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**Banquets of Gods, Banquets of Men.
Conviviality in the Ancient World**

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Conviviality in the Ancient World*

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SILVIA MUSTAȚĂ

This volume includes the proceedings of the sixteenth international colloquium of the Department of Ancient History and Archaeology of the Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj, on the subject of "Banquets of Gods, Banquets of Men. Conviviality in the Ancient World", held on November 23rd- 24th, 2012, in Cluj. Due to the diversity of subjects addressed by the participants, the two days of the conference were subdivided into morning sessions reserved for epigraphical and historical topics and afternoon sessions for the archaeological ones; which is reflected by the structure of this volume.

The Banquets of Thracians as an Expression of Intercultural Contacts. A Quick Glance through the Strainer's Holes

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Abstract. Based on information provided by written sources, not very many but quite contradictory, about the Thracian feasts accompanied by wine consumption, the author insists on one of them described by Diodorus of Sicily, which speaks of a particular Getic manner of drinking wine. In order to examine this particular Getic custom, the archaeological data provided by graves, settlements and hoards discoveries are analyzed, like vessels for wine consumption, drinking vessel assemblages, importations and imitations of patterns of the Greek and Roman world. It is an undisputable fact that the relationship between power and prestige and the wine drinking present in societies such as the Greek-Macedonian and Hellenistic and, later, Roman was the pattern for the Thracian elites. Almost everything connected with wine in the Thracian world is due to these poles of prestige and influence: the banquet pattern, the vessels for drinking, the way the wine was prepared before serving, and even the origins of the wine.

Key words: Thracians, banquets, wine, cultural patterns, imitation, acculturation.

Rezumat: Banchetele tracilor ca expresie a contactelor interculturale. O privire grăbită prin găurile sitei. Pe baza informațiilor oferite de izvoarele literare, nu foarte multe, dar contradictorii, despre banchetele tracice însoțite de consumul de vin, autorul se oprește asupra unuia dintre ele, descris de Diodor din Sicilia, care se referă la un mod particular getic de a bea vin. Pentru a examina acest obicei getic aparte, sunt discutate informațiile arheologice oferite de morminte, așezări și tezaure, cum ar fi vasele pentru consumul de vin, grupuri de vase de băut, importuri și imitații de modele din lumea greacă și romană. E un fapt incontestabil că relația dintre putere și prestigiu și băutul vinului prezente în societăți cum sunt cea greco-macedoneană și elenistică, iar mai târziu cea romană, au alcătuit modelul pentru elitele trace. Aproape tot ce se află în legătură cu vinul în lumea tracă se datorează acestor poli de prestigiu și influență: modelul banchetului, vasele de băut, modul de preparare a vinului înainte de servire, chiar originile vinului.

Cuvinte cheie: traci, banchete, vin, modele culturale, imitație, aculturație.

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The banquets, the conviviality, the wine consuming as a social, economic, political and even cultic feature in the barbarian world of proto-history are no longer light subjects outside the interest horizon of scholars. Especially in the past few years important studies have been dedicated to this theme, both regarding the Thracian society in general¹, and regarding the Dacian inner-Carpathian area in particular² and the Getic one south and east of the Carpathians³. The same theme is also discussed concerning the Celtic central and western European world⁴. As a consequence, a further step must be performed: to put together the realities of the two worlds and try to elaborate a new common model of the barbarian societies from the border of the Greek-Roman civilization.

The present paper seeks to contribute to the elaboration of such a pattern starting from the realities of the Thracian world of the second half millennium of the old era, seen from the perspective of the relationships and intercultural contacts between centre and periphery.

For the Thracian world in general and for the Getic one in particular, one of the few descriptions (though vivid, including many details) of a party when wine was drunk in huge quantities is the scene of the feast at Helis, told by Diodorus of Sicily (21, 12, 2-3). The feast was organized by the Thracian basileus Dromichaïtes, as a "big wake for the gods", at the end of the war in the first years of the 3rd century BC against the new king of Thracia, Lysimachos. The Thracian and the Macedonian leaders who took part in the feast received different treatments. For Lysimachos and the Macedonians, the wine was poured into cups of gold and silver, as at the feasts in their homeland, while Dromichaïtes and his people drank wine from rudimentary and modest cups made of wood and horn, as was their custom.

