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THE CROATIAN HYDRONYM AND CHORONYM *LÍKA* AND ITS PRESUMED RELATIVES *LECH*, *LIĚKĚ*, ETC.

The Croatian hydronym and choronym *Lika* is often mentioned together with the hydronym *Lech* (Austria, Bavaria) and with a group of Lithuanian and Latvian hydronyms and other toponyms and appellatives. They are all presumed to be based on the PIE root $*(h_1)leik-$ 'to bend'. Despite the fact that this root is not even mentioned in Julius Pokorny's *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (1959), researchers have taken it for granted for decades and used it for etymologizing onyms. It is clear now that this root does not exist. This article will show that the Croatian hydronym and choronym *Lika* and the Baltic onyms and appellatives are derived from the PIE root $*uleik^h-$ 'to be(come) moist, to moisten' and are not etymologically related to the name *Lech*, which is derived from the PIE root $*pleh_2k-$ 'to strike, to flatten'.

1. Introduction¹

1.1. A reader, acquainted with onomastic studies in general and those of Croatia specifically, might wonder what new information could possibly be revealed about the Croatian hydronym and choronym *Lika*. Indeed, the main novelties will not concern *Lika* itself, but rather the other names with which *Lika* is traditionally connected.

The article will mainly be concerned with the oldest layers of language we come across in Central Europe. For some researchers, some of the mentioned names are usually regarded as part of what is widely known as ‘Old European hydronymy’.

1.2. Neither the exact age nor the exact linguistic stratum of this layer of names has so far been determined without contradictions. Some researchers think that the language in which these hydronyms were coined was still Proto-Indo-European (PIE), while others rather regard it as a later North-West-Indo-European. Mostly it is thought to be Pre-Germanic, Pre-Celtic, etc. Recent research (often done by the author of this article himself) has shown, however, that more and more of these names lose their status as Old European and can be explained as Germanic or Celtic now. As for the rest of the names, we have to cope with another problem: starting from the phonological system represented in those names, neither Germanic nor Celtic could have developed from that language layer directly. This then raises the question whether there were two waves of immigration into Central Europe, one bringing the hydronyms and another one bringing what later developed into Germanic and Celtic languages. A lot of research remains to be done here!

1.3. Thus we see that nothing but names are attested in these oldest layers of languages we want to analyse. Furthermore, as it is generally known, the function of names is to refer to some entity – names do not have a meaning. However, we would like to find out what the names meant for those who gave them at the time they were given. In order to do so we have to find out which root and which suffix or suffixes were used to build a certain name and what they meant or what information they conveyed, respectively. Since we have no attested texts from the language layer in which the names were coined, this information can only come from other Indo-European languages. Only these well attested languages can be the basis for elucidating which roots have to be reconstructed, what those roots meant, and what the functions of the respective suffixes were.

¹ This paper is a slightly extended version of my paper presented at the conference *10. Skokovi etimološko-onomastički susreti*, which was held on 10-12 October 2022 in Zagreb.

I offer my sincere thanks to the anonymous reviewers, who helped to improve this paper and to make it more complete. Remaining errors are, of course, my fault only.

1.4. Therefore, all such information must come from these languages and may then be used for explaining the oldest layers of toponyms not stemming from these languages. The probability that anything attested in these oldest layers of toponyms cannot also be found in the other Indo-European languages is practically zero.

But given the improbable case that we should indeed be forced to reconstruct a new root based on the oldest layers of hydronyms and other toponyms or based on onyms in general, we should be aware of the fact that we are simply not able, and thus not allowed to attribute any meaning to such a root. Attributing a meaning to a root attested only in names is mere guesswork. And guessing is not scientific.

1.5. Finally, the last point about methodology must be made before starting with the analysis of *Lika* and its supposed “siblings”: We should keep in mind “Occam’s razor”. It goes – as is generally known – as follows: *Entia non sunt multiplicanda praeter necessitatem* (“Entities should not be multiplied without necessity”). In our case this will mean: If two roots already explain the complete material, we shall neither need nor invent a third one.

