]*. The paleography, but also the analogies with other inscriptions (among them, the formula *cura agente* or *agentibus*) dates this text to the mid-2nd century–second half of the 2nd century AD.

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[19] On *tesserarii* see Chiriac *et al*. 2004, 267-268.

[20] For *Bessi consistentes*, see ISM I 324, 326-328, 330, 332. For *Lai consistentes* see ISM I 343–347, 349. See also Mihailescu-Bîrliba 2012, 94-95.

[21] CIL XVI 1. See also Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Dumitrache 2012, 10-11.

[22] RMD III 136. See also Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Dumitrache 2012, 11-12.

[23] CIL XVI 10. See also Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Dumitrache 2012, 13-14.

[24] CIL XVI 12. See also Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Dumitrache 2012, 12.

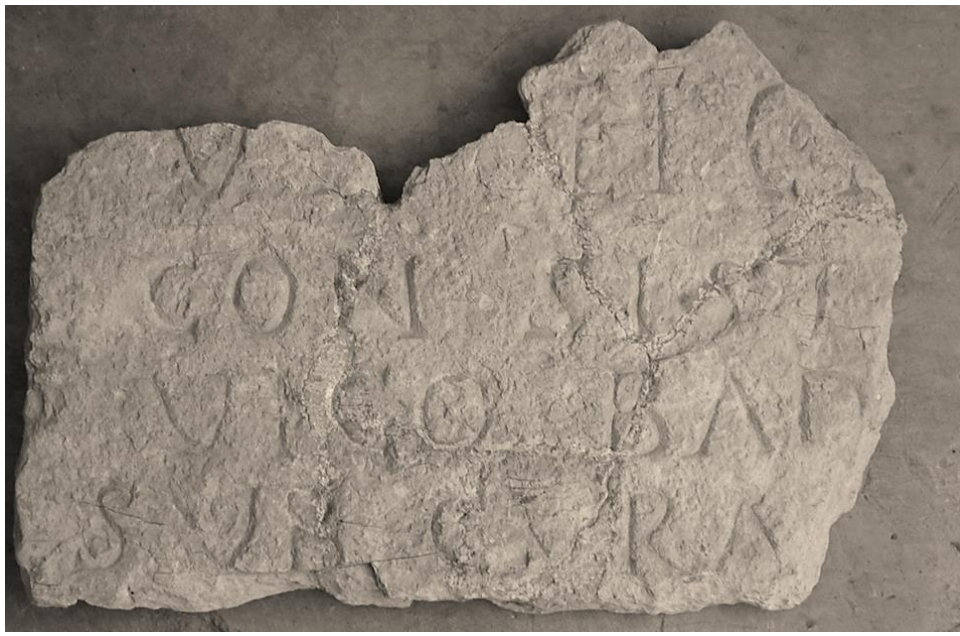


Fig. 4. Inscription attesting *vicus Bad[---]* at Mihai Bravu (photo: A. Ibba).

The formula *veterani et cives Romani consistentes* was analyzed more recently for the north of Lower Moesia by A. Avram.[25] The details of this discussion are beyond the scope of this article. In this case, the *vicus* was inhabited by *veterani*, former soldiers of the *legio Macedonica* (settled in *Troesmis*) or former members of auxiliary units or *classiarii* (of imperial fleets or from *Noviodunum*[26]), and by *cives Romani consistentes*, identifiable with *coloni* or merchants, organized in a *conventus* in the village. This type of association, constituted in order to defend common interests, very likely collaborated with the *vicani*, especially for raising public monuments and paying respect to the Roman state and emperor.[27]

[25] On *cives Romani consistentes*, see Bounegru 1986; Bérard 1993; Kovács 2000; van Andringa 2003; Avram 2007; Bourigault 2011. On *vici*, see the different opinions of Tarpin 2002, 7-14, 53-86, 261-280; Letta 2005; 2008; Todisco 2011, 9-27, 57-132; Leveau 2012; Aparaschivei 2015, 30-32; Ibba 2016.

[26] On Roman army in Moesia Inferior during the principate, see Matei-Popescu 2010, 35-53, 167-249.

[27] Bérard 1992, 92-95; van Andringa 2003, 49-52, 57-59; Bourigault 2011, 65-67, 69-71, 78, 83-86.

The *vici* formally depended on an administrative centre (larger and autonomous, which did not have mandatory Roman institutions) or on the *patrimonium principis*.[28] I and A. Ibba[29] presumed that *vicus Bad[---]* could depend on Troesmis,[30] Istros,[31] Ibida[32] or Noviodunum,[33] without excluding the possibility that it was a village constituted on imperial *praedia*.[34]

The present information does not allow us to find a definitive answer at this question. The *vicus* does not have a Latin or Greek name, but a Thracian or a Celtic one, like in the meridional part of Moesia Inferior.[35] It could have originated from the deities named *Badoniae*, mentioned exclusively at Apulum.[36] It is possible that this rural community emerged in the 1st century AD from a Thracian population.[37] In this respect we have to connect the inscription attesting *vicus Bad[---]* with the military diploma whose recipient is Tarsa. Tarsa returned home after discharge in AD 71. The *vicus*, as a Roman structure, appeared later, perhaps in the first half of the 2nd century AD. It was inhabited by veterans, Roman citizens and natives, probably of Thracian stock, very likely *Bessi*. That is why I and A. Ibba suggested also a restitution *vet(erani), c(ives) R(omani) et Bessi con(sistentes)*, but we rather prefer the first adopted variant.

As mentioned before, *Bessi* had been established in the countryside of northern Lower Moesia since the first half of the 1st century AD. They are mentioned at the beginning of the 1st century in conflict with Roman

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[28] Ibba 2016, 365–372; on *vici* from the *patrimonium Caesaris* see also Bérard 1993, 72-74.

[29] Mihailescu-Bîrliba & Ibba 2020, 28.

[30] On the territory of Troesmis: Aparaschivei 2010, 105-113, 144-145, 197-205; see also Bărbulescu 2001, 84-91.

[31] On the *regio Histriae* see Bărbulescu 2001, 31-47, 72, 99, 109, 139-151; Avram 2006, 66-67; 2007, 97, 101; Matei-Popescu 2013, 212-227.

[32] Opaiţ *et al*. 1992, 104, 107 Bărbulescu 2001, 91-96; Aparaschivei 2010, 239 nt. 16.

[33] On the territory of Noviodunum see Bărbulescu 2001, 76-83; Aparaschivei 2010, 115-117. Avram (2007, 97, 107) thinks that the *vicus Bad[---]* belonged to the territory of Noviodunum.

[34] On the *regiones Montanensium* and *Dimensium*, see Bérard 1992, 91–92; Matei-Popescu 2014, 187-188; see also Ivanov *et al*. 2015, 204-205, 221, 244.

[35] Poulter 1980, 734. See the toponyms of some *vici* in northern Bulgaria: *vicus Longinopara* (ILBulg 209, Bâltâc 2011, 257); *vicus Bres[---]* (RMD V 317; Bâltâc 2011, 259); *vicus Dizerpera* (RMD V 463; Bâltâc 2011, 259); *vicus Saprisara* (CIL VI 2933; Bâltâc 2011, 259); *vicus Zinesdina Maior* (RMD V 311; Bâltâc 2011, 259-260) etc.

[36] CIL III 14471 = IDR III.5 37 = ILS 9335 = AE 1901, 29 (*Apulum*), cf. Sanie 1970, 295-298, *contra* Nemeti 2013, 140-141. For Celtic toponyms, see Bărbulescu 2001, 99, 131.

[37] Poulter 1980, 733-734, 738.

authorities.[38] The communities of *Bessi consistentes* are then attested in the rural milieu of Istros.[39] At Ibida, not far from Mihai Bravu, a Thracian community is evoked by the inscriptions. A *magister* of *vicus Quintionis* (from the rural territory of Istros), Durisses Bithi, is commemorated in a fragmentary text.[40] Taking into account the names' identity, it is highly probable that Durisse Bithi is the same person as the *magister vici Quintionis*; he died at Ibida. V. H. Baumann, the first editor of the text, and subsequently E. Doruţiu-Boilă, the editor of the *ISM* V corpus, do not explain the reasons for Durisses' presence in Ibida.[41] Excepting Durisses Bithi, another Thracian family is attested at Ibida, Othis Seuthis, his wife Bithidia Bithi and a person whose name is not clear.[42] Durisses Bithi was a *Bessus*: thus, very likely the other Thracians from Ibida were *Bessi*. Em. Zah and Al. Suceveanu had two hypotheses for the presence of *Bessi* in the northern side of Lower Moesia (nowadays Dobruja).[43] The first is that the *Bessi* mentioned by Ovid were deported by Romans or forced to retreat by the Roman pressure in the Haemus region. The second is connected with the presence of *Bessi* in northern Lower Moesia in the 2nd century AD. Corroborating the fragments of Vegetius on the qualities of *Bessi* as miners and the analysis made by the geologist Em. Zah in the territories where their presence is attested, the two authors cited above think that members of the Thracian tribe were colonized in Dobruja for mining activities. The second hypothesis seems probable for the case of Ibida, where recent research has revealed ancient open-pit iron and copper mines (in the vicinity, at Altân Tepe).

However, at Mihai Bravu, Tarsa is attested in AD 71, being discharged after some years of service in the Ravenna fleet. Unfortunately, he was rewarded with a discharge before the 26 years of service, so it is difficult to know when he was recruited. It is certain that he was recruited in Claudius' or Nero's time. That means that the Thracian community was already in northern Moesia Inferior.

4. Conclusion

The settlement of Mihai Bravu was known under the name of *vicus Bad[---]*. The first epigraphic document is from AD 71 and mentions the

[38] Ovid.*Tristia*.3.10.5. The confirmation of Ovid's story is an important inscription dating from Tiberius, found in the countryside of Istros (Bărbulescu & Buzoianu 2014, 415-434). See also Jones 2016, 122-132; Kantor 2017, 95-91; Matei-Popescu 2017, 17-25.
[39] ISM I 324, 326-328, 330-332; V 62-64.
[40] ISM V 229.
[41] ISM V 229, *sub numero*.
[42] ISM V 228.
[43] Zah & Suceveanu 1971, 569-572.

Thracian Tarsa. Taking into account the attestations of *Bessi* north of Moesia Inferior, but also in the neighbouring settlement of Ibida, it seems that the *Bessi* settled *vicus Bad[---]* during Tiberius' reign. Later, veterans and Roman citizens were colonized at Mihai Bravu and formed a *conventus*. It is uncertain to speak at this moment of *Bessi consistentes* at Mihai Bravu, but the analogies with other rural communities in the area make this hypothesis probable.

AÉ – *Année Épigraphique*, Paris.

CIL – *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, Berlin 1863-.

IDR – *Inscriptiones Daciae Romanae.* Vol. I, III/1, 2, 3, 4 (ed. I. I. Russu); Vol. II (eds. Gr. Florescu, C. C. Petolescu); Vol. III/5 (ed. I. Piso); Vol. III/6 (ed. C. Băluţă). Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest/Diffusion de Boccard, Paris, 1975-2001.

ILBulg – B. Gerov, *Inscriptiones latinae in Bulgaria repertae*, Sofia, 1989.

ILS – H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, I-III, Berlin, 1892-1916.

ISM – *Inscriptiones Scythiae Minoris.* Vol. I (ed. D. M. Pippidi); Vol. II (ed. I. Stoian); Vol. III (ed. Al. Avram); Vol. IV (ed. E. Popescu); vol. V (ed. E. Doruţiu-Boilă). Editura Academiei Române, Bucharest/Diffusion de Boccard, Paris, 1975-2016.

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Sur la datation du culte du Cavalier thrace (On the dating of the cult of the Thracian horseman)

Slavtcho Kirov

Abstract: The paper attempts to clarify the chronology and especially the importance of the cult of the Thracian horseman, distinction is made between the votive monuments from those of a funerary character, from the very early fourth century BC to the end of the fourth century AD. His worship in Egypt – spread with the Thracian mercenaries as attested by Callimachus, offers a good parallel to evaluate his popularity in the Balkans in the early Hellenistic times. On the other hand, as his evolution in Egypt is detectable – crossing from the private to public area, suggests the possible way to understand his development in *Thracia* itself. Based to some archaeological finds and the use of shrines in the fourth century AD, we believe that his worship was preserved until it was replaced by Christianity.

Key words: Thrace, Egypt, cult, Thracian horseman, *Heros*, *Heros equitans*, *Heron*, *Callimachus*

Резюме: В статията се разисква хронологията – от ранното начало на 4 в. пр.н.е. до края на 4 в. от н.е. и разпространението на култа на Тракийския конник, като ясно се разграничават посветителните от погребалните паметници. Неговият култ в Египет, пренесен там от тракийските наемници и засвидетелстван от Калимах, предлага точен паралел, за да се прецени неговото разпространение на Балканите в началото на елинистическата епоха. От друга страна, също така както в Египет се проследява неговото развитие, т.е. преминавайки от личното към общественото пространство, се дава възможност да се наблюдава неговото развитие в самата Тракия. Въз основа на някои археологически находки и използването на светилища през четвърти век от н. е. може да се смята, че култът на Тракийския конник продължава и през този век, до цялостното му изместване от християнството.

Les études sur le monde thrace et l'exploitation de sa documentation pourraient renouveler l'histoire des contacts et des mutations à l'œuvre dans les régions de «confins». Avec un champ de recherche dédié à la Thrace et aux Thraces, la Thracologie tend à enrichir la connaissance actuelle d'un pan entier de l'histoire de l'Antiquité. Son but est de clarifier l'histoire, la culture,

la langue, la religion et l'économie des Thraces, depuis les premières mentions littéraires jusqu'à la fin de l'Antiquité tardive. Afin de se doter de moyens susceptibles à la réalisation de ses ambitions, elle ne néglige aucun support, ni aucune source, que ce soit la littérature ancienne, l'épigraphie, la numismatique, la papyrologie, ou la recherche archéologique, les comparaisons socio-culturelles, etc.

L'étude de la religion des Thraces constitue un domaine de recherche en soi. Tributaire non seulement des écrits légués par l'Antiquité, mais aussi et à plus forte raison pour les Thraces, de la recherche archéologique, elle tend à répondre aux questions fondamentales liées à la société thrace, à son développement et à l'interaction cultuelle et plus globalement culturelle avec ses voisins à travers les siècles. Lorsque nous évoquons la religion thrace et ses particularités, au-delà de la composition du panthéon lui-même aux différentes strates chronologiques, un aspect particulier ne passe pas inaperçu, pour ne pas dire qu'il ne s'impose par son envergure. Il s'agit d'une divinité particulière, très énigmatique, bien que très populaire, propre, telle que nous la connaissons, au monde thrace. C'est le Cavalier thrace. Son culte qui doit être obligatoirement dissocié des représentations funéraires,[1] par la façon dont il est attesté grâce aux découvertes archéologiques, aurait trouvé son apogée à l'époque impériale – globalement sous le Haut-Empire. Malgré une littérature abondante – catalogues, monographies, articles spécialisés, production stimulée par le nombre très élevé d'artefacts conservés, plusieurs aspects fondamentaux restent sujets à discussion – l'origine, la typologie – et, au-delà du simple catalogage, les contextes identitaires, les interprétations des historiens modernes (occidentaux et balkaniques), avec leurs propres enjeux.

Un des aspects très importants du débat scientifique relatif à cette divinité concerne l'époque de son apparition ainsi que de sa disparition. Grâce aux nombre exagérément grand des témoignages de l'époque du Haut Empire, il est devenu habituel à considérer que le culte est apparu, s'est développé et s'est éteint dans un laps de temp englobant plus ou moins les trois premiers siècles de l'Empire. Ainsi, en absence d'autres indices formels de datation, la mise au jour de plaques votives, même anépigraphes, sert d'élément d'orientation chronologique avec toutes les conséquences que cela peut induire. Dès lors une reprise de quelques éléments du riche corpus est nécessaire pour insister fermement sur une échelle chronologique bien plus conséquente qui dépasse amplement le cadre généralement admis.

[1] Comme l'a très justement rappelé Alexandrescu Vianu, cf. Alexandrescu Vianu 1980.

