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NORTH EUROPEAN *KulP- ‘beak, snout’

0. Introduction

It is generally recognized that despite obvious formal difficulties Slavic **kǫlpъ* ‘swan, spoonbill’ can hardly be separated from Baltic **gulbis* ‘swan’ (cf. Trautmann 1923, 101). In this article we shall examine the possibility that we are dealing here with a borrowing from a substratum language rather than a word inherited from Proto-Indo-European. The first section contains an overview of the various Slavic and Baltic bird-names and addresses the issue of their distribution. Particular attention is paid to the Serbo-Croatian forms, which are crucial in several respects. The next section investigates the relationship between the word for ‘swan, spoonbill’ and Slavic **kǫlbъ*, Lith. *kilb(uk)as* ‘gudgeon’. In the final section we shall try to establish Celtic cognates of the above-mentioned Baltic and Slavic words and discuss the origin of the root.

1. Bird-names containing BSl. **gulb-* or **kulp-*1.1. Baltic *gulb-*

The Baltic languages provide ample evidence for a noun **gulb-i-(o)s* ‘swan’, e.g. Lith. *gulbìs*, *-iës* f. alongside (Žem.) *gul̃bis*, *-io* m. (LKŽ III s.v., Būga 1914, 52 = 1958, 448), Latv. *gūlbis* m., OPr. (Elb. V.) *gulbis*. The *i*-stem *gulbìs* is already encountered in the works of Bretkūnas and Sirvydas (Sabaliauskas 1990, 117). The modern standard Lithuanian form is *gulbė* f.

1.2. Slavic **gǫlb-* beside **kǫlp-*?

The following nouns reflect **kǫlpъ* < **kulp-i-(o)s* (cf. ÉSSJ XIII 189): Slnc. *kòup*, *-pjă* m. (Lorentz 1908, 473), Kash. *kω'p* or *kω'p*, *-pa* m. (Lorentz 1958 s.v.) alongside *kělp* (Boryś 1996, 177), USrb. *kolp* (*kolp*), *-pja* m. ‘swan’, ORu. *kolpъ* f., Ru. dial. *kolp'* f. (Dal' 1905, 361) ‘spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)’. Forms pointing to **kǫlpъ* or **kǫlpa*, such as Ru. dial. *kolp*, *kolpa* (ÉSSJ l.c.) or Ukr. *kolpá* (ESUM II 524), must be secondary.

The most relevant derivatives of the root **kǫlp-* are Ru. dial. *kólpica* (*kolpíca*), *kólpik* (ÉSSJ *l.c.*; Dǫl 1905, 361), Ukr. *kólpycja* (*kolpýcja*), *kólpyk* alongside *kónpyk* (ESUM *l.c.*) ‘spoonbill’. USrb. *kólpica* ‘spoonbill’, which differs formally from *kolpica* ‘pen’, seems to occur exclusively in Jakubaš 1954. According to Schuster-Šewc (1981–1984, 596–597), *kólpica* is a borrowing from Russian. The same is said of Cz. *kolpík* ‘spoonbill’ (Machek 1971³, 271). Semantically these two forms would be as isolated within West Slavic as Ru. *kolpíca* ‘young pen’ (Vasmer 1986, 297) within East Slavic. I have not been able to trace the source of the latter form. Equally obscure to me is Ukr. *kolpéc* ‘a kind of pelican’ (*ibidem*).

In the older literature on Slavic etymology the root **kǫlp-* was thought to be limited to West and East Slavic. Then it appeared that there were some little-known Serbo-Croatian words meaning ‘swan’ which might be cognate. In 1929, Vaillant devoted an article to this question. He proposed that the words *kūf*, *kūp*, *guf* and *gub*, which had been recorded in Dubrovnik and neighbouring areas, continued a word **kuknu* (> **kupn-*, **kufn-*), to be compared with Gr. *κύκνος* ‘swan’, which originally belonged to the Romance speech of Dalmatia. His conclusions were dismissed – along with the hypothesis that the words represented Turk. *kuğu* ‘swan’ or It. *gufo* ‘owl’ (see also Skok 1972, 223) – by Sławski, who regarded *kūp* as an original Slavic form continuing **kǫlpь*. He attributed the *f* of *kūf* to hypercorrection, the model being the substitution of Romance *f* with native *p*. This explanation corresponds nicely with the fact that *kūf* is limited to the older literature from Dubrovnik (cf. Skok 1972, 223), whereas *kūp* is commonly used in Hercegovina. Sławski (1960, 39) did not attach any special significance to the “bookish” forms *guf* and especially *gub*.

