

# *lucida intervalla*

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## Cimmerians: A forgotten people of the ancient world

**Abstract:** The paper addresses the problem of the ethnicity of the ancient Cimmerians by reconsidering the scarce remnants of their language as attested in Greek, Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian sources. They include a single gloss *árgilla* 'underground house', which proved not to be genuine, three names of rulers, that can be best explained from Old Iranian, and the ethnic name itself, which is etymologically unclear, a fact that might reflect the ethnic (and linguistic) division of the Cimmerians reported by Herodotus into a ruling class (*basiléēs*), presumably a nomadic Iranian superstratum, and the common people (*dēmos*) as its (probably Indo-European) substratum.

**Keywords:** Cimmerians, ethnicity, language, social structure.

The first Greek mention of the Cimmerians is found in the Nekyia, the necromantic Book Eleven of the *Odyssey*; its poet places them into a mythical geography of the Otherworld, close to the entrance to Hades, beyond the stream of the earth-encircling river Oceanus, and describes their land, Κιμμερίων ἀνδρῶν δῆμος τε πόλις τε, as "wrapped in mist and cloud", a dark place where sun never shines, but "baneful night is spread over wretched mortals".<sup>1</sup> While attempting to retrace the path of Odysseus's wanderings, the ancient commentators of Homer opted for the Western Mediterranean and especially Magna Graecia. Consequently in the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC Ephorus localized the land of Cimmerians in Campania around the Lagus Avernus, a volcano crater lake which was considered to be one of the entrances to Hades.<sup>2</sup>

However, the Ionic colonisation of the north shore of the Black Sea, which started in the second half of 7<sup>th</sup> century BC, brought to the Greeks some knowledge of the real Cimmerians. A report on this topic is given by Herodotus in his description of Scythia (Hdt. 4.11–13), who drew information from both oral and written sources.<sup>3</sup> He tells us that the Cimmerians were inhabitants of the North Pontic steppe before the nomadic Scythians invaded it. The imminent Scythian invasion provoked a social dispute between Cimmerian princes (βασιλῆες), who were for fighting against the invaders, and the common people (δῆμος), who preferred not

<sup>1</sup> *Od.* 11.13–19, transl. A. T. Murray.

<sup>2</sup> This arbitrary identification resulted in a Pseudo-Cimmerian gloss, see below.

<sup>3</sup> Of the latter, he mentions the *Arimaspeia* of Aristaeas (4.13), a lost poem which is variously dated, from the mid 7<sup>th</sup> to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century BC.

to face the Scythians but to flee the country. Eventually, the princes chose to kill each other in a suicidal combat they chose themselves, whereas the commoners left for Asia, which resulted in renaming the land previously called Κιμμερίη (γη) ‘Cimmerian’ to Σκυθική ‘Scythia(n)’. The Homeric “land of the Cimmerians”, which is not the only, but the preferred reading of this line,<sup>4</sup> seems to reflect an early stage of Greek acquaintance with the far north of Europe, that preceded not only the founding of the first colonies on the north shore of the Black Sea, but also the Scythian conquest. At that time the Greeks had only a vague notion in which a real ethnonym from this area, situated on the edge of their known world, was combined with some knowledge of phenomena occurring much more north (subarctic night), as well as with the inherited Indo-European concept of the otherworld, which was not necessarily imagined as situated beneath the surface of the earth.<sup>5</sup>

In Assyrian and Babylonian sources from the 8<sup>th</sup>–7<sup>th</sup> century BC the Cimmerians, whose name is spelled *Gimir*-, *Gamir*- or the like, are often reported as being engaged in military conflicts taking place over a wide area encompassing Transcaucasia, the Near East and Anatolia and involving the kingdoms of Assyria, Urartu, Media, and Lydia. After the Lydian king Alyattes defeated them around 600 BC (Hdt. 1.16), the Cimmerians disappear from historical records.

Taking for granted the information that the Scythian intrusion into the Cimmerian land in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC caused a radical population change, archaeologists attributed to the Cimmerians a pre-Scythian culture of southern Russia and Ukraine called Chernaya Gora (ca. 900–750 BC), with its late phase called Novochoerkassk (9<sup>th</sup>–8<sup>th</sup> century BC). However, in the regions of Asia where the presence of the Cimmerians is later attested, artifacts of the Novochoerkassk type are

<sup>4</sup> Vll. Κερβερέων Aristarch., Κερβερίων Crates, χειμερίων schol. ad *Od.* 11.114, cf. Κεμμέριοι: Κιμμέριοι *Etyim. Magn.* 513.50. These readings are to be considered secondary to Κιμμερίων and reflecting the tendency of Homeric scholarship to reinterpret non-transparent foreign names occurring in Homer as descriptive, *noms parlants*, i.e. suited to their contexts, through association with Greek words Κέρβερος ‘the many-headed dog of Hades’ (cf. *Ar. Ran.* 187 with schol.), χειμέριος ‘hibernal, stormy’, κέμμερος· ὁμίχλη ‘fog’ Hesych. (PAPE / BENSELER 661 s.v. Κιμμέριοι, 648 s.v. Κερβέριοι, 645 s.v. Κεμμέριοι). On the later confusion and a possible relation with the German tribal name *Cimbri* see below.

