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## OLD PRUSSIAN *moazo* 'MOTHER'S SISTER', *mosuco* 'WEASEL' AND RELATED WORDS

### 1. Weasel and taboo.

In his article published in "Baltistica" Anatolij Nepokupnyj (2002, 35–43) reviews the origin of the Old Prussian term *mosuco* 'weasel, gl. wesele [= G. Wiesel]' (EV 662). He takes it as a diminutive form derived from the Old Prussian kinship term *moazo* 'mother's sister, gl. Mume [= German *Muhme*]' (EV 178). He explains the semantic change 'little mother's sister' > 'weasel' by taboo, stressing that the same process appears in the German dialects (cf. G. *Muhme* f. 'mother's sister, elder relative' > G. dial. *Mühmelein* f. 'weasel') and the Bulgarian ones (cf. Bulg. лѐля f. 'father's or mother's sister; elder relative' > Bulg. dial. лѐля f. 'weasel', also dimin. лѐличка f. 'id.', attested in Bebrovo and Elensko, see BER III 357, s.v. лѐля<sup>3</sup>).

Nepokupnyj rejects completely the traditional explanation of OPruss. *mosuco* 'weasel' as "a small animal" (cf. OPruss. *massais* adv. 'little, few / weniger', Lith. *māžas* adj. 'small, little', Latv. *mazs* 'id.'). which was suggested by Berneker (1896, 308) and later repeated by Trautmann (1910, 376), Endzelin (1943, 212), Mažiulis (1981, 288) and Euler (1985, 93). Nepokupnyj's position seems generally correct. As it was demonstrated by Kolbuszewski (1990, 42), the traditional derivation is doubtful not only from the phonological point of view (OPruss. *mosuco* must contain a long vowel in the root, which does not occur in the Baltic adjective \**mažas* 'small, little'), but also from the lexical one (the Old Prussian adjective for 'small, little' was *likuts* and not \**mažas*).

The problem of taboo in the weasel nomenclature is not a new question. It was known and discussed many times. Thirty years ago the late Prof. Wanda Budziszewska (1974, 154) said the following words<sup>1</sup>:

<sup>1</sup> Two footnotes are omitted in this quotation. The following abbreviations was used by W. Budziszewska: BD – T. Stojęć v, Rodopski rečnik, Bŭlgarska dialektologija proučvanija i materiali, II; V, Sofia, 1965, 1970; Gust – B. Gustawicz, Podania, przesady, gadki i nazwy ludowe w dziedzinie przyrody. – Zbiór wiadomości do antropologii krajowej, V, Kraków, 1881; Mosz – K. Moszyński, Kultura ludowa Słowian, I–II, Kraków, 1929–1939; Pom – W. Pomianowska, zróżnicowanie gwar południowosłowiańskich w świetle faktów słowotwórczych, Warszawa, 1970.

Charakter tabu mają również w bułgarskim i macedońskim nazwy łasicy, stąd zach. bułg. i mac. *nevestulka* (dosł. ‘panna młoda, młoda żona, synowa’), bułg. *bulčica* (dosł. ‘młoda mężatka’), *kađynka* (dosł. ‘pani’, Pom 50), dial. (z Rodopów) *kal’mànka* (dosł. ‘kuma’), BD 179, dial. sch. *kumica* (Pom *loc. cit.*, dosł. ‘kuma’). Zapożyczeniem z bułg. jest rum. *nevăstică* ‘łasica’, por. też ngr. lud. *nifca*, demin. od *vúμφη* ‘młoda mężatka, panna młoda’, pot. też tur. *gelencik* m.in. ‘łasica’ – *gelin* ‘młoda mężatka, panna młoda’ oraz węg. *menyét* ‘łasica’ (*meny* ‘synowa’ – Mosz II 1, s. 565). Nazwy te mogą pozostawać w związku z wierzeniem, że łasica jest z pochodzenia młodą kobietą (Mosz *loc. cit.*). Bułgarzy i Macedończycy, a zwłaszcza kobiety, bardzo się obawiają łasicy. Starożytni Grecy uważali, że ukazanie się jej przynosi nieszczęście. W Polsce w Starym Sączu przemawiano do łasicy pieszczotliwie: *pani lasia* (Gust 148). Podobne wierzenia i nazwy znane są również w zachodniej Europie.

