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The Information on the Aistians in Olafs saga Tryggvasonar
and
its Importance for the History of the East Baltic Region

As is well known, Olafs saga Tryggvasonar is a biography in Old Icelandic of king Olaf Trygvason who reigned Norway in 995-1000. Several versions originated, but only some manuscripts were handed down to us from the past. About 1190 monk Oddr Snorrason from the Benedictine Abbey Þingeyrar in the north of Iceland wrote vita of king Olaf Trygvason in Latin. This Latin version was lost. However, a translation into Icelandic made about 1200 was preserved in a Norwegian manuscript (the end of the 13 cent.) and in Icelandic one (ca. 1300). When compiling the biography Oddr Snorrason made use both of oral information and of the writings by Samundr Sigfússon as well as Ari Þorgilsson.

Snorri Sturluson (1179-1240) created Olafs saga Tryggvasonar as a part of his "Heimskringla". He followed mainly Oddr Snorrason's vita, but used also the Ágrip, the Jómsvíkinga saga as well as the lost Hlaðajarla saga. It is worth noticing that Snorri Sturluson transformed all these sources skillfully in accordance with his critical approach to historical facts. At the end of the 13 cent. Olafs saga Tryggvasonar hin mesta originated. It is preserved in two versions and in numerous manuscripts, among other in the Flateyjarbók. The compiler - apparently abbot Bergr Sökkason from the monastery Þverá in the north of Iceland - used Snorri's Olafs saga Tryggvasonar as a basis for his compilation, but Snorri's Olafs saga helga served him for a pattern. Besides, it was expanded with material taken over from the Jómsvíkinga saga, the Orkneyinga saga, the Landnámabók, the Laxdæla saga as well as the Hallfreðar saga.

All versions go finally back to Oddr Snorrason's vita of king Olaf Tryggvason. The writer himself hardly possessed extensive sources and his historical reliability can hardly be viewed high. Nevertheless, we know from historical sources of the 12 c. that slavery existed among the tribes in the East Baltic region, the Baltic lands for some time were dependent upon Russian states and paid tribute to them. This circumstance lets us believe that the passages in the Olaf's saga Tryggvasonar dealing with the Aistians and their country are ^{true} to facts and therefore present bits of valuable information on the East Baltic region in the 10 c., in the period of its history that lies in complete darkness.

After Astrid and her son Olaf ^{had} spent two years at king Hakon's the Old in Sweden, king Olaf's saga Tryggvasonar relates, she decided to visit her brother Sigurd who served with king Valdmarr in the east, in Garðaríki. King Hakon gave her a good retinue and outfitted her very well. They departed with merchants. On their voyage through the Baltic Sea vikings attacked them. They were Aistians - þat varu Eistr. They captured the people and their property, killed some men and divided others among themselves for bondservants. Here Olaf was separated from his mother. A person of the name of Klerkon took for himself Olaf, his foster-father Thorolf and his son Thorgil. Supposing that Thorolf was too old for bondservice and drudgery, Klerkon killed him and brought the boys to Aistland, where he sold them to a man called Klerkr for a good he-goat. Some time later Klerkr sold Olaf to another man for a rain-cloak or garment. His name was Reas, he had the wife Rekon (Recon), their son was Rekonr. In this master's house Olaf stayed for a long time, where he was treated well, since yeoman Reas loved him no less than his own son. Six years spent Olaf in exile in Aistland.

