

THE EASTERN BORDER OF CELTIC SETTLEMENT: A TOPONYMIC PERSPECTIVE.*

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The purpose of the present contribution is to determine the easternmost European traces of the Celtic presence.

1. As a witness of the Celtic presence in Eastern Europe the following toponyms have been cited:

1.1. **Νοῦϊόδουνον** / Noviodunum

Today probably Isaccea in the Danube delta (see Holder 1904: 787-9, who collected 10 toponyms of this name); originally **novio-dūnon* ‘new fort’ (cf. Delamarre 2001: 199, 130).

1.2. **Βριτολάγαι**

A tribe from the Danube delta. Holder (1904: 155) considered metathesis of gamma and tau, i.e. he proposed **Βριτολάται*, originally perhaps ‘strong warriors’; cf. Old Irish *bríg* ‘might, force’, Welsh *bri* ‘authority, prestige’, Gaulish **brigo-* and Old Irish *láith* ‘hero, warrior’, Gaulish **lati-* (LEIA B-90; Delamarre 2001: 76, 166), comparable with *Latobrigi* (Caesar, BG I, 5.4). Holder tried to find a parallel formation in the name of the fort *Λατόβριξ* in the Danube delta, but Falileyev (2007: 68) correctly mentions that *Λατόβριξ* is a conjecture of K. Müller (1880: 303) concerning the later gloss to Ptolemy’s *Geographia*, attested in the *Vaticanus Graecus* 191:

Ἀπέναντι Νοουιδούνον πέραν το Δανούβεως ποταμοῦ ἐστὶ πόλις τῶν Γόθθων
Ἄλιόβριξ

Opposite Noviodunon, on the other side of the Danube river, there is the town of the Goths, Aliobrix.

The problem is discussed in details in Falileyev (2007), where he also stresses an obvious Celtic origin of the toponym *Ἄλιόβριξ*, ‘another fort’ (note the fact that it is situated on the **other** side of the Danube), not taking into account the anachronic insertion of the ethnonym of the Goths.

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1.3. Καρρόδουνον / Carrodunum

The identification of Καρρόδουνον with Kamenec-Podol'skij is very attractive (Müller 1883: 434; Vasmer 1971: 265-66; Trubačev 1991: 42), if the interpretation 'stony or rocky fort' is correct; cf. Gaulish **Karros*, epithet of Mars, the god who was connected with the top of the mountain Pic-du-Gar, attested in CIL XII 356: *Marti Carro Cicino L(ucius) Pomp(eius)* (Holder 1896: 815-16); cf. further (with a velar extension) Old Irish *carrac*, Middle Irish *carraic* 'rock, stone', Old Welsh *carrecc* gl. *scropea*, Old Breton *carrec* etc. (Blažek 2006: 83), or 'chariot-fort' (Falileyev 2006: 72, fn. 6). Given the statistical predominance of city-names of the *Steinburg*-type (e.g. *Taškent* 'stony city') in comparison with the *Wagenhofen*-type, originally 'chariot-court', the first solution is more probable.

2. New investigation

Besides these toponyms of more or less accepted Celtic origin there are others with promising Celtic etymologies. These place-names are located by Ptolemy and in one instance by Pliny in the territory between the Tyras/Dniester and Borysthenes/Dnieper rivers.

2.1. Ἀξιάκης / Axiaces

A river in the west of the South Bug¹ and east of Dniester, today probably Tiligul/Teligol (length 173 km, basin 3,550 km²; mouth: Tiligul Liman of the Black Sea; spring: Podol'skaja highlands). Cf. Old Irish *ais* .i. *abann* 'river' (Stokes 1900: 239), variant *aiss* (see LEIA A-50), and the typical Celtic suffix *-(i)āko-. Cf. the French river *Aisse* (H.-Alpes, Cant.), which can be derived from Gaulish **Axia* (Dauzat 1982: 18). Alternatively and less probably the hydronym is derivable from the same stem as Old Irish *ais* f. 'back' < **axsi-* (LEIA A-50; Matasović 2009: 50).

