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My research field[1] concerns cult life in Thrace from the 8th to 3rd century BC. This paper will study one subregion of Thrace – the Rhodope Mountains area. The cult life of this region will be analyzed from a historiographical point of view. We know that strong ancient and contemporary traditions associate those mountains with an intense cultic life, and important sacred places. But a closer study of the archaeological sources for sacred places in the Rhodope Mountains reveals a huge contrast between the Northern and Southern sides of the Bulgarian-Greek border. Therefore, I would like to present a comparative analysis of the network of ancient sanctuaries in Bulgarian and in Greek Rhodopes, and to propose some explanations to the observed discrepancy. The aim is to contribute to our understanding of cultic life in Ancient Thrace through a historiographical study.

I. From political to archaeological border

The main part of my research consists in establishing a database on cult places in Ancient Thrace. The research area has been limited to the East by the Black Sea shore, to the South by the Aegean Sea, including the islands of Thasos and Samothrace, to the West by the Strymon River valley, and to the North by the Balkan Mountain (Stara Planina). In the Greek and Turkish parts of this area, I started from raw data, because the archaeological maps are not yet transferred to an online available database. In contrary, in the Bulgarian part, I had the significant help of the online available Bulgarian Archaeological Map database,[2] and even, the more specific project of a cult place database, kindly provided by Julia Tzvetkova.[3] I combined her database, including GPS coordinates, with a map that I created using Quantum GIS program, with a background data from the Ancient World Mapping Center website (awmc.unc.edu), and with administrative boundaries from the free online resource Global Administrative Areas (www.gadm.org).

The archaeological places selected for this paper are situated in the Rhodope Mountains on both sides of the modern Greek-Bulgarian border and were determined as being places for cult practice between the 8th and 3rd century BC by their excavators. At this stage, we rely on the excavator and publisher's opinion.

The map (**Fig. 1**) is very expressive. Whereas 49 ancient cult places have been spotted and studied in the Bulgarian part of the Rhodope Mountains, there is only one in the Greek part of the Rhodopes. This equates to 2% of these places located in Greece, although ca. 17% of this mountain range is on Greek territory. Considering that this political boundary dates back only to the first quarter of the last century, it would be anachronistic to confer any ancient historical ground to this discrepancy. How did ancient archaeological data happen to meet with contemporary political boundaries?

We can look for answers in the recent history of archaeological research in this area, but also, more specifically, in the historiography of the archaeology of cult in modern Bulgaria and Greece.

II. Overview of the state of archaeological research in the Rhodope Mountains

Field surveys in the Rhodope Mountains started actually with the foundation of the Institute of Thracology in 1972 and its expeditions: *Bessica,* in 1972-1973 around Peshtera, *Skalni*

1 I am very thankful to the Organizing Committee of the 13th International Congress of Thracology to provide me this opportunity to present for the first time part of my PhD research. I am also thankful to my directors Katerina Chryssanthaki-Nagle and Anne-Marie Guimier-Sorbets for their advice on my paper, of course all remaining errors are mine.

2 Nekhrizov 2005.

3 Tzvetkova 2012.

Grobnitsi in 1973 in the Eastern Rhodopes, then around Arda River in 1976 under the direction of Alexander Fol, and *Mesta* expedition in 1975-1979 headed by Mieczysław Domaradzki.[4] They led to several publications either focusing on a single category of archaeological data (as sanctuaries or megalithic monuments in the volumes *Тракийски паметници/Thracian monuments*[5]), or offering studies of a specific region, as the one edited by M. Domaradzki.[6]

M. Domaradzki headed also the creation of the Archaeological Map of Bulgaria (AKB) at the Archaeological Institute of the Bulgarian Academy of Science,[7] which soon collected published and unpublished data from numerous surveys and excavations in the Rhodope region.

On contrary, in Greece, the Rhodope Mountains have been quite ignored until very recently. Researches there were focused either on the Ancient Greek colonies on the Aegean Sea shore, or concerned earlier (Prehistoric) and later (Roman, Byzantine, until Contemporary) eras.

