

LITHUANIAN *MĖSÀ*

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§0 The Standard Lithuanian word *mėsà* 'flesh, meat' generally plays no role of importance in literature discussing the etymology of the Balto-Slavic word for 'flesh, meat', the prevailing view being that it is a borrowing from Slavic. In a work such as Vasmer's etymological dictionary of Russian, the form *mėsà* is not even mentioned at all¹. In this article, I shall once more argue in favour of the hypothesis that *mėsà* reflects an original root noun (cf. Derksen 1996, 23; 1997, 25; Kortlandt 1985, 118). An attempt will be made to clarify the relationship between *mėsà* and the Baltic and Slavic cognates which reflect a nasal element.

§1 Among the Baltic words for 'flesh, meat', Lith. *mėsà* stands out because it lacks the nasal element which is present in S. Žem. *mensà* (Skaidvilė, Vainutas, Kaltinėnai), Latv. *mīesa* (< **mensā*) and OPr. *menso* (Elb. Voc.), *mensā* (Ench.). According to Zinkevičius, the form *me·sà* in the Žemaitian dialect of the fishermen of the Couronian coast and the West Aukštaitian dialect of Smalininkai may reflect **mensā* as well (1966, 79). Unlike *mėsà*, these forms are in agreement with the Slavic evidence as to the shape of the root, cf. OCS. *męso*, Ru. *mjáso*, Pl. *mięso*, SCr. *měso*, Sln. *mesô* < **męso* (c). No doubt, this circumstance is primarily responsible for the fact that *mėsà* came to be regarded as a borrowing. Trubačëv (1992, 9), for instance, states that it is not expedient to explain the fact that the latter form does not contain a nasal in another way than by assuming that it is a borrowing from East Slavic, in all likelihood from Byelorussian.

The suggestion that *mėsà* may not be an original Baltic form is already found in the 19th century (cf. Pedersen 1895, 56; Brugmann-Delbrück 1897, 389). Indeed, Mikkola, writing in 1897, states that *mėsà* was commonly regarded as a borrowing from Russian (1897, 41). In the following decades several publications appeared which

¹ Neither are, for that matter, Lithuanian dialect forms reflecting a nasal.

maintained this view. Būga argued that in view of Žem. *māsa* (not **miesà*), the Aukštaitian form *mēsà* must have entered the Lithuanian language fairly recently (1924, XXXIII = RR III, 47)². Trautmann came up with a slightly modified hypothesis, proposing that an inherited form **mēsà* had been influenced by Byelorussian (1923, 178), a type of solution which had already been dismissed by Mikkola (l.c.). A Byelorussian origin of *mēsà* was also favoured by Skardžius (1931, 129).

The Žemaitian forms which some authors mentioned usually served to illustrate that a form corresponding in a more straightforward manner to its equivalents within Balto-Slavic had survived into Lithuanian, thus stressing the isolated position of the form *mēsà*. Specht, for instance, clearly stated that, while *mēsà* was commonly considered a loan from Byelorussian, Žem. *meisa* reflected **mensa* and was inherited from Indo-European (Baranowski 1922, 485). Other Žemaitian forms were *mēsà* (Salantai) and *māsà* (Kvėdarna), which Skardžius held to reflect **mensā* through an intermediate stage **meisa* (1931, 129). Here I must add that, according to Zinkevičius, the origin of the Žemaitian variants *mēsà* (*mēsà*), *mēsà* is unclear (1966, 79). Nevertheless, the forms which I cited at the beginning of this article make clear that there is evidence for a root **mens-*. Though it has been suggested that the nasal of Žem. *mensà* may be due to Polish influence (Trubačėv 1992, 9), I see no reason why we should not be dealing with a genuinely Lithuanian form. Neither do I believe that OPr. *menso*, *mensā* and Latv. *miesa* are borrowings from Polish and Russian, respectively (Brückner 1927, 336; v.d. Osten-Sacken 1913/14, 231). As far as I can see, the only foundation for these attempts to explain away all Baltic equivalents of Slavic **mēsò* as borrowings is the reasoning that if *mēsà* is not inherited from Indo-European, then neither are the other Baltic forms.