“The names for ‘weasel’ in Bulgarian and Macedonian demonstrate also a character of taboo, hence West Bulg. and Mac. *nevestulka* (lit. ‘bride, young wife, daughter-in-law’), Bulg. *bulčica* (lit. ‘young married woman’), *kađynka* (lit. ‘lady’, Pom 50), dial. (from the Rodope mountains) *kal’mànka* (lit. ‘godmother’), BD 179, SC. dial. *kumica* (Pom *loc. cit.*, lit. ‘godmother’). A borrowing from Bulgarian is Roum. *nevăstică* ‘weasel’, cf. also Mod. Gk. folk *nyfítsa* [*vúφίτσα* ‘weasel’], a diminutive of *vúμφη* ‘young married woman, bride’; compare also Turkish Osm. *gelencik* ‘weasel’ – *gelin* ‘young married woman, bride’ and Hung. *menyét* ‘weasel’ (*meny* ‘daughter-in-law’ – Mosz II 1, 565). These names can be in the connection with beliefs that the weasel is a young woman in origin (Mosz *loc. cit.*). The Bulgarians and the Macedonians, especially women, are very afraid of weasel. The ancient Greeks considered that weasel’s appearance brings unhappiness. In Poland in the town Stary Sącz one spoke affectionately to weasel: *pani lasia* ‘lady Łasia’ (Gust 148). Similar beliefs and names are also known in the West Europe”.

(my translation)

It is worth noticing that many different European names for ‘weasel’ derive from some analogous diminutive formations denoting ‘(young) woman’. A similar development occurs in a number of Romance languages, see e.g. Lat. *domina*, also *domna* f. ‘lady’ > Ital. *donna*, Port. *dona* f. ‘id.’ > Ital. dimin. *donnola* f. ‘weasel’, Port. dimin. *doninha* f. ‘id.’ (Meyer-Lübke 1935, 245, No. 2733); Lat. *commāter* f. ‘godmother’ > Sp. *comadre* f. ‘midwife; mother or godmother with respect to each other’ > Sp. dimin. *comadreja* f. ‘weasel’ (Meyer-Lübke 1935, 197, No. 2082). There is some reason to say that the weasel may be named not only after ‘mother’s sister’, but also a number of different terms denoting ‘young woman’ or ‘distinguished woman’. What is more, the exact East Baltic equivalents of OPruss. *mouazo* (f.) ‘mother’s sister, aunt’ demonstrate a little different semantics, see Lith. *móša* (f.) ‘husband’s sister, sister-in-law’ and Latv. *māsa* (f.) ‘sister’ (Fraenkel 1962, 464; Buivydienė 1987, 22; Smoczyński 2001, 126). If the Old Prussian term for ‘weasel’ derives from the Baltic term for ‘sister-in-law’, as Nepokupnyj believes that it does, then the etymology and the primitive semantics of this Baltic term of relationship should be also explained. Thus I intend to review the origin of Baltic *\*māšā* and also to discuss the origin of the taboo.

2. OPrus. *mosuco* and Slavic *\*lasъka* 'weasel': Is there any etymological connection between them?

In his discussion on OPrus. *mosuco* Nepokupnyj ignores the interesting etymology given fifteen years ago by Stanisław Franciszek Kolbuszewski (1990, 42–47), the late Polish balticist, according to which the Old Prussian word for 'weasel', *mosuco*, represents a borrowing from OPol. (XVI c.) *laska* 'weasel' (< Slavic *\*lasъka*, see Sławski 1975–1982, 21–22). The similarity of the Old Prussian *mosuco* and Northern Slavic *\*lasъka* is perfect semantically, but not phonetically (both these words, though built analogically, show different phoneme in the initial position). Kolbuszewski tried to explain the different initial phoneme in Old Prussian and Old Polish by assuming the emendation *\*wosuco* for EV 662 *mosuco* (gl. wesele) and by suggesting the development *\*l > l > ɥ* in some North Polish dialects (see Kolbuszewski 1990, 46).

