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NEW READING OF THE THRACIAN INSCRIPTION ON THE GOLDEN RING FROM EZEROVO

Abstract

This paper offers new translation of the one of the most interesting Thracian inscriptions. The key language is Old Bulgarian. Connections to other Slavic languages are also shown. Although short, the inscription on the Thracian golden ring provides us with enough information about the grammatical peculiarities of the Old Thracian language. These peculiarities are a useful tool for the purposes determining the ethnic affiliation of the people to whom Orpheus and Spartacus belonged.

Introduction

The golden ring with its inscription was found in 1912 during the excavations of Thracian burial mound in the place called Pärženaka near the village of Ezerovo, district of Plovdiv, Bulgaria. Other objects were also found at the site associated with burial rites: golden diadem, small golden spoon, broken bronze vessel, bronze mirror etc. The weight of the ring is 31.30 g, the letters are written on an elliptical plate: 17×20 mm long and 4-5 mm thick. The burial and the objects are dated to 5th century BC [1], p.105.

Facts

The golden ring of Ezerovo is presented in Figure 1.

The text presented in Figure 1 is written in 8 lines in *scriptio continua*. The last line is engraved on the edge of the elliptical plate of the ring because of lack of space. The letters are 61 in number; they are clear and resemble those of the Greek alphabet [1], pp. 86, 87. They are:

ΡΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕΑΣΝ
ΕΡΕΝΕΑΤΙΑ
ΤΕΑΝΗΣΚΟΑ
ΡΑΖΕΑΔΟΜ
ΕΑΝΤΙΑΕΖΥ
ΠΤΑΜΙΗΕ
ΡΑΖ
ΗΑΤΑ



Figure 1. The golden ring of Ezerovo

The text from Figure 1 in the deployed state:

**ΡΟΙΣΤΕΝΕΑΣΝΕΡΕΝΕΑΤΙΑΤΕΑΝΗΣΚΟΑΡΑΖΕΑΔΟΜΕΑΝΤΙΑΕΖΥΠΤΑΜΙ
ΗΡΑΖΗΛΑΤΑ**

Detchev concluded that the found artefacts were used in a burial ritual – consisting of a three-day wake, called by the Greeks *protezis*. Detchev compared the objects with others, from Trebenište, Macedonia, where another golden ring was found, and concluded that the ring from Ezerovo was made especially for the burial (for the funerary purpose alone) and not for everyday use, or as seal ring [2], p. 106.

In the past decades many translations were offered, but to date, none is generally accepted. Dechev (quoted by Duridanov [1] p. 88) suggested the following transcription: *Rolesteneas Nerenea tiltean esko Arazea domean Tilezypa mie erazelta*. That he translated into:

Bulgarian (Cyrillic): Аз съм Ролистенеас, потомък на Неренеас,Тилезипта, аразийка по род ме предаде на земята (погребана ме)

Bulgarian (Latinic): Az sãm Rolisteneas, potomãk na Nereneas, Tilezipta, araziika po rod me predade na zemjata (pogreba me)

English: *I am Rolisteneas, progeny of Nereneas, Tilezipta - of Arazian clan, gave me to the earth (buried me).*

Georgiev suggested a different reading [2], p. 108: *Rolistene, as Nerenea Tiltea nesko arazea do mean tilezypam ie eraz elta*. That he translated into:

Bulgarian (Cyrillic): Ролистене, аз Неренея Тилтея умирам спокойно до (теб) моя блаженопочивши аз, която децата отхрани (отгледа)

Bulgarian (Latinic): Rolistene, az Nerenea Tiltea umiram spokojno do (teb) moja blagopocivši, az kojato dečata othrani (otgleda)

English: *Rolistene, I Nerenea Tiltea die calm near (you) my silent sleeping (husband), (me) who the children fed (brought up the children).*

ΡΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕ is interpreted by Georgiev [2], p. 108, as Thracian personal name in Vocative case consisting of two parts: ΡΟΛΙ and ΣΤΕΝΕ. He connects ΡΟΛΙ with Thracian personal name Ρωλής and the toponym Ρολλι-γέρας, and the second part ΣΤΕΝΕ with the toponym Στένέ-κορτά.

ΑΣ or ΑΣΝ Georgiev translates as *I - me*, corresponding to Old Bulgarian азъ (az) – *I, me*, Lithuanian ‘as’ – *I, me* and Avestanic ‘azem’ – *I am*.

