

Analyzing the Texts of the Ancient (and not only the Ancient) Authors: Some Methodological Aspects

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Abstract: Along with the archaeological, epigraphical and numismatic material, the texts of the ancient, late-antique and early Byzantine authors provide the needed – though fragmentary – information for reconstructing the Thracian history and culture. These texts have been scrutinized and used by the modern historians of Antiquity for several centuries already and it seems that everything has been said. Still, I dare insist that some methodological aspects of their analyses have never been approached and are in fact badly needed. Following a very short summary of the highlights of the Thracian studies so far, the present paper tries to define two methodological principles to be taken into consideration in future research.

Keywords: endonym, exonym(s), reliability of Thucydides' reports

Ключови думи: ендоним, екзоним(и), достоверност на Тукидид



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1. INTRODUCTION

When back in 1968 Chr. M. Danov published the Bulgarian version of his book "Ancient Thrace"¹, the knowledge of the scholarly community of the pre-19th century studies on this subject was aware of just Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsili's book of 1734² and Felix Cary's one of 1752³. The German version of Danov's book published in 1976, despite some updates⁴, kept these two oeuvres as starting points of the European interest in ancient Thrace⁵. The same picture is reproduced also in otherwise pioneering book of Alexander Fol "Political history of the Thracians end of the 2nd millennium – end of 5th century BC"⁶. New knowledge of the topic emerged thanks to the unique and amazing private collection of old atlases, maps, engravings and books gathered by Dr Simeon Simov, part of which was presented at an exhibition in Sofia, opened on May 19th 1986⁷. Without referring

¹ Danov 1968: 14.

² Marsili 1734.

³ Cary 1752.

⁴ Schachermeyr 1976: VI.

⁵ Danov 1976: 1-2.

⁶ Fol 1972: 13.

⁷ Vanova et al. 1986; Pindikova 2006: 8.

explicitly to it, but undoubtedly hinting to this event, in 1990 Alexander Fol wrote that in 1986 it had become clear that the start of the thracological studies could be re-dated 20 years earlier than previously known⁸. The new name introduced then in the specialized literature was the one of Sigebert Haverkamp, who published in 1736-1737 two volumes of a general history of the ancient and early Medieval world; the second volume includes a section on the history and numismatics of ancient Thracians, but Thrace also appears throughout the detailed report on ancient Macedonia⁹.

Recently a further new name and oeuvre have been highlighted with the statement that the first known so far study on the history of ancient Thrace in fact dates back to the end of the 16th century and belongs to Reinerus Reineccius, who wrote "*Historia Iulia, Siue Syntagma Heroicum*" (1595)¹⁰; there a section of 31 pages is included under the title "Regnum Thracium"¹¹. However, the collection of the remarkable Bulgarian Dr Simeon Simov, has provided us with evidence, that the interest for ancient Thrace predates even the book of Reineccius, as already in 1585 Abraham Ortelius created the map of Ancient Thrace (*Thraciae Veteris Typus*)¹², putting in it a lot of efforts and – obviously – intensive study of the available ancient evidence on the matter.

Thanks to digital technologies it became possible to retrieve many more names of pre-19th century humanitarians who have studied Thracian history and geography, and this is a task which expects its motivated and trained researchers. Especially when we take into con-

sideration that meanwhile some of the codices have been destroyed due to wars in 17th-20th c. Here I am going to mention just two more names in an attempt to start drawing attention to the topic. In chronological order they would be Christophor Heidmann and Georgius Hornius: In 1658 Heidmann published a book, of which chapter XII is devoted to Thrace¹³ and chapter XIII – to Moesia and Dacia¹⁴, while in Hornius' oeuvre of 1666 the author introduces with short reports the Thracian history¹⁵.