Kolbuszewski's attempt is hardly acceptable for reason of an unnecessary emendation *\*wosuco*, but the suggested connection between the Old Prussian and Slavic terms for 'weasel' is undoubtedly noteworthy. This connection should not be abandoned without discussion. Therefore it is necessary to explain what kind of relation connects the Old Prussian and Slavic terms for 'weasel'. In other words, we must begin our research with explaining the origin of the Common Slavic term in question.

### 3. The etymology of the Slavic *\*lasъka* (f.) 'weasel'.

The Common Slavic term for 'weasel' can be reconstructed in two alternative forms: *\*lasica* (f.) and *\*lasъka* (f.). The former one contains the well known feminine suffix *-ica* (< IE. *\*-ī-kā*), which originates by adding the diminutive suffix *\*-kā* to the primitive *ī*-stem denoting the females of the wild animals, cf. Slavic *\*vblĭci-ca* (f.) 'she-wolf' < IE. *\*włk\*ī-* (f.) 'id.', cf. OInd. *vṛkī-* (f.) 'she-wolf', ON. *ylgr* (f.) 'id.' (< Gmc. *\*wulgīz*), Lith. *vilkė* f. 'she-wolf' (Pokorny 1959, 1178–1179). The latter one demonstrates the popular Slavic (diminutive) suffix *\*-ъka*, which derives securely from IE. *\*-ukā* (f.), see e.g. Sl. dial. *\*ortъka* (f.) 'duck' < IE. *\*anHt-* (f.) 'id.', cf. Lith. *antuka* (f.) 'snipe / Schnepfe' (Trautmann 1923, 10; Fraenkel 1962, 11–12). These two suffixes may easily appear with the same animal name, e.g. Pol. *kozica* (f.) 'wild mountainous goat; chamois' and Pol. dimin. *kózka* (f.) 'young she-goat' (< *\*kozъka*) in opposition to Pol. *koza* (f.) 'she-goat' (Sławski 1975–1982, 22). It is impossible to say which form is older and more archaic. However, it is clear that both forms in question derive from the Common Slavic root *\*las-* (or perhaps *\*ōls-*, if we assume, following Bańkowski (2000, 89), the primitive *\*oRT*-shape of the root in question).

Now I would like to present the Slavic lexical material:

(A) Slavic *\*lasica* (f.) 'weasel': ChSl. *ласица* 'Mustela'; SC. *lāsica, lāsica* (f.) 'weasel'; Sloven. *lāsica* (f.) 'id.'; Bulg. *ласица* (f.), Maced. *ласица* (f.) 'id.'; OCz. *lasiceč*, Cz. *lasice* 'weasel, *Mustela nivalis* L.'; Slovak *lasica* 'id.'; HSorb. dial. *lasyca*, LSorb. *lasyca* 'weasel'; OPol. and Pol. *lasica* (f.) 'weasel, *Mustela nivalis* L.'; Slovenian *lasēca* (f.) 'weasel'; ORus. *ласица* 'weasel or polecat', also 'lizard', Rus. dial. *ласица* 'weasel'; BRus. *ласица* 'weasel'; Ukr. *ласиця* 'weasel', also 'squirrel' (see Sławski 1975–1982, 15–17; Trubačev 1987, 35). The variant forms beginning with the prefixes *\*vb-* and *\*podb-* occur in many Slavic dialects, e.g. OCz. *vlasicē* (f.) 'weasel'; SC. dial. (1670) *ulāsica*, Bulg. dial. *vlāsica* 'weasel', SC. dial. *podlasica*, Sloven. *podlāsica* (f.) 'id.'