About the part NEPENEATIATEA Georgiev isn't very certain, he suggests two possibilities: NEPE (E) NEA TI - *your young wife*. NEPE he connects with Sanskrit ‘nari’ – *woman, wife*, Albanian ‘njeri’ – *human*, and points the Albanian phrase ‘grue(ja) e re’ – *young woman, wife*, also the Rumanian ‘soția cel tânără’ – *young wife*. NEA Georgiev connects with Greek νέα – *new*, coming from Indo-European ‘newa’ – *new, young*. T(I) or T’ is connected with Albanian ‘ty’, ‘t’, ‘të’, Rumanian ‘ți’, and Bulgarian ‘ti’, all with the meaning – *yours* in Dative case. IATEA is connected with Rumanian ‘aleasa-ă’ – *the chosen one* (-ă is interpreted by Georgiev as a suffixed definitive article) with the suggestion that the Thracian variant of *the hosen one* was IATE-A (with -A as suffixed definitive article).

But Georgiev considers also the possibility that NEPENEATIATEA was Thracian personal name: NEPENEA TIATEA. NEPENEA is related to Latin personal names Neriene(s), Nerienis, Neria. TIATEA is related to Thracian personal name Τιλθ-άζεις [2] p.109.

The part ΝΗΣΚΟ Georgiev connects with (Attic) Greek verb θνήσκω – *I die*.

The following A(P) PAZEA Georgiev equates to A(N) PAZEA and translates AN as *on, at*. PAZE-A he interprets as *line, row* (here in Locative case) coming from Indo-European ‘rogi’ - *line, direction*, present in Vedic ‘raji’ – *line, row*, German ‘Reihe’ – *row* and

common Slavic 'red' – *row*. According to Georgiev PAZE-A has a suffixed definitive article as in ILTE-A.

DO is connected with Latin 'do', Anglo-Saxon 'to', Lithuanian 'do' and Bulgarian 'do' – *next, beside*, up to.

MEAN corresponds according to Georgiev to Latin 'meum', coming from Indo-European 'meyo-m' – *mine*, here in Accusative case.

TIAEZYITAM Georgiev interprets as *silent – sleeping*. TIAE he connects with Lithuanian 'tylis' – *silent, calm*, and ZIITAM with Sanskrit 'supta-m' – *asleep*, in Accusative case, and equates it with Bulgarian блаженопочивши (blazhenopochivši) – *died in peace*.

IH is equated to Greek ἡ – (this one) *who*, related to Old Phrygian ιος – (this one) *who*.

HEPAZ means *children* according to Georgiev and is related with Phrygian εἶποι – *children*.

HLTA is translated as *fed, brought up*. HLTA → aluit – *cared for, brought up* (Thracian word, related to Latin 'alo' – *I care for, I bring up* [2], p. 108)

Discussion

To some degree I agree with Georgiev. I too believe that ROLISTENE is Thracian personal name in Vocative case, NERENEA TILTEANIS – Thracian name, AZ is equal to – *I, me*, and DO is equal to *next, beside*, but further on we differ in interpretation of the words and their cognates from other languages.

I disagree with Georgiev about the suffixed definitive article in Thracian words PAZE-A – (*at, on*) the *raw* and IATE-A – the *chosen one*. I'm not aware of the presence of such a grammatical peculiarity in any ancient language. On the contrary, it is to be found only in the modern forms of Bulgarian, Macedonian, Rumanian, Swedish and few more, but there isn't any evidence that in some language the suffixed definitive article existed before 1400-1500 A.D. Georgiev uses a modern grammar peculiarity for ancient, 2500 years old speech.

He also failed to mention that the ending **E** in ΠΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕ corresponds perfectly to the ending for the Vocative case in Old Church Slavonic, which is also **E** [3], p. 24.

My other remark towards Georgiev is the fact that he uses more than 5 different languages as the key language: Latvian 'tylis' – *silent*, Sanskrit 'supta-m' – *asleep*, Latin 'alo' – *I care for*, Greek θνήσκω – *I die*, νέα – *new*, ἡ – (this one) *who*, Rumanian 'aleasa-a' – the *chosen one*, etc.

There isn't anything wrong to point few equivalents from other languages, which correspond to the Thracian words, but it seems to me that for the credibility (and parsimony) it would be better if only one language is used for the deciphering of the words (and the equivalents are given only as supplementary). In the case of Ezerovo inscription we will see that Old and Modern Bulgarian offer sufficient matches.

Georgiev himself translated AZ as *I, me*, corresponding best to Bulgarian аз (*az*) – *I, me*.

It should be clear to him also that ΠΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕ (in Vocative case) corresponds best to the rules of the Bulgarian Vocative case - with ending Е. The prefix DO – *next, beside*, matches best Bulgarian and common Slavic ‘do’ – *next, beside*.