This remark of Diodorus, "as the Getic custom was", deserves to be discussed in detail. The custom of the Getic (and the Thracian in general) parties was indeed so different of that of the Macedonian world that the written source (Diodorus in this case), although written two centuries after the events, mentioned this detail?

We will further try to clarify this aspect by presenting firstly the sources and then commenting the archaeological evidence relevant for the behaviour of the Thracians during the feast and their wine-consuming during the Late Iron Age in the North Balkan area. Then we shall identify and individualize the way the barbarian Thracians drank wine at their parties.

¹ Marazov 2003a.

² Florea 2004.

³ Sirbu 2003.

⁴ Poux 2004.

What do the written sources tell us?

The written sources (the most numerous are the Greek ones) are contradictory regarding wine drinking during the Thracian feasts. Even extreme opinions could be found: there are sources that affirm that the Thracians did not even have knowledge of drink (Mela 2, 1, *Thracia*), and others that present the Thracians as heavy drinkers, the champions of the ancient world in this regard (Ael. VH 3, 15, *De Thracum et Illyorum vinositate*). Hardly a balanced, honest and fair opinion could be found in the written sources. It is possible that Pausanias is closest to the truth when he affirms that not only the Thracian men went drunk to battle, but even women used to drink a lot⁵; one consequence of such behaviour was the murder of Orpheus (9, 30, 5).

Why should we believe that the Thracians were the only different people in a world where alcohol was consumed not only for pleasure but also as a prestigious social and economical and even political function?

How important wine (or the alcoholic surrogates they drank during the long nights - Verg. G. 3, 349) was for their barbarian neighbours, the Scythians, results from the (although exaggerated) information that they had everything in common (even the women), except for the sword and the cup (Str. 7, 3, 7). For the Scythians the weapons and the drinks are on the same level. Why would the Thracians behave differently? The mixed populations from the Western Pontus (Greeks, Getae, Scythians) did not give up drinking wine, even when it was frozen: they drank it as iceballs (Ov. Tr. 3, 10 - winter in Tomis).

The historical written sources do not allow us to think that the behaviour of the Thracian is so full of excesses as that of their contemporaries, such as the Scythians - who used the skulls of their enemies killed in battles as cups during their feasts (Mela 2, 1 - *Scythia Europae*) - or the Germans who during the most important feasts drank the wine in the horns of the uri killed during hunting (Caes. Gal. 6, 28). The quiet feast of the Thracians who drank their wine in cups made of wood and horn (D. S. 21, 12, 2-3), "like the Getae / according to Getic custom", created a strong paradigm for the general perception, a commonplace characterized by moralizing nuances in the work of the ancient authors. The description that Strabo made of the strong personality of the great priest Deceneus (even he "a sort of charlatan"), who succeeded in putting the Getae on the right way by convincing them to cut down their vineyards and forget about the vice of drinking (7, 3, 11), brought into the collective

⁵ Marazov 2000b.

conscience a topos whose roots are placed in the ground of moralizing tendencies, an antithesis between the decadent and corrupted civilized world and the barbarian world: pure, natural and unaltered.

Perhaps it is not right to say that drinking wine was considered a virtue in the ancient world; it is more likely that it was considered a mark of high social and political status. Excessive consumption was risky, and because of that the act of drinking had to be performed with responsibility. In the middle of the imperial Roman epoch, Trajan was called *optimus princeps* despite his huge appetite for drinking wine. But the talent of the ancient authors transformed the vice into a virtue. Drinking wine, even excessively, was considered an act of greatness as long as it did not influence the equilibrium of the world. Talking of the virtues and the personality of Trajan, Cassius Dio said that the emperor drank as much as he wanted without losing his mind or harming anybody (DC 68, 7, 4). Thus, it was a thing to be mentioned in the chronicles as a good example. But as time passed by the emperor seemed to lose this feature. In the 6th century Ioannes Lydus was aware too of these “pleasures” of the emperor, but (perhaps influenced by the Christian ideas of the time) chose to present the radical version facing temptation: “Having an attraction for drinking excessively, Trajan gave up drinking wine” (Lyd. *mens.* 4, 18). This double point of view about the same person could be considered a clear example of how the written sources can influence our perception on some difficult subjects, everyone being tributary both to the ideologies and times when they were written as well to the personality of the author.

