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SOMMAIRE
CONTENTS
I N H A L T

ÉTUDES

ROBIN BRIGAND, ANDREI ASĂNDULESEI, OLIVIER WELLER, VASILE COTIUGĂ, <i>Contribution à l'étude du peuplement chalcolithique des bassins hydrographiques des Bahluiet et Valea Oii (Dép. Iași)</i>	5
ANA ILIE, <i>Un sceptre anthropomorphe de la collection d'archéologie du Complexe Nationale et Musée « La Cour Princièrè » de Târgoviște</i>	33
ALEXANRU VULPE, <i>Herodotus and the Scythian Problem in Romania</i>	47
IULIAN BÎRZESCU, <i>Die archaische Siedlung von Tariverde</i>	77
LUCREȚIU MIHAILESCU-BÎRLIBA, <i>Les « Romains » dans la cité d'Istros sous le Haut-Empire</i>	91
DAN APARASCHIVEI, <i>Physicians and Medicine in the Roman Army of Moesia Inferior</i>	99
IOAN PISO, FELIX MARCU, OVIDIU ȚENEA, GEORGE CUPCEA, RADU VARGA, <i>Das Kapitol von Sarmizegetusa</i>	119
IRINA ADRIANA ACHIM, <i>Paysage urbain tardo-antique à Histria : les églises paléochrétiennes entre le cadre architectural et la liturgie</i>	125

DISCUSSIONS

UROŠ MATIĆ, <i>To queer or not to queer? That is the question: Sex/gender, prestige and burial no. 10 on the Mokrin necropolis</i>	169
--	-----

COMPTE RENDUS

Ion Motzoi Chicideanu, <i>Obiceiuri funerare din epoca bronzului la Dunărea Mijlocie și Inferioară</i> , vol. I (text), vol. II (planșe), Editura Academiei Române, București, 2011 (<i>A. Vulpe</i>)	187
Simona Lazăr, <i>Sfârșitul epocii bronzului și începutul epocii fierului în sud-estul României</i> , Academia Română, Institutul de Cercetări Socio-Umane „C. S. Ploșor”, Editura Universitaria, Craiova, 2011, (<i>C. Kacsó</i>)	193
C. Kacsó, <i>Repertoriul arheologic al județului Maramureș</i> , Muzeul Județean de Istorie și Arheologie Maramureș, Bibliotheca Marmatia 3, vol. I (text) 628 p.; vol. II, 318 p. (71 hărți și 323 fig.), Editura Eurotip, Baia Mare, 2011 (<i>A. Vulpe</i>)	197
<i>Roma e le province del Danubio, Atti del I Convegno Internazionale Ferrara – Cento, 15 – 17 Ottobre 2009</i> , a cura di Livio Zerbini, Rubbettino Editore, 2010, 499 p. (<i>Adriana Panaite</i>)	200

ABRÉVIATIONS	209
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HERODOTUS AND THE SCYTHIAN PROBLEM IN ROMANIA

ALEXANDRU VULPE*

Key words: Herodotus, Scythian, Agathyrsi, tattoo, Ciumbrud cultural group, *Maris*, Odrysi, Darius, *balc*.

Abstract: This text provides a review of the main hypotheses relating to the presence of the Scythians and/or the Agathyrsi in the Carpatho-Danubian region, including the territory of present-day Romania. It provides a critical analysis of the literary information as well as that pertaining to the current stage of the archaeological discoveries. It discusses the growing importance of the latter in the interpretation of the historical sources, in particular Herodotus, from the 19th century to the present day. This explains the powerful role played by archaeology in the creation of the theory of a Scythian presence in this region as a real historical phenomenon, the result of a migration (invasion) from the east of ethnic groups from the Ponto-Caspian area. In order to avoid transforming this hypothesis into a historical myth, already the case for many, the author weighs up the different options at the researcher's disposal based on a re-evaluation of the different solutions and a critical analysis of the entire body of research available to date. He first emphasises the distinction between the generic notion of "Scythian" and the use of the same term to designate a specific chiefdom, that of the "Scythians in the hinterland of Olbia", a distinction often overlooked by those apt to historicise the archaeological discoveries. The final section of the article contains a discussion of three plausible historical scenarios in respect of what we understand by the terms of Scythian and Agathyrsi, as well as their relationship to Thrace and the Persian Empire.¹

Cuvinte cheie: Herodot, sciți, agathyrsi, , tatuaj, Ciumbrud, odrysi, Dareios, osseți, nart.

Rezumat: Articolul de față nu urmărește demolarea „mitului” prezenței sciților în zona României actuale, ca fenomen istoric înfățișat sub forma unei „invazii” din partea unei puteri răsăritene, ci își propune să arate că acesta este în prezent doar una dintre opțiunile posibile și, după părerea mea, cea mai puțin probabilă. Cred că în prezent nu mai este cu puțință a pleda cu convingere, uneori chiar cu patimă, atât în favoarea, cât și în defavoarea acestui scenariu istoric. Este un punct de vedere, aș îndrăzni să-l denumesc *modern*, din ce în ce mai des prezent în reuniunile și publicațiile de specialitate din ultima vreme. Scopul este de ne clarifica pe noi înșine asupra posibilităților de interpretare a unor evenimente cu caracter istoric, nu și a le găsi neapărat soluția.

This subject of this article is primarily historical in nature and thus based on literary sources. The involvement of archaeology depends, on the one hand, on the credibility of the corresponding literary source, and, on the other, on the interpretation applied to it. Admittedly, taken on its own, the archaeological research does provide an objective picture of the discoveries, albeit these were divided into subjectively defined cultural groups by the researchers. An even larger degree of subjectivity comes into play when hypotheses based on literary sources, themselves subject to strict criticism, are used to translate the nature and dynamics of the archaeological discoveries in historical terms. But the reverse also carries a risk: that of affording a high level of credibility to hypothetical historical data based on an interpretation of the archaeological material. This creates a vicious circle, in which one hypothesis claims to confirm another hypothesis based on the methods specific to a different discipline, and so on and so forth. This is

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¹ A version of this article in Romanian was published in SCIVA 63, 2012: *Sciți și agathyrsi în spațiul carpato-dunărean*.

what Rolf Hachmann called *die gemischte Argumentation* (Hachmann, 1970, p. 11), the mixture of archaeological information with historical data in the form of a premise for the understanding of the former using the methods specific to the latter, and vice versa. The Scythian problem, including that of the Agathyrsi, is in my opinion a typical case in which the methods specific to these two disciplines were combined, often with no critical discernment applied to either of them, the result being the creation of a historical picture that runs the risk of becoming pure fiction.

It should be noted from the outset that these shortcomings can be explained in terms of the history of the research, and it would be entirely wrong to pass judgment on the researchers from previous generations without first understanding the criteria they applied in formulating their conclusions. In general, historians, aware of the criticism, often seemingly exaggerated, to which Herodotus' text has been subjected from as early as the 19th century, in particular with regard to the *credibility* of the information it contains (see, among others, Panofsky, 1885²), have allowed themselves to become too enthusiastic about the archaeological discoveries that became increasingly frequent around the turn of the 20th century and which appeared to support certain interpretations of passages from *The Histories* by the author described, rightly or wrongly, as *pater historiae* (Cicero, *De Legibus* 5). Today, the relationship between the available research material, which has grown considerably following the archaeological excavations and has begun to be classified and studied critically from different perspectives, and the literary source has acquired a new dimension, again favouring critical perspectives on the latter (something I also discussed in my article on the critical interpretation of the passage dealing with the religion of the Getae in Herodotus IV, 93-96: Vulpe, 2009).

In what follows I will begin with a critical analysis of the threadbare and debatable literary information we have about the so-called *Scythians* in the Carpatho-Danubian region, an area which also contains present-day Romania. I would like to make it clear that I will not be discussing in this text the problem of Atheas' Scythians, who entered Dobruja in the first half of the 4th century BC, but *only* the problem of the Herodotean Scythians, the most controversial issue in the current research.

Although there is no explicit reference anywhere in Herodotus' *Histories* – essentially the most important, if not the only source on which the history of the Carpatho-Danubian region during the 7th-5th centuries BC is based – to a penetration of the region by the Scythians, certain passages have been interpreted as allusions to the occurrence of such an event. In fact, there are two such cases:³

1. The passage from IV, 100, after the discussion of the border between Thrace and Scythia (IV, 99), which would imply that “starting from the Ister and stretching northwards lies the country of the Scythians, and the first neighbours [presumably to the west] of Scythia, inland, are the Agathyrsi” (Ἡδὴ ὦν ἀπὸ μὲν Ἰστρου τὰ κατύπερθε εἰς τὴν μεσόγαιαν φέροντα ἀποκλήεται ἡ Σκυθικὴ ὑπὸ πρῶτον Ἀγαθύρσων), together with the description, in IV, 48, that “from the country of the Agathyrsi comes down the river *Maris*” (ἐκ δὲ Ἀγαθύρσων Μάρις ποταμὸς ῥέων), and again, elsewhere in IV, 48, where the five rivers are described that have their sources in the “Scythian land” (αὐθιγενέες Σκυθικοὶ ποταμοί), among which the Prut (Πυρετός/Πόρατα) can be identified with certainty; the others, in any case more to the west than the Prut, are open to debate (Vulpe, 1986).

2. The kinship of the Agathyrsi with the Scythians, based on the myth of the three brothers, Agathyrsos, Gelonos and Skythes (Herodotus, IV, 10), and seemingly also confirmed on anthropo-ethnonymic homophonic grounds: Spargapeithes, the king of the Agathyrsi (IV, 78) and an older Scythian king (IV, 76) of the same name; *Agathyrsos* and *Idanthyrsos*, the latter being the Scythian king from the time of Darius' expedition.

If we accept that *Maris* is the Mureş, and at first sight we have no grounds to doubt this,⁴ and that, according to another hypothesis, Ὀρδησσός is the Argeş,⁵ then we can understand the grounds on which

² The content and principal ideas of this work are also to be found in Fehling, 1971, p. 1 onwards, no. 5 and *passim*). Contra: in particular Jakoby, 1913, col. 403: “es sind leere Behauptungen...” (“there are empty claims...”).

³ The problem of the Agathyrsi is generally approached in a similar way by all the authors of the specialist literature: among others Patsch, 1925; Ščerbakivskij, 1934; Vulpe, 2003; 2004 etc.

⁴ See also other hypotheses about the location of this river below.

⁵ For example, Minns (1913, p. 28: “The Pyretos-Porata is evidently the Prut, the survival of this name justifies us in calling the Ordessos-Argeş”); cf. The discussion of plausible hypotheses in Vulpe, 1986, p. 33

Vasile Pârvan based his assumption that at some point in history the majority of present-day Romania formed part of Scythia. At the time, the few archaeological discoveries in Wallachia and Transylvania appeared to confirm the information contained in the literary sources. Based on the assumption that the majority of the local population can only have been of North-Thracian origin, the existence of Scythian tribes implied the idea of a “penetration” from the east; see, for example, observations such as “(the Agathyrsi) the former Scythian masters of Transylvania, were, during the time of Herodotus, completely Thracianised” (Pârvan, 1926, p. 37). Ever since, there have been continual attempts to identify, through archaeology, this indigenous Thracian population which is supposed to have Thracianised the Agathyrsi. But, despite the various explanations put forward, no convincing results have been produced as of yet.⁶ (In fact, the *local* Late Hallstatt population in Transylvania is represented by what – from an objective archaeological point of view, that is, in terms of the forms of material culture – we have chosen to denote by the neutral term of *Ciumbrud cultural group* [the most important literature on this subject being Vulpe, 1970; 1990 and 2010a; Vasiliev 1980; Moscalu, 1983]; these were the locals; the issue here is whether or not they were also indigenous). The above also explains Pârvan’s hypothesis in respect of the three waves of Scythians that allegedly entered Romania (Pârvan, 1926, p. 1-40). This historical and archaeological picture persisted throughout the interwar period and still exists today, despite the fact that the archaeological material has since been enlarged considerably through systematic research.

In order to achieve a better understanding of the relationship between the archaeological discoveries and the literary information pertaining to the “existence” of the Scythians in the Carpatho-Danubian area, archaeologists must ask themselves the following question: What did Herodotus, as well as the Greeks from his time, understand by the term “Scythian”? This is a logical question to ask, one much debated in the specialist literature, in particular in works of textual and historical criticism, but unfortunately also overlooked by many archaeologists, including in Romania. It is for this reason I considered it worthy of mention here.⁷

So what did the ethnonym Σκύθαι represent in the Greek imaginary, from the beginning of historiography up until Herodotus? How did it come about that historians and archaeologists, without distinguishing between the modern image and the imaginary of the Herodotean era, applied this ethnonym to a population they considered homogeneous and which, as such, was believed to have ruled over an immense territory in the North Pontic steppes? I am perfectly aware that my presentation of this subject is not original, but I nonetheless deem it necessary to provide a brief recap here, in order to understand how the “Scythians” became a problem in Romania.

Although the term “Scythians” does not appear in this form in the Homeric Poems, it is almost unanimously believed that they were alluded to in the first lines of Book XIII of the *Iliad*:

....αὐτὸς (Zeus) δὲ πάλιν τρέπεν ὅσσε φαιινῶ,
 νόσφιν ἔφ’ ἵπποπόλων Θρηκῶν καθορώμενος αἴαν,
 Μυσῶν τ’ ἀγχεμάχων καὶ ἀγαυῶν ἱππημολγῶν
 γλακτοφάγων, ἀβίων τε δικαιοτάτων ἀνθρώπων.

onwards. Adrian Robu drew my attention to a passage from Charon of Lampsacus (FgrHist, 262, F 6: Ὀστακος ἐκτίσθη ὑπὸ Χαλκεδονίων), which indicates that the Megarian colony of Astakos was known in the Ionic dialect as *Ostakos* (Robu has since completed his doctoral thesis *Mégare et mégariens de Sicilie, de la Propontide et du Pont Euxin. Histoire et institutions*, Neuchâtel et Maine, 2008, p. 183, n. 719). Is the same also true of the name of the river Ordessos, in Herodotus IV,48, in that it is nothing but the Ionic pronunciation of Ardessos? This issue is worthy of closer inspection, for it would mean the resemblance with Argeş is no longer a coincidence and that Pârvan’s arguments (1923, p. 12 onwards), although in my opinion unconvincing in the article in question, become more plausible when viewed from the perspective of this passage, which was overlooked by our great predecessor.

