

On the Tense Usage in the Opening Line of the *Igor Tale*

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There have been long-standing problems with the interpretation of the imperfect of the verb *byti* 'be' in the first sentence of the *Slovo o polku Igoreve*. The full sentence, with interlinear translation word by word, is:

1)	Ne	lěpo	li	ny	bjašetĭ,	bratie	načjati	starymi
	Not	fitting	Ques.	us	be-impf.	brothers	begin	old
			part.	dat.	3rd. sing	vocative	infinitive	ins. pl.
	slovesy	trudnyxŭ	pověstii	o	polku	Igorevě		
	words	difficult	tales	about	campaign	Igor		
	ins. pl.	gen. pl.	gen. pl.		loc. sing.	poss. adj.		

Igorja Svjatoslavliča

Igor Svjatoslavlič-gen

A literal, word-for-word translation might be something like that offered by Mann (1978:11) : "Was it not fitting, brothers, to begin about the campaign of Igor, son of Svjatoslav, with the olden words of heroic tales?" However, the next sentence is: *Načati že sja tŭi pěsni po bylinamŭ sego vremeni a ne po zamyšleniju Bojanju*. "This song should be begun according to the customs of this time, and not according to the inventions of Bojan." Since this sentence makes it clear that the author does not intend to begin the story in the old-fashioned way, then, in English at least, we would expect the first sentence to be in the subjunctive. Nabokov (1960:29) offers: "Might it not become us, brothers, to begin in the diction of yore the stern tale of the campaign of Igor, Igor son of Svjatoslav?" Howes (1973:29) has: "Would it not be fitting, brothers, to begin with ancient words the sorrowful tale of the campaign of Igor, Igor Svjatoslavič?"

There are similar problems with the translation into modern Russian. Jakobson (1966:168) and Dmitriev and Lixačev (1980:373) elect to use: *Ne pristalo li nam* to introduce the first sentence. They are essentially taking advantage of the existence of a weak modal *pristalo* which is morphologically past but present in meaning. The morphological parallel with OR is accidental. In sense, they are not far from

ukovskij's (Gudzij and Skosyrov 1938:79): *Ne prilično li budet*. Gudzij (Gudzij and Skosyrov 1938:41), however, has: *Ne pristalo li by*, and Storm (Gudzij and Skosyrov 1938:220) has: *Ne ljubo li nam bylo b*.

The difficulties with the translation reflect more than just a search for the right words. They reflect difficulties in the interpretation of *bjašetī* as an indicative past. The reason that "Was it fitting" would not be fitting in English is that in English "Was it fitting to do that?" implies that "that" was done. In order to indicate that it was not done, we use a subjunctive. If the same implications apply in Old Russian, there may be something wrong with the text of the *Slovo*. Mann (1982), in fact, assumes that there was once a heroic introduction to the *Slovo*, which has since been lost.

It is dangerous, of course, to apply English grammatical judgments to Old Russian. The main problem for arguments like that in Mann (1982) is that the focus is on an apparent deviant use of the imperfect. Van Schooneveld (1959:80) likewise treats this passage as an imperfect used as *irrealis*. In fact, it is the *lěpo* plus infinitive construction that contributes the modal meaning. In this paper I will argue that OR constructions of *lěpo* + infinitive with the indicative past of the copula do not imply that the action specified by the infinitive actually occurred, and that there is thus nothing odd at all about the use of an indicative verb in the first sentence of the *Slovo*.

It is in fact easy to demonstrate that OR constructions with *lěpo* + infinitive + past tense of *byti* can be used without regard to whether the act specified by the infinitive was carried out. The sentence in the *Slovo* may happen to be the only example with *bjaše* which expresses an unfulfilled obligation, but there are plenty of examples with *bě*, and in the later language there are examples with *bylo*. Moreover, *bjaše* does occur with *lěpo* plus infinitive; it may just not happen to be attested when the obligation specified is not fulfilled. The only other indicative past, the aorist *bystī*, would be inappropriate, since it reflects events or changes of state, rather than states.

We will first look at the older language, both OCS and Old Russian. The OCS examples are from the *Codex Suprasliensis*, with the page numbers from the Severjanov (1956) edition. The Old Russian examples are taken from the 1971 ANSSSR edition of the *Uspenskij sbornik*.¹ The first number given is the page in the published edition, the second is a notation for the page of the manuscript.

