DOES OLD RUSSIAN LIDIÉ 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 Arcivovskij, 1958, 68:

Цто было в Пудоги празда, ту празку Саргиь взале изо Олтэ. Закрою спроста як било о русаліхо в Пудогі. А цто про Сиамозерц хедыле есемо не платіце, а платіце в томо цто промежи ріду ніту. А нине Сиамозерц в городь. Говорь с ными саме. А я борзо буду. А нине есеме к тобь рибоко послало. А во Шути не лidy ни ловоу.

According to Arcivovskij, 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. Arcivovskij, 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; Oeto is the left tributary of the Svir; Sjamozero is a rather large lake to the west of Lake Onega; Šuja 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. Arcivovskij finds the expression zakroju sprosta most unclear and suggests a possible translation "prosto spisju nedoimki". The sentence ε byle o rusaleëxo v Pudogë can be translated as "Ja byl na rusalijax v Pudoge". Rusalii is the name of a heathen Slavic holiday which is accompanied by games and dancing. The phrase xedyle esemo is "ja xodil"; ne platze "ne platjat". Then follow comprehensible words, although Arcivovskij says he has difficulty in translating the clause. The word
rědo denotes "dogовор, usloviе". The clauses A nyne Šemezerci v gorodě and Gоvоrě s něми 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 ęs ti, ospodine, budu seems clear, but Arcixovskij suggests that the preposition ęs "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 ęs borzo budu "A ja skoro budu". Nine means "nyne", riboko "rybok". Eseme stands possibly for esmo.

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 lide "Hecht" (Elbing Vocabulary, 561; Mažiulis, 1966, 70). Cf. also Lith. lýdis, lydeκà, lydėkas, lydeksis, Latv. lidēka, lideks, lidaka "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 place.

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 *xodiť 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 /γ/ 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.

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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.

REFERENCES

