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VISIGOTHAE VERSUS OSTROGOTHAE

In this article, new interpretations of the ethnonyms Visigoths and Ostrogoths are proposed in a wider context of Germanic and Indo-European ethnonyms. The first component of the ethnonym Visigothae is etymologized on the basis of Old High German wisa “meadow, pasture”, to express the way of livelihood of its bearers, Goths-Pastoralists. On the other way, the first component of the ethnonym Austrogoti/Ostrogotthae may be identified with Old High German ustrī & ustarī “diligence, activity”. These etymologies allow us to determine in both the ethnonyms the pair representing the functional opposition: Goths-Pastoralists vs. Goths-Farmers, resembling another pair of Gothic ethnonyms, for this once environmental, Greutungi vs. Tervingi, originally “people from the stony or sandy country” vs. “people from forests”, respectively.

Keywords: Goths, ethnonym, etymology, complementary.

1.1. The ethnonym *Visigothae* is attested in the following main variants, SCHÖNFELD (1911: 267–68); REICHERT (1987: 784–86):

Wisigothi – A.D. 472: Priscus Panites apud Jordanes, *Getica* 115.1;

Visigothae ~ *Wisigottae* & *Wisigotae* – A.D. 525: Cassiodorus, *Varia* 78.3 & 79.30;

Vesegothae – A.D. 556: Jordanes, *Getica* 64.22 (*Vesegothae* ~ *Vaesegothae*); 78.7; 83.9 (*Vesogothae*); 91.20; 92.5 (*Vaesegothae*); 97.16 = 99.16 = 103.14 = 106.7, 8, 17, 19 = 107.3 etc. (*Wisigothi*), 99.5 = 107.21 (*Vesigothi*), etc.

Οὐσίγοτθοι – A.D. 560: Procopius, b.V. I, 2.2 (Οὐσίγοτθοι); 7 (Οὐσίτθοι); 37; 3.26; b.G. I, 12.12, 20, 21, 22, 33, 35, 43, 46, 48, 49, 50, 52; 13.4; 5; 11; 12; II, 30.15 = IV, 5.10 (Οὐσίγοτθοι); IV, 5.5;

Οὐσσιγότθοι - A.D. 568: Cyrillus of Scythopolis 72, 176.4.

1.2. The ethnonym *Ostrogotthae* is known in the following main variants, SCHÖNFELD (1911: 38–39); REICHERT (1987: 106):

Austrogoti & Austorgoti – A.D. 398 C.E.: *Scriptores Historiae Augustae v. Claudii* 25, 6.2;
Obstrogoti – A.D. 402: Claudius Claudianus, *Carmina Minora* 20,153;
Ostrogothi – A.D. 481: Gai Solii Apollinaris Sidonii *Epistulae et Carmina* 137, 36;
Ostrogotus & Histrogotus – A.D. 518: *Titulorum Gallicanorum Liber*;
(H)ostrogothae, -i – A.D. 556: Jordanes, *Getica* 59,12; 64,22; 78,7; 83,9; 91,20 (*Hostrogothae & Hostrogothi*); 92,3 & 17; 103,13 (*Hostrogothae*); 109,18 (*Hostrogothae*) & 23 (*Hostrogothi*); 111,22 (*Ostrogothi*); 121,2,11,14; 122,14 & 17 (*Hostrogothae & Ostrogothi*); 127,12 (*Ostrogothi*).
Ostrogothi – A.D. 568: *Chronica Caesaraugustana* II, p. 222, 490.