<sup>5</sup> In Proto-Indo-European, the same root \**ner*- provided the words for ‘below’ in Gk νέρθεν, ἔνερθεν, ἔνερποι, νέρτεροι ‘those below (of the dead, chthonic gods)’, Arm. *nerk*‘-), ‘north’ < \*‘region where the sun is below [the earth]’ in Proto-Germanic \**núrpra*- > *north*, Old Norse *norðr*, German *Nord(en)*, etc. and ‘left(-sided)’ < \*‘on the left side of someone who turns to the east when praying’ in Italic, cf. Umbrian *nertru* ‘sinistro’, Oscan *nertrak* ‘a sinistra’. Here belongs also Skt. *naraka*- ‘hell’ as well as Balto-Slavic verbal root \**ner*- ‘plunge, slip into’ (BEEKES 2010, 424). As it is described in the “Nekyia”, Odysseus’s visit to the otherworld was not a descent, *katabasis* in the proper sense, but rather a trip to the farthest north. It reminds us of Old Norse *Hel*, etymologically ‘a concealed (afterlife) place’ (IE \**kel*- ‘to cover, conceal’), located in the *Niflheim* ‘Home of Mist’ (*nifl* ‘dark, gloomy’, cognate with Gk νεφέλη ‘cloud’), a realm of primordial ice and cold, which is in the Norse pagan cosmology both the farthest north of the Earth and the lowest part of the universe, cf. *Gylfaginning* 47: niðr ok norðr liggir Helveggr “down and north lies the road to Hel”.

completely lacking, whereas those of Early Scythian type have been found, which casts doubt on the credibility of Herodotus' account and generally on the ancient Greek tradition concerning the Cimmerians. The impossibility of differentiating archaeological traces of the Cimmerians from those of the Scythians, as well as the fact that in the Neo-Babylonian texts the Cimmerian name (*Gimirri*) is used to designate the Scythians both of Europe and of Central Asia (the Sakas), suggests that two peoples belonged to the same stock (TOKHTAS'EV 1992). We know, on the basis of glosses and proper names, that the Scythians spoke a dialect of Old Iranian (TOKHTAS'EV 1992). However, the remnants of the Cimmerian language are much more scarce than those of Scythian, which precludes any decisive conclusion about its affiliation.

Besides the ethnonym itself, which will be discussed at the end of this paper, our evidence about the language of the Cimmerians is limited to the names of their three rulers, and to a gloss, which is unfortunately not genuine.

### “Cimmerian” ἀργίλλα ‘underground house’

In the legendary context of the Avernian location of Odysseus' katabasis an alleged Cimmerian gloss has arisen, noted by Strabo 5.4.5, where he cites the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC historian Ephorus.<sup>6</sup>

Ephorus, peopling this place with Kimmerii, tells us that they dwell in under-ground habitations, named by them Argillæ (ἐν καταγείοις οἰκίαις οἰκεῖν ὥς καλοῦσιν ἀργίλλας), and that these communicate with one another by means of certain subterranean passages; and that they conduct strangers through them to the oracle, which is built far below the surface of the earth. They live on the mines together with the profits accruing from the oracle, and grants made to them by the king [of the country]. It was a traditional custom for the servants of the oracle never to behold the sun, and only to quit their caverns at night. It was on this account that the poet said, “On them the Sun / Deigns not to look with his beam-darting eye” (*Odys. xi. 15*). At last, however, these men were exterminated by one of the kings, the oracle having deceived him; but [adds Ephorus] the oracle is still in existence, though removed to another place. Such were the myths related by our ancestors. But now that the wood surrounding the Avernus has been cut down by Agrippa, the lands built upon, and a subterranean passage cut from Avernus to Cumæ, all these appear fables. Perhaps Cocceius, who made this subterranean passage, wished to follow the practice of the Kimmerians we have already described, or fancied that it was natural to this place that its roads should be made under-ground.

Lacus Avernus is located in Campania near Cumæ (Cuma), the first Greek colony on the mainland of Italy, founded in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. In its neighbourhood subterranean structures cut into tuff rock are found, dated to 7<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> c. BC, such as “Sybil's cave” and a tunnel complex near Baiae, within the area of the

<sup>6</sup> The Geography of Strabo, London 1903 (transl. H. C. Hamilton and W. Falconer).

