

## IN SEARCH OF THE ORIGINS OF THE LITHUANIAN PEOPLE

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THE LITHUANIANS like all peoples conscious of their selfhood, began to explore the problem of their origins a long time ago. As early as the end of the 14th century or the beginning of the 15th, Lithuanians were theorizing that they were descended from the Romans. The Polish historian J. Dlugosz was the first to formulate such a theory in writing: In several places in his "History of Poland" he remarks that, to judge by similarities of language and religion, the Lithuanians must be descended from Romans—ones who escaped into Lithuania during the civil wars between Marius and Sulla and between Julius Caesar and Pompey. But this is really nothing more than an expression of the spirit of the times; during the period of humanism other nations, deeply impressed by the heroic histories and high culture of the ancients, put forth claims to Greek or Roman origins. Even in the early Middle Ages we find similar tendencies among the nobility. For example, the 12th century Polish chronicler Kadlubek searched for the ancestors of the Poles in classical antiquity; according to him, the first Polish duke, and later king, was Graccus, and he gave his name to the city of Cracow as his daughter Wanda gave hers to Van-dalia. Even Alexander the Great is supposed to have received letters from Poland, and Julius Caesar to have married his sister to the Polish duke Leszko.

The desire of the Lithuanian nobility to prove their honorable ancestry to the Poles—"We are Roman noblemen!"—had much to do with the acceptance of the theory of classical origins in Lithuania. In the chronicle of the 16th century Lithuanian Grand Duchy we find mentioned a certain Roman prince Palemon or Pilemon, who is supposed to have fled Rome in the first century A.D. with his family and a retinue of 500 and to have founded the Lithuanian royal dynasty. This theory of Lithuania's Roman origins, which fortified the Lithuanian nobility in their rivalry with the Polish, was endlessly repeated, and was expanded and strengthened by new rationalizations. Many romantics of the early 19th century, and even the later Ausrininkai—followers of the newspaper "Ausra" (The Dawn), first published in 1883—accepted this theory. A castle-hill at Seredzius. »»ar th@ N»mn- nas River, was named after this prince, and relatively recently a railroad station near Kaunas was named Palemonas.

During the course of centuries relationships were also claimed to exist between the Lithuanians and the Greeks, the Alans, the Heruli, the Slavs, the Tracs, the Phrygians and other peoples. These claims were unusually based on weak etymological speculation upon fortuitous resemblances between words in different languages or on correspondences in customs or religions. None of the theories was based on scientific evidence; they were created and promulgated in the main by amateurs who often try their hands at solving complex problems. These nationalistic theories were not discarded until a few decades ago, when many scholars began investigating the problem with scientific objectivity.

The science of linguistics has unquestionably made a very substantial contribution to the solution of this vexing problem of the original home of the Lithuanians and their relations with neighboring tribes. As the natural organ of man's spiritual, social and cultural communication, language is a primary source in the investigation of national origins and international intercourse. Language reflects a nation's antiquity and its spiritual and material culture. Words of native origin testify to a nation's creative powers; borrowings reveal the cultural influence of other nations, neighboring or far removed, and the ancient international relations. Peaceful relations with other nations include the exchange of ideas as well as the exchange of commodities; not only various articles but also their names reach other nations through the channels of trade. From the

