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CONTRIBUTION OF NIKITA TOLSTOY TO THE STUDY OF OLD SLAVIC CULTURE¹

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Abstract. *Serbian national culture entered through the wide door of Slavistic research thanks to Nikita Tolstoy and his successors (called "Tolstoyans" occasionally). Thus, several decades of efforts, undertaken by numerous vocabulary registrants, teachers, priests and other literate people who saved a part of our past from oblivion by writing down various linguistic items, have adequately confirmed their validity.*

The famous Slavist Nikita Ilyich Tolstoy left to us the literary work so abundant that it is impossible to give its adequate review in short. The aim of this review is, therefore, to point out only some of his scientific preoccupations.

The greatest number of Tolstoy's works may be classified into three categories: a) Slavic lexicology and semasiology, b) history of Slavic standard languages, and c) Slavic mythology. The first and third groups are mutually similar - they are united by the ethno-linguistic approach and by the search for ancient ideas of Slavs that had reflected in their languages, respectively. The main works of these two groups have been collected and republished in two separate books. The book containing the works on mythology was prepared and edited in Tolstoy's lifetime, under the title *Language and Folk Culture* (*Язык и народная культура*, Moscow, 1995). One selection from these works had also been prepared by the author of this text, in collaboration with the author himself, and the works were translated and published in Serbian in the book *The Language of Slavic Culture* (*Jezik slovenske kulture*, "Prosveta", Niš, 1995). Tolstoy did not live to see his book of selected works in lexicology and semasiology published. Mostly his wife Svetlana Tolstoy, with a zealous help of their daughter Marfa Tolstoy edited the book posthumously. This voluminous edition, numbering more than 500 pages, is titled *Slavic Lexicology and Semasiology* (*Славянская лексикология и семасиология*,

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¹ We are publishing this supplement instead of a necrology to the distinguished scientist who had long studied the Serbian language, and our dear friend Nikita Ilyich Tolstoy - Editor's note

Moscow, 1997).

Two Slavic cultural entities seemingly have "privileged" positions in Tolstoy's works - the Polesyan (at the junction of Ukraine, Byelorussia and Russia) and the Serbian culture. There are specific reasons for this. It was in Polesye during the sixties that Tolstoy started with his long-lasting research in the field, aimed at first towards the vocabulary, but becoming in time more and more complex, encompassing the entire spiritual culture. The result of the first period of research in Polesye was his book *Slavic Geographical Terminology* (*Славянская географическая терминология*, Moscow, 1969), in which the collected material was compared and interpreted in the context of corresponding terms in other Slavic languages. The results of his subsequent research in this area, which included his associates and students as well, were published in the collections thematically dedicated to the language and culture of Polesye (*Полесский этнолингвистический сборник. Материалы и исследования*, Moscow, 1983; *Славянский и балканский фольклор. Духовная культура Полесья на общеславянском фоне*, Moscow, 1986). Tolstoy's interest for the Serbian culture comes from the fact that he was born in Serbia (in Vršac, 1923), that he had spent his youth period and got first solid education there, as he went to Moscow in 1944. The Serbian language was like a mother tongue to him, and he even retained certain elements of Serbian orthography when writing in Russian. Almost all of his major works in the field of mythology contain detailed quotations of Serbian folk material. It is also the case with his capital work *Slavic Antiquities* (*Славянские древности. Этнолингвистический словарь*, Moscow, 1995), which represents an encyclopedia of Slavic folk culture. The principles of this work compilation were developed, and an experimental booklet and the first volume of 578 pages were published under his guidance, under the above-mentioned title. It is the first encyclopedia of the kind, which encompasses the traditional culture of all the Slavic peoples. It summarizes the results of many decades of research in the field of Slavic folklore, mythology, ethnography, folk arts. This work, consisting of several volumes, was conceived not only to gather in one place and interpret the remnants of the Slavic past, but to offer a possibility of reconstructing the image of the ancient Slavs' world, as well. It is upon Tolstoy's associates and students to continue with this work and to bring it to the end.

Two main streams of Slavic mythology studies were developed in Russia during the seventies and eighties. One of them was marked by the work of the philologists-Indo-Europeans Vladimir Toporov and Vjačeslav Ivanov, with their collaborators and students, while the other was related to the archeologist Boris Ribakov. Both approaches represent a step forward in the study of quite vague Slavic past, yet with essentially different results. The philologists offered a theoretically well-grounded approach - through a comparative analysis of the meanings of key terms, phraseology and firm parts of texts confirmed in Slavic and other Indo-European languages, to trace the initial, or some archaic state. In this, they are leaning on linguistic facts from old monuments of Indo-European culture (written in Hittite, Sanskrit, Greek and other languages), clearing them up by the principle of etymological analysis. Ribakov usually starts from certain archeological remainders that he considers parts of the old Slavic culture, and then compares them with regard to their resemblance to some other cultural facts coming from much later periods. For this reason, his reconstructions are subjective and therefore unreliable. Nikita Tolstoy offered the third option - a retrospective investigation of Slavic mythology. This approach is based on a detailed analysis of folkloric and ethnographic

material, taking into account its geographical diffusion and variations. The comparison of confirmed examples renders the invariant forms in which syntagmatic and paradigmatic connections may be observed. In this manner, a relatively new phenomenon is always studied (19th-20th century), but a comprehension of historical sequence of facts is also enabled by it, as the system insisted upon contains the rules of its development, that is its changes. That way, the semiotic methodology of synchronic research is specifically connected with the methodology of diachronic research. The linguistic material as the basis for the reconstruction of old Slavic ideas about the world has been recorded rather late, but nevertheless, as opposed to the archeological material, it retains a systemic character that enables a reliable in-depth reconstruction. The necessity of a comparative approach originates from the very nature of the linguistic fact meaning development, being that older status has been better preserved in some parts of Slavic regions, while other parts have adopted certain innovations. Hence, it is necessary to make charts of linguistic and cultural phenomena, and to determine cultural zones. These zones might be regarded as some kind of Slavic spiritual culture "dialects", and they could facilitate the comprehension of more general phenomena. Tolstoy suggests that such areal research be conducted by observing and comparing various isolines - *isoglosses* (presenting the linguistic material), *iso-pragmatic lines* (relating to the material culture), and *isodoxology lines* (relating to spiritual culture).

We should also mention Tolstoy's contribution in restoring the old Russian journal *Живая старина*, which included the culture of Serbian people into its columns and opened for Serbian authors. The latest issue of this journal, fourteenth in line since it was restored in 1995, is dedicated to the memory of its deceased editor-in-chief - Nikita Ilyich Tolstoy.

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DOPRINOS NIKITE TOLSTOJA PROUČAVANJU STARE SLOVENSKE KULTURE

Ljubinko Radenković

Zahvaljujući Nikiti Tolstoju i nastavljajući njegovog rada (koje neki nazivaju "tolstojevci") na široka vrata slavističkih istraživanja ušla je srpska narodna kultura. Višedecenijski napor mnogih zapisivača, učitelja, sveštenika i drugih pismenih ljudi, koji su svojim zapisima otrgli od zaborava deo naše prošlosti time je dobio odgovarajuće vrednovanje.