volcanically active Phlegraean fields, which may have inspired the Ephorus' report on the underground oracle and the buried habitations of its servants.<sup>7</sup> In any case, the Campanian Cimmerians being a pure fiction, the word ἄργιλλα has no connection to the language of their North Pontic namesakes, but together with ἄργελλα 'sauna-like room or building', which is a Macedonian gloss in Suidas,<sup>8</sup> most probably derives from Gk ἄργιλ(λ)ος 'white clay', as it has been envisaged already by Eustathius in his commentary on Dionysius Periegetes: he speculates that ἄργιλλαι might have been named after a clayey soil they were built of, the (white) clay being especially suitable for such a kind of buildings because of its impermeability.<sup>9</sup> Presumably for the same reason it was used to build Macedonian vapour baths. Significantly enough, the Greek word for 'white clay' was borrowed into Latin as *argilla* 'clay' and it is possible, or even probable, that the borrowing took place in this very part of Magna Graecia, wherefrom the spread of Greek culture in Italy started, including the alphabet. Among other things, the region of Cumae and Puteoli was known for a fine-grained version of pumice called pozzolan or pozzolanic ash, used as an additive in cement and mixed with lime to form a light-weight, smooth, plaster-like concrete.<sup>10</sup> Perhaps in the Cumaean Greek the word for 'white clay' specialized its meaning to 'pozzolan'. On the other hand, the hut-shaped pottery urns characteristic of the Villanovan culture may have contributed to the development of a local tradition about the subterranean clay houses and an oracle of the dead (νεκυομαντεῖον).

As for the underlying Greek designation of white clay, neither a convincing etymology nor even its Common Greek protoform have been established so far. Traditionally it is explained as a derivative from ἄργός 'white' < PIE *\*h<sub>2</sub>rǵrǵ-* with a rare and unproductive *-l-* suffix. Beekes recently criticised this derivation and

<sup>7</sup> The Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni on Malta, a Late Neolithic subterranean catacomb-like structure which apparently served as an oracle and a sanctuary devoted to the cult of the dead, indicates that such cults and beliefs were deeply rooted in the Western Mediterranean area. On the other hand, Ephorus' interpretation of the Nekyia may have been motivated by his local patriotism. Ephorus was a native of Aeolian Cuma, who celebrated his birthplace in an *Epichorios logos*, where he made Homer a Cymaean. Possibly he assumed a common ancestry of two homonymous cities in Aeolis and Campania, both of them founded as early Euboean colonies and named after Cuma in Euboea.

<sup>8</sup> ἄργελλα· οἶκημα Μακεδονικόν, ὅπου θερμαίνοντες λούονται.

<sup>9</sup> Eust. *ad D. P.* 1166: Τάχα δὲ καὶ αἱ ἄργιλλαι [sic!] τὰ ὑπόγαια οἰκήματα ἐκ τῆς τοιαύτης παρωνομάσθησαν λέξεως [sc. ἄργιλόεσσα], ὡς τῆς τοιαύτης γῆς μάλιστα εὐθέτως ἐχούσης διὰ τὴν στεγανότητα πρὸς κατεργασίαν τοιαύτης οἰκήσεως (Müller, GGM 2: 406 f.).

<sup>10</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pumice>. After citing Ephorus, in the next section of the same chapter Strabo praises the artificially constructed harbours of Puteoli, "which were much facilitated by the facile nature of the sand (διὰ τὴν εὐφυῖαν τῆς ἄμμου), which contains much gypsum, and will cement and consolidate thoroughly. For mixing this sand with chalk-stones they construct moles in the sea, thus forming bays along the open coast, in which the largest transport ships may safely ride" (5.4.6, transl. Hamilton & Falconer). Cf. Vitruvius *De Arch.* 2.6.

dubbed not only ἄργιλλα and ἄργελλα, but also ἄργιλ(λ)ος “Pre-Greek”.<sup>11</sup> In our opinion, the final conclusion on this lexical family has not yet been reached, nor all possibilities of tracing a Greek derivation exhausted. A reconsideration must start with establishing the chronological relationship between the variants with the single -λ- and those with -λλ-. Lexicographers and etymologists so far treated both of them on equal terms, and even judged the latter to be a primary form, although the chronology of their attestations clearly suggests the opposite. For instance, the information provided by LSJ s.v. ἄργιλλος or ἄργιλος is vague or even misleading, with the -λλ- form chosen for the headword and the single -λ- one referred to as epigraphically attested.<sup>12</sup> A better judgement is given in Bailly s.v. ἄργιλος, ἀργιλώδης: “mieux que ἄργιλλος / ἀργιλλώδης”. A search in TLG gave us a more detailed picture, according to which ἀργιλ- largely prevails since the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, whereas ἀργιλλ- does not occur before the Roman era, without ever having displaced the older form.<sup>13</sup>

We left aside the place names Ἄργιλος (πόλις), an Andrian colony at the mouth of Strymon in Bisaltia (Hdt. 2.12, 7.515, Thuc. 5.18.5, etc.) and Ἄργιλλος (λόφος), a mount in Egypt Ps.-Plu. *Fluv.* 16.3 (citing Sosthenes), because it is unclear whether these geographical objects have been thus named by the Greeks themselves after a clayey soil, or is a foreign denomination underlying (Thracian,<sup>14</sup> Egyptian), only secondarily Hellenized. One way or another, the appearance of -λ- and -λλ- forms in these possible onomastic attestations fits the pattern derived here from the appellative ones, that we present in the chronological order:

