

The inscription on the Ezerovo ring finally deciphered?

Alexandru Gheorghiu
Researcher in Linguistics
September 2020

Abstract

A new translation and very probable accurate decipherment of the inscription on a gold ring found in 1912 in Ezerovo, near Plovdiv, Bulgaria, which is generally presumed to be a 5th century BC example of at least one dialect of the Thracian language, a Palaeo-Balkan Indo-European language which went extinct over a thousand years ago, though the exact century when the language ceased to be spoken is not yet known.

Keywords: Thracian, Palaeo-Balkan, Dacian, Etruscan, Ancient Greek, Proto-Albanian, Indo-European

1. Introduction

In 1912, in a place called Pärženaka in a village called Ezerovo (Ezerovo takes its name from a lake in the area), near Plovdiv, Bulgaria, a gold ring inscribed with a text in Greek letters was found by happen-stance while a mould/burial mound was being excavated. The ring weighs 31.3 grams and the surface on which the letters are engraved (the last four letters are engraved on the other side) has an elliptical shape measuring 1.7 x 2 cm. In the same neighborhood besides the ring there were found other items considered to be belonging to a burial – a golden diadem, a small golden spoon, two triangular golden plates, a broken bronze vessel, a round bronze mirror and a broken bronze bracelet. Thus the golden ring was probably for the burial of a Thracian of means and status. The ring is considered to date back to the 5th century BC.

The language of the inscription is most likely Thracian, in the opinion of nearly all of the scholars of the past who have examined the inscription, and in my opinion as well. This conclusion is based on a number of factors, of which the most important are: 1) the inscription does not make sense in Greek; 2) the area where the ring was found was not an area where Greek speakers predominated at that time, and indeed Greek is thought to have been spoken natively by only relatively few in that area at that time; 3) it is not as likely to have been written in Paeonian or Illyrian or Macedonian (Greek dialect or not), because in the inscription we find *Rolis* (a variant of the well-attested Thracian and Daco-Getic anthroponym *Roles/Rholes*) as the first part of the inscription, a name not attested among Illyrians, Paeonians or Macedonians/Greeks, nor to my knowledge among any besides Thracians and Daco-Getians.

Few have found the previous translation attempts satisfactory; nor have I found them satisfactory; indeed, the only translation before mine which I think has a decent chance of being accurate is the translation essayed by Dimitar Dechev, published in 1957. I find Vladimir Georgiev's translation unlikely, and among the number of reasons for that determination is Georgiev's interpretation that Thracian "as" meant "I" in the inscription (referring here to the English pronoun "I"), which Georgiev extracted from "Rolistene/as/nerenea" in the inscription (the forward slashes indicate Georgiev's parsing, not any word-breaks found in the inscription; the inscription does not indicate any word-breaks). It's not that "as" is unlikely to have been the Thracian word for "I"(English)/"ego" (Latin)/"ich"(German), (etc., all from PIE **éǵh₂*, meaning "I"): that's likely enough, as seen in Old Prussian where "as" meant "I", deriving from PIE **éǵh₂*, the **gh** sound having been sibilized to **s**, and Thracian can be expected to have sibilized that gh there as well (though it's not certain that Thracian actually did that in this particular word, since this pronoun is not yet attested in Thracian, Georgiev's translation being too unlikely on this point of "as" from *Rolisteneas*, as well as his interpretations of the other elements being unlikely); my problem with

Georgiev's interpretation is that he extracts that "as" from *Rolisteneas*, which makes his interpretation of this "as" meaning "I" in the inscription very unlikely as will be seen.

I have therefore essayed my own translation, which has a high likelihood of being the first correct and accurate translation and decipherment of one of the two longest of the Thracian inscriptions discovered so far. If so, this provides us with the first advanced look at the Thracian language, beyond the short phrases translated before, and beyond the small number of glosses from ancient authors, and beyond anthroponyms, theonyms, toponyms, phytonyms (from the afore-mentioned ancient glosses), et al.

I agree with the order of the words and the sound-values of the letters which most past investigators have followed, and I agree with the reading direction, which is from left to right:
ΡΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕΑΣ ΝΕΡΕΝΕΑ ΤΙΛΤΕΑΝ ΗΣΚΟ ΑΡΑ ΖΕΑ ΔΟΜΕΑΝ ΤΙΛΕΖΥΠΤΑ ΜΙΗ ΕΡΑ ΖΗΤΑ (the letters on the ring itself are sometimes different from the letters indicated here, but the sound-values correspond to what is shown here). My parsing of the words is I think identical to Dechev's parsing; indeed it can be said that when it comes to parsing, we only perhaps disagree on the last word in the inscription. However, as will be seen, we disagree about the meanings of most of the words and elements thus parsed.

I agree with Dechev et al. that *Rolisteneas* in the inscription is a male Thracian anthroponym, and that we should parse it as *Rolisteneas*, not *Rolistene*, nor stopping at *Rolis*. I have not yet tracked down the name of the first person to recognize this *Rolisteneas* in the inscription, nor who was the first to end the parsing after the second S (*Rolisteneas*...); it may have been Dechev, but likely not. For anyone with a decent knowledge of Thracian anthroponyms, this was obvious; due to the known/attested Thracian names *Roles* and *Oroles* (and some other variants); as well as the *-sthénēs/-sthénē* (meaning "strong" in ancient Greek, from ancient Greek σθένος, *sthénos*, "strong") element from ancient Greek names (Alkisthénē, Androsthénēs, Kallisthénēs, Sthenélāos, et al.) being known to have been either adopted by Thracians, or perhaps Thracians had the word as well from Proto-Indo-European or from a Non-IE language of the area and time: the etymology of Greek σθένος (*sthénos*) is not agreed upon in the literature, with some preferring a Non-IE derivation.