1.6. A group of names from Lithuania, Austria and Bavaria will be studied hereafter; they all have already been, in one way or another, connected with *Lika* in Croatia.

2. Cro. *Lika* and its prehistory

2.1. Let’s start with Croatia and our main concern, the hydronym and choronym Cro. *Lika*.² These homonymous names of a lesser-known little river and a commonly known region in Croatia were first attested in the well-known *De Administrando Imperio* by emperor Constantine Porphyrogenetos in the middle of the 10th century. There we find the accusative form <litzan> in 30,93 (145,9) in the sentence

ὁ βoάνοc αὐτῶν κρατεῖ τὴν Κρίβασσαν τὴν Λίτζαν καὶ τὴν Γουτζεκᾶ
“their Ban rules over Krivasa, Litza and Gutzeka”.

Already the commentary contained in the 1840 edition of *De Administrando Imperio* by Immanuel Bekker informs us: “Litza Slave Lika” (Bekkerus 1840: 349).

According to the traditional etymology, this form came into being by a transfer of the palatalized stem as occurring in the locative Common Slavic/Proto-Croatian **vъ Licě* to the rest of the paradigm (thus already Skok 1928: 227).

² Whether the toponym *Lič* (name of a village ca. 25 km East-South-East from Rijeka) can be connected with the hydronym *Lika* is not clear. The village was founded in 1605/06 by Bunjevac-Croatian settlers who might have brought the name with them. Anyway, it does not seem probable at the moment that the name might contain something old and/or relevant for our discussion.

It remains unclear, however, why this should have happened, but, of course, we may imagine a situation in which a Slavic text containing a locative form with *-c- was translated into Greek retaining that form, because the translator was not aware of such a phonological change in the paradigm of the name. And when such a text was later reformulated, the palatalized form could have stayed unchanged further on. Interestingly, the length of the Slavic root-vowel, as it can be presupposed from the modern form of the name, did not play a role in the transcription; the long vowel of the name was represented by Greek *iota*, not by *iota-epsilon*. Here the question arises whether we have to presuppose maybe some Latin or early Romance intermediary stage of the transmission of the Slavic name into Greek.

2.2. Another solution was proposed by Aleksandar Loma (1999-2000: 99, 138) who dealt with Slavic names in *De Administrando Imperio*. According to him, the spelling <-tz->, however, rather points to a form with *-č-. Thus, Loma reconstructs a derivative **Lič-aska* of an older **Lika*. But the details remain unclear and it has not yet been explained how and why only the *č should be extracted from Common Slavic *-č-ask- and then be rendered as Greek <-tz->, as well as why there was no reflex of *ь, which should have given /i/ at that time.

2.3. But whatever the real preform might have been, there is a general agreement that, in some way or another, we have to do with a name directly or indirectly representing Slavic **Lika*.

The first attestation of the name in Latin sources is from 1185 for the choronym *medietatem Lice*, from which a Latin nominative **Lica* may be extracted; the attestations for the hydronym are younger.

3. Etymology

3.1. For the etymology of the hydronym and choronym Cro. *Lika* several proposals have been brought forward. The name has been connected with several other names outside Croatia: in the Baltics with the hydronym Lith. *Liėkė* and other names based on related preforms, as well as with the name of the river *Lech* (in Austria and Bavaria), attested in Antiquity and the early Middle Ages as *Lica*, *Licca*.

3.2. The following roots have been used as starting points for etymologizing all of these names: PIE **ulejk^u*- ‘(to be) wet, to moisten’, PIE **lejk^u*- ‘(to be) wet, to moisten’, and PIE *(H)*lejk-* ‘to bend’. However, these connections are partially “fata morganas”, as will be demonstrated on the following pages.

3.3. The easiest to eliminate is the PIE root **lejk^u*- ‘(to be) wet, to moisten’. We sometimes come across this root in onomastic literature (e.g., Schramm 1981: 285

quoting Schmid 1975: 80–84). It probably came into being by wrongly interpreting words which actually contain PIE **uleik^{u-}* ‘(to be) wet, to moisten’, but which lost the initial **u-* in the languages where it was attested.

