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THE SCYTHIAN LANGUAGE REVISITED

When describing a language, one is supposed, *inter alia*, to determine its genetic affiliation and establish the characteristic traits distinguishing it from kindred idioms. In spite of considerable advances in scythological studies, neither of the said tasks seems to be fully accomplished. Scythian has been identified as one of the Eastern Iranian languages, yet its exact place among them remains uncertain. It was only 11 years ago that K. T. Witczak succeeded in drawing a strict demarcation line between Scythian and Sarmatian (see below), yet there is still room for further research on this matter

Linguists have long tried to distinguish Scythian and Sarmatian. Thus, M. Vasmer in his work "Die Iranier in Südrussland" (VASMER, 1925) cited Scythian and Sarmatian materials separately. The same is true of the authors of the monumental "Compendium Linguarum Iranicarum". However, until the early 1990s no attempts had been made to specify the phonetic traits setting off Scythian from Sarmato-Alanian, although such scholars as Abaev, Harmatta, Zgusta, Bielmeier, to name just a few, repeatedly pointed out certain isoglosses characteristic of chronologically and/or geographically distinct dialects. It was probably due to the fact that all the distinguishing features were perforce elaborated on the basis of the North Pontic onomasticon, where Scythian names cannot always be set off from Sarmatian ones. Moreover, all the phonetic traits of the postulated dialects/languages could have been treated as a diachronic evolution of a single language. Until recently, there were no indisputable criteria by which a certain word could have been safely ascribed to either the Scythian or Sarmatian word-stock (hence an a priori supposition that Scythian was most closely related to Sarmato-Alano-Ossetic).

Meanwhile the most convincing of such criteria was well known to scythologists. Almost everyone setting out to study the Scythian language mentioned a correspondence between Scythian Παράλαται and Avestan *paraδāta*. This similarity was noted as early as in the mid-19th century¹, before J

Darmesteter pointed out for the first time that a $\delta > l$ change was a regular feature of South-Eastern Iranian languages² (although occasionally words reflecting this change can be encountered in other Eastern and Western Iranian languages – cf. below).

The said isogloss, affiliating the Scythian and South-Eastern Iranian languages, namely Bactrian, Pashto, Munji, and Yidga³, was thereafter repeatedly mentioned⁴, yet, as stated above, until recent time nobody would draw the self-evident conclusion and treat *all* the cases of the emergence of *l* in Scythian as reflexes of Old Iranian $*d^5$.

E. A. Grantovsky was the first to postulate that there existed a dialect of the Royal Scythians where δ changed into *l* (see above, n. 4). Moreover, he was the first to make an attempt at tracing the etymology of Scythian names with this change in mind (cf. his etymology of the name of a Scythian king, Πάλακος- < $*Pāḍaka$ – 1970, p. 175, n. 28). True, being a historian and studying primarily history, he did not try to give a comprehensive description of the Scythian language and therefore his treatment of the Scythian word-stock was not fully consistent, i.e., he regarded as Scythian both the words with the $*d > l$ change and those where Old Iranian $*d$ survived as *d*.

This inconsistency was overcome by the Polish scholar K.T. Witczak, who suggested a number of reliable phonetic criteria distinguishing Scythian and Sarmatian in his pioneering work (WITCZAK, 1992). His main conclusion, i.e., that Scythian and Sarmatian were not mere dialects of a single language but two different languages, seems quite convincing. At the same time, certain phonetic correspondences suggested by Witczak or their interpretation are open to question. One can try to correct and augment Witczak's list of distinctions between Scythian and Sarmatian as well as suggest new etymologies of Scythian proper names on the basis of the criteria established.

As mentioned above, Witczak was the first to state that a $*d > l$ change had been a distinctive feature of the Scythian language as opposed to Sarmatian, where Old Iranian $*d$ survived as d^6 . This conclusion can be substantiated by the analysis of indisputably Scythian proper names (see below).

The change of Old Iranian $*-ry$, $*ri$ into Scythian *ri* and Sarmatian *li*, mentioned by Witczak following Abaev and Harmatta⁷, is also a clear distinction between Scythian and Sarmatian (cf., for instance, Scythian proper names Ἀριαπειθης and Ἀριάντας, recorded by Herodotus, and such Sarmatian names from later North Pontic epigraphy as Φλίανος, Φλιμάνακος, etc.).

Witczak's suggestion that Old Iranian intervocalic $*-š-$ was lost in Scythian (as in modern Munji and Yidga)⁸ and became – *š-* in Sarmatian also seems quite plausible.