⁶ See, among others, (Crişan, 1965). The same author (*ibidem*, p.145) wrote: “Taking into account Herodotus’ description of Transylvania, which agrees with the archaeological discoveries, we can suppose that the inhumed interments along the Mureş valley belong to the Agathyrsi population, about whom, however, we do not know in what degree they were ethnically Scythians.”

⁷ I see no merit in filling the footnotes with references, even a careful selection thereof, to the rich literature on this subject.

(Zeus, turning [today we can infer “to the north”] his shining eyes towards the Thracians rich in horses, the Mysians [Moesians] who fought at close quarters and <towards the noble hippemolgi> [“milkers of mares”] *galaktofagi* [“eaters/drinkers of milk”] and the Abians, the most righteous among men>). These – and here I refer to the last lines in italics and with translations – were later also described in Greek literature as peoples of nature, known for their piety and moral conformism.

This manner of describing the Scythians persisted in Greek literature – Hesiod’s ἵππημολγοί and γαλακτοφάγοι (PsHes., F. 150, 15 Merkelbach-West, where, in F. 151, he nominally mentions the *Scythians* and their habit of living their lives in waggons, a fact repeated in all subsequent writings, including that of Herodotus) – also formed the basis for an image the Greeks adopted of the populations they came into contact with, probably even prior to the colonisation of the northern shores of the Black Sea.

It should be noted that the image the Greeks had of how the North Pontic peoples led their lives was also undoubtedly influenced by the Thracian connection, as can also be inferred from the lines from the *Iliad* cited above, that is in terms of north-south.⁸ This image is also in keeping with the Hellenocentric anthropological view, something also clearly embraced by Herodotus: in the centre of the *oikoumene* lies the Greek world; in the immediate proximity there are agricultural populations, followed, in concentric circles, by cattle breeders and, then, nomads (shepherds); the latter two categories represent the people Herodotus considers to be the Scythians: the Royal Scythians and the Nomad Scythians; the next circle is that of the hunter-gatherers, all of which being surrounded by mythical peoples (to the north, the Hyperboreans).⁹ According to this model, the Scythians was first and foremost a generic notion used to describe the peoples from the Ponto-Caspian area, also including regions further to the east, as far as Central Asia. The Scythians had already been mentioned by Hecataeus, both in his writings on Europe as well as those on Asia.¹⁰ The characteristics mentioned in the *Iliad* continued to denote the cattle breeders and nomads, characteristics conferred on the Scythians in the generic sense of this ethnonym.

Of significance here is Herodotus’ account, right at the beginning of the Scythian *logos*, of how the Scythians milk their mares (IV, 2). Leaving to one side the seemingly anecdotal nature of the account of this practice (which, as modern ethnographic findings show, describes a real situation specific to cattle breeders),¹¹ the paragraph in question closes with the observation that “they [the Scythians] are not tillers of the ground but shepherds” (οὐ γὰρ ἄροται εἰς ἄλλα νομάδες), a reference found again in IV, 46: “[They, the Scythians] living not by the plough but by cattle breeding” (ζῶντες μὴ ἀπ’ ἄροτου ἀλλ’ ἀπὸ κτηνέων). It should be noted that the Scythian *logos* as such, that is the ethnography of the Scythians, begins precisely with the second chapter of Book IV, is reminiscent of the description in the *Iliad* – *hippemolgi* and *galaktophagi* – and, consequently, the definition of the Scythian way of life and economy acquires, through generalisation, a special significance.

The author of the Hippocratic treatise *De aere, aquis et locis* (18) attributes these characteristics to the “nomadic” Scythians; in this case the term νομάδες can be ambiguous, meaning either *shepherds* in a

⁸ Cf. also Ivantschik, 2005, p. 66.

⁹ Cf. J. Harmatta (1990, p. 117), who cites K. Müller, *Geschichte der antiken Ethnographie und ethnologischen Theoriebildung*, Wiesbaden, 1972 (*non uidi*).

¹⁰ FgrHist, 1: F. 185, 190, 191; cf. also F. Hartog (1980, p. 48).

¹¹ Cf. Ghica (1902, p. 3, n. 1) and, more recently, Corcella (1993, p. 231). I am not referring here to the seemingly strange account of the blinding of the slaves and the causal relationship between this practice and the method of milking mares, about which there exist contradictory hypotheses: cf. Stein, 1857, p. 155; Ghica, 1902, p. 2, n. 4; Vanț-Stef, 1961, p. 498, n. 9; Corcella, 1993, p. 230. Of the proposed explanations, the few plausible ones are, in my opinion, those provided by the interpretations of the scholia on Aristophanes (*Hippes*, v. 963: μολγὸν ἀντὶ τοῦ τυφλόν) in respect of the possible relationship between the notions of μολγός (“leather rumen”) and τυφλός (“blind”), which allude precisely to the corresponding passage in Herodotus IV, 2 (cf. Stein, loc. cit.). However, as opposed to Stein’s hypothesis, which presupposes the existence of a Scythian word used in the wrong sense in the text, I believe it more likely to be an allusion to the second meaning of the noun μολγός, that of “depraved”, in respect of the blinding of the slaves, who, as described at the end of the preceding chapter (IV, 1), in the absence of Scythian men had relations with the women of their masters. Consequently, the blinding of the slaves appears to be a logical consequence of this unlawful act. However, we should also not overlook other *scholia* of the same verse: e.g. [μολγὸν] τυφλόν, πένητα, etc.

general sense or being suggestive of a particular ethnic or even social group. The fact that there is a description of these “nomadic Scythians” slightly earlier in the treatise gives us to understand that it refers to all those who practiced nomadism, that is, cattle breeders in general. The same passage also contains a description of the typical steppe landscape, rich in meadows, and the constant movement of the population in search of food (“drinkers of milk”, a term borrowed from Homer and Hesiod).

From even earlier (PsHesiod, F. 54, Rzach; F. 151, Merkelbach-West), the phrase ...γλακτοφάγων ἐς γαῖαν ἀπήνας οἰκί' ἔχόντων (“The galactophagi in the country of those who dwell in waggons”) was used to denote nominal the Scythians, a description also later adopted in the aforementioned Hippocratic treatise (18) – “The Scythians... have no houses, but live in waggons (οὐκ ἔστιν οἰκήματα, ἀλλ' ἐν ἀμάζησιν οἰκεῦσιν (...) which are covered with felt, being built in the way of houses, some with one compartment, others with three” – as well as by Herodotus (IV, 46): οἰκήματα τέ σφι ἦ ἐπὶ ζευγέων („their homes are in waggons”) and Ephoros (apud Strabo, VII, 3, 7: ἀμάξοικοι). All of these attributes are later summarised in the poem *Ad Nicomedem regem* (v. 851-865), composed around 200 BC by an unknown author known as PseudoSkymnus, whose source, at least in this respect, was Demetrios of Kallatis. Later, in the first century AD, Pomponius Mela (II, 1) attributes this same form of dwelling to the Agathyrsi (*Agathyrsi...quia pro sedibus plaustra habent, dicti Hamaxobiae* (The Agathyrsi... whose homes are in waggons, being known as the Hamaxobians [from the Greek ἄμαξα (waggon) and βίος (life)]”).

This description was applied in the North Pontic area in a generic sense to all those who practiced a livelihood based on cattle breeding, thus accentuating the difference from those who worked the land. To the extent that the position of the Agathyrsi in the Greek imaginary corresponds with the description of the Scythian way of life, the characteristics described above can also be understood as also applying to them as practitioners of a pastoral economy. In this light, and given the fact that there have to date been no clear identifications of sites with *settlements with stabile dwelling places* in intra-Carpathian Transylvania that can be dated with certainty to the period attributed to the group of Ciumbrud-type funerary discoveries, it was believed that the population in question may have been of a nomadic nature, of “Scythian” origin (Vasiliev, 1980, p. 32).

In the Greek imaginary, which we also find with Herodotus in terms of the customs of the non-Greek populations, the further away a given population was from the Greek world, the more their customs would differ from those of the Greeks. This is also reflected in social and economic life. François Hartog’s ingenious idea – of viewing the Scythian way of life, as presented by Herodotus, as the opposite of that of the Greeks, that is, a mirror image thereof¹² – is appealing and, to a large extent, justified. If we combine this point of view – which turns the Scythian *logos* into something akin to a work of literary fiction, albeit one based on real facts – with Detlev Fehling’s concept, in which the work of the “father of history” is seen as a novel with pretensions to “research” (*ein Forschungsroman*), written according to a pre-established structure in order to provide us with this picture,¹³ then we are justified in asking the question as to what, then, remains of the ethnonym “Scythian” seen as denoting a particular ethnically homogenous people. In following Hartog’s line of thought, we can imagine the term “Scythians” as a kind of code (*un simple signifiant*), which, if we trace its use throughout the *logos* and view it together

¹² Hartog (1980, 31) also believes that to Herodotus Scythia was “terre d’*eremia* et d’*eschatia*, terre déserte et zone de confins: elle est un bout du monde”, a wasteland stretching further than the mind could comprehend, an image that had already become commonplace; see also Aeschylus, *Pr. vinct.*, 2.

¹³ I recall that this author (Fehling, 1971, p. 176) even placed a question mark over the existence of Herodotus’ Pontic journey. Cf. Also the opinion of Kimball Armayor (1978, p. 62): “Either he did go and remained content to tell his readers what they wanted and expected to hear, or he did not go at all”. Cf. also Stephanie West (2002, p. 437-456, a study I read recently and in which I found a number of ideas I myself also articulated independently in recent years in articles essentially inaccessible to a wider public; e.g. Vulpe, 2003a and b). All the same, Fehling’s hypercriticism, although in my opinion unavoidable by all who wish to understand Herodotus, cannot be accepted without reservations. I consider the description of Fehling’s book by Otto Lendle (1992, p. 291) to be welcome and commonsensical: “...viele scharfsinnige Beobachtungen in eine inakzeptable These überführt....” (many sharp observations articulated in an unacceptable thesis).

with the different ways Herodotus describes all the Scythians, provides us with a picture of what we might call the *Herodotean Scythians*, and not a specific population (Hartog, 1980, p. 23).

Fehling's and Hartog's theories – to which we can also add others, some of which, as I mentioned above, were posited as early as the 19th century – have made an essential contribution to the study of Herodotus' ability as a storyteller, something which, however, also implies the questioning of his critical skills as a geographer, ethnographer and historian – but not of the veracity of the dates and facts that underlie his storytelling technique. Irrespective of how he acquired his information – through personal observation (ὄψις) or taken from the accounts of direct or indirect witnesses (for example, from the travellers [sailors] he most certainly would have come into contact with in public squares), or from literature¹⁴ – it is clear that Herodotus did not invent anything, but, rather, took information and used it in a way that appears original to us today (but not to his contemporaries in Antiquity) and unique in the Greek literature that survives to this day. However we choose to categorise his work, it is also a historical source.

Hartog confesses his lack of interest in comparing the Herodotean text with archaeological or mythological data, describing these as “*tournés vers l'extérieur*”, and a departure from the meaning and purpose of the Scythian *logos* (loc. cit. *supra*). And here, in fact, lies the heart of the controversy. Those who criticise Fehling or Hartog, invoking the value of the archaeological material in support of the credibility of the Herodotean text (see in particular Pritchett, 1993), should bear in mind that the archaeological finds neither disprove nor confirm the author of *The Histories*' capacity as an “observer”. These finds, seen through the lens of Herodotus' accounts, tell us, in a selective manner, only what the Greeks would have known and, in particular, what they would have been interested to know about the populations in the Pontus Euxinus region. This provides us with a picture of a world full of dates and information that partially reflect a given reality, albeit one presented in a confusing manner, making it difficult to discern what is actually true in the sense in which we should like to understand today.

Some examples: the course of the Danube, according to Herodotus or his sources, is linear, taking a turn to the south-east only where it flows into the sea, a geographical detail that is both true and explicable, for this is where the Greeks from Istros had set foot (IV, 99); the Tibisis and Atlas – by the way they sound, the Timiş (or Tisza) and the Olt (probably a metathesis of *Altas*) – flow from Haimos (the Balkans) to the north;¹⁵ the Alpis and Carpis are rivers that flow into the Danube, flowing from south to north, although their names are clearly suggestive of the two large mountain chains, the Alps and the Carpathians (IV, 49); Pyrene (II, 33) is a city situated at the source of the Danube (possibly Heuneburg), but the toponym is identical with the oronym Pyrene, meaning the Pyrenees in Aristotle (*Meteorologica* I, 13). We could cite many other examples that illustrate this immense confusion of real data, arranged as in a jigsaw puzzle, which Herodotus, or his sources, were unable, or did not take the trouble, to solve. What, then, can we say of the statement (V, 10: “As the Thracians say”) that beyond the Danube there lies an endless wasteland (V, 9: ἔρημος χώρη φαίνεται εὐοῦσα καὶ ἄπειρος), a land inhabited by bees that is impossible to enter? Herodotus does not believe this story, pointing out that the bees would not have survived northern cold. I would like to quote David Asheri: “for him (Herodotus) the true *terra incognita* was the limitless area extending beyond the Istros to the north and west...” (Asheri, 1990, p. 166).

Elsewhere (Vulpe, 2003b and 2009), however, I drew attention to the seriousness with which Herodotus tried to evaluate the information he obtained, which he presented through the use of alternative versions (cf. also Lateiner, 1989, p. 76 onwards), a method in which he sometimes expressed an opinion in favour of one version over another. Typical of this are the four versions pertaining to the origin of the Scythians. The interpretation of these versions has already been treated extensively in the literature from which I will make a brief selection in the following notes. Of particular interest here is why Herodotus chose one version and rejected another, based on his allegedly critical approach. I will briefly describe the four versions:

¹⁴ It is worth noting Jakoby's observation (1913, col. 250): “Es ist vielfach nicht möglich festzustellen, ob wir es mit einem ‘Präsens der Autopsie’ oder mit einem ‘Präsens der Beschreibung’ zu tun haben”, which could cast doubt even over what in the text appears to be the result of an allegedly first-hand observation.