Since Sławski’s article there is a strong tendency to accept *kūp* as the South Slavic counterpart of Ru. *kolp*’ etc. I see no reason why the forms with *g-* should not be taken seriously as well. While the RJA simply calls *gub* ‘swan’ doubtful (RJA III 484), the RSA has *gūb* ‘swan’, providing several attestations (RSA III 721). The variant *guf*, which occurs in the dictionaries of Mikalja (Micaglia) and Stulli (RJA III 495), must be another instance of hypercorrection. The possibility that *gūb* indeed continues **gǫlbь* (ÉSSJ VII 109) is enhanced by the existence of Sln. dial. *golbica* ‘skylark’ (Bezlaž 1972, 157). Thus, South Slavic seems to offer evidence for both **kǫlp-* and **gǫlb-*.

1.3. Distribution and semantics

The geographical distribution of the bird-name **kǫlp-* is quite interesting. It occurs in East Slavic, as well as on the periphery of West and South Slavic but it is

absent from Polish, for instance¹. Nepokupnyj's investigation of toponyms and hydronyms containing *kǫlp-² in the northern Slavic territory shows that they are concentrated in (a) North East Germany and North Poland, (b) East Byelorussia and the adjacent part of Russia minus the extreme North West and the area to the South West of Moscow (1966, 85). Now the mute swan (*Cygnus olor*) is very common along the coast of the Baltic Sea, while the whooper swan (*Cygnus cygnus*) hibernates in this area (and, by the way, along the coast of former Yugoslavia). Another winter migrant is Bewick's swan (*Cygnus Bewickii*). This is where *kǫlpь means 'swan'. In the Russian area (b), where the mute swan is rare but the whooper swan is a regular visitor when it migrates to the south, we have *kolp'*, *kólpica*, *kólpik* 'spoonbill'. Nowadays, this bird is rarely spotted in that region, but in the middle of the 19th century the spoonbill still nested in the Byelorussian woodlands (Nepokupnyj 1966, 84).

Since the general impression is that we have a basic noun *kǫlpь 'swan' vs. derivatives as *kǫlpica or *kǫlpikъ 'spoonbill', it is usually taken for granted that the meaning 'swan' is primary. This assumption is challenged in ÉSSJ XIII (190), where it is emphasized that we also find ORu. *kolpь*, Ru. dial. *kolp'* 'spoonbill' and SCr. *kūf* 'swan, pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*)', cf. Ukr. *kolpéc* 'pelican'. I agree that it is not self-evident that the original meaning of *kǫlp- (*gǫlb-) was 'swan'. Drawing attention to the shape and size of the spoonbill's and the pelican's bill, the ÉSSJ suggests that the meaning of the root refers to this physical feature. Furthermore, it is argued that there is a more than coincidental formal and semantic similarity between the bird-name *kǫlpь and the fish-name *kǫlbь 'gudgeon'. I find this an intriguing idea (pace Anikin 1996, 47). In order to be able to judge its merits we must now turn to the root *kǫlb-.

2. Slavic fish-names containing *kǫlb- and related forms

2.1. Slavic *kǫlb-

The evidence for *kǫlb- 'gudgeon (*Gobio gobio*)' is the following (cf. ÉSSJ XIII 132–133): Kash. *ketb*, *-ba* m. alongside *kelp*, *-pa* m. (Lorentz 1958 s.v.), Pl. *kielb-*, *-bia/-ba* m., Ru. dial. *kolb'* m. alongside *kolbá*, *kobl'*, *kólben'* m. (Dal' 1905, 341), Ukr. dial. *kóvben* m., *kóvbel'*, *kóblik*, Byel. dial. *kóvbyk*³. Kolomic (1983,

¹ The often quoted Polish forms *kielp* and *kielb* (see below) are in fact Kashubian.

² It is a pity that Nepokupnyj apparently did not investigate toponyms and hydronyms deriving from *gulb-* outside Lithuania and Latvia.

³ I shall leave semantically distant forms such as Cz. *kloub* 'joint' or Ukr. dial. *kovb* 'pig's stomach' out of consideration.

103) adds Slk. dial. *koba*, *kobla*, which he considers borrowings from Ukrainian, and SCr. dial. *kolba*. The basic form is apparently **kǫlbь*, parallel to **kǫlpь*. Moreover, the distribution of **kǫlb-* over the Slavic territory is similar to the distribution of **kǫlp-*. The main difference is the existence of “genuine” Polish forms.

