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The etymology of laz

Praslovanske *lazъ, *lězti, *loza in *lěsъ razlagamo kot izpeljane iz praindoevropskega korena *leg- ’upogibati, zvijati’ s pomočjo analize izvora praslovanskih *lāzъ lāza ’polje, travnik na mestu, kjer je bil posekan gozd’ in ’ozek prehod, odprtina v ograji’.

Proto-Slavic *lazъ, *lězti, *loza, and *lěsъ are explained as derived from the Proto-Indo-European root *leg- ’wind, bend’ through a closer look at the two origins of Proto-Slavic *lazъ and *lazъ ’(fallow) field or meadow created in place of a cut or burned forest’ and ’narrow passage’, ’opening, gate in a fence’.

The following correspondences can be observed in Slovene:

a) lāz lāza m. ’cleared area in a forest or next to one, covered with grass, usually with a field’ (SSKJ 2014: 1, 702);
b) lāz m. ’treeless area in a forest, cleared land, new field, new pasture (usually fenced)’; ’empty area in a vineyard or field’ (Pleteršnik 1894–95: 1, 498);
c) lāz laži f. ’gate in a fence’ (Pleteršnik 1894–95: 1, 499);
d) lāz lāza m. ’pole in a haystack or hayrack’, ’log (board), used for stepping on when working in a hayrack’ (Pleteršnik 1894–95: 1, 498);
e) perhaps also lās lasi ’long log (board) used by roofers for standing on’ (Pleteršnik 1894–95: 1, 496).

These words are known in all Slavic languages and can be semantically divided into the following two groups:

1) ’narrow passage’, ’opening, gate in a fence’, ’narrow path’, ’forest trail made by wild animals’, ’type of ladder’, etc.: Slovene lāz laži f. ’gate in a fence’ (Pleteršnik 1894–95: 1, 499), lāz lāza m. ’pole in a haystack or hayrack’, ’log used for stepping on when working in a hayrack’ (Pleteršnik 1894–95: 1, 498); compare lāza f. ’type of ladder’ (Pleteršnik 1894–95: 1, 499); Croatian lāz m. ’opening through which one enters a certain space; passage’, ’pathway in a thicket created by trudging’ (HER 2003: 662); Čakavian lāz lāži and with shift to the a-declension lāza f. ’opening in a fence, passage’; Serbian lāz and lāž ’narrow mountain pass, gorge; narrow pathway and the like’ (RSJ 2007: 624), ’narrow path,
passage, opening in a fence’ (RSKJ 1967–1976: 3, 155); Polish laz m. ‘narrow footpath on a mountain slope’ (Sławski 1975–83: 5, 59); Old Russian lazь ‘footpath in a forest’ (ESSJ 1974–: 14, 74), Russian laz m., ‘narrow, small opening, through which one can go or something can penetrate; passage’ (BTS); Belarusian laz m. ‘gap in a wall, hedge, etc.’ (ESSJ 1974–: 14, 74); Ukrainian laz lazu m. ‘narrow opening through which one can go somewhere; passage’, ‘footpath in a dense thicket, mostly used by animals’ (SUM 1970–80: 4, 436).

2) '(fallow) field or meadow created in the place of a cut or burned forest’ (hence ‘field, meadow, pasture’), ‘slope, hillside’, ‘hillside settlement’: Slovene lȃz láza m. ‘cleared area in a forest or near one, covered with grass, usually with a field’ (SSKJ 2014), lȃz m. ‘treeless area in a forest, cleared land, new field, new pasture (usually fenced)’; ‘empty area in a vineyard or field’ (Pleteršnik 1894–95: 1, 498), Resian las ‘clearing’ (ESSJ 1974–: 14, 73 after Kronsteiner, *Die Toponymie des Resia-Tales* 129), laze f. pl. (ESSJ 1974–: 14, 73); Croatian lȃz m. ‘part of a mountain slope feasible for passing; passage’ and ‘field obtained through clearing forest; cleared land’ (HER 2003: 662); Serbian lȃz and lȃz m. (RSJ 2007: 624: ‘field, meadow, and similar created by clearing forest; forest that is being cleared’ and ‘small area of cultivable land on inaccessible land, rocky landscape, moors, etc.’ (RSKJ 1967–76: 3, 155; according to ESSJ 1974– also feminine); Bulgarian dial. las m., ‘fields created at the site of previously cut or burned forest’ (ESSJ 1974–: 14, 72); Macedonian laz m. (= lazište) ‘dug up part of a forest’ (RMJ 1986: 378); Old Czech laz m. and lȃz m. ‘(fallow) field’ (Gebauer 1916: 2, 210, cited in ESSJ 1974–: 14, 73), Czech lȃz m. ‘cleared, but not cultivated land, covered with wild plants’ and laz m. ‘unplowed part of a furrow’ (Jungmann 1834–1839: 2, 275, cited in ESSJ 1974–: 14, 73); Slovak laz m. ‘area of land created by cutting forest’ (HSSJ II: 200), lazy pl. ‘groups of houses scattered on slopes, mountain settlement with scattered houses’ (HSSJ 1991–2008: 2, 200–201); Polish dial. laz lazu m. ‘area of burned or cut forest meant for cultivation or pasture’, ‘low swampy area overgrown with bushes’ (SJP 1958–69: 4, 284) and Old Polish ’block, obstacle, barrier; e.g., on a river’ (Sławska 1975–82: 5, 59); Lower Sorbian laz m., often plural lazy ‘pasture’, found in toponymy and hydronymy (cited in ESSJ 1974–: 14, 74); Old Russian lazь ‘cleared area in a forest meant for use’ (cited in ESSJ 1974–: 14, 74); Ukrainian dial. laz lazu m. ‘meadow’ (SUM 1970–80: 4, 436).