5<sup>th</sup> c. BC ἀργιλωδέστερος Hdt. 2.12;

4<sup>th</sup> c. BC ἡ ἄργιλος Arist. *Pr.* 890a bis, *Mete.* p. 852<sup>b</sup> 10 Bekker;

4<sup>th</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC Thphr. *CP* 3.20.3, 6.3.2, ἀργιλώδης *HP* 3.18.5;

<sup>11</sup> BEEKES 125 s.v. ἄργελλα: “The interchanges ε/ι and λ/λλ clearly point to a substrate word”, id. 126 s.v. ἄργιλλος: “Given the meaning, a substrate word is quite possible, and connection with ἀργός, which means ‘brilliant white’ is semantically not evident”. By the way, he repeats, following Frisk l.c., Jokl’s derivation of Alb. Tosk. *ragal* m. ‘cabin’ from ἄργιλλα, ἄργελλα. In fact, this Albanian hapax registered by Jokl as *ragal’a e šenit* ‘dog cabin, kennel’ is a Slavism, from Common Slavic \**rogьl’b* ‘corner’ > OSerb. *rogьlb* (1330), SCr *rògalj*, *ròglja*, specialized to ‘dog corner’ (cf. OREL 365, RJA 14: 127).

<sup>12</sup> Acarn. = IG IX, 1<sup>2</sup>, 2: 245, Thyrrheion, Akarnania: ἄργιλος μνᾶς πλέθρον παντᾶι, 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.

<sup>13</sup> In Modern Greek ‘clay’ is ἀργιλος m.

<sup>14</sup> Aristotle fr. 611.75 cites a founding legend deriving the city name, which he spells Ἄργειλος, from a homonymous Thracian word meaning ‘mouse’; similarly, but spelled with -ι- Steph. Byz. s.v. Ἄργιλος. No convincing etymology of this Thracian gloss has been proposed and its authenticity is disputed, cf. DETSCHEW 1957, 22–23, VELKOVA 1986, 41–42. With regard to Thracian connections of the historical Cimmerians (see below), it would be tempting to derive ἄργιλλα < \*ἄργιλ-ja from ἀργι(ε)λος ‘mouse’ in the original sense ‘mouse’s burrow, mousehole’, metaphorically used for underground human dwellings, but only if a real Cimmerian was once spoken in Campania, which is difficult to accept.

3<sup>rd</sup> c. BC ἄργιλος Mnasalcas, *AP* 7.194.1–2,<sup>15</sup> ἄργιλώδης Euphorion of Chalcis frg. 11,<sup>16</sup> ἄργιλος inscription from Thyrrheion (see above fn. 12);

1<sup>st</sup> c. BC–1<sup>st</sup> c. AD Strabo 13.1.67: γῆς ἀργιλώδους;

2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD ἡ ἄργιλος Opp. *H.* 4.658,<sup>17</sup> ἄργιλος Hdn. *Partit.* 447, ἀργιλώδης id. 212;

2<sup>nd</sup>–3<sup>rd</sup> c. AD Gal. ἡ ἄργιλος XII 168,<sup>18</sup> ἀργίλῃ dat. XII 438, XIX 90, ἀργιλώδης XVIIb 864, XII, 165, 166, ἀργιλλώδης III 910;

4<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> c. AD Orib. ἡ ἄργιλος: βώλους ἀργίλου ξηράς 5.4.1, ὁ ἄργιλος: ἀργίλῳ ὑγρῷ 7.21.3, ἀργιλώδης 9.11.6;<sup>19</sup>

5<sup>th</sup>–6<sup>th</sup> c. AD Hsch. ἄργιλος· ἡ σμηκτρὶς γῆ ἢ λευκόγειος, ἀργίλλῃ ψιλή· γῆ βλαστάνουσά τι, ἀργιλλώδη acc. s.v. ἀργινόνεττα;

11<sup>th</sup> c. AD ἀργιλλώδης Suidas s.v., ἀργιλώδης *ibid.*;<sup>20</sup>

12<sup>th</sup> c. AD Schol. in Dionysium Periegetam 183 ἀργιλλώδης (ἡ Λιβύη) GGM 2: 430.

Incomplete as they are, including only the text editions used for the TLG database without taking into consideration the variant readings of the manuscript tradition, the results of our search still seem to reflect a historical reality. Far from being “Pre-Greek”, the variants with -λλ- are Late Greek, secondary to those with -ιλ-. Consequently, the earliest evidence of -λλ- would be an indirect one, provided by the Latin loanword *argilla*, which is first attested c. 160 B.C. in Cato the Elder *Agr.* 40.2, but it is not sure that its geminated liquid reflects a Greek -λλ-.<sup>21</sup> Even for Strabo’s excerpt from Ephorus, -λλ- is not confirmed, in view of the reading ἀργίλαι in Eustathius;<sup>22</sup> on the other hand, there was in Latin a single *l*-variant reflected in *Argilētum* (Varro, Livy, Cicero, etc.), the name of a street and residential area in ancient Rome.