¹⁵ As has been observed before, Herodotus' source appears also to include the Southern Carpathians in the oronym *Haimos* without distinguishing them from the northern part of the Balkan Mountains (Stara Planina). This would perhaps also explain the placement of the Agathyrsi in *Haimos* by Stephen of Byzantium (*Ethnika*, H.-G. Beck, A. Kambylis, R. Keidell, Berlin, 2006, A, 24: Ἀγάθυρσοι ἔθνος ἐνδοτέρω τοῦ Αἴμου).

1. The local origin theory (IV, 5–7), which Herodotus rejects – “I do not believe” (ἐμοὶ οὐ πιστὰ λέγοντες), introduced by “According to the Scythians” (Σκύθαι λέγουσι). Recently, Askold Ivančik showed how the names of the Scythian mythical figures and peoples referred to in this passage were transcribed into the Greek text with surprising accuracy, the majority being explained through the Iranic languages.¹⁶ 2. The Greco-Scythian myth of the three sons of Heracles and Echidna: Agathyrsos, Gelonos and Skythes (IV, 8-10). Hazanov (1975, p. 38 onwards) saw this as a reflection of the territorial claims of the Scythians (which Scythians, I wonder?) over the Agathyrsi and Gelones. A similar myth is told by Diodorus (II, 43): Skythes, the son of Zeus and Echidna, had two sons – Palos and Napes – whose descendents extended Scythian rule to the east, as far as the Tanais (Don) river, and to the west, as far as Thrace; tales such as these later became *topoi* in Greek literature (see an analogous short story about the Celts: Parthenios, *Narrationes amatoriae*, 30). On the other hand, the entire story appears to be, as Ivantschik convincingly argues (2005, p. 100 onwards and the entire literature on this subject), more an *interpretatio graeca* of an old local, purely Scythian myth. 3. The version that begins with “there is another story, to which I adhere” (IV, 11. 12: τῷ μάλιστα λεγομένῳ αὐτὸς πρόσκειμαι) and which describes the successive migration of Nomad Scythians (Σκύθαι οἱ νομάδες) from Asia, driven out by Massagetae, who reached the northern shore of the Black Sea from where they drove out the Cimmerians. 4. The version of the elegiac poet Aristeas of Proconnesos (probably from the 7th century BC¹⁷), which is nothing but a variant on the previous version: the Issedonians were driven out by Arimaspians, the Scythians by Issedonians and the Cimmerians by Scythians. It is clear that the last two versions have a common source, that is, the picture the Greeks painted of the peoples living in the vast area beyond the most distant Greek colonies in this part of the *oikoumene*, a picture that corresponds with that described in Aristeas’ *Arimaspeia*.¹⁸

Each of the versions above, however, contains a seed of truth. On the one hand, we have the image of the Scythians who saw themselves as indigenous and possessing an old tradition, and who called themselves Σκόλοτοι, whom we might call “the Scythians from the Borysthenes” (Dnieper)¹⁹; while, on the other hand, we have the image of migratory aliens. It is clear Herodotus was not interested which of the two images referred to the people the Greeks generically named the Σκύθαι. All the same, the information he obtained, irrespective of the means, provides us with a mixed image of how he and his sources imagined Scythia (Σκυθικὴ χώρα) to be. In this “Scythian land” there lived, among other groups, four types of Scythian: Royal Scythians, Nomad Scythians (in the sense of shepherds), agricultural Scythians (ἀροτῆρες) and farmer Scythians (γεωργοί).²⁰ Which of these corresponds to the versions cited above? From which of the four types of Scythians do the kings originate mentioned in the genealogy in IV, 76, and whose descendent was Ariapeithes, at the time when Herodotus stayed in Olbia at the house of Tymnes, “the steward” (ἐπίτροπος), the man to whom the charge of business of the aforementioned Scythian king is entrusted? And if the latter were the “Royal” Scythians, what was their relationship to the Scythians who allegedly drove out the Cimmerians?

In fact, in socio-anthropological terms, we are dealing here with a number of chiefdoms, some organised in military fashion (tribal leaders, clans, sub-clans, etc., called *enclosed nomads*), from the

¹⁶ Ivantchik, 1999, p. 141-192 and bibliography. See also the observations of Aldo Corcella in reference to the passages discussed here and accompanied by a rich bibliography, in the latest critical edition (Corcella, 1993).

¹⁷ The dating of the poem *Arimaspeia* is disputed: Ivantchik (1993 b) argues in favour of the second half of the 6th century and his reasoning has been well received by philologists. All the same, while I do not believe a solution will be found to the problem, the arguments in favour of a considerably earlier date (see also the review of Ivantchik’s book, 2005: Vulpe, 2010b, p. 366) cannot be ignored.

¹⁸ On Aristeas: Bolton, 1962 (review by W. Burkert, *Gnomon*, 35 3, 1963, p. 235 onwards); and more recently: A. Alemany i Vilamajó, *Els “Cants arimaspeus” d’Aristeas de Proconnes i la caiguda dels Zhou occidentals*, Faventia, 21/2, 1999, p. 45-55.

¹⁹ Vinogradov has published a graffito with a dedication to Apollon, offered by a certain Anaperres the son of Anachyrsos, called *Skolotes*, presumably an aboriginal, found in Olbia, in the sanctuary of Apollon Ietros (Vinogradov, Rusjaeva, 2001, p. 136, cat. 8).

²⁰ Cf. also Hartog, (1980, p. 38 onwards). Even the apparent tautology between ἀροτῆρες and γεωργοί serves to support the ideas posited here.

vicinity of areas with stable structures (e.g. the Greek colonies), others, covering large areas of pasture, further from the stable centres, traditionally based on relationships of loyalty and kinship (the so-called *excluded nomads*, according to Lattimore, 1962, cited by Parzinger, 2006). The first category clearly includes those with a leader (chief), as Ariapeithes is presented to us, whose “steward”, Tymnes, would be Herodotus’ source in Olbia.

The modern meaning of the term *nomad*, not always reflecting the cultural-anthropological characteristics of populations practicing a pastoral economy, lead to the notion of “nomadic horsemen”, “of the steppe”, groups of nomadic warriors, whose leaders are considered to belong to the “elite of the steppe”, all of whom with similar behaviours and equipment, as reflected by the archaeological discoveries. The almost obsessive study of the warrior elites, which occupies prime position in the archaeological research of the last half century, in particular in German archaeology, is primarily motivated by the fact that the majority of the finds, originating from the more spectacular sites (especially funerary tumuli) or chance discoveries, served, and continue to serve, as the basis for research into the cultures of the Eurasian Steppe. These finds mainly consist of exceptional items (weapons, elements and ornaments for harnesses; pieces decorated in a style specific to the area between the Black Sea and the Altai Mountains where there is a preference for animal motifs). This is also seen in the so-called “Scythian triad”, as reflected in the contents of the tombs of the leaders, a notion which played a fundamental role in the creation of a picture of the “nomadic horsemen”, of the steppe (*Nomadenreiter*). It provides a picture of the leaders, the military aristocracy, in which they identified themselves as such, as bearing similar equipment. This picture fails, however, on account of its unilateral depiction, i.e. only of the leaders, the warriors, of certain communities, which, while ethnically diverse, had similar but not always identical social and economic structures, although the economy was predominantly – though, never exclusively – pastoral in nature. Too little, or even no heed was paid to the structure, in the form of a system made up of different sub-systems, of the way of life (of the society) of the communities in question, constituting what we might call the characteristics of their cultural structure as well as their relationships with groups practising different forms of economy. I take this also to include the strict rules for the division of pasture land, ensuring the means of subsistence, and social rank, etc.

We are thus faced with a paradox: although the Herodotean text contains a considerable amount of ethnographic information which could be used to support various cultural-anthropological interpretations (Herodotus might just as easily be “the father of cultural anthropology”), the archaeological finds have led to the creation of a picture of political and military structures which for historians are a source of aggressive acts with a tendency towards conquest, including a constant tendency of territorial expansion, in particular towards the west. This explains the image of the “invading Scythians” as threatening large swathes of Europe, including the penetration of Carpatho-Danubian space.

Although not the subject of this study, it is only natural to ask who these *Scythians* really were, who from the beginning were depicted, by Herodotus and in the Greek imaginary, as a relatively ethnically homogeneous people, and, in particular, what led many modern researchers to adopt this perspective. I believe the principal reason is to be found in the apparent linguistic unity found in the interpretation of many of the ethnonyms and anthroponyms cited in Book IV of the Histories as being of Iranian etymology.²¹ This led to a belief in an apparent predominance, throughout the vast Eurasian region, of nomadic populations of Iranian origin. It should be noted, however, that the majority of these names arrived through Greek channels – primarily through the Herodotean account itself – and that their source could not have spread far beyond the hinterland of the North Pontic Greek colonies, where the existence of Iranian populations, such as the “Scythians” from the Dnieper, has been attested to. In other words, the ethnonyms in question were not necessarily Iranian in origin, but, rather, “Iranicised” by those who passed them on to the Greeks.²² It would probably be far more accurate to imagine as part of this amalgam of

²¹ Cf. more recently, Pinault, 2008, p. 106 and *passim*, and the bibliography.

²² See also the study by Dan Slușanschi (2001, p. 65-72) on the etymology of the ethnonym Γέται, which, citing P. Kretschmer (*Zum Balkan-Skythischen*, Glotta 24, 1936, p. 1-56) as well as older literature, concludes that – *getai* appears more likely to be a suffix of Iranian origin adopted by the Greeks – see *Thyssagetai*, *Tyragetai*, *Massagetai*, *Matyketai*, and even *Dinogeteia* – and therefore *not* an ethnonym.

peoples, not all of whom were necessarily nomadic, many other groups, beside Iranian groups: Proto-Ugro-Finnic, Proto-Turkic, Mongol, etc.

There is no doubt that, between the Herodotean Scythians – as well as the *Herodotean Cimmerians*, for that matter – and the real populations and events in the world the Greeks imagined as being inhabited by the Scythians, no connection can be established that can lead to both a locating on the map of the peoples mentioned by Herodotus as well as their historical and archaeological identification. None of the many hypotheses put forward²³ is wholly convincing. By the same token, there are no solid arguments by which to trace, using the archaeological discoveries, the presumed migration routes of the populations generically known as the *Scythians*.²⁴

However, I believe that Herodotus' preference for the version of the migratory Scythians is explained by the Greek idea mentioned above as to what might be taking place in the vast unknown space at the margins of the *oikoumene*, where everything is in a state of continual motion and the way of life, that is, nomadic, is based mainly on a pastoral economy, which primarily suggests movement/migration. Similarly, he also devised a model in which the so-called Cimmerians, driven out by the Scythians, arrived in Asia Minor, the only place where this mysterious people was nominally attested to with any certainty and where an explanation for its presence had to be found (Vulpe, 2010b, p. 363 and 368). But the fact that Herodotus insisted on presenting the origin of the Scythians in the form of four different versions could, also in this case, reflect a critical approach in his assessment of the historical data, something which appears original to us in the modern world, but which was characteristic of Greek ideology of the time.²⁵ In essence, what Herodotus deemed worthy of including in the four different versions is an enumeration of real events that do not necessarily contradict one another, but which he did not take the trouble to describe as such; in fact, he was neither able to nor had any interest in doing so, merely being content with an "I do not believe" in the case of the first version. The latter, as with the third version, which he does believe in, are, however, the reflection of true phenomena. All the same, we ask ourselves the question: Why did Herodotus give more credence to the third version and on what grounds did he reject the first two? If he really did go to Olbia, as he explicitly states and I find it hard to imagine that the episode with Tymnes is fictional, then we can assume he heard the first two versions from entirely trustworthy local witnesses, while the source of the third and fourth versions appear more likely to have been literary (something, in fact, certain in the case of the fourth version). This observation should play an important role in determining how he used and selected the information while composing his *Histories*. This might constitute an argument worthy of consideration in favour of both those who support the idea that he composed the work at the end of his life, in Thourioi, as well as of the so-called "denigrators" of the credibility of the information contained in Herodotus' work. I will not dwell further on this point, as it does not constitute the subject of this study.

From the very beginnings of the critical study of the Herodotean text, the picture of successive migrations from Asia to Europe would make a powerful impression, owing to the similarity with phenomena from later periods. While, in principle, the description of this phenomenon clearly has a foundation in reality, using archaeology to demonstrate migrations of this nature, which we can assume also occurred in pre-historic times, remains a practical impossibility for the time being. From what we know today, we are unable to distinguish between the circulation of cultural elements in the form of influences or borrowings and that in the form of migrations, whether occurring within the space of a single generation (a Ghenghis Khan-type phenomenon) or gradually, the result of successive waves of

²³ Corcella (1992, LXIV, LXV) contains maps featuring reconstructions according to V. I. Iilinska/A.I. Terenožkin, in *Arheologija ukrajnskoj R.S.R.*, Kiyv, 1971, p. 8 onwards; B. A. Rybakov, 1979 and B. N. Grakow, 1980, p. 12, etc.

²⁴ A latest attempt to identify the presumed Cimmerian and Scythian migrations based on archaeological discoveries, by Jan Chochorowski (1998, p. 473-492), adopts the same historicising approach to the archaeological material hypothetically attributed to these populations.

²⁵ I am increasingly convinced that this use of alternative versions is in keeping with the spirit of the Sophistic doctrines of the 5th century BC, such as those of Protagoras, a contemporary and possibly even an acquaintance of Herodotus (they appear to have met in Thourioi), for whom every thesis has its antithesis and therefore nothing is certain.

demographic pressure. On the other hand, the origin of the Scythians, whether the version attributed by Herodotus to the Scythians themselves or that of the Pontic Greeks, despite their both being presented in the form of Greek mythical genealogies, contains elements that clearly have their origins in local, North-Pontic mythology.

*

Where do the Agathyrsi fit into this particular way of thinking?

