

# Lexical Variation of ‘*divine quietness*’ – ‘*silence*’ in the Slavonic Versions of the Ascetical Homilies of Saint Isaac the Syrian

Based on Material from Homily 21 of Version A and Homilies 10-14 from Version B

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**Abstract**—The present paper discusses the lexical variation of the lexemes of ‘divine quietness’ and ‘silence’, found in the two Slavonic versions of the Ascetical Homilies of Isaac the Syrian. The preference of the translator of version B for the lexeme ‘silence’ marks a new step in the process of creation of ascetic terminology.

**Keywords**—Isaac the Syrian; lexical variation; version A; version B; divine quietness; silence

## I. SUBJECT OF STUDY

The subject of the present paper is to study the lexical variation of the lexemes *мѣуаніе* / *мѣуальство* and *вѣзмѣвнѣ*, encountered in Homily 21 of version A and in homilies 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 of version B of the *Ascetical Homilies* of Saint Isaac the Syrian. The said lexemes render the same word in the Greek original, thereby forming a correlative pair (lexeme in version A – lexeme in version B). The interchangeability of the parts of the correlative pair is characteristic of Slavonic copies.

## II. SOURCES

The following manuscript copies of Version A and version B of the Slavonic Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian were used as sources of this study:

- Homily 21 – version A, Serbian copy of 1355 (Hilandar No. 470); see the catalogue of Dimitrije Bogdanović [1].
- Homilies 10, 11, 12, 13, 14 – version B, according to the Bulgarian copy of 1389 (Russian State Library, No. 462), (Preliminary list XI – XIV No. 552) and the Russian copy from the 40s of the 15<sup>th</sup> century (Codex Coloniensis) [2: 229–247], now at the

Institute of Slavonic Languages and Literature at the University of Cologne.

The use of the lexical variants in the three manuscripts will be presented below in the form of columns. The first column features the lexemes from the *Serbian copy* of 1355 (Hilandar, No. 470), (Homily 21) [1], version A; the second column – the *Bulgarian copy* of 1389 (Russian State Library, No. 462), (Preliminary list XI – XIV No. 552), [3] (Homily 10, 11, 12, 13, 14), version B; and the third column – the *Russian copy* from the 1440s (Codex Coloniensis) (Homily 10, 11, 12, 13, 14), also version B.

## III. LEXICAL VARIATION OF *мѣуаніе* / *мѣуальство* AND *вѣзмѣвнѣ* IN THE SLAVONIC COPIES OF THE ASCETICAL HOMILIES OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

The study of lexical variation in medieval Slavonic manuscripts is one of the typical problems of historical lexicology and medieval studies generally. According to E. M. Vereshchagin, “variation of the means of expression (including lexical variation) is an invariable part of the standards of the first Slavonic literary language” [1: 36].

### A. Variation of the Lexemes of *мѣуаніе* / *мѣуальство* and *вѣзмѣвнѣ* in the Two Slavonic Versions of the Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac The Syrian

In the copies of Homily 21 of version A and in homilies 10, 11, 12, 13 and 14 of version B of St. Isaac the Syrian’s Ascetical Homilies, the variation of the lexemes of *мѣуальство* from version A and *вѣзмѣвнѣ* from version B occurs on three occasions, while *мѣуаніе* from version A and *вѣзмѣвнѣ* from version B are found on two occasions.

In one of the cases, the lexeme **ВЕЗМЛЪВНІЕ** features in the two versions: **ВЕЗМЛЪВНІЕ** (A) – **ВЕЗМЛЪВНІЕ** (B1, B2) (see Table 1).

TABLE I. TABLE I. EXAMPLES OF LEXICAL VARIATION IN HOMILY 21 OF VERSION A AND IN HOMILIES 10, 11, 12, 13 AND 14 OF VERSION B OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN'S ASCETICAL HOMILIES

Serbian copy of 1355 (Hilandar No. 470)	Bulgarian copy of 1389 (Preliminary list XI – XIV No. 552)	Russian copy of the 1440s (Codex Coloniensis)
МЛЪУАЛЪСТВО	ВЕЗМЛЪВІЕ	ВЕЗМЛЪВІЕ
МЛЪУАЛЪСТВОУ	ВЕЗМЛЪВЪСТВОУ	ВЕЗМЛЪВЪСТВОУМА
МЛЪУАЛЪСТВА	ВЕЗМЛЪВНО	ВЕЗМЛЪВНО
МЛЪУАНИ,	ВЕЗМЛЪВІИ	ВЕЗМЛЪВІИ
МЛЪУАНИИ	ВЕЗМЛЪВІЕ	ВЕЗМЛЪВІЕ
ВЕЗМЛЪВНІО	ВЕЗМЛЪВІА	ВЕЗМЛЪВІА