There is indeed a root **leik^{u-}*, but it means ‘to leave’. The PIE root **leik^{u-}* ‘(to be) wet, to moisten’ is a ghost-root.

3.4. Interestingly now, the traditional etymology links these names, especially *Lech*³, but indirectly also the others, with a PIE root *(*h*₁)*leik-* ‘bend’. The starting points for that etymology seem to have been Baltic words that mean something similar to ‘lower and because of that moist part of a meadow’ (for more see below).

Slavic names were also formerly etymologized based on that root, which means ‘to bend’. The most prominent one is our hydronym and choronym *Lika* in Croatia. Skok (1971–1974, 2: 301) also notes Croatian *Lika*, but does not really give any etymology for it. The name may be either a Slavic or a Slavicized one; in both cases the same loss of initial **u-* will have taken place at some point in time. If it was Slavic, the change was *lautgesetzlich* (“Liden’s Law”); if the name was non-Slavic, but was integrated into Proto-Croatian in the 6th or 7th century after the arrival of the Slavs in today’s Croatia, a potentially occurring initial cluster would have been simplified in the course of integration, as such clusters did not exist in Slavic languages at that time.

Thus, the same point is valid as in the case of the Baltic names (see below): nothing speaks against etymologizing Cro. *Lika* starting from PIE **uleik^{u-}* ‘to (be) wet, moisten’ based on a preform **uleik^{u-}-ā-*. Starting from this reconstructed form either in Proto-Slavic or in a Pre-Slavic language (Illyrian, according to Mayer 1959: 71f.), from which the name was then integrated into Proto-Slavic in the 6th or 7th century, we would automatically get Early Common Slavic **Likā* > **Lika*. The originally circumflexed root lost the accent to the acuted ending and produced the Proto-Croatian **Liká*; later the accent was retracted again by the *Štokavian* accent shift. It remains an open question, however, at least for the moment, whether the name is Slavic or Pre-Slavic. It is probably Pre-Slavic, as we do not find any appellatives in Slavic languages which might derive from the same root. And, as far as I can see, there is only one more Slavic river-name which could be adduced: Slovak *Likava* (1321 *Lyka*).

Another unclear point is whether the place name *Pōr* (= *Portus*) *Epilicus*, attested (in a hardly readable way) on the Tabula Peutingeriana in the vicinity of Iadera/Zadar, belongs here, as is generally assumed (cf. Mayer 1957: 140). We cannot even tell whether that name had a long root-vowel or a short one, although a long one is more probable. And if it does belong here, it shows simplification of the root auslauting labiovelar.

³ Cf. Anreiter, Haslinger and Roider (2000: 13); Anreiter (2005a: 45; 2005b: 16; 2008: 150).

Another open question remains whether the river name *Paccolicus (fl.)* in Bruttium (attested in the commentaries on Vergil by Maurus/Marius Servius Honoratus in the early 5th century) in Southern Italy could be derived from the same root or has different origins.

As a result of all this we may say that there is no need to reconstruct the PIE root $*(h_1)leik-$ ‘to bend’ for anything in Slavic languages.

3.5. Let us now have a look at the Lithuanian river names *Liėkė*, *Liekà* and their “siblings”. Altogether there are about 20 different hydronyms and microtoponyms in Lithuania based on a Lithuanian root *leik-/liek-/laik-*. The names can be simplex nouns, derivatives or compounds: besides the ‘classical’ Lithuanian literature (esp. Savukynas et al. 1963; Vanagas 1970; 1981a; 1981b) we find a list of names in SEJL² (2018–2021) s.v. *laikšės* (LithED 656 s.v. *laikšės* the names are not to be found; in this dictionary they are mentioned on p. 696 s.v. *lieknas*). But at least some of the data seems dubious when compared to the data in *Lietuvos vietovardžių geoinformacinė duomenų bazė* (<http://lkiis.lki.lt/lietuvos-vietovardziu-geoinformacine-duomenu-baze>; further on: LVGDB): the attribution of names to certain geo-objects does not always seem to be the same.

