

Style and Subject Matter in Native Thracian Art

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TO THE PEOPLES of civilized societies like the classical Greeks and Persians, the inhabitants of ancient Thrace (which encompassed what is now Bulgaria, southern Romania, eastern Yugoslavia, northeastern Greece, and parts of European Turkey) must have seemed as primitive and wild as their Scythian neighbors who dominated the Pontic steppes on the northern shore of the Black Sea. Greek authors like Herodotus and Xenophon painted a barbaric picture of all these tribes. According to Herodotus, for example, the eastern end of the Eurasian steppes was the very edge of the known world, populated by a race of one-eyed men and by gold-guarding griffins. The Persians, who incorporated the Thracians and Macedonians into the satrapy of Skudra during the years from about 512 to 476 B.C., depicted the Skudrians on the sculptures of the Apadana at Persepolis as similar to the various Scythians who paid homage to the King of Kings.

When Thracian art began to be studied more or less seriously around the turn of the century, scholars like Casson and Rostovtzeff took the view that the Thracians had not created an original material culture, and they concluded that there was no such thing as native Thracian art.¹ This opinion was contested by other authorities, such as Filov and Griessmaier, and with the discoveries of the last fifty years, particularly in Bulgaria and Romania, the native characteristics of Thracian art have become apparent.² Recent studies by the Bulgarian archaeologists Venedikov and Marazov, and by the Romanian Berciu, have emphasized the view that this art developed during the first millennium B.C. from a geometric to a figural style as

a primarily indigenous phenomenon, although shaped to some extent by the many foreign contacts of the Thracian tribes.³ Furthermore, it has been stressed by these scholars that the Thracians were not closely related to the steppe nomads who were their neighbors to the north and east. Thracian tribes appeared in their homeland at least as early as the middle of the second millennium B.C., having come probably from more northerly regions of Europe, whereas the Scythians and other nomads moved westward along the steppes from Asia several hundred years later. Herodotus mentions that the Scythians thought of themselves as "the youngest of all nations" (4.5); the Thracians, on the other hand, had participated in the Trojan War, in which the swift white horses, richly ornamented chariot, and gold armor of King Rhesus had exemplified the elaborate material culture of Thrace in the Late Bronze Age (*Iliad* 10.435). While the Thracian tribes adopted—no doubt from the Scythians—some aspects of mounted nomadism in the

1. S. Casson, *Macedonia, Thrace and Illyria: Their Relations to Greece from the Earliest Times down to the Time of Philip Son of Amyntas* (Oxford, 1926) p. 246; M. I. Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (Oxford, 1922) p. 89.

2. Filov's ideas are discussed by Rostovtzeff, see note 1; Griessmaier's work is listed in note 4 below. A reconsideration of the arts of the Scythians and the Thracians has also been stimulated by recent loan exhibitions at The Metropolitan Museum of Art: "From the Lands of the Scythians," 1975, and "Thracian Treasures from Bulgaria," 1977.

3. I. Venedikov and T. Gerasimov, *Thrakische Kunst* (Vienna/Munich, 1973); A. Fol and I. Marazov, *Thrace and the Thracians* (New York, 1977); D. Berciu, *Arta traco-getica* (Bucharest, 1969); idem, *Contribution à l'étude de l'art thraco-gète* (Bucharest, 1974).



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first millennium B.C., they also preserved many traditions of the European Bronze Age and belonged more to the world of European cultures than to that of the East.

There are only two examples of art with native Thracian iconography in the United States, a silver cup in The Metropolitan Museum of Art (Figures 1–5) and a silver helmet in the Detroit Institute of Arts (Figures 6–10).⁴ These splendid objects (and a third piece, without figural decoration, which may come from the same workshop) have recently been subjected to a technical examination by Dr. Pieter Meyers, whose report appears following this article. The results of his analyses, along with this consideration of related works, offer some new insights into the character of native Thracian art.

The Metropolitan Museum cup and the Detroit helmet belong to a corpus of Thracian art mainly associated with the tribes of the Getae and Triballi, who ruled in northern Thrace; some related pieces, however, have been discovered throughout southern areas of Thrace. Most of these were made in the fourth century B.C., and take the form of helmets, greaves, drinking cups, horse trappings, and other objects of

use worked from silver and sometimes gilded. This metalwork has two varieties of decoration, one with human figures and the other with animals—the so-called Thracian animal style. Such art comes from graves and from chance finds which must have been

