

I TRACI TRA GEOGRAFIA E STORIA

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Scritti per il Mediterraneo antico

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Questa serie vuole celebrare il mare Mediterraneo e contribuire a sviluppare temi, studi e immaginario che il cratere firmato dal greco Aristonothos ancora oggi evoca. Deposto nella tomba di un etrusco, racconta di storie e relazioni fra culture diverse che si svolgono in questo mare e sulle terre che unisce.

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I TRACI TRA GEOGRAFIA E STORIA

THE ROMAN CONQUEST OF THRACE (188 B.C. – 45 A.D.)

Jordan Iliev

In 229 B.C. the Romans set foot on the Balkans¹, but it cannot be determined when they first came in contact with the Thracians². At that time the situation in Thrace was very complicated. The scanty sources testify that over the next few decades Thracian mercenaries take part in the armies of the great Hellenistic kingdoms, which for a certain time had interests in Thrace³. Furthermore, some Thracian tribes probably were among the Roman friends or even allies⁴. The situation complicates more by Thracian communities, which pursue their own independent policy⁵. Unfortunately, the available sources do not provide sufficient information to determine the significance of these most important factors in Thrace.

Between the end of the 3rd and the beginning of the 2nd century B.C. some Thracian tribes attracted the attention of the ancient writers with their interrelations with the Macedonian king Philip V⁶. As it seems, the Macedonian lands were regularly attacked by Thracian tribes and especially by the Maedi. In response the Macedonian king organized preventive or punitive campaigns. In connection with one of them, that of the 211/210 B.C., Livy specified that '[Philip] led his army, before he should be engaged in more important matters [...] into Thrace and against the Maedi. That tribe had been in the habit of making raids into Macedonia, whenever it knew that the king was engaged in

¹There are a lot of papers, dedicated to various aspects of the Thracio-Roman relationships, although most of them are just concentrated on the presentation of historical events, extracted from the scarce ancient sources. See for instance DANOV 1979, pp. 72-145; LOUKOPOULOU 1987, pp. 63-110; TATSCHIEVA 2004, pp. 11-70; PARISSAKI 2013, pp. 105-114; DELEV 2014, pp. 137-146.

²The earliest currently known mention of Thracians among the Roman allies is dated to 212 B.C., see Liv. 26.24.9.

³GRIFFITH 2014, p. 340 with references and sources about Thracian mercenaries in the troops of the Antigonids, the Seleucids, the Ptolemies, the Attalids, the Achaean League, Mithridates V and VI.

⁴About Thracian volunteers in the Roman army see GRIFFITH 2014, p. 234.

⁵There are some sources about independent Thracians, see ZANNI *et alii* 2007, p. 751.

⁶DANOV 1979, p. 86 sq.

a foreign war and the kingdom unprotected⁷. Polybius supplements that three years later the Thracian tribes near the Macedonian frontier and chiefly the Maedi threatened to raid across the border, if the king was away from his lands⁸.

The presented information clearly demonstrates the strategy of the Thracian tribes against Macedonia, which expresses in avoidance of direct engagement with regular troops. Philip V certainly understood this strategy and as a result he had no difficulty in his Thracian campaigns, but even assured the first documented passing of Roman troops through Thrace⁹. An interesting here is that the available sources don't tell anything about the Thracian possessions of Philip V or these of Antiochus III the Great¹⁰.

Anyway, during their passage (on the way to Asia Minor) in 190 B.C., probably on the route of the future Via Egnatia, the legions of Scipio were supported by Philip V. There are no evidences about any serious incidents on their way, except an unsuccessful attack of about 15.000 Thracians against the Numidian cavalry¹¹. The safe passage through Thrace is explained with the help of Philip V¹².

Two years later the Roman troops under the charge of Gn. Manlius Vulso, returning from a successful campaign¹³, followed the same route on their way back from Asia Minor to Italy. The transition is presented in sufficient details by Livy¹⁴.

Starting from Lysimachia the legions set out in north and reached to Cypsela. There Vulso divided the army into two sections, because for about ten miles the road was wooden, narrow and rough. That settlement later was a station on the Via Egnatia¹⁵. Without any doubt the localization of Livy's Cypsela wasn't

⁷ Liv. 26.25.6-7.