These two semantic groups cover roughly all of the meanings found in Slavic languages. Reflexes of Proto-Slavic *lazь or *lazь can also mean ‘(slow) walk’, ‘slowly moving person’, clearly a deverbal noun from *lězti, *lȃziti ‘crawl, creep, climb’.

Etymological dictionaries offer the reconstructed form *lazь laza m., explained as a deverbal noun from *lězti, *lȃziti for both semantic groups. This view was expressed in RHISJ (1898–1903: 5, 930): “Although the two meanings are rather
different, I believe that it is the same word nevertheless, the oldest meaning of which is one of the two meanings that gave rise to the others: the first meaning must have been a passage (a) or entrance (b)


Nevertheless, the picture appears to be more complex, albeit not very clear. Analysis of the reflexes and meanings shows that there are two different semantic fields, two declension patterns (ő-stems and ĭ-stems), and two different intonations: reflexes indicate the old acute as well as circumflex for the original form. Although it is commonly accepted that ‘narrow passage’, meaning ‘where one has to crawl’, came to mean something less narrow and eventually ‘field’ in Slavic (see ESSJ 1974–: 14, 66–67), I believe it convincing that the layer meaning ‘field or meadow created in place of a cut or burned forest, often covered with wild plants’ might be of different origin than the Slavic deverbal noun from *látiti, which yielded the meaning ‘narrow passage’ as well as ‘(slow) walk’, ‘slowly moving person’, the latter possibly coming into existence independently in some of the languages.

According to ESSJ (1974–: 14, 75), Proto-Slavic *látiti has two meanings,

a) ‘crawl, creep, climb’, as in Slovene léstti, laziti, látiti; and


Another possible explanation that I wish to present here and that also explains the other meaning of *látiti is based on the observation that—in cases where this can be established—‘narrow passage’ is more often connected with the ĭ-declension and circumflex, and with the meaning ‘field or meadow where there used to be forest’ there seem to be more cases of ĭ-declension as well as the old acute.

According to Vaillant 1974, the type *látiti mainly forms deverbal nouns with circumflex intonation except when prefixed (*túrət : *tôrъ). A deverbal noun with a prefix would be expected to have acute intonation: Slovene utôr, -ôra, preláz, láza. Vaillant gives some examples of acute intonation in this type (*gâdit : *gâdh), but they are not necessarily interpreted as deverbal nouns; it is more likely that *gâdh is an example of an old nomen actionis. Some of the deverbal nouns with old acute intonation (according to Vaillant) are represented by ščít ‘shield’, lek ‘remedy’, and rob ‘slave’. According to SSKJ (2014), however, they are all circumflexed.

The type *látiti therefore seems to form deverbal nouns with circumflexes. Some of the Slavic words pointing to Proto-Slavic *lazь or *lazь seem to indicate the old circumflex, but not all of them. I believe that there must have been contamination of two words with meanings that could be merged to some extent, but of different origin:
1) Proto-Slavic *lȃzь lazí m. 'narrow passage (where one has to crawl)': deverbal noun from *lȃziti of the same type as *žȃlь from *žȃliti;

2) Older Proto-Slavic *lȃzъ lȃza m. 'field or meadow created where there used to be forest' < Proto-Indo-European *lo̅-ó̅s, o-grade form of *leg- with Balto-Slavic lengthening according to Winter’s law.

