

Krzysztof Tomasz WITCZAK
University of Łódź

LITHUANIAN *blāké* f. AND PASHTO *brez* f. ‘BEDBUG’

The origin of Lith. *blāké* f. ‘bedbug, Cimex’ is disputable. Kretschmer (1896, 148) compares it with Lat. *blatta* f. ‘a fetid insect that shuns the light and is hostile to bees; cockroach, cockchafer, moth’ (White 1899, 82), suggesting a Latin-Baltic isogloss:

“Lat. *blatta* ein Insekt, Schabe od. dgl., wohl ein Wort der Volkssprache, durch die volkstümliche, der Schriftsprache fremde Assimilation von *c* an *t* aus **blacta* entstanden: lett. *blakts*, lit. *blāké* Wanze”.

Also Trautmann (1923, 34) reconstructs Baltic **blakti-* f. ‘Wanze / bedbug’ on the basis of Latv. *blakts* (pl. *blaktis*) ‘bedbug / Wanze’ and Lith. *blāké* f. ‘bug, bedbug, chinch’, dimin. *blakutė* f. ‘id.’. He compares these Baltic appellatives with Lat. *blatta* f. ‘cockroach, cockchafer, moth; a fetid insect that shuns the light and is hostile to bees’, which derives from **blacta*. Trautmann’s treatment indicates that Lith. *blāké* represents a back-formation from Baltic **blaktis*. The suggested development runs as follows: Baltic **blaktis* (cf. Latv. *blakts*) → **blakutis* (an anaptyxe of *-u-*) → **blakutiĵa* (a change from *i*-stem to *ĵa*-stem) → **blakiĵā* (a back-formation). The last change is easily explainable. The form **blakutiĵa* (cf. Lith. *blakutė*) was wrongly identified as a diminutive form, hence a back-formation **blakiĵā* (cf. Lith. *blāké*) was created.

Fraenkel (1962, 47) quotes the Baltic forms for ‘bedbug’ under the heading **blākas** adj. ‘gleich’ (= Latv. *blaks* ‘eben’). He emphasizes that Lith. *blakutė* f. ‘bedbug’ and Latv. *blakts* f. ‘id.’ are formed “nach Analogie” to Lith. *utė* f. ‘louse’ and Latv. *uts* f. (*i*-stem) ‘id.’ (= Lith. *utis* f.). The same statement was made earlier by Otrębski (1949, 124): “Il n’est pas exclus que le mot lithuanien *blākutė* soit un composé: **blak-utė*, où le second terme serait le mot *utė* ‘pou’. Cette analyse semble être confirmée par les forms parallèles *blakutis* : *utis*. De même le mot letton *blakts* a pu être relié à *uts* ‘pou’”.

Karulis (1992, 130) connects the Latvian and Lithuanian nouns for ‘bedbug’ with Ukr. *блоска* f. ‘bedbug’ (< Slavic **blok-ska*), dimin. *блочиця* f.

‘id.’, VRuss. блошиця f. ‘crab (body) louse’ and indicates some Balto-Slavic variants with initial *p-*, e.g. Latv. *plakts* ‘bedbug’, Russ. площица ‘crab louse, *Pediculus pubis*’, Czech *ploštice* f. ‘bedbug’ and Pol. dial. *ploszcyca* f. ‘id.’. He refers to the adjective denoting ‘flat, level, even, smooth’ (cf. Lith. *blākas* ‘gleich’, Latv. *blaks* ‘eben’ vs. Lith. *plakanas*, Latv. *plaks*, *plakans* ‘flach’).

In his etymological dictionary of the Lithuanian language Prof. Wojciech Smoczyński (2007, 62) ignores the old Latin-Baltic comparison and gives the following comment:

blāké “pluskwa, Cimex”. Oboczność form łot. *blakts* i *plakts* „pluskwa” (< **plakutis*, zob. *plàkti*) nasuwa podejrzenie, że grupa *bl-* w nagłosie jest wtórna (por. też *blusà* < **plusa*). Por. łot. *plaks* obok *plakans* „płaski, gładki” oraz pol. *ploszcyca* gw. „pluskwa” obok adi. *płoski* „płaski, gładki”. Zob. też *plāštaka* < **plaškata*. – Drw. *blakÿnē* „miejsce zapluskwione”, *blakinis*, *-ē* „zapluskwiony; o zapach pluskiew”. Vb. denom. *blakinėti* „szukać pluskiew; chodzić bez zajęcia, obijać się”.