Some interpreters--though agreeing about the Greek cognate/loanword *-sthenes*---prefer the parsing *Rolistene*, believing either, like Georgiev, that *Rolistene* is a grammatical inflection of a proper name, as in Latin and Greek (see Georgiev's translation for this usage and interpretation), if Thracian had an inflection like that identical to Latin: though Thracian and Dacian may well have had that inflection, the inscription on the ring is almost certainly not an example of that usage; or believing that *Rolistene* is a Thracian genitive form. I don't subscribe to either of those two interpretations; there is no convincing reason to think that the Kjolmen inscription (found in the Preslav region, north of the Rhodope mountains, in Moesia, where the Thracian population was probably mostly of the Getean/Moesian/Daco-Getean kind, who spoke a dialect which had a number of differences compared to most Thracians of the Ezerovo area) shows *Ebaroze* rather than *Ebaro Zesas* (as I will show in my upcoming paper on that inscription), nor is there any evidence that *Dadaleme* found inscribed on some silver philliae is a name showing such a genitive (as I plan to detail in future versions of this paper or in a separate study). I do have to find more examples of the *-eas* ending in Thracian names; since I have not yet compiled a catalog of Thracian names, nor have I reviewed all of the attested Thracian names (nor have I undertaken an extensive review; I last did a rather extensive review of Thracian and Dacian names many years ago, and I had access to only a smaller number of them), I do not currently have another example of a Thracian name ending with the adjectival suffix *-eas* (found in Greek and in Greek names) to include here. Yet Dacian names ending with *-eus* (*Decaeneus*; *Diurpaneus*) may be Romanizations of *-eas*; or *-eus* may be the Dacian version of the scarcely (?) attested Thracian *-eas* (or the Thracians living close to and among the Greeks may have adapted their native suffix so that it became identical to the Greek *-eas*). The name ending *-ais* (*Dekinais*, *Diernais*, etc.) is well-attested in Dacian, and I recall *-ais* in Thracian as well.

Second, I agree with a number of previous translators, including Dechev, that *Nerenea* likely was the genitive form of the name of the father of Rolisteneas or the genitive form of Rolisteneas' gens/family name; so that *Rolisteneas Nerenea* likely means "Rolisteneas, son of Nereneas", or "Rolisteneas of gens Nerenea". The Thracian name **Nerenea/*Nereneas* has to my knowledge not yet been attested elsewhere, but it looks very likely to be a name with that very form, since there is a Proto-Indo-European root word **h₂n^{ér}*, which meant "man; power, force, vital energy", from whence comes ancient Greek *aner*, meaning "man", and Albanian *njeri* (from Old Albanian *njer*, from Proto-Albanian **nera*) meaning "man; human being", to name a few cognates. There is also a Latin gens name *Neria*, a Latin nomen *Nerius*, and a Latin name *Nero*, all three of which were traditionally believed by the Romans to mean "strong and sturdy", matching the meaning of the PIE etymon.

There is also a reminiscence of the ancient Greek name for a particular sea-god, *Nereus*, whose name is of unknown origin and unknown etymology. I think there's a chance that ancient Greek *Nereus* is akin to Etruscan *neri* (the attested Etruscan element *neri* =water, according to some interpreters of Etruscan inscriptions); or *Nereus* could derive from PIE **h₂n^{ér}*, meaning "man", as in "the first man", which could have been a reference to a forgotten myth-cycle, perhaps also reflected in the name of another Greek sea-god, Proteus (this "forgotten" mythology about "the first man" being a sea-personage is actually encountered in the mythologies of various parts of the earth, and thus it is quite likely to be contained in the name of Nereus). I know that some have already noticed the similarity to Etruscan *neri* (though I noticed that resemblance on my own, before I knew that anyone else had noticed that, though it was an easy thing to notice) but I may be the first to see an analogy with the mythology surrounding Proteus and other sea-deities.

2. The new translation

Here now is my translation, different from any previous translations (besides agreeing with many translators about the meanings of the elements *Rolisteneas* and *Nerenea* and *mie*, and agreeing with Dechev about the meaning of *domean*): **ΡΟΛΙΣΤΕΝΕΑΣ ΝΕΡΕΝΕΑ ΤΙΛΤΕΑΝ ΗΣΚΟ ΑΡΑ ΖΕΑ ΔΟΜΕΑΝ ΤΙΛΕΖΥΠΤΑ ΜΙΗ ΕΡΑ ΖΗΛΤΑ:**

Rolisteneas Nerenea, tiltean, = "Rolisteneas Nerenea, fallen (fallen in the sense of deceased)"

ēsko Ara-Zea Domean Tilezupta = "Petitions Ara-Zea, Lady of the Covered Breasts"

miē era-zēlta = "to make me again bloom"

So the entire inscription reads: ***Rolisteneas Nerenea, fallen, petitions Ara-Zea, lady of the covered breasts, to make me bloom again.***

