

The History of Latin *alcēs* 'elk' (followed by a brief discussion of the history of Greek ἄλκη)¹

By AURELIJUS VIJŪNAS, Los Angeles

I. The history of Latin alcēs 'elk'

1. The attested nominative singular forms of alcēs in Latin

The noun *alcēs* 'elk (GB), moose (US)'² has nine or ten forms for the nominative singular in Latin: in addition to the above-mentioned *alcēs*, also *alces*, *alcis*, *⟨e⟩lax* (?), *alcs*, *alx*, *achlis* (gen. sg. *-is*), *alcē* (gen. sg. *-ēs*), *alce* (gen. sg. *alcēs* or *alcis*), *alcās* (gen. sg. ?; *LTL*, pp. 53, 174; *TLL*, p. 1513).³ The form *alcēs* is the "regular" form of this noun, and it is this form that is usually used as the key-word for "elk" in Latin dictionaries and grammars, cf. Walde/Hofmann (1938:28, 30), *LTL* (p. 174), Greenough et. al. (1991:31, fn. 2.), Kuzavinis (1996:44), and so forth. The form *alcē* is very common too, and often it is either provided as a variant of *alcēs*, or even as the key-word itself, cf. Walde (1910:24), *TLL* (p. 1513), Ernout/Meillet (1959:20); Pokorny (1959:303); *OLD* (p. 94).⁴

¹ This article was originally written as a final paper for the course *History of Latin*, taught by Prof. B. Vine. I am indebted to Prof. Vine for several very useful comments.

² From now on the British version "elk" will be used in this paper to translate Latin *alcēs*.

³ The root of *alcēs*, except for the very dubious form *⟨e⟩lax* (see above), usually shows the vowel *a*. However, an accusative form *elcum* (nom. sg. **elcus*, or a mistake?) is attested (*TLL*, p. 1513).

⁴ It is quite possible that the forms ending in *-ē(s)* are to be interpreted as *-ēs*. Latin nouns ending in *-ēs* are *t*-stems, cf. *mīles*, *-itis* 'soldier', and nouns ending in *-ē* are neuters (cf. *mare* 'sea'), but this is unlikely for an animate being like an elk. Therefore, if *alce* is to be read *alcē*, its genitive may have been *alcēs*, and not *alcis*, as is shown in *LTL*.

The distribution of the individual forms is noteworthy. The first instance of a nominative singular form is found in Gaius Julius Solinus (III c. A.D.), but he writes *alce* (i.e. *alcē*; cf. Solinus' "est et alce mulis comparanda...", Mommsen 1864: 108-9). The earliest attestations of the form *alcēs* come from medieval manuscripts (cf. Heffley 1882:17). The first clear instance is from the IX c. A.D., and it is found in a manuscript known as the Codex Cassellanus. In this manuscript a commentary on the so-called "Tironian" characters (Latin tachygraphic symbols) has been preserved, and in table No. 108 the character No. 41. $\frac{h}{-}$ is assigned a meaning of *alces* (i.e. *alcēs*; see Schmitz 1968, tab. 108, character No. 41.). Another example comes from the writings of Salmasius (XVI – XVII c.), where he "corrects" Solinus' *alce* (cf. above) as *alcēs* (see also *LTL*, p. 174). Both of these texts are very late in comparison with both Solinus' time and with the first attestation of the noun itself. A nominative plural form of this noun, viz. *alcēs*, is first attested in a text from the I c. B.C., Caesar's *Bellum Gallicum*, book VI, paragraph 27, as discussed further in section 2. below.

Two other medieval commentaries on Tironian characters, directly related to the above-mentioned Cod. Cassellanus and preserved in Cod. Guelferbytanus (IX c.) and Cod. Leidensis Vossianus Lat. O 94 (IX – X c.; cf. Schmitz 1968:61), curiously exhibit the forms *alcis* (Cod. Guelferbytanus) and *alcs* (Cod. L. V. L. O 94; written $\langle alc///s \rangle$, cf. Schmitz, *ibid.*).

