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### THE EAST-SLAVONIC *sorok* '40' REVISITED\*

**Abstract.** None of the hitherto proposed attempts at explaining the origin of the East-Slavonic numeral *sorok* '40', is satisfactory. This refers almost equally to those propositions that derive it from Greek (F. Miklosich, A. Brückner, V. Jagić), Turkish (O.N. Trubačëv) or from Old Norse (M. Vasmer).

The author of the current article puts forward a yet another solution, this time pointing to the Ugro-Finnic languages. As the basis of the borrowing, the Udmurt proto-form *\*śor-ku/\*sor-ku* is advanced, which was adapted to *\*sorkъ > sorokъ* on the East-Slavonic ground. A possible semantic evolution leads from 'marten pelt(s)' > 'a bundle of pelts' > 'a bundle of pelts of forty pieces (as many as was needed to sew one fur-lined overcoat)' > 'a numerical unit (measure) used in trade' to 'a stand-alone number 40'.

The proposed etymology corresponds well with the context of Ugro-Finnic – East-Slavonic linguistic and extralinguistic contacts.

One of the most characteristic words belonging to the genetic and chronological layer of the typically East Slavonic lexis is the numeral *sorok* (Russ. *сорок*, Ukr. *сорок*, Belarus. *сорок*). This unusual and still not fully recognised lexical innovation has gradually obliterated the regular systemic numeral *четыре десяти*, *четыри десяти* of Proto-Slavonic origin.

As the historical dictionaries extensively inform us (SRJ XI-XVII; Sreznevskij), very numerous attestations of this lexeme can already be found in Old Ruthenian oldest written texts both in the terminological sense: **сорокъ** 1. 'Единица счета, равная четырем десяткам; товарно-денежная единица' (14<sup>th</sup> c.). 2. 'Единица счета пушнины, особенно соболей, которые продавались сороками, наборами на шубу, вложенными в чехол, имевший то же название' (15<sup>th</sup> c.).

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3. ‘Церковно-административный округ’ (1604), and in the function of the symbol of the abstract numerical concept ‘40’ (12<sup>th</sup> c.). In spite of this, SRJ XI-XVII (26: 184), similarly as Sreznevskij (III: 467-468), meticulously registers also the diminutive variant **сорочекъ** (**сорочькъ**, **срочекъ**) in the sense corresponding to **сорокъ** 1 (12<sup>th</sup> c.) and **сорокъ** 2 (15<sup>th</sup> c.), moreover, SRJ XI-XVII (26: 180) also mentions the feminine form (with a question mark) attested exclusively in the oblique cases: [**сорока**, *жс.?*] ‘Чехол, мешок, содержащий обычно сорок шкурок пушного зверя (преимущественно соболя), подобранных по качеству меха, предназначенных для шитья одной полной шубы’ (16<sup>th</sup> c.) and ‘Как единица счета’ (16<sup>th</sup> c.).

The fact that the historical dictionaries do not give the oldest documentations of the investigated term in writing can be attested by for example the monumental work by A.A. Zaliznjak devoted to the Old Ruthenian birch bark documents (Zaliznjak 2004: 800-801). It is interesting that in the birch bark documents the chronology of the forms **сорокъ**, **сорочекъ** (**-чькъ**) both in the sense of ‘сорочок (товарно-денежная единица), 40 шкурок’, and ‘число 40’ does not in principle go back further in the past than the second half of the 12<sup>th</sup> c., whereas the only diminutive form with the suffix **-ьць**: **сорочецъ** (**-ьць**) was registered in genitive plural as early as birch bark document № 910 from the end of the 11<sup>th</sup> – beginning of the 12<sup>th</sup> c. (*ibid.*, 249).

