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THE ORIGINATION OF INDEPENDENT RUSSIAN CULTURE AMID BYZANTIUM AND SCANDINAVIA

The fact that various cultures mutually affect each other is a phenomenon proper to all stages of their development. In the course of mutual interaction their peculiar characteristics achieve maturity, and in the same course those characteristics gradually fade and disappear.

The influence exercised by one culture upon another is a form manifesting its existence. A culture exists in mutual interaction with other cultures, while the form which that process takes, may vary infinitely.

In the IX–XIII c.c. A.D. Russian culture, as well as any other, grew in continuous touch with the cultural development of other countries and nations. Four lines may be noted along which East Slavs experienced a certain amount of influence. One of the sources originating in the South was that of Byzantium. It was not anything sudden, but rather resulted from the development of millennial influences of Northern Black Sea coast Hellenism that found its way to the East-European plain. Another line of influence was of a shorter duration and came from the Scandinavian North. The cultural influence of the steppe nomads made itself felt in the South-Eastern regions; the cultural influence that came from the West was more variegated, higher and different in its nature; its was that of West-Slavonic and Germanic peoples.

While the influence of Byzantium had never raised any special controversy, being definite, clearly outlined and proved both by manuscripts and material monuments, the Scandinavian influence, from the very beginning of its investigation, gave rise to two contrary opinions among researchers in history; thus two schools of thought were formed – the so-called ‘normanists’ and the ‘antinormanists’.

The argument between the 'normanists' and the 'antinormanists' turned to be a lasting one. It has been going on for over two centuries and, to my best belief, has by now acquired a most archaic nature. It's time to see the matter in a new light, which is possible due to modern achievements in studying the development of cultures.

From the very start the bitterness of the argument was mainly due to the introduction of political motives alien to any scientific investigation. The political motive became most evident in German science, which, while under nazi control, attempted to prove that Russian culture was passive, dependent, and needed the interference of another dominating masterful nation.

The argument grew more complicated because of the vagueness of Scandinavian influence bearing a most peculiar nature.

An influence is formed as a combination of various forces. An influence usually corresponds to the inner demands of a country, seldom counteracting them. Influences exercised by different countries vary in the manner they combine with each other, as well as, in the manner they combine with the phenomena of the developing culture. Hence the various types of cultural influences. There is a type of influence to which a culture is subject in its early stages of development, another one affects it in its mature stages. An influence may be merely mechanical, exterior, but it may also be inwardly connected with a culture, deeply affecting it. However, not only the *types* of an influence may differ but also the ways in which they penetrate may be various. A cultural influence may spread through direct contacts of immediate neighbours, either by means of trade or war-raids, or through religious or literary connections arising among the bearers of intellectual culture. In the early days of history the exchange of cultural values existed only within 'short distances', but further on, with the growth and accumulation of cultural riches, the part played by distance gradually diminished, cultural connections extending over great distances, over interlying states, over seas and continents separating nations.

The influence to which Russian culture was subject in its early stages of development were of a various nature too.

In the one hand there existed the most archaic type of influence, i.e. the one arising among immediate neighbours, in the

present case among the Slavs, Finns and the peoples inhabiting the steppe. It was mutual and, on the whole, peaceful. It took no complicated forms, pertaining mainly to everyday life, and not being consciously realised by those concerned; thus it met with no psychological resistance. On the other hand, there existed the influence of Byzantium, which was of a higher type. It arose to the very finest and most perfect forms of relations that occur among highly developed intellectual cultures. Russia experienced the influence of Byzantine literature, fine arts, architecture, applied art, political ideas, scientific doctrines, and, of course, theology. Byzantine ecclesiastical organization was transferred to Russia; the Russian state copied the uppermost forms of Byzantine state power organization; Russia borrowed Byzantine court etiquette as well as certain ways of ruling the country.

Scandinavian influence was in its nature somewhat nearer to the one exercised upon Russia by the steppe nations than to that of Byzantium. It was of a less definite nature and more difficult to be 'proved' by historical data.

