

# REVIEW

of a dissertation thesis on the topic

**“Economic and cultural contacts of northwestern Thrace with the Greek world (5<sup>th</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC)”**

for the acquisition of the educational and scientific degree “doctor” (PhD)

by the regular doctoral student **Denis Danielov Borisov**

Scientific area **2. Humanities**

Professional field **2.2. History and Archaeology**

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Reviewer:

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member of the scientific jury by order of the Rector ПД-38-122/27.02.2024

The dissertation submitted for review contains 181 pages of text, a catalogue of 86 pages, 46 pages of bibliography and 112 pages of appendices, the main part of which is occupied by 92 plates with illustrations of archaeological finds included in the catalogue. The title with the phrases “*economic and cultural contacts*” and “*the Greek world*” it contains is inadequate; in view of the actual contents of the thesis, a title such as “*Ancient Greek and Hellenistic Imports and Influences in the Material Culture of Northwestern Thrace (5<sup>th</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC)*” would have been more suitable. A discrepancy in the formal structuring of the work is evident already in the table of contents on pp. 3–4, and is repeated within the text: the third chapter (which is the largest one in volume) is structured with sections and subsections numbered with Latin and Arabic numerals which are presented in the table of contents, while chapters 2 and 4 have sections marked with subheadings, but these are not numbered and do not appear in the table of contents, and the short chapter five is not structured internally at all, although in terms of the systematic approach adopted in the other chapters it should also have if only one section marked with a subheading (“helmets”). The table of contents also does not present the structure of the catalogue (which has sections with sub-headings at several levels), which would have facilitated access to its contents.

In the **introduction** (pp. 5–14), the aim of the thesis is formulated (on p. 5) as “*a study of the economic and cultural contacts of northwestern Thrace with the Greek world during the Classical and*

*Hellenistic ages through the analysis of archaeological monuments ... and written sources*". Yet neither in the subsequent enumeration of the specific tasks of the dissertation (on pp. 5–6 in the introduction), nor in the rest of the text presented does any actual analysis of written sources appear. The following pages of the introduction present the chronological scope of the study (pp. 7–8: 5<sup>th</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> c. BC) and the territory included (pp. 8–9), which is located within northwestern Thrace, identified with the tribal territory of the Triballi and delineated by boundaries from the river Morava in the west to the rivers Vit in Bulgaria and Olt in Romania in the east, and from the Niš and Sofia plains in the south to the southwestern Carpathian mountains in the north. The area thus demarcated is taken as a static entity, without taking into account the changes in the tribal territory of the Triballi over time (and the animated discussions in the literature on this subject). The assumed eastern boundary (the river Vit) is not explicitly and convincingly justified and does not correspond to the extent of the sites actually included in the survey, which reach and even go beyond the river Osam in the east. On p. 9 the author states, perhaps as a justification for this eastward extension of the surveyed area, that "*the area between the Vit and the Osam is not a part of northwestern Thrace, but the materials found indicate proximity to the Triballi*". It remains unclear exactly what is implied by this statement; nowhere in the dissertation are any general characteristics of Triballian culture discussed, which would allow their clear archaeological differentiation from neighbouring population groups.

The following section of the introduction is devoted to the history of northwestern Thrace from the fifth to the first century BC (pp. 9–14). This short text (four and a half pages) lists, summarily and incompletely, a number of events such as the campaign of Sitalces against the Triballi in 424 BC, the campaign of the Triballi to Abdera in 376 BC, their battle against Philip II in 339 BC, the campaign of Alexander the Great against them in 335 BC, the settlement of Celtic tribes in and around northwestern Thrace in the early third century, the Roman campaigns in the late second and in the first centuries BC. There is no analysis of the sources or of the discussions in modern literature on the many controversial issues in this account; the main sources are merely cited together with selected modern publications, and the account of the events themselves is general and superficial, containing not a few errors and inaccuracies. Thus on p. 9 it is claimed that in 376 BC the Triballi *sacked* the Greek city of Abdera, whereas the sources report only the devastation of its rural territory, from which they were repulsed by the citizens, then a subsequent crushing victory of the Triballi over them; the capturing of the city was prevented, however, by the timely appearance of the general Habrias with an Athenian naval squadron (Diod. 15.36.1–4). Arrian is confused with Appian of Alexandria on p. 10. On pp. 10–11, the account of the expedition of Alexander the Great against the Triballi mentions two successive battles at the River Lyginus, whereas the only existing source (Arr. Anab. 1.2) describes a single one. Further down on p. 11 it is claimed that envoys came to Alexander from the Triballi and the Celts of the Adriatic

