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GREEK AND LATIN AUTHORS ON THE
CARPATHIAN-DNIESTRIAN TERRITORY:
AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF PERCEPTIONS*

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Abstract. *The paper focuses on the lexemes and expressions emphasized by the concepts of *autopsía*, *akoé* and *autopátheia*. Our research analyse these concepts in the works produced by historians, geographers and poets and the way that their perception on certain events is influenced.*

Rezumat. *Lucrarea se axează pe lexemele și pe expresiile puse în evidență de conceptele de *autopsía*, *akoé* și *autopátheia*. Cercetarea noastră analizează aceste concepte (așa cum sunt întâlnite în lucrări scrise de istorici, geografi și poeți) și modul în care a fost influențată percepția acestor autori cu privire la anumite evenimente.*

Introduction

This paper aims to explore the different types of perception of the Carpatho-Dniestrian territory, as reflected in ancient literary sources. Our approach, based on the difference between professional (historians and geographers) and non-professional authors (especially poets), presents important implications for the endeavours that attempt to reconstruct the protohistory of the area in question. We provide a classification of ancient

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authors, following criteria which are found in the concepts of *autopsía*, *akoé*, and *autopátheia*. I mention the fact that I have used these three concepts on exegetical grounds, with the terms that designate them not having been employed by the cited authors. The taxonomy proposed is relevant to the credibility of historical information provided by literary sources.

The Carpathian-Dniestrian territory progressively catches the attention of the Greek and Roman authors, initially through simple general mentions and considerations, developing afterwards into detailed presentations. Though the ancient literary sources do not have the same historiographical value, the simplest reference to this area or the adjoining territory was sufficient to produce reverberations in the minds of authors with various backgrounds and of different calibres. From the perspective of *source theory*², we have included in our analysis a selected and non-exhaustive collection of several fragments from historians, geographers, and poets. We will not discuss the controversies related to the presence or non-presence of these authors in the mentioned territory; our selection of excerpts was based only on the authors' appeal to lexemes or expressions denoting their own autopsy and personal experience or information heard from another source concerning the area in question³.

Autopsía, akoé, and autopátheia as historical sources

It is common knowledge that ancient historiography displays a constant preoccupation not only for the information in itself, but also for the way it was obtained. Thus, a distinction was made between three types of

² MORENO LEONI 2008, 150.

³ See, for example, the recent exegesis on the credibility of Herodotus' work (VULPE 2009, 117–119), Dion Chrysostomos travel to the Getae (DANA 2001, 27; 2011, 13–14) or the famous case of Ovidius relegation at Tomis (LUISI, BERRINO 2008; MCGOWAN 2009; see also the discussion concerning the "subjectives/objectives arguments" of the exile at EZQUERRA 2010, 107–126, with an updated bibliography).

historical perception: αὐτοψία (“seeing with one’s own eyes”)⁴, ἀκοή (“hearing, sound heard sense of hearing”)⁵, αὐτοπάθεια (“one’s own experience”)⁶. In order to prove the truthfulness of the information, one of the most important characteristics of the historical narrative act is the *autoptic* perception. The idea of autopsy as historical source appears both in the Greek and the Latin historiography and a whole series of papers in the exegesis has valorised this concept⁷. For the Greeks, *autopsía* was one’s own visual perception, the author’s presence in the area he is writing about⁸. The *akoé* type of perception comprises the information directly heard by the historian, as well as the questioning of eye witnesses. It also implies taking over information based on the visual (auditory) perception of another person (including information provided by other authors)⁹. *Autopátheia* implies the personal experience of the author and the information provided by him could be characterized, as a consequence,

⁴ LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 284 < αὐτός, -ή, -όν as a compound “self, independently” (LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 284) + ὄψις, -εως “aspect, appearance, visual impression, act of seeing or looking” (LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 1282).

⁵ LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 51.

⁶ LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 281 < αὐτός, -ή, -όν + πάθος, -εως (“that which happens to a person or thing, what one has experienced”).

⁷ NENCI 1953, 14–46; SCHEPENS 1970, 163–182; 1980; MARINCOLA 1987, 121–138; 1997, 63–86; BUCKLER 1992, 4788–4830.