⁸ Polyb. 10.41.4.

⁹ Liv. 37.7.8-16.

¹⁰ In the end of the 3rd century BC there were some possessions of the Ptolemies in Thrace, which were conquered by Philip V. After the Second Macedonian war (200-197 B.C.) Philip V was forced to withdraw his garrisons from all of the cities on the Thracian coast. Immediately after that they were conquered by Antiochus III, who rules over them up to 190 B.C. After 188 B.C. some lands in Thrace were handed over the Attalids. See DANOV 1979, p. 59 sq. In 196/195 B.C. Antiochus III marched in Thrace, see GRAINGER 2002, p. 76 sq.

¹¹ Liv. 38.41.11-14.

¹² Philip V claimed that he was a diligent ally of the Romans, see Liv. 39.28.6-12.

¹³ GRAINGER 2002, p. 341 sq.

¹⁴ Liv. 38.40-41.

¹⁵ LOUKOPOULOU 2004, p. 880, No. 649. According to KALLET-MARX 1996, pp. 347-9 'the decade of the 130s is on the whole the most likely date for the construction of the via Egnatia'.

near the modern town of Ipsala (in Turkey), just because to the west of that town there is no way to found wooden, narrow and rough pass¹⁶ (see Figure 1).

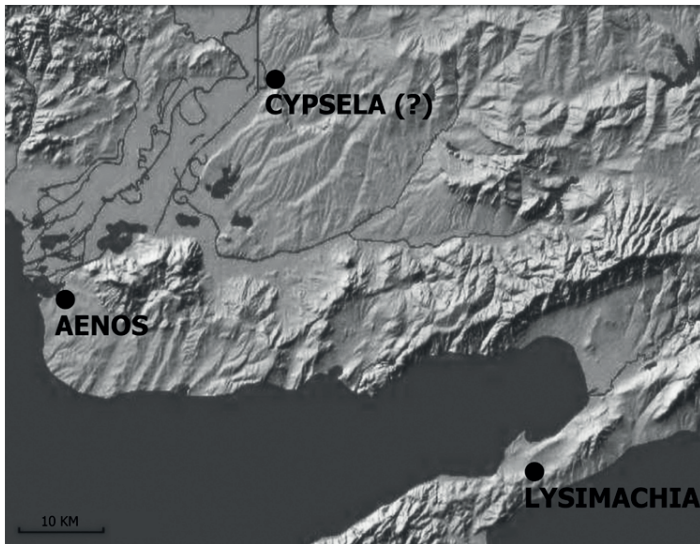


Figure 1. Map of the terrain between Lysimachia and Aenos.

The general ordered one section to go ahead and the other to bring up the rear at a great distance. The baggage (carts loaded with public money and other valuable booty) was placed between them. As they were marching in this order through the defile, not more than ten thousand Thracians of four tribes – the Asti¹⁷, the Caeni¹⁸, some of the Maedi(?)¹⁹ and the Coreli²⁰ – blocked the road

¹⁶ ILIEV 2011, p. 313 followed by BOTEVA 2014, p. 73.

¹⁷ There are no significant varieties in the available codices about that name; see BRISCOE 2008, p. 144 (a).

¹⁸ In the codices are presented the variants ‘Caeni’ and ‘Ceni’; see BRISCOE 2008, p. 144 (b). That tribe is well attested in the region; see DETSCHEW 1957, pp. 221-222.

¹⁹ The ethnonym ‘Madauteni’ is unattested elsewhere; see BRISCOE 2008, p. 144 (c). It can be interpreted as phonetic translation in Latin from the Greek phrase ‘some of the Maedi’ (Μαίδων τινες, attested in Strabo 7.5.12).

²⁰ In most of the available codices the attested form is ‘Cornelii’, but some editors replaced it with ‘Corpili’; see BRISCOE 2008, p. 144 (d). The ‘Coreli’ sounds familiar to ‘Coralli’.

at the narrow point. There then followed a lengthy battle, which is described by Livy. Night was at hand when the Thracians retired from the fight, not to avoid wounds or death, but because they had enough of spoils²¹.