The lexeme **МЛЪУАЛЪСТВО** is not included in the dictionaries with which we have worked, more specifically in [5], [6], [7], [8]1, [9] and [10]. The last dictionary features the lexeme **ВЕЗМЛЪВНІЕ**: **ВЕЗМЛЪВНІЕ**, -нѣ neuter for ἡσυχία 'divine quietness, silence' [10: 17]; **ВЕЗМЛЪВЪСТВОВАТИ**, -воуѣж, -воуѣши imp. for ἡσυχάζω 'to be silent, to be quiet' [10: 17].

The lexeme **МЛЪУАЛЪСТВО** was probably formed by analogy with **ВЕЗМЛЪВЪСТВО** with the help of the suffix -**СТВО**.

It should be noted that the lexemes **ВЕЗМЛЪВНІЕ** and **МЛЪУАНИЕ** are not fully synonymous.

Reference [9] presents the following lexemes in the reverse vocabulary ending in -**УАЛЪСТВО** [8: 669]:

НАУАЛЪСТВО  
ПОДНАУАЛЪСТВО  
ВЕЗНАУАЛЪСТВО  
САМОВЕЗНАУАЛЪСТВО  
ИЗНАУАЛЪСТВО  
ЛЮБОНАУАЛЪСТВО  
НОВОНАУАЛЪСТВО  
ПЕРВОНАУАЛЪСТВО

<sup>1</sup> The following affixal lexemes are listed in the dictionary edited by F. Miklošič: **млѣчливѣ**, **млѣчальникѣ**, **млѣчальник** (калугер, кој то је дал обѣт на млѣчане, пустинник, млѣчливѣ), **млѣчаніе**, **млѣчаніе** [8: 348].

МНОГОНАУАЛЪСТВО

СВѢЩЕННОНАУАЛЪСТВО

МНОГОВУАЛЪСТВО

БЕСПЕУАЛЪСТВО.

The lexeme **млѣчальство** should be registered in a future dictionary of 14th century Hesychast literature.

In Hesychast literature the word **ВЕЗМЛЪВНІЕ** 'silence' may refer to either the practice of exercise of sobriety (silence is perceived as remaining solitary in the cell with thought for and fear of God), or to the name of Hesychasm as a whole.

The lexemes **МЛЪУАНИЕ** / **МЛЪУАНИЕ** / **МЛЪУАНИЕ** / **МОУАНИЕ** (Gr. ἡσυχία, σιωπή) [11, vol. II: column 203] and **ВЕЗМЛЪВНІЕ** (**ВЕЗМЛЪВНІ**) / **ВЕЗМОУВНІЕ** (Gr. ἡσυχία) [12, vol. I: column 59] are found in 11th century Slavonic manuscripts.

It is also possible that the two lexemes **МЛЪУАНИЕ** and **ВЕЗМЛЪВНІЕ** were coined especially for the needs of the literary language (for the translation of a Greek word) because both have literary suffixes -**НИЕ** / -**НЕ**.

#### B. Lexical Variations in the Two Slavonic Versions of St. Isaac the Syrian's Ascetical Homilies as a Reflection of the Dynamics of Style, the Dynamics of The Idea of the Ascetical Literature

According to M. Fedotova, the difference on principle between the two Slavonic versions of St. Isaac the Syrian's Ascetical Homilies, proving that these are not different redactions but two translations independent of one another, lies not in the sphere of the literal translation, respectively in the field of stylistics, but in the sphere of outlook, of the ideology. For example, the choice of **ВЕЗМЛЪВНІЕ** in version B instead of **МЛЪУАНИЕ** / **МЛЪУАЛЪСТВО** from version A marked a turn in the point of view of the translator, i.e. the difference in the translations reflects difference in the understanding of the Greek term ἡσυχία [13: 68].

The Hesychast teaching in the Eastern Orthodox Church tradition distinguishes between:

- 1) *Quietness in the concrete meaning of the word, i.e. giving up speech;*
- 2) *Hesychia itself as a stage in monastic life, as a peculiarity of the 'mental and physical essence' of the monk;*
- 3) *Mystical quietness, silence of revelation accompanying the highest degrees of knowledge of the light of God [13: 68-69].*

A "wall" appears between the anchorite and the world, that is why the abstention from speech and communication became the symbol of this split. Quietness isolates the person. The Contemplative silence of ascetic life is a means to overcome passions.

