
**African Studies in Russia:
The Present Day in Light of the Past**
Review of Natalia B. Kochakova (ed.),
Ethnologica Africana.
In Memory of Dmitri Alexeyevich Olderogge

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This book is dedicated to the hundredth anniversary of Dmitri Olderogge (1903–1987), the ‘Founding Father’ of Soviet anthropological and linguistic African studies in the 1940s and their ‘Big Man’ till his death in the late 1980s. So, in some sense, practically the whole Soviet period of African Studies in Russia was overshadowed and dominated by the impressive figure of Dmitri Olderogge. Hence the book contributed and compiled by Olderogge's students, friends and colleagues is a ‘virtual monument’ not only to him but also to the time when almost all of them experienced ‘coming of age’ in the Soviet academy; the time which none of them was able to choose or change.

The first two parts of the book (pp. 15–194) may definitely be important not only to students of Africa or history of Russian anthropology but also be of great interest to all those doing what is now called ‘microhistory’ – history of a country or society through a personal biography. Reminiscences of Olderogge's students about him and his own reminiscences and letters to them and other colleagues do shed light on the intellectual atmosphere in the Soviet Union in general and the academic community in particular. It may be especially interesting to read these ‘monuments of the epoch’ for those for whom the USSR was not ‘his/her country’; I mean not the foreign reader only but the young Russian reader as well. There is no doubt about strong desirability of such documents' publication

nowadays as they give a chance to look at the passed epoch 'from within', with the eyes of its children and thus avoid its both demonizing and idealizing.

However, the complicated historical context cannot push into the background the figure of Dmitri Olderogge as one of the most outstanding and contradictory ones in the history of Soviet anthropology. Being a Holstein nobleman by origin, he happily survived all the Bolsheviks' purges and even became the Corresponding Member of the Academy of Sciences of the USSR (a very high position in the Soviet academic establishment and the society in general). Living and working in a 'Marxist country' Olderogge was still far from theoretical orthodoxy and in many respects was closer to Radcliffe-Brown or Evans-Pritchard than to Morgan and Engels (for example in his approach to the institutions of kinship). Indeed, it is a pity that the history of Russian (including Soviet) anthropology is still too little known to the world anthropologic community (to what minimal number of entries on Russian anthropologists in anthropological encyclopaedias testifies symptomatically).

The last (third) part of the book is titled just 'Africa' (pp. 195–366). It is a collection of eleven papers on very different aspects of African anthropology. What nevertheless gave the editor good reason to include them all into the book is that each of the aspects was among those studied by Olderogge. In fact, the first paper is by Olderogge himself; it is a previously unpublished piece of his unfinished manuscript in which the ideas of Leo Frobenius, one of the greatest Black Continent's explorers whom Olderogge knew in person, are discussed. The other ten contributions deal with such a diverse range of Africanistic problems as the pre-colonial state, common law, ethnic processes, intra-generation relations, traditional art and its representation in museums, religion, languages.

In particular, H. J. M. Claessen discusses problems of control and communication in early states with the help of the examples of the African polities of Dahomey and Buganda (as well as of some early states of South-East Asia, medieval Europe and pre-Columbian America). He demonstrates that a stable early state government is based on a fair degree of communication, organization and legitimacy. I. G. Kopytoff traces how political changes

from pre- to post-colonial times have crucially determined the process of the Democratic Republic of Congo's Suku ethnicity's formation and shaping.

The article by I. Ye. Sinitsina is devoted to legal consequences of death. It is shown how differences in the burial rituals are determined by the age, social and proprietary status and sex of the deceased and is argued that the most significant distinction is made between married and single persons as Africans consider the creation of a family as the most important social act. The specific features of traditional African cultures in terms of generation and gender divisions and interactions are also studied by I. L. Andreyev. The African spirituality as it is reflected in the religious system is under consideration of N. B. Kochakova in her paper on the famous Ifá divination of the Yoruba from whom it was borrowed by the neighbouring peoples. The author reveals the way the most fundamental values of traditional African (specifically, Yoruba) culture are expressed through the divination 'philosophy' and practice.

The block of contributions on African art includes the articles by V. B. Mirimanov on the approach to its periodisation, by S. Ya. Berzina and V. R. Arseniev on the principles of collecting and representing Ethiopian and the Niger Valley Savanna art respectively in museums.

African linguistics is represented by two papers. S. Brauner analyses processes of grammaticalization within locative classes of the Bantu (particularly Shona and Swahili) languages and argues that the locative classes were formed in these languages later than other noun classes. In his turn, A. A. Zhukov contributes to the once initiated by Olderogge discussion of the system of numerals in the Congo language as it is represented in Brusciotto's mid-17th century *Regulae quaedam pro difficillimi Congensium idiomatis faciliori...*, and insists that this system is unusual for the Bantu languages.

To conclude, the reviewed book does serve both as an intellectual homage to Dmitri Olderogge and as a collection of papers which may be important to, and helpful for many students of African cultures.

REFERENCES

- Kochakova, N. B. (ed.)
2002. *Ethnologica Africana. In Memory of Dmitri Alexeyevich Olderogge*. Texts in Russian with English summaries. Moscow: Muravei.