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The Case of Thracians and Greeks in the north-eastern Aegean

Introduction

Greeks dwelling in the north received so far less attention in modern scholarship¹.

Ancient poets seemingly produced evidence that deserve more thought due to direct dealings with peoples of Indo-European stock that had settled the Northern Aegean coast on either side of the Bosphorus².

We could find much support just by looking at the geographical setting of the region for it could help us to better understand such assumption. Moreover, the thick presence of Thracians and Phrygians on the Galipoli peninsula (i.e. on the ancient Chersonese, the one peninsula of Thrace that runs along the Hellespont bordering on the east the Dardanelles, the straight leading to the present-day Marmara sea), as stated by ancient authors like Herodotus (6.33), indicates its importance. The protruded piece of land stretching for at least 150 kilometres southward makes it a natural strategic place. It is not surprising that this region was extensively researched³.

Supposedly, various themes are to be explicitly discussed henceforward as subjects were presented to the very day according to sites and the peoples in contact. For instance, in recent studies Greek colonialism has appeared to have been a part of an independent activity done by natural expansion in the ancient world. Greeks expanding towards the north of the Mediterranean world into the last frontiers of the Aegean intermingled with indigenous population groups, such as Thracians, Phrygians⁴, etc. They even worshipped Thracian deities. As seen in two inscriptions from Odessos (present-day Varna)⁵, a religious group of worshippers set up a relief to the Thracian Heros Manimazos (Ἡρωί Μανιμαζωί θυνεΐται). The feasters (as lead by some Hermas, Greek at least by name) were (οἱ περὶ τὸν ἱερέα Ἐπταικενθὸν Ἀσιατικοῦ διὰ ἐπιμελητῶν Θεοδότου Ἡράκωνος καὶ Ζῆνι Ποσιδωνίου.) under a Thracian priest Eptaikentes.

In the second inscription under study (n.78), above the first relief it reads: "To the Heros Manimazos (Ἡρωί Μανιμαζωί), and below the second relief: "Hestiaios, son of Nikias, for his sons Nikias and Agathenor as a token of gratitude" (Ἑστιαῖος Νεικίου ὑπὲρ τῶν υἱῶν Νεικίου καὶ Ἀγαθῆνορος χαριστήριον).

Here a major difficulty makes itself visible: evidence is meagre and is irregularly distributed throughout the centuries. We seem to know much more about the Roman times than we do about the

¹ For further reading see ISAAC 1986, XI and HANSEN, NIELSEN 2004.

² Homer, Archilochos, Herodotus, Thucydides, and others.

³ ISAAC 1986, 159–160; HANSEN, NIELSEN 2004, 900–911.

⁴ See VASSILEVA's 2005 comprehensive study, 102–110, and especially her English summary of Chapter Ten "King Midas in the Thracian-Phrygian Contact Zone", 146–7.

⁵ *IGBulg* I² 77 and 78; and also *IGBulg* V 5033.

archaic and the classical period. However, even so, evidence presents itself according to activities, and historical layers sometimes surprise us with abundance without at that being informative and satisfying.

The subject-matter of this paper is to present a critical outlook based on epigraphic evidence with possibly new material and new perspectives. In this respect, we are gratified by the excellent supportive material that archaeology provided us with in order to be able to reconsider the history of cultural exchange between Thracian and Greeks⁶.

Archaeology provided excellent supportive material to reconsider the history of cultural exchange between Thracian and Greeks to the extent that scholars started speaking of partnerships (traditionally known as colonial relationship). Among the artefacts, there are many interesting scripts (inscriptions on stone, graffiti, dipinti, etc).

In my paper I propose to examine the onomastics in a number of epigraphic evidence and reconsider, in some way at least, traditional views on prosopography, language, and ethnicity.

From a linguistic point of view, I will try to demonstrate that the very structure of the onomastic items under study show a steady and recognizable pattern belonging to a language that has had its independent development, i. e. the Thracian. It is my understanding that a number of problematic obscure readings, misinterpretations and misrepresentations could be solved making use of new comparative data of a different order.

The study is relying on predominantly new and unpublished material coming from archaeological discoveries (inscriptions) in the region.

The Thracians in a Historical Perspective

The Thracian studies seem to have produced a solid record of topics comprehensively examined by scholars over the past one hundred and twenty years or so.

As the ancient Greek literary tradition has it, the Thracians lived in numerous tribes spread over the islands of the Aegean and up north to the Carpathian Mountains. The islands of Euboia, Lemnos, Samothrace, and Thasos⁷ trace back a path of historical and mythical memory of Thracian culture. Although in handbooks their language is termed 'Indo-European', scholars did not discuss criteria at length.