In 1983, the archaeologist Pantos A. Pantos noticed in his paper on the topography of Western Thrace:

"A lot of work remains to be done. There are still many unidentified place-names known from written sources. In the Rhodope Mt. exploration has begun only in the last years."[8]

Indeed, in the early 1980s Diamantis Triantaphyllos, then head of the 19th Ephorate of Prehistoric and Classical Antiquities in Komotini, conducted few surveys, mostly in the Southern Ismaros Mountain, but also in the Rhodope Mountains. His main syntheses were published in the journals of the Institute of Thracology, *Pulpudeva* and *Thracia Pontica*, and they strongly echoed the *Thracian monuments'* collection. Indeed, he published in 1983 an article about "Megalithic monuments in Western Thrace",[9] and about "Open-air sanctuaries in the Kikonian' region"[10] in 1986 (both in French). We should also mention the work of Nikos Efstratiou, who excavated an Iron age agricultural settlement in the Rhodope Mountains,[11] and published an ethnoarchaeological monograph on the Rhodopean Pomaks' villages,[12] which can also be useful to analyze Iron Age settlements. Recently in the past years, the Ephorates of the Greek part of Thrace have been also organizing archaeological surveys in the region, for example in the territory north of Abdera, and around Xanthi.[13] The Rhodope Mountains are not completely ignored anymore, even if it remains one of the less invested areas in Northern Greece. An important difference can also be noticed regarding the identification of the archaeological sites. In Greek publications, the archaeological sites are reported as settlements, with only exception mentioning of a sanctuary within a settlement: at Tsoutska Tepe, north of Linos village.[14] On contrary, in Bulgaria, we can notice a tendency to identify the archaeological sites often as sanctuaries.

In the last part of my study, I would like to focus on the tendency among the Bulgarian researchers to favour a religious interpretation of the archaeological sites in the Rhodope Mountains.

III. The historiographical point of view of the archaeology of Thracian cult

The overview of the Greek historiography will be brief, as there are few publications on the subject of the Archaeology of Thracian Cult. Greek researchers are mostly commenting the ancient narratives, and the archaeological data are scarce there. We know that several aspects of Greek religion, as the travel of Dionysos, or mythological heroes as Orpheus, happened to be related to Thrace and the Rhodope mountains according to some ancient sources. For that reason, when the northern Greek border was established between the two World Wars, there were some attempts in modern Greek historiography to put an accent on the interconnections between Greeks and Thracians, and more precisely – the Thracian background of part of the ancient Greek myths: according to some narratives, the first musicians and poets were told to be of Thracian origin (Orpheus, Musaeus, Thamyris, Eumolpos), as well as some priest's families like the Eumolpidai and Thrakidai, or the Dionysiac and Orphic cults. However, those narratives appear in the 5th century BC, and even later: actually, mainly to the Roman pe-

4 Baralis 2010, 104 n. 13.
5 Венедиков, Фол 1976; 1980.
6 Домарадски 1990.
7 Domaradzki 2005; Nekhrizov 2005.
8 Pantos 1983, 177.
9 Triantaphyllos 1983.
10 Triantaphyllos 1986.
11 Ευστρατίου 1991.
12 Ευστρατίου 2002.
13 Καλλιντζή et al. forthcoming.
14 Αναγνωστοπούλου-Χατζηπολυχρώνη 1987; 1988; 1991; 1997.

riod. A closer study of the context of their writing proves that those narratives are produced in theater plays and orators' speeches with the aim of presenting either anything considered wrong in the Greek religion as coming from the North, or anything religious coming from the North as something wrong.[15] Moreover, Tchavdar Marinov's monograph *Nos ancêtres les Thraces: Usages idéologiques de l'antiquité en Europe du Sud-Est [The Thracians, our ancestors. Ideological use of Antiquity in South-Eastern Europe]* showed the contradictions and political bias of this researches from the beginning of the 20th century.[16]

From an archaeological point of view, the Thracian influence in Greek religion has been discussed in the Samothracian and Thasian sanctuaries as well as in the sanctuaries of their *apoikiai*, but in the Rhodope mountains, the only identified sanctuary (Tsoutska Tepe) is considered as a Greek one and part of a Greek settlement,[17] which was established on a previously abandoned Thracian settlement.

