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FORMATION OF CULTURE IN THRACE DURING THE ROMAN AGE

Thracians is the name for the unification of the numerous Thracian tribes that inhabited an enormous area from the Carpathian Mountains in the north to the Aegean Sea in the south, from the Timok River valley in the west to the Black Sea in the east. Similar to the Scythians, they were defined by the father of history Herodotus as one of the most numerous people during the antiquity. The Thracians bore a culture that has been studied in greater detail in recent years, revealing new and unknown aspects. The Thracians founded the Odrysian state back in the 5th century BC, named after the name of the tribe of the Odrysae that gave the kings for the Thracian kingdom (Фол 1972: 16-37; Danov 1979: 21-185). Living in the lands of the Central and Eastern Balkans, the Thracians became involved very early in political, economic and cultural contacts with the Greek world. Hence the in-terpenetration of the cultures ever since the time of the Trojan War and Mycenae. These relations deepened and intensified during the Classical and Hellenistic periods with the development of the Greek colonies along the western Black Sea coast, as well as with the appearance of Greek emporia in mainland Thrace. A unique Thracian culture was created, which borrowed images from Greek art, investing them with their own Thracian interpretation and semantics. The Thracian influence on the religion of the Hellenistic world is well known (Фол 1994: 114-118; 235-239). It was against the background of that political and cultural history that Thracian art and culture developed when the Romans appeared in the Balkans in the 2nd century BC (Danov 1979: 21-185). The first direct military and political contacts between Rome and Thrace took place then. That was particularly valid of the lands of Southern Thrace, and especially of the lands to the south of the Rhodope Mountains. That marked the end of the autonomous economic and political development of the united Thracian tribes (Danov 1979; Геров 1980: 29-37). Rome did everything it could to divide them and to conquer them. The conquerors attached particular importance to the southern and southeastern part of Thrace, because these lands are on the road to Asia Minor, and the riches of the cities and kingdoms of Asia Minor were among the goals of the Roman imperial policy. The battle at Pydna in 168 BC was one of the remarkable events in the process of the gradual annexing of Thrace by the Romans. It was then that the already conquered Macedonian lands and a part of the lands of Southern Thrace were divided into four administrative units, and soon afterwards, in 148 BC, the Roman province of Macedonia was officially proclaimed (Danov 1979; Тачева 1987: 49-93; Bechert 1999: 73-76). For years, researchers paid less attention to the examined territory and period in Thracian history compared to the rest of Thrace (Bechert 1999: 177-180), although the period 2nd-1st century BC played a very important role for the subsequent political and economic development of the Thracian lands under Roman power. Naturally, this resulted from a number of objective reasons. On the one hand, few archaeological studies were conducted in the southernmost part of the Thracian lands. For this reason, many of the researchers drew historical information and reached conclusions solely on the basis of the epigraphic monuments and coins found. On the other hand, the territory of ancient Thrace that was in Northern Greece and in the European part of Turkey was for a long time not among the priorities of historical research in those countries. The situation changed in the past decades (Bakalakis - Triandaphyllos 1977: 239-247; Ahunbay 1989: 559-577; Sayar 1998; Adams 1997: 135-147). Bulgarian researchers - archaeologists and historians - obtained access to sites and monuments in the region examined. The latest International Congress of Thracology organised in the town of Komotini in Greece (Thrace 2007) can be cited as an example of that new research policy in the Balkans. All this contributes to the study in greater depth of the culture and history of the southern and southeastern part of Thrace, including during the Roman Age.

