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**“LANGUAGE REPLACEMENT” BY PRIIT LIGI**

The problem of Slavonic occupation and colonization of the Russian North-West in the Middle Ages presents a kind of puzzle for modern archaeology and ethnology. The theoretical aspects of this topic have for long remained outside the perspective available to researchers, and all new ideas are naturally welcome. In our opinion, however, neither political nor ideological confrontations (Ligi's article [1993,31–39] touches on a great number of these problems) are directly connected with the subject considered. Unfortunately, ethnic views and preferences in post-Soviet Estonia are based on a sort of “national extremism”. This tendency is naturally abetted by a traditional and slightly obsolete anti-communism. In its extreme manifestations the latter is of the same nature as the official ideology of the former Soviet Union. Strangely enough, Ligi conceives this mixture of political sympathies and historical-archaeological studies to be a natural and even inevitable condition of research. Being a convinced anti-communist, he nevertheless agrees with the neo-Marxists M. Shanks and C. Tilley (Ligi 1993,37). Yet Ligi himself is not a national extremist and claims to support “the politics of compromise”. But something of a political tone, to some extent an obstacle to impartial research, is still present in his essay. Let us turn to the historical construct suggested by this Estonian scholar. In his view, the large-scale medieval colonization of northwestern Russia is the invention of researchers.

The main part of Ligi's essay deals with critiques of various conceptions of Slavonic colonization, which he attributes to a Soviet “national-romantic paradigm”. To Ligi himself, the ethnic situation in northwestern Russia appears to have developed as

follows: between the 11th and 13th centuries the area was inhabited by various Finnic groups, who adopted the Slavonic language and became part of the medieval population of the Novgorod Land. Ligi accepts certain models of language replacement elaborated by C. Renfrew and I. Hodder: “The non-Slavonic elite changed its language in order to maintain its social position in the Old Russian state, and the rest of society followed suit” (Ligi 1993, 37).

While criticizing the way Russian scholars (Konetsky, Nosov, Sedov and others) have identified ethnos with archaeological culture, Ligi keeps to the very same positions, ignoring the theoretical aspects of the problem. But the roots of many problems related to certain ethno-cultural models lie precisely here. The modern theory of ethnos is presently undergoing a kind of crisis: it is clear that neither cultural traditions reflected in archaeological data nor language can be stable indicators of an ethnic community. We do not share the views of some scholars who consider ethnos to be of a biological or physico-geographical nature. Ethnic consciousness (or self-consciousness) should be considered as the main aspect of ethnic existence (Bromley 1983, 176; Lesman 1989, 13). It can be actualized in the socio-political, religious and other spheres. There are many ways in which ethnic consciousness can become reflected in the sphere of material culture (Klejn 1991, 145–153). This, however, does not mean that we can never determine the signs and significance of ethnos in different periods and epochs. In each concrete situation, we must coordinate the stadial and cultural peculiarities of the community under consideration. The same concerns the problem of using archaeological data in interdisciplinary studies to reconstruct ethnic history or spiritual culture. Curiously, Ligi does not use the term “archaeological culture”. In his essay, language communities correlate with certain burial traditions. However, the methodological impropriety of such a position is

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obvious (Petrov, Plokhov 1993, 59–69). The question must be posed differently: when did the population which introduced a specific tradition of burial mounds come to the territory in question (assuming it was not autochthonous)? In our view, there are no significant objections to correlating the “long barrow” tradition with the local Finnic inhabitants. The other situation concerns the “sopka” mounds.

