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Proto-Slavic *astriti ‘to watch sharply, cast looks’ revisited

Abstract. This paper revisits the hitherto interpretation of the PSL. (dial.) verb *astriti ‘to watch sharply, quickly; cast looks’ (with Cz. dial., Slk. and Pol. continuants) as deriving from PIE *ōk'-u-'quick', and as being related to the ornithonym *astrębъ ‘hawk, accipiter’. Since the precise connection between the verb and the ornithonym is uncertain, it is suggested that they be separated and the verb studied independently. Two possibilities of its origin are proposed. One argues that PIE *ak'r(o)- ‘sharp’ (i.e. PSL. *ostrъ) is a likely PIE prototype and suggests tracing the verb to it. The other departs from the analogy with synonymous PSL. *patri and proposes a number of possible PSL. roots the verb could formally be traced to. Our first proposal is just preliminary, and the other is finally discarded as insufficiently grounded - so they both remain only ideas for further study. Since even considering some new data (mostly Serbian, hitherto unnoticed) could not lead to a satisfactory result, it is concluded that hopefully new data will appear in future. Keywords: Slavic languages, etymology, semantics, verb, PSL. *astriti.

1 In Slavic etymology there is generally no doubt that PSL. *astriti ‘to watch sharply, cast looks’ and PSL. *astrębъ ‘hawk, accipiter’ have the same origin (with variations about some details of word formation, this is common opinion in both the dictionaries of respective languages and also the Common Slavic ones (Brückner 1927: 201; Machek 1971: 218; Sławski 1952–1982, 1: 518; ЭССЯ 1: 86; SP 1: 160; ESJS 3: 274; Králik 2015: 241).

1.1 The continuants of PSL. (dial.) *astriti can be found only in Western Slavic languages, attested solely in a limited, central part of their territory, and always with the same meaning, cf. Cz. dial. jastřiti, jastřít, jastriti, Slk. jastrít, Pol. jastrzyćć ‘to watch sharply, quickly; cast looks’; also Slk. dial. jaster ‘quick look’, jastrívý ‘who watches quickly, sharply’.

1.2 Continuants of the ornithonym *astrębъ, however, are attested in all Slavic languages, and with considerable formal variability. Apart from alternation of the initial vowel (je-/ja-), or an absence of pre-otation, it is especially characterised by variable vocalism of the suffix (-ęb-/-ǫb-) and the final vowel (-ъ/-ь) (cf. Brückner 1927: 201, etc. in pgf. 1). Standing furthest apart from other Slavic ornithonyms is the form without a suffix, Ukr. dial. áctep, a hapax legomenon on the basis of which a PSL. *astrъ (ЭССЯ 1: 86) has been reconstructed (cf. more in § 1.4.2.). The semantic variation of this ornithonym (in some cases it designates other species, cf. ESJS 5: 274) is not a rare phaenomenon and should not concern us.

1.2.1 Yet another hapax legomenon among bird names, S-Cr. reg. jástro, -a/-e m. ‘hawk; children’s game’,¹ so far unnoticed in the etymological literature,

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¹ Cf. the description for ‘a kind of social game’: “играју се деца, а и одрасли момци и девојке, јастре. Главна лица у игри су јастр и квочка. За јастра се одабере најјачи
unfortunately does not corroborate this PSl. reconstruction – it is not a counterpart of Ukr. šcmeč, but a local hypocoristicon of jācmpeb (as is witnessed by its accent and declension type).

1.3 The concrete connection between the verb and the ornithonym is described variably and typically scantily: only Machek (in the footsteps of Berneker 1908–1914, 1: 33 s.v. astraębъ(υ)) thinks that the verb might be a result of some shortening of the ornithonym,² while most other authors, more or less explicitly and with variations in details, depart from an unattested adjective **astrъ ‘quick’.

