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A Note on the Etymology of *Brūtes/Brūtīs* ‘a (Latin-Speaking?) Bride’¹

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this article is to trace the etymology of the Late Latin word *brūtes/brūtīs* ‘(Latin-speaking?) wife’ and try to decide whether the exact origin of this word can go back without doubt to the Gothic form **brūþs* attested in the form of the acc. sg. in the Gothic translation of the Bible made by the bishop Wulfila in the 4th century AD, as is usually assumed in the scholarly literature. It is concluded that the origins of the word should rather be traced to East Germanic **brūþiz* although all of the details are still not clear due to the lack of direct evidence and other hypotheses should also be considered.

KEYWORDS: Latin etymology, Latin language, historical lexicology, Gothic language

¹ This article is dedicated to the memory of the late Professor Dariusz Brodka, esteemed teacher and colleague. It was Professor Brodka who, back in 2007 when he was the Head of the Institute of Classical Philology for student affairs, accepted my study programme during an exchange year spent at Leiden University. Thanks to his kindness and generosity I could devote a large part of my time there to the study of Indo-European linguistics. I still remember his enthusiasm when he learned that I was going to follow a course on the Gothic language there. This short note is a small tribute to his memory.

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1. Introduction

Contacts between the Romans and the Germanic peoples date back to the early days of Rome: from the invasion of the Cimbrii and the Teutones through the conflicts in the time of Julius Caesar to the infamous defeat of the Roman legions at the Teutoburg forest and the subsequent wars with Rome leading to the stabilisation of the Roman border on the Rhine. The intensity of these contacts increased in time because of the presence of the Germanic tribes within the Roman borders and the consequent moves of the Germanic peoples towards the borders of the Roman Empire from around the 3rd century AD and later mainly due to the raids of other tribes from the East (Huns, later Slavic and Baltic peoples). Many Germanic mercenaries came to serve in the Roman armies as well and some of them even occupied significant positions within the army.² As a result of this situation, linguistic contacts between the Germanic tribes and the Latin-speaking Romans intensified.³

2. The linguistic contact between the Romans and the Germanic peoples

The linguistic contacts are most visible in terms of personal and place names preserved in ancient Greek and Roman authors as well as in loanwords, usually of the terms characteristic of their language (e.g. Tacitus cites words of the Germanic origin, e.g. *framea* ‘spear’⁴). In time, when the Roman and Germanic contacts intensified as a result of the increase in the number of Germanic people within the borders of the Empire, the number of loanwords increased as well because there must have been a bilingual environment at the borders of the Empire with people knowing both Latin and the Germanic languages – at least

² Cf. Wilczyński 2018 for the biographies of the most famous ones from the 5th century AD)

³ Cf. Todd 1992: 47–61; Wolfram 1997 for an overview with further literature there, cf. especially Gamillscheg 1934; Gamillscheg 1935.

⁴ Cf. Bruch 1913: 16.

to some considerable extent.⁵ The tribes that appeared around the 3rd century AD and came into especially intensified contact with Rome in the coming centuries were especially the Goths. Around that time came also the Franks and the Alamanni.⁶

After the incursion of the Goths and other East Germanic tribes through Central Europe to the Balkans, the Germanic languages came into direct contact also with Greek.⁷ The effects of those linguistic contacts are visible most often in loanwords, usually from Latin or Greek, more prestigious and literally developed, into the Germanic languages and a large majority early into Gothic,⁸ but the opposite direction is also attested.⁹ According to Brūch, up to the year 400 AD, there were at least 102 words of the Germanic origin in Latin.¹⁰ One of such examples, that is a probable loanword from Germanic (most probably an early form of Gothic, pre-Gothic or East Germanic) into Latin, is the Late Latin word *brūtis*,¹¹ attested also in the variant *brūtes* and *brūta*.¹²

Our knowledge of the Gothic language is confined mostly to the Gothic translation of the Bible, prepared in the 4th century AD by the bishop Wulfila, or more precisely the copy of this translation made in the 6th century.¹³ There are some fragmentary early inscriptions, a commentary on the Gospel of John, and some later writings stemming from interest in the Gothic language in the Middle Ages,¹⁴ along with the famous list of words preserved in the so-called Crimean Gothic in the 16th century Crimea,¹⁵ but the majority of the attested material comes from the translation of the Bible and it should be borne in mind that this is a conventional type of text.¹⁶ Other East Germanic languages – e.g.

