Laconian βοῦα ‘Band of Boys’ as a Collective Noun

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Abstract
In his lexicon, Hesychius of Alexandria gives the following Laconian gloss: βοῦα-ἀγέλη παίδων. <Λάκωνες> (“βοῦα: a band of young boys. Laconians”). This term is confirmed by epigraphical data from Sparta, see especially βο(υ)ᾱγός, later βο(υ)ᾱγόρ m. ‘leader of a young boys’ band at Sparta’ (IG V.1.257; 283; 292; etc.). The author explains the registered lemma from etymological and morphological points of view, accepting A. J. van Windekens’s etymology according to which the Laconian term βοῦα f. is related to the Lithuanian gaują f. ‘flock, pack, herd, bunch, band, gang’. She reconstructs the Indo-European nomen collectivum *g̯u̯j̯a f. ‘herd, pack, band’, originally ‘herd of cows, cattle’ (← IE. *g̯ōus f./m. ‘cow’), adding other reflexes taken from Latin and Indo-Aryan and Balto-Slavic languages, e.g. Latv. gauja f. ‘crowd’; Skt. (Pāṇini) góvyā f. coll. ‘cow-herd’; Vedic gāvyam, gavīyam n. coll. ‘herd of cows’; Oriya gāba ‘cattle’, also ‘a cow’; and so on.

Keywords
Ancient Greek; animals; collectives; etymology; Laconian dialect
1. Introduction

Hesychius of Alexandria wrote a lexicon of literary, rare or dialectal words before the end of the fifth century AD. He registered many Old Laconian and Late Laconian terms. Three of them are connected with the Spartan education of young boys:


1.2. βουαγόρ- άγελάρχης, ο τής άγέλης ἄρχων παῖς. Λάκωνες (HAL β-867; Latte 1953: p. 336; Cunningham 2018: p. 453) “βουαγόρ: leader of a flock or herd; boy-leader of a band of boys. Laconians”.

1.3. συμβουάδ<δ>ει, ύπερμαχεῖ. Λάκωνες (HAL σ-2307; Hansen 2005: p. 370) “symbouádei: [he] fights on behalf of [his βοῦα]. Laconians”.

It is obvious that these lemmas are related to each other. The term βουαγόρ represents a Late Laconian form, demonstrating the rhotacism of -ς in the final position (LaZzeroni 2006: p. 85). The agent noun in question has also been attested many times in some epigraphical texts from Laconia in four clearly related forms: βουαγός, βαγός, βουαγόρ, and βουαγόρ (IG V.1.257.1; 283; 292.6; 294.1; 305.6; 307.4; 312.4; 523; see Mitchell 1984: pp. 131, 133; Adrados 1994: p. 736; Liddell & Scott 1996: p. 323; Montanari 2003: p. 415).

Below I quote one of the Spartan inscriptions of the second century AD (IG V.1.307; Schwzyer 1923: p. 34; Buck 1955: p. 271; Pisani 1973: p. 103; Bartoněk 2015: pp. 134–135):

Κλεάνδρος ὁ καὶ Μήνιρ | Καλλιστράτῳ | βουαγόρ ἔπι | πατρονόμῳ | Γοργίππῳ τῷ <Γοργίππῳ> | νικά’ ἀρ μω’ αν Αρτέ | μιτ Βωρσέᾳ ἀνέση | κε
“Kleandros, called also Menis, Kallistratos’ son, leader of young boys’ band, offered for Artemis Orthia, having won in singing (in a musical conquest) in the time of performing office of patronomos by Gorgippos, the son of Gorgippos” (my own translation; cf. Kaczyńska 2014: p. 66).


Two inscriptions forms, βοαγός and βοαγόας, preserve final -ς and therefore are archaic or Old Laconian, whereas two other ones, namely βοαγόρ (βοαγόρ), have an innovative character and belong to the Late Laconian dialect. From the morphological point of view the Laconian appellative βο(ν)ᾱγός, Late Laconian βο(ν)ᾱγόρ m. ‘leader of a band of boys in Sparta’ represents a compound formation, containing the specific (probably local) appellative βοῦα f. ‘band of boys’ (attested only in the Hesychian lexicon) in the first part and the agent noun ἄγος m. ‘leader, chief’ (Liddell & Scott 1996: p. 14; Montanari 2003: p. 62) in the second one.

