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# THE ETYMOLOGICAL RAMIFICATIONS OF LITHUANIAN *sárgas*

In the preface to his Catechism of 1547, the first book printed in the Lithuanian language, Martynas Mažvydas entreats his fellow-countrymen to give up their heathen beliefs and practices and embrace the Christian religion. Among the supernatural beings of pagan Lithuanian mythology here mentioned we meet „the guardians of the fields" (acc. pl. *laukafargus* Mž 9). The etymology of their name is clear: *laukasargas* is a compound noun composed of the root of *laūkas* „field", a link vowel -*a*- and the noun *sárgas* „watchman, guard", this last containing the *o*-grade of the root whose *e*-grade appears in the verb *sérgėti* „to guard".

The affinities of this root outside Lithuanian have many problematical aspects. On semantic grounds the relationship with Slavonic *\*storg-/sterg-* is accepted in spite of the difficulties in reconciling the initial consonant of Lithuanian with the Slavonic variant. Most investigators seem to regard CS *\*st-* as secondary and probably arising by the contamination of two Indo-European roots, although there is great diversity of opinion as to the precise roots involved. Vasmer lists four suggested conflations which would link the root of Lithuanian *sérgėti* with that of Greek στέργω „I love"; στέγω „I protect"; Slavonic *\*strag-* or *\*ostrog-*. In his article on Russian *storož* Vasmer alludes to another possibility, namely that initial *st-* may have arisen by the metathesis of an earlier *ts-* (Фасмер III 757, 768).

Further afield Lithuanian *sérgėti* is linked with Latin *servo* „I keep, I preserve" and with the Iranian root seen in the Avestan verb *niš-haurvaiti* „he protects" and the synonyms *pasuš-haurvō, viš-haurvō*. Ernout and Meillet's etymological dictionary of Latin suggests a connection between the roots of *servo* and *vereor* „I fear", postulating *\*ser-*, *\*wer-* and *\*swer-* as variants of a single root (Ernout, Meillet 620 s.v. *servus*). This would bring into the picture Greek (ϝ)οράω „I perceive, I see" and φρουρός „guard", from προορός „one who looks forth". It would also let in the prolific Germanic root seen in English *beware, wary*, German *bewahren, Wahrung, warten* and the numerous Romance derivatives of that root, the most notable of which, namely French *garde*, Italian *guardia*, has spread to most, if not all European languages, including the Slavonic, where direct borrowings from Germanic, such as *varovati* „to protect", are also known.

Absent from the roll call of etymologically related Indo-European security men is the name of one of the best-known, if not most efficient guards of classical mythology. Nowadays, a jealous wife would engage a private detective to keep an eye on her erring husband. This method would have been dangerous and futile in the case of Zeus, a master of disguise and dissimulation. Hera, his long-suffering wife, decided to thwart the elusive polyphiloprogenitor by turning Io, the prey he was currently stalking, into a heifer and placing her under the watchful guard of the herdsman Argos.

The story is told in Aeschylus' tragedy „The Suppliants" in dialogue between King and Chorus[1]:

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| K i n g | And what then was the end of this monarchic quarrel? |
| C h o r u s | The Argive Goddess changed her mortal rival to a cow. |
| K i n g | And did Zeus then stop calling on the proud-horned heifer? |
| C h o r u s | He came to her, they say, disguised as a brawny bull. |
| K i n g | What did the mighty spouse of Zeus do to prevent this? |
| C h o r u s | She put on cow-watch an all-seeing sentinel. |
| K i n g | All-seeing sentry for a single cow! Who could this be? |
| C h o r u s | Argos, the son of earth, whom Hermes slew. |

In another of Aeschylus' plays „Prometheus bound", the chorus of the daughters of Oceanus sing of the sufferings of poor Io[2]:

Once more I feel the gadfly's sting and dread the ghost
of earthborn Argos – keep him far from me! I cannot bear
to look upon that cowman with ten thousand eyes.
He tracks me still in death. The earth
cannot conceal his treacherous gaze,
Awaking from the depths to haunt me,
while I must roam this sandy waste.

The poet stresses the watchman's remarkable qualifications for his task. He is an all-seeing custodian: τὸν πάνθ' ὁρῶντα φύλακ'; a panoptic cowman entrusted with a single beast: πανόπτην οἰοβουκόλον; the herdsman with ten thousand eyes: τὸν μυριωπὸν βούταν. No wonder the lexicographers have identified his name with the adjective ἀργός „shining, bright, glistening", seeing in the association a reference to the bright gaze of those everopen eyes. The same adjective, or its homonym, is frequent as a Homeric epithet in the phrase κύνες πόδας ἀργοί, which the dictionaries interpret as „dogs, fleet of foot", regarding this as a secondary meaning, rapid movement being likened to a flash of light.

An animal which bore the name of Argos is Odysseus' faithful hound, the first creature to recognise the wanderer on his return to Ithaca, in spite of his disguise. Although saddened by the ill treatment inflicted on his dog, Odysseus pretends not

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[1] Ἱκέτιδες, lines 297–305, in *Aeschyli septem quae supersunt tragoediae*, ed. Murray G., Oxford, 1946.

[2] Προμηθεὺς δεσμώτης, lines 567–573, *ibidem*. The English versions are produced, with apologies to Aeschylus and his admirers, by the author of this article.

to recognise him and asks the loyal swineherd Eumaeus whether the dog had been a good courser or a mere lap-dog, such as a king might keep for show. In reply Eumaeus praises the erstwhile speed and hunting prowess of Argos. Here again we have an intimation that the Homeric poets associated ἀργός, name and adjective, with speed. However, we may doubt whether this is the correct interpretation of Argos as the name of Hera's cowman, whose required virtue was the vigilance of a watchdog rather than the speed of a whippet. If the name was originally associated with his occupation we should examine the possible etymological connection with Lithuanian *sárgas*.

The phonological difficulties in relating the two words lie in the smooth breathing of the Greek Argos, where a lost initial s- would normally leave a rough breathing, *hargos*, and also in the vocalism of the root syllables where Greek and Lithuanian show the reflexes of Indo-European reduced grade and o-grade respectively. However, examples may be found to show that these obstacles are not unsurmountable. Loss of initial s- does not result in a rough breathing in the case of ἄλοχος „wife" from *sm̥-logh-os* „bed-fellow"; regular treatment of the pronominal root is seen in ἅμα „together, beside" from *sama*. Parallels may also be found for the alignment of o-grade forms in Baltic and Slavonic with reduced forms of the same root in other Indo-European languages. For example, Lithuanian *(vieną) kartą* corresponds to Sanskrit *sa-kr̥t* „once"; Common Slavonic *kortъkъ* corresponds to Latin *curtus* „short" from *kr̥to-*.

Therefore the proposed affinity between the Lithuanian *laukasargas*, guardian of the fields, and Argos, guardian of the prize white heifer, Io, is reasonable not only on semantic but also on phonological grounds: Lithuanian *sarg-* is from *sorg-*, while Greek *arg-* is from *sr̥g-*.