

THE PLEIADES IN THE BELARUSIAN TRADITION: FOLKLORE TEXTS AND LINGUISTIC AREAL STUDIES

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Abstract: This paper presents an analysis of Belarusian names for the Pleiades and their distribution in the territory of Belarus. Based on areal and ethnolinguistic studies, the author proposes the division of astrononyms with the *volos*, *vis*, and *stažar* bases into two separate groups. Such an approach helps to understand parallels in astrononyms of different groups and to provide another way of reconstructing the Old Slavonic astrononym *vtasiežjetišči*.

Keywords: areal studies in linguistics, astrononyms, Belarusian folk constellation names, constellations, folk names of constellations, Pleiades, Slavic languages, star folklore

This work focuses on Belarusian folk records about the Pleiades and the linguistic aspect of areal distribution of names for the Pleiades. As will be shown later, methodological approaches inherent in some studies relating to the treatment of linguistic sources sometimes lead to erroneous interpretations.

As a rule, Belarusian sources as well as the folklore and ethnographic texts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries indicate the presence of 6, 7, 10, or 12 (LABNG) stars in this stellar cluster. But it is the number seven (Blr. *sem*) that was the basis of some folk names for the Pleiades and the Great Bear constellation: *Siamižviodačka* (Kašpiarovič 1927: 305), *Siamiaryčki*, *Siemizviedzica* (LABNG).

Another motivational component for naming this star cluster was its visible features: the stars in the sky seem to be piled in a heap, placed close to each other in a small area of the sky. Folk descriptions present the stars as if they are in “a heap” (Blr. *u kučcy*, in Blr. dialects also *hurbačka*, *kupka* (ibid.), *hromadka* (PA), “a heap of stars” (Blr. *kučka zorak*) (Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Different models of nominating the Pleiades.

- ▲ - 'kupka' model
- ⊙ - 'kučki' model
- - 'hromadka' model
- ⊞ - 'stažary' model

Thus in the general sense, the internal form of an astronym can be represented as a complex of similar objects. These objects are implemented in anthropomorphic, zoomorphic or objective codes, for example, the Sieve (Blr. *Sita* 'a complex of holes'), the Hens (Blr. *Kurački* 'a complex of hens or hen with chickens'), *Valoski* (the root *valos* means 'the hairs', 'a complex of hairs'), etc.

The following models for names for the Pleiades are implemented in Belarusian tradition.

THE SIEVE MODEL

Two main dialectological forms can be found – *Sita* (*Sitačko*, *Sitca*, *Sicca*, etc.) and, considerably rarer, *Rešata* (*Rašotka*, *Rešatni*, etc.). In the first place this cluster appears in the memory of informants in the context of determining time: “The Sieve rose higher, it’s midnight, the cocks will crow” (Cychun 1993: 128); “A heap of stars to determine the time”; “The Sieve is the seven stars which rise in the east in the great night when the sky is clear, and when they set then the day is coming” (LABNG).

There is no textual variety in the main corpus of the field and archival records or such descriptions in the ethnographic sources. But definitely some exceptions exist – they are a kind of “Folk Bible” recollections. The same can be found in other European folk texts.

While describing this star cluster, sources often draw an obvious parallel between the holes in a sieve and the stars: “Sitečko. So, it looks like sifted flour. The same in the sky: many stars in a heap” (Avin 2015); “there are also [the Little Sieve, Blr. *Maloe Sita*] holes, small stars” (ibid.); “The Sieve (Blr. *Sita*) of stars ... the stars [in the Sieve] as the holes, there are many of them” (ibid.); “Siciečka (a little Sieve) – many, many stars as intertwined” (ibid.); “[Why was it called the Sieve?] So, I don’t know, maybe because it begins to sow corn from the autumn for the winter. Close to autumn, after the Sieve has risen, it began to sow corn” (ibid.). Also notice a quite popular Belarusian riddle: “How many stars in the sky, so many holes in the ground” (key – a stubble (the lower part of the grass stem after harvesting)).