The only exception is the Brno dictionary (ESJS 5: 274–275), where neither the de-adjectival origin of the verb is rendered probable, nor the semantic shift ‘quick’ → ‘to watch quickly’ obvious.⁴

1.4 The problem with the said prevailing opinion is that the mentioned adjective has no uniform, let alone indisputable etymology (its very existence is doubted, cf. ESJS in note 4) since it is interpreted in at least two ways, which require commenting on.

1.4.1 If PSl. *astrъ ‘quick’ is ultimately derived from PIE *ōk’-u- ‘quick’, an older form should be supposed, which would be regularly traceable to that PIE prototype. That would be a PSl. **asъ ‘quick’ – but it has no other reflexes in Slavic languages. On the other hand, for *astrъ ‘quick’ to be regularly projected onto a proto/language level, a PIE *ōk’-ro- (< *ōk’-u- ‘quick’) should be reconstructed – however this form, with the element -ro-, has no Indo-European parallels. An attempt at bypassing this problem on the level of Slavic, thus avoiding the Indo-European one, was made by Lang (1924: 21–22) who suggested that it be understood as a transformation of **asъ into **astrъ, after the model...
of *ostrъ ‘sharp’. Being aware of how isolated the thus reconstructed adjective is in the realm of Slavic, Sławski proposed derivation *astrъ < *asъ, without commenting on the absence of IE parallels.⁵ And he clearly saw no reason to change his mind later.⁶ Hence, the absence of Slavic and Indo-European parallels to respective prototypes should be seen as an objective shortcoming of this interpretation.

1.4.2 The other possibility is that, on the PSl. level, the adjective *astrъ ‘quick’ be equated with the ornithonym *astrъ ‘hawk’. The reconstruction of this noun has so far been based only on Ukr. dial. астреп (ЭССЯ 1: 86). Although a semantic development ‘hawk’ → ‘as a hawk’ → ‘quick (as a hawk)’ can easily be presumed, there remains a word-formation problem: the noun should be a nominalized adjective, and not vice versa. Hence the interpretation of the adjective remains unsolved and its reconstruction under doubt.

1.4.2.1 On the other hand, the ornithonym *astrъ itself, via an *asъ(s)tr-, can properly reflect a PIE compound *ōk'u-pter- ‘the quickly flying one’, pre-cognate with Lat. accipiter ‘hawk’, Gk. ἱρηξ ὠκύπτερος, ὠκυπέτης, OInd. āśu-patvan- (cf. e.g. ESJS 3: 274).⁷ Although this interpretation is quite satisfactory for the ornithonym, it does not solve the problem of tracing the origin of the adjective. In principle, when there is isomorphism of a noun and an adjective, we are dealing with nominalisation of the adjective. If that is the case in this instance, the ornithonym noun cannot be related to the abovementioned IE compounds – so it would have to be deprived of its relation with terms for the same bird in other IE languages for the sake of being connected with a domestic adjective of uncertain origin – which is not a promising way of tracing the origin of the ornithonym.

1.5 Not only is the motivation of the ornithonym by the swiftness of the bird justified in principle, but this term (in the form which we render primary, PSl. *astrъ ‘hawk’) has proper IE parallels meaning ‘the quickly flying one’. However, in the case of the adjective *astrъ ‘quick’, such an interpretation is facing serious word-formation difficulties (for the element -ro- cf. notes 5 and 6). Moreover, motivation of the verb by swiftness is not justified, or at the very least it is not obvious. Therefore, we should consider the possibility of

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5 "Psł. *astrъ < *asъ (z wtrąconym -t- p. ostry) to tylko słow. wyraz ... z nierzadkim w starzych przyjmitnikach przyr. -ro- ... do ie. "ōkú-s ’szybki’” (Sławski 1952–1982, 1: 518–519 s. v. jastrząb).

6 “Z *as-rъ (z wtrąconym -t- por. ostrъ), wyraz wyłącznie słow. z "ōk’-ro- ...” (SP 1: 160 s.v. “astrъ).