This is why we consider that the archaeological sources can offer a more objective image as well as suggestions for a more realistic interpretation of the issue that we are discussing here. We shall highlight them.

For the earlier period of the Thracian culture (5th- 3rd centuries BC), the most relevant information is offered by the sealed assemblages discovered in the leaders’ tombs or in hoards. Among these assemblages, an important position is held by the drinking sets made of bronze or noble metals.

The Thracian *basileis*, leaders and aristocrats loved luxury and used imported products that highlighted their status⁶. In their tombs were put pompous pieces of vessels used during feasts, predominant being the Greek vessels for wine drinking: *situlae*, *oenochoiai*, cups, goblets, *lebes* etc.

The Greek concept of *symposion*, expressed through the characteristic vessel, is present all over the elites of the Thracian society, as it results from the tombs of the leading class members. A series of auxiliary and apparently unimportant elements testifies that they did not simply get some luxury

⁶ Archibald 1998, 177-196.

vessel only because their shape and ornamentation were beautiful; the whole Greek ceremonial act was adopted. We refer to the strainers used for the wine filtration or the *kyathoi* used for getting the wine from bigger containers (like the *situla*-type vessels) into smaller vessels for drink; this shows the stages that preceded the direct consumption, all of them representing distinct episodes but in the same time they also represent the parts of a unitary ceremonial that the Thracians took as a whole from the Greek-Macedonian world.

The bronze *kyathos* / *simpulum*-type ladle imported from the Greek area in the 4th century BC is specific only for the vicinity of the Black Sea's coasts (for example: Nagornoe and Odessa-Levski)⁷, but imported strainers were spread over a larger area of the Thracian territory. Between the end of the 5th and the beginning of the 3rd century BC the bronze strainers and the vessels for feasts were found in the rich graves of some Thracian leaders at Rhuac, Vărbica and Šipka-Goljama Kosmata Mogila⁸. Another strainer was found in the famous Mušovica Mogila from Duvanlij, while a silver item was part of the funerary inventory of the tumulus grave from Peretu⁹. All these strainers are of Greek or Etruscan type and have nothing in common with the local-type strainers, specific for the 5th century BC, as known from the grave no. 17 of the necropolis of Ravna¹⁰.

As regards the famous hoards discovered in the Thracian lands, most vessels are also of Greek or Achaemenid type, although they belong to some barbarian workshops where noble metals (especially silver) were processed in the most refined manner. The royal names belonging to the Odrysian dynasty written on some vessels found to the north of the Balkan Mountains, such as the ones from Agighiol, Aleksandrovo, Rogozen, Borovo, Vraca, Radjuvene and Braničevo, could indicate the origin area of these extraordinary vessel sets¹¹. It is still unclear if the drinking vessels belonging to those sets (especially the *phiale* and *rhyton* types) represented only an impressive symbol or if their significance must be extended to the domain of cultic and ritual ceremonial. Figurative representations like the ones that are found on the greave from Agighiol or on the rhyton from Poroina led to the consideration that they were a feature of gods or heroes to whom the Thracian leaders identified themselves when they used the respective vessels. It is not impossible that the vessels that formed the big

⁷ Teleagă 2008, 277-278, map 50, pl. 79/1; 177/1.

⁸ Teleagă 2008, 276-277, map 50, pl. 112/2; 193/1-3.

⁹ Moscalu 1989, 169-170, pl. 48/2.

¹⁰ Mirčev 1962, 108, pl. 18/5.

¹¹ Măndescu 2010, 400-409, fig. 80-81.

Thracian treasures were used not for drinking wine during the sumptuous royal banquets, but more likely were used during some ritual ceremonials of purification, libations etc. There are also some finely morphologic details that lead to such assertions. For example, the golden amphora from the vessel set of the hoard of Panagjuryšte have at the basis of each handle a perforation through which the liquid flew rapidly and in an uncontrollable way and that made the ordinary usage of the respective vessel during banquets impossible.