Apart the fact that in modern scholarship less attention was paid to the Thracians and their history, politics came to play not an indecisive role in delaying and putting the investigation off⁸. Methodology was seriously influenced by approaches applied to standard western-like colonialism⁹.

Yet another peculiarity of the subject is that despite the spread of Latin as administrative language, Greek continued to be widely used. A major part of the corpus of the Greek inscriptions found in Bulgaria originated from Roman Imperial times, thus offering opportunities to leads to Thracian language development. A large number of the 1st-3rd century AD votive inscriptions are dedicated to the Thracian Heros (Horseman) whose local epithets provide a rich material for the present study.

⁶ See to that effect the numerous accounts in Proceedings of the 10th International Congress of Thracology, 2007. And among many other accounts, the paper of Adams, W. L. 3–13.

⁷ See among many other accounts the one by BOARDMAN 1999, 229–233; 264–266.

⁸ ARCHIBALD 1998, 3: 'Modern political divisions, geographical and ideological, have almost to the present day conspired to prolong the isolation.'

⁹ TSETSKHLADZE 2006, 26–27: 'books ...link ancient and modern colonization and 'colonialism'(s)'; OWEN 2000, 139: 'Greek colonization of Thasos, and indeed of Thrace, is currently written from a wholly Hellenocentric and text-based perspective, behind which lies an unspoken and pervasive comparison with Western European colonialism'. See more opinions in detail in TSETSKHLADZE 2006, 23–83. To this effect, see also OWEN 2005, 5–7.

Thracians and Hellenes

While there is a huge gap of time, passed en silence by scholars, lacking information on the Bronze Age period, there is a whole array of bits of information here and there scattered over the map of the millennia-long history of the Mediterranean. Because of its huge impact on culture, the Greek colonization for instance, that is to say various 'comings' of Greek settlers, merchants, etc. in the lands surrounding the sea, we have in hand a vast source of information indirectly or more directly leading to the early Thracian presence and their practices.

In terms of 'earliest possible', we need to better understand why we should abandon the model of violent conquest and subsequent 'asymmetrical power relationships'¹⁰. There seems to be unanimity among scholars¹¹ that in those remote times, the Thracians were not just passive observers of the 'coming of the Hellenes' up north; rather they were partners in creating a new environment for socio-cultural and economic development in the Aegean.

For a comparative outlook of the situation round the Mediterranean here are some examples:

In Macedonia (Bottiaia) — the town of Beroia, early 3rd century BC¹²:

Σαδάλας Νικάνδρου

Στράτων Σαδάλα

Φιλίστα Σαδάλα γυνή.

In translation: "Sadalas, son of Nikandros, Straton, son of Sadalas, Philista, wife of Sadalas. What we see is the famous name of Sadalas, once belonging to a Thracian king, appearing in the Nominative and Genitive form in that same inscription. It does not come as a surprise as there are other concurrencies of that same morphological shaping in proper Thracian. Ancient Macedonia does not make geographically an exception to that.

Not much different is the case in Ἀφροδ[ισία]

Σαδά[λα]

Θραϊτ[τα],

Δαιδ[άλου]

5

γυ[νή]¹³.

In translation: "Aphrodisia, daughter of Sadalas, a Thracian [woman], wife of Daidalos." Or Oloros, 5th BC¹⁴.

In the Inscriptions from Aegina¹⁵:

Νήνη, 2nd BC, n. 924; Βιτηψο Βιτηοπου, 2nd BC, n. 927; Δοληπορισ Πατα, 2nd -1st BC, n. 929.

Βιτηψ Δοληπορισ, Μοκαπορι Βιτηψοσ, ξηαιρετε, ca. 2nd BC, n. 930.

Kozios aipolou mnemeion, 3rd BC, n. 1073.

A major part of the corpus of the Greek inscriptions found in Bulgaria originated from Roman Imperial times, thus offering opportunities to leads to Thracian language development. A large number of the 1st-3rd centuries AD votive inscriptions are dedicated to the Thracian Heros (Horseman) whose local epithets provide a rich material for the present study. As an example here is a dedication to Asklepios, on a votive slab, found not far from Pautalia, present-day town of Kyustendil, southwestern Bulgaria, 3rd century AD. It reads in translation: "To (god) Asklepios, Teres Garytinov set up (as a votive)"¹⁶.

¹⁰ OWEN 2005, 6: 'the assumption that asymmetrical power relationship, drawn along ethnic lines, existed in all 'colonized' areas from the Late Geometric and Archaic periods onwards is one which still pervades much of the literature; and OWEN 2005, 18.