(B) Slavic *\*lasъka* (f.) 'weasel': SC. dial. *lāska* (f.) 'a kind of animal similar to weasel', dimin. *lāsčē, -ete* (n.) 'young of the weasel' (note the diminutive suffix *\*-ēt-*); Cz. dial. *laska, vlaska, ḡaska* (f.) 'weasel'; Slovak *laska* (f.) 'id.'; LSorb. *laska* (f.) 'weasel, *Putorius vulgaris* Rich.'; OPol. *laska* (f.) 'weasel, *Mustela nivalis* L.', Pol. *laska* 'weasel'; Slovenian *laska* (f.) 'id.'; Russ. *ласка* (f.) 'weasel'; BRus. *ласка* (f.) 'weasel' (see Sławski 1975–1982, 21–22; Trubačev 1987, 37–38, s.v. *laska* II<sup>2</sup>; Vasmer 1997, 481–482). With prefixes *\*vb-* and *\*podb-*: Cz. dial., Morav. *vlaska* (f.) 'weasel', Sloven. *podlāska*, SC. dial. *podlāska* (f.) 'id.'

(C) Slavic *\*lasa* (f.) 'weasel': SC. *lāsā* 'id.'. Note, however, that this Serbo-Croatian word can be a back-formation.

The exact equivalents of Slavic *\*lasъka* (f.) 'weasel' are attested in the Iranian subgroup of the Indo-Iranian languages:

(D) Iranian *\*rāšukā- / \*lāšukā-* (f.) 'a small animal of the weasel family, esp. weasel or marten': NPers. *rāsū* 'weasel', also 'sable'; Khowar *rušk* 'marten'; Yidgha *lū, l'ū* 'pine-marten'. The loss of Iran. *\*-š-* is regular in Yidgha, see e.g. Yidgha *yu* 'ear' < Iran. *\*gauša-* 'id.', cf. OPers. *gauša-* 'ear', Pahl. *gōš*, Kurd. *gūh*, Baluchi *gōš*, Sogd. *γwš* 'ear', Yaghn. *γuš*, Ossetic Iron *γos*, Dig. *qus* 'ear'<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> It should be correctly written as *\*las-ъka* (see Sławski 1975–1982: 21–22), as suggested by the variant form *\*las-ica* (f.) 'weasel', cf. Bulg. *ласица* f. 'weasel, *Mustela nivalis* L.', Maced. *ласица* (f.) 'id.', Slovenian *lāsica* (f.), Polish *lasica* = *laska* (f.) 'weasel' and so on (see Trubačev 1987, 35). Differently Bańkowski (2000, 89), who proposes the Common Slavic archetype *\*fols-ъka*, referring to the Slavic name for 'elk' (sic!).

<sup>3</sup> The development of Iran. *\*-š-* in the position between the vowels is one of the most typical features in the East Iranian languages. In the South-Eastern Iranian dialects this phoneme yields the following reflexes: *-ž-* (Pashto *γwaz* 'ear' < Iran. *\*gauša-*), *-g-* (Shughni *γūg* 'ear'), *-l-* or *-l'* (Sarikoli *γawl*, Ishkashim *γūl, γūl'*, Sanglichi *γoļ, γoļ'* 'ear'), *-y-* (Munjani *γūy* 'ear'), *-w-* or *-o-* (Roshani, Khufi *γōw*, Yidgha *yu*, Bartangi, Oroshori *γū, γū'*, Bajui *γūw*, Khotan Saka *gguva-*, Yazghulami *γwōw-* 'ear'), see Oranskij (1979, 116 & 121); cf. also Morgenstierne (1927, 29; 1974, 35).