OCS examples where the action was apparently not carried out, and where the English translation would use a subjunctive are:

- 2) 387, 18, (Ioanna arxieṗṗa Zlatooustaago slovo v velikyi vŭtornikŭ i o sŭbranii sŭborŭ na ḡa i ḡlāaxo čto stvorimŭ)

oni lŭkami na ubijenije na nŭ tvoraxo se, jegda imŭ bě lěpo obrativŭše slovo glagolati č'to sŭtvorimŭ

They were hatching plots to kill him, when it would have been fitting for them to take back their word(s) and say "What do we do?"

- 3) 135, 24, (Mŭčenije staago Pionna (Pionia) prezvutera Zmurniška grada.)
nŭ grěsi vaši rastoętŭ posrědu nasŭ i bā. oblěnixomŭ bo se družii že i přebiděvŭše bezakonije sŭtvorixomŭ drugŭ druga xapŭjŭšte i drugŭ druga jadŭšte sami se umorixomŭ. lěpo že bě namŭ prav'dŭ izlixā iměti pače knixčii i farisei

But your sins stand between us and God. We were neglectful, friends, and in neglecting, we committed unlawfulness, torturing each other and eating each other we killed ourselves. It would have been fitting for us to have more justice than the scribes and Pharisees.

Greek (Von Gebhardt, 1896): édei dè hēmōn t' ēn dikaiosúnēn perisseúein māllon pléon tōn grammatéōn kai farisaíōn

The *Uspenskij sbornik* contains both translated and original works. In the life of Feodosij, a work originally written in OR, we find a similar construction with *bě*.

- 4) 111; 51g16-52a 6 (žitie pŕpĕbnago oča našego Feodosija igumena pečerĭskago)
i vŭ utrěi dnŭ sědŭšemŭ imŭ na obědě. xlěbomŭ že tēmŭ izdrězanomŭ suščemŭ. tače blaženyi přezŭrěvŭ i vidě xlěby taky sušča i priglasivŭ kelarja vŭprašaše ego odkudu si suťi xlěbi. onŭ že otvěščeva jako vŭčera prineseni suťi nŭ sego radi vŭčera maly suščju bratii pomyslŭxŭ vŭ sii dnŭ vŭsei bratii přědŭložiti na jadŭ. tŭgda že blaženyi ḡlā emu lěpo bě ne pešči sja o proxodjaščimŭ dni nŭ po povelěniju moemu sŭtvoriti.

On the next day when they sat down to dinner the loaves of bread were (already) cut. The blessed one looked and saw that the bread was in that

condition, called the cellarer and asked him "Where did they come from?" He answered: "They were brought here yesterday, but because yesterday there were so few brothers, I decided to serve them to all the brothers today." The blessed one said to him, "It would have been fitting for you not to concern yourself about the coming day, but to do as I had ordered."

In this case not only English, but modern Russian uses a subjunctive. The translation from Dmitriev and Lixačev (1978:365) is: *Togda blažennyj skazal emu: "Sledovalo by ne zabolit'sja o buduščem dne, a sdelat' tak, kak ja povelel."*

More examples where the act is treated as not having occurred are found in a sermon by Ioan Zlatoust (John Chrysostom) (originally in Greek, probably through an OCS intermediary). They are taken from a sermon in which the author is discussing the parable of the virgins waiting for the bridegroom. Some of them did not bring enough oil for their lamps.

- 5) 322-3; 192b 30-192v 22 dadite bo namŭ rekoša ot masla vašego jako svěšča ny ugasoša. Lěpo bě pače podražati a ne nynja prositi. lěpo bě moliti prodajuščaja i kupiti maslo.....lěpo bě sŭmotriti nyněšnjuumu trudu. lěpo bě pomjanuti sŭrětenie. lěpo bě pomysliti jako svěšča bez masla světiti ne moguťi

"Give us," they said, "some of your oil, since our lamps have gone out." It would have been fitting rather to imitate (us), and not ask for more today. It would have been fitting to ask those who sell, and buy oil. It would have been fitting to see to today's task. It would have been fitting to remember the meeting. It would have been fitting to consider (the fact) that lamps cannot burn without oil.