4. Silver cup: M. Rostovtzeff, *Skythien und der Bosphorus* (Berlin, 1931) I, p. 534; exh. cat., *Katalog der Ausstellung eurasiatischer Kunst (Nomadenkunst und Tierstil)* (Vienna: Kunsthistorisches Museum, 1934) p. 19, no. 5, pl. 1; V. Griessmaier, "Ein Silbergefäß mit Tierdarstellungen," *Wiener Beiträge zur Kunst- und Kulturgeschichte Asiens* 9 (Vienna, 1935) pp. 49–60; P. Jacobsthal, *Early Celtic Art* (London, 1943) I, pp. 36, 57–58; II, pls. 226:2d, 227a; S. Foltiny, "Archäologische Funde aus dem Karpatenbecken im Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York," *Mitteilungen der österreichischen Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Ur- und Frühgeschichte* 26, pt. 2 (1976) pp. 99–109; idem, "Der Silberbecher vom Eisernen Tor und einige Probleme des 'thracischen' Tierstiles," *Festschrift für Richard Pittioni* (Vienna, 1976) pp. 567–577; P. Meyers, "Three Silver Objects from Thrace: A Technical Examination," *MMJ* 16/1981 (1982) pp. 49–54, figs. 2, 3, 7.

Silver helmet: *Antikensammlung Nachlass Franz Trau, Wien* (Lucerne: Galerie Fischer, 1954) no. 376, pl. 10; (related pieces, including silver vase [Detroit 58.160], nos. 372–375); B. Goldman, "A Scythian Helmet from the Danube," *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts* 42, 4 (1963) pp. 63–72; Meyers, "Three Silver Objects," pp. 49–54, figs. 1, 5, 6.



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the buried hoards of Thracian princes and chiefs. This native Thracian art was little used among the Odrysians, a royal tribe in southern Thrace who led an alliance of several Thracian tribes from the fifth century on. The Odrysians preferred a more Greek-looking art, which nevertheless often expressed Thracian beliefs.⁵

Elaborately developed during the fourth century B.C., a native Thracian art may have existed as early as the sixth century, at least in the animal-style variant. A bronze matrix found at Gurchinovo in northern Bulgaria (Figure 11) and some objects from Romania seem to be early examples of this style, although they must be dated stylistically rather than on the basis of their respective archaeological contexts.⁶ It may



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5. A. E. Farkas and E. C. Schwartz, *Treasures of Bulgarian Art from Earliest Times Through the Nineteenth Century* (forthcoming) chap. II.

6. Berciu, *Contribution à l'étude de l'art thraco-gète*, chaps. II and VII. On the possible existence of metal workshops in ancient Thrace see S. Kolkówna, "Remarques sur les sources archéologiques antiques relatives à la production d'orfèvrerie sur les rives septentrionales et occidentales de la Mer Noire," *Aurifex: I. Etudes sur l'orfèvrerie antique*, ed. T. Hackens (Louvain, 1980) pp. 106–154.

1–5. Cup, Thracian, 4th century B.C. Silver, H. 18.7 cm. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 47.100.88



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be merely by chance that the oldest preserved pieces of native Thracian art are decorated in the animal style rather than with human figures. It is, however, interesting that the evidence at present suggests that the animal style developed first, and in regions of Thrace close to the Scythian tribes. In the seventh century B.C. and earlier, Thracian art was typically geometric in its decoration, a taste which was a remnant of Late Bronze Age traditions.⁷

The bronze matrix from Gurchinovo was probably used as a source of ornament for repoussé metalwork. It must have served as a mold over which metal was hammered, but scholars disagree as to whether it formed a unified design for a cup like the Metropolitan Museum piece or a “copybook” of separate motifs for different kinds of metalwork. No doubt it belonged to an itinerant craftsman traveling between the Triballi tribe south of the Danube and the Getae to the north. Although nowadays few people would consider the matrix Scythian, it was often cited in the past as an instance of Scythian influence on Thracian art. There are obvious Scythian affinities: the detached heads of birds of prey between the animals’

legs, the drooping-necked animals lined up along the bottom, among them the stag in a folded pose—these are all typically Scythian motifs. In style, and in the use of a hatched edging for decoration on the animals’ bodies, the matrix can be compared to examples of early Scythian art, such as metalwork from the royal burial at Kelermes in the northwestern Caucasus dating from the late seventh century B.C.⁸ Yet there are significant differences, most notably in the decorative tendency of Thracian as compared to Scythian art. The bird heads on the matrix, used on the bodies of the two large animals as ornament, were important motifs in Scythian art where they were never treated in such a trivial fashion. The elaborate antlers at the top of the matrix are primarily ornamental as well, although they can be read as attached to the heads of the animals below them. In later Thracian metalwork, the antlers with animal heads at the end of each tip become even more of a detached motif, a phenomenon that never occurs in Scythian art. Moreover, the animals on the matrix are generalized and difficult to identify, while animals in Scythian art, particularly stags, are always clearly defined and realistic. All these distinguishing features must be considered characteristic of native Thracian animal-style art, an art related to and probably derived from the Scythian, but, by the sixth or fifth century B.C., one with traits of its own.