In my article I would like to explain the origin and etymology of the mysterious Laconian term βοῦα f. ‘band of the Spartan boys’, synonymic to the well known Ancient Greek appellative ἄγελη Doric ἄγελα f. ‘herd, flock (of horses, cows, pigs or birds); shoal (of fish)’, also ‘a band in which boys were trained (in Crete and Sparta)’ (Willets 1969: p. 162; Davaras 1989: p. 2; Link 1994: p. 23).

2. An overview of existing explanations of Lac. βοῦα f. ‘band of boys’

Four different etymologies have been proposed for the Laconian term in question so far. I present them below in the chronological order.

The first explanation was proposed by Bernhard Laum (1924: p. 11), who assumed that the term Laconian βοῦα, denoting a kind of the competition for the Spartan boys, goes back to *βουRenderWindow(1924: p. 11, 20)ōā < *βουσόᾱ5 and finally to the Proto-Greek archetype *βου-σσόϝᾱ f. ‘driving away cattle’, cf. Gk. σεύω ‘to hunt, chase; drive away; hurry away’ (Liddell & Scott 1996: pp. 1591–1592) < IE. *kʷ̣jeụ- ‘sich in Bewegung setzen’ (Pokorny 1959: p. 539; Rix 2001: pp. 394–395).6 This derivation was regarded earlier as impossible by Friedrich Bechtel (1923: pp. 368–369), as the geminate -σσ- cannot be lost in Laconian. Accepting Laum’s etymology, Paula Wahrmann reaches an alternative conclusion that Lac. βοῦα may represent “ein Hyperarchaismus” (see Kretschmer & Wahrmann & Kroll & Vetter 1929: p. 242). Pierre Chantraine connects the Laconian term in question with Gk. βοῦς ‘cow’, but following Bechtel’s position he ignores Laum’s explanation. Finally he says as follows: “Un rapport avec βοῦς est plausible, mais par quelle derivation?” (Chantraine 1968: p. 188). Also Beekes rejects this explanation on the basis of a phonological premise (“original σσ would not have disappeared [in Laconian]”).

The second etymology was suggested by Albrecht von Blumenthal (1930: p. 9). In his opinion, Lac. βοῦα is an Illyrian word, related to Gk. φυή, Dor. φυά f. ‘growth, stature;

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4 The term βουᾱ ‘a group of young people’ in the Etymologicum Magnum (208.6; 391.19G) represents a corrected form by Hemsterhuis, cf. Adrados (1994: p. 746, s.v. βουῶ), According to Mitchell (1984: p. 132), βουῶ “may be a mistake for βοῦα rather than from βουῶ”.

5 An artificial form βουσόᾱ f. ‘flock, herd, children’s group in Sparta / grey, agrupación infantil en Esparta’, created on a wrong etymology, is introduced to the fourth volume of Diccionario griego-español (Adrados 1994: p. 746, s.v.).

6 See also the Ancient Greek causative verb σοέω (as if from IE. *kʷ̣ˈjoụ-jó), cf. OInd. cyāvāyati vb. caus. ‘to cause to move, shake, agitate’ (Monier-Williams 1999: p. 403).
substance’, also ‘prime of age’. This etymology is commonly rejected by linguists for semantic reasons, cf. “semantisch unbefriedigend” (Frisk 1960: p. 255); “hypothèse en l’air qui ne va pas pour le sens” (Chantraine 1968: p. 188); “This is semantically improbable” (Beekes 2010: p. 229).

According to Arthur James Beattie, Lac. βοῦα f. ‘band of boys’ is related to Gk. βοή f. ‘a loud battle-cry’, as the Homeric phrase βοὴν ἀγαθός was “used frequently of the Spartan Menelaus in the Iliad (II 408 etc.)” (Mitchell 1984: p. 132, quotes Beattie’s opinion as a personal communication). The third explanation is nothing more than a guess.