Such constructions do not always refer to actions which did not occur. About equally often, they refer to actions which actually occurred. Examples with *běaše* and *bě*, both taken from sermons by John Chrysostom, are:

- 6) 355; 214v (Ioana arĭxiep̄špa Kostjantinja grada Zlatoustova ot sŭkazanja euanglĭskaago) In this passage the author is discussing the stationing of guards at the tomb of Christ after the crucifixion. He says:

lěpo běaše sĕdjaščemŭ i strĕguščemŭ byti vŭstaniju.....

"It was fitting for the resurrection to occur with (them) sitting and guarding"

- 7) 336; 201v 4-12: (Sĭġo oĉa našego Ioana Zlatoustago slovo o bludĭnici v velikuju srĕdu)
iŝŭ otide ottudu ne sŭmĭrĭti sja ubojavŭ nŭ vrĕmene raspjatiju ŷidy. lěpo emu bě přĕže mĭrtvyja vŭstaviti, boljaščaja icĕliti alŭĉjuščaja pravĭdy nasytiti

Jesus left there not fearing for his life, but awaiting the time of the crucifixion. It was fitting for him to first raise the dead, cure the sick, satisfy those hungering for truth.

Both of these examples, with minor variation, are found in *Suprasliensis*, which contains the OCS version of the same sermons:

404, 20: lěpo jemu bě přĕzde mĭrtvyę vŭstaviti

443, 29: lěpo bo běaše sĕdĕštemŭ imŭ i strĕgŭštemŭ byti vŭstaniju

We find a similar example in an original OR source (The life of Feodosij). It is in the relating of an incident in which the sexton of the church does not think that there will be enough oil 'from trees' to get through the service for the holiday of the Dormition. He asks Feodosij if he can press some from flax seeds and use that. Feodosij agrees, but when the sexton goes to pour in the oil, he finds a dead mouse in the container, despite its having been kept closed. Feodosij takes this as a sign from God that they had not had enough faith that God would provide enough of the oil. In the passage which follows there is both *lěpo by* and *lěpo bě*. Unfortunately some of the text following the *by* is lost. I will quote the passage with the reconstruction of the

missing text offered in Dmitriev and Lixačev (1978:336). The reconstructed letters will be in brackets.

- 8) 113; 53b, 25-28: lěpo by na[mũ br]ate nadežju imě[ti k]ũ bũ upovajušče jako moščinũ estĩ podati namũ na potrebu ego že xoščemũ. a ne tako nevěri'stvovavũše sũtvoriti ego že ne bě lěpo. nũ idi i prolěi maslo to na zemlju.

The modern Russian translation provided by Dmitriev and Lixačev is: *Sledovalo by nam, brate, vozložit' nadeždu na Boga, ibo on možet podat' nam vse, čego ni poželaem. A ne tak kak my, poterjavšie veru, delat' to, čto ne sleduet.* Assuming that the restored passage is correct, a literal translation into English might be:

It would be fitting for us, brother, to put our hopes in God, having faith that he can give us on request what we want, and not in such a fashion, lacking faith, do what was not fitting (to do).

Under the year 1097 in the *Primary Chronicle* (Dmitriev and Lixačev 1978:260) we find:

- 9) Se že 2-e mščenĩ stvori, ego že ne bjaše lěpo stvoriti, da by Bogũ otmestnik bylũ.

Thus he achieved a second vengeance, which he should not have performed, so that God would be the avenger.

The above examples show that OCS and Old Russian did not require a subjunctive when the action specified by the infinitive was not carried out, and that the lack of a subjunctive in the *Igor* passage is therefore no surprise. The only possible oddity is that the tense is past.

The OR and OCS *lěpo* plus infinitive construction can be said to present the action represented by the infinitive as potential, with *lěpo* providing the speaker's subjective evaluation of the action as morally appropriate. The tense merely refers to the time at which the potential choice of action was relevant, or when the moral constraint applied. Since the reference is to the time of the option or the constraint,

rather than to the time of the action, no reference to the actuality of the action specified by the infinitive is included. Since the predicate denotes the moral appropriateness or obligatoriness rather than the existence of the action, sentences (2-5) are legitimate indicatives in Slavic. The same should be true of (1). If there is any difference between *bě* and *bjaše*, it is connected with the basic meanings of those two forms in terms of the indicative categories of the verb, not in whether one presupposes the reality of an action specified by an infinitive complement, while the other does not.

