

Proto-Hellenistic and Early Hellenistic Phenomena in Ancient Thrace

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The term "*Hellenistic*" has for long been the subject of controversy¹. Leaving aside that wider usage which includes here also the eastern Roman provinces in pre-Constantine times and restricting ourselves to the more usual conception of the *Hellenistic World* which focuses on the "*successor states*" of Alexander's empire, we still have to do with something rather elusive and evasive both spatially and chronologically. Because of the different consequent destiny of the separate constituent regions, their own proper "*Hellenistic Ages*" were of different duration - only till the second half of the third century B.C. for the North-Eastern parts of Iran where the Parthian Kingdom then began to grow, into the second century for those immense territories in Iran and Mesopotamia the Parthians won over from the Seleucid Kingdom; till 167 for the Macedonian Kingdom of the Antigonids defeated by Aemilius Paulus at Pydna; till 133 for the Pergamene Kingdom bequeathed to the Romans by Attalus Philometor; till 74 for Bithynia, 64 for Seleucid Syria, and 30 B.C. for the Egyptian Kingdom of the Ptolemaei. Yet even this was not the end (although exactly this has often been suggested), for smaller Hellenistic states continued to exist even later, if only under the protection of the Romans - the Kingdom of Cappadocia for example lasted until A.D. 17, Commagene - until A.D. 72, and the Bosporan Kingdom - well into the IVth century A.D. Among these, let us not forget the Odrysian Kingdom in Thrace, whose last king, Roemetalkes III, was removed by the emperor Claudius only about A.D. 45 with the institution of the Roman province of Thrace.

Although for different reasons and on a smaller scale of variation, there is as little unanimity and agreement about the beginning of the Hellenistic Age. Should it be placed as late as 281 B.C. with the battle at Koroupedion and the end of *the Age of the Successors*? Or, with more reason, in 301 for the great battle at Ipsos? In 306/305 with the "*Year of the Kings*"? Or, perhaps, in 323 when Alexander the Great died in Babylon (this being the most popular, but not at all universally accepted date)? Or, earlier still, in 331 for the foundation of Alexandria, or in 334 for the start of Alexander's Eastern campaign, in 336 for his coming to power, or maybe even in 338 for the battle of Chaeronea? One of the greatest authorities of our century, the German Hermann Bengtson, pushed the beginning of the Hellenistic Age, if only for the Balkan regions (Macedonia and Greece proper), still further back - to 360 B.C., the beginning of the reign of Philip II².

An even earlier date has also been suggested, if only implicitly, including Thrace in the argument. In a book entitled "*Thrace and the Balkans in the Early Hellenistic Age*" the author, Alexander Fol, reviews Thracian history in the fourth century B.C. practically from its very beginning, evidently meaning that the whole length of time from the end of the fifth century on belongs to that period³. Unfortunately this view is not expounded in the book itself; in other statements professor Fol has sometimes advocated the same scheme⁴, at others refuting the very idea of a Hellenistic Age in Thrace⁵. However, the problem has been posed and can be formulated as follows: when did the Hellenistic Age in Thrace really begin, and what were the phenomena that characterized it?

It would take too much space to discuss here at large the different (and often contradictory) views on the essential characteristics and features of the Hellenistic World. These have been sought in the different spheres of social and economic life, political institutions, ethnic and cultural interrelations, etc. For the purposes of the present paper it is enough to declare that I tend to regard as the paramount and universal feature of *Hellenism* the integration of the two therefore separate and independent social and political systems of the *polis* and the *centralized territorial monarchy*.

The social and political institutions of ancient Thrace seem to have developed naturally along the Eastern model working from a primitive tribal organization to centralized territorial states like the Odrysian or the Bithynian Kingdoms. Therefore, in order to examine the phenomena that can define the transition of Thracian society to a *Hellenistic* condition, the attention should be drawn in the direction of the other component of the *Hellenistic equation* - the appearance of *poleis* in Thrace⁶.