3.6. The Lithuanian material

According to Smoczyński (LithED 656), the following names are built from the Lith. root *leik-/liek-*:

3.6.1. River names from the root *leik-/liek-*:

a) derivatives: *Liėkė* (2)⁴, *Liekė* (4)⁵, *Leikà* (4)⁶;

b) compounds: *Leikupis* (1)⁷.

3.6.2. River names from the root *leikn-/liekn-*:

a) derivatives: *Liekna* (1)⁸; 7× in LVGDB, six meadows, one forest, no hydronym; *Lieknas* (1; 4×)⁹; *Liėknas* (2; 3×)¹⁰; 5× in LVGDB, all of them meadows, no hydronym.

⁴ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 91); not in Vanagas (1970); cf. Vanagas (1981a: 189; 1981b: 59); not in LVGDB.

⁵ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 91); not in Vanagas (1970); cf. Vanagas (1981a: 189; 1981b: 59); not in LVGDB.

⁶ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 89); Vanagas (1970: 46; 1981a: 185, 189; 1981b: 59); not in LVGDB.

⁷ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 89); Vanagas (1970: 241; 1981a: 189; 1981b: 59); not in LVGDB.

⁸ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 91); Vanagas (1970: 36; 1981a: 190).

⁹ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 91); Vanagas (1970: 36, 115; 1981a: 190); form with acute intonation not found in LVGDB.

¹⁰ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 91); Vanagas (1970: 36; 1981a: 190).

b) compounds: *Liėknupalis*¹¹, *Liėknupis*¹², *Pusiáulieknis*¹³.

3.6.3. Toponyms from the root *leikn-/liekn-*:

a) derivatives: *Liekniat*¹⁴ (in LVGDB as name of the part of a farmstead); *Lieknėlis*¹⁵, *Ūžlieknė* (probably a forest name)¹⁶, *Ūžlieknis*¹⁷, *Ūžliekniai* (1)¹⁸;

b) compounds: *Liėknagala*¹⁹, *Júodlieknis*²⁰, *Šilialieknis*²¹.

3.6.4. In addition to the just mentioned list we find the following derivatives and/or onymizations of Lith. *lieknas*, *liekna* in LVGDB: 2× *Lieknālis* (2): two meadows; *Lieknālė* (2): field; *Liėknai* (2): pasture; *Liėkiai* (2): village; 4× *Lieknos* (1): three meadows, one swamp; *Liekniniai pāsėdžiai*: meadow; 3× *Liėknė* (2): three meadows; *Liėknės* (2): meadow.²²

There are some more compounds and composite names which can be neglected in this context.

However, there is still the problematic form *Liekà*, sometimes mentioned in older onomastic literature, which seems to be a ghost name: it is neither recorded in any of the books on Lithuanian toponyms by Vanagas – which are still the basic reference points for Lithuanian onomastics – nor in the Lithuanian toponymical database. Most probably it was a result of a misspelling of the attested *Leikà*.

3.7. On etymology in detail

3.7.1. Where do these names come from, what is their etymology? Based on that root Proto-Baltic **leik-/laik-* we also find a number of appellatives in Lithuanian and Latvian, mostly meaning ‘swamp, marsh, wet meadow’ and the like.

3.7.2. Interestingly now, the traditional etymology links these lexemes with the PIE root **(h₁)leik-* ‘bend’; thus already in IEW (669):

¹¹ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 91); Vanagas (1970: 89; 1981a: 190); not in LVGDB.

¹² Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 91); Vanagas (1970: 235; 1981a: 190); not in LVGDB.

¹³ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 130); Vanagas (1970: 254, 256; 1981a: 269); not in LVGDB.

¹⁴ Not in Savukynas et al. (1963); not in Vanagas (1970); not in Vanagas (1981a).

¹⁵ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 91); Vanagas (1970: 115; 1981a: 190); not in LVGDB.

¹⁶ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 181) – *Ūžlieknės ūpis*; Vanagas (1970: 272) – *Ūžlieknės ūpis*; (1981a: 356) – *Ūžlieknės ūpis*: pertaining to the forest name *Ūžlieknė*; not in LVGDB.

