

## Formation of the Concept of Beauty in the Words with the Proto-Slavic Root \*Lěp-, Based on the Material of Ancient Russian Written Records

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### *Abstract*

Old Russian texts provide an opportunity to study the early state of the Russian vocabulary. The vocabulary structure of the Old Russian texts included the words of the Proto-Slavic language, a large number of calques and artificially created words. The absence of written records of the Proto-Slavic language, in which its vocabulary would be recorded, deprives us of the primary source of the meanings of such words. The Proto-Slavic root \*lěp- had an undivided meaning. Undivided meaning of the root \*lěp- is a potential problem in the interpretation of the words with this root used in ancient Russian texts. Another problem in the lexical-semantic study of words in the Old Russian texts is that words being semantic calques received additional meanings under the influence of Greek. In this regard the paper shows the formation of the concept of beauty in words with the root \*lěp- used in ancient Russian texts. The purpose of this article is to study the evolution of the concept of beauty in the words with the Proto-Slavic root \*lěp-. The article provides a comparative analysis of lexical meanings of the words with the root \*lěp- containing the concept of beauty (used in ancient Russian texts) with their Greek equivalents. Such words are contained in ancient Russian written records: “The Life of St. Andrew the Fool”, “The Chronicle” by John Malalas, “The Chronicle” by George Amartol, “History of the Jewish War” by Josephus Flavius, Christianopolis (Acts and Epistles of the Apostles), Uspensky Collection of XII–XIII centuries, etc.

**Keywords:** Proto-Slavic language, root \*lěp-, concept of beauty, lexical meaning, Old Russian written records.

### 1. Introduction

One of the most important tasks of lexicology is to clarify the essence of the word meanings and to analyze the evolutionary development of their semantics. Old Russian written monuments, containing reliable information about the Old Russian vocabulary, present the factual material required to solve this problem. The word semantics denoting the concept of “beauty” has an ancient history. The diachronic study of its evolutionary development gives an idea of the changes from the Proto-Slavic period to the Old Russian. It covers the study of changes semantics has undergone over time in response to different historical-cultural and language

factors. However, the absence of the Proto-Slavic written monuments, which may include such words, creates additional difficulties in the study. Nevertheless, their reconstruction, given in the Etymological Dictionary of Slavic Languages, is a valuable material for studying the process of formation of the concept of “beauty” in the Proto-Slavic language and its development in the Old Russian period.

## 2. Methods and data

It is known that the Proto-Slavic root \*lěp-, which goes back to the Indo-European root \*leip-, retained its semantics. The root leip- would presumably «have the meanings: “smear; organize, order (full grade), “stick; climb; intend; wish (zero grade)” (Krasukhin, 2009: 155). Its semantic richness determined the structure of the etymological nest with the root \*lěp- in the Proto-Slavic period, reconstructed based on historical dictionaries of the Russian language, dictionary of the Russian dialects as well as dictionaries of the Slavic languages. Taking into account the fact that the words denoting a concept are a product of the historical reality in which they arose, we used information about the Proto-Slavic culture in the reconstruction of the etymological nest with the root \*lěp-. According to O. N. Trubachev, Proto-Indo-European is a prehistoric background of Proto-Slavic, and the reconstruction from the Slavic and the Proto-Slavic culture to Indo-European is natural.

The reconstruction of the etymological nest with the root \*lěp- showed that it included four word-formation nests with the following tops: \*lěpiti ‘smear, stick’, \*lěpiti “make something from a plastic material”, \*lěpiti “climb, ramp” (the nest includes plant names), \*lěpъjъ “beautiful”. The words of the word-formation nest with the top \*lěpъjъ “beautiful, good” directly define the concept of “beauty”. By our count, this nest contains 27 units reconstructed by means of reflexes in Slavic languages, including:

1. Prefixal verbs: \*oblěpeti “grow more beautiful”, \*polěpъšati “improve, get better”;
2. Abstract nouns (nomina abstracta) with the meaning “beauty, beautiful appearance”: \*lěpina “beauty”, \*lěpostъ ‘beauty’, \*lěpota “beauty”, \*lěpotina “beauty”, \*lěpotъ “beauty”, \*nelěpostъ “badness, inappropriateness”, etc.;
3. Diminutive nouns (nomina diminutiva): \*lěpava “beautiful child”, \*lěpotica “beautiful child”, \*nelěpъka “prematurely born calf”;
4. Adjectives: \*lěpotъnъjъ “beautiful”, \*lěponъjъ “beautiful”, \*lěpъkъjъ “beautiful”, \*lěpъnъjъ “proper”, \*lěpъskъjъ “good, beautiful”, \*lěpъšъjъ “best”, \*nelěpъjъ “ugly, bad” etc.