It is possible to illustrate the difference of the Byzantine type of influence from that of the Scandinavian type by means of the following example. In the most ancient Russian chronicle that came down to us, namely the *Povest vremennykh let* both strata of sources, Byzantine and Scandinavian, are found. The Byzantine stratum is mainly represented by carefully and artistically made translations of extracts from Byzantine historical treaties, mostly chronicles and lives of saints. The extracts may serve as evidence of the complicated historical notions and the scope of knowledge of world history to which the Russian reader found access through them. The Scandinavian stratum in the same chronicle, i.e. the so-called *Varyazhskie predanya* (Varangian traditions) are of an entirely different nature. In spite of the fact that they were exhaustively studied by Professor AD. STENDER-PETERSEN, many things about them are still obscure and doubtful; in the majority of cases their Scandinavian sources remain unknown; it is not clear whether they originated in Scandinavia or in Russia; in a number of instances even their very Scandinavian origin might be questioned. Such uncertainty is caused by their folk-lore amorphity. One can't deny the artistic merits of the plots, but from the point of view of historical notions they imply,

they belong to a completely different stage of historical consciousness.

The Scandinavian stratum of the *Povesti* (Russian chronicle) is archaic. The Byzantine stratum of the same is at a level with the European historical thought contemporary to it. Between the Scandinavian and the Byzantine influences exists the same *phasic* difference that lies between folk-lore and literature. The Scandinavian influence is, in its nature as akin to the influence of the steppe nomads, as the Varangian legends are, in their nature, akin to the legends of the *Polovtsy*.

However, in studying foreign influences it is important to establish not only the *type* of the influence, peculiar to certain stages of cultural development, but also the *combinations* in which a certain influence comes to meet the local forces of development.

The main point of argument between the 'normanists' and the 'antinormanists' is the problem of the origin of the Russian state. In the far off days, when the argument arose, – i.e. in the XVIII and early XIX centuries – the forms and types of state formation were not yet established, neither were types of culture distinguished one from another. Everything seemed simple: it was enough to establish the fact that Norsemen initiated the state formation and the Norsemen nature of the state seemed beyond doubt, no other proofs being necessary. The participation of Norsemen in trade was taken for a doubtless sign of their influence upon the way it was organized. History appeared to be a simple sequence of events, and the problem of studying the influence exercised on Russia by Scandinavians, Byzantines and steppe nomads mainly amounted to the study of some or other historical events: the summoning of the Varangians, the part the latter took in the matters occurring in Novgorod and Kiev. The argument went on along the following lines: whether these or other events mentioned in the chronicle had really taken place, or whether certain individuals described there were actual historical characters; whether there were few or many Varangians in ancient Russia; whether they came there as conquerors or as mercenaries; how long they had stayed; whether the story, found in the chronicle, about the three Varangian brothers summoned to Russia, was a legend or a fact; whether the number of Varangian barrows that remained in Russia was considerable or not, and so forth

and so on. Further on, the points at argument were the names of the Dnieper rapids, and the origin of the word 'Rus', as name of the country. The answers to these separate and quantitative questions were to settle the problem of dependency or not of the Russian state.

It doesn't mean that the matters which are still subject to discussion, are not worthy of scientific investigation in general. Of course they are, but they alone do not exhaust the problem. The development of scientific thought takes the course of concentric circles extending and involving new data, without dropping the data it has accumulated earlier. Our arguments grow archaic not because we continue discussing old problems, but rather because we do not add new ones to them.

Examining the matter from the modern point of view, we become aware that in order to establish the Norsemen origin of the ancient Russian state, one should first of all investigate the type and structure of its organization, and compare it with the one in Scandinavia of the same period, rather than make attempts at establishing the ethnic origin of the first Russian princes. It is not of much consequence *who* it was that brought a certain phenomenon, but of much greater one *what sort* of a phenomenon he did bring, as well as what it was in its essence. When we refer to the influence exercised by the Scandinavian state system upon the Russian state system, we should first and foremost compare the two state structures, the two types of state system during several centuries. The Norsemen were unable to bring something they themselves hadn't got, or something that existed in their own country in a different form; for you cannot take out roubles from a purse containing denarii or dirhems . . .

If it is proved that the system of ruling the state, the court of justice proceedings, legal rights and duties, the order of succession and handing down state power, the part played by popular assemblies (*vetche*) are, to a certain extent, common to both, then much will be achieved by means of the comparison. It is evident that when solving the problem on such a wide scale, much will depend on the general progress of historical science, the study of historical process as a whole.