Examining the early period in the conquering of Thrace by Rome, another important moment was the direction of the penetration of the Romans into the Eastern Balkan Thracian lands. After the Romans secured for themselves a relatively unimpeded passage across the lands of Aegean Thrace, they headed to the north and northeast. The main approaches to inner Thrace were along the valleys of the rivers Struma, Mesta, Maritsa, Arda and Toundja. Some of the Western Pontic cities, e.g., Apollonia, were captured and annexed already in the 1st century BC in connection with the wars waged by Rome against the famous Black Sea ruler Mithridates VI, as well as some of the cities along the Aegean coast, e.g., Abdera (Danov 1979:113). The campaigns of the Roman military commanders in the area of the Rhodope Mountain during that period are also known, the most popular among them being the march of Octavianus (the father of the future Roman emperor Octavianus Augustus (Danov 1979: 127; Тачева 1997: 61-71). The campaigns against the Maid-oi, Serdoi, Bastarnae and other tribes were no less important for the Roman expansion into Thrace (Геров 1980: 17 sq.). They all contributed to the proclaiming of the Odrysian kingdom as a vassal kingdom of Rome. The next very important move for the Roman imperial policy was the conquering of the Thracian lands between the Haemus Mountain (pres. Balkan Range) and the Danube River. The annexing was slow here, too, resulting in the differentiation of the two prefectures: *civitas Moesia et Tribalia*. For a short period these two territories were administered and their territory was identified as the Moesia Province. The most recent archaeological excavations in Oescus, the camp of the Fifth Macedonian Legion (Кабакчиева 2000: with literature; Kabakchieva 1996: 487-494), allows to fix the date of the founding of the Moesia Province in the 10-12 AD period, i.e., during Late Augustan times (Kabakchieva 2000a: 3-9). In this way, using the methods of tribal division and negotiations with the different Thracian rulers (small *basilei)* separately, the Romans succeeded in acquiring military and political control over most of the Thracian lands already at the very beginning of the 1st century AD. A very eloquent example in this respect can be seen in the brothers Rhaskos and Rhaskuporis (Thracian *basilei)* in the battle at Philippi, where one of the brothers fought on the side of Brutus, and the other one on the side of Octavianus (Danov, 1979: 21-185). The Thracians were famous warriors and this is clearly seen in their art (Marazov 2005). They were recruited as paid mercenaries by different rulers since the remotest antiquity. They developed their military skills in this way at the battles near Philippi as well, and a little later, in the famous battle of Actium in 31 BC, their military commanders manoeuvred between one side and the other in the battle with the aim of preserving their own lives and the lives of their soldiers. In spite of all their cunning, the Thracian kings could not safeguard the autonomous political existence of the united Odrysian kingdom. First Moesia, and a little later Thrace as well (45 AD), were included in the confines of the Roman Empire as its administrative units - provinces (on the date of the establishing of the Roman provinces Moesia and Thracia, see Stein 1920: 1-3; Велков 1979: 277-290; Kabakchieva 1997: 387-394 Кабакчиева 2000:3-9).

Initially,

a *procurator* was appointed at the head of the Senate Province ofThracia, similarto the provincial governor of Egypt, but later, probably at the time of Emperor Trajan (98-117 AD), the governor of the province already had the title *legatus augusti pro proetore,* which corresponded to its changed status (Eck 2000: 214-237; Roxan - Weiss 1998: 371-420). As regards the liminal Roman province of Moesia,

it was governed from the very beginning by a *legatus augusti pro proetore* (Danov 1979: 174).

Big Roman military units - legions, alae and cohorts - were stationed there from the very beginning, as well as auxiliary troops, unlike the inner Roman province of Thracia. This accumulation of troops in the lands under consideration resulted in the division of the province in two - Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior - in 85 AD, during the reign of Emperor Domitian (81-96 AD).

How did the Thracian aristocracy fit the new political scheme after the conquest of Thrace by the Romans? This is a question for which there is no straightforward answer. A part of the Thracian rulers lost their lives in the battles against Rome. Here I shall cite just the march of Marcus Licinius Crassus, who set off in 29-28 BC against the Bastarnae who were one of the big Thracian tribes that inhabited the lands of the present-day Northwestern Bulgaria. The battles were fierce, and after the Romans failed to win, they resorted to a dishonest move and killed the Thracian aristocrats. This event in the ancient Thracian history is mentioned even by the Roman historians (Dio Cass., LI, 23.2-27) in an attempt to show that they had defeated the belligerent Thracians.