It is likely that historically, Proto-Slavic *bě* and *běaše* were both imperfects (Vaillant 1966:65). Istrina (1919:107) seems to treat them variants with the same meaning in OR as well. They certainly often overlap in meaning, as in examples (8) and (9). Van Schooneveld (1959:64, 69) suggests that in OR *bě* is an imperfective aorist, while *bjaše* is an imperfect. This would make *bjaše* appropriate for referring to states coordinated with other activities, as in (4), or for states in the past whose termination point is not included in the time reference, which might be appropriate for the passage from the *Slovo*. If Van Schooneveld is correct, and *bě* is the unmarked past, then we could expect it to overlap with *bjaše*.

The Greek verb which is translated by OCS *bě lěpo* and *běaše lěpo* is *édei*, the past tense of the impersonal verb *dei*. Smyth (1956:401) describes *édei* in much the same terms as we have used above: "The Greek usage simply states the obligation (propriety, possibility) as a fact which existed in the past (and may continue to exist in the present). In English we usually express the non-fulfillment of the *action*."

All this suggests that English 'be fitting' is not a very good translation for *lěpo* constructions. In many contexts English 'supposed to' has semantic properties which are closer to *lěpo*, and *édei*, although it does not belong to a stylistic level one would expect of a translation of a medieval epic. "He was supposed to come," lacks any implication as to whether or not he came. "He was supposed to come and he did," and "He was supposed to come but he didn't show up," both are equally good English. We then might ask whether an author could begin a story with a rhetorical question like: "Brothers, was I supposed to begin this story in an epic style?" The answer is obviously yes.

However, both Greek *édei* and English 'supposed to' with the past tense can be used to express present unfulfilled obligations. "We were supposed to be doing our homework now," carries a heavy connotation that we are not doing our homework. Greek (Smyth 1956:401): *édei se taûta poieîn* "you ought to be doing this (but are not doing it)." In this use we might want to call the construction counterfactual. This is a

fairly common development of constructions which have a potential meaning combined with a past tense marker. English conditionals with 'would' developed in this way, as did the conditional of most Balkan languages (cf. Go-a@b 1973). The OCS conditional in *bi* plus I-participle combined the optative/potential mood of the copula with a participle which indicated anteriority. More narrowly, we can say that verb forms which indicate obligation, even though they are past tense forms, easily come to indicate present obligation. That is the history not only of Greek *édei*, but of English *ought*, *should*, and *must*.

There is however no indication in the older texts that the *lěpo* construction had undergone a similar development. In the translations in *Suprasliensis*, when Greek *édei* is interpreted as present obligation, the Slavic translator used *lěpo by*:

- 10) Suprasliensis 444, 11 (Ioanna arxiepiskoupa Kostantinja grada Zlatooustaago otŭ sŭkazanija euaggeliskaago. ježe otŭ Matfeę)
 cě i ašti prostŭ člověkŭ lěpo by pŭvati, nŭ da ouvěđetŭ jako i živŭ samoxotně postrada

Uspenskij sbornik, 214v, 25-29. a i ašti prostŭ člvkŭ lěpo by pŭvati, nŭ da uvěđetŭ jako i živŭ samoxotně postrada

and yet if a man is simple, he should be of good cheer. They should know that he, living, voluntarily suffered.

Greek: (Severjanov 1956:444) kaítoi ge ei psilós tis ános ên, édei tharhre ïn

- 11) Suprasliensis 126, 11, (Mŭčenije šťaago Pionna (Pionia) prezvutera Zmurniška grada.)
 lěpo že by vamŭ elinomŭ pokarěti sę učitelju vašemu omiru, iže sŭvěštajet'
 nepodobno jestŭ o umirajŭštiixŭ xvaliti sę.

It would behoove you Greeks to submit to your teacher Homer, who advises that it is inappropriate to brag over the dying.