The fourth etymology, not mentioned in Beekes’ dictionary, was suggested by Albert Joris van Windekens (1986: p. 48), who following Chantraine in connecting Lac. βοῦα with Gk. βοῦς proved that the above-mentioned connexion is indirect (“rapport n’est qu’indirect”). In his opinion, the Late Laconian term βοῦα f. ‘band of boys’ is closely related to Lithuanian gaujà f. ‘flock, pack, herd, bunch, band, gang’ and goes back to an Indo-European protoform derived from IE. *gʰōu̯ m./f. ‘cow’ with the original meaning ‘herd, horde / troupeau, horde’. He correctly stresses that the suggested relationship is perfect from the semantic point of view (“La concordance sémantique est complete”; Windekens 1986: p. 48).

Our short overview of existing explanations of Lac. βοῦα clearly demonstrates that the three former etymologies should be rejected for semantic, phonological or formal reasons, whereas the fourth explanation, though probably requires some additional comments, seems highly plausible.

3. A new interpretation of Lac. βοῦα as a nomen collectivum

None of the researchers have noticed that the Ancient Greek word βοῦα f. ‘band of boys’, attested in the Laconian dialect, may represent a collective form. The comparison of the Laconian word in question with Lith. gaujà f. ‘flock, pack, herd, bunch, band, gang’ allows to put a new hypothesis, according to which both terms are reflexes of an Indo-European collective noun, derived from the oblique root *gʰōu̯ (nom. sg. *gʰōus) m./f. ‘cow’ by means of the “collective” suffix *-iā (PIE. *-iēh₂). There are many instances demonstrating a high productivity of this suffix in the Indo-European languages, including Ancient Greek, e.g.

3.1. Gk. Att. φρᾱτρίᾱ, dial. (in Chios and Tenos) φᾱτρίᾱ f. coll. ‘brotherhood; people of kindred race, tribe, clan’ (Liddell & Scott 1996: p. 1953); Lith. brūtija f. ‘circle of the most faithful friends’ (with the progressive dissimilation of r – r > r – ø); Old Slovenian bratria, Old Serbian bratrja, Old Russian братрия f. coll. ‘brotherhood’, Old Polish bratrza f. coll. ‘brotherhood, brothers’ (< Proto-Slavic *bratr̩y̅a f. coll. ‘brotherhood’); Toch. A pratri

Accepting the proposed derivation of Lac. βοῦα f. ‘band of boys’ from IE. *gʰoú ‘cow’ (as suggested by P. Chantraine and A. J. van Windekens) we should reconstruct the Indo-European collective noun *gʰoujá f. ‘herd, pack, band’, originally ‘a herd of cows, cattle’. Moreover, we are able to indicate some further reflexes of the original collective formation. Firstly, the Lithuanian word gaunjá f. (4 AP) ‘flock, pack, herd, bunch, band, gang / multitude’ has a close equivalent in Latvian gauja f. ‘crowd, a lot of (people); multitude’ (Fraenkel 1962: p. 140; Derksen 2015: p. 166). Wojciech Smoczyński derives the East Baltic appellatives in questions from the verbal root *gau- ‘to obtain, receive’ attested in Baltic: Lith. gáuti ‘to receive, obtain’, Latv. gaūt ‘to catch, try to obtain, receive’, OPrus. pogauūt ‘to receive’ (Smoczyński 2007: p. 164). Rick Derksen quotes two different derivations of Lith. gaujà: the first follows Smoczyński’s explanation, the second treats Latv. gauja as a “cognate with the word for ‘cow’ (→ Latv. gūovs)” (Derksen 2015: p. 116).

In my opinion, the latter etymology is semantically better founded than the former one. Why? The East Baltic forms cannot be separated from the Sanskrit collective noun gávyā́ f. ‘a cow-herd’ (Monier-Williams 1999: p. 351), which is registered by Pāṇini’s work (IV 2.50).

I am convinced that the Baltic words, as well as the Laconian term βοῦα and OInd. gávyā, go back to the Indo-European protoform *gʰoujā f., which represents a collective noun (nomen collectivum) with the original meaning ‘cattle, herd of cows’ and is etymologically motivated by the Indo-European nominal root *gʰou- f./m. ‘cow’. The Baltic and Greek languages demonstrate the following semantic change: ‘herd of cows, cattle’ (an original meaning attested in Sanskrit) > ‘flock, herd’ (in Lithuanian) > ‘pack or crowd of animals’ (in Lithuanian only) > ‘crowd of people, band, gang’ (in both East Baltic languages) > ‘band of young boys’ (in Laconian). The above-mentioned development may be additionally confirmed by the Modern Greek material. It cannot be excluded that the intermediate meaning ‘crowd of people’ (registered both in Latvian and Lithuanian) appears to be preserved in the name of Bova (Gk. βοῦα), denoting the “Zentrum der griechischen Dörfer in Kalabrien” (Rohlfs 1964: p. 91). If the suggested connection is correct, then my hypothesis on the collective character of the Greek, Sanskrit and Baltic forms finds additional confirmation.

