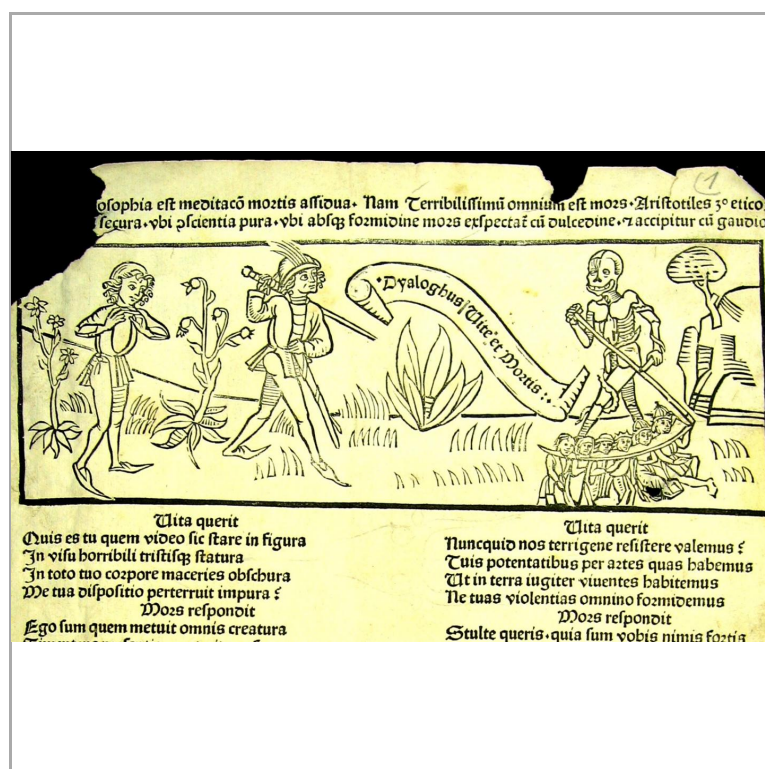


# Medieval Russia began speaking German

*Researcher from the Lomonosov Moscow State University tells about the linguistic ties between the Medieval Europe and Novgorod the Great*

LOMONOSOV MOSCOW STATE UNIVERSITY



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IMAGE: THE PRINTED VERSION OF GHOTAN'S IS  
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The monograph "Novgorod or the Forgotten Russia: the Trade Republic (XIIth-XVth centuries)" was presented at the Paris Book Fair at the end of March. This collective international monograph covers all the aspects of history, culture and international relations between the West and Novgorod the Great.

In addition to that, recognized experts were invited for coverage of each aspect. Catherine Squires, who is the professor at the Department of Germanic and Celtic Philology at the Faculty of Philology of the Lomonosov Moscow State University, was among them. In particular, she has written the chapters on trading, diplomatic and cultural ties between the West and Novgorod the Great.

The major role in the history of relations between Western Europe and Novgorod used to belong to the cities of Northern Germany, which formed the Hanseatic League and controlled all the trade in the Baltic Sea and the North Sea. The east-west trade axis of the Hanseatic League connected Novgorod with many trade centers such as London and existed until the XVII century.

"The Hanseatic League closed off the eastern Baltic region from the rivals including the Dutch, the English and the others. Moreover, it didn't allow them to learn the Russian language ", -- Catherine Squires explains.

According to Catherine Squires, it is clearly reflected in the ban adopted during the convention of cities of the Hanseatic League in 1434: "Nor may anyone encourage young Dutch, Zealanders, Flemish or English to master the knowledge of the [Russian] language".

The purpose of these efforts of the Hanseatic League was to keep the ties between Northern Russia and Western Europe under control. Such a monopoly on the linguistic mediation lasted from the beginning of the relations with Novgorod for about two centuries and a half. Among the evidence of this period there is an array of sources written in the regional Low German language.

At the same time most of the ancient archive documents in Russian language have not survived to the present day. That is why the western sources, especially ones written in the Low German language, are a significant addition to the source base, which formed during more than three hundred years of existence of the Low German language in Novgorod the Great.

Medieval Low German was an autochthonous language of Northern Germany, genetically close to Dutch and English. Nowadays it exists in the form of dialects. In contrast, the modern German language was formed on the basis of southern Upper German dialects, which are genetically different from the Low German language.

"In the age of the first contacts with Novgorod, the Low German language was used mainly in oral communication. Since the XIII century it began penetrating in written communication, displacing Latin", - Catherine Squires tells, -- "In the XIV century the Low German language of the Hanseatic League functioned as an international language of commerce and diplomacy throughout Northern Europe from Novgorod and Pskov to England and Scotland, including Scandinavia and the Baltics".

Catherine Squires was studying bark manuscripts and other historical documents in Low German related to the ties between the Hanseatic League and Novgorod the Great in XIII-XVI centuries since the late 1990s. Mostly, they are stored in archives in Moscow, St. Petersburg and Lubeck. She has conducted the linguistic research of the manuscript sources in Low German, which are related to the ties between Western Europe and Novgorod the Great, for the first time ever.

In addition, Catherine Squires returned many important handwritten documents, that were considered lost forever, for the scientific and cultural use. "The Skra of Novgorod" which is a charter of the Hanseatic trade yard in Novgorod and Boris Godunov's trade privilege to Lubeck are among them. These sources let take a fresh look at the life and culture of Novgorod and the Hanseatic merchants who lived in it.

"Language examination of bark manuscripts is needed to gather information on the history of German-Novgorod bonds, which are the most important episode in the history of Germany and Russia and Northern Europe", -- Catherine Squires summarizes.

Novgorod ou la Russie oubliée: Une république commerçante (XIe-XVe siècles). Philippe Frison, Olga Sevastyanova (dir.). Le Ver à Soie, Paris, 2015. ISBN: 979-10-92364-15-6

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