§2 Before I discuss any alternative theories for the origin of Lith. *mēsà*, I would like to pay attention to its cognates outside Balto-Slavic. In Sanskrit, we find a neuter *o*-stem *māṃsá-* 'flesh, meat',

² See also RR II, 692 (the manuscript presumably dates from 1918), where Būga claims that *mēsà* must be a borrowing from Russian in view of the discrepancy with the Žemaitian evidence. Some years before Būga still believed that *mēsà* had originated from **mēmsà*, which form had yielded *mensà* in Žemaitian (1907, 433 = RR I, 113).

which in the Rigveda occurs only once. Furthermore, we find in the Rigveda the compounds *māṃsabhikṣā* 'begging for meat as alms' and *māṃspācana-* (f. *-ī-*) 'used for cooking meat', as well as an Asg. ntr. *māḥ* (2x). Considering the fact that in Classical Sanskrit there is a neuter root noun *māṃs-*, of which according to Pāṇini all case forms except the NAsg. du. could be formed (Wackernagel 1930, 250), it seems obvious that the aforementioned form *māḥ* is the NAsg. of *māṃs-* and that it continues **mēms* (cf. Mayrhofer 1994, 344).

The absence of the nasal in Sanskrit *māḥ* has been adduced as evidence for a PIE sound law **-VN̄s#* > **-V̄s#* (cf. Schindler 1973, 154). If this is correct, one might argue that the root of Lith. *mēsà* ultimately continues a form **mēs*. In fact, Johannes Schmidt already stated that Lith. *mēsà* indicates that the loss of the nasal in Skt. *māḥ* was anterior to the disintegration of PIE (1883, 340). For decades to come the assumption that in Indo-European an alternative root **mēs-* had evolved from **mēms-* served to provide Lith. *mēsà* with a straightforward Indo-European etymology until it was gradually superseded by the theory that it is a borrowing.

As I said above, the fact that within Balto-Slavic the shape of the root of Lith. *mēsà* is isolated underlies the desire to dispose of this word as a borrowing. In the scholarly literature one encounters few tangible arguments for this hypothesis, however. A rather obvious argument would be the circumflex intonation of *mēsà* (AP 2), which according to the classical doctrine is incompatible with IE. **mēs-*, as such a reconstruction would yield **mēs-*. This observation was indeed made by v.d. Osten-Sacken (1914, 231). Another scholar who paid attention to the intonation of *mēsà* was Meillet. Though he noticed that the circumflex did not constitute a problem if one assumed that the word was a borrowing, he could not believe that a root so similar to its Latvian and Old Prussian equivalents had been borrowed (1902, 198-199). He therefore attributed the circumflex intonation of *mēsà*, which he considered to be based on a neuter NAsg. **mēs* (OPr. *mensā* < **mems-*), to the loss of the nasal resonant, cf. *akmuõ*, *duktẽ* < **-ōn*, **-ēr*.

Since I adhere to the view that lengthened grade vowels regularly received the circumflex intonation in Balto-Slavic, there is no need for me to resort to a special rule in order to establish *mēsà* as an inherited word. Of course, the circumflex of *mēsà* does nothing to disprove the theory that it is a borrowing either. However, it is

damaging to Karaliūnas' reconstruction $*h_2me-h_2ms- > *mēms(o)-$, a reduplicated root noun from $*h_2ems-/h_2mes-$ 'to create carnally', which would underlie Lith. dial. *mensà*, Latv. *miesa* and OPr. *menso*, *mensā* (1995, 135, 142)³. Karaliūnas apparently assumes that $*h_2me-h_2ms- > *mēms- > *mens-$, i.e. the shortening of the vowel in this constellation prevented the diphthong from becoming acute. If one does not link the acute intonation to vowel length but to the presence of a glottal element ($*h_2me-h_2ms- > *meHms-$), it is unclear why the reflex of the laryngeal would be lost. I would rather expect forms reflecting either $*mén-$ or $*mēs-$. A parallel may be offered by the Baltic endings of the Apl. of the \bar{a} - and \bar{e} -stems, cf. Lith. $-às < *-aHs < BSl. *-aHns^4$, with an early loss of the nasal in a final syllable, against $-ásias$ next to $-ósias$ in the compound adjective (Derksen 1997, 24-25). Another objection against Karaliūnas' etymology is the fact that in Sanskrit we would expect $māḥ - < Iir. *maHas- < PIE *meHms-$ in all case forms instead of NAsg. $māḥ$ vs. $māms-$ (cf. Beekes 1982, 56).