Any attempt to place the Agathyrsi elsewhere in the area west of Scythia needs to find either another explanation for Herodotus' statement – according to which they were the closest neighbours of Scythia to the west – or to demonstrate that Μάρις is not the Transylvanian *Mureş*, but another river with a similar name – or, to regard the entire passage as belonging to the category of ambiguous accounts to which the “father of history” refers when making geographic observations about the areas to the west of Olbia (see the examples given above)

Although most researchers have identified Μάρις as being the *Mureş*, all of the different possibilities mentioned above have had their supporters at one time or another. Tocilescu (1880, p. 406 onwards) cites the opinions of some of his contemporaries, to which I add Tomaschek (1893-94 [reprint 1980], II, 2, p. 95), most of whom do not question the said identification. Tocilescu uses convincing arguments to combat the hypothesis formulated by Bogdan Petriceicu Hasdeu (Hasdeu, 1873, p. 185-193), according to which *Maris* is the Olt and *Mariscus* “a small *Maris*”, that is, the Argeş (from *Transmarisca*, situated opposite its mouth). Later, Carl Patsch (1928, p. 3 onwards), although he supports the identification of the Herodotean *Maris* as the *Mureş* – “wo die Marosch unverkennbar ist” (idem, 1925, p. 69), repeats Hasdeu's idea about the *Mariscus* without citing it.

The existence of a *Mariscus* other than the river *Marisia* – the latter being none other than the Herodotean Μάρις, which became the Μαρίσκος in Strabo (VII, 3, 13), the *Marisia* in Jordanes (*Get.* 113. 114) and Μορήσις in Constantine Porphyrogenitus (*De administrando imperio*, 40) – was deduced from the text of the geographer from Ravenna (Ioseph Schnertz, 1940, IV, 5, p. 47): *Et desuper ipsum fluium Danapri per longum intervallum est superius nominatus fluius maximus Tanais, item fluius Tiram, item Bagossolam. De quibus fluminibus testatur mihi supra scriptus Iordanis sapientissimus cosmographus, item fluius Mariscus*. However, a few lines below the same author (IV, 14, p. 54) adds, again citing Jordanes: *Per quas Dacorum patrias transeunt plurima flumina, inter cetera quae dicuntur Tisia, Tibisia, Drica, Marisia, Arine, Gilpit, Gresia. Que omnia flumina in Danubio merguntur: nam fluius Flautasis finit patriam. Tamen ipsas patrias praefatus Iordanis chronographus subtilius exposuit*.

From the text by the anonymous author from Ravenna it thus transpires that for him the *Mariscus* and the *Marisia* are two different rivers. While, as can be inferred from the context, the *Marisia* is assumed to be the *Mureş* and most likely also the three Criş rivers (at least the *Gilpit* and *Gresia*; cf. also Jordanes, *Getica*, 113. 114 – *Grisia*), the “river” *Mariscus* appears out of place when mentioned alongside the Dnieper, the Don, the Bug and Dniester (“...and also the river *Mariscus*”). So why is a *Mariscus* mentioned alongside these large rivers, all of them in the Ukraine and flowing into the Black Sea? Unless it has been confused with Jordanes' *Marisia*, perhaps an honest *non liquet* would have been better. All the same, Patsch (1928), in analysing the above text, also made a connection with the late Roman site of *Transmarisca*, situated opposite Olteniţa, on the right bank of the Danube, by comparing the names of sites with similar constructions: *Trans-Aquincum*, *Trans-Dierna*, *Trans-Drobeta*, etc. This would imply that *Trans-Marisca* is “opposite” the river *Mariscus*, just as *Trans-Dierna* is across from the mouth of the *Dierna* (Cerna), and, therefore, that the *Mariscus* is the name of the Argeş. The Hasdeu/Patsch hypothesis was more recently reiterated by Nicolae Gostar (1970, p. 62, note 31), who, without rejecting the identification of the Transylvanian *Maris* as the *Mureş*, also presupposes *Mariscus* to be an old name for the Argeş; he argues that the hydronym Argeş is not derived from Herodotus' *Ordessos* (IV, 48), but, rather, citing N. Drăganu (Drăganu, 1933, p. 530), considers it a hydronym of Cuman origin (*sic*) (for an interpretation of the relationship between *Argeş* and Ὀρδησσός, see note... above).

I find it surprising that no one to my knowledge has drawn attention to the idea of *Transmarisca* meaning “beyond the reed bed”, from the Latin *mariscus* or *mariscum* (Greek: μαρίσκος), meaning “large reeds”, which can still be found in abundance on the left bank of the Danube.

During a trip to Bulgaria in 1975, I had a first-hand experience of this impressive view from the right bank of the Danube.²⁶

In attempting to rule out the possibility of the Agathyrsi being located in Transylvania, István Ferenczi (1971, p. 27 onwards), a supporter of the Scythian nature of the Ciumbrud cultural group, also believed that “it is not entirely certain that the ancient name *Maris* refers to the Mureş”, seeing the Agathyrsi as being represented by the group of necropoli of the Bârseşti and Ferigile type. In this context, he cites an older hypothesis of mine (Vulpe, 1966, p. 884; 1967, p. 102; 1970, p. 170 onwards), according to which the majority of cultural groups (consisting primarily of necropoli) from the Carpatho-Danubian region are the archaeological remains of a presumed “Thraco-Agathyrsi culture circle”, a “tribal union” that could have developed under the threat of danger from the east, that is, the westward expansion of the Scythians in the 6th century BC. However, at that time I also believed I could discern in Herodotus’ text two layers of information: one packed with facts, often presented anecdotally, about Darius’ campaign against the Scythians, gathered from the local tradition or literary sources (IV, 100. 125); and another containing information about events that took place in the middle of the 5th century, which he obtained during his sojourn in Olbia (IV, 48. 104, with the location and description of the Agathyrsi). Viewing matters in this way, I assumed that during a first stage the Agathyrsi meant the tribal union mentioned above, which also included Moldavia, while in a second stage the Agathyrsi, seen as a separate ethnic group, did not extend beyond the Transylvania Mureş river basin (Vulpe, 1970, p. 170).

This opinion of mine was partially adopted by B. A. Rybakov (1979, p. 173), and perhaps others, too. At any rate, the fact that the Agathyrsi were, according to Herodotus, the first neighbours of Scythia to be mentioned already represented the motivation behind all previous attempts to place them elsewhere in the area to the east of the Carpathians (Ščerbakivskij, 1934, p. 209 onwards; Meljukova, 1958, p. 102; the latter later, in 1979, p. 3, also accepting their location in Transylvania). In addition, the observation by Herodotus (IV, 100) that “starting from the Ister, inland (μεσόγαιαν), Scythia is bounded by the Agathyrsi first...” gives free reign to any interpretation as to where the land of the Agathyrsi begins. However, bearing in mind that in Herodotus the Danube follows a linear course, from west to east (IV, 99), the term μεσόγαια could just as easily be understood in terms of a reference to Moldavia or the Romanian Plain; note, however, the apparent contradiction with Book V, 9 about the landscape “beyond the Ister” (see above). Ion Horațiu Crișan (1967, p. 439-443), in challenging my hypothesis about the “Thraco-Agathyrsi culture circle”, tried to reconcile the two opinions about the location of the Agathyrsi; the latter, an Iranic ethnic group, separate from the Scythians, supposedly inhabiting the middle Dnieper area and one of their groups migrating to Transylvania, where they created an enclave.²⁷

Similarly, Ian Chochorowski, although not sharing my theory about the two layers of information in Herodotus’ work, believes the location of the Agathyrsi in the Mureş area does not represent their only homeland, which he places mainly to the east of the Eastern Carpathians. As a result, *Maris* should therefore be understood merely in terms of indicating the direction in which the river flowed: “The *Maris* flows from the Agathyrsi, as opposed to the five Scythian rivers,” the five rivers mentioned by Herodotus earlier in the same Book, IV, 48 (Chochorowski, 1987, p. 143 onwards). More recently, and with a number of refinements, Constantin Preda (2001, p. 5-14) reiterated Ferenczi’s hypothesis as to the Ciumbrud archaeological group being “Scythian”, while placing the Agathyrsi to the east of the Carpathians, supporting his opinion by an uncritical resort to sources from post-Herodotean Antiquity, the historical value of which I will discuss below.

What remains today of my suppositions formulated *in illo tempore*?

²⁶ Those who continue to advocate the Hasdeu/Patsch theory were recently joined by Alexandru Madgearu (2011, p. 139-146), who considers my *Mariscus* theory to be ridiculous. Naturally, I also find it hard to imagine that the name of a Roman fortress could have been derived from “reed bed”. But I find it still harder to believe that the name of the Argeş used to be the *Marisca* or is of Turkic origin. I believe the various theories should be ranked in order of probability.

²⁷ *Ibidem*. Crișan relies chiefly on the archaeological discoveries, including funerary practices, which, in his opinion, demonstrate close similarities between the Transylvanian group and that of the Dnieper tombs, an idea developed later by Valentin Vasiliev (1980). I expressed my opinion as to these so-called “close” similarities in particular in a review of Vasiliev’s book (Vulpe, 1981, p. 398-404 and 1981-1983, p. 119-136).

Firstly, I believe that any attempt to corroborate Herodotus' statements on the map should involve a presumption of disbelief in his ability to describe, in the Scythian *logos*, something that also corresponds with the real-life topography. As I said earlier, it is entirely unwise to pass judgment in relation to this jigsaw puzzle of data – data which, all the same, viewed on their own, serve to describe a reality. In this sense all the different hypotheses can be sustained up to a point. On the other hand, the articulation of the river/ethnonym relationship, in this case that of Agathyrsi/Μάρσις, would appear to provide an additional note of credibility to the text in question. Indeed, if *Maris* does not denote the Mureş, then there is no point in searching for it elsewhere.

Herodotus evidently used a variety of sources, a fact that has been much discussed. My theory of the two layers of information, as described above, can be complemented by the information Herodotus obtained via the accounts of the Greeks from Hellespontus (more precisely, Perinthus) contained in the Thracian *logos* (in particular V, 3-10). Naturally, it is difficult to decide what from this layered information is of relevance, geographically or historically. Similarly, it is also difficult to say what Herodotus took from Hecataeus' *Periplus Around the Earth*. Jakoby's assumption (1913, col. 258.10) that the information about the course of the Danube and its tributaries were taken from Hecataeus, is primarily based on the special authority enjoyed by this important expert in Greek historiography. It is, of course, known that Hecataeus's work is not merely a list of places mostly located along the coast, as might transpire from the almost 350 excerpts, the majority from Stephen of Byzantium's lexicon, some of which do, in fact, contain short descriptions of the inland parts of the areas in question.²⁸ However, how much of the information collected by Hecataeus was used by Herodotus while compiling his Scythian *logos* is open to debate, albeit one with little chance of reaching a conclusion.

My attempt to define a "Thraco-Agathyrsi culture circle" reflected a modern concept based, on the one hand, on the apparent unity of archaeological forms, especially ceramics, as well as an analysis of funerary inventories and the variety of rites practiced in the period 650-450 BC throughout the entire Carpatho-Danubian area; and, on the other hand, on a socio-historical interpretation in terms of a "union of tribes" similar to the notion of tribal union attributed to the Scythians. These are concepts which at that time were in frequent circulation in the specialist literature. Today, in my opinion, these have all been consigned to the history of research. Neither the so-called unity of forms of material cultural has been proved – on the contrary, what is striking is precisely the variety of local features in the cultural manifestations of different communities – nor has much evidence been produced to date in support of the existence of a union of chiefdoms. These remain working hypothesis.

From what we have discussed thus far it transpires that, despite the assumptions formulated, we still have no certainty as to the location of the Agathyrsi homeland, nor do we know whether the ethnonym in question refers to a distinct ethnic group. Consequently, the only solution, again hypothetical but plausible, is confined to the *Maris*/Mureş = Agathyrsi relationship and, therefore, the possible identification of the group of Ciumbrud-type necropoli as belonging to said ethnic group. Anything else is speculation. The location of the Agathyrsi as somewhere in the vast Eurasian space, as encountered in later authors, will be discussed below in the section on the literary tradition of this ethnonym.

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The Scythian nature of the Agathyrsi has also been based, besides the aforementioned homophony with names from the Scythian world, on the characteristics attributed to this *ethnos* by Herodotus in Book IV, 104, where he begins by describing the Agathyrsi as ἀβρότατοι. This term may denote a weak or delicate physical constitution, but may also be suggestive of effemination. He then calls them χρυσοφόροι τὰ μάλιστα (wearers of predominantly gold ornaments). It would, I believe, be going too far to take this expression to mean "possessors of gold", that is, an allusion to the ownership of the gold deposits in the Apuseni Mountains; this idea was, however, suggested by Patsch (1925, p. 71). Herodotus relates how the Agathyrsi share their wives to ensure they are all of the same kin and, being closely related, to ensure there is no envy and hatred between them (ἐπίκοινων τῶν γυναικῶν τὴν μεῖζιν

²⁸ For example, FgrHist, 291, on the mountains in the Caspian Sea area; other examples include: F. 154; 287; 119; 129.

ποιεῦται ἵνα κασίγνητοί τε ἀλλήλων ἔωσι καὶ οἰκίηοι ἔοντες πάντες μήτε φθόνω, μήτ' ἔχθει χρέωνται ἕς ἀλλήλους). The paragraph in question concludes with the observation that “in their other customs they resemble the Thracians” (τὰ δὲ ἄλλα νόμαια Θρήξι προσκεχωρήκασι). Whether or not this observation implies an allusion to their Thracian ethnic origins remains, I believe, a matter of hypothesis and something that cannot be resolved satisfactorily, neither through textual criticism nor a critical analysis of the archaeological data available to date. For this reason, I see no purpose in dwelling on this point any further here. Their other characteristics, however, place the Agathyrsi within the same collective image the Greeks had of the Scythians, in the generic sense afforded to this ethnonym (see also the community of women among the Scythians, Massagetae [Hdt. I, 216; Strabo, XI, 8, 6], etc.²⁹).

