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ROMAN RULE IN THE ODRYSIAN KINGDOM

-Abstract-

This study focuses on the imposition of Roman domination upon the Odrysian Kingdom, highlighting the difficulties of the Romans in imposing their authority. The imposition of the Roman direct control over the Odrysian Kingdom was not easy. Given their large number, their bravery in battles, the Odrysians were a remarkable military force.

Keywords: Thrace, Roman conquest, Odrysian Kingdom, Roman province, client king

STĂPÂNIREA ROMANĂ ÎN REGATUL ODRYS

-Rezumat-

Acest studiu tratează impunerea dominației romane în Regatul Odrys, evidențiind dificultățile întâmpinate de romani în impunerea autorității lor. Impunerea controlului direct al romanilor asupra Regatului Odrys nu s-a făcut deloc ușor. Prin numărul lor mare, prin vitejia dovedită în lupte, odrysii reprezentau o forță militară incontestabilă.

Cuvinte cheie: Tracia, cucerire romană, Regatul Odrys, provincie romană, rege client

After Macedonia and Greece became Roman provinces, in 148 and 146 BC respectively, the southern Balkan Peninsula has been transformed by the Romans in a strong basis from which offensive operations could start against the free lands of the Thracians. Since 167 BC, the towns on the west of Maritza River were under the Roman rule, because, from an administrative point of view, this land belonged to Macedonia. When, in 133 BC, the Pergamon Kingdom was taken over by the Romans, the entire Thracian south coast virtually passed into Roman hands.

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Within the mountains of Thrace, the population opposed armed resistance for a long time and many Roman commanders were often forced to fight fiercely against the Bessi, Dentheletae, Maedi and Triballi, in order to protect the Roman interests in the Balkan Peninsula.

Around 100 BC, there was a king called Kotys (100-87 BC) in the Odrysian lands, whose capital is likely to have been Bizye¹. As the Thracian tribe of the Astae was located in this region, historians speak of an Odrysian-Astic dynasty, whose first representative is Kotys. Sadalas I (87-57 BC), who gave general Sulla assistance against king Mithradates VI of Pontus in 87 BC, was probably his son.

During the Mithridatic Wars, the Thracians adopted different positions. While some, like Sadalas I went over to the Romans, others fought against Roman expansion. Maedi, together with other tribes, undertook raids into the Roman province of Macedonia, since the time of the first Mithridatic War (89-84 BC). A Roman counterattack followed, during which Sulla plundered the land of the Maedi on the Struma River². During those clashes between the Romans and the Thracian tribes, the Roman armies went several times in the lands of the Lower Danube. In this respect, we must mention the campaign undertaken by the governor of Macedonia, M. Terentius Varro Lucullus, in the years 72-71 BC, during which he conquered the cities Philippopolis, Cabyle and Uscudama³ and also the defeat of another governor of Macedonia, C. Antonius Hybrida in 61 BC, in the north-east regions of the Balkan Mountains⁴.

King Sadala I is succeeded by Cotys II (54-48 BC), known from Cicero's speech against Piso⁵, who will send his son, the future king Sadala II (48-42 BC), to support Pompey in his conflict with Caesar.

Sadalas II's reign is important especially because after his death, the Odrysian-Astic dynasty lost the power of the kingdom and the Sapaeian dynasty took the power. The princes Rhascas and Rhascuporis came to lead the kingdom. The fact that these two princes are of Sapaeian origin is proved by several arguments: Strabo presents Cotys, the Rhoemetalces' son, as Sapaeian⁶ and Tacitus's narrative shows that the dynasty was not popular among the Odrysians⁷. In addition, the name Rhascuporis does not appear among Odrysian kings and this

¹ Th. Mommsen, *Epigraphische und numismatische Schriften*, I, Berlin, 1913, p. 300.

² M. Oppermann, *Tracii între arcul carpatic și Marea Egee*, București, 1988, p. 160.

³ Eleonora Salomone Gaggero, *Relations politiques et militaires de Mithradate VI Eupator avec les populations et les cites de la Thrace et avec les colonies grecques de la Mer Noire occidentale*, in *Pulpudeva* 2 (1976), p. 299.

⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁵ Cicero, *Piso* 34.

⁶ Strabo 12.3.29.

⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 3.38.

can be an argument to support the idea that the Thracian king was not part of the Odrysian dynasty.