New interpretation

If the beginning of the inscription and words following it show such closeness with Bulgarian vocabulary and grammar, it is logical that an attempt should be made to decipher the rest of the words with the help of the Bulgarian and other Slavic languages. Only if this approach doesn't give good results, one should proceed with the search for related words in other Indo-European languages. There is another reason to begin with Bulgarian and other Slavic languages. That is the presence of testimonies of the ancient authors equating Bulgarians with Thracians (Moesians) [4], p. 76-79, 107-108, 110, and Thracians (Getae) with Slavs. T. Simokatta (quoted by Tsenov in [5], p. 14) is very clear:

Slavos sive Getas hoc enim nomine antiquitus appellati sunt
Slavs or Getae, because that was their name in the antiquity

My reading deviates from that of the other researchers and that is why I divide the text in a different way and I recognise 14 words consisting of 61 letters:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
ΠΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕ	ΑΣ	ΝΕΡΕΝΕΑ	ΤΙΛΤΕΑΝΗΣ	ΚΟΑ	ΡΑΖΕΑ	ΔΟ	ΜΕΑΝ	ΤΙ	ΛΕΖΥ	ΠΤΑ	ΜΙΗΕ	ΡΑΖΗΛ	ΤΑ
ROLISTENE	AZ	NERENEA	TILTEANIS	KOA	RAZEA	DO	MEAN	TI	LEZY	PTA	MIIE	RAZIL	TA

This I translate as:

Ролистене, аз Неренея Тилтеанис, коа раzea: до меан ти лези пта миe разил та
(Rolistene, az Nerenea Tilteanis, koa razea: do mean ti lezi pta miie razil ta)

In modern Bulgarian: Rolistene, az Nerenea Tilteanis, (săm tazi) koja(to) rjaza (tova): do men ti leži sypruže moi počinal tuk.

In English: Rolistene, me Nerenea Tilteanis (is the one) who wrote this: lay beside me my master, (husband) released here (in the grave)

Etymology of the words

1. ROLI-STENE – Thracian personal name, here in Vocative case still preserved in Modern Bulgarian, Macedonian, Serbian, and Czech language. For male names the ending is E: Ivane = Hey Ivan! ; Petre = Hey Peter! [6], p. 24. Related to ROLI are the Thracian personal name Rolis and Oroles, corresponding to common Slavic word ‘orel’ – *eagle* and to Bulgarian personal name Орльо (Orljo) with the meaning *eagle* [7], p. 118. The part STEN can be connected with Bulgarian personal name ‘Стан’ (Stan) [7], p. 138.
2. AS – I, me corresponding to Old Bulgarian азъ (ază), Modern Bulgarian ‘аз’ (az) – I, Slovene ‘jaz’ – I, Lithuanian ‘aš’ – I and Avestanic ‘azem’ – I am.
3. NERE-NEA – female Thracian name with possible meaning *strong one*. It is derived

- from Thracian word ‘aner’ *man* (strong one) and related to Gaulish ‘nertos’ *strength*, Hittite ‘innarumni’ *strong*, Luwian ‘innari’ *strong*, Sanskrit ‘nara’ *man*, ‘nari’ *woman*, and Bulgarian ‘nerez’ *male animal* (strong one). Other related Bulgarian word is ‘nestinarka’ *dancing woman* (it concerns a ritual dance on hot coals) In my opinion NERE is related to Bulgarian personal name Неранза (Neranza) [7], p. 116. The part NEA may correspond to Bulgarian personal name Нея (Neja) [7], p. 116.
4. TILTEANIS – Thracian family name with possible meaning: *progeny of Teano*. TIL is related to Old Bulgarian word **тилище** (**tilište**) – *human, person*, **челядъ** (**čeljadă**) – *progeny*, **человекъ** (**čelovekă**) – *human*. TEANO was female Thracian name. The wife of Antenor and daughter of Thracian king Cisseus was called Teano. As Slavic related anthroponyms I offer the Bulgarian personal names: Деян (Dejan) and Техан (Tehan).
 5. KOA – *who* (fem. gender) corresponding to Modern Bulgarian **коя** (koja) – *who* (fem. gender), Slovene ‘kdo’ – *who*, Sanskrit ‘kah’ – *who*, Luwian ‘kui’ – *who* also related.
 6. RAZEA – *wrote* corresponding to Bulgarian verb **реза, ряз** (reza, rjaz) – *wrote, carved* (Aorist tense, 3-rd person singular of the verb **режа** (reža) – *I cut, I make notches*) Bulgarian words **рез, ряз** (rez, rjaz) – *notch, mark*, **рисувам** (risuvam) – *I draw, I make lines*, **рисунка** (risunka) *drawing*, **образ** (obraz) *depiction, face*. Slovenian words ‘rez’ – *cut*, ‘rezati’ – *to cut*, ‘rezba’ – *woodcarving*, ‘raziti’ – *to scratch*, and common Slavic verb ‘risuvati’ – *to draw* are also related. RAZEA is also related to Sanskrit words ‘rekha’ – *notch, mark*, ‘rekhati’ – *to mark, to make notches*.
 7. DO – *beside, next*, corresponding to common Slavic word ‘do’ *beside, next, up to*.
 8. MEAN – *me*, corresponding to Bulgarian **мен, мене** (men, mene) *me*, Slovenian ‘mene’ – *me*, Russ. **меня** (menja) – *me*.
 9. TI – *you*, corresponding to Bulgarian **ти** (ti), Slovene, Serbo-Croatian, Czech ‘ti’ – *you*.
 10. LEZI – *lay!* corresponding to Bulgarian **лежи** (leži!) *lay!* **Ležati** – *to lay* is a common Slavic verb; Slovenian: **lézi!** – *lay down immediately!*, **lěži!** – *continue laying!*, **leži** – *is laying*.
 11. PTA – *master* corresponding to Bulgarian **бат** (bat) – *master*. Old Bulgarians used the title Bat. Bat Bajan had meaning *Master Bajan* (in Modern Bulgarian **бате** (bate) is used as *addressing towards elder brother*). Bosnian ‘bato’ – *big brother*, Ukrainian **батко** (batko) – *father*, Russian **батюшка** (batjuška) *master*, Avestanic ‘pait’ – *master* are also related. PTA is related also to Scythian ‘peit’ – *master* (In the names Spargapeit [8], IV-76, Ariapeit [8], IV-78, which had also variant ‘biti’ – *mistress* in the theonym **Tabiti** – *the Mistress* [8], IV-59). Thracian personal name **Baton** is also related to PTA (perhaps pronounced B’TA). Other related personal names are the Bulgarian: **Baton, Bat, Bato**. PTA corresponds also to common Slavic word **Gospod** – *Lord, master*. PTA is in Vocative case, the ending -a corresponding to -o in Old Bulgarian [8], p. 25, (**владико!** (vladiko!) – *Oh leader!*).
 12. MINE – *my*, corresponding to common Slavic ‘moj’ – *my*.
 13. RAZIL – *departed*, corresponding to Old Bulgarian verb **разити ся** (raziti sja) Slovene