Smoczyński suggests that the initial cluster *bl-* derives from **pl-*, giving as a parallel the Balto-Slavic item **blusā* f. ‘flea’, which corresponds to other Indo-European names for ‘flea’ with initial **pl-* (see Pokorny 1959, 102; Sławski 1974, 273–274), cf. OInd. *plúsi-* m. ‘a particular noxious insect, probably flea’; Lat. *pūlex*, *-icis* ‘flea’ (< **puslik-* < IE **plusi-*); Arm. *lu* ‘flea’ (< **plusos*); Alb. *plesht* m. ‘flea’ (< **pleusta-*, see Orel 1998, 333); Eng. *flea*, OE *fléah*, Germ. *Floh*, OHG *flôh* (< Gmc. **flauh-*); Gk. ψύλλα f. ‘flea’ (< **psuliā* < IE **plusī-*). In fact, the variation **bl-* and **pl-* is probably attested in the Iranian languages: Pashto *wrāža*, dial. (Waziri) *wrāža* f. ‘flea’ (< Iran. **brušā*, according to Morgenstierne 1927, 91) seems to begin with the voiced phoneme **b-*, whereas other Iranian names demonstrate the voiceless labial consonant **f-* (< Indo-Iranian **p-*) in the initial position (Rastorgueva, Edelman 2007, 79–80), cf. Chwarezmian *fruf* (or *βrwf*) ‘flea’ (< **fruša-*); Sogd. ’βš’h (**afšā*) ‘flea’ (< **frušā-*), Yazg. *fráš*, *fəráš* ‘flea’ (< **fruš-čī*); Yidgha *frīyo*, Munji *frīga* ‘flea’ (< **fruši-kā*); Parachi *ruč* ‘flea’; Ormuri (K) *š^Rak* (pl. *š^Racī*) ‘flea’ (< **frušačī-*); Shughni *firêyj* ‘flea’ (< **fruš-čī-*). As both bedbug (Lith. *blāké*) and flea (Lith. *blusà*) are small wingless insects that feed on the blood of human beings and some animals, it is possible to agree with W. Smoczyński that the initial *bl-* might be introduced into the Baltic term for ‘bedbug’ (Lith. *blāké*, Latv. *blakts* vs. *plakts*) by analogy to the Baltic name for ‘flea’ (Lith. *blusà* f. ‘flea’, Latv. *blusa* f. ‘id.’; cf. also Slavic **blъxa* f. ‘flea’: Cz. *blecha*, ORuss. *блѣха*, Russ. *blocha*, OPol. *blcha*, dimin. *bleszka*; Pol. *pchła* f. ‘flea’, SC *bùha*).

The Iranian languages provide important evidence for the Indo-European origin of the Lithuanian name for ‘bedbug’. Pashto *brez* f. ‘bedbug’, which derives from Iran. **bračī-* (or alternatively from Iran. **fračī*) seems to be an exact equivalent of Lith. *blāké* f. ‘bedbug’ (< Baltic **blakiiā* or **plakiiā*)¹. The similarity in form and meaning is evident. Also Wakhi *prič* ‘grub, maggot, worm, caterpillar’ (< **praičī-*, cf. Stebline-Kamensky 1999, 267) and Shughni *birēj*, *birēz* ‘a worm dangerous to sheep’ (< Iran. **f/bračī-*)² are related as well. A *vṛddhi*-form is attested in Iranian, namely Pashto *brāza*, *wrāza*, *wrāja* f. ‘a species of tick infesting dogs; a small red insect that feeds on the blood of camels or other domesticated animals’ (< Iran. **f/brāčyā-*) and perhaps Sogd. *pr’z’k* ‘a kind of a noxious insect’³ (Morgenstierne 1927, 89; 2003, 90; Rastorgueva, Edelman 2007, 80). It is obvious that all the above-mentioned Iranian forms contain the phoneme **-č-*, which represents a palatalized reflex of IE **k* or **k^u*.⁴ What is more, the Iranian forms, as well as the Lithuanian name for ‘bedbug’ (Lith. *blāké*), demonstrate no trace of **-t-* in the root. For this reason, Latv. *blakts* must be treated as a secondary form which may represent Baltic **blak-tis* or **blak-utis* (cf. Lith. dimin. *blakutė* f. ‘bedbug’).

