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## Is Slavic *četa* an Indo-European Archaism?

Marc L. Greenberg

The origin of the Slavic word \**četa* ‘military unit’ (Old Russ. *četa* ‘troop’, OCS *četa*, Bulg. *čéta*, Mac. *četa*, Srb./Cr. *čěta*, Sln. *čéta*; borrowings Alb. *çetë* ‘kinship, military unit’, ‘handoff in a relay’ [Geg], Rom. *ceată*, Hung. *czata*, ‘troop, band’ Turk. *çete* ‘Raubzug’, are presumably from Srb./Cr.) has eluded Slavic etymologists, leaving them with only tentative proposals, e.g., “Proisxoždenie ètogo (južnoslavjanskogo?) slova nejasno” (Černyx 1994: 387); “...nima jasne etimologije” (Snoj 1997: 71). In part this mystery owes to the absence of plausible cognates in IE, and, in particular, Baltic. Comparative Slavic reconstruction is hampered further by the lack of agreement in accent—as well as meaning—between East Slavic and South Slavic, cf. end-stressed Rus. *četá* ‘pair, couple’ vs. Bulg. *čéta*, Srb./Cr. *čěta*, Sln. *čéta*, all meaning ‘military unit, troop’, which indicate alternative Common Slavic reconstructions \**četā* vs. \**čěta*. This paper attempts to sort out these apparent conflicts, starting from and developing an offhand remark by R. Jakobson,<sup>1</sup> and arrives at a uniform starting point for all of these forms. Though the proposal presented here cannot be proven beyond a doubt, if correct, it may further aid in the analysis of the recalcitrant IE compound numerals ‘four’ and ‘five’.

In the literature at least five historical connections of Common Slavic *četa* have been proposed: (1) Common Slavic \**četa* is usually derived from IE \**kh₂et-* ‘twist, braid’, cf. Umbr. *kateramu* ‘congregamini’, Lat. *caterva* ‘crowd, throng, band’, Ir. *cethern* ‘idem’, despite the difficulty presented by the root vocalism (Skok 1971: 314; Vasmer 1987: 351; Černyx 1994: 387, all with references to earlier literature), which would have given rise to Common Slavic \*\**kot̥-*. Trubačev et al. reject this interpretation, preferring instead to see the form as (2) an internal Slavic formation from \**čyto*, \**čisni*/*\*čitati* ‘to count’, thus the form \**četa* would have originally meant ‘a group of a certain number’ (1977: 92–3; recently Gluhak also adheres to this view 1993: 176). Another possibility is (3) comparison with OCS *kotora* ‘battle’, which is perhaps cognate with Skt. *śātayati* ‘he vanquishes’, *śátru-* ‘enemy, victor’, from IE \**k'h₂et-*. This connection presents difficulties both with respect to the root vocalism as well as the unexpected

<sup>1</sup> To our knowledge, no one, including Jakobson himself, has followed up on this suggestion.

kentum reflex of the initial consonant (see Snoj 1997: 71). (4) Jakobson in his marginalia to Vasmer's etymological dictionary suggests laconically that “čet, četka ‘even number’, četnyj ‘even’, četa ‘pair, union’, čet’ ‘quarter’ seem to be archaic relics of the same word family as četyre” (Jakobson 1971: 646–47). A similar view is taken by Erhart (1982: 139) and Andreev (1986: 142), though neither of these treat the formal and semantic problems. Further, Martynov (1963: 186) has proposed connecting (5) \*s(ə)kōtъ ‘cattle’ (< \*kotīti se ‘to impregnate, propagate, multiply, give birth (said of animals)’, četa and OCS sъčetati ‘unite’).<sup>2</sup>