The head of the Roman column encamped outside the defile near the temple Mendidius ('circa templum Mendidium')²² on open ground. The first publishers of Livy changed – without any serious reasons – the name to 'Bendidius' and currently this is the most common reading²³. However, the eventual Greek version of that toponym (Μενδιίδειος) can find an explanation in Conon's information about the nymph Mendeis²⁴ and probably was in connection with Mende, a settlement in the area of the Aenians²⁵. The author of these lines believes that here Livy had in mind a toponym connected with the settlement and/or the nymph.

The following day, having reconnoitred the defile before they moved, they joined the advanced guard. In this battle there was a loss both of baggage and of camp-followers and a considerable number of soldiers had fallen, since there was fighting everywhere along the whole defile. That day they reached the Hebrus (Maritsa) River. Then they crossed the frontiers of the Aenians²⁶ near the temple of Apollo, whom the natives call Zerynthius²⁷.

Some details on the Thracian campaign of Vulso are presented in other passages of Livy²⁸. To Vulso himself are ascribed the following words: 'when the enemy attacked us in a defile hard to pass through, on unfavourable ground, the two divisions of our army, the van and the rear, at the same time surrounded the army of the barbarians which was lingering around our trains, that they

another Thracian tribe, known to Strabo (7.318), Ovidius (Epist. ex Ponto, 4.2.37; 4.8.83), Valerius Flaccus (Argonaut., 5.89) and Appian (Mithr. 293); see ILIEV 2011, p. 311, not. 11.

²¹ Liv. 38.40.9-15.

²² See BRISCOE 2008, p. 146.

²³ There are not known any serious evidences on the cult of Bendis in Thrace from that age, see JANOUCHOVA 2013, p. 100 sq.

²⁴ Con., Narr., 10 – ὡς Σίθων ὁ Ποσειδῶνος καὶ Ὑοσσης, ὁ τῆς Θρακίας χερρονήσου βασιλεὺς γεννᾷ θυγατέρα Παλλήνην ἐκ Μενδηίδος νύμφης.

²⁵ See ΛΟΥΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ 2004, p. 871 with references.

²⁶ Aenos was situated in the Melas gulf, see ΛΟΥΚΟΠΟΥΛΟΥ 2004, p. 875, No. 641.

²⁷ An epithet of Apollo and Artemis, probably delivered from a Thracian place name, see DETSCHEW 1957, p. 184 sq.

²⁸ The Roman general is accused of being unreasonable to pass through the Thracian lands without asking Philip V for assistance, see App., Syr. 43.

killed and captured many thousands on that same day and many more a few days later²⁹. They create an impression of subsequent prosecution of the above mentioned Thracian tribes by the Romans. War booty³⁰ is the possible interpretation of a coin hoard found in Rhodope Mountains³¹. So can be explained – at least partially – the ascertainment of Annius Florus that Vulso³² penetrated in Rhodope and Caucasus³³.

From the failure of Vulso for almost twenty years there are no evidences about conflicts between Romans and Thracians. Something more, there are no available sources of any serious Thracian ambushes near the route from Europe to Asia until the end of antiquity. This fact probably should be explained by the following actions of Vulso himself, or by the subsequent campaigns of Philip V³⁴ and Perseus³⁵ in Thrace.

Thracian communities participated actively in the Third Macedonian war (171-168 B.C.). Contemporaries were impressed by the Odrysian king Kotys, son of Seuthes, who fought on the side of Perseus. After the war he was assigned to the Roman allies³⁶.

²⁹ Liv. 38.49.10-11.

³⁰ Among the losses of Vulso were also the public money, see explicitly App., Syr. 43.

³¹ THOMPSON *et al.* 1973, p. 115, No. 872, from Rakitovo. It is composed of issues of Alexander III (11 tetradrachms and 2 drachms), Demetrius Poliorcetes (1 tetradr.), Lysimachus (3 tetradr.), Seleucus I (2 tetradr.), Antiochus I (1 tetradr.), Seleucus II (1 tetradr.) and Antiochus III (1 tetradr.). There is no other such a treasure with Seleucid coins in Thrace. Usually are found only single coins of not more than one Seleucid king, see for example THOMPSON *et al.* 1973, Nos. 874 (3 tetradr. of Antiochus I and 2 tetradr. of Seleucus III), 853 (1 stater of Seleucus I), 854 (3 tetradr. of Seleucus I), 859 (7 tetradr. of Seleucus I, 1 tetradr. of Antiochus I), 861 (1 tetradr. of Antiochus I), 870 (1 tetradr. of Seleucus I), 871 (1 tetradr. of Antiochus I), 887 (1 tetradr. of Seleucus I), 888 (1 tetradr. of Seleucus I).

