

LITUANUS

LITHUANIAN QUARTERLY JOURNAL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

Volume 15, No.3 - Fall 1969

Editors of this issue: Antanas Klimas, Ignas K. Skrupskelis

Copyright © 1969 LITUANUS Foundation, Inc.



SOME PROBLEMS IN LITHUANIAN ONOMASTICS: A Case Study of The Family Names (Surnames) of a Lithuanian Village

ANTANAS KLIMAS
The University of Rochester

Until very recently, there have been only a few investigations of problems in Lithuanian onomastics.¹ Most of this kind of work is scattered throughout various books, journals, Festschriften, etc. The names of the inhabited places (villages, homesteads, etc.) were collected to some degree in 1923, but mainly by administrators, not by linguists. Very recently, a nearly complete list of Lithuanian lake names and a similar list of the river names were published.²

The best summary of the research in Lithuanian onomastics up to this time can be found in several articles by Professors Antanas Salys and Petras Jonikas in *Lietuvių Enciklopedija* (Lithuanian Encyclopedia, 36 volumes, Boston, 1954-1969).³

But the work in collecting all types of names -hydronyms, oronyms, toponyms, anthroponyms, etc. -has been going on for years. The archives of the University of Vilnius, as well as the archives of the Lithuanian Academy of Sciences in Vilnius, have huge collections of these various names.

There are about 100,000 different Lithuanian family names which have been recorded to date. With a few exceptions, however, they have not yet been analyzed and classified.

Until now, in some cases only the traditional explanation of Professor Kazimieras Būga has been mentioned, namely that there were basically two main types of Lithuanian family names: the two-stem names, such as *Narimantas*, corresponding approximately to the possible Proto-Indo-European form: *NOR- and *MONT-, and the one-stem names, such as, for example, *Laukys*, corresponding perhaps to the Proto-Indo-European (prototype: LOUK-, or *LEUK-).⁴

In the year 1219, 21 Lithuanian regional (grand) dukes concluded and signed an agreement with Volhynia. All 21 of these Lithuanian names are really two-stem names. Even today in Lithuania such two-stem names are used, everywhere, e. g.

Vidmantas: *W(E)ID- and 'MONT-; or, as in this case, the component stems (or roots) show great mobility: they can "exchange" places, thus:

Mantvydas: *MONT- and *W(E)ID-

Before the 15th century, Lithuanians used only one basic name. Only from the 15th century do we find documents which indicate the beginning of the use of first names (call names, nicknames, Christian names) in addition to what we today call family names. In the 16th century this custom became a common and accepted practice.⁵

We will now take a look at the family names of one Lithuanian village located approximately in the southeastern part of Lithuania. The basic dialect of this village is the so-called South Middle Aukštaitish (South Middle High Lithuanian), with some Dzukian influence.⁶

1. The village under investigation is *Pelekonyš*, located in the county of *Alytus*, on the *Nemunas* river.

In 1939, there were 45 farms — 45 families - - in this village. There were many families with the same family name, although in some cases they were not related as far as it was known.

The following list gives the family names of this village in alphabetical order. The number after the name shows how many families had this same name.

Since this dialect distinguishes rising and falling intonation (both are possible), *au* (*au* and *aū*), *ei* (*ei* and *ei*), and possibly *ui* (*ui* and *ui*), we will mark a long stressed vowel with the uniform stress mark (*˘*), except in specific cases as listed above. The stressed short syllable will be uniformly marked with (*˘*). However, at the end of the list we shall give all of these names again, as they would now appear in Standard Lithuanian. Let me remark further that in the so-called mixed diphthongs this dialect also has long /i:/ and /u:/, instead of the Standard Lithuanian short /i/ and /u/. E. g.: Standard Lithuanian *pilnas*, *pulti*, but in Pelekony's dialect: *pi:lnas*, *pu:lti*, or *pylnas*, *pulti*.

2. The list of the family names:

1. Ambrazevičius (2)
2. Bajoras (2)
3. Bartusevičius (4)
4. Bernatonis (5)
5. Celiešius (4)
6. Čiūpas (3)
7. Grigonis (2)
8. Kavaliauskas (1)
9. Kizala (1)
10. Klimas (1)
11. Matulevičius (3)
12. Mickus (1)
13. Sodaitis (2)
14. Šapalas (1)
15. Šerys (2)
16. Šiugždinis (4)
17. Zablackas (1)
18. Zencėvičius (4)
19. Žitkus (1)
20. Žuromskas (1)

(In Standard Lithuanian, these names would normally be marked with the stress marks as follows: 1. Ambrazevičius, 2. Bajoras, 3. Bartusevičius, 4. Bernatonis, 5. Celiešius, 6. Čiūpas, 7. Grigonis, 8. Kavaliauskas, 9. Kizala, 10. Klimas, 11. Matulevičius, 12. Mickus, 13. Sodaitis, 14. Šapalas, 15. Šerys, 16. Šiugždinis, 17. Zablackas, 18. Zencėvičius, 19. Žitkus, 20. Žuromskas).