¹⁷ Not in Savukynas et al. (1963); not in Vanagas (1970); not in Vanagas (1981a); not in LVGDB.

¹⁸ Not in Savukynas et al. (1963); not in Vanagas (1970); not in Vanagas (1981a).

¹⁹ Not in Savukynas et al. (1963); not in Vanagas (1970); not in Vanagas (1981a); not in LVGDB.

²⁰ Not in Savukynas et al. (1963); cf. Vanagas (1970: 251, 256); not in Vanagas (1981a); not in LVGDB.

²¹ Cf. Savukynas et al. (1963: 185); Vanagas (1970: 239, 247; 1981a: 331); not in LVGDB.

²² All these names are neither in Savukynas et al. (1963); nor in Vanagas (1970); nor in Vanagas (1981a).

2. *leik-*, biegen‘.

S. oben S. 309 E, wozu ferner der kelt.(?) FIN *Licus* ‚Lech‘ (Bayern), die lit. FIN *Liėkė* und *Leikà*, lit. *liekna* ‚sumpfige Wiese‘, lett. *liėkna* ds.; vgl. illyr. *Epi-licus portus*, FIN *Pacco-licus* (Bruttium), mod. FIN *Lika* (Kroatien).

The starting points for that etymology seem to have been those Baltic words that mean something like ‘lower and because of that moist part of a meadow’: we find Lith. *lieknas* (var. *liėknas*) m. ‘swamp, swampy meadows’, Latv. *liekns* m. ‘lower areas, low lying meadow’, Lith. *liekna* (var. *lieknà*) f. ‘low lying swampy meadow’, Latv. *liėkna* f. ‘swamp, lower parts between two hills, moist, swampy woods, big moist meadow’, Latv. *liekne* f. ‘big meadows along an estuary’, Lith. *làiškės* (1) f. ‘big swamp with bushes grown over it’.²³

From the attested Lithuanian and Latvian word forms we may reconstruct the following pre-forms: Proto-Baltic **leiknā-/laiknā-*, **leikna-/laikna-*, **leikniā-/laikniā-* and **laik-s-iā-*.

3.7.3. Trying to trace down that root, however, turns out to be impossible; it is a mere phantasm: it is not attested reliably anywhere in the appellative lexicon of any Indo-European language. Having a look at the entry in Pokorny’s *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* p. 669, we only find there the Baltic appellatives, the Baltic names – and among other names: Croatian *Lika!* But traditional dictionaries still support the ‘bend’ etymology, while only Smoczyński says that these words are without etymology. In the latest versions of his dictionaries he finally takes the step to a “new” solution (actually already over a century old, but “killed” by the authority of Fraenkel’s *Litauisches etymologisches Wörterbuch*), which in my view is the only one possible.

3.7.4. The Lithuanian and Latvian appellatives, as well as related names elsewhere, can be derived easily and conveniently from the elsewhere well-attested PIE root **uleikʰ-* ‘to (be) wet, moisten’. Derived from this PIE root **uleikʰ-* are also Lat. *liquēre* ‘to be fluid’, OIr. *fliuch* ‘moist’, etc.²⁴

PIE **uleikʰ-* ‘to (be) wet, moisten’ also seems to be the starting point for the Baltic words in the newer etymological dictionaries; however, the problem of the acute is not necessarily tackled – but it has not been explained with the old etymology either. The phonological development is clear: the loss of initial PIE

²³ Cf. LitEW (1: 332, 364f.); Karulis (1992-2001: 523) (with outdated etymology). In SEJL (350) Smoczyński still writes: “Bez etymologii.” – Cf. now SEJL² (2018-2022) s.vv. *lieknas*, *làiškės*, where now an etymology based on PIE **uleikʰ-* is preferred. This etymological idea is actually already over a century old (which was also overlooked by Bichlmeier 2010), cf. LitEW (1: 332), where Fraenkel gives the older literature, but refutes this proposal. There is no explanation given for the acute intonation; SEJL² (2018-2022) s.v. *làiškės* admits: “*Akut bez historycznego uzasadnienia.*” – ALEW does not list any of the words in question.