The Bulgarian historiography is much more elaborated, of course. But how did it start? Once again, Tchavdar Marinov's work is crucial to our understanding of the "Thracological moment".

While the Thracian origin of Dionysus, for example, has been historically challenged by the discovery of his name on Mycenean tablets from Pylos and Crete dating back to the 13th century BC, the discovery was interpreted in some publications of the Institute of Thracology as a proof to the close relationship between Thrace and Mycenae and to the importance of Thracian religion in ancient times. Thus, in his monograph about "the Thracian Dionysus", A. Fol starts with establishing that Dionysus' cult is a Hellenized version of a Thracian orphic cult which had been conceptualized in his previous monograph,[18] to associate Thracian religion with pre-Greek Eastern Mediterranean cultures: Pierian,[19] Mycenaen[20] as well as Egyptian.[21] But the sources about the cult of Dionysus in Thrace appear only eight centuries later: it is Herodotus who mentions Dionysus among the gods honoured by the Thracians[22] and more specifically, by the Satrae through an oracular sanctuary.[23] Moreover, studies of the ancient Greek literature and mythology repeatedly pointed out that the Thracian background is a tool to explain Dionysus's strangeness, meaning its specifics in Greek pantheon. Thus, he has been presented as Egyptian or Indian as well.

As far as Orpheus is concerned, it is not until Aeschylus' work *Lycurgus* that his myth started being staged in Thrace. But this is a historically later tradition to that one which presents him as Greek, and dates back to the 6th century.[24] Similar to the case of Dionysus, the strangeness provided by the Thracian background should not be considered from a historicizing point of view, but as part of the construction of the myth.[25]

Regarding the Rhodope Mountains, it is not until August's era and Vergilius' *Georgics* that they became associated with Orpheus, and mostly because, together with the Pangaion Mountain and Hebros river, they mourn Orpheus' fate.[26] Already in 1972, Georgi Mihailov was critical toward the growing tendency in Bulgarian historiography to associate the Orphic tradition with Ancient Thrace and the Rhodopes,[27] but the Institute of Thracology took a different path.

15 See the second chapter of Bastide 2019, 39-65.

16 Marinov 2016, 98-106.

17 Αναγνωστοπούλου-Χατζηπολυχρώνη 1987; 1988; 1991; 1997.

18 Фол 1986; Fol 1993.

19 "In Pierien ist die orphische Lehre ab Mitte des II. Jahrtausends offensichtlich vertreten. Hier ist sie hellenisiert. Die Pierierinnen, das sind Thrakerinnen, die den Dionysos kultisch verehren, versammeln sich bei Leibethra am Gebirge Olympos in Pierien wo auch Orpheus legendär begraben ist. Eine solche Lokalisation der orphischen Mysterien ist sehr früh, und in den Texten aus und nach der alexandrinischen Epoche ist sie wie ein Echo enthalten.", Fol 1993, 179.

20 Describing the Sicionians' Metope at Delphi: "Dann wäre das Schiff ein Sonnensymbol, die zwei Sänger – Orpheus und Apollon, die Reiter aber – Reiter-Könige in der Tradition aus mykenischer Zeit, in der sie gewöhnlich Zwillinge sind – sowohl als Reiter als auch als Anthropomorphisation der Sonne. Diese Tradition kann – wie ich bereits zeigte – verkürzt durch die Formel "anax-anakes-anaktores" bezeichnet werden. Sie ist in der festen Burg des thrakischen Orphism – im Samothrakischen Heiligtum – erhalten.", Fol 1993, 176.

