

THE SUN WORSHIP WITH THE ROMANIANS

DOINA IONESCU, CRISTIANA DUMITRACHE

*Astronomical Institute of Romanian Academy
Str. Cutitul de Argint 5,
40557 Bucharest, Romania
Email: doinaionescu36@yahoo.com,
crisd@aira.astro.ro*

Abstract. We summarize the main aspects of the solar cult with the Romanian people and the populations that lived on their territory. We highlight the origin of the solar cult and its evidence with the ancestors of the Romanians, the Dacians, as well as its manifestations in present popular art and other aspects of Romanians life.

Key words: astronomy history, Sun.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Sun, our day star, has always impressed people all over the world, who included it in their cultures. The Sun gives warmth, light, life and therefore it is associated with a powerful symbolism in all forms of culture. There are many studies concerning the worshipping of the Sun in different cultures such as the ancient Egyptian, Aztec, Asian, Greek, as well as in the European countries. We note here the book of Bhatnagar and Livingston (2005), that presents a nice review of solar worship all over the world.

One can speak about the existence of a solar cult on the territory of Romania beginning with ancient times, more precisely with the Neolithic. This cult was taken over by the Romanians ancestors, called the Getae-Dacians, and it has continued to exist until nowadays.

First, let us say a word about the ancient inhabitants of Romania. The hearth of present day Romania was initially inhabited by the Getae, a branch of the Thracians, a people of Indo-European origin who were archaeologically attested on the territory between the Balkan Mountains (South), The Forest Mountains (North), the Black Sea shore (East) and beyond the river Siret (West). They were firstly mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus, who presented them as being situated on the territories South of the Danube in 514 BC, when the Persian king Darius launched a campaign against the Scythes, which inhabited the shore of the Black Sea. Strabon, in his work *Geographica*, made a more exact presentation of the Getaes frontiers. He called some of the Getae by the name of Dacians, the more widely spread name of the Romanians ancestors. Their country was located in the area in and around the

Carpathian Mountains and East of there to the Black Sea.

Densușianu (1913) noted that a powerful Neolithic migration, coming from Central Asia, had formed its first European country at the Carpathians, "at the Lower Danube and especially in the countries of Dacia". This was the Pelasgian population that formed and coalesced the great and powerful centre of the Neolithic population in Europe.

It seems that in our country the solar cult was first attested with the Pelasgians, forefathers of the Getae-Dacians, that lived in the Eastern part of the Get-Dacian territory, mainly around the Island of Leuce (the present Island of the Snakes, in the Black Sea). Homer placed Boreas in Thrace, and, therefore, in his opinion, the land of Hyperborea was somewhere to the North of the Thracian territory, perhaps in Dacia. The historic Hecateus Abderita, who lived in the time of Alexander the Great (4th-3rd century BC), showed that the population from the islands of the North Sea had raised a great circular temple to a native Apollo, a god of light and fire. He said that the priests of Apollo were the sons of Boreas (Georgescu, 2011). The Hyperboreans worship of Apollo is considered to be the golden epoch of the ante-Greek Pelasgian civilization.

In 1823, the archaeologists discovered on the Leuce island plateau the ruins of a square temple, with the sides of almost 30 meters, made up of big stone blocks, joined without cement, just as the Dacians built their fortresses. This temple was surrounded by many annexes intended for the storage of the gifts the people brought to their God of Sun.

In the territory inhabited by the Getae, a country later called Dacia, the solar cult appeared as part of an ample process of Indo-Europeanization, brought about first by the Scythes, by the end of the 3rd century BC. They had an Uranian religion that worshipped the Sun. Later it was enforced by the Celtic tribes, who conquered and settled for a while on part of the Get-Dacians territory in the 2nd century BC. The Celts had a real cult of the Sun, attested also during their presence in Gallia and Ireland that lasted until the appearance of Christianity. They worshipped a solar god was called Belenus, a god of light and fire. All these Scythe and Celtic influences added to the already formed Get-Dacian background, where the worshipping of the Sun already manifested.