It is already possible to say that the course taken by historical science lies in the direction of a further and further acknowledge-

ment of the part played by the inward tendencies in the development of a country and its state organization. In that connection even the obvious traces of Scandinavian influence acquire a new meaning, another historical value. To whatever extent the Scandinavian influence existed in ancient Russia, it wasn't anything forced upon the people but rather a phenomenon corresponding to the inner tendency of the country. The progress of historical science makes us gain a deeper insight into the essential meaning of events. Seemingly exterior forces are often found to be the phenomena of an inner process in the life of a country or a nation.

However, it would have been an error to think that the argument between the 'normanists' and the 'antinormanists' may of its own accord come to an end due to the progress of historical science alone. That would have been too much to expect, but it is quite probable that on the ground of it there may take place a certain shifting of opinions narrowing the gulf between them; though a complete solution of the problem can be achieved only as a result of a concrete complex investigation of definite facts, sources and phenomena. Thus in comparing the Russia common law with the Scandinavian and German common law, one should not ignore certain documents and events. On the contrary, a detailed study of some facts and events might prove of great value. For instance a comparative study of a treaty between Novgorod and Gotland, dating to about 1195, and the treaty between the Prince of Smolensk, Mstislav Davidovitch, and Riga and Gotland allows us to trace in both of them concrete relative norms of the Russian and the German common law.

Moreover, in the domain of analysing facts, sources and events, much will depend upon the progress of general knowledge, the progress of methods of investigation in particular. In social science the study of borrowings as yet does not possess exact methods of estimating borrowings, such as are practised in philology or in arts, when it comes to attributing an object of art. Similar to the way in which a specialist in art attributes a picture according to 'insignificant' details (e.g. according to the manner the artist is known to paint the ears, or the folds of clothing), a specialist in history investigating cultural borrowings should pay special attention to the likeness of 'insignificant' matters, the common nature of which cannot be accounted for either by the

stage of development common to the two nations, or by a chance coincidence. Only similar combinations of such 'insignificant' details may serve as a sure proof that we have to do with a borrowing.

The fact that points of similarity were found in the *Russkaya Pravda* and the West-European Germanic 'barbarian' law codes, made Russian historians, two centuries ago, consider the possibility of 'borrowings' from the Germanic common law into the *Russkaya Pravda*. Yet the absence of coinciding 'insignificant' details made them explain the likeness not by acknowledging the presence of a direct borrowing, but by the fact that the nations that created their codes of law, were at the time at the same stage of social development.

It is important not only to discover the *presence* of a borrowing, but also to find out the *part* it plays in the general system, its *relations* to other borrowings, also to those from other nations. Nobody denies the likeness of ancient Russian 'Varangian' swords to those of Norsemen and West-European swords of the same period. But it may be interpreted in various ways: it may be treated as depending on the fact that the swords were a borrowing from the Norsemen, or the Norsemen might be considered only an intermediate part, as those bringing the swords from Germanic regions, or else it might be considered as resulting from a coincidence of German influence in the North and in the East of Europe (the latter supposition being hardly probable). Lastly, it is very important to analyse the whole system according to which Russian warriors were armed, and the part of the sword in it. A sword was the weapon borne only by the privileged warriors of the prince's body-guard. This fact, by the way, signifies to its being a Scandinavian borrowing in its nature. Common troopers were armed with local weapons. As to the privileged troops, the prince's body-guard, they were fully armed in the Norseman fashion. Here connections are discovered not only with the Scandinavian North, but also with the Moslem East: chain-mail was brought to ancient Russia from the East and later exported to the West. The sabre, mentioned in the chronicle as early as in the X century, appeared in ancient Russia from the East. The Russian helmet differed in some respect from that of the Norseman. In general it may be stated that Russian armament

was original in nature. Its peculiarity resulted from specific local traits in the organization of the troops, conditions of defensive and offensive warfare, ways along which weapons came, and the state of local crafts.