21 "Die Lehre [des thrakischen Orphismus], die sich gegen Mitte des 2. Jahrtausends v. Chr. und danach stabilisierte, ist eine Äußerung der allgemeinen Erscheinungen in der Kultur des östlichen Mittelmeerraumes. Die ägyptischen Entlehnungen darin sind prinzipiell zulässig und nach dem Stand der Quellen auch für die Rolle der Lehre bei der Schaffung des Pythagoreertums forschungsmäßig zu erwarten […]. Die eigentliche Hellenisierung des thrakischen Orphismus geht zweifellos auch über die Aneignung ägyptischer Realien in Hellas vonstatten, die Ähnlichkeit mit einigen thrakischen Bestandteilen hatten.", Fol 1993, 185.

22 Hdt. 5.7: "Οὗτοι μὲν σφέων οἱ ἐπιφανέστατοι νόμοι εἰσί, θεοὺς δὲ σέβονται μούνους τούσδε, Ἄρεα καὶ Διόνυσον καὶ Ἄρτεμιν. Οἱ δὲ βασιλέες αὐτῶν, πάρεξ τῶν ἄλλων πολιητέων, σέβονται Ἑρμέην μάλιστα θεῶν, καὶ ὀμνύουσι μοῦνον τοῦτον, καὶ λέγουσι γεγονέναι ἀπὸ Ἑρμέω ἑωυτούς."

23 Hdt. 7.111; see the comments below and Цветкова 2016, 417.

24 Marcacciani 1995, 250-252.

25 Graf 1987, 100-101.

26 Μιχαλόπουλος 2004, 85-86.

27 Михайлов 1972, 244.

Religion has been an important part of the Institute's study areas since its beginning. The main example is the edited series *Thracian Monuments*, which discusses cult structures – rock-cut sanctuaries and tombs, as well as megalithic structures. The megalithic structures from the Eastern Rhodopes and Strandzha-Sakar region, mostly dolmens and rock-cut tombs, were considered as a model of the Thracian tholos-shaped funerary monuments. This idea, first expressed by B. Filov,[28] was taken over by Ivan Venedikov, who transformed the model into an origin.[29]

A. Fol introduced then the idea that the megalithic structures from the Rhodope mountains were connected with the "Thracian orphism",[30] freely inspired from the ancient sources, but totally absent in the archaeological and written data from the studied period. The point was to prove that the Thracians had developed a coherent religious concept, older than the Greek orphism, which could even have influenced it. The ancestry of the Thracian culture was promoted together with the notion that the Thracians were the Bulgarians' ancestors, as we can read it in V. Popov's programmatic presentation of the Thracology in 1983:

"Dans le cadre des tâches générales de la science bulgare, relatives à l'étude de l'héritage culturel et historique du peuple bulgare pour la période de 1300 ans depuis la fondation de l'État bulgare, la *thracologie* doit donner sa part à la recherche du nombre de processus et de phénomènes concernant la formation du peuple bulgare et de la culture médiévale bulgare. La Bulgarie s'avère l'héritière du noyau territorial de la civilisation thrace. "[31]

Sadly, as Tchavdar Marinov recalled it, this contemporary myth of the Rhodope Mountains as a sacred area to the Thracians, or as "Orpheus' mountain" was used as propaganda within the frame of an oppressive policy of homogenization which the State launched against Muslim communities in this part of the country.[32]

From J. Tzvetkova's review of ancient sources regarding mountain sanctuaries in Thrace, we can notice that it is not until the Roman times that a sanctuary can be precisely located in the Rhodope mountains.[33] Moreover, the frequently cited words of Herodotus about an oracular sanctuary of Dionysus in the Thracian mountains, "the high mountains covered with forests of all kinds and snow", do not name the mountain[34]. As Petra Pakkanen points out in an article about the identification of cult deposits: "we should not fall into using incongruous or non-contextual written documents as proof of cultic nature of later or "text-free" activities observable in material remains."[35] Angelos Zannis, who analyzed in an extensive study the ancient geography of the region between Strymon and Nestos Rivers' valleys, relates the hesitations in the traditions locating the Dionysus' oracular sanctuary alternatively on Haimos, Rhodope or Skombros mountains, to different degrees of knowledge of the authors, and comes to the conclusion that there was only one oracular sanctuary, which was probably located around Rila mountain, or in its South-Eastern neighbourhood.[36]