The best-known examples of fourth-century native Thracian art have been those excavated in the princely tomb at Agighiol, near the delta of the Danube River in eastern Romania. This tomb was partly robbed by

6–10. Helmet, Thracian, 4th century B.C. Silver, H. 24 cm. The Detroit Institute of Arts, Sarah Bacon Hill Fund, 56.18 (photos: Detroit Institute of Arts)



7. Farkas and Schwartz, *Treasures of Bulgarian Art*, chap. II.

8. M. I. Artamonov, *Goldschatz der Skythen in der Eremitage* (Prague, 1970) pls. 9–19.

11. Matrix, Thracian, 6th century B.C.; from Gurchinovo, Shumen District, northern Bulgaria. Bronze, L. 29 cm. Shumen, District Museum of History, inv. no. 23 (photo: after *Thracian Treasures from Bulgaria*)

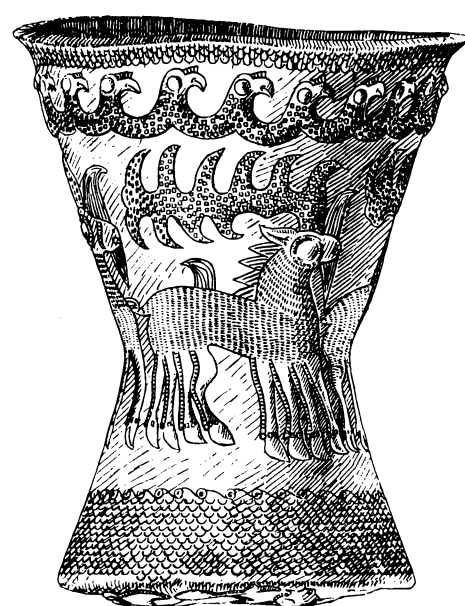




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local inhabitants in 1931, before being investigated and excavated by I. Andrieșescu and D. Berciu in the same year.⁹ A mound of rocks and earth 32 meters in diameter and 2 meters high covered two funeral chambers which had been largely destroyed by the treasure seekers. The archaeologists could, however, observe that the two chambers were built of stone and that although there were traces of fire, the burials were not cremations. The villagers reportedly had found the richest treasure in the larger chamber, which must have been that of the prince; his wife, or a slave, had been buried in the smaller room. In an untouched stone construction south of the two rooms was unearthed the burial of three richly caparisoned horses, which had evidently been interred at the same time as the humans since this structure was covered by the same mound.

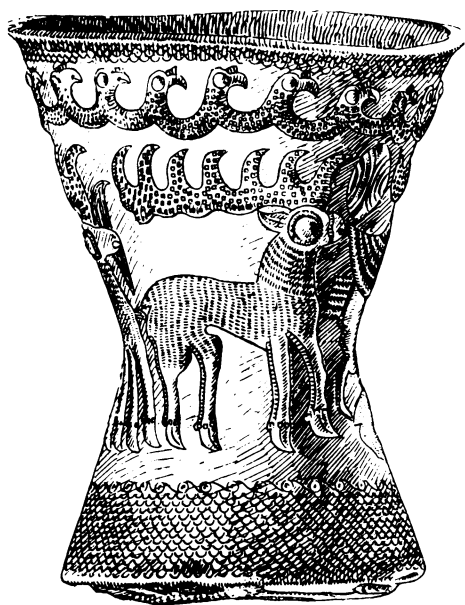
The chief finds at Agighiol were two silver cups decorated in animal style and similar to the Metropolitan Museum cup (Figures 12–18), a silver helmet similar in shape to the Detroit example (Figures 19, 20), and a pair of silver greaves (Figure 21); the last three objects were adorned with human figures. Other discoveries included five silver phialai, one inscribed in Greek letters ΚΟΤΥΟΣ ΕΤΒΕΟΥ, small gold and silver

ornaments, trilobate arrowheads, and Greek pottery. In the horse graves, the silver bridle trappings and bronze bits were well preserved.

Recent excavations in Romania have added to the discoveries of Agighiol. At Peretu, near the Danube in south-central Romania, a princely tomb beneath an isolated tumulus was excavated in 1970, although not published until preliminary reports in 1979 and 1980.¹⁰ Simpler than the Agighiol structure, the Peretu tomb was a squarish pit which contained, in addition to the skeleton of the prince or noble, a horse skeleton, remains of a chariot and two iron wheel rims, two dog skeletons, a gilded silver helmet (Figures 22–

9. Berciu, *Arta traco-getica*, chap. 3; idem, *Contribution à l'étude de l'art thraco-gète*, chap. III.

10. P. Voievozeanu and E. Moscalu, "Mormintul princiar getic și tezaurul de la Peretu, jud. Teleorman," *Cercetări Arheologice* 3 (1979) pp. 353–360; E. Moscalu and P. Voievozeanu, "La Tombe et le trésor princiers thraco-gétiques de Peretu (départ. de Teleorman)," *Apulum* 17 (1979) pp. 103–110; idem, "Le Tombeau princier gète et le trésor de Peretu," *Actes du IIe Congrès International de Thracologie . . . 1976* (Bucharest, 1980) pp. 383–390. The tomb with its contents has been reconstructed in the Historical Museum of the Socialist Republic of Romania in Bucharest.