Also Lat. *blatta* f. ‘cockroach, cockchafer, moth; a fetid insect that shuns the light and is hostile to bees’ must be analyzed morphologically as **blac-ta*. The Romance evidence (cf. Fr. *blatte* ‘black-beetle, cockroach’) strongly

¹ In my opinion, the feminine *ī-/iə*-stem nouns developed into the Baltic feminines ending with *-ė*, cf. Lith. *vilkė* f. ‘she-wolf’, OInd. *vṛkī-* f. ‘id.’, OIcel. *wulgr* f. (< **ulḱ^uīs*), Slavic **oblčica* f. ‘she-dog’ (< **ulḱ^uī-* plus the diminutive suffix *-kā*). It is supposed that the ending *-ė* represented Proto-Baltic **-ijā* in some cases (as in the Palaeo-Balkan languages, cf. Greek *μία* f. ‘one’, Thracian *MIH* ‘id.’, Arm. *mi*, Alb. *një* < PIE **smijə*) or alternatively **-ijā* (taken from the oblique cases and introduced later to the nominative). Note that the letter H in the Thracian inscriptions represented the value /schwa/, see Witczak 2006.

² According to Morgenstierne (1974, 20), the Shughni insect name derives from **upa-raičī-*.

³ According to Nicholas Sims-Williams (see Morgenstierne 2003, 90), the Sogdian form, cited in some dictionaries (e.g. Morgenstierne 1927, 89; Rastorgueva, Edelman 2007, 80), is a mistake for *pr’n’k* [**prānāk*] < Buddhist Sanskrit *prāṇaka-* ‘insect’.

⁴ It is hardly possible to suggest that Sarikoli *berga* ‘flea’ represents Iran. **brakā-*. We must agree with Stebline-Kamensky (1999, 316) that the Sarikoli term for ‘flea’ is a loanword from a Turkish source (cf. Uzb. *burga*, Kirg. *börgö* ‘flea’).

suggests that the Latin name in question may be of Gaulish origin. If so, then Latin *blatta* represents most probably a Gaulish derivative **blaktā* (< Celtic **blak-*).

The analysis of the related appellatives for ‘bedbug’ or a similar harmful, wingless insect demonstrates clearly that the original Indo-European archetype should be reconstructed as **blak^(w)ī* f. (*ī-* or *īə₂-*stem) or perhaps **blak^(w)iīā* f. (*iīā-*stem) ‘bedbug’. In my opinion, it derives probably from the Indo-European verb **blak^u-* ‘to be harmful, to be noxious’, which is attested in Greek βλάπτω ‘to disable, hinder, stop’, pass. ‘to damage, hurt, mar’, βλαβερός adj. ‘hurtful, noxious, disadvantageous’, Attic ἀβλαβής, -ές, Cretan ἀβλοπής, -ές adj. ‘without harm; unharmed, unhurt, secure; not harming, harmless, innocent’. The Lithuanian name for ‘bedbug’, *blākė*, as well as its Pashto equivalent (*brez* f. ‘bedbug’ < Iran. **bračī-*), may be convincingly treated as a straightforward reflex of the Indo-European protoform. Latv. *blakts* or *plakts* appears to derive from a diminutive form **blakutis*, analogous to Lith. dimin. *blakutė* f. ‘small or young bedbug’.

LIETUVIŲ *blākė* f. IR PUŠTŪNŲ *brez* f. ‘BLAKĖ’

Santrauka

Straipsnyje atskleidžiamas etimologinis ryšys tarp lie. *blākė* f. ir puštūnų *brez* f. ‘blakė’. Šiedu žodžiai taip pat susiję su la. *blakts*, *plakts* ‘blakė’, lo. *blatta* f. ‘tarakonas, gram-buolys, kandis; dvokiantis vabzdys, skleidžiantis šviesą ir priešiškas bitėms’, pranc. *blatte* ‘(juodasis) tarakonas’ (< galų **blak-tā*), be to, kai kuriais iranėniškais vabzdžių kenkėjų pavadinimais (plg. puštūnų *brāza*, *wrāza*, *wrāja* ‘šunis puolančių erkių rūšis; mažas raudonas vabzdys, mintantis kupranugarių ir kitų naminių gyvulių krauju’, šugnų *birēj*, *birēz* ‘avims kenkiantis kirminas’, sogdų *pr’z’k* ‘tokia vabzdžių kenkėjų rūšis’, vachanų *prič* ‘vikšras, lerva, kirminas’).

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Krzysztof Tomasz WITCZAK

University of Łódź

Department of Linguistics and Indo-European Studies

Ul. Lipowa 81

PL-90568 Łódź

Poland

[ktw@uni.lodz.pl]