We encounter **сорокъ** in the numerical function in the oldest written texts of the Old Ukrainian writing as early as the 14<sup>th</sup> c.: *а купилъ панъ Петрашъ за сорокъ гривень* (1359 – SSM II, 549), although the old form **чотырдесять** *тисяча лѣтъ и чотыриста чотырдесять пятого лѣта* (1445 – *ibid.*, 540), **\*четиридесять** *за четири десят златы* (1466) still had not gone out of use (cf. Ivčenko 1955: 36; Arpolenko 1980: 89). Also the earliest Old Belarusian texts abound in examples of the use of the discussed lexeme, both in the sense of the number and the object (as a calculation unit, a numerical measure): *сорокъ куницъ да два сорока бѣлокъ* (1440), and in the role of an abstract numerical concept, parallelly to the old form **чотырдесять**: *волов...сорокъ* (15<sup>th</sup> c.); *сорокъ бочокъ меду* – 1516 (*Hist. marfal.* 1979: 191).

Alongside its primary meaning ‘Число, сост. из 40 единиц’, ‘Число и количество 40’, more recent dictionaries of Russian (e.g. SSRLJ XIV: 325-326; Ožegov-Švedova, 749) also take into consideration the already historical meanings ‘Старинная русская единица счета, соответствующая четырем десяткам’, ‘Набор, связка мехов из четырех десятков однородных шкур’, ‘Мешок с сорока собольими шкурками (обычно как единица счёта, расчёта)’, as well as ‘Группа церквей, образующая благочиние и состоящая примерно из 4 десятков церквей.’ SSRLJ (XIV: 329; 335) also documents the diminutive formations: **сорочок**, **сороковик** ‘Набор, связка мехов, сост. из сорока однородных шкур’, recognizing both as archaisms (*устар.*).

The Russian dialectal material does not in principle bring in anything new here. The data of the *Kartoteki słownika gwar rosyjskich*, ('The Dictionary Registers of Russian Dialects'), the dictionary by W. Dahl and some dialectal dictionaries, especially the Siberian ones (Comakion 1974: 33; Èliasov 1980: 389), supply only the information that still up to this day hunters in Siberia sort and segregate sables "в сороки", i.e. by forty pieces.

The etymology of the term *sorok* has not so far been explained in a satisfactory way, although the discussion on this subject has been carried out since as early as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> c. The earliest explanation of its origin, already abandoned today, dating back to as early as F. Miklosich and confirmed by A. Brückner and V. Jagic derives *sorok* from the Greek (τε)σσαράκοντα '40', hence the Modern Greek *σαράντα*, or else from the Greek *τεσσαρακοστή*, Middle Greek *σαρακοστή* 'a forty-day fasting' (cf. Vasmer III: 722). Such an interpretation, additionally supported by Old Ruthenian Orthodox Church terms of undoubtedly Greek origin: *сорокоустъ*, *сорокоустие*, *сорокоустия* 'a forty-day service for the peace of the deceased man's soul; Lent' (Sreznevskij III: 464-465) does not stand to criticism, however, as in M. Vasmer's view (III: 722-723), it does not take into consideration the Old Ruthenian meaning 'a bundle of sable pelts', besides, there also exist obstacles of a formal nature, e.g. the phonetic ones. M. Vasmer responds more to the proposal of Scandinavian etymologists: "Поэтому, вероятно, следует предположить связь с *сорочка* в подражание др.-сканд. *serkr* 'рубаха', а также '200 шкур'" (ibid.). Let us remember that in the Old Scandinavian counting system 1 *serkr* was equal to 5 *timbr*, whereas 1 *timbr* contained 40 pelts (there was also a smaller unit of 1 *dicur* – 10 pelts).

The Scandinavian concept has been established as the only correct one in the Russian etymology (KÈS: 421; Černych II: 188-189) and historical grammar of Russian (cf. Kuznecov 1953: 183; Černych 1954: 207; Bulachovskij 1958: 200-201; Ivanov 1964: 358-359). It genetically connects the masculine variant of *sorok* with the feminine form *soroka*, the word-formative base of the diminutive form *сорочька* (also *сорочица*) 'shirt'. Moreover, it assumes that the original meaning of both variants is 'shirt, cover', and also 'sack' to which 40 sable, marten, squirrel pelts, etc. were put, just as many as is needed to sew a fur coat for a grown-up person.

