THE MAGICAL AND AESTHETIC IN THE FOLKLORE OF BALKAN SLAVS

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THE ETYMOLOGICAL MAGIC AND THE ETYMOLOGY OF TEXT

The terms etymological magic (EM), etymological figure (EF), and etymology (scientific and folk one), fall into different scientific disciplines: the first one, given in the title above, belongs to ethnology and folklore, EF to stylistics, while the distinction between folk and scientific etymology is made for linguistic reasons.1 Applied to a folklore text, these terms seem equally applicable in an attempt at text reconstruction, i.e. etymology of text.

Bringing into functional relation the (linguistic) etymology and (folklore) EM, the problem of scientific and folk etymology is brought into another level: it is clear that EM is operational be it folk or scientific. However, the diachronic view of this matter provides new possibilities for text reconstruction if we assume that the original text contains what we now take for scientific etymology whereas the variants with folk etymology are secondary. Nevertheless, these secondary variants are of immense significance for etymologists. They seem to indicate that they had replaced the original formula with etymologically or at least semantically related content.2 Recognizing an etymological relation between lexemes in a text brings us to the EF and contact synonymy as important models of Indo-European sacral 'text' construction.3 Practical realization of such association in variants of folklore text surpasses the frame of usual concept of EF and is more efficiently covered by the wide stylistic term paronomasia.4

1 Linguistic research stresses importance of personal nouns for 'language magic'; see e.g. Tolstoi N. and S. 1981:79 and Toporov 1966:206. Principles of 'magic thinking' relevant for diachronic semantics were elaborated in Némec 1990.
2 Tolstoi N. and S. 1988:250 revive folk etymology by relating it to EM: the principle of semantic attraction underlying harmonious words (regardless of their etymological relation) has general character and represents one of the most important features of a series of archaic folk and ritual magic texts. This principle can be referred to as EM. Tolstoi N. and S. 1988:252 refer to linguistic, mythological, poetic-ritual-magic function of folk etymology and hence to three aspects of the study of it: within linguistic (lexicology and etymology), within poetics (structure of text), and, thirdly, within spiritual culture (rites, beliefs, mythology).
4 Magic text can sometimes be recognized, apart from these lexical distinctions, on the basis of its structural features, such as presence of dialogue forms, cf. Stokić 1993a.
EM related to the cult of fertility is reconstructed in the following example as a Proto-Slavic EF of direct object type (verb + direct object). The EF was later to be transferred to other segments of text and etymologically modified through interpretation. Serbian folkloric material indicates that Jelisija’s Day was thought to be the last day to sow. Saint Jelisij is also named Alios; Alise, Lisa, Lisej (Nedeljčević 1990 s.v. Jelisijeveden). So in texts below:

Jelisije proso sije6
ide Vida da obide (Filipović 1949:138)

Aleksije projo sije
ide Vida da vidit (Butenik 1920:1-40)

Alios, proso seij (Nedeljčević 1990:110)

Macedonian and Bulgarian texts display the same situation. In attestations from Prilep: Do Elinea selejite seiat proso; Do Efseia, ako si selat, ke zrješ, ako ne si selat, ne ke zrješ; Eflinea selat (Tesepnov 1890:135). Or: Kato dogledi Efsej, veche proso ne se sej (and other attestations in Shishmanov 1893:555-556).

This text was taken as a formula in a riddle about ‘rain’ and restructured:

Jelisija biser sije,
da ne bi biser,
nubda po sela (Vuković 1890:42).
EM is also seen in a curse related to the name of this saint: Zaliso
‘e danoši dani!’ The same happens in Bulgarian examples: Noito raba
to Lisej (Shishmanov 1893:555).

Certain Russian evidences confirm that planting seed was indeed followed by magical text. By analogy, seeding (more precisely seed) of winter crops is associated with St. Simon, e.g. Senen-den’ i senena
dolej (Dajj s.v. Senen-den’ i senena) and Sena-to posenugat, Spica-to
posparinat (Shishmanov 1893:556).

In all South Slavic examples, except in this riddle, where folklore
formula is evident, proso, proja ‘millet’ is the object of seeding. Assuming that the recent EF with magic function has replaced some older Slavic

5 This seems to be a consistent connection: sejati proso ‘sow millet’, can be associated in the Serbian area with etymological figures prosoati/prosojati proso ‘sow millet’ in folk-tales and kositi proso ‘grow millet’ in proverbs (gveshta explicitly say kositi ‘grow millet’ rather than jasut ‘weep’). In terms of test etymology it would be equally important to reconstruct other Proto-Slavic verbs associated with millet. This would bring us closer to a full understanding of the original significance of this cereal plant.

formula, EF featuring proso ‘millet’ and verb prositi ‘beg’ is imposing.6 An additional argument for this presumption is love EM associated with millet, on Christmas Day: Koliko oide proso i prosila, onoliko me prosiluca (Čajkanović 1895:194). Similar love magic was recorded on the outskirts of Sarajevo on St. George’s Day and Ascension Day where a girl or widow throws millet around the house speaking: Sejem proho na Đurov dan da me prosor voći dan (Bosanska vila 1886:287). On the other hand, Russian examples point to the classical etymological relation ‘sejati seme’ ‘sow seed’.

According to the Slavic material set out above, it seems that there are two etymological figures of different content: ‘sejati seme’ ‘sow seed’ and ‘prositi proso’ ‘beg millet’. Both were originally associated with the agricultural cult of fertility while the second seems to be secondary connected with the wedding cycle.