La première difficulté à laquelle il faut faire face est l'identification précise. Nous savons que les Thraces honoraient de nombreuses divinités. Dès l'époque classique les témoignages des auteurs grecs nous font état d'une société polythéiste. Hérodote, tout en épargnant à ces auditeurs les noms thraces, mentionne Arès, Dionysos, Artémis ainsi qu'Hermès, qui est vénéré par les rois, mais aussi des dieux (*théoi*) locaux (*épichôrioi*) – Cybèle, Pleistor, Gebeleizis et Zalmoxis (qui est un *daimôn*). Bien d'autres nous sont connus grâce à l'épigraphie ou les sources postérieures – Darzalas, Déloptès, Zémélé, Bendis, etc. À ces témoignages sans équivoque, il faut ajouter un autre, beaucoup moins répandu dans la littérature scientifique – celui de Xénophane de Colophon du sixième siècle avant notre ère: «Αἰθίοπές τε <θεοὺς σφετέρους> σιμοὺς μέλανάς τε | Θρῆικές τε γλαυκοὺς καὶ πυρρούς <φασι πέλεσθαι>».[2]

Cependant, pour cette même période et depuis bien longtemps dans le bassin méditerranéen, le cavalier peut faire objet de représentation et d'une certaine vénération. Mais pour l'instant nous n'avons pas de témoignages explicites qui mettent en relation la figure du cavalier considéré par les Thraces comme divinité à part entière avec un nom, des épithètes, des symboles et une pratique rituelle qui lui sont propres. Or, de point de vue de l'anthropologie de la religion le mythe, le rite et le symbole sont les trois piliers sur lesquels repose l'expérience religieuse. Le mythe raconte comment une réalité est venue à l'existence, le rite rejoue le mythe tout en renvoyant au symbole, qui fait apparaître un sens secret. Dans le cadre du Cavalier thrace à l'heure actuelle, nous ne connaissons que des symboles, dont le plus répandu est le cavalier lui-même. Dès lors, comme l'ont regretté D. Boteva[3] et Zl. Gočeva,[4] sur la base de cette représentation commune, qui ne peut expliquer à elle seule ni le charactère, ni l'origine, le culte de cette divinité particulière fut totalement dilué par les rédacteurs du *LIMC* en l'intégrant dans le corpus du *Heros equitans*, même si initialement un article lui aurait été consacré. Ce choix de la rédaction du *LIMC* est d'autant plus surprenant qu'une étude à part est réservée à un autre cavalier (d'origine thrace) – Hérôn.

Il est tout à fait intéressant que la majorité des sources grecques et même plus tard les Romains dans un élan traditionnaliste, tout en liant la Thrace et les chevaux, ne font état d'aucune vénération d'un cavalier. Depuis Homère, les Thraces sont connus comme éleveurs de chevaux.[5] Chez Hésiode dans *Les travaux et les jours*, la Thrace une terre nourricière de cavales,[6] qui

[2] Xenoph. fr.16 (= *Silli et Den.* fr.14).
[3] Boteva 2000.
[4] Gočeva 2007.
[5] Hom. *Il*. 13.4; 14.227.
[6] Hes. *Op*. 507.

est traversée par le Borée. L'occupation des rivages septentrionaux de l'Égée, espacée dans des vagues successives, par les Grecs est à l'origine du mythe de Diomède et ses juments anthropophages, alors qu'un autre roi non moins célèbre – Rhésos, est tué pour son équipage. Est-ce que l'image héritée de quelques passages littéraires de l'époque archaïque est réellement représentative d'un quotidien réel? Comment comprendre cette même image qui s'est largement imposée dans la littérature antique et plus encore contemporaine, alors que mis à part les exemples qu'on vient de produire, les témoignages explicites à la fois textuels et archéologiques sur les pratiques d'élevage équestre sont plutôt maigres. Il est vrai que par exemple sur les monnaies de certains rois des Odryses – Cotys Ier ou Seuthès III, sont représentés des protomés ou des chevaux et des cavaliers. Il en est de même sur certaines monnaies de Lysimaque de l'atelier d'Amphipolis, figurant au droit une tête d'Apollon et au revers un cavalier.[7] Et même si ces représentations évoquent les styles iconographiques retenus pour représenter la divinité elle-même telle qu'elle est connue à l'époque romaine, rien ne nous permet d'affirmer qu'il s'agisse du Cavalier thrace.

Si les textes littéraires de l'époque classique restent désespérément muets quant à l'identification du Cavalier thrace, on aurait pu s'attendre à trouver un secours dans la recherche archéologique. Mais il n'en est rien – aucun vestige de l'époque classique ne nous est parvenu, alors même que le fragment de Xénophane cité ci-dessus est explicite – non seulement les Thraces étaient polythéistes, mais ils représentaient leurs dieux à leur image. Si l'on prend en compte le fait que les Balkans étaient très densément peuplés, on se serait attendu à une multitude d'indices liés à la pratique cultuelle thrace. Cela nous amène alors au constat que les représentations polychromes (*glaukoi kai pyrroi*) fussent-elles sous la forme de statues ou de peintures étaient réalisées surtout en matière périssable – bois, cire, etc.[8] Il est aussi fort possible que les murs aient été couverts de fresques[9] à l'instar des *tumuli*. L'explication n'est pas évidente et le savoir-faire des artisans ne peut pas être mis en question – les rois et les princes thraces avaient suffisamment de ressources[10] pour organiser la construction de sanctuaires et les pourvoir en objets cultuels de toute sorte. Cependant, pour l'instant l'exploration de temples et de sanctuaires des époques classique et

[7] Hoover 2016, no. 1745.

[8] Comme par exemples les plaques en bois peintes de Fayoum, cf. Drioton 1940, plus récemment Rondot 2015.

[9] De nombreux exemples dans Moormann 2011 et Saragoza 2011, 71, nn. 11, 12.

[10] Sans dresser la longue liste des trésors en métaux précieux, ni le monnayage, ni les artefacts provenant des tumuli funéraires, on peut mentionner un passage bien connu de Thucydide qui évoque un tribut annuel de 400 talents, cf. Thuc. 2.96.

hellénistique en dehors des grandes cités le long des côtes maritimes, ne nous apprend rien sur les pratiques elles – mêmes.

Il faut aussi mentionner une autre difficulté à laquelle les archéologues ne peuvent pas échapper – si l'on suppose que des plaques ou statues anépigraphes du Cavalier thrace étaient réalisées sur support durable – marbre, métal, etc., leur vénération durant des générations dans le même sanctuaire pourrait les faire confondre avec d'autres *ex-votos* bien plus tardifs, mais datables au moyen de l'épigraphie ou de la stratigraphie. Nous savons qu'à l'instar de nos lieux de culte modernes certains sanctuaires étaient utilisés pendant des siècles parfois sans interruption. Dès lors, lors d'une destruction tardive les anciennes plaques et autres dédicaces auraient pu se confondre avec les nouvelles et ne plus être datées correctement.

Mais les aléas du temps ne sont pas les seuls responsables pour le manque d'information. Les savants modernes savent que les Thraces étaient un amas de peuples qui avaient un point commun – ils n'avaient pas des traditions littéraires. Jusqu'à la provincialisation de la Thrace, l'utilisation de l'écrit est généralisée seulement dans les grands centres urbains le long des côtes maritimes thraces, c'est-à-dire que l'écriture reste l'apanage de la population urbanisée. L'intérieur des terres, où les structures villageoises dominent, demeure largement silencieux. Or, seule une population littrée peut comprendre le pouvoir de conservation et de transmission fourni par l'écriture. Bien sûr les cours royales auraient disposé de toutes les facilités offertes par l'écriture – tenue de comptes, de registres et autres correspondances avec les autres puissances du bassin méditerranéen, mais l'essentiel de leurs sujets demeuraient analphabètes. Il est impossible d'en connaître les raisons, mais certainement leur mode de vie en est grandement responsable.[11] Cette différence vis-à-vis de leurs voisins, exprimée par l'absence de codification de leur vie nous prive actuellement de pans entiers de leur histoire (dans le sens le plus général du terme). Leur point de vus aurait été indispensable pour une meilleure compréhension de leur société, car toute extrapolation qui s'appuie sur des sources externes, est nécessairement partielle et partiale.

Cet état de fait nous oblige à chercher des indices relatifs à l'histoire du culte du Cavalier thrace aux endroits où l'écriture était généralisée et où le désir de nommer la divinité et le dédicant, avec ou sans évoquer les raisons de son geste pieux, aurait permis cette pratique de façon suffisamment dense pour que de telles traces nous parviennent. C'est pourquoi il faut se tourner

[11] Cependant, il n'est nullement nécessaire de se servir de l'écriture pour exercer des pratiques cultuelles.

vers de les rives de la Méditerranée et les espaces qui auraient été et ont été occupés par une population d'origine thrace.

Pour le début de l'époque hellénistique nous savons que des Thraces s'étaient établis aussi bien en Asie Mineure – pays traditionnel d'échanges, ainsi qu'en Égypte. Si la proximité des terres orientales favorisait une migration bidirectionnelle depuis la plus haute antiquité, l'installation des Thraces en Égypte est un phénomène bien plus récent. Enrôlés dans les armées d'Alexandre le Grand et plus tard dans celles de ses successeurs ils voyagent et s'établissent durablement loin de leur pays natal[12] et on peut s'attendre qu'ils continuent à vénérer leurs dieux traditionnels.

Nous avons un témoignage littéraire, de très grande valeur et connu depuis longtemps. Parmi les différentes épigrammes dans l'*Anthologie Palatine* figure une attribuée à Callimaque:[13]

Ἥρως Ἠετίωνος ἐπίσταθμος Ἀμφιπολίτεω
ἵδρυμαι μικρῷ μικρὸς ἐπὶ προθύρῳ
λοξὸν ὄφιν καὶ μοῦνον ἔχων ξίφος·ἀνέρι δ' ἱππεῖ
θυμωθεὶς πεζὸν κἀμὲ παρῳκίσατο.

Callimaque, né à Cyrène, a vécu à Alexandrie durant la deuxième moitié du troisième siècle avant notre ère. Auteur de nombreux ouvrages, il ne nous est parvenu que très peu de son œuvre dont cette épigramme qui a retenue l'attention des savants dès le dix-neuvième siècle, avant d'être correctement comprise et commentée par M. Roussel.[14] Voici la traduction empruntée à É. Prioux:[15]

«*Logé auprès d'Éétion d'Amphipolis, je me tiens, moi, un modeste Héros, sur son modeste portique, avec, pour tout attribut, une épée et un serpent qui se tortille; c'est parce qu'il s'était pris de colère contre un cavalier qu'il m'a moi-même abaissé au rang de fantassin quand il m'a établi auprès de lui*.»

Comme le remarque M. Roussel, il n'est pas nécessaire de s'appuyer sur des connaissances particulières littéraires pour bien comprendre le sens.[16] Et

[12] Cf. p. ex. dans l'ordre chronologique: *P.Hib*. 1, 92 (264 a.C.); *P.Col*. 4, 80 (246 a.C.); *P.Hib.* 1, 33 (245 a.C.); *P.Tebt*. 3/1, 815 (223-221 a.C.); *P.Tebt*. 3/1, 793 (183 a.C.); *P.Tebt*. 3/1, 779 (175 a.C.); *P.Heid.* 9, 423 (158 a.C.); *P.Köln* 4, 187 (146 a.C.), etc.
[13] *Anth.Gr*. 9.336.
[14] Roussel 1921.
[15] Prioux 2007, 134-135.
[16] Chercher des emprunts à la mythologie et identifier des personnages avec des mêmes noms.

même, on pourra ajouter que si l'image véhiculée est plaisante, la scène n'est pas moins banale – un Thrace en Égypte, un *Cavalier thrace* - προπύλαιος évoqué comme dieux protecteur, un ἐπίσταθμος plus qu'odieux et un σταθμοῦχος fort malheureux.

La parodie est fine car un Thrace (Éétion) irrité contre un cavalier a voulu punir son dieu protecteur – lui-même un cavalier (seul point commun de toutes les représentations figurées que nous connaissons actuellement) en le privant de son attribut majeur (le cheval), en le dégradant dans la hiérarchie militaire au statut de simple soldat et en le plaçant dans un coin – tout comme son serpent. Or, dans les armées hellénistiques les Thraces combattaient le plus souvent à cheval et bien de Thraces attestés sur les terres des Lagides sont des cavaliers. Ainsi il est possible d'aller encore plus loin en supposant que l'ἐπίσταθμος était un cavalier originaire de la Thrace, ce qui impliquerait qu'il s'agisse d'une caricature d'une querelle «thraco-thrace» en Égypte.

Pour la représentation de cette scène, il n'est pas obligatoire que la pierre fût utilisée comme on aurait pu y croire, car de façon surprenante l'écrasante majorité des vestiges conservés (plus de 5000) sont en pierre, alors que des plaques en terre cuite représentant le *Cavalier thrace* étaient produites, comme l'attestent un fragment conservé au musée de Madara en Bulgarie ou bien un autre découvert près du village Mouletarovo.[17] Nous savons que des panneaux peints et encadrés de lattes entrecroisées ont existé en Égypte et que parfois ils ont été reproduits en terre cuite. Munis de trous ils pouvaient être suspendus non seulement dans les maisons mais aussi dans les temples. Il y avait aussi des réalisations en métal – le plomb est attesté de façon formelle, mais on peut supposer l'usage du bronze, et pourquoi pas dans une moindre mesure, des métaux précieux.[18] Néanmoins, ce qui demeure énigmatique est le fait que proportionnellement au monuments conservés, l'usage de la pierre est presqu'exclusif. Si l'on considère que la fabrication d'un *ex-voto* lapidaire (marbre y compris) avait un coût largement supérieur à l'équivalent en terre cuite et encore plus en bois peint,[19] force est de constater que, vu l'ampleur du culte, nous devrions nous attendre à une multitude de fragments en céramique, le bois ayant disparu à cause des conditions de conservation. Or, à ce jour, le nombre des fragments de

[17] Milchev 1959. Cf. aussi *ci-dessous* n. 50 . Le catalogue de *LIMC* de «*Heros equitans*» n'est d'aucune utilité en ce qui concerne les plaques en céramique.
[18] Boutantin 2013, 115. Des objets cultuels en argent ont été offerts à Κυρὶῳ Ἥρωι Πυρουμηρουλα, cf. Petrov 1960.
[19] Boteva 2011.

représentations figurées de *Heros* autres qu'en pierre est anecdotique. Faut-il y voir une raison particulière? On pourrait avancer plusieurs hypothèses, mais en l'état de la recherche actuelle, aucune ne serait pleinement satisfaisante de point de vue méthodologique.

Enfin, il faut aussi ajouter que si les textes votifs sont raillés tels quels par Callimaque, il n'en est pas moins en ce qui concerne les Thraces et leur dieu. Car, il ne peut s'agir que d'une plaisanterie adressée à *Heros* – c'est le dieu le plus vénéré et le plus répandu qui est ridiculisé, non pas par un de ses aspects particuliers, mais bien dans sa totalité.

À cette attestation sans équivoque pour la datation du culte de *Heros*, il faut ajouter les autres témoignages relatifs au culte de *Hérôn*, dont l'origine thrace ne peut plus être remise en cause, comme nous le fait découvrir la plaque mise à jour dans les environs de Svilengrad en Bulgarie et portant la dédicace bilingue *Heroni Totoithia* | Ἥρωι Τωτοιθιηνῳ.[20]

Des témoignages exclusivement épigraphiques mentionnant *Hérôn* en dehors de l'aire thrace proprement dite, proviennent de la Chersonèse Taurique[21] la Bythinie (Ὄλυμπος Ἥρωνι εὐχήν),[22] de la Lydie (ἔτους σϙβ΄· *vac*. Ἡρακλείδης | φύλαξ εὐχαριστῶν Περκω|ῳ θεῷ Ἥρωνι περὶ ὧν εὐξά|μην ἐπακουσθεὶς ἀνέθηκα), [23] de l'Ionie (Θάλλος Ἥρω|νι ἐπηκόῳ | εὐχὴν ἀνέ|θηκεν)[24] de la Thessalie (Ἀγάθων Ἥρωνι εὐχήν).[25] En Gaule la seule mention gravée sur un pilier hermaïque nous révèle *Heros*: Ἥρωι Λυσάνδρου,[26] alors qu'en Pannonie il est associé à Jupiter: «I(ovi) *O(ptimo) M(aximo) Heroni pro salute I(mperatoris) | d(omini) n(ostri) [[S[e]veri [A]l[exand]r[i]]] | Aug(usti) cultores collegii | eius templum a solo | extruxerunt curanti | bus Aurel(io) Mes<t=E>ri | o patre*».[27] La plupart ne sont pas datées précisément comme celui de la Lydie ou Pannonie et il est possible qu'ils ne soient pas datables obligatoirement de l'époque romaine.[28]

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[20] *SEG* 49, 992 et Gerassimova 2000; cf. aussi: *CIL* III 7592; *IScM* 4 34 & 35 & 85; *ILBulg* 191; *CCET* 2/1, 194; *AE* 1935, 71; 1936, 41, etc.
[21] Shcheglov 1969.
[22] Mendel 1900, 374
[23] De l'époque romaine *SEG* 57, 1195.
[24] *IEph* 3132.
[25] *IG* IX² 1287.
[26] *IGF* 47.
[27] *RIU* 5 1084.
[28] Sorties de leur contexte archéologique, la datation usuelle est celle de «l'époque romaine».