The inscription is thus a religious/magical formula for the deceased, who is seeking either a resurrection on this earth; or reincarnation; or a good afterlife. The ancient Greek writer Herodotus detailed how the Getae (a northern group of Thracians) believed that they were immortal, meaning that they didn't believe that they actually died even though they corporeally died (see Herodotus, *The Histories*, 4.94), so Herodotus furnishes some important proof there, but I recall some more proof from reference works on the Thracians, which I will detail in future versions of this paper. *Ara Zea* I hypothesize, as will be detailed in the following paragraphs, could be thought of as conceptual combination of an earth-goddess like Demeter and a goddess like Artemis (a goddess corresponding to Artemis has been attested as Bendis and also as Kotys/Kottuto among the Thracians), a conceptual combination already known and identified among the Greeks, Anatolians and Minoans (see the literature on the subject; of course, I'm not saying that the Thracians consciously combined Demeter and Artemis, which was not the case; nor am I saying that they consciously combined two Thracian goddesses; rather that the Thracians had at least one goddess, Ara Zea, who had qualities of both Demeter and Artemis, but those qualities were not taken from Greek religion, though some

later Greek influence, and vice versa, is possible). Of the Thracians, Herodotus in chapter 5.7 of the *The Histories* says: "They worship no gods but Ares, Dionysus, and **Artemis**. Their princes, however, unlike the rest of their countrymen, worship Hermes above all gods and swear only by him, claiming him for their ancestor."

In the immediate region where the gold ring was found, archaeological artifacts record that a cult of Apollo, the Kendreiseian Apollo (*Kendriso Apollo*; *Kendreiseia* was apparently an ancient name for Pulpudeva, which became the modern Plovdiv), was particularly important there. And the worship of Apollo in those days was usually accompanied by the worship of his sister, Artemis. In a scholarly source discussing the Thracians, I have found that *Kendrisia*¹ is considered to be the name of a Thracian goddess (I have also found sources saying that *Kendreiseia* was an ancient name for the town of Pulpudeva; the town was known by several different names in ancient times). And I have found sources which say that *Kendriso* (and *Kendros*) may be a Thracian name of Apollo. I could find no etymology given for this group of kindred attestations (*Kendreiseia*, *Kendrisia*, *Kendriso*, *Kendros* and even *Kendrisi*, the latter being the name of a Thracian tribe of the area), so I studied the forms and discovered the most likely etymology myself: the PIE root is ***(s)kand-**, "to shine, gleam, glow", from which comes ancient Greek *kándaρος* (*kándaros*, "charcoal"), Albanian *hënë* ("moon"), Sanskrit *चंद्र* (*candrá*, which as a noun meant "moon" and as an adjective meant "gleaming, shining"), Old Armenian *խանդ* (*xand*, "fiery emotion/passion"), Latin *candēō* ("to shine, gleam"). The form *Kendrisia* is a theonym, and is best understood as a feminine adjectival epithet of the Thracian Artemis, an adjectival epithet which meant "shining; gleaming" (the form *Kendreiseia* may be a toponym ("(city) of Kendrisia and Kendriso") formed from the theonym adjective *Kendrisia*; or *Kendreiseia* may be the actual attested form of the theonym, and could have been used as a theonym and a toponym; I am working on clarifying the attestations). The masculine adjective forms *Kendros* and *Kendriso* have the same meaning yet with a slight difference ("shining, beaming, burning"). Thus it's most likely that in the very place where the gold ring was found, the cult of Apollo (*Kendriso*, *Kendros*) and Artemis (*Kendreiseia* or *Kendrisia*; also known there and elsewhere among the Thracians, I hypothesize, as *Ara-Zea*) was very important, so much so that the tribe of Thracians native to the locale were known as the *Kendrisi*, worshippers of the Thracian Artemis (who was associated with the moon and with the earth and more) and her brother, the Thracian Apollo (associated with the sun and more). There will be more about the archaeological evidence in a future version of this paper; some of the archaeological evidence is in the form of images and/or inscriptions on ancient coins minted in the area.

Among the Greeks, Artemis had a rather long list of epithets/epicleses, including *Thērasia*, "the Huntress", an epithet attested on its own (without the name of Artemis appearing in the attestations), in Mycenaean Greek Linear B texts from Knossos in Crete as *Qe-ra-si-ja* (= *Khwerasia*, from PIE **ghwer-*, "wild animal"); *Khwerasia* later became *Thērasia* in several dialects of ancient Greek, due to a well-known phonological shift in ancient Greek of Mycenaean Greek *khw-* to ancient Greek *th-* in most dialects and in most situations, but in some dialects *khw-* shifted to *ph-*; and in some cases within the same dialect, *khw-* shifted to *th-* or *ph-* depending on the phonological situation of a particular word in the same dialect. Another of Artemis' many epicleses/epithets among the Greeks was *Chitone* ("the well-clothed"). For the explanation of *Tilezupta* as a Thracian epithet of Artemis, see the following paragraphs where that element is analysed in detail.

