

# *Ethnē Thrakōn* in Ancient Greek and Latin Authors – What’s in a Name?

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**Abstract:** Writing *l’histoire des noms, et même l’histoire par les noms* is, in the case of Thracian ethnonyms, a particularly complex procedure. After briefly commenting on some of the difficulties, the present communication focuses on two specific cases attested in both literary and epigraphic sources (Sapaioi, Coelaetae) and, by analyzing variations in the attested forms of these ethnonyms, tries to differentiate between variations that can be considered pertinent to the history of the tribes from variations that can be attributed solely to the literary tradition.

**Key words:** Thracian ethnonyms, Sapaioi, Coelaetae

**Ключови думи:** тракийски етноними, сапеи, койлагети



At the end of an article devoted to the study of the relatively rare Greek personal name Εὐλαϊος, published more than sixty years ago, Louis Robert formulated a sentence that was to acquire universal renown in the field of Onomastics: “we must not make catalogues of names, but the history of names, and even history through names”<sup>1</sup>. In 2000, in an article summing up his many years of research on the personal names of Macedonia, Miltiades Hatzopoulos suggested a reformulation of Louis Robert’s phrase, aiming to redress the importance of catalogues and highlight the advantages of both approaches: “we must not only make catalogues of names, but the history of names, and even history through names”<sup>2</sup>. The

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<sup>1</sup> Robert 1962-1963: 529 [987]: “Nous devons faire non point des catalogues de noms, mais *l’histoire des noms, et même l’histoire par les noms*”.

<sup>2</sup> Hatzopoulos 2000: 99: “Brilliant as it is, this programmatic declaration needs, in my opinion, slight emendation if it is to be realistic: “Nous ne devons point faire que des catalogues de noms, mais aussi *l’histoire des noms, et même l’histoire par les noms*”. In fact, before writing the history of names and even more before writing history through names, we must go through the less exciting – some would say the more tedious – work of collecting them”. Groundbreaking projects – like the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* (LGPN), with its online

comments of both Louis Robert and Miltiades Hatzopoulos were, of course, formulated with Greek personal names in mind. In a culture characterized by a rich literary tradition and the extensive dissemination of the so-called “epigraphic habit”, a name can occur in literary texts, in inscriptions of all kinds –whether of public or of private character, on stone or on any other medium–, on coins and also in papyri. More often than not, a name can occur more than once, sometimes even tens or hundreds of times. In the database of the *LGPN*, for example, the name Διονύσιος is catalogued 5.019 times; the name Απολλώνιος 4.724<sup>3</sup>. Such a proliferation offers scope for a more systematic analysis of a name’s original form(-s), its evolution into time, its geographical or chronological distribution. To transfer Louis Robert’s approach from the world of Greek personal names to that of Thracian ethnonyms may seem, and probably is, overly optimistic. It is certainly beset by a series of complex, sometimes absolutely determining, methodological difficulties; only some of these will be mentioned here, in a very selective way.

Systematic efforts to collect and analyze ancient testimonies on Thracian ethnonyms date back to at least the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD. Counting their number, however, has yielded a range of different results, varying from approximately sixty to one hundred tribes, with eighty often being considered an acceptable average<sup>4</sup>. These

numbers sharply deviate from the only surviving ancient testimony, that of Strabo, who, referring to the *ethnē* of the whole of Thrace, gives the very specific number 22<sup>5</sup>. His source remains unnamed. Some scholars suggest Theopompus, thus dating his testimony to the time of Philip II; others suggest Artemidorus of Ephesus or some other near contemporary author, thus dating it to the very beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC.

But difficulties do not end in counting. Since the overwhelming majority of Thracian ethnonyms have come down to us through the writings of ancient Greek and Latin authors primarily, two filters, at least, are to be taken into account.