Le culte de *Heros* / *Hérôn* est aussi très bien attesté en Égypte aussi bien seul que sous une forme syncrétique.[29] Comme le remarque E. Will, il est «*un dieu cavalier et représenté comme tel sur sa monture ordinairement au pas, bien que plusieurs fois il apparaisse à pied à côté de son cheval, ce qui a excité la verve du grand Callimaque* […]».[30] Si la première partie de ce postulat est correcte, en revanche la deuxième est anachronique, car les représentations de Hérôn sous l'apparence d'un soldat sont bien postérieures.[31]

Tout comme en Thrace, il avait ses temples en Égypte - à Théadelphie et à Magdôla notamment.[32] Le temple de Théadelphie est connu par quelques inscriptions conservées aujourd'hui au musée d'Alexandrie.[33] La première, découverte en février 1915, est gravée sur un linteau. On y lit qu'une famille a consacré le propylon et le mur d'enceinte à Hérôn Trismégiste.[34] Datée du règne de Ptolémée VIII Évergète II et de Cléopâtre III, soit 145-116 a. C., pour E. Bernard elle nous donnerait une date approximative de la construction du temple. Cette datation pourrait être moins large grâce à une dédicace d'une salle et d'un autel datant de 140 a. C.[35] et ainsi la construction du sanctuaire remonterait vers le milieu du deuxième siècle avant notre ère. Il fut embelli et agrandi une centaine d'années plus tard, car on y ajouta un deuxième propylon, certainement externe et monumental.[36]

Le temple de Magdôla fut fouillé en 1901-1902 par M. P. Jouguet qui en présenta les résultats devant l'Académie.[37] Dans cette entreprise il fut assisté entre autres par M. Lefebvre qui M. Collignon critiqua sévèrement dans son rapport devant la même Académie.[38] Il a aussi fourni deux inscriptions.[39] La

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[29] Boutantin 2013, 77, tableau 5.
[30] Will 1990.
[31] Rondot 2015; aussi Boutantin 2013, 107, n. 56.
[32] À Théadelphie et à Magdola notamment.
[33] Bernand 1981a, nn° 105, 106, 115, 127.
[34] Bernand 1981a, n°105: «ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου καὶ βασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας | τῆς γυναικός, θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν, καὶ τῶν τέκνων αὐτῶν | Φνεβσῆς Ψεναμούνιος καὶ Τνεφερῶς ἡ γυνὴ καὶ τὰ τέκνα | τὸ πρόπυλον καὶ τὸν περίβολον Ἥρωνι θεῶι μεγάλωι μεγάλωι | μεγάλωι».
[35] Bernand 1981a n°106: «[ὑ]πὲ̣ρ̣ βασ̣[ι]λέ[ως Πτ]ολεμα[ί]ου καὶ βασιλίσση|ς Κ̣λ̣ε̣ο̣[πάτρας καὶ τῶν] τέ[κ]νων, Φατρῆς Ὥρου | τὸ ἑστι[α]τ̣[ό]ρ̣ι̣[ο]ν κ̣α[ὶ τὸν βωμ]ὸ̣ν(?) Ἥρωνι μ[εγ]άλωι, (ἔτους) λ΄ Π̣α̣(χὼν) η΄».
[36] Bernand 1981a n°115: «ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Πτολε | μαίου θεοῦ Φιλοπάτορ | ος καὶ Φιλαδέλφου Πετο | σῖρις Ἡρακλήους καὶ ἡ γυνὴ καὶ | τὰ τέκνα τὸ πρόπυλον Ἥρωνι | θεῶι μεγάλωι μεγάλωι· | (ἔτους) ιε΄, Θῶυθ ιθ΄».
[37] Jouguet 1902.
[38] Collignon 1903, 446-449.
[39] Bernand 1981b, nn° 151, 152.

première date de 118 a. C.[40] alors que la deuxième lui est postérieure de deux décennies.[41]

Ces datations concrètes nous fournissent une étape intermédiaire dans le développement du culte du Cavalier thrace en Égypte. Car, si vers le milieu du deuxième siècle avant notre ère le culte s'est suffisamment propagé parmi la population locale pour qu'on éprouve le besoin de lui consacrer des temples spécifiques, son entrée doit nécessairement être bien antérieure. Ainsi, comme il ressort de l'épigramme de Callimaque, à la haute époque hellénistique le culte était d'abord individuel, puis vers au plus tard le deuxième siècle avant notre ère il a dépassé la stricte sphère privée pour investir l'espace public.[42]

Généralement cette propagation pouvait se réaliser de deux façons complémentaires – autonome[43] ou bien au moyen d'un syncrétisme avec une autre divinité aux fonctions proches. Pour Hérôn nous avons beaucoup de témoignages en association avec Harpocrate, qui n'est que l'enfant royal – Horus l'Enfant (d'Osiris). Aussi Harpocrate est parfois associé au soleil, tout comme le Cavalier thrace, mais si celui-ci peut être accompagné de nombreux animaux, Harpocrate-Hérôn est toujours à cheval.[44] Horus est aussi démembré avant de retrouver ses chairs et retourner à la vie,[45] à l'instar des éléments de la doctrine orphique (σπαραγμός – ὠμοφαγία - ἀναβίωσις). Ce syncrétisme est facilité par plusieurs ressemblances, dont la plus proche est évoquée par Plutarque, mais aussi les *papyri* dont le papyrus magique de Londres et de Leyde.[46] Selon l'auteur de Chéronée, Horus, à la demande de son père, aurait choisi le cheval comme un animal le plus utile sur le champ de bataille.[47] Alors que dans le papyrus magique: «*on apprend qu'Horus*

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[40] Bernand 1981b n°151: «ὑπὲρ βασιλ[έως Πτολεμαίου καὶ βασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας τῆς] | ἀδελφῆς καὶ β[ασιλίσσης Κλεοπάτρας τῆς γυναικὸς θεῶν Εὐεργετῶν] | καὶ τῶν τέκνων [...]ικος [...] καὶ ἱ[π]πάρχη[ς] ἐπ' [ἀν]||δρῶν κατ[οίκων ἱππέων καὶ ...] | [...Ἥρωνι θεῶι μεγάλωι] | τὸ πρόπυλον κ[αὶ τὰ λ]ιθικὰ ἔργα πά[ντα], (ἔτους) νβ΄ Ἐπειφὶ ».

[41] Bernand 1981b n°152: «ὑπὲρ βασιλέως Πτολεμαίου τοῦ κα[ὶ] | Ἀλεξάνδρου καὶ βασιλίσσης [Κ]λ̣[εο]||[πάτρας] τῆς ἀδελφῆς, θεῶν [Φιλομη]τ̣ό̣|ρων Σωτήρων καὶ τῶν τέκνων καὶ τῶν | [προ]γόνων, Ἥρ̣ωνι θεῶι μεγάλωι. | (ἔτους) [κ]΄, Φαμενὼθ α΄ κτλ.».

[42] On peut ajouter une autre inscription provenant du delta du Nil: «Ἥρωι μεγάλωι καὶ τοῖς | συννάοις θεοῖς οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς | πόλεως γεοῦχοι ἔτους | ἐνάτου, Παχὼν κε΄».

[43] Si bien la stèle portant Ἥρωνι Εὐμενεῖ date de l'époque ptolémaïque tardive, cf. Bernand 1992.

[44] Boutantin 2013, 77, tableau 5.

[45] Hani 1963, 111-120.

[46] Griffith & Thompson 1904.

[47] Plut. *De Iside* 19.358b-c; cf. surtout Guermeur 2012.

monte un cheval blanc à midi et un cheval noir, probablement à la minuit. Les deux chevaux sont ici en rapport avec le soleil et la lune. Une prêtrise liée à Isis, apparue durant le dernier tiers du IIe s. av. J.-C., le ἱερὸσ Πῶλοσ pourrait révéler l'existence d'un Horus assimilé à un jeune poulain».[48]

À la lumière de ces constats si l'on revient en Thrace nous devons reconnaître une très large pratique de ce culte au moins à la haute époque hellénistique si ce n'est à l'époque classique.[49] Le fait que la plupart des témoignages datent de l'époque romaine signifie simplement un certain changement dans la pratique physique du culte due aux changements sociétaux imputables à la provincialisation, et non pas à la naissance du culte. Ainsi, seules cinq plaques anépigraphies publiées par Zl. Gočeva et M. Oppermann[50] et par N. Hampartumian[51] proviennent des terres thraces et plus particulièrement de la côte pontique. Deux d'entre elles sont en céramique mais toutes timidement datées de la basse époque hellénistique, comme s'il ne s'agissait que des débuts encore mal assurés d'un nouveau culte.

Quant à la pratique deux hypothèses peuvent être avancées. Selon la première le culte du *Heros* serait individuel et rendu au sein du foyer familial. Ce fait ainsi que l'absence de tradition littéraire en Thrace et l'utilisation de matériaux périssables pour sa célébration pourraient expliquer l'absence de témoignages formels pour cette période de l'intérieur du pays. Pourtant, et ceci est la deuxième hypothèse, il serait étonnant que des sanctuaires ne serait-ce que locaux n'aient existé. Or, les preuves archéologiques formelles restent déficientes. Parmi les plus de soixante-dix sanctuaires extra-urbains mentionnés comme identifiables par I. Valchev pour la seule province de Thrace à l'époque romaine, seuls trois ont été fouillés.[52] Si ces trois sanctuaires datent de l'époque romaine, il est dangereux, en s'appuyant seulement sur ces publications, ainsi que sur les plaques inscrites, de généraliser la chronologie de ce culte tellement répandu. Ainsi, il est possible et cela malgré l'absence de textes épigraphiques formels, d'admettre que le culte était aussi rendu en public depuis la fin de l'époque classique, début de l'époque hellénistique. Par exemple, tel serait le cas avec le sanctuaire près de Sostra[53] et de Télérig (celui-ci ayant fonctionné peu de temps entre l'époque classique et l'époque romaine).[54]

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[48] Boutantin 2013, 172.
[49] Sans idée de débat sur la position du dieu dans le panthéon thrace, cf. Boteva 2000, 114-115.
[50] *CCET* 1, 80, 81, 82.
[51] *CCET* 4, 61 & 71.
[52] Valchev 2015, 109-111.
[53] Hristov *et al*. 2013, 42.
[54] Torbatov 2001.

La continuité des cultes rendus dans ces deux sanctuaires au quatrième siècle, ainsi que par exemple dans le sanctuaire au lieu-dit «Babanov» près du village de Madara en Bulgarie[55] nous permet par la même occasion de réviser la date de sa disparition. La pratique se poursuit bien après le troisième siècle comme l'atteste la dédicace adressée *Deo sancto Herrone* par Aurelius Valens[56] qui pourrait être postérieure du début du quatrième siècle. De cette époque date certainement la plaque en céramique de Mouletarovo dont il a été fait mention *supra*. Couverte d'un vernis vert et provenant d'un endroit où de la céramique d'époque tardive et des monnaies du IIIe-IVe s. ont été mis au jour il est légitime de croire que le culte auquel elle était destinée perdurait à cette époque.

Il est inutile de multiplier les exemples[57] et rappeler qu'une croyance aussi répandue ne peut s'éteindre de façon brusque en l'espace de quelques décennies. Il est vrai que le christianisme prend de l'ampleur au détriment des autres cultes, et le culte du Cavalier thrace petit à petit s'assimile aux cultes rendus des saints guerriers et guérisseurs dans le christianisme sans pour autant nier que certains sanctuaires aient pu disparaître dès le début du quatrième siècle.

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CCET – *Corpus Cultus Equitis Thracii*, 4 vols., Leiden.

CIL – *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum*, Berlin.

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IGF – J.-Cl. Decourt, *Inscriptions grecques de la France,* Lyon, 2004.

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LIMC – *Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classicae, Herakles – Kenchrias et Addenda Epona, Galateia, Helios, Helios (in peripheria orientali), Helios/Usil, 5/1 & 2,* Zürich & München.

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[55] Atanasov *et al*. 2005; 2006; Stoychev & Nedelchev 2007.

[56] *CCET* 4, 206. La stèle de *Val. Victorinus biarcus* (n°107) doit être écartée car c'est un monument funéraire, tout comme *CCET* 5, 31, 50.

[57] Y compris les témoignages de christianisation des terres balkaniques qui sont un autre indicateur.

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RIU – *Die römischen Inschriften Ungarns*, Amsterdam.

SEG – *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum,* Amsterdam.

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Christianity among the Thracians: sources and problems

Dimitar Dimitrov

Abstract: The present article is devoted to the spread of Christianity in the eastern half of the Balkan lands, with a special focus on the Thracian population. The Thracians, denominated usually as Bessi (Bessoi) in Late Antiquity, by the name of one of the Thracian tribes in the past, survived as a distinct ethnic group well to the early 8th century, developing even their own liturgical language, along with Latin and Greek. There is a special attention in the article on the missionary activity of Nicetas of Remesiana, but also on the presence of the Bessic monks in the monasteries of Palestine and Syria.

Key words: Thracians, Bessi, Christianity, Late Antiquity, Bessic language

Резюме: Настоящата статия е посветена на разпространението на християнството в източните и централни предели на Балканския полуостров, в земите, населени основно с тракийско по произход население. В Късната античност латиноезичните и гръкоезични автори обединяват всички траки под общото название *беси*, по едно от най-известните дотогава тракийски племена. Бесите възприемат християнството, включително и благодарение на мисионерската активност на Никита от Ремесиана. Бески монаси присъстват в религиозния и монашески живот в Светите земи и развиват свой литургичен език, за който споменава и св. Йоан Хризостом. Ние за съжаление не можем да кажем нищо конкретно за този *бески* език, освен че се е използвал за богослужебни цели наред с латинския и гръцкия.

The Thracian lands witnessed the early missionary activity of Apostle Paul and his companions. However, the penetration of Christianity during the early Roman imperial period is registered only sporadically. My attention will be focused on the period of the Late Antiquity (fourth-sixth centuries AD) when we have more explicit information about the spread of Christianity and the ecclesiastical organization of the lands traditionally inhabited by the Thracian tribes. The sources, including the earliest *Notitiae episcopatuum*, indicate about the dense set of ecclesiastical centers, some of them of a relevant significance. The confessional disputes revealed furthermore the importance of these lands in the history of Christianity. This is the case with

the partly abortive Council of Serdica (343 AD) and the counter-Council in Philippopolis, when important division lines appeared openly for the first time.

Special attention will be given to certain Latin and Greek sources as well as to the interesting personality of Nicetas of Remesiana. Along with the larger urban centers, where the influence of either the Latin, or Greek, was strong, we have to cope also with people who still had kept nearly intact their cultural habits and identity.

The main centers of Christianity in the Thracian lands

Thracian lands witnessed the permeation of Christianity since the very first apostolic missions, including the quite legendary mission of Apostle Andrew, but to a great extent just as the contact zone north of *Via Egnatia*. Later on, some of the main military and administrative centers in the Eastern Balkans came to be known for its nuclei of Christians, as the hagiographical geography was willing to demonstrate. The martyrs – historical, semi-legendary, or openly legendary – were attested during the Roman persecutions, mostly those of Valerian and the Tetrarchs, in the late third and the early fourth century. The martyrs were often soldiers in the Roman army, who secretly were attached to Christianity, or people from the educated urban strata, and even outsiders who, already Christians, frequented the Roman provinces of Thracia and Moesia Inferior, or the dioceses of Thracia and Dacia after the reforms of the Tetrarchy. We have never to forget that in those early Christian centuries Christianity was predominantly an urban phenomenon, with many Christians originating from families with satisfactory means of living and good educational traditions. St. Dasius of Durostorum was probably one of the most famous saints and martyrs, a soldier with possible provenience from those lands, but we have to have in mind another saints and martyrs, too, from Durostorum itself, from Marcianopolis, Tomis and Halmyris, Philippopolis, Adrianople, Drizipara and Bizya. If this hagiographical geography is correct, then we could tentatively try to pin-point some of the main centers of Christianity, namely, the legionary centers on Danube – Durostorum being the most important among them – and also, the northern Thracian/Moesian Black Sea coast up to the Danube delta, with Tomis (center of Moesia Inferior for centuries), Halmyris, Marcianopolis (center of whole Thracia during the Gothic wars of the fourth century) and probably Odessus/Odessos. Philippopolis, traditionally the main city of Thrace, became one of the main centers of Christianity along with Thessalonica, Serdica, Sirmium and, quite understandably, Constantinople. Another important area was Eastern Thrace, the hinterland of the later capital Constantinople,

where we have traditional Christian hubs, such as Heraclea, Bizya, and Adrianople. If moving to the west from the late Roman diocese of Thrace, but still in lands, traditionally inhabited by Thracians or related tribes, we have to stress the growing importance of Serdica as the center of power at the time of Galerius and later, in the early years of Constantine the Great in the Balkans, which gave precedence to the bishop of that city to became a representative of the very important outpost of the Christian lands, which were not under the jurisdiction of the new capital on the Bosphorus, but under the bishops of Rome. Serdica was, moreover, a capital of the new diocese of Dacia, formed gradually out of the territories of the former Moesia Superior and partly western Thrace, where military units and population from the territories north of Danube was transferred at the time of Emperor Aurelian.