In about the same time the king Valdemar of Holmgard *Novgorod* sent Sigurd Eirikson, the brother of Olaf's mother, to Aistland to collect tribute. He went there in great state, accompanied by a numerous retinue. And it so happened that that day when Sigurd with his retinue had ridden into the Reas household Olaf played with boys in the courtyard. Yeoman Reas loved the boy much, did not let him do thrall's work, instead taught him men's exercises and good manners, dressed and treated him like his own son. On their arriving Olaf turned round to meet the troops and greeted their leader courteously. In view of the boy who differed widely in speech as well as in appearance from locals Sigurd asked what was his name and where he had come from. Olaf told him all that had happened, and Sigurd understood that Olaf was his sister's son. Sigurd asked Olaf whether he wanted to be free from bondage under Eres and to leave this place. Olaf answered: "I am treated and looked after well here, since Reas, my foster-father, allows me to do and gives me everything I just ask him. Still, I would rather leave, if only my foster-brother Thorgil is ransomed and goes with me". They went to yeoman Reas and told him about their want. Reas said: "You can buy the elder at that price we shall agree about. But the younger is much more fine and clever. As a matter of fact, I love so much this boy that I shall never let sell him into bondage. Since you are skilful and discern who is a good boy, I will not refuse to let you redeem him, though at a great price. Nevertheless, you must give me the word of honour that you will not separate from him for money and will not treat him worse than he was treated and looked after here". After conversation had ended, Sigurd bought Thorgil for one mark of gold, while he paid nine marks of gold for Olaf. He took over the boys to Holmgard where he treated Olaf well and told none about his kin. Olaf was nine years old then.

In its earliest extant manuscripts Oddr Snorrason's saga gives different names of the Aistians, somehow (Jónsson F. Saga Óláfs Trygvasonar of Oddr Snorrason, Kóbenhavn, 1932, p. 22-23). The third man who bought Olaf and in whose household Olaf stayed for six years is named here Eres. His wife was Rekon and his son Reas. In spite of slight difference in recording, five personal names are attested all in all - four of men and one of a woman. As Olaf supposedly stayed in Aistland in 971-977, these names refer to the East Baltic inhabitants of the second half of the 10 c. Hence they are earliest recorded personal names and therefore present a bit of valuable information with respect to the problem of ethnical identity of the Aistians. In Old Icelandic and Scandinavian sagas, as is well known, the names Eistr, Eistir and Eistland apply to the present-day Estonians and their country, i. e. the Finno-Ugric people. Seaman Wulfstan's relation about his voyage to Vistula mouth and the town Truse attached to the Orosius translation into Anglo-Saxon by king Alfred the Great, speaks clearly of Estir/Aestii as ancient Prussians, the Baltic tribes of Indo-European origin. So a question who were the Aistians arises - whether they were Finno-Ugric people or Indo-European tribes. These five personal names that go back as early as the 10 c. may shed some light to this problem, if their origin is satisfactorily accounted for.

In considering a possibility whether these names - if they really are personal - are Finno-Ugric it should be kept in mind that consonant clusters are not characteristic of the Finno-Ugric languages in initial position. Reduction and simplification even occurred in Baltic and Germanic borrowings into the Baltic Finnish languages, cf. e. g. Fin. rastas, rästäs "throstle" and Lith. strāzdas, Lat. strazds "id.". The cluster Kl- is present both in Klerkon and Klerkr. It is not perhaps accidental that we find nothing that

could resemble above-mentioned personal names of the Aistians, in the study "Die ostseefinnischen Personennamen im Rahmen eines urfinnischen Namenssystem" by D.-E. Stoebeke (Hamburg, 1964). Therefore we can hardly expect them to be Finno-Ugrian in use as well as in origin.

Finnish scholar J. Mikkola was the first who saw Balt. *rikōne "mistress, sovereign" in Rekoni and compared it with Pr. rikijs "master, lord", rickawie "(he, she) rules, governs", Lith. rykauti (3 p. praes. -auja) "put in order, regulate, manage (a household); rule, reign" and Latv. rikuot "organize, arrange; manage, run, handle" (Baltische Lande, hrg. von Vrackmann und Carl Engel, Leipzig, 1939, p. 53), J. Mikkola's suggestion may be corroborated by the fact that in various judicial acts of the Grand Principality of Lithuania in the 15-16 c. rykūnia and rykūnija are widely used to denote a landowner's household servant woman responsible for cattle-breeding and dairy produce. It is most likely that these nouns with their -ia, -ija are the result of later development and that an original form was *rikūni apparently reflected in Rekoni. Lith. *rikūni is derived from the verb rykauti "put in order, regulate, manage (a household)..." with the suffix -ūni found also in Slavonic (e. g. OChSl. bogyni "goddess").