2. THE GETAE- DACIANS

On the territory of our country, archaeological researches revealed in isolated Getae, Scythe and Celtic tombs, as well as in great such necropolis, the existence of a great number of solar symbols on amulets, pottery, arms or many other kinds of objects. The multitude of these solar proofs is explained by the fact that the solar

cult, actually of a distant Indo-European origin, was a strong characteristic of the Get-Dacians religion.

All the symbols of the solar cult (the disk, sun wheel, swastika, spiral, boat, chariot, swan, and ax) were found in considerable number almost everywhere on the territory of Dacia. This solar cult reached its peak at the epoch of the metals, especially starting from the Epoch Age. We present below (Fig.1) two ancient Dacian objects bearing clear solar symbols. One is a Dacian silver coin, over 2200 years old, where a solar wheel with a solar horse is represented, that was found at Voloscani, Vidra village, Vrancea county, and in Moldavia (Silvia Păun, 1999). Another symbol is a Sun wheel with eight radii imprinted on a Dacian iron nail head, over 2100 years old, found at Sarmizegetusa Regia, Hunedoara country, Transylvania.

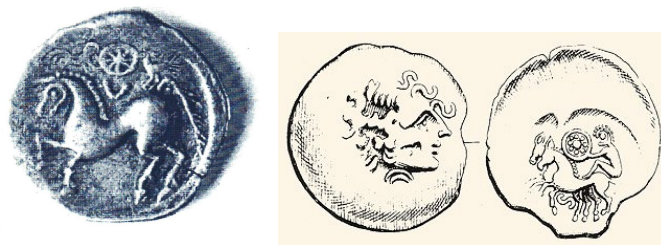


Fig. 1 – Dacian coin with sun wheel and solar horse, representing Apollo, the god of Sun.

The Sun wheel is common to many people, but the swastika symbol, a kind of solar wheel, seems to be an old Arian symbol. Citing Wikipedia encyclopedia we note that "The genesis of the swastika symbol is often treated in conjunction with cross symbols in general, such as the sun cross of pagan Bronze Age religion". There are a few speculative hypotheses and one of them is that the cross symbols and the swastika share a common origin in simply symbolizing the Sun (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Swastika#Origin_hypotheses). This symbol comes from the places between the Danube and the Carpathians Mountains, the so-called Dacia Hyperborea, at around 3000 BC. The Sun stronghold from Leuce Island (The Alba Monastery) is represented on a coin that has an ox head and the swastika sign on one of the sides. The swastika represents an ancient solar symbol, but, analyzing now this old sign, we cannot help observing that the interplanetary magnetic field has the same design at the maximum of the solar activity. Consequently, we can say that the swastika represents the Sun and the solar influence over the planetary space. This symbolism has been preserved, being still marked on popular bred in some religious rituals (Fig.2).

A special solar symbol, manifest beginning with the end of the Bronze Age is the so-called aquatic bird (swan or duck), that usually draws a solar chariot. The



Fig. 2 – Swastika, the symbol of the Sun and its influence, an ancient hyperborean sign.

solar chariots appeared in the Near Orient and spread over a vast area. With the Getae-Dacians the solar cult symbolized by the swan carrying a boat or a solar chariot perpetuated until the first Iron Age, and it can be found in many parts of Dacia. Worth mentioning are two very interesting discoveries, namely two miniature solar chariots made of bronze, with iron spindles, drawn by eight aquatic birds. The first such chariot was discovered near the town of Oraştie (Transylvania), in 1834. The second similar object was found in a funeral tomb at the village of Bujoru, the county of Teleorman, South of Romania, in 1974 (Fig.3).

The solar chariot found at Bujoru is made of bronze and it has iron spindles. It is made up of a frame with four wheels, on which is placed an elongated vase with lid, where incinerations were made for the solar god. The chariot was adorned at the ends with aquatic birds. The heads of such birds adorned also the nails that fixed the chariot. It was dated back to the Bronze Age and is considered to be a complex image of the solar god Apollo the Hyperborean. At the epoch of Herodotus there was the tradition of Apollo, the Hyperborean God, who, in winter, left on his chariot drawn by swans to the frozen North, to come back in spring.