7 For the universality of this model cf. recent, certainly independent poetic forms like Serb. obs. βραζονεμ(ах) adj. ‘which flies swiftly’ in J. J. Zmaj and P. P. Njegoš (РСАНУ 2: 160).
separating the verb from the ornithonym, based on the supposition that the
two themes are not etymologically related but simply homonymous, and that
only later was the verb semantically merged with the ornithonym.

1.5.1 Since certain deverbals are nowadays present only in Slovakian (cf.
§ 1.6.2), over a terrain less extensive – or at least not wider – than that covered
by the verb, it can be supposed that the verb is primary in this word-family.
This is a further reason for leaving aside the ornithonym (both in its basic
form – attested in Ukrainian and nowhere in the West – and with the suffix,
which is General Slavic)⁸ and concentrating on the verb.

1.6 Although it does not affect the outcome of etymologizing but only the
limits of its area, we should be mindful of the fact that in Polish the verb and the
adjective do not actually exist – they are not mentioned by either Sławski (1952–
1982) or SP – the last one to have them was Brückner (1927: 201 s.v. jastrzqb,
without citing the sources).⁹ Hence the Polish data should be disregarded.

1.6.1 Also for Czech, apart from the dialectal (Moravian) fixation in Bartoš
(1906: 130), the verb is attested only on a card from the card-file of PSJČ (it-
self omitted from the dictionary proper): jastriti ned. „Ten (Žarooký)¹⁰ jastril
ihněd po ní (holubičce) bystrým svým okem, a jak mu do oka padla, pustil na
ni žár.“ (1858 Němcová, Slov. poh.; 1908 Gebauerová Sp. 7, 164.26). (available
from: http://psjc.ujc.cas.cz). The folklore context speaks for authenticity, but
with problematic attribution.¹¹

1.6.2 Only in Slovakian is it well-attested even nowadays: jastriť ‘prenikavo,
ostro sledovať pohľadom, sliedovať očami’, jastrivý ‘ktorý prenikavo, ostro sledu-
je’, jastrivo ‘s prenikavosťou, ostroslievo pohľadu, sliedivo, pátravo’, jastrivosť
‘vlastnosť prenikavého, ostrého pohľadu, ostražitosť’ (SSSJ 444), with a nuance
of sharpening (one’s look or concentration), also Slk. dial. jastrit ‘zbystrováť
pozornosť’, jastrena f. ‘žena s prenikavým zrakom’ (SSN 2: 718).

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8 This means that, besides all formal details (cf. the exhaustive review in ESJS 3: 274–275),
an investigation into the relation of the PSl. ornithonym with the homophonous and syn-
onymous, MLat. astur (besides classical Lat. accipiter), with which it shares uncertainty
of attestations, remains for another occasion. Cf. also the idea that Lat. accipiter “could
contain acu- ‘sharp’ and reflect a cp. ‘with pointed wings’” (de Vaan 2008: 21).

9 Regardless of whether Brückner knew of Pol. jastrzyć bystrzy, jastrzyć ‘patruzyć bystro’
personally, or from some source(s) already unknown to Sławski in mid last century, we
cannot reckon with them today.

10 We have found no counterpart (e.g. Rus., S.-Cr.) to the compound Cz. žarooký; cf. however
the rare adjective S-Cr. жароокéм adj. ‘light, bright (of eyes)’, for word-formation cf.
спánočka (adj.) f. ‘dark eyed’ (PČAHY 5: 301, 3: 4).

11 The absence of this record from PSJČ is probably due to the judgement that the attesta-
tion from Slovenské pohádky a povести by Božena Němcová actually does not belong to the
Czech language.
1.6.3 Also mentioned should be Serb. dial. \( \text{jámpu} \) impf. ‘to hobble, scramble (of a child)’:\( \text{Jaćmep ce po đreja ko da je muko} \). Pirot (Zlatković 2014, 2: 351). The formal agreement of this hapax legomenon with Western Slavic forms should after all be rendered a coincidence, not only for its semantic inadequacy (which theoretically might somehow be surpassed), as much for its three synonyms with uncontracted -ao- which seem to speak for a prefixoid ja- + another verb of unknown origin¹² – unless those other semantically identical but formally different forms are not secondary formations, motivated by the intransparency of the basic \( \text{jámpu} \) ce.

