Ancient Thrace in the Modern Imagination: Ideological Aspects of the Construction of Thracian Studies in Southeast Europe (Romania, Greece, Bulgaria)

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Who Are the Thracians? An Outline of Ancient and Modern Views

"[…] the Thracian race is the most numerous, except the Indians, in all the world—and if it should come to be ruled over by one man, or to agree together in one, it would be irresistible in fight and the strongest by far of all nations, in my opinion […]" Today, this excerpt from Herodotus[1] is practically obligatory to quote in monographs, articles and even in novels dedicated to the paleo-Balkan peoples known under the common ethnonym Thracians (referred to in Ancient Greek as *Thra*[*i*]*kes, Thrēikes*, etc.).[2] This is especially true in Romania and in Bulgaria, where scholars, writers, journalists and political propagandists have created an immense library of writings dedicated to these ancient populations. These countries have even institutionalized a specific field of Thracian studies—or "Thracology"—that covers a series of disciplines: archaeology, history and art history, classical philology, epigraphy and linguistics, the history of religions, Indo-European studies and ethnography.[3] At first glance, this interest might be perfectly legitimate, given the historical data at our disposal.

Thracians were mentioned for the first time in the *Iliad*, while the last contemporary references to them are from the sixth century CE. By that time, it is likely that they were completely Romanized or Hellenized. Contrary to the

1 *Histories*, vol. 5, 3, translated by G.C. Macaulay.

2 Throughout this text I use different principles of transliteration of Classical and Modern Greek. While in the first case, I employ the standard system based on the Erasmian pronunciation, in the second, I have tried to follow the modern Greek phonetical features, although not to the extreme. Thus, while *β* is transliterated as *b* in the case of Ancient Greek and as *v* in Modern Greek, and *η* is *ē* and *i* respectively, in both cases the old diphthongs *αι, ει, οι* are rendered as *ai, ei, oi*, in order to preserve a certain visual correspondence with the Greek original.

3 This large scope is often interpreted as a proof that Thracology is a "modern interdisciplinary scholarly discipline": http://www.thracians.net/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=270 (accessed on January 20, 2013).

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superlatives in Herodotus's description, the Thracians were certainly not the most numerous ancient people after the Indians, even if we add to them the Getae, the Dacians and other populations that are sometimes classified separately. Yet in the Archaic, Classical and Hellenistic periods of ancient Greek history, they inhabited the territory (or parts thereof) of several modern countries—primarily Romania and Bulgaria, but also Greek Thrace and eastern Greek Macedonia, Turkish Thrace and also an area of northwestern Anatolia, as well as parts of Serbia, the Republic of Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Ancient sources also indicated that there were Thracian populations on a number of Aegean islands and in the core territory of Hellas. During the Roman Imperial period, they were scattered over a much larger territory: apart from the city of Rome itself and Italy, researchers have found information on Thracian soldiers, mercenaries and slaves in Egypt, in the Near East and elsewhere.

The Thracians certainly did not live on this space in isolation. Starting in the eighth century BCE, the Thracian coasts—first those by the Aegean Sea, followed by those by the Sea of Marmara and the Black Sea—were intensively colonized by Greeks. By the mid-fourth century, Philip II, the famous king of Macedonia, launched a series of military campaigns that imposed Macedonian domination over Thrace. It continued until 281 BCE and the death of Lysimachus, diadochus (successor) of Alexander the Great and king of Thrace, which was followed by a massive invasion of Celts. The long Roman conquest started by the end of the second century BCE. It was complete by the mid-first century CE in Thrace and by the beginning of the second century to the north of Danube, in Dacia. The Thracians created kingdoms of varying strength during certain periods—such as the Odrysian kingdom from the fifth to fourth century BCE or the Dacian kingdom from the first century BCE to the second century CE. But, in fact, exactly when these kingdoms existed is subject to debate. The same holds true for particular questions such as the level of "urbanization" of their territories.[4]

In general, the case of the Thracians is notable for the impressive number of far-reaching conclusions, ambitious hypotheses and speculations dedicated to them and the equally numerous deficiencies in our basic knowledge about them. To begin with, the ancient Thracian language is almost completely unknown, despite the exhausting exercises of etymology made by modern

4 For an archaeological discussion of this topic (untainted by nationalist overtones): Hristo Popov, *Urbanizatsiyata văv vătreshnite rayoni na Trakiya i Iliriya prez VI-I vek predi Hrista* (Sofia: Nous, 2002). On the Odrysian state: Zofia Archibald, *The Odrysian Kingdom of Thrace: Orpheus Unmasked* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon and Oxford University Press, 1998).

linguists. There are a number of Thracian words mentioned by ancient authors (glosses), toponyms of supposedly Thracian origin and personal names preserved in literary sources and on epigraphic monuments. But since the Thracians did not have their own script and, with certain exceptions, did not use the Greek or the Latin alphabets in their language either, there are almost no indigenous written documents. In 1912, in southern Bulgaria (Ezerovo, not far from Plovdiv), a golden ring was discovered with a mysterious inscription in Greek characters that was believed to be the longest text in Thracian. However, subsequent attempts to decipher it did not yield convincing results.[5] Thracian clearly belongs to the Indo-European linguistic family, but all the other classifications are disputable. It is not even clear if all the populations labeled as "Thracian" in the ancient sources spoke the same tongue: in the 1950s appeared the theory of the existence of two paleo-Balkan languages ("Thracian" proper and "Daco-Moesian") on the territory that was supposed to be "Thracian." More recent research demonstrates the existence of four onomastic zones ("properly Thracian," Daco-Moesian, "Western Thracian" and the Bithynian in northwestern Asia Minor).[6]

A long series of mysterious questions concerning the culture and the way of life of ancient Thracians remain open, from agriculture to religion. The data about the Thracian cults, for instance, come mostly from Greek as well as from Latin literary and epigraphic sources. Those that are attested to by the "domestic" Thracian iconographic material—like the famous Thracian Horseman (Heros)—are quite obscure, and they have generated numerous hypotheses and conclusions. For some Thracian deities, such as the long-debated Zalmoxis, we have not found any iconographic or epigraphic attestation, and practically all the data come from Greek and Latin literature. Nowadays, Thracian "civilization" is publicized worldwide through the famous "Thracian treasures"—fine creations of ancient artistic metalwork (toreutics)—as well as with the Thracian tombs discovered by archaeologists in mounds (tumuli). Some of them appear on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Yet who created these "treasures" and sepulchral monuments, and what the nature is of their stylistic features and deeper semantics, remain a matter of debate. Professional

5 Recently, excavations at the archaeological site of Zōnē at the Aegean coast of Greek Thrace unearthed a certain number of dedications from the Archaic period, written in a version of Greek alphabet but in an unknown language that might be Thracian. Studies are still to be done, and even the results achieved so far remain unpublished: Dan Dana, "*Onomasticon Thracicum* (*OnomThrac*). Répertoire des noms indigènes de Thrace, Macédoine Orientale, Mésies, Dacie et Bithynie," *Ancient Civilizations from Scythia to Siberia* 17 (2011): 30.

6 Ibid., 32–33.

Thracologists have suggested that some of the finest objects of toreutics were produced in Greek workshops and that others bear clearly Persian Achaemenid features.[7] Some specialists claimed that the Thracian chamber tombs were built by foreigners, for instance, by Ionian Greeks.[8]

Despite these and many other unclear aspects of ancient Thracian culture, throughout the last century and a half, it has been actively mobilized in Balkan national ideologies. As we will see in this essay, Romanians (since the late nineteenth century) and Bulgarians (more intensely since the 1960s and 1970s) have claimed not only the status of heirs of Thracian culture and "spirituality" but also Thracian "ethnic" ancestry. Modern Greeks, insofar as their imagined millenia-long historical continuity starts with the ancient Greeks—so fundamental to the modern conceptions of "European civilization"—did not have a particular need to claim Thracian ancestry. Yet, as we shall see, they have also used it in a number of particular contexts. For these three nations of Southeast Europe, the Thracian past contained important ideological stakes. Although the international debates about Thracian ancestry and heritage never reached the intensity of the present Greek-(Slav-)Macedonian competition for ancient Macedonians, the national-ideological aspects of the questions related to Thracians are still important.[9] And curiously enough, Romanians, Bulgarians and Greeks are not the only nations concerned by the evolution of the interpretations of ancient Thrace.

In the past, proponents of many other national and "proto-national" ideologies have tried to symbolically appropriate this ancient population. Before it was "returned" to Romania, the name "Dacia" was the medieval "classicist" appellation for Denmark. Just as remarkable was another confusion: between the allegedly Thracian tribe of the Getae and the Goths. It was launched as early as the sixth century CE by the work *Getica* (or *De origine actibusque Getarum*), written by the Gothic-Roman historian Jordanes. As a result, in the Renaissance and early modern period, the Getae, with their hero and god Zalmoxis, were included in the official (proto-)national ideology of monarchies

7 Ivan Venedikov and Todor Gerasimov, *Trakiyskoto izkustvo* (Sofia: Bălgarski hudozhnik, 1973).

8 Gocha Tsetskhladze, "Who Built the Scythian and Thracian Royal and Elite Tombs?" *Oxford Journal of Archaeology* 17 (1998): 55–92.

9 In fact, in the "Thracian case" as well, one can see phenomena similar to the "Macedonian." On two occasions, in 2005 and 2008, the Bulgarian media alerted their audience that the Greeks—more specifically, Greek tour operators—were trying to appropriate . . . Orpheus. In response, Bulgarian tour operators presented their country at a tourist exhibition in Switzerland with the slogan "The Sacred Land of Orpheus," while the village of Gela in the Bulgarian Rhodopes proclaimed itself "the birthplace of Orpheus."

as distant from the Balkans as "Gothic" Sweden and "Visigothic" Spain. Closer to the medieval Romanian principalities—in Transylvania—the Dacians and the Getae were proclaimed ancestors of the local Saxons. Jakob Grimm was among the last authors to insist on the German character of these ancient peoples. But by the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century, the theory of Getic and Dacian ancestry was embraced in Poland, where it tended to replace the traditional "Sarmatian theory" of the origin of the Poles.[10] As we will see, Lithuanian and Russian authors also insisted on a genetic link between their nations and the ancient Thracians, Getae and Dacians and influenced the development of the interpretations in the Balkans.

Moreover, quite unexpectedly, the theories about the Thracian language, area of settlement and historical destiny had (and still have) important repercussions in other national contexts, such as the Albanian and the Hungarian. Insisting on their nation's "autochthonous" Illyrian origin, Albanian scholars never subscribed to the idea, launched by a Bulgarian linguist in the 1950s, that their language had Daco-Moesian roots. Just as eager to show that the Romanians were *not* autochthonous in Transylvania, Hungarian propagandist publications—by contrast—emphasize Albanian-Romanian connections and still seek to dismiss the "legend" of the Daco-Roman continuity. Amid endless quarrels with Bulgarian historians about Macedonia's medieval and modern history, Macedonian classical scholars observed with anxiety the way the Bulgarian Thracologists pushed the western ethnic boundary of ancient Thracians deep into "their" Paeonian and ancient Macedonian territory.[11]

Given all these claims and passionate debates that the Thracians have provoked in the context of modern Europe, one might be surprised to read how this population is portrayed in ancient Greek literature, especially that of the Classical period. Thracians were presented with all the typical traits of "barbarians": they were primarily "warlike" and "bloodthirsty." In general, their way of life was far from the norms of the Greek *nomos*: the Thracians were depicted as unreliable allies, immoral people with exotic and unbridled sexual behavior, and incorrigible drunkards.[12] Moreover, they were not considered particularly intelligent: Aristotle even spoke of a Thracian tribe that was able to count only

10 More on these ethnogenetic myths: Dan Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade. Istorii despre un zeu al pretextului* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2008), 199–219.

11 As attested to by Nade Proeva, "Savremeni makedonski mit kao odgovor na nacionalne mitove suseda: albanski panilirizam, bugarski pantrakizam i grčki panhelenizam," *Zgodovinski časopis* 64 (2010), specifically, 188–189.

12 These data have already been well systematized by Gawril Kazarow, *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der Thraker* (Sarajevo: J. Studnička and Co., 1916).

to four, because "they are like children (*hōsper ta paidia*) and their memory does not reach further" (*Problemata*, XV, 3 [911a]). Given this testimony, how did the wise and refined Thracian "spirituality" promoted by a series of modern interpretations arise?

It must be noted that ancient authors launched in parallel a somewhat different vision about some cases and "categories" of Thracians. An example of this is the mythical singer and mystagogue Orpheus (plus his "relatives" and *Doppelgänger* Musaeus, Eumolpus, Thamyris); to some extent also Zalmoxis—the Geta (Getic deity?) who, according to Herodotus, preached that nobody actually dies. Some writers provided data about extremely pious ascetic "sects" among Thracians that abstained from meat and sex.[13] These apparent "contradictions" in the ancient (more precisely, ancient Greek) representations of Thracians certainly need a more complex explanation.

As the Romanian classical scholar Zoe Petre emphasized, the Thracians were projected as "the Other" of the Greek *polis*. Their habits represented a world "upside down," an "anti-system" of the Greek political-religious system. The fundamental elements of the latter were always defined in contrast with their antitheses, which were located either in the distant past or in the "barbarian world." Such elements were sacrifice, agriculture and marriage: the absence of one of these supposed the absence or the radical modification of the others. Thus, instead of marriage, which limits promiscuity for the sake of the social order within the *polis*, the Thracians pursued sexual freedom and odd premarital and marital customs; they did not have agriculture; their sacrifices were not like the standard Greek sacrifices of domestic animals to Olympic gods (Thracians allegedly also sacrificed people). Moreover, the "bizarre" world of the "barbarians" could be characterized not only by polygamy and all kinds of excesses but also by the opposite: celibacy, vegetarianism and an ascetic way of life.[14] Orpheus, Zalmoxis and similar figures were part of the typical Greek cliché about the barbarian "alien wisdom": they were like the Scythian Anacharsis and plenty of other figures from the East, from Egypt and from the West.[15] In any case, one thing is clear: they are also personalities that we

13 This was the case with the *kapnobatai* and *ktistai* described by Strabo (*Geography* 7, 3, 3) and long discussed in modern scholarship.

14 See Zoe Petre, *Practica nemuririi. O lectură critică a izvoarelor greceşti referitoare la geţi* (Iaşi: Polirom, 2004), 36, 192–207. Petre refers to Louis Gernet, Jean-Pierre Vernant, Marcel Detienne and their historical-anthropological analyses of the ancient Greek religion and mentality.

15 Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 29, 31; Dana, "Comment représenter les coutumes religieuses des Thraces (Hdt. V 3–8), entre Anciens et Modernes," in *Les*

know thanks exclusively to Greek and Latin literature and Greek and Roman iconography.

Facing these data, modern European classical studies consecutively adopted two interpretative strategies. The first was positivistic: it was typical of the nineteenth century, when a number of scholars took literally the data about Thracian "wisdom" and the alleged Thracian "contributions" to the Greek culture and religion (music and mystery cults, associated with figures such as Orpheus). They looked, at the same time, for ways to reconcile these data with the general "barbarian" image of the "uncivilized" Thracians. The second strategy, which appeared by the end of the nineteenth century and developed during the twentieth, valued precisely this "barbarian" aspect of Thracian culture. It was emphasized in the new search for the "archaic," the "orgiastic," the "irrational"—that is, of the not-so-"Apollonian" sides of the Hellenic civilization. As the Romanian-French researcher Dan Dana asserts, in the imagination of European classical philologists and historians of religion, Thracian culture (as well as Scythian—the two were often amalgamated) became the favorite source of all sorts of "non-Greek" elements in Greek religion: "animism," "shamanism," "orgiastic cults," "human sacrifices." and so on.[16] Finally, the anthropological dismissal of the concept of "primitive mentality" since the mid-twentieth century and the complete deconstruction of the progressive vision of human development additionally "rehabilitated" the image of cultural contexts like the Thracian that previously were unfavorably compared to models such as the Greek.

In the Western and Central European context, the Thracians have attracted the interest of French scholars and, even more, of German-speaking scholars. In the latter case, this interest was shared by representatives both of classical studies (*Altertumswissenschaft*) and of Indo-European or "Indo-German studies" (*Indogermanistik*). The first systematic analysis of the sources available on Thracians, particularly on the language and the religion of this paleo-Balkan population, was a monograph by Wilhelm Tomaschek, an Austrian of Czech origin, professor of geography at the universities of Graz and Vienna.[17] His book is today considered a pioneering work of Thracology. Yet the reconstruction of the interpretations given to Thracian ethnicity, language, culture

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représentations des dieux des autres (*Suppl. Mythos* 2), eds. Corinne Bonnet, Amandine Declercq and Iwo Slobodzianek (Salvatore Sciascia Editore, 2001). See also Arnaldo Momigliano, *Alien Wisdom: The Limits of Hellenization* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

16 Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 258.

17 Wilhelm Tomaschek, *Die Alten Thraker. Eine ethnologische Untersuchung*, vols. 1–2 (Vienna: F. Tempsky, 1893–1894).

and religion by modern "non-Balkan" European specialists goes beyond the scope of the present study. Unfortunately, the absence of such presentation can make the theses proposed by the Balkan scholars look more aberrant and inept than they are in reality, compared with the ideas promoted by their Western colleagues. As a matter of fact, in plenty of cases, Romanian, Greek and Bulgarian authors were reproducing foreign ideas or developing them further. Below are a couple of examples.

Since the second half of the nineteenth century, Balkan scholars often insisted that one of the most popular ancient Greek gods—Dionysus—was of Thracian origin. They likewise emphasized an alleged Thracian "belief in immortality" associated either with Dionysus, or with Orpheus, or with Zalmoxis, and based on a certain reading of ancient Greek data.[18] Especially in the Romanian context, this religious doctrine was seen as a precursor of Christianity. But in 1865 the French archaeologist Léon Heuzey discovered in Thrace the "cradle of the orgiastic cult of Bacchus" (*berceau du culte orgiaque de Bacchus*). According to Heuzey, this cult was related to a doctrine of life after death promised to those who had been initiated into the Bacchic mysteries. Thus the belief in immortality was presented as a "salient trait" of the Thracian "national religion."[19] Heuzey was also tempted to interpret it in a more spiritual way, as an initiation anticipating Christianity.

Later, the German classical philologist Erwin Rohde likewise claimed that the cult of Dionysus was of Thracian origin. In his opinion, its orgiastic "furor" was a "foreign and strange" body in the Greek "Apollonian" tradition.[20] Rohde's monograph *Psyche* had an enormous impact on the European classical scholars by the end of the nineteenth century and during the first half of the twentieth. In this work, Rohde also interpreted the Bacchic ecstasy as a "holy madness" through which the soul is united with the deity and thus immortalized. Through a series of speculations on the Dionysian, and hence "Thracian," origin of the Pythian prophecies in Delphi and of cathartic practices in ancient

18 This was especially the case for Herodotus. Such was his description of the customs related to (birth and) death of the Trausi, a Thracian tribe from the Rhodopes: "[. . .] when a child has been born, the nearest of kin sit round it and make lamentation for all the evils of which he must fulfill the measure, now that he is born, enumerating the whole number of human ills; but when a man is dead, they cover him up in the earth with sport and rejoicing, saying at the same time from what great evils he has escaped and is now in perfect bliss" (*Histories*, vol. 5, 4, translated by G.C. Macaulay).

19 Léon Heuzey, "La vie future dans ses rapports avec le culte de Bacchus, d'après une inscription latine en vers de la Thrace," *Comptes-rendus des séances de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres* 9 (1865): 372–378.

20 Erwin Rohde, *Psyche. Seelenlkult und Unsterblichkeitsglaube der Griechen* (Freiburg i. B.-Leipzig: Mohr, 1894).

Greece, Rohde dramatically reinterpreted the orgy, turning it into its opposite: asceticism. He proclaimed it to be no less Thracian, as it was practiced within Orphic sects that venerated the "genuine" Dionysus—in the middle of a Greece that had already made the Thracian god too "Apollonian." Rohde's interpretation suggested that the ascetic mysticism of the Orphic movement somehow prefigured Christian spirituality.

After Rohde, the French archaeologist Paul Perdrizet identified the homeland of the ecstatic cult of Dionysus as the Pangaeum Mountains in southeast Macedonia, a region inhabited in ancient times by Thracians.[21] Perdrizet also believed that Dionysus and Orpheus "prepared the way for Christ." The Belgian historian Henri Grégoire was even able to exclaim: "What, in fact, would be the Greek religion without the contributions of Thrace? A religion without Dionysus, without Bacchants, without Iacchus from the Eleusinian mysteries, without Sabazios-Sabadios, without Orpheus . . ."[22] Not surprisingly, these postulates would be readily repeated by Balkan scholars. More concretely, the Bulgarian Thracologists would exploit as much as possible the Western European writings on the "Thracian Dionysus," as well as the rich literature dedicated to the Orphic religious doctrine and "movement" in ancient Greece.[23]

The present work is focused on the national-ideological aspects of the study of ancient Thracians in Southeast Europe. Thus it does not pretend to provide an exhaustive presentation of the repertoire of Thracological problems, let alone of the enormous Thracological production. Only those questions that have a more direct relationship to the articulation of national identity and to a set of ideological values of the nation (spirituality, authenticity, originality) will be addressed here. It must be noted nevertheless that in some cases, respective national identity was projected—through Thracians—into a larger cultural background: Balkan, Eastern Mediterranean, Indo-European. To the extent that they are also loaded with certain implicit ideology, such cases will also be mentioned, although their value for the development of other disciplines, above all of "Balkan studies," should be a topic of separate research. In fact, Thracian studies were often intertwined with constructions of wider cultural contexts of this kind. The famous Romanian historian Nicolae Iorga

21 Paul Perdrizet, *Cultes et mythes du Pangée* (Paris: Berger-Levrault, 1910).

22 Henri Grégoire, "Thraces et Thessaliens maîtres de religion et de magie ou l'étymologie de *thrēskeia* et d'*atasthalos*," in *Hommages à Joseph Bidez et à Franz Cumont* (Brussels: Latomus, 1948), 379.

23 To cite just one study: William Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion: A Study of the Orphic Movement* (London: Methuen, 1952).

believed that the Thracians were "at the origin of everything in Southeastern Europe."[24] The no-less-famous Romanian historian of religions Mircea Eliade believed that the "common Thracian foundation" was "the principal element of unity of all the Balkan peninsula."[25]

The focus on national ideology is the reason why the important research on Thracians or on other ancient populations sometimes believed to be related to them (Scythians, Phrygians, Trojans, Paeonians, etc.) made by scholars from the former Soviet Union (Russia, Ukraine, etc.),[26] Turkey and the former Yugoslavia (Serbia and the Republic of Macedonia) will be left aside here or treated only in passing. Unlike Romania, Bulgaria and (to a lesser extent) Greece, in these countries, the study of Thracians was not of major ideological relevance. However, it must be noted that the importance of Turkish scholarship in this field has grown considerably over the last couple of decades—a fact that was recently acknowledged by the organization of the latest (as of 2013) International Congress of Thracology in Istanbul (October 2010).

"The Bravest and the Most Just of All the Thracians": The Invention of a Geto-Dacian Ancestry and Spirituality in Romania

Among all Southeast European national ideologies, Romanian nationalism has traditionally been the most interested in the symbolic promotion of Thracian cultural heritage and "ethnic" ancestry. Romanian scholars (historians, archaeologists, linguists) have been the most active in the study of the paleo-Balkan people—at least until the 1960s and 1970s, when their Bulgarian neighbors began producing a comparable number of Thracian-related works. But in Romania, ancient Thrace has also been addressed and exploited by writers, poets, playwrights and cinema directors, as well as by political figures, certainly more than in Bulgaria. Thus it seems much more central to the definitions of national identity.

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24 Nicolae Iorga, "Eléments de communauté entre les peuples du Sud-est européen," *Revue historique du Sud-est européen* 12 (1935): 115, quoted by Diana Mishkova, "The Politics of Regionalist Science: The Balkans as a Supranational Space in Late Nineteenth to Mid-Twentieth Century Academic Projects," *East Central Europe* 39 (2012): 266–303. See Mishkova for more references to the "Thraco-Illyrian" base of the Balkans in the scholarly constructions of "Balkan identity" from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

25 Mircea Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan. Etudes comparatives sur les religions et le folklore de la Dacie et de l'Europe orientale* (Paris: Payot, 1970), 183.

26 Here, the place of the Republic of Moldova is somewhat special, however, given the ambiguous status of the Moldovan national identity with regard to the Romanian.

In general, there are two reasons for that. On the one hand, Thracian studies were a part of the search for "national specificity" (*specificul naţional*) that became so dominant in the intellectual landscape of Romania since the end of the nineteenth century, particularly in the 1930s. This search was supposed to alter the Romanian nation's self-image as a culture "on the margins of Europe," that is, of "civilization," at "the gates of the Orient." It was also able to give a somewhat positive spin to the country's stigmatization as "Balkan."[27]

On the other hand, Thracian studies had a much more concrete task on a political level: it was supposed to prove the "autochthonous" character and the historical "continuity" of the Romanian ethno-nation in the territories of the modern Romanian state. This particularly concerned Transylvania—a much-disputed region with a Romanian ethnic majority but part of Greater Hungary since 1867. After its incorporation into the Kingdom of Romania in 1918, Transylvania was constantly claimed by Budapest. In fact, as early as 1871, the Austrian-German historian Eduard Robert Roesler published a study that confirmed a certain theory that already existed but was not systematized: that the ancestors of the modern Romanians came to present-day Romania during the medieval period, from territories south of the Danube.[28] Roesler's subscription to this theory earned him the eternal enmity of Romanian historiography, as the thesis of Romanians' (south-)Balkan origin meant in particular that the Hungarians had populated Transylvania before them. Thus Hungarians were confirmed as being the "first" and hence the "legitimate" masters of the region.

After the "Roeslerian attack," Romanian scholars have constantly tried to show that their nation descended from a Roman or, eventually, Romanized autochthonous population that lived also, if not mostly, to the north of the Danube. The center of the process of Romanization is held to be in Transylvania—more precisely, in its southwestern part (plus the regions of Banat and Oltenia), which constituted the Roman province of Dacia (106–271 CE) after this territory was conquered by the Emperor Trajan. Romanian historiography speaks of a "Daco-Roman synthesis" in which the proportions

27 On the perception of the Balkans and of "the Orient" in Romania: Sorin Antohi, "Romania and the Balkans: From Geocultural Bovarism to Ethnic Ontology," accessible online: http://archiv.iwm.at/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=235&Itemid=411 (accessed on January 20, 2013). One must also take into account the fact that in Romania, interest towards the Balkans was traditionally related to a certain political engagement with the destiny of the "brothers" to the south of Danube—the Aromanians and other Balkan Romance populations.

28 Eduard Robert Roesler, *Romänische Studien. Untersuchungen zur älteren Geschichte Romäniens* (Leipzig, 1871).

of autochthonous Thracians/Dacians and of Roman colonists vary according to the period in which the respective study was written and, sometimes, according to the personal ideology of the author.

Here a certain terminological clarification is needed. The ethnic terms used for the autochthonous population, both in scholarly publications and in all varieties of public and political discourse in Romania, are "Getae" and "Dacians," more often than "Thracians." The first two terms were applied by ancient authors to various populations that lived on territories which today are, for the most part, in Romania. Yet these populations were also identified as part of a bigger Thracian family—a thesis that is commonly accepted by Romanian historiography. For instance, according to Herodotus, the Getae were "the bravest and the most just of all the Thracians" (*Histories*, vol. 4, 93: *Thrēikōn eontes andrēiotatoi kai dikaiotatoi*).[29] In order to underline the unitary ethnic character of these peoples, Romanian historical literature uses the neologisms "Geto-Dacians" and "Daco-Getae" (*geto-daci, daco-geţi*) and sometimes even "Thraco-Geto-Dacians" or "Thraco-Dacians."

The last two expressions are certainly only scholarly terms, but Geto-Dacians and Daco-Getae also risk being a purely modern construction,[30] even though ancient writers such as Strabo or Pliny the Elder identified these two populations. The identification of Getae with Dacians is nevertheless largely problematic if it is put in the chronological and geographic context of ancient times. While the Getae were described by Herodotus as early as the fifth century BCE, the first reference to Dacians is only from the first century BCE (Julius Caesar, *Gallic War*, vol. 6, 25). While the Getae were believed to populate a region that corresponds roughly to what is today northeast Bulgaria and Romanian Dobrudja (Dobrogea), the Dacians were situated in Transylvania. As artificial as it may be, the ethnonym Geto-Dacians/Daco-Getae was endowed with a national "mission": it delineated the "Romanian" geographic space, that of the national "unity" from the Black Sea coast to the Hungarian plain.[31]

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29 The epithets used by Herodotus in this case—"the bravest" (*andrēiotatoi*) and "the most just" (*dikaiotatoi*)—seem to be a common locus in the ancient literature for geographically distant "barbaric people." It is used, for instance, for the Scythians: see Petre, *Practica nemuririi*, 88.

30 Curiously enough, the terms Geto-Dacians/Daco-Getae appeared for the first time in the Polish historiography of the nineteenth century: Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 216–219.

31 As underlined by Petre, *Practica nemuririi*, 276–288. These terms have since been questioned, but not abandoned, by Romanian archaeologists. According to Alexandru Vulpe, the current (as of 2013) director of the Vasile Pârvan Institute of Archaeology of the Romanian Academy, it is a harmless convention, and the efforts to replace it are

The heyday of the scholarly and public interest towards the Geto-Dacians and, in general, the Thracians in Romania was undoubtedly during the 1930s, but it was repeated in the 1970s and 1980s (and to large extent after 1989). These periods are certainly different in many respects: in the 1930s the Romanian political scene saw a move towards right-wing authoritarianism, royal dictatorship and a mass "contamination" of society, especially of the intellectual elite, with the fascist ideology of the Legion of the Archangel Michael (the "Iron Guard").[32] The 1970s and 1980s were years of communist rule, the personality cult of Nicolae Ceauşescu and autarchic state isolationism. Yet from an ideological point of view, these authoritarian periods shared basic common characteristics like nationalism—and its specific autochthonist version, involving the search for "national specificity."[33]

The intellectual climate of the post-communist transition was in many ways shaped by the heritage of these periods. In fact, nationalist communism had resurrected and used many of the nationalist interpretations of the 1930s, including those on the sublime "spirituality" and "political genius" of Geto-Dacians. After 1989 these interpretations were even further rehabilitated as intellectual guidelines, this time directed against the legacy of the allegedly "anti-Romanian" communism. Moreover, the end of strict state control over publishing and the partial de-legitimation of the previous academic literature led to the flourishing of an amateur literature on the "grandeur" of Thracians, often of excessive imagination, which opponents deride as an expression of "Dacomania" or "Thracomania" (*dacomanie, tracomanie*).[34] Yet as we shall see,

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useless. See Gheorghe-Alexandru Niculescu, "Nationalism and the Representation of Society in Romanian Archaeology," in *Nation and National Ideology: Past, Present and Prospects* (Bucharest: New Europe College, 2002), 209–234.

32 Specifically, on the intellectuals linked to it: Leon Volovici, *Nationalist Ideology and Antisemitism: The Case of Romanian Intellectuals in the 1930s* (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1991); Zigu Ornea, *The Romanian Extreme Right: The 1930s* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1999). See also Constantin Iordachi's contribution to the second volume of the present work.

33 On Romanian "national communism": Katherine Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceauşescu's Romania* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and Oxford: University of California Press, 1991); Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003). See also Alexander Vezenkov and Tchavdar Marinov's contribution to the second volume of the present work.

34 See, for instance, Vasile Lica, "De la thracologie la thracomanie. Glose marginale," in *Fontes Historiae. Studia in honorem Demetrii Protase*, eds. Corneliu Gaiu and Cristian Găzdac (Bistriţa and Cluj-Napoca: Accent, 2006), 1011–1027.

this literature is itself a continuation of publications from the beginning of the twentieth century and from Ceauşescu's period.

However, neither "Thracomania" nor academic interest in the ancient Geto-Dacians is necessarily so old. As emphasized in historiographic reflections, the first early modern Romanian national ideologists believed their people were of purely *Latin* origin. This choice seems "natural": unlike the other languages in Eastern Europe, the Romanian tongue has Latin roots, as was discovered by seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Moldavian intellectuals such as the chronicler Miron Costin and the prince and man of letters Dimitrie Cantemir. The same was true of the authors from the "Transylvanian School" of the late eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century (Petru Maior, Samuil Micu, Gheorghe Şincai, Ion Budai-Deleanu). These authors embraced Roman ancestry, regarded as noble and prestigious across Europe. Moreover, they believed and attempted to demonstrate that the ancient Dacians were completely exterminated by the Romans.[35] They tried hard to prove that not a single drop of Dacian blood remained in the veins of Romanians. Dacians were clearly treated as aliens: Cantemir thought that they were Scythians and had the same gods as the Slavs.

Ironically, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the name "Dacia" was often applied to the modern Romanian space by *Greek* intellectuals residing in Wallachia and Moldavia (Dimitrie Philippide, Dionisie Fotino) and by authors influenced by Greek culture. These individuals also accepted the idea of a Daco-Roman mixing.[36] In this direction, from the mid-nineteenth century on, the initial "Latinist" interpretation of Romanian ethnogenesis grew more nuanced. As early as 1858, the poet Cezar Bolliac wrote the short text "On the Dacians" (*Despre daci*), where he expressed his admiration of the ancient people who had inhabited Romanian soil before the Roman conquest: they were a big and powerful nation, with a sublime religion based on a belief in immortality. That was why they were also the first to accept Christianity. Bolliac was also an amateur archaeologist searching for material traces of Dacians and even for a Dacian alphabet.[37]

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35 See Lucian Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness* (Budapest: CEU Press, 2001), 86.

36 By the way, it was again Dimitrie Philippide who introduced the country's contemporary name (Romania). See Vasilis Gounaris, *Ta Valkania ton Ellinon. Apo to Diafotismo eos ton A' Pankosmio Polemo* (Thessaloniki: Epikentro, 2007), 69–70.

37 Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 91–92. See also Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, 36–40 ("Romanticism, Dacianism, and the National Essence").

But the academic and popular perceptions evolved after the publication of *Did the Dacians Perish?* (1860), written by the renowned historian, linguist and folklorist Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu.[38] He dismissed the Transylvanian school's thesis that Trajan exterminated the Dacians, saying that the Roman emperor only conquered them. For Hasdeu, the Romanians were descendants of Dacians and Romans alike. He also acknowledged a Slavic element in Romanian ancestry (but tried to minimize its importance). Born in northern Bessarabia, which was then part of the Russian Empire, Hasdeu studied at Harkov/Harkiv University. Not surprisingly, his approach to Romanian ancestry was fashioned in part by this education. Under the influence of the Russian scholar Aleksandr Chertkov, Hasdeu believed in a Dacian-Slavic affinity.

For a time, Hasdeu's manifesto had no significant repercussions in the academic field. The Latin identity kept all its indisputable prestige. It was Romania's link to the West, to "European civilization" and, more precisely, to the "great Latin sister" (*marea soră latină*)—France—the universal model not only of "civilization" but also of a centralized and homogenizing nation-state. While the historiography was still reluctant to revise the unique status of the ancient Romans as Romanian ancestors, the Dacian opponents of the latter won a more visible place in romantic poetry, particularly in the works of Mihai Eminescu, today considered to be the greatest national poet. He wrote, for instance, the drama *Decebal*, dedicated to the famous Dacian king and adversary of Trajan.