In the Słuck and Homiel regions some beliefs indicate this sieve is a place where souls are being sifted: “The Sieve is fiery candles in the sky in the place where righteous souls get together. Angels sift here the righteous souls from the wicked” (Sierżputoŭski 1930: 7); “The souls are sifted – the wicked to hell, and the righteous to paradise” (Avin 2015). Meteors were interpreted in a similar way: if a star falls, it indicates that the human soul flies from Purgatory. The famous Polish-Belarusian writer Mickievič described this heavenly sieve as a reminder about the first creations of God: “To the north shines the circle of the starry Sieve, through which God, as they say, gifted grains of corn, when he cast them down from heaven for Adam our father, who had been banished for his sins from paradise” (Mickiewicz 1834: 136–137).

Some traditions close to the Belarusian one, like those from Poland and Lithuania, also represent etiological legends about the Pleiades in a “Folk Bible” context. For example, a known Polish belief tells where the view of this sieve appears in terms of the most prominent Christian story, the Nativity: “...three

kings left a sieve, which was used to sift oats for their horses, together with gifts for Jesus... This sieve was used by the mother of Jesus, Mary, and after her assumption she hung the sieve between the stars in the sky” (ESBM 2005: 278). A similar story was found in the Lithuanian Mariampol region:

Mary had a sieve to sift flour, but one day the sieve disappeared. She found out that a devil had stolen the sieve and she sent Saint Mark to return the sieve. The devil didn't want to give the sieve back and Saint Mark had to fight with him. While struggling, they bent the sieve and Mary couldn't use it anymore. Therefore, she hung it in the sky, where we can see it now and call it the Sieve. (Balys 1951: 17)

Considering typical artificial mythologization of many folklore characters by romantic researchers in the nineteenth century, certain doubts appear regarding texts written by Ludwik Adam Jucewicz. In his work of 1846, the author mentions that Mejlus, the son of the goddess Lauma, was thrown into the sky and placed among the Pleiades stars (Jucewicz 1846: 19–20).

Etimology of one Prussian astronym of the sixteenth century, *paycoran* = *paytoran* seems to be disputable. On the one hand, Mažiulis reconstructed it as *saitāran (Lithuanian. *sietynas*, Latvian. *siētīņš*) (Pleiades) (Mažiulis 2007: 62), on the other, in the teamwork *Indogermanische Forschungen* the following interpretation is proposed: “*paycoran* ‘Hyaden’: lit. *paikas oras*”, i.e., associated with the notion “rainy” (Brugmann & Streitberg & Leskien 1900).

Generally, the astronoms of this group are known in the Finno-Ugric and Baltic regions: in Lithuanian, *Sėtas* (a sieve), *dangaus sėtas* (a heavenly sieve); in Estonian “an old sieve” (Prüller 1966: 166). They are also found in the Caucasian territory (Khalidova & Iusupova 1988: 34).

THE HENS MODEL

In the territory of Belarus, in the Western Polesia region (Fig. 2), the popular Western European astronym of the hens model can be found. Among Belarusian variations of this astronym the following can be pointed out: *Kuročka* (LABNG; PA), *Kurki* (Moszyński 1928: 156), *Kury* (Avin 2015), *Kurica* (PA), etc. Though in Western European texts the view of the Pleiades is represented as a hen with chickens, Belarusian sources do not show such etiologies: “*Kuročka* – a group of stars, a little collection, there are about 10 stars in one heap – the one is big and around it – small stars... *Kuročka* has risen” (Avin 2015); “One star is called *Kuročka*” (PA). Moreover, in the Belarusian dialects of Western Polesia the name of a hen which leads chicks is basically presented by the following

