

THE INDO-EUROPEAN ORIGIN OF LATIN *LEX*

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EL ORIGEN INDOEUROPEO DEL APELATIVO LATINO *LEX*

RESUMEN: La autora acepta la etimología tradicional de acuerdo con la que el apelativo latino *lex* deriva del verbo *legō* ('recoger, leer'), designando originariamente 'la colección (de principios jurídicos)'. Comparte el mismo origen la palabra del sánscrito *sraj-* 'corona de flores, guirnalda, corona que se lleva en la cabeza', originariamente 'colección (de flores)'. Ambos sustantivos abstractos (*nomina abstracta*), documentados en latín y en sánscrito, se reducen al mismo arquetipo **sleǵs* (f.), que se formó a partir de la raíz indoeuropea **sleǵ-* 'recoger' (la cual se reconstruye de modo erróneo como **leg-*). Las formas afines griegas y albanesas confirman la derivación sugerida de la raíz indoeuropea **sleǵ-*.

PALABRAS CLAVE: etimología latina; *lex*; nombres raíz indoeuropeos

ABSTRACT: The author accepts the traditional etymology according to which Latin *lex* (f.) derives from the verb *legō* 'to gather, take off, tear off, pick, roll up, look through, read', denoting originally 'collection (of legal rules, principles)'. The same origin is suggested for Sanskrit *sraj-* (f.) 'wreath of flowers, garland, chaplet worn on the head, any wreath or garland, circle, series, chain', orig. 'collection (of flowers)'. The two abstract nouns, attested in Latin and Sanskrit, must be treated as the same identical root formation **sleǵs* (f.), derived from IE. **sleǵ-* 'to collect, to gather' (and not **leg-*). Also the Greek and Albanian forms document the suggested derivation from IE. **sleǵ-*.

KEYWORDS: Latin etymology; *lex*; Indo-European root nouns

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I. INTRODUCTION

The Latin word *lēx*, gen. sg. *lēgis* f. '(legal) formula; contract, arrangement, law; resolution; regulation, rule' probably represents the root noun whose original meaning was 'collection (of legal rules, principles)', relating directly to the

Latin verb *legō* ‘to gather, take off, tear off, pick, roll up, look through, read’¹. The foregoing derivation is not ruled out by the etymologists; for instance, the French linguists Ernout and Meillet 1951: 631, s.v. *lĕx*, state: “Il est possible, mais non évident, que ce nom appartienne à la racine de lat. *legō*”. A similar position is maintained by Walde and Hoffmann 1938: 789, s.v. *lĕx*, who nonetheless voice reservations about the semantic aspect. De Vaan 2008: 337 accepts the original meaning ‘collection’, adding the following comment:

The PIt. [= Proto-Italic] root noun **lēg-* ‘law’ can be interpreted as a ‘collection’ of rules. Whether the root noun existed already in PIE [= Proto-Indo-European] is uncertain for lack of precise cognates².

Following De Vaan and others, I accept the traditional etymology, which derives Latin *lĕx* from the Latin verb *legō*. The verb in question represents an Indo-European heritage, cf. Greek λέγω ‘to gather, select, count, calculate’, secondarily ‘to speak, call’³ and Albanian *mb(ë)ledh* ‘to gather, clean up crops’ (Aor. *mblohdh*). The Indo-European root is commonly reconstructed as **lēg-* ‘to gather / sammeln, auflesen’⁴.

In my paper I would like to demonstrate that (1) the Latin noun *lĕx* has a precise cognate in Sanskrit; (2) the root noun **(s)lēg-s* existed already in Indo-European; (3) the reconstruction **slēg-* is more acceptable than **lēg-*.