Solar symbols are also present on the pottery discovered at Grădiştea Muncelului, within the remnants of the old Dacians' capital, Sarmizegetusa. All these manifestations of the solar cult from the Bronze Age certainly evolved, but there rises the question whether they can be connected to the Great God of the Getae-Dacians, Zalmoxis. We know from historical sources that Zalmoxis was considered a god of the sky and of light. Consequently he must have been also the god of the Sun, of fire and life, both here on earth, as well as in eternal life. He was also the patron of astronomy and a former student of Pythagoras. He and the great priest Deceneus, the latter one from the epoch of King Burebista (1st century BC), were the ones that taught astronomy to the Getae-Dacians.



Fig. 3 – Solar chariot discovered at Bujoreni (Bronze Age).

Part of this astronomical knowledge became manifest also in the construction of sanctuaries. Sarmizegetusa Regia, the capital of the Dacian state, is made up of a complex of sanctuaries and a civil settlement, dating from the Neolithic Age. The sanctuaries were dedicated to the cult of the Sun and to astronomical observations. The constructions there made up an ingenious calendar, surprisingly precise for the respective epoch.

The complex of sanctuaries, seven in number is situated at an altitude of 1200 m, in the Orăștie Mountains, on an artificially terraced plateau. All this was kept away from the uninitiated's eyes, and seems to have been intended for the deciphering of the astral mechanisms and of the great cosmic cycles. These sanctuaries correspond to the five naked-eye visible planets: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn; there is also one that corresponds to the Moon, whereas the seventh one, called the Pantheon, is a representation of the Universe. Most historians estimate that they were built between the 3rd and 2nd centuries BC, but there are also other calculations (in relation to the summer solstice day), which indicate that they are even 600 years older. The most important (and the best known) of them are the great circular sanctuary, the Pantheon, and the andesite Sun. The andesite Sun sanctuary was dedicated to the worshipping of the Sun (Fig.4). It represents an undoubtable proof that the Get-Dacians worshipped the cult of the Sun, practiced the sacred fire and incineration as homages to the Sun. It is made up of a central disk consisting of 11 blocks perfectly combined, with a diameter of 7 meters, that continues with ten rays encrusted on the surface (each 2.76m long), of trapezoidal form, with the exterior sides forming a circle arch. To the North the disk is completed by an alley made of andesitic blocks that narrow away from the disk. This sanctuary resembles the circular one at Stonehenge, *i.e.* it functions as a sacred circle used for many kinds of magical practices, as well as a form of protection of the space where a ritual is carried out. There are also obvious similitudes between Stonehenge and this sanctuary. They have the same exact

North-South and East-West orientations and their alignment allows the solar rays to cross the inside from one end to the other, only during one day of the year, namely on 22 December, when the Sun's declination is maximal and astronomical winter starts. In all zones where the Sun and the Moon were worshipped, that day was marked by fire ceremonies, whose goal was that the Sun should not "freeze" or disappear. The sanctuary is made of andesitic plates and is the place where the Sun was worshipped and sacrifices were brought to it. The Pantheon (Fig.4) is devoted to the whole cosmos. It is made up of three concentric circles and an arch with Hestia's hearth in the middle of the arch. The arch stands for the Earth, while the circle next to it is that of the Moon, followed by the circles of the Sun and (moving stars), *i.e.* planets and last by that of the fixed stars. The two big gates are oriented to the solstices directions, the Men Gate corresponding to the summer solstice (Cancer astrological sign) and the Gods Gate corresponding to the winter solstice (Capricorn sign). This sanctuary was also used as a calendar. The arrangement of the pillars and blocks of stones in concentric circles leads to the conclusion that the Dacians knew the calendar of 365 days and the motion of the Sun throughout the year. The Dacians created a quite precise solar calendar, which they used especially in agriculture. Their solar calendar was considered the most precise one in antiquity. The Dacian monks also placed a sacred hearth of fire at the centre of their smaller, round, multi-circled sanctuaries raised in the area nearby Sarmizegetusa, and also made incinerations as homages brought to the Sun.

Circular altars dedicated to the Sun were discovered at Sărata Monteoru and Sighișoara (in Transylvania country) dating from the same Bronze Age.



