EVIDENCE FOR THE GERMANIC ORIGINS OF SOME SLOVENE MONTH NAMES[1]

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1. Introduction

It is well known that the Slavic languages traditionally had Slavic names for the months of the year, almost all of which have been replaced by Latin-derived names. Only the Czechs, Croats, Poles and Ukrainians continue to officially use names of Slavic origin. This is a fairly recent development; in the mid-nineteenth century the Slovenes, among others, were still commonly using the Slavic names as well (Grimm 1848:94). Nonetheless, a standardi-zed set of Slovene names (*prosînəc, svęčân, sûšəc, mâli trávən, vęliki trávən, rôžnik, mâli srpàn, vęliki srpàn, kímavəc, vinotòk, listopàd, grúdən[2])* is frequently encountered in modern calendars and almanacs. Several exhaustive catalogues of these Slavic names have been compiled; for example, Franz Miklosich identified some 95 different roots of Slavic month names and organized them in a primarily semantic, partially etymological format (1868).

Similarly, the Germanic peoples had non-Latin names for the months, and several collections of these names have been pub-lished as well, notably those of Jacob Grimm (1848:71-113) and Karl Weinhold (1869). The German names did not persist as long as the Slavic ones, and Latin-derived names are found in German manuscripts quite early; several appeared already in Old High German, and the full set of Latin names was intact by the 16th century.

The origins of both the Slavic and German month names are obscure. A few Slavic month names are attested in Old Church Slavic, but their number does not approach the hundreds of names collected by Miklosich (1868).

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[2] All Slovene forms are as cited in Pleteršnik (1894 I-II).

Charlemagne[3] decreed twelve standard month names for the German-speaking people c. AD 800, but their origins are not entirely clear either. They are variously derived from seasons, seasonal activities and religious festivals, but how many of these represent older folk names is unclear.

Before the time of Charlemagne, no German month names are recorded (Grimm 1848:83). Although the mere lack of their attestation is insufficient evidence for concluding that there were no names for the months at that time, Hirt (1909:165) nonetheless feels that at some earlier time there were only names for seasons, but not for individual months. However, he also states (1919:112) that at least one of Charlemagne's month names (winnemânôth) is derived from a pre-existing folk designation. In any case, these twelve names decreed by Charlemagne represent only a small fraction of the total number of German month names. Weinhold (1869) gives over 200 different roots for German month names.

Neither the Slavic nor the German month names, except for Charlemagne's list, were ever decreed by anyone and probably did not originally refer to a calendrically fixed segment of the year at all. Miklosich states:

> Es ist nämlich ein Irrthum, anzunehmen, daß die natio-
> nalen Monatsnamen der heutigen Völker ursprünglich
> eigentliche Monatsnamen, d. h. Abschnitte des Jahres
> mit astronomisch bestimmten Anfang und Ende,
> gewesen seien; es ist vielmehr unschwer nachzuweisen,
> dass sie dies erst dann geworden sind, als die Völker
> durch das Christenthum mit dem römischen
> Monatsnamen bekannt geworden waren (1868:1).[4]

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[3]   The month names established by Charlemagne were as follows: 1. *wintar-
       mânôth* 'winter month', 2. *hornung* 'frost', 3. *lenzinmânôth* 'spring
       month', 4. *ôstarmânôth* 'Easter month', 5. *winnemânôth* 'meadow month',
       6. *brâhmânôth* 'plowing month' (?), 7. *hewimânôth* 'hay month',
       8. *aranmânôth* 'harvest month', 9. *witumânôth* 'firewood month',
       10. *windumânôth* 'wind month', 11. *herbistmânôth* 'autumn month',
       12. *heligmânôth* 'holy month', from Einhart's 830-837 *Vita Carli Magni*
       (cited in Grimm 1848:82).

[4]   "It is, of course, an error to assume that the national month names of the
       contemporary peoples were originally actual month names, i.e., segments
       of the year with an astronomically determined beginning and end; it is
       much less difficult to ascertain that they first became such when the
       peoples became acquainted with the Roman month names through
       Christianity."