After the defeat of Pompey, Caesar forgave Sadala for supporting his opponent⁸ and later Brutus overtook the territory of Sadala, helped by a prince of the Sapaeian dynasty called Rhascuporis. Sadala is mentioned in the historian Cassius Dio's writings, which states that the young king died before the year 42 BC, leaving his kingdom to the Romans⁹. Another information, given by Appian, indicates that in 42 BC a Thracian prince was assassinated¹⁰. His widow, Polemocratia, entrusts his son, whom she considered in danger, to Brutus, surrendering her husband's fortune to him at the same time and Brutus promises that he will recover the throne of Thrace for him¹¹.

Although at first sight the two historical sources seem to refer to Sadala II and his wife, Margarita Tacheva is of another opinion¹². In his opinion, the leaving of the widow who tries to save her son and fortune and the fact that she could not find another refuge in the capital Byzantium are evidence that the Sapaeian dynasty already took the rule of the kingdom. Perhaps, in this position, Rhascuporis helps Brutus in his conflict with the Bessi. Tacheva also believes that Polemocratia can not be identified with the widow of king Sadala II, but rather with his sister, whose husband was killed in 42 BC¹³.

After the battle of Actium (31 BC), M. Licinius Crassus was appointed as governor of Macedonia. He would manage to subordinate to the Roman rule the entire right bank of the Danube¹⁴. At the same time, the administration of the national sanctuary of Dionysus was withdrawn to Bessi and entrusted to the Odrysians, who were faithful to the Romans (year 25 BC). Under the rule of the Odrysians were also placed the Greek cities on the Black Sea coast¹⁵. The fact that the administration of the sanctuary of Dionysus was given to the Odrysian Kingdom caused a conflict among the Thracians and a rebellion of the Bessi against the Odrysian princes, broke out in 15 BC. King Rhoemetalces could hardly handle this situation and his nephew was killed in these confrontations¹⁶.

⁸ Caesar, *Civil War* 3.4.

⁹ Cassius Dio, 47.25.

¹⁰ Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.75.

¹¹ Appian, *Civil Wars* 4.75.

¹² Margarita Tacheva, *On the Genealogy of the Last Kings of Thracia*, in *Studia in honorem Chr. Danov*, 1985, p. 412.

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 414.

¹⁴ Cassius Dio 51.23-26.

¹⁵ Th. Mommsen, *Istoria romană*, IV, București, 1991, p. 17.

¹⁶ Cassius Dio 54.34 mention the murder of Cotys's son Rhascuporis in the conflict with Vologaisis but Metodi Manov, *Who was Rhascuporis Killed in 11 B.C.?*, in *Proceedings of the Eighth International Congress of Thracology. Thrace and the Aegean*, Sofia, 2000, p. 628, considers that the historian made a confusion due to repetition of the same name, and that it is Cotys, son of Rhascuporis, and not the reverse. The statement is made in connection with another event held in 11 BC, in which a Thracian prince called Cotys died.

With Vologaises, a priest of the Bessian sanctuary picked up by the Odrysian Kingdom, as leader, and armed and disciplined after the Roman model, the insurgents will be defeated with much difficulty by the Roman army arrived to support the Odrysian king Rhoemetalces. The command of Moesia, established on the "Thracian shore" on this occasion or shortly after these events, will disintegrate the cohesion of the Thracian population, separating the tribes from the left bank of the Danube from those related in the south of the Haemus¹⁷. Thus, the Roman domination in the land of the Lower Danube was consolidated.

After the establishment of the Principate, no other kings of the southern Thracians were remembered, except for those of the Odrysian Kingdom, the only kings recognized by Augustus after their becoming vassals of Rome. That measure was probably necessary since in the 1st AD century no Roman legions stationed along the Lower Danube and the Danube frontier defence of the empire should be provided by the Thracian vassals. Thus, in the second half of the government of Augustus, the king Rhoemetalces I ruled the whole Thrace as a vassal king of Rome¹⁸.

The position of the Thracian aristocracy was characterized by unconditioned loyalty to the suzerain and obvious leanings to Roman customs. The kings were generally loyal performers of the Roman political directives, trying however to maintain a minimum autonomy¹⁹. This situation determined a quarrel among their compatriots, determined to fight for national independence. The great Thracian insurrection in years 13-11 BC is firstly directed against king Rhoemetalces and his brother and co-regent Cotys, who loses his life on this occasion²⁰. Rhoemetalces skilfully used his position as a "client king" of Rome and he succeeded in keeping the power in the territories occupied by Rome and placed under his control as well as in the territories ruled by his predecessors and inherited by him. It is not exactly known when he received the royal title. It is possible that this happened after the Romans defeated the revolt from Pannonia (6 AD). Rhoemetalces's participation is mentioned by Cassius Dio, without having the royal title mentioned²¹.