However, the historical-cultural and linguistic foundations reveal the secondary nature of the aesthetic assessment in the lexeme \*lěpъ. Semantic shifts are connected with the material culture transformation caused by the settlement of Slavs. Archaeological sources can say about the method of construction of Slavic dwellings. They were built from rods coated with clay or stones set in clay. In the Chernyakhov culture (late 2<sup>nd</sup> century – 5<sup>th</sup> century AD) mud huts were made of poles with clayed twisted rods. It was also noted that the houses were coated with clay, and walls inside them were painted with white and red paints during the excavations of some settlements in the Czech Republic belonging to the late Bronze Age Urnfield culture.

Slavic material culture shows the relationship between the meanings “smear” and “decorate”. A similar semantic shift can be observed in derivatives of Slavic \*mazati. (ukr. мазати “clay; whitewash; pamper”, maced. мазни “stroke; decorate” etc.). The adjective \*lěpъjъ, denoting “private (aesthetic) and less often a general positive assessment can be a Slavic semantic innovation” (Дронова, 2006: 84).

Nevertheless, the analysis of the use of lexeme \*lěpъ in Slavic languages shows that it is the primary means of expressing the meaning 'beautiful' in Slovenian, Croatian, Serbian. Slavic material also points to the existence of semantic syncretism, combining both a positive assessment of some object and aesthetic pleasure for its observation. The aesthetic beginning is inextricably linked to the ethical one: beauty ennobles the heart of man (see Вендина, 2007: 194).

The term «syncretism» itself implies the existence of many signifieds in one form. Semantic syncretism is quite well studied in the works of Russian scientists and it is understood as “an ancient meaning indivisibility; the unity of meanings of an ancient polysemantic word; or a word, presented as an image and embodied in a symbol (linguistic sign)” (Пименова, 2011: 21).

Ancient words include syncretism of a qualitative “complex” meaning. For example, in ancient texts, it is quite difficult to determine the meaning of words with the root *добр-*. In addition, new meanings develop, and they are all interwoven in original, ancient or translated texts and obscure the understanding of texts (see Колесов, 2014: 334). There is a relevant question: “what are we talking about? About something necessary, about something beautiful, or about something good? One of the most frequent expression in the Old Russian monuments “*доброе дѣло*” may correspond to both the first and second and third meanings” for the adjective *добрый* (*Ibid.*: 334–335).

After the Christianity adoption in Rus, «from Bulgaria the corpus of Old Church Slavonic literature spread to Kievan Rus. <...> Greek texts translated into Old Church Slavonic was a hierarchically ordered group of writings, the most important being the books required for liturgical purposes. <...> Second in the hierarchy of translated literature came the extended Lives of the saints and the writings of the Church Fathers», and finally «the Russians received from their western and southern neighbours ... the apocrypha, stories about lives of the desert fathers, and chronicles» (Børtnes, 1992: 3–4). Ancient scribes copied the handwritten texts and changed them intentionally. These texts took East Slavic phonetic and lexical features. As a result, the Russian edition of Old Church Slavonic has been formed by the 12th century. It served as a standard language in Rus.

Thus, the Old Russian translated literature included the oldest structure and semantics of words related to Proto-Slavic. Therefore, one of the problems of lexical and semantic analysis of words in the translated texts is the semantic “branchness” of their roots, since the vocabulary practice of distinguishing individual meanings of a polysemant is opposed to the idea of the ancient meaning syncretism” (see Алексеев, 2016: 110).

Semantic extension came against the background of the translations of Greek texts due to the presence of an ancient meaning syncretism. According to Buck, “in the majority cases “beautiful” is specialised from expressions of approval or admiration of the most diverse character <...> Many of the words are again extended to apply to anything that gives pleasure (not merely to the visual sense)” (Buck, 1949: 1191). We can see the semantic extension of the words with the root \*lěp.

Consider the examples of words with the root \*lěp from the Old Russian translated literature.

### 3. Discussion

1. The Chronicle (John Malalas): “Ποποδοκλῖα (Брисеида) же бѣ высока, чиста, добрососа, *лѣпа*” ~ ἡ Βρισηὶς ἦν μακρὴ, λευκὴ, καλλίμασθος, *εὖστολος* / Hippodameia Briseis was tall, fair-skinned, with beautiful breasts, a good figure (Jo. Mal. chron: 50). *Εὖστολος* ‘well-equipped; convenient λιμένα; compactly build; of a human frame (Lampe, 1961: 576). It must be

noted that Lampe gives this special meaning “*compactly built; of a human fra*” for the Chronicle of John Malalas.

2. The Chronicle (John Malalas): Антиноръ... многосвѣдѣи, *лѣпѣ* ~ Αντήνωρ... πολυίστωρ, ἐλλόγιμος / Antenor was an eloquent historian (Jo. Mal. chron: 55). ἐλλόγιμος ‘special; elect, chosen by God; skilled in use of words, learned ἐλλόγιμος ἄνδρες opp. ἰδιῶται’ (Lampe, 1961: 452). Cf. description of Julian the Apostate in the XIII book of the Chronicle, where the adjective *лѣпѣ* also corresponds to ἐλλόγιμος: Ουλιανὸς Παραβάτης... ἦν δὲ ἐλλόγιμος.