It is worth emphasizing that Sanskrit gávyā́ f. ‘a cow-herd’ is not an isolated formation in Indo-Aryan. The collective noun gávyam (also gavyám) n. ‘cattle, herd of cows’ has been attested in some hymns of RigVeda (RV I 140.13; V 34.8; VII 18.7; IX 62.23) (Monier-Williams 1999: p. 351), as well as in modern Indo-Aryan languages, e.g. Oriya gāba ‘cattle’, also ‘a cow’ as the effect of a singularization of the old collective form (Turner 1966: p. 219). Collective formations (of neuter gender) ending with *-i̯om seem to be parallel to these in *-jā (of feminine gender), as it is demonstrated by two cognate formations, well attested in the Indo-European protolanguage: *bhr̥ātrijá f. coll. ‘brotherhood’ and *bhr̥ātrijom n. coll. ‘id.’.

3.2. The latter archetype is reflected by OInd. bhr̥ātryam n. ‘brotherhood, fraternity’ (Monier-Williams 1999: p. 770); Russ. dial. братье́-мъя n. coll., BRus. братья n., Ukr.

The lexical data, mentioned earlier (see 3.1), clearly demonstrate that the former archetype is firmly attested in Greek, Baltic, Slavic (and probably in Tocharian). In other words, the Indo-Aryan forms for ‘cattle, herd of cows’ (e.g. OInd. gávyam, gavyám n., Oriya gāba) are evidently related to the feminines (with a collective meaning), attested in Greek (Lac. βοῦα), Indo-Aryan (Skt. gávyā) and Baltic (Lith. gaują, Latv. gauja).

4. The phonetic development of IE. *gʰóu̯ia to Lac. βοῦα

The semantic development of IE. *gʰóu̯ia f. ‘herd of cows, cattle’ to Lac. βοῦα f. ‘band of boys’ is explained in section 3. Here I discuss the phonetic development of IE. *gʰóu̯ia in Ancient Greek.

Generally, it is possible to suggest that IE. *gʰóu̯ia f. yields Common Greek *βόβια. The internal digamma *f is lost in most Ancient Greek dialects, including Laconian, e.g. Late Lac. Κλέανθος (< Proto-Greek *Κλέϝανθος). The secondary form *βοώα develops regularly to Doric Greek βοά and further to βόα in the Laconian dialect, cf. Late Lac. Βωρσέα (< Old Lac. Φωρθεία, cf. Gk. Att. Ὄρθεια dat. sg.). The loss of glides *u (Gk. ω) and *i (Gk. ι) in the internal (especially intervocalic) position is perfectly attested in Laconian (Mitchell 1984: pp. 658, 710).

In my opinion, the development of βόα to Late Laconian βοῦα completely agrees with the common change of o > ov in numerous Modern Greek dialects. The long vowel ω [ɔ], which alternates with ου in Late Laconian (Lazzeroni 2006: pp. 86–87), is usually rendered as ου [u] in Tsakonian, the modern continuation of the Laconian dialect of Ancient Greek (Liosis 2014: p. 447), e.g. Tsak. γρούσα f. ‘tongue’ < Lac. γλῶσσα f. ‘id.’; Tsak. ούρα [’ura] f. ‘hour’ < Lac. ὀρᾶ; Tsak. καού [’kau] ‘to call, ask invite’ < Lac. καλά; Tsak. καού(ρ) [’ka’ur] adv. ‘well’ < Late Lac. *καλόρ ‘id.’ (Witczak 2015: p. 82). Also the short vowel o [ɔ] in the neighbourhood of a labial stop commonly gives ου [u] in Tsakonian, e.g. Tsak. τ’ούμα [’thuma] n. ‘mouth’ vs. Anc. Gk., Mod. Gk. στόμα n. ‘id.; Tsak. πούα [’pua] m. ‘foot’ vs. Mod. Gk. πόδι n. ‘id.’. It is highly probable that Late Laconian βοῦα represents an earlier form βόα. It is worth emphasizing that the Laconian inscriptions demonstrate not only Late Laconian βούāγόρ (or βούāγος), but also an earlier variant βοάγος.