But the intellectual climate in Romania was changing. Founded in 1863, the Junimea literary society rejected what it saw as a stubborn imitation of Western civilization—particularly of the "Latin sister" France—which had generated in Romanian culture only "forms without substance." These were criticized in 1868 in a programmatic text by Titu Maiorescu, the leading figure of the new ideology of *junimism*.[39] And not by chance, Maiorescu also ridiculed the Transylvanian School's insistence on assigning Romanians a purely Latin origin. Maiorescu's circle emphasized the "organic" development of culture as the only one that produced the desired "substance"—contrary to the borrowings and imitations of external "forms." Thus the Dacian "foundation" of Romanian nation and culture became important, in contrast to the Latin

38 Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, "Perit-au Dacii?" *Foiţa de istorie şi literatură* 1 (1860).

39 Titu Maiorescu, "În contra direcţiei de astăzi în cultura română," *Convorbiri literare* 19 (1868): 305–306. On *junimism* and the theory of the "forms without substance": Keith Hitchins, *Rumania: 1866–1947* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 56–67, as well as Diana Mishkova and Roumen Daskalov's contribution to the second volume of the present work.

heritage associated with France and the West. In the long run, this program was also the beginning of the construction of "national specificity"—a concept that would acquire various definitions in the intellectual trends that followed *junimism*.

In 1880 the first Romanian scholarly monograph on ancient Dacians appeared—Grigore Tocilescu's *Dacia before the Romans*. Tocilescu rejected the theories claiming the German/Gothic, Celtic or Slavic ethnic belonging of the Getae and of the Dacians and asserted their Thracian character.[40] Yet Tocilescu did not identify Getae and Dacians: he even presented the latter as morally "purer" than the former (monogamous and clear-headed, unlike the Getae).[41] Nevertheless, after Tocilescu, Romanian scholarship always treated the Getae and the Dacians as the same people. It should be noted that Tocilescu also insisted that relatively few Dacians survived the wars with the Romans. The Romanians thus appear to be again (almost) a purely Latin people, descendants of Roman colonists; they are still not considered to be the product of Romanization of an autochthonous population.[42]

Apart from the "ethnic" problem, a particular question addressed by Tocilescu—as well as by the authors before him (Bolliac, Hasdeu)—was the culture, and more precisely, the religion of this population. Since Herodotus, the Getae have been famous for one characteristic, recounted in a plethora of versions by a long series of Greek, Roman, Byzantine, medieval Western European, Renaissance and early modern writers, as well as by modern scholars. This is the alleged Getic "belief in immortality," particularly associated with the figure of Zalmoxis, who was first mentioned by Herodotus.[43] The

40 Grigore Tocilescu, *Dacia înainte de Romani* (Bucharest, 1880).

41 Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 301.

42 Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 93.

43 The story is narrated in *Histories*, vol. 4, 93–96): "[…] And their belief in immortality is of this kind (*Athanatizousi de tonde ton tropon*), that is to say, they hold that they do not die, but that he who is killed goes to Salmoxis, a divinity, whom some of them call Gebeleizis […] This Salmoxis I hear from the Hellenes who dwell about the Hellespont and the Pontus, was a man, and he became a slave in Samos, and was in fact a slave of Pythagoras the son of Mnesarchos. Then having become free he gained great wealth, and afterwards returned to his own land: and as the Thracians both live hardly and are rather simple-minded, this Salmoxis, being acquainted with the Ionian way of living and with manners more cultivated than the Thracians were used to see, since he had associated with Hellenes (and not only that but with Pythagoras, not the least able philosopher of the Hellenes), prepared a banqueting-hall, where he received and feasted the chief men of the tribe and instructed them meanwhile that neither he himself nor his guests nor their descendants in succession after them would die; but that they would come to a

entire "Zalmoxological" tradition was probably based solely on Herodotus's account: apart from the Greek and Roman literary versions of the story, there is absolutely no data showing a real cult of Zalmoxis, nor a local Getic tradition regarding him as a civilizing reformer or a philosopher.[44] Yet following all the interpretations treating him as a god, a hero, a sage of exceptional wisdom (but also as an impostor and a charlatan!), in the modern Romanian context, Zalmoxis gradually became an emblem of the national spirituality. As for Tocilescu, he interpreted Zalmoxis as a Getic deity and linked him to the cult of Sabazios, whom he saw as a Thracian version of Dionysus.

Soon, in the first volume of his great synthesis of the history of Romanians, Alexandru Dimitrie Xenopol put forth his view of Getic and Thracian religion.[45] The main doctrine of the Getic religion was again the immortality of the soul—a belief Xenopol considered "Aryan." Initially polytheist, this religion was reformed by Zalmoxis, who introduced an Iranian type of dualism: the historian established a connection between the "reform" of Zalmoxis and that of Zarathustra, who had recently been popularized by Friedrich Nietzsche (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 1883–1885). Xenopol and the other historians from the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century (Dimitrie Onciul, Nicolae Iorga) accepted the thesis of a Daco-Roman mixture but still privileged the Roman element: the Romanians were imagined as descendants chiefly of Roman colonists.

The treatment of Romanian ancestry changed further after World War I, in the context of the interwar "Greater Romania." The leading intellectual trend became less progressive and more conservative, and in many cases

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place where they would live for ever and have all things good. While he was doing that which has been mentioned and was saying these things, he was making for himself meanwhile a chamber under the ground; and when his chamber was finished, he disappeared from among the Thracians and went down into the underground chamber, where he continued to live for three years: and they grieved for his loss and mourned for him as dead. Then in the fourth year he appeared to the Thracians, and in this way the things which Salmoxis said became credible to them [. . .]" (translated by G.C. Macaulay).

44 This is the thesis of the voluminous work of Dan Dana (*Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*), who has analyzed an enormous corpus of versions and of interpretations of the story, from Herodotus to the present day. The corpus was also published by Dana: *Fontes ad Zalmoxin pertinentes / Izvoare privitoare la Zalmoxis* (Iaşi: Editura Universităţii, 2011). See also Petre, *Practica nemuririi*, 170. Despite the exceptional importance of the figure of Zalmoxis in modern Romanian scholarship and imagination, the present text will be extremely concise in dealing with this "file," as Dana's work on the subject is practically exhaustive.

45 Alexandru Dimitrie Xenopol, *Istoria românilor din Dacia Traiană*, vol. 1 (Iaşi, 1888).

anti-modern and anti-European. "National specificity" became the main subject of the intellectual debates, and it was generally discovered in the idealized, ahistorical setting of Romanian village life. This ideology was first expressed in the *sămănătorism* of the first decade of the century, and its main promoter was Nicolae Iorga. Yet during the 1920s, its "romantic" overtones disappeared as it morphed into a more spiritualized nationalist, autochthonist, fundamentally Orthodox Christian and more violently anti-Semitic version. It found its intellectual expression in the journal *Gândirea*, edited by the theologian and philosopher Nichifor Crainic, and in the writings of the broad circle of authors associated with it.[46]

It was in *Gândirea* that, in 1921, the philosopher Lucian Blaga announced in a short text his theory of the Romanian "non-Latin essence."[47] Blaga opposed the hitherto dominant Latinist tradition through his insistence on the exuberant vitality of Thracian and Slavic origin ("*un bogat fond slavo-trac, exuberant şi vital*") that he discovered in Romanian folk mentality. In his opinion, the subconscious elements of this essence contradict the Latin balanced rationality and silent harmony. Moreover, Blaga clearly sees these elements as the result of an ethnically mixed ancestry. His ideas of Thracian vitality and highly spiritual worldview were simultaneously mirrored in his "pagan drama" *Zamolxe* (the title being a Romanianized version of "Zalmoxis").

In another famous work,[48] Blaga conceptualized the "mioritic space" as a subconscious "stylistic" matrix of the Romanian mentality and culture. The philosopher was inspired by German ethnologist Leo Frobenius's theory positing a special link between landscape and "cultural style." Blaga took as a typical Romanian landscape a succession of hills and valleys with an undulating horizon. Here the term "mioritic," used for this "undulating landscape," is a reference to the folk ballad "Mioriţa," which already had a central place in the interpretations of the Romanian "national character."[49] After Blaga, the ballad would also be extremely important in the interpretations of the Geto-Dacian

46 Hitchins, *Rumania: 1866–1947*, 67–71; 298–319.

47 Lucian Blaga, "Revolta fondului nostru nelatin," *Gândirea* 1 (1921): 181–182.

48 Lucian Blaga, *Spaţiul mioritic* (Bucharest: Cartea românească, 1936).

49 Known in a variety of versions from different parts of Romania, the ballad speaks of a Moldavian shepherd who accepts with serenity his impending death. An enchanted ewe tells him that two other shepherds are plotting his murder, but he replies that the only thing he wants is to be buried by the sheep's pen. He also asks the ewe to tell the other sheep that he had in fact married a princess, the "world's bride" (*a lumii mireasă*), and that the wedding was marked by a falling star and was attended by the elements of nature (the sun, the moon, mountains, trees, birds). "Mioriţa" was first published in the mid-nineteenth century by the writer Vasile Alecsandri.

"belief in immortality" and "joy of death" and of its "survival" in Romanian folk culture.

The year 1926 saw the publication of what was certainly the most influential work on the ancient Getic and Dacian past in Romania: *Getica*, by Vasile Pârvan. A monumental opus, written by the father of the Romanian archaeological school, *Getica* immediately became a major point of reference and a source of scholarly and literary inspiration. It also entrenched a number of dogmata in the perception of the Romanian autochthonous "essence." To begin with, Pârvan introduced a fundamental distinction between Dacians and Getae on the one hand, and "southern Thracians" on the other. The problem is that much of the ancient Greek literature, especially from the Classical period, presents the Thracians in general as drunkards, lazy and vicious people of exotic and unbridled sexual behavior. Modern scholars emphasized their "orgiastic" character as well as the alleged Thracian origin of the Dionysian cult practices. This image obviously contradicted the Romanian perception of the Getae as highly spiritualized believers in immortality.

Pârvan's solution was simple: he presented the Getae and the Dacians as a sober peasant people, monogamous, quiet, composed, highly moral and pious in every respect.[50] They believed in immortality and in the continuation of life in a kind of Valhalla.[51] According to Pârvan, the Getic/Dacian religion was ascetic and "aniconic": the latter would become an obligatory *locus communis* in Romanian scholarship. In fact, Pârvan treated the Geto-Dacians almost as monotheists—or as "henotheists."[52] Specifically, he insisted that the Getic religion was "uranian," involving a supreme god—the god of the sky (the "serene sky," as he sometimes puts it). Yet at times he tended to see this god also as a unique god (*un singur zeu*) of Geto-Dacians.[53] His "aniconic" cult was practiced in the way that would be appropriate for a "uranian" type of cult: in the open air, on mountaintops.[54]

At the same time, Pârvan ascribed to the southern Thracians all the decadent characteristics that abound in the ancient sources: unlike the Geto-Dacians,

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50 Vasile Pârvan, *Getica. O protoistorie a Daciei* (Bucharest: Cultura naţională, 1926), e.g., 131–132, 147.

51 Ibid., 160.

52 Ibid., 156–157. Pârvan used a concept of the German linguist and historian of religion Friedrich Max Müller. Pârvan's description is confused: sometimes he also speaks of the existence of a Great Goddess in the Geto-Dacian religion.

53 Pârvan, *Getica*, 660. It must be noted that the thesis of the "singular god" of Thracians was launched by the French archaeologist Georges Seure. See Georges Seure, "Les images thraces de Zeus Kéraunos," *Revue des études grecques* 26 (1913): 224–261.

54 Pârvan, *Getica*, 151–153, 659–660.

they were "chthonic" and ecstatic polytheists influenced by Mediterranean religious models. Pârvan believed that the Thracians were "denationalized" and "uprooted" by these foreign influences: their culture was "chthonized" (*chthonizarea*) and "orgiasticized" (*orgiastizarea*) by its contact with the Mediterranean mentality.[55]

Here, his discourse becomes overtly "racial": the Getae "remained an Indo-European people with a Nordic mentality [*mentalitate nordică*], while the Thracians mixed, like the Greeks and the Italic peoples, with the Mediterranean race and instituted a mixed culture, in which many elements . . . are southern, not northern."[56] The Romanian ancestors were closer to the northern Indo-European populations, not only culturally but also in terms of biological phenotype: Pârvan emphasized that they were blond. Obviously, Pârvan's theory falls completely into the modern Aryanist approach: Geto-Dacians were a heroic blond people following a highly spiritualized belief in immortality on mountaintops.[57] Simultaneously, with its insistence on their peasant character, Pârvan's theory belonged fully to interwar Romanian intellectual anti-modernism and traditionalism, with its fascination with the atemporal archetypical character of the Romanian village.[58]

However, the Romanian ancestors' peasant character did not mean lack of grandeur. According to Pârvan, the Dacians, a powerful and numerous people with a unique civilization, were the only Thracian nation to create a state (a point of view that certainly contradicts the later Bulgarian emphasis on the political might of the southern Thracian Odrysian state). In Pârvan's view, by the time of the Roman conquest, Dacia was a great kingdom and—equally important—was already influenced by Latin civilization. On the one hand, Pârvan imagined Dacia to be a highly civilized "self-conscious nation" that had nothing to do with the mentality of dispersed barbarian tribes. On the other, this "nation" was absolutely complementary to the other ancestors of

55 Ibid., 160–161. Much later, a difference between Geto-Dacians and southern Thracians in the religious sphere was claimed by the *Dictionary of Religions* of Mircea Eliade and Ioan Petru Culianu, where a whole chapter is dedicated to the Thracian religion: *Dictionnaire des religions* (Paris: Plon, 1990).

56 Pârvan, *Getica*, 657.

57 As early as 1894, the archaeologist Teohari Antonescu discovered the homeland of the "Aryans" in Dacia: Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 96–97.

58 As Lucian Boia emphasizes, "for Pârvan, Dacia and Romania make up a whole, a 'trans-historical' civilization whose religious, cultural, and moral features are those of the idealized autochthonous peasant synthesis." (Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 66).

Romanians—the Romans—whom Pârvan presented in a very idealistic way as well.

The political motives behind Pârvan's treatment of "ancestors" are especially visible in his promotion of Dobrudja (the "Getic land") as an original focus of Romanian ethnic "formation." This emphasis was meant not merely to assert the legitimacy of Romanian "ownership" of a region simultaneously claimed by a neighboring country (Bulgaria). Dobrudja (Scythia Minor) was conquered by the Romans considerably earlier than Trajan's Dacia, and it has many more Roman monuments and traces of Roman rule than huge regions of modern Romania that were not part of the Roman Empire. Pârvan imagined and tried to prove some special relationship between the two foci of "Daco-Roman synthesis"—one to the east and the other one to the west on the map of interwar Greater Romania. There were allegedly many connections between the two regions, including roads, and Roman soldiers, merchants and Dacian peasants allegedly circulated between them.[59] Thus the rest of Dacia that was not under Roman rule was able to join the "Daco-Roman synthesis": it was Romanized by Transylvanian-Dobrudjan "interaction."

After Pârvan's voluminous work, the Geto-Dacians tended to become the quintessential Romanian ancestors: their sublime moral and spiritual character was fully accepted, although Pârvan's sharp distinction between them and the other Thracians was softened over time. The autochthonist drive and the nationalist mysticism of the 1930s largely redirected the intellectual interest away from the "Western" Latin references and closer to the ancestors who were both "more ancient" on Romanian soil and spiritually "more original" with their "Zalmoxian belief in immortality."[60] The historical mythology of the fascist Legionary movement both expressed and promoted this orientation.

There was another specific reason why the Legionary discourse promoted the Geto-Dacians: their alleged "anticipation" of Christianity, detected in their

59 See Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 119.

60 In 1941, on the pages of the Legionary newspaper *Cuvântul*, the historian Petre Panaitescu (rector of the University of Bucharest during the rule of the Iron Guard) exclaimed: "We are Dacians! In our physical being, in the being of our souls, we feel ourselves to be the descendants of that great and ancient people who were settled in the Carpathian mountains centuries before Trajan. We have no beginning, we have always been here . . ." References to the "Dacian race," the "Dacian blood" and so on follow. See Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 69. The "Roman ancestors" were never abandoned, though. According to the common narrative that crystallized in that period, Romanians inherited different values from their ancestors. From the Dacians they adopted a high spirituality based on the belief in immortality of the soul and the discounting of death. From the Romans they adopted a rational equilibrium and a sense of order.

"belief in immortality." Starting in the early twentieth century, Romanian writers insisted that the main doctrines of Christianity already existed in the Getic/Dacian religion.[61] And it must be noted that the dominant version of Romanian fascism—the ideology of the Iron Guard—was fundamentally Christian Orthodox and deeply suffused with mystic Christian symbolism: not by chance, the Iron Guard was founded in 1927 as the Legion of the Archangel Michael. Thus, on the one hand, the thesis of Geto-Dacian "proto-Christian" spirituality catalyzed the development of Legionary imageries about Zalmoxis and the Getae. On the other hand, these imageries made Getic spirituality even more like Romanian Orthodox Christianity. As a result, in the writings of this period, the religion of the Romanian non-Latin ancestors becomes strictly monotheistic and ascetic. Its mystical doctrine of immortality was cited to explain the "fact" that the Geto-Dacians did not fear death and never hesitated to sacrifice themselves for their "nation."[62] The heroic overtones of this rhetoric went hand-in-hand with extreme exaggerations of Getic/Dacian grandeur, which had "imperial" characteristics.

In this case, the source of inspiration also predates the 1930s: it is the massive work *Prehistoric Dacia* by the ethnologist and historian Nicolae Densuşianu, published in 1913 (two years after his death).[63] Today Densuşianu is regarded as founder of the particular genre that many Romanian academics call "Thracomania" or "Dacomania." According to Densuşianu, the geographic space of modern Romania was the cradle of a powerful prehistoric "Pelasgian Empire" created in 6000 BCE. It conquered Europe, the Mediterranean, North Africa (including Egypt) and a large part of Asia. Hence the Carpatho-Danubian region was the motherland of all European and other civilizations. Densuşianu also believed Latin and Dacian to be forms of the same language: the Latins came to Italy from Dacia. Densuşianu gave as "evidence" Trajan's Column in Rome, with its frieze representing the victorious military campaigns of the Roman emperor in Dacia: the Dacians and the Romans on it appear to be communicating without interpreters. Rejected by scholars as Xenopol and Pârvan as a dilettantish and chauvinist fantasy, Densuşianu's maximalism reappeared by the beginning of World War II.

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61 Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 413.

62 The Legionary ideology even elaborated a "cult of death" and spoke of "love of death" as an attitude dating back to the ancient Thracians. According to the founder of the Iron Guard, Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, "the Legionnaire loves death and he accepts the baptism of death (*botezul morţii*) with the serenity of the Thracian ancestors": Corneliu Zelea Codreanu, *Doctrina mişcării legionare: prezentare concisă* (Bucharest: Lucman, 2003), 52.

63 Nicolae Densuşianu, *Dacia preistorică* (Bucharest: Carol Göbl, 1913).

This was when authors like the writer Ioan Brătescu-Voineşti claimed that all Romance languages were of Dacian origin: the Romans were descendants of Geto-Dacians, the Latin language was a literary form of Dacian—hence, Italian, French and Spanish had "Romanian" roots.[64] Thrace/Dacia was presented as a real and spiritual empire and a cradle of European values. Thus the Latinist interpretation from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was completely reversed, but without a rejection of Romans: they were simply Dacians as well. At the same time, the references to "empires" and to "European values" were not only the consequence of historical megalomania: this was already the time of the "holy war" against "Asiatic Russia," during which the official propaganda of Marshal Ion Antonescu's regime depicted Romania as a champion of European identity.[65]

The imperialist construction of Geto-Dacian and Daco-Roman antiquity crumbled in 1944–1945 as a result of the communist takeover in Romania. Initially despised by the majority of Romanians as an alien (Russian but also Jewish) occupation, the new regime helped confirm this impression in the field of ancient and medieval history. The new legislator in this field, Mihail Roller, imposed a "Marxist-Leninist" interpretation of the early Romanian history that shocked scholars and intellectuals by introducing the Slavs as the legitimate "ancestors" of Romanians. In the 1950s archaeologists were obliged to discover sites proving a Slavic presence on the territory of modern Romania.[66] With de-Stalinization in the mid-1950s, Roller fell from grace, but his name remained synonymous with extreme political manipulation of the Romanian past (disdained even more because of Roller's Jewish origin).

Nevertheless, the Slavs were far from being the only Romanian ancestors, even during the Stalinist period. Wittingly or unwittingly, the communist regime emphasized Dacian ancestry as well. In the field of ancient history and archaeology, the new authorities encouraged research on the native population of Dacia, as the study of Roman rule and culture was seen as a possible infiltration of "Western influence." Thus the communist authorities effectively reconfirmed the previous juxtaposition of the "autochthonous Dacians" and

64 Ion Brătescu-Voineşti, *Originea neamului românesc şi a limbii noastre* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1942).

65 Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 321–322.

66 Virgil Mihăilescu-Bîrliba, "Impact of Political Ideas in Romanian Archaeology before 1989," *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica* 3–4 (1996–1997): 160. To some extent, the same period also emphasized the role of Scythians—a people who were autochthonous on the territory of the USSR and were studied extensively by the Russian/Soviet Scythological school.

the (now negatively connoted) "Latin connections to the West." Initially, the Roman domination was also presented in class-ideological terms as destructive and oppressive, while the "Dacian masses" played the role of the oppressed and the exploited.

Thus throughout the 1950s, Romanian archaeologists made important discoveries related to the Thracian/Geto-Dacian past. The excavations in Munţii Orăştiei unearthed a number of Dacian fortresses and sanctuaries that changed the way Dacian culture was interpreted.[67] In fact, these discoveries revived the depiction of Dacia as a unique and grand civilization. With its typical cultural-historical (meaning "ethnic") approach, Romanian archaeology started discovering "Dacian" sites almost everywhere, as well as "typical" Dacian artifacts like the "Dacian mugs"—which otherwise were found as far away as Budapest and even Burgenland.[68] With the "liberalization" of the post-Stalinist period, the "Daco-Roman synthesis" again became a topic of special concern. In the Romanian context, archaeology had a crucial task: it was supposed to provide evidence of continuity of settlement and culture after the abandonment of the Roman province of Dacia by the Emperor Aurelian in 271 CE. It was up to archaeology to find "indisputable" proof of the continuity of the "Daco-Romans" on the present Romanian territory, as the written sources, unfortunately, speak not only of the retreat of the Roman/Romanized population from it but also of populations migrating to it continuously throughout the centuries.[69]

This problem extends beyond archaeology. Linguistics was also expected to reinforce the theory of continuity. As early as 1774, the Swedish historian Johann Thunmann detected pre-Latin elements in the Romanian language;

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67 See Constantin Daicoviciu and Hadrian Daicoviciu, *Sarmizegetusa. Cetăţile şi aşezările dacice din Munţii Orăştiei* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1962). On the development of Romanian Thracian archaeology after World War II: Radu Vulpe, "Histoire des recherches thracologiques en Roumanie," *Thraco-Dacica* 1 (1976): 37–43.

68 For a critical survey of nationalism in Romanian archaeology: Niculescu, "Nationalism and the Representation of Society in Romanian Archaeology."

69 Gheorghe-Alexandru Niculescu, "Archaeology and Nationalism in *The History of the Romanians*," in *Selective Remembrances: Archaeology in the Construction, Commemoration, and Consecration of National Pasts*, eds. Philip Kohl et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 134. The difficulty of providing similar evidence is the reason why Romanian archaeologists still speculate on the existence of archaic village communities (*obşti săteşti*), imagined in the 1920s by the historian Nicolae Iorga as "popular Romaniae": stable cores of Daco-Roman population and culture that allegedly survived for centuries without state organization. On Iorga's concept, see Roumen Daskalov's contribution to the present volume.

these were later confirmed by linguists such as the Slovenes Jernej Kopitar and Franc Miklošič. These scholars paid special attention to the fact that the Romanian language shared many of these elements with Albanian.[70] These non-Latin, non-Slavic, non-Greek and non-Turkish characteristics and words were logically attributed to the paleo-Balkan linguistic base, defined by the different authors as Thracian, Thraco-Dacian, Thraco-Illyrian, and so on. In Romania, the Albanian-Romanian parallelisms were confirmed by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, who concluded that "the Albanians are our good brethren from the same Dacian blood."[71] However, the idea that the common elements of the two tongues were of Thracian or Dacian origin would later (especially during the communist period) be rejected by Albanian scholars, who insisted that their own language was of Illyrian origin. Not surprisingly, their explanation was that the elements in question show an Albanian influence over Romanian (an idea expressed during the interwar period by the Austrian Albanologist Norbert Jokl). What makes this idea especially unacceptable in the Romanian context is its inference that the ancestors of Romanians and Albanians once lived together (an "Albano-Romanian symbiosis"). This point actually calls into question the autochthony of the Romanians in the territories north of the Danube and supports the Hungarian claim that Transylvania was first populated by Hungarians.

Trapped in this political imbroglio, the Romanian scholars constantly struggled to prove that the common linguistic base was in fact Thracian—a thesis that allowed the theory on Romanian autochthony to be maintained. Thus the political stakes were an additional impetus for the development of the scholarly interest towards the language of the Thracian/Geto-Dacian "ancestors" in Romania. In 1959 an important monograph on the question appeared, authored by the linguist Ion Iosif Russu, in which he demonstrated the particular character of "Thraco-Dacian" among the Indo-European languages (including with regard to Illyrian).[72] In other works, Russu reduced the list of common

70 These include a series of common words, some of which are quite similar (*i/e bukur*—"beautiful," "nice" in Albanian, vs. *bucuros, bucuroasă*—"glad," "cheerful" in Romanian); common grammatical characteristics like the post-positive definite articles, the one for feminine being strikingly similar (*a* instead of *ă* / *ë* in the indefinite form); typical phonemes (*ă* in Romanian written as *ë* in Albanian); phenomena from the phonological history of the two languages (such as rhotacism). On these similarities, see Grigore Brâncuş, *Cercetări asupra fondului traco-dac al limbii române* (Bucharest: Dacica, 2009).

71 Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu, "Cine sunt albanesiï?" *Analele Academiei Române* 23 (1901): 103–113.

72 Ion Iosif Russu, *Limba traco-dacilor* (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RPR, 1959).

Albanian-Romanian features and attacked both the thesis of Albanian influences over Romanian and the concept of a Balkan *Sprachbund*.[73]

Russu's contribution to Thracian studies was not only in the field of linguistics. For most of the communist era, Romania's official interpretation of Thracian religion was his. Countering Pârvan's mono-/henotheistic thesis, Russu defended the polytheistic character of the Thracian cult system. It was centered around two gods: a "chthonian" one (Zalmoxis or "Zamolxis"—according to Russu's etymologies, this is the correct form of the name) and a "uranian" one (Gebeleizis).[74] Moreover, in an evolutionist manner, Russu claimed that the Thracians were socioculturally backward and even that the Getae were more "primitive" than the other Thracians. This was a complete reversal of the picture from the interwar period, during which the Geto-Dacians were proclaimed morally, spiritually and culturally superior to the southern Thracians. In the 1970s Russu's thesis would be seriously shaken by the rehabilitation of Vasile Pârvan's point of view.[75]

In fact, despite Russu's authority, the pre-communist interpretations of Thracian culture and "sublime spirituality" were far from completely suppressed. An interesting figure in this respect, linking the interwar Legionary imageries and the research from the communist period, is Ioan Coman. A theologian and classical philologist, Coman was close to the Iron Guard in the 1930s. He developed the theory of Geto-Dacian monotheism, supported to a certain extent by Pârvan, and interpreted Zalmoxis as well as the Getic priest Dekaineos (Deceneu) as religious reformers who promoted a *praeparatio evangelica*. Yet like a number of other intellectuals with his political sympathies and ideology, he accommodated relatively easily to the communist regime after World War II.[76] Coman's works were edited not only in Romania but also in Bulgaria, where they shaped to a certain extent the Thracological interpretations: a study of his on Zalmoxis and Orpheus was published in 1950 in a collective volume dedicated to the Bulgarian classical scholar Gavril Katsarov.

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73 See Ion Iosif Russu, "Limba română, limbile balcanice şi substratul. Elemente autohtone, traco-dace, în limba română," a work from 1962–1963 republished in the 2009 edition of *Limba traco-dacilor* (Bucharest: Dacica). Russu identified about 160 Thracian words in modern Romanian, but many of his etymologies were later contested.

74 Herodotus indicated that "(Ge)Beleizis" was another name of Zalmoxis, but the long "Zalmoxological" literary and scholarly tradition has promoted this figure into a separate god. This treatment is criticized by Dan Dana. The idea that Gebeleizis was a "uranian" god of thunder was already expressed by Wilhelm Tomaschek: Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 248.

75 Pârvan's voluminous monograph was republished in 1982.

76 See Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 315–317.

In this work, Coman clearly treated Zalmoxis and Orpheus as historical personalities, reformers of the Thracian cults who preached faith in one single god and the immortality of the soul. Later they were immortalized and made divine by their followers, the Thracians. In this way, Coman established an implicit analogy between them and Christ: Zalmoxis both preached monotheism and became himself the unique god of the Getae. As a result, Zalmoxis and Orpheus suddenly gain an exceptional spiritual role in European history: they promoted cultural values "among the Thracians, among the Greeks and to a certain extent among all Europeans."[77] Coman shows a clear preference for Zalmoxis: he presented the latter as a religious figure and a ruler, a priest-king, who had lived between 1500 and 1200 BCE. Orpheus lived in approximately the same time period and, just like Zalmoxis, he created an all-male initiatic cult. However, as a good Romanian,[78] Coman saw the figure of Orpheus as secondary to Zalmoxis, who was more ancient and brilliant. Orpheus was only a missionary of Zalmoxis: he only repeated the Zalmoxian reform but "with a mediocre result during his lifetime."[79] Thus Coman opposed the point of view of the Romanian historian (of Jewish descent) Carol Blum, who saw the religion of Zalmoxis as Orphic: on the contrary, Coman maintained, the Orphic doctrine was "Zalmoxian." Quite logically, the Getae, the people of Zalmoxis, are also presented as spiritually and morally superior to the other Thracians.

Coman's rhetoric could be shocking, with its nationalist overtones (the year is 1950!) and *loci communes* taken from the Legionary discourse. He often speaks of "race" (*race thrace*) and describes Zalmoxis and Orpheus in terms that were previously used to glorify the leaders of the Iron Guard and/or Marshal Antonescu: the Thracian "reformers" preached "national unity," "unlimited patriotism" (*patriotisme sans bornes*), "moderation that calms the instincts," "a profound religious faith" and so on. In 1958, in another collective volume published in Bulgaria, Coman went even further in identifying Zalmoxis with Christ: the former had also founded a soteriological doctrine through which his followers became divine.[80] In fact, this focus on Thracian primordiality presages the later development of the "Thracomaniac" genre in Romania.

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77 (Jean) Ioan Coman, "Zalmoxis et Orphée," *Serta Kazaroviana. Sbornik Gavril Katsarov. Statii, posveteni po sluchay na sedemdesetgodishninata mu*, vol. 1 (Sofia: BAN, 1950): 177.

78 The apt irony belongs to Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 217.

79 Coman, "Zalmoxis et Orphée," 183.

80 Jean (Ioan) Coman, "Grégoire de Nazianze et Némésius. Rapports du christianisme et du paganisme dans un poème littéraire du IVe siècle de notre ère," in *Studia in honorem Acad. D. Dečev. Izsledvaniya v chest na akad. Dimităr Dechev po sluchay 80-godishninata mu* (Sofia: BAN, 1958), 707–726.

Coman did not remain an exception for long. By the end of the 1960s, historians formerly involved in the Legionary movement were rehabilitated and were allowed to resume publishing. As a result, the historical literature began to sound in many respects like that of the 1930s and the early 1940s. It exalted the Geto-Dacians' "superior" religion and "higher" moral standing, heroic spirit, readiness to sacrifice themselves in struggle, idealism and lack of materialism. The rule of Nicolae Ceauşescu, general secretary of the Romanian Communist Party from 1965 on, completely restored interwar Romanian nationalism. As already noted, the latter was notable for its autochthonism: in the context of Ceauşescu's rule, this aspect was consolidated even further in order to legitimate the autarchic (largely anti-Soviet) character of the regime. The "autochthonous" Thracians/Dacians thus gravitated to the center of the official state politics of history. In general, they gained a much more substantial public presence: suffice it to say that the Romanian automobile whose production started in 1966 was named "Dacia."

In the field of the scholarly research on ancient Thracians, Romania's importance was demonstrated by the fact that, in September 1976, the Second International Congress of Thracian Studies (Thracology) was held in Bucharest.[81] Otherwise, the idea of such congresses came from Bulgaria (where the first congress was held four years earlier) as well as the idea to create specialized institutes of Thracian studies. Also in 1976, an Institute of Thracology was created in the framework of the Romanian Academy of Sciences and brought together archaeologists, linguists and ethnologists. In general it was more "conservative" than the Bulgarian institute of the same name created in 1972. Subjects like Thracian "spirituality" and religion, a favored topic for the Bulgarian Thracologists, were researched in Romania mostly by historians from other academic and university institutions.[82] Among them were, curiously enough, historians from the Institute of History of the Romanian Communist Party. They abandoned their previous topics, like the workers' movement in the country, and turned to ancient Dacia.[83] Similarly, Christian Orthodox theologists started dealing with Dacian religion (a path already followed by Ioan

81 The proceedings were published several years later: *Actes du IIe Congrès international de thracologie* (*Bucarest, 4–10 septembre 1976*), vols. 1–3 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1980).

82 The comparison belongs to Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 338.

83 Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 78. In the same period in Bulgaria, the local Institute of History of the Communist Party redirected its research towards patriotic themes (such as the Macedonian question) in a similar manner.

Coman), considering it a precursor of Christianity, with its doctrine of "resurrection" and of "immortality of the soul."

However, the interpretations of Thracian "spirituality" put forth, during the 1970s and 1980s, by scholars from Romanian academic circles could not be fully understood without taking into account the massive influence of a Romanian scholar who was not part of these circles. This was the famous historian of religions Mircea Eliade, who, in 1970, published the work *From Zalmoxis to Genghis Khan*, subtitled *A Comparative Study of the Religions and Folklore of Dacia and Eastern Europe*.[84] Eliade's book was translated and published in Romania ten years later, but its theses were already circulating in local academic milieus.

Eliade's personality and intellectual heritage is a topic of endless debate in Romania, but also in other countries, such as France and the United States, where he worked for most of his life as a researcher.[85] In his youth, he was involved into the Iron Guard and was even one of the intellectual "gurus" of the young Legionary intelligentsia. Certainly, Eliade's spiritual quests were not simple: his interests in yoga and Eastern religions were not typical of straightforward Romanian nationalists from the Iron Guard. Yet his perception of the Eastern esoteric doctrines was certainly adapted to the Romanian "spirituality" in some of his writings.[86] Eliade left behind several works that reveal quite a nationalist understanding of Romanian history and reflect the mysticism and anti-modernism of the interwar period.[87] To a large extent, this is the case for *From Zalmoxis to Genghis Khan* as well. Although its subtitle also refers to "Eastern Europe," the book clearly stresses the Dacian religion and Romanian

84 Initially published in French: Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*. The study was published in English under the title *Zalmoxis, the Vanishing God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1972). It must be noted that, between 1938 and 1942, Eliade edited a Paris-based journal of religious studies bearing the title *Zalmoxis. Revue des études religieuses*.