2.2. Λήϊνον πόλις

A town on an unknown tributary of the Borysthenes/Dnieper, whose identification with the South Bug² (GGR IV, 242: near the contemporary city Braclav; RE s.v. *Leinum*), not mentioned by Ptolemy, seems much more probable than an identification with the Berezina/Bjarezina, the right tributary of the Dnieper from Belorussia, which was proposed (with certain doubts) by Šafařík (1862, 555-56; first 1836; similarly DGRG). Cf. Celtic **leino-* > Old Irish *lían*, Welsh *llwyn* 'lucus, arboretum, nemus, saltus', Old Welsh *loinou* gl.

¹ Ukrainian *Південний Буг*, i.e. *Pivdennyj Buh*, Russian *Южный Буг*, the 806 km long river draining 63,700 km², with the source in the Podol'skaja vozvyšennost' and mouth in the Bugskij Liman, which is a part of the Dneprovskij liman.

² The fact that its mouth is in the Bugskij Liman, which is a part of the Dneprovskij liman, might lead to the conclusion that the South Bug is a tributary of the Dnieper.

frutices (Holder 1904: 171). A comparable counterpart is the toponym *Leignon*, AD 746 *Lenione*, in the Belgium province Namur. Holder (1904: 119) connected it with the pagan name *Laenius*.

2.3. Σάρβακον

‘Sarbacum’ or better Βάρσακον ‘Barsakon’ (GGR IV, 242), a place on an unknown tributary of the Borysthenes/Dnieper whose identification with the South Bug seems very probable (cf. fn. 2).

If the form Βάρσακον (GGR IV, 242) is primary, cf. Breton *barrek* ‘combe, plein jusqu’aux bords’ < **barrāko-* : *barr* ‘point, top’. The cluster *-rs-* is preserved, for example, in the island-name *Barsa* between Britain and Gaul (Itinerarium Antonini; see Holder 1896: 352-54; Matasović 2009: 58). The form Σάρβακον may be compared with the Gaulish river *Saravus*, today *Saar* (mouth of the Mosel): *Ponte Saravi*, *Ponte Sarvix*; Ausonius: *Sarāvus*; Rav. IV, 26: *Saruba*; AD 715: *super fluvio Saroa* etc. (Holder 1904: 1365). If the reading Σάρβακον is correct, it is an ‘Old European’ hydronym, extended by the typical Celtic suffix *-āko- (Holder 1896: 20-32).

2.4. Νίοσσον / Nioosum

A place on an unknown tributary of the Borysthenes/Dnieper, whose identification with the South Bug seems very probable (see fn. 2). Holder (1904: 749) included it among Celtic place-names with a question mark but without any argument. Perhaps from **neuiosson* < **neujo-st(H₂)o-m* ‘new-standing’, analogically maybe *Tagassus*, a derivative of the hydronym *Tagus* (Holder 1904: 1700f).

2.5. Μαϊτόνιον / Maetonium

A place on the east shore of the Dniester. Cf. the place-name **Matavonion* in Gaul (department Var), attested in the Tabula Peutingeriana in the form *Matauone*; in Itinerarium Antonini as *Matavonio*; CIL XII, 342: *pagus Matavonicus* (Holder 1904: 458; Sims-Williams 2006: 195); originally perhaps **mat(i/o)-abon-* ‘good river’, cf. Celtic **mati-/mato-* ‘good’ (Holder 1904: 460-61) and **abon-* f. ‘river’ (Holder 1896: 9; Matasović 2009: 23-24). Concerning the epenthesis of *-i-*, cf. Celtiberian *to.Ko.i.to.s /togoitos/* < **togotios*, gen. sg. of the *i*-stem **togotis*, as well as the dat. sg. *Togoti* in CIL II 893 (de Bernardo Stempel 2001: 326).

