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 Пăрăгенака near the village of Ezero, 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 Ezero 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:

РОЛИСТЕНЕАΣΝ
ΕΡΕΝΕΑΤΙΑ
ΤΕΑΝΗΣΚΟΑ
ΡΑΖΕΑΔΟΜ
ΕΑΝΤΙΛΕΖΥ
ΠΤΑΜΙΗΕ
ΡΑΖ
ΗΛΤΑ
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 Tilezypta mie erazelta. That he translated into:

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

**Bulgarian (Latinic):** Az sâm Rolisteneas, potomák 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 tilezyptam 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 spokoino do (teb) moja blagopočivši, 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).

РОΛΙΣΤΕΝΕ 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 Στένε-κορτά.

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

About the part ΝΕΡΕΝΕΑΤΙΛΤΕΑ 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 ‘ti’, and Bulgarian ‘ti’, all with the meaning – yours in Dative case. ΙΑΤΕΑ is connected with Rumanian ‘aleasa-a’ – the chosen one (-a is interpreted by Georgiev as a suffixed definitive article) with the suggestion that the Thracian variant of the hosen one was ΙΑΤΕ-Α (with -Α as suffixed definitive article).

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

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

The following A(P) ΠΑΖΕΑ Georgiev equates to Α(Ν) ΠΑΖΕΑ and translates ΑΝ as on, at. ΠΑΖΕ-Α 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 ‘meo-m’ – mine, here in Accusative case.

ΤΙΛΕ ΖΥΠΤΑΜ Georgiev interprets as silent – sleeping. TIAE he connects with Lithuanian ‘tylis’ – silent, calm, and ΖΙΠΤΑΜ with Sanskrit ‘supta-m’ – asleep, in Accusative case, and equates it with Bulgarian блаженопочивши (blazenopočivši) – died in peace.

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

HEPAZ means children according to Georgiev and is related with Phrygian έιροι – 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 ΙΛΤΕ-Α – 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 ΡΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕ 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, η – (this one) who, Rumanian ‘aleasa-ǎ’ – 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 ΡΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕ (in Vocative case) corresponds best to the rules of the Bulgarian Vocative case - with ending E. 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 (Moësians) [4], p. 76-79, 107-108, 110, and Thracians (Getae) with Slavs. T. Simokatta (quoted by Tsenov in [5], p. 14) is very clear:

_Sclavos 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:

This I translate as:

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

In modern Bulgarian: Rolistene, az 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 ‘Сран’ (Stan) [7], p. 138.

2. **AS** – I, me corresponding to Old Bulgarian азъ (azâ), Modern Bulgarian ‘а̀з’ (az) - I, Slovene ‘jaz’ – I, Lithuanian ‘а̀с’ – I and Avestanic ‘азем’ – 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 ‘innarummi’ 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 (tilische) - human, person, челядь (celjadă) - progeny, человечъ (человекă) – 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, ряза (reza, rjaza) – wrote, carved (Aorist tense, 3-rd person singular of the verb режа) – 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: лёзи! – lay down immediately!, лёзи! – 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 батьшка (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 Гospod – Lord, master. PTA is in Vocative case, the ending -a corresponding to -o in Old Bulgarian [8], p. 25, (владикo! (vladiko)! – Oh leader!).

12. MIHE – my, corresponding to common Slavic ‘моj’ – 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, разбират (razbiram) – I understand, раздавам (razdavam) – I give, I distribute, corresponding to Slovene verbs ‘razbiti’ – to break, ‘razbrati’ – to understand, ‘razdati’ – to give, to distribute.


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 MEAN ΤΙ ΛΕ ΖΙ! (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 ΡΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕ, and ΠΤΑ, 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.

Acknowledgement

I wish to express my gratitude towards Prof. Dr. A. Perdih for his great support, as well as to the reviewers for their ideas and advices.

References

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**Povzetek**

**Novo branje trakijskega napisa na zlatem uhanu z Ezerovega**

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