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## DID A GETIC LANGUAGE EXIST?

*Svetlana Yanakieva*

The paper discusses the hypothesis launched about the existence of a Getic language that was different from Thracian and from the so-called Dacian-Moesian language. The analysis was made on the basis of two criteria: socio-linguistic – the evidence of ancient authors on the speech of the Getae compared to the other Thracians, and internal linguistic – data on the phonetics and lexical material in the onomastic finds from the lands of the Getae, compared to the onomastics from the remaining Thracian territories. It becomes clear from the examples that no substantial differences – either phonetic or lexical – existed between the onomastics of the region inhabited by Getae and the one from the areas inhabited by the other Thracian tribes, which does not give grounds to refer to the Getic language as independent.

V. Georgiev’s hypothesis about the existence of two separate languages – Thracian and Dacian-Moesian (Георгиев 1957; 1977; Georgiev 1971: 164-165; 1983, and others), which appeared in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, divided researchers of the Thracian language into its ardent supporters and skeptics<sup>1</sup> – a division that exists to this day. Parallel with that, terms like Thracians-Dacians, Thracians-Getae and Dacians-Moesians circulate among linguists, historians and archaeologists (Russu 1969; Berciu 1974; Poghiric 1976; Coman 1980; Vulpe, Zahariade 1987, and many others), clearly due to the hesitation about whether there is a common linguistic and ethnic belonging of Thracians, Getae, Moesians and Dacians.

V. Georgiev’s hypothesis about the two separate languages sprouted the idea about the hypothesis launched by Boris Simeonov, which went even further, claiming that the Getic language is an “*independent* language, separate from Thracian, but closer to it and to Phrygian than to Dacian and Moesian” (Simeonov 1980). That conclusion of B. Simeonov is built on two types of data: evidence by ancient authors who – in his opinion – spoke about ethnic belonging of the Getae that was different from that of the Thracians, and linguistic facts: onomastic and phonetic.

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on this issue, see Janakieva 2014.

B. Simeonov's argument that the reference to the Getae with a separate tribal name was evidence that they were not Thracians, but a separate ethnos, is untenable. The ancient authors actually give them a dual identification – as Getae and as Thracians – as was the practice for other tribes as well, and the detailed analysis of the evidence gives no grounds to claim that the Getae were a separate ethnos, conversely – they were one of the Thracian tribes (Янакиева 2017).

B. Simeonov's hypothesis has not been discussed so far in academic literature, but its existence necessitates its analysis. The supporters of the theory about two separate languages included the territory of the Getae into the Dacian-Moesian language (V. Georgiev and others), or Dacian – as I. Duridanov preferred to call it (Duridanov 1985: 123). The issue of whether a separate Getic language existed should be studied on the basis of the available linguistic data, and of the evidence by the ancient authors relevant precisely to the language.

### **Ancient Authors**

Strabo is the only ancient author who gives concrete data on the language of the Getae, compared to the language of other tribes. His information that they spoke the same language as the Thracians and that the Dacians spoke the same language as the Getae (Str. 7. 3. 10; 7. 3 12-13) is very well known and extensively discussed. V. Georgiev, substantiating his theory on the separate Thracian and Dacian-Moesian languages, rejected the reliability of that evidence with the argument that the ancient authors presumably had no idea about comparative historical linguistics (Георгиев 1977: 183). I. Duridanov also believes that on this issue the information provided by the ancient authors is not trustworthy because they did not have a *correct* notion about the kinship of the languages and were therefore unable to distinguish the “barbarian” languages in the Balkan Peninsula, known to them (Duridanov 1985: 122). However, the original sources for that evidence most likely stem from direct observations: probably by the Greek colonists along the Thracian coast, who were in direct contact with different Thracian tribes and some of them apparently spoke Thracian (Janakieva 2002: 75-79). The finding that Getae, Thracians (here “Thracians” can be understood to mean Odrysaе or more Thracian tribes) and Dacians spoke the same language, rests – of course – not on linguistic analysis, but on the fact that all those tribes understood each other perfectly, according to the observations of the Greeks, and consequently that was also true of the Greeks who had learned Thracian.

A natural prerequisite for the theory about two or more languages can be seen in the logical thinking that language or dialect differences could not fail to emerge on such a large territory like the lands from the Carpathians

to the Aegean Sea. However, differentiating between language and dialect is a product of the contemporary classification of the languages, for which different researchers have different criteria, presented in two main groups: internal linguistic and socio-linguistic. The extent to which such a differentiation is difficult even for modern languages that are perfectly mastered can be inferred, for instance, from the uncertainty about the exact number of the Romance languages today. Opening several different reference publications will reveal a huge hesitation between eight (the number of the official state languages) and 15, 20 or 25. Klaus Heger's comment that their number could easily reach even 40-50 (Heger 1969: 46) sounded to me like a joke 40 years ago, but such a number is already seriously discussed today.