Another part of the Thracian aristocrats, defined by the Greek authors as "small *basilei",* preferred to cede peacefully to the Roman conquerors and thus to preserve relatively their independence. There were also some aristocrats who took part in the administration of the Thracian provinces of Moesia and Thracia, and they were granted Roman civil rights for merits to Rome. Many of them became the founders of bigger or smaller Roman villa estates or Roman villas (Mielsh 1987; Persival 1976; Thomas 1964; Николов 1984; Буюклиев 1986; Кабакчиева 1986; Младенова 1991; Kabakchieva 1995: 344-358; Кабакчиева 2005). The archaeological studies of villa estates, especially to the south of the Haemus Mountain, show that many of their owners were Thracian aristocrats. This was particularly true of the villas created during the Early Roman Imperial period, i.e., the villas from the 1st to the first half of the 2nd century AD (Kabakchieva 1995; Кабакчиева 2005: 393-407). A third part of the Thracian aristocracy joined the Roman army. Thrace and Gaul were among the most preferred areas from which soldiers for the Roman mercenary army were recruited. Some Thracian aristocrats also found place in it as commanders of auxiliary army units. After the end of their service, they received Roman citizens' rights and became some of the staunchest supporters and propagators of Roman culture in the Thracian lands (repoB 1980: 65 ff.). Many of the Roman villas were owned by Thracians - war veterans who had returned to their native lands. This is evidenced by the explored Roman villas, by the subtumular graves containing rich grave goods dated between the 1st and the second half of the 2nd century AD, as well as by the military diplomas found and the epigraphic monuments (Геров 1980: 20-39; 79-114; Gerov 1989; Велков, Александров 1994). After the brief survey of what happened in Thrace in the very first centuries after it was gradually conquered by the Romans, we shall examine the social groups that contributed most to the spreading of Roman culture in the Thracian lands.

The first group consisted of the colonists from Italy and from the other Roman provinces. Epigraphic data from Thrace have been collected for more than a century and a half, but in spite of the efforts made, the names of the Western Roman and Italian settlers in the provinces of Thracia and Moesia are not very numerous (Геров 1980: 38). We know many more names of settles who came from Greece and from the Eastern Roman provinces. This issue was investigated by many Bulgarian and foreign researchers (Тачева 1972: 17-43). It was found that the migrations took place in "waves" during the Roman Age from Asia Minor to the eastern part of the Balkans. The settlers found a place for calm life both in the cities along the western coast of the Black Sea and further inlands in Thrace and Moesia (Tatscheva 1970: 115-123 ff.). Many of these settlers were traders and craftsmen, hence they often did not leave epigraphic traces. Nevertheless, they had a great influence on the development of culture in the Thracian lands during the Roman period. Information about their presence in Thracian society and about the diverse culture created in the period between the 1st and the 4th century AD can be found in votive, sepulchral and other epigraphic monuments, as well as from the works of the ordinary and artistic crafts.

The military population and the veterans formed the other social group that played a very substantial role for the formation of culture in Thrace during the Roman period. They were not always of Thracian origin, having been born in places located far from Thrace.

The highest number of foreign population in terms of origin and culture is found close to the legions and other military camps of the Roman army in the Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior provinces (Gerov 1989). The degree of Romanisation in those lands was also significantly higher than in the fore-mountain and mountain areas of ancient Thrace.

As regards the Thracian population, it played a particularly important role for the formation of the Thracian-Roman culture to the south of the Lower Danube course and in the lands near the Aegean Sea in the south. A large part of that population lived in the *vici,* in the villas, in the road stations and in the emporia, where they found their new place for subsistence and also determined the mixed character of the culture in those habitation forms. A small part of the Thracian population remained to live in the villages in the areas close to the mountains and in the actual mountainous areas, where they withdrew during the turbulent times of the Roman conquest (Gerov 1980). Many of the Thracians found their place as traders, craftsmen and other professions in the cities. More data on the participation of Thracians in the governing of the cities appeared only after the mid-2nd century. As regards the κοινον Θρακων, that Thracian "parliament" was in session in Philippopolis (Гочева 1982: 67 ff.; Тачева 2007: 156-164), and not in the official capital of the Thracia province - the city of Perinthos on the Sea of Marmara (Danov 1979: 147 ff.). The latter was particularly indicative of the place of the Thracians in the city life and culture in Thrace during the Roman Age (Bospatchieva 2005: 316-330).

The exhibition comprises fifteen diverse monuments made of marble, bronze, silver and gold. They are among the emblematic finds from the Roman Age in the Vassil Bojkov Collection. Their provenance is not known, but they are from the territory of present-day Bulgaria. This allows me to make an attempt at a closer localisation on the basis of some of their characteristics and qualities. A case in point is the marble bust of Emperor Decius Traianus (249-251 AD). It is known that this Roman emperor originated from Moesia Superior (Remondon 1970: 103-104) and was personally in charge of the preparations for and the actual waging of the war of the Romans against the united forces of the Gothic tribes in 250-251 AD, and that he spent the winter of 250/251 AD in the cities of Moesia Inferior in connection with the war. Unfortunately, he perished in the big battle near Abritus in June 251 AD. However, the cited evidence contains very important information about the fact that the bust of Emperor Decius Traianus came with a much greater probability from the Moesia province and not from Thrace. As regards the monument itself, it is among the best portraits of that Roman emperor as a work of art. Many portraits of that ruler have been found in the confines of the Roman Empire (Вощинина 1974; Британова 1975: 80-81; Соколов 1983: 72-81; Bergmann 1977: 122 ff.; Kersauson 1996: 495-496), who reigned for a relatively short time in the mid-3rd century AD. His portrait image is undoubtedly an exquisite monument of sculpture and it was made by a famous artist around the mid-3rd century AD.