Of these possibilities, (1) and (3) are unsatisfying on formal grounds and may be rejected with a degree of safety. Explanation (5) may yet have merit in our view, though the derivational path may have been reversed, i.e., \*kʷet-/\*kʷot- ‘two’ ⇒ \*(sə-)kōtъ ‘offspring (of animals)’ ⇔ kotīti se ‘to reproduce (of animals)’ (i.e., ‘to make two’; see below on the reconstructed primary meaning of the root in question). Because (2) and (4) pose fewer obvious formal difficulties and both give rise to plausible semantic developments, they cannot be so easily abandoned (despite Trubačev et al., who summarily dismiss Jakobson's idea as “vrjad li verna” [1977: 92–3]). Connection (2), however, encounters difficulty at the derivational level. The Common Slavic derivation \*čyto, \*čisti, \*čitati ⇔ \*četa, supposed by Trubačev et al., goes against the normal pattern of postverbal formations from verbal roots in -b-, which show o-grade rather than e-grade in the noun, cf. \*čyrtati ‘to draw’ ⇒ čyrti ‘line’; of the twenty-seven postverbals from roots in -b- listed by Vaillant, the only example of an e-grade is \*-četъ (1974: 238–45). In light of this we find derivation from the verb unlikely.

In light of the shortcomings of explanations (1)–(3), let us explore further the possibility of explanation (4), which derives \*četa from a relic form in common with \*četyre ‘four’. The obvious difficulty that must be overcome is the analysis of IE \*kʷetuōr-‘four’ into its constituent parts, a task that cannot be taken lightly in view of the fact that, although the word is considered a compound, it has so far defied analysis (Winter 1992: 17). There are a few fragmentary pieces of evidence, in addition to the tangential arguments in the present paper, which help us make at least some guesses at its morpheme structure. The first piece of evidence, we believe, lies in the second syllable of the cardinal numeral \*(pen-)kʷe- ‘five’ in IE, in which Menninger sees the first constituent of IE ‘four’ (1970: 147). Perhaps compounded with \*(s)pen-, the resulting form would have meant ‘four with an

<sup>2</sup> Martynov, who analyzes \*sъkōtъ as a prefixed compound, disagrees with the mainstream view that \*skōtъ (without a jer in the first syllable) was borrowed from Germanic, cf. Go. skattis ‘ðýnáþrōf’, Old Isl. skattr ‘tax’ (Vasmer 1987/III: 655). In support of Martynov's view is the fact that, in contrast to native Slavic and older borrowings with initial \*sk- (e.g., \*skor(o)lupā ‘crust, eggshell’ > Russ. skorlupá, Ukr. škorúpa ‘earth's crust’, Cz. skořápka, Škraloup ‘skin on milk, crust of ice [on a river, lake]’), initial sequences of \*sъk- do not show the variant reflexes sk-/šk-.

additional item attached’. This further assumes a metanalysis \*pen-kʷet- > pen-kʷe-t- where the -t- became associated with the ordinal suffix -to-, permitting the cardinal form to occur with an open second syllable. This suggestion may not seem extraordinary when it is considered that such a compound formation responds to Winter's reservation about the antiquity of IE \*penkʷe: “[...] in spite of its easy reconstructability, PIE \*penkʷe does not appear to be a Proto-Indo-European form of longstanding. Two arguments can be raised against it: for one, \*penkʷe has two full-grade vowels, and this is in violation of old ablaut rules. The second point is just as serious: the use of the ordinal suffix \*-to- outside ‘tenth’ is secondary [...]” (1992: 15). Secondly, a more primitive meaning of \*kʷet-/\*kʷot- may be detected in \*kʷotero- ‘which of two’ (cf. Lith. kataràs, kataràs; Gk; póteros; Goth. hvaþaruh). Thus, the root \*kʷet-/\*kʷot- meant ‘two’ when extricated from the compound \*\*kʷot-etero-, which had become simplified by haplology to \*kʷotero- (cf. OCS eterъ ‘someone, a certain one’, which occurs as -terъ in the Codex Clozianus and as terъ in the Enin Apostol).