On this basis one might assume that the earliest nom. sg. form of *alcēs* was in fact *alcē*. However, there are grounds for believing that the "regular" form *alcēs* is quite old, too. The corpus of Tironian characters mentioned above was created by several authors between the I c. B.C. and I c. A.D. (cf. Bischoff 1990: 80). Even though the noun *alcēs* was not included in the list of the earliest author (Marcus Tullius Tiro; he is said to have created only the symbols for prepositions, cf. Mentz 1944:18), it may be that it was already included in the list of the first of Tiro's successors (Vipsanius? Mentz calls him simply "der erste Fortsetzer Tiros", cf. Mentz 1944:53, *et passim*). As has been noticed by earlier scholars, Tironian notes are often composed of graphemes, and this is the case also with the character for *alcēs* (see above). Apparently, it consists of the "main" part (or

“radical”, cf. Bischoff 1990:80) $\frac{1}{2}$ (*alc-*), and the “auxiliary”, $\frac{1}{2}$, which stands for the ending (-*es*).⁵ The symbol for the sound cluster *es* was added to the corpus by Mentz’ “der erste Fortsetzer”, and if it were known that it was “der erste Fortsetzer” who added the noun “elk” to the list, it would be possible to maintain that his pronunciation had been *alcēs*. However, it may well be that the word *alcēs* was added to the corpus by another author, who would have made use of the symbol $\frac{1}{2}$, invented by his predecessor, i.e. “der erste Fortsetzer”. What is clear is that given the shape of the character, $\frac{1}{2}$ the pronunciation of its author – whoever it was – must have been *alcēs*, and that this form existed in Latin as early as the I c. A.D. Thus, the form *alcēs* appears to be even older than Solinus’ form *alcē*. But this does not prove that *alcēs* is the original, i.e. the historically correct nominative singular form of this noun. Then the following questions can be raised: first, what was the original ending of the nominative singular form, and secondly, what was the source of all the other attested endings? In this paper I am going to explore the history of the noun *alcēs* in Latin, attempting to find answers to these questions.

Formally, *alcēs* belongs to the III declension. As is well known, the nouns that belong to this large declension type can have quite different endings in the nominative singular. Therefore, the simplest assumption is that *alcēs* has received certain endings analogically. But which endings are analogical, and which one is original? The multitude of the analogical endings shows clearly that the Romans themselves were not quite sure about the correct declension of this noun, and different authors (or scribes) used whatever ending suited their “Sprachgefühl” best. Very common endings for the III declension are *-is* (cf. *canis* ‘dog’, *sitis* ‘thirst’) and [-*Cs*] (cf. *urbs* ‘city’, *nox* [-*ks*] ‘night’, etc.), and it is quite possible that forms like *alcis* and *alx* are analogical. In contrast, forms with rarer endings, like *alcēs* or *alcē*, could be treated as *lectio difficilior* and so might be the historically “correct” forms. Whether this assumption is correct

⁵ A number of words ending in *-es* also have this characteristic element (see further Schmitz 1968, tab. 53, 94, 107, 108, 112, et passim).

or not can be determined by a study of the history of this noun, to be undertaken in the following section.

2. *The history of the noun alcēs*

The communis opinio concerning the origin of *alcēs* is that it is a Germanic loanword, cf. Walde/Hofmann (1938:28), Ernout/Meillet (1959:20), Pokorny (1959:303), *TLL* (p. 1513), Gamkrelidze/Ivanov (1995:437), Kuzavinis (1996:44), Mallory/Adams (1997:178), among others. The word itself, even though attested in a similar form only in three Indo-European sub-branches, must have been a part of the Proto-Indo-European vocabulary (cf. Germanic: Old Norse *elgr*, Old High German *elh/elhol/elah/elaholelich*, etc.,⁶ Old English *eolh/elch/ēola*,⁷ Slavic: Old Church Slavonic лось, Russian лось, Czech *los*, Upper Sorbian *łos*, Polish *łoś*; Indo-Iranian: Sanskrit *śśya-* 'male antelope' [of a certain species, see Mallory/Adams, *ibid.*], Khotanese *rūs-*, Wakhian *rūš* 'mountain sheep').⁸ The PIE form is reconstructed as **(h₁)ol̥k-i-s*, an animate *i*-stem noun (cf. Mallory/Adams 1997: 177).

Why the La. *alcēs* must be a loanword has been shown by Mallory/Adams (*ibid.*). The elk (*Alces alces*) is an inhabitant of forested areas with temperate climate, and has never lived in Southern Europe. Even during the Pleistocene period, when the climate of Europe was much cooler than it was in Proto-Indo-European times, the elk did not live to the south of the Alps (cf. Kurtén 1968: 169). From the late Pleistocene onwards, the area inhabited by elk continued to diminish, and already in ancient times this species lived only in the northern regions of Europe – in the forested areas around the Baltic sea, and in today's Belarus, Russia, etc. The Proto-Italic people moved to Italy from

⁶ See full list in Palander (1899:102-3). The vowel between *l* and *h* in certain form, cf. *elah*, etc., was inserted secondarily.