In a socio-linguistic situation lacking writing and literary language (as was the case in ancient Thrace), mutual understanding was an essential criterion for a common language. It is recognised as such to this day (Эдельман 1980: 129), while at the same time that criterion reflected the degree of language differentiation as well. Hence there is no justification to reject the assertion of Strabo and his sources, although that cannot be the only criterion.

Ovid's evidence that living in exile in Tomis he wrote a poem in the language of the Getae again suggests the socio-linguistic aspect, but of a different character:

... *et Getico scripsi sermone libellum,  
structaque sunt nostris barbara verba modis* (Ovid. *Pont.* 4. 13. 19-20).

Studying that letter by Ovid, R. Gandeva mentions "the language of the Getae" or "Getic" – interpreted by B. Simeonov as support for his theory about a separate Getic language (Simeonov 1980: 117). Discussing the rendering of the language of the indigenous population with Latin letters, Gandeva writes: "The ancient authors are not very reliable when rendering the specificities of **Thracian** phonetics with the Greek and Latin alphabet... Ovid coped with the difficulties of the foreign phonetics" (Gandeva 1968: 93). It becomes clear from this that she categorically included the speech of the Getae in the concept of Thracian phonetics, or Thracian language respectively. Ovid's expression *sermo Geticus* "language/speech of the Getae" denoted simply the language of the indigenous tribe of the Getae surrounding the poet, and – unlike Strabo's case – does not make it possible to understand whether he had any idea about its comparison with the language of other Thracian tribes, hence it cannot be interpreted that he believed that the Getae spoke a separate language.

## Linguistic Facts

If two separate, albeit related languages existed (as B. Simeonov claims), one would expect substantial internal linguistic differences between Thracian and the hypothetical separate Getic language. Were there such differences?

### *Phonetics*

B. Simeonov adduces **only one historical-phonetic difference**: the transition of IE short [o] into short [a] in Thracian and Dacian, which, however, was preserved – according to him – “in many Getic names.” The examples that he adduces are two personal names: of the Getic military commander Ζολτης (referred to as *archon* in the inscription) and of the king Oroles. According to B. Simeonov, in the name Ζολτης < IE \**gholto* “gold” there is a preserved IE [o], unlike its transition to [a] in Thracian in the first component *Saldo-* from the same root in the epithet of Asclepius from Zlatna Panega: Σαλδοβυσσηνος. The example is not convincing, because other variants of the epithet – Σαλδηνος, Σολδηνος and Σολδοβυσσηνος – can be seen in other inscriptions from the same sanctuary, i.e., there is *a/o* variation from the same place, which suggests that it was due to other causes, not to belonging of the two variants to different languages. Besides, it is not completely certain that Asclepius’ epithet and the name of Zoltes had the same root, although it is possible: there are examples of variation of a voiced and voiceless spirant in the same name in Thracian.

Analogous examples of *a/o* variation from other parts of the Thracian linguistic space comprise:

Αισύμη/ Οισύμη, a city on the Aegean coast;

Αστακός/ Όστακός, a city in Bithynia;

Άσσαρα/ Άσσορος, a city in Mygdonia;

Άραλος/ Άρωλος, a city in Bisaltia;

Βουρδαπα/ Βούρδωπες near the present-day village of Ognyanovo, Pazardjik district;

*Potaissa/ Patavissa* in Dacia.

The examples show that there was no division between the territory of the Getae and that of the other Thracians for the *a/o* variation, which was characteristic of the entire Thracian linguistic territory: Dacia, Moesia, Thrace and Bithynia in Asia Minor.

Simeonov has not proposed an etymology for the second personal name – *Oroles* – and has not cited a Thracian and a “Dacian” name with *a*-vocalism accordingly. However, other problems exist around it. It was men-

tioned only once by Pompeius Trogus whose text has reached us in Justin's epitome:

*Daci quoque suboles Getarum sunt, qui cum Oroles rege adversus Bastarnas male pugnassent* (Justin. 32. 3. 16).

