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AN ETYMOLOGICAL PROPOSITION: OLD GERMANIC *GŌD-SPŌD* 'GOOD FORTUNE' AS
SOURCE OF OLD CHURCH SLAVONIC *GOSPODЬ* 'LORD, MASTER'

Abstract

A thorough checking of the data provided by three etymological dictionaries, namely Georgiev et al. 1971 (s.v. *gospod*), Vasmer 1986 (s.v. *gospod'*) and Derksen 2008 (s.v. **gospodь*), would be enough to raise serious doubts about the application of the label "inherited" to **gospodь* and its large Slavic family. Vasmer (1986, s.v. Russian *gospod'* 'the Lord, God'), states that the putative origin of the Russian word under discussion is a Proto-Slavic compound **gostьpodь*; but it is also Vasmer who mentions that some outstanding linguists (including Antoine Meillet) objected to the mainstream etymological interpretation of *gospod'*. More recently, Derksen has stated that there is "no convincing explanation" for at least one element of the Proto-Slavic reconstruction **gospodь*. By starting from such doubts and uncertainties, the authors of the present article will propound an etymology according to which **gospodь* and its derivatives – to be found in Slavic languages as well as in Romanian – actually reflect a very early borrowing of the Old Germanic compound which is still visible in English *godspeed*.

Keywords: mainstream etymologies, reconstructions, Old Slavic material, Old Germanic proofs, a new solution

1. Frail reconstructions

All relevant attestations indicate that the *gospodь* lexical family is quite widespread in Slavic. Among the Slavic cognates of Russian (Russ) *gospod'* and of its family (which includes *gospoda, gospodar'* and *gospodin*) Vasmer mentions the following: Bulgarian (Bulg) *gospod, gospodar, gospodin*; Serbian-Croatian (SCr) *gospod, gospoda, gospodar, gospodin*; Slovene (Sln) *gospoda, gospodár, gospod*; Old Czech (OCz) *hospod* and Czech (Cz) *hospoda, hospodář*; Old Polish (OPol) *gospodzin* and Polish (Pol) *gospodarz*; Upper Sorbian (USorb) *hospodář* and Lower Sorbian (LSorb) *góspodaŕ*.[1] The basic meanings of such Slavic terms go from 'dominant male figure

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[1] See Vasmer 1986, s.v. *gospod'*.

of a household' to 'master', 'ruler' and eventually to 'the Lord'. The number and spreading of those cognates seem to impose the idea that the lexical family under discussion comes from Proto-Slavic times. As regards early attestations, terms such as *gospodъ*, *gospodinъ* and *gospoda* (not also *gospodar*, though) occur in Old Church Slavonic (OChSl) documents, as indicated in Georgiev et al. 1971 (s.v. *gospod*); in Russian such words were recorded in 14th century documents (see Vasmer 1986, s.v. *gospoda* and *gospod'*).

Also, the solid position of Bulgarian *gospod* is indicated not only by its basic meaning ('the Lord'), but also by the impressive number of Bulgarian derivatives to be found in Georgiev 1971 et al., s.v. *gospod*, where there are references to *gospodar* ('master, owner, ruler'), *gospodarica, gospodarka, gospodaruva, gospoden, gospodin,* plus names of plants such as *gospod'ova momička, gospod'ovi hambari,* etc. Etymologically, the same dictionary presents *gospod* as based on a Proto-Slavic (PSlav) compound, **gastьpadь*. The latter is referred to (or, rather, is "etymologically inspired" by?) Latin *hospes, hospitis* 'master of guests', which, in its turn, is explained as based on Proto-Indo-European (PIE) **ghos-ti-* 'stranger, guest, host' + **poti-* 'powerful, lord'. Among the Indo-European roots given in the Appendix of AHDEL (1973) there is a **ghos-ti* (=*ghosti-s* in Pokorny 1959, nr. 453), with the main meanings given as "stranger, guest, host." The root under discussion is presented as base of Indo-European words such as Old Norse *gestr* ("guest") and Latin *hostis* ("enemy (< stranger)"); the same entry of the Appendix also refers to a contracted compound with a double reconstruction, **ghos-pot-* or **ghos-po(d)-* ("master of guests"), which supposedly accounts for both Latin *hospes* ("stem *hospit-*") and "Common Slavic" **gospodĭ* ("lord"), as base of Russ *gospodin* ("sir, master").