⁷ The forms *elch* and *ēola* are Anglian, cf. Campbell (1997:97), the form *eolh* is West Saxon.

⁸ Greek ἄλακη 'elk' is a borrowing and therefore is not a direct reflex of PIE **(h₁)ol̥k-i-s*. This word entered Greek from Latin, but the ultimate source of borrowing was Germanic (for a more detailed account of the history of Greek ἄλακη see section II. below).

somewhere in Central Europe several millennia posterior to the Pleistocene period (around 1000 B.C.), and it is likely that the Proto-Italic people and elk never met. Moreover, the Indo-European proto-form **(h₁)olk-is* could not have yielded Lat. *alc-*, and there is neither reason nor ground to reconstruct an IE **h₂elk-*: such a form would be unfavourable for Germanic, as in Germanic there existed forms that had the vowel *e* in their roots (see the examples above). Reconstruction of **h₂* would also necessarily exclude the possible and rather attractive relation of the IE name for the elk to that of the red deer (*US* = “elk”), as the IE protoform of the latter definitely requires *e*-vocalism, cf. Lithuanian *elnias*, OCS *елень* ‘deer’, Armenian *eln* ‘hind’, Greek *έλλός* ‘fawn’, etc. (Gamkrelidze/Ivanov 1995:437; Mallory/Adams 1997: 154).

The claim that *alcēs* is borrowed from (early) Germanic is strengthened by the fact that the earliest known attestation of this noun in the Latin language comes from Caesar’s *Bellum Gallicum*, precisely where Caesar describes his expedition to the lands of Germanic people (see *B.G.* VI.27). There Caesar sees some animals that are apparently new to him, and he describes them in the following way:

Sunt item, quae appellantur alces. Harum est consimilis capris figura et varietas pellium, sed magnitudine paulo antecedunt mutilaeque sunt cornibus et crura sine nodis articulisque habent neque quietis causa procumbunt neque, si quo adflictae casu considerunt, erigere sese aut sublevare possunt.

There are also elks so-called. Their shape and dappled skin are like unto goats, but they are somewhat larger in size and have blunted horns. They have legs without nodes or joints, and they do not lie down to sleep, nor, if any shock has caused them to fall, can they raise or uplift themselves.

(text and translation from Edwards 1979:352-3)

That these “alces” (i.e. *alcēs*) are foreign to the Roman soldiers is made clear from the way Caesar describes them. Caesar’s words “quae alces appellantur” imply that the term is indigenous. In what form, then, did the Romans borrow the Germanic word? Was it borrowed as *alcēs*, which was to become the general form in later Latin, or did it have some other shape in the Latin of Caesar and his soldiers, e.g. any of the other variants attested, such as *alcē*, *alx* or *alcis*?

Given that the pronunciation of loanwords in the borrowing language has to reflect (at least to some extent) their pronunciation in the source-language, one has to agree that the Germanic base-words for La. *alcēs*, *alcē*, *alcis* or *alx* – whichever of them was used by Caesar and his soldiers – would have been pronounced in a somewhat similar way. Such a starting point rules out the Latin form *alcē* as being “original” (i.e. “Caesarian”), as Western Proto-Germanic, which was the source of the borrowing, did not have any *ē*-stem nouns (Caesar’s military expedition took place to some extent in the lands of West Germanic tribes; see the map of Caesar’s campaign in Edwards 1979, following Index IV; and Krahe/Meid 1969:28-30).⁹ The La. form *alx*, which is a root noun (i.e. **alc-s*) from the point of view of historical morphology, has to be ruled out too, as Proto-Germanic did not have a root noun **alxyz* that could have been borrowed by the Romans and ended up as a root noun *alx* there.¹⁰ It is only the remaining forms, *alcis* and *alcēs*, for which some linguistic support can be found. The two forms will be discussed separately.

Let us first look at the form *alcis*. From the synchronic point of view, *alcis* belongs to the III declension, and is declined like, e.g., *sitis* ‘thirst’ or *canis* ‘dog’. From the historical point of view, *alcis* would be an *i*-stem, like *sitis*.¹¹ The reason for such an analysis is that, as mentioned above, the PIE word for “elk” is reconstructed as an *i*-stem noun too, and it survived as such to some extent also in several Proto-Germanic dialects. An

⁹ The Indo-European ending **-ēn* (IE *n*-stems) was ousted in West Germanic by the ending **-ō*, cf. Krahe/Meid (1969:45).