3. There are several ways of analyzing these family names. We shall use here the traditional method of looking basically at their formation and etymologies.

Since Būga's time (cf. K. Būga, *Rinktiniai raštai* I, 201, Vilnius, 1958), the Lithuanian anthroponyms have usually been divided into two large groups: the first consisting of names of two basic roots, or stems, and another one made with one basic root, or stem.

It is somewhat surprising that there are no original Baltic two-stem names in this village. Only *Kizala*, as we shall see below, can be considered to be a two-stem formation, if it is not a direct borrowing from Slavic. But since, in our opinion, it can actually be a common noun which later became a personal name, we can assign its etymological history to the common noun group.

4. Since Slavic influence is obviously very strong in this area, we will first of all list all the borrowings from Slavic. There are several of this type: borrowings from Byelorussian, Russian, Polish, and one may possibly be a borrowing from Old Russian:

1. Bajoras
2. Kavaliauskas
3. Mickus
4. Zablackas
5. Zencėvičius
6. Žitkus
7. Žuromskas

Bajoras, just like the common noun *bajoras* 'boyar', clearly a borrowing from Slavic *bojar(in)u* (Cf. Būga, KS 167, also RR II, 191, etc.).

Kavaliauskas is clearly from *kavolis* 'blacksmith' which is a borrowing from either Byelorussian or Polish *kowal* 'blacksmith' [. 7](#)

Mickus is from Sl. *Miczko* which originally goes back to Greek *Demetrius*.

Zablackas is a Polish name: *Zablocki*.

Zencėvičius, with the Slavic suffix *-evič*, is clearly derived from Slavic: OCS *zęti* 'bridegroom', Polish *zie* 'son-in-law' [. 8](#)

Žitkus is most probably also a Slavic borrowing although its exact origin is hard to establish.

Zuromskas is clearly a Slavic name.

Another group of Slavic types is obviously derived from Christian saints' names, with phonological adjustments. These names are usually Greek or Latin in original but they came into Lithuanian via Slavic:

1. *Ambrazevičius*
2. *Grigonis*
3. *Klimas*
4. *Matulevičius*.

Ambrazevičius, via Slavic, is from the original *Ambrosius*, cf. Lith. *Ambraziejus*, *Ambraška*, and many others.

Grigonis consists of two elements: the first *Grig-* is certainly from *Grigas* (eventually going back to *Gre-yorius*), with the Lithuanian patronymic suffix *-onis* 'the son of, descendant of' [. 9](#)

Klimas goes back to Latin *Clemens*, via Slavic, most probably Byelorussian.

Matulevičius, With the Slavic suffix *-evič*, is made from *Matulis*, a diminutive of *Matas*, eventually going back to *Matteus*, etc. [. 10](#)

An interesting case, just like *Grigonis*, is *Sodaitis*, the only name formed with the Lithuanian patronymic suffix *-aitis*. The first part is certainly borrowed from Slavic (Russian) *sad* 'orchard'.

5. The remaining names are basically Baltic (Lithuanian). We may want to subdivide them into several subgroups :

a) Names derived from nicknames, professions, or characteristics:

1. *Čiupas* (cf. Lith. *čiupti* 'to grab, to grasp, to touch') originally meaning perhaps someone who likes to grab everything, to touch everything, or something similar.
2. *Šerys* (cf. Lith. *šerti*, past tense: *šėré* 'to feed animals') 'the feeder of animals'.
3. *Šapalas* clearly is nothing other than the Lith. fish name: *šapalas* 'chub'. The chub is one of the most numerous fish in the Nemunas river on which this village is located.
4. *Kizala*: there are several possibilities with this name. First of all, it could be considered to be regional common noun *kizala* 'the teaser, the joker', related to the verb *kizėnti*, *kizinti* 'to tease, to giggle, to joke laughingly'. Secondly, it could be a rather recent borrowing from Slavic. There is a third possibility: *Kiz-ala* being the original two-stem formation, since the formant *-ala* occurs quite frequently in Lithuanian hydronyms.