⁸Hdt. II, 99, 1: “Μέχρι μὲν τούτου ὄψις τε ἐμὴ καὶ γνώμη καὶ ἱστορίη ταῦτα λέγουσά ἐστί, τὸ δὲ ἀπὸ τοῦδε Αἰγυπτίους ἔρχομαι λόγους ἐρέων κατὰ [τὰ] ἤκουον: προσέσται δὲ τι αὐτοῖσι καὶ τῆς ἐμῆς ὄψις — Thus far all I have said is the outcome of my own sight and judgement and inquiry. Henceforth I will record Egyptian chronicles, according to that which I have heard, adding thereto somewhat of what I myself have seen”. The unequivocal proof of the consistent autoptic perception is constituted by the presence in the cited text of the expression ὄψις τε ἐμῆ.

⁹ Hdt. II, 52: “ὡς ἐγὼ ἐν Δωδώνῃ οἶδα ἀκούσας — this I know, for I was told at Dodona. The expression οἶδα ἀκούσας means “I know from hearsay”, hence it is rather borne by the *akoé* perception. About the importance of *autopsía* and *akoé* as methods of obtaining historical information, see PETROVIC 2004, 255–273; LEVENE 2005, 627–629; KLEBERG 1995, 72, APUD MORENO LEONI 2008, 150, NOTE 28; SCHRADER 2010, 25–48; PARASCHIV 2010, 384–396.

with a higher degree of veracity¹⁰.

Autopsía, akoé, and autopátheia at historians, geographers and poets

In the description of Ister, Herodotus use of the verb ἴδμεν (ionic form for ἴσμεν < οἶδα – “see with the mind’s eye”¹¹) is very interesting from the perspective of source theory. The author’s choice for this verb at first-person plural validates, as common knowledge, his statement, without being necessary to indicate the source of his information¹². However, the explanation on the constant height of the Ister during summer and winter¹³ is advanced with a certain degree of incertitude by the verb δοκέω¹⁴.

We find particularly interesting a fragment of Polybios regarding the quality of necessities of the living (cattle and slaves) in the Pontic area¹⁵. The adverb ὁμολογουμένως (“conformably with, by common consent”), derived from the verb ὁμολογέω – “agree with, say the same

¹⁰ Polyb. 12, 25h-4: “ἢ γὰρ ἔμφασις τῶν πραγμάτων αὐτοῖς ἄπεστι διὰ τὸ μόνον ἐκ τῆς αὐτοπάθειας τοῦτο γίνεσθαι τῆς τῶν συγγραφέων — there is nothing vivid in their presentment of events, for that can only come from the personal experience of the writers”; SIMPSON 2001, 65–68.

¹¹ LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 483.

¹² Hdt. IV, 48: “Ἰστρος μὲν, ἐὼν μέγιστος ποταμῶν πάντων τῶν ἡμεῖς ἴδμεν — The Ister, the greatest of all rivers known to us”.

¹³ Hdt. IV, 50: “ἴσος δὲ αἰεὶ ῥέει ἐν τε θέρει καὶ ἐν χειμῶνι ὁ Ἰστρος κατὰ τοιόνδε τι, ὡς ἐμοὶ δοκέει — But the Ister is ever of the same height in summer and winter, whereof I think this to be the reason”).

¹⁴ LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 441–442: δοκέω < “expect, think, suppose, imagine, have or form an opinion seem, pretend”.

¹⁵ Polyb. IV, 38, 4: “Πρὸς μὲν γὰρ τὰς ἀναγκαίας τοῦ βίου χρείας τὰ τε θρέμματα καὶ τὸ τῶν εἰς τὰς δουλείας ἀγομένων σωμάτων πλῆθος οἱ κατὰ τὸν Πόντον ἡμῖν τόποι παρασκευάζουσι δαψιλέστατον καὶ χρησιμώτατον ὁμολογουμένως — For as regards necessities it is an undisputed fact that the most plentiful supplies and best qualities of cattle and slaves reach us from the countries lying round Pontus”.

thing as, correspond"¹⁶) has the potential to confirm the truthfulness of the sentence.

Dion Chrysostomos' declaration of autopsy is emphasised in the description of his peregrinations among the Scythians and Getae¹⁷. However, the claims of his *autopsía* were put under suspicion by some scholars, taking into account the belligerent territories of the above-mentioned populations¹⁸. The autoptic perception is stressed by the verb *θεάσομαι* (< *θεάομαι* –“contemplate, see clearly, view as spectators”).