This article will examine some of the known Slovene month names and attempt to determine which may be derived from German names.

2. Categorization by Origin

For this purpose, it is useful to divide the Slavic month names into three categories: native Slavic names, obvious borrowings and names of uncertain origin.[5]

The month names which are almost undeniably Slavic in origin include, first, those which have been established as indigenously Slavic, such as *sьrpьnь 'July', from OCS sьrpъ 'sickle' (cf. Serb. CS sъrpъnъ 'sickle month', Sln. *mâli/vêliki srpàn* 'July/August', Pol. *sierpień* 'August', Cr. *sȓpanj* 'July') and *listopadъ 'November', literally 'leaf fall', seen in Sln., Cr., Cz., Pol. *listopad*, variously 'November' or 'October.' Also inclu-ded among these are those names which, although unattested in Old Church Slavic, are so widespread throughout the Slavic languages as to preclude any chance of borrowing from another language at some relatively late period. Among these might be reckoned a month name with a root meaning 'linden', usually used to designate the month June or July. Although this is apparently not found in Old Church Slavic, it is attested in Russian, Ukrainian, Byelorussian, Polish, Kashubian, Slovak, Slovene and Croatian. Such a widespread range makes it seem quite unlikely that this was the result of borrowing.[6]

Second, there are those month names which are unequivocally German and represent either direct borrowing or loan translation. Direct borrowing is quite evident in many of the Kashubian month names; for example, *sürmond* 'March', from MLG *sormând* 'March', meaning 'dry month' (Polański and Sehnert 1967), and likewise *haymōn* 'August', which corresponds with

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5   Abbreviations for languages and dialects: Cr. Croatian, Ger. German, Kajk. Kajkavian, Latv. Latvian, LSrb. Lower Sorbian, MLG Middle Low German, OCS Old Church Slavic, OIce. Old Icelandic, Plb. Polabian, Pol. Polish, Rom. Romanian, Serb. Serbian, Sil. Silesian, Sln. Slovene, USrb. Upper Sorbian.

6   This root is also found in Lit. *lêpinis menu* (mod. *lĩepinis menuõ* or, more commonly, *lĩepa*) and Latv. *lêpu mēnesis* (mod. *liepu mēnesis*), both meaning 'July' (Miklosich 1868:4). It is unclear whether this is evidence for a common Balto-Slavic root, or simply represents diffusion into the two languages from the neighboring Slavic languages.

Ger. *Heumonat* 'July', literally 'hay month', a name which goes
back to Charlemagne.

Loan translation is more difficult to identify, as many corres-
ponding designations could have arisen from simple seasonal,
cultural, or religious coincidence. However, there are some clear-
cut cases. One of the best examples is Plb. *rüsatz* 'February' and
USrb. *wulki/maly rózk* 'January/February'. These are loan
translations of Ger. *Hornung* 'February' (or *großer/ kleiner Horn*
'January/ February'), which is assumed to derive its name from a
root meaning 'frost' (cf. OIce. *hjarn* 'frozen snow', Sln. *srên*
'hoarfrost').[7] Several other etymologies have been proposed (cf.
Hirt 1909:165, Grimm 1848:83, Weigand 1909:892, Kluge
1989:317); however, none of these (with the exception of
Grimm's zodiacal theory, which we can safely discount) have
anything to do with Ger. *Horn* 'horn'. However, the Polabian is
derived from *rüg* 'horn', and the Upper Sorbian from *rózk*, a
diminutive of *róh* 'horn'. At the time of the borrowing, the
original meaning of *Hornung* had been lost in German, and it was
associated with *Horn*. The Polabians and Sorbs borrowed their
forms from this German folk etymology (cf. Pfuhl 1866:612,
Olesch 1962, Schuster-Šewc 1983:1705, 1992:280-281).

