

THE GETO-DACIAN AGRICULTURE

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So much has been said about our ancestors, the Geto-Dacians, that it is very difficult to tell the truth from its disproof, especially under the circumstances in which they did not have a language of their own, and their entire heritage of knowledge, customs, beliefs, rituals etc. was passed on from generation to generation and, unfortunately, most of it has been lost.

The only tangible proofs of the Geto-Dacian civilization are the archeological ones. Of particular usefulness are those referring to material civilization, whereas those referring to cultural life are few and, without concrete clues, difficult, if not impossible, to interpret. What is, however, beyond any doubt, as it is also attested by historical sources, is the fact that our ancestors practised agriculture and that the way they exploited the land was the **collective** one; in other words, they were organized in communities: „The oldest piece of documentary news in our country about communities dates back to the 1st century BC. The fragment from Horatio's Odes, greatly discussed and interpreted in various ways, remains the most important testimony about the Dacian agrarian community: the rough Gets lead better lives, with their fields undivided by borders and with common harvest and crops. They do not fancy crops that last longer than a year, and the land where work has been completed is replaced with another one that has the same purpose. This tells us that, before the Roman conquest, the land was owned in common (by a village or a tribe), that the crops belonged to every member of a community and that, every year, the land was cultivated in a different place, that had been abandoned the previous year.”¹

The actual way of cultivating land was the alternation of fields, but not in a rotation of crops. The following year, they simply opened ground on a new field, as they owned a lot of land with productive soil: „It is probable that the free Dacians, just like the Geto-Romans before them, practised a cropping-system that consisted both in the rotation of crops and in one-year pauses for certain fields so that they can regenerate. About the Gets' continuous changing of fields so that they do not get cultivated two years in a row, we find information at Horation.”²

IP.P.Panaitescu, *The Rural Community in Wallachia and Moldavia*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy, 1964. p. 17

2Gh. Bichir, *The Geto-Dacians from Greater Wallachia in the Roman Period*, Bucharest, Romanian Academy, 1984, p. 21

Therefore, from the oldest times, it seems that even from the Neolithic, the Romanian people was **bound** to the land: „An essential fact, the continuity of communities on the territory of our country from the Geto-Dacians to the foundation of the feudal states reflects the continuity of the Romanian people in Dacia, as a settled, organized and constantly bound to the land people.”³

There is a complex discussion about those who worked the land. Because, until the Roman conquest, slavery was unknown in our space of existence (only the domestic one and, even after the Romans came, it was limited to the construction of building, forts etc.), the conclusion imposed itself: those who worked the land were **free people**, organized in **communities** or

tribes. The leaders of these administrative units seem to have been changing often over the course of history, being chosen from among the (transient) conquerors of the territories: „The results of the archeological diggings that were made especially recently in the prefeudal establishments from our country take us to the same conclusion. In all the regions of the country, there were villages with steady establishments, mostly different than the establishments of Germanic and Turanian people in Dacia. In these villages of agriculturalists and cow breeders, there were domestic and agrarian tools of the locals, clay objects made by them, with shapes and ornaments that continue the style of the popular ceramics in the free and the Roman Dacia. Most of these establishments are completely devoid of metal weapons, unlike the knight tombs, with chain mail and spears of outside rulers. It is clear that the villages that were unarmed, but organized for the settled life of agriculturalists and cow breeders represent the continuation of the endemic Dacian-Roman villages, organized as free communities.”⁴

Closely related to the cultivation of land for the Geto-Dacians, **animal breeding** was done alternatively, according to climate conditions and especially historical ones: „*The economic* basis of crops in prehistorical Dacia always consisted in a harmonious mix between the cultivation of land and the breeding of cows, in different eras. Either one or the other was more prominent, a phenomenon which is related to climate, but which also needs to be related to the historical events that favoured a more stable life in lowlands, that were more propitious for agriculture, or that sometimes imposed the cultivation of a mobile belonging (cow or sheep herds) that was easier to defend.”⁵

3P.P.Pana

itescu,

op.cit. p.