The first concerns the author himself and/or his sources. Any foreign name – whether an ethnonym or any other name – will be adapted to the language of the text; and this adaptation may vary from author to author and from one period of time to another, leading to a number of different forms<sup>6</sup>. More importantly, an author might extent – whether intentionally or not, and for a variety of reasons– an ethnonym (=identity) to a less familiar or more distant group, the ethnonym more often used in this case being that of the Odrysians. Even a historian like Polybius – who had an impeccable education and was well-versed to the events of the Early Hellenistic Period– could label Dromichaetes King of the Odrysians (βασιλεὺς

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database and its nine, up to this day, published volumes– had, in the meantime, amply demonstrated the importance of catalogues and the mutually complementary character of both approaches.

<sup>3</sup> For Διονύσιος, see <https://search.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/browse.html?field=names&sort=nymRef&query=Διονύσιος>; for Απολλώνιος, see <https://search.lgpn.ox.ac.uk/browse.html?field=names&sort=nymRef&query=Απολλώνιος> (accessed on 07.07.2024).

<sup>4</sup> In a study published in 1893 and covering a large area stretching from the Carpathians to northwestern Asia Minor, Wilhelm Tomaschek analyzed 63 *ethnē*, divided into three large groups, labelled “Paeonian-Dardanian”, “Phrygian-Mysian” and “Thracian”, with this last one further divided into two sub-groups, “Southern Thracian” and “Northern Thracian or Getic”, see Tomaschek 1893; Brunhilde Lenk, in her still valuable entry on ancient Thrace for the *Realencyclopädie*, catalogued 53 *ethnē*, see Lenk 1936; Dimitar Detschew, whose book on the remains of the Thracian language was first published in 1957, assigned the terms “Stamm/Stammvolk”, but also “Sonderstamm” or “Bruchteile von einem Stamm” to 123 entries, see Detschew 1976. Other scholars have opted for a chronological or geographical approach. Thus, in a book devoted to tribes attested during the Archaic and Classical periods only, Alexander Fol and Toshko Spiridonov counted 48 cases, see Fol, Spiridonov, 1983; in his book on the history of the tribes of south-western Thrace, Peter Delev analyzed 54 cases, see Delev 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Strab. 7, fr. 48: Ἔστι δ’ ἡ Θράκη σύμπασα ἐκ δυεῖν καὶ εἴκοσιν ἐθνῶν συνεστῶσα· δύναται δὲ στέλλειν, καίπερ οὐσα περισσῶς ἐκπεπονημένα, μυρίους καὶ πεντακισχίλιους ἱππέας, πεζῶν δὲ καὶ εἴκοσι μυριάδας.

<sup>6</sup> Sometimes an author may even invent a name, but this particular category will not be taken into consideration here.

τῶν Ὀδρυσῶν; an extension) or King of the Thracians (βασιλεὺς τῶν Θρακῶν; a generalization), instead of the expected βασιλεὺς τῶν Γετῶν, used by other authors<sup>7</sup>. Anachronisms –sometimes introduced very consciously by ancient authors, in order to enhance comprehension for contemporary readers– can be particularly difficult to grasp. The classical example here is the term Haemimontani, a term pointing to Diocletian administrative reforms but used by the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD historian Ammianus Marcellinus to describe events related to the campaign of M. Terentius Varro Lucullus in the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC<sup>8</sup>.

The second filter pertains to manuscript tradition. Though profoundly indebted to generations of copyists for their meticulous and time-consuming work, the quality of the manuscript at their disposal, their own diligence and care, their knowledge and understanding of the manuscript's language, are all factors that may have affected the quality of the text reproduced. A copyist may distort an unknown to him ethnonym, to the point of making it unrecognizable. A copyist may choose to replace what he considers to be an incorrect form of a given ethnonym with what he considers to be the correct one, or, at least, the more common one. Thus, the Maidoi – a Thracian tribe dwelling along the middle course of the Strymon river – can become the Medes. Sometimes, a copyist may even translate. Thus, in a map of Claudius Ptolemy's *Geography*, dated to AD 1478, the Ἀστική στρατηγία of Thrace – so named after the tribe of the Astai – occurs as *Praefectura Urbana*. Philologists have, of course, made the necessary emendations; in some cases, though, restitution

of the original form – and by that, I mean the form as used by the Greek or Latin author in the original text– remains beyond our reach<sup>9</sup>.