Other phonetic changes postulated for Scythian by Witczak are less convincing. Thus, a supposed change: Old Iranian **-rn-* (or, rather, **-ṛn-*) > Scythian *-ll-* can only be supported by a single example, namely the alleged Scythian **Māspallā* "Scythian moon goddess" reconstructed from Μέσπλη⁹ 'eadem' recorded by Hesychius¹⁰ It does not mean that this correspondence should be rejected out of hand, yet certain caution in its adoption seems to be appropriate. The same can be said about the alleged loss of intervocalic **θ* in Scythian, illustrated by such examples as Scythian nom. pl. **pāyah* 'ways' inferred from the word Ἐξαμπαῖος translated by Herodotus (IV, 52) as Ἰραὶ ὁδοί, "Sacred Ways", and Scythian **baša* 'most excellent' < **vahišθā*, supposedly rendered by Herodotus as -μπασα in the name of a Scythian goddess, Ἀρτίμπασα (WITCZAK, 1992, p. 58).

Witczak suggested that Old Iranian **w* became *w* before front vowels (and semi-vowels)¹¹ and *b* before back vowels¹² in Scythian, while in Sarmatian it was lost completely before the front vowels and became *v* before the back ones. There seem to be too many exceptions to this rule both in Scythian and in Ossetic, resp. Sarmatian, e.g. Ὀρικός < **Warika/Waryaka*, cf. either Ossetic Digor *wærikkæ* 'lamb' (ABAEV 1949, p. 187) or Avestan *va'rya-* 'best' (VASMER 1925, S. 15), a Scythian proper name; Ossetic Digor *bijun* < **wi-* 'weave', etc. (see MILLER 1882, p. 85; 1887, 157; ABAEV, Slovar', I, 277), etc.

The regularity of a change **ś>θ* in Scythian, postulated by Witczak, also admits of doubt. True, this change can be encountered in Scythian proper names, such as Σπαργαπείθης and Εἰριαπείθης, and in a number of Ossetic words (see ABAEV, 1945, pp. 7-12; GRANTOVSKY, 1970, p. 162). However, in no Eastern Iranian language is this change regular, although occasionally it occurs even in Avestan (see GRUNDRIS, I, 1, § 282, no. 1). Moreover, since this change, according to Witczak, did not occur in Sarmatian, and is irregular in Ossetic, one would be bound to treat Ossetic lexemes reflecting this change as Scythian loanwords and expect other Scythian loanwords in Ossetic to show other linguistic peculiarities of the Scythian language, notably the above mentioned *d>l* change. Yet, although the phoneme *l* existed in Sarmatian, no word in the extensively researched and abundantly documented Ossetic has *l* as a reflex of Old Iranian **d*. The fact implies that there was no Scythian substratum in Ossetic, resp. Sarmatian, and that the **ś>θ* change was characteristic of a certain dialect or dialects of the South-Eastern Iranian type, independently superimposed by Scythian and Sarmatian, most probably in their Asiatic homeland (although it could have occurred in Eastern Europe as well).

Certain phonetic features of Scythian distinguishing it from Sarmatian that were overlooked by Witczak are also worth noting. There was a **χš>s* change in the initial position in Scythian, also typical of some modern South-

Eastern Iranian languages, e.g. Pashto¹³ This trait was pointed out by Harmatta (1951, pp. 308-309), although he did not tie it up with Scythian. It can be illustrated by such examples as Σατραβάτης, a proper name from a Phanagorian inscription of the 4th century B.C., where Σατρα- clearly renders Old Iranian *xšaθra- 'power', Σαῖοι < *xšaya- 'ruler, king', an ethnic name mentioned in an Olbian inscription of the 3rd century B.C. and probably corresponding to that of the Royal Scythians; and Σαταφάρνης < *Xšaitafarna-, the king of the said Σαῖοι. It should be noted that the relevant inscriptions are far too early to have any connection with the Sarmatians, who did not make their appearance in Eastern Europe, let alone in the westernmost Olbia area, before the 2nd century B.C.¹⁴

Unlike Sarmatian and Ossetic, Scythian did not see a $\theta r > r\theta$ metathesis. In a few indisputably Scythian proper names one encounters only the *-tr-* cluster: cf. the above-mentioned Σατραβάτης and Σατράκης, the name of the king of Asiatic Scythians mentioned by Arrian (Anab. IV, 4, 8).