For the closing period of the Late Iron Age corresponding to the so-called classical Geto-Dacian culture, i.e. the two and a half centuries that preceded the Roman conquest (mid-2nd century BC – 1st century AD), the archaeological data are collected especially from settlements, fortresses and hoards.

Despite the numerous agricultural tools (little knives, pruning knives, weed hooks etc.) from the Late Iron Age discovered in pre-Roman Dacian settlements (sometimes in tombs, as funerary inventory) – some scholars considered that the tools were used for the cultivation of vineyards¹² –, it seems that the wine the Geto-Dacian preferred was the southern one, imported from the Aegean Archipelago.

A local wine production certainly existed and can be archaeologically proved, not through the presence of agricultural tools (the fact that some of them were used for the cultivation of vineyards is disputable), but through the containers for the transportation of wine, i. e. the autochthonous amphorae, some of which having anepigraphic stamps that imitate the ones from reputed Greek centres. A recent statistic talks about over 300 local amphorae (a third of them bearing autochthonous anepigraphic stamps), discovered in over 20 Geto-Dacian settlements¹³.

Chronologically speaking, the autochthonous wine was produced and “commercialized” on the inner market in parallel with the qualitatively superior one coming especially from the Aegean islands (Rhodes, Cnidus, Cos). As most of the autochthonous amphorae were discovered in the area south of the Carpathians, we could suppose that this was the main area where local wine was produced¹⁴, a space that still preserves the properties for successful cultivation of vine even today.

However, a statistic of the wine quantity that was imported to Dacia can offer a much better image of the reality of the epoch. For the moment, only a four-decades-old statistic is in use, but it is still relevant as long as it

¹² Comşa 1982, 59-74, fig. 1-11.

¹³ Sîrbu 2003, 88-89, fig. 2.

¹⁴ Sîrbu 2003, 89.

quantifies (at that moment) about 1100 amphorae imported to the Dacian territory (about a third of them bearing stamps), discovered in 117 findspots. In a single site (at Cetățeni), surely a center of goods exchange, over 100 imported amphorae were identified¹⁵. Thus, by presenting the quantitative ratio between imported wine and the autochthonous production as 4/1, as it results from the quantification of the amphorae, we presume that we are not far from the reality. As a confirmation, this ratio of about 4/1 is recorded concerning the imported stamped amphorae and the autochthonous ones discovered in the Late Iron Age centre of Cetățeni: more than 180 stamps of Rhodes, Cnidus and Sinope, and 41 local stamps are known at present¹⁶.

But the imported wine did not come alone to Dacia (or rather it did not come only together with the amphorae that contained it). Continuing a certain tradition of the previous centuries in the northern Thracian area, the wine import was doubled by an imitation program of the special vessels used for drinking in the Hellenistic and Roman world. This is not a simple stereotype imitation of a misunderstood foreign pattern, but a global one that generated the idea of assuming and integrating a common pattern that became generally accepted and then adopted by the exponents of the autochthonous society.

It is obvious that the imported drinking vessels from the Hellenistic and Roman worlds were coveted and appreciated by the Getic aristocracy. Because the valuable authentic imports such as the *kantharos* from the hoard of Sâncrăieni¹⁷ were rather difficult to obtain, the imitation method was used on a large scale all over Dacia. Cheap imitations made of clay (some of them being executed in a poor manner) were used even by the aristocracy of very important centers of power such as Ocnița¹⁸.

In the 1st century BC, a "revival" of the act of depositing thesauri and hoards consisting of drinking sets which evoked the memory of the great horizon of Thracian hoards took place. Surprisingly or not, the vessel for drinking wine – which is best represented in this late hoards discovered both to the north of the Danube (Sâncrăieni and Herăstrău) and to the south of it (Bohot and Jakimovo) – is the silver cup without foot – the *mastos*, a Greek rather than an Italic feature¹⁹. The massive presence of the *mastos*-type silver vessel in the hoards of the 1st century BC suggests that in this period of time the source of inspiration for the drinking vessels of precious

¹⁵ Glodariu 1974, 27-40, 183-200, cat. no. 25.

¹⁶ Glodariu 1974, cat. nos. 25, 184-190; Măndescu 2006, 39-40, pl. 15-16/1-11.