area, while Arrian explicitly mentions, even before the Triballi and the Celts, “*the other independent tribes around the Istros*” (Arr. Anab. 1.4.6); with all of them Alexander made treaties of friendship. Again on p. 11, the statement attributed to Serbian authors that the “Lesser” Scordisci had settled in the late fourth and early third c. BC “to the east of the river Timok” seems to be mistaken, as according to Strabo (7.5.12) it was the river Margos (Morava) which separated the “Great” from the “Lesser” Scordisci, i.e. the latter settled in the area east of the Morava, not east of the Timok. The summary statement on p. 12 that “*in the period from the third to the first centuries BC, the territory certainly held by the Triballi and the Scordisci, for which the term Northwest Thrace can be used, was limited to the present northwestern Bulgarian lands, reaching as far as the right bank of the Iskar. Its boundaries to the north and west are defined by the rivers Timok and Danube.*” The main territories inhabited by the Scordisci extend to the west of this region, roughly between the Timok to the east and the lower reaches of the Drava far to the west, therefore their name has no place in the quoted passage; as for the Triballi, it remains unclear why the author limits here their lands only to the river Iskar in the east (the introduction defends an eastern border up to the river Vit, while the dissertation considers practically an even greater territory, reaching as far as the river Osam). As a matter of fact, the publications of Serbian archaeologists often advocate the continued presence of a Triballian population in eastern Serbia throughout the Hellenistic Age, along with the newly settled Autariatae and then the Scordisci. On p. 13, the second campaign of Marcus Licinius Crassus is described (incorrectly) as being directed “*south of the Balkan Mountains*”, although the next sentence (correctly) refers to his actions against the Getae in the north. On the same page, the archaeological site at Kale Krševica in the area of Southern Morava is described as “a Greek settlement”, which also seems inappropriate. Many specific events or more general issues in the history of the Triballi have not found any place at all in this short text: for example, their presumable dependence from the Macedonian Kingdom in the age of Alexander the Great and thereafter, the presence of a Triballian contingent in Alexander’s army mentioned by Diodorus, the relations of the Triballi with the Autariatae and the Scordisci, the disputed theory of their migration to the Dobrudja in the fourth century BC, etc. These problems are all extensively discussed in the literature cited in this section, e.g. in the book of Fanula Papazoglu.

The **first chapter** of the dissertation is devoted to the history of research (pp. 15–42). It contains a chronological inventory of briefly annotated publications on archaeological sites and artefacts related to the main topic of the dissertation as reformulated in the opening lines of this review. An attempt has been made to bring some periodization to the otherwise uniformly presented overview of the publications. The historical studies dealing with the region or the history of the Triballi however are missing here (some of these are cited in the introduction). I would suggest that a different organization of the information presented here would have been more appropriate – for example, an arrangement by sites

and finds, following the history of their exploration and relevant publications (rather than the current formalized section on the sites in the catalogue), and a separate overview of more general studies on the entire region or on individual artifact categories.

The following four chapters (second to fifth) are devoted to the four main categories of archaeological finds as included in the catalogue of the dissertation. These four chapters constitute the bulk of the textual part (131 out of 181 pages). The **second chapter** (pp. 43–62) is dedicated to the pottery. The 25 whole or fragmented ceramic vessels from Northwestern Bulgaria presented in the catalogue are analysed here, divided by shapes (scyphoi, kylixes, cantaroi, lekythes, kraters, amphoriskoi, pyxides, lamps, amphorae). The shape and decoration of the vessels, the existing opinions on their origin (in some cases local imitations are suggested), as well as the probable dating of each individual vessel, based on opinions in the existing literature and on proposed parallels from other regions of ancient Thrace and beyond, are discussed separately for each group. A summary is presented at the end of the chapter (without being separated from the preceding text by a sub-title or otherwise), which discusses the nature of the importation and use of Greek pottery in Thrace, its presence in aristocratic “banquet sets” (often alongside metal vases), the controversial issues surrounding the routes of Greek pottery penetration, and the existence of markets or other redistributive centers in the interior of Thrace. Such a centre for the import of Greek pottery into northwestern Thrace has been suggested, for example, in the ancient settlement at Kale Krševica in southeastern Serbia. The overall conclusion of this chapter is that northwestern Thrace was not permanently integrated in trade relations with the Greek world. No special comment has been made on the fact that the bulk of imported pottery from the region dates to the fifth and fourth centuries BC, while later finds remain extremely rare.