This very brief, very selective overview is just to underline the obvious: gathering, counting, analyzing, writing the history of names and, even more so, writing history through names can be a very complex procedure when dealing with Thracian ethnonyms. This certainly explains – at least, in part– the many hypotheses that have been formulated by modern scholars in their almost desperate effort to reconstruct the history of these tribes. But that writing history through names can be applied, after all, to the study of Thracian ethnonyms –albeit with certain limitations– is what I will try to demonstrate by analyzing two specific cases.

In two passages of Strabo's *Geography*, in Books 10 and 12 respectively, Strabo associates the Σαπαῖοι – a tribe dwelling in south-western Thrace, just to the east of Macedonia and to the north of both Abdera and Maroneia– to the Σάϊοι, Σιντοί or Σίντιες of the poet, the poet being Homer<sup>10</sup>. Though both passages repeat more or less the same information, they do deviate in some, apparently minor, details; (a) instead of the conjunctive adverb εἴτε (whether) of the first passage, the adverb of time εἴτα (later) is used in the second, thus introducing a chronological sequence to the occurrence of the different ethnonyms; and, (b) instead of the reading Σαπαῖοι of Book 10, the manuscript tradition of Book 12 preserved the reading Σάπαι. This second form was emended by the German philologist Christoph Gottlieb Groskurd in his four-volume edition of Strabo published in Berlin between 1831 and 1834, since unattested to his

<sup>7</sup> See Polyb. fr. 104: *Δρομυχαίτην τὸν βασιλέα τῶν Ὀδρυσῶν* and the relevant comment of Delev 2018: 24. For the predominance of Odrysians in modern literature, see Rufin Solas 2020: 35, who refers to “the exaggerated place that modern historiography has given to the Odrysians in the history of ancient Thrace”.

<sup>8</sup> See Amm. Marc. 27.4.11: *eodemque impetui Haemimontanos acriter resistentes oppressit*.

<sup>9</sup> For a distortion beyond recognition, see indicatively Livy 42.19.6 and the relevant comment of Briscoe 2012: 218–219: “I would now be inclined to print Serdis + Cernatis + que et Astis”; for the Maidoi as Medes, see Plutarch, *Alexander* 9.1; for the map, see Tacheva 2004: 121. The same phenomena, of course, apply to the study of Personal Names of Thracian origin. A ruler named Dizazelmis on his coinage (ΒΑΣΙΛΕΩΣ ΔΙΖΑΖΕΛΜΕΩΣ) is to be identified to Ζιβέλμιος of Diodorus (34.12: *Διηγύλιος υἱὸς Ζιβέλμιος*) and to Zisemis of Valerius Maximus (9.2, ext. 4: *Zisemis, Diogyridis filii*); on this ruler, see now Paunov 2021; the same remark applies to his patronymic.

<sup>10</sup> Strab. 10.2.17: *Τινὲς δὲ Σάμον καλεῖσθαι φασὶν ἀπὸ Σαίων, τῶν οἰκούντων Θράκων πρότερον, οἱ καὶ τὴν ἡπειρον ἔσχον τὴν προσεχῇ, εἴτε οἱ αὐτοὶ τοῖς Σαπαίοις ὄντες ἢ τοῖς Σιντοῖς – οὗς Σίντιας καλεῖ ὁ ποιητής – εἴθ' ἕτεροι (μέμνηται δὲ τῶν Σαίων Ἀρχίλοχος...); and 12.3.20: *Σίντιες γὰρ ἐκαλοῦντο τινες τῶν Θρακῶν, εἴτα Σιντοί, εἴτα Σάϊοι – παρ' οἷς φησὶν Ἀρχίλοχος τὴν ἀσπίδα ῥῖψαι... οἱ δ' αὐτοὶ οὗτοι Σαπαῖοι νῦν ὀνομάζονται*. For the ancient testimonies on the tribe of the Sapaioi and for their localization, see now Parissaki 2024.*

time. His emendation was universally accepted and introduced into all later editions of Strabo's *Geography*, including the most recent ones<sup>11</sup>.