In view of the above-mentioned $d > \delta > l$ change the occurrence of intervocalic *-d-* (or *-δ-*) in Scythian words awaits interpretation. Since Assyrian *z* in *ašguzāi*, *asguzāi*, *iškuzaī*, *Iškuza* corresponds to Greek θ in Σκύθαι and to later Scythian *l* in Σκόλοτοι, i.e. *skula-ta, it seems likely that by the time of Scythian Near Eastern campaigns, in the 7th century B.C., Scythian **d* had already become an interdental voiced *D* rendered by a sibilant in Assyrian that lacked interdental fricatives and by an interdental voiceless fricative in Greek that lacked voiced *D*. Yet the name of a Scythian king of the 7th century B.C. recorded by Herodotus as Μαδύης implies the simultaneous presence of the dental stop *d* that cannot go back to Old Iranian **d* in Scythian¹⁵ This fact can be accounted for by the change **-nt-* > *-d-* attested for South-Eastern Iranian languages; cf. Yidga *lad* 'tooth' < **danta*, etc. (see EDELMAN, 1986, p. 163). In this case one is entitled to treat the name Μαδύης as a reflex of Indo-Iranian **mantu* (cf. Avestan *mantu-*, Old Indian *mántu-* 'counsellor; ruler')¹⁶

The above-discussed phonetic changes characteristic of Scythian seem to imply that this language formed a subgroup with the so-called South-Eastern Iranian languages, i.e. Pashto, Munji, Yidga, and Bactrian, and was but more distantly affiliated to Sarmato-Alano-Ossetic. It seems likely that there was also a "South-Western Iranian" substratum both in Scythian and Sarmato-Alano-Ossetic.

With these changes in mind, one can analyze certain so far unexplained Scythian names and reinterpret some generally accepted etymologies. Thus, in view of rhotacism prevailing in Old Iranian (not counting certain onomatopoeic (?) words such as Persian *lab* 'lip', etc.), the abundance of Scythian names containing *l* is somewhat puzzling. One is therefore bound to derive

Scythian *l* from Old Iranian *d*. Such a derivation provides coherent explanations for a number of names of Scythian kings. The name of king Σαύλιος can be traced to Old Iranian **saudya-* (cf. Old Indian *śodhya-* 'to be purified'). The name of king Σκίλουρος seems to go back to **skidura-* 'cutting; victorious' (cf. Old Indian *chidura-* 'cutting; annihilating';¹⁷ for semantic development cf. Kurdish *birrā* 'victorious; lit. 'cutting'). The name of the son of Σκίλουρος, Πάλακος, was explained by Grantovsky as a reflex of **Pādaka* (see above). The name Παίρισαλος recorded in a number of inscriptions from the Crimea and the Taman peninsula has usually been treated as Thracian (see, for instance, VASMER, 1925, S. 47). However, it is clearly a 'scythicized' variety of the Bosporan royal name Παίρισάδης. Probably, the secondary *-d-<*-nt-*, like the original **d<*d*, changed into *δ* and then into *l*, although the process was somewhat 'postponed' as compared with the change of the **d<*d'*¹⁸ The name of Μαδύης has been analyzed above.

To summarize, the work of many a generation of scythologists has enabled us to outline the subgroup affiliation of the Scythian language, to separate its word-stock from that of Sarmatian, and to establish major phonetic correspondences, with the aid of which new Scythian etymologies can hopefully be produced.

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К ВОПРОСУ О СКИФСКОМ ЯЗЫКЕ

РЕЗЮМЕ

До недавнего времени не существовало достоверных критериев различения скифской и сарматской лексики. Лишь в начале 90-х гг XX века К.Т. Витчак привлек для решения проблемы давно отмеченное в скифологии обстоятельство – соответствие скифского *l* общеиранскому *d*. Переход *d>l* характерен, помимо скифского, для т.н. "юговостоочноиранских" языков (бактрийского, пашто, мунджанского, йидга – ср. публикуемую в настоящем издании статью Э.А. Грантовского, который в работе 1960 года первым постулировал существование диалекта скифов царских, где *d>l*, а также попытался этимологизировать скифские имена с учетом данного перехода), но не для сарматского и алано-осетинского (ни в эпиграфике сарматского времени, ни в современном осетинском языке не удается обнаружить примеров подобного фонетического развития).

В статье критически анализируются постулируемые Витчаком фонетические соответствия между скифским и сарматским, отвергаются некоторые из них и

предлагаются дополнительные (например, отмечавшийся ранее, хотя и не в связи с различением скифского и сарматского, переход анлаутного сочетания *xš>s в скифском при сохранении сочетания согласных в сармато-аланском, отсутствие в скифском сармато-алано-осетинской метатезы $\theta r > r \theta$ и нехарактерный для сарматского переход **nt*->-*d*- в скифском). Автор делает вывод о близости скифского языка прежде всего к юговостоноиранским, а не к североостоноиранским языкам (хотя и с последними его связывали определенные изоглоссы) и предлагает модифицированный вариант системы звуковых соответствий между скифским и сарматским, иллюстрируемый новыми этимологиями ряда скифских имен.