One of the main research directions for the Carpathian-Dniestrian space is afforded by the references to the geographic context, focusing, according to the current practices of historical geography, on the extent to which the *geographical knowledge* is based on *visual knowledge*. This happens because it is well-known that the information of such nature may be the result of research on the scene, but also of using direct or other witnesses. Moreover, this information should be understood from the perspective of the ancient cognitive universe.

The description of the Black Sea space by the geographer Pseudo-Scymnos is made from a heteroptic-heteroekphrastic perspective¹⁹, as he had not known this space *de visu*, and he had only taken over the information from Demetrius of Callatis, whose work, *On Asia and Europe*, is unfortunately lost. The reliability of the information given by Demetrius is supported, *expressis verbis*, by Pseudo-Scymnos himself, who

¹⁶ LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 1226.

¹⁷ Dion Chrysost., *Orat.* XXXVI, 1: “Ἐτύγχανον μὲν ἐπιδημῶν ἐν Βορυσθένει τὸ θέρος [...], διὰ Σκυθῶν εἰς Γέτας, ὅπως θεάσομαι τὰκεῖ πράγματα ὁποῖά ἐστι. — I happened to be visiting in Boristhenes during the summer [...], with the purpose of making my way, if possible, through Scythia to the Getan country, in order to observe conditions there”.

¹⁸ DANA 2011, 13–14.

¹⁹ The heteroptic perspective (< ἕτερος, -α, -ον “one of the two, another” + ὄψις, -εως “aspect, appearance, visual impression, act of seeing or looking”, LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 702, 1282) regards the information obtained from other sources; the heteroekphrastic perspective (< ἕτερος, -α, -ον + ἐκφράσις, -εως “description”, LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 526) involves, in our case, the detailed description of Black Sea assumed from other author.

appreciates the accuracy of the information provided by the Callatian geographer²⁰. In the description of Danube and the surrounded territory, as well as the characterization of the Sarmatians, the author uses different verbs or expressions in order to stress the *akoé* perception, such as ὡς φασι²¹/ὡς λόγος²²/ὡς συγγράφει Δημήτριος²³/φησι²⁴. We observe that the author is constant in the indication of his sources; when he mentions the Scythians, he is very accurate in indicating the source²⁵.

The claims of *akoé* occur also in the case of Strabo's *Geography*. Concerning the location of the Bastarnae, the author invokes the testimonies of other authors ("Whether one should say the Bastarnae, as most writers suspect, or say that others lie in between, either the Iazyges, or the Roxolani [...] – it is not easy to say")²⁶. The verb ὑπονοοῦσιν²⁷ emphasizes the idea of presumption. He stresses the value of autoptic information in the presentation of geographical knowledge. In the description of the Thracians' habits regarding women, the literary testimony of Strabo is based on one of Menander's paragraph. In this case, the author intends to demonstrate the truthfulness of Menander's statement, quoting the confirmation of other authors. Also, the mention that this was not an invention and it was "taken by the history" offers a supplementary confirmation of information veracity²⁸.

²⁰ Ps.-Scymn., *Perieg.*, 720: "ἔοικεν ἐπιμελεστάτως πεπυσμένος — it seems he was very well informed".

²¹ Ps.-Scymn., *Perieg.*, 779.

²² Ps.-Scymn., *Perieg.*, 783.

²³ Ps.-Scymn., *Perieg.*, 793.

²⁴ Ps.-Scymn., *Perieg.*, 863.

²⁵ Ps.-Scymn., *Perieg.*, 842–843: "εἴρηκεν Ἐφορος — as Ephoros said".

²⁶ Str. VII, 2, 4 (C. 290).

²⁷ LIDDELL, SCOTT 1996, 1890.

²⁸ DUECK 2005, 96–97; Str. VII, 3, 4 (C. 296): "ὅρα δ' ἃ λέγει Μένανδρος περὶ αὐτῶν οὐ πλάσας, ὡς εἰκός, ἀλλ' ἐξ ἱστορίας λαβόν [...]. ταῦτα γὰρ ὁμολογεῖται μὲν καὶ παρὰ τῶν ἄλλων — And see the statement of Menander about them, which, as one may reasonable suppose, was not invented by him but taken from the history [...]. Indeed, these facts are confirmed by the other writers as well".

