

Interactions in the Thracian-Phrygian Cultural Zone

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The Phrygian set of problems has always been a major issue in Palaeo-Balkan studies. Recent progress both in epigraphic and in archaeological studies changed the traditional view on the Thracian-Phrygian kinship. Anatolian and Hellenic perspectives dominate modern Phrygian studies. Scholars are mainly preoccupied with the Anatolian context of Phrygian culture and the contacts with the Greek world (Muscarella 1989: 333-342). However, an attempt to present a more independent interpretation of some Phrygian cultural phenomena has been proposed (Mellink 1993: 293-298). Against the Anatolian background of Phrygian culture, some "Mycenaean" characteristics of Phrygian society have been traced (Brixhe 1990: 73-75). Some closer historical parallels with ancient Thrace could not have been avoided (Vassileva 1994: 221-227).

Thus, the present state of Thracian and Phrygian studies requires a complex analysis of all data available. A new consideration of the ancient Greek texts about Phrygia, supplemented by the interpretation of the recent archaeological evidence, is indispensable. Such an interdisciplinary approach can support the working term *Thracian-Phrygian cultural zone*. Although the archaeological record prompted scholars to speak about an infiltration and "open channels with the Balkans" (French 1994: 69; Sams 1994: XXXI, 21, 176), the above term seems more appropriate from a historical and cultural point of view. As an instrument of research it would denote a common cultural space, an area of intensive Balkan-Anatolian interactions since the late 2nd millennium BC. The core of this zone lay on both sides of the Propontis, but comprised the Troad and Bithynia as well.

The most instructive cultural phenomena in the above zone can be followed in the sphere of cult and religion. The term religion is more relevant to the Phrygian society where the institutionalization of faith was more advanced. Both Thracian and Phrygian rituality were dominated by the cult of the anonymous Great Mother-Goddess. Some of the most eloquent Old-Phrygian inscriptions originate from the Western Phrygian language area. The Goddess is mentioned several times in the texts from Bithynia and Western Phrygia simply as *matar* or nominated adjectively as *matar Kubileya/Kubeleya* (W-04, 06, B-01)*. One of the inscriptions (W-01b) probably refers to an initiate in her cult who "gives name to the

* The designation of the Old Phrygian inscriptions follows that of the *Corpus*: Brixhe & Lejeune 1984.

Goddess" and devotes himself to her (Bajun-Orel 1988: 182-183; Fol 1994: 260). Identification with the Goddess and acceptance of her name have already been discussed in Thracian ritual practice (Fol 1990: 80, 125). The longest Old-Phrygian inscription from Germanos (B-01), Bithynia, seems to be the earliest evidence about a priestly college of the Goddess, called *duma-* (Bajun-Orel 1988: 187; Lubotsky 1993: 97; Vassileva 1995: 27-34). This text, still far from being completely deciphered and comprehended, yielded designations like "alien" and "non-alien" which would suggest a community of initiates.

Both Thracian and Phrygian cultures attributed an inferior place to the Goddess' male paredos, whose image can hardly be found in the artistic representations. The same adjective, or adjectives similar in meaning, attested both in masculine and feminine forms (*evtevey*, *evteveyay*, Dat. - B-03, *areyastin* - Acc. fem., *evdemnoy* - Dat. masc. W-01a) suggest that the anonymous male divine figure adopted or derived his name from the appellation of the Great Goddess (Vassileva 1990: 94-101). Modern commentaries on the forms *ATES*, *ATA*, *ATAS*, found in Old-Phrygian inscriptions, are not quite satisfactory. It is noteworthy that adjective-derived forms of personal names can be detected as well: *ATOIOS*, *ATEVO* (W-10). It is clear, however, that the dedicant and the dedicatee from the inscriptions, bearing the above names, do not correspond to the Greek literary character of the Goddess' lover. *ATES* from the Phrygian texts was a higher priestly official, while Attis was later a name reserved for the priests at Pessinus (Polyb. 21, 37, 5). It cannot be ruled out, therefore, that the myste could have accepted the designation of the male devine power at some stage of his initiation. This context can shed more light on the names *ATES* and *ATA* inscribed on a bronze phiale from Gordion (G-107) and on the bronze and silver vessels from Bayindir, Northern Lycia (Varinlioglu 1992: 10-20). Thus, in the 6th century BC the echo of the cultural interactions could be perceived as far to the southeast as the Taurus mountains. The late 8th century BC Phrygian political activity in this region has already been widely discussed.

The record should be supplemented by the studies on Sabazios, recently considered from the viewpoint of Thracian studies (Fol 1994: passim). Sabazios seems to be another name of the Palaeo-Balkan deity who underlay the image of the Greek Dionysos, marking the Anatolian (Phrygian) components in a common cult (Fol 1994: 64-70).