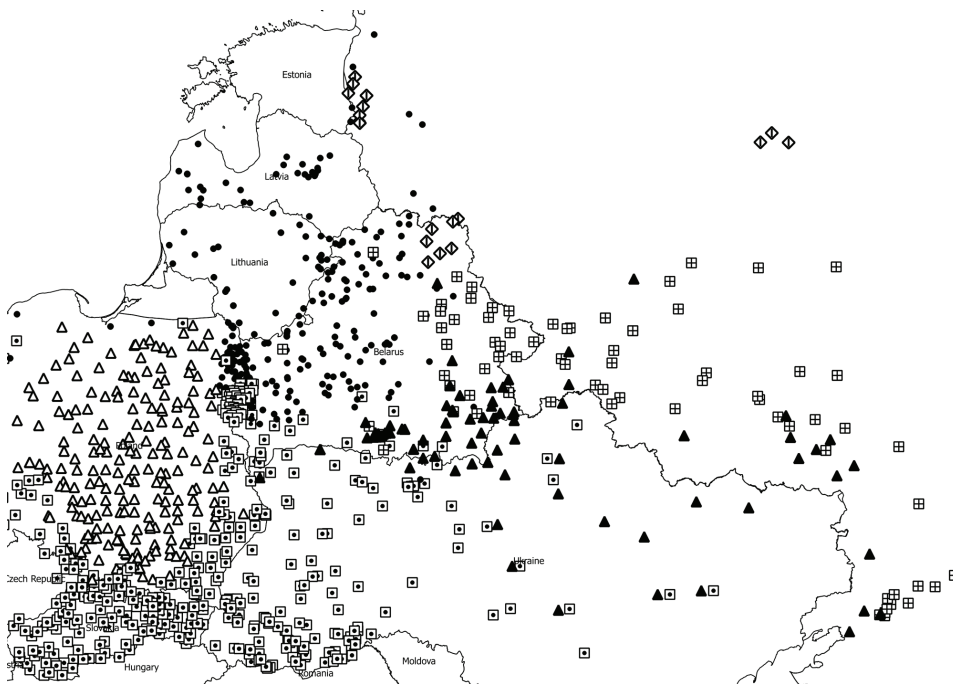


Figure 2. Different popular models of nominating the Pleiades.

- - 'sieve' model
- ◻● - 'hens' model
- △ - 'baby' model
- ◻⊕ - 'visožary' model
- ▲ - 'volosožary' model
- ◻◇ - 'valosyni' model

lexemes: *kvokša*, *kvočka*, *kvaktucha*, *kvakucha* – none of these matches the Belarusian astronomy of the hens model.

Incidentally, an interesting Croatian legend is relevant: “The hen which saved a church” (Pleiades; *kvočka* ‘a hen’). There was a church that enemies wanted to destroy. In front of the church *Kvočka* was sitting on a tree. They came at night and cut down the tree. *Kvočka* fell down and began to fly and scream so loudly that people woke up and saved the church. The criminals fled and they could not be caught. At that time, the people heard a shout – they went on shouting for *Kvočka* until they reached the place where the criminals were hiding and *Kvočka*’s scream subsided. While arresting the criminals, someone

looked at the sky, where there was a bunch of stars similar to the hen, which was named Kvočka (Valjavec 1867: 221). In the Vladimir region it is not recommended to put the hen on the eggs until the Pleiades are visible in the sky:

It's bad to put a hen on the eggs when the Siemik is in the sky. Nothing good will come of it. A hen is put on the eggs when there is no Siemik in the sky. From Yuri's day of spring to Theodore Stratelates day there is no Siemik – let the hen sit. Otherwise even if it sat then disease would choke the chickens. (Dobrovol'skaia 2011: 23)

Siemik is derived from the Russian *siem* 'seven', in accordance with the number of stars in the Pleiades.

Of particular interest is the areal distribution of this astronym in Belarus – Western Polesia and beyond it – the southeast of Poland and west of Ukraine. This astronym is also found in Western Europe and the Balkans.

THE SEVEN PERSONS MODEL: 'WOMEN', 'SEVEN MEN'

Widely distributed in Poland is the astronym *Baby* (Bel., Pol., Rus. *baby* 'women'), which can be found in Belarus only in border regions (Braslawszczyzna 2010: 453). At the beginning of the nineteenth century, Dalenha-Chadakoŭski indicated that this astronym was known around Minsk and the whole of Belarus (Spravochnyj 1849: 8), though the map of the areal distribution of the Pleiades (Fig. 2) does not confirm his statements. In Łastoŭski's vocabulary this astronym *Baby* (Łastoŭski 1924: 476) could be included due to a desire of the author to expand the *kryŭski* lexicon as much as possible.