Now for my proposed etymologies and other evidence for my translation given above:

Roli(*s): this is the well-attested Thracian and Getic male anthroponym *Roles/Rholes* (and also attested as *Rolis?*), *Rolouzis* (attested as a Dacian name) which may have the same etymology as the Daco-Getic (and Thracian?) male names *Oroles*, *Orola* (attested as a man's name) the etymology/etymologies of which I may have an essay on in the near future.

steneas: this is from ancient Greek *sthenes/sthenos*, meaning "strong", which the Greeks used for the termination of a number of their attested anthroponyms. Or alternatively, the Thracians had the word as well in an almost identical form as the Greek. Beekes (2010) states that the etymology of Greek *sthenos* is unknown, though there are Indo-European etymologies proposed. If Non-IE, the likelihood that Thracian had the form as well increases; though even if from PIE, Thracian and Greek could have both had it nearly identical; however, if the word is from PIE that becomes less likely. I have no problem considering the Thracian form to be a Greek loan.

Nerenea: the first part *Ner-* is from PIE **h₂nér** (*masculine*), meaning "man; power, force, vital energy"; cognates include Albanian *njeri* (=man; human being), from Old Albanian *njer*, from Proto-Albanian **nera*; and ancient Greek *aner* (=man). The Thracian *Ner-* is also cognate to the *Ner-* seen in the Roman nomen *Nerius* (*gens Neria*), and the Roman praenomen *Nero*: all of which Latin/Roman names (*Nerius*, *Neria*, *Nero*) were traditionally described as meaning *fortis ac strenuus*, "strong and sturdy", matching the meaning of the Proto-Indo-European etymology.

The second part of *Nerenea* shows the same element seen in Thracian *Esbenis* ("horseman"). The first part of Thracian *Esbenis*, namely *esb-*, is known to be from PIE ***h₁ékʷos** (*masculine*), meaning "horse, stallion": and just as the noun *esb-* has received the suffix **-en-** seen in *Esbenis*, likewise the noun *Ner-* has received the suffix **-en-** in *Nerenea*. The same **-en-** noun suffix is also seen in *Mezenai*, another Thracian term also meaning horseman/horserider/chevalier/cavalier (as *Esbenis* meant), but the *Mez-* in *Mezenai* derives from a different root, not from ***h₁ékʷos** (the certain etymology of *Mez-* is well-known in the literature on the Thracian language, and so I will not go into that in this paragraph; suffice it to say that there is no doubt about the etymology of *Mez-*). It's likely that after going more extensively through the Thracian and Dacian language material, I will find more examples of the **-en-** noun suffix.

The third and final part of *Nerenea*, the ending **-ea**, is the genitive suffix, which is in feminine form as we see in Latin *gens/gentes* names (note: the plural of *gens* is *gentes*). In Latin, the *gens* (family name) is always in feminine form: cf. Roman *gens* names such as *gens Aurelia*, *gens Nasennia*, *gens Neria* (noted above), *gens Valeria*: and many more, because all the Latin *gens* names have the feminine ending, even when the name itself has a "masculine" etymology. The Thracian *gens* name *Nerenea* is from the Thracian nomen ***Nereneas**. One can posit from *Esbenis* ("horseman") a Thracian nomen ***Esbeneas** (feminine ***Esbenea**) and a Thracian *gens* name ***Esbenea**. A form ***Nerenis** may have also existed in Thracian, but probably not as an anthroponym, but as a hypothetical word deriving from the same PIE root. I do not currently have more examples of Thracian or Dacian names ending with **-ea**, for reasons discussed above: I've just begun again reviewing the Thracian and Dacian name evidence after not having done an extended review of their names in several years.

tiltean: is interpreted by me as having meant "fallen", with the meaning of "deceased"; and since many among the Thracian people didn't believe in actual death, it makes sense that they would here, in this religious formula which is seeking a type of resurrection or life after death, use the term "fallen" instead of "dead". The cognates for "tiltean" that I propose are all, so far, found only in Germanic, and they mean "to slant down, slant/fall towards the ground". This does not mean that Thracian was particularly close to the Germanic branch; rather, this indicates linguistic interaction between Germanics and Thracians; it's possible that the root word for the cognates goes back to a Non-IE substratum language of Central Europe and the northern Balkans. English "tilt" is one of the Germanic cognates; English "tilt" from Middle English "tilte", from Old English "tyltan" (= "to be unsteady"), from *tealt* "unsteady," from a Proto-Germanic word reconstructed by not sure which linguist as ***taltaz**. Cognates for the English and Old English words are given as including: Old Norse *tyllast* "to trip," Swedish *tulta* "to waddle," Norwegian *tylta* "to walk on tip-toe," Middle Dutch *touteren* "to swing"; also believed to be a cognate is Icelandic *tölt* (used to describe the ambling gait of certain horses; and so also meant an ambling place for horses). Meaning "to cause to lean,

tip, slope" (1590s) is from sense of "push or fall over." Intransitive sense "to lean, tip" first recorded 1620s. As stated a few sentences above, these Germanic words have not yet been linked to any Proto-Indo-European root word, and the origin could be Non-IE. Cf. Etruscan *tle-* (found in Etruscan inscription TLE 890), which may have meant "defeated", perhaps from the earlier meaning of "knocked down or laid down" (in Etruscan inscription TLE 890, the meaning does not seem to be "killed", though the meaning "killed" could have developed from the earlier senses, and that meaning may have been employed elsewhere in Etruscan usage, though probably not in inscription TLE 890). And also Cf. Hurrian *til-*, "to destroy". I found Etruscan *tle-* and Hurrian *til-* in Arnaud Fournet's *A Tentative Etymological Glossary of Etruscan*. The Etruscan and the Hurrian forms are possible cognates.