The connection between the Slavic *\*las-ьka* and Iranian *\*rāš-ukā-* / *\*lāš-ukā-* is perfect from the view-point of semantics, phonology and word-formation<sup>4</sup>. Though the feminine suffix *\*-ukā* is easily identifiable in both these forms, the primitive Indo-European root cannot be established with certainty. On the basis of the Slavic and Iranian names for 'weasel' we may suggest that the initial phoneme *\*l* was followed by the long vowel *\*ā* or *\*ō* (long IE. *\*ē* is excluded from the Slavic data) and finally by a consonant cluster containing a palatal stop (IE. *\*k̑*, *\*ġ* or *\*ġh*) and a voiceless spirant (IE. *\*s* or *\*p*), as the Iranian forms strongly suggest (note Iran. *\*-š-*). The original shape of the Indo-European root may be reconstructed in different way, e.g. *\*lāks-*, *\*lāk̑p-*, *\*lōks-*, *\*lōk̑p-*, *\*lāġs-*, *\*lōġs-* and so on.

The Indo-European item can hardly go back to the verbal root *\*lāk̑-* 'to jump, to dance' (as suggested by Mann 1984–1987, 662) or to the nominal root *\*loh, k̑-* 'weasel' (as proposed by Blažek 1982, 60 and by Mallory and Adams 1997, 638). The Iranian forms show safely the phoneme *\*-š-* (derived from IE. *\*ks*, *k̑p*, *\*ġs* etc.) and not simple *\*-s-* (< IE. *\*k̑*) in the root.

It is, however, possible to follow Zubatý's suggestion, according to which the Slavic (and Iranian) terms for 'weasel' derive from the "coloured" basis, attested in Latvian *luōss* adj. 'yellow-grey, fallow' (as if from Baltic *\*lōsas* or rather *\*lōšas*). Sławiński (1975–1982, 16) quotes an adjective *\*lasъ* residually attested in some Slavic languages, e.g. Ukr. dial. *ласуї* adj. 'black or red-haired with the white belly or breast (of cow) / czarny lub ryży z białym brzuchem albo piersią (o krowie)'; Bulg. dial. *лас* adj. 'having glittering, black hair (of horse) / o lśniacej, czarnej sierści (o koniu)'. Cf. also derivatives: Rus. *лása*, dial. *ласá* (f.) 'glittering blot, spot / lśniaca się plama, smuga'; SC. *lása* 'a goat having colour of hair similar to weasel / koza zblížona kolorem sierści do lasicy'; Sloven. dial. *lasa* (f.) 'small mark of a different colour; birth-mark'. Blažek (1992, 60) assumes that such a "colourful" basis may be a common semantic motivation for the Slavic and Iranian terms for 'weasel'. If Latv. *luōss* derives really from Baltic *\*lōšas* (= Slavic *\*lasъ*) and further from IE. *\*lōks-*, *\*lōk̑p-* or the like, then its comparison with the Slavic *\*las-ьka* and Iranian *\*rāš-ukā-* / *\*lāš-ukā-* (both 'weasel') seems highly convincing. Thus the motivation for naming the weasel in Slavic and Iranian may be easily found in East Baltic, as well as in some residual Slavic forms.

<sup>4</sup> This Slavic-Iranian comparison is accepted by some Slavists and Indo-Europeanists, e.g. by Moszyński (1957, 132), Mann (1984–1987, 662) and Blažek (1992, 60). Mallory and Adams (1997, 638) lists the root *\*loh, k̑-* 'weasel' with the question mark, adding the following words: "If all these words belong together and are related by inheritance rather than borrowing, then there is evidence for a word of the center and east of the IE world. The Slavic evidence may show crossing of two originally independent words, *\*loh, k̑-* and *\*(h<sub>2</sub>)uisōlo-*". They quote also Latv. *luōss* with the wrong meaning 'weasel' against of 'yellow-grey, fallow'.

#### 4. Old Prussian *moazo* and related words.

The traditional etymology derives Old Prussian *moazo* (f.) ‘mother’s sister, aunt’ and its East Baltic cognates (cf. Lith. *móša* f. ‘husband’s sister, sister-in-law’, Latv. *māsa* f. ‘sister’) from the hypocoristic root \**mā* ‘mother’ (cf. Fraenkel 1962, 464; Karulis 1992, 570), preserved perfectly in OLith. *mótē*, Lith. *mótina*, Latv. *māte* (f.) ‘mother’, by means of suffixal *-sā-* (see Buivydienė 1987, 22; Smoczyński 2001, 126). If this explanation is correct, then the meaning attested in the Old Prussian item must be, in fact, original. However, a different possibility, according to which the connection with the Baltic (and Indo-European) term for ‘mother’ is secondary, must be also taken into account.