Nevertheless, in cultural terms, this astronym was very important because it had been used for several centuries in works written in Polish by scientists and writers from the Commonwealth of Poland. It was also important in religious and spiritual books like different translations of the Bible, such as the Radzivil Bible and the Niasviž Bible. In Polish literature, the astronym *baby* appears in 1466 at least (Słownik 1991: 312).

Folk etiology of this astronym is based on the concepts of mutual mapping between the celestial and earthly worlds – celestial bodies are anthropomorphized and "socialized" as people: "*Babki* (Pleiades) *Kosiarom* (Bel. *Kosar* – 'a mower'; Orion) carry something to eat" (Gładyszowa 1960: 36). Close parallels can be found in the Grimm legend about an evil baker and his wife and six daughters (Grimm 1854: 691–692), and a Prussian legend about a tyrannical husband who turns into a cuckoo and his wife and six daughters turn into the Pleiades (Frischbier 1882: 439–440).

Siem Malciev (seven men) is another astrononym of this model, which can be found in the autobiographical work of the Belarusian writer Janka Sipakoŭ (1936–2011): “There is the *Pleiades*, or in Zubrevičy village it is called Siem Malcov. Or it is also called Sito (a sieve)” (Avinin 2015), and this is a unique fixation at this time. However, the southern Slavs even give names to these seven starry brothers (the Pleiades or Ursa Major): (in Serbia) there are seven stars in *Vlašići*: “Mika and Mioka, Raka and Raoka, Orisav and Borisav and the seventh one is Milisav” or “Vole and Voleta, Rale and Raleta, Mile and Mileta and the smallest one is Pržoŭak” (Rovinskiy 1901: 442). Referring to other sources, Jankovič points to more variations: “Vao and Vaska, Mio and Mioka, Skarabojo and Borisav and the smallest one is Biliurak”; “Mile and Mileta, Rade and Radeta, Bore and Boreta and the smallest one is Prigimaz”; and “Ale and Aleta, Šurko and Burko and the smallest one is Mišurko” (Jankovič 1951: 139).

OTHER NAMES FOR THE PLEIADES

Among individual and rare astrononyms is *Hniazdo* (a nest) (Avinin 2015); “A heap of stars is a *Bouquet of Flowers*” (a source said that she came up with this name herself) (ibid.); *Gromadki* (Gładyszowa 1960: 185) seems not to be a name for the cluster but a description of it: “Gromadka of small stars – Kuročka” (where *gromadka* could be a synonym for a heap, a group) (PA), although such astrononym is recorded in the Simbirsk, Vyatka, and Ural dialects (Azim-Zade 1980: 98). It is interesting that the *Korona* (a crown) astrononym – “Korona. Koronka – stars in a heap” (PA) is also found in the Ukrainian part of Polesia in the form of *Venočok* (a little wreath) (ibid.), *Koruna* (a crown) (ibid.), and also as a description of the Sieve – “Sitco ascends by the morning, it looks like a wreath or a sieve” (Avinin 2015). Compare also with a Belarusian one – “A crown is made with twelve stars and put on Jesus’s head. It can usually be seen in winter” (Corona Borealis?) (ibid.).

ASTRONYMS OF THE VAŁASAŽAR, VISAŽAR, VAŁOSKI, VAŁASYNI, AND STAŽARJE TYPES

Researchers and informants associate typical astrononyms of this group with different objects in the sky: the Pleiades, Ursa Major and Ursa Minor, sometimes Orion, Cassiopeia or another constellation which was a folk invention. A particular Ukrainian name for the Milky Way is also known: “This is a bird’s

way; the birds fly in *vyrej* (a mythical place in Slavic mythology); this way is called *volosožery*” (PA).

In Belarus all of the above types of astrononyms can be found; moreover, they form their areals, which have a continuation/beginning in the neighboring countries.

