Dabragezas and friends: a celebratory note on 6th-century Slavic

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While scholars had long realized that North Russian is unusual, Andrej Zaliznjak improved the resolution of the facts to be accounted for by demonstrating that the earliest Novgorod dialect stood out from the remainder of Slavic (a) by not displaying the effects of the Second Regressive Palatalization – while at the same time sharing the Progressive Palatalization – and (b) by the ending -*e* in the nominative singular of masculine *o*-stems. Meticulous analysis of birchbark evidence was crucial in both cases.[1]

The facts involving the second palatalization show that the inherited diphthongs had not yet been monophthongized when palatalization became contrastive in Slavic as spoken in the Russian North, so **ai* (traditional **oi*) still was *ai*. In that way, the only velars to be affected were those that stood in the positions traditionally associated with the label of progressive palatalization.[2]

This conflicts with (a) views that put the monophthongization of diphthongs and the second palatalization earlier than the events that first brought Slavic to North Russia, and (b) the tradition of splitting the second palatalization into two chronologically distinct developments (progressive and second regressive). However, those views are incompatible with the present state of our knowledge:

– Borrowings – mainly onomastic – show that Slavic still had its diphthongs as speakers got to know the names of settlements and lakes as far apart as western Slovenia and northern Russia, e.g. Slovene *Batuje* = Latin *Batauia* (Holzer 2001: 39-40) and Russian *Rudomež* = Finnish *Rautamäki* (Vasmer 1934: 370, cf. Holzer 1998: 50).
– External evidence – again mainly onomastic – shows conclusively that the second palatalization took place as Slavic was spreading.[3]
– None of the reasons that have been adduced to split the second palatalization into two distinct changes has proved decisive.[4]

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[1] On the former point see Zaliznjak (1982: 61-75 = 1986: 111-122, cf. also Zaliznjak 2004: 41-47), on the latter Zaliznjak (1986: 129-134, cf. also Zaliznjak 2004: 99-107).

[2] See Vermeer (1986) and the reconstruction proposed in Vermeer (2014).

[3] Although the insight as such is older, the evidence discussed in Bidwell (1961) gave rise to a situation from which there was no going back.

[4] For detailed discussion see Vermeer (2008).

As for the *o*-stem Nsg, the important point for what follows is the problem of the Slavic reflex of PIE *-*os*. Of the solutions that have been proposed, three have adherents among scholars who are presently active:

- > *-*a*, i.e. traditional -*o* (Leskien 1876: 2-4).
- > *-*u*, i.e. traditional -ъ (Fortunatov 1895: 266n).
- > a novel vowel *-*ə*, which subsequently merged with -*e* in North Russian and -ъ elsewhere (Zaliznjak, Dybo and Nikolaev apud Zaliznjak 1988: 170, recently Olander 2012).

Although consensus does not seem to be forthcoming, Leskien's view remains the only one to account for all pertinent facts without compelling the investigator to leave loose ends.

Leskien's solution implies that the attested *o*-stem Nsg endings -ъ (most of Slavic) and -*e* (North Russian) are the outcomes of analogical replacements. In order to operate with an analogical development, standard methodology requires specification of a model and a motivation. Here the motivation is provided by the morphosyntactic anomaly that arose when the loss of final *-*s* caused the Nsg of msc *o*-stems to coincide with the NAsg of neuter *o*-stems, as seen in the following morphological patterns:

(1) Msc nouns with Nsg *-*a*/Asg *-*u* (trad. -*o*/-ъ), e.g. *xlaiba*/*xlaibu* (trad. *xlěbo*/ *xlěbъ*).
(2) Msc nouns with Nsg *-*u*/Asg *-*u* (trad. -ъ/-ъ), e.g. *medu*/*medu* (trad. *medъ*/ *medъ*). These are the nouns traditionally known as *u*-stems.
(3) Neuter nouns with Nsg *-*a*/Asg *-*a* (trad. -*o*/-*o*), e.g. *mensa*/*mensa* (trad. *męso*/*męso*).

Speakers were faced with the following reality:

- In the Asg the ending *-*a* marked the neuter and *-*u* the masculine gender.
- The same regularity held in the Nsg, but only in a small part of the nouns. Most nouns appeared to shift gender between the Nsg and the Asg.
- The ending *-*u* differentiated the Asg from the Nsg in part – but not all – of the msc nouns and in such pronouns as *ta*.
- The difference between Nsg and Asg was not marked in neuter nouns (which always had *-*a*) and in some msc nouns (which always had *-*u*).

