

ON THE ETYMOLOGY OF THE NAME *HANÁ* (RIVER AND REGION IN CENTRAL MORAVIA)¹

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Abstract: The author evaluates the existing etymological interpretations of the name of the *Haná* river in Central Moravia, which became the name of the entire adjacent region in 16th century. Taking into account the natural character of *Haná* river and the assumed inter-ethnic contacts in Moravia at the time of the arrival of the Slavs, the author considers it likely that the name of the *Haná* river is motivated in the same way as the name of the *Jahna* river in Saxony. According to the author, both names are Germanic, the original form of both names is **Ganō* and the Indo-European root **gʰan-* ‘to yawn’ (cf. German verb *gähnen*) is at the base of the name. The *Haná* river is thus a ‘yawning river’, i.e. a lazy flowing, shallow river with low banks.

Keywords: onomastics, etymology, hydronymy, Moravia, Haná region, German-Slavic language contact

1. INTRODUCTION

The name *Haná* refers both to the river, which is one of the most important tributaries of the *Morava* river, and to the region which occupies a large part of Central Moravia and which was historically inhabited by one of the most distinctive ethnic groups of Moravians – the Hanaks (*Hanáci*), whose dialects form a quite distinctive and lively dialect group of Czech language to this day. The name *Haná* was primarily a name of the river and was transferred to the whole adjacent region relatively late – the beginnings can be seen in the work *Historiae Regni Bohemiae* (1552) by the bishop of Olomouc, Jan Dubravius. It is a generally common situation – a region is named after the river that forms its axis. The case of *Haná* is comparable, e.g., to *Morava*, *Orava*, *Kysuca*, etc.

Similarly to these names, the name *Haná* is semantically non-transparent and most likely, as many other hydronyms, is of pre-Slavic origin (Malenínská 1995,

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p. 285; Ondruš 2000). The name *Haná* is first attested in a relatively late period, in a forged deed dating itself back to 1183 but originating from the 14th century (*super Hanam fluvium*; Friedrich 1904, p. 419). Late attestation is, however, also common for other Moravian hydronyms, for which there is no doubt about their pre-Slavic, most often Germanic origin (e.g. the name of the river *Jihlava* < **Igulaha*, Hosák – Šrámek 1970, p. 365; *Svratka* < **Swarta*, Hosák – Šrámek 1980, p. 536). The form of spelling of the hydronym *Haná* has remained unchanged until today (Hosák 1961).

2. PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS AT ETYMOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

The folk etymology of the name of the river *Haná* derives this name from the adjective *hajná* ‘(river flowing through) groves, small forests’ (Hošek 1904). Factually, this interpretation should not be completely ruled out, but the loss of *-j-* could not be explained by regular linguistic development, especially if we remember that such a motivated name would be semantically transparent and therefore not typical class of words undergoing a decomposition.

The German linguist E. Schwarz (1931, p. 52) first connected the name *Haná* with the root of the Slavic verb *goniti* ‘to chase’, later he inclined to the interpretation from the Germanic *gana* ‘rich, abundant’ (Schwarz 1961, p. 76). I consider the interpretation from the Slavic *goniti* unlikely, given that it is a rather small and slow flowing river. In the case of the interpretation from Germanic *gana* ‘rich, abundant’, perhaps a symbolic meaning could be considered – the river flows for the most part through a region that was and still is one of the most fertile in the Czech lands.

Czech linguist V. Polák (1942) connected the name of the *Haná* river with the pre-Slavic (perhaps Celtic) word *gana* ‘swift creek’. This interpretation does not quite correspond to the character of the *Haná* river, which to the observer may appear to be rather the opposite of ‘swift’ – it is a relatively slow flowing river with muddy water. The pre-Slavic origin of the term *Haná* was also admitted by the linguist V. Šmilauer.

The most recent interpretation, published by I. Lutterer and R. Šrámek (2004, p. 86), explains the name of the *Haná* river from the Germanic root *ganna* ‘stony, barren soil’ – given the fertility of the soil in the vicinity of the *Haná* river, this motivation seems unlikely to me (unless, for example, it was a taboo antithesis).

3. THE RIVER NAME *HANÁ* AND ITS SAXON PARALLEL *JAHNA*

I believe that it is possible to formulate an etymological interpretation of the name *Haná*, which would correspond better than the above mentioned interpretations to the rules of the internal development of the language, as well as to the reality to which the name *Haná* primarily refers, i.e. the character of the mentioned river in Central Moravia.