Several precisions are needed concerning the contributions of Count Luigi Ferdinando Marsili to the geography of ancient Thrace by introducing information about sites and monuments he has managed to autopsy. The first publication of Marsili's oeuvre concerning these lands appeared in fact already in 1726 in Latin¹⁶; the book of 1734 mentioned by Chr. Danov and Al. Fol, is a French translation. A further reason for the needed precisions is the fact that almost half a century before the book of 1726 (1934) Count Luigi Marsili published in Italian a report on the Thracian Bosphorus (1681)¹⁷, in which he discusses the topography and the geographical peculiarities of this strait, referring even to Polybios and his information about the "temple of Mercurius" in ancient Byzantion¹⁸.

Many further precisions concerning the pre-19th century interest in ancient Thrace are possible and are in fact needed; however, this is not the purpose of this paper. Also, I am not going to discuss here the publications on the matter which postdate 1800, as they have been discussed – though also not exhaustively – elsewhere¹⁹. What is needed in fact here, is to

⁸ Fol 1990: 10; cf. Vanova et al. 1986: 18, no I. 35.

⁹ Haverkamp 1737: 298-316 and 311-316, the latter being without page numbers.

¹⁰ Mitrev, Iliev 2024. Here I would like to thank Prof. DSc Mirena Slavova (Department of Classical Philology at the Sofia University) for introducing to me this publication.

¹¹ Reineccius 1595: 105-136.

¹² Pindikova 2006: 32-33. See also Phillips 1914: 115, no. 26. See here on p. 13.

¹³ Heidmann 1658: 323-347.

¹⁴ Heidmann 1658: 347-357.

¹⁵ Hornius 1666: 122, 144, 147. Special thanks are due to Prof. Dr Alexander Nikolov (Faculty of History at the Sofia University), who drew my attention to the text of this author.

¹⁶ Marsili 1726.

¹⁷ Marsigli 1681.

¹⁸ Marsigli 1681: 26.

¹⁹ Danov 1968: 15-42; Fol 1972: 14-35; Danov 1976: 2-21. See especially Theodossiev 2015: 4-5 for some intriguing information on early excavations of Thracian tumuli.

honour the experts, archaeologists and numismatists (Fig. 1), classicists and historians (Fig. 2), that have devoted their entire academic career to the history and culture of the ancient Thracians and whose achievements formed the basis for the modern studies in the field of Thracology.

periods in general. However, despite the thousands, possibly even hundreds of thousands of publications on such matters, an astonishing fact, firmly documented and clearly traceable, has never been introduced as a situation that should be taken into consideration. This is valid

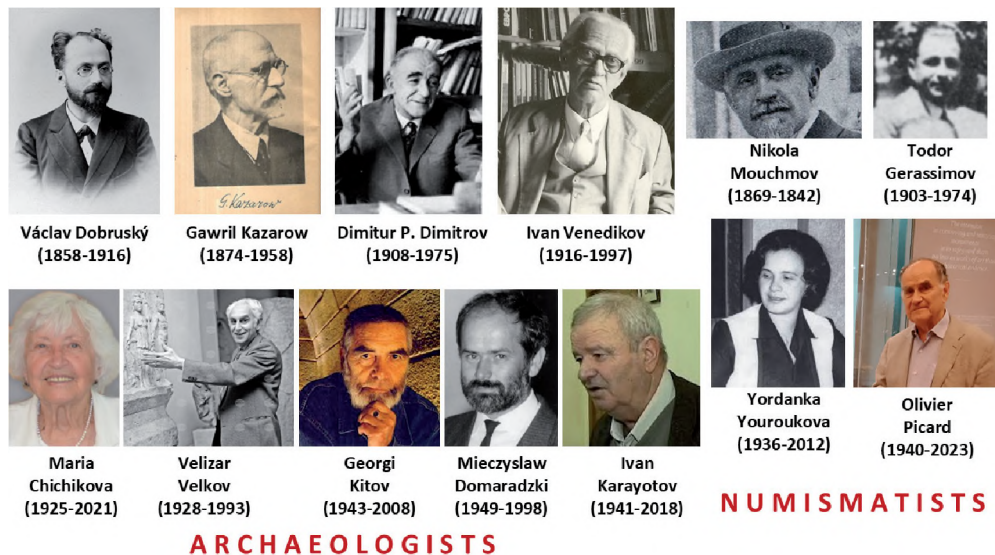


Figure 1. Some numismatists and archaeologists with essential contributions to the study of Ancient Thrace.