This morphosyntactic nightmare cannot have failed to confuse speakers and is unlikely to have persisted for long. Mainstream Slavic cured itself by generalizing the pattern of the *u*-stems (-*u*/-*u*, trad. -ъ/-ъ). Chances are that initially the change did not affect nouns referring to persons, where the meaning prevented confusion, and which were more frequent and salient in the Nsg, particularly

names. Here the substitution was later and more gradual, leaving various residues.

Before going on it has to be recalled that transferral of *u*-stem endings into the *o*-stem paradigm has been common in all kinds of Slavic. The same holds for replacement of nominatives with accusatives. In the latter case, differentiation between words referring to persons and the rest has been common as well.

Leskien's hypothesis is the only one to account for examples in which *-o* is masculine, such as names of the type (Russian) *Sadko*, which can be understood as residual. If one decides not to accept it, one forces oneself to interpret such formations as originally neuter, which implies the need to explain how the transition from neuter to masculine occurred. An example is Thomas Olander, who adduces German *Hänsel* and Ancient Greek *Sōkratídion* as parallels (2012: 322-323). The parallel does not hold, because Slavic names in *-o* are masculine both grammatically and pragmatically. Nobody says **"Садко игра<u>ло</u> на гуслях". And heroes are routinely given names of the *Sadko* type, whereas they could never be called *Hänsel* or *Sōkratídion* among speakers of German or Greek.

For the time being, Leskien's solution is the only one that can be accepted as workable.

This brings us to the subject of this contribution.

The oldest explicit information about speakers of Slavic is provided by Mediterranean sources that originated in the mid 6th century CE, beginning with Procopius and Jordanes. Neither author mentions any likely Slavic-speakers by name, apart from Jordanes' unfortunate *Boz*, whose name has resisted interpretation in terms of Slavic – or any other terms – to this day.[5]

Later authors do provide occasional names. Of those, the only ones to have been active in the sixth century are Agathias of Myrina and Menander Protector. In the extant fragments from their work, six names are attributed to persons we may reasonably assume were speakers of contemporary Slavic, two by Agathias and four by Menander. They are mentioned in connection with events that took place in the mid 550s to late 570s.[6]

1. *Dabragezas*, Asg *Dabragezan*, Gsg *Dabragezu*, identified as an Ant, assuming that the traditional interpretation of the manuscript evidence is correct, which seems reasonable.[7] The initial element of this name is obviously the

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[5] What follows is entirely based on the information collected and discussed by various specialists in Гиндин et al. (1991) and Литаврин et al. (1995). For brevity's sake no specific references will be given. Examples can easily be located through the indices.

[6] For documentation and ample discussion of problematic points see Левинская & Тохтасьев (1991a, 1991b).

[7] In the transcription, accent symbols and breathings are omitted, <ι> and <ει> are both transcribed as <i>, <ου> is transcribed as <u>, whereas <η> and <ω> are transcribed as <ē> and <ō>,

adjective *dabr-* (trad. *dobr-*), here revealing itself to the public for the first time in recorded history. As for the second element (-*gez-*), several Slavic possibilities have been proposed (-*gost-*, -*jĕzd-*, *-*jĕzd-j-*), but none has managed so far without raising more problems than it solves, so it seems preferable to see here – with Vasmer – the reflex of Germanic *gaiz-* 'a kind of spear', which is common in Germanic names, for instance that of the Gothic warlord *Radagaisus* (active appr. 405). The fact that the *g* in -*gez-* is followed by a front vowel is worthy of note. It is unlikely to be a mistake, seeing that the element -*gez-* (unmodified velar and all) recurs in *Velegezitai* (Gpl *Velegezitōn*, Apl *Velegezitas*, Dpl *Velegezitais*) 'name of a Slavic group participating in a siege of Thessaloniki around 615 and later settled in Thessaly (Greece)', who figure prominently in the *Miracles of Saint Demetrius* (2d part).

2. *Suarunas*, identified as a Slav. The name has plausibly been derived from the noun *svarъ*, which is attested since OCS times (Euch, Supr) with meanings like 'conflict'. The suffix invites identification with *-*unъ*, which is of old standing as well, occurring as it does not only in OCS (marginally), but apparently also in the personal name *Sklavunon* (Asg), mentioned by Theophanes the Confessor ("Chronographia", compiled in the 810s) in connection with events of the mid 760s as the name of a leader of the familiar Slavic group of the *Severeis*.