‘Hesychia’ (вѣзлѣвнѣ ‘silence’) is different from the ‘quietness of the mouth’. “Hesychia as an inner world means ... another attitude of the soul” [14: 91], respectively a Christian expression of dispassion. “Quietness of the mouth” is a means to achieve ‘hesychia’, i.e. an accompanying but not obligatory element. ‘Hesychia’ is simultaneously a goal, a means and a condition to achieve the prayer.

And only after that, after ascending the “ladder” of prayers, does the anchorite reach the divine quietness, which is above our understanding of words, of giving them up [13: 69]. Such is the conceptual difference of quietness as an ascetic practice, ‘hesychia’ and the mysticism of quietness. Each of these concepts is presented in Greek by different lexemes (σιγή, ἡσυχία, σιωπή, ἡρεμία and others).

S. M. Zarin concludes that ἡσυχία in ascetic writings has a narrower and more special meaning compared to the meaning of this term in the Scriptures. According to him, ἡσυχία in the Scriptures is used rarely, only on several occasions, the word itself means peace, млъуаниѣ ‘silence’ (in the New Testament). On the other hand, “the synonymous ἡρεμία and other words with the same root have more limited connotations than ἡσυχία, since the latter refers to the *inner* essence of man, while the former is used most frequently to designate the external, sensual part of the phenomena and of human activity” (italics according to S. M. Zarin) [15: 426].

According to the observations of M. Fedotova, whoever wrote version B consistently translated the Greek term ἡσυχία as вѣзлѣвнѣ, preserving the variant млъуаниѣ / млъуалѣство meaning for the synonyms σιγή and σιωπή, unlike version A, where all variants are mixed and the term ἡσυχία is translated once as млъуаниѣ / млъуалѣство and on other occasions as вѣзлѣвнѣ. This consistent use of different lexical variants in version B aims to achieve stylistic differentiation, on the one hand – distinction of the concrete and the “literary” meaning. On the other, the choice of the translator of version B marks a new step on the way to the creation of consistent ascetic terminology. The Slavonic translator realized that the conceptual notions concerning the Hesychast movement have to be distinguished [13: 71-72].

The lexical variation in the two Slavonic versions reflects not only the dynamics of the language change, not only different preferences for translation techniques, but also the dynamics of style and the dynamics of the ideas. To designate divine quietness as giving up speech, the 14<sup>th</sup> century Slavonic translator consciously uses the lexeme млъуаниѣ / млъуалѣство, while for the translation of the term ἡσυχία from ascetic literature the translator used the lexeme вѣзлѣвнѣ. In order to convey the meaning of the supreme degree of seeing the light of God, the translator again uses the variant млъуаниѣ / млъуалѣство ‘divine quietness’, which in the given context began to be used in tradition thanks to the works of Dionysius the Areopagite, translated into Slavonic also in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The author of version A does not take into account the conceptual

difference between the Greek and the Slavonic usages of the word and for him ‘млъуаниѣ’ and ‘вѣзлѣвнѣ’ are complete synonyms [13: 72].

M. Fedotova notes that the age of Hesychast councils of 1341, 1347 and 1351 left an imprint on translations on which Hesychasts and their followers in Constantinople, Mt. Athos, Bulgaria and Serbia worked actively. It was precisely the Hesychast movement in the Slavic South that conditioned the enormous interest in 14<sup>th</sup> century mystical and ascetic literature [13: 72].

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Lexical variation is one of the most specific problems of textological and linguistic research of medieval Slavonic manuscript heritage. The number and character of the differences between the individual copies of a certain text from the medieval literature fund present the picture of the possible changes in the process of copying, beginning with the spontaneous changes and ending with conscious interventions (editing) of orthographic, lexical, grammatical, stylistic and textual character.

The lexical variants in the two Slavonic versions of St. Isaac the Syrian’s *Ascetical Homilies* show that medieval Bulgarian ascetic and monastic lexis featured variants for designating certain notions. Their combination in a certain text was chosen consciously, not randomly.

The observations and conclusions made in the present study could be used for further research of lexical and semantic peculiarities of the medieval Slavonic versions of St. Isaac the Syrian’s *Ascetical Homilies*, as well as in the compilation of specialized dictionaries of medieval ascetic literature.

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