This monument gives me grounds to make a small survey of the development of sculpture in Thrace. Three-dimensional monuments were rare during the period of the free existence of the Thracian kingdom. Thracian sculptors were not familiar with the art of sculpture, hence the three-dimensional monuments found in Thrace are believed to have been made either by itinerant artists, or ordered in some of the famous Greek workshops during the Roman Age. Specialists reached the same conclusion also about the recently found bronze head of the Thracian king Seuthes III in the course of the archaeological excavations of the Golyama Kosmatka tumulus near Ka-zanluk (Китов 2005: 67 ff.). The cited example, as well as the sculptures from Thrace kept in the Bulgarian museums, support such a theory (Попова-Мороз 1999: 309-325). Therefore, the art of three-dimensional monuments appeared in Thrace parallel with the spreading of sculpture during the Roman period.

The other monument of ancient sculpture in the exhibition is a sepulchral statue of a girl (Cat. No. 83). This exquisite portrait image is also an example that some of the citizens of the Moesia and Thracia provinces were sufficiently affluent and could afford to order such a work of art. It is difficult to date the portraits of children and young people, in spite of the canons of art in the period between the 1st and the 3rd century AD (Wegner 1939: 216-217). Nevertheless, I believe that the girl's statue was made more likely during the reign of the Antonines, not earlier.

Sculpture from Moesia and Thrace can be divided into several groups: statues, busts and reliefs of emperors and of representatives of imperial families, statues and reliefs of deities and cult scenes, statues and reliefs of eminent public figures, as well as statues, busts and

reliefs for sepulchral monuments.

The sculptures in the Vassil Bojkov Collection belong to three of the cited groups. Their authors were artists trained in some of the greatest workshops during the Roman Age and they were very talented. Studies on sculpture in Moesia and Thrace produced very important results in recent decades. Local workshops were identified, some of which had been established already during the Early Roman period (Milceva 2005: 7-11). It is also necessary to note the conclusion about the type of the sepulchral statues, which were under the influence of the Imperial and Western Roman portrait sculpture, especially in the Moesia Superior and Moesia Inferior provinces (Milceva 2005: 9-10). This is also the style of the statue of a girl in the Vassil Bojkov Collection, which can be examined as a statue of the "Little Herculanean" type (Bieber 1977: 123; 164; figs. 694; 700).

Sculpture in the areas under consideration reached the highest levels of perfection from the 2nd to the mid-3rd century BC. The bust of Emperor Tra-ianus Decius, as well as the bronze head of Emperor Gordian III (238-244 AD), found near the ancient city of Nicopolis ad Istrum (near the village of Nikyup, Veliko Tarnovo district - *Избрани паметници НАМ, София* [Selected Monuments of the National Archaeological Museum, Sofia]), show that valued sculptural works of the type exhibited were produced and displayed in the Thracian lands to the south of the Lower Danube until 250 AD. The general economic crisis in the Roman Empire, as well as the numerous incursions into the Balkans by various tribes from the north and northeast, led to disruption in the urban life, culture and art in Moesia and Thrace during the third quarter of the 3rd century AD.

In addition to the portrait of Emperor Decius Traianus and the girl's statue, the exhibition also presents a marble bust of a Satyr with excellent artistic execution (Cat. No. 92). Such images decorated not only public buildings and fora, but also many of the rich private villas during the Roman Age. An auger was used to shape the nostrils, the ends of the lips and the ears of the girl's statue and of the bust of the Satyr. The Satyr's face is extremely expressive, charged with energy and radiant. It gives an idea of the art of sculpture in the area of the Northern Mediterranean during the Roman Age as a sculpture that had integrated many of the traditions of Hellenistic art.