The primary form \*ἀργίλο- was a feminine *o*-stem, which may be explained not only by a semantic connection of the clay with the female personification of earth, but also by the composite structure of an original adjective \*ἀργι-ιλφ-ο- ‘(of) white clay’, with the Caland form ἀργι- (cf. ἀργί-πους) of the adjective ἀργός ‘white’ < \*ἀργρός determining the second member, presumably a thematicized ἰλφ-ο- from

<sup>15</sup> Ἀκρίδα Δαμοκρίτου μελεσίπτερον ἄθε θανούσαν / ἀργιλος δολιχὰν ἀμφὶ κέλευθον ἔχει. Cf. Suid. s.v. Ἀργιλλώδης.

<sup>16</sup> Ὀριον οἶά τε μῆλον, ὃ τ’ ἀργιλώδεσιν ὄχθαις.

<sup>17</sup> καὶ τότε ἀνήρ ἄργιλον ὁμοῦ πίειραν ἀείρας.

<sup>18</sup> Referred is to the volumes and pages of Kühn’s edition.

<sup>19</sup> In the second and third instance Oribasius (†403) cites Antyllus (2<sup>nd</sup> c. AD). The secondary masculine form but with single -λ- prevailed in Modern Greek, cf. above fn. 13.

<sup>20</sup> Ἀργιλλώδης: ὁ ῥύπαρός. ἡ Ἀργιλώδης γῆ, λευκὴ καὶ καθαρὰ, citing the elegiac couplet of Mnasalcas, see above.

<sup>21</sup> The geminated λλ may go back to a Latin adaptation of the Greek word, cf. Ernout/Meillet 46 s.v. *argilla*: “le double *l* a sans doute pour objet de noter le caractère palatal de la liquide (cf. *mille*, *stella*)”. In this case, -λλ- in Late Greek might be due to a retroactive influence of Latin *argilla*, but it is only a guess.

<sup>22</sup> See above fn. 9.

ἰλύς f. (ī, ū), gen. ἰλύος ‘mud, slime’, here ‘clay’, which is the meaning of its closest cognate, Common Slavic \**ilъ*, ‘silt, clay’, being an old *u*-stem as well.<sup>23</sup>

## Cimmerian ruler names

The ruler names as recorded in Akkadian cuneiform are *Teušpā*, *Sandakšatru* and *Tugdammī*, the latter recurring in Greek tradition as Λύδαμης.<sup>24</sup> They are largely assumed to be Iranian, although none of them is interpreted unambiguously. No exact matches in Old Iranian onomasticon are found, but several elements of the names in question – all of which appear to be compound – may be explained by (Indo-)Iranian rather than by any other language spoken at the time when and in the regions where the Cimmerians are referred to. The most obvious would be *-kšatru* = OIran *xšaθra-* ‘rule, kingship, estate’;<sup>25</sup> unfortunately, the reading is ambiguous and *-kurru* is also possible,<sup>26</sup> which on its part can be interpreted as Old Iranian word for ‘son’.<sup>27</sup> As to *Sanda-*, various interpretations have been put forward: as OIran (OPers) \**santa-* ‘holy, increasing’;<sup>28</sup> as OIran (Avestan) *zantu-* ‘district’;<sup>29</sup> as OIran (Av) *sānda-* ‘satisfactory (?)’;<sup>30</sup> as Anatolian (Cilician) theonym *Sanda* (Greek Σάνδης, Σάνδων);<sup>31</sup> as OIran \**čand-* related to Old Indic *candrá-* ‘gleaming, light’;<sup>32</sup> as an Iranian counterpart of OInd *śānta-* ‘appeased’.<sup>33</sup> In respect of *Tugdammī* opinions are divided between those who, in view of the dynastic name Λύδαμης in 5<sup>th</sup> century Caria,<sup>34</sup> suspect it to be of Anatolian origin,<sup>35</sup> and

<sup>23</sup> Gen. \**ilu*, SCr. *ilov-ača* ‘clay’, etc., cf. recently DERKSEN 2008, 211 s.v. \**jьlъ*, \**jьlo* (better reconstructed by SNOJ 2003, 217 as Proto-Slavic \**ilъ*). For the semantics cf. Gk πηλός ‘loam, mud, clay’.

<sup>24</sup> Callim. *Hymnus in Dianam* 252.

<sup>25</sup> JUSTI 1895, 500; HÜSING 1900, 565; MARQUART 1896, 236, 1905, 105 f.; MEYER 1909, 11; LEHMANN-HAUPT 1922: 423; VASMER 1923, 110; DIAKONOFF 1950, 266, 1981: 117; ABAEV 1965, 126; LOMA 2000, 342.