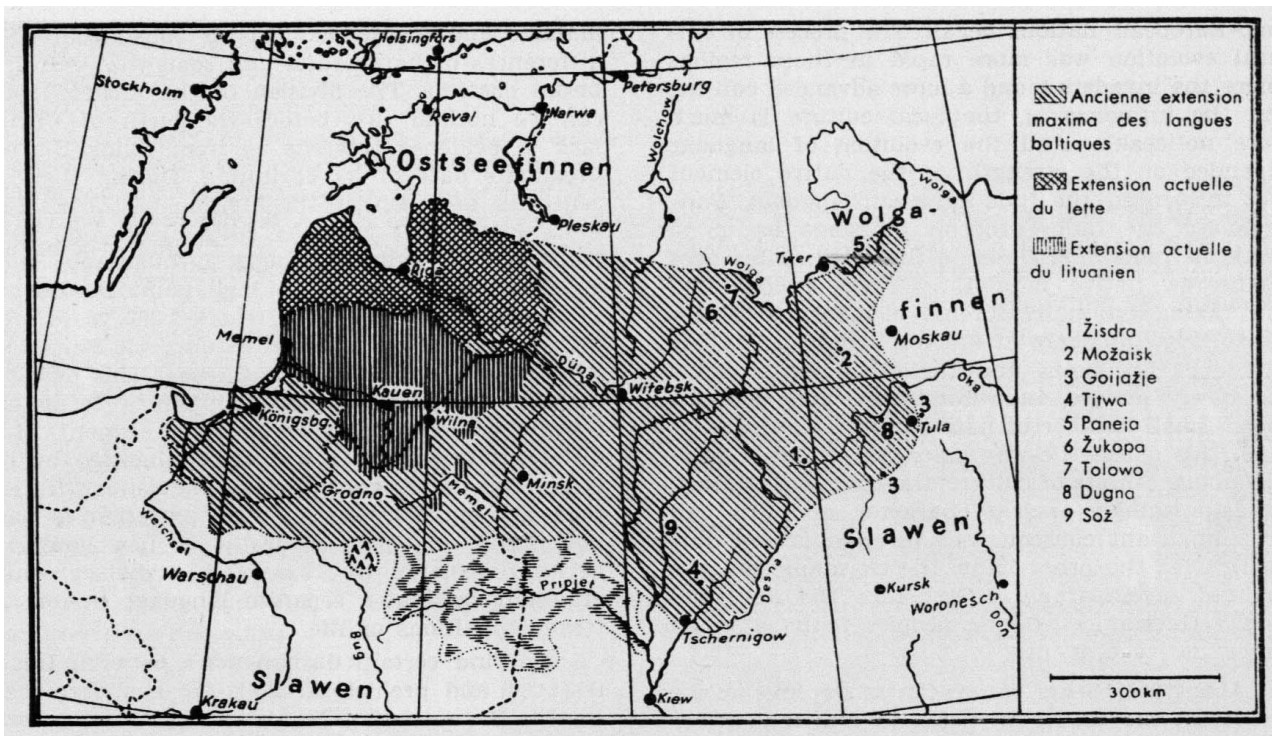
number and nature of these borrowings can be determined the creative powers of a particular nation and its role in cultural interchange. Finally, the study of proper names is of great importance. Place names, especially the names of rivers and lakes, often remain after a people has moved or disappeared. It is possible to determine from these names the homes of ancient peoples.

Comparative linguistics, based on the comparison of grammar and vocabulary, has reconstructed the over-all picture of many ancient languages and their old morphological forms, and has determined the ties and the degree of relationship among different languages along with answering and clarifying many problems of prehistory. Linguistics has shown that the Lithuanians, Slavs, Germans, Italics, Celts, Greeks, Armenians, Persians, Hindus and others made up in the deep past a single people using the same language. Since the name of this prehistoric people has not been preserved scientists call it the Indo-European, after the eastern and western bounds of the present nations that share this origin. Linguistics has found that the Lithuanian, Lettic, Old Prussian, Curonian, Semigallian and Selonian languages are interrelated and form a single linguistic group, which is called the Baltic or Aistian group. ("Baltic" from the Baltic Sea, "Aistian" from "Aestorium gentes," Tacitus' name for the people who lived on the shores of the Baltic). The Baltic languages have developed from a common root, and in ancient times all the Balts spoke the same language and made up one nation.

