

Kleine Mitteilungen

The riddle of the Gothi Tetraxitae

After the break-up of Attila's empire, a group of the Crimean Goths joined a branch of the Huns — the Utigurs, and together with them crossed the Strait of Kerch and then settled in the Kuban valley and along the Caucasian littoral of the Black Sea between Anapa and Tuapse, that is, in the region of the Circassians.¹⁾ There is some evidence that the Goths lived there, in association with the Circassians, during about ten centuries. In the Lay of Prince Igor's Campaign of the late twelfth century "fair Gothic maidens on the coast of the blue sea" are mentioned.²⁾ It is quite likely that we have here a reference to the Caucasian Goths and not to the Crimean as some scholars think. Furthermore, among the peoples ruled by the Mongol Khan Nogay in the second half of the thirteenth century the Byzantine historian Georgios Pachymeres mentions the Goths side by side with the Zikchi, i. e., the Circassians.³⁾ The Goths have been also mentioned, in connection with the Circassians, in some of the accounts of the events of the second half of the fifteenth century at the time when the Ottoman sultans extended their sovereignty over both the Crimea and Circassia.⁴⁾

According to Procopius of Caesarea, the Goths who settled in Circassia were called Tetraxitae.⁵⁾ The name is known only through Procopius; it puzzled a number of scholars and until 1936 no plausible explanation of it was

¹⁾ See K. Zeuss, *Die Deutschen und die Nachbarstämme* (1837; reimpression, Heidelberg, 1925), 430—433; R. Loewe, *Die Reste der Germanen am Schwarzen Meere* (Halle, 1896), 19—105; A. A. Vasiliev, *The Goths in the Crimea* (Cambridge, Mass., 1936), 57—69. As to archeological evidence, M. A. Miller has kindly let me know that a number of Gothic graves of the fifth to the seventh centuries have been excavated both in the Kuban River valley and along the Black Sea littoral.

²⁾ H. Grégoire, R. Jakobson, and others, eds., *La Geste du Prince Igor*, *Annuaire de l'Institut de Philologie et d'Histoire Orientales et Slaves*, 8 (1948), pp. 58 (old Russian text), 59 (French transl.), 165 (English transl.).

³⁾ G. Pachymeres, Bonn ed., 1, 345. Cf. Loewe, 50.

⁴⁾ See Loewe, 38—41. Loewe refers to Peucer's edition of „*Chronicon Carionis*“ (Frankfurt, 1566), 186—187, and to Frieseman, *Beschryving van de Krim* (Amsterdam, 1786), 93.

⁵⁾ Procopius, *History of the Wars*, VIII, 4, 9, H. B. Dewing's ed. in *Loeb Classical Library*, Vol. 5, pp. 84 (Greek text) and 85 (English transl.).

found. In that year there appeared A. A. Vasiliev's well-known monograph on "The Goths in the Crimea" in which he offered a radical solution of the enigma. Vasiliev has pointed out that in some of the manuscripts of Procopius' "History of the Wars" the name of the group of the Goths in question appears as "Trapezitae" and not as "Tetraxitae". On that basis Vasiliev suggested that the latter name is but the result of a copyist's error and that only the former name is genuine. Says he: "The Tetraxite Goths must disappear from history and be replaced by the Trapezite Goths."⁶) As far as I know, Vasiliev's conclusion has been generally accepted by the scholars in the field.

And yet I do not believe that the verdict must be considered final. The problem is an involved one, and not all of its aspects are clarified in Vasiliev's explanation. Vasiliev derives the name Trapezitae from Trapezus, i. e., "Table Mountain," in the Crimea, now known as Chatyrdag. This is plausible enough, as a designation of the Goths who lived in the Crimea, but does not preclude the possibility of the existence of a special name for the Goths settled in the Kuban region. It would be natural for a copyist familiar with the Crimean geography but unfamiliar with that of the Caucasian coast of the Black Sea to replace a name unknown to him (Tetraxitae) with that he knew (Trapezitae). On the contrary, if the name Tetraxitae did not exist (as Vasiliev argues), why would the copyist insert it instead of the supposedly original and well known name Trapezitae? This would have constituted not an error but an invention of a new name by the copyist.