According to D. Dana, the form *Oroles* resulted from erroneous reading of the name *Roles* in a Greek source of Pompeius Trogus, where it had an article – ὁ Ῥώλης (ΟΡΩΛΗΣ), just as in Cassius Dio 51. 26. 1 (Dana 2007: 237), and he believed that *Oroles* and *Roles* were the same person.<sup>2</sup> Using articles with personal names was common in ancient Greek, e.g., ὁ Σωκράτης, ὁ Σεύθης, etc. Although D. Dana's assumption is feasible from a palaeographic and onomastic viewpoint, it is problematic from the point of view of the chronology and localisation of the events described by Pompeius Trogus/ Justin. There have been Romanian studies conducted from a century ago (V. Pârvan) to our times, the issue has been addressed in Bulgarian literature as well.<sup>3</sup> In view of the character of Justin's epitome, the dating of *Oroles* is difficult. In a very recent study, S. Dimitrova presents in detail all facts, circumstances and hypotheses, and reaches the conclusion that *Oroles* had to have a place of honour among Getic dynasts in the first half of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC (Димитрова 2018), i.e., half a century before *Roles*. An earlier dating cannot be ruled out either.

An interesting case in connection with *Oroles* can be seen in the assumed variance of the personal name Ὀλορος/Ὀρολος in Southern Thrace. The first form occurs in Herodotus (Hdt. 6. 39) for the name of Miltiades' father-in-law. It is assumed about the name of his grandson, the father of Thucydides (Thuc. 4. 104), that both forms existed.<sup>4</sup> That opinion was accepted by D. Detschew, who believed on that basis that the anthroponyms Ὀλορος and *Oroles* were the same name (Detschew 1957: 341). A metathesis of the two liquids occurs in other Thracian names as well, e.g., Ταρουλας/Ταλουρας

<sup>2</sup> For this reason, *Oroles* is absent as a separate name in D. Dana's *corpus* of Thracian personal names, being given as a corrupt form with reference to the name *Rola*, Ρωλης (Dana 2014: 265; 296-297), which is not entirely correct, because his hypothesis is debatable.

<sup>3</sup> See detailed literary references in the papers by S. Dimitrova (Димитрова 2017 and 2018), as well as in D. Dana's cited paper.

<sup>4</sup> On the basis of the text in the biography of Thucydides by Marcellinus (Marcell. *Vita Thuc.* 16, who in turn cited Didymus concerning the text on the grave stele of Thucydides). Some earlier researchers give preference to the form Ὀρολος (e.g., Müller 1882: 138). According to T. Burns, W. Smith even claimed the existence of a manuscript by Thucydides containing that form. Burns himself does not support such a view (Burns 2000: 15, note 12). Among the numerous editions of Thucydides on the internet I also failed to find critical reference in which such a variant of the name is cited.

(Detschew 1957: 491-492), therefore the form Ὀρολος is not impossible. It is curious that one of Justin's codices – *Lipsiensis* – contains the form *Olore* (Ablativus) for the name of the Getic king. Although it is possible that the metathesis here was due to a copying error, the analogy in the variation of the rendering of both names seems to tilt the balance more towards the opinion that it was one name. However, it seems that a final decision is not possible for the time being, but if (with the possible appearance of new material) identity between Oroles and Ὀλορος/Ὀρολος is confirmed, that would be yet another example of shared lexical material in the formation of onomastics in the North and South (see below). On the other hand, if D. Dana's theory is confirmed, namely that *Oroles* is a corrupt form of Πώλης (which is less likely for the time being), then that example of B. Simeonov is ignored in general.

Although B. Simeonov's two examples on the different reference are not convincing, there nevertheless exists an assumption of transition of IE short [o] into [a] in Thracian (Detschew 1960: 175-176; Георгиев 1977: 164), but it is based only on etymologies of proper names, which are unreliable, and on one gloss – σκάλμη – whose IE stem (if its etymology is correct) could also be of *e*-degree of an IE root.

At the same time, there is short [o] in numerous names from the territory of the language considered to be Thracian proper: Ὀδόμαντοι, Ὀδούσαι, Ὀλορος, Ὀλυνθος, Ὀρβηλος, Ὀσκιος<sup>5</sup> (Detschew 1957: 336-346). Therefore, D. Detschew was compelled to resort to many and varied explanations, extremely unconvincing, for the different cases of the appearance of short [o], although it *should have* passed into [a] (Detschew 1960:176).<sup>6</sup> The examples with omicron show that the short [o] tended to be preserved in the entire Thracian language space.

B. Simeonov believes about another phonetic peculiarity – the preservation of IE long [e] in Thracian proper and its transition to [a] in Dacian (according to V. Georgiev) – that this characteristic brought the Getic language closer to Thracian. No examples are cited. On this issue it should be said that the variants with *a* and with *e* are not divided geographically between the South and the North, in most general terms, but the same names from Thrace and from Dacia occurred in both variants (Янакиева 2009: 151-152; Yanakieva 2014: 25 and map No 3), e.g., the river names Ἰατρος/*Iatrus/Ieterus* and Κέβρος/Κίαβρος in Moesia. With other examples, e.g., the settlement

<sup>5</sup> I am adducing only names attested early to avoid doubts that the short [o] may have resulted from vowel isochrony. Otherwise, the examples are much more numerous.