At least two archaeological sites in Thrace dating from the end of the fourth and the beginning of the third century B.C. have been identified as *royal cities* - *Seuthopolis*⁷ on the upper Tonzos and the still anonymous Getic city near *Sveshtari*⁸ which might have been the residence of Dromichaetes, *Helis*⁹. There are a number of other and usually later examples like *Nikomedia*¹⁰ and *Prusias*¹¹ in Bithynia, the late Odrysian capital *Bizye*¹², probably *Cabyle*¹³ in the third century B.C. It has been argued that the *royal cities* in Thrace could not have had anything in common with the *Hellenistic poleis*, being the centers of administration of a royal economy which precluded the existence of any *chora* or city territory in private possession of the eventual citizens¹⁴. The conclusion however remains purely conjectural, and the example of Seuthopolis with its royal palace within a fortified citadel is rather ambiguous, for the internal wall separating the royal palace from the rich and impressive habitations of the citizens around the *agora* might well be also a sign of the relative autonomy of the city in relation to the king. The same idea is suggested by the numerous aristocratic burials around Seuthopolis¹⁵

(which could not all belong to royalty); these are scattered over a vast expanse of territory in a pattern that strongly implies *landed property*.

The evidence for the existence of other early urban agglomerations of local origin in the interior of Thrace is scarce and not explicit. Pre-Philippean *Philippopolis*¹⁶ alone presents some archaeological evidence to this effect, but this remains unfortunately unpublished. Demosthenes mentions *Drongilon*, *Masteira* and *Cabyle* as probably urban centers also already in existence at the time of Philip II's aggression in Thrace¹⁷, and the Maedi in the Strymon valley had at least one city from which Alexander expelled them in 340 B.C.¹⁸ A further number of probable city names are supplied by the inscriptions on royal Odrysian silverware mostly from the time of Cotys I - *Ergiske*, *Beos*, *Apros*, *Geistoi* and *Sauthaba*¹⁹; however the real meaning of these inscriptions remains dubious and the character and status of the settlements cannot be inferred therefrom.

A specific aspect of the early urbanization in ancient Thrace is presented by the Macedonian colonization. Its beginning should be sought in the early years of Philip II with the resettlement of *Amphipolis*²⁰ and *Krenides-Philippi*²¹, both in Thracian lands annexed to the Macedonian kingdom. Then the operation was repeated on a much larger scale during the big Thracian campaign of 342-340 B.C., in which Philip, according to the explicit text of Diodorus, "*founded considerable cities at the most suitable places to restrain the impudence of the Thracians*"²². The most certain and explicit cases are of course *Philippopolis*, "*founded by Philip the son of Amintas*" according to Stephanus Byzantinus²³ and evidently bearing the king's name, and *Cabyle*, "*a Macedonian colony*" according to the same author²⁴. Demosthenes mentions, along with *Cabyle*, *Drongilon* and *Masteira* as Odrysian strongholds captured and again fortified by Philip²⁵. Another foundation of Philip was *Bine*, mentioned in the Etymologicum Magnum²⁶. We should of course add also *Alexandroupolis*, the foundation of Alexander in the lands of the Maedi²⁷. The list, of course, cannot be full; some further cases (notably the Fort of Pernik²⁸) have been suggested on purely archaeological (but inconclusive) evidence.

Some authors have suggested that the main aim of Philip's establishments in Thrace was the installation of military garrisons in conquered enemy land and have even called them accordingly "*military colonies*", evidently presuming them more or less in the fashion of the Athenian *klerouchiai*. But a number of ancient sources explicitly speak of the enforced resettlement of population including prisoners of war and criminals; these were presumably mainly Chalkidean and Aegean Greeks - according to a statement by Demosthenes Philip destroyed some 32 cities in this area²⁹. Plutarch's information that Alexander settled Alexandroupolis with a "*mixed population*" probably gives the key; it remains doubtful whether in some cases Thracians were included alongside with the Macedonians and Greeks as citizens of the newly established *synoikiai*. These must have been founded on land

that was taken away from the local population and given over to the new settlers as landed property - the only possible induction to make them stay. This basic idea is confirmed by a statement of Diodorus concerning a later stage of the Macedonian colonization in Thrace: when in 322 Antipater imposed a census oligarchy in Athens after the Lamian war, he offered land in Thrace to the poor former citizens and over 12 000 of them took the offer³⁰. The only great foundation of Lysimachus in Thrace - his capital city of *Lysimacheia*³¹ on the Thracian Chersonesus - is of course a different case: no one seems to have ever doubted that at least this was a real "*Hellenistic polis*".