There remains, finally, a group of Slavic month names which
are neither obviously originally Slavic, since they are unattested in
Old Church Slavic or occur only sporadically in the modern
languages, nor readily identifiable as loan translations, because
they could have arisen from simple coincidence (for example,
naming a particular month 'cold month' or 'harvest month').
Also included in this group are those names which appear in only
one language, such as Sln. *mlêčan* 'May', either 'milk month' or
'month when the chicory blooms' (cf. Sln. dialect *mlêč*
'chicory'[8]), regarding which the only tenable conclusion is that
they arose independently in that particular language.

Nonetheless, it seems possible to identify a number of loans
from German to Slovene based on their geographical distribution.
More precisely, it is plausible to conclude that if a particular name
occurs only in those Slavic languages which border on or were
heavily influenced by the German language, and if there is a

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7   See Schuster-Šewc 1992:280-81 for a detailed discussion of this root.
8   This latter was supplied by an anonymous assessor from Slovenia.

corresponding month name in German, then the origin of that Slavic month name lies in loan translation from German. Furthermore, if these Slavic languages are not contiguous, the case for borrowing from German is strengthened, as it is much more likely that a particular name would be borrowed from a central source into adjacent but non-contiguous languages, rather than arise independently in each non-contiguous language and be borrowed into one adjacent language.

3. Suggested Loan-Translations from German

3.1. "Wine month"

A number of Slavic languages have a month name derived from the concept *wine*. Slovene uses *vinotòk*, 'wine pouring month', for October. This is a likely loan translation from German *Weinmonat* 'October'. The element *-tòk* is a Slovene innovation, but geographical evidence points to the German origin of this name. Pleteršnik (1894:II.771) records this name as being attested in the area of Gorica.

Plb. *weiniamōn* 'October' is an obvious borrowing from German, related to the recent *Weinmonat* 'October'. LSrb. and USrb. exhibit *winski* and *winowc* 'October', respectively, among other variants, identified as a borrowing from German by Schuster-Šewc (1983:903). None of the other Slavic languages have a month name with the root *wine*; hence, given the existence of a German month with the root *wine*, it seems likely that these are loan-translations or (in the case of Polabian) borrowings from German. Bulg. and Mac. both have *grozdober* 'grape gathering' for September. However, these names do not involve *wine* per se, and may be ascribed to the coincidence of seasonal characteristics.

It is interesting to note also Rom. *viniceriù* 'October', cited in Miklosich 1868:21 (cf. Rom. *vin* 'wine'). Tiktin (1903:1746), who glosses it as 'September', suggests that the word is of Slavic origin, making it an apparent second-hand loan translation. However, since Germans have lived in the area of Romania at least since the beginning of the 14th century, it may be a direct borrowing from German.

3.2. "Christmas month"

The use of the concept *Christmas* to designate one or more months patterns especially well to include those languages which have experienced the most influence from German. Ger. *Christmonat* 'December' arose in late Middle High German (Weigand 1909:351), replacing Charlemagne's *heligmânôth*, literally 'holy month', which of course referred to Christmas as well.

Slovene used *vêliki božîčnjak*, 'great Christmas month', to indicate December. Pleteršnik (1894:I.47) indicates that a variant of this name, *božîčnik*, comes from the region of Fram na Pohorju (south of Maribor).

December is also indicated by Kajk. Cr. *božičnjâk*, derived from *Bòžič* 'Christmas' (Gluhak 1993:143), Plb. *trebemōn*, derived from *tribe* 'Christmas', and LSrb. *godownik* and USrb. *hodownik* (among further variants), which derive from *gody* and *hody* respectively, both meaning 'Christmas'. These last are identified as loans from German by Schuster-Šewc (1983:903). In addition, direct loans are evidenced in Sil. Pol. *wanočnjik* 'January' (Grimm 1848:96) and LSrb. *vienahtnik* (Weinhold 1869:36), both from Ger. *Weihnachten* 'Christmas'. Interestingly, Hungarian (which exhibits German influence) had *karácsonyhava* 'Christmas month' (cf. *karácsony* 'Christmas'), as a name for December (Hofmann 1933:86).