"Tiltean" may have meant in this inscription merely in bad shape ("unsteady"), but not deceased; in which case, to make him bloom again would mean to bring him back to good health. If that is so, the ring inscription would have been for a person who was still living when the inscription was made. But why wouldn't he have just left out the word "tiltean" in that case? Why inscribe in gold that he is sick? I'd imagine that that would not be considered a propitious or wise thing to do. So I think the translation that I gave above is more likely, that the inscription was for the deceased *Rolisteneas Nerenea*.

ēsko: meant to "ask, petition"; there are many Indo-European cognates for this word, including English "ask", Lithuanian "ieškoti" (=to seek), Armenian "hayc" (=demand, request; seeking); Sanskrit "icchatī" (=to seek); all ultimately from Proto-Indo-European **h₂eys-*, "wish, desire". Why hasn't anyone before me linked the "ēsko" in this inscription to this root that I'm linking it to? If I'm correct, it was a big oversight (and a key oversight) of previous translators, due to the un-obvious nature of this inscription.

Ara Zea: the likely translation of this is *Ara*=earth, and *Zea*=goddess. In Albanian "varr" means "grave" (not the adjective; but as in a gravesite); in Albanian, initial "v" sound was added to many PIE inherited words that began with the A sound. Albanian "varr" (from Proto-Albanian **arr-*) is a cognate to Thracian *ara*, as are English "earth" and Dutch "aard/aerde/erde" from Proto-Germanic **erþō* (=erthō), meaning "earth"; Messapian/Messapic "aran" (=field); ancient Greek **ἔρα* (**éra*) in *ἔραζε* (*érase*, "on the ground"), which in Doric Greek was *ἔρασδε* (*érasde*, "on the earth"). There are many more Indo-European cognates for this word as well. And there are also some non-Indo-European words which seem to fit, such as Hattic "araz" which meant "earth". The PIE root for Thracian *ara* (if it means "earth") would be PIE **h₁er-*. There is also the Proto-Indo-European root **h₂erh₃-*, meaning "to plough", from which is said to derive ancient Greek *ἄρουρᾶ* (*ároura*), meaning "cultivated land; cultivated field; ground; earth".

Zea meaning "goddess" is expected (or even already attested?) in Thracian; one example from many: cf. the Thracian *Zeidoros*, which is the Thracian version of the Greek name *Theodoros*, which means "Given by god" or "Given by the gods". *Thea*=*Zea*=Goddess. The PIE root for Thracian *Zea* (if it meant "goddess") is PIE **dyéws*, meaning "sky; heaven", which according to some PIE source books (Watkins et al.) may derive from a verb which meant 'to shine, be radiant'.

In Romanian and Italian, there is/was the folklore survival of a supernatural woman named *Arada* in Romanian and *Aradia* in Italian; probably some linguists assume (have not yet identified which linguists, if any, believe/assume that) that both names derive from *Herodias* (*Herodias* is the Greek feminine form of Greek *Ἡρώδης*=*Hērōidēs*, which became "*Herod*" in English ²), mentioned in the New Testament (in the Gospel of Matthew and in the Gospel of Mark); however, *Erodiade* is the usual form of *Herodias* in Italian, while *Irodiada* is the form of *Herodias* in Romanian; and deriving the Romanian form *Arada* from *Herodiade* or *Herodias* (if any linguists actually do so) is an assumption which has not been demonstrated to be true or that it fits the evidence well or the phonological evolution well. The historian/mythographer/anthropologist/folklorist Mircea Eliade considered *Arada* of Romanian folklore to be a metamorphosis of the earlier *Diana*/*Artemis* ³(*Diana*

being the Roman version, Artemis the Greek version), owing rather little or not much conceptually to Herodiade/Herodias, with whom Diana/Artemis was blended in the Middle Ages; while a derivation of the name *Arada* from Herodiade/Herodias does not seem phonologically sound; it seems in fact very debatable; I do not know what conclusion Eliade came to regarding the supposed (by whom?) derivation of *Arada* from Herodiade/Herodias.

The actual situation seems to be that *Erodiade* (Italian) and *Irodiada* (Romanian) became identified with and code-names (in the dangerous climate of the times) for the earlier *Arada* (Romanian) and *Aradia* (Italian), explaining why both pairs are attested. The identification started from the similar names, and then from there at some point those pagan goddesses were linked conceptually to the historical/New Testament figure, due to the subversive role and reputation both of those female figures acquired in Christianity, and due to some other resemblances between the two which I intend to describe in an upcoming version of this paper. The Italian *Aradia* form probably derives from Etruscan, since much of the Italian traditions about Aradia may derive from Tuscany: the Etruscans most likely (combining all the genetic, linguistic and historical evidence) migrated from Western Anatolia/the Aegean, where their kin the Lemnians were found on the island of Lemnos, where a Thracian tribe known as the *Sinti* also dwelt. The Romanian form *Arada* most likely derives from Daco-Thracian.