b) Names made from the original onomatopoeic nouns: *Šiugždinis*, in our opinion, is the only one of this type. It has to be related to *šiugždėti* 'to rustle, to make a noise producing a shshsh-type of sound'. *Šiugždinis*, then, was originally an adjective, then a nickname, and finally a name.

c) The names *Bartusevičius* and *Bernatonis* offer several possibilities. *Bernatonis* can be explained as having been formed from the suffix *-onis* attached to the name *Bernotas* which comes from *Bernardus* and which also produced such names as *Bernatavičius*, *Bernatavičius*, etc. However, there still remains the possibility that *Bernatonis* is related to the Baltic *bernas* 'child, boy, farm hand'. It could conceivably be a diminutive form, plus the suffix *-onis* (i. e., *bernaitis*, *bernatis*, plus the suffix *-onis*). [. 11](#)

Bartusevičius might also be a Slavic borrowing, but one should also consider the possibility that it may be the name of the Old Prussian tribe, the Barthians, Lith. *bartas*, possibly also **bartus* and even **bartusas*. We know that at one time this area was inhabited by the Old Prussian Yotvingians, or Suduvians. Even the name of the nearest town in this area is Old Prussian (Jot-vingian, or Suduvian): *Jieznas* (Cf. Būga, RR in, 134 and RR HI, 609-610, op. cit., 1961). There is also a river *Jieznia* and *Jieznėlė* in the same area.

6. A name that is more difficult to explain completely satisfactorily is *Celiešius*. Like *Kizala*, it could be a borrowing from Slavic (cf. Byelorussian *celyj*). It could, however, be derived from an Old Prussian word,¹² with the suffix *-iešius* added later. (It would perhaps be possible to consider *Celiešius* a Selian, or even Couronian, or Latvian name, but many more systematic investigations would be needed).

Conclusions:

1. With one remotely possible exception, *Kizala*, there are no two-stem family names in this village. This may show that either the original Lithuanian inhabitants were replaced by the people moving, from the east and the south, bringing more Slavic influence, or that originally Pelekony's was inhabited by the Old Prussians (Yotvingians - - Suduvians). They may have been replaced in the manner suggested above.

2. Since this village did belong to the estates of the Grand Duchess and was administered from Vilnius (i.e., the inhabitants were the so-called royal, or free peasants, and never became real serfs), the great majority of Slavic names could be explained as having come from Vilnius, although, during the last several centuries, only Lithuanians have been living here.

3. It is respectfully suggested that a similar type of investigation be carried out for each Lithuanian village or locality, and that the results be grouped later into larger units. Because of the rapidly changing socio-geographical situation, this kind of work will become utterly impossible in a few decades.¹³

4. The patronymic type of surname is the most frequent in this old Village, both with the Baltic patronymic suffixes *-onis* and *-aitis*, and with the Slavic suffixes *-vič* and *-owski*. One name expresses social strata (*Bajoras*), one is the name of a fish (*Šapalas*), one or two nicknames (*Čiūpas* and *Kizala?*), one name shows profession or occupation (*Šerys*), and several may be of Old Prussian (Yotvingian-Suduvian) provenance. A great many of these names are derived from Christian names, via Slavic mediation, and a few have been taken directly from Slavic.¹⁴

Some additional remarks should be made here, primarily as suggestions and reflections.

a. In addition to the analysis of the family names of this village given above, several cases present other possibilities (e. g., of translation, loan translation, re-translation, etc.).

b. Since in many Lithuanian villages no extensive, older documentation is available, only the comparison of the results of the investigation will shed some light on the chronological distribution of the family names in Lithuanian villages.

c. As was briefly mentioned above, one could also analyze and classify these family names structurally (or synchronically), but this was not the aim of this paper.

d. Almost all of the farming families in this village also have nicknames. It is important to note that the great majority of the nicknames are more interesting than the official family names because they are more inventive, more picturesque. Many of the nicknames used in this village do very frequently occur as actual (i. e., official) family names in other villages and areas. For example, one family by the name of *Bartusevičius* was nicknamed *Genys*, 'woodpecker.' In many other areas of Lithuania, *Genys* is an actual (official) family name. Some farming families had not only one, but two, three, or even more picturesque nicknames.¹⁵

Unfortunately, not much attention has been paid to this very interesting problem of nicknames until now. Hereby we express the hope that somebody, realizing this, will start systematically collecting all the nicknames still so widely used in thousands of Lithuanian villages.

