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“The Pagan dialects from Narew” in the light of Yatvingian onomastic remnants

30 years ago Prof. Zigmantas Zinkevičius published a manuscript entitled “The Pagan Dialects from Narew” (henceforth PDN) in Russian and Lithuanian (Zinkevičius 1984; 1985). It was a manual copy by Vyacheslav Zinov, a young man from the city of Brest in White Russia. Later the Lithuanian scholar presented an English augmented version of his paper with the same title: *A Polish-Yatvingian Vocabulary?* (Zinkevičius 1992), as he suggested that Zinov’s copy may contain not only Polish words, but also their equivalents in the lost Yatvingian language. Balticists treat this discovery in different ways. Some of them accept Zinkevičius’ hypothesis, some reject the Yatvingian origin of the Baltic part, others believe that the manuscript, called Zinov’s dictionary after the surname of the young copist, is a modern forgery.

In my presentation I would like to demonstrate that the Baltic vocabulary, attested in Zinov’s dictionary, agrees very well with Yatvingian onomastic remnants. Observed differences are, in fact, doubtful or illusory. Thus the Yatvingian hypothesis, suggested by Zinkevičius (1984; 1985; 1992) and accepted by a number of scholars (e.g. Helimsky, Karulis, Orel, Sabaliauskas, Schmalstieg, Schmidt, Witczak and so on), seems the best possible conclusion.

The author wants to demonstrate additionally that a forgery is impossible for a number of reasons. Firstly, a linguistic calque attested in the post-Yatvingian toponymical area (*Windobała – Wiatrołuża*), confirmed by Zinov’s dictionary, was unknown in the eighties of the 20th century (Witczak 2004). Secondly, some toponyms from the post-Yatvingian area cannot be correctly explained without Zinov’s dictionary, e.g. the *Kojle* lake near Suwałki, originally ‘a silent [lake]’, refers only to *kajli* ‘silently’ [PDN 125] and not to OPrus. *kails* ‘healthy’, Latv. *kails* ‘naked, bare’, Slavic **cělъ* ‘whole, intact’ (< BSl. **kailu-*). An alleged forger would have to be an excellent Balto-Slavic linguist and dialectologist, exceeding all the modern specialists of the Baltic onomastics. Thirdly, Yatvingian is the only Baltic language showing the depalatalization of palatalized syllabic resonants after Baltic **v* at an early period. It is attested in three different sources: (1) Maleckis’ relation from 16th c. on the Sudovians (i.e. Yatvingians) in Sambia mentions “an aged priest offering a goat” called *wurszajtis*, cf. Lith. *viršaitis* ‘village-mayor, village-chief, elder in a village’, Latv. *virsaitis* ‘village-mayor’ (Witczak 1989); (2) the Masovian river name *Wągra*, *Węgra* represents (Yatvingian) **Wungrā* and Baltic **Wingrā* f. ‘winding, tortuous, crooked [river]’ (Witczak 2015); (3) “the Pagan Dialects from Narew” demonstrates two examples of the observed phenomenon, cf. *wułk* ‘wolf’ [PDN 25] < Balt. **wilkas*, cf. Lithuanian *vilkas*, Latvian *vilks*, OPrus. *wilkis* ‘id.’; *wułd* ‘to want’ [PDN 3] < Balt. **wiltēi*, cf. Lith. *viltis* ‘to hope’, Latv. *vilt* ‘to cheat, swindle, delude’. This phonological process (i.e. Yatv. *vul-*, *vun-*, *vur-* < Baltic **vil-*, **vin-*, **vir-*) was unknown and completely unrecognized before the publication of Zinkevičius’ articles (1984, 1985). Generally, it is impossible to suggest that an unknown forger had better knowledge than all the Balticists, who existed and worked in the 20th century. In other words, Zinov’s dictionary entitled “The Pagan Dialects from Narew” should be treated as a copy of a lost authentic document. My final conclusion is that Prof. Zinkevičius correctly named it the “Polish-Yatvingian dictionary”.

References

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