The most important question concerns migrations. Ligi maintains that there were no “social, economic and demographic preconditions whatsoever for large-scale Slavonic migration” (Ligi 1993, 35). Consequently, he doubts the reality of such a process. He also refers to an essay by his sympathizer V. Pararin, complaining that the latter’s book has remained unmentioned in Russia, “because of his neglect of archaeological data”. As a matter of fact, this study evoked no response among scholars because of its absolute amateurishness. Pararin is a professional geographer with no essential practical knowledge or skills in historical or cultural studies. He completely rejects the possibility of migration by ethnic communities. “Ethnos originates and develops in a directly appointed place (appointed by whom? – A.P., N.P., A.S.). Here, as a rule, it also dies out or regenerates” (Pararin 1990, 150). Ethnic migration, in fact, is one of the most characteristic phenomena of Barbarian Europe in the first millennium A.D. Part of this era is appropriately termed the time of “the great migrations”. However, in many cases migrations were caused not only by socio-economic or demographic reasons but also by other factors that are not so easily comprehended. The question of the existence or non-existence of migration is not resolved at the level of burial traditions. Data relating to settlement is of paramount importance in this connection. Written sources (if such exist) are no less important. In this connection we may turn to the attention paid by scholars (primarily Ligi) to another version of Slavonic colonization, which may be termed “Danubian” and has been actively elaborated by D.A. Machinsky (1987, 7) over the past few years. It has no less an extensive historiographical basis than the “Western-Slavonian” theory. With justifiable grounds, Ligi mentioned the absence of historical causes and the possibility of the migration of Slavonic population into the Ilmen area from the Western Slavonian lands. It should be mentioned that Machinsky’s model completely correlates with the data of the chronicles. Moreover, the spread of a significant number of settlers from regions further south (from the area of the Smolensk group of “long barrows” in the Upper Dnieper valley) is clearly outlined through exca-

vated data from a settlement at the Zemlyanoye Gorodishche in Staraya Ladoga, dating from the beginning of the ninth century (Machinsky, Kuzmin, Machinskaya 1986, 164–166). Furthermore, this migration is not by any means connected with agricultural colonization, but a pioneering movement into these parts of the Baltic-Volga water route at the time (Petrov 1992, 27–29).

The idea of total and comparatively rapid language change appears to be quite unacceptable from a culturological point of view. In this connection, Ligi again echoes the views of Pararin. The substitution of a Finnic language by Slavonic could hardly have precluded a serious conflict between the two cultures. They appear to have had quite different images and affiliations with different language groups. The idea of the organizing role of language in culture, its deep and indissoluble connection with all other spheres of human activity and the human mind is a commonplace in modern cultural studies. It is particularly important to comprehend this point in the study of traditional and archaic communities. The connection of language with other elements of folk culture is clearly explained by the scholars of the Russian “ethno-linguistic school” (Tolstoy 1983; Tolstoy 1989). Therefore, a simple replacement of language among a significant number of Finnic tribes inhabiting the vast area of northwestern Russia would have generated a mixed cultural area, based initially on bilinguality. However, there are no traces of such a symbiosis (or conflict) in the Old Novgorodian dialect and folk culture of Northern and northwestern Russia (we refer here only to the population called Russian and not to actual Finnic groups such as the Vod’, Izhora and others). Slavonic-Finnic contacts in the Middle Ages generated a small number of symbiotic forms of folklore in places where the Russian and Finnic cultures had co-existed (see Bernshtam 1992). However, the whole evidence only amounts to these examples. The ethnographic aspects of this question are clearly illuminated by D.K. Zelenin (1929).

Toponymical data also provides evidence to counter Ligi’s model. R.A. Ageeva has observed a prevalence of hydronyms of Slavonic origin in comparison with Finnic ones in the Russian North-West (Ageeva 1989). Taking into account the complexity of providing a cultural-historical interpretation of hydronyms, the situation appears to contradict the idea of “language replacement”. In fact, hydronyms are traditionally considered to be the most conservative level of place-names. Assuming the large-scale changing of language by the Finnic inhabitants of the Russian North-West, the old hydronyms would have remained untouched and

were only adapted to a contemporary language situation. Were this the case, we could easily record a great number of Finnic-derived names of lakes and rivers in the area, but no such situation exists.