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4Ibidem,

p. 23

5Alexandru Vulpe, Mihail Zahariade, *The Geto-Dacians in the Military History of the Antic World*, Bucharest, Editura Militară, 1987, p. 325

Another element, impossible to contest, is that of the conditions which were favourable to agriculture, a fact that is unanimously admitted by all sources that referred, in a way or another, to the Geto-Dacian economy: „Agriculture. Agriculture was favoured both by the capability of people and by the geographical conditions, as the Wallachian Plain was and still is one of the most fertile regions, due to the existence of the chernozem rich in humic substances present in the ploughable soil. During these times, agriculture was a lot more easy to practise due to the existence of the iron plough pulled by oxen. The representation of the Getian plough pulled by oxen was preserved on the so-called tomb of Quadratus, discovered at Capidava. In establishments, the practice of agriculture is attested by the presence of iron tools, carbonized plant seeds and grinder stones. From among the tools discovered up to the present in establishments such as Militari-Chitila, we mention: the reaping hooks, a ploughshare and a plough knife, as well as a mattock, all made of iron.”⁶

Generally, it is unanimously accepted that the Geto-Dacians used the **wooden** plough, but with an **iron ploughshare**. The usage of a plough entirely made of **iron** seems to be attributed to **the Slavonians**, who arrived on the territory in the 6th century BC: „The approximately same thing that Horatio mentions about the Gets was also said by Caesar about the Suebs. Productivity in agriculture grew a lot because of the plough with iron ploughshare and knife (reaping hooks, mattocks etc.), allowing for greater supplies of agricultural products to accumulate, some of them even exportable to the Roman world.”⁷

In what concerns the actual **cultivation** of **plants**, things are of controversy here as well. Based on the irrefutable proofs of archeology, the specialists reached the conclusion that, from the oldest times, **wheat** was cultivated on the territory of our country: „From among the cultivated plants for which we have got archeological evidence, we mention: wheat, bird seed and hemp, the carbonized beads and stems of which were found in some cottages and supply pools; on several clay bricks, prints of wheat ears were imprinted. At Mătăsaru, wheat beads belong to species like *Triticum compactum* and *Triticum vulgare* (with a long bead), species known even in previous periods, judging by the discoveries made in Grădișteța-Muncelului, Cetățeni, Popești etc.”*

6Gh.

Bichir,

op. cit.,

p. 20

7Ibide

m, p.

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8Ibidem, p. 21

Historical sources also agree that our ancestors obtained very rich wheat harvests, and this was without any artificial (or maybe even natural) fertilization of the soil and without any other artificial means of stimulating production: *„About the Geto-Dacian skills in*

wheat

cultivation and especially about that of the Gets in the Wallachian Plain, we can tell from Arrian's accounts describing Alexandru Macedon's expedition from 335 BC to the North of the Danube. He tells us that, after the Macedonians had crossed the river at night, the next day, in order to be able to move forward to the Gets' territory, they had to go through lands that were rich in wheat; the wheat was so tall that, to be able to move forward, the infantry received an order to put down the wheat with their lancets. At Mătăsaru, carbonized beads of wheat were found (...), and also carbonized beads of bird seed (*Panicum* sp.) at the bottom of a poriferous dish. (...) The presence of hemp was documented through ramshackled stems found in three cavities (...) Still at Mătăsaru (...) bottle grass seeds were found (*Setaria viridis*). Carbonized wheat beads were also found at Colonesti-Mărunței (...) and at Scornicești (...) hemp stems.”⁹

These large productions, for those times, were also due to the fact that the Geto-Dacians had a well-developed iron civilization. This was especially in what tools were concerned, because bronze was preferred for weapons: „At the foundation of any civilization, there are the working tools, attunement and man's skill of working and producing material goods. From this point of view, the Dacians had reached a high level in the last two centuries before the Roman conquest (...)

Unending is the range of iron tools discovered in Geto-Dacian establishments, especially those in Orăștie Mountains. Here, like in other Dacian establishments, various agrarian tools were found: mowers, reaping hooks, hacks, mattocks, racks, peckers, pruning knives etc., the ones that stand out being knives and ploughshares, of a specific type. Indeed, I. H. Crisan's research showed that, unlike the triangular ploughshare, with bented edges, specific to the Romans and the Celts, the Dacians had a ploughshare of a massive, flat shape, with a triangular apex and a strong median rib; the bar ended with a hook that could be fixed in the wood of the plough.¹⁰

The following fact is obvious and certain: the usage of tools and, especially, of the ploughshare led not only to the quantitative increase of cereal, but also to the qualitative one: *„ this iron ploughshare increased productivity in agriculture considerably and allowed for*

9Ibidem

10Hadrian Daicoviciu, *The Dacians*, Bucharest, Editura Enciclopedia Română, 1972, p. 233
the accumulation of great food supplies. Big quantities of cereal and other types of crops (many varieties of wheat, bird seed, rye, lentil, two-row barley) found in the hambars and storage pools from the Geto-Dacian establishments cannot therefore surprise us,”ⁿ

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