¹¹ See TSETSKHLADZE 1999 and 2006.

¹² BCH 71/72 (1947/1948) 438, 2.

¹³ IG, II (second edition), 8900 from Athens, Roman imperial period.

¹⁴ Kirchner n.11380.

¹⁵ Inscriptiones Argolidis. Here I thank Dr. J.Curbera, who kindly sent me off-prints of these inscriptions.

¹⁶ Ασκληπιῶ Τηρης Γαρυτινος ἀ(νέθηκεν).

The Thracian Language

We need to have a basic understanding of the language of the inhabitants of the northern territories the ancient Greeks dealt with. Our knowledge of the Thracian language comes from evidence that has been assembled by modern scholars throughout the last centuries from two types of documents: literary documents derived from Greek and Latin writers and inscriptions. Owing to the fact that epigraphy furnished less information, many scholars undertook investigations that were not based but on one principle, to find any indication leading to any information on the Thracian. Methodologically speaking this kind of ‘thesaurus at any rate’ produced only more confusion extant in many writings to the present day.

Thus, of many speculations over the etymology of a name or word, nothing proved to be more important than the secure reading, the authentic Thracian sound that can be found only in inscriptions¹⁷.

The Method

It becomes clear that to exemplify the method will be impossible under the circumstances. For each case is for itself within the framework of the general theory.

A short but eloquent piece of evidence is to be found in the following inscription: Κυρίῳ Ζβελσουργῷ, “to Lord Zbelsourdos”

This votive plate shows a classic representation of Zeus, as he is known from Greek iconography with his attribute, the thunderbolt, in his right hand and an image of his bird, the eagle, ascending to the left.

The votive tablet was found in the village of Stradalovo, south of Pautalia, present-day town of Kyustendil, and is to be dated to the 3rd century AD as are many votive tablets of the same kind and period already dated.

The artifact is registered under № II – 408 in the Regional museum of Kyustendil. The inscription was incised somehow irregularly but beautifully in two lines: the cutter misjudged the space available on the tablet, and in a very unexpected way finished the message on the line above the first one! The size of the letters is also irregular and varies between 1,2 and 2 cm, the first line being 7 cm long and next (originally the first one!) ca. 12 cm long.

As we are concerned with the linguistic problems that inscriptions very often offer, we should not miss the opportunity in observing that under the form of Ζβελσουργος the epithet appears in *IGBulg. IV 2216-2218*, from the sanctuary of Zeus Zbelsurdos near the village of Shatrovo in the place called Tsarichina, eastward of Pautalia, 1st-3rd century AD. In inscription 2216, this epithet was read incorrectly by Detschew¹⁸.

And again, in contrasting the form in our inscription, another variant is present in three inscriptions from Bulgaria¹⁹. We already discussed the existing alternation thi- / si- in Thracian, exemplified here through Ζβελσουργος and Ζβελθουργος. The connecting syllable –ou- is to be explained through the analogical assimilation of the Greek language editing, i.e. s-ou from ti/thi and ord- /urd- leveled to t/th/s. This alternation already exists in Thracian names and at least in the original Thracian variant is only a /t/ replaced by Greek /th/ (theta), which through contamination may have been altered to /s/. Although we can get a sense of chronology through some sequences, language change is too complicated a phenomenon to be simply accounted for using time and space frames. Tentatively, one should posit *ti* to precede *si*.

Yet another linguistic point in this name is to be made through observing that it starts with a Z-. In Indo-European there is originally no /z/, and thus this phoneme is an allophone of the original /s/. Therefore,

¹⁷ For an interpretation of the method see HODOT 1990, 12: He made a key methodological point proving that the literary tradition of the Lesbian dialect in Asia Minor is ‘un témoignage médiatisé’.

¹⁸ DETSCHEW 1976, 177.

¹⁹ Cf. Ζβελθουργος, an epithet of Zeus, *IGBulg. II 762* from Kardam, NE Bulgaria, 2nd-3rd century AD; III 1886, 1st – 3rd century AD; V 5612, from Krumovgrad, southeastern Bulgaria, 3rd century AD.

in trying to be consistent here, we should “edit” Zbelsourdos to Sbelsourdos. By comparing these two variants, one cannot miss the obvious voicing of the S- into Z- before *b*. This is a classic case of regressive assimilation due to the voiced element as in b representing the glide /w/. And it is only a matter of time to welcome among the true Thracian names the “legitimate” form that starts with S-.

Going further with our observation, we should not disregard the status of the Thracian /b/. For it stands for the IE glide */w/ and emerges as such through its allophone /ou/ or simply /o/, or /b/ as for example in Be-tespios, Ouertespios²⁰, etc.