The **third chapter** deals with metal vases, either of presumed foreign origin or locally made under Greek or Hellenistic influence. It is the largest chapter in the whole dissertation (pp. 63–134, or almost 72 pages of text), which corresponds to the significant number of metal vessels included in the catalogue (a total of 110 pieces, representing about 60% of all catalogue numbers). It should be noted that in both the title of this chapter and its text, as elsewhere in the dissertation, the formula “toreutic artefacts” is used inaccurately as a definition of metal vessels in general. *Toreutics* is a term for the artistic decoration of metal objects (not only vases) by engraving, hammering, stamping, and other techniques (from Ancient Greek *τορέβω*, A. Bailly. Dictionnaire Grec-Français: ciseler, graver en creux ou en relief; Liddel-Scott. A Greek-English Lexicon: to work in relief or repoussé). Thus, not all metal vases are works of toreutics (the undecorated ones are not), and even in those that are, this concerns their artistic decoration, not the vessels as such. The metal vases presented in this chapter are divided according to their shapes into types and subtypes (which are repeated in the catalogue): phialae and calyx cups, jugs, drinking cups (including cantaroi, kylixes, rhytons, beakers, kotylai, mastoi), craters, situlae,

lekanides, trays, hydriai, ariballoi, cauldrons, and chytrai. The metal vases presented in the dissertation are discussed in this chapter in a rather versatile and in-depth way. Many parallels are provided. As for their origin and dating, the opinions in the existing literature (often quite contradictory) are amply adduced, without specific arguments and considerations by the author himself. The shapes themselves, their typological hierarchy and their names are taken for granted and are not specifically commented upon. “Каликс купи” seems a poor translation of the English “calyx cups”, the Bulgarian “купа” meaning “bowl”, not “cup” (despite the homophony).

I am not convinced that the parallel treatment of bronze and silver vases in this chapter represents the best solution. Although there are matches in shape between them (in some cases there are matches in shape with ceramic vases as well), bronze and silver have different qualities, require different technology in the production of vessels, which were accordingly made in different workshops and production centres. Consumers also varied, some using expensive bronze and others even more expensive silver vases of the same shape, while some shapes are represented by vessels made only of bronze or only of silver. I miss the logic for exclusion of one of the most representative artefacts from the region, the gold jug from the Mogilanska mound in Vratsa, from discussion in this chapter of the dissertation. Although the figural decoration of this exceptional object is undoubtedly indicative of local Thracian production, with a number of its peculiarities (the general shape of the vessel, the specific elaboration of the handle, the mouth and bottom rims, the palmette frieze and other details) the golden jug from Vratsa falls within the scope of the issues discussed in the dissertation (as a locally made artefact with obvious traces of the adoption of elements from foreign models).

Under a separate subheading, “Banquet sets”, the metal (and in some cases ceramic) vases found in the area and considered to be parts of wine-drinking sets, are briefly listed grouped together on p. 129; by contrast, the subsequent concluding text on pp. 130–134 is not at all separated by a subtitle or otherwise from the preceding text. Problems like the probable origins and routes of penetration of bronze and silver vessels into ancient Thrace (and in particular into the lands of northwestern Thrace) are briefly discussed here, basically by quoting the opinions on these issues in the existing literature. For the probable routes of penetration, the author refers (p. 131) to the maps in the appendix and the concentration of finds reflected in them, but there is no separate map for the finds of metal vases there. The reasoning behind the claim (on p. 134) of more intensive contacts with ancient Macedonia, especially in the second half of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC, in comparison with less pronounced contacts with mainland and island Greece and the Greek cities on the Aegean and Propontic coasts, remains unclear. The final conclusion (similar to that at the end of the chapter on pottery) is that northwestern Thrace was not fully integrated into the network of Greek markets, unlike the rest of ancient Thrace (p. 134).

The **fourth chapter** discusses ornaments and toilet articles and covers pp. 135–167. Some 159

heterogeneous objects falling into this categories of finds (5 of them from the territory of Eastern Serbia, the rest from North-Western Bulgaria) are analysed here and included in the catalogue (under Nos A133–A169, B1–B5). Among them are a gold wreath, a pair of gold earrings, a necklace from electrum with 36 beads and another one of gold with 38 beads and two end pieces, four bronze rings, 17 glass beads and pendants, one amber bead and seven others made of fossil resin (copal), 42 gold appliqués, pendants and figurines, one bronze mirror and two small gold spoons. I would question the presence of the copal beads in the dissertation, and the argument for including the amber bead (pp. 149–150: a single parallel from Potidaea in the Chalcidice peninsula from an earlier period) does not seem convincing enough. For all the disparate finds considered here, parallels and opinions on origins and dating are offered.