The Hippocratic treatise, *De aere, aquis et locis*, 19, thus describes the characteristics of the physical constitution of the “Scythians”, such as a structure that is soft and fleshy (παχέα [τὰ εἶδεα] καὶ σαρκώδεια), and moist (ὕδρα), which explains their weak manhood (ἄνανδρα) and inability (ἄτονα). Do these expressions suggest an analogy with ἄβρότατοι, an attribute used to describe the Agathyrsi? Perhaps, but only in the Herodotean imaginary. It is, however, clear that this image, being a contradiction of the belligerent nature normally associated with the “Scythians”, reflects both the geographical and climatic determinism of the Hippocratic perspective, as well as, perhaps, the Hippocratic philosophy in respect of the four elements of the human body.³⁰ As noted at the beginning of this article, the author of the treatise attributes these characteristics to the “nomadic” Scythians. In this case, this term is ambiguous: meaning *shepherds* in a generic sense or being suggestive of a particular social or ethnic or even religious group (e.g. the *Enarees*: Hdt. I, 105; IV, 67). The fact that, earlier in the same treatise, there is a description of the way of life of the “nomadic Scythians” implies the author is referring to all those who practice nomadism, that is, cattle breeders in general. I would return here to the Homeric term ἄβιοι (The *Iliad*, XIII, 6), which was initially understood primarily as an ethnonym, but later also translated by Ephoros (4th century BC) as an epithet: “lacking in vigour” (apud Strabo, VII, 3, 9), an attribute conferred on those who feed on dairy products – *galaktofagi* – such as the pastoral Scythians (the term was discussed extensively by Ivantschik, 2005, p. 18 onwards; review by Vulpe, 2010b).

The later literary sources, from the Roman era and in Latin, the earliest being from the time of Augustus, mention the *tattooing* of the Agathyrsi. The first to mention this custom is Vergil (*Aeneis*, IV, 146): “*pictique Agathyrsi*”; followed by Pliny (*Hist. Nat.*, IV, 88): “*et caeruleo capillo Agathyrsi*”, denoting the characteristic of blue hair colour. These characteristics later appear in exaggerated and diversified form in Pomponius Mela (II, 1,10): *Agathyrsi ora artusque pingunt, ut quique maioribus praestant, ita magis aut minus: ceterum isdem omnes notis et sic ut abluī nequeant*. Solinus, who compiled Pliny and Mela, provides more detail (15, 3): (*Agathyrsi caeruleo picti, fucatis in caeruleum crinibus, nec hoc sine differentia: nam quanto quis anteit, tanto propensiore nota tingitur, ut sit indicium humilitatis minus pingi*); and also Ammianus Marcellinus (XXXI, 2, 14): “*...interstincti colore caerulea corpora simul et crines*”.

The source for the Agathyrsi tattoos, used by the authors cited above, is not known. However, it is curious how a geo-historian like Strabo, in his “colossal” work (κολοσσοῦργία), in which he uses information from a large number of authors, including Herodotus, does not at any point mention the Agathyrsi. Trogus, who similarly compiled his *Philippic Histories* using Greek sources, also fails to mention them (at least judging from what remains of Justinus’ compendium). We must therefore seek another source of inspiration. We might look to Ephoros or, as I believe is more likely, to Poseidonios of Apamea (2nd century to approx. 51 BC). The latter, a shining example of Middle Stoicism, gathered information about the customs of the Barbarian peoples with the aim of supporting the Stoic ideology of “collaboration” (συνεργία) and “kinship” (συγγένεια) of all nations, despite the differences between them, such that they might be held to account in the face of divine unity, the absolute good, the λόγος. Poseidonios could thus be considered as playing a pivotal role in the transmission of information from

²⁹ A concept idealised in the Greek imaginary in the 5th-4th century BC V-IV, in Plato, *Leg.*, and made the subject of irony in Aristophanes: *Eccl.*, and later also expressing the idealisation of a way of life characteristic of peoples living close to nature.

³⁰ See, among others, more recently, Enache, 2011.

authors whose works were no longer accessible to all in the 1st Century BC. So it was through him that information originating from authors other than Herodotus about the ethnography of non-Greek populations was able to circulate, information that was later used in Antiquity. The first plausible such work that comes to mind is Βαρβαρικά νόμιμα (the customs of the Barbarians) by Hellanikos of Mytilene, an author from around the same time as Herodotus,³¹ and which contains many descriptions Herodotus chose to omit or was unaware of. Of course, I could be accused here of making ungrounded statements, with no direct proof to back them up; however, for the time being, Hellanikos is the only author to whom has been attributed a behaviour somewhat similar to that of Herodotus; I am referring here to his “travelling speaker” manner – albeit, as opposed to Herodotus, Hellanikos produced his *logoi* according to a theme presumably composed mainly of compilations (Jakoby, 1912, col. 107; v. Fritz, 1967, p. 479; Lendle, 1992, p. 63).

The question nonetheless arises as to whether Herodotus knew more than he mentioned about the tattoos of the Getae and, implicitly, perhaps also those of the Agathyrsi? A suggestion of this kind might be derived from an analysis of the text about the tattoos of the Thracians in Book V, 6, of his *Histories*.

Herodotus relates how the Thracians of rank (εὐγεννές) would tattoo themselves, while the ordinary people (ἀγεννές) did not respect this custom.³² This passage (V, 6), however, is introduced by τῶν δὲ ἄλλων Θρηίκων ἐστὶ ὄδε νόμος (“the *other* Thracians have the following custom”), which comes after the exceptions listed in V, 3-5 (πλὴν Γετέων καὶ Τραυσῶν καὶ τῶν κατύπερθε Κρηστωναίων οἰκεόντων, “except for the Getae and the Trausi and those who live to the north of the Crestonians [Macedonia]”), who, all of them, differ in terms of specific practices from those of the “majority” of the Thracians, the latter having similar customs throughout all their communities. Although from this account we learn nothing new about the custom of tattooing, we can ask whether Herodotus was not in some way aware of the different way in which tattooing was practiced by the Getae, as distinct from that of the other Thracians, as described in the passage of the book “on the interpretation of dreams” (*Onirocriticon*, I, 8) written at the end of the 2nd century AD by Artemidoros of Ephesus: οἷος στίζονται παρὰ Θραιξίν οἱ εὐγενεῖς παῖδες καὶ παρὰ Γέταις οἱ δούλοι (“this is how, among the Thracians, they tattoo the children of good birth and, among the Getae, the slaves”). This author was most likely a stoic and his source could have been Poseidonios’ treatise on divination. Similarly, Porphyrios (*Vita Pythagorae*, 14) writes that Zalmoxis, after being captured and tattooed by thieves, covered his face in shame.

What is important here is less what might or might not be true in these accounts, and more the identification of the primary source of this information. Of course, we might regard Hellanikos, alongside Herodotus, as the main source of information about the Barbarian peoples in the 5th century. In 426 BC, the year of the staging of the comedy *The Babylonians*, Artisophanes describes the tattooed faces of the slaves as Ἰστριανά, for those living by the Ister used to tattoo themselves (Comic. Attic. Frag., F. 88, *apud* Hesychius, *Lexica*, i. 1033, Munksgaard, 1953). This is presumably an allusion to the Getae, among whom only the slaves were tattooed.

It is also to be presumed that Aristotle – the last author to mention the Agathyrsi as an *ethnos*, still believed to be in existence in his time – and who is known, together with his pupils, to have collected information about various Barbarian populations – also used Hellanikos. In *Problemata*, 19, 28, the Stagirite relates how still in his day the Agathyrsi used to sing their laws so as not to forget them: “Ἡ ὅτι πρὶν ἐπίστασθαι γράμματα ἦδον τοὺς νόμους, ὅπως μὴ ἐπιλάθωνται, ὥσπερ ἐν Ἀγαθύρσοις ἔτι

³¹ The date of the writings by this author has been subject to controversy ever since Antiquity. Placing them slightly before Herodotus, Pamphila, the female philosopher from the time of Nero [Aul. Gel., XV, 23, 10], writes that, at the beginning of the Peloponnesian War, Hellanikos was 65 years old, while Herodotus was 53; the same is true of Eusebius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus and Apollodoros. Placing them slightly later, Porphyrios [*apud* Eusebius, *Praep. Ev.* X, 3, 16] writes that Hellanikos plagiarised Herodotus in “The Customs of the Barbarians”. The modern view tends to date at least a part of Hellanikos’ works to after Herodotus (v. Fritz, 1967, p. 479; Lendle, 1992, p. 63 onwards).

³² The tattoos of the Thracian women, also mentioned by Plutarch (*De sera numinis vindicta*, 12), are depicted on some Greek vessels (Zimmermann, 1980, p. 163 onwards).

εἰώθασιν; (“Is it because before they knew the art of writing they used to sing their laws in order not to forget them, as is still the custom among the Agathyrsi?”)

One more argument in favour of the idea that the Peripatetics were aware of a different use of tattoos among the Getae is given by the account of Clearchus of Soli, a pupil of Aristotle, according to which Thracian women who lived to the west and north of the Scythians, having been tattooed by Scythian women, had to conceal their shameful marks by adding ornamental motifs (F. 46, ed. Schwabe, 1969; *apud* Athenaeus, 524c onwards).

This raises a number of problems. On the one hand, what strikes us in the aforementioned text is the information about the geographical location of the Thracians in question (here it is most likely a matter of the Getae). This location can only be credible in the event of an advance of Atheas’ Scythians into Dobruja, an event that took place, according to Vladimir Iliescu (1972, p. 59-64; *idem*, 2004, p. 9-24), in the first half of the 4th century BC – an issue I do not intend to address here. In reality, we are unable to know precisely where the Scythians in question came to settle. The text in question, which also indicates the cardinal points, does, however, appear to point to the south of Dobruja, where up until the 2nd century BC and even the following century there is evidence of small dynasts of Irano-Scythian origin. Bearing in mind that Clearchus’ writing dates from the end of the 4th century BC, we can assume he knew of the events that took place one generation before.

On the other hand, the text implies that the act of being tattooed itself, considered a matter of shame, obliged the women affected to change the appearance of the ornamental motif. This does not necessarily contradict Artemidoros’ account; indeed, there is no mention of gender, as is also the case with Herodotus in respect of the Thracians. Of course, both authors will have had men in mind, but tattooing among the female sex has been attested to among the majority of primitive populations.³³ All we are able to deduce from Clearchus is the interest of the Peripatetics in the customs of the Barbarian peoples, including the custom of tattooing. Their knowledge of the work mentioned above by Hellanikos, or the sources available in his day, is evidently highly plausible.

Also in relation to the practice of tattooing we might mention the possible relationship between the Agathyrsi and the Dacians. Pliny (*Nat. Hist.*, XXII, 1, 2) recounts how among the Dacians and Sarmatians the men would tattoo their bodies (“*maresque etiam apud Dacos et Sarmatos corpora sua inscribunt*”), while in another chapter (VII, 11) he writes that this kind of marking (*nota*) on the arms of the Dacians (?) (in cod. B it says *aliquorum* instead of *Dacorum*) continued for four generations. This piece of information should be born in mind, especially given the possibility that the territories of the Herodotean Agathyrsi may have partially overlapped with those of the Dacians. It is also interesting in this context to note the curious account by Cassius Dio (LI, 22, 6) that “they [the Dacians] are Scythians of some sort” (ἐκείνοι [Daci] δὲ δὴ Σκύθαι τρόπον τινά). It is possible that these accounts were based on a passage in Herodotus about the location of the Agathyrsi by the *Maris*, which was reinterpreted at a time when it was common knowledge that the Dacians lived in the Mureş basin and could therefore be considered “descendants” of the former. However, it is at the same time an allusion to the Scythian origins of the Agathyrsi as this was perceived by the Ancient post-Herodotean authors, in the sense discussed above.

The descriptions of the Agathyrsi by later authors also mention their location – this during a period when this *ethnos* was no more than a memory, located somewhere in the vast Eurasian region, on account of a certain inertia of Ancient historiography in terms of not erasing from memory ethnonyms that had acquired prestige on account of the authority of those who once consigned them to writing. The historical and geographical value of this information is non-existent.³⁴ At the same time, this phenomenon repeats the old, vague Homeric and Herodotean vision of the immensity of the regions lying on the periphery of the *oikoumene*, an image which was gradually moved to the north and east following the expansion of the Roman Empire to the south-east of Europe and, implicitly, the expansion of geographical knowledge. This explains why the Agathyrsi are placed alongside the Gelones (their brothers, according to the Myth recounted by Herodotus in IV, 10) in PsSkymnus (863-865, Diller), followed by Pliny (*loc. cit. supra*)

³³ On tattoos in general in Europe, see, M. Kunter, 1971, p. 1-20.

³⁴ See, however, Bodor, 1964, p. 153 onwards, who maintained that some Agathyrsi survived into the Roman era.

and Solinus (loc.cit. *supra*): *Gelonis Agathyrsii conlimitantur*; as well as Ammianus Marcellinus, cited above. To this list we can also add the writings of Pomponius Mela (II, 1): *ab eis (Arimaspae) Essedones usque ad Maeotida, huius flexum Buce amnis secat: Agathyrsi et Sauromatae ambiunt*.

Claudius Ptolemy (*Geographia*, III, 5, 10) and Dionysius Periegetes (310-319), sharing the same point of view inherited from the old days as the aforementioned authors, move the Agathyrsi, together with other peoples, including the Gelones, to an area stretching from the lands north of the Ister and the Black Sea and as far as the legendary Rhipaei mountains (there are no solid grounds for the identification of this mountain chain as the Urals). Naturally, this information has no real geo-historical value; along the same lines we also find the use in Roman Antiquity of the anthroponym *Agathyrsus* used to denote freedmen, perhaps in recollection of their place of origin, in Dacia or the North Pontic region (Bodor, 1964, p. 153-156).

The Agathyrsi, having become a northern people, acquire new attributes: in Dionysius Periegetes' description (319) they were called "the cold ones" (ψυχροί), inhabiting the Rhipaei mountains, where the diamonds sparkle (ἀδάμαντά τε παμφανόωντα). Could these descriptions provide an explanation for the blue tattoo? The diamond, the cold and the colour blue are associated with the image of the northern areas, as appears in Servius, in his commentary on *Aeneis* IV, 146: "*Pictique Agathyrsi populi sunt Scythae, colentes Apollinem hyperboreum..., picti autem, non stigmata habentes, sicut gens in Britannia, sed pulchri, hoc est cyanea coma placentes*". According to the Hippocratic view, the people of the North must, owing to the harsh climate, be strong and therefore also cruel. The delicate Herodotean Agathyrsi had already, in Juvenal (XV, 125), become brutal (*immanes*) and, in the Latin translation of Dionysius' Periegetes, by Priscian (311), *fortes*.