Figure 2. Some classicists and historians with essential contributions to the study of Ancient Thrace.

2. THE ISSUE WITH THE ETHNONYMS: ENDONYM, EXONYM(S)

The ethnonyms are among the most often discussed problems in the scholarly community, not only concerning the ancient Thracians but different ethnic groups in different historical

even more for the times, poorly and fragmentarily presented in the sources, as is in fact the situation in the Antiquity (but also the Middle Ages) for almost all ethnic groups mentioned by the ancient (and medieval) authors.

The instructive linguistic situation I am trying to get the attention to, concerns modern-

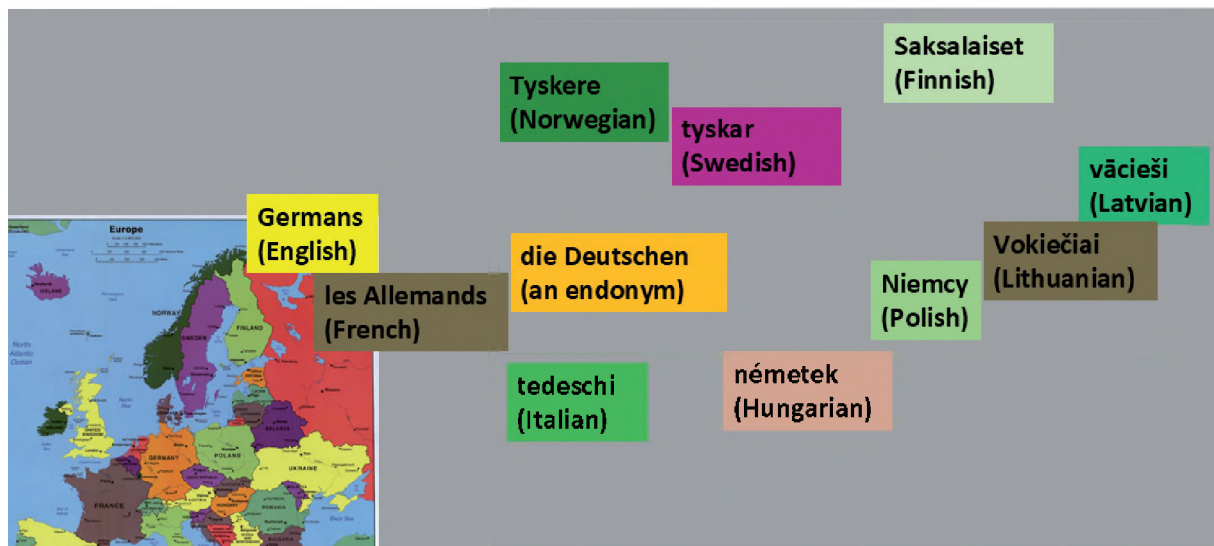


Figure 3. Visualisation of a correlation between endonym and exonyms: the “die Deutschen” case.

day Germans whose endonym is *die Deutschen*, but who has numerous exonyms as shown on **Fig. 3** (in fact they are even more; the examples given in the Figure are just enough to illustrate my point). The appearance of most of these exonyms has a logical explanation, however this does not change the fact of the colourful picture concerning the attested ethnonyms. Nowadays, thanks to the mass media and the printed maps, it is clear all these ethnonyms refer to the same nation; however, we could just imagine what would have happened without these media of universal information. It is more than sure that the experts would have started to search place and space on the map for at least eleven different ethnic groups. No doubt, the ‘die Deutschen / Germans / tedeschi / etc.’ case should function as a warning sign for everybody when dealing with ancient (and medieval) ethnonyms. All above said is – of course – valid also for the Thracians and the numerous Thracian tribal names that have come down to us. Traditionally it is believed that there are ca. 80 Thracian tribal names, reported by the ancient authors. Having in mind the case with the numerous modern exonyms for the Germans, are we allowed at least to ask, how many of these ca. 80 Thracian ethnonyms

referred to just one tribe, or we will continue to view all of them as different Thracian tribes within ancient Thrace?