The presented etymology possesses, however, some weak points. The etymological link between the words *sorok* and *soroka* (*soročka*) is not so obvious at all (cf. e.g. the entry *сорочка* in Vasmer's dictionary III: 724-725). Similarly, the use of the former in the sense of a 'sack; cover, case'. The historical sources do not mention the fact that animal pelts were put into sacks. Mentioned are only bundles or batches of pelts (cf. IKDR I: 322). The furs were sorted by 40 and tied around. At times particular parts of each pelt were cut off and sewn

together, e.g. from the stomach or the back. The number of such bundles ran into thousands.

Only the feminine name *сорочка* (but not *сорок*) in the sense of the sack in which ‘a bundle of 40 pelts was once stored and sold’ is mentioned by more recent sources (e.g. BSĚ XL: 110). We read in W. Dahl’s dictionary (III: 402-403): “[...] каждый сорочок на полную шубу вложен в чахол, в сорочку”. In Dahl (III: 404) *сорочка* is also a ‘чахол, мешок, надеваемый на штуку красного аршинного товара, оболочка, чахол на мех, на шубу’. This sense appeared in Russian relatively long ago, which is documented by SRJ (XXVI: 185): **сорочка** ‘Чехол, покров; накидка’ (1577) and ‘Мешок, чехол, в который вкладывалась каждая штука дорогой ткани’ (1619). The identical meaning with which the initial feminine form (with a question mark) [**сорока**, ж.?] reconstructed on the basis of the forms of cases was provided in that dictionary (180) is, as can be judged on the basis of the illustration material, no longer so certain. On the contrary, one could discern in it the confirmation of the meaning ‘a bundle, bunch of pelts’: *А пары [соболей] съданы въ сороку* (1584); *16 сорокъ соболей* (XVI); *Я свои бѣлки перевязать хочу в сороку* (1607).

It seems that the above-mentioned sense of the investigated term is secondary in Russian in relation to the primary meaning ‘a shirt, a kind of underwear’, similarly as the Polish word *koszulka* (‘T-shirt, undervest’) may secondarily mean ‘a cover put on some object, a case, a jacket, a dustsheet, a wrapper, a protective curtain, etc.’ (SJP III: 1055).

No sources, either the old or the newer ones, sufficiently and uncontroversially confirm the sense of the ‘sack’ for the masculine form *сорок*. Siberian hunters put the pelts of fur-covered animals “в сумы”: “Разобрав меха по сорокам зашив их в сумы и скупив мамонтову кость, купцы выючат коней и спешат миновать тундры [...]” (SSRLJ XIV: 325), and never “в сороки”. On the other hand, pelts are sorted “в сороки”, tied together and sold: “Скупщики пушнины обыкновенно связывают по 40 соболиных шкурок в один пучок [...]” (ibid.: 329).

In such a case it is understandable that a Russian Slavist O.N. Trubačëv sceptically approached the etymological interpretation presented in M. Vasmer’s dictionary (III: 723) and translated by himself:

Тем не менее, изложенные этимологии не могут удовлетворить. Не исключена возможность, что *сорок* восходит к др.-вост.-слав. \**съркъ*, заимств. из тюрк.; ср. тур. *kirk* ‘сорок’, с диссимиляцией  $k - k > s - k$ ; ср., возм., *собака* < тюрк. *köbäk*.

It appears, however, that O.N. Trubačëv’s conception is also unsuccessful, both from the formal point of view (a curious dissimilation, which does not have

an analogy in other Turkic borrowings)<sup>1</sup> and the semantic one, as one would have to accept a development from the abstract meaning of a number into the direction of a concrete object 'a bundle of pelts'. As early as the oldest written texts (8<sup>th</sup> c.) the Turkic word *kirk* possesses only the numerical meaning '40' (cf. Clauson 1972: 651). However, nothing suggests that *kirk* once referred to 'the bundle of pelts' or something similar, although on the other hand, in keeping with the information provided by *Słownik etymologiczny języków tureckich* (The Etymological Dictionary of Turkic Languages) (ĚSTJa VI: 235-236), the etymology of this word has not been explained in an unambiguous way. This issue was once discussed by M. Räsänen (1957: 80), who recognised *kirk* as a verbal noun created with a suffix *-k* from the verb *kir-* 'to break, smash, shatter', and thus the original meaning of the noun would be 'a break, a breakdown; Russ. *излом, ломка*'.