The distinguished linguist Kazimieras Buga made the greatest contribution to the scholarly investigation of this matter. While investigating place names in the territories of Minsk, Smolensk, Mogilev and Vitebsk, he established that in these regions, to the east of present-day Lithuania, lived the ancient Lithuanians and Latvians. In his opinion the ancient Lithuanians lived north of the Pripyet River, along its left tributaries and along the Berezina and upper Dnieper almost to the middle of the Soze River basin. Buga counted in this area 121 river names of Baltic origin—for instance the Lucesa (Laukesa), Volcesa (Vilkesa), Toluva, Dugna, Soze, etc. The neighbors of the Lithuanians to the north and east were the ancestors of the present-day Estonians and Finns and those to the south were the ancestors of the Slavs. Buga claims that the Balts did not always occupy these ancient territories. The first of the Balts to separate from the common nation were the Old Prussians, and they were the first to reach the shores of the Baltic. It would appear that even before the time of Christ the Old Prussians were living around the mouth of the Vistula. The Lithuanians and Latvians moved from their original territories much later; even in the sixth century they were still living in what is now Belorussia. At the end of the sixth century or the beginning of the seventh, when the Slavs began moving along the Dnieper and across the Pripyet into the territory the Lithuanians were then occupying, the latter were forced to migrate to the west, to present-day Lithuania, where the ancestors of the Estonians, Livonians and Finns had lived. The Slavist Max Vasmer came to the same conclusions when he investigated the eastern boundaries of the Lithuanian tribes, except that his further studies of place names led him to place those boundaries even farther to the east. He demonstrated that the Baltic tribes once lived in the territories of Smolensk and Kaluga, in the western part of the Moscow territories and in the southwestern part of the Tver and Pskov.

For a long time Buga's theories concerning Baltic as well as Lithuanian origins were the most widely credited. However, new archeological discoveries have led to a reinterpretation. A substantial part of his theory is incompatible with the latest results of prehistory studies. But the work of Buga, Vasmer and other linguistic scholars remains important, especially since they established that the boundaries of the Lithuanian and related tribes in prehistoric times are not limited by later ethnographic borders, but that Lithuanians lived far to the east in the lands of the Belorussians and the Russians. The linguists' conclusions are supported by the results of research into prehistory.

The origins of any nation are lodged in prehistory; therefore the science of prehistory, or archeology, is of immense importance. The essential sources of our knowledge of prehistory are the discoveries at ancient homesteads, castle-hills, burial grounds, and so forth. Such discoveries are direct witnesses to the life and culture of prehistoric times. It is now possible not only to investigate the development of material and spiritual culture but also to determine what people lived in a particular place at a particular time. Science has evolved a complex procedure to answer such ethnical questions. We know that any people that has retained primeval cultural traits and has not lost its identity through general cultural influences possesses its own unique material and spiritual culture, distinguishable from that of neighboring peoples. One can detect many differences even in different provinces of a single nation. In Lithuania, for example, the žemaičiai (Lowlanders), the Rytiečiai Aukštaičiai (Eastern Highlanders), the Dzūkai and the Žanavykai differ not only in dialect but also in apparel, architecture, customs and even personality characteristics. These differences between various nations and tribes must have been even more noticeable in prehistoric times, when contacts among nations were limited. And indeed, when we examine prehistoric remains we find provinces and even groups with distinct cultures — differing in their ceramics, ornaments, household appliances, tools, weapons and burial customs — existing in various areas at the same time. Once these areas are clearly demarcated on a map, the areas and boundaries of cultural groups become apparent. Each such cultural group is assigned to the nation that is known to have inhabited that area in early historic times, and research is undertaken on whether or not there have been any changes in the course of cultural evolution. If this cultural evolution is continuous, it is often possible to trace a nation's primary origins. This continuity of cultural evolution is easily traceable in the case of Lithuania, as of other areas inhabited by the Balts. Let us, then, see what the science of prehistory has to say concerning Baltic, and at the same time Lithuanian, origins.