For example, the following names of Ursa Major are known: *Stožar* (PA) (variants: *Stožary*, *Stožarje*), *Sažór* – “*Sažor* is far, it’s not a time to get up” (ibid.); the Pleiades – *Stožáry* (ibid.), *Stožerka* (Kašpiarovič 1927: 291) – “Look at *Stožerku*, is it time to thresh?”; *Stožarja* (Dobrovol’skij 1894: 348), from *stažarje* – “scaffolding under the haystack”. Similar Estonian names are also known for the Corona Borealis (Prüller 1966) and the Russian *Sažáry* (Avinlin 2015).

Among astrononym variations of the *volosožar* type, the following (often associated with the Pleiades) are also found: *Vołosozár* (ibid.) – “*Vołosozar* rises close to autumn, there are many stars in one place – the day becomes shorter and the night becomes longer”; *Vałasazar* (PA), *Vałasazár* – “*Vałasazar* has risen very high – it will be 12 o’clock soon” (LABNG); *Vałasazary* (PA), *Vałasazaryk* (Avinlin 2015), *Cary-vołosozary* – “The six stars in the same place are called *vołosozary*, *cary-vołosozary*” (ibid.), etc. *Vielisazar* is known as a unique name: “*Vielisazar* is in the south, so it’s time to thresh” (Kašpiarovič 1927: 56).

Another group is composed of astrononyms of the *visažar* model (often the Pleiades, rarely Ursa Major): *Visyžár* – “Get up to thresh, soon the day will come: *visyžar* has already risen in the sky” (Bialkievič 1970: 110); *Visažár* – “Going to thresh depends on *Visažár*, if it’s in the south, it’s time to go” (LABNG); *Visažór* (ibid.), *Wosožary* – “Kosory i wosožary, gdy ukazują się na niebie – to zbliża się jesień” (Kosory and Wosožary – when they appear in the sky, then the autumn is coming) (Gładyszowa 1960: 187), and the variations *Vysažar*, *Vesežar*, and *Vysožar*.

For the last, a small group of astrononyms is characterized by the presence of the *volos* part and lack of such formants like (*ž/z*)*ar*: *Vałósynia*, *Vałosy*, *Vałosyny* (LABNG), *Vałoski*, and *Vałosny* – “*Vałoski* in the dawn – a horse in a plow” (Kašpiarovič 1927: 52). This type is mostly known in Russian in the Pskovsk region: Rus. *Vołosynia* (Slovar’ 1970: 63), *Vołosýnje* (Ursa Minor, the Pleiades), *Vołosýnia* (Ursa Major, the Pleiades), *Vołosnica* (Slovar’ 1979: 123, 125). Moreover, this type of astrononym occurs in a diary of the merchant Nikitin from the fifteenth century, who was from Tver (*vołosyny*) and in a vocabulary written by Tonis Fenne at the beginning of the seventeenth century in Pskov (*Vołosyni*).

In its rather poor textual diversity, the fixed astrononyms in the context of languageographical analysis provide interesting results not previously discussed

by scholars. The areal distributions can create new findings on the etymology of these groups of astrononyms and possible cross-ethnic contact.

We presume that it is methodologically improper to consider all four variants of astrononyms to be derived from a common name. As can be seen in Figure 2, astrononyms of the types like *vołosyni*, *visožary*, and *vołosožary* form separate areals, and astrononyms of the *stažary* type seem to occur sporadically (at least for the territory of Belarus). In addition, while analyzing these names, many researches directly appeal to Church Slavonic astrononyms, especially to *vtasiežjelišči* form, without considering its other variations which can be found in different texts. But the linguistic mapping, together with the involvement of folklore and ethnolinguistic materials, shows that it makes sense to allocate two separate subgroups, at least for the East Slavic area: 1) astrononyms of the *stažary* and *visažary* type, and 2) astrononyms of the *vołosožary* and *vołosyni* type.