NOTES:

¹ See, for instance, MÜLLENHOFF, S. 112, although he was not sure if Scythian Παραλάται should be derived from *paraδāta* or from Avestan *ratu*.

² J. DARMESTER, 1883, 71, 195-201, see also MINORSKY, 1930, pp. 65-66.

³ It is supposed that the $\delta > l$ change was also characteristic of a Sogdian dialect, whose existence is postulated mainly on the basis of the allegedly Sogdian loanwords in Persian (see SIMS-WILLIAMS, 1989, pp. 173, 179, with further references).

⁴ GRANTOVSKIJ, 1960, S. 25, Anm. 22; Schmitt, 1989.

⁵ Scythologists' hesitation in appraising this isogloss are best illustrated by Bielseimer's words: "If [italics added] we take seriously the derivation of Scythian Παραλάται < *paraδāta*..., the survival of intervocalic *d* in Sarmatian and Ossetic... proves to be a clear phonetically differentiating trait" (Wenn wir die Ableitung skyth. Παραλάται < *paraδāta*... ernst nehmen, stellt die sarmatische und ossetische Bewahrung von intervokalisches *d*... ein klares lautliches Differenzierungsmerkmal dar) (BIELSEIMER, 1989, p. 240, n. 12).

⁶ Regrettably, Witczak was not aware of Grantovsky's relevant observations scattered over a number of non-linguistic publications, and so missed an opportunity to reinforce his argumentation by the suggestions of his predecessor.

⁷ They, however, did not differentiate Scythian and Sarmatian, and regarded these features either as an archaism and an innovation within a single language (ABAEV) or as traits of a more archaic/more recent dialect (HARMATTA).

⁸ Cf. his examples: Scythian *spau* "eye" (recorded as σποῦ by Herodotus – IV, 27) < Old Iranian **spak'su*; Scythian *kararu*- "nomadic wagon used as dwelling" (recorded as καραρύες by Hesychius) < Old Iranian **kqrqšaru*- – cf. Tocharian A *kursär*, Tocharian B *kwársär* "team (of horses)", etc.

⁹ Since in Hesychius's lexicon this gloss is listed after μεσοφέρδεν and before μεσπῆλα, Witczak, in accordance with alphabetical order, suggests a conjecture: Μεσπέλλη.

¹⁰ Witczak's second example, the alleged Scythian **x^vallah-* 'praise; glory' < **x^varnah-*, reconstructed on the basis of Slavic **chvala* 'praise', cannot be accepted, since the reflex of Old Iranian < **x^varnah-* is attested as -φαρν(η)- not only in Sarmatian proper names but also, for instance, in a Scythian proper name Σαιταφάρνης recorded in the 3rd century B.C. in Olbia, where the early presence of the Sarmatians is highly unlikely if not downright impossible.

¹¹ As in Scythian **maluwyam* 'mead' recorded as μελύγιον (witli Γ instead of the lost *F*) by Hesychius (see WITCZAK, 1992, p. 53).

¹² As in the Scythian name of the Dnieper, Βορυσθένης < **Varustāna* (VASMER, 1925, S. 65).

¹³ In Sarmatian the initial Old Iranian **xš-* was reflected as *xš-* (Greek ξ-, Ossetic *xš-*).

¹⁴ True, Greek Σ- could have rendered Iranian *xš-*: cf. Greek σατράπης < Old Persian (or the so-called Median) *xšathrapa-*. However, given that initial *Xš-* in Sarmatian names is invariably recorded as Ξ, it seems likely that the **xš->s-* change in the initial position did take place in Scythian.

¹⁵ This being so, one is bound to reject the generally accepted etymology of the name Μαδύης deriving it from **madu-* 'honey; mead'.

¹⁶ Similarly the name of a Scythian tribe recorded by Hellanicus (*apud* Steph. Byz.), Εἰαῖάδουῖε, cannot be derived from **āma-adaka* 'raw-eaters', and seems to go back to **a-mantu-ka* 'having no rulers'.

¹⁷ This etymology was first proposed by Trubachev (1999, pp. 276-277). Yet, having been somewhat obsessed by his idea of the presence of Indo-Aryans in the North Pontic area, he treated the name, in spite of its purely South-Eastern Iranian phonetic form, as Indo-Aryan.

¹⁸ The name of the Scythian king Ἰδάνθουρος seems to contradict this conclusion. However, this name is rendered by Arrian as Ἰνδάθυρος, and Herodotus's rendering may be erroneous.