

NOTES ON THE SEMANTIC DEVELOPMENT OF OLD CHURCH SLAVIC *ŠTUDŮ* AND *BLAGŮ*¹

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Abstract: *DIWEG-PUKANEC, Martin: Notes on the Semantic Development of Old Church Slavic študŭ and blagŭ.* The aim of this paper is to research enantiosemymy concerning the Old Church Slavic words *študŭ* ‘manners’ and *blagŭ* ‘good’ in Slavic languages. The original meanings of the word *študŭ* must have been related to ‘beat’. By the 15th century at the latest, the meaning changed to ‘modesty, chastity (acquired through training, discipline and beatings)’. The semantic change may have been associated with the significant religious movement of flagellants. Since the semantics of Old Church Slavic *blagŭ* are quite rich, its original nature could be revealed by etymology. Proto-Slavic **bolgŭ* should be linked with Proto-Slavic comparative **bolъjъ* ‘bigger, better’ from Proto-Indo-European **bol-*, **bel-* ‘strong’. The church has preserved the positive meanings of the root. The negative connotations fully emerged in secular or non-church environments, at the latest in the 14th – 15th centuries, when the behaviour of yurodivy fanatics in Russia, also called *blagy*, began to be viewed negatively.

Keywords: *etymology, moral words, Old Church Slavic, semantic change, semantics, Slavic languages*

The aim of this paper is to collect semantic material relating to Old Church Slavic words *študŭ* and *blagŭ*, and to determine the original meaning of these words in Proto-Slavic and how it developed, not only in Old Church Slavic, but also later in Church Slavic and other historical and modern Slavic languages and dialects. Both words underwent radical semantic changes, which we will attempt to place in a historical context in this study, at least in the form of a hypothesis. As part of these semantic considerations, we will also outline the etymologies of both Old Church Slavic terms analysed.

Old Church Slavic *študŭ* has two meanings: 1. ‘manners, behaviour, way of life; Sitte, Brauch, Lebensweise; победение, поступки (pl.), обычай, нравы (pl.); σχῆμα, τρόπος; mōs, mōrēs’, 2. ‘naturally, instinctively; отприроды; von Natur, instinktiv; φυσικῶς; naturaliter’ (SJSE, s. v. *študŭ*). The latter meaning, which is more important for semantic analysis, is defined in the dictionary based on this Old Church Slavic sentence from the 12th century, which is a translation from Greek, and we will return to it later: “Си же, елико убо не вѣдят, хулять, еликоже щоудью яко скоти животьнии вѣдять, въ сихъ сквѣрнять ся” (Jud. 10) (SRJ XI – XVII XXV 2000, 7).

In South Slavic languages, the term corresponding to Old Church Slavic *študŭ* is attested mainly in Serbian/Croatian as *ćud* (since the 15th century) or *ćud* (in the 17th century), but also in Slovenian since the 19th century as *čūd* ‘nature’, which is most likely borrowed from Croatian *ćud* (cf. Pleteršnik 1894, 116). The semantics of the Serbian/Croatian term are as follows: ‘character, nature, custom, habit, manners, will’, ‘nature, naturalness, instinct, sense’, ‘sin’ – *Niste vi ni rodom*,

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ni jezikom, ni ćudom Grci = You are not Greeks by race, language, or customs; *Koliko ljudi, toliko ćudi* = Quot capita, tot sententiae; *Bogom se svijem molim vašojzi naravi da zlu ćud prikrate* = I pray to God that your nature will restrain your evil temper (RJA II 1884 – 1886, 145 nn.).

To understand the original meaning of the word, it is also important to know the semantics of Serbian/Croatian expressions with the same root: *ćudâne* ‘consternation (about horse)’, *ćudati*, *ćudnuti* ‘to desire’, *ćudati se* ‘to fear, to refuse, to run away (about horses)’, *ćudljiv* ‘sensitive (about child)’, ‘fearful (about horse)’, similarly *ćudovit*, but also finally *ćudoredan* ‘related to morality, moral’, which is attested since the 18th century – *ćudoredni nauk* = moralis documentum, *ćudoredne nauke vaditi* = informandis moribus documenta promere, *ćudoredna kripas* = virtus moralis, *po zakonu ćudorednu* = bonis moribus congruenter, etc., *ćudorediti* means ‘to instil moral values and qualities (virtues)’ and *ćudorede* ‘morals, virtues’ (cf. RJA II 1884 – 1886, 150).