¹⁰ The “standard” IE word for the elk was an *i*-stem noun (cf. Pokorny 1959:303, Mallory/Adams 1997:178) and, as will appear below in this section, it has been preserved as such also in certain Proto-Germanic dialects, whereas other dialects transformed the inherited *i*-stem to an *n*- or an *a*-stem, i.e. those morphological classes of nouns which were productive. The root noun **alxyz*, mentioned above (theoretically, one might expect another version, PGmc. **elxyz*, as well), would have had to be an innovation too, but such a thing could not have happened in Proto-Germanic, as root nouns were very rare and not at all productive (on the contrary, this group of nouns was gradually disappearing in Germanic).

¹¹ The noun *canis* is a consonant stem from the historical point of view, and its similarity to the historical *i*-stems is due to special Latin development.

example of an *i*-stem noun “elk” in Germanic is ON *elgr* ‘elk’, which developed from PGmc. **algiz* (< pre-Gmc. or late IE **olkis*).¹² The Proto-Germanic (pre-Scandinavian) form **algiz* looks quite close to La. *alcis*, but it is not the form from which *alcis* derives. Latin *alcis* cannot derive from the Proto-Germanic form **algiz*, as PGmc. **algiz* would have developed to La. **algis*.¹³ The shape of La. *alcis* points to a protoform **alχiz*, in which the velar fricative would have been voiceless (as opposed to that of the pre-Scandinavian form), cf. Much (1895:26), Osthoff (1901:319-20), Pokorny (1959:303), among others. Such a voiceless fricative, *χ*, can be seen in the attested West Germanic forms, cf. OHG *elh*, *elho* and OE *eolh*, but, in fact, these West Germanic forms do not reflect Proto-Germanic **alχiz* either (for the morphology of the West Germanic forms cf. fn. 12 above). Thus, Germanic apparently shows no trace at all of the early form **alχiz*, “required” by the Latin nominative singular form *alcis*. However, even though the Germanic languages show no trace of such a form, it must have existed in Proto-Germanic, at least in a certain Proto-Germanic dialect or dialects, namely, those once spoken in the areas that Caesar visited during his military campaign. There are several reasons for this assumption. First of all, Germanic has evidence for an *i*-stem noun with the *o*-grade of the root, cf. the Proto-Scandinavian form **algiz* < pre-Gmc. **olkis*. The pre-Scandinavian form was stressed on the ending, but there is little doubt that the form **ólkis* existed in pre-Germanic as well, since *i*-stems are very often proterokinetic. The early Germanic form **alχiz* with the *o*-grade of the root can be further (although indirectly) supported by the Common Slavic form **olsb* (< **ólk-i*). Finally, it can be said that PGmc. **alχiz* is the only possible Germanic

¹² The rest of the dialectal Germanic words for “elk” are (secondary) *a*-stems, cf. OHG *elh* and OE *eolh*, or *n*-stems, cf. OHG *elho* and OE *ēola*.

¹³ The Germanic voiced spirants *þ*, *d*, *g* are reflected as *b*, *d*, *g* in Latin, cf. La. *Gautae* (tribal name) – ON *Gautar*, OE *Gēatas* < PGmc. **gaut-*; La. *brutis* ‘bride’ (attested on an inscription from Dalmatia) < PGmc. **brūþiz* (cf. de Vries 1977:60), La. *Harudes/Charudes* (tribal name) – OE *Hæredas*, ON *Hǫrðar*, Old Swedish *Haruþs* (personal name; Rök-inscription, Sweden) < PGmc. **harud-*; cf. de Vries 1977:281). A voiceless *s* would have been substituted in Latin for the Germanic word final **-z*, since no Latin nouns ended in *-z*.

base-form for a Latin noun that would have been able to have the nominative plural form *alcēs*.¹⁴ Thus, one might want to draw a conclusion that the oldest, i.e. "Caesarian" nom. sg. form of the noun *alcēs* was in fact *alcis*, which was a latinized version of the PGmc. nom. sg. **alχiz*. This is an attractive solution, but it is not the only one possible.