2. LATIN *LĒX* AND SANSKRIT *SRAJ-*

In my opinion, the exact equivalent of the Latin lexeme appears not only in Italic (cf. Marrucian *līxs* nom. sg. ‘law’, Oscan *līgud* abl. sg. ‘lege’, *līgis* abl. pl. ‘legibus’, Samnian *legu* gen. sg. ‘of the laws’ and so on⁵), but also in Old Indic, cf. Sanskrit *sraj-* f. (nom. sg. *sraḥ*, instr. sg. *srajā*, loc. sg. *sraji*) ‘wreath of flowers, garland, chaplet worn on the head, any wreath or garland, circle, series, chain’⁶, as well as *srajā-* f. ‘wreath of flowers / Blumenkranz’⁷. The Sanskrit term could

¹ So F. Bücheler apud Walde 1910: 424f., s.v. *lĕx*; R. Meringer apud Muller 1926: 233; Walde, Pokorny 1926: 422; Buck 1949: 1421; Pokorny 1959: 658, s.v. *lēg-*. The traditional etymology is commonly accepted by most modern scholars, e.g. Weiss 1993: 15-28; Sihler 1995: 282; Roberts-Pastor 1996: 95; Mallory-Adams 1997: 346; De Vaan 2008: 337; Kaczyńska 2011: 244.

² De Vaan 2008: 337.

³ Cf. Liddell-Scott 1996: 1033-1034; Montanari 2003: 1171-1172.

⁴ See Pokorny 1959: 568; Rix 2001: 397.

⁵ Buck 1905: 199; Weiss 1993: 15-22; Untermann 2000: 434-435. See also Oscan *līgātūs* (nom. pl.) ‘legati’, *līgātūs* (dat. pl.) ‘legatis’, as well as the Oscan goddess’s by-name *līganakdikei* (dat. sg. f.) ‘legiferae’. According to Weiss 1993: 22, the Samnian phrase *legu tanginud* ‘by the decree of the laws’ seems to contain a clear Latinism.

⁶ Monier-Williams 1999: 1274.

⁷ See especially Mayrhofer 1964: 553; 1996: 784.

indicate ‘garland, wreath’ as a ‘collection (of flowers)’. Manfred Mayrhofer considers the etymology of the Sanskrit word to be doubtful⁸.

The suggested comparison is completely accurate from the view-points of the word-formation, semantics and phonology. Firstly, both Latin and Sanskrit terms represent the root formations (based on IE. **leǵ-* or **sleǵ-* ‘to collect, gather’), both are nouns of feminine gender, both belong to the abstracts (‘collection’). Secondly, both refer to the verbal root denoting the activity of ‘collecting, gathering’, though Latin *lex* denotes a ‘collection of rules’, Sanskrit *sraj-* means ‘wreath, garland’ i.e. ‘a collection of flowers’. Thirdly, the correspondences between Lat. *l* and Skt. *r* (as if from IE. **l*), Lat. *e/ē* and Skt. *a/ā* (as if from IE. **e/ē*), Lat. *g* and Skt. *j* (as if from IE. **ǵ*) seem certain. Fourthly, the presence of *s-* in Sanskrit is not troublesome, though it requires some important comments (see No. 3-6).

The original declension should be reconstructed as follows:

nom. sg. **sléǵs* (cf. Lat. *lēx*, but Skt. *sraḥ* is formed analogically);

gen. sg. **sléǵ-és* (cf. Skt. *srajás*, but Lat. *lēgis* with an analogical lengthening);

dat. sg. **sléǵ-éi* (cf. Skt. *srajé*, but Lat. *lēgī* instead of **lēgī*),

acc. sg. **sléǵ-ṃ* (cf. Skt. *srajam*, Lat. *lēgem* instead of **lēgem*);

loc. sg. **sléǵ-í* (> Skt. *srajī*);

instr. sg. **sléǵ-éh₁* (> Skt. *srajā*);

In plural we might expect: nom. pl. *sléǵ-es*; gen. pl. **sléǵ-óm*; acc. pl. **sléǵ-ṃs*; loc. pl. **sléǵ-sú*, instr. pl. **sléǵ-bhis*.

The long vocalism of Latin *lēx* (gen. sg. *lēgis*) seems expectable in the nominative singular, but it cannot be treated as original in the oblique cases (Sanskrit *sraj-* f. demonstrates only the short vowel -*ā-* in the root). Thus the lengthening should be regarded as resulting from the nominative case (by analogy) or alternatively from a long-grade verbal form⁹. In fact, the long-grade *ē*-root variant **lēǵ-* (or **slēǵ-*) is well attested in the Latin perfect tense *lēgī* ‘I gathered’ and the Albanian aorist *mbloḍh* ‘id.’ (as if from Proto-Albanian **ambi-llēdh-* < IE. **h₂mbhi-slēǵ-*). Thus it is obvious that the long-vowel preterite form *(*s*)*lēǵ-* was inherited from the parent language¹⁰.