⁵ Brūch 1913: 89ff.

⁶ Wolfram 1997: 39.

⁷ Wolfram 1990; Heather 1998.

⁸ Cf. Corazza 1969.

⁹ Restelli 1979.

¹⁰ Cf. Brūch 1913: 87–88.

¹¹ Brūch 1913: 15.

¹² Simon 2021: 309.

¹³ Cf. Scardigli 1973.

¹⁴ Cf. Zironi 2009 on this topic.

¹⁵ Cf. Stearns 1978.

¹⁶ Cf. most recently Zironi 2023 on the context of making of the translation with further literature there and Falluomini 2015 on the description of the Gothic Bible.

Vandalic and Burgundian – are attested only fragmentarily, mostly in personal names and individual words attested in glossaries and thus we cannot tell very much about them.¹⁷ Thus, Gothic in the form of Biblical Gothic remains is only reliable and to some extent complete source for East Germanic.

3. The case of Latin *brūtes/brūtis* – attestations

The Latin word *brūtis* interpreted by Green as ‘a Latin-speaking wife of a Germanic soldier’ is only attested in Latin inscriptions.¹⁸ It does not appear in literary works and thus it was probably confined to the spoken and lower register Latin rather than the literary language. The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* presents a different meaning than the one given by Green, i.e. ‘wife’.¹⁹ Green is clearly of the opinion that it denoted ‘a Latin-speaking wife of a Germanic soldier’ because the inscriptions come from the region where Germanic people were present and denote persons serving in the military.²⁰ According to Joseph Bruch, following earlier scholars, the Latin inscriptions in which the word occur come from the 3rd–4th centuries from Lurnfeld in Carinthia, Cupria in Serbia and Kutlovica in Bulgaria.²¹

An example of such inscriptions is the one dated to 131–250 AD from Pannonia where the word *brūtis* appears²²:

D(is) // M(anibus) // [---] qu[---] / [--- e]t Ael(iae) Flavinae aviae / [--- m(unicipii)] Mog(etianae) a(v)unculo et / [---]IA[--- et Ael(iae) Ca]ndidae matri et Ael(io) / Candido qu(a)e[storio ---] nepoti et Ael(ius) Flavi/nus vet(eranus) ex b(ene)f(iciario) [l]eg(ati) [l]eg(ionis) --- e]t Iul(ia) Marcella brutis / et Ael(ius) Maximus d(ecurio) mun(icipii) [---] et Aeliae

¹⁷ Cf. the case of the Vandalic language – Onesti 2002; Hartmann 2020, and Burgundian – Hartmann, Rieger 2022.

¹⁸ Green 1998: 184; Simon 2021 with earlier literature there.

¹⁹ Cf. OLD 243.

²⁰ Green 1998: 184.

²¹ Bruch 1913: 15.

²² Cited after EDH, cf. also EDCS.

Candidiana et Pul/chra nepotes eorum viv[i fece]runt sibi [et pa]rentibus / ka[riss]imis

Another one from Moesia dated to 171–250 AD presents the variant of the form *brūtes*²³:

-----] / vix(it) an(nos) XX mi/litavit me(n)ses / VIII P(ublius) Aur(elius) Ma/rcianus mi[l(es)] / leg(ionis) VII Marcian/us v[et(eranus)] leg(ionis) VII pater / et Aur(elia) Marcia / mater se viva / sibi et fili(i)s bene / merenti(bu)s pos(uerunt) / Aur(elia) Rufina / brutes

The form *brūtes* is easily explained as coming back from *brūtis* with the change *-is* > *-es*, which is characteristic of Vulgar Latin.²⁴

Recently, Zsolt Simon has proved that the form actually originated in Pannonia and spread from there into Moesia and the eastern provinces of the Empire.²⁵ His hypothesis concerning the etymology and origin of the form will be mentioned and evaluated in the next section.

There is also a variant of the word *brūta* attested in glosses.²⁶ It is most probably an analogical formation created on the model of pairs like *neptis* : *nepta* or *nurus* : *nura*²⁷ with the characteristic ending *-a* of the feminine stems.