85 The best presentation of his biography and intellectual development is certainly Florin Ţurcanu, *Mircea Eliade. Le prisonnier de l'histoire* (Paris: La Découverte, 2003). See also the shorter French version of Dana's *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*: Dan Dana, *Métamorphoses de Mircea Eliade. A partir du motif de Zalmoxis* (Paris: Vrin/EHESS, 2012).

86 See Daniel Dubuisson, "L'ésoterisme fascisant de Mircea Eliade," *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales* 106–107 (1995): 42–51, and the opinionated monograph by the same author, *Impostures et pseudo-science. L'œuvre de Mircea Eliade* (Lille: Presses Universitaires du Septentrion, 2005).

87 For instance, the works of popular history he published during World War II, when he was in diplomatic service in Portugal. Eliade claimed that the Roman conquest did not change Dacia's ethnic makeup: the Dacians learned Latin but kept their spirituality—in particular, the cult of Zalmoxis, which prepared them perfectly for the later adoption of Christianity. See Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 100.

context.[88] Otherwise, Eliade's method was based on comparatism and was largely influenced by James Frazer's monumental opus *The Golden Bough* (1890) but also by a series of other concepts, including Carl Gustav Jung's theory of the archetype and the notion of mystery religions supported by Raffaele Pettazzoni, the "father" of the history of religions in Italy.

In the first chapter of the book, Eliade introduced the idea of a Getic/Dacian religion based on initiatic/mystery cults—a theory that would enjoy a bright future in Romanian and, even more, in Bulgarian Thracology. On the basis of (apparently erroneous)[89] etymological speculations, he derived the Dacian ethnonym from the word for a specific animal: the wolf.[90] Quite rapidly, without reference to any concrete data, Eliade concluded that this carnivore played a central role in Dacian mythology: young Dacians allegedly underwent rites of military initiation—a kind of *Männerbünde*[91]—in which they imitated the wolf pack. Eliade went so far as to perceive some special, predestined connection between Dacians and Romans, as the latter had the genealogical myth of Romulus and Remus, suckled by a she-wolf.[92]

The second chapter of Eliade's book describes the Dacian religion as an initiation to immortality. Here, the main reference is, of course, the myth of Zalmoxis. His *katabasis* in the underworld is understood as an "initiatic death," and his *epiphaneia* marks the introduction of an eschatological cult based on the belief in immortality. Together with the Hellenist Ivan Linforth,[93] Eliade believed that the verb *athanatizein* used by Herodotus in his narrative about Zalmoxis (*Athanatizousi de tonde ton tropon*) should be translated as "to make oneself immortal," not just "to believe in immortality," that is, as a reference to practices and rituals of immortalization. Apart from this initiatic and mysterial aspect, the Geto-Dacian religion was of a uranian-solar character: Gebeleizis (Herodotus's alternate name for Zalmoxis) is again taken to be a separate

88 Even Genghis Khan actually marks the beginning of Romanian history, following the long "prehistory" studied by Eliade: he noted that the medieval Romanian principalities appeared after the end of the Mongol invasions (Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 30), although the connection here is anything but obvious.

89 Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 271.

90 See "Les Daces et les loups"—Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 13–30.

91 The concept of initiatic "closed male associations," or *Männerbünde*, was introduced in 1902 by the ethnologist and historian Heinrich Schurtz.

92 "It is significant that the only people who managed to vanquish definitely the Dacians, who occupied and colonized their land, and who imposed on them its own language, was the Roman people . . ." (Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 29).

93 Ivan Linforth, "Oi athanatizontes (Herodotus 4.93–96)," *Classical Philology* 13 (1918): 23–33.

celestial god, assimilated with the latter into a syncretic cult. The uranian-solar aspect is proved with the help of discoveries made by Romanian archaeologists: like Constantin and Hadrian Daicoviciu, Eliade believed that the Dacian sanctuaries in Sarmizegetusa and Costeşti were not covered but were open to the sky. In the round sanctuary of Sarmizegetusa Regia, he discovered a "celestial symbolism" confirmed by the round altar nearby—the "stone (andesite) sun."[94]

Thus the theory exposed in the first chapters of *From Zalmoxis to Genghis Khan* strangely recalls imageries put forth by "Aryan studies": initiatic male brotherhoods worshipping solar and celestial gods and sharing a heroic belief in immortality.[95] Moreover, Eliade saw parallels between the cult of Zalmoxis and Christianity—a link typical of the Legionary mythology in interwar Romania. Yet he did not accept Ioan Coman's straightforward interpretation of Zalmoxis as a reformer who paved the way for the religion of Christ. Here Eliade's argumentation is more sophisticated, but it still treads on shaky ground.

This is the reference to the "data" of *folklore*—another crucial aspect of Mircea Eliade's methodology. Eliade is convinced that "there is enough proof of the survivals of 'pagan' heritage, that is, Geto-Dacian and Daco-Roman heritage, in the [folklore of the] Romanians."[96] But even this insistence is a modest one: in Eliade's opinion, folklore—in particular, Romanian folklore—has preserved pre- and protohistoric conceptions of the universe going back as far as the Neolithic period. He frankly stated that the Dacian cult of Zalmoxis and the myths, symbols and rites that constitute Romanian "religious folklore" had roots in a spiritual world that preceded the development of the great civilizations of the Middle East and the Mediterranean.[97]

In *From Zalmoxis to Genghis Khan*, several chapters deal with Romanian popular legends, particularly with two creations of the "poetic genius" of the Romanian people that had already inspired the ethno-philosophy of Lucian

94 Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 61. Today it is clear that the Dacian sanctuaries were covered: Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 274.

95 Schurtz's theory was already marked by many stereotypes of "Aryan studies" from his era and would later be used by the Nazis in the ideology of structures such as the ~~ss~~. See Stefan Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols: Indo-European Mythology as Ideology and Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 207–217.

96 Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 73.

97 Ibid., 9. Eliade also believed that the Balkan peoples had common cultural traits that preceded the "Geto-Thracians" and that were pre-Indo-European. The Thracians had allegedly participated in a "proto-historical culture" whose influence rippled through Central Asia and inspired new cultural forms on the shores of the China Sea (ibid., 183–184).

Blaga. These are the ballad "Mioriţa" and the story about the "Meşterul (Master-builder) Manole," which are seen by Mircea Eliade as possible rudiments of the Getic "joy to die."[98] Eliade regarded Romanian folklore as "superior" to the popular creations in the neighboring (Balkan) countries,[99] and he discovered in it a "cosmic Christianity" (*christianisme cosmique*) projecting the Christological mystery over all nature.[100] In other works as well, Eliade characterized this "cosmic Christianity" as a primitive/archaic folk religion of Europe, which he tended to contrast with what he called the "historical" (so as not to say "Judaized") Christianity.[101]

Today, many aspects of the interpretation Eliade suggested in his 1970 publication can shock, both with their similarity to the Christian Orthodox mythology of the Iron Guard[102] and with their speculative and "initiatic," rather than strictly scholarly, character. Nevertheless, Eliade's work became extremely influential in Romania in the later communist era—the 1970s and 1980s—and even more after the fall of communism. His reconstruction of Geto-Dacian "spirituality" was not entirely new—it was partly grounded in Romanian intellectual and scholarly tradition, and it also further reinforced some of that tradition's elements. For instance, the idea that, in the Daco-Roman/Romanian case, Christianity had a genuinely "popular character," that it was "natural," unlike the late and "official" Christianity of the neighboring peoples (such as the Bulgarians and the Hungarians), is still entrenched in Romanian archaeology.[103] Echoing the exiled Eliade, Romanian ethnologists started

98 Here he referred to an interpretation by the poet and essayist Dan Botta (also an advocate of the interwar fascist ideology), who identified a Thracian background in the two legends: Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 225–226. "Meşterul Manole" is the Romanian version of a widespread legend existing all over the Balkans, Anatolia and the Caucasus. The plot concerns a master builder who walls his wife into a building (the Monastery of Curtea de Argeş in the Romanian version, the Bridge of Arta in the Greek, etc.) so that it stops crumbling. About "Mioriţa," see above.

99 This is specifically the case for the legend of the Meşterul Manole: Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 185. According to Eliade, the story about Manole contains "a scenario of a primordial myth; primordial as long as it represents a creation of spirit that largely precedes the proto-historical and historical eras of the peoples of Southeast Europe" (ibid., 183).

100 Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 241.

101 See Dubuisson, "L'ésoterisme fascisant de Mircea Eliade," 48–50.

102 His study on the legend about the master builder Manole was finished in 1943.

103 See Niculescu ("Archaeology and Nationalism in *The History of the Romanians*," 156), who explains this insistence on a "popular Christianity" without hierarchy by the absence of any evidence about Church organization on the future Romanian territory outside the Roman Empire.

discovering, one after another, "survivals" from Geto-Dacian cults in Romanian folklore. The idea that the pastoral ballad "Mioriţa" had a Thracian foundation was practically unquestionable.[104]

Mircea Eliade's influence is visible in reconstructions of the Thracian religion like that of the historian and archaeologist Ion Horaţiu Crişan in his 1986 monograph on the "spirituality of Geto-Dacians." Crişan approached the Geto-Dacian religion through the famous trifunctional scheme of archaic Indo-European society and the pantheon set forth by the French linguist and historian of religion (and Eliade's "godfather" in the French academic milieus) Georges Dumézil.[105] According to the author, Geto-Dacians had a Great God of uranian-solar type, a Great Goddess of chthonian and agrarian nature and a god of war.[106] In the same era, there was a secret "Zalmoxian" doctrine, reserved for the aristocratic elite and the priests, and centered upon the achievement of immortality through initiatic/mystery rites.[107] Here Dumézil's trifunctionalism and Eliade's emphasis on initiatic cults are combined with a certain influence of Bulgarian Thracology that will be discussed later.

Crişan's work must be put in the context of the 1980s, when the publication of writings on Dacians reached its peak. There was a concrete political motivation behind that: the autochthonist trend of the ideology of Ceauşescu's regime culminated in 1980, when Romania solemnly commemorated "2,050 years since the foundation of the first centralized and independent Dacian state (*primul stat dac centralizat şi independent*) of Burebista."[108] This is the era when the Getic kings Dromichaetes and Burebista and the Dacian Decebalus formed a holy triad in the narrative about the autochthonous origins. Moreover, they formed a dynasty: paradoxically or not, it was during the communist period that the thesis of a dynastic relationship between the different Getic and Dacian rulers, known from ancient sources, was established. Quite emblematic is the fact that the central axis of the new city center of Bucharest that was built

104 E.g., Paul Tutungiu, "The Thracian Mythical Substratum of 'Mioriţa,'" in *Actes du 11e Congrès international de thracologie* (*Bucarest, 4–10 septembre 1976*), vol. 3 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RSR, 1980), 373–379.

105 Dumézil's vision of "Indo-European society" and mythology was certainly shaped by his sympathies towards extreme-right ideologies like that of Action Française. On Eliade and Dumézil, see the second part of *The Study of Religion under the Impact of Fascism*, ed. Horst Junginger (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 303–418 (the chapters by Cristiano Grottanelli, Florin Ţurcanu, Eugen Ciurtin and István Keul).

106 Ion Horaţiu Crişan, *Spiritualitatea geto-dacilor* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1986), 433–434.

107 Crişan, *Spiritualitatea geto-dacilor*, 386–387; cf. Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 288–289.

108 See Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 78–79.

in the 1980s—the Victory of Socialism Avenue (Victoria Socialismului)—had two main branches: Decebal Boulevard and Burebista Boulevard. Sometimes the archaeological findings were also manipulated by the new construction. For instance, the site of Piatra Neamţ-Bâtca Doamnei, unearthed in the late 1950s, was "rebuilt" as an impressive fortress to mark the 2,050-year anniversary of the foundation of the "centralized and independent" Dacian state. Yet specialists had already proved by that time that what was initially thought to be defense walls was only supporting walls for terraces.[109]

Rigorous scholarship is certainly the last concern of the political use of history: in the context of Ceauşescu's rule, autochthonism and isolationism went hand-in-hand with historical megalomania. In 1974 a special genre of literature—known as protochronism (*protocronism*)—was launched by the literary critic Edgar Papu.[110] According to the protochronist writings, Romanians anticipated many of the great Western inventions. The protochronists likewise discovered a whole set of highly sophisticated ideas in the culture of their "Dacian ancestors." For instance, they claimed that the "doctrine" of Zalmoxis was a philosophical system that influenced Pythagoreanism, Platonism and other theories. Through "archaeometric" and "archaeo-astronomic" analyses of the structure of Dacian sanctuaries, they discovered an extremely precise "Dacian calendar," more exact than other ancient calendars. This type of writing was clearly encouraged by the regime, which completely revived the amateur "Thracomania" of Nicolae Densuşianu. As early as 1976, the periodical of the Institute of History of the Romanian Communist Party published an article asserting the pre-Latin character of the Dacian language: the Romans were themselves Geto-Dacians who had previously migrated west; Dacia had its own script since the Bronze Age, and so on. The article did not neglect to present Densuşianu's "proof" in that regard: that the Dacians and the Romans on Trajan's Column speak without interpreters.[111] Densuşianu's tacit rehabilitation was crowned in 1980, when his *Prehistoric Dacia* was republished in

109 Mihăilescu-Bîrliba, "Impact of Political Ideas in Romanian Archaeology before 1989," 157–158. Mihăilescu-Bîrliba particularly criticizes the manipulation of ancient history in the publications of Ilie Ceauşescu, an army general, military historian and brother of the dictator Nicolae Ceauşescu. His writings emphasized the pure and unaltered character of the Romanians as direct descendants of Geto-Dacians, while they treated the Romans as occupiers and oppressors. See also Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 103.

110 On protochronism, see Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism*, 167–214.

111 Lucreţiu Mihăilescu-Bîrliba, "Nationalism in Romanian Archaeology up to 1989," *Studia Antiqua et Archaeologica* 3–4 (1996–1997): 162. See also Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 103.

Săptămâna, a protochronist periodical edited by the xenophobic and anti-Semitic writers Eugen Barbu and Corneliu Vadim Tudor.[112]

A key figure in the revival of the Thracomaniac genre was Iosif Constantin Drăgan, a Romanian businessman based in Italy. His case reveals much about the ideological evolution of the Romanian communist regime. Drăgan openly held fascist beliefs prior to World War II and had been involved in the Legionary movement. For this reason, after the communists took power, he was barred for some time from returning to Romania. However, not only was this ban later lifted (in the early 1970s), but Drăgan was actually received many times by Nicolae Ceauşescu, head of the Romanian Communist Party and state. The success of Drăgan's business in Italy allowed him to set up the "European Foundation Drăgan" (promoting the values of "European" and "Romanian civilization"), publishing houses, print and electronic media, and even a private university that opened in his hometown after the end of communist rule.[113] Drăgan's foundation sponsored a number of Thracological symposia in Italy and Spain attended by Romanian, Bulgarian and Western European academic scholars. An amateur "historian" himself, Drăgan authored books like *We, the Thracians, and Our Multimillenary History*,[114] in which he traced the boundaries of a grandiose ancient Thracian space that occupied all of East and Central Europe, Asia Minor, and parts of Italy and Spain. The self-styled scholar presented the Thracians as Europe's most ancient civilization and Thrace as the original homeland of the Indo-Europeans.

After 1989 Romanian academic scholarship faced serious competition from a boom in Thracomaniac literature. The same ideas were repeatedly expressed in numerous variants. For the experts of the genre, the Geto-Dacians were never Romanized—just the opposite: the Romans were Dacians.[115] Thus the imperial majesty of Rome is brought back into the original homeland of

112 After 1989 Barbu and Tudor founded the ultra-nationalist party Greater Romania (*România Mare*).

113 On Drăgan's case: Boia, *History and Myth in Romanian Consciousness*, 105, 178. Between 1994 and 2004, he also financed the construction, near the town of Orşova on the bank of the Danube, of an immense stone statue of the Dacian king Decebalus (55 meters high). This is the tallest stone sculpture in Europe.

114 This is the English title of the book published in 1976 in Milan by Drăgan's publishing house, Nagard. In the same year the monograph was edited in Romania: Iosif Constantin Drăgan, *Noi, Tracii. Istoria multimilenară a neamului românesc*, vol. 1 (Craiova: Scrisul românesc, 1976).

115 For instance, Gheorghe Iscru, *Geto-Dacii: Naţiunea matcă din spaţiul carpato-danubo-balcanic* (Bucharest: Nicolae Bălcescu, 1995). The autochthonist and even anti-Roman attitude of the Thracomaniac movement culminated in the publication of the Romanian-

the Latins. Iosif Constantin Drăgan discovered that at least half of the Roman emperors were of "Thraco-Illyro-Dacian" origin—a "fact" that is certainly not so groundbreaking, as the Romans in general are supposed to have the same origin. The "supreme spirituality" and religion of the Romanian ancestors was especially valued. Some of the recent "researchers" even founded a new "interdisciplinary science" called "Zalmoxology." It claims to combine history, religion studies, ethnology, studies of folklore, the "history of mentalities," and so on.[116] Sarmizegetusa Regia, the Dacian "capital," attracted the interest of all kinds of enthusiasts who named it "the Romanian Stonehenge." Its great round sanctuary and andesite "solar altar" seem particularly suited for archaeo-astronomical measurements "proving" the sophisticated astronomical knowledge of Dacians who used a specific solar calendar.[117]

This kind of publication is easy to ridicule. Yet strikingly, in the field of Thracian studies it is often difficult to distinguish between professional scholarship and charlatan myths.[118] This problem can be illustrated on many levels and with diverse examples. Sometimes hypotheses from "serious scholarship" nurture Thracomaniac theses, and vice versa. For instance, the idea of a Dacian solar calendar, so exploited in the amateur writings, was first suggested by the professional archaeologist Hadrian Daicoviciu.[119] A specific characteristic of the Romanian treatment of the Thracians/Geto-Dacians (incidentally, running counter to the Bulgarian interpretation) is the insistence that these peoples were *literate*. This thesis was established during Ceauşescu's rule by professionals, including Ion Horaţiu Crişan, who indicated that the Geto-Dacians used Greek and Latin script. Yet Crişan also "discovered" Geto-Dacian literature, poetry, astronomy, philosophy, ethics, Geto-Dacian education, Geto-Dacian

American physician Napoleon Săvescu, *We Are Not Descendants of Rome: Noi nu suntem urmaşii Romei* (Bucharest: Intact, 2002).

116 Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 383.

117 See Iharka Szűcs-Csillik et al., "Case Studies of Archaeoastronomy in Romania," *Archeologia e Calcolatori* 21 (2010): 325–337.

118 As already mentioned, academic scholars from different countries agreed to participate in the conferences organized by Drăgan's foundation. Drăgan's book *Dacia's Imperial Millennium* was also edited in Bulgarian by Sofia University's publishing house, and the Bulgarian scholar Alexander Fol wrote an approving foreword (although with slight reservations): Yosif Konstantin Dragan, *Imperskoto hilyadoletie na dunavskite traki* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 1992). This was obviously a gesture of gratitude for the conferences in Italy and Spain, which Bulgarian specialists attended as well.

119 See his influential book *Dacia de la Burebista la cucerirea romană* (Cluj: Dacia, 1972). Cf. Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 347.

botanics, physics, technical thought and inventions.[120] During the 1970s and 1980s, the professional standards of research were obviously contaminated by protochronist imperatives. Recently, the thesis that the Thracians did not have their own script was contested by new publications on the famous Sinaia lead plates (*Tăbliţele de la Sinaia*), allegedly discovered in the 1870s during the construction of the Peleş castle and considered by most academic scholars to be modern forgeries.[121] Yet some scholars accepted their authenticity, and others even claimed that the Sumerian alphabet originated from the territory of modern Romania.[122]

But the boundary between "serious scholarship" and pure speculation is most permeable in the area of Thracian "spirituality" and religion. We need only recall that the cult of Zalmoxis—so often evoked and discussed over the last century or so that it became a real obsession of the Romanian discourse on "national specificity" and of Romanian Thracological research—is not attested to by any archaeological and epigraphical findings.[123] Thus there is a good chance that all the "data" about Zalmoxis from the ancient Greek and Latin texts represent a purely literary tradition that grew exclusively out of the short account of Herodotus. At least, this is the main conclusion of the voluminous study on the topic by the Romanian and French scholar Dan Dana. This means that the image of the Getae, who believed in immortality or practiced rites of immortalization (*athanatizontes*), must be seen instead as a figure of the Greek imagination of cultural otherness—as was also recently stated by Romanian classical scholar Zoe Petre.[124] There is indeed a problem with the scarcity of information on Getic and Dacian religious beliefs. Even if Eliade is

120 Crişan, *Spiritualitatea geto-dacilor*, 286–343.

121 See the book by the engineer Dan Romalo, *Cronică apocrifă pe plăci de plumb?* (Bucharest: Arvin Press, 2003).

122 This is the case for Sorin Paliga of the Department of Slavic Languages at the University of Bucharest. He referred to the Neolithic signs of the Vinča-Turdaş culture, more precisely to the Tărtăria tablets: Sorin Paliga, "The Tablets of Tărtăria—an Enigma? A Reconsideration and Further Perspectives," *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 19 (1993): 9–43.

123 Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 427.

124 Petre, *Practica nemuririi*, 387. However, even as cautious a researcher as Zoe Petre accepts Eliade's theory about the cult of Zalmoxis as initiatic and related to a belief in immortality, and even his idea of initiatic brotherhoods of young soldiers identifying themselves with wolves (Ibid., 276). In the story of Zalmoxis, Petre finds traces of the ancient "Indo-European" belief in immortality reached through magic practices and drinks like the Indian *soma* (ibid., 178). The clichés of "Indo-European" comparative mythology are thus visible in Petre's work as well. Incidentally, it is not clear why the magic potions of immortality should necessarily be "Indo-European"—the word *elixir* is of Arabic origin.

convinced that "as everywhere else in the provinces of the Roman Empire, the autochthonous religious realities survived, more or less transformed, not only the process of Romanization but also that of Christianization,"[125] there is a surprising lack of data about the Dacian cults in the Roman province of Dacia.[126]

The particular glorification and idealization of Dacians and Getae, "the bravest and the most just of all the Thracians," in Romanian discourse and scholarship is vulnerable as well. Here it is a question particularly of Pârvan's belief in the moral and spiritual superiority of the "Geto-Dacian nation" over the other Thracians. The *topoi* used in ancient Greek literature to describe "barbarians" (Scythians, Persians, Carthaginians, Celts, etc.) and abundantly employed for the Thracians (excessive drinking, eating, laziness, promiscuity) are by no means limited to the "southern Thracians," as Pârvan imagined.[127] His image of the Getae as a simple peasant people, abhorring excesses, is not necessarily confirmed by the later archaeological discoveries. In the Getic area, archaeologists have found armaments of precious metals and lavish burials dating from the time of the wars between the Getic king Dromichaetes and the Macedonian ruler of Thrace Lysimachus (the beginning of the third century BCE).[128]

Finally, the very idea of Geto-Dacian "national unity," an anticipation of the Romanian one, is far from being unproblematic. It can be considered a classic case of "methodological nationalism," which particularly contaminates the interpretation of archaeological discoveries. Although Romanian archaeologists and historians quickly linked the Dacian fortresses in the southern Transylvanian area (Munţii Orăştiei) to the reign of Burebista, this attribution is highly disputable. On the one hand, the latter is unequivocally defined by the sources as a Geta. On the other, his military and political activities were concentrated in the Pontic and Mediterranean zone. This aspect largely puts

125 Eliade, *De Zalmoxis à Gengis-Khan*, 73.

126 Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 275, 291, 353; Sorin Nemeti, *Sincretismul religios în Dacia romană* (Cluj: Presa Universitară Clujeană, 2005).

127 Emphasized by Petre, *Practica nemuririi*, 177.

128 Petre, *Practica nemuririi*, 192, referring to publications of Alexandru Vulpe. This is the case for the Sveshtari tomb, discovered in 1982 in northeast Bulgaria. On the other hand, the era of Burebista (first century BCE) and Decebalus (the first to the beginning of the second century CE), the "heyday of Geto-Dacian civilization," is characterized by crude burials, far from the monumentality of the tombs from the fourth to the third century BCE and with a drastic decrease in the number of tombs discovered by archaeologists. Of course, the Romanian specialists tend to explain this fact by citing religious reasons: Valeriu Sîrbu and Gelu Florea, *Les Géto-Daces. Iconographie et imaginaire* (Cluj: Centre d'études transylvaines, 2000), 85.

into question the reconstruction of a "dynastic" continuity between Burebista and Decebalus as well.[129]

Since the late nineteenth century, in the Romanian context, Thracian studies have been expected to give the appropriate answers to a number of questions of "national importance" and to confirm pre-established theses. The ancient Getae and Dacians have been interpreted in terms of unity, autochthony, originality, and moral and spiritual superiority. They were supposed to demonstrate Romanian historical continuity and the right of Bucharest over certain territories, as well as Romanians' supposed national distinctiveness. Yet despite all these claims, ancient Thracians have served more than just the Romanian cause. Other national ideologies likewise sought to demonstrate spiritual originality, archaic background and the legitimacy of territorial rights by citing this silent ancient people.

From Barbarians to Prehistoric Hellenes: The Ancient Thracians in Modern Greece

"The bright variety of fall's last colors, the brooks that at frequent intervals streaked the land, the groups of trees and houses that stood picturesquely by their banks, the tombs of the Odrysians rising up here and there like huge, cone-shaped mounds, not only broke up the flat monotony of the plain's features, but also gave that endless picture an extraordinary, wonderful unity and variety."[130] This description of Eastern Thrace's autumn landscape by the modern Greek writer Georgios Vizyenos would be somewhat cryptic to a broader Greek audience, with its reference to the Odrysian tumuli (*ton Odryson tymvoi*). These are the numerous burial mounds of the mighty Thracian tribe that inhabited this territory in ancient times. Vizyenos, himself a native of the region, was deeply interested in its ancient inhabitants and sought to discover traces of their beliefs and culture in the local popular traditions. He published an important study on the tradition of *Kalogeroi*—the carnival with explicit sexual symbolism performed by masked men before the period of Lent—and its relationship to ancient Dionysian rituals.[131]

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129 Petre, *Practica nemuririi*, 274–275, 286–287.

130 From Georgios Vizyenos, "The Only Journey of His Life" (1884), translated by William F. Wyatt and published in *My Mother's Sin and Other Stories* (Hanover and London: University Press of New England, 1988), 180.

131 Georgios Vizyinos, "Oi Kalogeroi kai i latreia tou Dionysou en Thraki," *Thrakiki Epetiris* 1 (1897): 102–127 (first published in the periodical *Evdomas* in 1888).

However, ancient Thracian culture and its "rudiments" in modern Greek folklore remained a scholarly concern of authors, most of whom came from the region of Thrace, like Vizyenos. The Turkish-Greek and Bulgarian-Greek population exchanges in the 1920s put an end to "Hellenism" in Eastern (Turkish) Thrace and in what in Greece is called Northern Thrace (*Voreia Thraki*)—a term referring to the former Eastern Rumelia, which has been part of Bulgaria since 1885. Since the interwar period, "Greek Thrace" has shrunk to the small Western Thrace—a region with a large Muslim community exempted from the Greek-Turkish population exchange stipulated by the Treaty of Lausanne (1923). Although a hinterland of imperial Constantinople, a land populated by a numerous Greek community and homeland of important intellectuals, clergymen, and benefactors, Thrace was marginal to the Atheno-centric modern Greek state before part of it was annexed by the latter. But the symbolic shrinking of "Greek Thrace" to the three northeast Greek geographical departments with a tangible presence of Islam, stuck between Turkey and Bulgaria, did not make the region less marginal. A survey of the representation of Greek historical regions on 517 Greek postage stamps finds Thrace in last place: only 2 percent of the stamps bear images from this region. At the same time, its western neighbor, with which it is often associated historically and on an administrative level—Macedonia—is indisputably in first place (24 percent, more than Athens with its 18 percent!).[132] Today, the amount of Greek scholarly and other literature produced on Thrace certainly cannot compare to the ocean of publications on Macedonia. Moreover, a mere glance at the titles related to Thrace shows that frequently the main subject is the local Muslim population—a sensitive topic in the context of the uneasy Greek-Turkish relations.

And quite understandably, the Odrysians and other Thracian tribes and kingdoms never achieved popularity in modern Greece. Nurtured by European philhellenism, Greek nationalism has, from the beginning, been articulated around the idea of a direct link between ancient and modern Greece.[133] Amid

132 Basil Gounaris, "The Politics of Currency: Stamps, Coins, Banknotes, and the Circulation of Modern Greek Tradition," in *The Usable Past: Greek Metahistories*, eds. Keith Brown and Yannis Hamilakis (Lanham, MD; Boulder, CO; New York; and Oxford: Lexington Books, 2003), 69–84.

133 Despite the fundamental reference to Orthodox Christianity as well. It would be vain to try to list the publications on the topic. More recent studies include Vassilis Gounaris and Yannis Frangopoulos, "La quête de la nation grecque moderne et le 'cas grec' comme un cas paradoxal de la construction du fait national contemporain," *Socio-anthropologie* 23–24 (2009): 115–153; and the collective volume *The Making of Modern Greece: Nationalism, Romanticism, and the Uses of the Past* (*1797–1896*), eds. Roderick Beaton and David Ricks (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2009).

the illustrious achievements of ancient Hellenic civilization, with their fundamental significance to the self-understanding of "European civilization," the obscure Thracians, who probably did not leave behind a single written text, might simply be difficult to notice. Furthermore, they were unanimously described as "barbarians" by the ancient authors, whose point of view was reproduced in the classicist reading of history by the first modern Greek intellectuals. Thus, when Adamantios Korais rejected the Roman self-designation (*Romaioi*/*Romioi*) of his compatriots and suggested the "correct" ethnonym (*Graikoi*, according to him), he explained that the Roman throne was often occupied by Thracians and "other such thrice-barbarian rulers (*trisvarvarous despotas*)": Bulgarians, Illyrians, Triballoi and Armenians.[134] More than eight decades later, Vizyenos was still able to ironize other Greeks' rejection of "barbarian Thracians" like himself.[135]

In the meantime, modern Greek authors readily attributed Thracian ancestry to their neighboring peoples. The Vlachs and especially the Bulgarians were often associated with the Thracians. For instance, in the late eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth century, the enlightener Athanasios Psalidas believed that in ancient times the latter were called Thracians.[136] Thus for a certain time, the term "Thracians" served as a "classicist bridge" between the Greeks and their northern neighbors: these were deemed as close, but also as different, as the ancient Thracians, Dacians and Illyrians were to the ancient Greeks. Terms such as "Thraco-Bulgarians" (*Thrakovoulgaroi*) and even "Thraco-Serbo-Bulgarians" were commonly used until the 1860s.[137] Similarly, the region of Thrace (just like Macedonia and Epirus) was not universally included in the mappings of the Greek space.[138]

But in the 1870s, the terms "Thracians" and "Bulgarians" were definitively separated from each other. The reason for that was the very advance of Bulgarian nationalism (until then, largely underestimated from a Greek point of view) and, more concretely, the establishment of a Bulgarian Church (the Exarchate) in 1870. The problem was, more precisely, that the latter started claiming

134 Adamantios Korais, *Salpisma polemistirion* (Alexandria, 1801), 8–9.

135 In his poem "To Symvoulion ton Grammateon," in *Atthides aurai* (1884).

136 Gounaris, *Ta Valkania ton Ellinon*, 39.

137 Ioannis Koliopoulos, *Istoria tis Ellados apo to 1800. To ethnos, i politeia kai i koinonia ton Ellinon*, vol. 1 (Athens: Vanias, 2000), 77–78; Vasilis Gounaris, "I Makedonia ton Ellinon: Apo to Diafotismo eos ton A' Pankosmio Polemo," in *Makedonikes tautotites sto hrono. Diepistimonikes prosengiseis*, eds. Ioannis Stefandis, Vlasis Vlasidis and Evangelos Kofos (Athens: Pataki, 2008), 191–192; Gounaris, *Ta Valkania ton Ellinon*, 115, 157.

138 At the beginning of the nineteenth century, it was still represented by its medieval name, "Romania": Gounaris, "I Makedonia ton Ellinon," 187–188.

Macedonia and Thrace for its diocese—lands considered vital both for the Constantinople Patriarchate's jurisdiction on the Balkans and for the realization of the irredentist Megali Idea of the Hellenic Kingdom.[139] Since then, the term "Thracians" (*Thrakes*) was reserved for the Greek population of Thrace, covering Greek-speakers but also the segment of the Bulgarian-speaking population that remained affiliated with the Constantinople Patriarchate. It was in this context that Greek ideologists started "rehabilitating" the ancient Thracians and constructing a narrative about the millennia-old Hellenic character of Thrace.

In fact, even before the creation of the Exarchate, the growth of Bulgarian nationalism, as well as of its claims of historical continuity in Thrace, was perceived and resented by Greek intellectuals coming from the region of Philippoupoli/Plovdiv—an area with an urban Greek but predominantly Bulgarian peasant population and with an increasingly significant Bulgarian national movement within the city in the 1850s and 1860s. Most likely, the first Greek author who left behind works on ancient Thracians was Vlasios Skordelis, a teacher and historian from Stenimachos (today Asenovgrad in Bulgaria, a formerly Greek town not far from Plovdiv).

In 1865 he published his speech *On Thrace*, meant to demonstrate the Greek character of the region since prehistoric times. Skordelis proposed that Hellenes, Thracians, Macedonians, Thesprotians, Illyrians and Pelasgians were "different branches of the same tree" and that Thracians and Greeks were thus united by "the closest possible relationship, or rather the common origin [*i stenotati syngeneia, i mallon, i koini katagogi*]."[140] According to Skordelis, this relationship is proved by the fact that the Greeks borrowed their music and religion (*thriskeia*) from the Thracians (*Thrakes*). Orpheus, the most important mythical musician and founder of sacred rites and mysteries, was Thracian. He also participated in the expedition of the Argonauts: for Skordelis, all this proved that he was not foreign to the Greeks. The same was the case for Musaeus, Thamyris, Eumolpus and other mythological figures. Skordelis also quoted ancient sources that attested to a Thracian population inside Greece, including in Attica. Conversely, he exposed the importance of the Greek colonization of Thrace—both of the coastlines and, according to Skordelis, the internal territories. He did not forget the data about Greek/Athenian-Thracian

139 On the Megali Idea: see Paschalis Kitromilides, "On the Intellectual Content of Greek Nationalism: Paparrigopoulos, Byzantium and the Great Idea," in *Byzantium and the Modern Greek Identity*, eds. David Ricks and Paul Magdalino (London: Ashgate, 1998), 25–33.

140 Vlasios Skordelis, *Peri Thrakis* (Constantinople, 1865), 7, 13.

military alliances and indicated that Thrace finally "assimilated" to the Greek language and culture after Alexander the Great. His conclusion was that the Thracians were as Greek as the Athenians and the Spartans.