The term corresponding to Old Church Slavic *študb* is not attested in East Slavic languages, but it is found in West Slavic, namely at the beginning of the 17th century in Middle Czech as *cud* ‘discipline, good manners, exercise’ (Jungmann 1835, 250), and similarly in modern Czech, as well as in Slovak dialectal *cúd* ‘fluid that comes out of a cow before calving’ (SSN I 1994, 220), since before calving, cows release a thick mucus plug and often clear or bloody fluid from the vulva, along with urine and excrement.

In order to understand this meanings, it is necessary to know the verbs that are attested already in Old Czech, namely: *cúdi* ‘to clean’, ‘(about an animal or a human) to defecate, to shit, to clean’ (ESSČ, s. v. *cúdi*), *cúdi se* ‘(about an animal or a human) to defecate, to shit’ (ESSČ, s. v. *cúdi se*), *cudnovati* ‘to clap (one’s hand)’ (Gebauer 1903, 147, where it is stated that the term is related to the onomatopoeic words *čundy*, *čundy*, *cundy*, *cundy*, but the root of the verb is *cudn-*, not *cund-*). Middle Czech *cúdi* means ‘to clean’, ‘to groom a horse’, ‘to beat’, as well as ‘to shit, to soil’ (Jungmann 1835, 232), Czech dialectal (Moravian) *cúdit* ‘to clean’ – *kráva sa cúdí* ‘cow is cleaned after calving’, ‘to eat greedily, to drink a lot’, ‘to beat’, *cudovat sa* ‘to argue’ (Bartoš 1906, 40). Old Slovak *cúdiť* (documented since the 16th century) means ‘to clean’, ‘to convert to cultivated land, to clear’, ‘to groom a horse’ (HSSJ I 1991, 194), Slovak dialectal *cúdiť* ‘to clean, to sow, to rain’, *cúdiť sa* ‘to get rid of the fetal bed’, ‘to remove the remains of flowers and mature fruit (about fruit trees)’, ‘to rain’ (SSN I 1994, 220). This root also includes the Czech and Slovak adjective *cudný*, meaning ‘morally pure, innocent, shy’.

In the 16th century, corresponding verbs are also attested in Polish: *cudzić* ‘to clean, to groom a horse’, ‘to beat, to hit, to train’ (SP XVI w. III 1968, 701). This century also documents the adjective *cudny*, meaning ‘beautiful, perfect, extraordinary, good’, as well as ‘ugly’ (SP XVI w. III 1968, 697 nn.), which is also attested in the former meaning in Old Polish (Sł. stp. I 1953 – 1955, 335). Old Polish noun *cudność* means ‘beauty’, but also ‘modesty, chastity’, which results from discipline – *Czudność disciplina morum* (in the 15th century) = ‘chastity: discipline of morals, manners’ (Sł. stp. I 1953 – 1955, 334 n.). Polish dialectal *cudować* means ‘to destroy, to curse’ (Machek 1971, 85) – *Niech (mąż) nie krzyczy, nie cuduje, niech mnie sanuje* (Karłowicz 1900, 260) ‘Let him (the husband) not shout, not hit/curse, let him respect me’. Old Polish (*cud*), *cudo*, *czudo* (Sł. stp. I 1953 – 1955, 333 n.) and Old Polish or Old Czech *cud* ‘court’ are not etymologically related.