¹⁷ Spănu 2012, 18, fig. 1.

¹⁸ Berciu 1981, 28, pl. 7/1; 8/4; 74/1.

¹⁹ Feugère 1991, 3, fig. 4.

metal remained the Greek area. Even some of the *kantharoi* from Sâncrăieni were initially produced as *mastoi*²⁰. Even more than that: the strainer present together with the *mastoi* as part of the vessels set from Jakimovo, an auxiliary item without any common feature with the republican Italic ones, is a further argument supporting the idea of a Greek and not Roman source of inspiration.

The trend of imitation of the Hellenistic patterns, present for a long time as an important feature of the Getic aristocracy, is reflected by the numerous *rhyta*, which are local imitations, made in clay, of the prestigious vessel, possibly with a cultic significance and purpose, carved in precious metals in the Persian and Greek worlds. For the end of the 2nd and 1st century BC, a period when the prototype was no longer a trend in its original area, the usage of *rhyton* imitations is sufficiently well documented in the important Late Iron Age centres of power, due to discoveries such as those from Cetățeni, Piscul Crăsani, Poiana, Popești and Sighișoara²¹.

But perhaps the Geto-Dacian large-scale imitation of wine drinking vessels could be seen just by looking at the local imitations of the hemispherical mould-made bowls and the local imitations of *kantharoi*²². Beside the obviously different spreading area (the local hemispherical mould-made bowls are frequently met with to the south of the Carpathians, while the main spreading area for *kantharos*-type vessels is east of the Carpathians), these imitations also reflect different centres of influence (the hemispherical mould-made bowls were taken from the South, after eastern Hellenistic prototypes produced at Delos and Megara, while for the pattern of the Geto-Dacian *kantharos* one must be looking to the Roman world), as well as a substantially chronological delay (the hemispherical mould-made bowls are chronological indicators for an earlier stage of the classical Geto-Dacian culture, i. e. the second half of the 2nd century and the first half of the 1st century²³, while the *kantharoi* were discovered in later contexts, from the second half/the end of the 1st century BC and the first half of the 1st century AD).

The Geto-Dacian imitations went even further, beyond the ordinary patterns of the vessels for wine drinking from the Hellenistic and Roman world. One of the most interesting discoveries was made in the settlement of Cetățeni, a Geto-Dacian centre that developed and prospered due to the trade of Aegean wine. This find shows that the sources of inspiration were more numerous and included rare shapes of vessels for drinking wine.

²⁰ Spănu 2012, 11.

²¹ Sîrbu 1995.

²² Glodariu 1974, 143-145; Sîrbu 2003, 90, fig. 3-4.

²³ Babeș 1975, 136, fig. 7.

Thus, a small fragment of wheel-made painted pottery, found in an archaeological layer dated to the 1st century BC, a fragment that could not permit a clear reconstitution²⁴, seems to indicate a local imitation, unique until now, having as a pattern a filter jug-type vessel spread during the Hellenistic era in the eastern of the Mediterranean basin²⁵. The decisive morphologic element for this affiliation is represented by the inner perforated membrane, which functioned as a strainer (Fig. 1). The fact that this is the only painted pottery fragment discovered at Cetățeni could raise a question mark about the origins of the vessel it was a part of, but the technique and the manner used to paint it, i. e. the geometric patterns, are clearly autochthonous²⁶.

Thus, the Dacians drank wine imitating the Greek-Hellenistic and Roman patterns, using vessels especially created for drinking that imitated the ones of the "civilised world". The probability of a certain refinement of the Geto-Dacian banquet ceremony was discussed, referring to the change of drinking vessels (from *mastos* to *kantharos*) as the Roman republican imports to the north of the Danube got more intense²⁷. The same changing of the poles of influence and of the pattern of the autochthonous banquet ceremony may be illustrated by the replacement (around the mid-1st century BC, as the Romans came closer to the Danube) of the mould-made bowls with the *kantharoi*, both of them being locally imitated. This issue has already been discussed in this paper.