Additionally, January is often designated (cf. Silesian Pol. *wanočnjik* above) with some form of a root meaning 'Christmas'; this is shown in Sln. *mâli božîčnjak*. Hofmann (1933:87) identifies this as referring to the circumcision of Christ, celebrated on January 1st. Miklosich also records Hun. *nagy/kis karácsony* 'great/little Christmas month' for December and January, respectively (1868:22).

Outside the Slavic languages, *Christmas* is seen as a root in Finnish *joulukuu*[9] and Sardinian *nadale*, both 'December' (Miklosich 1868:22).

Despite the relatively wide non-Slavic incidence of the root *Christmas*, it seems safe to conclude that the above names for December (and, of course, Sil. Pol. *wanočnjik*) are derived from German because of the geographical distribution of these names

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[9]   This is from *joulu* 'Christmas' + *kuu* 'moon, month', incorrectly cited by Miklosich as *jouluhuu*.

in the Slavic languages. However, lacking a German Christmas-based designation for January, it seems likely that these latter names are a purely Slavic innovation, even though their roots may be derived, via 'December', from German.

3.3. "Pentecost month"

Pentecost (Whitsunday) occurs in May or June, and is restricted to only two Slavic languages as the name of a month. Sln. *risâlček* 'June/July' is derived from *risâle/risâli* 'Pentecost' (mod. *bînkosti*), and Pleteršnik (1894:II.427) gives a variant of this name, *risâlščak*, from a Slovene dialect spoken in Hungary. Plb. *pancjüstemōn* 'June' is an obvious loan from Ger. *Pfingst-mond* 'Pentecost month' (Olesch 1962). Both seem likely to be directly borrowed from German, since they occur in non-contiguous languages, and Polabian especially so, because of the German element *-mōn*. On the other hand, the evidence is far from strong, and *Pentecost* is hardly a non-arbitrary designation.

3.4. "Rose month"

The Ger. *Rosenmonat* 'June', literally 'rose month', seems to have given rise to names in at least four languages. Slovene has *rộžnik* and *rộžəncvet* (the latter attested by Grimm 1848:95, literally 'rose blossom') for 'June'. Pleteršnik (1894:II.440) gives also the Primorsko variants *režni, rženi*[10] *cvęt* as equivalents of *rộžni cvęt* 'June'. USrb. likewise has *róžownik* 'May', among other variants, identified as a German loan by Schuster-Šewc (1983:903). In addition, Miklosich cites a Czech name for May, *rǔžen* (1868:5), while Gluhak (1993:637) gives *rožnjak* as a Kajkavian Croat designation for May.

The distribution of this term among non-contiguous languages, together with the arbitrariness of naming a month for the concept *rose* and the existence of the German month name, constitute strong evidence that these are all derived from German.

3.5. "Candlemas month"

Weinhold (1869:49) gives the German month name *Lichtmessen* 'February', literally 'Candlemas'. *Candlemas* is also used as a month in Slovene; namely, *svęčân* 'February' (cf. *svệča*

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10   These forms are as cited by Pleteršnik, without diacritics.

'candle', *svę̆čnica* 'Candlemas'). Pleteršnik (1894:II.605) also gives the form *svę̆čən* (from Valjavec).

This root is also seen in USrb. *swĕčkowne mĕsactwo* 'February', from *swĕčk Marje* 'Candlemas' (Schuster-Šewc 1992:279), LSrb. *swĕckowny* (cf. LSrb. *swĕckownica* 'Candlemas'), which Schuster-Šewc identifies as a pre-Reformation borrowing from Upper Sorbian (1992:280), Kajk. Cr. *svečen* 'February' (Gluhak 1993), and Silesian Pol. *hromĕčnjik*, shifted to mean 'January', literally 'Candlemas' (Grimm 1848:96). To this last, compare Slk. and Cz. *Hromnice* 'Candlemas', and Pol. *gromniczna* 'Candlemas'. Additionally, Miklosich cites Latv. *svĕču mēnesis* and Hun. *svećnica* [sic], both indicating 'February' (1868:24).