In Slavic there is a lengthening following Winter’s law, whereby Baltic and Slavic short vowels undergo lengthening before unaspirated voiced stops, and that syllable gains a rising, acute accent (Winter 1978). Winter’s law states: “In Baltic and Slavic languages, the Proto-Indo-European sequence of short vowel plus voiced stop was reflected by lengthened vowel plus voiced stop, while short vowel plus aspirate developed into short vowel plus voiced stop” (Winter 1978: 439). Kortland (1988) observed that the lengthened vowel gains rising (acute) intonation and Rasmussen (1992) observed that the lengthening operated only in the syllable immediately preceding the stress. Matasović (1995a, 1995b) proposed limiting the operation of this law to closed syllables. This view was rejected by Derksen (2002).

Proto-Indo-European *log- 'stick, rod, branch’ is reconstructed in Pokorny (1959: 691) on the basis of Old Greek ológinon 'myrtle’ and Old Church Slavic loza, Russian lozá. As for the existence of Proto-Indo-European *log-, Slawski (1975–82: 5, 58) and Vasmer (1950–58: 2, 449) draw attention to Avestan razar- m., razurā f. 'forest, grove’, in his interpretation from *logʰ-u-ro-, whereas *lógʰ-o- would have yielded Proto-Slavic *lazъ. Mallory and Adams (2006: 157) agree to some extent, but their (more acceptable) reconstruction indicates the unaspirated form: *h log- 'branch' and 'vine, tendril’, with reflexes in Russian lozá 'vine’, Old Greek ológinos 'branch’, Avestan rázura 'forest, thicket’, Hittite alkista(n) 'branch’ (see Ćop’s explanation below). No language seems to support aspirated *g:.

For Pokorny (1959: 2, 660), the connection between the Proto-Indo-European root that he reconstructs as *lēgʼ- : *logʼ- 'twig, ‘hazel’ and Proto-Slavic *loza is uncertain. His reconstruction of *lēgʼ- is based on Albanian lethī́, laithī́ (*lə-ʼ-) 'hazel’, Lithuanian lazdà 'stick, hazel’, Latvian lazda and lagzda 'hazel’, (*laz-g-da), and Old Prussian laxde 'hazel, spear’, but also Proto-Slavic *lēska f. 'hazel’. According to Snoj (1993: 165), Albanian laithí cannot be linked to Slavic for phonetic reasons. I believe that a Proto-Indo-European *leg-/*log- root explains Proto-Slavic *loza (*lg-), lězti (*lēg-), les (*leg-), and laz (*log-). A connection was already suggested by Vasmer (1950–58: 2, 54) under loza: “On the other hand, this should raise the question of the relationship of loza with raz, réz; i.e., creeping, climbing plant” and was discussed in Toporov (1990: 47–52) in connection with Pokorny’s Proto-Indo-European *lēgʼ-.. For *lēg, compare Persian rāz ‘vine’ (Slawski 1975–82: 5, 240).

Proto-Slavic *loza is retained throughout the Slavic world (see ESSJ 1974–1990: 16, 118–120): 1) 'rod, branch’: Slovene (lôza, lôza), Croatian, Serbian (lôza), Bulgarian (lozá), Macedonian, Slovak (loza), Polish (loza), Russian (lozá), and Ukrainian (lozá); 2) 'vine’: Slovene (lôza, lôza), Old Church Slavic, Bulgarian (lozà),
Macedonian, Serbian, Croatian (lòza; dial. lozä), Czech dial. (loza), Slovak (loza), Polish (loza); 3) ‘willow’: Polish (loza), Russian (lozà), Ukrainian (lozà); 4) ‘forest’ or ‘shrubs, bushes’: Slovene (lòza, lóza) (also ‘grove’, ‘forest undergrowth, copse’), Serbian, Croatian (lòza), Russian (loza), Ukrainian (lozà). In Proto-Slavic *loza one could trace the old zero-grade form of the same e-grade root: *leg- : *lg'-dô- ‘one that gives rods’ according to the rule that Proto-Slavic *zd yields z if the preceding vowel did not carry the stress (compare Proto-Slavic *grēžiți versus Lithuanian *gramzdûti; see Snoj 1993: 165ff.). Baltic languages support this reconstruction: Lithuanian lazdà ‘stick, hazel’, Latvian lazda, lagzda ‘hazel’, Old Prussian laxde ‘hazel’ (Toporov 1990: 47–52). In Balto-Slavic a secondary schwa could have developed within clusters of a syllabic liquid between two consonants (see Rasmussen 1992: 71: ‘/a/ as zero-grade substitute’). This explains the suggested development *lg'-dô- > *lg'-dô- > Balto-Slavic *lazdû. On the other hand, I am unable to explain why Winter’s law does not apply in this case. Čop (1971: 31) explained alk in Hittite alkîsta(n) as a development from zero-grade *lg'-.