Here I would like to follow this alternative way of thinking. I believe that the Baltic forms may be eventually derived from the nominal root \**maġh<sub>x</sub>s-* ‘woman, lady’ by means of the feminine *ā*-stem. The Indo-European root \**maġh<sub>x</sub>s-* appear in Old Indic *máhiṣī-* (f., *ī*-stem) ‘woman of high rank’, especially ‘the first or consecrated wife of a king; queen’, Pali *mahesī-* (f.) ‘chief wife’, Prakrit *mahiṣī-* (f.) ‘king’s chief wife’, Singhalese *mehesi* ‘queen’ (Turner 1966, 573, No. 9962, 9972). It is also attested in the Iranian area, cf. Khotan Saka *mijse* ‘woman’ (< Iran. \**maziš-ī-*) and Pashto *māšō* ‘maternal aunt’ (as if from \**maziš-ā-*).

The protoform \**maġh<sub>x</sub>s-ā-* (f., *ā*-stem) ‘woman, lady’ may be securely suggested as an archetype for the Baltic forms such as OPrus. *moazo* (f.) ‘mother’s sister, aunt’, Lith. *móša* (f.) ‘husband’s sister, sister-in-law’, Latv. *māsa* (f.) ‘sister’. The development of \**maġh<sub>x</sub>s-ā-* > Balto-Slavic \**māzh<sub>x</sub>s-ā-* > \**māžsā* (note the lengthening of the root vowel caused by the loss of a laryngeal *h<sub>x</sub>*) > Baltic \**māšā* seems quite regular and perfect from the phonological point of view. Also the semantic aspects of the suggested etymology are acceptable.

The above-mentioned derivation explains the phoneme *-š-* in the Lithuanian term of relationship. On the other hand, the traditional etymology, which introduces the alleged suffix *-sā-*, is hardly explicable from the view-point of the Indo-European and Baltic word-formation. It is clear now that the relation between Baltic \**māšā* (f.) ‘sister-in-law, relative woman’ and Baltic \**mātē* (f.) ‘mother’ is secondary rather than original.

#### 5. Weasel and young woman: the reflections on the possible origins of the popular thinking.

The weasels were domesticated and intentionally bred in the ancient Greece. They were treated like cats in modern times. The common European myth, according to which every weasel is similar to a young woman, seems to be born in the classical

Greece. The motivation for such an identification ('weasel' = 'young woman') has appeared in some phase of the development of the Greek language.

The suggested identification of 'weasel' and 'young woman' was caused by two following reasons:

Firstly, the Greek language has preserved the Indo-European term of relationship \*ǵʰh<sub>x</sub>-ōs- (f., originally *ōs*-stem, not *ū*-stem) as γάλως (gen. sg. γάλωος) 'husband's sister, brother's wife', dial. (Hesych.) γάλις (f., *i*-stem) 'id.', cf. Lat. *glōs*, gen. sg. *glōris* (f., *ōs*-stem) 'husband's sister, brother's wife', Slavic \*zъly (f., orig. *ōs*-stem, secondarily *ū*-stem) 'husband's sister', e.g. OChSl. *zъlvna* (f.) 'id.' (Witczak 1998).

Secondly, the Greeks introduced a new term for 'weasel', γαλήη (f.), dimin. γαλιδεύς, deriving it from the Indo-European term for 'mouse' or 'dormouse', cf. Lat. *glīs*, gen. sg. *glīris* 'dormouse', OInd. *giri-*, *girikā-* (f.) 'mouse', Ormuri *gilak* 'rat', Bakhtiari *girza* 'id.', Thracian ἄρ-γίλος (m.) 'mouse', orig. 'field-mouse' (< IE. \*ǵʰh<sub>x</sub>-i-). Note, that only the Greeks introduced the semantic change: 'mouse, dormouse' > 'weasel'.