But Artemis/Diana is a moon goddess, one might say, why is she being invoked in that manner in the Ezerovo inscription? Artemis/Diana was not quite "a moon goddess" (at least not in the way many would imagine), that was only one of her aspects and functions. Going back into history, Artemis was identified with Cybele, both of them being the goddess of wild animals and nature; both being forms of the earth goddess; so Artemis and Diana were not just moon goddesses. Artemis was also the goddess of the hunt, of maidens, was invoked for a safe and successful childbirth, and more. The Thracian Artemis was usually called *Bendis*; *Kotys/Kottyto* was another Thracian equivalent of Artemis. We can expect she had more names among the Thracians, especially since the Thracians were not so unified. Here in this inscription, Ara Zea bears many similarities to Phrygian *Cybele* (the Phrygians used to live next to the Thracians) and to the Artemis of Ephesus in NorthWestern Anatolia; her function as earth goddess, like *Demeter* and *Gaia*, is emphasized in this inscription. Indeed, another of the several known Thracian inscriptions reads "Da, dale me": with "Da" referring to Demeter; and that "Da Dale Me" inscription is, as I will further detail a bit further in this essay, an invocation/petition to Demeter which in essence is identical to the inscription on the Ezerovo ring, which instead petitions *Ara Zea* (=Artemis, Bendis) to do the same thing requested of Demeter in the "Da Dale Me" inscription.

Domean: meant "lady" (literally, "lady of the household", from an older meaning of "of the household/of the home"), cognate to Latin *domina* (=lady; literally, "lady of the household"); and Latin *domus* (=home) and Slavic *domo* (=home). From PIE **dóm-*, "house, home".

Tilezupta: meant "Breasts + Covered" ("Covered Breasts"), referring to her maidenhood/virginity/sanctity. In one ancient Greek mythical tradition, a male personage named *Actaeon* caught a sight of *Artemis* nude while she was bathing; for that invasion, he was transformed into a deer, a deer which was chased down and killed by Artemis' hunting dogs. Thracian depictions of *Bendis* always show her well-cloaked and well-clothed. One of the epithets of Artemis among the Greeks was *Chitone*, covered by a chiton (an ancient Greek style of tunic, worn also by ancient Romans and some others). This interpretation of *Tilezupta* is one of the very many first such interpretations/original interpretations that my new translation shows.

Thracian *tile-* (breasts) is cognate to Albanian *tul* (=piece of soft flesh without bones, etc.) and to ancient Greek *τύλη*, *túlē* (=swelling; hump of a camel; cushion). In 5th Century BC Attic Greek, the pronunciation of *τύλη*, *túlē* is said to have been *tý.ɛ*: (this is rendered in IPA). There are some more cognates; all deriving from PIE **túh₂-lo-* ("swollen, lump"), in turn from PIE **tewh₂-*, "to swell, to crowd, to be strong". One of the additional cognates is Proto-Slavic **tǫlъ*, the meaning of which has been

reconstructed as "back of the neck, nape"; this Proto-Slavic word is the source of words with similar meanings ("back of the neck; nape; back of the head"; "back" "rear") in many Slavic languages; since in some Slavic languages the meaning is "back" and/or "rear", I wonder whether the older meaning was actually "buttocks" in Proto-Slavic, or in an earlier stage than Proto-Slavic (the meaning older than "buttocks" would have been "bulge/fleshy bulge"). The Thracian and ancient Greek usage most likely sometimes extended to the buttocks (especially the buttocks of many women) as well as to breasts. In the gold ring inscription, the breasts are referred to primarily, given the more important linkage of breasts to nurturing and fertility. Note also how the Artemis of Ephesus has her breasts covered by a garment which is covered with gourds of vegetables and/or fruits and/or bulls' testicles. But the Thracian Artemis' buttocks was very likely included as well in the epithet.

Thracian *zupta* is cognate to Sanskrit *gupta* ("secret"), from PIE **geup-*, "to cover". Other cognates may be Bulgarian *župa* (tomb), Polish *zupa* and Ukrainian *župa* (salt mine), and Old Slavonic *župište* (tomb). The Proto-Slavic **župa* would derive from an earlier **gheu-p-/*geu-p*. The Slavic forms could derive from an earlier meaning of "arching over", progressing to "covering over". The change of the initial G sound (and also the aspirated G) to an initial sibilant Z sound happened often in Thracian, which often shows the "satem" sound-shift, and Thracian was largely a satem language; but I don't think it was that close to Baltic or Slavic; somewhat close, but not that close. Thracian was likely closer to Proto-Albanian. I do not believe that the *-ypta* in *Tilezypta* has anything to do with the name of the (adopted) Thracian goddess *Ipta/Epta*. Such a reading would be a totally different translation, and there's no guarantee that a viable translation can be made from that angle. The goddess *Ipta* (variant *Epta*) was likely of Western Anatolian origin, and little is known about that goddess.

miē : is cognate to Latin *mē*, English *me*, Ancient Greek μέ (mé), ἐμέ (emé, "me"), Sanskrit म (mā, "me"). A very common Indo-European form and a very basic Indo-European form, from PIE **(e)me-*, **(e)me-n-* ("me").

era : is cognate to Latin *re-* and the meaning here was: "again". The Latin prefix *rē-* is from Proto-Italic **wre* ("again"), which has a parallel in Umbrian *re-*, but its further etymology is uncertain (cf. recent editions of the *Oxford English Dictionary*). While it carries a general sense of "back" or "backwards", its precise sense is not always clear, and its great productivity in classical Latin has the tendency to obscure its original meaning. Calvert Watkins proposes a metathesis of Proto-Indo-European **wert-* ("to turn"), while de Vaan suggests Proto-Indo-European **ure-* ("back"), which is related to Proto-Slavic **rakъ* in the sense of "looking backwards."