In the ÉSSJ mention is made of a Polish (i.e. Kashubian) variant *kielb* ‘swan’ alongside the expected *kielp* (ÉSSJ XIII 190), which is interpreted as an indication that the two words are cognates. According to my findings, the form *kielb* can be traced to Hilferding’s 18th century lexicon. Its correctness is certainly not beyond doubt. Conversely, we do have a reliable attestation *kelp*, *-pa* ‘gudgeon’, however (see above). In addition, I would like to point out that beside SCr. *gūb* ‘swan’ we have *gūb* = *glàvoć* ‘goby’ (RSA III 721). This marine fish⁴ and the gudgeon, a freshwater fish, belong to different orders but due to their resemblance in appearance as well as behaviour they have similar or identical names in several languages (e.g. Du. *zeegrondel* vs. *riviergrondel*; *grondel* is derived from *grond* ‘bottom’). If *gūb* ‘goby’ continues **gǫlbь* (ÉSSJ VII 109), this would be a strong indication for a root **KulP-* from which both bird- and fish-names were derived. Unfortunately, there is a fair chance that *gūb* ‘goby’ is cognate with Lat. *gōbius*, Gr. *κωβίος* ‘goby, gudgeon’, cf. Sln. *gúba* ‘barbel (*Barbus plebeius*)’ (Bezla j 1972, 185).

2.2. Lithuanian forms

In Lithuanian, the regular word for ‘gudgeon’ is *gružlỹs* or *gružas*. Nowadays obsolete names are *kilbas* 1, *kilbùkas* 2, *kélb̃as* 3 and *kelbùkas* 2 (LKŽ V 505, 774). The forms with *e*-grade are explicitly marked as loanwords, while the addition “(Pl. *kielb*)” suggests the same for *kilbas*. Fraenkel (1962, 236) also regards these words as borrowings. If Lith. *kilb(uk)as* and *kelb(uk)as* were inherited forms, this would cast doubt upon the etymological connection of **kǫlb-* ‘gudgeon’ and **gǫlb-* (**kǫlp-*) ‘swan’: while the Lithuanian fish-name cannot be separated from Slavic **kǫlb-*, the connection with *gul̃bis* ‘swan’, and therefore with **gǫlb-*, is far from evident. The fish-name has *k-* as opposed to the *g-* in *gul̃bis* (but cf. SCr. *kūp* : *gūb*). Furthermore, the root vocalism is different, as is the tone of the root. Possible arguments against the view that *kilb-/kélb-* was borrowed from Polish would be the acute tone of the root and the fact that it shows ablaut. Since the rule that borrowings have a circumflex is a simplification and the ablaut could easily be secondary, Fraenkel’s claim that we are dealing with a borrowing can be upheld.

⁴ The meaning ‘loach’ (ÉSSJ VII 109) is probably inaccurate.

3. Etymology

There are two traditional etymologies for Baltic *gulb-* ‘swan’ and Slavic **kъlp-* ‘swan, spoonbill’. Almost predictably, one relates to colour, the other to sound. Both are mentioned in Pokorny 1959. The first etymology departs from a root **ǵ^hel(H)-* ‘to shine, glimmer’, which is found in, for instance, Lith. *žālias* ‘green’, *gelšvas* ‘yellowish’, Ru. *zelėnyj* ‘green’, *žėltyj* ‘yellow’ (o.c. 430–431). This etymology strikes me as unsatisfactory. Apart from the bird-name itself, there is no evidence for a root **gul-* and the colour adjectives derived from the root **ǵhel(H)-* denote all sorts of colours except white. Decidedly more attractive is the second etymology, which advocates a connection with MHG *gel(p)fen* ‘to cry, sing, boast’, OS *galpōn* ‘to cry loudly, boast’, OE *gielpan* ‘to boast’. These verbs reflect an extended root **ǵ^hel-b-* from **ǵ^hel-* ‘to call, cry’ (o.c. 428). In an attempt to establish a vocabulary linked to the coastal areas where the swan is frequent, Nepokupnyj (1966, 84) stresses the fact that Sw. dial. *galpa* and Dan. dial. *galpe* refer specifically to the squawking of birds.

A weak spot in Nepokupnyj’s argumentation is the fact that in the area around the Baltic Sea – the area which is indicated on his map with toponyms and hydronyms – it is the mute swan which is frequent. The mute swan is, of course, not completely mute. When feeling threatened, it makes a hissing sound (cf. Ru. лебедь-шипун). Nevertheless, it is obvious that the connection with the Germanic verbs would make more sense with respect to the whooper swan (Ru. лебедь-кликун)⁵. However, as the latter species hibernates in the same regions, the proposed etymology cannot be rejected for purely semantic reasons. Besides, there is a parallel in OIc. *svanr*, OHG *swan* etc. < PIE **suonH-*, cf. Lat. *sonāre* ‘to sound’.

There are several reasons why the second etymology also fails to convince me. In the first place, it does not shed light on the consistent vocalism **-ul-* and the variation between voiced and voiceless stops of the Balto-Slavic bird-name. In the second place, its semantic aspects exclude any connection with the fish-name **kъlbъ*. I find this hard to accept, if only because of the similar geographical distribution of the two words within Slavic. This is the point where we should return to the above-mentioned suggestion of the ĚSSJ and discuss more elaborately the semantic link between the birds designated by **kъlp-* and the gudgeon.