If we pose the question of ethnicity, it will be difficult task to answer, and with dubious relevance. Cities in the Balkan provinces of the Roman Empire were inhabited by different people, from Hellenized or Romanized locals, be they of Thracian stock or another, to Roman soldiers from different parts of the Empire, Greek-speaking people from the southern Balkans and Asia Minor, and also Syrians and Jews. Some of the names could betray ethnic origin, like that of Dasius of Durostorum, but most of them did not. The question of the pervasion of Christianity among the Thracian ethnic communities, still existing partly intact in the remote and village regions of the territory, will be discussed later in the present text.

With the legal and favorable status of the Christian religion obtained in the fourth century AD, Christianity spread rapidly since on everywhere in the Roman lands, including the Balkan provinces. The active building of churches, often great urban and sub-urban basilicas, was the demonstration of the new means and the new spirit of the Christian faith and the Church. There is already a mass of literature in Bulgaria, concerning the church-building in the Late Antiquity as a result of the archaeological excavations in process or in the past. What we still have as a question are the regional and social differences, demonstrated by the ecclesiastical buildings in different parts of modern Bulgaria and beyond its actual boundaries. Other important source of information, concerning the ecclesiastical organization, are the episcopal rolls (*notitiae episcopatuum*), several of them being produced from Late Antiquity up to the Paleologan times. In the earliest we have, known as the *Notitia of Pseudo-Epiphanius* and dated with reliable certainty to the time of Emperor Heraclius, we could see what was the situation with the ecclesiastical organization and hierarchy in the seventh century, inherited mostly by the Late Antiquity, before the great changes starting from the late decades of that century and during the next eight century. The administrative diocese of Thrace at the time was part of the greater ecclesiastical diocese of the

capital Constantinople, while the dioceses of Illyricum, like Dacia and Macedonia, with respectively Serdica and Thessalonica as their centers, were still under the jurisdiction of Rome. We know from the Council of Serdica in 343, organized with the assistance of Constans, at that time Emperor in Italy and Illyricum, and Pope Julius I, that the eastern bishops, supported by the eastern Emperor Constantius (II), were not content with the guidance and the decisions of the council and thus moved to Philippopolis, already in the territories of the Eastern Empire, to organize there their own council, or counter-council, depending on the point of view.[1] We see from the *Notitia of Pseudo-Epiphanius* that from the metropolitan church centers in Thrace, after the patriarchate of Constantinople itself, there was the eparchy of Europe with Heraclea as the center, posed on the eight place of preeminence, followed by Thrace proper (Philippopolis, 33d place), Rhodope (Trajanoupolis, 34th place) and Haemimons, with two metropolitan centers in Adrianople (36th) and Marcianopolis (37th). From the autocephalous archbishoprics we have Mysia (Odessos, 39th), Scythia (Tomis, 40th), Europe (Bizya, 41st) and few more, including Beroe (50th) and Nicopolis (ad Istrum, 54th).[2] So far as the latter city practically ceased to exist in the sixth century, the center was probably moved nearby, with Carevec hill in Veliko Tarnovo as one of the possible options. Jordanes has mentioned in his *Getica*, moreover, that even in his time, that is, the reign of Justinian the Great (527-565), the so called *Gothi minores* still lived in the area, practicing Christian faith. Were those Goths the followers of Ulfilas (Wulfila), that is, more likely Arians, or were they other group of wholly orthodox Goths is still a debatable question.[3]

Thus, we could conclude that the ecclesiastical organization of the Balkan lands reached its wide scope and completion during the Late Antiquity, from the fourth to the sixth century. What was still disputable was mostly the question of jurisdiction. During the fifth and sixth century we witness some obvious collisions between Constantinople and Rome, especially concerning the metropolitan see of Thessalonica, considered as too close to Constantinople not only in the sense of distance, but at the same time being named the Papal Vicariate. We see in the *Notitia* 5 in the edition of Parthey, probably from the late seventh century, that Rome was still

[1] Barnard 1983, 56-96.

[2] Darrouzès 1981, 204-213.

[3] Jordanes, *Getica* 267: alli Gothi, qui dicunt minores. According to Isidore of Seville, however, those Goths (*Gothi minores* in Jordanes) 'non solum perseveraverunt Christiani catholici, sed etiam in Concordia Romanorum', that is, they were Orthodox post-Nicaeans, and not Arians (in *Historia Gothorum, Wandalorum, Sueborum* 10).

dignified with the vast territories under its jurisdiction, including Illyricum with Thessalonica, the land of the Slavs, the Avars and the banks of the river Danube.[4] The disputes will be solved in the eighth century in a Gordian knot-manner by the Emperors Leo III and Constantine V, with Illyricum, Sicily and parts of Southern Italy transferred under the ecclesiastical control of Constantinople. Now, let us turn our attention on the survival of Thracian identity in Late Antiquity and its connections with Christianity.

Thracians and/or Bessi

Bessi was the usual name, given to the remnants of the Thracians in Late Antiquity. Being originally a name of a particular tribe, Bessi came to denominate the whole Thracian population in the later period. They had been transferred from 'rude pagans', according to Paulinus of Nola, to beloved children of God. The influence of both Greek and Latin liturgy was noticeable. There was also a trend to development of a Bessic liturgy, recorded in the monasteries of Palestine and the adjacent regions during the late antique period. The question of the use of Bessic liturgical language is a very complicated one, not completely resolved until nowadays. Bessi (or *Bessoi* in Greek) used to be one of the most famous Thracian tribes in Antiquity. They inhabited the region around the upper current of Maritza (Hebros) river as well as the Western Rhodope mountains. They were traditionally presented as warlike and tumultuous in the ancient sources, but also as highly devoted to their beliefs and zealous keepers of the temple of Dionysus, whose location is still a subject of heated debates. They were conquered only with difficulties by the Romans and their Thracian allies, which resulted in their partial relocation here and there, including the lands between Haemus range and the river Danube, approximately the territories of nowadays North Bulgaria and Romanian Dobrudja. Ovid had mentioned Bessi near Tomis along with Getae, Sarmatians and other *Barbarian* tribes in the hinterland.[5] Bessi came to be known as skilled mine-diggers, too, and this image was preserved in Late Antiquity, making them a company to the Dalmatians and the *Galatians* in Spain.[6] Their rude nature was not missed either, nor their resistance to hardships. For Ammianus Marcellinus, Bessi

[4] Parthey 1866, 138-145.

[5] We should avoid generalized conclusions concerning the ethnical picture in Dobrudzha in Antiquity, especially those based on poetical sources – see Podosinov 1983 and Williams 1994, 1-8.

[6] Pacatus Drepanius, *Panegyrici Latini* XII.28; Cl. Claudianus, *Carmina: De consul. Manlii Theodori,* 38; Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina,* XVII; Fl. Vegetius Renatus, *Epitoma rei militaris,* IV.24. For the law of Valentinian I (370) concerning the run-away Thracian ore-miners see *Codex Theodosianus* X.19.7.

were the most ferocious of all the Thracian tribes. For Paulinus of Nola, a man frequenting Aquitaine, Spain and Italy, the Bessi were fiercer than the winter cold widespread in their lands. We are surely confronted by a staunch *topos*. As enemies who created problems to the Romans, they were presented in negative colors, although recognized as good soldiers. Strabo didn't miss to mention that Bessi were called brigands by the brigands themselves.[7]

The problem of Thracian – and I would add also Bessic – identity in Late Antiquity is neither new, nor is it lacking contradictory theses and misperceptions. We already know a lot, yet not enough, about the Christianization of the Balkans from the fourth to the sixth centuries. The place of Thracians in it should be reexamined again.

Bessi provoked the curiosity of the Bulgarian erudite Stephan Zachariev in the 19th century – he has presented them in a Romantic way, typical for the time, as pious and more educated in comparison with the other Thracian tribes. The twentieth century witnessed a new, more academic interest in the subject. Two publications – the article of G. Kazarov of 1924 and the book of V. Beshevliev published in 1965 – were already examples of scholarly research, based on sources and *Quellenkritik*, made by venerated classical philologists and historians.[8] We should not, therefore, consider Late Antiquity in the Balkans any more as a '*dark curtain embracing and covering those lands for centuries*'.[9] Nonetheless, many speculations appeared in the last decades at the expense of serious investigations. I would try in the present part of the article to sum up traditional sources again and to add new ones.

The fame of Thracians as good soldiers continued its life well into the Late Antiquity. *Descriptio totius mundi et gentium* defined Thracians as brave and skilled in military affairs (LIBI I, 79). Thracians took part in the Roman and Early Byzantine army so far as the Balkan region was generally the main reservoirs for recruits. Many Emperors from the third up to the early seventh century originated from the Balkans, making brilliant career in the army. There were special Thracian units, too, as we know from John Lydus, Procopius, and John Malalas. *Notitia Dignitatum* preserved the names of cohorts and *alae* of Thracians, Moesians, Dacians, and Illyrians, along with the others, in the army around the year 400. The auxiliary palatinate units (*auxilia palatina*) had their symbols – the Thracians were there with the lion on their symbolic coat of arms, together with Dacians, Scythians, Tervingi, Dalmatians etc. (LIBI I, 224-256). These elite military forces were created on an ethnic base, although they later probably included people of different

[7] Ammianus Marcellinus, 17.4.10-11; Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina,* XVII; Strabo, 7.5.12.
[8] Nikolov 2008, 71-94; Katsarov 1924, 31-47; Beshevliev 1965.
[9] Dujcev 1942, 229-270, especially 229-230.

origin. So far we dealt with the general notion *Thracians*. However, *Bessi* were mentioned also among those enlisted in the military units. Basing his report on older sources, John Lydus listed in *De Magistratibus* the Triballians and Bessi among the new recruits in the Roman army.[10] In his history of Justinian's wars Procopius has on many occasions written about Thracians in the army. Well known is the story from the Gothic wars in Italy about Bourkentios from the Bessi, who was corrupted by the Goths and became a traitor – as a result he was severely punished by being burnt alive.[11] John Malalas has written about *Scythians* (probably Huns), Goths and Bessi in the armies of Emperor Anastasius (491-518) and Justinian the Great (527-565). That information was confirmed by Theophanes in connection with the campaign against the Persians in the year 505.[12] As it was already mentioned, many Emperors from the third century onwards well into the Late Antiquity originated from the Balkans. We should start the list with Maximinus Thrax (Emperor from 235 to 238, at the onset of the crisis in the Empire) and include Diocletian, Maximian Herculius, Galerius, Maximinus Daia (Daza or Daca),[13] Severus, Licinius, Constantius Chlorus and his son Constantine the Great. Emperor Julian has defined in *Misopogon*, in a highly sarcastic manner, his origin and that of the dynasty, from the 'boorish and austere Moesians' as opposed to highly sophisticated, spoilt and effeminate citizens of Antioch.[14] Emperor Marcian (450-457) was of Thracian origin according to Priscus and Evagrius – only Theodore Lector defined him as 'Illyrian'. Marcian was a son of a soldier. Following his father's steps, he went to Philippopolis to be enlisted as a recruit, making a brilliant career. According to the context it becomes obvious that Philippopolis was close to his native lands, thus in the traditional area of the Bessi.[15] Jordanes disclosed in his *Roman History* the origin of Emperor Leo I (457-474) from the Bessi so that this is one of the nicknames this Emperor came to be known with. This information was

[10] *De Magistratibus* I.47.

[11] Procopius, *De bellis* 6.26.

[12] John Malalas, *Chronographia* 393.12-17; 442.8-17 (Thracians); Theophanes, *Chronicle* 145.17-20.

[13] The name Daia was preserved in the sources and represented also as Daza (a Thracian name – compare with St. Dazius or Dasius) or Daca (possible ethnical or regional name, coming from the Dacians). See references in Jones *et al*. 1971, 579 (Galerius Valerius Maximinus Daia) and ODB II (Maximinus Daia), 1322.

[14] Julian, *Misopogon*, II, 348b-d.

[15] Evagrius, *Ecclesastical History* II.1, based on Priscus; Theodore Lector, *Excerpta* (PG 86/1, 563, p. 165. The information of Evagrius reflected later in Theophanes, Cedrenus, and Zonaras.

confirmed by Malalas and Theophanes.[16] In his *Ecclesiastical History* Evagrius openly named Justin I (518-527) as a Thracian (IV.1), as it was done by Malalas and the *Chronicon Paschale*. Procopius, however, called Justin and Justinian Illyrians. The identification of Bederiana and Tauresium is still problematic.[17] Tiberius II Constantine (578-582, actually ruler from 574) was a Thracian, too, according to Evagrius (V.11) and Theophanes, while John of Antioch claimed Thracian origin for Phocas (602-610). There were many military commanders belonging probably to the Thracian ethnie, including Dionysius from the fifth century (according to Priscus), the famous rebel Vitalian (Evagrius III.43), the no less famous Belisarius from Germania (modern Sapareva banya in Bulgaria), but also the commanders from the late sixth and early seventh century, like Comentiolus (Evagrius VI.15), John Mystacon and his brother-in-law John Philippicus (Evagrius VI.3), Castus (Theophylactus Simocatta) etc.[18]

The late antique and early Byzantine sources have transmitted to us names of people from the Thracian confines who had taken part in the army or administration here and there in the wider Empire. At the time of Constantine the Great *dux* of Egypt, Thebais and the two Lybias was certain Valerius Rometalca.[19] In 365 a tribune with similar (probably identical) name Rumitalca took side with the usurper Procopius, according to Ammianus Marcellinus (26.8.1-3). Remetalcus/a (with variations) was not just a typical Thracian name – it was, moreover, a regal name for at least three representatives of the Sapean dynasty (first century BC – first century AD). We could identify as indisputably Thracian the names of the two brothers Kutzes and Buzes (or Kutzas and Buzas), commanders of the military detachments in Lebanon during the Persian campaigns of Justinian the Great. Kutzes was also the name of the son of the rebellious Vitalian in the early sixth century. Boraides – a Thracian name, too – was one of the bodyguards of Belisarius, but there was also a son of a certain tribune, a shoemaker from Adrianople, a priest from Serdica and a *bucellarius* in the middle of the VI century. This was also the name of a quarter in Rome at the time of the Western Roman Emperor Anthemius (467-472).[20] Cutilas/Kutilas was a Thracian who took part in the war of Belisarius in Italy, being officer

[16] Jordanes, *Roman History* 43.16-17: *Leo Bessica ortus progeniae*...; Malalas 369.2; Theophanes (110.19) called him 'Thracian by birth'.
[17] Malalas 410.1-2, 425.1-9; *Chronicon Paschale* 611.12; Procopius, *Historia arcana* 38.5-16; Dujcev 1942, 243-245.
[18] GIBI II, 260-271, 292; Beshevliev 1951, 217-234; 1965, 54-66.
[19] Beshevliev 1965, 56, n. 298.
[20] *Chronicon Paschale* 320.

(*lancer*) in his guard. Certain Goudilas was probably *magister militum per Thraciam* at the time of Justin I, while another Godilas (his name was probably identical with Cutilas and Goudilas) was the chief of the Illyrian cavalry regiment in Italy. Bessas (could-be ethnical denomination?) was leader of the Armenian units in Lazica, where Benilus and Buzes were also sent from Thrace. The name Buzes seemed to be widespread in the sixth century – we don't know, however, if Buzes, a consul and military commander, mentioned in Procopius' *Secret History* as adversary of Empress Theodora, was identical with the aforementioned commander in Lazica or with the military chief in Lebanon. The ex-consul Buzes was, anyway, very close to Belisarius who also felt into disgrace at that time. Agathias has mentioned, too, Bessas and Buzes as taking part in the Persian war.[21] Quite dramatic is the story of another Buzes, brave soldier and hero, who by concurrence of events, led by zeal for vindication, became a traitor. Theophylactus Simocatta has told us that story in connection with the Avar incursions in the Balkans sometimes on the boundary between the sixth and the seventh centuries.[22] Not very clear is the origin of the name Bourkentios/Burkentius, neither that of the Thracian lancer Barbation, mentioned by Procopius, nor that of the famous Belisarius himself.[23] Thracian was also the name Germanus /Germanos, which not coincidentally acquired popularity at the time of Justin I and Justinian the Great.[24] Among persons, mentioned explicitly as Thracian or originating from Thrace, many wore Latin, Greek or universal Christian names, like Libellarius, Florentius, Ruffinus, Marinus, Vitalian, Comentiolus, Himerius, Herodian, Theodosius, Priscus, Maurus, Peter, Paul, Solomon, John etc.[25] In that period (fourth to sixth centuries) the diocese Thracia, which included the older Roman provinces of Thracia and Moesia Inferior, had a motley ethnical structure, colored additionally by the German, Iranian

[21] Agathias, *History* (PG 88, based on the edition of Niebuhr, (Bonn 1828), II. 18-20, III. 2-6.

[22] Theophylactus Simocatta, *History* II.16.

[23] The editors of GIBI II proposed Latin origin for the name Burkentius (GIBI, 119, note 4), while Beshevliev preferred the Thracian origin of the name, (Beshevliev 1965, 61, note 375).

[24] The name Germanos possibly originated from a Thracian god of hot mineral waters. Germania/Germaneia, the birthplace of Belisarius, was and still is famous for its hot springs. There are different toponyms stemming from the same root, like the river Dzerman. German was the name of a ritual doll in the Bulgarian traditional folklore, with obvious pagan roots.