The Saxon chronicler Widukind, in his work *Res gestae saxonicae sive annalium libri tres*, mentions in his commentary on the events of 960 the fortress of *Gana* (Widukind z Corvey 2016), which existed near the present-day village of *Jahnatal* in the district of Meissen in Germany (Free State of Saxony). *Gana* was the central seat of the Slavic tribe of the Glomatians (Slavic **Glomačī*) and the name of the fortress was derived from the name of a nearby river *Gana*, attested in sources as early as 1012 or 1018 (*usque ad Ganam fluvium*), currently called *Jahna*. A. Greule (2014, p. 250) in his book interprets the name of the Saxon river *Jahna* as pre-Slavic or Germanic. He reconstructs its original form as **Ganō* and sees the basis of this name in the Indo-European root **g^han-*, which is also found in the modern German verb *gähnen* ‘to yawn, to open wide’ (cf. English *yawn* – Drosdowski 1997, p. 215; see also Kluge 2011, p. 328).

And in this point I can see a factual connection between the Saxon river *Jahna* and the river *Haná* in Central Moravia, and therefore the same motivation for their names. Both rivers are rather short (*Jahna* – 30 km, *Haná* – 35.8 km, even with the source rivers – 52 km), they flow mainly through lowland areas and therefore have a small downslope, i.e. they are not very watery² and especially in summer they easily undergo eutrophication. An archaic man, who was particularly careful to monitor the quality and usability of the water in order to preserve his own health and life, undoubtedly saw that the Saxon river *Jahna* or the Moravian *Haná* are rivers that flow ‘lazily’ – and therefore, for example, that their water is not suitable for drinking, unlike the water from the numerous ‘swift’ rivers (such as those that the Slavs called *Bystrica*).³ Therefore, the Germanic language speakers who lived in Saxony and Moravia before the arrival of the Slavs named both rivers ‘yawning’, also because of shallow river with low banks.

Let us also add that the area around the present-day *Haná* river in Central Moravia was already a populous area at the time of the Germanic settlement of this region. It is not impossible that one of the administrative or cult centres of the Quadi tribe living in Moravia until the 6th century was located here – for example, in the village of *Kostelec na Hané* there is evidence of a large Germanic burial site (Droberjar 2014).⁴ It can be assumed that after the arrival of the Slavs, there was a rich mixing with the Germanic people, as evidenced by the contemporary presence

² The Saxon river *Jahne* is also mentioned by chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg (Dětmar z Merseburku 2008, p. 229), in the explanatory note on p. 314 it is explicitly stated that *Jahne* is a ‘small river’ (*řička*).

³ Cf. also Slavic names of the type *Medlány* (now part of the city of Brno): it is a diminutive of *medlané*, ‘people living by the softly flowing water’, by a brook or a small river **Medla* – in the neighbourhood lies *Bystrc* (its name is motivated, on the contrary, by fast flowing water, in Czech *bystře tekoucí*; Hosák – Šrámek 1980, p. 47).

⁴ I would like to thank my father, archaeologist PhDr. Josef Bláha, for valuable information on inter-ethnic contacts in Moravia in the 6th century AD.

of Germanic and Slavic pottery – and that there was also a natural transmission of toponyms. This includes the name of the nearby city of *Olomouc*, for whose interpretation from the Germanic genitive form **Alamundis* ‘belonging to Alamund’ I have offered new arguments (Bláha 2017).

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Resumé

K ETYMOLOGII NÁZVU HANÁ (RIEKA A OBLASŤ NA STREDNEJ MORAVE)

V príspevku autor analyzuje doterajšie etymologické interpretácie českého hydronyma *Haná* ako názvu rieky na strednej Morave, ktorý sa v 16. stor. stal označením celej priľahlej oblasti. Zohľadňujúc prírodný charakter uvedenej rieky a predpokladané etnické kontakty na Morave v čase príchodu Slovanov, autor považuje za pravdepodobné, že české hydronymum *Haná* má rovnakú motiváciu ako nemecké hydronymum *Jahna*, označujúce rieku v Sasku. Podľa autora sú obidve hydronymá germánskeho pôvodu; ich východiskom je germánske **Ganō* ako odvodenina od indoeurópskeho koreňa **gʰan-* ‘zívať’ (porov. nemecké *gähnen* a anglické *yawn* ‘id.’). V zmysle uvedeného výkladu je rieka Haná pomenovaná ako „zívajúca“, t. j. pomaly tečúca, plytká rieka s nízkymi brehmi.

Kľúčové slová: onomastika, etymológia, hydronymia, Morava, oblasť Haná, germánsko-slovanský jazykový kontakt