5. Remarks on the accentuation of Lac. βοῦα

Some researchers suggest that the circumflex attested in the Hesychian lemma βοῦα is false. It is a common opinion expressed by two authors of etymological dictionaries of the Ancient Greek language, cf. “l’accentuation doit être fautive” (Chantraine 1968: p. 188; Windekens 1986: p. 48 repeats the same phrase). In fact, the Greek language lost a differentiation between the long and short vowels as early as in the first century.
BC. Generally, the Ancient Greek accent has been preserved until today, but both its melodic character and the primitive distinction between the circumflex, the acute and the grave were completely lost two thousands years ago. Of course, Greek grammarians of the late ancient times, like e.g. Hesychius of Alexandria, apply the traditional rules of the classical accentuation. The final -α after phonemes other than ε [ɛ], ι [i], ρ [r] in the Attic dialect, as well as in the Hellenistic koiné, was always treated as a short vowel. It is obvious that the Greek grammarians recorded dialectal words according to the standard principles. This is why the circumflex in the Late Laconian gloss can be questioned. However, the place of accent in the initial syllable is relatively certain. The barytone accent is also attested in Pāṇini’s work (IV 2.50: gávyā f. ‘a cow-herd’). In other words, there is a completed accentual and formal agreement between Lac. βοῦα and Skt. gávyā (both go back to IE. *g̣u̯āiā f.). However, the attested Lithuanian stress (the 4th accentual paradigm in the literary language) seems to indicate an alternative variant with the oxytone stress (as if from IE. *g̣u̯iā f.). Is it possible to suggest two oppositional accents for the same collective noun?

It cannot be excluded that the observed accentual differentiation is caused by a crossing between two alternative types of accentuation of the Indo-European collectives. The situation in RigVeda seems similar. The Old Indic collective noun gāvyaṁ n. ‘herd of cows’ demonstrates not only the barytone stress: gāvyaṁ (RV I 140.13; V 34.8; IX 62.23), but also the oxytone one: gavyām (once in RV VII 18.7), as recorded by Monier-Williams (1999: p. 351). It should be noted that the feminine collective noun *bhrātrījā seems to demonstrate a barytone accent (cf. the lexical data recorded in 3.1), whereas the cognate neuter formation *bhrātrījōm (3.2) appears to have an oxytone stress, cf. also OInd. (RV) bhrātrām n. coll. ‘brotherhood, fraternity’ (Monier-Williams 1999: p. 770). This is why it is possible to put a tentative hypothesis that the Indo-European feminine collective derived from IE. *g̣oúyā ‘cow’ was stressed initially (i.e. IE. *g̣oújā f. coll.), whereas the cognate neuter collective finally (i.e. IE. *g̣oújom n. coll.). Of course, this situation might lead to creating forms with a secondary accentuation, e.g. Vedic gavyām turns into gāvyaṁ under the influence of Skt. gávyā f. coll. ‘a cow-herd’. If my explanation is correct, then the 4th accentual paradigm in Lithuanian must be treated as a secondary phenomenon.

6. Slavic and Latin-Romance reflexes of the collective noun *g̣oúyā

Above I demonstrated that the feminine noun *g̣oúyā is attested in three Indo-European subgroups: Baltic, Greek and Indo-Aryan. In these subgroups a collective meaning was generally preserved. Note, however, that the Oriya term gāba demonstrates not only a collective meaning (‘cattle’), but also a singulative one (‘a cow’) (Turner 1966: p. 219). Below I would like to discuss further possible cognates that completely have lost their original collective sense.