In the hypothesis described above it is assumed that a Germanic nominative singular form, **alχiz*, was borrowed into Latin as a nominative singular form, *alcis*, the expected nominative plural of which would be *alcēs*, exactly as it appears in the Latin text (see above). Yet there are two more possibilities.¹⁵ Since the elk, just like other *cervidae*, can be seen in herds, one could assume that the Latin soldiers saw not a single animal, but a herd of elk. In this situation one could imagine the following scenario. The Roman soldiers, seeing some strange animals, could have asked the Germanic people the following question (here constructed by me *ad hoc*) "What are these animals called?" The Germanic people might have answered: "These are [called] **alχīz*", using the nominative plural form of the animal name. However, before this assumption can be validated, one has to answer the following questions: first, would it have been natural for the Gmc. form **alχīz* to become Latin *alcēs*? Certain parts of this question are easy to answer – as mentioned above, the Germanic fricatives do become stops when Germanic words are borrowed into Latin (see fn. 13 above). The change of the final *-z* in the Germanic form to the Latin *-s* can be explained easily as well (see fn. 13 above). The only problem is the change from Gmc. *ī* to Latin *ē*. The long vowel *ī* in the Gmc. form **alχīz* was a high vowel, which was created as a result of contraction, cf. pre-Gmc. **olk-ej-es* > early PGmc. **alχejez* >

¹⁴ As mentioned above, Germanic has no evidence for possible base-forms of other attested Latin nom. sg. forms, viz. *alcē* or *alx*. For the treatment of the form *alcēs*, which cannot have developed from some Germanic nom. sg. form, see below in this section.

¹⁵ The first one, which is described below in this section, was suggested to me by Prof. B. Vine (personal communication).

**alχijiz* > **alχi'iz* > **alχīz*.¹⁶ At least in Proto- and late Common Germanic this vowel was high enough to be able to merge with the long monophthong *ī* of different origin, e.g. the *ī* that continued late IE **ī* (< **iH*) or the **ī* that had developed out of **-inχ-*, cf. younger Gmc. **līht-* 'light' < **linχt-* < IE **[h₁lenk^(uh)to-]* **[h₁leng^{uh}to-]*. The Latin vowel *ē* in the nom. pl. ending *-ēs* was definitely lower than the Gmc. *ī*, and therefore it is unlikely that in the change from Gmc. **alχīz* to La. *alcēs* the lowering of Gmc. *ī* to La. *ē* would have been automatic. If it is the case that the Romans borrowed the plural form, the ending *-ēs* would have to be explained by analogy, since the ending *-īs* was not a normal nom. pl. ending in Latin (even though it did occur sporadically as such; see Meiser 1998:138).

The above described hypothesis faces another problem, namely whether the Roman soldiers could have seen a herd of elk during their campaign to the Germanic lands. According to Walker et al., elk (*Alces alces*) are not as keen on living in groups as other *cervidae*, the only time they can be seen in herds being their mating period, which is in September – October (Walker et al. 1975:1383, 1401). Therefore the hypothesis described above would be likely to be correct only if we knew that the Roman campaign took place in early autumn. However, it seems that the Romans travelled through the Hercynian forest in spring, which makes it much less likely that Caesar and his soldiers could have seen a herd of elk, seriously weakening the strengths of this hypothesis.¹⁷

There is yet one more possibility that has not been discussed. It happens in languages that the plural form of a certain word in language *A* is borrowed into language *B* as the singular form of that word. A couple of examples from modern Russian can be adduced, viz. the slang word *báks* meaning 'dollar' (pl. *báks-y*), and *čĩpsy* '(potato) chips' that has the same structure as *báksy*,

¹⁶ The development of intervocalic **j* in Proto-Germanic has been described by Þórhallsdóttir (1993). On the development of the PGmc. diphthong **ei* see Vijiūnas (2001:61-3).

¹⁷ Book VI of *Bellum Gallicum* does not say exactly when Caesar was in the Germanic lands. However, it is clear from the beginning of book VI that he started his campaign by the end of winter (see *B.G.* VI.3). Thus, the Roman army must have reached the Germanic lands soon thereafter.

mentioned before. The base-words for the nouns *baksy* and *čipsy* are obvious – in the former case, it is the colloquial English noun *buck* 'dollar' in its plural form, *buck-s* 'dollars'. In the latter case, the English word is *chip* in its plural form, *chip-s*. Theoretically, the same thing could have happened with the word *alcēs*.