³² In some editions the name is 'Piso'.

³³ Flor. 1.39.20 ('Vulso Rhodopen Caucasumque penetravit'). Some editors replace the oronym 'Caucasus' with 'Haemus'.

³⁴ In the available sources are documented campaigns of Philip V against one Amadokos, other campaign against Odrysians, Bessi and Dentheletai and another one against Dentheletai and Maedi. In 179 B.C. Perseus driven out one Abrupolis, king of the Sapaecians, from his lands, see HATZOPOULOS 1983, pp. 80-87 with references.

³⁵ His campaign against Abrupolis, a king in Thrace, was considered among the reasons for the 3rd Macedonian war, see Polyb. 22.18.2; Liv. 42.13.5; 43.40.5; App. Mac. 11; D. S. 29, fr. 36; Paus. 7.10.6.

³⁶ DANOV 1979, p. 93.

After the end of the war with Perseus in 167 B.C. the territory of the old Macedonian kingdom was divided in four merides each of them with republican government³⁷. Undoubtedly, the first of them includes some Thracian areas, but their territorial scope is controversial, due to scarce sources. That republican government lasted for less than 20 years. In 151 B.C. Pseudo-Philip (Andriscus) with the help of some Thracian troops reestablished for a while the Macedonian kingdom. Two years later Macedonia was reconquered by Q. Caecilius Metellus and turned into Roman province. So, some Thracian lands, at least these around the lower stream of Struma river fall under direct Roman rule³⁸.

During more than a century the governors of the province followed the above mentioned strategy of the last Macedonian kings against the regularly invading Thracian tribes. The ancient tradition provides only fragmentary information about Thracian attacks and preventive or punitive Roman campaigns. They had the following sequence:

- 135 B.C. Marcus Cosconius fought successfully against the Scordisci in Thrace³⁹;
- 114 B.C. Gaius Porcius Cato fought unsuccessfully against the Scordisci⁴⁰;
- 113/112 B.C. Gaius Caecilius Metellus Capriarius campaigned in Thrace and was honored with a triumph in 111 B.C.⁴¹;
- 111 B.C. Marcus Livius Drusus fought successfully against the Scordisci⁴²;
- 110-106 B.C. Marcus Minucius Rufus fought successfully against the Thracians and was honored with a triumph for his 'victories over the Besians and other Thracians'⁴³;
- 104 B.C. the Romans defeated the Thracians⁴⁴;

³⁷ KALLET-MARX 1995, p. 11 sq.

³⁸ Some modern scholars restrict their frontiers to the lands between Stymon and Nestos rivers, others extend them to the downstream of Hebrus, see DANOV 1979, p. 99; LOUKOPOULOU 1987, p. 64.

³⁹ Liv., Per. 56; KALLET-MARX 1995, p. 39. Thrace is considered as the arena of some conflicts with the Scordisci, see PAPAZOGLU 1978, p. 297 with references.

⁴⁰ Liv., Per. 63; Eutr. 4.24; Flor. 1.39; Cass. Dio fig. 88; Amm. Marc. 27.4.4.

⁴¹ Eutr. 4. 25; Fasti triumph. a. 111; KALLET-MARX 1995, p. 224.

⁴² Liv., Per. 63; Flor. 1.39; Fest. 9; Amm. Marc. 27.4.10; Iord., Rom., 219; Fasti triumph. a. 110.

⁴³ Liv., Per. 65; Flor. 1.39; Fest. 9; Amm. Marc. 27.4.10; Iord., Rom. 219; Fasti triumph. a. 106. The adversaries of Minucius are listed in FD, 3.1, No. 526; SEG, 41, No. 570 and CID, 2, No. 121a; see a commentary in ILIEV 2011, p. 320; DELEV 2014, p. 170.