Similar generalizations of individual fixations of folk motifs or lexical units are discussed in many papers. In some cases, the existence of lexical units or folk motifs is generalized to entire regions, which of course appears doubtful and can lead to far-fetched interpretations. The reason is obvious: the researcher does not always have the opportunity to gather all the available material and see its local areal distribution. This is the case with fundamental papers and catalogs such as the *Dictionary of Russian folk dialects* (Slovar russkikh narodnyh govorov – SRNG) or *Thematic classification and distribution of folklore and mythological motifs on habitats: An analytical directory*, prepared by Y. E. Berezkin. Regarding the latter, some Belarusian folk motifs are extrapolated to the whole territory of Belarus, although their detailed review may indicate the presence of isodoxa (a line dividing the elements of spiritual culture) (such as in the case of the “moon carrier” motif) or the apparent cross-border invasion of neighboring ethnic groups (the case of “the moon spots” or the *Twardowski* motif).

A detailed linguistic analysis of all forms and contexts in which there are astrononyms of these groups is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, I believe it is important to point out some key points that, in my opinion, have been overlooked in studies by other authors, including some incorrect statements found in reputable papers.

Let us start with the popular astrononym *vtasiežjelišči*, which is found in Church Slavonic sources and often used in research papers. In most cases, a number of authors use the form *vtasiežjelišči* while ignoring other variations, for example, *vtasožjelišti*, *vtasožjelca*, *vtasožjelci*, *vtasožjelcъ*, *vtasožlc*, *vtasožilešč*, *vtasožilišči* or *vtasiežjelišči* (Slovar’ 1899: 70). As correctly noted by Fomina, similar names are composite: *vtasie* and *žjelišče* (for the *vtasiežjelišči* form) (Fomina 1995: 274),

where *vlasie* is the shape of the original Slavic name for the constellation, and *žjelišče* is “a place of mourning”; moreover, the *vlasie* astronym can be found in *Vladislavov sbornik* in 1465 (Khristova-Shomova 2007: 119–130). In my opinion, the second formant was interpreted incorrectly: instead of “a place” (a place of mourning, the graves, etc.) (RES 2012), it should be interpreted as *žila* (a sinew). Compare with Church Slavonic – *žila* (a sinew), *žilty rečnyje* (river streams), *žilty hoviažyje / voľovyja* (ropes or whips made of bullock sinews), and the known Old Church Slavonic names of the Pleiades – *vlasoželbci*, *vlaso(-žilišti / -želišti)* (Skok 1971: 609). Sometimes it means *foal* (D’iachenko1900: 185), *žitavъ* (sinewy), *žitica* (vein) (Slovar’ 1899: 219–220). In the *Lexicon* of 1627 by Berynda: *žiliščnyj* – *žitovatyj* (sinewy), *mocnyj* (strong), *tuhij* (tight), *žilicie* (a small sinew). Also in Macedonian: *žilišta* – “a place to live”, but this word also means “sinew”, and a rich set of forms in Bulgarian are derived from the semantic foundation *žila*: *žilest*, *žilici*, *žitka*, *žitaviec*, etc. A similar interpretation is valid in logical and semantic terms – in Job 38:31 we can find: “Can you bind the chains of the Pleiades? Can you loosen Orion’s belt?” That is, *vlasie žjeliščnyj* can be interpreted as “tight hair: a ‘knot of tight hair’ or ‘tight knot of hair’”. However, it is possible that the translators themselves might have mistakenly understood *žjeliščje* as “a place”. The proposed hypothesis can easily interpret the considered astronym, but there are still many open questions in the field of its phonetic transformations.

Khristova-Shomova attempted to reconstruct this composite astronym as a ‘hairy turtle’ which looks very fantastic (Khristova-Shomova 2007: 125), and resembles the pagan Slavic god Volos – it is difficult to imagine that a Christian scribe “popularized” the pagan god. She referred to a fundamental work *Issledovaniya v oblasti slavyanskih drevnostey* (Research on Slavic Antiquities) written by Ivanov and Toporov, which actually has some inaccuracies that occur in the context of the analysis of the names of constellations and related texts on pages 49–50; for example, the statement “...staroe nazvanie Plejad... soedinjaetsja s arhaicheskim naimenovanijem Poljarnoj zvezdy Los’, otrazhennym v arhangel’skih govorah” (the old name of the Pleiades ... is connected to the archaic name of the North Star as ‘Moose’, which is reflected in the dialects of Arkhangelsk) (Ivanov & Toporov 1974: 49–50). At the same time, in accordance with Nikitin, it can be seen that this is a separate constellation or a star and in no way connected to the North Star (ibid.): “...a los’ golovoju stoit na vostok” (...and the moose’s head is to the east). The North Star cannot point to the east because humans attributed this star with the following functionality: 1) the star always stays in the same place; 2) it points to the north. Moreover, a unique lexical item in the Arkhangelsk dialects can be defined as Ursa Major, and not the North Star. Furthermore, there are indications about

