

Pavia Indo-European Summer School (September 2013)

Introduction to Albanian

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Day 1: *A Sampling of Facts and Data about Ancient Illyrian (largely from R. Katičić, Ancient Languages of the Balkans (1976))*

1. Ancient (Greek) testimony for a “precise political” entity (p. 155) called “Illyrians” in western Balkans in ancient times, including, post-4th century BC, southern Adriatic coast):
 - Thucydides (5th cent. BC)
 - Demosthenes (4th cent. BC)
 - Strabo (1st cent. BC)
 - Appian (Hellenistic period)
2. Ancient testimony for a “large ethnic group whose territory extended deep into Balkan mainland” (p. 156) with name “Illyrian”
 - Herodotus (5th cent. BC)
 - Periplus of Pseudo-Scylax (4th cent. BC)
 - Pseudo-Scymnus (1st cent. BC)
3. NB: many tribes were said to be under the rubric of “Illyrian” (especially in sense in (2), both in Greek and in Roman traditions (and not all were in the Balkans))
4. “Illyrian” “evidence” (an inscription on a ring found in Kalaja Dalmaçës, near Shkodër, thus within Ancient “Illyricum”

A N A
O H Θ H
I C E P

Read (by Hans Krahe) as:

- **ana** ‘deity’ (cf. Messapic inscriptions ostensibly addressed to *ana aprodita*, *ana aθana*)
- **oēθē** ‘goddess name’
- **iser** ‘sacred’ (cf. Greek ἱερός, Sanskrit *iṣira-*)

Thus: “To the goddess Oethe”

5. But (Ogdenova 1958, 1959) – archaeological setting for ring is Byzantine (thus not more ancient than c. 6th cent. AD, and maybe as late as 12th cent. AD); inscription to be read bottom to top (with IC interpreted as K rather than I + C (= S), and P as a damaged B):

K(UPI)E [B]OHΘH AN(N)Aι ‘O lord, help Anna’
[k(yri)e voiθi ana]

6. Scholion to *Odyssey* 5.281 – reference to “Illyrian” **rhinos** ‘mist’; cf. Alb. **re** (Geg **rê**, thus Proto-Albanian *ren-), ‘cloud’. But, is there another explanation for the similarity?
7. Non-Greek (“Eleian”, in northwest of Greece) gloss in Hesychius (c. 4th cent. AD): **bra** ‘brothers’ – maybe a form of Proto-Indo-European *bhrāter-, “explained as an Illyrian loan” (p. 171). But, what sense of “explain” here?
8. **Delminium** (“name of ancient capital of the Delmatae” (p. 173), a powerful tribe on coastland of western Balkans – connected by some with Alb. **dele/delme** ‘sheep’ (but based on a misunderstanding of a reference in Strabo to the place as a ‘pasturage for sheep’ (when what was meant was that it was “made into a pasturage”, an idiom for ‘laid waste to, devastated’)
9. Plus, lots of other proper names (toponyms and anthroponyms) – but, none are securely etymologizable and even so, they do not connect in obvious or compelling ways to known Albanian words
10. Nonetheless, Katičić believes that given that the areas where the name “Illyrian” is assigned by ancient testimony more or less correspond with Albanian-speaking territory, “it is normal and natural to regard Albanian as the modern descendant of the Illyrian language” (p. 185), and he even states “the only thing one can do in to keep an open mind while remembering in that in this controversy the burden of proof is with those who deny the Illyrian descent of Albanian”. Note that Hamp (1994ab) thinks otherwise and is dubious of the value of ancient testimony as to the “Illyrians” (suggesting that for some at least, the name may have been like “Indian” to many Americans or “aborigine” to many Australians (and cf. (3) above)) and skeptical since there is (virtually) no linguistic evidence as to what an “Illyrian” language was like.
11. Still, recently (October 2009 presentation in Tiranë), Hamp has suggested that a couple of clear loan words into Latin might be instructive and offer some insight into “Illyrian” and Albanian prehistory:

sybina (also: *sygina*) ‘hunting spear’ ~ Alb. **thupër** ‘thin flexible stick; rod’
sīca ‘dagger’ ~ Alb. **thikë** ‘knife’

The semantic match in each case is precise enough to make a connection attractive; these can be interpreted therefore as borrowings into Latin from a *sibling* of Albanian; that is:

“pre-Illyrian *????”
 / \
 “X.” *sybina/sīca* Alb. *thypën/thikë*

But this is not the same as saying *sybina/sīca* are the *direct ancestor forms* to **thupër/thikë** (and note some minor “issues” to deal with, such as the Latin by-form with –g- or the nature of the suffix involved or the roots in question) and in any case, couldn’t Albanian have *borrowed* **thupër/thikë** from the same language that Latin did (so that the forms are not *cognate* (in the technical sense))?