Though there are no traces of the verb **srajati* in Old Indic, the nouns *sraj-* and *srajā* (f.) seem to demonstrate that Old Indic preserved a pair of derivatives of

⁸ Mayrhofer 1964: 553: “Nicht überzeugend erklärt”; Mayrhofer 1996: 784: “Nicht sicher gedeutet”.

⁹ Sihler 1995: 581f.; Weiss 2009: 412–413.

¹⁰ According to Weiss 1993: 23, the lengthened grade of the root may be related to the Narten verbal paradigm. He adds that “such a root Narten ablaut originally extended through all verbal and nominal formations”.

the Indo-European root **(s)leĝ-* ‘to gather, collect’. In any case, Sanskrit *sraj-* (f.) ‘wreath, garland’ (orig. ‘a collection of flowers’) should be regarded as an exact cognate of Latin *lĕx* f. ‘law’ (orig. ‘a collection of rules’).

3. THE PROBLEM OF THE INITIAL **s-*

The Sanskrit root noun *sraj-* (f.) differs from the Latin and Italic cognates in that it contains the initial sibilant **s-*. This difference might be explained in two ways:

1. The Sanskrit form *sraj-* contains the so called *s-mobile* added to the Indo-European root **leĝ-* ‘to collect, gather’. The movable **s-* occurs in the initial position of some Indo-European verbal and nominal roots, but it is absent from other examples. It is frequently explained as an addition created in the sandhi environment by the false decomposition.

2. It is not impossible to suggest that the initial **s-* was originally present in the Italic subgroup of languages, as well as in Greek. The initial cluster **sl-* has been simplified to *l-* in Latin and to *λ-* in Greek¹¹, cf. Lat. *lĭmus* m. ‘slime, mud, dirt’ vs. Old Norse *slĭm* adj. ‘thin, slim’, Old Eng. *slĭm*, Old German *slĭmen* ‘clean’ (< **sleimos*); Lat. *lĭmāx* (m. and f.) ‘snail’, Greek dial. (Hesych.) λείμακες ‘naked snails’ vs. Pol. *ślimak* ‘snail’ (< PIE. **slei-meh₂k-s*).

The former possibility allows us to reconstruct the Indo-European verbal root **(s)leĝ-* (with the ‘movable’ **s-*), the latter one seems to suggest that the reconstruction **sleĝ-* (and not **leĝ-*) might be correct.

Below I intend to discuss the problem. It is obvious that the Latin and Italic examples are completely ambiguous (e.g. Lat. *legō* may derive both from **leĝ-* or **sleĝ-*). The Sanskrit *sraj-* contains the initial *s-*. Whether it represents *s-mobile* or not, the answer is uncertain.

In this situation we should review the Greek and Albanian lexical data, which demonstrate many verbal forms of the Indo-European root **leĝ-* or **sleĝ-* and a number of derivatives.

4. THE GREEK EVIDENCE FOR THE CLUSTER **sl-*

The Greek lexical material indicates quite convincingly that the Indo-European root began with some consonantal cluster (e.g. **sl-*). Let us consider consecutively the confirmed forms:

¹¹ See Rix 1992: 76f.; Sihler 1998: 171; Meiser 2006: 112.

A. The Aeolic form ἐπίλλογος m. (Alcaeus, *Fr.* 204, 2)¹² corresponds to the Attic-Ionic form ἐπίλογος. The Aeolic geminate -λλ- remains inexplicable if the word in question stems from the traditionally reconstructed Proto-Indo-European pre-form **h₁epi-logos*. The gemination in the Aeolic dialect must represent some consonantal cluster (**σλ*, or **ϝλ*). So, in our attempt to clarify the origin of the Aeolic ἐπίλλογος, it is necessary for us to assume the archetype **h₁epi-slogos*. Thereby, the Indo-European root must have sounded **sleg-*. The Aeolic form rules out the traditional reconstruction **leg-*.

