

Strumiński, Bohdan. *Linguistic Interrelations in Early Rus'. Northmen, Finns, and East Slavs (Ninth to Eleventh Centuries)*. Collana di filologia e letteratura slave, 2. La Fenice Edizioni, Rome in association with the Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, Edmonton and Toronto, 1996. 353 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$49.95 (paperback).

THE linguistic consequences of the East Slavs' encounters with Greek (whether direct or indirect) are contentious but well documented. The evidence can be interpreted and evaluated in many ways, but the texts are there to see, in the totality of the Church Slavonic legacy. Encounters with Scandinavian and Finnic peoples, by contrast, are obsessively interesting for historians but much more elusive for linguists. There were very few direct borrowings in either direction; or rather, very few borrowings made their way into the language of the medieval written records or survived into modern times. Such evidence as there is consists mainly of personal names, toponyms and ethnonyms. The quality of the material is further compromised by the fact that all of it reaches us in much later manuscripts, and significant chunks of it (the names in the tenth-century Rus'-Byzantine treaties) risk further corruption in their circuitous route back into Slavonic via Greek.

Bohdan Strumiński is undeterred. In this ambitious book he probes and pushes and pummels the exiguous material until he has extracted from it astonishingly precise and detailed answers to a range of fundamental questions. One chapter examines what the East Slav and other sources can reveal about 'the system of Old Nordic' (pp. 24-61), and Strumiński is able to produce copious observations on stress, vocalism, consonantism, inflection and word formation. Another chapter deals with the opposite, 'the system of Old East Slavic as reflected in Old Nordic' (pp. 62-76). The longest section consists of a series of loosely connected studies on issues of onomastics (pp. 77-228), including Strumiński's arguments on, for example, the etymology of *Rus'*, the Rus' gods, names for Kiev, the names of the Dnepr rapids, the ethnic composition of the Rus' élite as reflected in personal names (here Strumiński covers some of the same ground as the recent book by Jukka Korpela), and a reconstruction (from Slavonic via the hypothetical Greek) of the names in the Rus'-Byzantine treaties. There are lists of lexical borrowings in both directions (pp. 229-54), and remarks on relations between Old East Slavonic and Finnic (pp. 255-87), including a reconstruction of the 'rudiments of Meria historical phonetics' based on twenty-one words preserved in Russian. The book ends with word-lists in ninety-two languages (pp. 302-53).

One cannot but be impressed by the sheer confidence and bravura with which Strumiński attacks each question: by the long sequences of asterisked forms in his hypothetical etymological chains, by the assuredness with which he deduces the systemic from the particular. These are substantial and important essays. Whether they are wholly persuasive is, of course, another matter. The source-base is oddly conservative: Strumiński pays no attention whatever to the Novgorod birch-bark documents, or to Zalizniak's major studies of the Novgorodian dialect. The linguistic chronologies are uncomfortably categorical. Thus, for example, it is claimed that the Rus'-Byzantine treaties must have been translated into Slavonic in the early part of Iaroslav's

reign in Kiev, because: (i) the period of direct contact with Varangians ended with the death of Iaroslav, and the translator of the treaties clearly did still have direct knowledge of Scandinavian names; (ii) the translation included nasal vowels, which 'were still used in Rus' Church Slavonic' at the start of Iaroslav's reign (where are the manuscripts?) but whose 'removal [...] from the literary Rus' Church Slavonic' had 'occurred' by 1056–57 (the Ostromir Gospel) (pp. 201–02). Such assertions of chronological fact need a great deal more justification.

The boldest and the most flawed chapter is the first (pp. 11–23). Why, asks Strumiński, are the East Slavs so homogeneous linguistically over such a large area? In search of an answer he considers the chronology of the main East Slav linguistic features: metathesis of liquids, pleophony, the vocalization of jers, and so on, and finds that all of them appear from the ninth to the mid-eleventh century; which was precisely the period over which the Northmen 'conquered and united all the East Slavic tribes', thereby 'enabling East Slavs to coalesce into one linguistic group' (pp. 22–23). The historical statement is too simplistic to bear any kind of critical scrutiny, while the assumed mechanisms of the relations between power and language-change (change in the sounds of language itself, not just in the conventions of sacred or administrative texts) strain plausibility to — or beyond — the limits. Still, a more cautious scholar would probably not have produced so substantial a book. There is plenty here to taste and chew. How much will be digested remains to be seen.

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Offord, Derek. *Using Russian: A Guide to Contemporary Usage*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York and Melbourne, 1996. xxx + 407 pp. Index. £14.95 (paperback).

THIS is a book we have all been waiting for, even if we did not realize it, and is an excellent source for reference and browsing. Because of the perspectives it provides, it should also improve the use that students make of other reference aids and of Russian itself. Any minor criticisms offered in this review are in the overall context of admiration for the number of strands Offord has brought together and the scale of the achievement this book represents. It covers so much ground, and so pithily, that one begins to expect miracles and to reproach the author unjustly for not handling quite everything. Spacious but not wasteful, the layout in any case permits copious annotations of one's own. Offord's long experience as a teacher informs the whole presentation; typical student questions are answered and common misconceptions deftly forestalled.

The crucial chapter one treats varieties of language and register. A valuable touch is that Offord gives extended examples and provides English translations, so that students can see that the style adopted in translating, other things being equal, depends on the original.