Greek: (von Gebhardt 1896:158) édei dè humās mén, õ Héllēnes, peíthesthai tō i didaskálōi humōn Hōmērōi...

These examples seem to be similar in function to the use of *lěpo by* in example (8).

In later texts we do find examples of *lěpo* + infinitive with indicative past which pertain to decisions in the immediate present. The indicative past in this case, however, is *bylo*. Vinogradova (1963-84), under the citation for *lěpo*, gives two examples from the *Ipat'evskaja letopis'*, under the years 1170 and 1187.

The example from 1170 (Arxeografičeskaja komisija 1871:368) is from a speech by Mstislav Izjaslavič to his brothers:

- 12) Bratě, požalíte si o Ruskoj zemli i o svoej otcině i dědině, ože nesut' xrestijany na vsjako lěto u vežě svoi, a s nami rotu vzimajuče, vseгда perestupajuče a uže u nas' i Grečskij put' izuotimajut', i Soljanyj i Založnyj. a lěpo ny bylo, bratě, vuzrjače na Božiju pomošt' i na molitvu svjatoě Bogorodici, poiskati otec' svoix' i děd' svoix' puti i svoej česti.

Brothers, have pity on the Russian land and the land of your fathers and grandfathers, for they take Christians to their camps each year, swearing oaths with us and always breaking them. They are already taking from us the Greek route, and the Salt and the Založnyj route. It would behoove us, brothers, relying on God's help and the prayers of the Holy Virgin, to seek the routes of our fathers and grandfathers, and our own glory.

The example from 1187 (Arxeografičeskaja komisija 1871:440) is part of a narrative about a campaign against the Polovcy. At one point, Jaroslav wants to go back, and Rjurik sends him a message:

- 13) Brate, tobě bylo ne lěpo izmjasti nami, a věst' ny pravaja est', až' veži Poloveckija vose za polūdne, a velikogo ždy nětut'.

Brother, you should not bring us to disarray; we have reliable information that the Polovtsian camp is in the south, and it is not a long ride.

Under the year 1189 (Arxeografičeskaja komisija 1871:446) we find one example where *lěpo bylo* is in competition with *lěpo by*:

- 14) "Se inoplemenñiji otñjali otčiny vašju; a lěpo (by/bylo) potruditisja."

"Lo foreigners have taken away your inherited land, you should exert yourselves."

We find *by* in the *Ipat'evskij* copy, but *bylo* in the Xlebnikov and Pagodin copies.

As we might expect, constructions with *bylo lěpo* are not limited to cases where the obligation was not fulfilled. Under the year 1164 in the *Ipat'evskaja letopis'* we find (Arxeografičeskaja komisija 1871:357):

- 15) ..i čelovaša svjatago Spasa na tomě, jako ne poslatisja kŭ Vsevolodičju Novygorodu; pervoe čelova piskupŭ Antonŭ svjatogo Spasa, i potomŭ družina čelovaša. I reče Gjurgij tysjačkyi "Namŭ bylo ne lěpo dati piskupu čelovati svjatago Spasa, zaneže svjatitelĭ estĭ, a namŭ sja o nĭ ne blazniti, zaneže knjazi svoi ljubilŭ."

and they kissed the Holy Savior (pledging) not to send to Vsevolodič in Novgorod; Bishop Anton kissed the Holy Savior first, and then the družina kissed it. And Gjurgij the commander of a thousand said: "We should not have let the Bishop kiss the Holy Savior, because he is a priest; we should not fool ourselves about him because he loved our princes."

Examples (12) and (13) certainly indicate that in at some time in the history of East Slavic, *lěpo* constructions with indicative past came to be applied to present choices. Dating this change is a problem.

The earliest copy of the *Ipat'evskaja letopis'* is from the early fifteenth century, but it is clearly based on much older original versions of the chronicles it contains. It is a compilation of three chronicles: The *Primary Chronicle*, which goes up the year 1111. The *Kievan Chronicle* goes from 1111 to 1201, and the *Galician Chronicle* goes from 1201 to 1292. The Pagodin and Xlebnikov copies come from the sixteenth century, but they seem to reflect a slightly different earlier copy, with sections which are lacking in the *Ipat'evskaja*. Where both versions agree, as is the case with examples (12) and (13), we are dealing with a reconstructed copy older than any of the three copies. Work on the *Primary Chronicle*, whose reconstruction is primarily based on a comparison of the *Ipat'evskaja* and *Lavrentovskaja letopisi*, shows that the chronicles preserve verbal

morphology very well, and the *Primary Chronicle* is used by such scholars as van Schooneveld (1959) in discussions of twelfth century verbal morphology.