This short review brings forth the conception of far reaching processes of urbanization in Thrace in the IVth century B.C. Despite their different origin the new cities appear to have had a citizenship based on landed property - or, they must have possessed the basic traits of Hellenistic poleis as opposed to the system of direct royal economy. Therefore, it could be presumed that the appearance of the cities exemplifies the transition of ancient Thrace to a *Hellenistic condition*.

The analysis of other aspects in the development of Thrace during the IVth century seems to corroborate this general conclusion. The appearance of *Greek mercenary armies* in the service of the Odrysian rulers is a typical example. Cotys and Kersobleptes had in their service such armies lead by Iphikrates and Charidemos, as did the rivals of the latter - Amadokos II employing the mercenary commanders Simon and Bianor and Berisades and his sons - Athenodoros. The position of these mercenary commanders, some of whom are explicitly mentioned to have married into the families of the respective kings, anticipates the appearance of the *philoi* or *king's friends* as one of the typical institutions of Hellenistic monarchy.

An example of a different type is offered by the employment of the Greek language for political purposes. The earliest official document of this type is the newly found inscription from the emporion Pistiros in the Hebros valley which belongs to the time of the successors of Cotys I³². It could be argued that the inscription from Pistiros reflects the relations of the Thracian king with the Greek settlers as an explanation for the use of Greek, but the regular appearance of inscriptions in Greek on royal Odrysian silverware from the reign of Cotys³³ makes this objection futile.

To cut short what threatens to become a very long argumentation, I could say in conclusion that there are enough grounds to suggest the existence of *Early Hellenistic Phenomena in Ancient Thrace* even before the Macedonian invasion in the time of Philip II. The Early Hellenistic Age in Thrace, which could therefore be stretched from the reign of Cotys (beginning in the 80-es of the IVth century) to roughly the middle of the IIIrd century B.C., coincides thus with what has for long been defined on the basis of independent archaeological evidence as the most prosperous and wealthy period in Thracian history.

Returning now to the question of cities and urbanization, I would like to recall that those mentioned in the above account were neither the only nor the earliest cities in ancient Thrace. First came evidently the numerous Greek colonies on the Thracian coasts of the Aegean, the Propontis and the Euxine³⁴, whose character as autonomous poleis no one has ever questioned. It has recently been proved that autonomous Greek establishments existed even in the deep interior of the country; the first known example, the *emporion Pistiros* on the upper Hebros³⁵, could hardly have been unique. The specific relations established between the Greek cities and the territorial political formations of the interior contain the rudiments of what was to develop into the kernel of the Hellenistic system. An early but very instructive example is offered by the principality of the Philaids in the Thracian Chersonesos; of course the most important and best known case is that of the great Odrysian Kingdom in the Vth and IVth centuries B.C. I have neither the time, nor the intention to analyze here and now the details of the relations between these states and the Greek cities incorporated in their political territories; I will content myself with pointing out the problem and tentatively suggesting a name for it. The specific phenomena that characterize the integration of the Greek and Thracian communities with their antagonistic social and political traditions into a composite entity could be called *Proto-Hellenistic*. Similar phenomena are of course known from other areas affected by the Greek colonization; being essentially of the same order, they were the precursors of those much vaster and deeper processes that marked the transition to the Hellenistic Age.

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NOTES

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3. А. Фол, *Тракня и Балканите през ранноеллинстическата епоха*, София, 1975.
4. A. Fol, *La ville royale thrace. Généralités*, in: Index. Quaderni camerti di studi romanistici, 20, 1992, 41-42.

5. А. Фол, *Елинизъмът в Тракия*, in Исторически преглед, 1984, 5, 47-52; ср. A. Fol, *Les grandes périodes de l'histoire thrace*, Actes du II^e Congrès international de thracologie I, București, 1980, 19-23.

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