Most recently, Rejzek (2022) has discussed this group of words, adding Old Church Slavic *študb* ‘manners, behaviour, way of life’ to the words mentioned in West Slavic languages. However, he does not mention Old Church Slavic *študb* in the meaning of ‘naturally, instinctively; φυσικῶς’, nor Slovak dialectal word *cúd* ‘fluid that comes out of a cow before calving’, and, moreover, he completely avoids Serbian/Croatian material. Therefore, he comes to slightly different conclusions than those presented here. The broader context of the Greek text Jud. 10-11 clearly shows what kind of customs, behaviour, or way of life is meant in the case of Old Church Slavic *študb*: οὐαί

αὐτοῖς ὅτι τῇ ὁδῷ τοῦ Κάιν ἐπορεύθησαν (NTG 1881, 347), where ‘the way of Cain’ is mentioned. It is therefore likely that Old Church Slavic *študb* had the semantic nuance of ‘violent manners, violent behaviour, violent way of life’, although it was gradually disappearing in Old Church Slavic as a result of semantic generalization.

The original meanings of the word *študb* must then most likely be hidden in Middle Czech *cíditi* ‘to beat’, Polish *cudzić* ‘to beat, to hit, to train’, Polish dialectal *cudować* ‘to destroy, to curse’, Czech dialectal (Moravian) *cúdit* ‘to beat’. As a result of brutal, violent beating or causing fear of it, then Old Czech *cúdit* ‘(about an animal or a human) to defecate, to shit’, *cúdit se* ‘(about an animal or a human) to defecate, to shit’, as well as (through the transfer of meaning based on the figurative similarity) Moravian *cúdit*, Slovak *cúdiť sa* ‘to clean after calving’. This semantic change is perhaps also evidenced by the reflexive forms of verbs alongside the non-reflexive ones. From this then derives the additional meaning ‘to clean’.

By the 15th century at the latest, the meaning changed from ‘to beat, to hit, to train (a horse, etc.)’ to ‘modesty, chastity (acquired through training and discipline)’ – *Czudnoszcz disciplina morum* ‘chastity: discipline of morals, manners’. Chastity and morality were apparently acquired by people through training, discipline, and quite possibly even beatings, but certainly not in the same way as with horses, as shown, among other things, by Serbian/Croatian adjective *čudljiv* ‘fearful (about horse); but ‘sensitive (about child)’. All of this was a kind of purification.

We can agree with Rejzek (2022, 168) that if we accept the connection between Old Church Slavic *študb* and West Slavic words with the root *cud-*, the source will be Proto-Slavic **teu-d-*. However, we disagree that this **teu-d-* cannot originate from Proto-Indo-European **tēu-* (**teuh₂-*) ‘to grow, to become strong’ (LIV2 2001, 639 n.). On the contrary, the relationship should be seen precisely in Old Indic *tavīti* ‘is strong, has power’, *tavás* ‘strong, powerful’, Avestan *tavah* ‘strength, power’, *tauman* ‘wealth, strength, power’, etc. (see Pokorny 1959 – 1969, 1080 n.). The other Proto-Indo-European **teuH-*, which Rejzek refers to as the only possible source, with the meaning ‘to pay friendly attention to, to care for, to protect’, can hardly explain such a specific meaning as that of the Slovak dialect word *cúd* ‘fluid that comes out of a cow before calving’ and similar expressions.

Given the semantics of the root, the time of radical semantic change in the moral sphere, and the geographical distribution of the attested expressions, it can be speculated that the semantic change (semantic specialization) ‘manners’ > ‘morals’ will be related to the significant religious movement of flagellants (cf. Novak – Srđelić 2025), which is documented in the countries of Central Europe (Bohemia, Hungary, Poland, etc.) as well as the eastern Adriatic since the second half of the 13th century, although flagellation is often mentioned in monastic rules as a means of acquiring discipline much earlier. The practices of flagellants respected the original concept of suffering as *imitatio Christi*, and its goal was to torment the body in order to purify the soul. Moreover, great force was used in the whipping, and a bloody fluid flowed from those who were whipped, as mentioned by a German Dominican in the 14th century (Aberth 2005, 123): “With these *flagella* [whips] they beat and whipped their naked bodies to the point that the scourged skin swelled up black and blue and blood flowed down to their lower members and even spattered the walls nearby”.