Concerning the Thracian tongue (different enough so that ancient Greeks and Thracians used interpreters to communicate), Skordelis thought that it was simply an ancient Pelasgian form of Greek and that its difference from the latter was due to the evolution and the "refinement" of the language among the "more southern Greeks."[141] The language problem logically led the author to address the modern situation in Thrace and the fact that much of the local population spoke not Greek but Bulgarian. Skordelis stated that this fact did not prove the Bulgarian character of the local population, because "language is not always a certain marker of somebody's ethnic race (*tis ethnotitos phylis tinos*)."[142] The Thracians lost their "mother tongue," Greek, as a result of foreign oppression, through the endless incursions and robberies launched by the barbarian Bulgarians since the Middle Ages.

In his *Thracian Meditations*, published in 1877 in Leipzig, the same author presented a some information from ancient writers about Thracian tribes (particularly the Odrysians) as well as geographical descriptions of Thrace. This time, Skordelis showed special interest in the ancient Thracian language, especially in the names of Thracian "cities" (*poleis*). He emphasized the Thracian origin of certain second components of designations of inhabited places (*-iskos*, *-bria*, -[*d*]*iza*/-[*d*]*izos*, *-para*) and tried to provide an etymology for them through comparisons with Sanskrit, etc. Nevertheless, this did not lead him to question the "closest relationship" of the Thracians to the Greeks. On the one hand, the latter had imported many cults and gods and music and poetry from the Thracians. On the other, the Thracians were themselves relatives of the prehistoric population of Greece, the Pelasgians.[143]

Put forth by the teacher from Stenimachos, these postulates would enjoy an amazing longevity in Greek scholarship. However, it must be noted that Skordelis did not invent most of these "discoveries": he quoted Western European, particularly German, authors who had already researched ancient Thrace. For instance, the thesis about the link between Thracians and

141 Skordelis, *Peri Thrakis*, 21–22.

142 Ibid., 26.

143 Vlasios Skordelis, *Meditationes Thracicae. Thrakikai meletai* (Leipzig: Walter Wiegand, 1877), 39–42.

Pelasgians—itself suggested by ancient sources—was already promoted by the German Bernhard Giseke.[144]

Identical conclusions were reached at the same time by the Constantinopolitan teacher Iroklis Vasiadis (of Epirote origin). He presented sources on various tribes of ancient Thrace and also asserted their affinity (*syngeneia*) to the Greeks. Just like the latter, the Thracians were descendants of the branch of the Aryans that was called Pelasgians or "Thraco-Pelasgians," or "Graeco-Italians."[145] Together with Skordelis, Vasiadis referred to the historian of ancient Greek religion Karl Otfried Müller and to other modern authors who indicated that the Thracians must be identical to Greeks, as it was inconceivable that those who introduced the Muses and mystery cults to Greece—Orpheus, Thamyris, Musaeus and Eumolpus—were foreigners. According to these scholars and to Vasiadis, the cult of Dionysus was also Thracian in origin—a thesis that would soon be "cemented" by the authority of the German classical philologist Erwin Rohde.

However, the Greek authors were not interested in ancient Thrace out of purely scholarly motives. Their primary task was to reject the Bulgarian allegations that appeared in the meantime that the ancient inhabitants of Macedonia and Thrace were not Greek but Slav-Bulgarian. They knew the writings of the revolutionary Georgi Rakovski that dreamed up a "Vedic" ancestry for Bulgarians. And they were especially eager to discredit the publications of the Bosnian Stefan Verković, especially the *Slavic Veda*, a collection of texts that were allegedly popular chants of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (Pomaks) that evinced a vivid memory of ancient Thracian and Macedonian mythological or historical figures such as Orpheus and Alexander the Great.[146] The Greek polemicists clearly understood the message of these publications: it was not

144 Bernhard Giseke, *Thrakisch-pelasgische Stämme der Balkanhalbinsel und ihre Wanderungen in mythischer Zeit* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1858).

145 Iroklis Vasiadis, *Thrakikos, itoi, peri tis Archaias Thrakis kai ton laon autis* (Constantinople, 1872), 10. In the case of "Graeco-Italians," Vasiadis referred to Theodor Mommsen's *History of Rome*, where the German historian tried to demonstrate the close relationship of the Italic peoples to the Greeks.

146 *Veda Slovena*(*h*), whose first volume was published in 1874 in Belgrade and the second in 1881 in St. Petersburg. The publication was accepted as authentic by a number of European and Russian scholars. Later it was proved that the volumes contained contemporary forgeries, probably by Verković's informer, Ivan Gologanov, a Bulgarian teacher from the region of Drama, Macedonia. On Greek reactions, see also Gounaris, *Ta Valkania ton Ellinon*, 261–262. Vasiadis's work was published before the *Slavic Veda* but after Verković presented in Moscow the first such song—about the "wedding of Orpheus" (1867). This publication triggered the first round of debate.

the Greeks but the Bulgarians from Macedonia and Thrace who were "first," autochthonous in these lands. Thus they should rule these lands in the future.

Both Skordelis and Vasiadis were especially opposed to the Bulgarian claims.[147] They demonstrated the Greek presence in ancient Thrace, backing up their assertions with quotations from the founder of Thracian archaeology, Frenchman Albert Dumont,[148] who had otherwise accepted the authenticity of the *Slavic Veda*. In 1897 an archaeological study on Thrace was also published by Christos Tsountas, one of the most important Greek archaeologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century and a native of Skordelis's hometown (Stenimachos/Asenovgrad).[149]

By this time, both this town and Philippoupoli/Plovdiv, as well as a number of Greek centers on the western Black Sea coast, were already part of Bulgaria. At the beginning of the twentieth century, the parts of Thrace that still remained under Ottoman rule witnessed harsh Greek-Bulgarian propaganda competition. It reached its peak after the Balkan Wars and especially after World War I, which led to Thrace changing hands several times. However, the argument asserting Greece's "rights over Thrace" relied mostly on the substantial Greek population in the urban centers of the region, rather than the fuzzy connection between ancient Thracians and Greeks.[150] Mainstream historiography, shaped in the late nineteenth century by Constantine Paparrigopoulos, showed little interest in Thracians. In his famous *History of the Greek Nation* (the first volume of which was published in 1860), the father of modern Greek historiography mentioned the "initial affinity" (*archiki syngeneia*) between Greeks, Thracians and also Illyrians. However, this reference seems extremely short in comparison with the rest of his monumental work.[151]

Nevertheless, the Greek-Bulgarian debate over modern Thrace certainly catalyzed the scholarly works on the history of the region, including ancient Thrace. The evolution is clear if one compares the first edition of the *History*

147 Vasiadis was also scandalized by Ilarion Makariopolski, the leader of the Bulgarian Church movement, who allegedly told him that Orpheus was an ancestor of the Bulgarians and that ancient Greeks received poetry and music from the Thracians, in other words, from the Bulgarians. See Vasiadis, *Thrakikos*, 14.

148 The archaeological and epigraphic investigations of Albert Dumont in Thrace, published in different periodicals, were collected in *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'épigraphie*, eds. Théophile Homolle and Léon Heuzey (Paris: Thorin, 1892).

149 Christos Tsountas, "I proïstoriki Thraki," *Thrakiki epetiris* (1897).

150 Unlike in the case of Macedonia, where the historical references to ancient Macedonians were always present: see Gounaris, *Ta Valkania ton Ellinon*, 285.

151 Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, *Istoria tou ellinikou ethnous*, vol. 1 (Athens: Pavlidou, 1860), 58–59.

of Paparrigopoulos with the 1932 edition produced by Pavlos Karolidis, Paparrigopoulos's successor at the chair of Greek history at the University of Athens. In the parts of the first volume that he wrote, Karolidis gave Thracians special attention.[152] He treated them as an "Aryan" people related to the Pelasgians—he likewise used the term "Thraco-Pelasgians" (*Thrakopelasgoi*)—and thus to the Greeks as well as to other peoples (Illyrians and Phrygians, and also Albanians and Armenians). Like Skordelis and Vasiadis, he emphasized that the first Greek musicians and poets were Thracians (Orpheus, Musaeus, Thamyris, Eumolpus); the last one was among the founders of the most important mystery cult in ancient Greece—the Eleusinian mysteries—as witnessed by the Eumolpidai, a family of priests at Eleusis. The members of a family of priests in Delphi, the most important oracle of the Hellenic world were called Thrakidai; the orgiastic cult of Dionysus was introduced in Greece by the Thracians; the same was true of the Orphic cults.[153]

In this way, Karolidis connected the Thracians to the most ancient era in Greek history—he discusses them in a preface dedicated to the prehistory of Greece—and particularly to the elements in Greek religion considered the most ancient. Thrace was imagined as the cradle of all sorts of mystery rites and orgiastic cults. In fact, this thesis was not new: it had been reproduced by a number of foreign authors. Following ancient writers such as Plutarch (*Life of Alexander*, 2), Karl Otfried Müller even linked the Greek word *thrēskeia* ("religion," "worship") to the ethnonym *Thrakes*/*Thrēikes* ("Thracians"): he was simply quoted by Karolidis.[154] The extremely ancient character of the "religion of the Thraco-Pelasgians" was confirmed by the supposed presence of a cult of the Great Mother Goddess—a topic specially discussed by Karolidis. Lastly, the historian attacked the theory that the Thracians were Slavs/Bulgarians and, in particular, the collection of "Orphic chants" published by Verković—the same ones that provoked the indignation of Vasiadis.

Appearing in an edition of Paparrigopoulos's authoritative *History*, these points achieved a certain popularity. But in fact, they were largely inspired by

152 See Pavlos Karolidis, "Eisagogi," in Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, *Istoria tou ellinikou ethnous*, vol. 1, part 1 (Athens: Eleutheroudakis, 1932), 124–133, and Pavlos Karolidis, "Parartima," in Konstantinos Paparrigopoulos, *Istoria tou ellinikou ethnous*, vol. 1, part 2 (Athens: Eleutheroudakis, 1932), 420–423.

153 The preserved names of Thracian mythical figures and of Thracian settlements also allegedly prove the Thracian language's close relationship to Greek: Karolidis, "Eisagogi," 48–53. See Karolidis, "Peri Thrakon kai Thrakis," *Thrakika* (1929): 261–264.

154 Georgios Vizyenos declared that Greek religion came from Thrace: Eleni Spathari-Begliti, *Istoriki kai koinoniki laographia Anatolikis Thrakis* (Athens: Livani, 1997), 30.

publications of Greeks from Thrace who were not necessarily professional historians. Since the late 1920s, the idea that Thrace had a Greek identity in ancient times (and, in general, throughout history) has been asserted by the publications of two institutions established by patriotic activists, intellectuals and scholars coming from the parts of Thrace under Bulgarian and Turkish domination. These were the Thracian Center (*Thrakiko kentro*) and the Association for Thracian Studies (*Etaireia thrakikon meleton*), founded in 1927 and in 1937, respectively. The periodicals of these institutions—*Thrakika* and the *Archive of the Thracian Ethnographic and Linguistic Treasure* (*Archeion tou thrakikou laographikou kai glossikou thisavrou*, henceforth cited as ΑΤΗΛGΤΗ)—declared their task to be saving "the soul of Thrace."[155] To that end they recorded memories of Greek refugees from Thrace and popular chants, published information on Thrace's archaeology and architecture, and presented the richness of the local dialects and particular folk traditions. Contributors to the two journals were especially concerned about countering claims in Bulgarian publications involving the legitimacy of Sofia's "rights" to Thrace (including Greek Western Thrace). They felt such claims "twisted" the historical truth.[156]

On the pages of *Thrakika*, the history of Thracian Hellenism was researched systematically (and perhaps in the most professional way) by Kosmas Myrtilos Apostolidis, philologist and historian from Philippoupoli/Plovdiv.[157] Among Apostolidis's interests was ancient Thrace. In his work *On Ancient Thracians* (1928), he dealt with the origin of this Indo-European (or Aryan, according to the terminology of the time) people. Following Giseke and the existing Greek works on "Thraco-Pelasgians," Apostolidis also concluded that the Thracians, despite their "undoubtedly barbarian" (*anamfisvititos varvara*) mores and habits, were relatives of the Proto-Hellenes.[158] However, Apostolidis did not simply repeat the established theses: he was aware of recent trends in the scholarship on Thracians published abroad (with authors such as Wilhelm Tomaschek and Paul Kretschmer)[159] and introduced a series of new points. He dealt, for instance, with the affinity between Thracians and the Phrygians

155 *Thrakika* (1928): iv, v. In 1992 the two organizations merged.

156 On these polemics: Theodora Dragostinova, *Between Two Motherlands: Nationality and Emigration among the Greeks of Bulgaria, 1900–1949* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011), 231–236.

157 He gave special attention to the history of his native city: see his posthumously published book *I tis Philippoupoleos istoria apo ton archaiotaton mechri ton kath'imas chronon* (Athens: Enosis ton apantachou ex Anatolikis Romylias Ellinon, 1959).

158 Kosmas Myrtilos Apostolidis, "Peri ton archaion Thrakon," *Thrakika* (1928): 81.

159 Tomaschek, *Die Alten Thraker*; Paul Kretschmer, *Einleitung in die Geschichte der griechischen Sprache* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck ja Ruprecht, 1896).

in Asia Minor, with the Thracian "thalassocracy" (prehistoric rule of the sea), with the question of the pre-Indo-European population of Thrace and the influences of Trojan, Mycenaean and other prehistoric "Greek" civilizations over Thracians. He likewise treated the Thracians as "exporters" of religious cults, music and poetry into Greece, as well as of elements of material culture. In fact, Apostolidis referred here to the results of archaeological excavations in Bulgaria and to works of Bulgarian scholars such as Rafail Popov, Gavril Katsarov and Bogdan Filov.

However, the insistence on the close affinity between Thracians and Greeks had to resolve the following paradox, already faced by Paparrigopoulos: many ancient authors indeed indicated a series of Thracian "imports" into Greek religion, but at the same time, the Thracians were depicted as wild barbarians, to whom any kind of culture was foreign. This fact led some German scholars (such as Karl Otfried Müller, Otto Abel and Bernhard Giseke) to distinguish between cultured "prehistoric Thracians" and uncultured "historical Thracians" from the classical and subsequent periods. The paradox was resolved through the theory of Eduard Gerhard[160] and other authors: the "later," "historical Thracians" were those ancient Pelasgians who preceded the Greeks and whose cultural inventions were adopted by the latter, but who, for some reason, remained on the same cultural level—not developing like the Greeks—or even lapsed back into barbarity. In the same way, Paparrigopoulos believed that the affinity between Thracians and Greeks disappeared as a result of Greece's cultural development. Apostolidis repeated this point.[161]

The historian from Philippoupoli also researched the language of the ancient Thracians and suggested an interpretation somewhat more nuanced and more informed in terms of knowledge of the foreign scholarship on the topic than the previous dogmatic indications of the "close affinity" of Thracian and Greek.[162] Echoing authors such as Tomaschek and Kretschmer, he believed that the closest relatives of the Thracian language were Phrygian and Armenian; Apostolidis united them under the term "Thraco-Phrygian family."[163] However, a certain patriotic motivation is visible again: Apostolidis's

160 Eduard Gerhard, *Über Griechenlands Volksstämme und Stammgottheiten* (Berlin, 1853).

161 Apostolidis, "Peri ton archaion Thrakon," 77–79. Thracians also experienced "barbarian" influences coming from the north, from the west and from Asia: see Apostolidis, "Peri ton ithon kai ethimon ton archaion Thrakon," *ATHLGTH* 20 (1955): 49–80.

162 Kosmas Myrtilos Apostolidis, "Peri tis glossis ton Thrakon," *Thrakika* (1932): 181–235, continuation in *Thrakika* (1933): 71–112.

163 Apostolidis, "Peri tis glossis ton Thrakon" (1933), 110. Already Herodotus (*Histories*, vol. 7, 73) had defined the Armenians as "Phrygian colonists."

basic preoccupation was to reject the special connection of Thracian to Slavic (and Lithuanian) postulated by some European scholars and to reaffirm its special connection to Greek. According to Apostolidis, initially, "Thraco-Phygian" was closely related to the latter but, over time, the Thracian language became estranged (*apexenothi*) from Greek. A particular problem here was the discovery, in 1912, of the golden ring from Ezerovo, in Bulgaria's Plovdiv region, written in Greek characters but in an unknown language. The inscription received diverse interpretations and "translations" by Bulgarian linguists who accepted that the language was ancient Thracian.[164] But Kosmas Myrtilos Apostolidis attempted to show that the ring was actually written in a corrupted version of Greek.[165]

Apostolidis likewise insisted that the use of Thracian was gradually replaced by Greek during Macedonian rule and that it completely disappeared after the Roman conquest, of course in favor of Greek. In that point, his main purpose was to dismiss the Bulgarian claim that Thracian was still spoken by the time the Slavs arrived in the Balkans. An emblematic example of this was the Bulgarian name of the native city of Apostolidis—Plovdiv. It was a name introduced by Bulgarian activists in the nineteenth century but pretending to be an old Slavic form of Pulpudeva, the Thracian name of Philippoupolis, as attested to by the Roman-Gothic historian Jordanes. Apostolidis did his best to deconstruct this argument in detail.[166]

Finally, Kosmas Myrtilos Apostolidis gave special attention to the problems of Thracian religion.[167] He emphasized that the Thracians venerated the same gods as the Hellenes: their deities bore pan-Hellenic names (Apollo, Zeus, Hera, Artemis, etc.) and were, in general, depicted according to Greek iconographic conventions. Thus Apostolidis rejected the thesis, supported by the Bulgarian Gavril Katsarov, that under the Greek names of Thracian gods, one must suppose the existence of purely Thracian deities that have only been identified with their Greek analogues by Greek writers. Apostolidis also dismissed the idea, repeated by Katsarov, that certain epicleses of Greek gods (e.g., Zbelsourdos/Zbelthiourdos in the case of Zeus) were Thracian gods, identified with their Greek counterparts. He attempted to demonstrate that these were nothing more than alternative names.

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164 The first attempt at translation belonged to the linguist Dimităr Dechev: Dimiter Detschew, "Die thrakische Inschrift auf dem Goldringe von Ezerovo (Bulgarien)," *Glotta* 7 (1916): 81–86.

165 Apostolidis, "Peri tis glossis ton Thrakon" (1932), 197–223. See also Konstantinos Kourtidis, "I epigraphi tou chrysou daktylidiou tou choriou Ezerovo," *Thrakika* (1932): 72–83.

166 Apostolidis, "Peri tis glossis ton Thrakon" (1932), 227–231.

167 Kosmas Myrtilos Apostolidis, "Peri tis thriskeias ton Thrakon," *Thrakika* (1934): 41–59.

Yet Apostolidis was not able to negate completely the existence of Thracian deities whose origin and identity was confirmed by ancient authors. Just like the previous modern Greek scholars, he emphasized that Thracians "exported" a series of gods into the Greek religion, including Dionysus, Bendis and Cotytto. These immediately led him to the recognition of certain traits of the Thracian cults, like the belief in immortality of the Getae, known for their god Zalmoxis.[168] Apostolidis agreed with the common assumption that the most typical trait in Thracian religious practice was the dominance of orgiastic and mystery cults, some of which the Greeks borrowed (such as the Dionysian rites and the Eleusinian mysteries). In this context, he also indicated the presence of the orgiastic "Phrygo-Pelasgian" god Sabazios and of the Great Mother Goddess, the Phrygian Cybele, in Thrace—figures that would assume exceptional importance in Bulgarian Thracology. Apostolidis also researched another Thracian cult that had attracted the attention both of modern Greek authors (since Skordelis) and of foreign archaeologists: the Thracian Horseman/Rider or *Heros*, whose image is found on thousands of funerary or votive reliefs, mostly from the Roman period. To this day, Greek scholars either identify it with Greek gods (such as Apollo) or tend to interpret it as a syncretic Thraco-Hellenic god and refer to the names of Greek deities, mentioned next to the image of the Horseman, the typical Greek iconographic style, and so on.[169] Apostolidis emphasized another important aspect of the cult: it represents the heroization of a dead person, epitomizing Greek religious ideas.[170]

In general, his presentation of Thracian religion was ambiguous. On the one hand, Apostolidis emphasized that the Thracians venerated pan-Hellenic gods and tried to demonstrate how their ritual practices recalled Hellenic practices. On the other hand, he admitted the existence of specific traits that, he thought, still survived among the "Hellenized Thracians." Here Apostolidis quoted the ethnographic research of the writer Georgios Vizyenos on *Kalogeroi*.

Another activist of the Thracian institutes—the ethnographer and medical doctor Konstantinos Kourtidis—also dedicated special attention to ancient Thracian religion. His publications confirmed the image of Thrace as the source of all Greek mystery cults—the Dionysian, the Orphic, the Eleusinian and also

168 In fact, it was a Greek philologist and archaeologist born in Macedonia who wrote the first doctoral dissertation on Zalmoxis: Athanasios Rhousopoulos, *De Zalmoxide secundum veterum auctoritatem* (Göttingen, 1852).

169 E.g., Dimitris Samsaris, *O exellinismos tis Thrakis kata tin elliniki kai romaïki archaiotita* (Thessaloniki: Altintzi, 1980), 219–222.

170 Kosmas Myrtilos Apostolidis, "Peri tou Thrakos Ippeos i tou Kyriou Iroos," *ATHLGTH* 6 (1939–1940): 17.

of the Cabeiri and the Great Gods venerated in the "Thracian islands" (Lemnos, Samothrace, Imbros) and elsewhere.[171] Thanks to such kinds of literature, the image of Thrace as the land of the "Dionysian spirit," orgiastic rites and mysticism reached a broader audience in Greece. The importance of Orpheus and of Orphism is confirmed by the case of the poet Angelos Sikelianos, who sought inspiration in the esoteric Orphic writings and doctrines.[172]

After World War II, and especially from the 1960s on, the contents of *Thrakika* and of *ATHLGTH* became more outdated, given the development of Thracian studies abroad. The aforementioned main points of interpretation of ancient Thrace were constantly echoed. Authors such as Polydoros Papachristodoulou, founder of the Association for Thracian studies, continued to insist on a "close relationship" of the "Thraco-Phrygian" language to the Greek, its distance from Lithuanian and the Slavic languages (i.e., from Bulgarian, as this was the main concern) and the other traditional postulates.[173] It must be noted that the Greek Thracian activists and scholars knew and often quoted Bulgarian Thracological literature. Some of them, like Apostolidis, were natives of the Bulgarian part of Thrace. Papachristodoulou (born in Saranda Ekklisies or Lozengrad, today Kırklareli in Turkish Thrace) had studied in a Greek school in Plovdiv.[174]

To a certain extent, the professional scholars working on ancient Thrace and who had direct knowledge of Thracian studies abroad also reproduced—and still reproduce—theses from the era of Apostolidis (who died in 1948). In general, they insist on the inclusion of Thracians in the ancient Greek context: not by chance, the Tenth International Congress of Thracology, which was held in 2005 in Greek Thrace (Komotini-Alexandroupoli), was entitled "Thrace in

171 See Konstantinos Kourtidis, *Ta archaia ellinika mystiria, itoi ta Kaveiria—Dionysia—Orphika kai Eleusinia* (Athens: Damianos, 1934). See also Kourtidis, *Istoria tis Thrakis apo ton archaiotaton chronon mechri tou 46 m.Ch.* (Athens: Aleuropoulou, 1932).

172 Whose spirit he identified as "Doric": see Takis Dimopoulos, *Sikelianos, o Orphikos* (Athens: Ikaros, 1981); Ritsa Frangou-Kikilia, "O Angelos Sikelianos kai i proaionia orphiki phoni," *Singrisi / Comparaison* 11 (2000): 100–107. Incidentally, in 1958–1959, in Komotini (Greek Thrace) "Pan-Hellenic Orphic Games" were organized: Michail Martidis, "Panellinioi Orphikoi Panthrakikoi agones stivou," *Thrakika* (2005–2007): 344–348.

173 Polydoros Papachristodoulou, "I Thrakiki glossa kai oi Slavoi," *ATHLGTH* 31 (1965): 57–59. See also his study "I Thraki apo ta poly palia chronia," *ATHLGTH* 32 (1966): 226–403.

174 Sometimes, despite their Greek nationalism, they were able to evaluate the Bulgarian archaeological and other publications in a positive way. See Papachristodoulou's notice on Thracian tumuli in *ATHLGTH* 17 (1952): 285–287, where he praises the achievements of Bulgarian archaeology.

the Graeco-Roman World."[175] This perspective is certainly realistic insofar as the historical sources on Thracians are either Greek or Roman—not to mention that many specific characteristics of the Thracian culture known to us may have been invented or interpreted in a specific way by ancient Greek authors. At the same time, Greek cultural influences in Thrace are crucial in many respects. The Greek researchers likewise legitimately stress the study of the Greek colonies in the region. Yet they still repeat a number of problematic points, such as the Thracians' alleged "ethnic" affinity to Greeks via the obscure prehistoric "Pelasgians." Some even maintain that the Thracians participated in the "ethnogenesis" of the ancient Greeks.[176] Also debatable is Greek scholars' insistence on the Thracians' extremely rapid and complete Hellenization.[177]

A good example in this regard is Dimitris Samsaris, a specialist on the Roman period and a participant in conferences and international scholarly committees organized by the Bulgarian Thracologists. In a 1980 monograph dedicated to the Hellenization (*exellinismos*) of Thrace during Greek and Roman antiquity, Samsaris directly reproached the Thracologists in Bulgaria and Romania for neglecting this problem.[178] He focused on the foundation of Greek colonies in Thrace, on the migration of Greeks to the region and on their mixing with the local population, a phenomenon that led to the Thracians' "loss of ethnic physiognomy."[179] Samsaris also brought to light the social, commercial and cultural contacts between Thracians and Hellenes; the introduction of Greek institutions, art and religious cults into Thrace; and the linguistic Hellenization of Thracians. Although he presented quite a "barbarian" image of the Thracian way of life, Samsaris also repeated the thesis about the affinity of the Thracian language to Greek (and to Pelasgian).[180] In fact, in the meantime the link between Pelasgians and Thracians was confirmed by the great

175 See the proceedings: *I Thraki ston Ellino-Romaïko kosmo. Thrace in the Graeco-Roman World* (Athens: National Hellenic Research Foundation, 2007).

176 Vasiliki Papoulia, "Phaseis entaxeos archaion phylon tis Chersonisou tou Aimou ston elliniko kosmo," in *I istoriki, archaiologiki kai laographiki ereuna gia ti Thraki* (Thessaloniki: IMCHA, 1988), 209.

177 Concerning the complex question about the Hellenization of Thracians in the Aegean and Pontic area, and its treatment by Greek archaeology, see Alexandre Baralis, "Hellénisation et déshellénisation dans l'espace pontique: le passé antique à l'épreuve des constructions identitaires modernes," in *Les stéréotypes dans les processus d'hellénisation et de romanisation*, eds. Rosa Plana and Hélène Ménard (Montpellier, forthcoming).

178 Samsaris, *O exellinismos tis Thrakis*, 7–8.

179 Ibid., 113.

180 Ibid., 20.

authority of Michail (Michel) Sakellariou in his works on the "pre-Hellenic" and "proto-Greek" populations in Greece.[181]

Concerning the properly archaeological interest in Thrace, it must be noted that the latter traditionally occupied only a marginal place in Greek archaeology. Tellingly, the region obtained an autonomous archaeological service (*ephoria*) only in 1962.[182] And, of course, the research was concentrated from the outset on the Aegean coastal area—in the ancient Greek colonies (Abdera, Maroneia, Zōnē). For a long time, the hinterland did not interest the Greek archaeologists. The same was true of the traces of settlements predating the Hellenic presence on the littoral, which were classified simply as "prehistoric." It was only in the 1970s that the situation changed thanks to the activity of Diamantis Triantaphyllos—and, to a large extent, under the impact of the development of Thracian studies in Bulgaria.[183] While many specialists, such as Georgios Bakalakis, preferred to keep on ignoring the Thracian presence, Triantaphyllos and other researchers gave special attention to questions that preoccupied their Bulgarian colleagues (such as megaliths and local Thracian "sanctuaries").

It must be noted nevertheless that the evolution of classical studies compelled a certain revision of traditional postulates that actually *confirmed* the legitimacy of the Helleno-centric point of view. For instance, Dionysus is no longer treated as a Thracian deity imported in Greece but as a Greek god, as his name was meanwhile discovered on Mycenaean tablets with Linear B.[184] More recent works of Greek authors underline the Hellenic origin of the figure of Orpheus and of the Orphic doctrines.[185] Here, a possible reason for this emphasis is the active exploitation of both Orpheus and Orphism as well as of Dionysus in Bulgarian Thracian studies. Thus the reference to Thracian specificities in ancient religion became largely useless for the cause of Greek national ideology, despite its relative importance in previous writings. Even

181 See, in particular, Michel Sakellariou, *Peuples préhelléniques d'origine indo-européenne* (Athens: Ekdotiki Athinon, 1977), where he traced the migrations of Pelasgians into the Greek peninsula from Thrace and asserted that the "real" Pelasgian was related mostly to the Thracian language (291–292).

182 On Thracian archaeology in Greece, see Alexandre Baralis, "La protohistoire de la Thrace. Enjeux identitaires et territoriaux," in *Ecrire le passé: la fabrique de la préhistoire et de l'histoire à travers les siècles*, ed. Sophie de Beaune (Paris: CNRS, 2010), specifically pages 106–108, as well as Alexandre Baralis, "Hellénisation et déshellénisation."

183 Baralis, "La protohistoire de la Thrace," 107.

184 See Samsaris, *O exellinismos tis Thrakis*, 204.

185 Evangelia Marangianou-Dermousi, "O Orpheas sti Thraki," *Thrakika* (1991–1992): 157–173.

so, Thrace still retains a mysterious and esoteric aura in the popular Greek imagination.[186]

In any case, unlike the Romanian and (as we shall see) the Bulgarian authors, the Greek researchers never speculated about some specific Thracian spirituality and even less about a Thracian political genius, Thracian "empires," and the like. They instead followed interpretations set forth since the mid-nineteenth century by modern Western authors, treating Thracian culture as extremely archaic, orgiastic and so on. Thus the Greek studies of "Orphism" are based on European classical scholars and, in general, do not add new interpretations.[187] The reason for this difference is clear: while the Romanian authors sought in Thracian (Geto-Dacian) spirituality the sources of "national distinctiveness," their Greek colleagues instead tried to include the specifically Thracian elements in the richness and variety of ancient Greek culture. The Hellenic heritage of Thrace is certainly not to be neglected either: Greek scholars did not feel a particular need to invent, for example, some special Thracian philosophy, since they could simply refer to such an important figure in the history of philosophy and science as Democritus (born in Abdera, a Greek colony on the Aegean Thracian coast). The University of Thrace, established in 1973, bears his name.

Hence, if one excludes the publications of modern Greek authors from Thrace—more precisely, of those from the refugee organizations—ancient Thracians never constituted a primary topic of research in Greece. Nevertheless, in some contexts, ancient Thrace appeared to hold important stakes for Greek national ideology. The main context of this type is the field of ethnography and the studies of folklore—or, as it is known in Greek, *laographia*.

Since the very beginning, modern Greek ethnography was expected to provide evidence of the historical continuity between ancient and modern Hellenism, against the pernicious denials of such continuity by the Tyrolean historian Jakob Philipp Fallmerayer. The link was supposed to reside in Greek folklore—in the "primitive" popular culture and, more precisely, in the forms of "popular worship" (*laïki thriskeia*). These had allegedly preserved traces and "survivals" (*epivioseis*) from ancient cults that were otherwise suppressed by

186 Curiously enough, an album of four CDs containing Greek songs from "Eastern Rumelia," that is, from what is now southern Bulgaria, and released in 2008 bears the title *Apo ti Thraki tou Orphea kai tou Dionysou* ("From the Thrace of Orpheus and Dionysus").

187 See, for instance, Eleni Boliaki, "O Orphismos kai i tychi tis psychis meta to thanato," *Thrakika* (2005–2007): 216–236. On the alleged relationship between Orphism and Christianity: Konstantinos Tsopanis, *Orphismos kai Christianismos* (Athens: Iamvlichos, 2003).

Christianity.[188] The rich folklore of Thrace played an important role in this respect. Since the late nineteenth century, a number of Thracian popular customs were included in the repertoire of traditions "demonstrating" the link between modern and ancient Greeks.

Two customs in particular were emphasized: the aforementioned masquerade on the eve of the Orthodox Great Lent (known by a variety of names—Kalogeroi/Kalogeros, Koukeroi, Kiopek Beis, etc.);[189] and the striking firewalking dance, called the Anastenaria and performed in the Strantza Mountains (Bulgarian: Strandzha, Turkish: Yıldız Dağları), mostly on the church holiday of Sts. Constantine and Helen (May 21). These rituals were seen as "living remnants" (*zontana leipsana*) of the Dionysian cult—a thesis reinforced by the premise that Dionysus was a Thracian god *par excellence* who was adopted by ancient Greeks.

The discovery of the "Dionysian" background of the Thracian folk customs started in 1873 with a work by Anastasios Chourmouziadis, professor of theology at the Phanar College of the Constantinople Patriarchate (*Megali tou Genous Scholi*).[190] He was actually asked by the Patriarch to investigate and write a report revealing the "true" nature of the Anastenaria: the dance on red-hot coals was denounced by the Church as a practice inspired by satanic

188 On *laographia* and, in particular, on Nikolaos Politis, the father of the discipline: Michael Herzfeld, *Ours Once More: Folklore, Ideology, and the Making of Modern Greece* (New York: Pella, 1986). On Politis's theory of the "survivals" from ancient Greek culture: ibid., 102–105. See also Loring Danforth, "The Ideological Context of the Search for Continuities in Greek Culture," *Journal of Modern Greek Studies* 2 (1984): 53–85.

189 The rite exists in the Balkans in various versions that evolved over time, even during the period in which they were observed by ethnographers. In general, it is performed on the eve of the Orthodox Great Lent, more precisely on what is called Cheese Monday (*Tyrini Deftera*)—a week before the beginning of the fast—but it can also be celebrated between Christmas and Epiphany. A variety of fur masks and bells are used by the participants. There are a number of protagonists: men with a range of roles—*kalogeros*, "king" (*vasilias*); "girls" (*koritsia*—roles played by unmarried men); an "old woman" (*Babo*, again performed by a man); "Gypsies"; "policemen" (*zaptiedes*—from the Ottoman *Zaptiye*), and others. The performance itself follows a series of moments: procession and visit to houses, dance in an open space, ploughing, "marriage," "death," "resurrection," etc. It also involves obscene pantomimes and a wooden phallus. For a description of the diverse versions of the custom in Eastern and Northern Thrace and a survey of the literature on it, see Manolis Varvounis, *Laïkes thriskeftikes teletourgies stin Anatoliki kai ti Voreia Thraki* (Athens: Poreia, 2010), 87–98. Varvounis is cautious about the origin of the custom and believes that it has incorporated "numerous cultural layers."

190 Anastasios Chourmouziadis, *Peri ton Anastenarion kai allon tinon paradoxon ethimon kai prolipseon* (Constantinople, 1873).

possession. Chourmouziadis never visited the villages in which the rite was performed, and his report was based on information from priests who had served in those villages. Nevertheless, he felt able to interpret the Anastenaria as superficially Christianized Dionysian "orgies."