[25] Trombley suggested that Sarapis, the military commander of Justinian the Great with a theophoric Egyptian name, was of Thracian origin, too (Trombley 1993, 185-6).

and Hunnic newcomers. Thus, it is not to be wondered that many people from Thrace did not have Thracian names. Some of them, at least, were not Thracians at all. Rhecithangus, native of Thrace, *dux* of Phoenicia Libanensis, mentioned by Procopius, had a German name and was probably Goth, or Gepid. Together with the aforementioned Benilus and Buzes, in Lazica were sent also the commanders Odonachus, Babas and Uligagus with their military units. The latter, Uligagus, was from the Heruli, while Odonachus had a German name and was probably a leader of Gothic troops. The name Babas is not very clear – it could be Hunnic or Turkic. We have the curious example with Bessas, too. The Goths Godegisclus and Bessas were, according to Procopius, from those Goths who didn't follow Theodoric Amal in Italy, but remained in the Balkans and took part in the military campaigns of Emperor Anastasius.[26] It is highly probable that this Bessas was identical with the commander who was fighting in Italy and later was sent to head the Armenian troops in Lazica.[27] Thus, we have a case of a Goth from the Balkans with a Thracian name, probably as a result of the process of acculturation of different ethnical groups and communities in the Balkan provinces in those troubled times. Similar is the case with the name Sitta(s) (from Zittas) which was surely Thracian – it has been registered on inscription from the first century AD. In the sixth century, however, this was the name of a Goth, officer in the imperial guards of Justinian, married to Comito, the older sister of Empress Theodora.[28] We may conclude with a relative certainty that by the sixth century Goths and Thracians in the lands south of the river Danube had reached to a certain point of mixture and acculturation. This process involved the traditional name system, too, as much as different typical names for one or another ethnie were used interchangeably. In that case we are not to exclude also a widespread practice of mixed marriages.

There was also a certain trend to be noticed in the usage of the notion *Bessi* in Late Antiquity. Firstly, the memory for the original tribe of Bessi was still preserved as well as certain *topoi*, like their connection to the ore-mining, or their fierce and warlike nature. The stereotypes gradually covered a wider area of Thracian and Illyrian lands. Out of being completely forgotten in their tribal divisions – even Theophanes in the early ninth century mentioned names of Thracian tribes – the Thracians were rather unified as an ethnical massif for the outside observer. *Bessi*/*Bessoi* came gradually to be a universal notion for all the Thracians. For Paulinus of Nola sometimes

[26] Procopius, *De bellis* I.8; V.16.
[27] Procopius, *De bellis* VII.11; VIII.9, Agathias, *History* 65. 7-9, 67. 12-14, 85. 13-16.
[28] Procopius, *De bellis* I.12; Malalas 470.13; Beshevliev 1965, 59; Fol 1969, 120-121 (the inscription of Rufus Sitta).

around year 400 the *topoi*, used traditionally for Bessi, were applied to all the Thracians and Moesians. Jordanes (sixth century) explained in his *Getica* that Hister was the Bessic name for the river Danube. In that context Bessic was used for Thracian – both terms came to be mutually replaceable.[29] When Malalas wrote about *Bessoi* in the army of Anastasius, along with Goths and Scythians, he obviously had in mind the Thracians in general. This tendency was to be developed and widespread in the Byzantine period. Kekaumenos in the eleventh century connected the origin of the Vlachs with the ancient Dacians and *Bessoi*, who used to live close to the rivers Danube and Sava, but later moved to Epirus, Macedonia, and Hellas. The notion *Bessoi* was used by the Byzantine author for all the Thracians and Moesians. We should have in mind, however, that topography could foil the efforts of an amateur explorer. The toponyms like Bessai in Asia Minor, in Bithynia as well as in the proximity of Ephesus, have come probably from the rare Greek word *bessa* (Dorian *bassa*) with a meaning of 'wooded combe', 'glen', not from the ethnical notion in discussion.[30]

The last mention of a man from Bessi on a high position was made only in the early eight century. According to Theophanes, Justinian II had sent in 710-711 three expeditions against the rebellious citizens of Cherson. The third one was led by the patrician Mauros who was styled as *Bessos*. Mauros hold high position and title, with strong connections to the court. After being unsuccessful against the Chersonites, however, he changed sides, gave his support to Philippicus Bardanes and even took part in the deposition and murder of Justinian II and his son Tiberius.[31] An inevitable temptation exists to identify the aforementioned military commander with another Mauros, the collaborator of Kuber, mentioned in the *Miracula St. Demetrii*. The latter was also raised to commanding post by the Emperor in the late VII century, but was later banished to live in 'the outskirts of the city under arrest'.[32] The identification remains quite unsure. We have to recognize, nonetheless, that among the people, led by Kuber, who were *Rhomaioi* mixed with Bulgars and Avars, there could be many natives from the Balkans, some of them with Thracian identity and speaking Thracian (*Bessic*) language.

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[29] Jordanes, *Getica* (alias *The Origins and Deeds of the Goths*), 75.12-19: '*...Qui lingua Bessorum Hister vocatur...*'

[30] Malamut 1985, 243-251.

[31] Theophanes 379.17-380.29. Patriarch Nicephorus wrote, too, about Mauros, his participation in the siege of Cherson, his betrayal and the killing of Tiberius, the son of Justinian II, but without mentioning the ethnical origin of Mauros (*Short History* 46.22-48.7).

[32] GIBI II, 158-165.

Late Antiquity in the Balkans witnessed for a real mill of ethnies, cultures, and languages. Realities and terms tend often to be elusive, to wash away as in a crooked mirror, which makes the task of the scholars quite difficult. We should always bear in mind the fact that Late Antiquity introduced new regional and administrative notions, which did not coincide with the traditional ethnical names and boundaries. There was a mixture of different ethnical groups, too, both local and newcomers. Thracians came to be, therefore, not only the traditional ethnical massif, but also the inhabitants of the diocese Thrace, notwithstanding their ethnical composition. There were many infiltrations and many people of German, Hunnic, or Iranian stock, as well as people whose first language used to be either Greek or Latin. Emperor Aurelian in the 270-ies abolished the old province of Dacia, removing army and population south of Danube, where new administrative units were organized. Thus, in the fourth up to the seventh century we have notions widely used which originated from the administrative territories, like Illyricum, Pannonia, Dacia (south of Danube), Moesia, Thrace, Macedonia, or Dardania.

We could conclude so far that the term *Bessi*/*Bessoi*, although not devoid completely of its original sense as a tribal denomination, came to be used as a universal ethnical notion for the Thracians and Moesians, along with some other notions in use, gradually emptied of its original sense, like Dacians or Illyrians. The term *Thracians* did not, by all means, disappeared – it was rather used in both ethnical sense and in the sense of regional and administrative appurtenance. When 'land of the Bessi' was mentioned, however, it was a sure sign of ethical origin and affiliations and not just a birthplace. So far as purposeful forced Romanization or Hellenization was not made, at least part of the Thracians have preserved their language and identity, not only those who inhabited the mountain regions – difficult to access, as it was believed in the past – but also those in villages and towns, including the imperial capital Constantinople.[33] Having in mind the fact that so many Thracians (*Bessi*) hold high positions, becoming even Emperors, it is difficult to agree nowadays with the traditional thesis that the Thracian 'revival' should be regarded only among the nameless rural mass of people, consumed and melted in the Slavic sea. Another thesis has been overcome, too, that the Bulgarian lands were nearly completely depopulated at the time of the arrival of Bulgars and Slavs.[34] There are testimonials that even in the early seventh century the Thracian ethnie was not completely assimilated, but kept its language, names, and traditions. The last mentioning of a man

[33] Beshevliev 1965, 66-97; Gerov 1971, 27-31.

[34] These were, for example, the conclusions of Velkov 1972, 375-380.

from the *Bessi* on a high court position was from the early eight century. We have to consider also the role of the Christianization and the new liturgical languages in the context of assimilation, acculturation, as well as presservation of a certain level of self-identity and self-consciousness.

Christianity among Bessi: the case of Nicetas of Remesiana

Jerome and Paulinus of Nola wrote about the Christianization of the *Bessi* (the Thracians). In a letter Jerome gave a triumphant account of the fast spread of Christianity among many peoples, including the 'savage Bessi' who, along with other peoples, dressed in fell, transformed their hiss and lisp into a sweet song dedicated to Cross. In poem XVII, written sometimes between 398 and 400, Paulinus of Nola has given credit to his good friend, Nicetas of Remesiana, who had, by missionary zeal and the gift of eloquence, spread the word of Christ among the rude nations, like the Bessi, Dacians, *Scythians* (probably the Huns were meant), and the *Getae* (that is, the Goths).[35] Paulinus came to know Nicetas during the visit of the latter to Nola in 398 in connection with celebrations dedicated to the blessed memory of St. Felix. Paulinus mentioned Nicetas once more in his poem XXVII. Who was Nicetas of Remesiana? This question truly sounds strange when having in mind that the main investigations of his personality and deeds were done and published on the boundary between the nineteenth and the twentieth century. His activity was, moreover, strongly connected with the Christianization of the Balkan lands. Nicetas was born in the province of Dacia Mediterranea sometimes in the 330-ies and died ca. 414. He became bishop of Remesiana (Romatiana) which is the modern town of Bela Palanka in Eastern Serbia. Gennadius of Marseille called him '*Niceas* (sic) *Romatianae civitatis episcopus*', attributing to him the authorship of two texts, *Instruction to the catechumens* (*competentes*) *before the Holy baptism*, in six books, and a short opus, *Ad lapsam virginem libellus*.[36] This is nearly everything we know about the peculiar "apostle" of the Balkan peoples in Late Antiquity. During the Middle Ages and well into the modern era, his writings were ascribed either to St. Ambrose, to Nicetas of Aquileia (the second half of the fifth century), or to Nicetius of Trier. The Bulgarian editors of the first volume of Latin sources (LIBI) were in captivity of similar delusion so far as they had put in a note Aquileia as the native place of our Nicetas. Paulinus had, however, written about 'Scupi which is close to your homeland'. The capital of modern Macedonia – Skopje, is far enough from Aquileia, but close, indeed, to Bela

[35] Jerome, ep. 60; Paulinus of Nola, *Carmina*, XVII, XXVII.
[36] Gennadius of Marseille, *De viris illustribus,* XXII; Cassiodorus, *De instit. divinarum litterarum*, XVI; Czapla 1898, 56-61.

Palanka, the ancient Remesiana, which was probably Nicetas' birthplace. Many small pieces of the puzzle were put together in the last over one hundred years. Paulinus, Jerome, Gennadius of Marseille and Flavius Cassiodorus are our main informers. Dom Morin has ascribed the authorship of certain hymns, popular in the Catholic Church, to Nicetas of Remesiana. In *Revue Bénédictine,* XI from 1894 (pp. 49-77, 345-377) Morin has proposed that even the famous *Te Deum*, traditionally ascribed to St. Ambrose, was actually written by Nicetas. In 1897 he has published '*Epistola ad virginem lapsam*' in *Revue Bénédictine,* XIV from 1897 (pp. 193-202). Scholars generally accept that attribution.[37] It is highly probable that Nicetas was the author of the Latin Symbol (thus styled *Dacian Symbol*, too), which lay down, along with the Aquileian Symbol, the Symbol of Ravenna, the Symbol of Turin, and the Spanish Symbol, in the foundations of the universal Catholic Symbol later.[38]

It is a pity that in the last decades Nicetas was presented in different editions, reference books and Internet sites in an openly propaganda manner, becoming a victim to ill-fated nationalism, ignorance, or both. Nicetas was a *Dacian* bishop, as he originated from and served in Dacia Mediterranea, a territory including approximately the triangle between the cities Sofia, Kjustendil and Nish nowadays. After the reforms of the Tetrarchy and Constantine the Great, *Dacia* became one of the great dioceses in the prefecture of Illyricum. The diocese embraced the provinces of Dacia Mediterranea and Ripensis, Moesia Superior, Dardania and Prevalitana, with the capital in Serdica. Remesiana was under the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the metropolitan of Serdica, too. Paulinus has mentioned explicitly the Dacians along the Danube as objects of Nicetas' missionary activity, which gives a reason for announcing him as a saint-protector of modern Romania. His presentation as a Dacian in an ethnical sense, however, or even a kind of proto-Romanian, is quite simplifying. The ethical picture of the central parts of the Balkan peninsula was rather motley at that time – not only the descendants of the Romanized Dacians spoke Latin then, but also the Romanized Thracians, Moesians, and many others. Actually a great part of the local elite used to speak Latin, Greek, or both languages, without being obligatory for them to forget their native language, spoken often at home.

The presentation of Nicetas as a 'Greek bishop' is misleading, too, throwing anachronistically a phoney reality across to the real Late Antiquity. Division between Greek Orthodox and Catholic Churches was far ahead in

[37] Hümpel 1895; Burn 1905; Weyman 1905, 478-507; Turner 1906, 203-219; Walsh 2008, 3-76.
[38] Kelly 2006, 174-175.

the future, not relevant to the period, when Nicetas used to live and act. Nicetas was *Orthodox* in a sense that he was following the official post-Nicaean line, devoid of heretic influences. His main 'working' language was Latin, his connections with Italy and the West – quite strong and intense. It is not by chance that his writings were later ascribed to famous Latin authors and theologians, like St. Ambrose. Latin was at the time popular in the ecclesiastical circles in the Balkans. This was the main language of the 'Scythian monks' (connected with the province of Scythia Minor). We could just remind few names, like those of John Cassian, John Maxentius, Dionysius Exiguus (The Small) and many others. The 'Scythian school' had an important role in opposing the so called Monophysitism in the sixth century. Those monks were either from Scythia, or their activity was connected with the province. This proves how popular the Latin language was in the region in Late Antiquity.[39]

It is understandable that we have to throw aside the theories of Nicetas' Slavic origin. He could by no means be a Slavic bishop in the Balkans in the late IV century. According to Paulinus, Nicetas taught his *barbarian* flock in Latin: '*Orbis in muta regione per te/barbari discunt resonare Christum/corde Romano*'. The preliminary conclusion is that Nicetas was a priest and missionary from the Balkan provinces of the Late Roman Empire and notwithstanding his ethnical origin (Thracian, *Dacian*, or other) he was a *Roman* in the political and cultural sense as well as a zealous Christian. His main 'working' language was Latin, the official language of the Empire then, which was widespread in the western and central parts of the Balkan Peninsula, along the Middle and Lower Danube. His congregation constituted of different tribal and ethnical groups in a process of mingling and acculturation.

Christianity among *Bessi*: language, liturgy, and identity

Let us pay attention to different data concerning the spread of Christianity among *Bessi*, the call of monasticism in their lands and abroad, their language, liturgy, and culture. The late fourth and the early fifth century came to be the key time, when Bessi accepted Christianity on a mass scale. The historian Olympiodorus has told the story of the governor of the Thracian diocese who had discovered pagan statues on the former holy place which had obviously not been in use at that time, that is, in the 420-ies. The place should be located somewhere in the Western Rhodope mountains, or

[39] Altaner 1967; Gray 1979. According to Cassiodorus (*De divinis lectionibus* 23) Dionysius Exiguus was a 'Scythian by birth' and a connoisseur of both Latin and Greek.

the north-western corner of the Thracian plain, the traditional *habitat* of the Bessi in the past (*History*, 27). The holy complex was not in use, but the memory of the locals was still alive. Christianization was not a single act, but rather a long process, with pagan traditions being kept for centuries ahead, more stubbornly among the rural population. The deep valid Christianization was to a great extent an urban phenomenon. The members of the Bessic elite made many different careers in the Late Roman world, including the ecclesiastical one. At the time of Emperor Leo I in the second half of the fifth century, a certain Dizas, obviously a Thracian, was a bishop of Odessos (modern Varna). The deacon Bessula served under the bishop of Carthage, while certain Marcellinus, a priest from Vercelli in North Italy, was from the land of the Bessi (*Bessorum in partibus ortus*). A priest named Boraides appeared from a stone inscription from Serdica.[40] The names could lead to a conclusion that although developing in the Latin and Greek Church hierarchy, most of those people kept also their traditional names and presumably their ethnical memory, even the language. To be sure that the Bessic language was not spoken only at home, we could proceed with involvement into the heated debates concerning the existence of the liturgical, if not written, Bessic language.[41]

To what extent are trustworthy the data given by John Chrysostomus and did *Biblia Bessica* exist at all? In his eighth homily, dated 399, the famous patriarch of Constantinople has illustrated the speedy progress of Christianity among heathen nations. Following the effective rhetorical question: '*Where are now the followers of Plato and Pythagoras and those from Athens? And where are now the fishermen and tent-producers*?', Chrysostomus continued: '*Not only in Judaea itself you hear (the Word), but also on the language of the barbarians It brightens up more brilliant than sun. The Scythians, the Thracians, the Sauromatoi, the Mauroi, the Indians, and those, too, who inhabit the remotest parts of the world – all they turn It into their own language, speculating philosophically on what was told*' (PG 63, col. 500-501). The opponents of the possible existence of a translation of at least a part of the Holy Writ in Thracian usually underline the rhetorical hyperbole, so typical for the genre. I would not oppose the use of hyperbole in those texts, but I would like to discuss the main information existing in that extract. Thracians were mentioned explicitly, along with the Scythians and others. Under *Scythians* in the late fourth century we should understand either Goths, or the Huns – both nations were called like that at the time. The Goths

[40] Information gathered by Beshevliev 1965, 57-59.