3. WHAT MATTERS WHEN ASSESSING ANCIENT (AND NOT ONLY ANCIENT) REPORTS? THE CASE OF THUCYDIDES

The above question concentrates the entire basic energy even of our everyday life. However, I am strongly committed to staying solely within the scholarly aspect of the matter.

The author’s chronological and territorial coordinates have already long ago been recognized as important when evaluating a report. His / Her social and political position has also been identified as essential at least since mid-19th century²⁰. The sources, used by the respective author is a third “must” to evaluate, and it is also universally agreed upon.

And, of course, the condition of the respective codices that have come down to us is a fourth “must” already approached to by many experts. Let me remind, that – on the one hand – some ancient texts are available in just one codex²¹, which deprives us from the possibility to check the correctness of the preserved text.

²⁰ For a recent discussion on the matter see e.g. Konaris 2022.

²¹ See e.g. Jackson 1970: 248, n. 1.

On the other hand – some texts have been preserved in many codices and some of them differ from one another greatly in certain parts²² and there are emotional debates which of the versions presents more accurately the original author's idea.

The obligatory need to check the codices and not to rely just on the published ancient sources became clear also while working with Eusebius' *Chronicle* entirely preserved solely in an Armenian translation of which only one copy is available and the Latin translation of Eusebius' *Canons* by Jerome, preserved in eleven codices. As already mentioned in another place²³, Dr Nicolay Sharankov drew my attention to the fact that the different codices of Jerome associate the transformation of the Thracian kingdom into a Roman province with different year within the 206th Olympiad – more codices date the change in the fourth year of the 206th Olympiad²⁴. Although only in three out of eleven the change is dated in the second year of the 206th Olympiad²⁵, the latter is the one universally accepted in the published versions of the Jerome's text, despite the fact that it does not synchronize with all available evidence on the matter²⁶. The incorrectness of this approach when publishing Jerome's text is evident also by the fact that the Armenian translation of Eusebius' *Chronicle* dates the birth of the Roman province of Thracia in the third year of the 206th Olympiad²⁷, i.e. in the time of AD July/August 47 – June/July 48, which is in full accord with the information one could extract from the available parts of Tacitus' *Annales* and Cassius Dio's *Roman history*²⁸. This would mean that

due to incorrect publications of the Jerome's codices for almost century and a half the transformation of the Thracian kingdom into a Roman province has been wrongly dated to either AD 45 or AD 46. This is really a pity, as back in mid-19th century this fateful for the Thracian lands change was dated to AD 47²⁹, but this relatively correct dating remained without followers in the centuries to come. Nowadays the good news is that thanks to the digital era, the obligatory need to check the codices and not to rely just on the published ancient sources, becomes achievable.

The fourth "must" aside, despite the long-lasting universal agreement on the first three elements of the assessment, there are huge differences in approaching some of the ancient authors. Among them Thucydides has a very special place, being approached and "measured" quite controversially³⁰. And this is fully understandable, due to the huge literature published on his personality and his oeuvre³¹; in 2018 even the First International Academic Conference "Thucydides the Athenian" was held in Athens (Greece)³². Thus, we have Karl Popper's definition of Thucydides as 'greatest historian, perhaps, who ever lived'³³. Of course, we must have in mind that this *laudatio* comes from the author of another very influential book, 'The Poverty of Historicism'³⁴, still there can hardly be a doubt that this definition was really meant as a praise, even though followed by the statement "But however successful he was in making sure of the facts he records, and however sincere his efforts to be impartial, his comments and moral judgements represent an interpreta-

²² See e.g. *Hdt* V.16.1 which in some codices includes three Thracian ethnonyms (the Doberes, the Agrianes and the Odomanti), while in other codices these three names are missing.