In Georgiev et al. 1971 (s.v. *gospod*) the second member of a PSlav compound reconstructed as **gastь-padь* (not **gostь-podь*, as propounded by Vasmer 1986, s.v. *gospod'*) is presented as a cognate of Indo-European terms such as Lithuanian *pats* ('spouse'), Old Indic *páti-*, Avestan *paiti-* and Greek *-potēs* ('master, ruler') – all these with a well-preserved *t*. The same series includes the second member of the Gothic compounds *bruþ-faþs* 'bridegroom' and *hunda-faþs* 'centurion, chief of a hundred-men military unit'. In the same entry of the above-mentioned Bulgarian dictionary there follows a series of complicated (and hardly persuasive) arguments, all meant to justify the derivation **gastьpadь* > *gospod*, and especially meant to explain the troublesome *d* of the Slavic term. The latter should actually have a *t*, just like its putative cognate, Latin *hospes, hospitis*.[2]

Worth mentioning at this point is that Derksen (2008, s.v. **gospodь*) – for all his indication of PIE **gʰost(i)-pot-* as base of an inherited PSlav **gospodь* (that is, neither **gastьpadь* nor **gostь-podь*), and for all his joining the mainstream assumption of a connection with Lat *hospes* – closes the entry under discussion by the following statement:

> To my knowledge, there is no convincing explanation for the problem that the Proto-Slavic etymon [that is, **gospodь,*] has a **d*. According to Ernout-Meillet (529), the variation between **pot-* and **pod-* is old […], but in view of Winter's law this explanation does not work for Slavic.[3]

The troublesome *d* is also observed by Buck (1988, 19.41 MASTER), who considers that OChSl *gospodь* reflects "probably *gos-podĭ* from **gosti-pot* (change of dental variously explained)." Our arguments, presented below, make the various explanations for the *d* of OChSl *gospodь* appear as superfluous, since the voiced dental under discussion reflects a quite regular Germanic consonant, in

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[2] However useful Latin *hospes* ('guest, stranger') may have been for the mainstream etymology of Slavic *gospod*, the Latin word is far from being clear as a contracted compound. Here is what Ernout and Meillet's dictionary (ed. 1985) gives under *hospes, -itis* (our translation): "The word has the sense originally expressed by *hostis* […], and one may be tempted to believe that it is a compound whose first element would be *hosti-*; but the dropping of the *i* is rather surprising. As for the second element, one can only hypothesize on it."

[3] Winter's law (with Kortland's additions to it) regards Balto-Slavic vowel lengthening in certain positions. A number of "worries" about Winter's law were expressed by Collinge (1985: 225-226), who drew the following general conclusion: "Despite some acceptance of the Winter-Kortland thesis [...], much more work on the precise mechanics is needed." Our etymology of *gospodь* really does not depend on the validity of Winter's law, so we will not insist on the mechanics of the latter.

a word that was borrowed from Germanic into Slavic very early, most probably before the eighth-century divergence of Proto-Slavic into historical Slavic languages.

2. Germanic evidence

One interesting aspect is that the *gospod* entry in Georgiev et al. 1971 dismisses an etymological proposition (whose?) according to which the *d* of *gospod* would indicate a Gothic origin of the Slavic word. Gothic certainly is important for the present article, but not for the sake of the above-mentioned Go -*faþs* (< PIE **poti*-); much more significant for this discussion are the Gothic terms *gōþs* 'good' and *gōdei* 'goodness' as well as *spēþs* 'late'. The last one is a cognate of West Germanic terms such as Old Saxon (OSax) *spōd* 'success' and Old English (OEng) *spēd* 'speed, success, wealth'(see below). We must first focus on the Germanic cognates of English *good* and *speed*, since we assume that Slavic *gospodь* is a very early Old Germanic loan, whose perfect cognate in Modern English is the compound *godspeed*, with the original meaning of 'good fortune'.