This theory would be convenient for certain reasons. The nom. sg. form *alcēs* would not have been typical for the III Latin declension, even though such forms did occur there, cf. *mēlēš* 'badger', *fēlēš* 'cat' (beside *fēlis*), *vulpēs* 'fox', etc. Since more regular nominatives in this class of nouns had the ending *-is*, like *sitis* 'thirst' or *canis* 'dog', by means of analogy the form *alcis* would have been back-formed from the plural form of this noun, which would have definitely been *alcēs*.¹⁸ Furthermore, since the III declension also contained nouns like *vōx* 'voice' (gen. sg. *vōcis*), *urbs* 'town' (gen. sg. *urbis*), etc., by means of analogy the nom. sg. form *alx* (gen. sg. *alcis*) would have been created, and it indeed occurs (see section 1.). Yet the forms *alcēs* and *alx* can also be created by analogy and back-formation from the plural if the original form had been *alcis*, as proposed in the first theory (see above). Therefore the last mentioned hypothesis does not provide anything that would make it preferable to other explanations. Besides that, if one wanted to accept this theory, it would also be necessary to accept the definitely uncommon phenomenon whereby a noun in its plural form in language *A* would be re-interpreted as a noun in its singular form in language *B*. In this paper I am going to adopt the first explanation, i.e. the one according to which the original Latin nom. sg. form was *alcis*, borrowed from a certain Germanic dialect in which the respective form had been **alχiz*. The rest of the forms, e.g. *alx*, *alcēs*, *alcē*, etc. must be looked at as later Latin innovations.

The change from the oldest *alcis* to *alcēs*, *alcē*, *alx* cannot – except for the last form – be easily explained, and may have had manifold causes. All of these forms must be analogical, but only the reason for the change from *alcis* to *alx* is quite clear – in this

¹⁸ The noun *alcēs* would have acquired the nom. pl. form *alcēs* through analogy from nouns like *mēlēš*, *vulpēs*, etc., which had the same shape both in nom. sg. and nom. pl.

case *alcis* was remodelled according to nouns like *vōx*, cf. *vōcis* (gen. sg.) – *vōx* (nom. sg.) ⇒ *alcis* – x, x = *alx* (also written <alcs>).

The later substitution of *alcēs* for *alcis* most probably stems from the influence of semantically similar nouns like *mēlēs* ‘badger’, *fēlēs* ‘cat’ (the form *fēlis* is more common), *vulpēs/volpēs* ‘fox’, etc., even if the origin of the ending *-ēs* in these nouns is still a matter of debate (for discussion and further references see Sommer 1902:406-7; Bammesberger 1970:38-41; Leumann 1977:343-4, also p. 344, fn. 2. [all with further literature]; Beekes 1995:181-2; Sihler 1995:316, fn. a.; Meiser 1998: 141-2). Secondary forms like *canēs* ‘dog’ (for the regular *canis*, cf. Leumann 1977:343-4) make it clear that this group of nouns at least exerted morphological influence on other nouns (animal names?).

The form *alcē*, which does not belong to the third declension, is declined like *epitomē*, *-ēs*, and is probably a borrowing from Greek ἄλκη (in that case a “borrowed borrowing”, cf. fn. 8 above).¹⁹

The forms *achli* (abl. sg.; NB metathesis *chl* < **lχ*) and *achlin* (acc. sg.), found in Pliny the Elder (*achli* in the description of book VIII in book I, line xv f., see Rackham 1997a:42; *achlin* in book VIII: XVI, see Rackham 1997b:30), may well be a secondary borrowing from Germanic **alχi-* (cf. also Much 1895:26, Lloyd/Lühr/Springer 1998:1031), the *-ch*-spelling probably representing a clumsy attempt to reflect the Germanic pronunciation of the fricative **χ*.

II. The development of Greek ἄλκη ‘elk’

The Greek noun ἄλκη ‘elk’, first attested in Pausanias’ (II c. A.D.) description of Greece, book V.12.1., is considered to be a loanword.²⁰ However, the traditional explanation that ἄλκη was

¹⁹ Greek ἄλκη is attested in the II c. A.D. (in Pausanias’ description of Greece, book V.12.1.), and Solinus’ form *alcē* is from the III c. A.D.