B. The perfect form εἴλοχα might be derived from the reduplicated pre-form **se-slog-h₂e*¹³, which goes back to the Proto-Indo-European root **sleg-*, showing a regular apophonic variant (with the vocalism **-o-*) as well as the aspiration of the velar consonant **ǵ* in the proximity of the laryngeal sound **h₂*. The aforementioned derivation of εἴλοχα is fully understandable in the light of the perfect form εἴληφα (Doric εἴλᾱφα), which is a continuation of the pre-form **he-hlāpha* (< Proto-Indo-European **se-sleh₂ǵ^h-h₂e*). There is absolutely no doubt that the perfect forms λέλεχα and λέλεγα are secondary both in their structure and meaning (referring only to the sense ‘to speak’). The regular perfect form, derived from the root **leg-*, would sound **λέλοχα* (< Proto-Indo-European **le-log-h₂e*), which form is not in fact attested. Therefore, the perfect form εἴλοχα should be deemed original and archaic, whereas the forms λέλεχα and λέλεγα – secondary and analogical¹⁴.

C. Greek Ionic-Attic ἀμφιλέγω, Doric ἀμφιλλέγω ‘to dispute, dispute about’ can be explained in two different ways: on the one hand, it may contain the rare Greek prefix ἀμφίς adv. ‘from both sides, on both sides, around, round, from all sides’ (e.g. cf. Attic ἀμφισ-βητέω, Ionic ἀμφισ-βατέω ‘to go separate ways, disagree’), while on the other hand – the Greek common prefix ἀμφί adv. ‘on both sides, around, round’ (< Proto-Indo-European **h₂mbhi*). The geminate -λλ-, confirmed in the Doric dialect, needs clarification. Unfortunately, we have no possibility of deciding whether the Greek verbum compositum goes back to the Proto-Indo-European **h₂mbhis-leg-* (according to the traditional interpretation, that is what the universally accepted pre-form would look like), or **h₂mbhi-sleg-*. The Albanian counterpart *mb(ë)ledh* ‘gather, clean up crops’ does not resolve the problem of the alternative, either, although there is no doubt that the Albanian *-l-* goes back to a kind of geminate.

My conclusion is: The internal analysis of the Greek material shows that there are such Greek forms as, e.g., Aeolic Greek ἐπίλλογος, Attic εἴλοχα, which clearly evidence that the onset of the Greek verb λέγω included originally a consonantal

¹²Rodríguez Somolinos 1998: 219, 247. See also Liddell, Scott 1996: 127.

¹³After Rix 1992: 256 and Beekes 1995: 238 I reconstruct the 1 sg. perfect ending as **-h₂e* (and not **-h₂m*).

¹⁴See especially Kaczyńska 2011.

cluster (e.g. **sl-* or **ɹl*). The Proto-Indo-European verbal root **leǵ-* ‘gather’ is therefore hard to keep up in the light of the Greek data. The alternative reconstruction **sleǵ-* is much better-grounded.

5. ALBANIAN EVIDENCE

For the Greek λέγω and Latin *legō*, the etymologists quote *tertium comparationis* in the form of the Albanian compound verb (verbum compositum) *mb(ë) ledh* ‘to gather, clean up crops’ (Aor. *mblodh*)¹⁵, demonstrating the Albanian prefix *mbë* corresponding to the Greek ἀμφι- and Latin *amb-* (from IE. **h₂m̥bhi-* ‘around’¹⁶). So, the Albanian verb is synonymous with the Greek ἀμφιλέγω, Doric ἀμφιλλέγω ‘to dispute about, dispute, question’¹⁷. The Albanian counterpart is of great importance to the reconstruction of the original form of the Indo-European root as it shows the palatal character of the voiced guttural appearing in the root (Albanian *dh* < Proto-Indo-European **ǵ*). Besides, unlike the Greek verbum compositum having the figurative sense, the Albanian verb preserved the original meaning ‘to gather’. Therefore, both the phonetics and semantics provide sufficient evidence that the Albanian word was not a borrowed verb.