*Limites de l'extension masima des langues baltiques à l'époque préhistorique et à l'époque moderne d'après V. KIPARSKY 1939*

Lithuanian prehistory, like that of all nations, can be divided into three general periods: the Stone Age, the Bronze Age and the Iron Age. These periods receive their names for the substances on which the material culture of the time was based. During the Stone Age most tools and weapons were made of stone or bone; during the Bronze Age the first metal implements appeared and displaced those of stone; finally, in the Iron Age the bronze implements gave way to ones of iron. The first men appeared in Lithuania about 18,000 years ago. when the glacial period had ended and the country was free of ice. These first inhabitants were probably nomads. Few of their traces remain; it is impossible to determine the racial origins of these early inhabitants of Lithuania. It is clear only that they arrived from the south and east, following the retreating masses of ice. Around 3500 B.C. elements of Finnish cultural emerged. From these people evolved the present-day Estonians and Livonians, artifacts of whose ancestors are still found in Latvia. At the time the area was still thinly settled; the inhabitants were hunters, fishermen and gatherers of wild food plants.

The great migrations of the Indo-Europeans and other groups began around 2500 B.C. Various nations or groups of nations migrated from one region to another, attacking foreign territories, capturing the land and sometimes displacing the former inhabitants. The Baltic areas were not immune to these migrations. About 2300 B.C. people of an agricultural culture, farmers and shepherds, reached the southeastern shores of the Baltic. This was the Globular Amphora Culture, so called for their amphoras, or two-handled urns. Many modern students of prehistory link the spread of this new culture with the Indo-European advance. As for their center, there is a strong tendency to search for it in the Ukraine and the neighboring steppe regions to the east. New discoveries indicate that around 3500 B.C. the Indo-European tribes, already exhibiting some language differences, began to expand from these steppes in all directions. Some migrated to the north, reaching central Russia and southwestern Finland, and even Sweden; other tribes traveled northwest until they reached the shores of the Baltic Sea; still others found themselves in central Europe, etc. When the newly arrived inhabitants settled permanently in their new homes, the slow evolution of different Indo-European nations began. The process of cultural evolution was more rapid in those regions where the invaders found a more advanced culture, and the influence of the local culture is much more noticeable. And the evolution of language depended on the strength of the native element that influenced the Indo-European language. Consequently the Indo-European language began to break up, remaining closer to the original in places where few native inhabitants were encountered and taking on many foreign elements in places where large numbers of natives had to be assimilated. In Lithuania and the other Baltic lands the newly arrived Indo-Europeans met up with only a small number of native people; consequently, in this out-of-the-way place, far removed from all famous centers of culture, the language retained an astonishingly ancient character, and this had very important consequences for comparative linguistics. On the other hand, the Germanic tongues changed incomparably more, since the ancestors of the Germanic-speaking peoples found a much larger native element.

About 2000 years before Christ we find in the area from the Helos Peninsula to the Runa River an already-formed cultural group that can be considered to be proto-Baltic, the direct ancestors of the Lithuanians. The most substantial deposits of this new culture are found from the Bay of Danzig to the Nemunas River. Remains have also been found in West and East Prussia, Lithuania, Latvia up to the Duna River, and Belorussia. The Baits, as can be seen from the investigations of their homesteads, were sedentary people who remained in the more fertile regions, tilling the soil and raising domestic animals.

The continuing evolution of Baltic culture can easily be traced to the beginning of historic times. The culture continued its development without interruption through the Bronze Age (1800-400 B.C.). The continuity of the culture can be observed not only in its material aspects but also chronologically and geographically. In the Bronze Age the Baits were completely formed, and lived very much where they live now: To the west they reached the Persanta River in Pomerania, to the north as far as the Duna and the Abava, to the east—as is shown by river names of Baltic origin—they reached Moscow, Tula and the Desna River, and to the south they reached the Pripet Marshes, the Bug and the Vistula.