Imitation and acculturation do not limit themselves to this episode, but went further into Geto-Dacian behaviour. The entire procedure of wine preparation before serving, the taking of the liquid out of the big vessel and pouring it into smaller ones used the same Greek and Roman pattern. The most recent cataloguing regarding the imports of auxiliary materials for wine-consuming is relevant. In numerous Dacian centers of power, especially in Transylvania, but also in the outer Carpathian area, imported Roman wares such as bronze strainers (Divici, Piatra Craivii, Pietroasele-Gruiu Dării, Peștera Ungurului, Brad) or *simpula* (Bănița, Costești, Divici, Piatra Roșie, Rădulești, Tilișca, Cârломănești)²⁸ were discovered.

The Geto-Dacian aristocrats and leaders knew the whole ensemble of the vessels for wine as well as the auxiliary elements used during Greek and Roman parties and adopted these customs. Their preference for the original auxiliary pieces, such as strainers and *simpula* produced in

²⁴ Măndescu 2006, 84-87, pl. 37/8; 38/4.

²⁵ Rotroff 1997, 180-183, cat. nos. 1183-1193, fig. 73, pl. 87.

²⁶ Florea 1998, 185-194, pl. 2/3; 17/5; 21/10.

²⁷ Spănu 2012, 18.

²⁸ Plantos 2003, 121-122, pl. 1/1-5.

Campania or generally in southern Italy²⁹, is obvious. In fact, no autochthonous imitation of a Republican bronze strainer or *simpulum* was discovered until now. The technical limitation was clear and whether or not such a piece was to be used during banquets was conditioned by its quality. It is without any doubt that in these situations the functioning of the piece directly depended on the accuracy of the handicraft – a fact that could explain why they preferred original auxiliary pieces, such as strainers and ladles, and why they did not want local copies.

Although these auxiliary pieces did not come to pre-conquest Dacia directly from the Roman world, but probably through the Scordiscian milieu in the south-west³⁰, this contamination manner through pattern propagation illustrates the common scenery of the relation between the barbarian populations and the example they considered a superior one. Although there are elements that particularize these objects, they do not allow us to consider the Barbaricum as a whole having a unique morphology in its relationship with the poles of prestige: Greek or Roman.

In this late period before the Roman conquest, important differences between the ways the imported wine was seen by the Geto-Dacian and by their western neighbours of the Barbaricum can be noticed. From the first half of the 2nd century to the end of the 1st century AD, when the Pontic and Balkan trade routes leading to the Aegean area were taken over by the Romans, the Geto-Dacians enjoyed southern wine, which they imported in huge quantities. In the Celtic area, the Italic imported wine, though well represented in the 2nd century, became more and more rare in the 1st century BC³¹. The Geto-Dacians consumed wine hugely and all the social classes were well represented (the quality of the wine varied, of course, from one class to another), while the Celts drank it only if they were part of the warrior elite. The Celtic world did not imitate nor took over the Greek-Roman patterns of the vessels, while the Geto-Dacian did both. In Gallia the accessories for the symposium, the vessels for drinking of Roman provenience, were imported and spread only after the Roman conquest³².

At the end of this periplus through the features of the Thracian wine customs, many doubts remain regarding Diodorus' assertion about the existence of a personal hallmark of the manner the Getae drank during feasts. Although the written sources regarding this issue are confusing and non-concordant, the archaeological ones offer clearer information. It is

²⁹ Guillaumet 1991, 89-95; Castoldi/Feugère 1991, 61-87.

³⁰ Rustoiu 1994, 234-236.

³¹ Poux 2004, 196-198, 374-380.

³² Poux 2004, 240-242, 605.

undisputable that the relationship between power and prestige and wine-drinking present in foreign societies such as the Greek-Macedonian and Hellenistic and, later, Roman was the pattern for the Thracian (both the Thracian-Getae and, later, the Geto-Dacian) elites. Almost everything connected to wine in the Thracian world is due to these poles of prestige and influence: the banquet pattern, the vessels for drinking, the way the wine was prepared before serving, and even the origins of wine. Then where could be found that so-called “custom of the Getae” that represented their hallmark? Diodorus must have been wrong.

Illustrations

Fig. 1. Hellenistic filter jugs (A) and a ceramic fragment from a possible local imitation found at Cetățeni (B). (A - according to Rotroff 1997)

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