As regards Old Church Slavic *blagb*, it has several meanings: 1. ‘good, right’, ‘virtue’, ‘saint’, 2. ‘good, kind, benevolent’, 3. ‘beneficial, useful, good’, 4. ‘blissful, pleasant’, 5. ‘superb, brilliant, excellent’, ‘noble’ (SJSE, s. v. *blagb*), *ѣко благѣиѣхъ моѣхъ негрѣбоуешѣ* = *tōn agathōn mou* (Ps 15:2), *клирици из зем’ла и благыхъ своихъ* = *patria bonisque privati*, that is ‘property, estates’ (pl.) (SJSE, s. v. *blago*). Old Church Slavic composite *blagoteča* means ‘good runner’, *možeblaštvije* ‘bravery, virility’, literally, apparently, ‘male virtue’, etc. (cf. ESJS I 1989, 64).

In South Slavic languages, the corresponding word is rather well documented. Bulgarian *blag* means 'happy', 'good, kind', 'tasty', 'modest' (Duvernois 1885 – 1888, 104), 'good, mild', 'kind, gentle', 'sweet, tasty' (BER I 1971, 52 n.), Macedonian *blag* 'sweet', 'sweet, not spicy (about pepper, etc.)', 'gentle', 'good, kind' (MRS 1963, 33). Serbian Church Slavic *blagŭ* meant 'good; ἀγαθός' (in the 13th century) (Petković 1935, 18), Serbian/Croatian *blâg* 'good, kind, gentle, sweet, happy' (since the 12th century) (RJA I 1880 – 1882, 394 nn.), Slovenian *blâg* 'noble', 'kind', 'beneficial', 'blissful' (Pleteršnik 1894, 30).

In West Slavic languages, the adjective *blahý* 'blessed' is merely assumed to exist in Old Czech; only the adverb *blazě* is attested (Gebauer 1903, 61), while the adjective itself is attested later in Middle Czech with the meanings 'good, true', 'blessed, blissful, happy', 'kind' (Jungmann 1835, 131), Middle Czech *bláhový* means 'blissful, happy' (Jungmann 1835, 131), but Czech *bláhový* 'foolish, slow-witted, unwise', Czech dialectal (Moravian) *blahovať* means 'to bliss, to congratulate', *blahút* means 'fool' (Bartoš 1906, 17). In Slovak, the adverb *blaze* is attested in the 17th century, and the adjective *blahý* 'blessed, happy' since the 18th century (HSSJ I 1991, 135). Sorbian *bložki* means 'blessed, blissful' (Schuster-Šewc 1978, 37).

Polish is more complex both phonologically and semantically. Old Polish *blogi* (since the 16th century), with secondary substitution *h > g* (cf. ESJS II 1990, 65), meant 'happy' (SP XVI w. II 1968, 218), but Old Polish *blahy* (since the 16th century), with Church Slavic metathesis of liquids, i.e. a borrowing from (Russian) Church Slavic, meant 'of little value, of little importance, imperfect, modest, very light, little', 'weak, feeble, small, miserable, poor' (SP XVI w. II 1968, 198 n.). Polish *blogi* means 'fortunate, saved, blessed', 'sweet, kind, dear, pleasant, delightful', 'beneficial, wholesome', 'kind, merciful, gracious', as well as 'bad' (SW I 1900, 174), Polish *blahy* 'worthless, insignificant, unworthy of attention, colourless, bland', 'uncertain, doubtful, false' (SW I 1900, 170 n.), Polish dialectal *blogi* means 'fortunate', 'worth, valuable', and 'bad' (Karłowicz 1900, 92), *blagi*, *blachi*, *blachy*, *blahy* 'worthless, bad' (Karłowicz 1900, 91).

In East Slavic, enantiosemia is similar. Old Russian Church Slavic *blagyi* means 'kind, good, merciful, favourable, convenient, fat' (since the 11th century), 'pleasant, beautiful, wonderful' (since the 11th century), 'angry, furious, bad, unkind' (since the 15th century), 'crazy' (since the 15th century) (Sreznevsky 1893, 109 n.; SRJ XI – XVII vv. I 1975, 191), Old Russian *bologo* (since the 11th century) 'good, good deed' (Sreznevsky 1893, 145; SRJ XI – XVII vv. I 1975, 282), Russian *blagóy* 'good', 'foolish, frivolous' (Ushakov 1935, 148), Russian dialectal *blagóy*, *blagíy* 'good, noble, honest, useful, good-hearted, compassionate', 'evil, angry, stubborn, persistent, headstrong, restless, carefree, bad, difficult, uncomfortable' (Dal 1911, 222 n.).