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12–16;17,18. Two cups,
Thracian, 4th century
B.C.; from tomb at
Agighiol, eastern Ro-
mania. Silver, H. 18 and
16.7 cm. Bucharest, His-
torical Museum of the
Socialist Republic of Ro-
mania, inv. nos. AR 128,
129 (drawings and
photo: after Berciu, *Arta
traco-getica*)



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25), a gilded silver head identified as a rhyton or standard top (Figures 26, 27), a small silver vase and three plain silver phialai, and silver bridle ornaments similar to those found at Agighiol. The Peretu helmet is closely related to the one in Detroit. Although the animal motifs are not identical, on both a horned animal adorns the left cheekpiece (Figures 9, 24) and a bird of prey grasping a fish and a hare the right (Figures 8, 23). Two horned animals are placed along the neckpiece of the Peretu helmet (Figure 25), rather

than the rosette and ivy leaf design at the back of the Detroit helmet (Figure 10), and there are minor differences in the patterning on the upper portions. The strange silver head from Peretu may have been used as a cup, although a hole in the neck suggests that it was attached to something, perhaps a wooden pole. The head is comparable to the large-eyed, narrow-lipped faces on the knees of the Agighiol greaves, one of which also wears a necklace of amphora-shaped beads (Figures 26, 21). Dr. Emil Moscalu, one of the



19. Helmet, Thracian, 4th century B.C.; from tomb at Agighiol. Gilded silver, H. 27 cm. Bucharest, Historical Museum of the Socialist Republic of Romania, inv. no. AR 131 (photo: after *Treasures from Romania*, London, 1971)



20. Detail of Figure 19 (photo: after *Treasures from Romania*)



21. Greave, Thracian, 4th century B.C.; one of a pair from tomb at Agighiol. Gilded silver, H. 47.8 cm. Bucharest, Historical Museum of the Socialist Republic of Romania, inv. no. AR 121 (drawings: after Berciu, *Arta traco-getica*)

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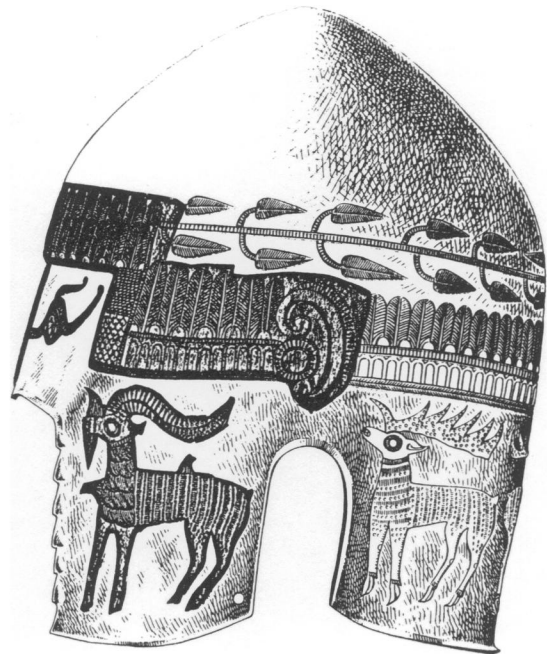


22–25. Helmet, Thracian, 4th century B.C.; from tomb at Peretu, south-central Romania. Gilded silver, H. approx. 25 cm. Bucharest, Historical Museum of the Socialist Republic of Romania (photos: Historical Museum; drawing: after Voievozeanu and Moscalu, "Mormintul princiar getic . . .")