Fig. 4 – The Andesite Sun and the Pantheon sanctuary at Sarmizegetusa.

Most probably the name given by the Dacians to the Sun was "Dzio". Hence come the present words "ziua" (day) and "zeu" (god), that has a close relative in

Italian, namely "dio".

With the Dacians everything started from the Sun. They considered that the New Year began on the date of the spring equinox, in March, when the Sun regained its powers and helped Nature revive. In March, when the Sun grew stronger, the Dacians resumed all activities: the agricultural works, the climbing of the sheep in the mountains for grazing, mining and the training of the armies. The solar cult continued in Dacia even after it was conquered by the Romans, in the 1st century AD. The Romans, too, had the old Persian cult of the god of light, Mithras that had spread rapidly in the Roman Empire, starting from the 2nd century until the 5th century AD. The Roman army had turned this cult into the cult of Sol Invictus (the unconquered Sun), that reached its climax during the reign of Emperor Aurelian, who raised a temple for it in 274 (*i.e.* three years after the withdrawal of the Roman troops from Dacia).

The Neolithic populations, especially the ancient Pelasgian current, people whose public and private lives were based on religion, had at the same time a special cult for the deceased. One of the most important Neolithic necropolis in Europe was discovered at Cernica, near Bucharest, the present capital of Romania. The majority of the tombs (96.3%) can be considered to have a solar orientation, corresponding to the Sun's azimuth at sunrise (Sîngeorzan, 1976). The measurement of the azimuth coordinate of the Sun at the summer solstice gives the median axe orientation of the tombs. It seems that the funeral rituals took place in the morning and that the bodies were placed in the tombs facing the Sun. This practice of burying the dead facing East was transformed to the orientation of the bodies with the head pointing East with the Christian people.

3. THE CHRISTIAN CONTINUATION

Christianity, in general, and Romanian Christianity in particular, took over almost all dogmas and rituals of the religion of Mithras, the solar god, such as the celebration of the day of Sunday, Christmas, baptism and the sacrament. The head cover of the Orthodox priests is called even today "mitra" and is taken over also from the Persian priests of Mithra. The birth of the Persian god Mithras, "The Sun of Rightness" was celebrated on the 25 of December, date taken over by Christianity for the birth of the Savior Jesus Christ.

The Sun has a special significance also in the Romanian folk culture. Actually, Romanian Christian religion also abounds in solar symbols and beliefs adopted from the pagan period, that overlapped and mixed up with the Christian beliefs. The old folk people speak even today of the Sun as Gods Star, Gods Eye, the Holy Sun, which, when it rises, makes all stars disappear. The Romanian Orthodox churches

are known for their pictures where cosmic aspects are often mixed with saint figures and biblical scenes. The Sun occupies an important position in this context - Fig.5 displays some examples.



Fig. 5 – An wall picture at Voroneț Monastery (left); coat of Arms of Moldavia, dating from the XVIth century found at Probota Monastery.

An important solar symbol in ancient times seemed to be the Cross sign. The specific Dacian cross is characteristically made up of a circle around the cross sign. Later it was made up of a circle inscribed with a cross or of a cross over passing its margins. The Orthodox cross contains the Sun rays and the Orthodox churches are recognized by their specific spiers, as Fig.6 displays.



Fig. 6 – The Orthodox Cross, a mixture between a simple cross and the Sun symbol.

A remarkable thing in the architecture of the Christian churches orientation is the same concern for the Sun rise point. From the beginning, the Christian churches have been built with the altar facing the East, actually the point where the Sun rises

to spread light on the Earth. Tombstones are also facing the same direction.

4. SOLAR CULT TRACES IN THE ROMANIAN POPULAR ART

The Sun is present in the Romanian peoples outlook, starting with the Southward orientation of the folk houses, namely of the "prispa" (open verandas) or of the "foișor" (belvedere). The icons, the churches, the church altars and tombs always face the East. The older they are, the more deliberately they seem to observe the direction of the solstice sunrises. In the Romanian tradition the most frequent solar symbols are the sun wheel, the circle, the wheel with the cross in it, the mill wheel or the rhombus. These symbols are to be found also in the architecture of the folk houses. In many regions of Romania, such as in Bucovina, Maramureș, Oltenia, the Sun is carved on the pillars, doors and beams of the houses, being considered a good luck omen and a sign of protection against evil. Solar symbols are present also on the houses in Transylvania, Oltenia, as well as on the engravings of the churches in Maramureș.