Chourmouziadis believed there were many parallels between the Anastenaria and the ancient Bacchic and Maenadic possessions: the enthusiasm and the ecstasy; the sacrifice of a bull during the Anastenaria and the role of the bull in the myths and the worship of Dionysus; the distribution of raw meat after the sacrifice and the alleged Bacchic practices of *omophagia* (eating of raw flesh); the carrying of an icon by the *anastenarides* (the participants in the dance) and of idols in the ancient processions. Even the exclamations the Strantza peasants made when dancing over hot coals (*a! eh! ouh! ih!*) were interpreted as invocations of Bacchus.[191]

These analogies are certainly problematic: suffice it to say that the meat distributed during the Anastenaria is cooked and not consumed raw.[192] And, most of all, there is no information whatsoever about firewalking during the Dionysian festivities. However, Chourmouziadis backed up his argument by linking the Anastenaria to another "Dionysian" rite—namely, to the Koukeroi (Kalogeroi)—as well as to a series of other customs and "superstitions." In general, Chourmouziadis's work had a dual aim. He condemned the obscure "pagan" traditions that contradicted the doctrines of the "Mother Church." Yet at the same time he deemed them useful, as they represented living proofs of continuity with ancient Greece that could be used against the assertions of Fallmerayer. Instead of punishing them, the Church simply needed to "educate" and to "enlighten" the people performing these rituals.

The link between the Kalogeros and the ancient Dionysian festivals was soon confirmed by Georgios Vizyenos and even more convincingly by the British archaeologist Richard Dawkins. Inspired by Vizyenos's article, Dawkins traveled to the area of Vizyi/Vize in Eastern Thrace to witness the rite in person.[193] Dawkins indicated aspects that, in his opinion, proved that the

191 Chourmouziadis, *Peri ton Anastenarion*, reprinted in *ATHLGTH* 26 (1961): 143–167.

192 See Dimitris Xygalatas, "Ethnography, Historiography, and the Making of History in the Tradition of the Anastenaria," *History and Anthropology* 22 (2011), 62. For a critique of the ethnographic interpretation of ritual sacrifices in Greek folk traditions through ancient Greek cult practices: Stella Georgoudi, "L'égorgement sanctifié en Grèce moderne: les *Kourbania* des saints," in *La cuisine du sacrifice en pays grec*, eds. Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant (Paris: Gallimard, 1979), 271–307 (specifically on Anastenaria: 303).

193 Richard Dawkins, "The Modern Carnival in Thrace and the Cult of Dionysus," *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 26 (1906): 191–206.

custom was a "survival of the worship of Dionysus." These included the *phallophoria*; the use of a cradle with a "child" that recalls the *liknon* in Dionysian festivals; and the ritual death of the Kalogeros that re-enacts the murder of the young Dionysus by the Titans, who were smiths just like the Gypsies in the modern folk custom.[194]

In the interwar period, scholarly interest towards the Anastenaria and Kalogeros grew. Thus in his annex to the first volume of Paparrigopoulos's *History*, Pavlos Karolidis referred to a peculiar survival of "the orgiastic cult of Dionysus." "In some places of Thrace are kept nowadays some orgiastic celebrations of Easter (*sic: orgiastikoi tines eortasmoi tou Pascha*) called *anastenamia* [*sic*], probably remnants of the ancient Thracian orgiastic rituals."[195] The research on these "survivals" was especially catalyzed by the fact that Bulgarian scholars discovered similar rituals and started publicizing them among the European scholarly community. More precisely, the Bulgarian folklorist Mihail Arnaudov did so in his publications.

In reality, two details compromised the "purely Greek" character of the Thracian folk customs. First, the Anastenaria was (and is) performed not only by Greeks but also by Bulgarians from the Strantza/Strandzha region. Second, the pre-Lent carnival is a tradition known not only to Greeks and Bulgarians but all over Europe, as well as in former European colonies on other continents. Moreover, in many cases, the accessories employed by the participants (fur masks, bells, wooden phalluses) seem strikingly similar (in the *Busójárás* among the Croats of southern Hungary, the *Kurentovanje* in Slovenia, the *Tschäggätta* in Switzerland and plenty of other customs in the Alpine area).[196] And, ironically, the "Dionysian tradition" often has foreign names under which it is celebrated by Greeks as well. These are names of Turkish or Arabic-Turkish (*Tzamala*/*Djamala, Bey, Köpek Bey, Arapides, Yenitsaroi/Yeniçeri*) or Slavic/Bulgarian origin (*Startsi*).

The connection between the two rituals is not obvious either. There are few common elements between the Anastenaria and Kalogeros: the most striking ones—the masquerade and the obscene symbolism (in the case of the latter) and the firewalking related to a pious veneration of Christian symbols (in

194 It is possible that the British archaeologist mixed up Titans and Cyclops: it was the latter who were smiths.

195 Karolidis, "Parartima," 422. On the Kalogeros (Kiopek Beis) performed in the area of Adrianople: Polydoros Papachristodoulou, "Symmikta laographika Adrianoupoleos," *Thrakika* (1929): 429–430.

196 See Gerald Creed, *Masquerade and Postsocialism: Ritual and Cultural Dispossession in Bulgaria* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2011), 18.

the case of the former)—are certainly not common. Indeed, the rituals were often practiced by inhabitants of the same villages, like the famous Kosti in the Strandzha Mountains, but the area of diffusion of the carnival before Lent is incomparably bigger than that of the firewalking.

Aware of some of these problems, the archaeologist Konstantinos Romaios dedicated a long study to both rituals[197] in which he concluded that they have preserved an extremely ancient worldview from a cultural period that is older than the classical Greek religion. He saw them as remnants of a prehistoric worship of the elements of nature and of spiritual forces. Only in historical times did these kinds of worship take the form of Dionysian rites. The insistence that the Anastenaria was so archaic—that its worldview preceded the Hellenic gods—actually "internationalized" the custom. Romaios indicated the existence of similar rites in India, Japan, the Pacific and elsewhere. Yet he did not neglect his patriotic duties. Romaios insisted that the Anastenaria (and the pre-Lent carnival) were of purely Greek/Greek-Thracian origin—he asserted that the Bulgarians took them from the Greeks.

Yet Chourmouziadis's work remained the prism through which most of the authors continued to interpret the Anastenaria. Just like Chourmouziadis, they had never attended the ritual either. Thus a number of clichés were constantly repeated: the pious veneration of the Christian saints Constantine and Helen was frequently described as an "orgy." But, surprisingly or not, even ethnographers who attended the custom were unable to reconsider the dominant interpretative framework. It was largely the national interest that tended to restore the purely "Dionysian" interpretation. Thus the main figure within the Association for Thracian Studies, Polydoros Papachristodoulou, reasserted the "ecstatic" and "orgiastic" aspects of the Anastenaria as "a Christianized Dionysian ritual" where the place of Dionysus is taken by Saint Constantine.[198] Papachristodoulou clearly saw research on the firewalking as a national cause.[199]

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197 Konstantinos Romaios, "Laïkes latreies tis Thrakis. Anastenaria. Teleti tis Tyrinis Defteras," *ATHLGTH* 11 (1944–1945): 1–130.

198 Polydoros Papachristodoulou, "T'Anastenaria, oi Kalogeroi, Seïmenides k'oi Piterades," *ATHLGTH* 15 (1950): 263–367.

199 And he formulated his belief with shocking candor: "Now, when the study of Mr. K. Romaios brought the custom on the international stage and demonstrated it as an extremely ancient and very important tradition, connected to all the similar customs in the world, it would be a shame not to exploit it (*na mi to ekmetalleuthoume*), at least from a national viewpoint, as its existence confirms the presence of Hellenism in Thrace for about three thousand years. The Bulgarians exploit such important phenomena, and very rightly so" (Papachristodoulou, "T'Anastenaria," 309).

Each year, throughout the 1950s, Papachristodoulou provided observations and "new data" in the *ATHLGTH* from the Anastenaria performed by former Thracian refugees residing in Greek Macedonia (in the town of Langadas near Thessaloniki and in villages such as Agia Eleni in the department of Serres and Mavrolefki in the department of Drama).[200] But in fact, these articles did not modify the established interpretation at all. The same was true of the pre-Lent carnival, which was clearly interpreted as a presentation of the "Orphic" myth about the death of the young Dionysus-Zagreus, dismembered by the Titans. Similarly, one of the protagonists in the custom—the "Gypsy woman" (*katsivela*)—was identified with the Thracian orgiastic goddess Cotytto.[201] Even the fact that the *anastenarides* were often reluctant to speak about their rite was seen as similar to the obligation of the participants in ancient Greek mysteries to keep them secret.[202] The "Dionysian" reading of the Anastenaria and of the carnival custom was further consecrated by Georgios Megas, a leading Greek ethnographer, a native of Mesimvria (Nesebăr) on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, and a staunch defender of many "purely Greek" traditions against Bulgarian attempts to appropriate them.[203]

A more elaborate version of the same reading was suggested in 1963 by the doctoral dissertation of the ethnographer and theatrologist Katerina Kakouri.[204] Her work was immediately translated into English and was followed by two documentary films that Kakouri consulted on and were to be used in anthropology classes at the University of California (Berkeley). All this explains the popularity of her ideas abroad (particularly in Bulgaria). On the one hand, Kakouri

200 Polydoros Papachristodoulou, "T'Anastenaria apo nea stoicheia tou 1952 (Maïou 21)," *ATHLGTH* 18 (1953): 131–178; Polydoros Papachristodoulou, "Simeiomata kai paratiriseis stin telesi ton Anastenarion 1952 kai 1953 sto Langada Thessalonikis," ibid., 305–320, etc.

201 Grigorios Euthymiou, "O Kiopek Beis Didymoteichou," *ATHLGTH* 19 (1954): 153–160.

202 See Eleni Boliaki, *To dionysiako (;) Anastenari. Ermineies kai parermineies* (Athens: Pataki, 2011), 123. The *anastenarides* have been persecuted by the Church (as Chourmouziadis's case shows)—a fact that certainly explains their lack of confidence in "foreign people," including ethnographers: see Xygalatas, "Ethnography, Historiography, and the Making of History," 67–71.

203 Georgios Megas, "Anastenaria kai ethima tis Tyrinis Defteras eis to Kosti kai ta perix autou choriou tis Anatolikis Thrakis," *Laographia* 19 (1960–1961): 472–534. Later, Megas rejected his own interpretation of Anastenaria through Dionysian mysticism and suggested that the custom had a purely Christian character. In this case, his aim was to protect it from persecution by the Orthodox Church. See Boliaki, *To dionysiako (;) Anastenari*, 130.

204 Katerina Kakouri, *Dionysiaka: Ek tis simerinis laïkis latreias ton Thrakon* (Athens: Ideotheatron, 1999) (new edition). English edition: *Dionysiaka: Aspects of the Popular Thracian Religion of Today* (Athens: Eleftheroudakis, 1965).

reproduced and enriched the analogical method of the previous scholars with a series of "similarities" between aspects of Thracian folk customs and ancient Dionysian worship. According to her, it had an uninterrupted continuity in Thrace: Kakouri referred to the *anastenarides* as "Bacchants" or "Bacchant-Christians." On the other hand, the author discovered that the Dionysian and the Orthodox Christian elements of the Anastenaria were blended with heretic influences. She referred to medieval sects such as the Paulicians and the Bogomils, although the iconolatry of the *anastenarides* clearly contradicts the aniconic character of these doctrines.[205] Nevertheless, Kakouri thought that heretic communities from Asia Minor had settled in Thrace and brought their cult of sun and fire, Zoroastrian in origin, and thus maintained the existing mystic and enthusiastic traditions in Thrace.

To a certain extent, the last thesis contradicts the very idea that the ritual firewalking has Thracian and Dionysian roots. But it was obviously seen as a necessary link to the only geographically "close" case of firewalking, described by ancient sources. One sentence in Strabo's *Geography* refers to a similar practice in the sanctuary of Artemis Perasia in the south of Asia Minor (Cilicia).[206] Given the fact that the Dionysian cult did not include such a practice, and taking into account the cult of fire in Zoroastrianism, the Persian influence through Asia Minor seemed a necessary premise. It was suggested by Konstantinos Romaios. A sentence from Macrobius also provided the link between Dionysus and the solar/fire cult: according to the Roman historian from the early fifth century CE (*Saturnalia* I, 18, 11), the Thracians identified Dionysus, Sabazios and the Sun as one deity.[207]

Thus the "Dionysian key" of the interpretation of the Anastenaria was enriched with diverse additional aspects: Persian fire cult, solar cult, Mithraic and heretic dualism, and even shamanism.[208] Eventually, this led to questions

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205 Firewalking rites have not been documented among them either, even if Paulicians retained their community in Thrace—in Philippoupolis (Plovdiv). In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, they converted to Catholicism. See the critical assessment of Boliaki, *To dionysiako (;) Anastenari*, 133–135.

206 "At Castabala is the temple of the Perasian Artemis, where the priestesses, it is said, walk with naked feet over hot embers without pain" (Strabo, *Geography* 12, 2, 7, translated by H.L. Jones).

207 Cited by Apostolidis, "Peri tis thriskeias ton Thrakon," 51.

208 The various (mis)understandings of the rite are analyzed in detail by Boliaki, *To dionysiako (;) Anastenari*. In his recent voluminous monograph on folk religion in Eastern and Northern Thrace, ethnographer Manolis Varvounis also supposes that the rite has a pre-Christian heliolatric basis, visible in its ecstatic aspect and in the role of the ritual "non-burning" fire: Varvounis, *Laïkes thriskeftikes teletourgies*, 102–110.

about whether the custom was "Dionysian" at all. The most representative example here is the writer and ethnographer Maria Michail-Dede, author of a series of publications on the Anastenaria based on fieldwork in the 1970s.[209] However, her "methodology" is no less traditionalist than that of the previous authors, and in some cases, her rhetoric is even more nationalist.[210] Although Michail-Dede disagreed with the theory about the Dionysian origin of the rite, she followed the conventional path leading to ancient Greek "roots." Suddenly, the Anastenaria appeared to show the manly and heroic nature of the ancient Thracians and, in general, of the ancient Greeks. The register of the interpretation is at the same time Christian Orthodox: for Michail-Dede, the Anastenaria is an ancient heroic competition (*agon*) that was Christianized and adapted to the cult of the sainted emperor-warrior Constantine.[211]

Obviously, the Greek "laographic" approach to Thracian folk customs was unable to abandon the patriotic search for ancient Greek archetypes, even when it abandoned the reference to "the Thracian" god Dionysus. Yet despite all the interpretations put forth by modern studies linking it to ancient Thracian, Greek and other cults, the earliest records of the Anastenaria are strikingly recent. There are no accounts of the firewalking custom between antiquity and the nineteenth century—if one accepts Strabo's description of Artemis's

209 See Maria Michail-Dede, "To Anastenari," *Thrakika* (1972–1973): 23–178. See also Maria Michail-Dede, "Ta tragoudia kai oi choroi ton anastenaridon," *Thrakika* (1978): 75–129; Maria Michail-Dede, "Anastenari (I Drosia tis Fotias)," *Thrakika* (1988–1990): 41–152.

210 According to her, those who do not speak Greek language cannot understand the rite. The same goes for those who do not know the mentality and the psychological structure (*psychosynthesi*) of the uprooted (*xerizomenon*) Hellenes. Furthermore, and "most important," the custom cannot be understood by those who do not know "the triptych—religion, fatherland, family—that dominates the psychological structure and the mentality of [the way of] life in the Greek [ethnic] space." (Michail-Dede, "To Anastenari," 26). As Dimitris Xygalatas points out, the "triptych" in question is actually the motto of the Regime of the Colonels in Greece, whose rule took place during the time Michail-Dede was writing: Xygalatas, "Ethnography, Historiography, and the Making of History," 65.

211 In her ethnographic observation of Kalogeros, she also criticized the theory about its direct continuity from the Dionysian processions: Maria Michail-Dede, "O 'Kalogeros' stin Agia Eleni Serron," *Thrakika* (1979): 93–126. Apparently, from her patriotic and even "militaristic" perspective, Michail-Dede attempted to purify the Greek popular traditions of orgiastic "immorality." She approached the carnival from a traditional "naturalist" point of view: as a rite designed to make the earth fertile and thus related to the cycle of the seasons. As such, Kalogeros expressed a kind of social philosophy linking Man and Nature through the cycle of birth, life and death: Michail-Dede perceived here an "archaic thinking" (*archaïki skepsi*) that influenced the philosophy of Heraclitus.

sanctuary in Cilicia as having anything to do with Thrace at all.[212] This fact is certainly surprising for such an "ancient" custom, given how close the area is to important administrative and ecclesiastic centers such as Adrianople, as well as to the most important one—Constantinople.[213]

The exploitation of the mysterious (in origin) Anastenaria and of the rather banal (on a European scale) Kalogeroi recalls the uses of folklore in Romanian (and Bulgarian) Thracology. Scholars in these countries have sought to find elements of the "folk traditions" that could demonstrate an age-old cultural continuity and also autochthony on a certain territory. The last aspect was directed against the claims of neighboring nations regarding the same territories. Yet despite all its problematic features, in the Greek case, the research on ancient Thracians did not evolve into something similar to the Romanian "Thracomania." The reason is clear: although deemed "Pelasgian brothers," the ancient Thracians never became the quintessential "ancestors" of modern Greeks. Respectively, the political uses of antiquity and the dilettantish works were focused on ancient Greeks as well as on the highly politicized ancient Macedonians. At the same time, the absence of "Thracomania" did not prevent Greek Thracian studies from inept and anachronistic usage. The issue here is, more precisely, of a certain "ethnogenetic" and "racial" theory about the 20,000–40,000 Slavic-language-speaking Muslims living in Greek Western Thrace and known as Pomaks (*Pomakoi*).

At first glance, the Greek interest in the Pomaks could seem paradoxical. Slav-/Bulgarian-speakers and, at the same time, Muslims, the Pomaks do not fill either of the standard criteria for "Greekness"—unlike, for instance, the Karamanlides from Asia Minor, who were Turkish-speaking but Orthodox

212 Greek scholars were able to exploit one alleged "source" about Anastenaria in the Middle Ages—a short mention of some people, "obsessed by demons" (*daimonoliptous*) and called "Asthenaria," in an anonymous account about the Vlacho-Bulgarian rebellion of Asen and Petăr in Moesia (Northern Bulgaria) in 1185. See Romaios, "Laïkes latreies tis Thrakis," 25. Even if the "possession by demons" in this case (contrasting with the pious Christianity of the *anastenarides*) can be treated as a stigmatization by the official Church, similarly to its numerous reactions since the nineteenth century, no firewalking is mentioned in the text, and the etymological connection between Anastenaria and the obscure "Asthenaria" remains debatable. The source in question also seems somewhat "unpleasant" to Greek researchers, as it speaks of Vlachs and Bulgarians, and not of Greeks/*Romaioi*.

213 For a relatively recent anthropological assessment of the rite that does not seek utopian ancient archetypes: Loring Danforth, *Firewalking and Religious Healing: The Anastenaria of Greece and the American Firewalking Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

Christian in their religion, which made possible the construction of their Greek identity. There is good reason to believe that the only connection the Pomaks have with the Greek nation is the fact that, as a result of the historical upheavals of the twentieth century, a small number of them happened to inhabit Greece.

Initially, the Greek scholars and intellectuals did not show a particular sympathy for this population. In his sarcastic refutation of the authenticity of the *Slavic Veda*, Vlasios Skordelis characterized the Pomaks as "mountainous half-barbarians."[214] Iroklis Vasiadis did not spare his irony either when commenting on the affinity between Pomaks and ancient Thracians suggested by the pro-Bulgarian publication of Stefan Verković.[215] He designated them "Bulgaro-Pomaks" (*Voulgaropomakoi*) and "Slavo-Pomaks" (*Slavopomakoi*) in order to emphasize their distinctive non-Thracian and non-Greek ethnic character. The incorporation of part of the Pomak population into Greece did not immediately change this attitude: the first censuses in the 1920s registered the language of the Pomaks as "Bulgarian," and publications from the interwar period referred to them as "Bulgarian Mohammedans."[216] But, little by little, the picture changed. The scholars and activists from Papachristodoulou's Association for Thracian Studies were instrumental again in a process that promoted a new image of Pomaks as "Islamized Thracians."[217]

The new theory was based on Skordelis's insistence that the Bulgarian language spoken in Thrace was not evidence of Bulgarian origin, as the "genuine" Bulgarians from the Middle Ages never mixed to such an extent with the autochthonous population. More concretely, he explained that the language of the inhabitants of the Rhodopes contained many Greek words that actually showed the locals' Hellenic roots.[218] Since the 1920s, the theory of the "mixed language" of the Rhodopes was applied specifically to the Pomaks,[219] as the

214 Vlasios Skordelis, "Ellinikon lexilogion ek tis Rodopis," *Vyron* (1874): 885–886.

215 Vasiadis, *Thrakikos*, 32.

216 Tasos Kostopoulos, *To "Makedoniko" tis Thrakis. Kratikoi schediasmoi gia tous Pomakous* (1956–2008) (Athens: Vivliorama, 2009), 20–21.

217 According to the ambiguous expression of Georgios Skalieris, *Laoi kai phylai tis Mikras Asias* (Athens, 1922), 72.

218 It was only Bulgarian "tyranny" that compelled it to speak Bulgarian: Vlasios Skordelis, *To chorion tis Rodopis* (Athens, 1875). This point was repeated by Vasiadis. See Gounaris, *Ta Valkania ton Ellinon*, 150–151, 239.

219 Even if the Greek loanwords indicated by the Greek authors were either typical of the standard Bulgarian language—such as *dyavol* (*diavolos*, "devil"), (*h*)*aresvam* (Classical Greek *areskō*, Modern Greek *mou aresei*, "to like"), *zalisvam* ("to divert, to distract someone's attention"—from *zalizo*, "to stun, to daze")—or archaisms, previously used in many

Christian Bulgarians of Western Thrace had to quit the region in the framework of the Greek-Bulgarian exchanges of population. Moreover, Skordelis had linked one of the popular names of the Pomaks—*ahryani*/*achrianides*—to that of the ancient Thracian/Paeonian (?) tribe of the Agrianes.[220] The authors from the Thracian association also discovered a Czech writer who had indicated, as early as 1878, the "Thracian origin" of the Pomaks.[221]

The conclusion was "obvious": Konstantinos Kourtidis and Kosmas Myrtilos Apostolidis saw the Pomaks as "Thraco-Hellenes," and this thesis was confirmed by Polydoros Papachristodoulou.[222] A key piece of evidence was the fact that the Rhodopian Slav-speaking Muslims showed no sympathies for the Bulgarians. The Greek scholars stressed that the Pomaks participated in the suppression of the Bulgarian anti-Ottoman April uprising in 1876. They also pointed out that the Pomaks' temporary Christianization by the Bulgarian army (more concretely, by its Macedonian detachments) and the Bulgarian Orthodox Church during the Balkan Wars fueled their extreme anti-Bulgarian resentment.[223] Certain "racial" characteristics of the Pomaks were also emphasized.

This discourse became more pronounced in the early 1980s, when the Pomaks were described by authors such as the politician Yannis Magkriotis as an "Indo-European mountain race": dolichocephalic, of average or above-average height, fair-haired, with white or reddish faces. Pomaks did not have the "Turko-Mongolian type" of the Turks. On the contrary, they had "Greek physiognomy," similar to the mountainous "Greek Indo-European type." Their eye sockets were shaped like those of Alexander the Great.[224] According to

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(if not all) Bulgarian dialects (*argatin* from *ergatis*, "worker," *drum* from *dromos*, "road," "way," etc.).

220 Skordelis, *Meditationes Thracicae*, 23.

221 Leopold Geitler, *Poetické tradice Thráků i Bulharů* (Prague, 1878). Ironically, Geitler's task was to demonstrate the authenticity of the *Slavic Veda* of Verković, which was vehemently rejected by Greek authors: see Kostopoulos, *To "Makedoniko" tis Thrakis*, 33–38.

222 Polydoros Papachristodoulou, "Oi Pomakoi," *ATHLGTH* 23 (1958): 3–25.

223 It culminated again in the late 1930s and during World War II, when the Bulgarian nationalist organization Rodina (backed by the Bulgarian government) pushed for members of the community with Turkish-Arabic personal names to adopt religiously neutral but Slavic names. Greece was able to instrumentalize the Pomak resentment during the post-war Paris Peace Conference, when a Pomak delegation was sent to request the annexation of the Pomak regions of Bulgaria to Greece.

224 Yannis Magkriotis, "Pomakoi i Rodopaioi," *Thrakika* (1980–1981): 43. The text of Magkriotis (a politician from the PASOK party who served as deputy minister of foreign affairs and of infrastructure as well as minister of Macedonia and Thrace) was later published as

Magkriotis, the language of the Pomaks—which would look "to a non-specialist like a Slavo-Bulgarian idiom"—was not an indication of a common origin with Bulgarians. In fact, the Pomak language had many Greek elements, their houses looked like Greek houses and not like Turkish ones (?), and they had popular songs that represented versions of the pan-Hellenic one about the Bridge of Arta.[225]

In this way, a highly speculative theory, proposed in the nineteenth century and initially directed against Bulgarian claims on Thrace, was redeployed by the end of the twentieth century in order to counter Turkish influence in the three northeastern Greek departments. The complicated Greek-Turkish relations intensified state and public interest towards the non-Turkish-speaking segment of the Muslim population of Western Thrace. Separating the latter from the Turkish-speakers, according to the principle of "divide and rule," was proposed in order to limit Turkish identity and the "pan-Turkic propaganda" of Ankara in this region. In the mid-1990s the Greek state initiated a real ethnic "revival" of a Pomak identity, with the publication of Pomak dictionaries, grammars and other literature, aiming to codify a Pomak linguistic norm, different from Bulgarian, and to implement it at the expense of the traditional prestige of the Turkish language within the community.[226] This policy was even seen as a way to get the local Slav-speaking Muslims to identify as Greek: as descendants of ancient Thracians, they were supposed to be relatives of the Greeks.

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a brochure: *Pomakoi i Rodopaioi: oi Ellines mousoulmanoi* (Athens: Risos, 1990). On Magkriotis and other promoters of the Thraco-Hellenic "racial" origin of the Pomaks during the 1980s: Kostopoulos, *To "Makedoniko" tis Thrakis*, 126–144.

225 The Greek version of the Romanian "Meşterul Manole," which also has Bulgarian and other Balkan (and not only Balkan) versions.

226 Yet this implementation had limits. The Pomak language never replaced education in Turkish at the schools in the Pomak-populated areas, largely because of the resistance of the community itself. The recent "Pomak revival" has been researched by a number of scholars (Vemund Aarbakke, Ekaterini Markou, Leonidas Embirikos, Lambros Baltsiotis, Christian Voss, Fotini Tsibiridou and others). See Kostopoulos, *To "Makedoniko" tis Thrakis*, 155–221. In fact, in the 1990s, there was a real boom of research activity on Pomaks that has still not ended. Unfortunately, this interest is often intertwined with the strategies of state politics, the sophistication of the scholarly approach notwithstanding. In this respect, one must certainly mention the interesting "ethno-archaeological" studies by Nikos Efstratiou in the Pomak villages in the Rhodopes (*Ethnoarchaiologikes anazitiseis sta pomakochoria tis Rodopis* [Thessaloniki: Vanias, 2002]). Efstratiou suggests that data from the Neolithic period in Thrace be interpreted in light of his observations of techniques and family structures typical of Pomaks. Thus he projects a long and dubious historical continuity.

Despite their marginality in the Greek historical imagination, ancient Thracians have been used in diverse ways and have played a number of roles since the late nineteenth century. They were supposed to back up the Greek defense against the advance of Bulgarian nationalism from the north, to confront Western skeptics with additional proof of thousands of years of historical continuity, and to counter the Turkish influence from the east. The Bulgarian context was, however, decisive for the very construction of the Greek image of ancient Thrace. Bulgarian scholarship also reshaped it in several ways during the twentieth century and was itself largely shaped by the modern Greek—as well as Romanian—theories.

"The Land of Orpheus": The Uses of Antiquity and the Construction of Thracology in Bulgaria

The role of ancient Thracians in the modern Bulgarian context is somewhat paradoxical. The Thracians were canonized as ethnic "ancestors" of Bulgarians relatively late (in any case, later than in Romania)—only in the 1960s. As the Bulgarians speak a Slavic language, in their case, establishing a link to antiquity was certainly more difficult than for the modern Greeks or the Latin-speaking Romanians. Yet today, the quantity of scholarly works and popular literature on ancient Thrace in Bulgaria is not only equal to that in Romania but, in some cases, even more significant. And it is certainly much larger than the number of Greek works, despite the fact that our knowledge of Thracians is greatly based on ancient Greek sources. Bulgaria even launched and became the center of a field of scholarly research known as "Thracology" (*trakologiya*).

The explanation of this peculiar evolution is certainly complex. The first Bulgarian national ideologists from the nineteenth century logically chose Slavic ancestry. Based on the vernacular Slavic tongue, Bulgarian nationalism tried to gain legitimacy and to emancipate its putative ethnic community from the cultural domination of the Greek ~~(Romaic)~~ identity, which enjoyed an overwhelming prestige among Balkan Orthodox Christians under Ottoman domination. Greek was the language of the Orthodox Church—of the Constantinople Patriarchate, which would receive competition from a separate Bulgarian Exarchate only from 1870 on. The same language was adopted by the commercial and urban Orthodox elite. Facing this "unpleasant" situation, Bulgarian national leaders tried to counter the Greek influence through the promotion of an identity that connected the Bulgarians to the Great Russian people, but also to a number of other nations of Eastern and Central Europe, in a big ethno-linguistic family. Although marginal and even "Orientalized"

in Western articulations of "European" identity (as well as in the Greek and Romanian ideologies), the Slavs gave Bulgarians a "European" belonging in different ways—including, as we shall see, through a supposed Slavic link to the antiquity.[227]

In the years just before, and even more so after, the creation of the modern Bulgarian state in 1878, the picture grew more complex as a result of the professionalization of Bulgarian historiography. Acquainted with scholarly standards and works abroad, Bulgarian historians were able to distinguish from the Slavs the "Proto-Bulgarians"—an obscure population with Asiatic roots who came to the Balkans in the late seventh century CE and founded the first medieval Bulgarian state. The Proto-Bulgarians (who were, as it finally appeared, a Turkic-speaking people) constituted the *differentia specifica* of Bulgarian ethnogenesis in the Slavic world. As such, they also tended to be named as the quintessential ancestors of modern Bulgarians. Thus, in a way, they assumed a role similar to that of the Thracians/Geto-Dacians in the Romanian management of origins. This trend became especially pronounced in the authoritarian climate of the interwar period and of World War II, when state anti-communism was blended with an anti-Russian and, in general, anti-Slavic attitude. Writers, historians and archaeologists from the 1930s and the early 1940s were glorifying the "political genius" of Proto-Bulgarians. At the same time, they clearly downplayed the Slavic element of Bulgarian ancestry.[228]

Just as in Romania, the Communist Party takeover in 1944–1945 signaled the symbolic promotion of Slavs as the "right" ancestors. Of course, in Bulgaria, this transition was much smoother than in Romania, as the national ideology had a Slavic base, and the Slavic references did not disappear despite the delusions of the fascist period. Bulgarian archaeologists were summoned to denounce the "chauvinism" of the Proto-Bulgarian trend of the previous

227 The Slavic reference of the incipient Bulgarian national ideology had many sources, stakes and articulations that cannot be discussed here. On this topic, see Diana Mishkova, "Differentiation in Entanglement: Debates on Antiquity, Ethnogenesis and Identity in Nineteenth-Century Bulgaria," in *Multiple Antiquities—Multiple Modernities: Ancient Histories in Nineteenth Century European Cultures*, eds. Gábor Klaniczay, Michael Werner and Ottó Gecser (Frankfurt and New York: Campus Verlag, 2011), 211–243. See also Stefan Detchev, "Who are the Bulgarians? 'Race,' Science and Politics in Fin-de-Siècle Bulgaria," in *We, the People: Politics of National Peculiarity in Southeastern Europe*, ed. Diana Mishkova (Budapest: CEU Press, 2009), 237–269.

228 On the development of Bulgarian ethnogenetic preferences, see Ilija Iliev, "The Proper Use of Ancestors," *Ethnologia Balkanica* 2 (1998): 7–18.

scholarship and to discover Slavic archaeological sites.[229] However, this pan-Slavism and the attack against traditional Bulgarian nationalism did not last long. After the end of the Stalinist period, since the late 1950s, the national mission of the historical and archaeological studies has been completely restored.[230] Again like in Romania, the dominant doctrine and rhetoric of the communist regime became extremely "patriotic," and from the 1960s to the 1980s, almost everything from the ideological arsenal of the previous "bourgeois nationalism" was eventually reused. The Proto-Bulgarians raided past scholarly research but also textbooks, popular publications, fiction and the cinema. This was especially the case around 1981, when the communist regime solemnly commemorated, not without a touch of megalomania, "1,300 years since the creation of Bulgarian state"—a jubilee similar to the "2,050 years since the foundation of the first centralized and independent Dacian state" marked at the same time north of the Danube. Contrasted with the Slavs, the Proto-Bulgarians were not contaminated with "Muscovite" and communist references. That is why they again became the dominant and quasi-unique Bulgarian "ancestors" after the fall of the communist regime in 1989.

But, in the meantime, another ancient people—the Thracians—were also promoted in the Bulgarian ethnogenesis, which finally took the shape of a "holy trinity" of Thracians, Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians. Historical records indicated the Thracian presence predated that of the Slavs and the Proto-Bulgarians, and thus the Thracians had the advantage of being "autochthonous." Moreover, Thracian ancestry was especially convenient during the communist era, given that it did not have anti-Slavic/Russian connotations from the fascist period like the Proto-Bulgarian one. It was also imagined as the Bulgarian link to an era and a civilization—that of antiquity—that was universally recognizable and able symbolically to add to the cultural richness of the modern Bulgarian state. Yet the search for a similar link was not so new, and it certainly preceded the communist regime.

Here a return to the late Ottoman period is necessary. As already stated, before 1878, in cultural terms, Bulgarian nationalism tried to fight the domination of Greek identity. Yet the relationship between the two was more complex,

229 The new imperative was presented and, finally, imposed during debates organized in February and March 1948 at the Archaeological Institute in Sofia. See "Diskusiya za săstoyanieto i zadachite na bălgarskata arheologiya," *Izvestiya na Arheologicheskiya institut* 17 (1950): 431–480.

230 Concerning historiography, see Ivan Elenkov, "The Science of History in Bulgaria in the Age of Socialism: The Problematic Mapping of Its Institutional Boundaries," *CAS Working Paper Series*, Issue 1 (Sofia, 2007).

as the Greek influence in many respects contributed to the formation of the Bulgarian nationalist set of arguments.[231] We saw that initially Greeks authors designated the Bulgarians as "Thracians"—a name that they reserved for their co-nationals from the region of Thrace after Bulgarian nationalism gained momentum. But not surprisingly, by this time, Bulgarian national leaders had already begun speculating on the possible roots of Bulgarians in ancient times. Greek education was not the only vehicle for such ideas: very important was the "Illyrian theory" of the origin of Slavs that was launched by Dalmatian authors (such as Vinko Pribojević and Mauro Orbini) as early as the sixteenth century and was maintained until the nineteenth century, when the Illyrian movement evolved into modern Croatian nationalism. In the early and mid-nineteenth century, other scholars and ideologists of pan-Slavism believed Slavs were affiliated with certain paleo-Balkan peoples. Thus the famous Polish historian Joachim Lelewel and Russian authors such as Aleksandr Chertkov imagined the Thracians and the Dacians to be Slavs. The (Czecho-)Slovak Pavol Šafárik, one of the fathers of Slavistics, considered the Slavs to be autochthonous in Southeast Europe.