The second group of Roman monuments in the exhibition show three bronze statuettes: of the deified Augustus, of Mars and of Venus (Cat. Nos. 89, 88 and 90). These monuments speak eloquently with different pictorial forms and techniques about the exquisiteness of the art that was widespread in the Thracian lands during the Roman period. The statuettes of Mars and Venus reproduce works by famous sculptors from the Hellenistic period. The statuette of Augustus is connected with the worshipping of the imperial cult in the Roman provinces of Moesia and Thracia. This bronze sculpture shows again that the statues of Octavianus Augustus were known for a hundred years and more after his lifetime. And while the statuettes of Mars and Venus were most probably made in some of the great workshops outside Moesia and Thracia, the statuette of Augustus bears the features of the provincial art of Moesia and Thracia from the 2nd and the first half of the 3rd century AD.

The exhibition also presents three bronze balsamaria - vessels for ointments and scents - used by youths and athletes during the Roman period (Cat. No. 84). Their connection with sports activities is indisputably proven in the concrete case by the set consisting of an elegant balsamarium and three strigils. The vessel and the strigils are decorated with the same ornaments of coloured enamel. The find is unique and it has no parallels anywhere else in the Roman Empire. That set of balsamarium and strigils was probably a prize or a gift for some famous ancient athlete. The other two bronze balsamaria - one shaped like a bear and the other one made like the bust of Eros - are also very rare and do not have exact parallels. It should be pointed out here that each of these vessels is a work of ancient art. More bronze balsamaria are known from the provinces of Moesia and Thracia than from all the other Roman provinces. Many of these vessels have been found in graves, which makes it possible to date the beginning of their production and fashion to the late 1st - early 2nd century AD (Ненова-Мерджанова 2000: 83 ff.). Studies on the figural balsamaria show that they were

much more widespread in the eastern and liminal Roman provinces.

A comparison between already published balsamaria from Moesia and Thracia did not reveal any particular difference. Moreover, workshops for producing bronze works of art have already been localised not only in Pautalia (pres. Kyus-tendil) in Thrace, but also in Oescus (Gigen village, Pleven district), Novae (near Svishtov) and Durostorum (pres. Silistra) in Moesia (Ненова-Мерджанова 1994:3; Nenova-Merdjanova 1997:103-112; Огненова-Маринова 1999: 278-308; Dimitrova-Milceva 2006: 9-22; Георгиев-Доневски 1980: 119-121). It appears that workshops were developed in Moesia and Thracia not only for the production of high-quality and beautiful bronze vessels, but also of bronze statuettes of all deities in the Thracian, Greek and Roman pantheons, worshipped in the Thracian lands during the Roman Age, as well as parade helmets-masks (Ubl 1980: 137-138; Dimitrova-Milceva 2006: 21).

Parallel with the development of the production of works of art, Moesia and Thracia were provinces that traded successfully and established economic contacts with close and remote areas in the ancient world. An example of the trade links with Italy during the Early Imperial period can be seen in the bronze lamp with exquisite shape and decoration, which had been delivered to a rich citizen of the provinces Moesia or Thracia (Cat. No. 85).

The examined exhibits constitute only a part of the rich collection of splendid works of ancient art kept in the Vassil Bojkov Collection. Several articles of adornment - gold and silver torques, as well as a multi-component gold necklace (Cat. No. 93) - have been selected for the exhibition. Several workshops for the exquisite works of ancient toreutics have been identified in Moesia and Thracia.

During the Roman Age Thracian art was enriched and became more sophisticated, and a culture was created that can be defined most generally as Thracian-Roman. It combines in an inextricable unity elements of the older Thracian art, as well as elements of the cultures of other areas in the Roman world. The freedom of the religious orientation gave an opportunity to the citizens in the provinces to worship the deities that their ancestors worshipped, which created a feeling in the population of the provinces that they were living in a relative independence.

On the whole, the Roman Age witnessed the development of urban culture and the increasing sophistication of town planning, architecture and monumental art (Ivanov 1987; *Археология* 2004, 1; *Археология* 2006, 2; *The Lower Danube* 2007).

It was only during that period that one can refer to a strictly built road network in the Thracian lands, as well as to cities over the entire territory of the provinces Moesia and Thracia, which also formed unifying centres forthe otherforms of habitation: Roman villas, villages, road stations and emporia. This new organisation of the life and of the economy in the Thracian lands contributed to the development of Thracian-Ro-man art and culture during the 1st-4th century period.