The **fifth chapter** (pp. 168–173) discusses the elements of weaponry that are relevant to the dissertation topic. It concerns five bronze helmets of Chalcidian type found in different places in the area between the valleys of the rivers Ogosta and Osam. The assumption that some of them were made in Greek workshops and others in local Thracian workshops under Greek influence (p. 173) is declared without substantive arguments apart from the opinions of other authors cited in the text.

The four chapters (from two to five) which present the archaeological material from the area of study contain overall a thorough and versatile analysis of the artefacts systematised in the catalogue of the dissertation. Many parallels and analogues from other regions of Thrace or from territories beyond are adduced, and numerous opinions in the existing literature on the dating and origin of both the objects included in the study and of their parallels are cited. An independent personal analysis by the author of the arguments and evidence for one or another putative provenance of the individual artifacts or for the dating of both the artifacts themselves and the complexes in which they were found is however largely absent. In some places, after citing existing opinions, the author has also stated his own viewpoint on these matters, without, however, substantiating it with relevant arguments.

A brief summary is provided on pp. 174–181. It reiterates in synthesized form the main content and proposed conclusions of the preceding chapters and briefly discusses two categories of archaeological finds excluded from detailed consideration in the dissertation: coins and metal vessels of Italic origin. The summary conclusion that northwestern Thrace was not fully integrated with the “Hellenic markets”, unlike the rest of Ancient Thrace, is finally reiterated on p. 181. The assumption of the use of riverside routes for the delivery of imported goods delivered by river vessels along the Danube is also repeated here. The claim (on p. 179) about the presence of a local aristocracy placed under Triballian control in the valley of the river Osam, presumably attested by finds like the treasures from Letnitsa and Lukovit which are declared to be products of Triballian workshops, is controversial. Lukovit is located in the catchment area of the Iskar, west of the Vit and very far from the river Osam; the

population of the Osam basin in the fourth century and later remains unidentified, it may have been indigenous (Crobyzian?) or composed of Triballi resettled in the east, and the alleged “Triballian workshops” in which (some of?) the objects from the two treasures were produced remain unsubstantiated.

The catalogue covers pp. 182–267 and is divided into three parts according to the territorial origin of the finds from Bulgaria, Romania or Serbia, which is completely unnecessary and could have been avoided in view of the limited number of finds from Romania and Serbia included and of the fact that their origin is already indicated by a special index attached to each catalogue number (instead of using A for Bulgaria, B for Romania and C for Serbia it would have been clearer to use as indices B, P and C in Slavic or B, R, S in the Latin alphabet). In each of the three parts, the *archaeological complexes* (numbered with Roman numerals) and the *individual finds* are discussed separately, the latter divided according to their material and purpose (in accordance with the chapters in the main text of the dissertation) and by types and sub-types in each such section and numbered with Arabic numerals (in one case with an added letter). The subheadings here unnecessarily end with a full stop and, as already mentioned, are not reflected in the table of contents. It seems to me that it would have been more suitable to present the complexes and the individual finds in two separate catalogues, without a division by countries, and with clear cross-references between them for all the objects originating from the respective archaeological complexes; I have already made my point above that the overview of the complexes would have stood better in the first chapter, merged with that of the explorations and publications. The catalogue of the finds contains a total of 182 catalogue numbers and is diligently and clearly produced, including for each individual object the appellation, material, place of preservation (with inventory number), find location (but without a reference to the catalogue of archaeological complexes), a reference to the illustrations in the appendix, a brief description, dimensions, dating (with a reference to publications) and once again a list of publications of the object itself (often with repetitions in the two lists).

The bibliography adduced on pp. 268–313 includes 13 titles of works by ancient authors, 305 titles in the Cyrillic alphabet, 287 titles in the Latin alphabet, 12 titles in Greek, and 22 Internet addresses. On p. 311, the few titles in modern Greek are introduced with the inaccurate heading “Greek authors”; there are quite a few publications by Greek authors also in the section with Latin titles, while the Greek-language titles include at least one author of non-Greek ancestry (D. Feytmans). It may be noted that the book of Fanula Papazoglu on Central Balkan tribes in the pre-Roman times, fundamental for the history of the Triballi, is cited from the first Serbian-language edition of 1969 and not from the second expanded and enlarged English-language edition of 1978.

The appendix (pp. 314–425, the pages are not numbered) includes 92 plates with illustrations (photographs and drawings) of almost all the artifacts discussed in the dissertation. The illustrations are

of good quality and give a vivid visual impression of the archaeological finds discussed in the dissertation. In contrast, the maps are not very informative; it would have been considerably better to present separate maps by type of finds and by period. Nor are the appended chronological tables particularly useful; they present graphically the specified dating or chronological interval proposed for each individual object as a dot or column of several dots referenced to a time scale.