2. Traditionally the ethnonym *Austrogoti/Ostrogothae* has been interpreted as “Eastern Goths”. It was already Jordanes [*Getica*, §82] who first formulated the following opinion: *Ablabius enim historicus refert quia ibi super limbum Ponti, ubi eos diximus in Scythia commanere, <erat> pars eorum quae orientalem plāgam tenebat, eisque praeerat Ostrogotha. Incertum utrum ab ipsius nomine an a loco (id est orientali), dicti sunt Ostrogothae, residui vero Wisigothae (id est a parte occidua)*. “Now Ablabius the historian reports that in Scythia, where we have said that they were dwelling above an arm of the Pontic Sea, was a part of them that held the eastern portion, and their leader was Austra-guta; they were called Ostrogoths, it being uncertain whether from his name or from the place (that is, “eastern”). But the rest were called Visigoths (that is, the Goths of the western country).”¹ The term is well-attested in all Germanic languages with the exception of Gothic: **austaz* > Old English *eást* “East”, late Middle High Germanic *ost* id., with derivatives **austraz, -an* > Old Nordic *austr* “East”, Old English *eáster, eástre* “Easter”, Old High German pl. *ōstara* id., adv. **austanē* > Old Nordic *austan* “from the East”, Old English *eástan* id., Old Saxon *ōstana* id., Old High German *ōstana* “eastward”, adj. **austrōnjaz* > Old Nordic **austrāenn* “eastern”, Old English *eástern*, Old Saxon *ōstrōni* id., Old High German *sund-ōstrōni* “south-eastern”, OREL (2003: 30–31). This idea would be intelligible and therefore acceptable if both ethnonyms formed a meaningful pair, Eastern Goths vs. Western Goths, i.e. if the name of Visigoths was really derived from the cardinal point “west”. But it is not the case. The term “west” is **always** attested with *-t-*: **westan* n. “west” > Old English adv. *west* “westwards; West”, Old Frisian *west*

¹ English translation Ædredrich Yeat, see <<http://www.harbornet.com/folks/theedrich/Goths/Goths1.htm>>

“west”, Middle Low German *west* id., Old High German adv. *nord-west* “in the north-west”, including the derivatives like the adv. **westanē* > Old Nordic *vestan* “from the west”, Old English *westan* id., Old Saxon *west-an(a)* id., Old High German n. *westan* “West”, or the adj. **westraz* > Old Nordic adv. *vestr* “westwards”, Old Saxon *westar* id., Old Frisian *wester* id., Old High German *westar* “western”, and **westrōnjaz* > Old Nordic *vestrænn*, Old English *westernne*, Old Saxon *westrōni*, Old High German *westrōni* “western”, OREL (2003: 459). The etymology of the word “west” proves that the *-t-* component is an indispensable part of the word: the Germanic designation of “west” is derived from the IE verb **H₂wes-* “to spend the night” (LIV 293) by the participle suffix **-to-*, cf. Sanskrit *vāstu-* “spending the night” with the **-tu-* suffix. The alternative etymology based on the compound of the prefix *(*a*)*we-* “beyond” and the verb **sed-* “to sit” (LIV 513–15), i.e. “sitting beyond [the horizon]”, also operates with Germanic **t* < IE **d*. If *Visigothae* are not “Western Goths”, why should then *Ostrogothae* be “Eastern Goths”? The direct comparison of the first component of the ethnonym *Austrogoti* / *Ostrogothae* with Sanskrit *usrá-* “shining, bright, morning” (the etymological counterpart of the Germanic **aust(r)a-* “east”) preferred by Schönfeld (1911, 39) and Streitberg is not better since this solution opens another question: what is the meaning of the first component of the ethnonym *Visigothae* if it shall form a semantic counterpart to “shining, bright, morning”? SCHÖNFELD (1911: 267–268) and STREITBERG (1920: 7) seek the explanation in the component *Wisi-* of some archaic Germanic personal names: e.g. Ostrogoth *Wisibadus*, Vandal *Visimar*, the independent ethnonym *Visi* (300 C.E.), *Vesi* (5th cent.), perhaps identical with *Visigothae*, further personal names from the Old High German milieu *Wisi-/Wisu-* (e.g. *U(u)isibado* by Cassiodorus (*Variae*), or *Visigard*, the daughter of Theudeberts I., the king of the Langobards, by Gregory of Tours – see REICHERT (1987: 783–84). In some Indo-European branches the corresponding form is also productive in anthroponyms, e.g. the first component of the Old Indic personal names *vāsu-*, or Gaulish *vesu-/visu-* (e.g. *Vesu-avus*), mostly meaning “good, excellent, noble” cf. MATASOVIĆ (2009: 418). But the pair “Bright-Goths” vs. “Good-Goths” looks rather strange.