<sup>26</sup> Hüsing, Meyer l.c.; DIAKONOFF 1950, 268.

<sup>27</sup> HARMATTA 1996, 181. However, OIran \**kuru-* ‘young, animal young, child’ is questionable, and for the PN OPers *Kuruš* ‘Cyrus’, OInd *Kuru-* the interpretation as \**ku-ru-* ‘humiliator of the enemy (in verbal contest)’ proposed by Karl Hoffmann appears more plausible (cf. SCHMITT 2002, 59 f., 2006, 104).

<sup>28</sup> MARQUART (1896, 1905), Hüsing, Diakonoff (1981), Loma l.c. Sceptically Vasmer l.c.

<sup>29</sup> Lehmann-Haupt l.c.; refused by Vasmer, Diakonoff (1981) l.c.

<sup>30</sup> JUSTI l.c.: ‘gut geheissene Herrschaft führend, mit der man zufrieden ist’. According to KELLEN/PIRART 1990, 316 “mot d’origine et de sens inconnus”.

<sup>31</sup> DIAKONOFF 1950 l.c., followed by Abaev l.c.; taken into consideration already by Meyer l.c., however as “hardly possible”.

<sup>32</sup> Vasmer, Harmatta l.c. (the latter interprets *Sanda-kuru* as ‘splendid son’).

<sup>33</sup> Vasmer l.c. In this, as well as in the previous case, credible Iranian cognates are missing.

<sup>34</sup> Borne by a satrap, father of Artemisia, and by her grandson, tyrant of Halikarnassus, this obviously non-Greek name enjoyed subsequently some popularity in the Greek world (ZGUSTA 1964, 275). There was also a town Λύδαμοντ in Mysia.

<sup>35</sup> Hüsing, Lehmann-Haupt, Vasmer l.c.; DIAKONOFF 1950, 266, 1981, 117.



those who tried to explain it from Iranian, proposing various analyses: *\*Tukta-* ‘perfect’,<sup>36</sup> *\*Dugda-maiši-* ‘having dairy sheep’,<sup>37</sup> *Dugda-maya-* ‘giving happiness’,<sup>38</sup> *\*ġugā-dāmi-* ‘creating happiness (?)’,<sup>39</sup> *\*Tux-dama-* ‘daunting with force’.<sup>40</sup> The name *Teušpā* used to be considered the same as OPers *Čišpiš*, Greek *Τεισπης*, son of Achaemenus, the legendary founder of the Achaemenian dynasty;<sup>41</sup> otherwise it has been etymologised as OIran *\*Tavāspa-* (< *\*tava-* + *aspa-*) ‘having strong horses’,<sup>42</sup> *Taviš-paya-* ‘swelling with strength’,<sup>43</sup> *\*Tava-spā* ‘strongly repulsing (the enemies)’.<sup>44</sup>

Of all these proposals, some can be rejected without much hesitation as ill-fitting with the written records (*Teušpā* = *Čišpiš*, °*aspa-*, °*paya-*, *Tugdammī*: °*maya-*, °*dama-*, *Sanda-* = *zantu*°). Of the rest, more probable (or less improbable) are those that operate with attested Old Iranian anthroponymic stems. From this point of view, the readings *\*Santa-xšaθra-* and *\*Dugda-maiši-*<sup>45</sup> are preferable, cf. for the *santa-* Av *\*Spəntō.xratu-*, *\*Spəntō-δata-*, for *xšaθra-* Av *Xvāxšaθra-*, OPers *Ṛta-xšaça-* ‘Artaxerxes’, etc., for *dugda-* Av *Duydō-uuā-* f.,<sup>46</sup> for *maēšī* Av *Dawrā-maēšī* m. By the same criterion, *Teušpā* is best analysed as a compound with verbal root *pā-* ‘to protect’ as its second element, cf., for instance, OIran PN *\*Kāra-pā* ‘protecting the army’.<sup>47</sup> In sum, three Cimmerian personal names give the impression of belonging to Old Iranian onomasticon and reflecting the worldview of the ancient Iranians (sacred kingdom,<sup>48</sup> pastoralism<sup>49</sup>).

<sup>36</sup> JUSTI 1895, 328, referring to the Persian gloss *τυκτά: τέλειον* (Hdt. 9.110), which is interpreted by Hinz 1975, 238 as OPers *\*tuxta-* ‘accomplished duty (towards guests), meal’.

<sup>37</sup> Marquart, in a personal communication to Vasmer, cited by the latter (1923, 116); WITCZAK 1992, 54.

<sup>38</sup> Harmatta l.c.

<sup>39</sup> V. A. Livshits in DIAKONOFF 1981, 117, with reference to OI *duhā-* ‘luck, happiness’ and OIran *\*dāmi-*. The word *dāmi-* is Avestan and means ‘creator, founder’.

<sup>40</sup> ABAEV 1965, 126 who compares Oset. *tux-domæg* id. (-*æg* suffix of pt. praes. act. < *\*akas*). The anachronism of this comparison is stressed by DIAKONOFF 1981, 116.