Under these numerous influences, a number of Bulgarian authors from the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries (who were not professionals in the field of classical studies or linguistics) established a clear-cut link between Bulgarians, Slavs, Illyrians, Macedonians and other ancient populations.[232] The fact that modern linguists located the *Urheimat* of Indo-European/Indo-German/"Aryan" peoples in India had peculiar repercussions in the Bulgarian context as well. The revolutionary Georgi Rakovski and the Macedonian teacher Jordan Hadžikonstantinov-Džinot believed that the Bulgarians' original homeland was Vedic India and established direct "links" between Bulgarian and Sanskrit. In that amalgam of genealogies, Thracians were clearly seen as Slavs and Bulgarians.

This theory was promoted during the aforementioned Greek-Bulgarian Church controversy, which evolved into a propaganda battle for the historical

231 See Roumen Daskalov's study "Bulgarian-Greek Dis/Entanglements," published in the first volume of the present work (*Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 1, ed. Roumen Daskalov and Tchavdar Marinov [Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013], 149–239).

232 On the Bulgarian appropriation of antiquity during that period: Desislava Lilova, *Văzrozhdenskite znacheniya na natsionalnoto ime* (Sofia: Prosveta, 2003), 201–227, and Mishkova, ibid. More precisely, on the references to ancient Macedonians: see my article "*Famous Macedonia, the Land of Alexander*: Macedonian Identity at the Crossroads of Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian Nationalism" in the first volume of the present work (*Entangled Histories of the Balkans*, vol. 1, 273–330).

and ethnic "rights" over modern Thrace (otherwise still under Ottoman rule). In 1870 Stefan Zahariev, an activist in the anti-Greek cultural movement in the Philippoupoli/Plovdiv region, published the first Bulgarian work in which ancient Thrace got special attention.[233] The writing was clearly meant to be a response to Greek publications on the history of Thrace, and especially of the Plovdiv area, like those of Vlasios Skordelis. But it was itself influenced by the Greek writings: for instance, Zahariev spoke of "Thraco-Pelasgians." The author tried to substantiate his study's scholarly claim with references to ancient writers. He was intrigued, for instance, by the question about the location of the famous Dionysian oracle kept by the Thracian Satrae and Bessi and described by Herodotus (*Histories*, vol. 7, 111).[234] Zahariev provided information on ancient Thracian tribes, as well as descriptions of archaeological objects and epigraphic monuments from ancient and medieval times. Nevertheless, in order to prove the Slavic/Bulgarian character of the Thracian "Pelasgians," he suggested absurd folk "etymologies" of ethnonyms and also an "Indian/Aryan" theory about Thracian and Bulgarian origin that echoed Rakovski's.

The equation Thracians = Slavs = Bulgarians was also advocated by a close collaborator of Rakovski, the schoolteacher Tsani Ginchev. However, his "Thracian theory" was made public only in 1895, a year after his death, by the Bulgarian literary scholar and ethnographer Ivan Shishmanov.[235] The same theory of ethnogenetical continuity already enjoyed the attention of international scholarly milieus after the Bosnian "Illyrian" Stefan Verković published the two volumes of the aforementioned *Slavic Veda* (1874, 1881). Leading European scholars, such as Albert Dumont, throughout the 1870s director of the French Archaeological Schools at Rome and Athens, accepted the authenticity of the enormous collection of Bulgarian "popular songs" from the Rhodopes. These narrated stories about the Hindu deities Vishnu and Shiva, as well as about Orpheus, the Trojan War, Philip of Macedon, Alexander the Great, etc. The Thracian singer Orpheus was especially prominent in Verković's publications. However, a number of scholars, including Bulgarian specialists such as

233 Stefan Zahariev, *Geografiko-istoriko-statistichesko opisanie na Tatar-Pazardzhishkata kaaza* (Vienna, 1870).

234 This question has attracted the interest of foreign archaeologists such as Paul Perdrizet (*Cultes et mythes du Pangée*). Zahariev stated the sanctuary was located in the Rhodopes, far west of the spot in the Eastern Rhodopes (Perperikon) where Bulgarian archaeologist Nikolay Ovcharov recently claimed to have discovered it.

235 Ivan Shishmanov, "Trakiyskata teoriya na Tsanya Ginchev," *Yubileen sbornik na Slavyanskata beseda* (1895): 38–55.

Shishmanov, soon rejected the contents of Verković's books as forgeries similar to James Macpherson's "poems of Ossian."[236]

In fact, Rakovski's nationalist delusions and "Indian" genealogies were ridiculed even by his contemporaries. The idea of "Illyrian ancestry" disappeared as a result of its politicization as a Croatian national project. Moreover, the reference to ancient Macedonians never entered the mainstream Bulgarian historical narrative but remained a more or less popular myth in Macedonia and went on play an important role in the future, in the development of the contemporary Macedonian national identity. It must be noted that, at the beginning of the twentieth century, the theory that the Slav-speaking Bulgarians were autochthonous in the Balkan peninsula, and that the ancient Thracians, Illyrians, Macedonians, Goths, and others were Bulgarians, was promoted only by the historian Gancho Tsenov. He kept defending it even in the interwar period: pro-German and affiliated with the Nazi regime, Tsenov managed to have some of his works put out by prestigious German publishers.[237] But he was also rejected and ridiculed by the mainstream Bulgarian historians of the era. Thus the theory of the Thracian-Bulgarian genealogical link risked having a short lifespan, limited to forgeries put forth chiefly by dilettantes.

The Thracians, however, never stopped haunting the Bulgarian imagination. Instead of the idea that the ancient Thracians were Slavs and Bulgarians, a new interpretation, much more difficult to reject offhand, gained credibility. Ivan Shishmanov, in his critical review of Tsani Ginchev's "Thracian theory," noticed that although on the whole it was "fantasy," it had a "healthy scholarly core." Quoting Tomaschek and other contemporary European scholars, Shishmanov dismissed the Slavic thesis about Thracian ethnic identity but suggested that Bulgarians might be, like the Romanians, descendants of Thracians: Slavicized in their case, just like the Romanized Thracians in the Romanian case. He also cited linguists such as the Slovenes Kopitar and Miklošič, who indicated

236 See the presentation of the debates by Gane Todorovski, "Za i protiv *Veda Slovena*," *Godišen zbornik na Univerzitetot vo Skopje* 19 (1967), available online at http://makedonija.rastko.net/delo/11724 (accessed on January 20, 2013). A later offspring of Rakovski's megalomania was the works of the journalist Nikola Yonkov-Vladikin, who glorified the ancient Thracians as "the pillar of Aryanness," civilizers of the Ancient Egyptians and Chaldaeans, inventors of the Persian and of the Indian religions and founders of Rome. See Nikola Yonkov-Vladikin, *Istoriya na drevnite traki*, vols. 1–2 (Plovdiv, 1911–1912).

237 See, for instance, Gančo Cenov, *Die Abstammung der Bulgaren und die Urheimat der Slaven: eine historisch-philologische Untersuchung über die Geschichte der alten Thrakoillyrier, Skythen, Goten, Hunnen, Kelten u.a.* (Berlin-Leipzig: Walter de Gruyter, 1930). His insistence that the Goths were "Bulgarians" was based on Jordanes's identification of Goths as Getae (hence, also "Thracians").

that some of the "autochthonous" Balkan features shared by Romanian and Albanian (mentioned above) also characterize Bulgarian—for instance, the post-positive definite article. The idea that contemporary Bulgarians were partially descendants of Thracians was supported in the 1890s by the leading Lithuanian national activist (and medical doctor in Bulgaria) Jonas Basanavičius (Ivan Basanovich).[238] Shishmanov was cautious enough: he emphasized that answering the question required more extensive scholarly research. And Bulgarian scholars soon undertook it.

The father of professional Thracian studies in Bulgaria was undoubtedly the classical scholar Gavril Katsarov. A German-trained specialist with a wide range of expertise (as a historian of ancient Greek world and Rome, a philologist, epigraphist and archaeologist, as well as an ethnographer), Katsarov covered virtually all aspects of the ancient Thracian past—especially the fields of historical geography, political history, culture and religion. With extensive knowledge not only of the ancient sources on Thracians but also of the contemporary Western European scholarship (by Tomaschek, Kretschmer, Roesler, Perdrizet and Rohde, among others), as well as of the Romanian authors (like Tocilescu and Iorga), Gavril Katsarov was able to craft interpretations that remained influential for a long time internationally. In 1913 he published a detailed critical presentation of the ancient sources on Thracian culture and way of life that was released in German three years later.[239] An English-language version of this study appeared in *The Cambridge Ancient History* (1930). Especially important was his monograph on Thracian religion, published in the famous *Realenzyklopädie* of Pauly-Wissowa.[240] Katsarov also dedicated special studies to deities (or figures considered as such in his era and often nowadays) such as the Thracian Horseman, Zalmoxis, Zbelsourdos and Bendis. These studies also enjoyed international popularity.

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238 Basanavičius believed that the Lithuanians were descendants of Thraco-Phrygians who had migrated to the Baltic area (e.g., *Lietuviškai–trakiškos studijos*, 1898). This theory was not so new. Jakob Grimm linked the Thracian language to Lithuanian (as well as to German), and he was echoed by other German and by Polish authors: Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 218–219, 229–230. The Polish and Russian theories of Slavs being descendants of Thracians who had migrated northwards certainly encouraged Basanavičius's conceptions. In his publications in Bulgaria, he claimed that he found Thracian remnants in Bulgarian personal names, toponymy, folk traditions and even the "anthropological type" of some Bulgarians.

239 Gavril Katsarov, "Bităt na starite traki spored klasicheskite pisateli," *SbBAN* 1 (1913): 1–97; Kazarow, *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte der Thraker*.

240 Gawril Kazarow, "Thrakische Religion," in *Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft* VI A 1 (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1936), 472–551.

The difference with regard to the previous (quite marginal) Bulgarian literature on ancient Thrace is visible. Uncontaminated by any Slavic theories about the origin of Thracians, Katsarov believed—along with the contemporary Western scholarship—that these constituted an ancient population related to Phrygians (and to Armenians) and referred to a particular "Thraco-Phrygian language." Moreover, he dismissed any idea of Thracian cultural "grandeur": an obvious difference, this time, from not only previous but also subsequent Bulgarian works. In his earlier writings, he considered the Thracians to be "primitive" and "uncultured tribes" (*părvobitni plemena, nekulturni plemena, primitiven Stämmen*), populations with a much lower degree of cultural development (*mnogo po-nizka kulturna stepen*) than Hellenes.[241] Indeed, just like the modern Western European and Greek authors, Katsarov accepted the Thracian origin of Dionysus and of the Orphic doctrines and noted that the most famous Greek musicians—Orpheus, Musaeus and Thamyris—were Thracians. But he rejected the idea of any sophisticated musical art among Thracians.[242]

Similarly, he emphasized the "ephemeral" character of the Thracian polities, especially of the Odrysian state so cherished by later Bulgarian scholarship.[243] In fact, Gavril Katsarov was incomparably more fond of ancient *Macedonian* rulers, and more precisely, of Philip II. Indeed, in the 1920s, he taught a specialized course on the "Ancient Thracians" at Sofia University, in which he actually introduced Thracian studies in the Bulgarian higher education curriculum. But for his solemn speech in December 1927, when he was nominated rector of Sofia University, Katsarov did not choose as a topic Teres, Seuthes, Sitalces, Dromichaetes or any other Thracian king, but Philip II and the relations between Macedonia and the Hellenic world in his era.[244] Later, Bulgarian Thracologists would attack Katsarov for having wrongly glorified some ancient Macedonian greatness and for having thus "underestimated" Thrace.[245] But as a matter of fact, Katsarov was especially eager to demonstrate that the ancient Macedonians were not Greeks from an "ethnic" viewpoint. He saw the ancient "Macedonian nation" (sic) as a fusion of Pelasgians, Thracians and Illyrians,

241 Katsarov, "Bităt na starite traki," 6, 10, 45; Kazarow, *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte*, 13.

242 Katsarov, "Bităt na starite traki," 41.

243 At the same time, his evaluation of the Dacian kingdom (that would be so glorified by his Romanian colleagues) was much more positive: Katsarov, "Bităt na starite traki," 14.

244 Gavril Katsarov, *Makedoniya i Elada v vreme na Filipa II* (Sofia, 1928).

245 Alexander Fol, *Politicheska istoriya na trakite* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1972), 24.

plus Greek elements.[246] In a way, this Bulgarian classical scholar's special interest shows to what extent, during the first half of the twentieth century, it was Macedonia, not Thrace, that preoccupied Bulgarian irredentist nationalism: the "de-Hellenization" of ancient Macedonia pursued by Katsarov went together with the demonstration of its non-Greek character in the present.

In any case, Katsarov's initial caution concerning the questions of Thracian "ancestry" is impressive. In contrast with the ethnographic methodology fashionable in his era, he was skeptical about the insistence of certain foreign authors that contemporary Balkan peoples inherited from Thracians their popular costumes, folk traditions, beliefs, agriculture, vernacular architecture and music.[247] Thus he was extremely cautious about identifying the Kukeri—the Bulgarian version of Kalogeroi/Koukeroi—as a custom with Thracian roots, as was already suggested by Jonas Basanavičius and, after him, by the Bulgarian ethnographer Dimităr Marinov, even though he knew and quoted the works of Vizyenos and Dawkins on the Greek tradition. Katsarov believed that the Kukeri was "seldom" practiced in Bulgaria and that the Bulgarian version of this custom was "just part of the much richer Greek custom"[248]—words that certainly sounded blasphemous to later Bulgarian ethnographers. He admitted that the rite "recalled" Dionysian cult practices but believed that, in any case, it was extremely difficult to isolate specific Thracian elements in this cult. In general, he found Marinov's insistence on the Thracian origin of Kukeri "hasty," "still ungrounded," and "difficult to prove." Moreover, unlike many later works on Thracian "anthropological characteristics" that would sound quite racist, Katsarov criticized the idea of some specifically fair-haired Thracian type and emphasized the "racially mixed" character of ancient Thracians.[249]

However, his initially skeptical position about all things Thracian, in ancient times and in Bulgarian genealogy as well, evolved in the interwar period. In his Cambridge article, he stated that the ancient authors' representation of Thracians as primitive barbarians seemed "too sweeping."[250] Before that, in a

246 Despite these elements, according to Katsarov, the Macedonian state was founded by "Macedonians-Illyrians," not by Greeks: Gawril Kazarow, *Quelques observations sur la question de la nationalité des Anciens Macédoniens* (Paris: Ernest Leroux, 1910), 12.

247 Katsarov, "Bităt na starite traki," 47.

248 Gavril Katsarov, "Kukerite," *Periodichesko spisanie* 68 (1907): 454–458.

249 Katsarov, "Bităt na starite traki," 46; Kazarow, *Beiträge zur Kulturgeschichte*, 109; Kazarow, "Thrace," in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, vol. 8 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1930), 544. Compare to Peter Boev and Slavtscho Tscholakov, "Die Abstammung der Thraker nach anthropologischen Angaben," in *Dritter internationaler thrakologischer Kongress zu Ehren W. Tomascheks, 2.–6. Juni 1980 Wien*, vol. 1 (Sofia: Swjat, 1984), 313–316.

250 Kazarow, "Thrace," 534.

monograph published in Bulgarian in 1926 with the title *Bulgaria in Antiquity* (sic), he indicated that Slavs cohabited with Thracians for a long time, until the latter were fully assimilated. Thus he admitted the existence of Thracian elements in Bulgarians' way of life and "anthropological type."[251] These and similar statements provoked reactions from Greek authors, particularly from Myrtilos Apostolidis, who took issue with Katsarov in a number of works.

Gradually, in the Bulgarian context, the Thracians were becoming ancestors with an original culture and religion that had allegedly left its imprint on Bulgarian traditions. Echoing Western scholarship as well, Katsarov stated that Thrace was the homeland of a particular belief in immortality. More precisely, he discussed an allegedly Orphic doctrine of transmigration of souls that had influenced Pythagoreanism.[252] Ancient Thrace was not barbarian—it was *archaic*. On the one hand, during the Bronze Age, there was a "Thracian-Mycenaean cultural unity," and Katsarov believed that, in Thrace, there was a "Mycenaean influence even down into the Classical period."[253] On the other hand, the "Thraco-Phrygians" had mystic and orgiastic cults (Orphic and Dionysian practices, the cult of Sabazios, etc.) that had influenced the Greeks. This archaism was somehow visible in the domination of "chthonic deities" in Thracian religion:[254] for Katsarov, this was the case for the Thracian Horseman (Heros) as well. With all this taken into account, Katsarov did not deny Greek influence over Thracians in the Classical and Hellenistic periods for the sake of some Thracian originality. He discussed the Hellenic impact in a variety of aspects—for instance, in the art objects from ancient Thrace. Likewise, he indicated a number of Scythian and also Sarmatian influences in art and in the funeral customs of Thrace.

These last questions were already subjects of analysis by other specialists in Bulgaria, mostly by Bogdan Filov. Also trained in Germany, Filov is the indisputable father of professional archaeology and of art history in Bulgaria—fields of research that were previously developed mostly by foreigners, often without archaeological specialization. A scholar of international renown, Filov worked on both sites and monuments dating back to ancient and medieval times, particularly on Thracian sites like the tumular necropolis in Duvanli and

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251 Gavril Katsarov, *Bălgariya v drevnostta. Istoriko-arheologicheski ocherk* (Sofia, 1926), 86. In his introduction to Ivan Pastuhov, *Starite traki v Bălgariya* (Sofia: Hristo G. Danov, 1929), Katsarov wrote that Bulgarian history did not start with the Slavs and that ancient Thrace was part "of our own history."

252 Kazarow, "Thrace," 552.

253 Ibid., 534.

254 Kazarow, "Thrakische Religion," 521.

the tomb in Maltepe-Mezek. Bogdan Filov proposed a number of interpretations that would thereafter remain key to Thracian studies. One such contribution was the conceptualization of a particular "Thracian art," different from both Greek and Scythian art.[255] In artistic metalware (toreutics) in particular, he distinguished Greek, "Graeco-barbarian" and "purely barbarian" objects, the last two categories covering works by Thracian masters. The "barbarian" reference notwithstanding, Filov's "Thracian art" would enjoy a bright future, and not only in Bulgaria: the 1920s marked the beginning of the great discoveries of the so-called "Thracian treasures" in Bulgaria (those from Vălchitrăn, Duvanli, and elsewhere) that would later tour world museums as a part of the Bulgarian state's official cultural promotion.

Another of Filov's contributions to the structure of Thracian studies was his treatment of the aforementioned Thracian-Mycenaean socio-cultural relations.[256] The idea was already present in the Western European and (as we saw) the modern Greek interpretations of Thracians: it was assumed that, initially, the Thracians had the same level of "flourishing" culture as the ancient Achaeans (or even the "Pelasgians"), which was attested to by Homer, but that something later hindered their evolution. Analyzing the Thracian beehive or *tholos* tombs, Filov noticed their similarity with the Mycenaean ones. The problem here is that a gap of at least seven or eight centuries separates these Thracian monuments, which date to the fifth to third century BCE, from the Late Bronze Age tombs in Greece. Filov's explanation—that pre-Roman Thrace conserved Mycenaean architectural models that the Hellenic world abandoned in the Iron Age—would later be re-examined. But the idea that Thrace preserved well into the first millennium BCE an archaic culture and "spirituality" that we see in Mycenaean (but not in later) Greece would become a fundamental postulate of Thracian studies in Bulgaria.

The studies in the interwar period certainly developed within a larger ideological background. One must take into account the political context, more precisely the "Thracian question," generated by the fact that after World War I, Bulgaria lost Western Thrace and its outlet on the Aegean Sea, while almost all of the country's Greek population left for Greece during the exchanges of population that followed. These events further incited the Bulgarian-Greek

255 Bogdan Filov, "Pametnitsi na trakiyskoto izkustvo," *IBAD* 6 (1916): 1–55. The same in German: Bogdan Filow, "Denkmäler der thrakischen Kunst," *Mitteilungen des Kaiserlich Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts, Römische Abteilung*, vol. 32 (Berlin, 1917): 21–73.

256 Bogdan Filov, "Trakiysko-mikenski otnosheniya," in *Sb. Ivan D. Shishmanov* (Sofia: Prosveta, 1920), 40–53; Bogdan Filow, "Thrakisch-mykenische Beziehungen," *Revue internationale des études balkaniques* 3 (1938): 1–7.

debates about Thracian history, including ancient history, that were already presented here from the Greek side.

Their Bulgarian side represented the same mix of scholarship, dilettantism and activism. During the interwar period, a number of popular pamphlets dedicated to the history of Plovdiv (the center of what Greek writers call "Northern Thrace") and of the Bulgarian Black Sea coast emphasized the Thracian presence and heritage in these territories. The strategic purpose was to dismiss the Hellenic ancestry of the local Greek population through the thesis that its members were actually descendants of Hellenized Thracians and Slavs/Bulgarians. This argumentation was launched in particular by patriotic activists affiliated with the "Thracian associations" (*Trakiyski druzhestva*) and the Thracian scholarly institute (*Trakiyski nauchen institut*) in Sofia—Bulgarian counterparts of the *Thrakiko kentro* and the *Etaireia thrakikon meleton* in Athens.[257] On the one hand, the emphasis on the ancient Thracian foundation of towns traditionally populated by Greeks (like Apollonia/Sozopoli/Sozopol or Mesimvria/Nesebăr at the Black Sea coast, which were meanwhile being Bulgarianized), tended to compromise the uniqueness of the local Greek ethnic presence and cultural tradition. On the other hand, the authors in question contributed to the popularization of a genetic link between Thracians and Bulgarians. The latter were seen as the "real" descendants of the autochthonous population, while (despite the inconsistency) the Greeks were always the product of "assimilation."

In general, the ideological construction of national identity was evolving. Just as in Romania, in Bulgaria the interwar period was marked by a conservative and often anti-modern search of "national distinctiveness," which spawned ethno-national "ontologies" like those of Lucian Blaga. Likewise, the folk traditions of peasantry, already the subject of interpretation and sometimes of (re)invention, enjoyed even greater interest. In both cases, the ancient Thracian "essence" of modern Bulgarians was symbolically excavated and promoted as a distinctive ethno-national heritage, allegedly intermingled with Slavic and Proto-Bulgarian elements (especially cherished in the interwar period).

This trend is visible in the ethno-philosophical writings of the essayist Nayden Sheytanov. An author of idiosyncratic constructions blending *Völkerpsychologie*, certain metaphysics of national history and a somewhat megalomaniac version of the official Bulgarian nationalism, Sheytanov was especially interested in the mystic, "magic" and irreducibly distinct elements of Bulgarian folk culture and, in general, of Bulgarian "national character" and

257 More concretely, Anastas Razboynikov, Ivan Batakliev and Stoyu Shishkov: see Dragostinova, *Between Two Motherlands*, 226–230.

"essence."[258] He believed these characteristics made up a specific "worldview" that had its roots in the ancient history and culture of the Balkans. According to Sheytanov, Bulgarians are characterized by a harmony of elements that are firmly rooted in the "old Thracian soil." He gave Thracian ancestry special importance, since it made the Bulgarians autochthonous in the Balkans. Sheytanov even underlined the need to develop a specialized discipline called "Thracistics" (*trakistika*).[259] At the same time, he put the Bulgarians at the very center of the Balkan peninsula (described as a "focus of world history") and even identified it with them, while he explicitly marginalized the Greeks (whom he "deconstructed" through Fallmerayer) and cast them outside the Balkan historical metaphysics. For him, Byzantium was also Thracian and Slavic, rather than Hellenic.

Sheytanov presents the "ancient" Balkan "spirituality" of Bulgarians chronologically, linking together Dionysian roots, Orphism and medieval Bulgaria (specifically, the heretic Bogomilism) and ending up in the "Revival period" of the nineteenth century. In the latter case, he extolled the idiosyncratic Rakovski, with his linguistic speculations and "Indian theories" of Bulgarian origin. At the same time, he described the nineteenth-century national poet Hristo Botev as a new Orpheus. The Orphic mythology, centered on the myth of the dismemberment of the young Dionysus-Zagreus by the Titans, played a crucial role in Sheytanov's metaphysics. He linked the resurrection of Dionysus (seen as an archetypal Balkan deity) to that of Christ and concluded that it was not Palestine but the "religion-creating" Balkans, together with the "Thraco-Phrygian" Asia Minor, that made Christianity a world religion.[260] Dionysus's killers—according to the Orphic myth, the Titans—had a central place in Sheytanov's national characterology of Bulgarians, and he dwelled on the "tragic Titanism" of Bulgarian historical existence.[261]

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258 See Nayden Sheytanov, *Velikobălgarski svetogled I. Balkano-bălgarski titanizăm* (Sofia: Rodna misăl, 1939).

259 See Albena Hranova, "Rodno, dyasno i lyavo: Anton Donchev," in Albena Hranova, *Istoriografiya i literatura. Za sotsialnoto konstruirane na istoricheski ponyatiya i Golemi razkazi v bălgarskata kultura*, vol. 2 (Sofia: Prosveta, 2011), 521–568. Accessible also on http://www.librev.com/index.php/component/content/article/413 (accessed on January 20, 2013).

260 Sheytanov, *Velikobălgarski svetogled*, 189.

261 For a more detailed analysis of Sheytanov's writings: Balázs Trencsényi, "The Nationalization of Philosophy: Constructing a Bulgarian 'National Ontology' in the Interwar Period," *CAS Working Paper Series*, no. 1 (Sofia, 2007); Balázs Trencsényi, "Relocating Ithaca: Alternative Antiquities in Modern Bulgarian Political Discourse," in *Multiple Antiquities—Multiple Modernities*, 247–275.

Nayden Sheytanov's speculations never became mainstream intellectual fashion in Bulgaria, yet they are representative of a deeper intellectual evolution. Not coincidentally, the preface to one of his books was written by Filov, who, by this time (between February 1940 and September 1943), was prime minister of Nazi-allied Bulgaria. At the same time, an identical search for "archaic features" was underway in studies of Bulgarian folk culture. Here an important role was played by the aforementioned ethnographer, folklorist and literary historian Mihail Arnaudov. He has left important works on traditions such as Kukeri (Kalogeroi) and Nestinari/Nestinarstvo (Anastenaria) that were so dear to the Greek "laographers" as well.

However, Arnaudov's interpretation of these and other traditions was not obsessed with Thracian roots: his analysis placed them in a broader historical and geographical context in which ancient Greece and Rome, as well as influences from the ancient Orient, were always present. This is the case with his 1920 study of Kukeri, where he also dealt with the custom of Rusalii.[262] Just like the Greek authors, Arnaudov traced Kukeri back to the Dionysian cult. But, paradoxically, his interpretation seems even more Helleno-centric and less "Thracian" than those of the Greek ethnographers. He identifies the prototype of the folk rite as the Anthesteria, one of the Dionysian festivals in ancient Athens. According to Arnaudov, the figure of the "king," one of the main protagonists of the ritual, was clearly a survival of the role of the Athenian *archōn basileus* in Anthesteria.

His approach to Nestinari was similar. In fact, the rite was described as early as 1866 by Petko Slaveykov, leader of the Bulgarian cultural movement from the late Ottoman period: this is the first known report on the Anastenaria/Nestinari. Arnaudov published his own observations in 1917 and in 1934.[263] Although he too saw similarities with Dionysian practices, Arnaudov considered the Nestinari to be a product of Zoroastrian and Mithraic influences that reached Thrace through Asia Minor. He even referred to attested or possible migrations of Syrian, Armenian and Persian populations to the Balkans. Moreover, he analyzed the rite within the vast context of ecstatic, enthusiastic

262 Mihail Arnaudov, "Kukeri i Rusalii," *Sbornik za narodni umotvoreniya i narodopis* 34 (1920). *Rusalii* is a cathartic and apotropaic dance performed by men. The tradition has what is probably a Latin name (*Rosalia*) and is typical of Romanian folklore as well. Romanians and Bulgarians share another similar custom—*Căluşarii*—that modern ethnographers likewise attributed to the ancient Thracian "foundation."

263 Mihail Arnaudov, "Novi svedeniya za nestinarite," *SpBAN* 14 (1917): 43–100; Mihail Arnaudov, *Ochertsi po bălgarskiya folklor*, vol. 2 (Sofia: 1934; 2nd ed., Sofia: Bălgarski pisatel, 1969).

as well as "shamanistic" phenomena and practices all over the world—from Siberia to Saint Theresa through the Muslim Sufi orders. His theses influenced Greek scholarship—more precisely, the interpretations by Konstantinos Romaios and Katerina Kakouri, which were examined above. At the same time, Greek authors wrongly accused Arnaudov of attempting to "Bulgarianize" the custom and of spreading "Bulgarian propaganda" in European scholarly circles (as his 1917 work was also published in German).[264]

Mihail Arnaudov was cautious concerning the "ethnic origins" of folk traditions. But the general ideological ambiance of the 1930s and during World War II encouraged the public interest in "Bulgarian folk customs" and their "ancient" origins. In some cases, this interest intermingled with certain mystic religious movements that flourished in Bulgaria during the same era. Thus, in the 1930s, members of the ultra-Orthodox sect "The Good Samaritan" discovered the Nestinari and saw the firewalking as an act through which one achieved revelation and God's grace. They started promoting the tradition among the wider public, despite the opposition of the Orthodox Church.[265] Obviously, Nestinari, along with other "authentic" Bulgarian folk traditions, was already undergoing a peculiar process of re-invention, often marked by Sheytanov's brand of irrationality and mysticism. Paradoxically or not, this process would become even more visible during the "rationalist" communist period.

Yet after taking power, the Bulgarian communist authorities censored much of the old scholarship and banished the dominant nationalist, conservative right and fascist ideology of the interwar period. Bogdan Filov was executed in February 1945 as the wartime prime minister responsible for the country's alliance with Nazi Germany. But it would be far-fetched to say that the scholarly traditions were destroyed. Gavril Katsarov, retired since 1943, was honored in 1950 by the new regime with the highest award for scholarly activity (the Dimitrov Prize); the Archaeological Institute of the Bulgarian Academy published a *Festschrift* dedicated to him before he died in 1958. The Thracian themes were present in this and other publications, which also included contributions by foreign scholars, particularly those from the new, "socialist" Romania, such as Ioan Coman.

In the 1950s Thracian studies saw significant advances in Bulgaria, especially in the field of the feebly documented ancient Thracian language. These

264 See also Boliaki, *To dionysiako (;) Anastenari*, 180.

265 See Galia Valtchinova, "Visionaries and the National Idea in Interwar Bulgaria: The Circle of the Orthodox Association *The Good Samaritan*," *Acta Ethnographica Hungarica* 54 (2009), 265–285.

involve the publications of the classical philologist Dimităr Dechev[266] and especially of the linguist, Vladimir Georgiev, a disciple of Paul Kretschmer.[267] While Dechev's etymologies were soon questioned and are today considered largely useless, Georgiev put forth interpretations that a number of scholars still regard as valid. He cast doubt on the idea of a unique Thracian tongue spoken in ancient times throughout the entire geographical space of modern Romania, Bulgaria, parts of Serbia and Macedonia, Greek and Turkish Thrace and northwest Asia Minor. Even before Georgiev, some scholars noted the discrepancies between the structure of toponyms in Dacia and Moesia on the one hand and Thrace *stricto sensu* on the other: while the designations of settlements ended in *-dava* in the first case (such as Argidava, Burridava and Sucidava), the corresponding elements in Thrace were *-para* and *-bria* (such as Bessapara, Skaptopara, Selymbria and Poltymbria). On the basis of these onomastic and phonetic particularities, Georgiev concluded that there were two languages: Thracian to the south and "Daco-Moesian" to the north, divided roughly by the Haemus mountains (Stara Planina).[268]

As this interpretation tended to ruin the image of Thracian "ethnic unity" on both sides of the Danube, it was rejected by leading Bulgarian and Romanian scholars, including by the main linguistic authority in Romania, Ion Iosif Russu.[269] At the same time, Vladimir Georgiev attempted a vast reconstruction of Southeast Europe's protohistory on the basis of toponymy and phonetic changes. Georgiev thought that it was possible to identify areas of settlement

266 Dechev's main work was published in Vienna: Dimiter Detschew, *Die thrakischen Sprachreste* (Vienna: R.M. Rohrer, 1957).

267 Vladimir Georgiev, *Trakiyskiyat ezik* (Sofia: BAN, 1957); Vladimir Georgiev, *Trakite i tehniyat ezik* (Sofia: BAN, 1977). This theory was accepted by other specialists, like the Bulgarian Ivan Duridanov; see his *Ezikăt na trakite* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1976).

268 Here a special problem is the Thracian name of Plovdiv, the main city of present-day Bulgarian Thrace, which has a "Dacian" ending: *Pulpudeva* (a linguistic *hapax* in Jordanes, *De summa temporum*, 221, 283). Another problem was the status of Paeonian—the language of a paleo-Balkan population that inhabited what is nowadays the Republic of Macedonia. The topic appeared to be sensitive, given the Bulgarian-Macedonian historical controversies that began in the late 1950s. Dechev considered Paeonian to be Thracian, but Ivan Duridanov, a disciple of Georgiev, considered it a separate language.

269 Yet his compatriot Cicerone Poghirc subscribed to the theory of the Bulgarian specialist: Cicerone Poghirc, "Thrace et daco-mésien: langues ou dialectes?" *Thraco-Dacica* 1 (1976): 335–347. Today the distinction between Thracian and Daco-Moesian onomastics is validated by Dan Dana. See "Les Daces dans les ostraca du désert Oriental de l'Egypte. Morphologie des noms daces," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 143 (2003): 166–186; Dan Dana, "*Onomasticon Thracicum* (*OnomThrac*)" and *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 250.

and early migrations that happened long before any written sources, even as early as the fourth millennium BCE—an ethno-historical approach that would be used in Greece by Michail Sakellariou. Thus the problem of Thracian "ethnogenesis" and links to "Pelasgians," Trojans, Etruscans and other obscure ancient populations acquired a new importance.[270]

Along with the linguistic studies, Thracian archaeology scored indisputable successes. In fact, on the eve of and during the first five years of communist rule in Bulgaria (1944–1949), extremely important discoveries were made, like the Kazanlăk tomb with its famous frescoes, the town of Seuthopolis, and the Panagyurishte treasure (all of them dating from the late fourth to third century BCE). These would become emblematic of Thracian culture and would be instrumentalized by the communist authorities to promote Bulgaria's ancient "cultural richness." Yet this process took time: after the completion of an archaeological study, Seuthopolis was submerged in 1955 by an artificial lake (its construction led to the discovery of the Thracian-Hellenistic site).