The text of the dissertation is clear, grammatically correct and of good style. In places there are errors and inaccuracies of a different nature, of which I would like to give a few examples. On p. 9, for example, an error is made in the statement that the treasures of Lukovit and Letnitsa come from the territory between the Iskar and Vit rivers: this is true of Lukovit, but Letnitsa is far to the east, in the valley of the Osam. On p. 60 the name of Ion Glodariu is spelled as “Gladriu” (though correctly elsewhere in the dissertation). On p. 61, the archaeological site of Kale Krševica in the Bujanovac area of Serbia is located “between the valleys of the Vranja and the Southern Morava”; it is actually above the river Krševička about 3.5 km before it flows into the Southern Morava as its right tributary. There is no river named “Vranja” in the immediately vicinity, and the nearest river with a similar name (the Vranská Reka, which flows into the South Morava at the town of Vranje as its left tributary about 10 km north-east of Kale Krševica) is not suitable as an indicator of its location. On pp. 116 and 118 the old Turkish name of the district Asparuhovo in Varna, Ses Sevmes (or Ses Sevmez), is spelled as “Sev Sevmes”. On p. 137 the finds of golden wreaths from Amphipolis, Sevasti in Pieria, Aenea and Cassandra are referred to “the territory of ancient Greece” and separately from the finds listed below as “from the territory of ancient Macedonia”. Actually, all the four finds mentioned in the first paragraph are from the territory of the Macedonian kingdom (at least such as it was in the time of Philip II, which may be indicative in view of the rather general dating of the finds). The ambiguous formula “the Greek world” is carried over from the title to many places in the text of the dissertation, e.g. on p. 181 where “Hellenic wares” found in north-western Thrace are attributed an origin in “various centres: Athens, Rhodes, Cyzicus, Chalkis and Ancient Macedonia”; on p. 182 it is claimed that the catalogue includes “wares of Greek origin or such made under Greek influence”. Given that Ancient Macedonia is explicitly listed among the producing regions, this implies the inclusion of Ancient Macedonia in the “Greek world”, which is controversial (to say the least) and not explicitly argued in the dissertation (e.g. in the introduction).

The dissertation of, Denis Borisov is overall a voluminous study, not only in terms of the quantity of text, the archaeological material collected and analyzed, and the literature used, but also in terms of the scope and complexity of the issues addressed. It contains certain scientific contributions and is the result of considerable amounts of work put in by the author. At the same time, there are not a few weaknesses and shortcomings, some of which have been mentioned in the above text. For example,



quantitative statistics of the finds by category, material, origin and dating are absent – and they could have suggested interesting observations. Even a cursory glance at the maps in the dissertation (which do not give quantitative data on the finds, but only on their locations) reveals clear differences in the latter’s spatial distribution: scarce in southwestern Romania (one site), eastern Serbia (two sites), and the northwestern corner of Bulgaria west of the Ogosta River (two sites), they become more abundant in the east: 10 sites between the Ogosta and the Iskar, seven sites between the Iskar and the Vit, 12 sites between the Vit and the Osam, and two more immediately east of the Osam (the rest of the area between the Osam and the Yantra is not included in the study). This apparent disparity in the distribution of the finds is not noted or commented upon in the dissertation. The same can be said of their chronological distribution: clearly the finds from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to 1<sup>st</sup> centuries BC are inferior both in quantity and quality to those from the Classical and Early Hellenistic periods. I disagree with the author’s suggestion that the relatively higher density of finds in the river valleys delineates trade routes, from which he draws a conclusion on the predominance of imports along the Danube. To me, it suggests only a greater concentration of population, which is natural in the fertile (and less forested) riverside valleys. With the exception of amphora tare (which requires river transport – but which is practically almost absent in the studied area), the finds analysed in this dissertation (pottery and metal vases, helmets and jewellery) could easily have been transported overland, whether as articles of trade, gifts or spoils of war. To the author’s assertion about the absence of evidence in the historical sources for the use of overland routes for trade (p. 178), I would counterpose a little commented passage in the Anabasis of Arrian, according to which when crossing the Haemus in his campaign against the Triballi in 335 BC, Alexander the Great was met on the ridge by many “armed merchants” (τῶν τε ἐμπόρων πολλοὶ ὀπλισμένοι) and local Thracians who rolled heavy carts down the slope against his army (Arr. Anab. 1.1.6).

In conclusion of all said above, and assessing both the positive aspects and the shortcomings of the reviewed dissertation, I give my vote for the bestowal of the educational and scientific degree “doctor” (PhD) to Denis Danielov Borisov.

Sofia, May 31, 2024

Reviewer:

  
(prof. Peter Delev)