Given the existence of the German month name and distribution in appropriate non-contiguous languages, it seems reasonable to conclude that these names are derived from German, despite the non-arbitrariness of the root. Even though the root is evidenced in Latvian, the fact that it does not appear in any of the Slavic languages to the east would imply that it was borrowed into Latvian from the west. It seems less likely to be an original Baltic form, since it does not match with Lithuanian. The Hungarian is an obvious borrowing from Slavic.

3.6. "Winter month"

At first, it might seem odd to look upon the element *winter* as a result of borrowing in the name of a month; a combination like 'winter month' seems easily producible without any recourse to other languages. On the other hand, when the distribution of those names containing the element *winter* is examined, the results are interesting.

Slovene has *zîməc* 'January', which Pleteršnik (1894:II.921) attests in the dialect of Fram na Pohorju. Plb. has *seymemōn* 'November', meaning 'winter month', which is a probable loan translation from German (cf. OHG *wintarmânôth* 'January') due to the element *-mōn*. Ukrainian, however, which is not a language that usually shows German borrowings of this type, has *prozymec* 'January', meaning 'during winter'.

Sorbian has many month names involving the concept *winter*. LSrb. *Nazymski* 'September' is glossed by Hofmann (1931:142) with the meaning 'before winter'. LSrb. *Nazymnik* 'November',

shared with and originally Upper Sorbian, is interpreted as 'toward winter' (cf. LSrb. *nazyma* 'autumn'). For November, USrb. also has *podzymnik* (Schuster-Šewc 1992:279). December is indicated by LSrb. *zymski* (from *zyma* 'cold') while LSrb. *wezymski* 'January' means 'during winter' (Schuster-Šewc 1983:1771). Finally, there is LSrb. *pozymski* 'March', meaning 'after winter' (Hofmann 1931:142).

Additionally, Miklosich cites Latv. *zêmas mēnesis* (mod. *ziemas mēnesis*) 'November'. Again, the root is neither shared by any of the adjacent east Slavic languages, nor does it match a Lithuanian root, suggesting that it was borrowed from the west.

Were it not for the Ukrainian example, it would seem rather likely that all the Slavic names were derived ultimately from German, with the Lower Sorbian terms having multiplied from an original base root. Still, it is possible that the west and south Slavic words could be derived from German, while the Ukrainian is a native innovation.

4. Conclusion

Based on the two factors of likelihood of German historical influence on a particular language and the degree of non-contiguity of languages exhibiting various semantic roots, it seems safe to conclude that the Slovene month names *vinotòk, risâlček* and *svęčân* (as well as other Slavic names based on the concepts *wine*, *Pentecost* and *Candlemas*) are in all probability derived from German counterparts. Slovene *božîčnjak, rộžnik,* and *zîməc* (as well as other Slavic named based on the concepts *Christmas, rose* and *winter*), while the geographic evidence is not conclusive, are likely candidates for being loan-translations as well.

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POVZETEK

SLEDOVI NEMŠKEGA IZVORA NEKATERIH SLOVENSKIH IMEN ZA MESECE

Številna slovenska imena za mesece - tako ona sprejeta in rabljena v knjižnem jeziku (prosinec, svečan itd.) kot tudi razna druga, krajevna in pokrajinska, so negotovega izvora. Med njimi je nekaj takih, ki po svoji semantični zgradbi spominjajo na nemška imena mesecev (npr. slov. vinotok, nem. Weinmonat 'oktober'). S podrobno analizo teh semantičnih korenov v drugih slovanskih jezikih - in s predpostavko, da so se taka imena razširjala prej iz enega izvora kot pa nastajala vzporedno in samostojno - je možno zaključiti, da so nekatera slovenska imena za mesece dejansko prevzeta in prevedena nemška mesečna imena.