2.6. Ἔρακτον / Eractum

A place on the east shore of the Dniester. Derivable from **ei-rak(a)ton* < **epi-(p)rak-ato-m*, perhaps ‘[place] by Rhak(a)tae’; cf. the ethnonym ‘Ρακάται (Ptolemy II, 11.11), and further Old Breton *rac* ‘devant’, Welsh *rhagu* ‘I get before, I oppose’ (Holder 1904: 1069).

3. Original geographical references by ancient authors³

Mox Axiacae cognomines flumini, ultra quos Crobyzi, flumen Rhode, sinus Saggarius, portus Ordesos et a Tyra CXX flumen Borysthenes... (Pliny IV, 82)

We then come to the Axiacæ, who take their name from the river Axiaces, and beyond them, the Crobyzi, the river Rhodes, the Sagarian Gulf, and the port of Ordesos. At a distance of 120 miles from the Tyra is the river Borysthenes, ...

ὁ δὲ **Ἀξιιάκης** ποταμὸς καὶ αὐτὸς διαρρεῖ τὴν Σαρματίαν ὑπὲρ τὴν Δακίαν μέχρι τοῦ Καρπάτου ὄρους (Ptol. III, 5.18)

The **Axiaces** river flows through Sarmatia, not far above Dacia, and from the Carpathian mountains.

ὑπὲρ δὲ τὸν **Ἀξιιάκην** ποταμὸν Ὀρδη(σ)σός $\gamma\zeta$ $\mu\eta$ (Ptol. III, 5.29)
...above the **Axiaces** river, Ordessus [$57^{\circ}00$ $48^{\circ}30$]

Ἀξιιάκου ποταμοῦ ἐκβολαί $\gamma\zeta$ $\mu\eta$ (Ptol. III, 10.14)
...sources of the river **Axiaces** [$57^{\circ}00$ $48^{\circ}30$]

καὶ πρὸς τῇ ἐκτροπῇ τοῦ Βορυσθένους ποταμοῦ

Λήϊνον πόλις $\gamma\delta$ γ δ'

Σάρβακον $\gamma\epsilon$ γ

Νίοςσον $\gamma\zeta$ $\mu\theta$ $\gamma\omicron'$ (Ptol. III, 5.29)

And near the river which flows into the Borysthenes/Dnieper:

Leinum town $54^{\circ}00$ $50^{\circ}15$

Sarbacum $55^{\circ}00$ $50^{\circ}00$

Niossum $56^{\circ}00$ $49^{\circ}40$

ὑπὲρ δὲ τὸν Τύραν ποταμὸν πρὸς τῇ Δακίᾳ

Καρρόδουνον $\mu\theta$ $\mu\eta$ $\gamma\omicron'$

Μαιτώνιον $\gamma\alpha$ $\mu\eta$

Κληπίδαυα $\gamma\beta$ $\mu\eta$ $\gamma\omicron'$

Οὐιβανταάριον $\gamma\gamma$ $\mu\eta$ $\gamma\omicron'$

Ἡρακτον $\gamma\gamma$ $\mu\eta$ $\gamma\omicron'$ (Ptol. III, 5.30)

Above the Tyras/Dniester river near Dacia:

Carrodunum $49^{\circ}30$ $48^{\circ}40$

Maetonium $51^{\circ}00$ $48^{\circ}30$

Clepidava $52^{\circ}30$ $48^{\circ}40$

Vibantavarium $53^{\circ}30$ $48^{\circ}40$

Eraetum $53^{\circ}50$ $48^{\circ}40$

ἡ δὲ ἐφεξῆς τῶν στομάτων τάξις ἔχει οὕτως· ὁ μὲν πρῶτος μερισμὸς τῶν στομάτων ὁ κατὰ **Νουϊόδουνον** πόλιν $\gamma\delta$ γ' $\mu\zeta$ (Ptol. III, 10.2)

³ Authors of translations are Bostock & Riley (see Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History* 1905); Stevenson (see Ptol.); Rolfe (Ammianus Marcellinus); Yeat (Jordanes).

The following is the order of the mouths of the Danube: the first of these mouths, which is near the town **Noviodunum**, is located at 54°50 46°30.