It seems even less probable to recognise the Turkic fractional numeral *çeyrek* 'a quarter, ¼', known also in Cheremis (Mari) as *t'šerək* 'id. (Paasonen 1948: 157), and according to M. Räsänen (1969: 102) borrowed from the Persian *čahār-yak* (*čahār* '4' + *yak* '1') 'Viertel, quarter' as the source of this borrowing (and I have encountered such an opinion in discussions with linguists). It is difficult to treat seriously a proposal of this sort if it is not supported in any way by either phonetic or semantic (the change of the meaning: 'quarter' > 'forty' is rather unlikely), or else chronological considerations (one would have to assume that this word passed from Persian > Turkic > East Slavonic as early as before the 11<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> c.).

The instability of the hitherto explanations of the origin of the lexeme that interests us has made me resume the research, and its results enable me to suggest, obviously, very tentatively, a different source of the borrowing, this time – a Finno-Ugric one.

In today's language of the Udmurt people the combination of the words *sēr ku* means precisely 'the marten pelt' (Vachrušev 1983: 387). Similar words are registered by dictionaries of the Komi language: *ser* 'Marder, Mustela Martes' and *ku* 'Haut, Fell, Balg' (Wiedemann 1880: 284; 124). In the dictionary of the Vogul (Mansi) language by A. Ahlqvist (1891: 53) *sor* has a slightly different meaning 'Dachs, badger'. The authors of the etymological dictionary of the Komi languages (KÈSKJ 1970: 143; 250) date these two words back to the General Permic Era (1000 years BC – 9<sup>th</sup> c. AD – as it is the time when the bifurcation into the Komi and the Udmurt languages took place), and reconstruct the proto-forms: *\*šer* or *\*šer* 'marten' and *\*ku* 'bark, skin'. Naturally, it is more likely for Old Ruthenian

<sup>1</sup> The example quoted by O.N. Trubačëv: *собака* < Turk. *köbäk* contains a mistake. It should correctly be *köpäk*, which in Middle Turkic written texts means 'a dog with fluffy hair' and stems from the nominal-verbal root *\*köp* 'fluffy, downy' ~ *\*köp-* 'to swell, gain in volume, grow fluffy' (S. Stachowski, p.c.).

to have adopted the Udmurt variant with an umlaut ( $e > o$ ), and thus *śor* or *sor* (Wiedemann 1880: 526). The umlaut took place “еще в общеудмуртском языке, вскоре после падения общепермского языкового единства” (Istor.-tipol. 1978: 318). The phonetic adaptation in Old Ruthenian is rather uncontroversial: *\*sor-ku* > *\*sorkъ* > *\*sorokъ*, however, the development of the meaning seems less certain, although quite probable: ‘marten pelt(-s)’ > ‘a bundle of pelts’ > ‘a bundle of pelts of forty pieces (as many as was needed to sew one fur-lined overcoat)’ > ‘a numerical unit (measure) used in trade’, cf. e.g. Pol. *kopa* (‘three score’), *mendel* (‘a set of fifteen’), *tuzin* (‘a dozen’) > ‘a stand-alone number 40’. In this way an abstract numeral developed from a concrete hunting term, through a trade and calculation unit. Here one could quote similar phenomena from other languages, e.g. the old Slovak and dialectal *meru* ‘40’ developed from the Hungarian *mérő* ‘a sack, a measure of grain’ (Vasmer III: 723; more extensively about it: Németh 2008: 79-81), the Yakut *möhök* ‘100’ < Russ. *мешок* ‘a sack, a saddlebag’ (Stachowski 2002: 46), the Danish *snes* ‘20’ < ‘a stick on which 20 fishes were hanged for smoking’, *ol* ‘80’ < ‘id. with 80 fish’ (Preobraženskij: 359).