The Romanian folk people have preserved till today the custom of carving many of the above mentioned solar symbols on various household objects such as dowry cases, distaffs, funeral stones, tools, pottery. Solar, along with lunar symbols can be found even on folk clothes in some parts of our country, such as on sheepskin sleeveless jackets in Bunila and Poienița Voinii, Hunedoara County, Transylvania. The most common Romanian folk custom related to the Sun is the trinket ("mărțișor"), which is actually a symbol of the spring Sun.

A famous Romanian tradition is represented by the Easter eggs painting. The Sun, stylised or not, occupies a central place in this painting, together with many geometric designs (Fig.7).

The worshipping of the Sun can be found also in some Romanian folk dances. The best example is "hora", which through its round shape imitates the roundness of the Sun. The origins of the "hora" dance come from the period when on the territory of our country dominated the cult of the Sun. At Bodești-Frumușica was discovered a ceramics vase representing such a dance, namely a "hora" made up of six women. This object was dated as belonging to the Cucuteni Culture, approx. 3700-2500 BC. This is a clear proof that this traditional Romanian dance appeared more than 5000 years ago.

One of the most archaic agro-solar traditions in Romania is the dance of the *Calușari* (Fig.8), a tradition practiced for 9 days, that begins (with the dance of the sunrise, around a mound) exclusively on the Whitsun. The dance, regarded as holy, is performed by 9 characters: "Vătaful" (king and pontiff), carrying a white flag, club, sword, etc, "Ceașul" (with hammer, knapsack with 9 simples such as garlic, worm-



Fig. 7 – Easter eggs and a Maramureș region gate.



Fig. 8 – The traditional Romanian dance *Călușarii* (it means the horsemen), a Sun worship ritual.

wood, etc) and 7 "calușari" (who represent the solar horses of Apollo, in 9 dances, with jingle bells, clubs, etc), beside 2 bagpipe players and the "Mut", a dumb person with a whip. This tradition, marked also by the number 9, represents the prehistorical farmers invocation to the Sun, for the favoring and and protection of the harvests against the malevolent actions of the 9 fairies called "Rusalii".

In time, many Romanian rulers and princes, from all regions of our country, adopted symbols of the Sun in their coats of arms or seals. We notice here a couple

of examples:

- the royal seal of Prince Stephen Stefan the Great, ruler of Moldavia, 15th century;
- the coat of arms of the Brancoveni royal family, rulers of Wallachia, 17th century;
- the coat of arms of the united Romanian principalities carried out by Prince Michael the Brave, the end of 16th century.

The symbol of the Sun is present in the present arms of Romania.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The Sun has fascinated the ancient inhabitants from many countries and continents, the inhabitants of the land between the Charpatian Mountains and Black Sea, our forefathers, included. In the Romanian tradition, the worshipping of the Sun has its roots in the Dacian prehistory and even much more in the old pre-Greeks and Thracians epochs, especially in the Pelasgian culture. Apollo, the God of the Sun, represented as a rider knight, the divination of Mithras and the Roman worshipping of Sol Invictus, were also widely spread in the Romanian ancient territories. The pagan symbols of the solar cult, Dacian and Roman alike, found their way into the daily life of the people, into their religion, art and folklore.

The ancient solar cult imbued even the Christian religion, influencing the orientation of the churches, icons and tombs, as well as the essence of the Orthodox cross. The Romanian folklore is rich in solar symbols, that are often used in the ornamentation of the folk household objects, clothes and houses. Traditional solar symbols are to be found also on painted eggs and dances. The Romanian princes used the image of the Sun in their coats of arms as a sign of dignity and power.

We can conclude that the day star of our planet, the Sun has been present with the inhabitants of the Romanian country places from Neolithic Age until the present day. This cult is very well integrated in the popular traditions, as well as in the Christian Orthodox religion.

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