²⁴ Cf. LatEW (1: 812); DÉLL (362); EDLIL (345); EDPC (426).

* μ - before PIE * l , * r is regular in Baltic and Slavic, the labiovelar becomes a velar there.

3.7.5. PIE * μ leik μ - ‘to (be) wet, moisten’ may be regarded as a much better starting point for etymologizing Baltic names and Baltic appellatives meaning something similar to ‘swamp, marsh, wet meadow’ – and it is properly attested elsewhere. This automatically results in no need to adduce the PIE root *(h_1)leik- ‘bend’, which – and this is the crucial point – does not even seem to be attested anywhere else.

3.7.6. Slavic names formerly etymologized based on the PIE root *(h_1)leik- ‘bend’ (e.g., Slovak *Likava* (1321 *Lyka*) – and, as the most prominent, the hydronym and choronym *Lika* in Croatia) do not, however, attest this root either. As mentioned above (§ 3.4.), Croatian *Lika* is either a Slavic or a Slavicized name, and thus the loss of initial PIE * μ - might have taken place at some point in time.

3.7.7. Therefore, the same point is valid as in the case of the Baltic names: nothing speaks against etymologizing Slovak *Likava* and Croatian *Lika* starting from PIE * μ leik μ - ‘to (be) wet, moisten’, while it is clear that there is no need to reconstruct the PIE root *(h_1)leik- ‘bend’ for anything in Baltic or Slavic languages.

4. *Lech*

4.1. We shall now turn to material outside Baltic and Slavic languages. As already mentioned, there is nothing in the appellative lexicon. But besides the just mentioned Slavic group around the Croatian hydronym and choronym *Lika*, there is the river-name *Lech* in Austria and Bavaria.²⁵

The situation with the river name *Lech* is a bit more complicated. The name was attested in Antiquity and the early Middle Ages as *Lica*, *Licca*. Moreover, in Antiquity we also find in Ptolemy the Genitive Λικίου (2,12,2) and the accusative Λικίαν (2,13,3), as well as the ethnonym Λικάτιοι (2,13,3).

But it will turn out in the end that this name contains neither the PIE root *(h_1)leik- ‘to bend’ nor the PIE root * μ leik μ - ‘to be wet, to moisten’, as we have been told in several recent publications, among them Greule’s *Deutsches Gewässernamenbuch* (Greule 2014: 304), the standard publication on hydronyms in and around Germany and their etymologies. This dictionary offers both solutions as possible.

However, as already mentioned before, the PIE root *(h_1)leik- ‘to bend’ does not exist.

²⁵ Cf. on this name explicitly with full bibliography Bichlmeier (2010; 2023).

4.2. The name *Lech*, generally regarded as Celtic, cannot be reconstructed on the basis of PIE $*ulej\acute{k}^{u-}$ ‘wet, moisten’; in case it were a Celtic name, its form would now have to be German $\dagger Bleff$, $\dagger Fleff$ or $\dagger Flepp$, depending on when it was integrated into German. But it can be reconstructed based on a root meaning ‘to strike, beat’ or ‘to flatten’, without contradictions and without taking into account special rules only for this name. While traditionally the root has been reconstructed as PIE $*plek$ -²⁶, we now have to reconstruct it as $*pleh_2k$ - ‘to beat, to flatten’ (LIV² 485).

But in either case the reconstruction can be shown to work nicely: the variant based on the traditional reconstruction of the root would be the following scenario:

(late) PIE $*p_lk-n\acute{a}$ - > Early Proto-Celtic $*\phi likn\bar{a}$ - > Proto-Celtic $*likk\bar{a}$ - → OHG *Lech*

or

PIE $*p_lh_2k-n\acute{e}h_2$ - > late PIE $*p_lk-n\acute{a}$ - (by ‘weather’-rule)²⁷ > Early Proto-Celtic $*\phi likn\bar{a}$ - > Proto-Celtic $*likk\bar{a}$ -²⁸ → OHG *Lech*

Starting from a root meaning ‘flat, to flatten’ this would give us the meaning ‘the flat one’ = ‘the shallow one’.