If the first part of IE ‘four’ meant ‘two’, then the second part must have been a multiplier. Menninger suggests comparing Skt. varga- ‘group, row’; thus \*kʷet-yōro- meant ‘(two) groups/rows of two’ (Menninger: loc. cit.). Attractive though this may be semantically, this suggestion has no merit with respect to the sound correspondences and must be rejected. Another multiplicative meaning is found in Skt. vāra-, e.g., pancavāram ‘five times’, which Emmerick believes is limited to Indo-Iranian (cf. Zoroastrian bār, Modern Persian bār ‘sois’, Ossetian bārā ‘will’, all from Proto-Indo-Iranian \*vāra- (1992: 188). If we assume that this element is the same as that in the second syllable in IE ‘four’, it follows that at some point the compound became opaque to IE speakers and became understood not as ‘two times two’, but simply as ‘four’ and that the simplex \*kʷet- continued with the more specific meaning of ‘pair, partner’, hence Sl. \*četъ ‘even number’.<sup>3</sup>

A collective meaning was obtained by adding the desinence \*-eh₂ (cf. Sl. \*nogā ‘foot, leg’, originally ‘a multitude of toenails [\*nōg̃t̃s]; see Marko Snoj's etymologies of Sn. nόga ‘foot, leg’, nόht ‘toe-/fingernail in Bezljaj 1982: 226). As to the semantic development from a number word to the more specific meanings ‘pair, partner’ and ‘military unit’, we must assume that the Russian meaning ‘pair’ is primary and that the meaning ‘military unit’ is derived from this. For a parallel we may compare Latin *ex quadra* ‘from a (battle) square’ (i.e., an array of four soldiers), which gave rise to Ital. *squadra* ‘battle square, squad’; with an augmentative suffix also Ital. *squadrone*, Fr. *escadron*, both ‘squadron’. The

<sup>3</sup> In connection with this it is tempting to explore the Finno-Ugric evidence: Finn. kaksi, Votyak kät, Hung. két ‘two’, from Proto-Finno-Ugric \*kákta. However, we shall leave the possibility of deeper reconstruction to better-informed specialists.

meaning developed from the formation of pairs or rows of soldiers in a battle formation (Menninger 1970: 179).

The Sl. data present further formal difficulties. If derived in the normal manner, Common Slavic \*četā (< \*kʷet-eh₂) should yield final stress in the daughter languages, as attested in Russ. četá (cf. \*gʷen-eh₂ > \*ženā ‘woman’; Russ. žená ‘wife, woman’; with retraction Srb./Cr. žēna, Sln. žēna). The South Slavic data, however, reveal stem stress: Bulg. čéta, Srb./Cr. čēta, Sln. čēta. This stress cannot have been original and we must assume for South Slavic an analogical replacement of the stress. One possibility is the reanalysis of the nom. sg. fem. as a nom. pl. neut. of the type Srb./Cr. sēla ‘villages’, an oxytone paradigm (Stang’s b-class). In this form the short falling stress in Srb./Cr. reflects the short neo-acute stress, which regularly results in a long rising stress on a tense vowel, such as we find in Sln. čēta. This explanation is weakened in light of the back formation of the nom. sg. neut. in Srb./Cr. čēto, which should have developed a short rising stress in neo-Štokavian if analogical to sēlo:sēla (nom./acc. sg. : nom./acc. pl.). Rather, the relationship čēto:čēta suggests Slavic barytone accentuation (Stang’s a-class). A model for this accentual pattern would be the deveritative \*jāto/\*jāta ‘pack (of animals), flock (of birds), school (of fish)’ (cf. OCS jato, Srb./Cr. jāto, Sln. játa), which received root stress by Hirt’s law \*jeh₂t-éh₂ > \*jāta (cf. Skt. yātā- ‘journey, hike’).<sup>4</sup>

To summarize, the development suggested here is \*kʷet- ‘two’ ⇒ \*kʷet-eh₂ ‘multitude of pairs’, which is attested in Sl. as ‘troop, group, band (of soldiers)’. The formation of a singular (Srb./Cr. čēto) indicates the reinterpretation of \*četā as a plural. A newer collective formation is implied by the accentuation \*čēta, analogical to \*jāta.

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<sup>4</sup> The difference in accent marks reflects the diachronic distinction between “old acute” stress, which arose only on long vowels, and “neo-acute”, which was not thus restricted. At the time of the analogical development described here, the two (historical) stress types may have had identical properties.