verb 'raziti se', and Russian 'razoitis', all with the meaning *to go away, to depart*. RAZIL is a past tense participle with ending L – [9], p. 38. The root in RAZIL is I (Infinitive *iti* – *to go*). RAZ is a common Slavic prefix which we find in Bulgarian verbs *разбивам* (*razbivam*) – *I break*, *разбирам* (*razbiram*) – *I understand*, *раздавам* (*razdavam*) – *I give, I distribute*, corresponding to Slovene verbs 'razbiti' – *to break*, 'razbrati' – *to understand*, 'razdati' – *to give, to distribute*.

14. TA – *here*, corresponding Old Bulgarian *toy* (tu) – *here*, Modern Bulgarian *тук* (tuk) – *here* and Slovene 'ta' – *this, that* and 'tukaj' – *here*. The best match, however, is Slo. dial. (Idrija) 'ta' – *here*.

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the inscription was written about 2500 years ago, half of the words have remained almost unchanged in Modern Bulgarian: AZ = az – *I*, TI = ti – *you*, LEZI = leži – *lie or lay*, KOA = koja – *who*, DO = do – *beside*, MEAN = men – *me*, RAZEA = rjaza – *cut*. The rest of the words can be explained easily with help of the Old Bulgarian vocabulary and Bulgarian personal names. The phrase: ΔΟ ΜΕΑΝ ΤΙ ΛΕΖΙ! (*do mean ti lezi!*) is strikingly close to Bulgarian ДО МЕН ТИ ЛЕЖИ! (*do men ti leži*) – *lay beside me!* It was shown also that the words from the inscription have equivalents in Slovene, Czech, Russian etc.

The grammatical peculiarities are very important when the affiliation of certain language has to be determined. We can notice the presence of Slavic (Blg. Sl.) personal pronouns AZ – *I*, TI – *you*, MEN – *me*, Vocative case in ΠΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕ, and ΠΙΤΑ, Slavic Past tense in RAZIL, and Slavic (Blg.) Aorist in PAZEA, Imperative in LEZI – *lay!*, Common Slavic noun DO – *next, beside*, and the common Slavic prefix RAZ-. That gives me the right to claim that Thracian language was nothing more but archaic Slavic language. So much peculiarities in such short text are good prove that Simokatta wrote the truth: *Slavs, or Getae (Thracians) because that was their name in the antiquity* [5], p. 14.

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Povzetek

Novo branje trakijskega napisa na zlatem uhanu z Ezerovega

Podan je drugačen prevod enega od najbolj zanimivih traških napisov. Ključni jezik je stara bolgarščina. Podane so tudi sličnosti z drugimi slovanskimi jeziki. Čeprav kratek, nam daje napis na traškem zlatem prstanu dovolj podatkov o slovničnih posebnostih stare traščine. Te posebnosti omogočajo ugotoviti etnično pripadnost ljudstva, iz katerega sta izšla Orfej in Spartak.