The lexical issue presented in this paper corresponds well with the context of the general Finno-Ugric–Slavonic linguistic relations (cf. about this: Bednarčuk 1976 – there also a detailed bibliography).

The suggested etymology of the lexeme that interests us finds a strong justification in the history of the economic contacts between Russia and the far North. The sources attest that before the 11<sup>th</sup> c. the people of Novgorod knew the Permians, the predecessors of today’s Udmurts and Komis, inhabiting the areas on the rivers Kama, Vičегда and upper Pečora (SSS IV: 61) well. These areas, similarly as those situated more to the north or north-east, e.g. the Pečora (ibid.: 85) or Yugra (ibid. II: 342), were economically exploited by the people of Novgorod. It most often involved collecting annual tributes in the form of furs. For this purpose expeditions were organised. It was more seldom a trade exchange. The merchants of Novgorod and Old Ladoga exchanged iron for pelts and precious furs which subsequently constituted one of the basic articles in Ruthenia’s trade with the countries of the South and East. In SSS (I: 443) under the entry of the **Northern Dvina** we find information that the economic expansion went out of Old Ladoga and Novgorod into the said river basin as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> c.:

As early as the 7<sup>th</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> c. precious furs went from the Dvina banks as well as the neighbouring lands south [...]. It was partly the tribute collected by Ruthenia from the Finnish peoples.

The possibility of introducing the numeral *sorok* from the Finno-Ugric languages is indicated indirectly by numerous examples of using names of concrete objects connected with hunting and trade in pelts of fur-covered animals by the

Finno-Ugric people in the function of symbols of various numbers, and especially, what pertains directly to the Ruthenian numeral, the name of the 'bundle of pelts' (cf. Majtinskaja 1973: 211-217; Majtinskaja 1979: 164-176). This phenomenon is best visible in the numerical system of the Selkups:

For the southern Selkups, who lived in the forest, most important were squirrel hunts. The significance of these hunts is indicated by the fact that when money was not yet known, the measure of the value were bundles of ten squirrel pelts, e.g. the pelt of the wolverine was worth one bundle (i.e. 10 squirrel pelts), and the pelt of the sable – 3 bundles (30 squirrel pelts). A trace of counting with the help of the bundles has remained in the Selkup numerical system. The Selkups living on the Turuxan river count the tens above ten in this manner: 20 – *sitt-sar*, 30 – *nas-sar*, 40 – *tiēs-sar*, 50 – *sombl-sar*, 60 – *muk – sar*, etc. The same numerals in a different dialect sounded in the previous century as follows *sede sārm* (20), *nak sārm* (30), *te sārm* (40), *sombla sārm* (50), *muk sārm* (60), etc. The latter part *sārm* (in the shortened form *sar*) is nothing else but the name of a bundle consisting of 10 squirrel pelts. The literal translation of the word 'twenty' would be 'two bundles', 'thirty' – 'three bundles', etc. (Hajdú 1971: 332-333).

In the Nenets language (the Samoyedic group of the Uralic languages) number '10' is referred to by the word *ju?*, whereas '9' is *xasawa ju?*, i.e. literally 'the Samoyedic ten'. The reason for such a state of affairs stems from the fact that Samoyedic peoples tied the pelts of fur-covered animals into the bunches of 9 pieces, and Russian traders re-tied them into the bunches of 10 pieces. As the 'bunch, bundle' in the Nenets language is *ju* (without a glottal stop), which reminds us of *ju?* '10' (with the glottal stop), the concept of the 'bundle' was probably connected with the concept of '10', and their own nine-element bundle was called the 'Samoyedic ten' (more extensively about this: Honti 1990: 73-78).

The use of pelts of fur-covered animals as a form of commodity money by the Finno-Ugric peoples has had a long tradition, and its traces have occasionally survived in the language (cf. Cieślak 1983: 19; KÈSKJ 1970: 298; Vasmer I, 281: 287). A similar custom, known in Ruthenia (SSS IV: 93), could have been, as A. Brückner (408) tentatively suggests, adopted by Ruthenia from the Finns.

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