2 Since hitherto tracing the PSl. \( \text{*astriti} \) to PIE \( \text{*ōk’u-} \) ‘quick’ (> Gk. \( \text{ṓkvos} \), OInd. \( \text{āśu-} \), etc.) has proven problematic on many levels (§ 1.4.1, 1.4.2), we should consider the possibility of a completely different prototype. And that could, ultimately, be PIE \( \text{*akr(o)-} \) ‘sharp’ (> Gk. \( \text{ἄκρος} \), Lat. \( \text{ācer} \), Lith. \( \text{aštrūs} \), etc.) i.e. PSl. \( \text{ostrъ} \) – the adjective so often mentioned in previous explanations, and also omitted from them. Departing from this prototype not only makes it possible to surpass the formal obstacles in the way of derivation from PIE \( \text{*ōk’u-} \) ‘quick’, but it is also semantically better justified. In fact, (eye)sight or a look, when positively valued, is typically characterised as sharp (clear, precise, penetrating, piercing, etc.) rather than swift. This is best confirmed by compounds with similar meaning, such as С.-Cr. \( \text{oштрьвид} \), \( \text{бистрьвид} \), \( \text{jaшнъвид} \), or its synonyms \( \text{oштрьок} \), \( \text{бистрьок} \), \( \text{jaшнъок} \), and \( \text{живъок} \), even \( \text{брзъок} \)¹³ (ОРСЈ 338, 928). Cf. also Rus. dial. \( \text{oстроокий} ‘с живым, быстрым взглядом’ \) (СРНГ 24: 88), besides standard Rus. \( \text{oстровгля́зый} ‘idem’.

2.1 This semantic aspect can be corroborated by the neighbouring Ukr. \( \text{гостри́ ти (очи на кого)} \) ‘стріляти очима на кого’, lit. ‘sharpen one’s eyes at someone’ (sum.in.ua/s/ghostryty), also ‘стежить за кимс, приглядатися до кого-, чего-нібуд прагнути здійснити щос’ (slovopedia.org.us/49/53395/357084.htm), as a phraseologism from \( \text{гостри́ ти} \) ‘острить, точить’.¹⁴ In further course the object in the phrase could have been omitted or substituted with an instrumental (for Cz. \( \text{jastril ... okem} \) cf. § 1.6.1). The original relation with eye(s) as with the internal object would eventually have led to the verb developing a secondary intransitivity.

⁰⁴ For an analogous semantic shift cf. ORus./Rus.CSl. \( \text{обострить} \) ‘заостривать, направить, \( \text{устремить (оружие) на кого-л., что-л.} \) (ЭССЯ 28: 134 s.v. *obostriti (sę)).
2.2 On the formal side, the long vowel in \textit{jastriti} can best be interpreted if we allow its derivation from \textit{ostrěti}, through an analogy with \textit{paliti} ‘to set on fire’ from \textit{polěti} ‘to burn’. But this analogy is not complete since such lengthening has so far been attested solely for primary verbs (cf. Vaillant 1950–1977, 3: 410–412), and not for denominals (\textit{ostrěti} is a deadjective of the type \textit{slaběti}). On the other hand, the still unexplained length in Lat. \textit{ācer} ‘sharp’ (de Vaan 2008: 22; NIL 295, note 32) might well indicate that we could have had a PSl. long vowel variation, \textit{āstrъ} alongside \textit{ostrъ}. Another possible reflex of that \textit{āstrъ} could be \textit{(j)astro-oka}, provided it is not a composition \textit{vṛddhi} from \textit{ostro-okъ} (cf. note 17). These should be seen purely as ideas for further studies into this verb’s origin, and not yet an answer to the question of its etymology.