As a result of this one observation a second one is pressing: What is the value of *b*? As we have already mentioned *b* is a replacement of /w/ and phonetically it had weakened to bilabial *w* as in the English word ‘way’. Again, the contamination that had occurred through the influence of the Greek language over Thracian with using the Greek script and by Greek schooling gave way to write *b* which in its turn already in the 4th century BC had the phonetic value of *w* in Greek. So, in restoring S- and –ou- the outcome is not necessarily unexpected: *Swel-ti-ord-os. By pronouncing it as Soueltiourdos or Souelsourdos we reach another stage or another range of already attested forms of names that are connected, e.g. Σουητουληνος, an epithet of the Thracian Heros²¹, Σουητουληνος²², again an epithet of the Thracian Heros.

The Presentation of the Material

With many inscriptions found on metalwork, it became even more difficult to keep up with the line of treating equally all inscriptions and positive data yielded. For epigraphy developed its own way²³ and therefore facts are hardly to be interpreted from a single point of view. For example, we cannot be sure that the value (in terms of alphabet reform, editing, and lettering) of an inscription found on the Athenian agora could be attributed automatically to an inscription found in Thrace. The situation is comparable to that in similar fields as history of religion²⁴.

Thus, it is worth exemplifying the above mentioned statements through epigraphic documents that speak for themselves.

The method of presenting the material, adopted here, consists of studying the chronological layers of the evidence. The notion of chronology being part of the notion of phoneme (as it gives the phonemic variants and therefore the history of the language), the study is centered on the history of the language changes of the Greek inscriptions found in Bulgaria, as these in some respect reflect the history of the phonology of the Thracian names, as well as the rich cultural environment. The information that comes along with each text enhances the understanding of the layers. The latter, in the light of the interdisciplinary analysis, open new and unexpected perspectives of describing the culture that once flourished in these vast territories.

Secondly, using that approach in order to study the phonology, i.e. the theoretical value in the nature of the Thracian phonemes, only the epigraphic evidence is being employed, and mainly from Bulgaria²⁵.

In the categories of Thracian sounds, the interrelationships between various classes²⁶ have been proposed and later perceived as theoretical entities that may change according to “sound laws”²⁷ that should

²⁰ DETSCHEW 1976, 56.

²¹ See *IGBulg.* III, 1726, 1st – 3rd century AD.

²² *IGBulg.* IV 2139.

²³ See BODEL 2001, 2, 10–15.

²⁴ See to that effect among many other problems the one outlined by ARCHIBALD 1999, 431: ‘Archaeology can be expected to play a far more significant role in the interpretation of religious behavior, not simply because written sources are meagre but because it provides evidence which no ancient writer was capable of giving.’ And further on, p. 435, ‘our problem is how to define what was distinctive about the religious behavior of Thrace and how mutual interactions with other traditions affected this distinctiveness.’

²⁵ It should be noted here that on several occasions occurrences found in Greece, Anatolia, and elsewhere around Thrace proper, were used as parallels to Thracian forms.

be the same for e.g. Ezbenis and Asbenoi. In their analysis, the fluctuation e/a is to be referred to the way these 'sounds' were pronounced (closed or open pronunciation); the shift of s>z is a later development²⁸ or a feature that is not marked by any specific conditions²⁹ or the shift was conditioned according to its word-initial or intervocalic position³⁰. It is true that the intervocalic S normally changes to Z, however in our example we observe the same opposition between /s/ and /z/. If we take its chronology into consideration, S and Z are synchronic (as they appear in our Evidence) and therefore this opposition is irrelevant as to their morphophonemic involvement. There is a piece missing in this easy-to-solve puzzle. And it is namely that we are not dealing with sounds but with 'unreal sounds' or abstractions³¹.

The underlying PIE * /w/ and its treatment in Thracian through the Greek beta conditioned the shift. A plausible reason could be the word initial varying a/e³². So, the above-mentioned classes, may be distinguished for subclasses, called allophones³³ which can be analyzed for distinctive features; sonority is the one in our case. This very feature is crucial to the understanding of the phenomenon, for in this 'sound change' we see a principle that has long been explained and reads that generally one specific trait *per se* is involved³⁴.

No doubt, sounds cannot be phonemes for they belong to a different category. Their functional analysis is also called phonetics³⁵. Only on the surface could one register the phonetic units, as they belong to the physiology of the articulation.