28 Filov 1938.

29 "Tout ce que nous avons dit jusqu'à présent nous permet de conclure que le tombeau à coupole thrace a suivi un développement régional et que la ressemblance entre les tombeaux thraces, mycéniens, cariens, étrusques et scythes ne provient pas d'une origine commune. En Thrace le développement est indépendant et si on parle d'une influence de Mycènes c'est seulement pour indiquer que l'idée en est transportée." Venedikov 1974, 205; cf. the comment of Marinov 2013, 29. In this paper the author prefers to correlate two archaeological facts notwithstanding a gap of several centuries between them, rather than to inscribe them in their regional context (an Early Iron Age culture on one hand, and the Hellenistic period on the other hand). This interpretation could partly be explained by the circumstances of his writing, at a time when access to international publications might have been limited, and when the most famous Macedonian tombs were not yet discovered. These circumstances do not explain the persistence of this interpretation in A. Fol's work.

30 Фол 1986, 151 sqq.

31 Translation of the underlined part: "Thracology must take part in the research on the numerous processes and phenomena regarding the formation of the Bulgarian people and the Bulgarian medieval culture. Bulgaria inherited the territorial core of Thracian civilization." Popov 1983, 10.

32 Marinov 2016. 160-163.

33 Mela 2.17.1-5; Цветкова 2016, 420, n. 24.

34 "Σάτραι δὲ οὐδενός κω ἀνθρώπων ὑπήκοοι ἐγένοντο, ὅσον ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν, ἀλλὰ διατελεῦσι τὸ μέχρι ἐμεῦ αἰεὶ ἐόντες ἐλεύθεροι μοῦνοι Θρηίκων: οἰκέουσί τε γὰρ ὄρεα ὑψηλά, ἴδησί τε παντοίησι καὶ χιόνι συνηρεφέα, καὶ εἰσὶ τὰ πολέμια ἄκροι. Οὗτοι οἱ Διονύσου τὸ μαντήιον εἰσὶ ἐκτημένοι: τὸ δὲ μαντήιον τοῦτο ἔστι μὲν ἐπὶ τῶν ὀρέων τῶν ὑψηλοτάτων, Βησσοὶ δὲ τῶν Σατρέων εἰσὶ οἱ προφητεύοντες τοῦ ἱροῦ, πρόμαντις δὲ ἡ χρέωσα κατά περ ἐν Δελφοῖσι, καὶ οὐδὲν ποικιλώτερον." ("But these Satrae, as far as our knowledge goes, have never yet been subject to any man; let alone of all Thracians have ever been and are to this day free; for they dwell on high mountains covered with forests of all kinds and snow; and they are warriors of high excellence. It is they who possess the place of divination sacred to Dionysus; which place is among the highest of their mountains; the Bessi, a clan of the Satrae, are the prophets of the shrine, and it is a priestess that utters the oracle, as at Delphi; nor is aught more of mystery here than there.") Hdt. 7.111, ed. Loeb, transl. A. D. Godley.

35 Pakkanen 2015, 28.

36 Zannis 2014, 77.

IV. Conclusion: Is there an alternative to the "cult trope"?

We tried to show that the archaeological border overlapping the political one can be explained at several levels. Firstly, there is, of course, a political line, allocating most of the Rhodope Mountain in Bulgaria. Secondly, it is clear that until present, Greek archaeologists have not been interested in this region as their Bulgarian colleagues. And thirdly, we can see that there is also a "cult trope" in the archaeology of the Rhodope Mountains in Bulgaria, consisting of this, that archaeologists working in this region are often in search for sanctuaries, or have a tendency to consider the sites as cultic ones. We tried to emphasize some historiographical reasons for this trope, having in mind that it would benefit any archaeological work.