As I have mentioned above, the ĚSSJ disputes that the primary meaning of **kъlpъ* is ‘swan’. It is argued that the name contains an element relating to the conspicuous bill of the spoonbill and the pelican. Since the gudgeon – and also the goby (see above) – has a conspicuous head, its name may contain the same semantic element.

⁵ Bewick’s swan is also much noisier than the mute swan.

I would like to add that the gudgeon and the spoonbill both scour the bottom of rivers and lakes for food. This characteristic could be extended to the swan, however. The way in which swans search the bottom for food without really diving is called *grondelen* in Dutch, cf. *grondel* ‘gudgeon, goby’. In any case, it is semantically plausible that the word for ‘swan, spoonbill, pelican’ and the word for ‘gudgeon’ are derived from the same root.

Pursuing the line of thought of the ÈSSJ, I would like to propose that both **kǝlp-* (**gǝlb-*) and **kǝlb-* have Celtic cognates, viz. OIr. *gulban* ‘beak, sting’, W *gylfin* ‘bird’s bill, beak, snout, sharp-pointed nose’, OCor. *geluin* gl. *rostrum* < PCl. **gulbīno-* (Schrijver 1995, 37, 351), OW *gilb* gl. *foratorium*, W *gylf* (*io-* or *n-*stem) ‘bird’s bill, beak, snout, nose, mouth, sharp-pointed instrument’, Mlr. *gulba* (*n-*stem?) ‘beak, mouth, jaw’. Hitherto these words lacked an acceptable etymology. Pokorny (1959, 367), for instance, assigned them to the root **geleb^h-* ‘to scrape’, which is in conflict with the *u* of the Celtic forms (cf. Stüber 1998, 110). If the Balto-Slavic forms under discussion are indeed cognate with PCl. **gulb-*, we would be dealing with a North European word of possibly non-Indo-European origin. In view of the Celtic forms, Slavic **kǝlp-* (**gǝlb-*)/**kǝlb-* and Baltic *gulb-* must contain an original sequence **ul*, not a syllabic resonant. The assumption of a substratum word⁶, not uncommon in the case of animal names, would render the initial plain velar unproblematic and the existence of variants with one or more voiceless stops less awkward. Possible parallels for the variation between voiced and voiceless stops are OIr. *gabor* ‘goat’, W *gafr* ‘goat, she-goat’ < PCl. **gab-* vs. Lat. *caper* ‘goat, he-goat’, OIc. *hafr* ‘he-goat, billy’ < **kap-* (cf. Pokorny 1959, 529), and Lat. *habēre* ‘to have’ < PIE **g^hab^h-* vs. *capere*, Gr. *κάπτω* ‘to take’ < **kap-* (Gysseling 1987, 60). Since the Balto-Slavic evidence points to a non-acute root **kulp-/gulb-/kulb-*, the root-final *b/p* variation indicates that the substratum language had a non-glottalized stop here (cf. Kuiper 1995, 66, in connection with his “European” substratum).

Finally, I should not leave unmentioned that theoretically **kǝlp-* may be one of Holzer’s Slavic borrowings from “Temematic”. In this extinct Indo-European language, the PIE voiced aspirated stops are allegedly reflected as voiceless stops (Holzer 1989, 13). The regular Balto-Slavic form **gulb-* < PIE **g^hulb^h-* would have been preserved in Baltic and marginally in Slavic. Note that Holzer’s rule according to which PIE **l̥* yields **lo* in Temematic (*l.c.*) precludes the reconstruction of a proto-form **g^hl̥b^h-*.

⁶ Cf. Machek’s qualification: “nejspíše slovo praevropské” (1971³, 241).

ŠIAURĖS EUROPOS *KulP- 'snapas, snukis'

Santrauka

Laikantis aiškinimo, iškelto ĖSSJ, tvirtinama, kad žuvies pavadinimas sl. **kъlbъ* 'gružlys' yra giminiškas paukščio pavadinimui bl. **gulbi(o)s* 'gulbė', sl. **kъlpъ* arba **gъlbъ* 'gulbė, gironvė, pelikanas'. Įrodinėjama, kad šie pavadinimai turi elementą, siejantį su išsiskiriančiu gironvės ar pelikano snapu ir su krintančia į akis gružlio galva. Tai reikštų, kad 'gulbė' nėra pirmą kartą paukščio pavadinimo reikšmė. Šią hipotezę svariai paremia keltų šaknis **gulb-* 'paukščio snapas', iki šiol neturėjusi priimtinos etimologijos. Šiaurės Europos šaknies **KulP-*, kurios kilmė greičiausiai neindoeuropietiška, rekonstravimas padėtų pašalinti formalias kliūtis, manifestuojamas baltų ir slavų kalbų formų, ypač skardžiųjų ir dusliųjų priebalsių įvairavimą.

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