At the very end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD, though, an inscription was spotted at the churchyard of Παναγία Εκατονταπυλιανή at the island of Paros in the Cyclades and was published by French and German epigraphists<sup>12</sup>. Often referred to as the *Monumentum Archilochi*, it remains to this day one of Paros' most important epigraphic texts. The inscription dates to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC; but as explicitly stated at the beginning of the text (ll. 1-9), it reproduces a life of Archilochus, the island's most famous poet of the Archaic period, as compiled by De-meas, a chronicler of the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC. It is, then, particularly important to stress that the text presents multiple chronological layers. In theory, it refers to events of the Archaic period; but in context, it reproduces information of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, while dating to the 1<sup>st</sup> century BC. I will skip details – which have been analyzed elsewhere<sup>13</sup> – only to mention that in l. 51 the text gives the reading εἰς τὰς Σάπας, that is the accusative plural of a feminine noun, most probably a place name. Then came a second epigraphic find. In 1921, André Plassart published a catalogue found at the sanctuary of Delphi, the so-called “grande liste” of the *theorodokoi* of Delphi. The text consists of a series of place names arranged in a more or less geographical order, each one accompanied by one, two or three personal names of those responsible for the reception of the *theoroi*, the *theoroi* being those announcing the celebration of the sanctuary's Panhellenic Games. At col. III, l. 83 Plassart read the names of Ἀντιφάνης and Ἀντιγένης Κλέωνος – that is two brothers of probably Greek origin – as *theorodokoi* ἐν [Σ]άπαις. Reactions to Plassart's reading varied; but Jacques Ouhlen's extensive re-examination of the text in the early '90s seems to have confirmed the reading<sup>14</sup>.

Taken together, these testimonies –that is, an inscription from Paros, an inscription from Delphi, and a literary reference by an ancient author, who explicitly mentions his presence in the Cyclades during his many journeys around the Mediterranean and who may have visited the Archilocheion just a few years after the *Monumentum Archilochi* was placed there – allow us to suggest the following: (a) the form Σάπαι may have existed after all, even if for a more or less short period of time during the last quarter or the very end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC; (b) that this form may have designated some kind of place name, maybe even an administrative center, if only to Greek eyes; and (c) that the passage of Book 12 of Strabo's *Geography* –that is the one preserving the reading Σάπαι and using the adverb of time εἴτα– may have been closer to the author's original text.

But there is more, I think. Surprising as this may seem, towards the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, Delphi –that is the Aetolians, who at the time still controlled the sanctuary and the assembly of the Delphic Amphictyony–, Paros – which, like other islands of the Cyclades still remained within the sphere of influence of the Ptolemies – and the Thracian tribe of the Sapaioi – who, during the second half of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC, were the northern neighbors of the so-called Ptolemaic strategy “of the Helle-spont and of the places in Thrace”<sup>15</sup> – shared one common trait; and that was their profound Anti-Macedonian feelings. Sapaean resentment to Macedonian pressure and control will be clearly manifested a few decades later, with the attack of Abruporis against Amphipolis in the summer of 179 BC and Perseus' counterattack soon afterwards. Both Polybius and Livy, as well as the text of an *epistula* sent by a Roman magistrate to the members of the Delphic Amphictyony in ca. 171 BC, mention the hostilities between Macedonians and Sapaean as one of

<sup>11</sup> See e.g. the edition Radt 2002-2011 and more specifically the *apparatus criticus* at Band 3 (2004) p. 446: Σάπαιοι Groskurd: σάπαι codd.

<sup>12</sup> See IG XII 5, 445 and Suppl. pp. 212-214 (cf. SEG 15, 518); Parissaki 2024: 20, n. 53 for further bibliography.

<sup>13</sup> See above, n. 10.

<sup>14</sup> See Plassart 1921: l. III 83: ἐν [Σ]άπαις Ἀντιφάνης Ἀντιγένης [Κ]λέωνος; for reactions, see Papazoglou 1988: 19, n. 25; for Ouhlen's re-examination, see Ouhlen 1992: p. 55 (as l. III 87): Ἐν Σάπαις Ἀντιφάνης Ἀντιγένης Κλέωνος.