3. The Life of Savva the Consecrated: Съведе и къ лаврѣ. и помоли старьца прияти его. с *лѣпымъ* епитиемъ ~ κατήγαγεν εἰς τὴν λαύραν, καὶ παρεκάλεσε τὸν γέροντα δέξασθαι αὐτὸν μετὰ τῆς *προσηκούσης* ἐπιτιμίας (Жит. Сав. Осв. 1890: 221;16–18) / he came to the Lavra and asked the elder (starets) to take him after proper punishment. *Лѣпѣ* corresponds to *προσήκων* freq. in Part. as Adj. “befitting, proper” (Liddell-Scott-Jones: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj/#eid=91928>).

4. The Old Russian “Pchela” (book of aphorisms): И ражагаѣтъ оума *лѣпноту*, яко трость вѣнь (Семенов 1893: 39) ~ <...> καὶ ἀναφλέγει τὴν διάνοιαν ἢ *θέα*, καθάπερ ὕλη πυρὶ γενομένη ὑλέκκαυμα (Семенов 1893: 39) / passion ignites the mind like a fire. This fragment is a unique case, where the noun *лѣпнота* “beauty” corresponds to *θέα* “sight, spectacle, performance, in a theatre or elsewhere” (Liddell-Scott-Jones: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj/#eid=49276>). This is an example of a metonymic transfer under the influence of the meaning of the Greek word «*θέα*».

5. The Old Russian “Pchela”: Наказание славнымъ есть *лѣпнота* ~ Ἡ παιδεία εὐτυχοῦσι μὲν ἐστὶ κόσμος (Семенов 1893: 168) / punishment for reasonable people is a blessing. *Лѣпнота* corresponds to *κόσμος* and, apparently, here it means ‘blessing’. Cf. *κόσμος* “metaph., honour, credit” (Liddell-Scott-Jones: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj/#eid=61185>).

6. We can see the semantic extension in compounds with the root \*lěp-. For example, from Svjatoslav Izbornik of 1073: Се оубо иже безъчѣствѣтъ *чистою добролѣпнѣ* <...> не полжчить собож нехытраго прошенію ~ εἴ τις ἀτιμάσειε τὴν *ἱερὰν εὐκοσμίαν* <...> ἀποτεύξετα δι’ αὐτὸν τῆς ἀνεπισήμονος αἰτήσεως (Изб. 73: 118) / If someone neglect this sacred order <...> he will never obtain forgiveness. The noun *добролѣпнѣ* corresponds to *εὐκοσμία* in the meaning “good order; in worship” (Lampe, 1961: 566). Dictionary of the Russian language of 11–17 centuries, however, gives only the meaning ‘beauty’ (СЛРЯ XI–XVII вв., Вып. 4: 263).

7. Cf. the semantic extension (by metaphorization)<sup>1</sup> for the adjective *священнолѣпный*, as a rule, corresponding to *ἱεροπρεπής* ‘beseeming a sacred place, person or matter’ (Liddell-Scott-Jones: <http://stephanus.tlg.uci.edu/ljsj/#eid=51521>). Мужъ почтенный, величественный видомъ, *священнолѣпный* лицомъ (Св. Вас. Вел., Письмо 47 (51)). τὸ ἄνδρα <...> ὁσον δὲ ἔχων τὸ *ἱεροπρεπὲς* ἐν τῷ εἶδει (Βοσπορίῳ ἐπισκόπῳ LI: [https://www.loebclassics.com/view/basil-letters/1926/pb\\_LCL190.325.xml](https://www.loebclassics.com/view/basil-letters/1926/pb_LCL190.325.xml)) / man with a face like a saint.

Thus, the examples show that the concept of “beauty” in words with the root \*lěp- had a further evolutionary development, expressed in the semantic extension.

This study gives an idea of this concept development in Old Russian.

<sup>1</sup> “An analysis of the compound words with the root \*lěp- in Old Russian written records and lexicographic sources shows that metaphorized words were classified as social and family relations as well as religious beliefs (see Galochkina, 2020: 125).

#### 4. Conclusion

We can see the concept of «beauty» in words with the root \*lěp- in the Proto-Slavic period based on the reconstruction of its etymological nest by means of reflexes in the Slavic languages and confirmed by historical and cultural research.

In Old Russian, the concept of “beauty” was transformed under the influence of Greek and the Christian culture, perceived by the Slavic society. This resulted in fact that words with the root \*lěp-, expressing the concept of “beauty” and having, as a rule, polysemy due to the ancient meaning syncretism of the root, acquired the semantic extension.

The research results expand our knowledge about the semantics of words with the root \*lěp-, denoting the concept of “beauty” in the Slavic languages.

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