Thus far we have discussed the history of the picture of the Agathyrsi during Antiquity. Based on comprehensive research, Stephan Borszak (1985, p. 169-176) discusses at length the literary history of the Agathyrsi up to the Middle Ages; some of his information was gathered in a similar fashion to the cases described above.³⁵ In terms of tattoos among the Agathyrsi and the Getae, I do not believe it is possible to say what is true from this series of accounts – the results of successive, poetic exaggerations of various attributes initially described in the primary source mentioned above, which, as I have demonstrated, must presumably also have been known during the time of Herodotus.

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But what, then, of the Scythian "invasion" of Carpatho-Danubian space? Unfortunately, archaeologists today still often have a tendency to explain cultural transformations – in particular, in respect of material culture, but also the spiritual, ideological aspect thereof – in terms of invasions and the movement of populations without seeking an anthropological explanation for these cultural phenomena. The latter are evaluated, as in the case in question, only by according preference to the literary source, however vague.

To my mind the brief discussion above clearly demonstrates the extremely ambiguous nature of the Herodotean information in respect of the issues addressed here. I believe we can view as relatively reliable the geographical information that can be verified on the ground. For the rest, we should view Herodotus' interpretations of the ethnographic and historical information with considerable reservation. Otherwise, we will fail to learn anything about an invasion of these parts from the east or about an expansion to the west of a population that might be part of what Herodotus understood by "Scythian".

Based on the opinions of the foremost researchers from the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, or, to be precise, those who had available to them *only* the written sources, we arrive at an entirely different vision of the Scythian problem in Transylvania, viewed from the perspective of the Agathyrsi. For example, B. G. Niebuhr (1828) regarded the Agathyrsi as predecessors of the Dacians; for W. Tomaschek (1893, reprint 1980, p. 99 onwards) and K. Müllenhoff (1882) they were Thracians or relatives of the Thracians; F. Lindner (1841) saw them as Thracians under the rule of the Scythians; while G. Kazarow (1916, p. 16) was of the opinion they were Thracians mixed with Scythians. On the other

³⁵ I have only read Borszak's article in 1995, and therefore any similarities between this text and that of Borszak are purely coincidental, the result of working with the same Ancient literary material.

hand, Grigore Tocilescu was more in favour of the Scythian origin of the Agathyrsi, albeit with certain reservations: “a people about which history has little to say, and ethnography and philology are unable to contribute” (1880, p. 506).

As I said at the beginning of this article, the increased credence afforded to the migrationist theory and, implicitly, the “Scythianism” of the Agathyrsi, came about as a result of an increase in archaeological discoveries towards the end of the 19th century. At first, these discoveries occurred by chance. Here and there, museums and collectors were made aware of the finds from funerary inventories, finds from which those who discovered them, the majority farmers, only retained the more valuable pieces, especially those made of metal (weapons or large pieces of jewellery), usually discarding objects they considered uninteresting, such as ceramics. This is how priority came to be given to certain kinds of objects, such as akinakes-type daggers and short swords, arrow tips, bronze mirrors, etc. All of these, viewed individually, were considered to be of eastern origin and appeared to lend credence to the idea of an invasion of Transylvania by a Scythian people, corresponding to the Agathyrsi. This theory was considered convincing and used at the time to consolidate the model of a historical process by a number of researchers, such as M. Rostovtzev (1922), N. Fettich (addendum to Rostovtzev, 1931), T. Sulimirski (1961, p. 793-799) and others, including Pârvan. I attach significance to the observations of the archaeologist from Cluj (Kolozsvár), István Kovács, who, in 1910, in Târgu Mureş (Marosvásárhely), performed a systematic excavation of a small inhumation necropolis, the first of the type we know today as the “Ciumbrud type”: “Les objets trouvés... prouvent que les éléments du peuple qui s’en servaient pour leurs sépultures ne se sont pas beaucoup ressentis de l’influence scythique qui a apportée en Hongrie les objets caractéristiques, de type oriental, surtout les poignards, la masse de points de flèche, de grelots, de miroirs etc. Notre cimetière devait donc être localement isolé des nouvelles influences orientales” (Kovács, 1915, p. 310-317). Nonetheless, based on Fettich, in 1937 M. Roska published a catalogue of Scythian finds in Transylvania (Roska, 1937, p. 167-303).

All the same, the latter view has persisted and still finds advocates today. Valentin Vasiliev, in 1980, for example, named his monographic work on the Late Hallstatt discoveries in Transylvania: *Sciții agathyrsi în România* [“The Agathyrsi Scythians in Romania”]. István Ferenczi, who published his exemplary work on the diggings at the necropolis in Ciumbrud, in Alba county, was of the opinion that the people buried there belonged to a purely Scythian group and believed that the closest analogy to this was to be found in a necropolis in the northern Caucasus (in Istisu). For Ferenczi, the Herodotean Agathyrsi were those buried in the tumular incineration necropolis in Ferigile, in Vâlcea county (1971, p. 11-36). Heated controversy broke out on publication, in 1955, of an article by A. I. Meljukova in which the elements deemed to be of Scythian origin were viewed as a consequence of the influence of Scythian culture on the areas bordering the Scythian world (Meljukova, 1955, p. 240 onwards; D. Popescu, 1958, p. 9-38).

It should be recalled that all of these theories are based on the idea that the archaeological discoveries, initially few in number, continue to constitute a strong argument for the interpretation of certain literary passages in a given way. Scarcely anyone thought this admixture of sources might produce distorted conclusions, while few proposed a critical analysis of the archaeological source, although the number of discoveries in this branch, many of which the result of systematic research, had grown significantly in the meantime.

As discussed earlier, some of the characteristics attributed by Herodotus to the Agathyrsi were compared to those of the Scythians. But it is more convincing to view them as part of the imaginary of the Herodotean Scythians. We gain nothing by attempting to find archaeological confirmation for these characteristics. Neither the skeletons from the Ciumbrud cultural group or, generally speaking, those from the same period, display delicate features³⁶ (see, all the same, the “Amazonian” in Cozia, Iași county, deemed female based on the anthropometric data, but buried with weapons, something not unheard of in

³⁶ The few anthropometric measurements made of the skeletons from the Ciumbrud-type tomb demonstrate morphological similarities with those from the Bronze era in Transylvania (the Noua and Otomani culture areas); only the individual buried in Brateiu, in Sibiu county, displays features also found among the North Pontic populations: O. Nekrasov, 1980, p. 433 onwards.

the North Pontic world³⁷), nor is the inventory of the tombs rich in gold pieces (they found only very few earrings and a metal pendant made from this metal).

I am surprised, however, that to my knowledge no one to date has asked the question as to whether the Agathyrsi, considered a distinct *ethnos*, were not also a creation of the Greek imaginary adopted by Herodotus in his *skythikos logos*. Just as we speak of the Herodotean Scythians, so we should also speak of the Herodotean Agathyrsi, a term that perhaps does not denote any real people bearing this name.

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If, therefore, the people presumed to be Scythians in these parts became a “problem”, in particular owing to the growth in archaeological finds and their importance to the understanding of the literary source, then we should now briefly consider the possible interpretations arising based on the discoveries made to date and independently of the Herodotean text (for the main bibliography, see Vulpe, 2010a, chapter III-V).

The cultural group characteristic of the late Hallstatt period (approx. 650–450 BC) in Transylvania is almost exclusively made up of funerary discoveries which we some time ago chose to denote by the neutral term of “the Ciumbrud cultural group” (Vulpe, 1970, p. 152 onwards; 1990, p. 127; Moscalu, 1983, p. 159). The discovery of cultural groups consisting of tumular incineration necropoli in the Southern and Curvature Sub-Carpathians (the Ferigile and Bârsești groups), considered by many (including myself) to belong to the local Thracian population, restricted research into the Scythian problem to Transylvania and part of Moldavia, Dobruja and the Brăila Plain. Among others, the particular rites practiced in connection with these funerary groups were considered essential to the justification of historical interpretations: incineration in the case of the indigenous population and inhumation for those newly-arrived in Transylvania and even in other regions. Another argument in favour of a cultural restructuring, occurring either around 600 or 650 BC, was given by the apparent contrast, essentially also in respect of funerary rites, with the previous cultural heritage, that of the era of Basarabi-type ceramic “culture”. As a consequence, the explanation for these cultural “transformations” was sought on a historical level, in terms of an important migration from the east attributed to the Scythians or the Agathyrsi, the latter also being considered a Scythian people. All of this was believed to be the result of a chain reaction unleashed by the presumed migration of the Scythians to the north of the Black Sea and by the resulting movements of populations. This view was shared, in one form or another, by different authors, including, previously, the author of these lines (Vulpe, 1970).

Although I had reservations about the historical interpretation of these purely archaeological phenomena, I now believe that neither I nor others went nearly far enough with the critical analysis of the archaeological information. Viewed as a whole, the main general phenomenon differentiating the cultural picture of the Middle Hallstatt (the time of Basarabi “culture”) from that of the period in question here, the Late Hallstatt, is the evident (re)appearance at almost the same time *throughout* Romania of various groups of funerary discoveries, something which is in striking contrast with the almost total absence thereof in the previous era. In other words, as I have suggested on various occasions, the early and middle periods of the first Iron Age in the Carpatho-Danubian regions are characterised precisely by the apparent absence of traces or funerary monuments visible from an archaeological perspective.³⁸ We can assume the existence of special funerary practices that leave no traces on the ground, such as the scattering of cremated remains over water or on land, or the exposing of the bodies, etc., which cannot be detected and proven by current means. This phenomenon, however, is particularly important in itself for it reflects a certain behaviour towards the dead determined by an ideology we can only speculate on without being able to explain. The same phenomenon, the absence of funerary discoveries, was also identified in the

³⁷ Nekrasov, 1980, p. 335; Fialko, 1991, p. 4-18; Guliaev, 2003, p. 112-125.

³⁸ Vulpe 2010a, p. 368 and 442. I discussed this issue during a presentation in Baia Mare at the international symposium entitled *Der nordkarpatische Raum in der Bronzezeit*, 1998 (unpublished), providing statistical graphs to illustrate this somewhat curious situation; I recently revisited the subject in *Zu den Grabsitten der älteren Hallstattzeit in Rumänien*, in (F. Verse et al.) *Durch die Zeiten*, Festschrift für Albrecht Jockenhövel zum 65. Geburtstag, Rahden/Westf., 2008, p. 269 onwards.

second Iron Age, in particular in the period considered to be that of the “maximum development” of Geto-Dacian civilisation.³⁹ Without elaborating on this issue here, I would like to note that the principal explanation for the so-called cultural restructuring that occurred at the beginning of the Late Hallstatt in Romania is ideological in nature, something visible in funerary practices, which themselves reflect transformations, such as the *post mortem* display of social status.

On the other hand, in tracing the way of life, economy and habitat throughout the first Iron Age in the Carpatho-Danubian region, we see that the transformations in these areas occurred far more smoothly. What is most striking is the paucity, if not absence, of discoveries of stable settlements not only in Transylvania, but also *all over* the country. From this point of view, this phenomenon also contrasts less with the previous period and more with the consistent number of funerary discoveries in the period under discussion. The archaeological material available at this stage in the research is naturally not sufficient for us to draw more reliable conclusions, but what we do have indicates a predominantly pastoral way of life in which the phenomenon of transhumance must have been specific to these regions, accompanied by relative stability in terms of habitat.⁴⁰

The archaeological interpretation of the way of life practiced in the period under discussion here should be based primarily on the climatological research, which in turn should be based on palynological, pedological, archeozoological and archeobotanical data. Unfortunately, in the current stage of the research, there are still many gaps in the data for the Carpatho-Danubian region. An attempt to address these deficiencies through reference to the situation in Central Europe or the North Pontic area, regions for which more extensive research has been performed, carries risks that remain difficult to assess for the time being.⁴¹ Nonetheless, by making such a comparison we are able to establish a regression in the height of the Black Sea, from +5 metres during the Bronze Age to -4 metres relative to the current level, over the duration of the Iron Age, a phenomenon which also led to a decrease in the level of inland waters and triggered the onset of an increasingly drier climate. At same time, however, to the west of the continent, the climate became more humid and colder (around \pm 1000 BC there was, throughout the entire Palaeartic region, a transition from a subboreal climate to a humid and cold subatlantic climate, the so-called “little Ice Age” that occurred towards 850 BC). Given these climatic conditions, it is understandable that there was an increase in the importance of pastoralism in the production of means of subsistence, which seems also to be reflected in the preference for ovicaprine and bovine breeding,⁴² a phenomenon also with direct implications for the form of habitat. These climatic transformations were characterised by long periods of fluctuation. It appears that the period in which the climate was at its driest and coldest was precisely that of 8th-5th centuries, that is, the period under discussion here.⁴³

However scant and unequally distributed in space, these data help us to imagine the evolution of the way of life practiced throughout the Hallstatt period and, implicitly, the type of habitat, too. This explains the reduction, almost to the point of disappearance, of the larger settlements with multiple forms of living, in parallel with the dispersion of habitat in the form of small groups of family farmsteads located at considerable distance from one another, together with poorly inhabited fortified sites, which were believed to be places of refuge or centres for which the main purpose of the fortification was predominantly the display of the social status of the communities in question. Here I am also referring to the over 350 sites from the Basarabi period (Middle Hallstatt), of which almost 300 have been identified in Romania alone, the majority in the Romanian Plain. These are, in fact, sites from which only ceramic fragments with Basarabi decorations were extracted, without being able to determine either the physical

³⁹ Cf. Babeş, 1988, p. 3-32. As well as the literature mentioned above, see also Lazăr, 2006, p. 5-12, with a specific reference to the Oltenia area.

⁴⁰ Cf. Hänsel, 2000, p. 31-42.

⁴¹ Cf. A. László, în *IR*², 2010, p. 298; in general, M. Tomescu, (1998-2000, p. 235-270).

⁴² More consistent data are available for the areas in south-western Romania: G. El Susi, 1996. p. 161 onwards and *passim*.

⁴³ Tomescu (1998-2000, p. 266 onwards). The dendrochronological analysis carried on wood samples from the oldest Greek tomb in Orgame (Argamum), as well as the chronological data (second half of the 7th century), also provided information about the extremely dry climate in Dobruja, at a time when west-central Europe was experiencing a very humid and cold period (verbal information obtained from Margarita Primas).

extent of these settlements or their stability. This situation does not necessarily reflect demographic growth in the regions in question, but only the dispersion of the settlements in the form of small-scale sites. As mentioned above, during the Late Hallstatt even the identification of these site becomes problematic.