Quite probably, the town of (the so-called) Seuthes III would not have had this destiny if it was unearthed ten years later. Since the 1960s, under Todor Zhivkov as the head of the party and state, the ideological transformations of Bulgaria's communist regime led to a re-evaluation of the ancient Thracians without precedent in the country's history. These transformations were identical to those in Romania: resurrection of "bourgeois" scholarship and increasingly nationalist policies in many respects, including in the field of history. An outcome of this evolution was a certain autochthonist trend obvious in the search for more and more ancient "roots" of the nation that were supposed to symbolically "cement" the present statehood with the party's authority over it. A peculiar nexus between state leaders and scholars was formed concerning the promotion of national history.

Thus, as early as 1964, the members of the Institute of History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences discussed "theses" about the origin of Bulgarian ethnicity (*narodnost*): the codifiers of the national narrative added the Thracian element to the traditionally recognized Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians.[271] The party and state leadership expressed its support. In December 1967, at a plenum of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party dedicated to the "patriotic education of youth," Todor Zhivkov, general secretary of the party and head of the government, asserted that "in our veins" also ran "Thracian

270 The same was true of the "ethnic" ancestries of modern nations. Thus Georgiev suggested that the Albanian language was in fact Daco-Moesian—a theory that the Albanian authors, insisting on "autochthonous" Illyrian ancestry, never accepted.

271 Scholarly Archive of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, 88/2/47/2–8.

blood." He emphasized that the Bulgarians were "legitimate heirs" of Thracian history and culture.[272] In July 1970, scholars from the academy discussed "the question of the Thracian heritage in our lands" with Zhivkov and, in particular, the foundation of a specialized center of Thracian studies, as well as the organization of a world congress dedicated to Thracian history and culture.[273]

Both plans were realized in 1972 when the Institute of Thracology at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences was created and the First International Congress of Thracology was held in Sofia. The first director of the institute was the historian and classical philologist Alexander (Aleksandăr) Fol, who held the position for twenty years. In 1979 he also founded the Thracological Chair of History of Bulgarian Lands in Antiquity at Sofia University's Faculty of History. Fol was undoubtedly the main architect of the particular field of studies called "Thracology."[274] He had good knowledge of the contemporary modern scholarship on ancient Greece and the Mediterranean, as he enjoyed the relatively rare opportunity to do research in "capitalist countries" (Collège de France, German Archaeological Institute in Rome). Fol likewise occupied important administrative positions in the state apparatus: deputy chair of the Committee for Culture (an institution equal to a ministry) in the 1970s and minister of eduction in the 1980s. Both his career and the achievement of the Thracological project were largely made possible by a certain high patronage: that of Lyudmila Zhivkova, daughter of the general secretary of the party and herself chairperson of the Committee for (Art and) Culture in the 1970s.

The popularization among the Bulgarian and foreign public of Bulgaria's Thracian cultural and "spiritual" heritage was an essential element of the state's cultural policy defined and directed by Zhivkova.[275] The Thracians became a fixture in school textbooks and in a variety of popular publications, while the so-called "Thracian art" from "the Bulgarian lands" started an endless tour of the world museums.[276] Thracian monuments in the country became

272 Central State Archive of the Republic of Bulgaria, 1b/34/88/404–405.

273 Central State Archive, 1b/36/1078/88–89.

274 Fol himself emphasizes his paternity: Alexander Fol, *Samotniyat peshehodets. Intervyuta, izkazvaniya, razgovori, otzivi, statii v mediite* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 2006), 142.

275 See Iliev, "The Proper Use of Ancestors," 11. Apparently Lyudmila Zhivkova was personally fascinated by Thracian culture: she had the work *Kazanlăshkata grobnitsa* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1974) published under her name, dedicated to the famous tomb in Kazanlăk.

276 On the ideological stakes and the chronology of these exhibitions in the 1970s and 1980s: Galia Valtchinova, "Le passé, la nation, la religion: la politique du patrimoine en Bulgarie socialiste," *Etudes balkaniques* 12 (2005): 194–205. It must be emphasized, nevertheless, that Bulgarian specialists have interpreted "Thracian art," particularly the metalware, largely as a product of Iranian (Achaemenid) influence. Some of the finest objects were

objects of careful patrimonialization that also enjoyed international support: the Kazanlăk tomb was designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979, followed by the Sveshtari tomb. Similarly to "Dacia" and other ancient designations in socialist Romania, in Bulgaria Thracian references (Trakiya, Orfey, etc.) colonized the world of the socialist "economy of shortage" and of state-run tourism. They appeared on food products and, especially, on hotels and restaurants at the Black Sea coast and elsewhere.[277] "The Golden Orpheus" is the name of an international song contest held since 1967.

Surprisingly or not, the reference to Spartacus, the famous Thracian leader of a slave uprising in Rome from the first century BCE—traditionally highly charged with class-ideological connotations in leftist and communist rhetoric—was less present in the Bulgarian public space than that of the mythical singer Orpheus. While in Romania, the central Thracian figure in the popular imagination of "national specificity" and ancient "spirituality" was the Geta Zalmoxis, in the Bulgarian context, since Verković's *Slavic Veda*, the central Thracian figure has undoubtedly been Orpheus—also a key part of the modern Greek image of Thrace. His figure was employed in many contexts and for diverse tasks. For instance, Bulgarian musical folklore, instrumentalized for identity indoctrination during the communist period, was projected into a long historical continuity going back to a supposed ancient Thracian musical culture associated with Orpheus.[278] At the same time, the image of the Rhodopes as "the mountain of Orpheus" was propagandistically used in the homogenizing and oppressive policy of the regime *vis-à-vis* the Muslim communities in this part of the country.[279] It must be noted that Thracological experts were involved in a geostrategic program to promote and develop the

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clearly identified with Greek workshops situated on the Propontis, such as Lampsacus: Venedikov and Gerasimov, *Trakiyskoto izkustvo*. This point of view was, however, efficiently hid from the wider public.

277 On this question, see Alexander Kiossev, "Trakiya: prednatsionalno, natsionalno i komunistichesko konstruirane na mesta na pamet," in *Okolo Pier Nora. Mesta na pamet i konstruirane na nastoyashteto* (Sofia: Dom na naukite za choveka i obshtestvoto, 2004), 375.

278 E.g., Iliya Manolov, "Drevnefrakiyskie ēlementy v bolgarskoy narodnoy muzyke," in *Actes du IIe Congrès international de thracologie*, vol. 3, 289–292.

279 See Hranova, "Rodno, dyasno i lyavo: Anton Donchev," where she discusses in particular the Thracian imageries in the historical novels of the writer Anton Donchev. In his most famous work (*Vreme razdelno*, 1964; English edition, *Time of Parting*, 1968), he depicted the "forced Islamization" of Bulgarians in the Rhodopes (whose descendants are supposedly the Pomaks). In another novel, he consecrated the newly coined "holy trinity" of Thracians, Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians (*Skazanie za han Asparuh, knyaz Slav i zhretsa Teres*, first volume in 1982). Cf. Iliev, "The Proper Use of Ancestors."

Strandzha-Sakar area that borders Turkey. In the 1970s and 1980s, a number of fieldworks of the Institute of Thracology were held in this region, in the context of the often uneasy and, after 1985, severely damaged Bulgarian-Turkish relations.

When destined for a wider audience, the writings of Bulgarian Thracologists had a pronounced "patriotic" character, which marked some of the first publications of the founder of the discipline as well. Even the cliché of the "blood" connection between Bulgarians and Thracians can be found there.[280] A nationalist agenda is visible in specialized research as well: in his *Political History of Thracians*, Alexander Fol bashed the "pro-Greek" tradition of European classical studies that allegedly underestimated the role of Thrace as a political factor.[281] The Odrysian kingdom (fifth to fourth century BCE) was especially downgraded, and Fol, as well as other Bulgarian scholars, attempted to restore its glory.[282] But it would be too one-sided and even erroneous to treat the Bulgarian Thracological production as a narrowly nationalist enterprise. In fact, since the very beginning, the ancient Thracian heritage was seen from a different perspective as well, which dominated the specialized studies and differed clearly from the parochial interest in "ancient ethnic roots" and "blood."

Bulgarian Thracology from the 1970s on has been shaped by a number of influences—primarily by the heritage of the Western European classical studies and history of religions from the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, but also by Soviet "Indo-European studies" (pursued by scholars such as Vyacheslav Ivanov and Tamaz Gamkrelidze). In some respects the influence of modern historical anthropology can be detected coexisting with traditional Bulgarian ethnography as well as a residual structuralism intermingled with a simplified Freudianism and with Marxist-Leninist clichés. Finally, a certain Romanian influence, especially Eliade's accent on initiatic and mystery cults, is visible.[283] Using this eclectic methodology, Bulgarian scholars

280 Alexander Fol, *Dălboki koreni* (Sofia: NS na OF, 1966); Alexander Fol, *Pesenta za Sitalk* (Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1968).

281 Fol, *Politicheska istoriya na trakite*, 10–12, 24, 27.

282 And certainly they often exaggerated it. For instance, Fol and other authors created suspicious dynastic genealogies (just like the Geto-Dacian "dynasties" launched in socialist Romania) suggesting that the big Odrysian state lasted much longer than is usually accepted. Some specialists have nevertheless criticized this approach—in particular, the treatment of the small territory controlled by "Seuthes III" (the ruler of Seuthopolis) as a continuation of the Odrysian kingdom. See Hristo Danov, *Traki* (Sofia: Narodna prosveta, 1979), 123.

283 On the influences over the construction of Bulgarian Thracology: Galia Valtchinova, "Vanga, la 'Pythie bulgare': Idées et usages de l'Antiquité en Bulgarie socialiste," *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 31 (2005), specifically 111–117.

tried to situate ancient Thracian culture in much wider geographical contexts and "archaic" cultural-historical entities, including Southeast European, Balkan-Anatolian, Eastern Mediterranean and Indo-European. This large-scale approach was fully in the spirit of the megalomaniac (often "planetary") pretensions of Lyudmila Zhivkova's cultural messianism, which was inspired by occultist doctrines.[284] Thus the narrowly ethnic interpretations were "sublimated": in his later works, Alexander Fol tried to overcome the ethnic semantics of Thracian studies and even criticized the idea of a genetic connection between Thracians and Bulgarians.[285]

The result was a paradoxical cohabitation of a traditional ethno-national register with a "de-ethnicizing" trend. The latter was also due to the somewhat elitist character of Bulgarian Thracology, especially visible in the writings and statements of Alexander Fol. Those studying ancient Thrace presented it as a highly specialized endeavor of people with classical culture—itself exceptional in the officially egalitarian context of a communist regime that initially even suppressed classical education in high schools. To some extent, ethno-national claims were too "plebeian" for this kind of elitism. Thus, in the late phase of Bulgarian communism, dealing with the Thracian past was seen as an autonomous space of "pure culture" and "spirituality," far removed from the class-ideological clichés of the official doctrine.[286]

However, these aspects of Bulgarian Thracology did not erode the official nationalism of Zhivkov's regime and even reinforced Bulgarians' national pride in a more delicate "universalistic" manner. Thracology promoted the image of Bulgaria as a highly "spiritual space" that inherited the unique, extremely old and mystic culture of Thracians and was itself situated at the crossroads (the "contact zone") of large civilizational entities.[287] In this manner, Thracological constructions substantially repeated Eliade's imagery of the ancient "Balkan" culture but also the "Balkano-Bulgarian" megalomania of Nayden Sheytanov's "Thracistics" from the interwar period. Similarly, they were penetrated with a Sheytanov-style mysticism that was initially only favored by

284 On Lyudmila Zhivkova's cultural policy: Ivan Elenkov, *Kulturniyat front* (Sofia: IIBM, Institut "Otvoreno obshtestvo," Ciela, 2008). The most shocking projects launched by Zhivkova (a follower of Agni yoga, a spiritual teaching of the Russian painter Nicholas Roerich) are presented in Ivan Elenkov, "Lekite krile na totalitarnoto văobrazhenie," *Kritika i Humanizăm* 29 (2009): 211–235.

285 For instance, Fol, *Samotniyat peshehodets*, 105.

286 In some paradoxical cases, it was even imagined as an emancipatory form of cultural "dissidence." This aspect is highlighted in Iliev, "The Proper Use of Ancestors," 14–15.

287 An image propagated also among the foreign public: for instance, Alexander Fol et al., *Thracian Legends* (Sofia: Sofia Press, 1976); Alexander Fol and Ivan Marazov, *Thrace and the Thracians* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1977).

Lyudmila Zhivkova's occultism:[288] once again, ~~they~~ were focused on a search for Dionysian and Orphic archetypes that, over time, grew more and more central to Thracology. And again, just as in the speculations of Sheytanov but also of the self-styled *antiquisants* of nineteenth-century Bulgaria, ancient Greece was conspicuously marginalized in the paleo-Balkan or Balkan-Anatolian vision suggested by Thracological research. A closer look at its field of study would demonstrate this particular mix of patriotic pretensions and of pretentious esotericism.

The field in question is, indeed, itself extremely large. It stretches from the prehistory of the European continent (and beyond), from megalithic "sanctuaries" and archaeo-astronomical measurements, to Bulgarian folk traditions. An obsession with "the archaic" is obvious in all cases. There has been a trend to date the start of the Thracian "ethnogenesis" as early as possible, even to the Aeneolithic/Chalcolithic "cultures" from the late fifth millennium BCE. Here the main reference is the famous Varna Necropolis, discovered in 1972—the year of the foundation of the Institute of Thracology and of the First International Congress of Thracology. Bulgarian specialists tended to interpret the site as a place of birth of a "proto-Thracian" civilization.[289] Even if this theory was criticized by other scholars in Bulgaria,[290] the golden objects from Varna—extolled by a number of publications as "the oldest (technologically worked) gold in the world"—have been regularly included in the exhibitions of "Thracian treasures" touring the world's museums.[291]

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288 Zhivkova died prematurely in 1981—in the same year as the solemn commemorations marking "1,300 years since the creation of the Bulgarian state." The jubilee was organized largely under her patronage, and it was the occasion for a surfeit of publications on the history of Bulgaria, including on the Thracian past.

289 See Henrieta Todorova, "Die Übergang vom Äneolithikum zur Bronzezeit in Bulgarien. Die Ethnogenese der Thraker," in *Dritter internationaler thrakologischer Kongress*, 117–120; Alexander Fol, "Les grandes périodes de l'histoire thrace," in *Actes du IIe Congrès international de thracologie*, vol. 1, 19–23.

290 E.g., Danov, *Traki*, 21.

291 Like their colleagues elsewhere in the Balkans, Bulgarian protohistorians have used tendentious methodologies in order to prove "their own" archaeological sites were more ancient than those from corresponding layers and "cultures" in neighboring countries. In this way, their own prehistoric "ancestors" appear to be "earlier" and "more developed" than those of the neighbors. For a criticism of this approach (and, in particular, of the chronological schemes, criteria and designations) with its nationalist premises: Zoï Tsirtsoni, " 'Mon récent est plus ancien que ton moyen': motifs d'une guerre balkanique en cours," in *Mythos. La préhistoire égéenne du XIXe au XXIe siècle après J.-C.*, ed. Pascal Darcque, Michael Fotiadis and Olga Polychronopoulou, *BCH Supplément* 46 (2006): 231–244.

Here, for a time, Bulgarian scholars found particular inspiration in the influential "Kurgan hypothesis" of the Lithuanian-American protohistorian Marija Gimbutas. The end of "Varna culture" by the turn of the fourth millennium BCE corresponds roughly to the arrival of the Proto-Indo-European nomadic pastoralists who, according to Gimbutas's theory, destroyed the gynocentric "Old Europe." According to the same hypothesis, before the arrival of Indo-European male domination, the religious universe of the continent was centered on the veneration of a Great Mother Goddess.[292] On the basis of this theory, of Soviet Indo-European studies as well as of the kind of ethno-historical linguistics espoused by Vladimir Georgiev and Michail Sakellariou, Bulgarian Thracologists launched (often contradictory) speculations about the process of "Indo-Europeanization" and about the particular place of the (proto-)Thracians in it. The founder of the discipline, Alexander Fol, described massive migrations of Indo-Europeans and "Indo-Iranians," and he set (quite arbitrary) limits to these migrations, such as the "Hyperborean diagonal" passing through Thrace.[293] The last concept is not corroborated in any way by ancient geography, but it became a constant and obligatory reference of Fol's school.

Once the Indo-European migrations and/or "consolidations" were finished, the "Thraco-Pelasgian ethno-cultural community" and "Mycenaean Thrace"[294] appeared—cultural areas dating to the second millennium BCE. Thus the "Pelasgians," so emphasized in Greek scholarship, in Romanian "Thracomania" and in the Albanian national ideology,[295] likewise figured prominently in Bulgarian academic Thracian studies. Just as prominent was the belief in Thracian-Phrygian ethno-linguistic affinity, allegedly confirmed by common orgiastic cults, such as the one to Sabazios. Once promoted by Paul Kretschmer, the ancient Thraco-Phrygian link seems to be a die-hard thesis in Bulgarian Thracology; it is also the backbone of the Balkan-Anatolian "contact

292 See Marija Gimbutas, *The Gods and Goddesses of Old Europe 7000–3500 BC: Myths, Legends and Cult Images* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1974); Marija Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989).

293 Alexander Fol, "Thracians and Mycenaeans: Methodology of Parallelism," in *Thracians and Mycenaeans: Proceedings of the Fourth International Congress of Thracology; Rotterdam, 24–26 September 1984* (Leiden: Brill, 1989): 9–14.

294 On these concepts: Alexander Fol, *Trakiyskiyat orfizăm* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 1986), 139–143; Fol, *Politicheska istoriya na trakite*, 38–68.

295 See Pierre Cabanes, "Archéologie et identité nationale en Albanie au XXe siècle," *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 30 (2004): 115–122; Nathalie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais. La naissance d'une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe* (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 166–177, etc.

zone" that Thracology claims. Concerning the Mycenaean link established by Filov, it confirmed the extremely ancient character of Thracian culture from the classical and the Hellenistic eras ("Mycenaean type of society"): in the mid-1980s, it was abandoned in favor of the "more appropriate" term "Orphic Thrace." Referring to these numerous affinities and contacts with prehistoric populations—with Pelasgians, Phrygians and Mycenaeans, as well as Trojans and even Etruscans—Bulgarian Thracology managed to pull the Thracians out of their marginal position in the historical development of Europe. From "barbarians," excluded from history, the illiterate Thracians with their oral *paideia*—another key but obscure notion from Alexander Fol's lexicon—suddenly appeared to be at the heart of a big prehistoric Southeast European, Eastern Mediterranean and Indo-European culture.

The latter was older than the "Greek miracle," but the Bulgarian Thracologists took additional measures to discredit that miracle. Thus the Thracian stone-built and, in particular, beehive tombs, which struck Filov as similar to the Mycenaean ones, were treated as a product of a separate architectural evolution. The archaeologist Vasil Mikov and, after him, his colleague Ivan Venedikov found their archetype in the local "megalithic architecture," more concretely in the primitive dolmen and rock-cut tombs. They are considered typical of the Early Iron Age (twelfth to sixth century BCE) and are concentrated in the Strandzha-Sakar area and in the Eastern Rhodopes.[296] Thus the Mycenaean Greek influence on the beehive or *tholos* tombs, these emblematic monuments of "Thracian architecture," was neutralized. They appeared to be "autochthonous"—even if Venedikov acknowledged the existence of striking similarities and even of close links between Thrace and Asia Minor, where the *tholos* tradition remained intact throughout the first millennium BCE.[297] Not surprisingly, the Greek expert Dimitris Samsaris protested this "de-Hellenization" of the Thracian sepulchral monuments and insisted on the Mycenaean influence and thus on a point of view echoing Filov.[298]

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296 See Venedikov and Gerasimov, *Trakiyskoto izkustvo*, 70–72; *Trakiyski pametnitsi*, vol. 1: *Megalitite v Trakiya*, ed. Ivan Venedikov and Alexander Fol (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1976), 23–24, 78–81, 122.

297 Some of Venedikov's colleagues found his argumentation contradictory: Petăr Delev, "The Cult of the Dead in Thrace and Mycenaean Greece," in *Contributions au IV^e^ congrès international de thracologie* (Sofia: Académie bulgare des sciences, 1984), 185–190. Venedikov himself established analogies between the rock-cut tombs in Thrace and the Mycenaean tombs and claimed that the idea of the *tholos* tomb, in Asia Minor as well, was Mycenaean: *Trakiyskoto izkustvo*, 71; *Megalitite v Trakiya*, 110–115.

298 Dimitris Samsaris, "Les influences mycéniennes sur les Thraces," in *Thracians and Mycenaeans*, 167–173.

Similarly, the Bulgarian scholars did their best to discover a prehistoric Thracian navigation and "hegemony" over the Black, Marmara and Aegean seas. Here the starting point was the "Thracian thalassocracy"[299] that allegedly preceded the ancient Greek colonization. This topic had already been discussed by Katsarov, but the historicity of the prehistoric "thalassocracies" has been questioned and even rejected in international scholarship. Nevertheless, since the 1970s, the interest in Thracology led to an unprecedented development of underwater archaeology in a search to confirm the importance of Thracian navigation. Such confirmation was soon discovered in the waters near Bulgarian ports (and ancient Greek colonies) such as Sozopol: stone anchors, hastily dated to the end of the second millennium BCE. On this basis, Alexander Fol launched the concept of "Thracia Pontica": a vast area of Thracian maritime domination and cultural interactions that linked Thrace to Asia Minor (in particular to Troy), to the Aegean Islands, and even to Egypt and the ancient Near East.[300] Thus Thracians grew into a cultural-historical "partner" of ancient Greece, even in the sea, and the old understanding about their primitive and barbarian level of development was completely swept away.

The Bulgarian scholars were certainly right in their epistemological critique directed at the idea that the "influences" were one-directional (by Greece on Thrace) and in their insistence that what happened instead involved "interactions" and "crossings."[301] However, they were less critical in their efforts to prove that Thrace was as archaic as possible and had the largest possible spaces of cultural interactions. Soon foreign specialists in underwater archaeology put into question the dating of the Black Sea stone anchors as well as their Thracian origin: they suggested that the findings were from much later periods, even from the Middle Ages.[302] In the "Pontic" affair as well, Bulgarian Thracology's approach seemed anything but levelheaded. In general, the

299 It figures in a list of similar "dominations over the seas" that allegedly took place between the Trojan War and the crossing of the Aegean by Xerxes in 480 BCE. The list is attributed to Diodorus Siculus, a writer from the first century BCE, but it is attested to by Eusebius of Caesarea, in the early fourth century CE.

300 Alexander Fol, "La Thrace et les mers. Thracia Pontica. Aperçu général," in *Thracia Pontica I. Premier Symposium international* (Sofia, 1982), 9–15; Ljuba Ognenova-Marinova, "Thracia Pontica," in ibid., 69–81. Cf. Maya Vassileva, "Thracia Pontica as an Instrument of Research," in *Thracia Pontica V* (Varna, 1994), 9–12.

301 Alexander Fol, "La colonisation grecque en Thrace—croisement de deux cultures," in *Thracia Pontica IV* (Sofia, 1991), 3–14.

302 Honor Frost, "New Thoughts on Old Anchors," in *Thracia Pontica VI. 1* (Sozopol, 1997), 101–114; Jan de Boer, "Phantom-Mycenaeans in the Black Sea," *Talanta* 38–39 (2006–2007): 285–288.

discipline was accumulating a threatening mountain of problems, speculations and tendencious interpretations. But at a certain point, by the 1980s, scholarly verification (or, to put it in Karl Popper's terms, falsifiability) ceased to be a consideration. Not surprisingly, this happened in the traditionally much-debated sphere of Thracian religion and "spirituality."

The research of this sphere was undoubtedly the main point of interest of Thracian studies in Bulgaria as well. Publications from the socialist period naturally kept discussing questions inherited from the older scholarship. These were, on the one hand, the "Thracian" religious doctrine of "immortality" as well as "purely Thracian" deities (or those considered as such), including Zbelsourdos, Zalmoxis, Bendis and, of course, the Thracian Horseman (Heros). A traditional problem with the last figure is that it appears on thousands of votive and funerary reliefs but not in written sources (not in the Greek and Roman descriptions of the Thracian religion), and not before the Hellenistic period: actually, most images of him are from the Roman era. The classical scholar Georgi Mihaylov dwelled on the Thracian Horseman in a 1972 monograph, where he treated him as a chthonic deity with a variety of functions (such as the god of nature, of vegetation, of the animals' world, of the underworld and as a god-healer).[303] At the same time, like the French archaeologist Georges Seure and like Gavril Katsarov, Mihaylov thought that the Thracians' belief in immortality could be detected in the figure of the Heros: the Thracians believed that the one who died became *hērōs athanatos*, an immortal being. He also noticed that the iconography of the horseman was borrowed from Greek funeral art.[304] Yet this did not lead him to reconsider the status of the Heros as a particularly important Thracian god.

On the other hand, the researchers readily subscribed to the traditional idea of the Thracians as "masters of religion" of the ancient Greeks. Here the main references were, of course, the "Thracian roots" of Dionysus and of Orpheus. However, the Bulgarian scholars working from the 1960s on knew something that their colleagues from the first half of the century did not: the name of Dionysus was deciphered on Mycenaean tablets from Pylos and Crete, written in Linear B and dating back to the thirteenth century BCE. This did not necessarily lead them to doubt the Thracian origin of the god.[305] A comfortable

303 Georgi Mihaylov, *Trakite* (Sofia: Dărzhavno voenno knigoizdatelstvo, 1972), especially 237–247. According to Mihaylov, the Heros was identified with Greek gods during the Hellenistic period, and the result was the development of a syncretic cult.

304 Mihaylov, *Trakite*, 244; Georgi Mihailov, "Epigramme funéraire d'un Thrace," *Revue des études grecques* 64 (1951): 104–118.

305 For instance, Danov, *Traki*, 60.

reaction was to pretend that this fact only attested, once again, to the close connections between Mycenae and Thrace, and thus the extremely ancient character and the crucial importance of Thracian religion. Georgi Mihaylov, however, did not accept the thesis about Thracian export in this case and even supposed Greek influence in a Thracian cult of Dionysus.[306] Indeed, the thesis of the Thracian origin of Dionysus was launched by certain ancient Greek authors—quite probably, in order to underline the singularity of the god. That is why other ancient authors claimed other origins of Dionysus: he has been seen as an Egyptian and even as an Indian deity.[307]

Mihaylov was as cautious about the figure of Orpheus and about possible Thracian roots of the so-called Orphic doctrines that appeared in Greek contexts (Southern Italy, Athens) in the sixth or fifth century BCE.[308] Moreover, Mihaylov even emphasized that all the "Thracian myths" in fact belong to Greek mythology: they are mentioned only in Greek and Latin literature and, to the extent that they appear on monuments from Thrace, these are products of Greek and Roman art.[309] By the way, the figure of Orpheus, so popular in ancient Greek literature and art (for instance, in Athenian pottery), does not appear in the "domestic" Thracian epigraphic and iconographic monuments.[310] Soon, this levelheaded approach in Bulgarian Thracian studies would be completely destroyed by a kind of conceptual "Bacchic mania."

It was signaled in the mid-1970s in the writings of Alexander Fol—in rather surprising contexts, such as publications about megaliths. Fol saw these monuments as "mysterious sacred places" dedicated to the solar cult "in its chthonic character" (sic). He discovered complex orientations of dolmens and rock-cut

306 Mihaylov, *Trakite*, 224, 227.

307 Petre, *Practica nemuririi*, 47.

308 He even directly denied the existence of such roots: Mihaylov, *Trakite*, 125, 197. The author likewise criticized the thesis of Thracian "monotheism" and the idea that Orpheus and Zalmoxis were real historical figures (Ioan Coman).

309 Mihaylov, *Trakite*, 183–184.

310 According to Ivan Marazov, *Vidimiyat mit. Izkustvo i mitologiya* (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1992), 52. Indeed, Orpheus was regularly seen by the ancient authors as Thracian but also as other kinds of "foreigner" (for instance, Cretan). And at times he was not attributed any specific "ethnic" origin. The same was true for Musaeus, legendary musician, priest, prophet, and a *Doppelgänger* of Orpheus: in some cases he was regarded as a Thracian but in other cases as an Athenian. The foreign/Thracian origin of mythological personalities should not be accepted, in a traditional positivistic way, as an indication, or a memory, of a genuinely foreign cultural provenance. The reference to a specific origin might simply emphasize the particular nature of figures that were otherwise produced by a purely Greek mythological imagination. See Petre, *Practica nemuririi*, 49.

tombs towards phases of the sun and immediately linked them to Orpheus, "who united in his myth everything," as well as to "the eternal question of Orphism."[311] By the early 1980s, the interpretations proposed by Alexander Fol on a variety of problems finally crystallized in his theory of "Thracian Orphism"—the one whose existence Georgi Mihaylov dared to doubt. Thereafter, it became the hallmark of Bulgarian Thracology, and as such, it deserves special attention. It must be noted that, although the concept was promoted in the 1980s, most of the publications on Thracian Orphism are after 1989. Thus, from the point of view of the dominant scholarship, there is a perfect continuity between the late communist and the post-communist period.

According to Alexander Fol, Thracian Orphism represents an aristocratic Thracian doctrine or "ideology" dating back to the second millennium BCE that was transmitted orally between those initiated in it.[312] This kind of Orphism preceded the Greek one by centuries or even as much as a millennium. It was an ideology of the "Thraco-Pelasgian community," a paleo-Balkan oral doctrine, preceding the Trojan War. Greek Orphism, as well as Pythagoreanism, represented only later and denatured versions of it. One may well ask about the written sources concerning such a doctrine: secret, transmitted orally, and so far away in prehistory. The answer is that there are no sources—but this is also what makes Thracian Orphism so special. Fol often stated that the Thracians were a "non-literary culture." According to him, the lack of script was the misfortune but also the greatness of the Thracians: in Bulgarian Thracology, this absence was invested with highly sophisticated spiritual values and was interpreted practically as a conscious choice by Thracians.[313] Thus Fol's explanation was that this aristocratic ideology was "coded" and can be "deciphered" in a variety of data: in Thracian megaliths and art, but also in the Greek corpus of Orphic texts and elsewhere.

Strikingly enough, under a Marxist-Leninist regime, Bulgarian Thracology demonstrated a special inclination for "royal" and "aristocratic" cults and ideologies of the "elite." One likewise sees Eliade's accent on "initiation"[314] but also

311 *Megalitite v Trakiya*, 25.

312 His first monograph on the question was *Trakiyskiyat orfizăm* (1986).

313 The Thracians did not need a script—simply put, their religious *Weltanschauung* excluded it: Dimităr Popov, *Trakologiya* (Sofia: Lik, 1999), 12.

314 Romanian authors also drew a distinction between "elite cults," based on the doctrine of immortality, in which only the aristocratic and military class were initiated, and popular cults of agrarian character: Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 325, 388. To the extent that some of these statements are quite recent, one can also suppose an additional influence in the other direction: that of Bulgarian Thracology on Romanian Thracology.

a certain inspiration by the Italian historian of religions Raffaele Pettazzoni, who spoke of the existence of a specific "royal cult" in Thrace, different from a plebeian agricultural religion. Pettazzoni's impact is even more visible in Fol's idea that this cult was "urano-chthonic": it combined perfectly the solar/uranian and the chthonic principle.[315] Whatever this means, Thracian tribes were ruled by priest-kings who were central figures within the Orphic mystery cults. Of course, the image of the priest-king here, a cliché from the history of religions itself, is based on parallels with Minoan Crete, Mycenae and other extremely archaic cultures. The "Dionysiac" orgiastic cults were, by contrast, practiced by the "popular strata": they constituted the "peasant Thracian religion."[316]

According to Alexander Fol, the overall purpose of the Thracian Orphic initiation was the achievement of immortality. The very reference to "Orphism" in this case naturally evokes all the problematic around the myth about the young Dionysus-Zagreus who was torn apart by the Titans—a destiny that also put Orpheus in the hands of Maenads or of Thracian/Macedonian women. Fol attempted the reconstruction of the Thracian or "Thraco-Pelasgian" archetype of this tale,[317] which was otherwise seen by modern authors as the central anthropogonic belief of the Greek Orphic tradition since the sixth century BCE. However, even the existence of such a tradition is far from definitively confirmed. Pausanias, in the second century CE (*Description of Greece* 8.37.5), attributes the tale of Dionysus's dismemberment (*diasparagmos*) by the Titans to an author from the sixth century BCE (Onomacritus), whose existence has not been proven. It is striking that the most complete version of the myth dates only from the sixth century CE: it belongs to the Neoplatonist Olympiodorus, a pagan philosopher in an already Christianized world.[318] This is not an obstacle for Alexander Fol in his reconstruction of a belief allegedly dating back to the second millennium BCE. After Zagreus, he even dealt with a second version of the "Thracian Dionysus": Sabazios.[319]

To complicate the picture further, Alexander Fol placed at the beginning of the Thracian Orphic cosmogony a pan-archaic chthonic Great Mother

315 His article "La religione dell'antica Tracia" was published in *Serta Kazaroviana*, 291–299, and was quoted in Fol, *Politicheska istoriya na trakite*, 50.

316 Sic—*selska trakiyska religiya*: Alexander Fol, *Politika i kultura v drevna Trakiya* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1990), 64.

317 Alexander Fol, *Trakiyskiyat Dionis*, vol. 1: *Zagrey* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 1991).

318 More in Radcliffe Edmonds, "Tearing Apart the Zagreus Myth: A Few Disparaging Remarks on Orphism and Original Sin," *Classical Antiquity* 18 (1999): 35–73.

319 Alexander Fol, *Trakiyskiyat Dionis*, vol. 2: *Sabaziy* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 1994).

Goddess. She gave birth and was then impregnated by her son, who was the Sun and the Fire. Their *hierogamy* produced another son identified with the Thracian priest-king—an *anthrōpodaimōn* residing between the human world and the divine immortality. Not surprisingly, he also impregnated the Great Mother Goddess. In the meantime, the development ensued of the Thracian Orphic cosmos, which Fol and his followers describe using a highly mystic vocabulary enriched with Pythagorean-like numerical speculations.[320]

In fact, many researchers doubt Greek Orphism even existed as a specific religious doctrine and consider it an invention of nineteenth-century classical studies[321]—although a number of texts and practices (not necessarily interrelated) were designated by ancient Greek authors as "Orphic." But the Thracian Orphism of Bulgarian Thracology is amazing, given that there is not a single written testimony that can confirm its existence. Moreover, although ancient authors have provided plenty of data about Thracian religion, none of it refers to any specific cult to a Mother Goddess in Thrace. Of course, the ancient Greeks were not initiated in this cult—perhaps unlike the Bulgarian Thracologists who used a specific method of *interpretatio thracica* in order to

320 As "Thracian Orphism" indeed seems to be a doctrine for an initiated elite, it is better to let the initiated explain it: "The Thracian Orphic Universe has ten stages, and its numeral expression is 4 + 3 + 3. The Great Goddess Mother/Cosmos/Mountain is quiet (first stage); after that she winces and self-conceives (second stage), she wears her fetus (third stage) and gives birth to her divine Son (fourth stage). This divine Son expresses the totality in Cosmos, i.e., he has a solar (related to the sun) and chthonic (earthly) nature. He is the Sun, but he is also Fire or blood. The next three stages give the final shape of the doctrinal faith, and they reflect the daily and the annual cycle of the sun. The Son-Sun rises on the horizon (fifth stage), he turns around and thus moves the Cosmos (sixth stage), and he enters into a sacred relationship with the Great Mother Goddess (seventh stage). The sacred marriage is believed to be a fusion of the light coming from the Son-Sun/Fire with the darkness of the cave, which symbolizes the womb of the Great Goddess Mother. This act leads to the birth the child of the gods-consorts (eighth stage). This is the priest-king who, after passing an important probation, receives the insignia of power from the Great Goddess Mother and arranges the world of humans (ninth stage). The tenth stage is the symbolic sacred marriage of the king with the Great Mother Goddess, which has the task of putting in motion the life cycle again." Valeriya Fol, *Orfey Trakietsăt* (Sofia: Tangra-TanNakRa, 2008, 54–55).