4.3. Besides the river name, there are appellatives that seem to go back to the same Proto-Celtic preform $*likk\bar{a}$ -. cf. Mlr. *lecc* ‘plate of stone’, Welsh *llech* ‘plate of stone’, Breton *lec’h* ‘tomb stone’.²⁹

It is possible to arrive at the given semantics, too, by applying standard sound laws and standard semantic shifts, which would lead to the river name *Lech* originally having meant ‘the one with stone(-plate)s’.

²⁶ This root-structure is taken as the starting-point of the etymology of *Lech* by Falileyev, Gohil and Ward (2010: 22, 147).

²⁷ For the ‘weather’-rule cf. Neri (2017: 343), $VHK_nR/U\acute{V}$ > $VK_nR/U\acute{V}$, $RHK_nR/U\acute{V}$ > $RK_nR/U\acute{V}$ or $R_eK_nR/U\acute{V}$. This means, a laryngeal gets lost in the position before a sequence of occlusive plus consonantic resonant plus accented vowel. Thus, the development described is completely regular: PIE $*p_lh_2k-(m)n-\acute{o}$ - > Pre-Proto-Celt. $*p_lk-(m)n-\acute{o}$ - > Early Proto-Celt. $*\phi lik-n\acute{o}$ - > Proto-Celt./ (Proto-)Gaul. $*likko$ -.

²⁸ The assimilation of (Pre-)Proto-Celt. $*-kn-$ > $*-kk-$ is also regular: Stokes (1893, *passim*, here 170) had already shown (followed by Lühr 1985 *passim*, here 293, 337 and de Bernardo Stempel 2010, *passim*) that in Proto-Celtic there was a sound law similar to “Lex Kluge” in Germanic which caused that in a position before the word accent groups of PIE $*p/t/k + *n$ became Proto-Celt. $*pp/tt/kk$ and those of PIE $*b^{(h)}/d^{(h)}/g^{(h)} + *n$ became Proto-Celt. $*bb/dd/gg$.

²⁹ Delamarre (DLG² 201 = DLG³ 201) already took PIE $*plek$ - as a starting-point for his etymology. But in view of the fact that the root must be reconstructed indeed as PIE $*pleh_2k$ -, his preform $*p_lk\bar{a}$ has proved wrong: correctly reconstructed PIE $*p_lh_2keh_2$ would rather lead to Proto-Celtic $*l\bar{a}k\bar{a}$. And his claim that the geminate is the result of “gémination expressive” seems also to be rather *ad hoc*. Cf. also Delamarre (2012: 177; 2021: 183).

For that we have to start from an *n*-stem or a *men*-stem derived from the PIE root **pleh₂k-*:

PIE **pléh₂k-(m)n̥* n. or **pléh₂k-(m)ōn* m., Gen. **pl̥h₂k-(m)én-s* →
**pl̥h₂k-(m)n-és*, Instr. **pl̥h₂k-(m)n-éh₁*, ‘flatness, flat area, plain’.

And from this last form, i.e., the weak form of the stem, a possessive adjective can be derived in PIE **-ó-*: PIE **pl̥h₂k-(m)n-ó-* ‘having flatness or a plain, being characterized by flatness’. This form leads again to the aforementioned Proto-Celtic **likko-*.

In the appellatives there seems to have been a shift from ‘plain (thing)’ to ‘plain thing made of stone’ to ‘stone-plate’.

This meaning is corroborated by what the river looks like in its upper parts: in case of low(er) water, stone-plates protrude from the water and wide areas with gravel can be seen respectively, and at some places upriver the water flows through quite narrow canyons with steep rock walls.