In general, what we call “traditional” archaeology has predominantly been limited to the recording of discoveries and their empirical interpretation based on “common sense”. In our case, we need also to understand the uncritical and preferential use of the historical source in keeping with archaeological common sense. In short: what was initially regarded as merely plausible is now considered increasingly certain. This is an inductive method, in that it begins with the discovered object so as to reach general archaeological and historical conclusions.

It is not my intention here to elaborate on the new directions of modern archaeology.⁴⁴ But if we are to examine the “Scythian” problem using a deductive form of analysis specific to a processualist interpretation of the archaeological data characteristic of the first Iron Age in Romania, then we will arrive at a new way of looking at things, something which will question the validity of the ideas formulated to date about the history of this period.⁴⁵

The situation described above in terms of the contrast between the archaeological picture of the Basarabi period and that of the following period, the late Hallstatt, represents the beginning of a processualist approach: the scenario of a Scythian migration/“invasion” is opposed by scenarios for which there exists more tangible arguments on both an archaeological and cultural anthropological level.⁴⁶ These primarily draw attention to the slow changes to the environment, occurring gradually, starting from the middle of the Bronze Age, and which had essential repercussions for the economic and social systems, and, last but not least, spiritual culture. Along these lines, a more convincing explanation might also be found for the phenomenon of the apparent “emptying” of the Romanian Plain during the first half of the 7th century, towards the end of the Basarabi period, and the appearance, around midway through the century, of the Ferigile- and Bârsești-type necropoli in the sub-Carpathian regions, a phenomenon initially interpreted as a movement of the population to the sub-mountainous areas. The old historical interpretation – that is, the withdrawal to more sheltered areas in the face of invaders⁴⁷ – is opposed by a more plausible explanation relating to environmental changes, which implicitly assumes the search for places providing conditions for the acquisition of means of subsistence.

Without dwelling any further on this issue, I would like to point out, in the form of a first conclusion, that to continue to make statements based on the ambiguous and vague accounts from the literary source, with the aim of lending them credibility with help of the archaeological material, is to turn the “Scythian” problem, with a special emphasis on the Carpatho-Danubian region, into a myth, that is, a distorted picture of certain realities, which are thus rendered increasingly difficult to interpret correctly.

In this context, we should also mention the importance accorded to the ceramic forms and decorations, elements which, at this point, constitute the main factor in judging the archaeological phenomena. I have described elsewhere (Vulpe, 2010a, p. 325 onwards) the extent to which the notion of Basarabi “culture” can become distorted when based only on *this* type of discovery. The new trends in archaeology focus primarily on the significance of ceramics and their decoration, including the presence or absence of the latter. Ceramics are seen as “bearers of cultural meaning”, reflecting the behavioural processes of different social groups, of the relationships between various groups and their ideology, factors which play a greater role than the corresponding utilitarian and empirical function. In our case, the fact that the ceramics from the Ciurbrud-type tombs have been much more simply decorated than those from the contemporary necropolis in Ferigile naturally has a significance that is anything but ethnic; note the large difference in terms of variety of decoration even within the necropoli from the Ferigile and Bârsești group. The motifs in the more elaborate decorations on vessels from the necropolis in Ferigile

⁴⁴ See Palincaș, 2006; 2010, p. 53.

⁴⁵ See a relatively recent example of a historicising interpretation of the so-called Cimmerico-Scythian “migrations” in J. Chochorowski, 1998, p. 473-492, especially fig. 7.

⁴⁶ The rich literature of a more theoretical nature includes: L. R. Binford, 1968, p. 5-32; the same publication: A.C. Spaulding, *Explanation in Archaeology*, p. 33-40; C. G. Hempel, 1965; see also Bernbeck, 1997, p. 49 onwards.

⁴⁷ Proposed, as it happens, many years ago: Vulpe, 1970, p. 115-214.

(Vulpe, 1967; 2010a, p. 484 onwards) are more a local phenomenon and cannot even be generalised to the entire southern sub-Carpathian area. There are many possible explanations for this (including a certain aesthetic sense within the group living by the Bistrița in the Vâlcea area), but none bears any relation to the ethnic characteristics of this cultural group.

This means that, based on the current stage of archaeological discoveries, we can devise a number of scenarios by which to explain the cultural transformations occurring in these parts in the Late Hallstatt period, of which the migration of populations from the east is neither the only, nor the most probable, not to mention the most difficult to prove. The cultural influence from the east was an almost permanent feature of the four millennia BC. The variation in intensity of these influences throughout this extended period is subject to the subjective assessment by archaeologists of the materials found based on a multitude of objective conditions, of which I would mention, above all, insufficient knowledge ensuing from the unequal stage of research in the various areas of the immense Eurasian region.

Taking a general view of the history of south-eastern Europe in the period between the 7th and 5th centuries BC, the only important historical events that could have influenced the cultural transformations of this region, including the North Pontic area, are the political restructurings that occurred in the Middle East; that is, the rise and fall of the Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian kingdoms, followed by their assimilation by the Persian superpower, which, at the end of the 6th century, had expanded its borders as far as the Lower Danube. The so-called “Scythian problem” should, from now on, be considered only a marginal issue in the context of these major historical-political phenomena, while the cultural influences – more evident in types of armament, the method of fighting (the so-called „bow-riders“ ἵπποτοξόται) and in jewellery and luxury items, and which spread either via the North Pontic channel or through the south Thracian world (the Odrysian Kingdom) – should be seen as consequences of the historical changes in the Middle East.

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Returning to the *Scythian problem* in Romania and the subject of this article, we can observe that it is the result of a combination of two lines of research: the literary source (for the most part Herodotus) and the archaeological discoveries dating from the Late Hallstatt period. The critical study of the information acquired via these two channels, carried out using methods specific to each case (the philological-historical method and that of modern archaeology), serves to emphasise still further the fragility of the arguments put forward in support of different hypotheses and calls for particular caution when it comes to drawing conclusions from interpretations arrived at following a combination of the two lines of investigation.

Besides the fact already noted that there is no mention anywhere in Herodotus’ text of a Scythian migration to the Carpatho-Danubian region (and to the west of the North Pontic world in general), we also have Herodotus’ confused picture of the geo-ethnographic situation in the area and of the western borders of what he called Σκυθίη. While the Herodotean Scythia also reached as far as the west of the river Prut (see IV,48), it need not necessarily have been inhabited by a population of eastern origin, but, rather, by the “Herodotean Scythians”, in the general and vague sense of this ethnonym – that is, in real terms, by completely different *ethne*, in the sense deduced from the Scythian *logos*. Translated into present-day terminology, these populations were presumably predominantly North Thracian; but this, the result of logical deduction, is merely plausible and remains uncertain.

Therefore, for Herodotus it was not clear where Scythia ended, a Scythia imagined by the Greeks as a vast, endless and mostly unknown territory inhabited by all kinds of populations, especially nomadic shepherds, among others, known generally as “Scythians”. This square-shaped Scythia (IV, 101), an image impossible to reconcile with reality, despite the many attempts to make sense of it,⁴⁸ was

⁴⁸ See also a number of attempts to locate the *square-shaped* Scythian land geographically: Minns, 1913, p. 27, fig. 4. Although broadly speaking appearing to correspond to the shape of present-day Ukraine, in reality it is merely an abstraction of an image adopted by Herodotus from his sources. We should not overlook, however, Herodotus’ ability to make schematic descriptions of certain geographical areas and compare them (see the description of Egypt as a kind of basin, a “gulf” of the Nile [II, 10, 11] or the comparison of the shape of Taurica and that of Attica [IV, 99] etc.; cf. also Vulpe, 1986, p. 40).

constructed by Herodotus with the aid of maps drawn up from the Ionian journey, perhaps even the *Periplous*, of Hecateus of Miletus, who made observations in his work on the map by Anaximander, his fellow citizen, in which he emphasised the idea of symmetry, hence the geometrical shape of the lands described (cf. also Dan, 2011, p. 25-56).

Summarising the above, we can confirm that it is impossible, based on the literary source, to establish something that attests or at least alludes to a movement of populations, of *ethne* of eastern origin, to areas which, according to the Herodotean picture, correspond with present-day Romania. Based on a critical analysis of Herodotus' text, there is no one element that permits us to make a specific ethnic identification – Thracian or non-Thracian – in respect of the population living in these parts (with the natural exception of the South-Danubian Getae; but even in this case, seemingly more certain, it is impossible to identify their precise location in the areas between the eastern Balkan mountains and the Danube).

By eliminating, on the grounds of being impossible to demonstrate, the idea of a migration from the east to the Carpatho-Danubian region during the so-called “Scythian” periods, I would appear to be supporting the idea, popular among Romanian historians, of the permanence and continuity of the indigenous demographic and cultural heritage, which is presumed to be “Geto-Dacian”. I can clearly state that this is not the case. While the current means of interpreting the archaeological discoveries tend to explain more easily the continuity of inhabitancy of a particular area than the interruptions and transformations observed in cultural evolution, presumed to be the result of the migration of populations, this does not imply an *a priori* rejection of these events, which surely must also have occurred in the four millennia BC. However, the theory of historical models, transposed to prehistory, is subject to the risk of myth creation. No matter how dangerous the obsession with the idea of continuity, the reverse is equally dangerous, in that any cultural transformation occurring in prehistoric times in the intra-Carpathian region must necessarily be in keeping with the well-known historical models supported by literary sources from the end of Antiquity and the Middle ages.⁴⁹

I am fully aware that what I have written and argued in favour of in this article will be met with reluctance by some. To demolish a myth that was presented to us as historical truth and which once enjoyed the support of prestigious names, including Vasile Pârvan, is a courageous endeavour. At the same time, however, I am convinced that the way to make real progress in understanding and interpreting archaeological discoveries and in formulating a research strategy within this discipline is to abandon the historicisation of objective phenomena, foregoing hope of obtaining a satisfactory explanation based on Herodotus' text, no matter how tempting this may be. I will conclude by first urging myself to take my own advice as someone who, on more than one occasion, has been tempted to produce a historical-archaeological synthesis of the so-called “Scythian” era.

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In lieu of conclusions: possible historical scenarios

The purpose of this article was to draw attention in particular to the fragility of the available information, both literary information and, especially, the historicising interpretation of archaeological discoveries. That being said, however uncertain and vulnerable to multiple interpretation, the literary source also reflects real events. The questions raised here about the Scythians, while they cannot be answered with the aid of archaeological research, do not prevent us from formulating theoretically plausible historical scenarios. In what follows I will discuss the three episodes from Herodotus' *Histories* which I consider relevant.

The Agathyrsi scenario and Darius' Scythian campaign

The Persian campaign led by Darius I against the Scythians is the oldest historical event to have taken place in these parts of Europe that is documented in literary sources and probably dates to 514/513 BC. The first question we should ask is: which *Scythians*? By “Scythians” do we mean the generic sense

⁴⁹ I discussed the problem of using historical *models* to demonstrate migrations in *Migrații ca temă arheologică și istorică. Modelul Est→Vest*, Memoriile secției de științe istorice și arheologie, 2006, p. 29-40.

given to this ethnonym? Or, as is only logical, a specific political entity or chiefdom? Both the Greek and oriental sources are ambiguous on the matter. If the expedition by the Great King north of the Danube is not in doubt – and I am among those who do not question this event – then its target must have been what I called above “the Scythians in the hinterland of Olbia” or the “Scythians by the Dnieper”.

The description of this event by Herodotus is replete with digressions and tales of an anecdotal nature and is presented in a way that verges on the unbelievable and should be – and generally has been – viewed as such by modern historians. It is almost impossible to distinguish, from among the melange of exaggerations, anecdotes and geographical discrepancies, what parts are actually true.⁵⁰ It is clear that in other texts referring to Darius’ campaigns (Ctesias and the Achaemenid epigraphic documents, in particular the Behistun inscriptions), there exists a confusion between at least two campaigns by the said king, of which only one, that also described by Herodotus, took place at the Danube and whose scale and consequences cannot be accurately assessed. At the same time we should bear in mind that the scenarios of Darius’ campaign across the Danube only originate from the Greek sources, in which the term “Scythian” can be understood, as I have already said, in a generic sense. The end of the expedition, described in terms of catastrophe (more mildly by Herodotus, more colourfully by Ctesias), also reflects a fundamentally Greek moral concept, according to which a transgression of the limits of power unleashes the envy and response of the gods. In this case, for Darius, his *hybris* was crossing the Danube.⁵¹

I am among those who keep accounts based on sources to a minimum and who believe that Darius’ expedition really took place and achieved its aim, at least in part.⁵² It appears to me to have been intended as an act of force meant to intimidate one of the political structures covered by the generic term “Scythians”, most probably the chiefdom of the “Scythians by the Dnieper”. I find a comparison with the forced crossing of the Danube by Alexander in 335 BC (Arrian, *Anabasis* I, 4) with the intention of intimidating the Getae a plausible explanation. Similarly, we can say that Darius’ campaign was a success and that, from then on, the Scythians in question would no longer create problems for the Persians in their campaigns against the Greeks. It is not possible to talk of a Scythian expansion south of the Danube before the 4th century BC.

As transpires from later sources (Plutarch, *Alexander*, 36, citing Deinon, a 4th-century BC author of a comprehensive history of the Persian Empire of which only fragments still exist today: FgrHist, 690, F 23b), the Persians viewed the Danube as the border of their empire. Thrace, including the Getae, who, according to Herodotus (IV, 93), had the “lack of wisdom” (ἀγνωμοσύνη) to face Darius’ armada, became a Persian province (a satrapy, perhaps?) called *Skudra*; and it appears as such in a number of inscriptions from the time of this king. Megabazos and, later, Otanes are thought to have been the first leaders (satraps?) of these lands, which in the west reached as far as the border with the Macedonians (*ibidem* V, 14 onwards).⁵³

Herodotus, in describing Darius’ campaign in Scythia, portrays the Agathyrsi not only as a separate people from the Scythians, but also as having a hostile attitude towards them (IV, 118-120.

⁵⁰ I will cite selectively from the rich literature on this subject: P. Alexandrescu, 1956, p. 319-342; J. Gardiner-Garden, 1987; P. Geoges, 1987 (1995), p. 97-147. For a recent survey of the critical studies of this event, see Tuplin, 2010.