In what concerns Valerius Flaccus²⁹, he makes brief references to: the seven mouths of the Danube³⁰ which he describes as scary (*torvus*) and with dangerous shores (*ripa metuendus*)³¹, to the Tyras River (*flavusque Tyres*)³² or the cruelty of the populations living near the mouth of the Dniester (*saevos alumnos*)³³. The information concerning the seventh mouth of Danube is presented as a well-known information, by using the verb *accipio*, *-ere*, *-i*, *-um*³⁴. We can thus see, from the heteroptic perception, the negative attitude of the poet towards this area.

The Latin sources concerning this space are particularly illustrative of the way in which the ideology influenced the perception of certain famous authors regarding the Danubian-Pontic area. Starting from certain excerpts that emphasize these authors' negative perception of the Getic population, the main thematic spheres reflecting the Roman ideology and the poetic imaginary have been identified. Concerning the fragments of Virgil referring to the Black Sea area (analysed from an ethno-geographic perspective), we can definitely discern a negative perspective³⁵. We find to be extremely expressive the idea of the Danubian conspiracy against Rome³⁶. Through this stylistic device (hypallage), we can observe an illustration of Virgil's subjectivism; he uses—by extrapolation—for the Danube a term specific to the internal conflicts of Rome (*coniuratio*). An apparent reflection of the typical Roman ideology can also be found at Horace (*rigidi Getae*³⁷, *profugus Scythes*³⁸). The propagandistic mark generated the invention of a genuine imaginary

²⁹ MURGATROYD 2009, 342.

³⁰ Val. Flac., IV, 718.

³¹ Val. Flac., VIII, 218.

³² Val. Flac., IV, 719.

³³ Val. Flac., VIII, 219.

³⁴ GLARE 1968, 21–22: “to receive, admit, accept”.

³⁵ Verg., *Georg.*, III, 34–35; 352–357; 360; 362; 364–370; 373–374; 376–377; 379–383; 462; IV, 461; 463; *Aen.*, VII, 603–605.

³⁶ Verg., *Georg.*, II, 497.

³⁷ Hor., *Carm.*, III, 24, 9–24.

³⁸ Hor., *Carm.*, I, 35, 9; IV, 14, 42.

universe. This is why we have to stress an essential issue: the information from the literary poetic texts should not be analysed by employing the same criteria used for historians, as their goal is primordially aesthetic³⁹. Ovid's case is the most contradictory and interesting. The numerous subjective contexts sometimes include objective details, among which those referring to the Danube, or to the various ethnic groups from the Carpathian-Dniestrian space⁴⁰. Ovid's perception of the space he had been exiled to is simultaneously autoptic, heteroptic, and autopathic. As regards the autoptic perception, we note the author's preference for verbs, such as: *tangam/tactam* ("to touch")⁴¹, *visere/vidimus/vidisse/video* ("to see")⁴², *adspiciat/adspiceres* ("to look")⁴³, *adest* ("to be present")⁴⁴. From among the lexemes illustrating *autopatheia*, we mention the following:

³⁹ ALEXIANU 2006, 39–50.

⁴⁰ CURCĂ 2010, 292.

⁴¹ Ov., *Trist.* I, 2, 83: "Obligor, ut *tangam* laevi fera litora Ponti — I am constrained to reach the wild shores of illomened Pontus"; IV, 10, 109–110: "*Tacta* mihi tandem longis erroribus acto/iuncta pharetratis Sarmatis ora Getis — Driven through long wanderings at length I reached the shore that unites the Sarmatians with the quiver-bearing Getae".

⁴² Ov., *Trist.* III, 2, 1: "Ergo erat in fati Scythiam quoque *visere* nostris — So then was fated for me to visit even Scythia"; III, 10, 37: "*Vidimus* ingentem glacie consistere pontum — mingling with the vast deep through many mouths, freezes as the winds stiffen his dark flood"; III, 10, 39: "Nec *vidisse* sat est — And seeing is not enough"; III, 10, 49: "*Vidimus* in glacie pisces haerere ligatos — I have seen fish clinging fast bound in the ice, yet some even then still lived"; IV 6, 48: "sic me, quae *video* non *videoque*, movent — Thus what I behold and what I do not behold affect me".