3 Another way of seeking a solution could be oriented toward finding a more or less synonymous verb, preferably from the same terrain and homophonous in a way indicating a similar structure. Such is, for example, PSl. dial. \textit{patriti}/\textit{patrati} ‘to watch, focus one’s eye on something; care about smth./smb.’ etc. (well attested in Pol. \textit{patrzeć}, Cz. \textit{patřit}; Slk. \textit{patrit}, also Ukr. dial. \textit{námpumu}, Brus. dial. \textit{nămpu}, S-Cr. reg. \textit{nămpu} ‘to belong’). It has no certain etymology, but it is most convincingly interpreted as a denominal from PIE \textit{patro-} ‘food, fodder; grazing’ (from PIE \textit{pa-} < \textit{peh₂-} ‘to feed’ and the suffixed for nomina instrumenti \textit{-tro-}), with supposed semantic development ‘to give food’ → ‘to take care, oversee’ → ‘to look, watch, follow’ (Boryś 2005: 418).

3.1 Having in mind this onomasiological parallel, and after the model of this formation, we cannot exclude the possibility that PSl. \textit{(j)astriti} is a denominal of such kind, from an unattested noun from a so far unidentified verbal root: we can think of PSl. \textit{as-}, \textit{at-}, \textit{ad-}, \textit{jas-}, \textit{jav-}, \textit{ěs-}, \textit{ět-}, \textit{ěd-}, with an even larger number of possible PIE prototypes. Among the candidates within the already reconstructed PSl. lexical fund we can point to the root which is in PSl. \textit{ěska}, \textit{ěsknъ}, \textit{ěskrъ}, \textit{jьskra}, \textit{jьskriti} (SP 6: 139–141; ЭССЯ 6: 50–53, 8: 239–40), if we allow its derivative \textit{*ěsk-tro-} > \textit{*ěstro-}, with a regular ellision of \textit{k} before \textit{t} as in PSl. \textit{pleťo} ‘to knit’ < \textit{plektō}. This supposition is semantically attractive, since the members of this word family are used to describe eyes, look, etc. – but from the formal side, it is pure construction.

4 The only formally and semantically simple explanation – and unlike the previous two not at all speculative – would have it that PSl. (dial.) \textit{astriti} is

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15 This reconstruction is justified by Rus. (obs.) \textit{остреть} ‘становиться остree’ (Даль 1881–1882, 2: 705), and Ukr. \textit{zorniwaamu} ‘idem’ (УРС 141), although it is not recorded in \textit{ESCA} (cf. 36: 61). This absence is probably accidental, as is certainly the case with the causative \textit{ostriti} (cf. ibidem) whose PSl. antiquity is not in doubt, with regard to its numerous present continuants in Slavic languages as well as reconstructed prefixed forms \textit{naostriti} (ЭССЯ 22: 203) and \textit{obostriti} (сё) (ЭССЯ 28: 134).
a denominal verb from *astrъ ‘hawk’. But it is out of the competition since it would be based solely on the Ukr. dial. hapax legomenon. Such a solution is already implied in ЭССЯ (1: 86), and it would nicely correct Machek’s formulation “z nějaké zkráceniny jména jastráb” (cf. note 2), but one attestation simply does not suffice. Even three potential South Slavic supports for this reconstruction have proven inadequate: S-Cr. reg. jácmpo m. is a hypocoristicon, certainly fairly recent (§ 1.2.1.), Serb. dial. jácmpu (mu) ce is semantically inadequate (§ 1.6.3.), and a couple of rare zoonyms, S.-Cr. reg. jácmpoka ‘sheep name’ Grbalj (RJAZU 4: 486; PCAHY 8: 603), also jácmpoka ‘sheep name’ Kurelac (ibid.), whose connection with *astriti was supposed even by Skok (1971–1974, 1: 720 s.v. jastreb, with no explanation),¹⁷ by themselves open more questions than they offer clear answers,¹⁸ and at the end of the day take us back to *astrěbъ and *ostrъ.