3. The designations of other Gothic groups could be inspiring, namely *Greutungi* vs. *Tervingi*, where the same suffixal extension indicates they should be understood together. The ethnonym *Greutungi* / *Grutungi* / *Grauthungi* / *Gruthungi* etc., see SCHÖNFELD (1911: 113); REICHERT (1987: 389) is etymologizable on the basis of Old Nordic *grjót* “stone,

gravel”, Old English *gréot* “sand, dust”, Old Frisian *grēt* “sand, gravel”, Middle Dutch *griet* id., Old Saxon *griot* id., Old High German *grioz* id., DE VRIES (1962: 190); OREL (2003: 141), therefore “people from the stony or sandy country”, SCHÖNFELD (1911: 113); similarly already Zeuss and Streitberg). In the ethnonym *Tervingi* / *Thervingi* / *Terungi* the derivative of the Indo-European word **deru-* “tree” is identified. In Germanic for the appellative “tree” with secondary apophonic change of the suffix in the originally acrostatic neuter from **dór-u* vs. obliquous **dér-u^o* → **dréu-*, the “second Benveniste’s base” **dreu-* > Germanic **trewan* > Gothic *triu*, Old Nordic *tré*, Old English *tréo(w)*, Old Saxon *treo*, *trio* “tree” (OREL 2003: 409–10) is known. But the “first base” is also attested in Germanic, besides **terwōn* ~ **terwan* “tar” e.g. in the latinized Old Germanic matrae’s name *Ala-terviae* (Edinburgher Hafen Crammond). It is generally accepted the *Tervingi* were “people from forests”², perhaps a reminiscence of their stay in thickly wooded Dacia (SCHÖNFELD 1911: 222). The ethnonyms *Greutungi* and *Tervingi* form a pair in complementary unity, the former living in the barren country, while the latter were inhabitants of the forested land. The correct etymologies of the ethnonyms *Ostrogothae* & *Visigothae* should respect a similar principle.

4. A satisfactory solution could be based on the etymological connection of the component **austra-* with Old High German *ustrī* & *ustarī³*, glossed by Latin *industria⁴*, i.e. “Fleiss, Regsamkeit” in German or “activity, dili-

² Cf. Old Russian *Derevljane* vs. *Poljane* “forest-people” vs. “field-people” (B. Brogyányi, p.c.).

³ Swedish *yster* “frisky, lively, boisterous” added by Torp & Falk (1909, 33: **ustrjaz*; followed by Orel 2003, 436) is probably not related if is simplified from **yrster* with regard to the dialect variant *yrsker* (Hellquist II, 1410–11).

⁴ Latin *industria* was among others also used when talking about agricultural activities, cf. e.g. Cornelius NEP. *Cato* 3.1: *In omnibus rebus singulari fuit industria: nam et agricola sollers et peritus iuris consultus et magnus imperator et probabilis orator et cupidissimus litterarum fuit.* “In all his pursuits he gave proofs of singular intelligence and **industry**; for he was a skilful **agriculturist**, well-informed in political affairs, experienced in the law, an eminent, commander, a respectable orator. He was also much devoted to literature.”
(See Cornelius Nepos, *Vitae*, ed. by Albert Fleckeisen. Leipzig: Teubner. 1886; translation: C. Nepos, *Lives of Eminent Commanders* (1886), transl. by John Selby Watson, <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/nepos.htm#Cato>;
SERV. *Aen.* 1.273: *et bene rusticorum laudat industriam* “and pleasantly he praises the diligence of peasants”. (See Maurus Servius Honoratus, *In Vergilii carmina comentarii. Servii Grammatici qui feruntur*, Georgius Thilo et Hermannus Hagen. Leipzig: Teubner. 1881).

gence” in English, usually derived from the verb *ustinôn*, glossed by Latin *fungi*, i.e. “verrichten, ausführen”/“accomplish”, see KÖBLER (1992: 1125); SCHADE (II: 1067); GRAFF (1834: 486), and of the component **wisi-* (or **waisi-*) with Old High German A.D. 810 *wisa* “meadow, pasture”, SPLETT (1993: 1140): “Wiese, Weide”; gl. Latin *caespes, calma, pratum* – see KÖBLER (1992: 1213), i.e. “grassy ground, grass, turf, lawn, meadow”), in the place names earlier: A.D. 756 *Harioldes-wis*, A.D. 795 *Loubwisa* (DW 14, I.2, 1575), German *Wiese* (also in the sense “pasture” – see DW 14, I.2, 1579–80), Middle Dutch & Middle Low German *wese* “meadow”, reflecting West Germanic **wisōn*, besides the apophonic variant **waisōn* continuing in Old Nordic *veisa* “pool, stagnant pond”, Old English *wāse* “ooze, mud, slime”, Old Frisian *wāse* id. TORP & FALK (1909: 413); OREL (2003: 441). In this perspective, it is possible to interpret the ethnonyms *Austrogoti/Ostrogothae* as ‘(field-)working-Goths’, i.e. ‘Goths-farmers’, vs. *Visigothae* as ‘Goths from pastures’, i.e. ‘Goths-pastoralists’. The first solution finds an unexpected internal Gothic support in the clan-name *Amali* (the Ostrogothic leaders should originate from this clan). The name is etymologizable on the basis of verbs attested in Icelandic *amla* “to exert, try hard, strive” (IDO 34), Norwegian *amla* “to work; drudge, toil; work hard” (NO I: c. 69), all derived from the Old Nordic verb *ama* “belästigen” (de Vries 1962: 8), see GRIMM (1880: 313): “In *Amala* liegt der begriff von *amal*, altn. *aml* labor, strenuitas und die *Amalae* sind wiederum die tapfern geschäftigen mühevollen helden”. And for the geographic and ethnologic context it is worthwhile to mention the differentiation of the Scyths according to HERODOT [IV, 11, 17, 18]: Σκύθαι οἱ νομάδες “Scythians – nomades”, Σκύθαι ἀροτῆρες “Scythians – ploughmen” and Σκύθαι γεωργοὶ “Scythians – farmers”:

