

The Orpheus Dispute

If you have ever seen Hallmark Channel's film "Jason and the Argonauts" you will probably think Orpheus, one of the members of the expedition, is African but he actually is of Thracian origin. Archaeologists claim that his home land and the very spot where his legendary love with Eurydice occurs are the Rhodopes Mountains in Bulgaria. The mythical musician of divine talent was born and lived in the Rhodopes area, which is pre-vaillingly situated nowadays within Bulgarian territory.

That is the reason why Bulgarian Minister of Culture and Tourism was so astonished to find that her Greek counterpart Dmitris Avramopulos has started to promote Greece as "The Land of Mythical Orpheus". This campaign had been undertaken during the tourism expo in Moscow and threatened to impair the image of Orpheus as a Thracian singer. Some months later, at the tourism fair in London the two ministers met and after thorough discussion of the matter came to the most sensible conclusion – Orpheus is to be accepted as a mythical figure of the whole Balkan area, he should be honored by all without any claiming to own him. Bulgarian and Greek ministers decided to start the development of a joined product under the title "Rhodopes – Homeland of Orpheus". The Greek Minister promised to contribute for the promotion of the project through Greek tourist offices in Europe. He even suggested the idea that tourist operators in both countries should establish similar tourist routes that will present the region as a place in Europe building an image of a millennium history and culture. Thus both countries will implement a common policy to enhance the capacity of the Rhodopes region to attract tourists and the accusations of theft of historical and cultural symbols will be forgotten.

Although the project is still under discussion some ambitious entrepreneurs have already started their promotion campaign. At the very beginning of the small mountain village Gela there is a huge, colorful billboard informing you that you are "Welcome to the Birthplace of Orpheus". There also are tourist routes called "Following the Footsteps of the Orpheus Legend" with a visit to the cave Diyavolsko Garlo (The Devil's Trough). As this particular cave is the deepest one in Bulgaria and has an underground river inside, local people claim that this is the very spot where Orpheus' journey to the Under World had started.

The Orpheus matter became even more intense while at a round table meeting, during the 14th International Youth Folklore Orpheus Celebrations, the profound archaeologist professor Nikolai Ovcharov announced that the temple found earlier this year near the village of Tatul was the place where Orpheus' funeral had taken place. The sanctuary itself depicted one unique habit of the Thracians-to bury their king not under a hill but in a cave really high in the mountains. It was believed that this way their ruler will serve as a link between people and the gods even after his death. Such a ritual is described to have been held for two kings only- Rezus and Orpheus. That data is according to ancient writings from which it does not become clear whether Orpheus had actually existed as a historical figure or is a fictitious character of all Thracians.

Covered in the mist of legend and beliefs the story of Orpheus and his love for Eurydice is always worth exploring. We can only hope that Bulgarian and Greek efforts in this joint venture will eventually turn out to be successful in promoting the beautiful myth and the unforgettable nature and customs of the Rhodopes Mountains.

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4 Paws to the Rescue

Very few people know that high in the Rila Mountain there is a recovery home for a really special kind of retired artist – former street dancing bears. 12 kilometers from the town of Belitsa and km from Bansko (the famous Bulgarian ski resort), on 120 000sq. m. plot the biggest park for dancing bears in Europe is situated where 18 brown bears have already been sheltered. The latest inhabitant is a bear called Marry, just recently rescued from her owner who inherited her and the bear dancing business from his father. The money earned by the animal on the streets was the only support of the family for many years. It was not until recently that the bear became too expensive to care for and the owner decided to give it away to the 4 Paws association because of the compensation. The 4 Paws crew found the animal in very

poor condition and had to give her first aid assistance. Now she is already well accepted by her three room mates- Leta, Violeta and Galia, who have been longer in the recovery centre but still have not overcome some of the psychological trauma of their previous life. The three poor creatures did not sleep during the cold months at all as they were too thin to spend that much time without food.

Now all ex-artists are adjusting to a wild, free way of life and workers at the recovery centre say that the process is long but rewarding. With great anticipation are expected the other 7 future members of the club- the last, still working, street dancers. They will hopefully be rescued by the end of this year and then all 25 dancing bears in Bulgaria will be gathered in the recovery home.



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