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ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF LITHUANIAN lēžti

In his etymological dictionary of the Lithuanian language prof. Wojciech Smoczyński (SEJL, 348) treats the Lithuanian verbs lēžti, lēžtu, lēžau1 ‘to remit (of frost); to quiet down (of a slaughtered piglet)’ and atlēžti (also atlēšti) ‘to diminish, remit (of frost); to grow warm (of weather); to quiet down (after a ferment)’, trans. ‘to soften (soil)’ as remaining without etymology (“Bez etymologii”). In my opinion, the Lithuanian verb(s) in question cannot be separated from the Celtic and Germanic verbs denoting ‘to drop, drip, melt, leak’, e.g. OIr. legaid ‘melts, melts away, destroys, perishes’, MW. dilein ‘to destroy, chase away’ (< Celt. *di-legnā-), MW. lleith adj. ‘wet, moist’ (< Celt. *leg-to-); ON. leka ‘to leak, pour out in drops’, E. leak, G. lecken (IEW, 657; LIV2, 397). The verbal root in Lithuanian demonstrates a long vocalism which can be explained as a Narten root ablaut (PIE. *lē-< *le-) or as a secondary lengthening in Baltic before the voiced stop (Winter’s law).

It is obvious that the Indo-European verbal root had to denote a weather phenomenon connecting with growing warm in the early spring time (‘to remit (of frost); to grow warm(er); to thaw; to melt; to drop, drip, leak’), cf. also Lith. atlēšys m. ‘thaw’ (< Baltic *at-lēž-s-), also ātlyža f. ‘id.’ (with a secondary zero-grade of the root *lēž-).

Julius Pokorny (IEW, 657) reconstructs the root *leg- (on the basis of the centum languages), whereas Martin Kümmel (LIV2, 397) hesitates whether the root in question contained a velar voiced stop (PIE. *g) or a palatal voiced one (PIE. *g). The Lithuanian verb lēžti, if related, allows us to reconstruct PIE. *leg- ‘to drop, drip, melt, leak; thaw’.

1 Erratum in SEJL (editor’s note).
REFERENCES


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