Proto-Slavic *lêsü lësa a) ‘wood’ and b) ‘forest’ (“etymologically unclear” according to ESSJ 1974–: 14, 250) can be explained as a lengthened form of the e-grade stem according to Winter’s law (Proto-Slavic *lêsü < Proto-Indo-European *lĕg'-só-). After the lengthening, retraction from the final falling tone onto the first rising tone took place. The circumflex intonation that I reconstruct for Proto-Slavic *lêsü means that this is the mobile type with the acute root syllable, which according to Stang (1957: 9–11) merged with accent paradigm c to become circumflexed. Sławski’s opinion (1975–82: 5, 55) that in *lêsü there is the reflex of a Proto-Indo-European short diphthong is therefore not necessarily valid. Parallel development can be postulated for *lázü < *log'-ós, except that it did not belong to the mobile type and thus retained the rising tone.

The lengthened grade of *leg'- is *lég'- ‘crawl, creep’ (Latvian lēzēt, ležāt, lezuōt ‘slide, slip’, Old Prussian līse ‘crawls’ and Proto-Slavic *lêzti, láziti, which yielded *lazû). ESSJ (1974–: 16, 119) sees a connection between Proto-Slavic *loza and *lézti following Štrekelj (1905: 27, 52), but derives *lézti from Proto-Indo-European *lēg'- following Pokorny (1959: 1, 660) or *lêg'- following Pokorny (1959: 1, 658–659; ESSJ 1974–: 15, 37).

On the basis of a formal and semantic connection to *lég'- ‘crawl, creep’, the full-grade root *leg'- would have meant ‘that which winds, bends’ > ‘rod, branch’, which developed the meanings ‘hazel’, ‘myrtle’, ‘vine’ and further (extended with suffixes) ‘where (hazel) rods grow; field where plants grow’ (*lazû), ‘site where rods can be obtained; place that gives rods’ (*lozû), ‘vegetation, wood’ > ‘site where wood grows’ (*lêsü).

Proto-Slavic *lézti, *lazû, *loza, and *lêsû seem to be etymologically related. As for Proto-Slavic *lëska ‘hazel’ (Slovene lëska, Croatian lijëska, Serbian lëska, Czech líska), which Miklosich already explained in connection with these words (cited in ESSJ 1974–: 14, 240): Proto-Slavic *lëska could be reconstructed as *lég'-kô- or *lég'-sô- (cf. Proto-Slavic *lësa > Old Czech lësa, Russian lesá, Slovene lësa,
Croatian ljȅsa). The trouble is that in this case one cannot postulate retraction of stress to a pretonic vowel according to Hirt’s law (except as a possible analogy to *lȅsъ).

As for Slavic occurrences of both groups of words *lazъ/*lazь (‘narrow passage’ and ‘field or meadow created in place of a cut or burned forest’), it seems that a distinction should be made between the two different proveniences. Etymological explanations, which favor the explanation that *lazъ is a deverbal noun from *lězti, are connected to the latter development, and etymologies that link it to Proto-Slavic *loza are connected to the former development. Proto-Slavic inherited *lȁzь from Proto-Indo-European. Proto-Slavic *lȁzь from *lȁzìti (originally from the lengthened grade of the same Proto-Indo-European root that yielded Proto-Slavic *lazъ) was formed later. It seems that, due to contamination with the new, semantically somewhat similar word, in some places the old word adopted the intonation and seems to be fading as an autonomous word of distinct provenience.

Ablaut grades of Proto-Indo-European *lěg̑- ‘wind, bend’:


b) o-grade: *lŏ̑g̑ ‘branch, rod’: Old Greek ológinon, Avestan razur- m., razurā, *lŏ̑g̑-ós > Proto-Slavic *lazъ;

c) zero-grade: *l̑g̑- ‘branch’: Hittite alkista(n), *l̑g̑-dō- > Balto-Slavic *lazdā > Lithuanian lazdā, Proto-Slavic *loza;


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K etimologiji laza

Praslovansko *lâžь lâžа m. ‘polje, travnik na mestu, kjer je bil posekan gozd’ se razloži iz praindoevropskega *log'-ós, o-jevske stopnje korena *leg'- s podaljšanjem po Winterjevem zakonu. Iz korena *leg'- ‘upogibati, zvijati’ je morda tudi psl. *lězti, *loza in *lěšь.

The etymology of laz

Proto-Slavic *lâžь lâža m. ‘(fallow) field or meadow created where there used to be forest’ is explained as derived from Proto-Indo-European *log'-ós, the o-grade form of *leg'- with Balto-Slavic lengthening according to Winter’s law. The Proto-Indo-European root *leg'- ‘wind, bend’ might have also developed into Proto-Slavic *lězti, *loza, and *lěšь.