[41] On the Thracian language in general see Dechev 1952; Duridanov 1976; Georgiev 1977.

are the more probable option, according to my modest opinion, but Huns are not to be excluded, too. Themistius and other contemporary authors used widely the denomination *Scythian* for the Goths and incidentally for Huns. The homily itself was dedicated to the spread of Christianity among the Goths mainly. After Ulfilas they had their writing system, translations, as well as a liturgical language. The contacts of the Roman Empire with Huns and Sarmatians (*Sauromatoi*) presupposed strong cultural and religious ties, not only military and political ones. This is valid for the *Mauroi* as well – John used this term for either the inhabitants of North Africa, or the Arabs in the Middle East where a strong Christianization was to be witnessed during the fourth century and beyond. Who were the Indians (*Indoi*)? Perhaps they were the peoples of South Arabia where Christianity was introduced by missionnaries, including Theophilus Indus in the middle of the fourth century.[42] South Arabia developed few writing systems, among which the Sabaean was the most popular, used in liturgies along with the Ethiopian (Ge'ez). In that 'company' the use of Thracian in Christian liturgies is not surprising. Gregory of Nyssa – a contemporary of Chrysostomus and not less famous theologian – mentioned in his orations against Eunomius the Thracians who, along with Greeks, Romans, Syrians, Medians, Cappadocians, *Maurussians*, Scythians, and Egyptians, spoke their own language expressing thus important notions of the Faith with their own words (PG 45, cols. 1045-1048). There is a temptation, anyway, to recognize the existence of Thracian liturgical language, used in the Balkan provinces together with the dominant Greek and Latin, but also with the Gothic. This doesn't presuppose, however, the existence of any '*Biblia Bessica*'. In many cases, Christianization among peoples in the Empire, or outside its frontiers, was accompanied with translation of at least certain pieces from the Holy Writ to be used in liturgy or for better explanation of the faith among people with poor or lack of any knowledge of Latin or Greek.

The Bessic language and liturgy were mentioned a few times in connection with the activity of pilgrims and monks of Thracian stock in the Middle East. The spread of Bessic monasticism in the Holy Land could just enlarge our knowledge as well as deepen our conviction in the deep-rooted Christianity among them during the fifth and sixth centuries. It could also throw light on the complex problem of the Bessic language and its very existence. The Thracians (*Bessoi,*), too, along with many other people from the huge Empire, were undertaking pilgrimage to the Holy Land, which was becoming a kind of a pious fashion, or religious tourism in modern words. Some of them remained there, becoming eremites in the deserts or monks in

[42] Philostorgius, *Ecclesiastical History*, 3, fragments 4-6.

laurai and *koinobia* in Palestine and Sinai. The communities of monks were a mix of ethnies, languages and cultures, united in the new Christian attitude to life and death, with new values to be cherished. We know a lot about them from the writings of Jerome. There were also Bessic monks in those monasteries. The monastery of the reverend Theodosius the Coenobiarches (died ca. 529) in Palestine witnessed divine service in three languages – Armenian, Greek, and 'the language of the Bessoi', if we are to believe to his biographer Theodore of Petra. The monastery was found, moreover, in the Judaean desert, close to Dead Sea, in a place named Kotilas (or Koutilas), probably of Thracian origin. This place was mentioned once more by Cyril of Scythopolis in the *Life of St. Euthymius*. It is not to be excluded, therefore, that the place was occupied by a solitary monk-eremite with that name, or that there was a *skete* with that name. It was stressed by Theodore in his *Life of Theodosius* that the saint had ordered four churches to be built in the monastery, one cathedral and three other smaller churches for the Greeks, Armenians and *Bessoi*. For the latter it was explicitly explained that they used to give honor to God by prayers in their native language.[43] Monks gathered in the cathedral church during the main feasts in order to officiate together in Greek. Similar was the practice in the monastery of St. Sabas, according to Cyril of Scythopolis. Different languages created problems, anyway, so Sabas had obliged the Armenians, particularly, to sing certain hymns in Greek in order not to deviate into the 'Euthychian heresy'. The anonymous pilgrim from Placentia in North Italy visited Sinai around the year 570 and met there three fathers who had knowledge simultaneously in Latin, Greek, Syriac, Coptic and Bessic, as well as many other translators among the monks.[44] A curious story was told by Cyril of Scythopolis in the *Life of St. Sabas*. At the time of the Origenist disputes in Jerusalem and its vicinity about the middle of the sixth century, a real 'civil war' had broken out. The Bessoi from the monasteries close to the river Jordan, fueled by divine zeal, went to the Holy City to support their Orthodox brethren against the Origenists. The followers of Origen were numerous, however, and the Orthodox had to seek shelter in a *xenodochion*, surrounded by a hostile mob. A certain monk from the Bessoi, Theodoulos, very strong and brave man, succeeded in pushing out no less than 300 of the enemies, but died later because of the many strikes and the stones flung against him (193.24-194.12). This episode is quite interesting as

[43] *PG* 114, 493B (*Life of St. Theodosius Coenobiarches*); Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of St. Euthymius* 51.9, ed. Usener 1975, 45. See also the French edition of that *Life* in Festugière 1963, 85-160 as well as Chitty 1966, 109.

[44] *Anonymus Placentiae*: '*..tres abbates, scientes linguas, hoc est, latinas et graecas, syriacas et aegyptiacas bessus..*', ed. Geyer 1898, 184.

it clarifies well the staunch position of the Bessic monks and their monasteries in the Holy Land in support for the Orthodox post-Chalcedonian faith against Origenism or the so called Monophysitism. Bessic monks, moreover, supported the policy of Justinian the Great in Church matters. Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the toleration of their language in monasteries of the Eastern Mediterranean. They were not victims of suspicion for their Orthodoxy, like the Armenians and some of the Coptic monks used to be.[45] Monasteries of Bessi existed in the capital, too. One of the *hegoumenoi* who signed the decisions of the Council of Constantinople in 536 was Andrew, leader of the monastic community of Bessi, styled as the '*monastery of Theotokos (and Ever-Virgin Mary) of the Bessoi*'.[46] The last mentioning of Bessic monastery in Palestine was done by John Moschus in the early seventh century. He wrote about Shoubiba (Soubiba in Greek) of the Bessi and Shoubiba of the Syrians as two monasteries divided by their ethnical staff as well as their main liturgical language.[47]

Speculation with the Bessi unfortunately continued for decades and centuries. Being defined as enigma, the Bessic Christians were like unspecified inheritance provoking appetites of many. Historians and philologists in the past, starting from Tomašek, have tried to define the Bessic language as a popular Latin of the Balkan people, thus presenting the Bessi as proto-Romanians in a sense. However, the sources do not support such a thesis. How could, otherwise, the anonymous author from Placentia, whose native language was Latin, delimit clearly the Bessic from Latin, enumerating Greek, Syriac and Coptic in between? Obviously the language of Bessi was different from both the official Latin and the popular Latin in the Balkans. The idea of the completely Romanized Thracians was overcome with argument by Beshevliev in the 1960-ies. A 'new fashion' appeared, however, after the World War II of identifying Bessi in the Middle East with the Georgians. What to do with the Bessi in the Balkans then? All the supporters of that identification have generally one main argument: nobody knows exactly who those numerous Bessi were and what was their language, *ergo* they were Georgians.[48] We have witnessed similar speculations in Bulgaria, too. There is a tendency, rarely spread among professional scholars, to identify the Bessic language with the later Medieval Bulgarian (or Old Church Slavonic) and their script with the Cyrillic, which was developed in Bulgaria about the

[45] Binns 1994, 190-195; Griffith 1997, 11-31.
[46] Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, VIII, 987-8, 1009-1010.
[47] John Moschus, *Pratum spiritale*, ed. *Patrologia Graeca* 87c, 3025.
[48] Patrich 1995, 338, n. 35; Gagoshidze 2001, 363-84. However, Festugière 1961, 124, n. 291 and Shahîd 1989, 197 supported the Thracian identity of those monks.

end of the ninth century century. Needless to say, serious arguments are lacking. The Thracian inscriptions with Greek letters are not quite helpful, too.

In conclusion I would like to state only that an objective and unintentional analysis could direct us to the existence of a *Bessic* language, different from Latin and Greek. It was hardly a literary language: we would at least have some examples nowadays. The language was, however, used in liturgy and interpersonal communication. People knew it, even foreigners, who came to be translators. We are lacking any information about a writing system and Bessic letters. That is why we could suppose the usage of either Latin or Greek script for it. There are generally many questions to be solved – some of them probably never – concerning the writing systems in the Balkans in Late Antiquity, similar to that created by Ulfilas for the Goths, or to the letters created by the extremely enigmatic person of Aethicus Ister. There are many hypotheses concerning the latter, including a possible connection with Western Europe in the Early Middle Ages and not with the Balkan lands. Thus, we could just say so far that Thracian was one of the liturgical languages in the Christian Middle East, along with the Latin, Greek, Gothic, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian and Georgian, keeping for itself the alluring halo of a historical enigma.

Conclusion

During the Late Antiquity Christianity spread and perpetrated into the Thracian lands, with many centers of Christianity and important ecclesiastical headquarters created later. Being predominantly urban phenolmenon, Christianity found its adepts in the cities first, but with the mass Christianization after Constantine the Great, and especially from the late fourth century onwards, ecclesiastical leaders, preachers and monks, succeeded in permeating the rural areas as well. Thus, a new Christian identity of many people with Thracian roots, generally styled as Bessi at that time, led to the use even of Thracian/Bessic, along with Greek and Latin, for liturgical purpose, although it was obviously quite restricted in the Balkans and probably far more spread among the Bessic communities in the monasteries of the Middle East in the fifth and sixth centuries.

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An Early Christian monastery near the village of Dragoinovo, Parvomai municipally (preliminary report)

Ivo Topalilov

Abstract: This article presents the preliminary results of the archaeological campaigns between 2009-2019 in the region of 'Tsarkvishte' (Church), south of the village of Dragoinovo, Parvomai municipality. In this period a full study of a three-nave basilica and the partial study of the building located south of it and part of the eastern enclosed wall of the complex has been undertaken. Although the excavations are not completed, they allow us to gain some idea of the specifics and reconstructions of the uncovered early Christian complex, which is interpreted as a monastery. Its foundation dates back to the end of the 4th - beginning of the 5th century and is accepted as part of the process of Christianisation of the mountain population of the Rhodopes, which in the sources is mentioned as 'Bessoi', and which determines the specifics of the complex. It lasted until the end of the 6th-beginning of the 7th century when it was destroyed during the Slavic-Avar invasions.

Key words: Christianisation, *bessoi*, Rhodope, monastery, archaeological report

Резюме: Настоящата статия представя предварителните резултати на археологическите проучвания, които се проведоха в периода от 2009–2019 г. в местността „Църквище", разположена южно от с. Драгойново, община Първомай. Те обхващат пълното проучване на трикорабна базилика и частичното проучване на сградата, разположена южно от него и част от източния ограден зид на комплекса. Разкопките не са завършени, но въпреки това ни позволяват да придобием известна представа за спецификите и преустройствата на разкрития раннохристиянски комплекс, който се интерпретира като манастирски. Изграждането му се отнася към края на 4 – началото на 5 в. и се приема като част от процеса на християнизация на планинското население на Родопите, които в изворите се споменава като 'беси', което обуславя и спецификата на самия комплекс. Той е просъществувал до края на 6 – началото на 7 в., когато е бил разрушен при славяно-аварските нашествия.

In 2009 the archaeological excavation in the region of 'Tsarkvishte', located 2 km south of the village of Dragoinovo, Parvomai municipality, Plovdiv district started with the main aim to uncover and study the remains that were attested during I. Velkov's visit in the area in the beginning of the 50s of 20th century (fig. 1).[1] In the following years,[2] a Christian complex from

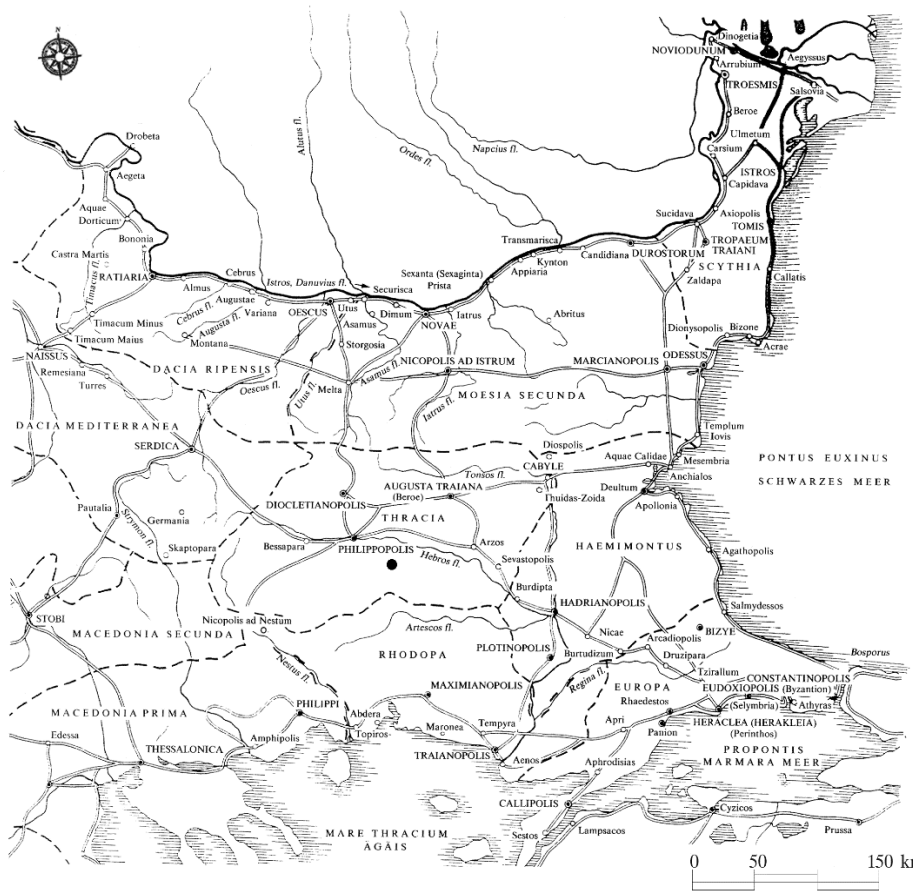


Fig. 1. The location of the Early Christian monastery near the village of Dragoinovo (the map of Thrace is adapted from Ivanov 2015, fig. 2).

[1] Velkov 1955, 88-90.

[2] The annual archaeological excavations during these years were carried out exclusively with the financial aid provided by the former mayor of Parvomai, Mr. Angel Papazov.

the late antique period has been excavated, which had replaced an earlier sanctuary of the Thracian horseman, Hera and Zeus (?),[3] which ceased to exist during the so-called Gothic wars in the 80s of the 4th century.[4] The interest in the discovered structures increased not only because in this case we are dealing with a rare example which shows a continuity between a pagan sanctuary and a Christian temple,[5] but also because of the probability of excavating a monastery complex which was built in the late 4th century or at the beginning of the 5th century and therefore is among the earliest monastery complexes discovered so far in Thrace (fig. 2).[6] The presentation of the main results of the archaeological excavations and the specifics of the complex is the main task of the present article.

It seems that in a very short period of time after the burning and the end of the sanctuary of the Thracian horseman, an early Christian complex was built in its place, which incorporated the remains of the earlier structure. The newly founded complex was located in the northeastern part of a relatively flat and level rocky massif, dominating the area, although located at the foot of the mountain (fig. 3). Of this complex up to now the entire Christian church, part of the building located south of it, as well as the eastern fence wall of the complex have been uncovered.[7] Before describing the discovered remains, it should be mentioned that a relative lack of skill and precision in the construction of the individual sectors of the complex has been observed, which is manifested both in the quality of construction technique as well as in the deviations in the size of the Christian temple (catholicon) and the adjacent building. The deviations vary up to 0.30 m, and in the description that follows the average measures of each element will be taken.

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[3] The problems related to the sanctuary will be considered in a separate study. A short review of the results of the archaeological excavations through the ages is available in the annual edition of Arheologicheski otkritiya i razkopki.

[4] See for this Topalilov 2016, 598.

[5] On the rural pagan sanctuaries in Thrace – see Valchev 2015.

[6] On the Christian monasteries in Thrace – see most recently Manev 2017.