Suggesting a model of the formation of the north-west Russian population in the 11th–13th centuries, Ligi assigns the local (in his view, Finnic) population a less favourable role. In his view, a Finnic nobility pursued its own political aims by adopting the fashionable cultural stereotypes of the Slavonic population which was concentrated in the towns (here Ligi presents an incorrect analogy, also in poor taste, with the elite of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in the national borderlands of the former Soviet Union). Before the building of Coporye in 1240, there were four towns in northwestern Russia (Novgorod, Ladoga, Pskov and Isborsk). Following Ligi, the Finnic population was stratified until the tenth century according to a “pyramid” model, with a steeped hierarchy in the social sphere. But where were these realities reflected?

We have a great deal of facts at our disposal regarding the Finnic culture of the period. The highly varied works of Finnic material culture and art are well known (Fenno-Ugri et Balti 1987, Kochkurkina 1981, etc.). But there is no evidence of social stratification or a strict hierarchy of Finnic society at this time. There are no “nobles’ barrows”, nor any outstanding complexes of settlements etc. There was probably social stratification, as existing within all barbarian societies, among the inhabitants of the North-West at the time, but there is no reason to liken it to that known from examples of societies of a similar stage (Germans, Sarmathians etc.). Apparently, a hierarchy can be not only vertical but also horizontal; indications of the latter can be noted in the variety of the “long barrows”.

According to the model suggested by Ligi, reflections of new cultural stereotypes adopted by the “Finnic elite” are to be found in the material culture of the local centres. These would be of a character similar to the data from the towns of northwestern Russia (Novgorod, Ladoga). It is known that the culture termed “Old Russian” did not emerge gradually but immediately; most of the objects from burial complexes of the 11th–14th centuries have parallels and analogues in Novgorod; they were simply made there according to Novgorodian models (Lesman 1984). But to us, such a situation seems to be more a reflection of contacts between village and town populations; in some cases these contacts could even be of international character. There are distinct complexes among the burial grounds and cemeteries, but they are always connected by scholars to a Finnic population (Zalakh-

tove, Manuilovo, etc.; Ryabinin 1983; Khvoshchinskaya 1990).

Not all the components of the Old Russian culture are known, and we cannot deny the significant role played by the Finnic tribes in its formation. But as a whole this culture seems to us to have been more or less regular and homogeneous. It appears suddenly, all at once, and almost synchronously with the Christianization of Russia. Within the same context are certain political events, for example the invasion by Yaroslav the Wise (Mudry) into the areas beyond Lake Peipus (Chudskoye) and the foundation by him of the town of Yuryev (Tartu) around 1030.

With regard to our concept of the colonization of the North-West in the Old Russian period we can adduce an analogue with a later process. Settlements which had been deserted during the so-called Time of Troubles were settled from the pogosts (administrative and parish centres) and large villages (*selo*) – the “pioneering strongpoints” (Vorobyev, Degtyarev 1986, 57) – around the beginning of the 17th century. N.I. Platonova follows almost the same concept (Platonova 1988, 18). Pioneering movement into vast territories really makes its appearance at this time; some scholars compare this process to the “great clearings” of 12th-century France (Shvejkovskaja 1992, 79). Returning to the problem of national ideology and national politics, Ligi’s concept seems to be more unacceptable to Estonian nationalists than their Russian counterparts. The suggested model of “language replacement” can correlate with historical reality only if the Finnic tribes of the Russian North-West had undergone a most severe and cruel cultural crisis. What kind of culture could it have been if it had forgotten in only a few centuries, and without any exterior compulsion, its language, customs and gods? A changing of language is not at issue here, but a more or less violent assimilation.

There are neither “best” nor “worst” cultures. Historical observation shows that a culture possessing smaller socio-political potential dissolves and becomes assimilated by more active cultures. After all, no one can say that the foundations of modern American culture in the 18th and 19th centuries were laid by English-speaking Indians.

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