Old Ukrainian Church Slavic has the meanings 'good, kind, nice, righteous, holy, blessed, happy', as well as 'bad, poor, cheap' since the 16th century (SUM XVI – I/XVII II 1994, 92 n.), Ukrainian 'old, poor, weak', and 'good, gentle, good-hearted' (SUM I 1970, 191), 'blessed', 'bad, weak, powerless, feeble' (Hrinčenko 1907, 70), the original *boloh-* is attested in the adverb *ne-z-bolóha*, from which stem the meanings 'prosperity, pride' (cf. SP I 1974, 306). Old Belarusian *bologiy* meant 'good' (HSBM II 1983, 133), Old Belarusian Church Slavic *blagiy* 'good, kind, pleasant', as well as 'bad' (HSBM II 1983, 22), Belarusian *blahí* means 'having no positive qualities, not meeting requirements', 'morally evil', 'skinny, sickly-looking', 'unpleasant for others (in terms of behaviour, character, etc.)' (TSBM I 1977, 381 n.), and 'weak, powerless, bad' (Turaŭ I 1982, 61), dialectal *blahiy* 'silly' (Nosovich 1870, 26).

Since the semantics of Old Church Slavic *blagŭ* are quite rich and its meanings do not clearly point to the character of "good", its original nature could be revealed by etymology. However, there are as many as three relatively widespread interpretations of this word (cf. ESJS II 1990, 65; Králik 2015, 72). The first interpretation is from Proto-Indo-European **bʰel-* 'shining, radiant', which would not shed much light on this semantic problem, but it is not mentioned by ESSJa or Derksen,

and can perhaps be considered marginal today. The second etymology, which both ESSJa (ESSJa II 1975, 173) and Derksen (2008, 51) mention with some doubt, is the etymology from Proto-Indo-European **b^hleg-* ‘to desire’, but even Derksen notes that the connection with Old Indic *bṛhaspāti-* (the name of a god, literally ‘lord of prayer’), Avestan *bərəṣaya-* ‘to welcome, to pay respects’ and *bərəg* ‘rite, (religious) custom’ is “highly speculative”, and ESSJa points to the improbability of a change from **-l-* to Indo-Iranian *-r-*. The third of the widespread interpretations is phonologically the most likely. Berneker linked Proto-Slavic **bolgŭ* with Proto-Slavic comparative **bolъjb* ‘bigger, better’ from Proto-Indo-European **bol-*, **bel-* ‘strong’, given that a positive with the formant *-go-* would be extremely rare (Berneker 1924, 69).

Based on the third etymology, we can interpret the original meaning as ‘strong’, which is indicated by above-mentioned Old Church Slavic composites, both Old Church Slavic and Slovene ‘noble’, Ukrainian ‘prosperity, pride’, etc., and probably confirmed by a sentence from the 13th century: “къ душьному мужьству и тѣломъ благъ быше и крѣпокъ” = “he was mentally courageous, physically *blagŭ*, as well as strong” (Smirnova 1966, 57). In any case, considering all three etymologies presented, it is unlikely to assume that the original meaning was ‘weak, powerless, feeble, small, modest, miserable, poor, bad’, or even ‘silly, foolish, crazy’.

However, the first evidence of this latter meaning in the 15th century in Old Russian Church Slavic is quite interesting: “...да за ним благой слон идет... да обивает люди, да чепь у него железна велика во рте, да обивает кони и люди...” = “...and behind him goes *blagoy* elephant... and beats people, and has a big iron flail in his mouth, and beats horses and people...” (SRJ XI – XVII vv. I 1975, 282). Is this, then, an analogy to the customs known among West and South Slavs as *cud* or *čūd*, and is this why the semantically corresponding term has not been preserved in East Slavic languages? Even if so, these customs are not related to flagellants, but to a specifically Russian type of religious asceticism called *yurodstvo*.