<sup>6</sup> According to him, the phenomenon was equally relevant to the lands both to the south and to the north of the Istros.

name Ζάλδαπα/Ζέλδεπα (between Durostorum and Marcianopolis) and the first component of the personal names Επτα-/Επτη-/Επτε-, we cannot be certain about the length of the vowel.

In the sphere of consonantism (an extremely important issue that has not been addressed at all by B. Simeonov), the onomastic material from the area of the Getae reveals identical specificities and the same graphic variants as the material from Dacia and Thrace south of the Haemus Mountain with respect to the plosive consonants cited by V. Georgiev as a distinctive feature between Thracian and “Dacian-Moesian”:

Κοθήλας, Κουτίλας, Γουδίλας, *Gudila* – the variants reflect the variation between voiceless and voiceless aspirated consonant (τ/θ) and between voiced and voiceless (γ/κ), characteristic of the entire Thracian linguistic space.

The same variation is also found in the river name Ἰθρους/*Iatrus*, the settlement name Τόμοι, *Tomii/Thomi*, Θιαγόλα/*Tiagula* (one of the arms of the Danube River), as well as in other areas:

Παρτίσκον/*Parthiscus*, river and settlement name in Dacia;

Τέαρος/Θέαρος, river name in Southeastern Thrace;

Τραυσοί/*Thrausi*, tribe in the region of Maroneia.

Numerous personal names: *Dentis/Δενθις*, *Σιτάλκης/Sithalcus*, *Επτησυκος/Επτησυχις*, *Επταπορις/Efteporis*, etc. (see more examples on the different categories of names in Янакиева 2009: 157-161; Янакиева 2012: 334-344; Yanakieva 2014 and map No. 4).

### ***Lexical material***

The onomastic material from the territory of the Getae demonstrates a high degree of lexical unity with the onomastics from the other Thracian areas.

#### *Ethnonymy, hydronymy and settlement names:*

The ethnonym Γέται has an exact parallel in the name of the Edonian king Γέτας, i.e., from Southwestern Thrace, on 5<sup>th</sup> century BC coins.

Two rivers bore simultaneously the name Ἄξιος: the tributary of the Istros on the Getic territory (near pres. Cherna Voda) and pres. Vardar in Southwestern Thrace.

The same stem is seen in the river names Πάνυσος on the territory of the Getae (pres. Kamchiya), *Panisos* in Southeastern Thrace and Πάνναξ in Southwestern Thrace.

The two components of the hydronym Θιαγόλα/*Tiagula* (one of the arms of the Istros Delta) have parallels accordingly in the settlement name

*Tiutiamentus* (*vicus*) from the region of Plovdiv and in numerous personal names: Θιαθιους, Αβλουθιης, Τιουτα, etc. (Detschew 1957: 2, 43, 75, 162, 202-203, 507) for the first component, and the local name Γολόη (in the area of pres. Yambol) and personal names Γολας, Γολης from Zlatna Panega and the Botevgrad region for the second component.

Νάρακον, Ναράκιον, one of the Istros arms, most probably had the same stem as the settlement name *Narcos* in Southeastern Thrace and the personal name Νάρις (given to a leader of the Bisaltae).

The river name Πυρετός (pres. Prut), tributary to the Istros, has the same stem as the personal names Πυρετης, Πυρουλας, Πυρουσαλα, etc., the second component -πυρις, -πυρος in numerous personal names, e.g., Επτεπυρις, Ζιπυρος, Νεστοπυρις, etc., as well as the first part of the epithet of the Thracian Horseman Πυρ(ου)μηρουλας (inscriptions from Plovdiv, Kovachevo, Gurmen near Blagoevgrad and Golyama Brestnitsa near Lovech) and of the tribal name *Pyrogeri* (in the area of Philippopolis).

The stem (or the first component) of the name of a lake and settlement, *Salmorude* (\**Salmuris*) near the Istros Delta has the same stem as the first component of the river name and the name of a region Σαλμυδησσός in Southeastern Thrace.