[7] Unfortunately, in 2020 the expert commission at the Ministry of Culture, consisting of representatives of this and other institutions in the country, did not include the archaeological site among the beneficiaries of governmental funding for regular archaeological research in the year. A similar reluctance to get involved was shown by the new mayor of Parvomai municipality, Mr. Nikolay Mitkov, which called into question not only the completion of the archaeological research, but also the fate of the discovered remains.

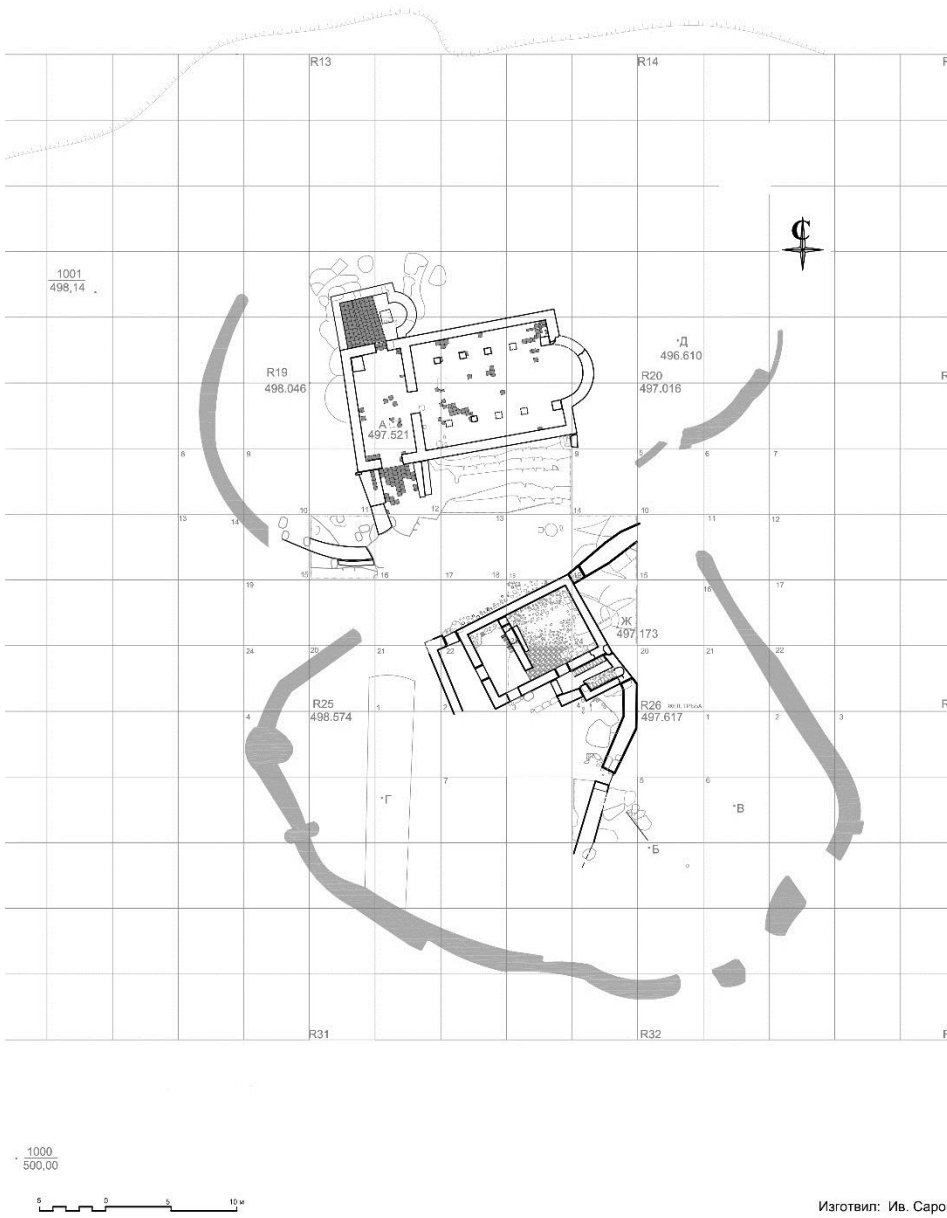


Fig. 2. Architectural and geodesic drawing of the remains (author: Ivan Sarov).



Fig. 3. The terrain of the site (view from North).

It seems that the catholicon was originally a single-nave church with a rectangular naos with one apse, a one-piece narthex, with a total internal length of up to 17 m with the apse, and a width that varies between 8-8.10 m (fig. 4). Thus, the eastern part of the nave, next to the apse, is 8.10 m wide,



Fig. 4. The catholicon (view from East).

and in the western direction it diminishes to 8 m, as in the narthex. The dimensions of the naos are also irregular, with the length in the southern aisle up to 10.72 m, and in the northern aisle - up to 10.40 m, with a total length of 12.45 m. The apse itself has a diameter of 3.80 m at the base and a depth of 2.50 m. Indeed, the archaeological excavations revealed the foundations of a three-aisle basilica, but they also showed that both colonnades to the east started with a masonry buttress (0.70/ 0.70 m), built by crushed stones welded with a white mortar, which was adhered to the already plastered on the inside eastern wall of the church (fig. 5). Therefore, we can assume that the division of the naos may have happened at a later time. What remains unclear is the reason for this reconstruction: the need of constructive strengthening of the building which may explain the replacement of the stone base and column by masonry or liturgical demands which required the subdivision of the space. I would prefer the first option. The connection between the narthex and the naos was made through an entrance with a width of 1.70 m, located approximately in the central axis of the building. The narthex is 3.60 m wide and was accessible from the north and south; the church has no entrance from the west. The main entrance is from the south, whose width of 1.30 m is greater than that on the north – 0.80 m.



Fig. 5. The eastern pillar of the south colonnade in the naos (view from West).

The church has walls in the *opus emplectum* with two distinct faces, made of rows of large and medium-sized semi-framed pieces of rock, up to 0.80 m long, rows aligned with small sized lime stones at some places, all of them welded with white mortar. The thickness of the wall is 0.70 m, and the emplecton consists of small stones and fragments of bricks, united with white mortar. We have a reason to believe that in height the construction was entirely masonry with whole or fragmented bricks embedded in it, welded with white mortar; the found bricks and remains do not allow us to assume the development of the walls in height in the techniques of *opus mixtum* or *opus mixtum vittatum*. The bricks are different in size and shape and belong to both Roman and Late antique period, which may suggest that some of them probably belonged to the earlier sanctuary. In the walls of the church within the apse, the side aisles and the narthex whole and fragmented marble votive plaques were attested, which were used as *spolia*, and which probably belonged to the earlier sanctuary. They were not found *in situ*, but in the layer of construction debris coated with mortar, including the front, which suggests that they were part of the construction in such a way as to obscure the images.[8]

The walls were founded directly to the rocky massif, and in some places are preserved at the height of 0.80 m. The roof was wooden, gabled, with both types of tiles used, and the building is plastered with white mortar on both inside and outside. The naos has brick floor, preserved in fragments *in situ*. It was placed on a heterogeneous base, composed mainly of small-sized river stones, mixed in light brown, loose soil, placed over the leveled rocky massif. It changes in two areas: in the western part of the central and southern nave the substrate consists mainly of medium and large slabs and bricks onto which the brick pavement has been placed, while in the western two thirds of the northern, and middle of the central aisle, it consists of a burnt mud brick layer. The idea of having a second, earlier pavement should be abandoned due to the fact that the base of the pavement is consistent with the westernmost stone base of the southern colonnade of the later basilica. The use of slab stones can be determined by the well-leveled rocky massif in this part and its elevation can be compared to the eastern third of the church. In places, especially in the western part of the naos, another, heavily compacted clay level was found under the brick floor, which is the upper surface of a layer consisting of light brown clay soil located directly on the rock massif.

At one point, probably soon after the church was built, its space was divided into three aisles by two colonnades. To the east, as already mentioned

[8] Some of them are published in Koleva & Topalilov 2010, 180-185.

above, they began with a square-shaped masonry pilaster attached to the heel of the apse, and continued westward with four hewn stone blocks of square or rectangular shape close to a square, used for colonnade bases. They were captured by the rock mass by mortar, with one base from the southern colonnade and three from the northern one preserved *in situ*. The bases are placed symmetrically, but are not equidistant from the side walls of the church and thus the outer aisles have different widths. Moreover, in contrast to the southern colonnade, in the northern one the bases are not placed exactly in a line and a minimal deviation may be observed. For this reason, in the eastern part the width of the aisle is 1.20 m, and in the western 1.30 m. In contrast, the width of the southern aisle is 1.50 m along the entire length of the naos. Therefore, the width of the nave is on average 5.30 m. Despite the discovered whole segment bricks, given the size of the stone bases, which vary, but with a length of up to 0.52 m and a width of 0.42 m, the absence of any traces from mortar or construction on the bases themselves, as well as the scarce amount of such bricks found in the archaeological research, do not allow us to assume that the columns were masonty. It is therefore more likely that they were wooden.

The change with the new three-aisle interior seems to have impacted also the pre-apse space. The altar space was extremely disturbed with the later robbery of the material, during which the altar, the northern third of the apse wall, as well as the floor of the church down to the rocky massif were completely dismantled. It is clear that the altar had a bema that reached the first pair of columns, enclosing the entire space of the central nave, as it can be judged from the position of the bed of the chancel preserved in the floor. The dimensions of the bed (0.14/0.16 m) most probably show those of the wooden beam; no remains of a chancel were found (fig. 6).

The narthex belonged to the group of wider one-room antechambers, with a brick floor, found partly *in situ* (fig. 7). On its northwest corner the basis of an obscure rectangular structure (1.14/0.96 m) was found, made of large square stones, one of which with a length of 0.80 m, with the filling of small stones and fragments of bricks on mud solder (fig. 8). Its functions remain obscure.

It seems that alongside the Christian church, other construction activities were carried out south of it. Here there was an earlier rectangular building preserved in ruins, oriented in a northeast-southwest direction, which consisted of an almost square room (5.30/5.10 m)(room 1) and another, rectangular, located westward (room 2), probably an antechamber (figs. 9; 10). The walls were made in *opus emplectum* with two well-defined fronts, carefully made with small and medium-sized lame stones, welded with mud solder. The emplecton is composed mainly of small stones, in some places



Fig. 6. The altar area (view from SW).



Fig. 7. The narthex (view from South).



Fig. 8. The unidentified structure in the NW part of the narthex (view SE).

with the inclusion of fragments of bricks. These remains, which I interpret as the remains of the earlier pagan sanctuary, have been preserved to some extent in height, and were restored and integrated into the new building of the early Christian complex. Although the technique used in both cases is *opus emplectum*, in the late antique building the fronts, and especially the outers, are made of large and medium-sized semi-framed pieces of rock similar to those of the catholicon and in sharp contrast to the earlier ones made and placed very carefully. The walls are 0.70 m thick and preserved at a height of 0.60 m. The floor in the central room (room 1) had a base of large and medium and rarely small, slab and lame stones, soldered with mud solder which also leveled the surface, like the floor's base in the basilica (fig. 11). It remains unclear whether the floor was covered with bricks or had clay surface, as no bricks have been found *in situ* on the one hand, and on the other - on this clay surface along the eastern wall a millstone was found. The surface in the antechamber is also clay, although a flat stone with an irregular shape (*tikla*) was found *in situ*. The 'insulation' in this room is different, combining burnt mud brick layer and continental clay, without stones.

Additionally, a masonry structure was found attached to the western wall in room 1 (fig. 11). It is built of lame stones and single fragments of bricks, welded with clay solder, with a length of 1.90 m and a width of 0.40 m. The height is on average 0.45 m, but on the south side there is a 'backrest' with a



Fig. 9. Architectural and geodesic drawing of the remains south of the catholicon (author: Ivan Sarov).



Fig. 10. The integrated ruins of the pagan sanctuary into the new building (view from West).



Fig. 11. The room 1 (view from East).

thickness 0.30 m which rises 0.20 m above (fig. 12). Fragments of bricks were found in places on the upper surface, probably indicating its coverage. In the middle part, in the western wall, a rectangular opening (0.40/0.30 m) was found, the purpose of which as well as the masonry structure itself remain

unclear. The function of the room is also discussible, but it should be noted that up to now this is the largest and most central of those discovered; however, the millstone found probably indicates its economic functions.

Room 2 has a rectangular shape, whose width is 2.60 m, which as mentioned above is interpreted as former antechamber. It was accessed from the south, thus suggesting that the original entrance from the west was closed. Whether this happened with the integration of the remains in the new monastery building or later is unclear. This room accesses room 1 through two symmetrically located passages from the north and south, of which the northern one was subsequently closed.

At this moment, the layout of the building remains unclear, as it has not been fully excavated, but it probably extended in western and south-western direction, outside the area studied so far. To the west, another room, parallel to the antechamber, was explored, with width of 2.10 m and entrance from the north.

In an identical construction technique in *opus emplectum* with the inclusion of medium and large processed and semi-processed stones, another wall was built, which was partially exposed northeast of the building. Unlike



Fig. 12. The unknown structure in room 1 (view from East).

the outer face, the inner one was made of small lame stones. The filling is heterogeneous, consisting of small and medium-sized stones and gravel,

welded with mud solder. The thickness of the wall is 1, 10 m, and most likely in height it continued in a brick superstructure. This wall forms with the building an entrance with a width of 1 m and surrounds from the east the open complex, which includes the Christian church and premises located south of it, separated from the rest of the world by a fence wall, i.e. in our case we are dealing with a monastery complex.

The lack of accurate dating finds, including coins in the relevant archaeological context, does not allow us to obtain the exact dating of the construction of the complex. However, several observations can be made on the specifics related to the architecture of the basilica and the stratigraphic situation.

The specifics of the Christian church are several. With its internal dimensions of the naos of 8/12.45 m, ie. approximately 2:3, the building belongs to the group of churches with an *elongated* naos, which is supported also by the ratio between the central nave and outer aisles, which is 1:3.[9] Here we must note that the church was originally a single nave, so the additional division of its interior space into aisles cannot be taken into account in studying its original characteristics. The wide semicircular apse and the relatively large narthex can also be mentioned, the latter probably being a consequence of its purpose as a monastery building.[10] For instance, the basilica located on Dzhendem Tepe, near Philippopolis, which was also turned into a monastery and whose construction dates back to the second half of the 4th century, has a relatively wider narthex too.[11] The shape of the apse, dimensions and ratio assign the church to the group of those examples, dated in general to the end of the 4th century - the first half of the 5th century in Philippopolis and its area. The ratio of the nave and aisles as well as the tiny width of the outer aisles refers to the group of basilicas, which usually date back to the first decades of the 5th century or even earlier. A kind of terminus ante quem may be obtained with the basilica discovered near Komatevo, now part of Plovdiv, with its deeper and narrower apse as well as the relatively elongated nave, the construction of which is referred to the first half of the 5th century in general.[12] So, we can conclude that the construction of the

[9] For them – see Chaneva-Dechevska 1999, 59.
[10] Compare with the similar case with the catholicon of the monastery found near the village of Isperihovo, Bratsigovo region, whose construction dates back to the middle of the 5th century – see Dzhambov 1956, 175-192; Chaneva-Dechevska 1999, 261-262.
[11] On the basilica – see Tsontchev 1938, 22-32; on the dating of its construction - see Tsontchev 1938, 32; Martinova & Bospachieva 2002, 194; Bospačieva 2005, 30.
[12] On the basilica – see Dzhambov 1959, 157-163; Chaneva-Dechevska 1999, 254-255.

church at the complex near the village of Dragoinovo can fit into the already established trend in the literature of intensive construction of Christian temples at the end of the 4th century and especially the first half of the 5th century,[13] which also happened in Philippopolis, Diocletianopolis and the area.[14] The narrow space left on both sides of the apse, which will later be transformed into side aisles, is an argument for the relatively early dating of the Christian building. The proposed brief analysis gives me reason to believe that the catholicon of the monastery was built at the end of the 4th century - the very beginning of the 5th century at the latest. Probably the complex was built very soon after the destruction of the pagan sanctuary due to the inclusion of marble votive tablets as *spolia* from the sanctuary in the construction of the Christian church showing the presence and preservation of the tradition of the sacred continuity of the place; after all, the new Christians were the old pagans, who at least in the first generation retained some of the pagan traditions. As a close parallel to the original Catholicon, we can point out the church discovered near the village of Nova Mahala, Batak municipality, as well as to some extent the early church near Krichim and near the village of Dolni Voden, whose construction dates back to the end of the 4th century.[15]

A kind of terminus post quem also offers a scarce amount of the pottery, which was found in the leveling layer in front of the entrance of the complex which is dated to the 4th century.[16]

The construction of the church, and probably of the monastery complex, should be assumed as part of the Christianisation of the local population. The specifics that we find in its architecture, and in the subsequent significant reconstruction of the Catholicon and the complex, connect it more with the examples known from the Rhodope mountains rather than from those of the valley. We have some information about the Christianisation of the mountain population, referred to as *Bessoi*, about which I will not dwell here in detail, in a letter of Paulinus, bishop of Nola[17] and one of

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[13] See for this trend in Dinchev 2002, 138-139.