<sup>15</sup> IG XII.8, 156 (= Syll<sup>3</sup> 502), ll. 3-4: στρατ[ηγός] ἐφ' Ἐλ[λησπόντου καὶ τῶν ἐπὶ Θράκης τόπων. For Ptolemaic rule in Aegean Thrace, see Chrysanthaki-Nagle 2007: 281-282, with earlier bibliography.

the main causes that led to the outbreak of the Third Macedonian War<sup>16</sup>. The variant Σάπαι, therefore, may reflect a specific development within specific circumstances.

In other cases, though, a variation in the form of a name may indicate a development unrelated to the history of the tribe itself. The *Coelaetae* emerge in AD 21, when, as Tacitus reports, they rebelled against the King and ally of Rome Rhoemetaces II, along with the Odrysae and the Dii. A votive inscription from Bizye, the capital of the client kingdom of Thrace at the time, refers to this rebellion with the designation Κοιλαητικός πόλεμος “Coelaetic War”. Valerius Flaccus in his *Argonautica* of the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, also mentions the *Coelaetae* in a poetic context. Pliny the Elder mentions the *Celaetae maiores* and *minores*, the first in association with the Haemus, the second with the Rhodopes. And a military diploma of AD 86, found in Romania gives the reading *Coloeticus*<sup>17</sup>. With these

references in mind, we could perhaps suggest that the form Κοιλητική, to be found in Claudius Ptolemy’s catalogue of the strategies of Thrace, instead of the expected Κοιλαητική, represents a “simplified” / Hellenized version of the name, whether introduced by the author himself or his sources. If this is so, the etymological association of the form Κοιλητική with the Greek word κοῖλον, as suggested by some scholars, should not be used as an argument in defining their tribal territory<sup>18</sup>.

When dealing with external testimonies, as in the case of Thracian ethnonyms, a range of serious methodological difficulties must be taken into account. Only some have been analyzed here; others – like those pertaining to the perception of identities, e.g. – can prove equally challenging and determining. The world of the Thracian *ethnē*, as transmitted by ancient Greek and Roman authors, is a complex but also a very interesting one.

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<sup>16</sup> See, respectively, Polyb. 22.18.2-3, Livy 42.13.5 and RDGE 40, ll. 15-17. The causes of the Third Macedonian War have been analyzed by Burton 2017: 78-123, esp. pp. 81-83.

<sup>17</sup> See, respectively, Tac. Ann. 3.38; OGIS 378; Val. Fl. *Argonautica* 6.81; Plin. HN 4.40-41; CIL 16, 33.

<sup>18</sup> For the catalogue of strategies, see Ptol. *Γεωγραφικὴ Ὑφήγησις* 3.11.8-10 (ed. Stükelberger and Graßhoff); for this interpretation, see Delev 2014, 311, who revives an earlier suggestion by Venedikov 1982, 64.

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## ***Ethnē Thrakōn* в сведенията на античните гръцки и латински автори – Какво стои зад името?**

**Мария Габриела Г. Парисаки**

Настоящото съобщение разглежда накратко методическите трудности, срещани при изследването на тракийските етноними и техните засвидетелствани форми. За да илюстрира по-добре тези трудности, авторът анализира два конкретни казуса: Sapaioi и Coelaetae. Твърди се, че формата Sapaī – открита във всички ръкописи на книга 12 от *Geographica* на Страбон, но изменена на Sapaioi от редакторите през XIX век, може да е представлявала съществуваща вариация, употребявана през късния III в. пр. Хр., тъй като е засвидетелствана в два надписа: известният каталог на theorodokoī (длъжностни лица, които отговарят за посрещането на пратеници) от Делфи и надписът на Состен от Парос. Обратно, формата Κοιλητική – откривана в *Geographica* на Клавдий Птолемей, вместо епиграфски засвидетелстваната Κοιλαλητική – може да представлява „единизирана“ версия, приписвана на Птолемей или неговите източници; като такава, тази форма трябва да се счита за неотнормирана към историята на племето или неговата локализация.