⁴⁴ Iul. Obs. c. 43.

- 101-100 B.C. Titus (or Marcus?) Didius annexed some Thracian lands⁴⁵;
- 93-87 B.C. Gaius Sentius Saturninus fought unsuccessfully against the Thracians⁴⁶;
- 89, 87 and 86 B.C. Thracians invaded into Macedonia⁴⁷;
- 85-84 B.C. Lucius Cornelius Sulla ‘cut the Thracians to pieces in several battles’⁴⁸;
- 77-75 B.C. Appius Claudius Pulcherus defeated the Thracians in many battles⁴⁹;
- 73 B.C. in Thrace Gaius Scribonius Curio subdued the Dardani⁵⁰;
- 73-63 B.C. in the course of the Third Mithridatic war some Thracians take part on the side of Mithridates⁵¹;
- 72-71 B.C. Marcus Terentius Varo Lucullus subjugated the Thracians or (after Sallust) the Moesians and conquered the Bessians⁵²;
- 62-58 B.C. Gaius Antonius Hybrida campaigned in Thrace with little success⁵³;
- 59 B.C. Gaius Octavius, the father of Augustus, leading an army in the remote part of Thrace and routing the Bessians and the other Thracians in a great battle⁵⁴.

Information for thinking about the eventual areas of these campaigns provides the coin hoards, whose burial is dated at that time⁵⁵. The attached maps show that in the end of the 2nd century B.C. possible areas of military actions are the Valley of Hebrus River, Rhodope Mountains and the lands to the northeast of

⁴⁵ Flor. 1.39; Fest. 9; Amm. Marc. 27.4.10; Iord., Rom. 219. See also LOUKOPOULOU 1987, p. 74 with commentary on the inscriptions from Knidos and Delos.

⁴⁶ Liv., Per. 70; Oros. 5.18.30.

⁴⁷ Liv., Per. 74, 81, 82.

⁴⁸ Liv., Per. 83. About the Thracians in the army of Sulla see SANTANGELO 2007, p. 46.

⁴⁹ Liv., Per. 91; Fest. 9; Amm. Marc. 27.4.10; Oros. 5.23.17; Iord., Rom. 219.

⁵⁰ Liv., Per. 95; Flor. 1.39; Fest. 7.5; Iord., Rom. 216. See also PAPAZOGLU 1978, pp. 179-183.

⁵¹ App., Mithr. 69.

⁵² Liv., Per. 97; Serv., ad. Aen. 604; Eutr. 6.10; Oros. 6.3.4; Amm. Marc. 27.4.11; Fest. 9. On the discrepancy in the available sources see PAPAZOGLU 1978, pp. 410-413.

⁵³ Liv., Per. 103; Cass. Dio 38.10.3, 51.26.5, 51.72.2.

⁵⁴ Suet., Aug. 94.5; 3.2.

⁵⁵ About the coin hoards as temporary deposits for safe-keeping during times of crisis see GEROV 1980, pp. 361-432.

Haemus (see Figure 2). In these areas is concentrated the majority of the coin hoards. The coin hoards from the 1st century B.C. are found mainly in the river valleys (see Figure 3). The comparison between these two maps shows that most of the coin hoards from the 2nd century B.C. are found in the eastern part of Thrace. A large group of hoards from the 1st century B.C. are concentrated to the north of Haemus. Unfortunately, the imprecise burial dates prevent any assumption for their connection with concrete historical events.