[14] See basilica Nos 5 and 8 in Diocletianopolis – Madzharov 1993, 134-135; 137-139.

[15] Initially, the archaeologist who uncovered the church near the village of Novo selo dates its construction to 4th c. – see Melamed 1999, 85, but the date may be précised to the end of 4th c. – see Vaklinova 1999, 56. On the church found near the town of Krichim – see Tankova 1997, 61-64; on its date – see Vaklinova 1999, 56. On the church near the village of Dolni Voden – see Moreva 1983, 13-19. The earliest coins found in the latter basilica, regardless those of Constans (337-350), are of Arcadius.

[16] The pottery has been studied by Tsvetelina Slavkova.

[17] Paulini Nolani, *Epistulae*.

his poems-songs dedicated to Nicetas of Remesiana,[18] Eusebius Hieronymus,[19] as well as in a sermon of John Chrysostom from 398/399, who mentions the translation of the Holy Scriptures into 'Thracian language'.[20] Certainly, in this case we cannot ignore the possibility that the evangelization undertaken by Niceta covered only that part of the Rhodope mountains that belonged to the administrative territory of Serdica and its bishop, i.e. northwestern part, as the rest, i.e. the one entering the diocese of Thrace was carried out by missionaries sent from Constantinople. The presumption in this case is that by rule a bishop from one diocese cannot operate in the diocese of another bishop.[21] One of the specifics of this process is the filling of the mountain with monks and the transformation of the caves into their churches and dwellings,[22] ie. a kind of monastery complexes or hermitages. This leads M. Vaklinova to the conclusion that 'the Mountains were crowded by monastics sells'. [23] At the same time, one of the letters of Paulinus dated to the beginning of the 5th century informs us that monks were dwelling in monasteries along the slopes of the Rhodope Mountains.[24] This specificity of Christianisation of the population in the Rhodopes (*Bessoi*), as well as the parallels with the complexes discovered near the village of Novo Selo, Batak district and that near the town of Krichim which was also located at the foot of the Rhodopes, allow me to suggest that the discovered Christian complex near the village of Dragoinovo should be included among those mentioned by Paulinus as monks' dwellings. The specifics of the complex that cannot yet be assigned to the standard Christian monastery type known from 5th

[18] Paulini Nolani, *Carmina* XVII. 180-235.
[19] Eusebius Hieronymus, Ep. 60 ad Heliodorum.
[20] Ioan. Chrys, PGr LXIII, 500-501.
[21] This problem is discussed in Karavalchev 2013, 80-90. It is noteworthy mentioning that the diocese of *Thracia* which encompassed most of the Rhodope and the valley of the river Hebros was under the jurisdiction of the Constantinopolitain bishop as early as the middle of 5th century as the canon 28 of the Fourth Ecumenical council at Calchedon reveals: canon 28: Canon 28: Ut et Ponticae, et Asianae, et Thraciae dioeceseos metropolitani soli: praeterea et qui sunt in barbarico, episcopi praedictarum dioeceseon ordinentur a praedicto sanctissimo throno sanctissimae Constantinopolitanae Ecclesiae. Nimirum unoquoque metropolita earum ipsarum dioeceseon, una cum episcopis provinciae ordinante provinciae episcopos, ut divinis canonibus promulgatum est. Metropolitas vero earum dioeceseon, sicut dictum est, ordinari a Constantinopolitano archiepiscopo, electionibus convenientibus secundum morem factis, et ad eum perlatis (Schwarz 1936).
[22] Paulini Nolani, *Carmina* XVII. 90-92.
[23] Vaklinova 1999, 54.
[24] Manev 2017, 221.

century onward, should be explained by the aforementioned characteristic of the Christianisation of the *Bessoi* as well as the early date of the complex itself.

Before going further, a brief discussion is needed on the change of the interior of the catholicon and its transformation into a three-nave basilica. The abovementioned specifics of the church, related to the ratio between the nave and outer aisles, the smaller size of the latter, which make them narrower, find parallels in basilicas dated to the time of construction of the complex itself. All this shows that this additional internal reconstruction took place very soon after the construction of the catholicon itself. It can be a consequence either of the need for internal additional strengthening of the building or liturgical requirements. The latter option would be particularly of interest, probably suggesting some changes in the monastic liturgy, but this is unclear.

It seems that after some time the early Christian monastery underwent some changes. They are found in each of its components - the catholicon, the building located south of it and the fence wall and are associated not so much with changes in the interior, but rather with the construction of new premises. For example, the changes in the catholicon which cover its western part and are associated with the additional construction of two rooms, which are located respectively north and south of the narthex. The northern room has a rectangular shape (6.30/4.90 m external dimensions), with a wide apse from the east, whose diameter is 1.92 m (fig. 13). The walls are built in *opus*



Fig. 13. The north chapel attached to the narthex.

emplectum with small lame stones, welded with mud solder and have thickness up to 0.80 m. Single large half-framed pieces of rock were used on its western wall, near the main building of the basilica. It remains unclear whether the walls were plastered, but fragments of red and yellow wall mortar plaster were found near the apse and the northern aisle of the Catholicon. A square shaped masonry base (0.80/0.80 m) was found in the pre-apse space, built of lame stones and fragments of bricks welded with mud solder, most likely on an altar table or a cross. It seems that the entire eastern space of the room was separated as we can conclude from the preserved brick floor. In this case, the irregular shape of this separated pre-apse part is impressive, which, following the preserved brick floor, started directly from the north side of the entrance and continued diagonally to include the probable base of the *mensa sacra*. Whether there was a chancel is unclear due to the lack of any remains. The floor, which covers the rest of the room is made by bricks with the size of 34/34/4.5 cm, consisting of eight rows and one additional half-row to block the gap from the irregularity of the eastern space in the room (fig. 14). The bricks themselves have different types of incised decoration, most often with three fingers in the form of an octagon or 'X', but there are also bricks with incised squares. What distinguishes them from the others used in the flooring in other parts of the basilica is their additional decoration of an incised cross. It is an isosceles Greek cross and is



Fig. 14. The brick floor of the chapel.

most often incised in the middle of the brick (fig. 15). The location of this sign on the bricks, part of the flooring, is relatively rare, which is why it is of particular interest. It is known that the placement of sacred symbols and the image of Jesus Christ on the floor of church buildings was forbidden by a decreet issued in 427 in the name of Theodosius I and Valentinian III.[25] The example with the catholicon of the monastery near the village of Dragoinovo is the second such example known to us at the moment from today's Bulgarian lands, along with the one in the basilica located at the locality 'Gradishte' near the town of Gabrovo.[26] With the construction of this room, the northern entrance to the narthex of the church was closed, which became the only entrance to the chapel.



Fig. 15. A detail from the brick floor.

[25] *Codex Iustinianus* 1.8.1: 'The Emperors Theodosius and Valentinian to Eudoxius, Praetorian Prefect. As it is Our diligent care to guard in every way the religion of the Celestial Divinity, We specially command that no one shall be permitted to trace, carve, or paint the image of Christ the Saviour either upon the earth, upon stone, or upon marble placed in the earth, but it shall be erased wherever found; and anyone who attempts to violate Our laws in this respect shall be subject to a heavy penalty. Given on the twelfth of the Kalends of June, during the Consulate of Hierius and Ardaburius, 427'.

[26] On the 'Gradishte' basilica – see Chaneva-Dechevska 1999, 208-211.

In the course of the archaeological excavations we have not found any small finds or pottery that would allow revealing the functions of this room. It was initially suggested that this was a baptistery,[27] but this interpretation could not be accepted without hesitation due to lack of any direct arguments. Indeed, the location of the room, its shape and the presence of an apse from the east has a parallel with the baptisteries that were discovered within the administrative territory of Philippopolis and at the foot of the Rhodope mointains, such as for example the basilica at the locality 'Yurta' near Diocletianopolis (modern Hisarya),[28] basilica No 4b[29] and basilica No 8[30] in Diocletianopolis, near the village of Branipole[31] and the 'Red Church' near Perushtitsa.[32] With the exception of the baptistery of the basilica No 8, where the semicircular pool is located in front of and in the apse, the other examples are characterized by its absence, which calls into question their interpretation as a baptistery.[33] By the way, in the identified baptisteries from Philippopolis and the region, the apse from the east is missing, as is the case with the so-called 'Small Basilica' in Plovdiv,[34] the basilica near Komatevo, although there is no piscina either[35] and the room located north of the narthex of the catholicon of the monastery complex, discovered near the village of Isperihovo, Bratsigovo region. [36] The cross sign, which is found on the floor of the room, points to similar functions, but the lack of a piscina is crucial and clearly indicates that the room performed other functions. Even if we assume that the baptism took place in a portable baptismal font, from which no remains were found, the location of the masonry base, which may

[27] See Topalilov *et al*. 2014, 387. This interpretation was shared by Assoc. Prof. Sergei Torbatov (NAIM-BAS) while discussing the results of the archaeological excavations at the annual archaeological meetings.

[28] The basilica is dated to the second half of 5th century based on the polygonal apse and the room interpreted as a baptistery lacks any piscina – see Madzharov 1981, 63-70.

[29] The room interpreted as a baptistery has a square shape with a small apse of the east, and no piscina is attested – Madzharov 1993, 133-134.

[30] Madzharov 1993, 138.

[31] On the basilica – see Tsontchev 1948, 35-48.

[32] The construction of the chapel is dated to 6th century – Chaneva-Dechevska 1999, 258-259.

[33] The interpretation proposed in the literature is questioned by N. Chaneva-Dechevska on the example of the room attached to the narthex of the 'Red church' near Persuhtitsa – Chaneva-Dechevska 1999, 256.

[34] Bospachieva 2002, 55-76.

[35] Dzhambov 1959, 160.

[36] Dzhambov 1956, 179-180.

be connected to it, in the immediate vicinity of the apse does not allow its use for this purpose without hindrance. It should be noted that in some of the aforementioned cases, such as the one at the Red Church near Perushtitsa and near the village of Branipole, these premises are interpreted in fact as chapels.[37] Probably this interpretation can be applied to many of the other examples mentioned above. Therefore, the lack of a piscina, but also the presence of the base for the altar table in the pre-apse space, which was undoubtedly separated in some way, give me reason to believe that this room is more likely to be interpreted as a chapel rather than a baptistery.[38] A possible parallel is the chapel attached to the catholicon of another monastery located at the foot at the Rhodope Mountains near the village of Isperihovo, constructed in the second half of 5th century.[39] It remains unclear whether this reconstruction should be regarded as a consequence of the development and the new requirements of the monastery liturgy or the reasons are different, viz. linked with the specifics of the Christianity in the area.

Another room was also attached to the narthex from south (fig. 16). It has a rectangular shape (5/3 m external dimensions (E-W / N-S), with preserved eastern and western walls, built in *opus emplectum* of small and medium-sized lame stones, welded on mud solder. The thickness of the wall is 0.50 m. On the inside to the two walls and along their entire length are additionally attached masonry structures of medium and small stones with a row of large semi-processed pieces of rocks at the bottom, whose height reaches 0.35 m above the floor with a thickness of 0.50 m. The upper part of these structures is covered and leveled with whole and fragmented bricks, which allows their interpretation as benches. The floor was made of bricks, most of which are preserved *in situ*. The entrance of the room from south which now is the entrance of the basilica itself, remains unclear as no structures are preserved, but the possibility should not be ruled out that the original one has still been in use, and in fact that the newly built room actually had the functions of a shed and therefore no door was needed. In the southwestern part, the wall reaches a protruding rock massif, which was further processed probably due to this reconstruction. Such kind of antechambers are typical of the Christian churches in the Rhodopes, which once again shows the connection of our church with these in the mountains rather than those in the plains.

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[37] Chaneva – Dechevska 1999, 256.
[38] Topalilov & Koleva 2015, 530-532.
[39] Chaneva-Dechevska 1999, 261.



Fig. 16. The antechamber of the catholicon (view from South).

Besides the catholicon, the building south of it was also subjected to additional reconstruction. The changes are partially revealed because, as I mentioned above, the building has not been fully explored. It is clear, however, that it has been extended at least to the south. An adjoining room was found here, which has a rectangular elongated shape (length 4.30 m / width – 1.20 m), but in the eastern 2/3 it is extended in a southern direction and its width reaches 1.90 m through a niche that shifted the south wall (fig. 17). This niche is 2.30 m long and 0.70 m deep, and the space in front of it is limited by a number of small-sized stones. In this way a facility is formed, the bottom of which is covered with slabs, which, however, do not cover the entire surface. A similar row of such stones was also found in the northern part of the room, and it is clear that they do not belong to the respective facility as it is placed on the slabs themselves. At present I am inclined to interpret this structure as a 'bed' that was enclosed into a niche in the south wall. The access to the room was through an entrance from the north, connecting it with the central room of the building (room 1), but it remains unclear whether this entrance was made at the reconstruction of the building with the construction of the Early Christian complex or existed originally with the pagan sanctuary. What is clear is that in a certain period of time it was closed, which shut up the room from the rest of the building and raises the question of its functioning at that time. It is not impossible that the room may be interpreted as a monastery cell, given its small size and the 'bed'. A bronze cross of chandelier which is one of most spectacular small finds was found in this room (fig. 18).



Fig. 17. The attached room 3 from the south (view from East).

Most probably during this period the building expanded to the west. An additional rectangular room was found here, attached to room 2 with a width of 2.10 m. Whether this is the last room of the building in this direction remains unclear, but we may observe on the terrain that the destruction layer disappears 2.50 m westward, which may suggest the end of the building itself.



Fig. 18. Bronze cross of chandelier.

The pottery found is fragmented; whole forms have not been restored. The most common form is that of storages, followed by pots, lids, earthen jugs and amphorae. The local pottery, made of sandy clay, baked to beige, predominates, but single and small fragments of redslip pottery have been found. Pottery dates back to the Late Antique period only.[40]

Archaeological excavations have shown that at that time a new fence wall of the complex was also built southward (fig. 19). Like the original, it is built in *opus emplectum* with outer face made of large and medium-sized pieces of rock, some of which semi-framed, and the inner of medium pieces and small stones. The emplecton consists of small and medium-sized stones and fragments of bricks welded with mud solder. The thickness of the wall is 1.10 m and it can be traced to at least 14 m, but it continues southward and curves in a southwesterly direction. A new entrance with a width of 1.20 m was found in this wall, and within the studied squares no pavement inside wes found, but only a clay surface. The construction of this wall reveals the extension of the complex to the south during this second period, when the earlier entrance was most likely closed. Unfortunately, at the moment we cannot determine the entire area of the complex due to the lack of visible remains of the fence wall of the terrain, either as a consequence of its low preservation or the subsequent looting of the ovals of the Revival period that are attested in the area, in whose walls the semi-processed rock pieces had a considerable part.



Fig. 19. The outer face of the fence wall (view from East).

[40] The pottery has been studied by Tsvetelina Slavkova.

The archaeological material discovered so far does not provide any information about the exact date of these changes which reflect the growth of complex's importance among the local Christian population. However, two hints are found which may help - the pottery and stratigraphic observations in room 2. In the latter, in contrast to the other rooms of the building, two burnt clay surfaces were found with a layer of burnt mud bricks between them with a thickness of 0.15 m. It is very likely that this burnt layer indicates that this part of the building was set on fire after which the final interior of the room was set up. If the reason for this fire is not domestic, we may assume that it reflects a cataclysm that occurred to the complex which I hypothetically connect with the Hun invasions in the 40s of the 5th century. It is well attested that these invasions affected heavily all kind of religious complexes in Thrace - both pagan and Christian - the former ceased to exist, while the latter found a serious reconstruction, which in some cases led to a change in the purpose of the building itself.[41]

The end of the complex may be referred to the end of the 6th - the first decades of the 7th century and lead to the Slavic-Avar invasions. The last coin found dates to the time of Justinian I, and the scarcity of small finds shows that the complex was abandoned in an organized manner. We can assume that the monks hid in the fortress located on the neighboring hill, the end of which is also related to that time.[42] The abandonment of the monastery complex allowed its looting, and probably then we should assign the dismantling of the brick floor in the naos and narthex too.

The archaeological excavations raise the question about a possible partial re-use of the complex in the 12th-13th centuries. An argument for this are the fragments of pottery of this date found during the excavations of the naos, and especially the altar area relating to the period when the late ancient fortress on the neighboring hill was turned into a monastery. However, we cannot assume that the basilica itself was used at that time, given the location where these fragments were found. It would not be surprising if this activity was connected with the construction of the neighboring monastery and the search for relics in the altar of the earlier one.

The archaeological excavations raise another question. Thus, unlike the naos and the narthex, the brick floor in the northern chapel and the passageway adjoining from the south remained intact through the ages. Indeed, some parts of the floor in the antechamber is missing, but it is due to modern looting. The entirely preserved floor in the chapel may suggest that

[41] A special study will be devoted to this problem by the author.
[42] Dzhambov *et al*. 2009, 640.

it was reused in a time when the rest of the basilica was in ruin which may be at the very end of Late antiquity, i.e. the first half of 7th century given the lack of any medieval material at this part of the basilica.

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