

Hypocorisms are diminutive forms of personal names derived by clipping and / or by adding a diminutive affix. Typical examples of hypocorisms in modern Russian are names like *Vasja*, *Vas'ka*, *Vasian* (< Vasilij). The Old Russian language, like modern Russian, possessed a rich inventory of hypocoristic names, however, their function and semantics differed from hypocorisms of modern Russian. In particular, Old Russian hypocorisms rarely expressed any diminutive, pejorative or affectional semantics, nor did they have any stylistic colloquial traits. Many princes of the 11th-13th centuries, in relation to which one can hardly suspect any disrespect from the author, appear in chronicles under hypocoristic forms of their names:

- (1) *PrestavisA blǫgovĕrnyi i hrĕtoljubivyi knAz' Mikhalko sĕbъ Gjurgevъ vnukъ Monomaha Volodimera* ‘The **pious and Christ-loving prince Mikhalko** (<Mikhail), son of Gjurgy, grandson of Vladimir Monomakh, is died’ [Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh letopisej¹, v. I, col.s 128-128b]

Moreover, Old Russian hypocorisms were not a distinctive feature of the informal register: they were commonly used in both formal chronicles and informal birch bark letters. In this regard, their distribution with full name forms in Old Russian texts requires research. This article is devoted to one particular type of Old Russian hypocorisms, that is, hypocoristic forms of Christian names. All Christian names under discussion had a clear dichotomy of full, or canonical (as presented in Mstislav Gospel) forms and their hypocoristic variants: *Vasilij vs. Vasil'ko / Vasil; Milhail vs. Mikhalko / Michal; D(i)mitij vs. Dmitr; Georgij vs. Gurgi / Yuri / Diurdi*.

Christian names were adopted into Old Russian shortly after the Christianization at the end of the 10th century. In their full canonical form, they were used only as the names of saints, church leaders (primarily metropolitans and bishops), and Greeks by origin. Moreover, they could appear in textual baptismal clichés related to Russian princes, for example:

- (2) *RodisA Aroslavu syn i narečĕnъ bysĕt' vъ sĕm' kršĕnii Vasilii*
 Was.born Yaroslav.DAT son and named was in saint.LOC baptism.LOC Vasilij
 ‘A son was born to Yaroslav and was given a name “Vasilij” at the saint baptism’ [PSRL, v. I, col.s 164]

However, apart from canonical forms, these names also had hypocoristic variants. For the formation of the latter, the same clipping and/or affixal patterns were used, as for the original Slavic names (Yanin, Zaliznyak 1986: 146): *Vasil'ko*, *Lyashko*, ***Dmitr***, *SelA*, *Giuryata*, *Styriata* (Christian hypocoristics highlighted in bold). In their book (2006: 134), Anna Litvina and Fjodor Uspenskij suggested that hypocorisms of Christian origin might have a special adaptive function which aimed at neutralizing their once unfamiliar foreign character. Our article provides more evidence in favor of this claim through the analysis of three Old Russian chronicles (the Laurentian Codex, the Hypatian Codex, and the Novgorod First chronicle of Elder and Younger redactions) in comparison with the birch bark letters of the 11th-15th centuries. We assumed that an indirect proof of this hypothesis, if true, would be an identification of the following stages in the history of the Christian name-giving in Old Russian:

- (i) Stage 1, before 11th: names of Slavic origin alone;
- (ii) Stage 2, approximately 11th – 12th: first wave of new Christian names, primarily in the hypocoristic form;
- (iii) Stage 3, approximately after 13th: expansion of canonical forms of Christian names, henceforward used instead of old hypocorisms)

It was expected that, as they were adopted into the Russian language, Christian names gradually lost their initial religious semantics and their full forms became to be treated as

¹ Hereinafter PSRL [Complete edition of Russian chronicles], Saint Petersburg: Academy of Science (SSSR), 1926–1928.

unmarked, while hypocoristic versions, on the contrary, gradually developed additional diminutive semantics and were supplanted to the language periphery.

The analysis confirmed this hypothesis based on various formal features. According to the data, the general evolution of Christian name-giving in Old Russian was as follows. Originally, Christian names in their full forms referred only to saints, foreigners (primarily Byzantine emperors) and church figures with a high social status. Later on, Christian names started to be used for secular people (initially in hypocoristic form). Subsequently, foreign-language and / or religious connotations were lost and the canonical versions of Christian names for people with high social status gradually replaced their hypocoristic forms. This evolution was reflected as follows:

- 1) The first princes of the 11th-12th centuries with Christian names appear exclusively under hypocorisms. However, approximately from the 13th century, their descendants begin to appear under the full canonical form of the Christian name, and this evolution has no reverse course. This evolution can be viewed below on princes baptized under the name *Mikhail* (*Mikhalko* → *Mikhail*). They are listed in the chronological order under the names they hold in chronicles:

- *Mikhalko Vyacheslavich* (? - 1129) → *Mikhalko Yurievich*, son of *Yury Dolgorukij* (1145/1153 — 1176) → ... → ***Mikhail*** *Vsevolodovich of Chernigov* (1176 – 1246; first appearance in the *Hypatian Codex* under the year of 1224) → *Mikhail Khorobrit* (1229-1248) → *Mikhail of Tver* (1272-1318)

- 2) In later redactions (clearly traced when comparing the Laurentian Codex with the Hypatian and also when comparing the older and younger redactions of the Novgorod First chronicle), canonical full names are sometimes used instead of early hypocorisms. The evolution of Christian names attributed to secular people is detected only in one direction - from hypocorisms to the full canonical forms, see Example 3 where *Vasilko* in 3a is called *Vasilij* in 3b:

(3)

- a. *v se zhe lroto voievasha Polovci LАhy s Vasil'kom' Rostislavichem'* [PSRL, v. I, col.72]
- b. *v se zhe lrof voevasha Polovcъ LАhi s Vasil'em' Rostislavlichem'* [PSRL, v. II, col. 79b]

‘The same summer Polovtsy fought with Vasilij Rostislavich’

- 3) In some cases, the full name may appear in later mentions of the same person in the same monument.

At first sight, the distribution of *Georgii* [*George*] and its hypocoristic forms *Yuri* / *Diurdi* differs from the distribution of *Vasilii* vs. *Vasil'ko*. However, the diachronic analysis of *Georgii* vs. *Yuri* provided evidence for a similar evolution, in a more elaborate form.

References:

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