1. For a very copious listing of literature on this and related problems, see Petras Jonikas, "Asmenvardžiai ir vietovardžiai" (Anthroponyms and Toponyms), Lietuvių Enciklopedija (Lithuanian Encyclopedia), vol. XV, 555-571. For the latest discussion of Lithuanian proper names, cf. Alfred Senn, "An Inventory of Lithuanian Proper Names," Names (Journal of the American Name Society), XVII (June, 1969), 127-137.

2. B. Savukynas, "Ežerų vardai" ('Lake names'), Lietuvių kalbotyros klausimai III-IV, 1960-1963. Also: B. Savukynas, A. Vanagas, V. Vitkauskas, K. Vosylyte and Ermanytė, Lietuvos TSR upių ir ežerų vardynas ('List of River and Lake Names of the Lithuanian SSR'), Vilnius, 1963.

3. To mention just a few of the most important articles in various volumes of the Lietuvių Enciklopedija (Lithuanian Encyclopedia): "Asmenvardžiai" ('Anthroponyms'), "Krikštavardžiai" (Given Names; Christian Names; First Names), "Pravarde" ('Nicknames'), etc. Especially important are the long articles by Dr. Petras Jonikas in this Encyclopedia, vol. XV (a special volume on Lietuva — Lithuania): "Asmenvardžiai ir vietovardžiai" ('Anthroponyms and Toponyms'), Lietuvių Enciklopedija, vol. XV, 555-571.

N.B. This Lietuvių Enciklopedija of 36 volumes published in Boston (1953-1969) will be published in English (6 volumes), basically concentrating on Lithuanian and Baltic subjects.

4. Cf. Ernst Pulgram, "New evidence on Indo-European names," Language, XXVI (April-June 1960), 198-202.

5. For more details, see Petras Jonikas, op. cit., especially pp. 556 ff.

6. For more information on the dialect of this village, see Antanas Klimas, "German and Russian Loanwords in the Dialect of Pelekony's, Lithuania," Communications et Rapports du Premier Congrès International de Dialectologie generate (Louvain du 21 au 25 aout, Bruxelles les 26 et 27 aout 1960), troisième partie, (Louvain, 1965), 162-168.

7. Of course, the family name Kavaliauskas could also be a direct borrowing from Polish Kawalewski, Kowalewski, or some similar name.
8. Zencevičius, just like Kavaliauskas (see above, footnote 7), could also be a direct borrowing from Polish Zecewicz, Zen-ciewicz, etc.
9. There is some doubt whether this suffix is really Lithuanian (or Baltic): it may be formed from Proto-Indo-European *-AN-, with some non-Baltic influence (i. e., all old Slavic borrowings into Lithuanian show their long -a- reflected in Lithuanian as a long -o-; e. g. Sl. (Russian) sad came into Lithuanian as sodas /'sodas/ 'orchard'). However, in the present paper we will not open a discussion of this problem.
10. Ambrazevičius and Matulevičius could also be direct borrowings from Polish Ambrozewicz, Ambrazewicz and Matulewicz, etc.
11. This particular area at this time does not have diminutive suffixes in -aitis, but this name could conceivably have come from a dialect area where the suffix -aitis occurs as -atis. Cf. Kursatis, instead of Kuršaitis, etc.
12. To ever detect this unknown Old Prussian word is most probably a hopeless task: there are only 3 Old Prussian short catechism and 2 very short vocabularies preserved.
13. It is not only the general trend to abandon farms and to move to the industrial cities, but there were many "external" calamities that befell this village. In 1948, the Russians deported 17 families from this village to Siberia. Some were allowed to return many years later, but only one or two returned to live in this village, others moving to other areas, mainly to the cities. In the years 1944-52, several young men were killed fighting in guerilla (partisan) war against the Russians. (The Lithuanian partisans fought against the troops and secret police detachments of the Soviet Union.) Today many of the farmers, all forced into collective farms, keep trying to escape this new serfdom by moving to towns, cities and even to the harbor cities on the Baltic Sea. Because of this situation throughout the whole of Lithuania, the distribution pattern of family names, which remained more or less constant for several centuries, will be irretrievably destroyed very soon.
14. There are villages in the western part of Lithuania, particularly Samogitia, where the Slavic influence is almost negligible. There are villages all over Lithuania where the two-stem family names predominate (i. e., the type Vidimantas).
15. It is a very well known fact that many of the old nicknames became real family names. This, I submit, should be considered as one of the universals in anthroponymics.