

Nikos Chausidis

Skopje, Macedonia

'River People' of the Northern Black Sea and Macedonia

Based on archaeological, linguistic and other facts, contemporary science finds the nucleus of Indo-Aryans in the Northern Black Sea and the North Caspian area. It was from these areas, that their culture and population spread to south in the 2nd millennium BC and established the culture of Iranians in Iran and that of the Indian Aryans in India. There are indications for expansion of this complex towards the Balkans, in the historical sources witnessed as 'Cimmerian overrun'. Referred to as the oldest name of Thrace in the sources, the toponym Aria (*Ἀρία*) furthermore relates to it. Late Bronze and Early Iron Age Thraco-Cimmerian finds could be considered as archaeological indicators of this expansion.

We believe that in addition to these arguments, ethnonyms and toponyms with the root *sind-* should also be considered. In the Northern Black Sea they could be found under the ethnonym Sindi (*Σίνδοι*), referred to as Indi (*Ἰνδοί*) by Herodotus and as 'Indian people' by other ancient sources. Following the theories of P. Kretschmer, O. N. Trubachyov associates the Indo-Aryan *sindu* – river/great river, referring to the Kuban River, once probably called **Σίνδος*, of which **sinda(va)* signifying river people was derived, which in Indo-Aryan would sound like *sindhu* and as *hindu* in Iranian. Analogously, as *Sinu* (reduced of *Sindhu*), also sounded the Scythian (i.e. Pre-Scythian) name of Tanais River (Don). In the Kuban region, ancient authors located 'Sindian Scythia', referred to as 'old, i.e. primordial Scythia' by Herodotus. A tomb stone found at Taman Peninsula with an inscription 'India' (*Ἰνδίη*) contributes towards these analyses, denoting the name of the deceased. According to Trubachyov, some sources also mention Sindi along Danube. In Macedonia, Sindi as ethnonym can be found through several ethnonyms and toponyms containing *sinth-* i.e. *sith-* given in the ancient written sources: 'Land of Sitonia' (*Σιθωνία*) in the middle of the Chalkidiki Peninsula; Sithones tribe, along with Mygdonians being part of Edoni kingdom; town of Sindos (*Σινδός*) in Mygdonia in Thermaic Gulf; Sindonaioi tribe with no clearly determined location, which some researchers associate with Sindos and its inhabitants; toponym and ethnonym *Sinti/Sintia/Σιντική* in the lower Strymon; Sintians who populated the island of Lemnos; town of Sintia in Dardania (near the northern borders of Macedonia). We suggest interpretation of evident resemblance of toponymes and ethnonymes of both areas in three manners: (a) as migrations of the Sindi from the Northern Black Sea to Central

Balkans (in the context of the aforementioned processes); (b) as movement of some other Indo-Aryan ethnicities who, settling in Macedonia, would call themselves Sindi due to the location of a nearby river or region rich in rivers; (c) as migration of peoples containing *sind-* in their names in the region surrounding the Black Sea and Macedonia from some other common point of origin, perhaps on the Danube shore. In favor of these interpretations are the Indo-Aryan parallels of some other Macedonian hydronyms: Axios (from *akši* – black), its contemporary name Vardar (from *vari* – water; **kali-vardi* – black water) which coincide the most frequent epithet of this river nowadays ‘muddy Vardar’ and its greatest tributary Crna Reka (literally Black River).

These parallels and hypotheses have an archaeological background via the similar elements found in Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age cultures in both regions. This mainly refers to the bronze jewelry with an emphasized cult purpose which in the Northern Black Sea can be found within Coban culture and in the so-called Macedonian bronzes from the Early Iron Age in Macedonia. Many researchers have pointed to the resemblance of these objects, interpreting it with the sprees and migrations of the aforementioned Thraco-Cimmerian population. Cultural relations between the Northern Black Sea and Macedonia could also be traced in the previous periods through similar burial rites: (a) decedents buried in contorted position, males placed on their right hips, while females on their left hips; (b) killing the widow during her husband’s burial and thus burying her in the same grave. Furthermore, we refer to the similar stone stellae from the Northern Black Sea (Nataljevka, Belogradovka, Pervomaevka...), Romania (Dobruja), Bulgaria (Kalishte, Ezerovo, Plachidol) and Macedonia (Ulanci).

The association of these populations and the river is also given in terms of religion. In the Iliad, Paeonians, predominant inhabitants of Macedonia in the 1st millennium BC, are led by Pyraechmes, the grandson of Axios, mythical character who is a personification of the biggest river in Macedonia by the same name (today Vardar). Axios will also try to help the other Paeonian leader, Asteropaeus, in his duel with Achilles. Paeonians, but not only them, presented the fertile power of the rivers through an anthropomorphized water bull which would be incarnated as Dionysus Tauros in later ancient traditions. His presence in Macedonia could be traced via two ancient toponyms: (1) Tauriana, the ancient name of Lake Dojran and (2) Tauresion, an ancient settlement, most probably located in the vicinity of Skopje near the village of Taor, on the banks of Vardar River. The great significance of the mythical character from the Northern Black Sea by the same name could be traced both through the ethnonym Tauri and the toponym Taurica/Tauris which originally referred to the southern shores of Crimea.