That there was an archaic Indo-European association between the notion of "fortune" and the notion of "divinity" (as "dealer of fortune") is a well-known fact. In early Germanic, there also was an association between "fortune" and "health" or, rather, "wholesomeness". For instance, Old High German (OHGerm) *heil* 'luck, fortune' was subsequently recorded in Middle High German with meanings such as 'health, happy turn, healing, help' (cf. Pfeifer 1989, s.v. *Heil*). Such linguistic facts can be referred to historical evidence too. In that respect, an Austrian historian, Wolfram (1995), in commenting on the status of early Germanic kings, observes that fortune was expected to be held by and to radiate from Germanic chiefs and kings.[4] For an illustrative example – in referring to the conflict between two famous Germanic leaders, Marbod and Arminius – the same historian makes the following observations (p. 38, our translation):

> Marbod was quite fortunate. But, especially in archaic cultures, fortune [*Glück*] counts not as accident, but as merit, and as a good trait of a man who is capable of being a king. The better is the one who is more fortunate […]. Arminius probably had long worked at that fortune-confrontation [*Glücksvergleich*] with Marbod.

The quotation above refers to a period in which the Old Germanic society was undergoing important transformations due to its contact with the imperial Roman world. It was at that time that the archaic Germanic notion of "fortune", as well as the notion of "kingship", began to shift to new meanings and implications. It was, most probably, also during the period under discussion when the form of the early Germanic compound *gōd-spōd* ('good fortune') was contracted to **gospod* on Germanic soil.[5] Phonetically, a contracted form such as **gospod* reflects exactly the same simplification of a consonantal cluster (-*dsp*- > -*sp*-) and the same shortening of an originally long vowel (in front of the cluster) as the ones that led, in more recent times, to the form of English *gospel*, from Old English *gōdspel* (*gōd* 'good' + *spel* 'news, tidings'). Also phonetically, by starting from a rather transparent Germanic **gospod*, there would be no more need of divergent reconstructions, either at the PIE level (**ghos-pot*- vs **ghos-po(d)*-) or at the PSlav level (Georgiev's **gastъpadь* vs Vasmer's **gostъpodь* vs Derksen's **gospodь*).[6] More particularly, by assuming that PSlav **gospodь* simply derives from

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[4] Cf. Wolfram 1995: 21 (our translation): "When honor [*Ehre*] is intact, wholesomeness [*Heil*] beams out. […] It is kings who hold the biggest portion of wholesomeness."

[5] We will apply the blanket formula "Old Germanic" to recorded and unrecorded varieties of tribal Germanic of the period between (approximately) the 2nd century and the 6th century of our time. Nevertheless, contacts between speakers of Proto-Slavic and speakers of Proto-Germanic can have occurred in even earlier times (see also below).

[6] Although, from a phonetic perspective, we focused mainly on the *t/d* problem, at this point we will also refer to the vocalism of the above-mentioned reconstructions. It appears that the authors of the Bulgarian etymological dictionary Georgiev et al. 1971 wanted to suggest an *early* Proto-Slavic situation by the *a*-vocalism of their reconstruction **gastъpadь,* whereas, for his **gospodь*, Derksen took into account not only an already contracted form of an inherited compound, but also a later stage of the PSlav vocalism – see Carlton's table (1990: 98), which indicates a shift from PIE *ŏ* to early PSlav *ă* and then to late PSlav *o*. As we will point out in the present

OGmc *gospod,* the seemingly troublesome *d* of the Slavic word appears as a quite regular continuator of a Germanic consonant, which was part of a Proto-Germanic stem *spōdi-* (see below).

3 Fortune as "divine allotment" in Germanic and Slavic

We assume that in certain Slavic territories that came to be controlled by one or another Germanic tribal unit, approximately between the 3ʳᵈ century BC and the 2ⁿᵈ century of our time,[7] the Germanic loan *gospod* eventually became a synonym of *bog* 'god' (cf. Russ *bog,* Ukr *big*, Bulg *bog*, Pol *bóg*, etc.). Also, certain derivatives of *gospod* began to be used as synonyms of the native derivative *bogatъ* 'rich, fortunate' – cf. OChSl *bogatъ*, Bulg *bogat,* Pol *bogaty* and Russ *bogatyj*, as well as Romanian (Rm) *bogat* 'rich' (as a Slavic loan). Etymologically and semantically speaking, a parallel presentation of the lexical families and semantic spheres of Slavic *bog* and of Old Germanic *spōd*, respectively, would be of help for this demonstration.