[IV, 11] Σκύθας τοὺς νομάδας οἰκέοντας ἐν τῇ Ἀσίῃ, πολέμῳ πιεσθέντας ὑπὸ Μασσαγετέων, οἴχεσθαι διαβάντας ποταμὸν Ἀράξην ἐπὶ γῆν τὴν Κιμμερίην (τὴν γὰρ νῦν νέμονται Σκύθαι, αὕτη λέγεται τὸ παλαιὸν εἶναι Κιμμερίων) “There is yet another story, to which account I myself especially incline. It is to this effect. The nomadic Scythians inhabiting Asia, when hard pressed in war by the Massagetæ, fled across the Araxes river to the Cimmerian country (for the country which the Scythians now inhabit is said to have belonged to the Cimmerians before)...”

[IV, 17] ἀπὸ τοῦ Βορυσθενειτέων ἐμπορίου..., ἀπὸ τούτου πρῶτοι Καλλιπίδαι νέμονται ἐόντες Ἑλληνές Σκύθαι, ὑπὲρ δὲ τούτων ἄλλο ἔθνος οἱ Ἀλαζόνες καλέονται. οὗτοι δὲ καὶ οἱ Καλλιπίδαι τὰ μὲν ἄλλα κατὰ ταυτὰ Σκύθησι ἐπασκέουσι, σῖτον δὲ καὶ σπείρουσι καὶ σιτέονται,

καὶ κρόμμου καὶ σκόροδα καὶ φακούς καὶ κέγγρους. ὕπερ δὲ Ἀλαζόνων οἰκέουσι Σκύθαι ἀροτῆρες, οἳ οὐκ ἐπὶ σιτήσι σπεύρουσι τὸν σῖτον ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πρήσι. τούτων δὲ κατύπερθε οἰκέουσι Νευροί. Νευρῶν δὲ τὸ πρὸς βορέην ἄνεμον ἔρημον ἀνθρώπων, ὅσον ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν. “North of the port of the Borysthenites, which lies midway along the coast of Scythia, the first inhabitants are the Callippidae, who are Scythian Greeks; and beyond them another tribe called Alazones; these and the Callippidae, though in other ways they live like the Scythians, plant and eat grain, onions, garlic, lentils, and millet. Above the Alazones live **Scythian ploughmen**, who plant grain not to eat but to sell; north of these, the Neuri; north of the Neuri, the land is uninhabited so far as we know.”