zēlta: derives from PIE **ǵʰelh₃-*, "to bloom, flourish, become green; green; yellow; gold". This shows an aspirated hard G becoming the sibilant Z again. The Proto-Slavic **zolto* (=gold, yellow) also derives from PIE **ǵʰelh₃-* by way of Proto-Indo-European **ǵʰólh₃tom* ("gold"), as does English *gold*. The Latvian and Lithuanian cognates are in this case closer to Thracian: Latvian *zēlts* ("gold"; "golden") and Lithuanian *zelt* ('to bloom; become green; make green'). Latvian, Lithuanian and Slavic show the sibilization which occurred so often in Daco-Thracian as well. And in Latvian, we find the verb *zelt* which means "to bloom; become green; make green". My interpretation also gives new significance to the fact that the inscription was inscribed on a gold ring.

Compare the occurrence of *zēlta* in this inscription with the occurrence of *dale* and *dele* in two other Thracian inscriptions: "Da Dale Me" ("Demeter, make me bloom" my own translation; instead of "Demeter protect me" as a previous scholar hypothesized) and "Euzie dele Mezenai" ("Horseman, make Euzie bloom/Horseman makes Euzie bloom", my own translation; instead of "Horseman, protect Euzie" or "Horseman protects Euzie". The Horseman in Thracian mythology was an important savior god to them, who was in time replaced by Christ and St. George after Christianity came). In these two inscriptions, *dale* and *dele* mean "to sprout, rise, bloom", from Proto-Indo-European **dʰelh₁-*, cognate to Ancient Greek θάλλω (thállō, "to grow, bloom, thrive"), Welsh *deillio* ("to emanate, derive) and to Albanian "dal" ("to go out, come out, exit"), as well as more cognates. So those two inscriptions, I think, back up my new

translation of the inscription on the Ezerovo ring. The components miēerazēlta may alternatively be parsed as miēe ("me") and ra-zēlta ("again-bloom").

I have not yet read Dechev's 1957 monograph, *Die thrakischen Sprachreste* (published under the name of D. Detschew (Germanized form of Dechev); Vienna, 1957; written in German), which is unavailable in Los Angeles libraries (perhaps a university library around here may have a copy, but likely not; I've checked some) and unavailable online. From looking at his translation, Dechev seems to have been relying a lot on the supposition that era zēlta or era+zēlta (there's no word break in the inscription; the last four letters -ēlta continue on the other side of the ring, but that's not an actual definite word-break: a word-break in this context refers to specific points or lines that ancient scribes often used to indicate word-breaks) in the inscription meant "ground+delivered", in other words "delivered to the ground", a euphemism for "buried". Dechev's interpretation of era would be cognate to ancient Greek ἔραζε (éraze), "to the ground". Note that I still have not yet found Dechev's book, but I think his interpretation is that era zēlta was two words, just as I think it was two words; but he thinks era meant "earth" and zēlta was a verb which meant "delivered to/sent to". However, it's unclear what PIE root he would derive such a zēlta from, as he imagined back then. It doesn't seem as if he was saying that era zēlta is a past-tense verb derived from a noun era or eraz meaning "earth", acquiring an unexplained suffix -ēlta or -zēlta: that would indeed be highly unlikely. I think Dechev actually realized that, and what he meant was that era and zēlta are two words, with his hypothetical meanings described a few sentences above. I think I know which PIE root Dechev intended as the source of zēlta in his interpretation, and if so the semantic link between them is very weak, and so his interpretation is very unlikely. When I verify which root (if any) Dechev intended as the source of his zēlta, I will analyze his hypothesis in more detail.

I have a different interpretation of era and zēlta (zēlta derives from PIE *ǵʰelh₃-, and had the same meanings as Latvian "zelt", which also derives from that root; and many words for gold derive from that root, suggesting a direct link to the golden ring), and my translation makes good sense as a whole. I hypothesized above that Ara in the inscription has to do with "earth", and Ara is cognate to ancient Greek ἔρα- in ἔραζε, to Proto-Albanian *arr-, "earth", and to Messapian "aran" (there are a number of Messapic and Thracian correspondences, including Messapic *Manzana* being cognate to Thracian *Mezenai*, from an earlier **Menzenai*), and cognate also to many other Indo-European words, as well as probably being cognate to the Hattic word "araz" which appears to have meant "earth" according to the experts on Hattic; so in my hypothesis, the era in era zēlta did not mean "earth" and is not linked to ancient Greek ἔραζε. In Georgiev's translation, very different from Dechev's, era zēlta does not have anything to do with "buried" or "delivered to the ground", so it shouldn't be assumed that most palaeolinguists accept Dechev's interpretation.

A big problem with Dechev's translation, as many people have noticed, is why was all this trouble taken to record that a woman from Arazea (no such place-name has been found, by the way) named Tilezupta (Dechev doesn't try to explain the supposed "name" Tilezupta, which is not attested as an anthroponym) is the one who took charge of the burial of Rolisteneas? Do we have support for that idea from Balkanic traditions, where a woman who was, it seems, not part of the family (in Dechev's translation, she is described as a woman from Arazea; Dechev believed that Arazea is an unattested toponym; I don't think it is a toponym, nor do I think it is a gens name: notice for example that the order is *Arazea domean Tilezupta*, not *Tilezupta Arazea*) officiates/takes ritual charge of the burial and of the sending off of the deceased (especially a deceased man) to the other world or to the earth? Do we have support from that in the inscriptions of any cultures? Dechev's translation sounds like a wrong translation. I don't think the ring records who took charge of the burial or of the sending off of Rolisteneas. I think it records a religious magical invocation meant to protect and help the deceased Rolisteneas. Georgiev's completely different translation is not convincing either.