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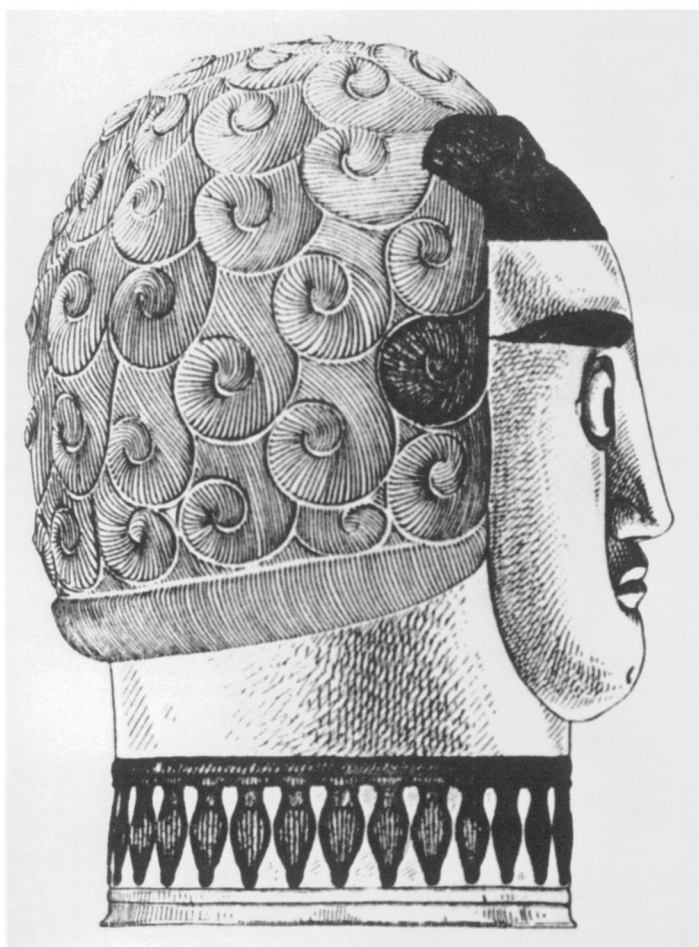




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26, 27. Head, used as rhyton or standard top, Thracian, 4th century B.C.; from tomb at Peretu, south-central Romania. Gilded silver, exact height unknown (approx. 23 cm.). Bucharest, Historical Museum of the Socialist Republic of Romania (photo: Historical Museum; drawing: after Voievozeanu and Moscalu, "Mormintul princiar getic . . .")

excavators of Peretu and curator of Thracian art at the Historical Museum, has told the writer that in his opinion all this metalwork—the objects from Agighiol and Peretu, as well as the Metropolitan Museum cup and the Detroit helmet—was produced in the same workshop,¹¹ and he hopes to conduct technical analyses of the Romanian silver objects that will establish this fact. Meyers, in the study that follows, demonstrates that the New York and Detroit pieces came from the same workshop: the silver in both is



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similar in trace elements and on both the same tool was used.

In Berciu's opinion, it is possible that the Metropolitan Museum cup and the Detroit helmet were plundered from the tomb at Agighiol before its formal excavation late in 1931. The helmet and four re-

lated silver objects turned up in 1954 in the auction of the Trau collection of Vienna, at the Galerie Fischer, Lucerne;¹² when, how, and from whom they had been acquired by the Trau family are not known. There is somewhat more information about the cup, which was acquired by the Museum in 1947. It was first mentioned in 1931 by Rostovtzeff as having been found by a laborer in 1913 or 1914, near the Iron Gates, where the Danube flows into western Romania. In Griessmaier's discussion of the cup in 1935,¹³ it was said to have been found in two pieces near the Iron Gates and taken to an antiques dealer in Budapest, who in turn sold it to Baron Eugen Kohner. On the baron's death, the cup was acquired by a private collector in Vienna, who lent it to an exhibition of Eurasian art at the Kunsthistorisches Museum in 1934. The reported place and date of the cup's discovery may both be false, fabricated to draw attention away from the actual facts. If the cup, the helmet, and the related objects in the Trau collection were indeed looted from the tomb at Agighiol early in 1931, their supposed discovery far to the west, some seventeen or eighteen years earlier, would serve to disguise the robbery. On the other hand, the metalwork in the Peretu tomb shows that Agighiol was not the only burial to hold such objects, and it is possible that both cup and helmet came from a Thracian grave as yet unknown to archaeologists.

If the Metropolitan Museum cup and the Detroit helmet were taken from Agighiol, the prince buried there would have possessed two silver helmets, one decorated with human figures and the other with animals; he would also have possessed several silver cups decorated with animal-style motifs, as well as an assortment of silver vases, bowls, and cups, which could have been part of a drinking set with containers of different sizes. The Vulchitrun treasure—a set of gold

11. One other object probably to be included in this group is a gilded silver vase with three tattooed faces on the body, now in the Hermitage, Leningrad, said to come from Kurgan II, Mastiugino, near Voronezh on the Don River, excavated early in the 20th century; see A. P. Mantsevich, "Mastiuginsk'e kurgany po materialam iz sobraniia gosudarstvennogo Ermitazha," *Arkheologicheskii sbornik* 15 (1973) fig. 5:1, p. 24.

12. *Antikensammlung Nachlass Franz Trau, Wien*, no. 376, pl. 10; related pieces, nos. 372–375.

