

The Language of the Thracians, Ivan Duridanov

IV. The Thracian onomastics

C. Tribal names

The name of one of the largest Thracian tribes, attested in the forms of **Besso** (Hdt., Dio), **Besso** (Eust. to Il.), **Béssoi** (Strab.), **Bessi** (Caes., Cic., Liv., Plin.), is explained from the IE *bhendh-so- ‘bound to something (contract, faith)’ and is thought to be related to the Albanian besë ‘an agreement, truce’, the Old-Ir. bĕs(s) ‘a costum, tradition’. The etymology looks plausible but it must be supported by semantical parallels, which are still not found. Besides, the falling of the n before s (resp. before other fricative consonants) is not definitely attested in Thracian.

In some cases the tribal name was initially a dweller’s name, derived from a geographic name. For example, **Apsinthioi** - a tribe, inhabiting the region to the north of the Thracian Chersones (Galipoli) is a derivative from Apsinthos, Apsynthos, a frontier river and the main settlement of the Apsinthioi. The Thracian tribe of **Mygdones** (Strab.) was named after the region of Mygdonia (initially MygdŌn). The name **Panáioi** (Thuk.) as was called one part of the Thracian tribe of **Edoni** was originally a geographical name, from the Thracian word *pan(s)- or similar, meaning ‘a swamp, a bog’ and present in Thracian river names such as Panisas, Panax, etc.

The name of the large Thracian tribe of **Odrisi**, attested since the V-th c. BC - **Odrýsai** (Hdt., Thuk.), and later - **Odrysa** (Liv.), **Odrusae** (Tac.), is derived (Vl. Georgiev) from the name of their main town Odrysa or Odrysia (Steph. Byz.). It is assumed it was the town of Uscudama (later Adrianopolis), which name is Thracian. It is, however, not likely for one town to have two names of the same (Thracian) origin. As the second name Odrysa (-ia) appeared later, I am inclined to think it was given by the Greeks to the town of Uscudama, after the latter established itself as a main centre of the Odrisi. That is, the town was called ‘Odrisian (town)’ (compare to the form Odrysia in Steph. Byz. The tribal name Odrysa itself is a totem name, derived from the Thracian word for the otter: it must have sounded as *Udrusai (with dr instead of tr) from the IE *udr-us-oi, compare with the Old-Ind. udrá-h ‘water animal’, the Avest. udra- ‘otter’, the Greek hydros, the Old-HighGerman ottar, the Lith. údra, the Bulg. vidra.

Totem were the names of two other tribes:

1. **Bébrykes** (Apoll. Rhod., Theokr., etc.) - lived on the both sides of the Bosphorus. Their name meant ‘the Beavers’, compare to the Lith. bēbrus, bēbras, the Old-Pruss. bebrus, the Slav. *bebrъ in the Bulg. village name of Bebrovo, the Old-HighGerman bibar, etc., from the IE *bhebhru-s, resp. -o-s.

2. **Bysnaioi** (Steph. Byz.), part of the Bebrykes; the name meant ‘goats’, compare to the Roam buzni ‘a goat’, the Avest. bŪza- ‘a goat’ - from the IE *bhŪg’o-s.

Names describing qualities:

1. **Dársioi** (Hekataios in Steph. Byz.), **Dersáioi** (Hdt., Thuk.), the neighbours of the **Spaei** and **Edoni** in Aegean Thracia. The name is related to the Old-Pruss. personal names Dersko, Dirse, the Lith. place name Darsi **Ški** **U** káimas, which are explained from the Old-Pruss. dyrsos gyntos ‘able, brave men’, similar to the Old-Ind. dhṛsnú- ‘brave, audacious, bold’, the Avest. daršvyu- ‘brave, strong’, the Greek thrasys ‘brave’, the Goth. ga-dars ‘to dare’. The Thracian Darsioi, Dersaioi originated from the IE *dhorso- (resp. *dherso-).

2. **Kíkones** (Hom., Hdt., Strab.), **Cicones** (Plin., Ovid., etc.), a tribe inhabiting the region between the Biston lake and the lower course of Hebros’ sing. Kíkōn, attested also as a personal name, from the IE *g **U**ig **Ō**(n), related to the Old-HighGerman queh, quek ‘alive’, the German keck, the Swiss check ‘strong’, the Anglo-Saxon cwicu, the Old-Nord. kvikr, kykr ‘alive, live, agile’ from the IE *g **U**ig, compare also with the Latv. dzîga ‘live (noun)’.

3. **Skaíoi** (Hekataios in Steph. Byz.; Strab.), **Skaibóoi** (Polyaen.), a tribe between Troy and Thracia. The name is identical to the Greek skaiós ‘left’, the Latv. svaevus the same’ from the IE *skai **U**o-s. In the country of the Skaioi there was a river Skaios potamos and a village Skaion teichos (Strab.). It is possible that the tribe was called after the original river name (compare semantically to the Bulg. river name Leva reka [Left river] in the Vraca district).

The name of the **Sátrai** (Hdt., Hekataios in Steph. Byz.) - a tribe, inhabiting the region between Mesta and Struma near the mountain of Pangeus is interpreted as being related to the Old-Ind. ksatrá- ‘domination, rule’, the Avest., Old-Pers. k **Š**athra- ‘domination, kingdom’. However, it is also likely that Sátrai is related to the Lith. (Zhemait.) **Š**atrùs ‘live, agile, row’, compare it to the etymology of the tribal name of the Kíkones. There was also a personal name of Satr **Ē**s.

For the name of the **Trausoi** (Hdt., Steph. Byz.), **Thrausi** (Liv.), who inhabited the southwestern part of the Rhodopes, there are two explanations offered: they were named after the river name Trauos (a Grecized form of the initial Thracian *Trausas (see the explanation above), or it was an adjective, similar to the Lith. trau **Š**us ‘brittle, fragile’, the Latv. trauss ‘brittle’ and ‘cold, luke-warm (for people)’, which is contained in the Old-Kurian (Balt.) family name Trouusz (Hansz), the Old-Russ. troh **Θ** ‘lazy; sad’ etc.