The *Kievan Chronicle*, which contains the above examples, is internally quite consistent and conservative, although one can detect changes in the language in entries dated in the second half of the twelfth century. The chronicle ends in 6708 (1200-1201) with an eye-witness account of a visit of Prince Rjurik to the monastery. Since the writer does not identify the monastery, we can assume that it is the monastery in which he lives. He closes the entry with a prayer for the prince which amounts to a paean to him. The last word is "amen". This a logical way to end an actual redaction, and it is reasonable to assume that the version which comes down to us might have been put together in 1201. Since it contains detailed information from the first part of the twelfth century, it must have contained preexisting accounts of those years. The style of different parts is different enough to lead us to think that this was a compilation, rather than a rewriting in 1201.

In the narrative passages of the *Kievan Chronicle*, the use of aorists and imperfects follows archaic norms. L-forms as simple pasts appear occasionally in narrative passages in the late twelfth century entries, but l-forms appear more consistently in quoted speech and in indirect speech. Inconsistencies due to copying would not be limited to later entries, and would not be limited to direct and indirect speech. This indicates that very little distortion of the verbal morphology has been introduced through the process of copying. The expanded use of l-forms in direct speech is assumed to reflect the actual colloquial language, while the narrative passages continue the norms of the written language.

Significantly, examples (12) and (13) are from direct quotations. Since it is extremely unlikely that both examples could have innovative verbal morphology introduced through copying, they are likely to represent the actual colloquial usage of the late twelfth century. These passages refer to present choices, although the conditions which led to them are obviously past. This reflects a functional development which parallels the development of Greek *édei* and English "was supposed to." It is a natural change which could have taken place at any time. The absence of parallels in the earlier texts, however, makes it difficult to locate this innovation in time.

Where then does this leave the passage from the *Slovo*? If the *Slovo* is authentic², it must have been written shortly after the 1185 campaign that it describes. This is very close in time to the passages from the *Kievan Chronicle*. If examples (12) and (13) reflect the actual Old Russian of the late twelfth century, then the *Slovo*

passage probably does not. This we might have concluded without the passages from the *Kievan Chronicle*. Almost no one believes that the imperfect was a living oral form in the East Slavic of the late twelfth century. Scholars such as Uspenskij (1988:172) take the radical position that the imperfect had disappeared in East Slavic before the introduction of a written language. Kuznecov (1959:215) places the loss of the imperfect after the beginning of the twelfth century. Ivanov (1990:328) claims that the imperfect still existed in the first half of the twelfth century, but had disappeared by the end of the century. The elimination of the imperfect was implemented by its replacement by imperfective I-forms³.

This leaves a small chance that some East Slavic dialects could have preserved imperfects until the last two decades of the twelfth century, but it is far more likely that the purveyors of the written language said *bylo*, while writing *bjaše* or *bě*. The author of the *Slovo* could easily take his colloquial *lěpo bylo* and convert it into high-style literary form by replacing *bylo* by *bjašetĩ*. In doing so, he may have created a mild anachronism, a construction with the morphology of the early twelfth century, but the semantics of the contemporary language. It is extremely unlikely that he would have noticed.

This view allows for a natural interpretation of the passage in the *Slovo* as a modal construction pertaining to a present choice. Before closing, however, we should investigate the possibility that this view is wrong, and that *bjašetĩ* in this context had retained a past reference. We should ask ourselves whether a reference to a past obligation could make sense as the opening sentence of the *Slovo*. To make sure that we are locating the time of the choice in the past, we could propose (with apologies to Nabokov) a translation of the first sentence as: "Brothers, were we supposed to have begun with words of yore the stern tale of the campaign of Igor?" We can then ask whether this could be an appropriate way of starting a story, and if so, what it implies. To me, at least, it is clearly permissible to start a story with such a sentence. For instance, I would see nothing odd in starting a talk (in English) with the rhetorical question: "Was I supposed to have started this talk with a quote in Russian?" The use of such a construction indicates that the locus of the option was in the past, and that therefore implies that the decision has already been made. In the case of the sentence from *Slovo* there is at least a strong implication that the decision is not to start the story with words of yore, and not just because by uttering the sentence, the storyteller has in fact started it in a different way (although that aspect cannot be ignored).