13. Rostovtzeff, *Skythien und der Bosphorus*, p. 534. Griessmaier, "Ein Silbergfäß," pp. 49–60.

drinking vessels of various sizes and shapes discovered at Vulchitrun in northern Bulgaria and dated in the Late Bronze Age—shows that the use of such sets was a Thracian tradition, which continued into the first millennium B.C.¹⁴ While the later Thracian drinking sets were usually composed of rhytons with spouts in the base, such rhytons seem not to have been used by the Getae, who apparently preferred a cup or a rhyton used like a cup.

The Metropolitan Museum cup and the two similar examples from Agighiol are not unique in their beakerlike form; cups like them, although with geometric rather than animal designs, have been found in Bulgarian Thrace.¹⁵ Earlier prototypes for these Thracian cups can be seen in metalwork from northwestern Iran of the late second to the early first millennium B.C.¹⁶ Tantalizing and mysterious as are the connections between Iran and Thrace, it is possible that metalworking traditions linked these distant regions. As for the animal-style decoration of the cups, Dr. Prudence Harper, curator of the department of Ancient Near Eastern Art in the Metropolitan Museum, has pointed out that the two Agighiol cups have land and water settings respectively: each has a deep band of scales at the bottom, convex on one cup to represent conical mountains, concave on the other and bordered by a wave pattern to suggest water. On the cup with a water setting (Figures 12–15), a horned bird of prey with immense claws holds a fish in its beak and a harelike creature in its claws. The bird is flanked by one horned and two antlered animals; a tiny bird of prey is inserted over the horned animal so as to face the large bird. One staglike creature, placed on the opposite side of the body of the cup from the large bird, has eight legs. Above and independent of this scene is an antler border with bird-headed tines; the rim is adorned by a thin band of scales. On the base of the cup a winged, scaly, lionlike monster chews an animal leg and grasps a small beast in its clawlike feet (Figure 16). The scene on the Agighiol cup set in a mountain landscape depicts four animals, one horned, two with antlers; one stag has eight legs (Figure 17). As on the other cup, the animals' bodies are patterned and a band of bird-headed antlers borders the top. The base is decorated with a sort of griffin grappling a boarlike creature (Figure 18). The cup in the Metropolitan Museum has a water setting and, like its counterpart from Agighiol,

shows a large bird of prey attacking fish and hare, facing a smaller bird, and flanked by three animals, one with horns and two with antlers (Figures 1–4). Almost opposite the large bird is the eight-legged stag (Figure 4). At the top is the bird-headed antler border, below a thin band of scales. On the base, a griffinlike creature attacks a boarlike animal (Figure 5).

Aside from stylistic relationships with contemporary Scythian and earlier Iranian art, the scenes on these cups are clearly Thracian. The eight-legged stag seems to be unparalleled elsewhere, and the combination of large and small birds of prey opposed to the eight-legged stag suggests a Thracian myth or legend. On the two cups with water settings, the monstrous bird of prey with land and water creatures in its grasp may symbolize dominance over land and water by the creature of the air. The eight-legged stag is probably a symbol of fabulous swiftness, and its placement on the opposite side of the cup from the bird of prey may indicate that the stag is always free from the domination of the bird. Professor Astrik Gabriel has pointed out to the writer that medieval Hungarian chronicles describe the migration of the Hungarian peoples into Europe as led by a stag which they followed to their final homeland. The importance of the stag in Scythian art has been noted by several scholars, among them Professor Ivan Marasov, who has mentioned to the writer that an eight-legged deer appears in the folklore of modern Siberian shamanism, perhaps as an instance of the persistence of an ancient motif of magical or religious potency.¹⁷ However, the eight-legged stag seems to have been depicted in visual form only in Thracian art.

A horned animal and the monstrous bird of prey grasping a fish and a hare are also found on the De-

14. Farkas and Schwartz, *Treasures of Bulgarian Art*, chap. II, which also has a discussion of the Borovo and Panagurishte treasures.

15. *Thracian Treasures from Bulgaria*, exh. cat. (London, 1976) nos. 549 and 551, the Dalboki treasure, found in 1879 near Stara Zagora and now in the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

16. As noted by Berciu, *Arta traco-getica*, pp. 112–113.

17. Farkas, "Interpreting Scythian Art: East vs. West," *Artibus Asiae* 39 (1977) pp. 127–128; V. I. Abaev, *Osetinskiiazuk i fol'klor* (Moscow/Leningrad, 1949) I, pp. 37, 179, 198; A. Lommel, *Shamanism: The Beginnings of Art* (New York, 1967) p. 62.

troit and Peretu helmets (Figures 6–9, 22–24); the Agighiol helmet is decorated with human figures probably representing a Thracian prince or hero (Figures 19, 20). If the Detroit and Agighiol helmets were in fact a pair with complementary decoration, the possibility arises that the animal and human figures in Thracian art tell a similar tale, one of domination by a being or beings with supernatural powers.