The essence of *yurodstvo* lay in the fact that a person renounced the usual way of behaving and consciously took on the appearance of a madman, and this had been the case since the beginnings of Christianity in Russia, but especially in the 14th – 16th centuries. *Yurodivy* often endured physical hardship, public mockery, and beatings while living a life of asceticism. Nevertheless, the church considered these madmen to be saints and recognized their “prophetic” abilities. When they died, their remains were even declared holy and attributed with miraculous powers that brought healing from diseases (cf. Smirnova 1966), so it can be assumed that something similar existed in Greece or in pre-Christian times, which, from a semantic point of view, would point back to the etymology connected with Avestan *bərəg* ‘rite, (religious) custom’.

In any case, this church background has preserved the positive, old ritual or at least new religious, meanings of the root. The negative connotations fully emerged in secular or non-church environments, at the latest in the 14th – 15th centuries, when the behaviour of *yurodivy* fanatics, called *blagy*, who, with their rowdiness, shouting, and throwing of objects, differed little from animals or madmen, began to be viewed negatively (cf. Smirnova, 1966; ESJS II 1990, 65). From colloquial Russian, the expression with negative meanings spread to other East Slavic languages, from Old Ukrainian to Old Polish, and much later, in a weakened sense, into Czech and even into non-Slavic languages, namely from Old Belarusian into the Baltic languages, cf. Lithuanian *blagnas* ‘unsuitable, bad, evil’, *blōgas* ‘bad, weak, poor’, Latvian *blāgs* ‘weak, bad, evil, quarrelsome’ (Fraenkel 1962, 45 n.); semantically important in the context of Slavic *cud*, *čūd*, absent in East Slavic, is Lithuanian verb *blōginti* ‘to exhaust (a horse)’ (Szmoczyński 2007, 65 n.).

The first change in the meaning of Proto-Slavic **bolgŭ* occurred in the early days of Christianity and was not radical. Its nature is even very difficult to estimate. The further semantic change in the Middle Ages, though, was radical and concerned the Russian environment, so it is most likely related to the significant religious movement of the holy fools known as *yurodivy* or *blagy*.

The similarity between this movement and the flagellants is not great; after all, the flagellants had positive semantic connotations from a Christian point of view in both the Church and the population, while the yurodivy only had them in the church, but outside it, quite the opposite. However, it cannot be completely ruled out that these types of Christian religious fanaticism in the Slavic environment were not linked to some older, pre-Christian religious customs and rituals, Slavic or broader Indo-European ones, preserved in rural areas, since several pagan customs were still practiced in the peripheral areas (not only) of the Slavic world even in the 20th century.

The ritualistic use of whips was practiced in various Indo-European cults, in Europe, for example, in the Dionysian cult, at the Thargelia festival, or at the Roman festival of Lupercalia. Especially the old Spartan cult of Artemis Orthia was famous for its ritual flagellation of adolescent men. Self-flagellation was practiced by the priests of resurrecting Attis. Whipping is often perceived by scholars as a ritual of manhood. Blood-letting caused by ritual scourging is interpreted as a substitute for human sacrifice or self-castration or as a means to increase fertility. It was only later that the whip made its way to early monastic rules as an instrument of education. Benedict of Nursia (480 – 547), for example, prescribes flagellation of the stubborn and the disobedient, as well as the novices (cf. Bräunlein 2010, 1120 nn.).

Slovak and Moravian meanings of *cúd*, *cúdiť sa*, and *cúdit* would refer to a fertility ritual; proposed Proto-Indo-European source roots **tēu-* (**teuh₂-*) and **bol-* ‘strong’ and especially Old Church Slavic composites like *možeblašbviye* would point to a ritual of manhood. Nevertheless, it cannot be unequivocally confirmed that Old Church Slavic *študь* and *blagъ* are echoes of such ancient rituals. The semantic material presented here only illustrates changes in Slavic languages after the literacy revolution in the Cyrillo-Methodian era. Further semantic research will reveal the extent of these changes.

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