[IV, 18] ταῦτα μὲν παρὰ τὸν Ὑπανιν ποταμὸν ἐστὶ ἔθνεα πρὸς ἐσπέρης τοῦ Βορυσθένης: ἀτὰρ διαβάντι τὸν Βορυσθένεα ἀπὸ θαλάσσης πρῶτον μὲν ἢ Ὑλαίη, ἀπὸ δὲ ταύτης ἄνω ἰόντι οἰκέουσι Σκύθαι γεωργοί, τοὺς Ἑλληνέες οἱ οἰκόντες ἐπὶ τῷ Ὑπάνι ποταμῷ καλέουσι Βορυσθενεῖτας, σφέας δὲ αὐτοὺς Ὀλβιοπολίτας. οὗτοι ὧν οἱ γεωργοὶ Σκύθαι νέμονται τὸ μὲν πρὸς τὴν ἠῶ ἐπὶ τρεῖς ἡμέρας ὁδοῦ, κατήκοντες ἐπὶ ποταμὸν τῷ οὐνομα κεῖται Παντικάπης, τὸ δὲ πρὸς βορέην ἄνεμον πλόον ἀνὰ τὸν Βορυσθένεα ἡμερέων ἕνδεκα. ἤδη δὲ κατύπερθε τούτων ἢ ἔρημος ἐστὶ ἐπὶ πολλὸν. μετὰ δὲ τὴν ἔρημον Ἀνδροφάγοι οἰκέουσι, ἔθνος ἐὼν ἴδιον καὶ οὐδαμῶς Σκυθικόν. τὸ δὲ τούτων κατύπερθε ἔρημον ἤδη ἀληθέως καὶ ἔθνος ἀνθρώπων οὐδέν, ὅσον ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν.

“These are the tribes by the Hypanis river, west of the Borysthenes. But on the other side of the Borysthenes, the tribe nearest to the sea is the tribe of the Woodlands; and north of these live **Scythian farmers**, whom the Greek colonists on the Hypanis river (who call themselves Olbiopolitae) call Borystheneitae. These **farming Scythians** inhabit a land stretching east a three days’ journey to a river called Panticapes, and north as far as an eleven days’ voyage up the Borysthenes; and north of these the land is desolate for a long way; after the desolation is the country of the Man-eaters, who are a nation apart and by no means Scythian; and beyond them is true desolation, where no nation of men lives, as far as we know.”⁵

To conclude, the present arguments document that in the names *Austrogoti/Ostrogothae* and *Visigothae* the difference in the ways of the livelihood of two groups of Goths is reflected.

⁵ Herodotus, with an English translation by A. D. Godley. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1920.

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RESUMÉ

Austrogoti/Ostrogothae & *Wisigothae/Vesegothae* aj. tradičně bývají vnímáni jako ‘Východní & Západní Gótové’, jak soudil už Jordanes [*Getica*, §82] v polovině 6. st. Tato interpretace je nesporně mylná, neboť složka *Wisi-* apod. nemůže být vytvořena od germánského **westan* ‘západ’, **westraz* ‘západní’. Přesvědčivější není ani alternativní etymologie obou etnonym od Streitberga a Schönfelda, která by vedla k poněkud kurióznímu páru ‘Světlogóti’ & ‘Dobrogóti’. Inspirací mohou být jména jiných gótských skupin: *Greutungi / Grutung* / *Grauthungi / Gruthungi* aj., vzhledem k staroseverskému *grjót*, staroanglickému *gréot*, starosaskému *griot*, starohornoněmeckému *grioz* ‘kamení, písek, štěrk’, zřejmě ‘lidé z kamenité či písčité krajiny’, a *Tervingi / Thervingi / Terungi* aj., vzhledem ke stgerm. ‘všestromovému’ božstvu v lat. přepisu (nom. pl.) *Ala-terviae*, a germ. **trewan*, které pokračuje v gótském *triu*, staroseverském *tré*, staroanglickém *tréo(w)*, starosaském *treo*, *trio* ‘strom’, pravděpodobně tedy ‘lidé z lesů’, představují opozici dvou výrazně rozdílných životních prostředí. Klíčem k primárním funkcím etnonym *Austrogoti/Ostrogothae* & *Wisigothae/Vesegothae* mohou být starohornoněmecká slova *ustrī* ‘industria’, tj. ‘pracovitost, přičinlivost’, a *wisa* ‘pastvina’. Pak by obě etymologizovaná etnonyma tvořila smysluplný pár reprezentující rozdíl v obživě: *Visigothae* = ‘Gótové-pastevci’ & *Austrogoti* = ‘Gótové pracující [na poli]’, připomínající Hérodotovo [IV, 11, 17, 18] rozlišení Skythů kočovných [Σκύθαι οἱ νομάδες] a Skythů oráčů [Σκύθαι ἀροτήρες] či Skythů rolníků [Σκύθαι γεωργοί]. Pozoruhodné potvrzení etymologie jména Ostrogótů nabízí i jméno klanu Amalů, z něhož se rekrutovali ostrogótská vůdčivá. Již Jacob Grimm jej spojoval s islandským *amla* ‘snažit se, dřít se, lopotit se’, norským *amla* ‘těžce pracovat’.

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