The settlement name Δινογέτεια in Dobroudja has parallels for its two components: for the first – even the name of the Δινισκάρα *castellum* in Moesia, the settlement name Δίνιον in Western Thrace and numerous personal names: *Dinis*, Δινις, Δινικενθος, *Dinibithus* – from the entire Thracian linguistic space (the regions of Plovdiv, Pazardjik, Stara Zagora, Philippi, etc.), and for the second – the stem of the actual ethnonym Γέται, the mentioned personal name Γέτας from Southwestern Thrace, the first component Γετο- of the personal name Γετομουσης from Olbia and the second component -γετης/-γεθης of the personal names Ζιγεθης and Παριγετης and the theonym Σουρεγεθης. The examples are from Kraynitsa (near Blagoevgrad), Batkun (near Pazardjik), Philippi and Durostorum (Detschew 1957: 187, 358, 472).

### *Personal Names*

The name of the Getic chieftain Ζυράξης (Cass. Dio 51. 26), which most probably stood instead of Ζυραζης,<sup>7</sup> is the same as the personal name Ζουραζης, Ζουραζις, *Zurozis* seen in inscriptions from Pizus, Varna, Milkovitsa (near Pleven) and elsewhere, and the names from the same stem *Zura*,

<sup>7</sup> D. Detschew's assumption that this was a case of the frequent confusion of ζ with ξ (Detschew 1957: 196) is entirely justified, e.g., the settlement name Δριζίπαρος/Δριξίπαρος.

Ζουρης, Ζυρις, in inscriptions from Capidava, Olbia, Popovo, Varna, Pizus, Amphipolis, Rhodosto, etc. (Detschew 1957: 194-195). Zyras, a river on the territory of the Getae (pres. Batovska river in Dobroudja) is from the same stem, as well as the first component of the settlement name Ζουρόβαρα in Dacia.

The already cited name of the Getic king Κοθήλας/*Gudila* (Athen. 13. 557 d; Jord. *Get.* 65) has the same stem as the widespread personal names Κουτίλας, Κουθιουρας, Κοθιης, *Cutiula*, *Cutiuis* (in ancient authors, in inscriptions from Histria, from Orizovo (near Chirpan), from Sandanski, from Thessaloniki, etc.), as well as the personal name Κότυς – widespread throughout Thrace. The name of the Dacian king Cotiso and of the goddess Κοτυτώ/Κότυς probably had the same stem (Detschew 1957: 249-250; 257-262).

The name of the Getic king 'Ρώλης (Cass. Dio 51. 24. 7 and 51. 26. 1) is identical to the first component of the personal name Ρολιστενεας in the inscription on the ring from Ezerovo and the name of the *castellum* Ρολλιγεράς in the area of Germania (Procop. *Aed.* 4. 4).

For some names with two stems there are separately attested correspondences for either component, which is also a normal lexical parallel, because both stems are complete lexical units:

Both components of the personal name Βυρεβίστα were widespread in Thracian onomastics to the south of the Haemus Mountain: for the first component these are the first elements of the personal names Βουργειλος, Βουρθειθης, Βουρκεντιος, the second elements of Μουκαβουρις, Δαρουβυρα, *Azbora*, and for the second component – the second elements of Αυλουβειστας, Διτυβιστος. The examples are from inscriptions from Pizus, Razgrad, Rupite and Cherna Gora (near Stara Zagora), Lozen (near Haskovo), etc., as well as from ancient authors (Detschew 1957: 81, 82, 119, 144, 313, etc.).

The personal name Δρειβαλος from Tomis (*ISM* II, 125) also occurs in inscriptions from Dionysopolis (*IGBulg* I, 14 b<sub>19</sub>) and from Olbia (Δρειβαλις), other parallels being the first components of the names Δριζενις from Marcianopolis and *Drigissa* from Ratiaria and Somovit (near Pleven) for the first component, and for the second – names with second component -βαλος/-βαλις from different parts of the Thracian linguistic space: Βαζοβαλις from Kopilovtzi near Kyustendil, the name of the Dacian king Δεκέβαλος in ancient authors, borne by ordinary people as well (in inscriptions), maybe also Σαροβαλος from Tanagra, etc. (Detschew 1957: 40, 124, 423, etc.).

Therefore, between the territory of the Getae and of the remaining Thracians there is evidence both of mutual understanding (socio-linguistic),

and of internal community of the linguistic system. It becomes clear from the examples that no essential phonetic differences are observed between the onomastics of the region inhabited by Getae and the onomastics from the areas of the other Thracian tribes. This, and the common lexical formation of the onomastics in the different areas does not provide grounds to claim that Getic was an autonomous language, different from Thracian. The situation is similar to that with Thracian and “Dacian-Moesian.” As regards dialect differences, their existence should be assumed theoretically for such a vast territory as the Thracian space. However, the absence of whole texts makes it impossible to identify them. The available onomastic material does not provide data in this respect.

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