The formal relationship between Klerkr and Klerkon looks like being that of a primary word and its derivative. There was a wide spread tendency in the Lithuanian language to form personal names with the patronymic suffix -ūnas, cf. Baltrūnas : Baltrus, Gailiūnas : Gailikas, Pilkūnas : Pilka. Later on these personal names became surnames. It is possible that this sort of derivation manifests itself also in Klerkr and Klerkon going back to Lith. *Klerkas or *Klerkus : *Klerkūnas. Underlying appellatives may be Lith. klérka "flover; weeper, squaller, bawler...", klérkus "one that clucks, quacks..."; cf. also Latv. klerga "one who is clumsy at work", although with the root final -g-.

Contrary to Rekon/Rekoni, Klerkr and Klerkon, the personal names Eres and Reas have counterparts among Lithuanian and other Baltic proper names. Eres seems to have undergone regular phonetic development, namely ^{*Erias} > ^{*Eries} (aye after i) > Eres (loss of i before the front vowel e), which is characteristic of the Lithuanian dialects. Eres < ^{*Eria-} may be compared first of all with such surnames - originally personal names - as Ar̄ys, Ar̄ius and Ar-aitis in present-day Lithuanian. Second, we find ^{*Aria-}, respectively ^{*Eria-} in the compound toponym Ariogala (the second component is -gala in the sense "region, territory") which is testified Erogeln 1390, Eragolen 1407, Eragel 1418 in German documents. The cognate Ar̄ya- "hospitable lord, master of the house" in Old Indian explains the primitive sense of Lith. Aria-/Eria-.

It is likely that Reas has also been transformed phonetically. The consonants j and y are sporadically dropped in intervocalic position in the Lithuanian and other Baltic languages. As ^{*Reja-}/Reja- are almost not attested in the Baltic proper name corpus, the option of ^{*Reva-}/Reva- remains to be considered. If Reas comes from ^{*Reva-} it may be compared with the Lithuanian surnames, originally personal names Reva, Rēvas as well as their derivatives Rev-aitis, Rev-eta, Rēv-atas, Rēv-uta, Rev-ūtas. If Reas goes back to ^{*Rēva-} with lengthened root vocalism it may belong to the anthroponym Rēva and the toponym Rēviškė in Lithuanian, to toponyms Rēveli and Rēvelītes in Latvian. The Prussian toponym Rewen can reflect both ^{*Rev-} and ^{*Rēv-}. Balt. ^{*Rev-}/Rev- may be attributed to the Indo-European root ^{*reu-} "to open; space" found e. g. in Oldcel. rūmr "roomy, spacious", rūm "room, place" < ^{*rū-mo-} < ^{*ru-mo-}, Latin rūs, rūris "open land, field; country" < ^{*reuos-} as well as in Avestan ravah- "wide open space, expanse" < ^{*reues-}/reuos-. A corresponding verb is presented in Tocha-

rian ru- "to open". Along with ravah-, Avestan possesses the -en- stem noun ravan- "wide open space". The Lithuanian river name Revuonà may etymologically be compared with it (IE protoform *reuon-/ *reuōn-). This exposition shows that the primitive meaning of the Lithuanian surnames Revà, Rėvas and Rėvà may be understood as "a man in an open space, i. e. a free, independent man".

The presented material and its historical-comparative interpretation lead us to the conclusion that the personal names of the Aistians Klerkon, Klerkr, Eres, Reas and Rekon/Rekoni ~~are apparently~~ attested in Olaf's saga Tryggvasonar are apparently of the Indo-European origin and were most likely used by the ancient Baltic tribes. Another conclusion quite unexpected is that they look like denominations of certain occupations and social status rather than personal names in the strict sense of the word.

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