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DOES OLD RUSSIAN *LIDIĖ* COME FROM OLD PRUSSIAN *LIEDE* „HECHT, PIKE, ЩУКА“?

Antoniewicz, 1965, 25, notes that there are five occurrences of place names with the element *Prus-* in them in the Novgorod area and indeed within the city of Novgorod there was even a Prussian street (now *Željabova* street). According to Antoniewicz, the date and the purpose of the arrival of the first Prussian group in Novgorod is not clear. It seems established, however, that there were indeed Old Prussians in Novgorod. With this in mind let us examine birch-bark writ no. 131 as transcribed by Arcixovskij, 1958, 68:

Цто было в Пудогѣ прѣзда, ту прѣзку Сѣргиѣ възлѣ изо Олѣтъ. Закрою спроста а ѿ
быле о русалеѣхо в Пудогѣ. А цто про Сѣмозерци хедыле есемо не платѣце, а платѣце в
томо цто промежи рѣду нѣту³³. А ныне Сѣмозерци в городѣ. Говорѣ с нѣми саме. А ѿ с
ти, осподине, буду. А ѿ борзо буду. А нине есеме к тобѣ рибоко послалѣ. А во Шуѣ ни лидиѣ
ни ловоу.

According to Arcixovskij, the interpretation of this birch-bark writ is the most difficult of any of the 136 which had been published by 1958. The awkward handwriting of an unskilled scribe makes the paleographic determination difficult, but there is nothing to contradict the stratigraphic date, viz., the 14th century. Arcixovskij, 70, notes that although the interpretation of the text is difficult, the geographical names are clear. Thus *Pudoga* is the modern city of Pudož east of Lake Onega; *Oлѣтъ* is the left tributary of the *Svirь*; *Sѣмозеро* is a rather large lake to the west of Lake Onega; *Шуѣ* is the west tributary of Lake Onega. The words *prazda* and *prazka* are two ways of writing the same word. Apparently they are variants of the term *prazga* which denotes a kind of rent or payment for the use of property. Arcixovskij finds the expression *zakroju sprosta* most unclear and suggests a possible translation "prosto spišu nedoimki". The sentence *ę byle o rusaleęxo v Pudogę* can be translated as "Ja byl na rusalijax v Pudogę". *Rusalii* is the name of a heathen Slavic holiday which is accompanied by games and dancing. The phrase *xedyle esemo* is "ja xodil"; *ne platece* "ne platjat". Then follow comprehensible words, although Arcixovskij says he has difficulty in translating the clause. The word

ređr̃ denotes "dogovor, uslovie". The clauses *A nyne Semezerci v gorodě* and *Govorě s němi same* can be translated respectively as "A nyne Sjamezercy v gorode" and "Govori s nimi sam".

Apparently the Sjamezercy who had held back payment had arrived in Novgorod and the person addressed could negotiate with them himself. The expression *A ę s ti, ospodine, budu* seems clear, but Arcixovskij suggests that the preposition *s* "with" is written instead of *k* "to, towards" and, 71, the word *ospodine* "master" may mean that the author was in the service of the person addressed. Then the phrase is repeated in another way *A ę borzo budu* "A ja skoro budu". *Nine* means "nyne", *riboko* "rybok". *Eseme* stands possibly for *esmb*.

This phrase could possibly be translated as "I sent you some fish". The word *lidiě* is incomprehensible. According to Arcixovskij, 71, if there is a mistake, i. e., if the first *i* stands for an *o*, the clause is meaningful, *ni lodiě, ni lovu*. In my view it is further significant that Arcixovskij, 145, believes that writ no. 131 was written by a non-Russian.

I should like to suggest that the author of birch-bark writ no. 131 was an Old Prussian. If this is so, then the word *lidiě* is not to be understood as *lodiě* but is to be equated with Old Prussian *liede* „Hecht“ (Elbing Vocabulary, 561; Mažiulis, 1966, 70). Cf. also Lith. *l̃ydis, lydekà, lydėkas, lydėkis*, Latv. *līdēka, līdēks, līdaka* "pike". With this interpretation the last sentence is to be understood as meaning "there are no pike, there is no catch" or "in the river Šuja there is no catch of pike". Since the pike is a rather large fish, then the preceding sentence "I have sent you some small fish" (*riboko*) becomes more meaningful. I. e., since there weren't any of the large pike, the author sent some small fish in its place¹.

One may also note the appearance of *i* for Russian *y*, which could be a Baltic mistake since there is apparently no /y/ in Old Prussian. In one case the author has written *nyne* correctly with the -y-, but in the word *xedyle* presumably for **xodil̃r̃* the -y- appears for expected -i- probably showing that the author could not distinguish between /i/ and /y/ in his own speech.

The form *ospodine* "master" without an initial consonant may show that the author of the writ did not hear an initial spirant /ɣ/ which was not part of the phonemic inventory of Old Prussian. One notes also the incorrect use of *ti* as the object of the preposition *s*. There is no really good evidence for an Old Prussian 2nd sg. pronoun in the instrumental case, but there apparently existed an enclitic Old Prussian form *tien*, an apparent acc. singular form.

¹ I owe this suggestion to Mrs. Ariadna Martin.

The following three factors are important: (1) there was apparently a population of Old Prussians in Novgorod, (2) the text of birch-bark writ no. 131 was probably written by a non-Russian and (3) the Old Prussian word *liede* "Hecht, pike, ščuka" would make good sense in the context.

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