Slavic *bog* has clear Indo-Iranian cognates, such as Old Indic *bhágas*, used as an epithet of generous divinities, Sanskrit *bhájati* '(he) deals, distributes, apportions', Sanskrit *bhaga* 'good fortune',[8] or Avestan *baγa* 'god' (the last term being translated by Vasmer – 1987, s.v. *bog* – by both Russian *gospod'* and Russian *bog*). The above-mentioned Indo-Iranian terms, and their Slavic cognate, *bog*,[9] can be referred to PIE *bhag-* 'portion, share, to share, to get a share' (see that root in the AHDEL Appendix). It appears that there are no inherited Germanic terms based on PIE *bhag-*. In exchange, Germanic preserved a number of terms based on another Proto-Indo-European root, namely *sp(h)ēi-*, which designated notions such as "fortune", "luck", "progress", "success" and "speed." In the German dictionary Pfeifer 2004, s.v. *sputen* 'to hurry' ('sich beeilen'), the following Germanic cognates are mentioned: MLGerm *spōden* ('eilig entsenden, antreiben'), OSax *spōdian* ('fördern'), MDu *spoeden* ('eilen'), OHGerm *spuot* ('Erfolg, Fortgang, Wesen'), OSax *spōd* ('Gelingen'), OSax *spōdian* ('fördern'), OEng *spēdan* ('Glück haben') and ModEng *speed* ('Erfolg, Eile'). According to Pfeifer, the enumerated terms reflect a Proto-Germanic stem *spōdi-*, which appeared as a derivative ("mit Dentalsuffix") from a Proto-Germanic verb that survived in Old English as *spōwan* ('to succeed, to be successful') and in Old High German as s*puoen,* with similar meanings. In fact, the same dental suffix (as marker of a "*ti*-Abstraktum") occurs in several Indo-European cognates given in Pfeifer 2004, under *sputen*: OInd *sphita* ('reichlich'), Lat *spatium* ('Raum, Dauer, Länge'), as well as OChSl *spěti* ('fortschreiten, gedeihen, einen guten Fortgang haben') and Russ *spet'* ('reifen').

Old English is important for this discussion, since it contains the significant series of cognates that includes *spōwan* ('to succeed, to be successful') and *spōwendlice* ('thrivingly, prosperously, abundantly') as well as *spēd* ('speed, quickness, success, prosperous issue, means, substance, abundance, wealth, power, faculty, opportunity, means'), *spēdan* ('to speed, to have success, to succeed') and *spēdig* ('having good speed, prosperous, having means, wealthy, opulent, rich, abundant, copious, powerful'), all extracted from Bosworth's dictionary (ed. 1983). The semantic-referential sphere of *spēd* is revealed by a particular Old English text, namely the "report" that a ninth-century Scandinavian navigator, Ohthere, delivered at the court of King Alfred the Great. About Ohthere, whose residence was somewhere on the Norwegian coast, we learn the following:

> He was a very prosperous [*spēdig*] man, in properties that make up their fortune [*spēd*], that is,
> in wild deer […].Those deer are called reindeer […]. He was among the first men in that land;

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article, by assuming derivation from OGmc *gospod* (from *god- spōd*) we implicitly obtain a perfect explanation for both the *d* of PSlav *gospodъ* and for the *o* vocalism of the latter.

[7] The very choice of such chronological limits indicates that we take into consideration the earliest stage of the Germanic expansion, that is, the one that took place before the spectacular expansion of the Goths. Archaeological evidence makes it clear that the earliest Germanic tribal units that moved southeast, to the area north and east of the Carpathians, belonged to the Elbe-Germanic group (see *Elbgermanen* as an entry in Hoops et al. 1989: 107-115). Such an aspect can very well account for the fact that the numerous *gospod*-loans in Slavic and Romanian correspond to archaic West Germanic terms, rather than to Gothic and Scandinavian ones.

[8] See terms given under *bhag-¹* ("to share out, apportion") in the AHDEL Appendix.