It is clear from attested inscriptions that the word was in use in Late Latin and that it was probably confined to the eastern areas of the Roman Empire with the first attestations appearing in Pannonia. Moreover, it is said the word was borrowed from Late Latin into Medieval Greek, giving the form *broútis*.²⁸ In the western Romance languages, the word is supposed to have given the Old French *bru*

²³ Cited after EDH, cf. also EDCS.

²⁴ Cf. Pudić 1964: 864; Simon 2021: 311.

²⁵ Simon 2021: 312–315.

²⁶ Simon 2021: 309, n. 2.

²⁷ Cf. Bruch 1913: 131; Ernout, Meillet 2001: 76; Simon 2021: 309, n. 2. with further literature there.

²⁸ Cf. Lehmann 1986: 83; Green 1998: 184.

‘daughter-in-law’,²⁹ but it is absent in Romanian, the language in which Balkan Latin forms are usually continued.³⁰

4. The origin of the form

As far as the origin of the word is concerned, it seems clear that *brūtes/brūtis* is a loanword in Latin since the word is absent from the literary language and occurs only in inscriptions from the 2nd–3rd centuries onwards (this assumption was already proposed by scholars in the 19th century³¹). Green suggests that the word was taken over from East Germanic,³² probably directly from Gothic since the Goths were present in the area from the third century AD.³³ Additionally, he observes that the word cannot have been borrowed from West Germanic³⁴ since in this language attested forms present the variant with /d/ instead of /þ/ (Old Saxon *brûd*, Old English *brȳd*, Old High German *brût* with the change /d/ > /t/ following the High German sound shift) and this should also have been adopted as Latin /d/. Green concludes that the word is ‘a solitary clear example of Gothic influence on Balkan Latin’.³⁵

However, it should be borne in mind that the Gothic language is attested almost exclusively from the Bible translation made by Wulfila and his followers back in the 4th century AD.³⁶ Whereas it is clear that it must have been a spoken language as well (in a lower register), defining the Gothic Biblical form as a direct loanword into Latin, especially of a lower register, is somewhat imprecise in etymological research. Therefore, in my opinion, it should be explicitly stated that the form was borrowed from the spoken language rather than from its literary

²⁹ Cf. Bruch 1913: 181–182, for the explanation of the change in meaning, and Bloch, von Wartburg 1964: 91.

³⁰ Cf. Rohlfs 1947; Rohlfs 1954.

³¹ Cf. Simon 2021: 309 with earlier literature there.

³² Green 1998: 184.

³³ Green 1998: 184.

³⁴ Similarly Bruch 1913: 48.

³⁵ Green 1998: 184.

³⁶ Cf. Scardigli 1973; Falluomini 2015.

high register variant of the Biblical translation which unfortunately is the only variant that is attested.

In my opinion, Brūch is right stressing the fact that the form which made its way into Latin should rather be identified as Proto-Gothic **brūpiz* or even East Germanic **brūpiz*.³⁷ It seems more reasonable that the word was borrowed from the low register language rather than the literary language of the Biblical translation. Moreover, Loewe points out to an idea that if Gothic **brūþs* had been really the source of Latin *brūtis*, then we would have expected a Latin form **brūs*, gen. sg. **brūtis* instead of *brūtis*, gen. sg. *brūtis*.³⁸ It seems clear that the assumption of a loanword from Biblical Gothic is not the most favourable explanation since it does not exactly match the outcome in Latin and is attested in a different register. Although we do not have Gothic attested from any other register, we have to assume that it existed somewhat similarly to Latin and its descendants in the form of the Romance languages – we only have classical high-register Latin and only small traces of Vulgar Latin (inscriptions from Pompeii) that is the language from which the Romance languages developed. Yet, classical Latin with its different styles and traces of the popular language allows us – to some extent – to reconstruct the Vulgar Latin forms.³⁹

The Gothic form **brūþs*, along with its Germanic cognates (Old Icelandic *brūðr*, Old Saxon *brūd*, Old English *brȳd*, Old High German *brūt* ‘bride’), goes back to Proto-Germanic **brūdi-*.⁴⁰ Further history and etymology of the word is not known – Kroonen and Lehmann present a list of several etymologies but all of them are doubtful.⁴¹ Lehmann further points out that the form of the nom. sg. is not attested in Gothic itself and that the acc. sg. *brūþ* is the form that is actually attested in the manuscript.⁴² Indeed, the form is attested only once in the Gothic translation of the Bible – in the following fragment (Mat 10,35⁴³):

³⁷ Brūch 1913: 48.