²⁰ The nom. sg. form itself does not appear in the text, but it is clear from the morphology of the attested forms that the nom. sg. had to be ἄλκη, cf. the

borrowed from Germanic in the same way as the Latin noun *alcēs* 'id.' is difficult to accept (see the etymology of Gk. ἄλκη in Prellwitz 1905:26; Boisacq 1923:45; Frisk 1960:75; Pokorny 1959:303; Chantraine 1968:62).²¹ It is quite unlikely that any of the ancient Germanic dialectal words for "elk", which can be reconstructed here as (nom. sg.) **alχiz* **[álxiz]*, **algiz* **[ályiz]*, **elχaz* **[élxaz]* and **elχō* **[élxō:]*, would have ended up as ἄλκη in Greek.²² The Germanic velar fricatives χ [x] and g [ɣ] would most probably have been preserved in post-classical Greek, as velar fricatives were not foreign to later Greek any more (on the development of Greek tenues aspiratae and γ see Schwyzler 1959:204-7). Illustrative in this context might be the spelling of certain ancient Germanic tribal, personal and place names by the ancient Greek authors, cf. Gk. Χάττοι 'Chatti' (tribal name; Strabo), Χαριοβαύδην (← **Harja-ǵaud-*; personal name [acc. sg. ?]),²³ Χάρουδες/Αροῦδες 'Harudes' (tribal name; Ptolemy derives it from PGmc. **Harud-*, cf. Old Norse *Hǫrðar*).²⁴ The Germanic endings **-iz* and **-az* would have

following extract from Pausanias' story: "Ὅσοι δὲ ἀνθρώπων τὰ διὰ τοῦ στόματος ἐς τὸ ἐκτὸς ἐλέφασιν ἐξίσχοντα ὀδόντας τῶν θηρίων εἶναι καὶ οὐ κέρατα ἤγηται, τούτοις ἔστιν ἀπιδεῖν μὲν ἐς τὰς ἄλλκας, τὸ ἐν Κελτικῇ θηρίον, ἀπιδεῖν δὲ ἐς τοὺς Αἰθιοπικοὺς ταύρους· ἄλλκαι μὲν γὰρ κέρατα ἐπὶ ταῖς ὀφρύσιν ἔχουσιν (...)" (Rocha-Pereira 1977:28; English translation: "Those people who believe what sticks out through elephants' mouths is teeth and not horns ought to consider the elk [acc. pl. in Greek; A.V.], the Celtic animal, and also Aithiopian bulls: male elks have horns on their eyebrows (...)" ; Levi 1979: 230).

²¹ The Proto-Scandinavian forms **alzī-* in Chantraine (1968:62) and **alzī-* in Frisk (1975:60) have to be reconstructed as **álgī-* (or **álzī-*).

²² The Proto-Germanic form **alχiz* is indirectly witnessed by La. *alcēs* (or *alcis*, cf. Much, op. cit.; Osthoff, op. cit.), PGmc. **algiz* has yielded Old Norse *elgr* 'elk', PGmc. **elχaz* has developed into Old English *eolh* and Old High German *elh*, and PGmc. **elχō* is reflected in OE *ēola* (an Anglian form, cf. Campbell 1997:97) and OHG *elho*.

²³ Both the vowel *o* in Gk. Χαριο- and the vowel of the ending, -η-, are unexpected (the Germanic name is more likely to have been a simple *a*-stem, cf. Gmc. **Harja-ǵaudaz*, cf. also its Latin version *Hariobaudo*, dat./abl. sg. [nom. sg. **Hariobaudus*], cf. Reichert 1987:178), but they may result from a not very accurate rendering of Germanic vowels into Greek, a common phenomenon in ancient texts.

²⁴ Examples from Reichert (1987).

been changed to Greek *-ις, *-ας, since such desinences with final -z did not exist in Greek and the Proto-Germanic ending *-ō would perhaps have been changed to -ων in Greek, cf. Gmc. *Edeco* (personal name) → Gk. Ἐδέκων; *Harietto* (id.) → Χαριέττων (cf. Reichert, op. cit.).²⁵ The resulting forms would have been *ἄλχις, *ἄλγισ, *ἔλχας or *ἔλχων, but only the form ἄλκη is attested.²⁶ Therefore another potential source of borrowing has to be considered.²⁷

Adams and Mallory have proposed that Gk. ἄλκη is a later borrowing from Latin *alcēs* (Mallory/Adams 1997:178). As is known, La. *alcēs* itself is a borrowing from Germanic, and in their explanation Adams and Mallory suggest that the noun travelled in the following way: Germanic > Latin > Greek. The

²⁵ Some Germanic names became “thematized” in Greek, cf. *Idiko* (morphologically the same as *Edeco*, the *n*-stem name mentioned above) → Ἰδικῶνος; *Agelo* → Ἀγέλωνος (see Reichert, op. cit.), and one could also assume that PGmc. **elχō* could have become *ἔλχωνος or *ἔλχῶνος.