These two Hellenic terms, γάλως (gen. sg. γάλωος) 'husband's sister, brother's wife', dial. (Hesych.) γάλις 'id.' and γαλήη (f.), dimin. γαλιδεύς 'weasel', have been secondarily connected with each other in some period of the development of the Greek language and culture. On the basis of such a contamination the weasel was identified with any young woman. This belief became highly popular in the Hellenic world, especially at the Balkan Peninsula, hence it penetrated into a part of the Baltic area. Later it went to Italy and to the Romance languages. In my opinion, all the modern examples of naming the 'weasel' after a '(young or honoured) woman' (e.g. Mod. Gk. *νυφίτσα* f. 'weasel' < Anc. Gk. *νύμφη* f. 'girl'; Ital. *donnola* f. 'weasel' < It. *domna* 'lady'; Hung. *menyét* 'weasel' < Hung. *meny* 'daughter-in-law', etc. etc.) are reflexes of an ancient tradition, which did not exist in Indo-European (IE. \*ǵʰh<sub>x</sub>-i- 'mouse, dormouse' and IE. \*ǵʰh<sub>x</sub>-ōs- 'husband's sister' are not etymologically related) and which was born in the Greek mind.

## 6. Old Prussian *mosuco* 'weasel': archaism or innovation?

It is generally accepted that the Slavic word for 'weasel', \**lasъka*, cannot be disassociated from the Iranian forms \**rāš-ukā-* / \**lāš-ukā-* (f.) denoting 'weasel or an animal similar to weasel'. The Old Prussian term *mosuco* (f.) should not be isolated from the Slavic and Iranian forms. It seems to be identical as to the semantic aspects and very similar as to the shape (the only *differentia specifica* is the initial phoneme *m-* against the expected \**l-*).

In my opinion, the primitive West Baltic term for 'weasel' was identical with Slavic \**lasъka* (f.) 'id.' and Iranian \**rāšukā* / \**lāšukā* (f.) 'id.' and it contained original \**l-* in

the initial position, deriving from the Baltic adjective *\*lōšas* 'yellow-grey, fallow', attested in Latv. *luōss* adj. 'id.'

In some period of the historical development of the Old Prussian language the ancient identification of 'weasel' as a 'young woman' was also introduced into the West Baltic area. This is why the West Baltic term *\*lāšucā* (= Slavic *\*lasъka*, Iran. *\*Rāš-ukā-*) has been early interpreted as OPrus. *mosuco* 'weasel' by the obvious influence of the Old Prussian term *moazo* (f.) 'mother's sister, aunt'. By analogy, the old Indo-European term for 'foal, colt', *\*mand-iyom* (n.), has been secondarily reinterpreted as OPrus. *maldian* (n.) 'id.' by influence of the adjective *\*maldas* 'young' (the change is evidently caused by the so called folk or popular etymology).

Some researchers, including A. Nepokupnyj, believe that this phonological change or perhaps a lexical innovation was caused by taboo. It is not completely impossible, but I think that some contamination of the supposed West Baltic term *\*lāšucā* (f.) 'weasel' and the Baltic *\*māšā* (f.) 'sister-in-law, relative woman' appeared rather as an element of the ancient tradition, according to which each weasel was identified as a young woman.

My conclusion is the following: OPrus. *mosuco* (f.) 'weasel' seems to be an archaic reflex of the Indo-European term *\*lōks-ukā* (or the like), denoting 'weasel or an animal similar to weasel'. On the other hand, it may be treated as an innovative form, to which the initial phoneme *\*m-* was introduced by the influence of Baltic *\*māšā* (f.) 'sister-in-law, relative woman' (< IE. *\*māghl̥s-ā-*) because of the ancient folk beliefs on the weasel as a 'young woman'.

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