After the death of Rhoemetalces I, Augustus divided the state between his brother Rhascuporis and his son Cotys²². It was probably a compromise between the Thracian tradition, according to which the legitimate successors were the agnates, and the claims of the direct heirs which were increasingly stronger. From

¹⁷ Th. Mommsen, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 17.

¹⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.64.

¹⁹ Gianfranco Gaggero, *Nouvelles considerations sur les dynastes du I^{er} siècle de n. ère*, in *Pulpudeva* 3 (1980), p. 305.

²⁰ Th. Mommsen, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 103.

²¹ Cassius Dio 55.30.

²² Tacitus, *Annals* 2.64.

Tacitus's account, it is clear that the division was made at the expense of Rhascuporis²³. Cotys, the king Rhoemetaces' son, was more Roman than Thracian and he obtained the hand in marriage of a relative of the imperial house, a great granddaughter of Antony, named Antonia Tryphaena²⁴. Perhaps this is why he received, at the division the kingdom, the most fertile lands, the civilized cities and lands near the Greek colonies, while the wildest regions, less cultivated, in the Rhodope Mountains, were given to Rhascuporis. Even the natures of the two kings were just like the territories they received: Cotys was "gentle and friendly", while Rhascuporis had a "fierce, greedy and unsociable" character²⁵. Although initially between the two kings was a "pretended understanding" due to fears that the Roman emperor would not tolerate a conflict between the two Thracian kings²⁶, after the death of Augustus, Rhascuporis starts a series of incursions in the territory of his nephew in order to restore the Thracian unity²⁷. Cotys reports his uncle's aggression to emperor Tiberius (14-37 AD), which attracts his capture and then his assassination by Rhascuporis²⁸. Antonia Tryphaena's request that the murder of her husband be punished is followed by the Roman Senate's decision to exile king Rhascuporis to Alexandria, where, according to the official version, he is killed during an escape attempt²⁹.

Analyzing the information provided by Tacitus, we find that Rhascuporis represented a danger not only to his grandson's possession, but also to the Roman rule in Thrace. Even before the murder of Cotys, Rhascuporis began the formation of an army under the pretext of protecting the borders against Scythians and Bastarnae's incursions, but, in fact, planning a war against the Romans³⁰. The same author mentions, moreover, Antistius Vetus of Macedonia, exiled by Tiberius in 21 AD for his involvement in Rhascuporis's plans, which aimed at a war against the Roman Empire³¹.

On the other hand, the attention that the Romans paid to the situation in Thrace and their desire to resolve the conflict with Rhascuporis are proven by the nomination of Pomponius Flaccus as governor of Moesia, based on the friendship he had with the Thracian king. At that time, he was probably the most suitable to

²³ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.64.

²⁴ Margarita Tatcheva, *The Last Thracian Independent Dynasty of the Rhascuporids*, in *Studia in Honorem G. Mihailov*, Sofia, 1995, p. 465.

²⁵ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.64.

²⁶ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.64.

²⁷ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.64.

²⁸ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.67.

²⁹ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.67.

³⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.65.

³¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 3.38.

solve the problem³². The double assassination is followed by a new division of Thrace, between the son of Rhascuporis, Rhoemetalces II, who did not approve of his father's actions, and Cotys' underage sons³³.

Emperor Tiberius will use the divisions in the ruling house to send a Roman governor in Thrace in year 19 AD³⁴. Titus Rufus Trebellenus was sent as legal guardian of the underage princes³⁵ who will be educated in Rome³⁶. Not only the Thracians sent their sons to be educated in Rome. We have the example of Ariarathes IV, king of Cappadocia, who sent his son, the future king Ariarathes V, to Rome to receive an education³⁷. The purpose of their stay is said to have been specifically academic: to learn to speak and write Latin. But they also made many Roman connections, which they sought to exploit upon their return home. On the other hand, we must note that the situation was in the advantage of the Romans. Even though these princes were usually appointed *amici populi Romani* they were, in fact, potential hostages of Romans, who were a guarantee of the good relations between Rome and the client kingdoms. We must not overlook the fact that, besides granting the title of *amicus populi Romani*, in special cases, the granting of Roman citizenship to some faithful leaders is practiced.

Such a situation exists in Thrace. It is the Latin dedication of one M. Acculeius in honour of Rhoemetalces II who gives him the name C. Iulius. It seems that the king was a Roman citizen and derived his citizenship from a grant of

³² Tacitus, *Annals* 2.66. Pomponius Flaccus, a veteran of campaigns and given his close friendship with the king all the more appropriate to deceive him, was placed, mainly for that reason, in charge of Moesia.

³³ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.67.

³⁴ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.67.