²⁶ Occasionally the Germanic fricative *χ/h* appears as *κ* in Greek sources, cf. Κασουάριοι (Ptolemy) ← *Chasuarii* (tribal name); Καῦκοι (sic Strabo [both examples from Reichert, op. cit.]) ← *Chauci* (tribal name; Gmc. ?**Haukōz*), and one could argue that also in the word for “elk” the letter *κ* may be an inaccurate rendering of the Germanic fricative *χ*. However, examples like Καῦκοι and Κασουάριοι are very rare, and in general Greek authors preserved Germanic fricatives well, cf. also Ἀριούλφ ‘Ariulf’ (personal name; ultimately most probably the same as **Hariwulf* < PGmc. **harja-wulfaz* ~ Proto-Scand. *hAriwolATR* [Stentoften inscription; see Krause 1971:164], Old Norse *Herjólfur*); Ἀριμούθ ‘Arimūth’ (id.; inaccurate spelling for ?**Harimōth* < PGmc. **harja-mōd-* ~ Old English *Heremōd*, ON *Hermóðr*); Ἀθαοῦλφος ‘Athaulf’ (id.; ultimately from PGmc. **apal-wulfaz* [with the loss of *l*, cf. OE *Æðestan* for *Æðelstān* < **apal-stainaz*; see further Campbell 1997:195-6, fn. 5] examples from Reichert, op.cit.). Moreover, even if one refused to consider the Greek *κ* in the form ἄλκη as being problematic, the ending -η would still remain unexplained.

²⁷ The noun ἄλκη must be a borrowing, and not a native Greek word. As shown in Kurtén (1968: 169), elks have never lived in Greece and adjacent areas (cf. also Mallory/Adams 1997:178). As for the linguistic side, ἄλκη can by no means be a reflex of PIE *(*h*₁)*ol̥k-is* ‘elk’, as IE *(*h*₁)*o-* could not have yielded Gk. ἄ-. Greek ἄ- could derive from IE **a-* or **h*₂*e-* (there are also other ways to obtain Gk. ἄ-, but they are not relevant here), but, as I mention in section I.2. above, **h*₂*e-* cannot be posited for the reconstructed root of the IE word for “elk” (the reconstruction of IE **a-* in the root of this noun was already rejected by Much, op. cit.).

date of the earliest attestations of these words in Greek and Latin is certainly favourable for the explanation proposed by Adams/Mallory, as the earliest attestation of Gk. ἄλκη is later than that of La. *alcēs*.²⁸ The only remaining problem (of which Adams and Mallory provide no account) is the morphological difference between the two forms: the La. noun *alcēs* has the ending *-ēs* whereas the ending of Gk. ἄλκη is *-η*. This difference can be easily explained. Numerous examples collected by Viscidi (1944, *passim*) show that Latin words tended to preserve their original gender upon penetrating into the Greek language (although exceptions occur, see Viscidi, *op. cit.*), cf. La. *cellarium* 'store-room' – Gk. κελλάριον; *cellarius* 'store-keeper' – Gk. κελλάριος; *bal(l)istra* 'ballista (military machine)' – βαλίστρα; *census* 'registration, census' – κῆνσος; *magister* 'teacher' – μαγίστηρ; *ala* 'flank, wing (milit.)' – ἄλα, etc. There also exist instances where Greek has changed the ending of the borrowed words in order to preserve the original gender, cf. La. *collega* 'colleague' (masc.) – Gk. κολλήγας; *scriba* 'scribe' (masc.) – σκριβάς. Such must also have been the case with Gk. ἀκία (fem.; reflecting La. *aciēs* 'a group of soldiers', fem.) and with ἄλκη (← La. *alcēs*, fem.), which received the feminine endings *-α/-η* (I declension), as the ending *-ης* is generally perceived as masculine in Greek, cf. the masculine I declension nouns πολίτης 'citizen', στρατιώτης 'warrior', ποιητής 'poet', etc. In fact, Greek also had a morphological group of feminine nouns that ended in *-ης*, but this class, being represented by only a *single* member, viz. the nominalized adjective τριήρης 'trireme', did not have sufficient power to attract the Latin word *alcēs* (and, similarly, *aciēs*). As is well known, in inflectional languages loanwords are absorbed by those groups of words that have the most regular and the most common declension (if the word borrowed is declined) or conjugation (if the loanword is conjugated).

²⁸ As mentioned above, ἄλκη is first attested in the II c. A. D., whereas the La. form *alcēs* is from the I c. A. D. (it has to be noted that the form *alcēs* is not the original Latin form. The earliest form of this noun was **alcis*, and it entered Latin in the I c. B.C., as pointed out by me in section I. above).

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