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Tombeau d'un noble thrace

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## LA THRACE BIENHEUREUSE

La Thrace bienheureuse, pays des giroflées,

Des roses et des muguets, des vignes et des colchiques

Berça nos vies d'enfants de ses chansons magiques

Et du galop sonore de ses cavales ailées !

Athanase Vantchev de Thracy

**ENGLISH (My translation) :**

## **HAPPY THRACE**

The Happy Thrace, country of wallflowers,

Roses and lilies of the valley, vineyards and autumn crocuses

Rocked our children's lives of its magic songs

And the sound gallop of its winged mares!

**Thrace:** region, 3,310 sq mi (8,575 sq km), SE Europe, occupying the southeastern tip of the Balkan Peninsula and comprising NE Greece, S Bulgaria, and European Turkey. Its boundaries have varied in different periods. It is washed by the Black Sea in the northeast and by the Sea of Marmara and the Aegean Sea in the south.

**Land and Economy :**

The Rhodope Mts. separate Greek from Bulgarian Thrace, and the Maritsa River, ancient Hebros (called the Évros in Greece) separates Greek from Turkish Thrace. The chief cities are Istanbul, Edirne (formerly Adrianople), and Gallipoli (all in Turkey); Istanbul (Constantinople) is generally considered a separate entity. With the exception of the mountainous Bulgarian section, Thrace is mainly agricultural, producing tobacco, corn, rice, wheat, silk, cotton, olive oil, and fruit. Natural gas has been discovered in the region.

## **History :**

### **Ancient and Medieval History**

At the dawn of history the ancient Thracian, a group of tribes speaking an Indo-European language, extended as far west as the Adriatic Sea, but they were pushed eastward (c.1300 B.C.) by the Illyrians, and in the 5th cent. B.C. they lost their land west of the Struma (Strimón) River to Macedon. In the north, however, Thrace at that period still extended to the Danube. Unlike the Macedonians, the Thracians did not absorb Greek culture, and their tribes formed separate petty kingdoms.

The Thracian Bronze Age was similar to that of Mycenaean Greece, and the Thracians had developed high forms of music and poetry, but their savage warfare led the Greeks to consider them barbarians. Many Greek colonies, Byzantium on the Hellespont and Tomi (modern Constanța) on the Black Sea, were founded in Thrace by c.600 B.C. The Greeks exploited Thracian gold and silver mines, and they recruited Thracians for their infantry. Thrace was reduced to vassalage by Persia from c.512 B.C. to 479 B.C., and Persian customs were introduced.

Thrace was united as a kingdom under the chieftain Sitalces, who aided Athens during the Peloponnesian War, but after his death (428 B.C.) the state again broke up. By 342 B.C. all Thrace was held by Philip II of Macedon, and after 323 B.C. most of the country was in the hands of Lysimachus. It fell apart once more after Lysimachus' death (281 B.C.), and it was conquered by the Romans late in the 1st cent. B.C. Emperor Claudius created (A.D. 46) the province of Thrace, comprising the territory south of the Balkans; the remainder was incorporated into Moesia. The chief centers of Roman Thrace were Serdica (modern Sofia), Philippopolis (Plovdiv), and Adrianople (Edirne).

The region benefited greatly from Roman rule, but from the barbarian invasions of the 3d cent. A.D. until modern times it was almost continuously a battleground. The northern section passed (7th cent.) to the Bulgarians; the southern section remained in the Byzantine Empire, but it was largely conquered (13th cent.) by the second Bulgarian empire after a brief period under the Latin Empire of Constantinople. In 1361 the Ottoman Turks took Adrianople, and in 1453, after the fall of Constantinople, all of Thrace fell to the Turks.

Thrace is the country of the greatest poets in the Antiquity: Orpheus.

**ORPHEUS:** in Greek mythology, celebrated **Thracian musician**. He was the son of the Muse Calliope by Apollo or, according to another legend, by Oeagrus, a king of Thrace. Supposedly, the music of his lyre was so beautiful that when he played, wild beasts were soothed, trees danced, and rivers stood still. Orpheus married the nymph Eurydice. When Aristaeus tried to violate her, she fled, was bitten by a snake, and died. Orpheus descended to Hades searching for her. He was granted the chance to regain Eurydice if he could refrain from looking at her until he had led her back to sunlight. Orpheus could not resist, and Eurydice vanished forever. Grieving inconsolably, he became a recluse and wandered for many years. According to some legends, he became a devoted follower of Dionysus and introduced that god's cult in many places, but the women of Thrace, offended by his inattention, tore him to pieces. Another legend says that Orpheus taught the Thracian men to worship the sun (Apollo) above all other gods; in revenge Dionysus caused the wives of the Thracian men to murder their husbands and tear Orpheus to pieces. It was said that his head was thrown into the river Hebrus and floated, still singing, into the sea to the island of Lesbos, where an oracle of Orpheus was established. He was celebrated in the Orphic Mysteries.