8 It should be emphasized, however, that most Greek collectives demonstrate an oxytone stress (Schwyzer 1939: p. 469).
The South Slavic languages demonstrate two cognate forms, which, in my opinion, remain in an etymological relation to Lac. βοῦα, namely Serbo-Croatian gúja f. ‘snake, viper’, dial. (western) ‘ascarid, Ascaris lumbricoides L.’, dial. also ‘epilepsy’, Bulgarian (dialect.) zýa ‘viper’. The Slavic terms seem to derive from Proto-Slavic *guja f. ‘snake, viper’ (Trubačev 1980: p. 168). The Proto-Slavic archetype may be treated as a primitive nomen collectivum with the original meaning ‘a crowd of snakes (or vipers)’. The Proto-Slavic origin of the Serbo-Croatian and Bulgarian forms, as well their possible relationship to the East Baltic forms, is sometimes questioned by the reason of narrow geographical range and a different meaning (so Sławski 2001: pp. 299–300). In fact, the local distribution of the South Slavic equivalents theoretically may indicate a substratum borrowing (perhaps from an Illyrian or Dalmatian *gaujā).

It is not impossible that Latin bŏva, also bŏa f. ‘snake, especially water snake’ and a number of Italo-Romance forms, e.g. Italian dial. (Piemontese) boa ‘worm, caterpillar / Wurm, Raupe’, (Val Sessia) bova ‘id.’, (Mailandish) boa ‘fog stripes / Nebelstreifen’, perhaps also a diminutive form bолово ‘snail / Schnecke’ (Meyer-Lübke 1935: p. 110, s.v. bóva “Schlange”), derive from the Indo-European collective name *g̯ουα f. as well, cf. a similar development in Lat. óvum n. ‘egg’ (< IE. *ōuióm n. ‘egg’, cf. Gk. ωόν n. ‘id.’). Of course, the Latin term bóva f. cannot be treated as an inherited term by the reason of the initial phoneme b-. However, the development of *g̯ου- to b- is typical of Osco-Umbrian, as well as Celtic. Many animal names (both wild and domesticated ones), attested in the Latin vocabulary, were probably borrowed from the Osco-Umbrian languages, especially from the Sabinic one, e.g. Lat. bōs, bōvis m. f. ‘cow’ (< as if from Sabinic *bous < IE. *g̯ous); Lat. bufō f. ‘toad’ (< IE. *g̯oudhōn, cf. OInd. gōdhā-, also gōdhikā- f. ‘a kind of lizard, iguana’); Lat. burdō or burdus m. ‘hybrid of a stallion and a female donkey, hinny’ (< IE. *g̯ordhōn or *g̯ordhos, cf. OInd. gardabhā- m. ‘donkey, ass’, Toch. B kercapo ‘ass, donkey’); Lat. lupus m. ‘wolf’ (< IE. *lukós m. ‘id.’ by a Sabinic mediation); Lat. ursus m. ‘bear’ (< IE. *r̥t̥kos m. ‘id.’ by a possible Lucanian mediation, cf. Gk. ἄρκτος m. ‘bear’).

The striking connection of the South Slavic and Latino-Romance forms seems to demonstrate a special semantic development from ‘herd of cows’ (in Indo-European) > ‘pack of wild animals’ > ‘crowd or bundle of snakes’ and further (as a result of a supposed singularization) to ‘a snake’ (in Latin and South Slavic) and ‘a viper, a worm, a caterpillar, an ascarid’ (in Italo-Romance and South Slavic).

Conclusions

In my paper I have analysed the Laconian term βοῦα f. ‘band of boys’ from the viewpoint of the Indo-European etymology and word-formation. The detailed and careful investigations presented above lead to the following results:

1. Having presented four different explanations for Lac. βοῦα suggested so far, I reached the conclusion that Albert Joris van Windekens (1986: p. 48) gave a correct
etymology of the Laconian word, comparing it with Lith. gaujà f. ‘flock, pack, herd, bunch, band, gang’.

2. Close equivalents are to be found not only in Lithuanian, but also in Latvian gauja f. ‘crowd, a lot of (people); multitude’ and Sanskrit gávyā f. ‘a cow-herd’. It cannot be excluded that Latin bo(v)a f. ‘(water) snake’, SC. gýja f. ‘snake, viper’, Bulg. dial. zýa ‘viper’ are related as well.

3. The comparison of the Laconian term βοῦα f. ‘band of boys’ with its possible equivalents, attested in Balto-Slavic, Indo-Aryan and Italic languages, strongly suggests a derivation from an Indo-European nomen collectivum *g̃óu̯iā f. ‘herd of cows, cattle’ (← IE. *g̃óu̯ús f./m. ‘cow’), see especially Sanskrit gávyā f. coll. ‘a cow-herd’.

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