Besides, the name Tetraxitae is not meaningless. Its first part obviously represents the Greek numeral *tessares* (*tettares*), "four."⁷) Apparently, the Tetraxitae consisted of four clans or four communes. Characteristically enough, when the Tetraxitae requested Emperor Justinian to give them a bishop (A. D. 548), they sent four envoys to Constantinople, each of their divisions being apparently represented by a special man.⁸) As a general remark, the numerical element occurs very often in the names of composite tribes or composite communes. For example, in *Stephanus Byzantius' Ethnica* we find such names as *Tetrapolis*, *Tetrachoritae*, *Tetracomii*.⁹) Of the same type are the names of many Mongol and Turkish tribes and clans, such as *Dörben Oyirad* ("Four Oyirads", i. e. "Four Divisions of the Oyirads")¹⁰) and *On Uigur* ("Ten Uigurs").¹¹) In view of the close association between the Gothi Tetraxitae and the Circassians,

⁶) Vasiliev, 68—69.

⁷) Both *Tomaschek*, *Die Goten in Taurien*, 12 (quoted by Vasiliev, 64), and *Massman*, *Ulfilas XXVII* (quoted by *Loewe*, 33) recognized the significance of the numerical element in the first part of the name Tetraxitae but neither offered a satisfactory explanation of the second half of the name.

⁸) *Procopius VIII*, 4, 12, ed. *Dewing*, Vol. 5, pp. 86—87.

⁹) *Stephanus Byzantius*, *Ethnica*, 618.

¹⁰) *B. Vladimirtsov*, *Obščestvennyj stroj Mongolov* (Leningrad, 1934), 135.

¹¹) *W. Kotwicz*, *Contributions à l'histoire de l'Asie Centrale*, *Rocznik Orientalistyczny*, 15 (1949), 175. Cf. *J. Markwart*, *Über das Volkstum der Komanen*, *Abhandl. Gesellsch. Wissensch. Göttingen, Phil.-hist. Klasse*, new series, 13, No. 1 (1914), 35—36 and 199—200.

the name of the latter is of special importance to us. According to Joseph Markwart, the name of the Circassians — in old Russian Čerkas, in modern Russian, Čerkes — is to be explained as a contraction from Čahar-Kas, "Four Kas", that is, "Four Kas Clans" or "Four Kas Communes."¹²⁾ "Kas" is an old name of the Circassians. In the Russian chronicles of the Kievan period the Circassians are called Kasogi.¹³⁾ In "Hudud al-Alam", a Persian geographical treatise of the late tenth century (based partly on earlier sources) the name appears in the form of Kasak.¹⁴⁾

It must be taken into consideration that the Gothi Tetraxitae were, numerically, not a strong tribe. According to Procopius, when, during the reign of Justinian, they supported the Utigurs in the latter's war against the Kutrigurs they mustered but two thousand men. We may think that when the Goths settled in the land of the Circassians, the latter did not migrate away from their country, but only were compelled to give part of their lands for the settlement of the Goths. Since the Circassians, judging from their name, must have been divided into four communes, each of these communes had to make room for the newcomers. As a result, the Goths themselves were divided into four groups or cantons.

On the basis of all of the above considerations we may come to the following two conclusions: (1) The name Tetraxitae follows the pattern of the name of the aborigines of the area, the Circassians. (2) The name Tetraxitae is a contraction of Tetrakasitae; Tetra-Kas is a Greek paraphrase of Čahar-Kas; -itae is the Greek form of ending similar to that in Cherronesitae, Tanaitae, Tetrachoritae, Trapezitae.

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¹²⁾ Markwart, 141.

¹³⁾ See G. Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia* (New Haven, 1948), 354—355.

¹⁴⁾ V. F. Minorsky, transl., *Hudud al-Alam* (London, 1937), 161; cf. Minorsky's note on p. 446.