The parallels between Phrygian and Thracian rock-cut complexes and tumuli reveal a common rituality (Fol 1994: 258-259, Vassileva 1994a: 63-67). The Phrygian monuments are more elaborate and imposing due to the Anatolian setting and the adoption of the Near Eastern cultural heritage. The grave furnishings attest to a similar royal code as well. Though the variety of the formulae inscribed on the Phrygian metal vessels is greater (Brixhe 1989-1990: 63), a com-

mon practice could be followed, stemming from Near Eastern and Anatolian traditions (Vassileva 1992-1993: 161-166).

The recent archaeological and epigraphic discoveries, both from Thrace and from Asia Minor, would support the above considerations. A newly-found 5th-4th century BC silver phiale in a tumulus in Central Bulgaria bears an inscription where the name *Zeila(s)* is mentioned, much earlier than the famous Bithynian ruler (Dimitrov 1995: 23-25). The latest excavations at Daskyleion revealed a 9th-8th century BC Phrygian habitation, as well as an earlier evidence about Thracian population. The cult or temple area excavated displays strong Phrygian affinities related to the worship of Kybele. The sacred place was later maintained by the Persians as well (Gates, 1995: 230). The inscription and the graffiti found there (Bakir-Gusmani 1993: 135-144) testify to the Phrygian cultural conservatism in the times when the site became the centre of the Persian satrapy.

The discovery of pre-Hellenistic vaulted tombs in the vicinity of Daskyleion, where the burial rite strongly resembles Thracian practices, should probably change the traditional view which associates the Hellenistic tombs found in the region with the Celts. They would rather be an evidence of a common tradition in Southeastern Thrace and Northwestern Anatolia (Winter 1988: 64).

The Greek texts concerning the ethnic and cultural situation in Northwestern Asia Minor have already been discussed in the context of Thracian studies. Here Kyzikos occupied a major place, together with Daskyleion which belonged to her cultural sphere. Both cities were within the Byzantium/Constantinople *chora* (Fol 1994: 69- 70, 179, 208, 222, 253, 259, etc.). Onomastic data from the Asiatic coast of the Propontis would support the assumption about a common pre-Greek, Palaeo-Balkan-Anatolian layer. Kyzikos and its vicinity yielded the greatest number of epigraphically attested Thracian names in the region (Mitchell 1978: 121; 1982: 20). It should only be reminded that the latest Pelasgian enclaves seem to be found in Plakia and Skylake on the Mysian coast, according to Herodotus' story (Hdt. 1, 57). The catalogue tradition considered Plakia to be a Phrygian city (Ps.-Skyl. 94). The location of the evidence about Pelasgian and Phrygian antiquity coincides only in the Propontis area and on the island of Samothrace. A 7th century BC Phrygian inscription from Pteria (P-03) mentions *devos mekas*. This is probably the earliest evidence about the Great Gods whom the Greeks knew as Samothracian gods (Vassileva 1990: 97). The island would be another keystone in the Thracian-Phrygian cultural zone.

Finally, the Thracian-Phrygian cultural zone was also the area where the Greeks learned about and acquainted themselves with Thrace and Phrygia. The Greek literary character of king Midas is a good example of this process. His figure emerged from Hellenic observations in the Thracian-Phrygian zone. His association with Macedonia resulted from Herodotus' version about the Phrygian

migration from Europe to Asia Minor. The rest of the evidence, predominantly mythographic narratives, outlined the cult and religious functions of the Phrygian ruler as they were attested by the Phrygian material itself. The "Orphic" associations of king Midas (as a disciple of Orpheus and an initiate in Dionysiac mysteries in the story about Silenus) were due to the Greek mastering of the southwestern Thracian lands, after the migration theory had been established. Midas as the son of the Great Mother-Goddess demonstrates the characteristic doctrinal position of the king both in Phrygian and Thracian rituality. The story about his magic gold could have originated either from Thrace, or from Phrygia, but the Greek penetration through the Straits produced many more gold objects and treasures in the legendary texts about Asia Minor. The Hellespontic area contributed greatly to the literary image of king Midas in Greek tradition. Some authors point to the contribution of the Persian satrap centres Sardis and Daskyleion in the shaping of the iconography of Midas in Greek vase painting (Miller 1988: 79-87).

Thus, the introduction of the concept of Thracian-Phrygian cultural zone could prove to be of great significance for the study of the cultural exchange between the Balkans and Asia Minor in the late 2nd and 1st millennium BC. As an approach it should replace both the migration explanations and the search for influences. Pure ethnic terms are inappropriate to the phenomena studied. Multi-cultural interactions furnish the essence of the Thracian-Phrygian zone. These can also mark the Thracian contribution to the Anatolian blend of Phrygian culture and the Anatolian share in Thracian cultural phenomena. The Thracian-Phrygian cultural zone provided a great number of elements for Hellenic spiritual synthesis as well.

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