²³ Boteva-Boyanova 2021: 15.

²⁴ Schoene 1866: 153.

²⁵ Helm 1956: xlvii.

²⁶ Boteva-Boyanova 2021; Boteva 2022.

²⁷ Schoene 1866, 152; Karst 1911: 214–215.

²⁸ Boteva-Boyanova 2021: 11–14; Boteva 2022: 46.

²⁹ Migne 1866: 449.

³⁰ See for example the insightful review of J. P. Euben on 1984 W.R.Connor's book on Thucydides, strongly influenced by the Vietnam War (Euben 1986).

³¹ See e.g. Rengakos, Tsakmakis 2006: 839–882; Balot, Forsdyke, Foster 2017; Nývlt 2018; Low 2023.

³² Marinatos, Pitt 2022.

³³ Popper 2013: 169.

³⁴ Popper 2002.

tion, a point of view; and in this we need not agree with him"³⁵. Different attitude is championed by the esteemed French historian of Antiquity Nicole Loraux, who wrote back in 1980 'Thucydide n'est pas un collègue'³⁶. Harsher critique was published back in 1885, when Herman Müller-Strübing insisted that Thucydides wrote a "martialisch-didaktische epopöe (...), an die wir durchaus nicht die forderung historischer treue (...) stellen dürfen"³⁷.

As is well known and often mentioned, however not properly discussed, Thucydides was personally involved in some of the events he wrote about, having failed in his public tasks and because of this he was exiled by his compatriots. He spent 20 years in exile, and being in exile, started writing his work on the Peloponnesian War. Moreover, he was exiled by the Athenians, because he failed to secure for his polis the control over Amphipolis and accordingly, the control over the gold and silver mines in Pangaion. However, he did not fail to keep the hold of his own mine in the same region

(Thuc. IV.105.1) – a situation very seldomly discussed in the historiography.

We will remain ignorant of how he obtained these mines³⁸; also, the question arises whether the security of his own mines was Thucydides' main priority while in the region of Amphipolis, where he was supposed in fact to protect the Athenian public interests. Sentenced to exile because he failed protecting these interests, Thucydides devoted his time in Thrace while in exile to write his 'History of the Peloponnesian War' obviously as an active participant in the contemporary events but also – beyond any doubt – as an attempt to regain the respect of his compatriots. With all these circumstances in mind, I personally opt to give support to the popular skepticism concerning the historicity and complete truthfulness of Thucydides³⁹. There are a real number of strange sounding pieces in his narration, that should expect caution in trusting it, despite his real achievement of revealing the logic of the historical process and the causality.

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³⁵ Popper 2013: 169.

³⁶ Loraux 1980. Thanks are due to Dr Alienor Rufin Solas, who drew my attention to the English version of this study (see Loraux 2011).

³⁷ Müller-Strübing 1885: 289.

³⁸ Tzvetkova 2008: 144; Plant 2016: 128-129.

³⁹ See e.g. Irwin 2023.

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Методологически аспекти на анализа на антични (а и не само антични) автори

Дилиана Ботева-Боянова

Изследването представя три аспекта на методологическата работа в изследванията за Древна Тракия, които имат и по-широко принципно значение извън конкретните географски измерения. В първата част са представени възможностите за проследяване на развитието на научните знания, станали възможни благодарение на новата дигитална среда. Направени са съответно отделни допълнения и уточнения по отношение на интереса към земите на Древна Тракия преди началото на XIX в. Втората част е съвсем лаконична и акцентира върху необходимостта от висока осторожност при анализа на етноними, като се отчитат особеностите на ендонимите и екзонимите. Третата част визира от една страна необходимостта от задължителна автопсия на кодексите, тъй като често при печатното им издаване са допускани сериозни и необосновани промени, а от друга страна е фокусирана върху оценката на Тукидид като личностна позиция и съдба, и – съответно – тяхното неизбежно отражение върху характеристиките на неговата „История на Пелопонеската война“.