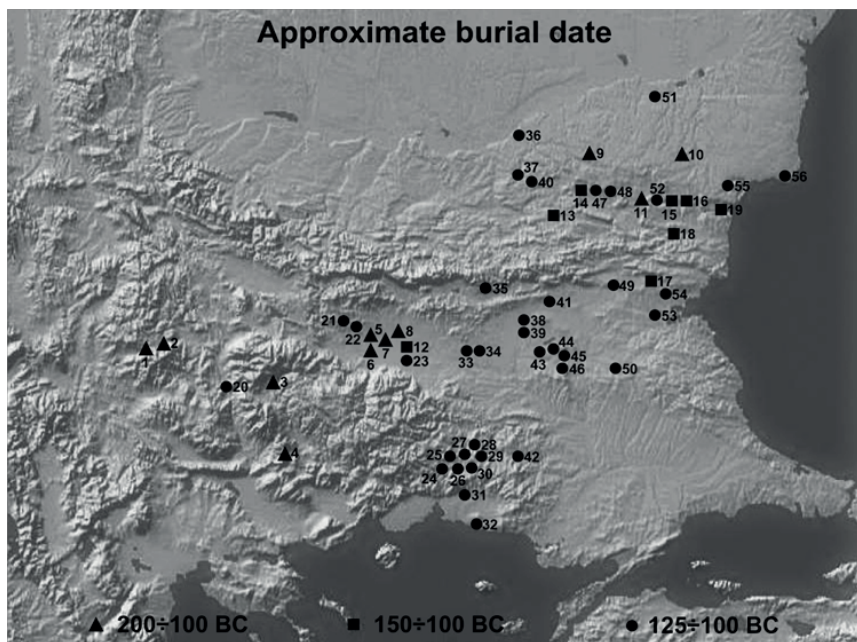


Figure 2. Coin hoards from the 2nd century B.C.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ As listed in THOMPSON *et al.* 1973, No. 947 (1), 946 (2), 945 (3), 948 (4), 944 (5), 949 (6), 950 (7), 951 (8), 943 (9), 941 (10), 942 (11); 906 (12), 904 (13), 902 (14), 903 (15), 905 (16), 899 (17), 900 (18), 901 (19); 952 (20), 912 (21), 914 (22), 911 (23), 939 (24), 940 (25), 913 (26), 938 (27), 932 (28), 937 (29), 936 (30), 935 (31), 934 (32), 908 (33), 909 (34), 915 (35), 896 (36), 929 (37), 917 (38), 918 (39), 928 (40), 920 (41), 910 (42), 919 (43), 921 (44), 922 (45), 923 (46), 926 (47), 927 (48), 933 (49), 924 (50), 930 (51), 898 (52), 897 (53), 925 (54), 953 (55), 954 (56), 907.

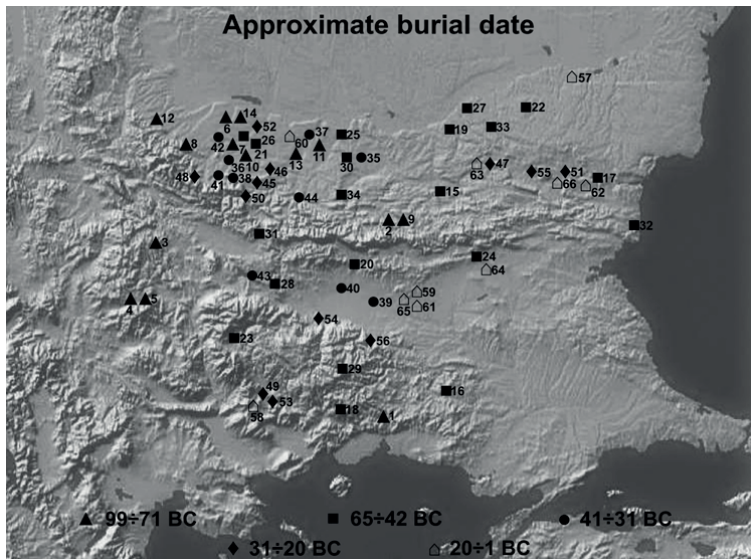


Figure 3. Coin hoards from the 1st century B.C.⁵⁷.

After the middle of the first century B.C. the Thracians played an important role in the Roman civil wars. Some Thracian auxiliaries take part in the army of Pompeius⁵⁸. In the period of the two triumvirates and of Augustus' principate Thrace was turned into client kingdom⁵⁹, but some common principles of the client kingdoms⁶⁰ are attested in Thrace since the end of the Third Macedonian war. Studies on the Thracian coinage show that the 'late Thracian dynastic coinage was influenced by Rome as early as 42 B.C.'⁶¹.