[9] In fact, the Slavic term under discussion was considered by several important scholars not as inherited, but as an Iranian loan in Slavic (as mentioned, with objections, by Vasmer, in his *bog* entry).

but he had no more than twenty cattle, twenty sheep and twenty swine, and the little that he ploughed, he ploughed with horses. And their income mostly depends on the tribute that the Finns pay to them. The tribute is in deer hides, bird feathers, whale bone and ship-ropes, which are made of the skin of walrus and seal.[10]

Our Norwegian Viking appears to have represented the top position of a micro-tributal system imposed by Germanic intruders, as foreign elite in territories inhabited by non-Germanic natives. Ohthere presented himself as a prosperous man in terms of what belonged to his household proper, as well as in terms of what was brought to him as tribute.

Two important derivatives of the family of the Old English verb *spōwan* occur in the fragment above, namely *spēd* and *spēdig* (see meanings above). In regard to the latter, Bosworth's dictionary of Old English also contains, as a separate entry, the compound *gōd-spēdig* ('rich in good'), which is of particular interest for our etymological demonstration. On the one hand, OEng *gōd-spēdig* indicates that the traditional English well-wishing formula *Godspeed* has been wrongly interpreted in dictionaries; on the other hand, the respective formula etymologically clarifies Slavic *gospod*, as a loan from Germanic.

The etymological team of AHDEL (ed. 1973, s.v. *Godspeed*) as well as Hoad (*The Concise Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 1986, s.v. *god*) presented the formula *Godspeed* as coming from the phrase *God speed*, interpreted as 'May God prosper (someone)'. Hoad compares *Godspeed* to *good-bye*. However, whereas *good-bye* appears to be a contraction of a formula such as "God be by you," the original (Old English) form of *Godspeed* must have contained *gōd* 'good', not *god*. Anyway, as regards Ohthere, he was not presented expressly as favored by any god, but simply as *spēdig*, that is, as a man of good fortune.[11]

It is hard to decide whether in Ohthere's time (the ninth century) the archaic Indo-European idea of fortune as direct manifestation of divine benevolence still reflected a strong belief with Germanics. Nevertheless, such a belief must have been still strong in the traditional (pre-feudal) culture of the earliest Germanic tribal units whose traces were found by archaeologists in Slavic territories.[12] It is such signs of Germanic presence among the early Slavs that accounts, in our opinion, for the success of a Germanic compound such as *gōd-spōd* 'good fortune', which probably entered Proto-Slavic already contracted as *gospod*.

4. Conclusion

With arguments such as the ones given above, we can first of all assume that Old Church Slavonic *gospodь* should not be regarded as an inherited term (from Proto-Slavic **gastьpadь* or **gospodь,* from Proto-Indo-European **gʰost(i)-pot-*), but as based on a contracted form of Old Germanic *gōd-spōd*. The compound under discussion must have been borrowed by speakers of Proto-Slavic from temporarily dominant Germanics, in pre-feudal times, when the status of those intruders could grow no higher that the position of prosperous "franklins" of the Ohthere type. It was only when heirs of those well-to-do foreigners began to grow into proto-feudal lords that *gospodь* came to mean 'lord', and eventually 'the Lord'. We will add that the existence of a rich Romanian lexical family – which includes words such as *gospod* 'princely', *gospodă* 'noise', *gospodar¹* 'well-off peasant', *gospodar²* 'prince, ruler', *gospodin* 'lord, the Lord' and *gospodină* 'goodwife, housewife, lady of the house' – should also be taken into account in discussions such as the present one. "Comfortable" mainstream etymologies indicate that all those Romanian words are borrowings from Slavic. Nevertheless, at least some of them may prove to be based on Germanic borrowings into either substral (pre-Roman) idioms or into early East Romance. But this is the subject of a more comprehensive article to-be.

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[10] Our translation, after Whitelock 1990: 18-19.

[11] In that respect, let us observe what Bosworth (1983) gives as a second meaning of OEng *spēd*: "II. *speed* (as in *good speed*), *success, prosperous issue*."

[12] Kozak 1999 provides an archaeological view on the overlapping of pre-Gothic and Gothic types of Germanic settlements (mainly the ones representing the Przeworsk culture and the Černjakhov-Sântana de Mureş culture, respectively) north of the Carpathians, that is, precisely the area that several specialists have considered to be part of the Proto-Slavic homeland (see Birnbaum and Merrill 1985: 71-74).

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