<sup>41</sup> JUSTI 1895, 152; MEYER 1909, 10; LEHMANN-HAUPT 1922, 423; explicitly refused by VASMER 1923, 110 and DIAKONOFF 1950, 266.

<sup>42</sup> MARQUART 1905, 115 f., accepted by DIAKONOFF 1950, 266, ABAEV 1965, 126; rejected, because of the vocalism, by VASMER 1923, 110, DIAKONOFF 1981, 116.

<sup>43</sup> HARMATTA 1996, 181.

<sup>44</sup> DIAKONOFF 1981, 116 (with Livshits).

<sup>45</sup> Hence *Dugdāmī* by the way of hypocoristic shortening or phonetically with *š > h > ø* (thus WITCZAK 1992, 54, who assumes the same change in Scythian).

<sup>46</sup> Name of Zaratuštra’s mother. It goes back to Ilr *\*dhugdha-guā-* ‘having milk cows’ (MAYRHOFER 1979, 36 f.).

<sup>47</sup> Written in Elamite cuneiform *qa-ra-ab-ba* (Hinz 1975, 148). The first element remains unparalleled; an interpretation as *\*Dauš-pā-* ‘protecting with arms’ is both formally and semantically plausible, but no OIran name including *\*dauš-*, Av. *daoš-* ‘(upper) arm, shoulder’ is known to us.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. the Zoroastrian *Xšaθra* Vairya as one of the *Amaša Spənta*.

<sup>49</sup> The Asian Scythians, *Saka*, were known as shepherds, cf. *Σάκαι μηλονόμοι* ‘tending sheep’ in a fragment of Choerilus of Samos (5<sup>th</sup> century BC).

In 7<sup>th</sup> century BC Old Iranian was already divided into several dialects. Cimmerian *\*santa-* would reflect the development *\*čv > s* characteristic of Old Persian (*santa-* ‘holy’ in *\*Santāramati-* > Armenian *Sandāramat*), and probably also of Scythian,<sup>50</sup> as opposed to *sp* of Avestan and Median. On the other hand, *xšaθra-* bears witness to the preservation of Common Iranian cluster *θr*, which in Old Persian developed into *ç* (a sibilant or an affricate) but remained unchanged in other Old Iranian dialects – Avestan, Median and initially also in Scythian, where it eventually resulted in *(h)r*.<sup>51</sup> Greek *λυγδα-* for *dugda-* points to the change of *d* into *l*, which is also observed in Scythian.<sup>52</sup>

## The name of the Cimmerians

Scarce as it is, our evidence suggests that the Cimmerians spoke an Old Iranian dialect akin to Scythian. The difficulties of distinguishing Cimmerian and Scythian archaeological remains from one another and the terminological non-differentiation between the Cimmerians and the Scythians in the Near Eastern sources imply a close relationship between two ethnic groups as well.<sup>53</sup> However, it may be true only of Cimmerian ruling class, called ‘princes’ (*βασιλῆες*) by Herodotus, as opposed to the common people (*δῆμος*), if we assume a scenario often repeated in North Pontic area, i.e. nomads who came from the East and subjugated the already settled population. A compound ethnicity of the historical Cimmerians is suggested also by the fact that, unlike their ruler names, the name of the people itself, variously recorded (Greek *Κιμμέριοι*, Akkadian *Gimirri*, *Gamirra*, *Gamira*, *Gimirrī*, *Gimirrāi(u)*, Hebrew *Gmr*,<sup>54</sup> Old Armenian *Gamirk* ‘Cappadocia’),<sup>55</sup> has no plausible Iranian etymology<sup>56</sup> and consequently may be ascribed to an older ethnic layer. True, we do not know whether it was a self-designation of the people in question (autonym) or a name given to them by their neighbours (heteronym). The difference in the anlaut, Greek *κ-* vs. *g-* of Near Eastern records, is explained by a change within the (Proto-)Cimmerian itself or in the mouth of the Thracians,

<sup>50</sup> Cf. LOMA 2000, 342. Of middle Iranian languages, it is known to Khotan Saka (*aśśa-* ‘horse’ = OPers *asa-*, Av *aspa-*) and of the modern ones to Wakhī.

<sup>51</sup> The same was the development in Parthian and Khotan Saka.

<sup>52</sup> WITCZAK 1992, 52 f.; LOMA 2000, 342 f. Cf. MAYRHOFER 2006, 25.

<sup>53</sup> DIAKONOFF 1981, 132 ff. IVANTCHIK identifies the Cimmerians at the time of their invasions of Asia Minor with the bearers of the “Early Scythian” culture (2001, 339).

<sup>54</sup> Vocalised *Gōmār* in the Masoretic text, *Gámer* in Septuaginta.

<sup>55</sup> DIAKONOFF 1981, 104 ff. He reads Akk *Gāmīr(r)a* with a long *a* because of the Armenian form (108).