⁵⁷ As listed in PAUNOV – PROKOPOV 2002, No. 127 (1), 17 (2), 120 (3), 114 (4), 113 (5), 63 (6), 5 (7), 7 (8), 18 (9), 103 (10), 130 (11), 55 (12), 110 (13), 62 (14); 118 (15), 106 (16), 54 (17), 61 (18), 100 (19), 108 (20), 11 (21), 112 (22), 101 (23), 111 (24), 27 (25), 70 (26), 58 (27), 131 (28), 123 (29), 51 (30), 41 (31), 44 (32), 40 (33), 68 (34), 50 (35), 26 (36), 122 (37), 132 (38), 102 (39), 115 (40), 59 (41), 71 (42), 48 (43), 67 (44); 119 (45), 1 (46), 2 (47), 29 (48), 45 (49), 47 (50), 43 (51), 117 (52), 105 (53), 30 (54), 65 (55), 129 (56); 77 (57), 25 (58), 109 (59), 39 (60), 116 (61), 53 (62), 3 (63), 126 (64), 52 (65), 64 (66).

⁵⁸ Caes., B. C. 3.4; 3.95.

⁵⁹ On the history of the friendly kings in Thrace see TAČEVA 1995, pp. 459-467.

⁶⁰ Summarized by BRAUND 2014, *passim*.

⁶¹ PAUNOV 2015, p. 279.



Figure 4. Silver drachm of the Thracian king Rhoemetaces I with Augustus, ca. 11-10 B.C.⁶².

On the eve of the battle near Philippi Marcus Brutus campaigned successfully against the Thracians for a little while⁶³. In the battle itself an important role played the brothers Rhaiscos and Rhaescuporis⁶⁴.

In the following decades the Roman activities in Thrace were connected with assistance of their vassal kings in times of revolutions:

- 29-28 B.C. Marcus Licinius Crassus campaigned against Moesians and Thracians⁶⁵;
- 24-23 B.C. Marcus Primus against the Odrysians⁶⁶;
- 19-18 B.C. Marcus Lollius subdued the Bessians⁶⁷;
- 15-11 B.C. Vologaesius make a revolt against Rhaescuporis, the son of Cotys⁶⁸;
- 13-11 B.C. Lucius Piso crushes the Thracians⁶⁹;
- Around 12 A.D. the province of Moesia was organized⁷⁰;
- 21 A.D. Coilaetae, Odrysae and Dii took up arms⁷¹;
- 26 A.D. Poppeius Sabinus crushed the Thracian tribesmen⁷².

⁶² Image source: PAUNOV 2015, p. 282.

⁶³ Liv., Per. 122.

⁶⁴ App., B. C. 4.11.87 sq.

⁶⁵ Liv., Per. 134-135; Fasti triumph. a. 27; Cass Dio 51.23.2-27. See also PAPAZOGLU 1978, pp. 414-430.

⁶⁶ Cass. Dio 54.3.2.

⁶⁷ Cass. Dio 54.20.3.

⁶⁸ Cass. Dio 54.34.5-7.

⁶⁹ Liv., Per. 140.

⁷⁰ TATSHEVA 2004, p. 22. See also BOTEVA 2014, pp. 110-137.

⁷¹ Tac., Ann. 3.38.

⁷² Tac., Ann. 4.46-50.

Besides the listed political events, in the end of the Hellenistic age large-scale reorganization was implemented in the Thracian kingdom. The country was divided into specific ethno-political areas called strategies⁷³. It can be argued that this reform has been performed by Rhoemetaces I (end of the 1st century B.C. – 12/13 A.D.). The reasons for this assumption are at least two: (1) the earliest epigraphic sources for strategists are dated to the second half of the 1st century B.C. and (2) Rhoemetaces reformed after Roman pattern the Thracian army⁷⁴. This was assuredly an important aspect for the smooth annexation of Thrace in 46 A.D.



Figure 5. 'People of the Bessians' – an image in the so called 'Simulacra gentium'⁷⁵.

⁷³ GEROV 1980, p. 229; TATSCHÉVA 2004, p. 33; TATSCHÉVA 2007, pp. 33-47.

⁷⁴ Flor. 2.27. About the significance of the strategies for the Thracian recruits in the Roman army see TACHEVA 2000, p. 32.

⁷⁵ Image source: Inscriptions of Aphrodisias, <http://insaph.kcl.ac.uk/iaph2007/iAph090009.html>.

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