⁵¹ See also the speech by Artabanos in the famous dispute, imagined by Herodotus (VII, 8 onwards) to have taken place before the great Medic campaign, between Xerxes, Mardonios and Artabanos (“God likes to limit all that rises [above the rest]”); cf. also Lateiner, 1989, p. 129.

⁵² In my opinion, the layer of destruction in the 6th century BC wall of the fortress in Histria associated with Darius’ campaign (Dimitriu, 1964, p. 133-144) cannot be seen as convincing evidence in support of this hypothesis, something also true of the interpretation of most archaeological data of this kind. So, the presence of some parts of harness equipment of achaemenid type found in a funerary tumulus at Histria (Alexandrescu, 2008, p. 119-143) doesn’t implicate the presence of some Persian military units in that area.

⁵³ This opinion is also shared by N. G. L. Hammond, 1980, p. 53-61; on the other hand, J. M. Balcer, 1988, p. 1-21, is of the opinion that it was not an actual satrapy and that the area of Thrace occupied by the Persians was in fact governed by the Satrap of Sardes (Lydia), *Skudra* denoting in inscriptions only an ethnic group, i.e. that of the Thracians. For an overview of the main hypotheses relating to the meaning of the *Skudra*, see Rehm, 2010.

125).⁵⁴ For example, when the Scythians, pretending to be pursued by the Persians, reached the countries neighbouring Scythia, the Agathyrsi were the only ones to show any signs of resistance, as opposed to the cowardly attitude of the Melanchlainoi, Androphagoi and Neuroi, who took flight. In another article (Vulpe, 1986a, p. 825-834 and 1986b, p. 333-342) I discussed these issues, comparing them with the description of the resistance of the Getae against the Persians, as opposed to the surrender without fighting of the Skyrmiadai and Nipsaioi Thracians, thus suggesting a possible symmetry between the attitudes of the Getae and the Agathyrsi. Leaving to one side the celebratory, jingoistic nature of the publications in which the work cited above appeared (published to mark “2,500 years from the first battles of the Geto-Dacian people (sic) for freedom and independence”), I today still view the symmetry between the descriptions of the two confrontations in Herodotus’ text as more than mere coincidence. It is probably the result of the author’s narrative style, albeit without necessarily implying any real relationship, such as one of ethnic kinship, as suggested at the time, between the two peoples, the Getae and the Agathyrsi.

The Ariapeithes/Spargapeithes scenario and its consequences

The only historical information about the events that took place in the Lower Danube regions, as described by Herodotus, and in which we can place some faith, is limited to the relationships between the Scythians in the hinterland of Olbia and the Odrysian Thracians, accounts which also feature the Agathyrsi. I am referring here to the Octamasades/Skyles episode (Hdt. IV, 78-80) and the extensive observations that can be drawn from a critical analysis of the entire passage also involving other literary sources from the period.

In reality, we do not know the extent or duration of Persian rule in Thrace. What is for sure is that it did not encompass the entire territory inhabited by Thracian communities and cannot have reached far inland. It can be assumed that the Persians will have consolidated their rule, especially in the southern areas, where the army of Xerxes had been in 480. It is similarly plausible that Persian rule also extended to the Odrysian Thracian people, that is, to the Marița basin. However, after being defeated in the second Medic war (479), the Persians were forced to abandon Thrace during the following decade, and, sometime between 480 and 470 BC, in place of the temporary province of Skudra, the Odrysian Thracian kingdom was founded by Teres I.⁵⁵

We can assume that a Scythian political structure, taking advantage of the weakness of the Persians, will have fought over the territories in the Lower Danube area, something which would explain the first confrontation with the new Odrysian power. From the patches of information we are able to extract from Herodotus’ text (IV, 78-80), we learn of the marriage of the Scythian king (chief) Ariapeithes to the daughter of Teres, which resulted in the birth of Octamasades, who would later seek to take control of the chiefdom. Intermarriage of this kind is in, in fact, a kind of diplomatic manoeuvre, taking place either subsequent to the diffusion of a tense situation or in an attempt to prevent or solve such situations through the forging of an alliance. In this case we are unable to say whether or not the alliance of the two kings was also the result of military confrontation, but this is something that could be deduced from an examination of the historical anachronism depicted in the Greek tragedy *Rhesus* attributed to Euripides.

In this tragedy (*Rhesus*, 422-435), whose authorship is disputed,⁵⁶ the Thracian king Rhesos (Δολώνεια, Iliad, X), the character we might identify as Teres, apologises to Hector for being late in coming to the aid of the Trojans (in our case the *Persians*) on account of having been involved in a bloody confrontation with the Scythians, who had invaded his country and whom he defeated.

⁵⁴ I find the hypothesis rather exaggerated that in the so-called “resistance” of the Agathyrsi we can see the Persian king’s intention to take control of the gold deposits in the Apuseni mountains (Bury, 1897 and, more recently, Gardiner-Garden, 1987, p. 344).

⁵⁵ Archibald, 1998; cf. also Vulpe, 2000, p. 76-82.

⁵⁶ From the literature I cite *pro*: Euripides, W. Ritchie, 1964; *contra*: D. Ebener, 1966. Vladimir Iliescu (1976, p. 367-376, and the abridged version: Pontice 2, 1969, p. 191-194; Craiova, 2004, p. 53-65) adopted the arguments of Ebener, both men having in mind a work from the 4th century BC (Iliescu saw Rhesos as being Cotys I, who, in 387 BC, became king of the Odrysians) by an unknown playwright.

If this play was really written by Euripides in his youth, presumably around 455-450 BC, as some sources suggest, the anachronism in question would correspond to the time of Teres and Ariapeithes. This seems all the more likely as no other sources tell us how Teres, according to Thucydides (II, 29, 2), managed to make “of the country of the Odrysians a powerful kingdom containing all of Thrace.” We might interpret this as an allusion to the reproach voiced by Hector (in our case, the Persian satrap, or even the king), who reminds Rhesos that it was he who had made him, previously nothing more than a minor dynast, into a great king of the Thracians (*Rhesus*, v. 401-412). As I said in another article (Vulpe, 2000, p. 79), there are some indications of the friendly relations the Odrysians continued to maintain with the Persians even after the latter’s departure from Europe.⁵⁷ I am therefore of the opinion that the scenario depicted in this play (see also *Rhesus* 449-454) corresponds better to the situation arising following the Persian abandonment of the last fortresses in Thrace (Doriskos appears to have been the last Persian stronghold to be conquered by the Athenians, in 465 BC) than to other scenarios, such as a conflict between Oktamasades and Sitalkes, or events taking place in the 4th century BC, as suggested by those who contest Euripides’ authorship of this work.⁵⁸

Later, when Ariapeithes was slain through deception (δόλος), possibly in an ambush, by the Agathyrsi king (chief) Spargapeithes, the same Scythians, now led by his son Octamasades, again clashed with the Odrysians, on this occasion led by Sitalkes, the son of Teres. The confrontation took place at the Danube and ended with a change of rivals to the respective thrones (Hdt. IV, 78). It thus clearly transpires that the Odrysians, who can be considered heirs to the land of *Skudra*, also saw the Danube as the northern border of their realm. The latter Thraco-Scythian conflict must have taken place sometime between 450 and 430 BC, most likely during the decade of 440-430 BC.

From reviewing these scattered accounts and trying to give them a historical explanation, it results that the Lower Danube was disputed by three different powers: a Scythian power, the Odrysians and the Agathyrsi led by Spargapeithes. Thucydides, in describing the Odrysian Kingdom of Sitalkes (II, 95-98), paints a picture that corresponds with the above. The Getae are seen as the subjects of the Odrysians, but are characterised, as are also the other populations in the areas neighbouring the Scythians, as having weapons like those of the Scythians and as being all of them “bow-riders” (ἵπποτοξόται). They were part of Sitalkes’ cavalry when, in 429 BC, he set out in aid of the Athenians during the Peloponnesian War (according to Thucydides, II, 98, 4, “the greatest part of the cavalry came from the Odrysians and, with them, the Getae”; this is reference to Sitalkes’ colossal army, of which cavalry accounted for one third).

The scenario of the “balc”-type expeditions.

Today it is clear that any statement about the ethnic characteristics of a population from the Carpatho-Danubian region in the period 650-450 BC can only have the value of a working hypothesis.

The scenario I proposed in my last article on the Agathyrsi (Vulpe, 2004, p. 480), in which a band of horsemen, made up solely of men, entered the intra-Carpathian region and defeated the local fighters,

⁵⁷ Thuc. II, 67: this can be deduced from the account of the episode of Phamake and the Odrysians; cf. also Rehm, 1010, p. 143.

⁵⁸ Some have suggested the conflict from the time of Sitalkes (below), but in that case the play could be expected to correspond stylistically with a more mature Euripides, which is not the case (see Iliescu, *op. cit.*, who lists the hypotheses proposed by various exegetes). Theoretically, all the hypotheses are plausible, but I personally tend more towards that mentioned here, which I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (Vulpe, 2000, and in the corresponding bibliography). In the issue surrounding the identification of the author of the tragedy, a decisive role was played by the stylistic and compositional arguments put forward by modern philologists. However, doubts over the authorship also existed in Antiquity: in a *hypothesis* written by an anonymous author during the Alexandrine era, a comparison is drawn between the style used in *Rhesus* and that of Sophocles, while still observing that the *didaskalia* (essentially a kind of record) confirms Euripides as the author of the work in question, especially as he was also known to have written a *Rhesus*. That those who made these observations would at the time have had a much more comprehensive picture of the work of Sophocles – who we know wrote over 120 theatre plays, of which only 7 and a half survive today – and would have known more than we do today about the theatrical productions of the day, is, I believe, an indirect argument in support of Euripides’ authorship of the play.

taking control of the country, can be viewed as being part of what, according to Askold Ivantschik (2005, p. 183), were the military expeditions performed by young men referred to in Ossetian legends (the so-called *Nart sagas*) under the name of *balc*. This is only one more in a long line of hypotheses about the ethnic identity of this group and in itself might not be of any particular value. However, these kinds of actions (of the type *Männerbünde*) fits reasonably well with the above idea. The progeny resulting from them would have claimed the ethnic identity of the conquerors but would still have been raised in the language of their mothers – in the case in question, presumably the language of the North Thracian group.

Of course, we might also consider the possibility that militarily organised groups of nomads (in the sense of practitioners of a pastoral economy) will have migrated in search of new pastures and settled in the Hungarian Plain (*Alföld*) and, from there, arrived in central Transylvania. In any case, such events do not leave archaeologists with any currently easily identifiable traces. There are also other, even more plausible explanations for the connections in terms of material cultural with the North Pontic area: the types of arms and harnesses spread and were adopted rapidly depending on their efficiency; the same is true of jewellery, depending on the fashion, etc. That being said, we should note that, owing to the prejudice arising from the interpretation of the texts, in the case in question more emphasis has always been placed on relations with the east, ignoring or minimising those with the western territories, especially the West Balkans and what is generally known as the „eastern Hallstatt culture circle“ (*Osthallstattkreis*). But of these I have spoken elsewhere.

Bibliography 03

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ABRÉVIATIONS

- ARMSI – *Academia Română. Memoriile Secțiunii istorice*, București.
- ActaMN – *Acta Musei Napocensis*, Cluj-Napoca.
- AÉ – *Année Épigraphique*, Paris.
- ANRW – *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, H. Temporini, W. Haase (eds.), Berlin - New York.
- Archeologia – *Archeologia*, Varșovia.
- Britannia – *A Journal of Roman-British and Kindred Studies*, London.
- BJ – *Bonner Jahrbücher des Rheinischen Landmuseums in Bonn und des Vereins von Altertumsfreunden im Rheinlande*, Bonn.
- CCA – *Cronica cercetărilor arheologice din România* (valable à <http://www.cimec.ro>), București
- CCARB – *Corso di cultura sull'arte ravennate e bizantina*, Ravenna.
- Chiron – *Chiron. Mitteilungen der Kommission für alte Geschichte und Epigraphik des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, München.
- CIG – *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, Berlin.
- CIL – *Corpus Inscriptiorum Latinarum*, Berlin.
- CRAI – *Comptes rendus de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres*, Paris.
- Dacia – *Dacia. Revue d'archéologie et d'histoire ancienne*, București.
- EphemNap – *Ephemeris Napocensis*, Cluj-Napoca.
- ESA – *Eurasia Septentrionalis Antiqua*, Helsinki.
- FgHist – *Die Fragmente der Griechischen Historiker*, ed. F. Jacoby, Berlin-Leida, 1923.
- HSCPh IDR II – *Inscripțiile Daciei romane, II, Oltenia și Muntenia*, culese, însoțite de comentarii și indice, traduse în românește de G. Florescu și C.C. Petolescu, București, 1977.
- IGBulg – *Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria Repertae*, G. Mihailov (ed.) I, *Inscriptiones orae Ponti Euxini* 2, Sofia, 1970; II, *Inscriptiones inter Danubium et Haemum repertae*, Sofia, 1958; III/2, *Inscriptiones inter Haemum et Rhodopem repertae. A territorio philippopolitano usque ad oram Ponticam*, Sofia, 1964.
- IGLNovae – *Inscriptions grecques et latines de Novae (Mésie Inférieure)*, V. Božilova, J. Kolendo, (eds.), Bordeaux, 1997.
- ILBulg – *Inscriptiones Latinae in Bulgaria Repertae*, B. Gerov (ed.), Sofia, 1989.
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- ISM V – *Inscripțiile din Scythia Minor, grecești și latine. V. Capidava-Troesmis-Noviodunum*, reunite, însoțite de comentarii și index, traduse în română de E. Doruțiu-Boilă, București, 1980.
- JDAI – *Jahrbuch des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts*, Berlin.
- PAS – *Prähistorische Archäologie Südost europas*, Berlin.
- REB – *Revue des Études Byzantines*, Paris.
- RÉSEE – *Revue des Études Sud-Est Européennes*, București.
- RMM.MIA – *Revista muzeelor și monumentelor. Monumente istorice și de artă*, București.
- RIB – *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain*, R.G. Collingwood, R.P. Wright (eds.), Oxford, 1965.
- SEG – *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*.
- ZPE – *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*, Bonn.



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