At first the Baltic culture was more or less monolithic, but eventually, since it was spread over a large area, it began to differentiate, and this undoubtedly is connected with the division of the Baits. Around 1000 B.C. the Baits began to split, culturally and probably linguistically, into the Western and Eastern Baits. The Od Prussians gradually evolved from the Western Baits and the Lithuanians and Latvians from the Eastern Baits. Six centuries before Christ the Western Baits began to divide into tribes: Sembians and Notangians, Galindians and Suduvians; this is substantiated by differences in handicrafts and somewhat different burial customs. The division of the Eastern Baits can be noticed just before the birth of Christ; lack of evidence prevents us from fixing the approximate date of its beginning. During the first centuries after Christ the division of the Eastern Baits into tribes becomes quite clear; one finds three distinct cultural groups: Lithuanians, Semigallians and Curonians. A high point in the cultural life of the Baits was reached 200 years after Christ. Even in what is now Estonia the Baits constituted a strong cultural influence. This development continued without interruption up to historic times. One can find more unifying elements than differentiating ones in all areas inhabited by the Baits. One must assume that linguistic differentiations accompanied new cultural patterns; as each new tribe emerged culturally, a new language began to emerge too, based on a dialect which gradually became a separate language under different conditions of life.

We find certain discrepancies between Buga's research and prehistoric data. As has been mentioned, Buga, basing his case on place names, argued the necessity of looking north of the Pripet for the original Lithuanian homesteads, arguing that the present Lithuania was previously inhabited by the ancestors of the modern Livonians, Estonians and Finns, and that the Lithuanians did not migrate until the sixth or seventh century, in response to Slavic pressure. These theories of Buga's, shared in part by other linguistics scholars, are incompatible with the results of modern prehistory studies. If, as Buga holds, the Lithuanians did not migrate until the sixth or seventh centuries, a new influence would be detectable in the Lithuanian material culture of the time. But no traces of such an influence have been found, the culture evolved without a break; consequently there can be no talk of migrations at this time. Almost all the Baltic tribes had been living on the shores of the Baltic Sea from 2000 B.C., when the proto-Balts settled there, to the beginning of historic times. This is where they originated; only the boundaries of their territories changed over the centuries. For example, in the Bronze Age the Western Baits lived even beyond the Vistula, in Pomerania; later they were forced out of this region by the Germans. The territory they inhabited in the south was also reduced when the decisive battles between the Jatvingians and the Poles took place. In the north, the Baits were able to expand further and win new territories from the Livonians and the Estonians; here the boundaries were pushed from the Duma to present-day Estonia. The Baits suffered their worst losses in the east. The ancestors of the Lithuanians and Latvians, as studies of place names and archeological discoveries show, lived much farther to the east than their present ethnographical boundaries. Because of Slavic expansion, the area inhabited by the Baits in the east began to diminish in the sixth century A.D. It is possible that some Baits migrated westward, but prehistoric evidence indicates that most of them became absorbed into the Slavic culture. This Slavicizing of the Lithuanian and Latvian peoples took a long time; as late as the 11th and 12th centuries a remnant of the Lithuanian tribes—the Galindians—were living west of Moscow along the upper Protva River, near the present cities of Gzack and Mozhaik. And the present southernmost Lithuanian islands, in Slonim and Lyda Districts, are probably remnants of territories that used to be inhabited entirely by the Lithuanians.

We see from this brief survey that the problem of Lithuanian origins has received substantial clarification recently, that the evolution of a Baltic culture can be traced from the first Indo-European settlements up to historic times. Many details still need clarification; the question of boundaries, especially, is in need of new evidence and study. Many problems are very difficult to solve because the eastern part of the Baltic territory remains the least investigated, and the material, lodged in Belorussian museums and Russian archeological collections, is inaccessible. It can only be hoped that these difficulties may be overcome in the future and the solution of the problem of Lithuania's origins may be formulated with precision.

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