The inscription may have been done by a hired Thracian poet ⁴, since this parsing (identical to Dechev's parsing) and translation of the inscription shows a pronounced flowing metrical rhythm, as well as showing rhyme/assonance: steneas/nerenea/tiltean/arazea/domean; tiltean/domean; further assonance in the series of -tea(n)/-ta/-ta terminations: Rolisteneas Nerenea tiltean/ēsko Ara Zea domean Tilezupta/ miē

era zēlta"; the alliteration in zea and zupta and zēlta and other alliterations elsewhere; and the recurring til- element in tiltean and tilezupta, even though the meanings of the two occurrences are I'm sure different (as discussed above), having different meanings and different etymologies. But I believe tiltean and tilezupta were chosen specifically so that Tilezupta can counteract tiltean. A type of verbal magic common in anthropological studies.

Linguistically, note the harmony between the adjectives tiltean ("fallen") and domean ("of the home"): domean is also a noun (which came to be equivalent to Latin *domina* and English *lady*; further discoveries regarding the Thracian language should clarify why we see domean instead of domea, not that domea suggests itself as "more likely" or more expected than domean: the sentence suggests that there is probably a Thracian grammatical rule here which required the 'n' at the end of the word domean, or if not a grammatical rule, an etymological/morphological one, since the older meaning was "of the home") and yet also an adjective, since it originally meant "of the home"; and the -steneas name element is actually an adjective ("strong"), as is Nerenea (the name Nerenea quite likely meant "virile, potent"; see the cognates, including the Latin cognates). Even the noun *Zea* may be seen in an adjectival way, considering the likely PIE etymology of *Zea*: according to some linguistic sources (Watkins et al.) on Proto-Indo-European, the source was a verb which meant "to shine; be radiant", in which case *Zea* can be described as a feminine adjective ("the radiant one"), as well as a feminine noun. The Thracian adjective suffix *-ea* is nearly identical to Latin *-ia* seen in gens names (*Neria*, etc.) and to an adjective suffix found as far back in Greek as Mycenaean Greek, where it was represented as *-(~)i-ja (=i-ya)* (cf. Mycenaean Greek *Potnija*, *Qerasija* et al.) or *-(~)e-ja (=e-ja)* (cf. Mycenaean Greek *Ipemedēja* et al.).

The harmony between the verbs zupta (covered) and zēlta (to bloom), both ending in -ta, is also suggestive. And the verb contained in tiltean we can reconstruct as *tiltea or *tilte or *tilta, among other possibilities, or all of those depending on the grammar of the phrase. So, *tilta, zupta and zēlta, three Thracian verbs? With ēsko being a verb of a different class. Of course, Thracian would have had a great diversity of verb forms, but it looks like verbs ending with -ta, for whatever reason (etymological etc.), were one category.

Conclusion

Future discoveries of examples of the Thracian language will hopefully clarify whether this new translation that I present here is correct. In my opinion, this new translation is the most likely to be correct from the many translations which have been published over the decades up until now. My translation does not contradict any of the basic assumptions about Thracian. Nor does it show that Thracian was distant from Balto-Slavic and/or Albanian. On the contrary, it shows a language which bears many similarities to both Proto-Albanian and the earlier stages of Balto-Slavic, as well as to some other branches of Indo-European.

References

instead of references, I have included endnotes which cite some additional sources not named in the essay.

Email: alexandru.gheorghiu.323@gmail.com

1 I found the form *Kendrisia* in Bruce M. Metzger's *The Problematic Thracian Version of the Gospels*. I will soon clarify whether *Kendrisia* is an alternative rendering of the possibly more accurate rendering *Kendreiseia*, or whether both forms are attested; and I will clarify whether or not the two forms have slightly different usage: the form *Kendrisia* may be exclusively a theonym; the form *Kendreiseia* may be a toponym; if only one form from those two is actually extant in ancient sources, I will find out whether the extant feminine form (if only one of them is attested) could be both a theonym and a toponym.

2 the name *Erodis/Irodis* (in Greek Ἡρώδης=*Hērōidēs*) itself is believed to have a Greek etymology, either deriving from the Greek word ἥρωϛ (= *hērōs*) combined with the Greek word ὕδῆ (*ōidē*, "ode"), or from the name of *Hērā* (in Greek: Ἥρα) combined with the same ὕδῆ, with *Hērā* of course referring to the wife of Zeus. *Hērōs* is considered to derive from the Proto-Indo-European root **ser-*, meaning "to guard; watch over; protect"; and it is considered that the name of *Hērā* possibly derives from that root as well. The *Hērō-* element in *Hērōdotus* derives from *Hērā*.

3 Eliade, Mircea (February 1975). "Some Observations on European Witchcraft" in *History of Religions*, Volume 14, Number 3. Page 160-161.

4 This aligns with the Greek traditions of the Thracians having many singers/bards (cf. Orpheus, Eumolpus, et al.) albeit most of them may have been only oral bards, though we can expect that quite a number of Thracian and Dacian poems were written down but have since been lost over the centuries.