Turning to Modern Russian, we find, according to my informants, that similar constructions with similar implications are possible. It would be possible to start a story with the rhetorical question: *Byli li my dolžny nacat' starymi slovami ratnyx povestej o poxode Igorevom?* This introduction would be particularly appropriate when we had already decided not to begin it in an epic manner.

Those implications could fit admirably into an interpretation of the first sentence of the *Slovo*. We thus have two plausible possibilities. One is that by the time of the writing of the *Slovo*, *lěpo* constructions with past indicative could be used as modals referring to present choices. The other is that such constructions had past reference, but that such a reading is stylistically reasonable in the context.

Notes

1) These two works have word indices, and have the greatest concentration of relevant examples in OCS and OR. I did not check the gospel texts of OCS directly, but I did find that a Greek concordance of the New Testament (*The Analytic Greek Lexicon*, Zondervan 1970) indicates no instances in the gospels of *édei*, which is the normal Greek source of *lěpo bě*. In OR I checked the *Uspenskij Sbornik*, the *Izbornik of 1076*, the sermons of Kyril of Turov, and the *Kievan Chronicle*. Relevant constructions were found only in the *Uspenskij Sbornik* and the *Kievan Chronicle*. Mann (1982) reports that there are no examples with contrary-to-fact reading in *The Primary Chronicle* or in the *Paterikon* of the Pečerskij Monastery.

2) Given the spreading acceptance of the claim that the *Slovo* is not an authentic 12th century document, we should ask why the writer used an apparently innovative combination of *bjašet'ŭ* with *lěpo* in possibly present modal function. *Zadonščina* does not have a *lěpo* construction in the corresponding passage, but uses: *lutči bo nam est'*. The writer of the Igor Tale, if he was a fraud, was a very smart man. He also had to have available both *Zadonščina* and the *Ipat'evskaja letopis'*. It would not take a very smart man to notice that *bjaše(tŭ)*, in the course of the history of East Slavic writing, was replaced by *bylo*. He would likewise notice that in the chronicles of the twelfth century l-forms as simple pasts were limited to direct speech. Sentences (12) and (13) are found within a few pages of the account of the Igor campaign in the *Ipat'evskaja letopis'*. The writer could use (12) as his model, merely replacing *bylo* by *bjašet'ŭ* to create a construction appropriate for a narrator's comment. It is probably unnecessary to explain why he might have elected to use *bjašet'ŭ* rather than *bě*, but he did have

available an example with *bjaše lěpo* in example (9). That sentence does occur in the version of the *Primary Chronicle* found in *Ipat'evskaja* (Arxeografičeskaja komisija 1871:175). It is also true that in the last half of the *Kievan Chronicle*, *bjaše* is more common than *bě*.

3) Examples of l-forms used as indicative pasts where we would expect imperfects, found in the *Kievan Chronicle*, are: under the year 1152 (Arxeografičeskaja komisija 1871:313): *Volodimirū že na vsemū na tomū čelova xrestū, no leža tvorisja aky iznemagaja s ranū, no ranū na nemū ne bylo* "Volodimir kissed the cross (swore) to all of that, but lying there he pretended that he was weak from wounds, but there were no wounds on him."; under the year 1175 (Arxeografičeskaja komisija 1871:404): "*Vaju otecī dobrū bylū, koli u nasū bylū,*" "Your father was good when he was with us (= ruled us);" and under the year 1184 (Arxeografičeskaja komisija 1871:429) *Navoropnici že, perešedše Xorolī, vzijdoša na šolomja, gladajušče kdě uzrjatī ē; Končakū že stojalū u luzě.* "The Navoropniks, having crossed the Xorol', went up on a hill, looking for a place from which to see them; Končak stood in a low place."

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