321 Claude Calame, "Qu'est-ce qui est orphique dans les Orphica?" *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 219 (2002): 385–400; Stian Sundell Torjussen, *Metamorphoses of Myth: A Study of the "Orphic" Gold Tablets and the Derveni Papyrus* (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag, 2010); Radcliffe Edmonds III, *The "Orphic" Gold Tablets and Greek Religion: Further Along the Path* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

demonstrate its existence.[322] It is, however, quite likely that the Great Mother Goddess of Thracian Orphism is simply a figment of Bulgarian scholars' imagination, derived from their reading of Marija Gimbutas's theory of prehistoric "Old Europe," as well as from analogies with (problematic reconstructions of) the religion of Minoan Crete, of Phrygia, and so on. Today, the figure of the Great Mother Goddess itself is considered a cliché of the modern history of religions, expressing sexist stereotypes.[323]

In any case, since the 1980s, as a result of Alexander Fol's institutional power, Bulgarian Thracologists subscribed indiscriminately to Thracian Orphism with all of its concepts: Hyperborean diagonals, *paideia*, solar-chthonic unity, and so on. The scholars started discovering Great Mother Goddesses, Orphic and Dionysian elements everywhere: it was enough to have a female image on a tomb fresco or over a metal application in order to proclaim it a representation of the Great Mother Goddess. "Traditional" Thracian gods, such as the Thracian Horseman, were quickly accommodated to the solar-chthonic schema; Zalmoxis became a personification of the aristocratic elite passing the initiatic rites of immortalization.[324]

Nevertheless, all of the main notions of Bulgarian Thracology have been criticized in the field from which they have been taken: the study of ancient Greek religion. For instance, the heuristic value of "initiation" is generally put into question.[325] It is *a priori* problematic to what extent the term "mysteries," a concept with a certain meaning for Greek religion, is applicable in non-Greek contexts. Walter Burkert, one of the leading scholars of Greek mythology today, has criticized the entrenched clichés about the ancient mystery cults. Among these are the theses about their allegedly foreign origin[326] and highly spiritual

322 Alexander Fol, "Interpraetatio Thracica," *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 11 (1983), 217–230. For some reason, Fol spells the term "interpraetatio" throughout the essay, despite the fact that the standard Latin form is *interpretatio*.

323 Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*, 200–207; Philippe Borgeaud, *La Mère des dieux. De Cybèle à la Vierge Marie* (Paris: Seuil, 1996); Lucy Goodison and Christine Morris, *Ancient Goddesses: The Myths and the Evidence* (London: British Museum Press, 1998); Christine Morris, "From Ideologies of Motherhood to 'Collecting Mother Goddesses,'" in *Archaeology and European Modernity: Producing and Consuming the "Minoans,"* eds. Yannis Hamilakis and Nicoletta Momigliano (Padua: Bottega d'Erasmo, Aldo Ausilio Editore, 2006), 69–78.

324 See Dimităr Popov, *Zalmoksis. Religiya i obshtestvo na trakite* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 1989).

325 *Initiation in Ancient Greek Rituals and Narratives: New Critical Perspectives*, eds. David Dodd and Christopher Faraone (London and New York: Routledge, 2003).

326 Not only Bulgarian but also Greek and Romanian scholars have insisted that practically all the Greek mystery cults were of Thracian origin: the Eleusinian mysteries, the Cabeiri,

character that was close to (or that paved the way for) Christianity,[327] as well as the dogma about the mysteries as a triumph over death and their association with the figure of the "Dying-and-Rising God" popularized by James Frazer.[328] Today, in the studies of ancient cults, concepts such as "solar" and chthonic," abundantly used by Bulgarian Thracologists, are deemed empty of meaning.[329] The dichotomy of "Apollonian and Dionysian," which one sees regularly in the publications of Fol and that goes back to Friedrich Nietzsche and Erwin Rohde, is clearly anachronistic.[330]

It would certainly be unfair to limit the scope of Thracian studies in Bulgaria since the 1980s to Alexander Fol's speculations—which, with the passing of time, evolved in completely idiosyncratic constructions formulated in an obscure and even completely hermetic language.[331] There are also other patterns of research on the Thracian past that do not necessarily fall into the categories of Thracian Orphism. Unfortunately, in the field of Thracian religion and "spirituality," even the "alternative" approaches seem often highly speculative. Such is the case with Ivan Marazov, art historian and specialist of "Thracian art," one of the most publicly visible Thracologists today. Marazov's conceptual framework is shaped by influences both from the "East" and the "West": the Soviet/Russian Scythological school and its interpretations of the Scythian

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the Theoi Megaloi at Samothrace and so on. It must be noted that the Bulgarian specialists also "Thracized" the most famous oracle of the ancient Greek world: Delphi. It was seen as originally "Thraco-Pelasgian": Fol, *Trakiyskiyat orfizăm*, 142–150. On this basis, Fol even established a spiritual link between Pythia and the Bulgarian clairvoyant Vanga, whose "gift" was of great interest to Lyudmila Zhivkova: see Valtchinova, "Vanga, la 'Pythie bulgare.' "

327 In Bulgaria, the link between the Thracian "belief in immortality" and Christianity was not as strong as in Romania. However, there are publications that argue that Thracian Orphism paved the way for the adoption of Christianity and even influenced the early Christian doctrine: Roman Tomov, *Imperatorite-orfitsi. Orfizăm i ranno hristiyanstvo IV–VI vek* (Sofia: Akademichno izdatelstvo/Prozorets, 1998).

328 Walter Burkert, *Ancient Mystery Cults* (Cambridge, MA, and London: Harvard University Press, 1987).

329 Renate Schlesier, "Olympische Religion und Chthonische Religion," in *The Notion of "Religion" in Comparative Research: Selected Proceedings of the XVIth IAHR Congress*, ed. Ugo Bianchi (Rome: "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, 1994), 301–310.

330 See Cornelia Isler-Kerényi, *Dionysos in Archaic Greece: An Understanding through Images* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), more concretely 235–254: "Modern Mythologies: 'Dionysos' versus 'Apollo.' "

331 See, for instance, Alexander Fol, *Chovekăt văv vidove vreme* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 1998); Alexander Fol, *Chovekăt văv vidove prostrantsva* (Sofia: Reklamna agentsiya Ochi, 2003).

"animal art style," the Soviet/Russian Indo-European and Eurasian studies (exemplified by Vyacheslav Ivanov), Mircea Eliade's focus on "the archaic" and "the sacred," Georges Dumézil's trifunctional scheme of Indo-European societies and religions, and modern structuralism in anthropology, especially the "Paris school" of historical anthropology of ancient Greece (Jean-Pierre Vernant, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Marcel Detienne).

The result is an in-depth search of ancient semantics "coded" in images on art objects from Thrace (particularly the toreutics). These images are projected on the extremely large background of Indo-European comparativism: especially emphasized are the parallels between Thrace and ancient Iran, as well as Vedic India.[332] In fact, Marazov's interpretations demonstrate all the epistemological shortcomings of the studies of Indo-European religion and, more concretely, of the structuralism in their field. On the one hand, the structuralist accent on *implicit* semantic paradigms means that the results are often ultimately unverifiable and remain, in the best case, beautiful hypotheses. On the other hand, the publications of Marazov, and in general of Bulgarian Thracologists, abound in not-so-beautiful clichés coming from traditional Aryan studies, such as Indo-European horsemen, as well as Hyperboreans worshipping solar cults and organized in "secret masculine societies" (*Männerbünde*) like those in ancient Iran.[333] More innocent but no less problematic and criticized in other scholarly contexts is the easy application of the concept of "shamanism" that we see in works on Thracian/paleo-Balkan mythology published by Marazov and by the Bulgarian classical scholar Bogdan Bogdanov.[334]

Problematic or not, the constructs created by Bulgarian Thracologists found their "foundations": just as in Romania and in Greece, they lay in age-old folk traditions. Following the path traced by the previous generation of ethnographers and folklorists—such as Mihail Arnaudov—the new specialists confirmed, intensified and even enriched the "ancient ~~foundation~~" of Bulgarian folklore. Ivanichka Georgieva, the leading researcher of "Bulgarian folk mythology," discovered a great variety of Thracian survivals attesting to

332 See Ivan Marazov, *Mitologiya na trakite* (Sofia: Sekor, 1994); Ivan Marazov, *Mitologiya na zlatoto* (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1994).

333 On Thracian "secret male societies": Popov, *Zalmoksis*, 101–110; Marazov, *Mitologiya na zlatoto*, 136–137.

334 Bogdan Bogdanov, *Orfey i drevnata mitologiya na Balkanite* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 1991); Marazov, *Mitologiya na trakite*, 166–173. For a critique both of the fashion of the "initiatic cults" and of the shamanistic thesis: Dan Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 256–287; Dan Dana, "Preuve et malentendu. Le mythe historiographique de l'origine et de la transmission du chamanisme en Grèce ancienne," *Cahier du Centre de recherches historiques. La preuve en histoire* 45 (2010): 109–128.

the uninterrupted continuity of Bulgarian folk culture since the most ancient times.[335] As a result, the Kukeri and the Nestinari were proclaimed unequivocally to be relics from the Thracian religion and spirituality—and they were not the only ones. Even a rather cautious scholar like Georgi Mihaylov believed that a number of Bulgarian customs and legends dated back to ancient times; thus the South Slavic popular hero Krali Marko (Marko Kraljević) became a reincarnation of the Thracian Horseman.[336] The aforementioned Rusalii, the viticulture feast of Trifon Zarezan, the custom known as German (expected to bring rain), the popular Saint George and Saint Marina, and even Christmas and New Year customs (Koledari, Survakari) were seen as belonging to a Thracian religious base.[337]

Not surprisingly, in most of the cases, connections were made between these rites and the "Thracian Dionysus," identified by Alexander Fol in the figures of Zagreus and Sabazios. Especially the "white" Kuker, without a mask, from the Strandzha area, was clearly interpreted as a representation of Dionysus-Zagreus-Sabazios.[338] Thus a thesis put forth more than a century ago by the Greek writer Georgios Vizyenos was repeated and enhanced by Bulgarian Thracology, despite the fact that there are similar customs in Central Europe. The archaeologist and art historian Ivan Venedikov actually claimed that the Romans brought the Kukeri into the Celtic settlements in Central and Western Europe but that the rite was authentically created by "the Thracian village."[339] Concerning the other hallmark of Strandzha—the fire-walking dance of Nestinari—it was easily linked to the solar/fire phantasms of Thracian Orphism. Bulgarian specialists discovered in it the figure of the Sun-Son of the Great Mother Goddess and claimed that the rite was a relic of the Thracian "belief in immortality."[340]

In fact, the "modern interdisciplinary scholarly discipline" of Thracology was (and is) hostage to a quite traditionalist ethnographical approach that arbitrarily projects folk traditions back in history and discovers them retroactively in real or supposed ancient cults. Like Chourmouziadis in 1873, Bulgarian

335 Ivanitchka Georgieva, "Survivances de la religion des Thraces dans la culture spirituelle du peuple bulgare," in *Actes du II^e Congrès International de Thracologie*, vol. 3.

336 Mihaylov, *Trakite*, 7–8.

337 See the monograph of the specialist of Thracian art Ivan Venedikov, *Mednoto gumno na prabălgarite* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1983).

338 Stoyan Raychevski and Valeriya Fol, *Kukerăt bez maska* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 1993).

339 Venedikov, *Mednoto gumno na prabălgarite*, 190–191.

340 Valeriya Fol and Ruzha Neykova, *Ogăn i muzika* (Sofia: BAN/Tilia, 2000).

specialists claim that the exclamations of the *nestinari* as they dance over hot coals (*vah! văh!*) are invocations of Bacchus. In the same way, the shout *Sabo, Sabo!* during the festival of Saint Athanasius in the town of Etropole is linked to the cult of Sabazios.[341] In reaching such conclusions, it is highly doubtful that proper standards of scholarly research were adhered to. The last example is clearly based on a folk etymology—that is, merely the fact that the two words sound alike. An academic scholar such as Ivan Venedikov even discovered Sumero-Akkadian traces in Bulgarian folklore.[342]

The result of this evolution is certainly ironic. Born in an academic tradition that started with scholars of international importance such as Gavril Katsarov and Bogdan Filov, Bulgarian Thracian studies, by the 1990s, proceeded to rehabilitate dilettantish publications from the nineteenth century such as those of Georgi Rakovski and—most notably—the *Slavic Veda* of Stefan Verković.[343] Interwar speculations like those of Nayden Sheytanov, linking Thracian Dionysian and Orphic archetypes with the medieval heretic Bogomilism and, through it, with the Bulgarian folk culture, are to be heard at congresses of Thracology.[344] Such facts show again to what extent it is difficult to distinguish academic Thracology from popular Thracomania, despite the Bulgarian Thracologists' pretense of engaging in highly specialized scholarly research.

As stated earlier, in terms of Thracological works and methodology, there is a perfect continuity between the 1980s and the post-communist period. However, the fall of the communist regime in Bulgaria had a certain influence, quite ambivalent, on this field of study. On the one hand, Alexander Fol's institutional authority fell as well—unlike his symbolic authority as "father of Thracology," which lasted at least until his death in 2006. In any case, archaeologists researching Thracian sites formulated critiques of basic postulates of

341 Fol, *Trakiyskiyat Dionis*, vol. 1, 74; Fol, *Trakiyskiyat Dionis*, vol. 2, 209–211; Dilyana Boteva, "St. Athanase d'Etropolé, Sabazios et l'oracle de Dionysos," *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 23 (1997): 287–298.

342 See Ivan Venedikov, *Razhdaneto na bogovete* (Sofia: Arges, 1992).

343 See Bogdan Bogdanov, "Zagadkata 'Veda Slovena' "—introduction to the new edition of Verković's collection from 1997. It was published by the Open Society Institute in Sofia: its director until 1997 was the classical scholar Bogdanov. His father, the writer Ivan Bogdanov, had attempted to demonstrate the authenticity of the *Slavic Veda*: see his *Veda Slovena i nasheto vreme* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 1991). See also Fol, *Samotniyat peshehodets*, 108; Idem, *Trakiyskata kultura. Kazano i premălchano* (Sofia: Tangra-TanNakRa, 2009), 179.

344 Vidka Nikolova, "Bogomilstvoto-nestinarstvo i negovi trako-orficheski predobrazi," in *Eighth International Congress of Thracology: Thrace and the Aegean*, vol. 2 (Sofia: Europa Antiqua, BAS, 2002), 909–917.

the "father of Thracology."[345] On the other hand, just like in Romania, popular Thracomania only flourished and further contaminated the scholarship. This process is especially visible in the archaeological "Thracian tomb-hunting" and in a new "megalitho-mania" promoted by academic scholars.

New scholarly projects, publications and Web sites claim that the "Thracian megalithic sanctuaries" were complex astronomical observatories, similar to Stonehenge. The dolmens and the rock-cut tombs were oriented according to the summer or the winter solstice in a perfect mathematical manner: according to specialists such as Valeriya Fol, they were sanctuaries of the God-Sun, the Son of the Great Mother Goddess (and of the Mother Goddess itself).[346] In a competition with Valeriya Fol, the archaeologist Nikolay Ovcharov discovered important caves he believed the Thracians used to symbolize the vulva of the Great Mother, fertilized by the phallus of the Sun. They ~~also~~ were also used for mysterious "Dionysian orgies."[347] Starting from 2000, Ovcharov won great popularity by publicizing the "Sacred town" and "Thracian sanctuary of Dionysus" in Perperek/Perperikon, as well as the "Tomb of Orpheus" next to the village of Tatul—both in the Eastern Bulgarian Rhodopes. In fact, both sites were already known and researched: the idea that the rock-cut monument in Tatul was the "Tomb of Orpheus" was put forth, as early as 1976, by Alexander Fol.[348] As we already saw, the location of the Thracian sanctuary of Dionysus, mentioned by Herodotus (*Histories*, vol. 7, 111), attracted the interest of Stefan Zahariev ~~as early as~~ the nineteenth century. The question had been discussed by a number of archaeologists, Bulgarian and foreign. However, no one looked for it in the Eastern Rhodopes, and hence, no one had the chance to "discover" it.

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345 Representative of this "revisionist" trend is the monograph of Konstantin Rabadzhiev (Rabadjiev), *Elinski misterii v Trakiya. Opit za arheologicheski prochit* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo, 2002). The title of the book alone—*Hellenic Mysteries in Thrace*—is "provocative": in general, it is assumed that the Hellenic mysteries were Thracian . . . Critiques of Alexander Fol's methods were expressed by foreign archaeologists as well: Zofia Archibald, "Thracian Cult—from Practice to Belief," in *Ancient Greeks West and East*, ed. Gocha Tsetskhladze (Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 1999), 427–468.

346 For instance, http://rock-cut.thracians.org/en/index.php (accessed on January 20, 2013). See also Valeriya Fol, *Skalni toposi na vyara v Yugoiztochna Evropa i v Mala Aziya prez drevnostta* (Sofia: BAN, 2007); Valeriya Fol, "Bogăt, pochitan ot vsichki hora," *Balkani* 1 (2012): 21–32.

347 http://www.nasamnatam.com/patepis/Peshtera_Vulvata-278.html (accessed on January 20, 2013).

348 *Megalitite v Trakiya*, 25.

Public interest in the Thracian chamber tombs also experienced a real renaissance in the late 1990s and the first years of the twenty-first century, when the archaeologist Georgi Kitov discovered a number of important monuments of this kind in Central Bulgaria. As a result, the area between Kazanlăk and Shipka, previously known as "the Valley of the Roses," was renamed "the Valley of the Roses and of the Thracian Kings" (sic).[349] Both Kitov and Ovcharov competed in the media for the moniker of "Bulgarian Indiana Jones."[350]

Not surprisingly, the scholars' Thracomania is fully embraced and developed by dilettantes. At present, neo-pagan associations perform mysterious rites at the "Thracian cult complex" near Starosel, discovered by Kitov: there the enthusiasts regularly worship the Great Mother Goddess and the Sun. Some of them even founded a "Thracian Church" that is ruled, for some reason, by "cardinals" (sic). The same activists meanwhile discovered and decoded a Thracian script—a "discovery" that certainly contradicts the traditional theory about the ancient Thracians' illiteracy. Others recycled the idea that the Thracians were, in reality, Bulgarians, or even insisted that the Bulgarians were the ancestors of the ancient Thracians.[351] In general, the autochthonist theory from the nineteenth century and Gancho Tsenov's publications from the beginning of the twentieth century enjoy popularity on Web sites, discussion forums, and the like. At the same time, old folk traditions associated with Thracians—primarily Nestinari and Kukeri—are achieving greater popularity and are sometimes even more instrumentalized than before.[352] In 2009 it was Bulgaria, not Greece, that succeeded in adding the Thracian firewalking custom to UNESCO's Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.[353]

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349 In his scholarly publications, Kitov (who died in 2008) demonstrated quite a conservative ethnocentric approach towards the Thracian monuments and a faithful support of the postulates of "Thracian Orphism." See, e.g., Georgi Kitov and Daniela Agre, *Văvedenie v trakiyskata arheologiya* (Sofia: Avalon, 2002).

350 Ovcharov did not resist the temptation to publish autobiographical writings under this sobriquet: Nikolay Ovcharov, *Otkritiyata na bălgarskiya Indiana Dzhouns* (Sofia: Zahariy Stoyanov, 2008).

351 Stefan Gayd, *Trakiyskoto pismo—dekodirano*, vols. 1–4 (Sofia: Institut po transtsendentna nauka, 2006–2008); Vladimir Tsonev, *Drevnite bălgari—pradedi na trakite* (Sofia: Litera prima, 2007).

352 About Kukeri, see the recent monograph of the anthropologist Gerald Creed (Creed, *Masquerade and Postsocialism*), who analyzes the reasons for this "rebirth" of the tradition in post-communist Bulgaria.

353 It must be noted that the Thracian heritage, with its "mysterious aura," is commercialized and commodified for the purposes of tourism and the wine industry much more actively nowadays than during socialism. It suffices to look at the popular wine labels, some of

Paradoxically or not, despite all these developments, the ancient Thracians have certainly lost some of their symbolic authority as Bulgarian "ancestors" since the fall of the communist regime. By the late 1980s, the extremely spiritualized image of the Thracians was linked to that of the Proto-Bulgarians—who in the meantime were also reinterpreted as a people with a unique ancient culture.[354] Today it is they who attract the biggest share of popular obsessions and manias about ethnic roots and origins. In accordance with the new anti-communist/anti-Russian vogue, the only "ancestors" of the Slav-speaking Bulgarians who seem, for the moment at least, out of public favor are, once again, the Slavs.

Thracian Studies: A Successful Balkan Entanglement with Problematic Results

Throughout this essay, we have followed the diverse ways in which representatives of contemporary Balkan nations have employed the mysterious entity of the ancient Thracians to further their national ideologies. Romanians and Bulgarians, as well as Greeks, have claimed to be descendants and cultural heirs of this paleo-Balkan people whose language, society and culture are in many respects little known. The absence of a sufficient number of reliable sources and, most of all, of a Thracian written record means that many details of this ancient people remain unfamiliar to us or problematic. Indeed, the numerous gaps in our knowledge about ancient Thracians helped make them so inspiring to modern nation-builders and scholars. This relative lack of sources and of confirmations provides a blank slate onto which one can project whatever content ~~she or he~~ deems usable for the construction of nation's past, originality and glory.

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which curiously refer to themes from Thracian Orphism: Thracian Mystery, Maenad, Mezek (the Thracian tomb that inspired Filov's Thraco-Mycenaean parallelism), Thracian Gold, Bendis, Zagreus, Sabazios . . .

354 As witnessed by the publications of Ivan Venedikov cited here. One finds two main protagonists in them: Thracians and Proto-Bulgarians, often designated in the literature after 1989 simply as "Bulgarians" or as "ancient Bulgarians." Alexander Fol was a key figure in the Tangra-TanNakRa Foundation, which finances publications on "ancient Bulgarians." According to the new conceptions, these had Iranian (that is, "Aryan"), not Turkic, roots. For a presentation, full of irony, of the (often aberrant) interpretations on the origins, the "political genius" and the "exceptional" culture of the "ancient Bulgarians" that proliferated after 1989: Roumen Daskalov, *Chudniyat svyat na drevnite bălgari* (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2011).

Yet the development of scholarly Thracian studies—of Thracology—likewise provides a second perspective on the problem. Although guided, in most cases, by "patriotic" motives in their interest in the ancient Thracian past, modern Southeast European researchers studied, quoted, and sometimes even copied each other. They debated among themselves, but they were also able to pay attention to one another's interpretations, measure their degree of probability and, in many instances, accept them. In any case, in Thracology, the forms and examples of international agreement were more frequent than in other scholarly contexts. Given all the nationalist fervor that things related to history traditionally cause in the Balkans, Thracian studies instead represents a "success story." However, it is an ambiguous and largely paradoxical success story when one takes into account the constant political instrumentalization of Thracian studies for the sake of national identity. The forms of consensus were themselves made possible by a certain political context.

It was already there in the 1970s when, by organizing international congresses and a number of conferences and workshops, Bulgarian Thracologists initiated a certain opening to specialists from the neighboring countries and, in general, to international scholarly circles.[355] This somehow entailed the abandonment of any strong claims of "ownership" over the Thracian past. It must be noted that the political status quo in Southeast Europe by this time facilitated the dialogue with (certain) neighbors. Thus the fact that both Bulgaria and Romania belonged to the "socialist camp" encouraged communication between scholars from Sofia and from Bucharest, particularly in the field of Thracian studies.[356] At the same time, the old Greek-Bulgarian debate on the history and the "ethnic character" of Thrace and Macedonia virtually disappeared, as a result of the surprising improvement of relations between socialist Bulgaria and Greece, which was under the right-wing military dictatorship of the colonels in Athens. Suddenly, Greek and Bulgarian scholars were able to sit at the same table. Unfortunately, this was largely due to the fact that they found new common "enemies": the supposed "Turkish propaganda" and the Macedonian nationalism in and outside Yugoslavia.

As a consequence of this dialogue, many theses and concepts that were put forth by scholars in one of these countries can be found in the scholarship

355 This was somewhat successful: suffice it to say that the Third Congress of Thracian Studies was organized in Vienna, and the fourth in Rotterdam.

356 In other fields of research, such as medieval history, this communication was going to be much more difficult. Often it was spoiled by nationalist controversies—despite the "socialist internationalism" theoretically required from the scholars in both countries. See Roumen Daskalov's contribution to the present volume.

of another one. This was the case as early as the late nineteenth century, when Bulgarian authors appropriated the Greek notion of extremely archaic "Thraco-Pelasgians." It was Greek scholars who emphasized all the allegedly Thracian "contributions" to Greek religion and culture: Dionysus, Orpheus and Orphism, Eumolpus—the Thracian founder of the Eleusinian mysteries—and the Thracian priests both in Eleusis and in Delphi. The Bulgarians, including the professional Thracologists from the 1970s on, readily subscribed to these postulates. But while, in the Greek context, they were supposed to emphasize the prehistoric links between Thracians and Greeks, the Thracians' "quasi-Greek" and eventually completely Hellenized nature, in the Bulgarian context, the same references were employed in order to distinguish Thracian culture from Hellenic culture, to demonstrate its exceptionally "archaic" character and to underline to what extent ancient Greeks were indebted to Thracians. The case is similar for the "folk traditions" used in both Greek and Bulgarian argumentation: the firewalking and carnival rites of Greek- and Bulgarian-speaking peasants from the modern region of Thrace. Proposed by Greek writers and largely accepted by the Greek *laographia*, the thesis of the ancient Thracian-Dionysian origin of these rituals was promptly reproduced by Bulgarian scholars. It must be noted that the Bulgarian Thracologists not only knew Katerina Kakouri's publication but even got to observe the rite performed by Greek refugees from Bulgarian Strandzha residing in Northern Greece.[357] Conversely, conclusions drawn by Mihail Arnaudov influenced Greek scholarship; paradoxically, the Bulgarian ethnographer even reinforced the "Greek positions" in the debate about the historical roots of firewalking. Curiously enough, in their demonstration of the "Thracian ancestry" of the Pomaks of Western Thrace, Greek propagandists reproduced a claim made by the pro-Bulgarian *Slavic Veda*, whose authenticity was attacked by previous Greek authors.

The Romanian-Bulgarian entanglement in Thracian studies is at least as important as the Greek-Bulgarian. In fact, a mere glance at the names of participants in congresses of Thracology might leave the impression that, to this day, Thracology remains largely a kind of Bulgaro-Romanian affair. Romanian influences are clear, especially in the Bulgarian treatment of the Thracian "initiatic" and "mystery cults" and of Thracians' famous "belief in immortality." Mircea Eliade's authority remains visible in the Bulgarian publications. As a matter of fact, Eliade supposed, already before Alexander Fol, that the Thracians shared a fundamental myth of *hierogamy* between the Great Mother Goddess and the

357 The fieldwork took place in 1993, in probably the most famous village of the *anastenarides*: Agia Eleni, in the region of Serres, populated by people from Kosti in the Bulgarian part of Strandzha. See Fol, *Trakiyskiyat Dionis*, vol. 2, 186–202.

god of thunder, and that the son of these two was Dionysus. Conversely, some later references to a Great Mother Goddess in Romanian scholarship might be the result of Bulgarian influence.[358] A number of other main "protagonists" in the Bulgarian Thracological constructions appeared earlier in Romanian writings, including in the "Thracomania" of Nicolae Densuşianu—for instance, the Hyperboreans (and, of course, the Pelasgians).[359] Extremely important, even today, is the Romanian-Bulgarian interaction in the field of linguistic research: the studies of the ancient Thracian tongue are undertaken mostly by specialists from these countries. No less impressive are the parallels in the evolution of the intellectual interest towards Thracians in both countries, with its political background: the autochthonist search for national distinctiveness in the interwar period, while under authoritarian regimes and fascist ideologies; the phase of "national communism" (or rather of communist nationalism) since the late 1960s that revived the heritage of the fascist period; and the post-communist developments as well.

Nevertheless, the results of this Balkan collaboration are questionable and, nowadays, even anachronistic in many respects. The problem of Thracian studies today is, to a large extent, its conceptual and methodological obsolescence. If a century ago, it was ~~relatively~~ ~~"~~up to date~~"~~ with the dominant theses and concepts of classical studies and related scholarly disciplines ("Indo-European studies," ethnography, etc.), nowadays, it looks, in many respects, like rudiments from another era. The solar Indo-Europeans and "Hyperboreans," organized in initiatic *Männerbünde*, the obligatory analogies with Iranian and Indian religions that we still see in the Thracological publications, are remnants from the Aryan imageries from the nineteenth century. These references were especially promoted by scholars with controversial links to fascist movements and ideologies (Eliade, Dumézil, Stig Wikander) and, not by chance, the same notions were instrumentalized by the propaganda of the extreme right.[360]

358 See Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 277 and 354.

359 The mythical people from the North were researched by a Bulgarian author: Tsvete Lazova, *The Hyperboreans: A Study in the Paleo-Balkan Tradition* (Sofia: University Press, 1996). Lazova's definition of "paleo-Balkan" is certainly curious: it encompasses the Balkans, Asia Minor, the Aegean Islands, Crete, Southern Italy and Sicily. Thus a huge part of the ancient Hellenic world is "Balkanized" and, in fact, "Thracized," while the core of ancient Greece is completely isolated from the extremely "archaic" Balkan culture.

360 On this set of problems: Arvidsson, *Aryan Idols*; Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Black Sun: Aryan Cults, Esoteric Nazism and the Politics of Identity* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2002).

It is amazing to what extent they influenced scholarly research in communist countries—primarily in the Soviet Union.[361]

Moreover, certain deities and religious concepts claimed by Thracology as having Thracian origin or some special relationship to Thrace quite probably have neither. Apart from Dionysus, this is, according to more recent publications, the case for Sabazios—the "genuinely Thracian" archetype of Dionysus. His homeland is clearly Anatolia, and his cult did not have much in common with Dionysus.[362] The last detail also contradicts the old cliché about the ancient Thracian-Phrygian cultural unity. The same is true of the ethnolinguistic kinship: recent studies of the Phrygian language have rejected the idea of its proximity to Thracian.[363] The "belief in immortality," deemed so typical for Thracians, with their "contempt of death" and "joy to die": these are instead *topoi* of ancient Greek literature that were used to describe not only the "courageous character" of Thracians but also other "barbarian" populations, such as the Celts.[364] Regarding the famous Thracian Horseman, some studies rejected his status of deity, on the basis of observations found in the older scholarship as well (in works by scholars such as Seure, Apostolidis, Mihaylov). The issue is an iconographic convention representing the heroization of the deceased that existed in the Greek context, mostly in Asia Minor. From there it spread into Thrace from the third to the second century BCE. According to a Romanian author, the Greek-Anatolian origin of the iconography is "incontestable."[365] Similarly, a Bulgarian scholar recently criticized the idea that the Thracian Horseman was a syncretic "all-purpose god" and

361 At a certain point, Alexander Fol and some of his colleagues realized the risks hidden in the ethnic concept of "Indo-Europeans" and started talking about "paleo-Balkan and Anatolian ethnocultural communities," etc.: Popov, *Trakologiya*, 267. But despite the modification of the terms, the imageries are intact.

362 Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 233, citing Isabelle Tassignon, "Sabazios dans les panthéons des cités d'Asie Mineure," *Kernos* 11 (1998): 189–209, and other publications.

363 To a certain extent, this is recognized today by Bulgarian scholars, although quite reluctantly: see Kiril Yordanov and Maya Vassileva's introduction to *Thracians and Phrygians: Problems of Parallelism*, eds. Numan Tuna, Zeynep Aktüre and Maggie Lynch (Ankara: METU, 1998). Page 5: "Recent progress in archaeological and epigraphic Phrygian research, however, has changed to a great extent the attitude toward this range of problems [the Thracian-Phrygian kinship]. Hellenic and Anatolian perspectives dominate most recent interpretations of the Phrygian data."

364 See Dana, *Zalmoxis de la Herodot la Mircea Eliade*, 428.

365 Maria Alexandrescu-Vianu, "Remarques sur l'héroïsation thrace," *Dialogues d'histoire ancienne* 6 (1980): 101–111.

emphasized that it was a Greek iconographic convention.[366] Finally, the Thracian stone-built chamber tombs from the Classical and the Hellenistic period—the ones that were supposed to be the product of a purely "autochthonous" development from primitive dolmens—are most likely the result of Greek-Persian syncretic know-how from Western Anatolia as well.[367]

These and similar data and conclusions actually tend to restore the legitimacy of the Helleno-centric point of view that both Bulgarian and Romanian scholars opposed. In many cases, this seems to be the most reasonable solution: our information about Thracian religion and "spirituality" comes from Greek (and Latin) literary sources, and it is often difficult or impossible to decide what is "Thracian" in these data and what is a specific Greek perception of the Other. Yet the absence of "purely Thracian" elements in one or another context does not mean that there are "purely Greek" elements. As the examples of the Thracian Horseman and the chamber tombs show, often the influences and the interactions are more complex, and the "Oriental," Anatolian, Persian and other elements should not be underestimated. This remark indeed puts the Thracians back into the larger "Balkan-Anatolian" context claimed by the Bulgarian Thracologists, yet not necessarily as the key protagonist they imagined.

All that does not mean that methodologically up-to-date investigations of ancient Thracian societies, languages and cults are impossible. Throughout this text, a number of such studies have been quoted. However, such research necessarily entails the destruction of accumulated fictions set forth since the nineteenth century by scholars from Greece, Romania, Bulgaria and, in general, from Europe.

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366 Nora Dimitrova, "Inscriptions and Iconography in the Monuments of the Thracian Rider," *Hesperia* 71 (2002): 209–229.

367 This time, this is the opinion of a professional Thracologist: Maya Vassileva, "Achaemenid Interfaces: Thracian and Anatolian Representations of Elite Status," *Bollettino di Archeologia on line. Volume speciale* (2010): 37–46, at http://www.google.gr/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CC0QFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2F151.12.58.75%2Farcheologia%2Fbao_document%2Farticoli%2F4_Vassileva_paper.pdf&ei=i6cFUfqQOaOp4ATO-YHIBg&usg=AFQjCNFb5K1eA7CUJXbliBJGW6RRyOhpEQ&sig2=MC69qgcQ6Sbnp8C3GjNZfg&bvm=bv.41524429,d.bGE (accessed on January 20, 2013).