We now may come to the subsequent conclusion: First, there is no /z/ in Thracian as a continuant of PIE */z/ as the latter simply does not exist. Second, /z/ in synchrony is just an allophone, a variant of the phoneme /s/³⁶. Third, there may be another condition involved, e.g. assimilation e-e. Fourth, only the phonemic analysis with the appropriate distribution of the phonemes can lead us through establishing the etymology of this Thracian etymon of e/asba from PIE * h¹ek'w-o-s. Fifth, this conclusion would not be possible, if we were to disregard the information from our direct source and the method of the phonological (phonemic) analysis³⁷.

Here is a good example to that effect:

In 2004 an inscription was found in a field within the territory of the village of Brestovitzza about 15 kilometers south-west of ancient Philippolis, present-day city of Plovdiv³⁸.

The inscription, as on the pictures hereafter, was incised on a granite column whose dimensions are as follows: 1.22 m long, diameter of 0.33 m. The inscription itself is 0.525 m long in 11 lines, between 11 and 14 letters in each one; lines are ca. 0.325 m wide. The letters are of an almost equal size of 0.03 to 0.039 m in height.

Ἀγαθῆ τύχη

²⁶ See LEHMANN 1993, 8 for a brief but succinct presentation of the phonological theory.

²⁷ See DEČEV 1960; GEORGIEV 1983; DURIDANOV 1985.

²⁸ DURIDANOV 1985, 108.

²⁹ DEČEV 1960, 162–63: 'Es folgt daraus, dass im Thrakischen das ide. \underline{s} teilweise unverändert bleibt, teilweise zu \underline{z} wird.'

³⁰ GEORGIEV 1983, 1173–74: 'Ide. \underline{s} ist im Thrakischen erhalten geblieben.... Im Anlaut vor Vokal und intervocalisch wird \underline{s} oft zu z (wie im Deutschen).'

³¹ LEHMANN 1993, 12: 'besides the perceived, articulated sounds, classes were proposed that were labeled "phonemes". ..The classes... are abstractions'.

³² See DIMITROV 1994.

³³ LEHMANN 1993.

³⁴ LEHMANN 1993, 78; LEHMANN 1952, 3.

³⁵ So ANTILA 1989, 207–8: 'Phonetics in this framework was called functional, and an enormous amount of work has been directed toward the principles and procedures for arriving at this level. These principles are generally known as phonemic analysis, and the functional phonetic surface units as phonemes.'

³⁶ So BONFANTE 1937, 127–29: In his critic of Jacobsohn (Festschrift 1926, 72 ff.) he examines a large group of words contrasting them against their correspondent cognates in other Indo-European languages to finally make valuable observations on the phonological and phonetic development in Thracian. Among other, he pointed out to way Thracian sounds were represented through Greek script.

³⁷ There is no mention of Asbenoi in Detschew, for this essential item was unknown to the literary tradition.

³⁸ I extend my warmest thanks to my colleagues Ms. Elka Penkova and Ms. L.Konova, both senior curators at the National History Museum in Sofia, for giving me the opportunity to work with this extremely important inscription and for allowing to publish it.

Αὐρ(ηλίω) Μαρκιανῶ Μάρ-
κου, ἀντικωμάρ-
χω καὶ φίλῳ καὶ βο-
5 ἠθῶ Αὐρ(ηλίου) Φιλικισσί
μου φυλάρχου β¹,
κωμῆται Ασβη-
νοι εὐχαριστή-
ριον ἀνέθηκαν.
10 Εὐτυχεῖ

Translation: "Good luck! To Aurelios Markianos, son of Markos, deputy mayor, and friend and adiutor to Aurelios Felikissimos, second phylarchos, the villagers Asbenoi set as a token of gratitude. Let he be happy!".

Of utmost importance for understanding the name of the inhabitants of the village is the name *Asbenoi*. For this part of the Roman province of Thrace, as well as the whereabouts of the village of Brestovitsa, a modern place-name occurs that might be useful. In the vicinity there are quite a few villages by the name of Koinare, from Old Bulgarian and modern Bulgarian Kon 'horse'.

Conclusions

- 1) For the correct understanding of interactions we need a theory and a method that are not confined with simple comparison.
- 2) Sounds and phonetics are irrelevant. In modern linguistics (ever since F. de Saussure!) the method of the internal reconstruction is to be applied through systemic analysis at the phonological level, at least.
- 3) A database with new readings is needed to replace the still indispensable handbook by D. Detschew.
- 4) Caution should be used with etymologies.
- 5) Terms as PIE and IE are part of the theoretical approach, and therefore should not be regarded as purely fictional. They should be incorporated in the systematic study in order to prove a given case.
- 6) Hellenes and Thracians were neighbors and partners for millennia, and not just enemies in constant state of war.
- 7) Thracian is appearing as a separate IE idiom, like Phrygian, and Greek ever since the remote past.

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