Goldman, in his discussion of the Detroit helmet, emphasized its foreign elements, which he ascribed to the Scythian ruler whom he believed to have been its owner and to influences from Hellenistic, Celtic, and Etruscan art; to the latter he attributed the motif of eyes on the forehead band of the helmet. Nowadays, however, the helmet is considered Thracian, because of its animal-style ornament, the floral motifs on the sides and back, which are paralleled on other pieces of Thracian art, and its shape, pointed like the Agighiol and Peretu helmets.¹⁸ Simpler helmets of bronze found in Thrace are usually pointed;¹⁹ the shape seems designed to accommodate the Thracian topknot, the typical hair style of many Thracians (although not of the Getae, who apparently wore their hair in short curls). On the Detroit, Agighiol, and Peretu helmets the forehead band is adorned by a central vertical strip between the two eyes, which may represent tattooing, a sign of the lofty status of the helmet's owner.²⁰ Herodotus (5.6) mentions that a mark of Thracian nobility was the use of tattoos. On the Agighiol helmet, the main decoration is a series of male figures, mounted on horseback; they have curly hair, seem to be dressed in scale armor, and hold spears. On a headdress made for a prince, this decoration no doubt represents the powerful prince himself, or the legendary Thracian hero who plays an important role in later Thracian religion and is embodied in the cult of the Heros, or Thracian Horseman.²¹

A related theme appears on one of the pair of gilded silver greaves discovered in the Agighiol tomb (Figure 21). These are examples of native Thracian art, although probably inspired by Greek greaves which were occasionally adorned with Gorgon heads on the kneecaps. Here the Gorgon is replaced by strange individuals, one male, the other female. The greaves are not identical, for the male, not illustrated here, has a tattooed face and no jewelry, while the woman

is much more elaborate. She wears two necklaces, one a simple torque, the other of pendant beads; heavy earrings are looped through her ears. Two coiled snakes with dangling heads may represent breasts. On her left side, the muscle stylizations are elaborated into a snake-headed monster at which one of the coiled snakes strikes. Along the other side, two male figures are shown. The upper figure is mounted on a horse; he holds aloft a bow and seems to be dressed in armor or a tight-fitting, trousered costume. Below, the same figure is seen seated on a low-backed throne; in one hand he holds a horn-shaped rhyton and in the other a bird of prey. These figures appear to depict two aspects of the ruler's public image.

The greaves from Agighiol are comparable to a single greave recovered from a rich tomb at Vratsa in northwestern Bulgaria, in the region of the Triballi Thracians.²² The mound at Vratsa, discovered in 1965 and excavated in the years following, held three tombs, all of the fourth century B.C.; only one of them was more or less intact, although partially crushed by a collapsing roof. As at Agighiol, this tomb was built with two chambers, and horse burials, as well as a chariot, were also discovered near the entrance. One man, the chief, and two women, one probably the chief's wife and the other a slave, were buried in this tomb, and many lavish gifts and horse trappings were preserved. The Vratsa greave was more elaborately decorated than the Agighiol examples, and probably came from a different workshop; but the same staring face—this time with facial tattoos of leaves as well as parallel horizontal lines—embellished the kneecap. It is possible that behind this image of Greek derivation there was a Thracian divinity, one with a long tradition in Thracian art. Although about one

18. For the floral motifs see beakers cited in note 15. A gold helmet of similar shape and with interesting human and animal decoration was discovered in the Baiceni treasure in Romania in 1961; see M. Petrescu-Dimbovița and M. Dinu, "Le Trésor de Baiceni (départ. de Jassy)," *Dacia*, n.s. 19 (1975) pp. 105–123.

19. *MMAB* 35, no. 1 (1977) fig. 36, pp. 58–59.

20. For a discussion of tattoos on figures of Thracian women on Greek vases, see K. Zimmermann, "Tätowierte Thrakerinnen auf griechischen Vasenbildern," *Jahrbuch des deutschen archäologischen Instituts* 95 (1980) pp. 163–196.

21. Farkas and Schwartz, *Treasures of Bulgarian Art*, chap. III.

22. *MMAB* 35, no. 1 (1977) pl. 6, p. 35; Farkas and Schwartz, *Treasures of Bulgarian Art*, chap. II.