the *-ynja* suffix, but in Nikitin's text, according to the dictionary by Sreznevskij, the *volosyny* (Sreznevskij 2003: 1256) form can be found, but the stress position is unknown.

In addition, the author indicates that *volosožary* originates from the Pskov region, but in the SRNG dictionary to which the authors refer, *volosožary* is recorded with a question mark and is an explanation for the *Volosýnia* astronym. This situation often occurs in mini-dictionaries and folklore-ethnographic works from the nineteenth to twentieth centuries, when instead of a Greek analogue it is known to the compiler of the dictionary by the local astronym (in this case the Pleiades). Most likely, this record might have been collected or interpreted by a native from Ukraine or southeastern Russia. Secondly, as seen in Figure 2, the *Volosožary* astronym areal does not extend so far to the north.

On page 50, in a section about the Eastern Slavic *Volos* again, in my opinion, these authors mistakenly added *visožary* to a common group that will be shown below. Some criticisms are voiced by Strakhov about the wiredrawn "Peryn" as the name of the goddess (Strakhov 2003: 154–155).

As concerns the Mordovian *Vele* (the Pleiades, a swarm, a village), such a name is typologically consistent with the known Eastern and Western Slavonic astronoms that mean a "bunch" or "pile", for example, Bel. *Kučki*, *Kupki*, *Hramadka*, *Kupa*, and Pol. *Gromadka* or *Kupa*. These are not connected with the mythological view and are the simplest and probably most archaic forms of the description of the Pleiades, which have nothing in common with theistic reconstructions.

Thus, it becomes clear that in the section devoted to *Volosyni*, many things have not been explained, and obviously erroneous references have been included. Additionally, in this part of the paper various professional researchers and amateurs of "Slavic antiquities" are actively referenced.

Let us consider the etymology of the *visožary* astronym, which in many studies is supposed to be a transformed form of *volosožary*, *volostožary*, *volosožary*, etc., and sometimes, again, it is associated with the god Volos.

As can be seen in Figure 3, the astronym with the explicit prevalent form *visožary* is popular in the Bryansk and Orel regions. In Belarus, most likely, this astronym has lost its original meaning, which has led to a large number of variants pointed out above. Nonetheless, the following meanings of *visožary* exist in the Bryansk and Orel regions: *visožár* – "a tall man", "a high tree", "the name of a bird", and as a synonym for *visljáj* – "a tall man with non-noble figure" (Slovar' 1989: 51–52). According to the ESBM, *visožary* is possibly a contaminated lexeme from *vysokij* (high) and *podžarnyj* (slabsided) (ESBM 1978: 91, 160).



Figure 3. Different vowels in the root of visožary.

- *vis-*
- ⊙ *vas-*
- ⊖ *vjes-*
- ◐ *ves-*
- ⊕ *vos-*
- ⊗ *vys-*

Let us look at some examples that may indicate the historical and semantic parallel between *stažary* and *visožary*.

According to archeological data, it is known that the Yukhnovsk archaeological culture, which is believed to have been influenced by Scythian culture, has been extended to the territories of Chernigov, Bryansk, Orel, and Kursk. Some traces of the Scythian language can be found in the Bulgarian and Ossetian languages. Therefore, we try to consider some examples of these two seemingly distant languages. The Bulgarian *vis* may mean ‘the top of a mountain’, ‘the top of a tree’, and could be connected with the Indo-European **(v)-upsis*, wherefrom, according to the compilers of the dictionary, Bulgarian *visok* and *viš* are also

derived (Balgarski 1971: 152–153). The Bryansk *visožary* – ‘tall person’ and the Orel *visožary* – ‘high tree’ fall into the ‘something or someone tall or high’ semantic field, which is close to the ‘top of something’ semantic field.