3. *Mezamēros*, Asg *Mezamēron*, identified as an Ant. The second component has abundant parallels among speakers of Slavic attested later. It is preceded by *meza-*, which may render a reflex of Slavic *medjā* 'boundary'.

4. *Idariziu* (Gsg), identified as an Ant. The name has so far resisted all attempts at interpretation in Slavic terms.

5. *Kelagastu* (Gsg), identified as an Ant. The second component is parallelled mere decades later by *Ardagastos* and *Piragastos* mentioned by Theophylact Simocatta in connection with events of the late 580s and 590s.[8] As for the initial component, Zdzisław Stieber (1969: 68) has famously proposed that it stands for *kĕl-* < earlier *kail-* 'whole, intact, healthy', with monophthongized *ai*, but still without the effect of the second palatalization. Since at that stage velars could be followed by front vowels, Stieber's interpretation removes all worries about the unmodified *g* in *Dabragezas* and *Velegezitai*.

6. *Dauritas*, Asg *Daurention*, mentioned as a leader of Slavs. Like *Dabragezas*, the name begins with *dabr-*, in this case followed by a suffix. Unfortunately it is impossible to tell what suffix was intended here.

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where the macron should not however be read as implying length, because by this time contrastive length had long been lost from the language.

[8] Given a Gsg in -*u*, the Nsg ending may have been -*os*, -*ēs*, or -*as*.

Curiously, three of the names (*Dabragezas*, *Suarunas*, *Dauritas*) are reported with a Greek Nsg/Asg in *-as/-an*. Левинская & Тохтасьев (1991a: 301, 308) rightly argue that this is no trivial fact: whereas the declension type in *-os/-on* (as in *Mezamēros* and *Daurention*) is among those that are most commonly resorted to when adapting non-Greek nouns to Greek, the type in *-as/-an* is exceptional in that role, hence these examples require an explanation. If we were to suppose that our names still had a Nsg in *-*a* (or possibly even *-*as*) in contemporary Slavic, that would constitute an explanation. Starting from a Nsg in *-*u*, on the other hand, *-os/-on* would have been the only reasonable possibility and the attested choice of inflectional type would remain odd, if not mysterious. This suggests that at the time involved the msc Nsg in *-*a* (trad. *-o*) still occurred in formations in which it is no longer attested at later stages.

Later Greek authors invariably opt for *-os/-on* when reporting Slavic names, e.g. *Ardagastos* (Asg *-on*, Dsg *-ōi*), *Musōkios* (Asg *-on*), *Piragastos* (Asg *-on*) (Theophylact Simocatta, active during the reign of Heraclius, 610-641), *Perbundos* (Asg *-on*, Dsg *-ōi*) (*Miracles of Saint Demetrius*, 2d part, written most probably during the 680s-690s), *Nebulon* (Asg) (Nicephorus' "Breviarium", compiled probably during the 770s-780s), *Sklavunon* (Asg), *Akamēros* (Theophanes the Confessor's "Chronographia", compiled in the 810s).

Since Agathias' and Menander's names constitute a tiny sample, one may well prefer to attribute the oddities they display to accident and random effects of transmission. But if we decide to take them literally, it turns out that Leskien's hypothesis about the reflex of *-*os* helps to account for the attested forms in the case of *Dabragezas*, *Suarunas* and *Dauritas*, whereas Stieber's assumption that the second palatalization had not yet taken place at the time of borrowing helps to make sense of *Dabragezas* and *Kelagastu*. The *k* in *Kelagastu* (Menander) is supported by the *g* in *Dabragezas* (Agathias), which in turn is supported by the *g* in *Velegezitai* (*Miracles …*). Similarly Agathias' *Dabragezas* and *Suarunas* may cast light on Menander's *Dauritas*.

Our names corroborate the onomastic evidence and the implications of Zaliznjak's North Russian discoveries. They allow us to catch a glimpse of a stage in the evolution of Slavic that was later than the monophthongization of diphthongs, but earlier than the second palatalization and the final normalization of the msc *o*-stem Nsg. They suggest a date shortly before the middle of the sixth century as an absolute terminus post quem for these developments.

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