³⁸ Loewe 1906: 277.

³⁹ Cf. Herman 2000.

⁴⁰ Kroonen 2013: 79.

⁴¹ Lehmann 1986: 83–84; Kroonen 2013: 79.

⁴² Lehmann 1986: 83.

⁴³ Quoted after WP.

Gothic version: *gam auk skaidan mannan wiþra attan is jah dauhtar wiþra aiþein izos jah bruþ wiþra swaihron izos;*

Greek version: ἦλθον γὰρ διχάσαι ἄνθρωπον κατὰ τοῦ πατρὸς αὐτοῦ καὶ θυγατέρα κατὰ τῆς μητρὸς αὐτῆς καὶ νύμφην κατὰ τῆς πενθερᾶς αὐτῆς,

Translation: *For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law.*

In a recent article, Simon has presented three most often occurring possibilities concerning the origin of this form⁴⁴:

- 1) the form comes from Gothic or Pre-Gothic;
- 2) the form comes from another East Germanic language closely related to Gothic;
- 3) the form does not come originally from Germanic.

In his article, Simon follows Loewe 1907: 278 and Pudić 1964: 864 and claims that the form was borrowed from (North-)West Germanic in the region of Pannonia where this form appears at first⁴⁵ and that it was probably originally Celtic, following his earlier claims concerning languages used in Pannonia,⁴⁶ and first made its way into the Northwest Germanic continuum and then into Latin. Simon's argument is based on the fact that the Goths or the East Germanic tribes could not have been present so early in Pannonia as to claim that the word was borrowed into Latin from Gothic in this area.

However, a Celtic form that he claims was the original source of the borrowing is neither directly nor indirectly attested. We do not have any such form in Celtic which would be supposed to be used in Pannonia – nor any probable cognate form in the other Celtic languages. Moreover, the existence of the Proto-Northwest Germanic form is based solely on the later West Germanic words (cf. Old Icelandic *brūðr*, Old Saxon *brūd*, Old English *brȳd*, Old High German *brūt* 'bride') which are only attested in the 6–7th centuries, long after the Latin word first appears in inscriptions. In my opinion, Simon's hypothesis, although not improbable, is still less credible than the one which seeks to trace the origin

⁴⁴ Simon 2021: 315.

⁴⁵ Simon 2021.

⁴⁶ Cf. Simon 2018.

of the Latin form to East Germanic. Simon himself states that there is a possibility that a small group of East Germanic people could have been present at the time in Pannonia,⁴⁷ but he does not think that their number would be enough to make a significant impact on the language used in the area.

5. Conclusion

It has been shown that the Late Latin word *brūtis*, usually thought to be a loanword from Gothic **brūþs* (expected but unattested form of the nom. sg.) is easier explained as a borrowing from East Germanic **brūþiz* (or Proto-Gothic **brūþiz*) rather than directly from Gothic. However, it should be still kept in mind that the attestation of the Gothic word and the whole corpus of Biblical Gothic enable us to postulate such reconstructions since otherwise our knowledge of East Germanic and early Germanic in general would have been very scanty, but it is rarely directly the Biblical Gothic form that should be postulated as a loanword (apart from learned borrowings obviously), rather a form in an East Germanic language which was in use and could be similar to the Gothic one. If it was Vandalic, Burgundian, Bastarnic or another language from the East Germanic branch is not known due to the fact that our knowledge of the East Germanic languages other than Gothic is very limited. But from the gathered evidence it hardly seems to be Biblical Gothic. The hypothesis postulated by Simon 2021 is also possible but it is based on the form that is not attested – either in the original Celtic form spoken in Pannonia or the form of Proto-Northwest Germanic from which it was supposed to be borrowed into Latin. Therefore, in my opinion, it is more probable that the Latin form *brūtis* should go back to East Germanic **brūþiz*, the reconstruction of which could be easily based on the Gothic cognate **brūþs*, attested in the translation of the Bible in the form of acc. sg. *brūþ*.

⁴⁷ Simon 2021: 316.

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