⁴³ Ov., *Trist.* I, 2, 94: "*Adspiciat* vultus Pontica terra meos — Let the land of Pontus behold my face"; III, 10, 75: "*Adspiceres* nudos sine fronde, sine arbore campos — One may see naked fields, leafless, treeless — a place, alas!". The second-person singular form, *adspiceres* 'all you can see with your eyes', can be considered a type of autoptic impersonal perception.

⁴⁴ Ov., *Trist.*, IV, 6, 47: "Vulgus *adest* Scythicum bracataqua turba Getarum — Before me is a crowd of Scythians, a trousered throng of Getae".

perpetior ("to undergo or experience hardships, sufferings to the full")⁴⁵, *premor* ("to exert a steady or continuous force against, apply pressure to press")⁴⁶, *pati/patior* ("to be subjected to an operation or process, undergo")⁴⁷, *aeger eram*⁴⁸ ("ill, unwell, sick"), *iaceo* ("to lie")⁴⁹, *vivere* ("to be alive, live")⁵⁰, and *cingunt* ("to surround, encircle")⁵¹. The heteroptic perception is visible through verbs such as *constat* ("to consist")⁵² and *dicitur* ("to talk, to speak")⁵³. We are confronted by a case of autoptic and, at the same time, acustic perception in the metaphor used to express the invasions of the Getae, Bastarnae, and Sarmatians in the Black Sea area⁵⁴.

⁴⁵ Ov., *Trist.* II, 187: "Ultima *perpetior* medios eiectus in hostes — I am now enduring the extreme, thrust forth into the midst of enemies".

⁴⁶ Ov., *Trist.* II, 190: "Parrhasiae gelido virginis axe *premor* — I am crushed beneath the Parrhasian virgins pole".

⁴⁷ Ov., *Trist.* II, 206: "quemquam [...] Caesaribus salvis barbara vincla *pati* — Right forbids that anyone of Latin blood should suffer barbarian bondage while Caesars live"; III, 3, 7: "Nec caelum *patior* — The climate I cannot endure".

⁴⁸ Ov., *Trist.* III, 3, 3–4: "*Aeger* in extremis ignoti partibus orbis, incertusque meae paene salutis *eram* — I am ill-ill in the utmost part of an unknown world, almost in doubt of my recovery".

⁴⁹ Ov., *Trist.* III, 3, 13: "Lassus in extremis *iaceo* populisque locisque — I lie among these far-away peoples in this far-away place".

⁵⁰ Ov., *Trist.* III, 10, 4: "me sciat in media *vivere* barbaria — I am living in the midst of the barbarian world".

⁵¹ Ov., *Trist.* III, 10, 5: "Sauromatae *cingunt*, fera gens, Bessique Getaeque — About me are the Sauromatae, a cruel race Bessi, and the Getae".

⁵² Ov., *Trist.* III, 9, 6: "*Constat* ab Absyrti caese fuisse loco — More ancient than the founding of the city, was given to this place, 'tis certain, from the murder of Absyrtus".

⁵³ Ov., *Trist.* III, 9, 10: "*Dicitur* his remos adplicuisse vadis — brought to a haven her oars, they say, in these waters".

⁵⁴ Ov., *Trist.* III, 14, 38: "pro libris arcus et arma sonant — Not here have I an abundance of books to stimulate and nourish me: In their stead is the rattle of bows and arms".

Conclusion

It is very interesting that the authors express, occasionally, their own opinion concerning the information provided by other sources⁵⁵. Before using the data relevant for the reconstruction of protohistory, it is imperative to know the correlation between the author and his text through the professional and autoptic perspectives. A philological approach can contribute to completing and detailing, in a critical vision, the outcomes of the research concerning this area. The analysis of historical events presented by historians, geographers, and poets through *autopsía*, *akoé* and *autopátheia* is relevant to the credibility of the information provided by literary sources. The source type of information can also have a significant impact on the subjective cultural perceptions of the authors concerning ancient ethnic and geographical alterity.

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⁵⁵ See, for example the use of superlative ἐπιμελεστάτως at Pseudo-Scymnos, who denotes a complete trust in the accuracy of Demetrius's information.

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