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OVERCOMING NATIONAL ROMANTICISM IN ARCHAEOLOGY

I find Ligi's extensive article on the Slavic colonization of Northwest Russia and national romanticism in archaeology interesting in many respects. It contains fresh views, sound reasoning, and a balanced approach. I find many ideas conforming to my own: a critical attitude to Rybakov's conception of Slavic ethnogenesis, reference to the combination of Marxism and Kossinna's methods in Soviet archaeology, critical estimates of the achievements of Soviet archaeology, and many others. The author does not make any direct references to my works, and I could also mention other works by myself that are not used but contain similar ideas (e.g. on "ethnic indicators", see Klejn 1973).

I cannot however escape the impression that while criticizing the ideological misuse of archaeology, the author himself unwittingly introduces ideological accents, albeit with a reverse meaning, which is something that all of us do. This is evident in the vehemence with which the author refers to the condemned theory of Slavic colonization and seeks models according to which the local Finno-Ugrian population would have been more active and advanced in the contemporary peopling of Northwest Russia.

Instead of developing my own views in detail, I shall refer to my published works.

As opposed to Shanks and Tilley, as mentioned by the author, I would maintain that despite the evident impact of political factors on archaeologists, it is quite possible for them to apply methods eliminating the influence of ideological biases on the results achieved. These will only remain in the choice of the theme or topic and the material, but this again is unavoidable. The theme and material, however, can be the same for people of different ideological orientations.

Ethnogenesis is of course a topical subject in regions like the East Baltic, which are populated by

various peoples involved in sharp conflicts as regimes change and political maps are redrawn. It is only natural to seek in the archaeological record evidence and grounds for justifying national or state relations, rights and pretensions. Such evidence relates to ancient inequality among cultures, their relative superiority or backwardness, the distribution of territories, ancient roots and migrations etc.

First of all, it would be wise to take into account some simple truths. Whatever the archaeological facts - whether Northwest Rus was really colonized by Slavs in the 8th century or not until the 13th century, or not conquered at all and only infiltrated by small Slav groups, or whether there was never any invasion and the language spread by itself among the local Finno-Ugrian population - all this is plainly of no significance, be it moral, political or legal, for defining the present rights of any population. The latter are solely dependent on recent international affairs, contemporary agreements between states, and the established system of international jurisprudence.

Nevertheless, scholars have to tackle the problem of ethnogenesis, but for quite different reasons: to identify the sources of the cultural processes which they study (Klejn 1976; 1981). Unfortunately, we often confuse the concepts. To me, *ethnos* is a concept from the field of social psychology: a community of people united under some pretext (unity of language, territory, religion etc.) by feelings of solidarity motivated by a conviction of a community of origin and historical fate, regardless of whether this conviction is realistic or not. Pretexts may be different and they may change. What remains are these feelings and convictions, and it is they that are decisive (Klejn 1978; 1992). The existence of *ethnoi* is determined first of all by the consciousness of people, whereas material factors serve only as building material, and they are evidently the background against which the patterns of consciousness are formed.

If this is the case, problems of ethnogenesis are

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hardly available to archaeological study. What we usually mean when speaking of ethnogenesis is in fact glottogenesis – the origins of language communities and questions regarding their roots. Estonians and Russians are ethnol, although merely the linguistic aspect is treated here. Slavs and Finno-Ugrians, however, are purely linguistic concepts – and only that. There are racial characteristics of Slavic peoples but there is no Slavic race. Nor are there things such as a Slavic economy, politics, pan-Slavic solidarity, common religion etc. Slavs are united and differ from others only through their speech, and more precisely with respect to certain common features of grammar and glossary which permit conclusions regarding common origins.

In our studies, we subconsciously graft certain characteristics of ethnol onto the Slavs, but this is an error. Accurately speaking, it is correct at only a very early stage, but we do not know which stage. In speaking of a “theory of Slavic colonization” we are in fact dealing with the purely linguistic questions of when and how East Slavonic spread into the forest zone.

Linguistic questions, however, can only be ultimately solved by linguistic data on the kinship of languages, glottochronology, toponomastics etc. Archaeological data can play only an auxiliary part. They reveal culturogenesis, which may or may not coincide in its patterns with glottogenesis (Klejn 1981; 1988). Yet, even if the prototypes of the long barrows and *sopkas* can be confidently recognized, this will not solve the problem of the “theory of Slavic colonization”, since wherever they appear to be – in the forested regions of the North, in the Dnieper basin, in Poland, or even in Estonia – this would not indicate the initial origin of the bearers of this culture but merely point to the roots of some components of this material culture and perhaps some of its religious forms.

Whether or not there had been a migration or continuity in a genetic sense, and whether the population changed or remained the same while changing its language or culture are not problems of ethnogenesis but of racial genesis. And again, this may or may not coincide with culturogenesis and glottogenesis. Paleoanthropology solves these problems with its own anthropological means. By solving each of these problems, scholars obtain only auxiliary data for better solutions to problems in neighbouring disciplines. The entire history and optimal solutions of these particular issues are to be achieved through interdisciplinary synthesis (Klejn 1988).

Under the conditions of medieval economic isolation, when trade was not a decisive factor, could the Slavic language have spread among a non-

Slavic population without the infiltration of the Slavs themselves? Hardly. There was no radio or television. Only in the large cities were there any appreciable numbers of literate people. Religion did not implant language – Greek was not taken to Rus in the way that Latin was implanted in Europe and Arabic in Central Asia. Administration is a further question, but we must bear in mind the Varangians and Tartars in Rus. Accordingly, one apparently has to assume some kind of infiltration of Slavic population into the Finno-Ugrian milieu.

The question, however, is how large these groups of invaders were; what was the nature of infiltration; and when and how the Slavs penetrated the local milieu. What were the reasons for the domination of Slavic over the indigenous language? Was the local population expelled, or were they outnumbered by the invaders? Or was it a question of cultural superiority, the impact of urban centres, or military-administrative oppression? Nothing should be rejected beforehand and everything must be estimated, calmly and without bias. It must also be borne in mind that the answers as such will change nothing as regards the position of the Russian minority in Estonia, the Russian majority in Narva, Karelia within the Russian Federation, the status of Finno-Ugrian minorities in the Leningrad district, the territorial claims of Estonia regarding Russia or Russian reactions to them, the imperial pretensions of Russian politicians to power in the Estonian government, or with regard to the Estonian reactions to them.

Was there a Slavic colonization – so what? Was there no Slavic colonization – so what?

We are talking about something quite different!

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