Now let us consider the example from Ossetian. According to Abaev, the Ossetian *wis/wes* (rod, long switch) goes back to *vaiša* and corresponds to the Slavic *věcha*, or ‘pole’, meaning a stick in the ground to indicate the path, and the Latin *virga* (from **vis-ga*) (rod, twig) (Abaev 1965: 314). On the other hand, according to Max Vasmer, who has examined *visožary* and *vesožary* as a part of *stožár* vocabulary article, the following forms are known in different Slavonic languages: the Russian *stožár* (a fence around the haystacks) and the Old Russian *stožárъ* (a pole stuck in the ground to strengthen the stack), *stožárънъ* (tax on the stack); the Bulgarian *stóžar*, *stóžer* (piles hammered in the barnyard); the Serbo-Croatian *stožer* (piles hammered in the barnyard); the Slovenian *stožér* (pole in a haystack); the Czech *stožár* (mast); the Slovak *stožiar* (mast). Further etymology is associated with *stežer* (a rick, a stack) (Vasmer 1987: 764). Compare with the Lithuanian *stāgaras* (long dry stalk of a plant), the Latvian *stagers* (the same, with an alternating vowel), and Lithuanian *stegerỹs* (a dry stem, a dry footstalk). Additionally, in the Belarusian and Ukrainian languages a comet is sometimes called *vieha*.

Thus, when considering the far etymologies, we find a convergence between *stožar* and *visožar*, and it becomes clear where the meaning ‘a tall man’ comes from – this is a comparison with a tall pole in the center of a stack of hay. This result could also correspond to the onomasiological model specified by Mladenova for the majority of the names of the constellations as ‘signs’ (Mladenova 2004: 48–54). However, in this case, we get closer in semantic convergence too. Apparently, *Vołosožar*, the astrononym which is typical of eastern Ukraine and southwest Russia, was originally a descriptive adjective like *visožary*, or *podžaryj* (slabsided). On the other hand, the formant *-žary* could occur due to the influence of the areal of *visožary* with which they border. A separate issue requiring resolution is the cause of the separation of areals with the foundation *volos* (*Volosyni*, *Vołosožar*) by the *visožar* areal. We note an interesting observation: in the Old Bulgarian language, according to Cejtlin, nouns with the suffix *-yni* were formed from “a basis of qualitative adjectives. Almost all of them have abstract meanings, and they usually express different moral and ethical concepts” (Cejtlin 1986: 198–199).

At the end of the paper, I would like to reveal some etiological legends about *visožary*. From the former Tula province: *Visožary* appeared in the sky because forty brothers were tortured for their Christian faith (Avin 2015). Forty brothers are the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste who did not bring sacrifice to the pagan gods and were tortured for it. In memory of these martyrs a holiday called

Soroki (Rus. *sorok* – ‘forty’) was established, which also symbolizes the beginning of spring. This time falls on the day of the heliacal rising of the Pleiades in the astronomical context.

In the Kursk region, another variant reads as follows:

At first God created all the stars as dense and rife as Visažary and a view of the stars was amazing. But one night some people went along the road and they started talking among themselves, saying: ‘so this Visažary we planted with Grandfather’ and then during the conversation they fell into a deep ravine and were maimed, and the Lord began to beat them with a whip from the sky saying: ‘Do not look at the sky and see the wheels.’ Since then cripples and stars have become rare, only Visažary the Lord stayed dense and rife. (Sviatskij 1913: 146–147)

As in the story about the forty martyrs, here the motif of mangling is present; the observation that earlier all constellations looked like *Visažary* is also interesting. Compare with a prohibition to look at Orion or *Kostylík* (a spike-nail): “Must not, must not show *Kostylík* to kids until they begin to run, because it says – the baby may become lame” (Dobrovol’skaia 2011: 23).

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Tsimafei Avilin

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