<sup>56</sup> Pace DIAKONOFF 1981, 131 f., who, with Livshits, traces it back OIran *\*g(ā)m-īra* ‘having the faculty of going, being in movement’ and HARMATTA 1996, 181, who assumes OIran *\*Gaya-mīra-* ‘union of clans’ (?).

who presumably mediated this name to the Greeks,<sup>57</sup> just as in the case of Greek Σκύθαι ‘Scythians’ < thrak. \**Skupa-* < OIran. \**Skuḏa-* (Assyr. *Ašguzai* / *Iškuzai*), with the substitution of a voiceless dental fricative for Old Iranian voiced one.<sup>58</sup> A similar consonant shift seems to underlie the Greek form of the river name Τάναϊς < \**Danawi-*, cf. Av *dānu-* ‘river’, Russian *Don*.<sup>59</sup> This gave rise to the hypothesis that the genuine Cimmerian was a IE language characterised by a Lautverschiebung, either a sub-branch of Thracian<sup>60</sup> or identifiable with Proto-Armenian.<sup>61</sup> However, in addition to the general probability that a variety of Indo-European was spoken in the early 1<sup>st</sup> millennium BC North Pontic area, no more can be said with certainty about the language of this people extinct some 2500 years ago.<sup>62</sup> All we can is to pose questions, and the answers still lie enveloped in the deep „Cimmerian mists“.

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<sup>57</sup> Thus DIAKONOFF 1981, 129 f. It is to be noted that the repeated attempts to establish a common Proto-Indo-European etymon connecting the name of Cimmerians with that of the Germanic (or Celtic) *Cimbri* as well as with the Balto-Slavic \**se(m)bra-* ‘farmer’ depart from its Greek form, whose voiceless anlaut is probably secondary. As for the BSL term, it can be better explained from Old Iranian compound \**sar-bra-* supposedly underlying Ossetic *særvæt* ‘pasture, meadow, meant for communal use’ and Pashto *sar’ay* ‘exchange of services, cooperation, e.g. two peasants lending each other their own single ox to make a pair for ploughing’ (LOMA 2018, 25–26, 39–40).

<sup>58</sup> Rendered by *z* in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC Assyrian records (*Ašguzai*, *Iškuzai*) and subsequently changed to *l* in Scythian mouth, cf. *Skólotoi* as the self-designation of the Scythians in Hdt. and the names of their kings *Skýlēš*, *Scolo-pitus* (Loma 2000, 343), as well as the name of a left tributary of Dnieper *Vorskla*, Old Russian *Vorsklъ*, *Vǫrǫskla*, *Vorskola* < Scythian \**Varu-skula-*, originally denomination of a tribe to be identified with Herodotus’ Βορυσθενέται Σκύθαι ‘Dnieper-Scythians’ (LOMA 2010, 13).

<sup>59</sup> SCHRAMM 1973, 166 ff.

<sup>60</sup> It is a question whether Thracian (and thrakoid) personal names occurring in the inscriptions of Greek colonies in the North Pontic area (cf. ZGUSTA 1955, 278–293) represent a Pre-Iranian substrate, or rather an adstrate.

<sup>61</sup> SCHRAMM 1973, 204 ff.; HOLZER 1999. A detailed review of the latter book and Holzer’s “Temematic” hypothesis is given in Loma 1990. With all due reserve, one should consider the possibility that the Austrasian ethnonym *Khmer*, designating the autochthonous population of Cambodia, has something to do with the Cimmerians, given the fact that the name of their country undoubtedly reflects OInd *kamboja-*, name of a tribe in the northwestern India, assumed to be of an Iranian origin, in view of the Achaemenian dynastic name OPers *Kbuḫy-* = Gk Καμβύσης, cf. MAYRHOFER 1979 [2]: 23.

<sup>62</sup> The Tauri, ancient inhabitants of the southern part of the Crimea peninsula, who are supposed by some scholars to have been descendants of the Cimmerians, nevertheless bear a name explainable from Old Iranian: *Taura-*, a patronym from *Tura-* ‘quick’; the name of their eponymous ruler seems to have been calqued by the Greeks as *Thóas* (LOMA 2006, 114 f.).

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## Кимеријци: Заборављени народ Старог света

*Ајсџиракџи*: Рад се бави питањем етничке припадности древних Кимеријаца, преиспитујући оскудне остатке њиховог језика посведочене у грчким, асирским и нововавилонским изворима. Ту спадају једна глоса, *árgilla* 'подземна кућа', која се показала неаутентичном, три владарска имена, која се најбоље тумаче из староиранског, и сам етним, који је етимолошки нејасан, што би могло одражавати етничку (и језичку) поделу Кимеријаца о којој говори Херодот – на владајући слој (*basílees*), по свој прилици ирански номадски суперстрат, и обичан народ (*dêmos*) као његов (вероватно индоевропски) супстрат.

*Кључне речи*: Кимеријци, етничка припадност, језик, друштвена структура.

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