5. Could Croatian *Lika* be of Celtic origin?

Starting from the just mentioned Proto-Celtic preform **likkā* for the hydronym *Lech* we may now test the possibility whether Cro. *Lika* might come from it. The answer to this question is a bit complicated:

If the Proto-Celtic form, which might have been coined by the Celtic tribes passing through the Balkans in the 4th/3rd century BC, was somehow passed on phonetically more or less unchanged to the Slavs arriving in the 6th century AD, we would expect it to have been taken over as Proto-Slavic **likā* > Common Slavic/Proto-Croatian **l̥ka* > Cro. **Laka* (cf. **d̥ska* > *daska*) or even **Oka* (though maybe only in a context after a preposition ending in a vowel; cf. **pril̥pnōti* > *prionuti*).

If, however, Proto-Celtic **likkā* entered some language without phonemic geminates and changed to **likā* and from there went on into Vulgar Latin or some Balkan Proto-Romance, where (accented) vowels in open penultimate syllables were lengthened, then the Slavs arriving in the 6th century AD might have heard there a form /likǎ/. If that was the case, they might have re-interpreted the form as Proto-Slavic **l̥kǎ* which would then give Proto-Cro. **liká* > Cro. *Lika*.

As we can see, theoretically we can explain the origin of Cro. *Lika* based on a Proto-Celtic preform, but we would have to accept several mediary stages, which can be assumed but cannot be proven. Moreover, this solution would, of course, sever the ties of Cro. *Lika* with the other Slavic and Baltic onyms and appellatives and would give the name an etymology different from the one

of Slovak *Likava* (1321 *Lyka*) – unless we think that this name took the same phonological development as Cro. *Lika*, although it would be very far-fetched if not outright impossible to assume some Proto-Romance intermediary layer in Slovakia.

Thus, a Celtic origin of Cro. *Lika* is rather improbable.

6. Results

1. A PIE root $*(h_1)leik-$ ‘to bend’ does not exist. It is a ghost-root and nothing else.

2. However, there is a PIE root $*uleik^u-$ ‘(to be) wet, to moisten’, which is well attested, e.g., in Latin and Celtic, and is most probably contained also in Slavic names (*Lika*, *Likava*), Baltic names (Lith. *Liekė*, etc.) and Baltic appellatives (Lith. *Lieknas*, etc.).

3. The hydronym Lith. *Liekà* is most probably a ghost name based on a typo for *Leikà*.

4. However, neither of the PIE roots $*(h_1)leik-$ and $*uleik^u-$ is the basis of the river-name *Lech*, which has traditionally been said to be etymologically connected with the Slavic and Baltic material. The river name *Lech* goes back to a PIE root $*pleh_2k-$ ‘to beat, to flatten’ and most probably originally meant ‘the one with stones’ or ‘the one with stone plates’.

5. Cro. *Lika* might theoretically also have developed from this Celtic name, but it appears more probable that it is etymologically connected with the other mentioned Slavic and Baltic onyms and appellatives.

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O etimologiji hrvatskoga hidronima i horonima *Lika*

Sažetak

Hrvatski se hidronim i horonim *Lika* često spominju uz hidronim *Lech* (u Austriji i Bavarskoj) i uz skupinu litavskih i latvijskih hidronima i drugih toponima te apelativa. Pritom se dovode u vezu s pie. korijenom $*(h_1)leik-$ ‘savijati (se)’. S obzirom na to da se taj korijen spominje u djelu *Indogermanisches etymologisches Wörterbuch* (1959.) Juliusa Pokornoga, jezikoslovci su se desetljećima pozivali na nj. Provjerom se, međutim, pokazalo da navedeni korijen uopće ne postoji. U radu se dokazuje da se hrvatski hidronim i horonim *Lika* te baltička imena i apelativi temelje na pie. korijenu $*uleik^{u-}$ ‘biti/postati mokar’, ali da nisu etimološki povezani s imenom *Lech*, koje je izvedeno od pie. $*pleh_2k-$ ‘udarati, činiti plosnatim’.

Keywords: Old European hydronymy, Slavic hydronymy, Celtic hydronymy, ghost-roots, historical phonology

Ključne riječi: staroeuropska hidronimija, slavenska hidronimija, keltska hidronimija, nepostojeći korijeni, povijesna fonologija