Βριτολάγαι δὲ ὑπὲρ τοὺς Πευκίνους (Ptol. III, 10.13)
Britolagae above Peucini

The following examples, if no edition or website is mentioned, are taken from Holder (1904: 789):

Tabula Peutingeriana: **Novioduni**; Itinerarium Antonini: **Novioduno**.

Simili pertinacia tertio quoque anno per Novidunum navibus ad transmittendum annem conexis, perrupto barbarico, continuatis itineribus longius agentes Greuthungos bellicosam gentem adgressus est. (Ammianus Marcellinus 27, 5.6 [AD 367])

With like persistence in the third year also he made a bridge of boats to cross the river at **Novidunum** and forced his way into the barbarian territory; and after continuous marches he attacked the warlike people of the Greuthungi, who lived very far off... (Ammianus Marcellinus 1939: XXVII)

Notitia Dignitatum: 39, 25: *Milites primi Constantiani Novioduno*.
Priscus, *Fragm.* 1^a: **Νοβίδουον**.
Procopius, *Aedif.* 4, 11: **Ναϊδοονώ**.

Sclaveni a civitate Novietunense et laco qui appellatur Mursiano usque ad Danastrum et in boream Viscla tenus commorantur (Iordanes, *Getica* 5, 35)
The abode of the Sclaveni extends from the city of **Noviodunum** and the lake called Mursianus to the Dniestr, and northward as far as the Vistula.

Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *Them.* II, 1: **Ναβιόδουος** and **Ναβιόδουον**.

4. Conclusion

Summing up, the present results confirm the traditionally proposed Celtic origin of proper names from the Danubian delta (Noviόδουον, Ἀλιόβριξ, Βριτολάγαι = *Βριγολάται) and the upper Dniester (Καρρόδουον). New candidates for Celtic toponyms are added from the area between the lower Dniester and Dnieper, namely *Axiaces* / Ἀξιιάκης, Βάρσακον (better than Σάρβακον), Ἡρακτον, Λήμιον πόλις, Μαιτώνιον, Νίισσον. The last three place-names were already included by Holder (1904) in his Celtic corpus but without any concrete etymological support of such identification. These new etymological and geographical identifications shift the eastern border of the European Celts to the South Bug, according to Ptolemy a tributary of the Dnieper, although its name was unknown to him.

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Abbreviations

- CIL** *Corpus inscriptionum latinarum*, ed. by Theodor Mommsen et alii. <http://cil.bbaw.de/cil_en/dateien/cil_baende.html>
- DGC** Martinière, B., 1730f, *Le grand dictionnaire géographique et critique*, La Haye-Amsterdam-Rotterdam.
- DGRG** Smith, W., 1854, *Dictionary of Greek and Roman Geography*, London, Walton and Maberly and Murray.
- GGR** Mannert, K., 1795, *Geographie der Griechen und Römer aus ihren Schriften dargestellt*, IV: *Der Norden der Erde von der Weichsel bis nach China*, Nürnberg, Grattenauer.
- LEIA** Vendryes, J., Lambert, P.-Y., 1959-96. *Lexique étymologique de l'irlandais ancien*, Dublin, Institute for Advanced Studies – Paris, CNRS Éditions.
- Pliny** Plinii Secundi *Naturalis Historiae*, Libri III-IV, ed. by Roderich König & Gerhard Winkler, Darmstadt, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1988.
- Ptol.** Ptolemy's *Geography*, translated by Edward Luther Stevenson. New York: Public Library, 1932. <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Gazetteer/Periods/Roman/_Texts/Ptolemy/3/5*.html>
- Rav.** Geographus Ravennas & Guidodi Ravenna, ed. by Gustav Parthey and Moritz Pinder. Berlin, Nicolai, 1860.
- RE** *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Alterthumswissenschaft* Bd. IV, Pauly, A. F., Waltz, Ch., Teuffel, W., eds., Stuttgart, Metzler, 1846.
- Them.** Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus, *De thematibus*, ed. by Agostino Pertusi. Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, Studi e testi, 160. Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, 1952.

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