PLAZ PLAZINU PUTE

On the syncronic level, a protective function against snake bites has next magic formula. Serbian and Bulgarian folklore are linked with St. Lazarus: Lazar’s Saturday (Willow Day) but also with some other saints in spring time: Areinner, Pojednikinja (cf. Nedeljčević 1990: 111-112; 105-106).7 Proto-Slavic traces in folklore-texts are saved only by part: EF in the vocative and nominative case (verb + subject, noun in nominative, i.e. vocative case). In some texts there is evidence of contact synonymy of parenyomologically associated verbs kositi and plaziti ‘creep and crawl’. These verbs are freely interchangeable in texts. Evidences with the verb
plaziti ‘crawl’:

Kuca luca Lazarica,
bjed od kuča plazanica,
bjed, plazo, od kuče,
jer je Luco kod kuće (Pečo 1925:371)

Bjeliste, guje plazanice, eto svete Lazarice! (Dragićević 1907:231)

Bjed rinja plazanu
eto svetog Lazaru
i on nosi tavinu
osječe ti glavu (material for RSANU, from Bosansko Grahovo).

6 “Millet could be understood as grain cajole, begged from God. It is most likely that the original test of the Slavic prayer for good millet crop contained the phrase prositi proso ‘beg seed’ in spirit of EM’, Looma 1990:94.

7 EM seems to have influenced the choice of Lazarus ‘who was raised from his grave by
Jesus four days after his death’, as brother to Nicodemus; swallow and snake in a legend of the origin of snakes (Doredić 1958:107).

8 Similar process of ‘coding’ a name of a God by several different names was shown in Toporov 1979.
above. We believe that this reconstruction is not valid for Proto-Slavic EF semantically associated with snake izza lasti, but only *polz*; p*te*polz

The verb lasti 'creep' is likely to yield an EF structure as a suffix derived noun. Proto-Slavic *polz* reptile, snake is attested in all Slavic languages (cf. Kipartov 1981 s.v. *polz*). Material for RSANS indicates absence of Serbian evidence of this lexeme except in above referred folklore texts. Among the reconstructed forms of Proto-Slavic verb pr*te*polziti (pr*te*polziti), it is the form *polziti* (see) that is abundantly evidenced in SGr. dialects.

In Serbo-Croatian material, parallel with the connotation 'snake' this Proto-Slavic EF has another realization: puž 'snake'. Hence puž pr*te*polziti (puž' snakes/crawls/creeps) not only in Children's folklore13 but also in riddles on snakes, where EF is coded into denotatum.12 There is no evidence of this phenomenon in variants of 'snake' riddles in other Slavic languages.

An attempt to reconstruct Slavic magic text intended for protection against snakes in South Slavic material gives additional complexity to associations with St. Jeremias,14 where there is no trace of EF.15 So, for example:

Bed*te zmije i gušteri, evo ide Jeremiasa sas rdjava sabljiste (Antonijević 1971:187)

Jeremija uz polje!
Bed*te zmije u more!
Koja zmija ostala, oči svoje izbela, na dva trna glogova i četiri špova (Milčević 1873:117-118)

Bogay, bogay poganja eto ti go Šeremija (Shishmanov 1893:560-561)

9 Macale is associated the verb plasti with another verb of similar harmony: lesti, but ESSJ 15, s.v. *lesti* refutes this attempt at etymological association. It is interesting that this verb too is found in EF such as Russian dat. last' (estom) 'swarm, as of insects, slog through the crowds' lezom lest' 'pester, meddle with other people's business' (ESSJ 15, s.v. *lesti*).

10 Cf. ESSJ s.vv. *lastit* /lastitka, *lastačita, lastačita/, *lazač*.
12 Baba plac - baba nje, roze imao - kozlje nje (Mateošić 1876a); Gage last, gage plast, kijace nje, tovar nosi (Obradović 1895:3); Ožko last, ožko nje, srpčina, tovar nje (Bojadži-Bijorč 1924-1948). Verbs lasti/lastiti /creep/creep/ are not included in all Serbian attestations. Hence e.g. Gaje last, gaje ni, roge imao, ces nje (BK 1846:227). Bija je, bija nje (Lazarević 1987:283).
13 Macedonian and Bulgarian attestations are comparable with a Serbian attestation recorded in Magljaj. Fikri iku, fit nje, rege imao, roje nje (Škabrlj 1887:239).
14 Magic effect is achieved in the Albanian variant by simple repetition: Jeremi, Jeremi, boštë e sharejn, u ndajtë nje Dr. Filipovcić 1967:142).
15 Macale is 1882-138 and later Shishmanov 1893:560 still percieving in texts associated with St. Jeremias.
Bulgarian folklore links this operation to other festivities, as well: Annunciation: Draganj ceznit i gudevite; che e ovan Elenanove, first day of March: Draganj ceznit, gudevite, D'mi, che baltu Maria lde i ostro sitgla da vi iseche (and other examples in Shishmanov 1893:560-561).

However in Russian folklore St. Jeremiah is related to seedling: Eremegia podjimj setecyo, Eremegia opastj (prokinj) setecyo (Dal s.v. serne).

From the linguistic point of view, conclusions on the relation between magic and aesthetics in folklore are simple. As well as for magic texts, they are valid for some other minor folklore types too, first of all, riddles: the aesthetic function is but secondary, all ornamental segments were later included into text. What synchronically seems to be ornamental and tinged with certain style, is often only a readily transferable pattern open to multiplying by certain model. The prototype of the model was originally strictly functionally conditioned.

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