The Albanian phoneme *l* (pronounced like [l] or [lʲ]) stems from the geminate **ll* in intervocalic position, as found in numerous Latin loan-words (e.g. Alb. *ng-jalë* ‘eel’ < Lat. *anguilla*; Alb. *bulë* f. ‘bud’ < Lat. *bulla*; Alb. *kál* (Rom. *kal*) m. ‘horse’ < Lat. *caballus*; Alb. *qelë* ‘priest’s house’ < Lat. *cella*; Alb. *fjalë* f. ‘word, speech, tale’ < Lat. *fabella*; Alb. *gjel* ‘cock’ < Lat. *gallus*, etc.), whereas the Albanian phoneme *ll* (a velarized alveolar lateral, pronounced like the English *w*) comes from the single liquid consonant in the same position (e.g. Alb. *engjëll* (dial. *êjill*) ‘angel’ < Lat. *angelus*; Alb. *prill* ‘April’ < Lat. *aprīlis*; Alb. *buell* ‘bull’ < Lat. *būbalus*; Alb. *qiell* ‘sky’ < Lat. *caelum*; Alb. *kallm* ‘reed, straw’ < Lat. *calamus*; Alb. *kallënduor* ‘calendar’ < Lat. *calendārium*; Alb. *këndellë* ‘candle’ < Lat. *candēla*, etc.¹⁸). The pre-Albanian geminate **ll* (whence Alb. *l*) could point to an original consonantal cluster (e.g. **sl-*, **ɹl-*, also **ln* or **lǵ*¹⁹), however not to the single Proto-Indo-European phoneme **l*.

The obvious conclusion is that the Albanian lexical data give a positive evidence to reconstruct the Indo-European root **sleǵ-* (and not **leǵ-*).

¹⁵ Cf. Walde, Hoffmann 1938: 780; Pokorny 1959: 658; Orel 1998: 251; Rix 2001: 356; Beekes 2010: 841-842.

¹⁶ Beekes 1995: 221. See also Skt. *abhi-*, Av. *aibi-*, *aiwi-*, OIr. *imb-*, OHG. *umbi*.

¹⁷ Liddell-Scott 1996: 92.

¹⁸ See especially Pedersen 1895: 535-551. Examples of the Albanian borrowings from Latin are quoted after Haarmann 1978: 200-271.

¹⁹ Demiraj 1997: 52, 55 derives the Albanian intervocalic *-l-* from IE. **-ln-* (e.g. Alb. *dal* ‘to go out’ = Gk. θάλλω ‘to bloom’ < IE. **dhalnō*), as well as from IE. **-lǵ-* (e.g. Alb. *mjel* ‘to milk’ = Gk. ἀμέλω ‘id.’ < IE. **h₂melǵō*).

6. INDO-EUROPEAN **SLEG-* ‘TO GATHER, COLLECT’

The Latin lexical material offers no possibility of determining the original form of the Indo-European root (Lat. *legō* may continue not only the Indo-European root **leǵ-*, but also **sleǵ-* or **ǵleǵ-*). For this reason, the Greek, Albanian and Sanskrit data must be taken into consideration.

The Greek and Albanian data indicate the initial cluster **sl-* (or alternatively **ǵl-*), whereas the Sanskrit nominal forms contain the cluster *sr-* (as if from **sl-*). Thus we reach to the final conclusion that the Indo-European verbal root denoting ‘to gather, collect’ should be reconstructed as **sleǵ-*. It is necessary to conclude that the traditional reconstruction **leǵ-* should be treated as obsolete (out of date).

7. THE ROOT NOUN **SLEG-S F.* ‘GATHERING, COLLECTION’

The Italic languages (namely Latin, Marrucinian and Oscan) demonstrate the root noun **lēgs* which seems to come back to the archetype **slēǵ-s* (gen. sg. **sleǵés*). This root noun had to be created as early as in the Indo-European times, if my hypothesis, according to which the Sanskrit appellative *sraj-* (f.) ‘wreath, garland’ corresponds to the Latin word *lēx* (f.) ‘law’ and refers to the verbal root **sleǵ-*, appears to be correct.

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