³⁵ After the death of king Cotys, his sons, Cotys, Roemetalces and Polemo were put under the protection of the Romans and grew up with future emperor Gaius. This was to their advantage, because, after Gaius come to power, Roemetalces becomes king of Thrace and Cotys king of Armenia Minor. Information is provided by Cassius Dio 59.12. The same author says that Polemo receives from Gaius *τὴν λατψαν ἀρχήν*, probably consisting of Pontus and some parts of Bosphorus. Also, Cassius Dio 60.8 says that emperor Claudius gives Bosphorus to Mithradates VIII, a descendant of Mithradates the Great, giving, in turn, to Polemo a part of Cilicia. D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor to the End of the Third Century After Christ*, Princeton, 1950, p. 546-449 and Anthony A. Barrett, *Polemo II of Pontus and M. Antonius Polemo*, in *Historia. Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte* 27 (1978), p. 437-448, believes that Cassius Dio made a confusion between Polemo, king of Pontus, and M. Antonius Polemo, king and high priest in Cilicia, thus resulting that Polemo, Cotys' son, did not have any control in Cilicia.

³⁶ Cf. D. Braund, *Rome and the Friendly King: the Character of the Client Kingship*, New York, 1984, p. 11: "There was an intimate connection between education at Rome and succession at home". It became, therefore, a custom, especially after the battle of Pydna, for the Romans' clients to send their sons to Rome to be educated in the Roman spirit.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 9.

Caesar or Augustus. But since Rhoemetalces II reigns from 19 to 26 AD, it is probable that he had inherited his citizenship from a predecessor to whom Caesar or Augustus conferred it³⁸. Given it is the only mention of this kind, it is difficult to make clear assumptions about when the Thracian king received Roman citizenship. We can say, however, that the granting of citizenship (*tria nomina*) clearly means granting a certain status to that king, which is included among imperial elites with a special status. Sending a Roman legal guardian for the Thracian princes meant that local elites no longer gave the Romans trust and are proof of the Romans' intent to consolidate the control over the Thracian kingdom, this way preparing the annexation of the state. The Roman habit of sending a guardian for underage kings was not something new for Rome. Long before, M. Aemilius Lepidus, a former consul and pontiff, was sent as guardian for Ptolemaeus Epiphanes' children, a king of Egypt who died in 181 BC³⁹.

The sending of Trebellenus causes an uprising of the Thracians against the double exploitation of Rome and of the local aristocracy⁴⁰. The event is narrated by the historian Tacitus who mentions: "As for Thrace, since the division of the kingdom between Rhoemetalces and the children of Cotys, who, due to their tender age were under the guardianship of Trebellenus Rufus, it was divided against itself, not being used to our rule, and blamed both Rhoemetalces and Trebellenus for allowing the wrongs of his countrymen to go unpunished. The Coelaetae, Odrysians and Dii, powerful tribes, took up arms, under different leaders, all on a level in their obscurity. This hindered them from uniting in a formidable war"⁴¹. The new governor of Moesia, Publius Vellaeus, managed to suppress the uprising with relative ease because "a clash in which merely half-armed stragglers were slaughtered without bloodshed on our side"⁴² did not even deserve to be called a battle or even a skirmish, but nevertheless, Thrace was far from being pacified. In 25 AD, when the Romans government ordered recruitment in Thrace, the contingents refused to serve outside the country, triggering a new uprising, this time defeated by Poppaeus Sabinus⁴³. The direct government under the guardianship form lasted in Thrace until the death of Emperor Tiberius.

³⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 40.

³⁹ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁰ Tacitus, *Annals* 3.38.

⁴¹ Tacitus, *Annals* 2.67. Tacitus here resumes the Thracian narrative from 2.67.2–3, where the guardian's name was given as Trebellenus. By Thrace is "not being used to our rule" Tacitus probably means that the Thracians failed to appreciate the severity with which Rome would respond to revolt.

⁴² Tacitus, *Annals* 3.39.

⁴³ Tacitus, *Annals* 4.46.

For some time, the Odrysian Kingdom successfully fulfilled the task of being the defender of the Roman Danube frontier, but, due to a dynastic crisis and to the increasing barbaric threat, Rome would impose direct control over the Thracians, ordering the formation of province Thrace under the rule of emperor Claudius (year 46 AD).

As a conclusion, we may say that the imposition of direct control over the Thracians was not easy. The last of the Odrysian kings, Rhoemetalces III (38-45 AD), had been raised in Rome as a companion of the future emperor Gaius⁴⁴. But the Thracian nation did not share the Roman inclinations of the ruling class and the Roman government was gradually convinced that the shaky throne of vassals, maintained only by means of countless interventions of the protective power, was harmful both for Romans and for the country itself.

⁴⁴ Th. Mommsen, *op. cit.*, 1991, p. 103.