An essential aspect in studying borrowings is the estimation of their quantity. It is extremely difficult. Even to find out the quantitative correlation of borrowings from various countries is of interest. In that respect linguistic data is of doubtless value. Linguistic data may help in studying the spheres of cultural life where a foreign influence is most remarkable. Language borrowings are, on the whole, defined and classified. An overwhelming majority of borrowings indicates to Byzantine influence. This influence as it has already been mentioned, manifested itself in the higher spheres of intellectual culture. The Scandinavian influence is inferior not only to the Byzantine, but also to the Turkic influences. It may be seen in the spheres of state and social life (*varyag*, *tiun*, *gridin*, *grid*, *yabednik* etc.), in jurisdiction (*vira*), in navigation (*shneka*, or *sneka*, *shchqla*), in trade (*berkovsk*, *kerbat*). Some of these words are evidence of the fact that the speaker was aware of the phenomenon, while the thing itself might have not existed as a borrowing (e.g. *shneka* – a Scandinavian boat that had, as it seems, never been built in ancient Russia); another group of words witnesses to the fact that a Scandinavian term was transferred to a similar object or phenomenon (*shchqla* – mast), but some of the words prove the transfer of Scandinavian objects, phenomena and forms to ancient Russia (such words as *tiun*, *grid* etc. may serve evidence of it).

An essential aspect of influence studying is the analysis of the degree of its 'consciousness'. Neither those who exercise an influence nor those who are subject to it, may be consciously aware of the fact, while in another case it might be conscious and intended on both sides.

Byzantium never conquered ancient Russia, but the 'awareness' of its influence is beyond doubt. Representatives of the Byzantine state and its clergy were consciously extending the influence of their state and church. And with the same degree of consciousness it was accepted or rejected in Russia.

This 'awareness' of the Byzantine influence in Russia is made

evident by most various direct and indirect manifestations. Clothing may be mentioned among the latter, especially the clothing worn by princes. We know but little about the Russian costume customary during the pre-mongolic period, especially so about the costumes of princes. However, the examination of tombs of princes proves that the costumes of princes were mostly made of Byzantine stuffs and the miniature portraits in the Trirsky Psalter show that they were cut after the Byzantine fashion. N. P. KONDAKOV proved that in the miniatures of the Trirsky Psalter, Yaropolk is depicted in the costume of a Byzantine despot, and his wife is wearing a Byzantine court dress, the so-called *lor*. Consequently, in that case, the Russian prince was aware of himself as one possessing the rank of a member of the Byzantine State hierarchy.

It is remarkable that neither in the chronicle nor in any other historical manuscripts indications may be found to the effect that a Russian prince should consider himself to be a Norseman, a member of the Varangian organization; while a Varangian body-guard at the court of a Russian prince is frequently mentioned in the chronicle. The fact that some Russian princes had Scandinavian names (Ruric, Oleg, Olga, Igor and a few more) is not yet evidence of their considering themselves Norsemen: foreign names may be found in any country.

The attitude towards the country they exercised influence upon, seems to be absolutely different in the case of Scandinavians and that of Byzantium.

Byzantium looked upon ancient Russia as a country of aim. It turned the people to Christianity, it spread the Byzantine ecclesiastical organization all over Russia. The Scandinavians considered Russia as a country of means. First it served them as a gigantic bridge leading south to the regions that tempted them with their riches and ancient culture; somewhat later, in the XI–XII centuries, it was a means of enrichment. The Scandinavians never tried to achieve cultural predominance. No matter in what way the problem of the quality in which they came to Russia, – whether as conquerors or mercenaries – will be settled, their intellectual influence in Russia was peaceful in its essence. Though Byzantium could never attempt at conquering Russia as a state, it was nevertheless aggressive in its influence.

There is no evidence proving that Scandinavians thought Russian culture inferior to their own or unequal to it; that it was something that needed improvement. The Greeks wished to level Russian culture, to make ancient Russia an intellectually dependent country. In fact they only managed to create a rival, and intensified the growth of national selfconsciousness (this is obvious from the *Slovo o Zakone i Blagodati* by the Metropolitan Ilarion).

Russian culture originally developed amid Byzantine South and Scandinavian North, European West and Asiatic East. Byzantine South, with its treasures and cultural traditions, was most attractive for ancient Russia. During several milleniums the South attracted the whole of the Germanic and Slavonic world. In this striving to Byzantium Scandinavians and East Slavs were rather allies than enemies, both tending southward: in their common movement they together were subject to the influence of its Christian culture.