4.1 If we look back at the distribution of fixations, we see that in Ukrainian, where only the ornithonym without the suffix is attested, so far there are no fixations of its denominal. On the other hand, in Czech (Moravian) and Slovak there is no ornithonym without the suffix, only the verbs that would regularly derive from it. This would mean that the verb might have originted in Proto Slavic, and on a wider territory (as would be the case with the noun), and that later, with the retreat of the noun without a suffix – caused by the expansion of the one with a suffix – the verb itself lost motivation and perished, except in the central territory. The noun was, accidentally, preserved in the East, in

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¹⁶ The original definition “nomen ovis indi solitum” (from Vuk’s Srpski rječnik, as the single source for both RJAZU and PCAHY), can be interpreted with two nuances of meaning: that jácmpoka is a name traditionally named for sheep, or that it is the most frequent name for sheep.

¹⁷ He also quotes: “Brückner ... za polj. jastry < praslav. *astrъ ‘bistar’ [sic!], češ. jastřiti ‘oštro gledati’, slov. jastrif. Odatle su možda naša imena ovaca jástroka (Grbalj) = jastrovka (Kurelac)”.

¹⁸ Apart from semantic ambiguity, there is also a formal uncertainty about which of these zoonyms is primary: either jácmpoka (< *jastrov < jácmpo) by the way of contraction yielded jácmpoka or just on the contrary, jácmpoka has resulted, by secondary diphtongisation, insertion of a -е- into the original jácmpoka, which is itself a result of contraction of *jacmpoka. In the first case, by departing from the hypocoristicon implies that the zoonym is motivated by the grey colour (cf. jastrebă ‘goat name’, jastrebašм ‘grey (like a hawk)’, jastrebăča ‘name of goat, hen, turkey’). In the other case a possibility arises of relating this zoonym with the standard (nominalized) adjective oštripoka, with semantic referring not only to the eye or look, but to general appearence of an animal. In that way this form would be placed among the forms that result from compositional vṛddhi, with typical lengthening (j)а < о (for the classical PSl. *asokorъ : *osokorъ cf. ЭССЯ 1: 82; SP 1: 159), also *gavezъ : *gavezъ, then *galębъ : *golębъ (Loma 2003: 272), or S-Cr. jašleđ without complementing *ogleđ (id.; with more details OC EPCJ 41–42). Hence we go back to the ultimate origin from PSl. *ostrъ.
Ukrainian – so that in no language is there a complete “noun + verb” couple. On the other hand, it is quite possible that the verb is of a fairly recent date (yet older than the 19th century when it was first written down), derived from the non-suffixed ornithonym¹⁹ before it perished from the wider range of the Tatry and their foot hills.

5 Revisiting the origin of the verb PSl. (dial.) *(*)(j)astriti has not resulted in a satisfactory outcome: after an argumented rejection of one insufficiently grounded interpretation we presented two others: one that remained inconclusive due to lack of data, the other speculative to such a high degree that it too had to be eventually rejected. Even introducing into consideration of some hitherto unnoticed and new data, and a widening of the territory examined, has failed to yield a substantial breakthrough. Hopefully, it is just a matter of time until new evidence will appear and bring this pursuit to an end.

References

SSN: *Slovník slovenských nářečí*, 1–, Bratislava 1994–.

That such nouns can be derivative base for denominals, cf. also PSL. *sɔpъ* : *(na)sɔpiti sę* (ЭССЯ 1: 86 s.v. *astriti*; ЭССЯ 23: 67), or Rus. *cöva* ’awl’ > *ocövëtэ* ’to get drowsy, sleepy and slow’, then S-Cr. *soko* ’falcon’ > *sokólni* ’to encourage’; cf. also S-Cr. reg. *naorнá* adv. ’quickly’ Pirot (Златковић 2014, 1: 514).

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