§3 In the present article I would like to revive the theory that *mēsà* continues a PIE root noun $*mēms-$, which in view of the Sanskrit evidence had lengthened grade throughout the whole paradigm. Unlike most earlier protagonists of this view, however, I am inclined to separate the loss of the nasal in the NAsg. $māḥ$ from the identical development in Baltic. Maintaining the parallel with the Apl. of the \bar{a} - and \bar{e} -stems, I assume that in Proto-East Baltic the nasal was lost in the NAsg. $*mēns$. It was retained in polysyllabic forms, including the plural $*mēnsaH$, which had collective meaning. In inlaut the constellation $*-VNs-$ then merged with $*-VNs-$, cf. S. Žem. *mensà*, where the n is still a segmental phoneme. In most Aukštaitian dialects, the NAsg. $*mēs$, which may be compared to OPr. *seyr* 'heart' $< *kērd$, was preserved long enough to bring about the analogical elimination of the nasal in the collective $*mēsà < *mensaH$ (cf. Schmidt 1883, 340), which everywhere in Baltic is inflected as an \bar{a} -stem⁵. In

³ As Karaliūnas does not mention *mēsà*, we may assume that he subscribes to the view that it is a loanword.

⁴ I prefer this scenario to the view that the absence of a nasal in this ending dates back to PIE (cf. below).

⁵ Unless OPr. *menso* (Elb. Voc.) is a ntr. pl. (cf. Mažiulis 1996, 130), which seems rather implausible.

Slavic, the neuter root noun $*mēms-$ was thematized. Note that besides forms reflecting $*mēsò$, we also find Ru. dial. *mjasá* ntr. pl., Byel. dial. *mjása* ntr. sg./f. sg. and SCr. dial. *mésa* f. sg. 'flesh, meat' (Trubačëv 1992, 8).

§4 In the preceding paragraphs I departed from the traditional PIE reconstruction $*mēms-$, tacitly replacing it with $*mēns-$ for the later reconstructed stages. Since Skt. *māms(á)*-, Toch. B *misa* pl. t. f., Arm. *mis* and Alb. *mish* 'flesh, meat' give no information as to the place of articulation of the nasal, the m of the former reconstruction seems to be based solely on Goth. *mimz* 'κρέα' (I Kor. 8: 13)⁶. The latter reconstruction is required by OPr. *menso*, *mensā*, Žem. *mensà* and Latv. *miesa*, cf. Lith. *tamsūs* 'dark', Latv. *tūmsa* 'darkness'⁷ (thus already Mikkola 1897, 242). Insofar as this discrepancy has received attention, the *communis opinio* seems to be that Baltic has innovated. A clear statement on this issue was made by Karaliūnas, who claims that $*-ms-$ became $*-ns-$ in Proto-Baltic" (1995, 138). I find no evidence for such a rule, however. Endzelīns suggested that the n of the Baltic forms may be due to the dissimilation of an initial and a medial m , while adding that alternatively the m of Goth. *mimz* may result from the assimilation of a medial n to the initial m (1910, 202; Mühlenbach-Endzelin II, 655), a hypothesis which Mažiulis is inclined to endorse (1996, 131). Though I find a development $*minz > mimz$ most unattractive, it seems to me that, given the minimal evidence for $*mēms-$, we may at least call it an open question whether we should reconstruct PIE $*mēms-$ or $*mēns-$.

⁶ Crimean Gothic *menus* 'meat' is too uncertain to be considered a further invalidation of the m of Goth. *mimz*. Apart from the emendations *mems*, *mennis* and *menis*, a connection with Hung. *ménhús* 'horsemeat' has been suggested (Feist 1939, s.v.).

⁷ In Latvian, tautosyllabic m was preserved before a non-homorganic obstruent.

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Lithuanian mėsa

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In defiance of the prevailing view, the author argues that Lith. *mėsa* 'flesh, meat' is not a borrowing from Slavic but a form based on the NAsg. **mēs* of a neuter root noun **mēms-* (or **mēns-*), cf. Skt. *māms-*, NAsg. *māh* 'id'. The form **mēs* arose when in the constellations **-V̄Ns#* and **-VHNs#* the nasal was lost, a development which must probably be dated to the East Baltic period. In most Aukštaitian dialects, the root noun **mēs* existed long enough to bring about the analogical elimination of the nasal in the (collective) plural **mēsà*. The remaining Baltic forms, such as Latv. *miesa* or Žem. *mensà*, reflect the nasal element of the polysyllabic case forms.