Recently, several publications have been questioning the cultural interpretation of hilltop archaeological sites, and highlighted the intense economic or domestic activities which they hosted. It can be agriculture, exploitation of local resources or goods production at a domestic or larger scale, as it appears in the work of Hristo Popov and Stanislav Iliev at Kush Kaya,[37] the work of E. Bozhinova at Dragoyna,[38] and the ethnoarchaeological study of Nikos Efstratiou.[39]

In my opinion, only when these activities are taken into account, and when the contemporary myths about Thracian sanctuaries are deconstructed, we might be able to assume the possibility for an archaeological site to have had cult functions as well, and to perceive the reality of its daily use. In an article about the birth of the Archaeology of ritual in Protohistoric Gaul, John Scheid ascertained that "archaeological research can be disappointing when it uses outdated theories as interpretative tools, instead of asking the questions relevant to the material context." Even though it implies dedicating much attention to the analysis of some outdated theories, I hope with this work to bring forth new, and hopefully relevant questions to the rich and various material contexts discovered in this region.

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37 Попов 2009.
38 See Bozhinova et al. 2013 and last again Bozhinova 2018.
39 Ευστρατίου 2002.

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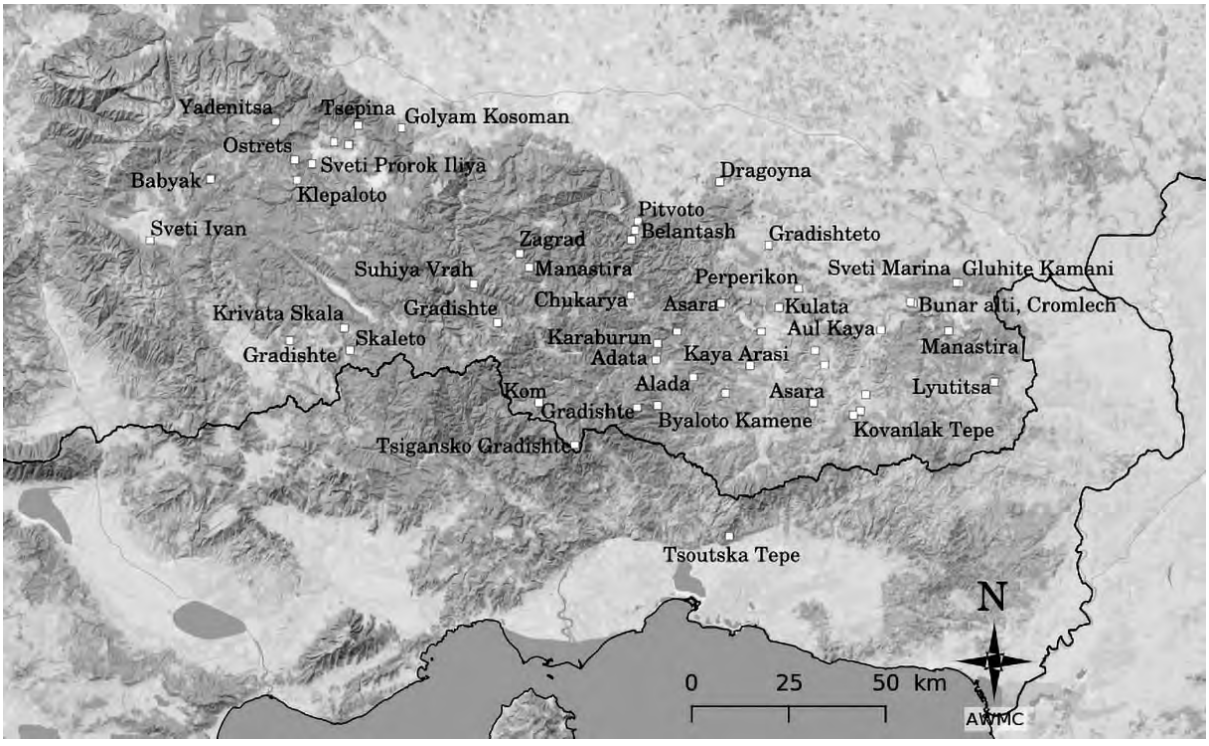

Fig. 1. Cult places in the Rhodope Mountains, 8th - 3rd century BC (by the author).