28. Statuette, Thracian, Late Bronze Age; from Klichevac, Yugoslavia. Terracotta, H. approx. 33 cm. Destroyed in World War I (drawings: after M. Gimbutas, *Bronze Age Cultures in Central and Eastern Europe*, The Hague, 1965)

thousand years lie between them, and there are few connecting examples to link classical Thracian art with the Late Bronze Age, the personage on the greave is reminiscent—in her elaborate jewelry, tiny breasts, and eyebrows meeting at the nose—of a Late Bronze Age clay figurine (Figure 28). Such figurines are associated with the presence of Thracians in southeastern Europe, and related examples have been discovered in cemeteries in Romania and Bulgaria.²³

Another link between Vratsa and Agighiol is the discovery of phialai at Vratsa, inscribed in Greek letters with the enigmatic Thracian words ΚΟΤΥΟΣ ΕΤΒΕΟΥ, such as had been found at Agighiol. Although the interpretation of this inscription is not agreed upon, it may refer to an Odrysian ruler named Kotys, who reigned between 382 and 359 B.C. This king might have given the phialai to the princes of Thracian tribes as a sign of political alliance. Perhaps because of the Odrysian hegemony in southern Thrace during the fourth century, native Thracian art, which probably developed in northern Thrace, came to be distributed very widely. Horse trappings like those

from Agighiol, Peretu, and Vratsa were used throughout Thrace, and traveled even further. A horse with Thracian-style trappings was discovered in a recently excavated Scythian burial at Khomina Mogila on the lower Dnieper River on the Pontic steppes (Figure 29).²⁴ Workshops in Bulgarian Thrace produced their own versions of this native art, amply demonstrated in the Letnitsa treasure, a group of gilded silver plaques unearthed in a bronze vessel at Letnitsa, near Lovech in northern Bulgaria (Figure 30).²⁵ As on the Agighiol helmet and greave, a horseman is shown on many of the plaques. Female figures on the plaques are related to those on the Agighiol and Vratsa greaves, with their tiny breasts. There are local differences, in particular the Thracian topknot on many of the figures rather than curly hair, and the scene of a sacred marriage which has yet to be discovered elsewhere. Other than that, the male figures, shown as hunters or warriors, are similarly garbed in some sort of scale armor or tight-fitting trousers. On the plaque illustrated, the rider holds a phiale; behind him is a doglike animal. This plaque, which may depict a ritual, seems to anticipate the cult reliefs of the Heros which were so common in Thrace in Roman times.

The popular cult of the Heros revolved around worship of a deity who was a superhuman hero or legendary king; his exploits included both hunting and warfare.²⁶ The roots of this cult lay perhaps in tales of the kings of classical Thrace and even earlier Homeric heroes. The living kings of Thrace were apparently considered to be heroes, whose superhuman qualities included the power to live forever. The earliest evidence for the worship of the Heros points to the second century B.C., but some of the sanctuaries where he was worshiped might have been in use in the fourth century B.C. and even earlier. The typical Roman cult relief showed the Heros on horseback, often holding a phiale, sometimes accompanied by an animal and with the tiny figure of a second horseman opposite him. The fourth-century repre-

23. Farkas and Schwartz, *Treasures of Bulgarian Art*, chap. II.

24. B. N. Mozolevskii, "Skifsk'e pogrebeniia y s. Nagornoe bliz g. Ordzhonikidze na Dnepropetrovishchine," *Skifsk'e drevnosti* (Kiev, 1973) pp. 187–234.

25. Farkas and Schwartz, *Treasures of Bulgarian Art*, chap. II.

26. *Ibid.*, chap. III.

29. Bridle ornaments, Scythian, 4th century B.C.; from Khomina Mogila, Dnepropetrovsk District, USSR. Gilded silver, nose ornament H. 10.3 cm. Kiev, Archaeological Museum (drawings: after Mozolevskii)

sentations of horsemen might in some way reflect the Heros as he was understood at the time, perhaps still closely identified with living kings and chieftains. If this were true, the mounted figures in Thracian art would be more than mere images of powerful rulers; they might reflect the semidivine status which those rulers enjoyed. It is even conceivable that the animal-style themes in native Thracian art were connected with such depictions. The monstrous bird of prey, dominating land and sea and air, might have been associated with the heroic ruler, as protective spirit, avatar, or tribal totem, an ancient form of belief eventually abandoned by the Thracians. As the legendary bird was all-powerful on earth, so was the heroic king. The dualism of the second, small horseman on Heros plaques is already implied by the small bird of prey facing the larger one on the Metropolitan Museum and Agighiol cups.

Although the precise interpretation of Thracian iconography remains uncertain, the native character of Thracian art is evident. The imagery of animal and human figures is in part traditional and looks back to the Late Bronze Age, despite the obscurity which covers those links with the past. At the same time, the art looks forward to the Roman period, when the iconography of the Heros or deified king—still fluid during the fourth century—was standardized. The animal style may have died out in Roman times, but it was a vital and peculiarly Thracian idiom in its day, despite its many ties to the arts of other peoples, both earlier and contemporary.



30. Bridle ornament, Thracian, 4th century B.C.; from treasure of Letnitsa, Lovech District, northern Bulgaria. Gilded silver, H. 5 cm. Lovech, District Museum of History, inv. no. 589 (photo: after *Thracian Treasures from Bulgaria*)



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