

We find the following very interesting article regarding Vladimir Toporov on the web site of the University of Washington, Seattle, USA (source: http://depts.washington.edu/aabs/news/2006/05/remembering_vladimir_toporov.html)

A slightly revised English translation of Algirdas Sabaliauskas' article Keletas smulkmenu Vladimiro Toporovo portretui which appeared in 'Siaures Atenai,' May 8, 2006, No. 14 (792).

At the end of 2005 on the 5th of December after sixteen days of suffering (a second heart attack, pneumonia) the 78-year old Vladimir Toporov departed from us. Russian science lost one of its most distinguished personalities. This loss was also terribly painful not only for Lithuanian and Latvian philology, which the deceased had enriched with splendid researches, not only for those who love the culture in general, but also for those who are concerned with the future of these peoples. Research on the Baltic languages and learning about their ancient culture was not simply a profession. It was his moral duty as a scholar. He formulated this credo in the preface to his Dictionary of the Prussian language. "The extinction of the Prussians is a loss for humanity and mankind and the attempt to recreate lost cultures is at least to a small degree connected with moral duties."

Vladimir Toporov was a man of vast importance for the study of the Baltic languages. As a result of the bloody events of the 13th of January he turned down the prize awarded to him by the Soviet Government. Lithuania awarded him the Baltrusaitis prize and the Order of Gediminas (3rd degree) and Latvia awarded him the Order of the Three Stars.

During his not so short life the author of these lines has never met a man in whom extraordinary talent, industry, modesty and unusual respect for the work of others was so harmoniously combined.

In 1960 at the Institute of Language and Literature there was a meeting with the secretary of the Soviet journal 'Voprosy jazykozniija' (Problems of Linguistics), Nikita Tolstoy, the great-grandson of Leo Tolstoy. The administration of the institute assigned me the job of taking care of the guest. We walked about the 'old town' of Vilnius and I was greatly surprised, when at the Orthodox church near Dawn Gates (Ausros vartai, Ostra brama) the guest crossed himself (these were the times of militant atheism), gave some money for candles and explained to the monk sitting there just for which deceased persons he was to pray. Imperceptibly the conversation turned to Toporov. Recently in Moscow his translation from Pali of the Buddhist chef d'oeuvre 'Dhammapada' had been published. From Toporov's letter (23 March 1960) I had learned the unfortunate history of this work. The Oriental Institute of the

USSR Academy of Sciences had published the book. They had begun to sell the book at the institute kiosk. However, after three or four days the distribution of the book was stopped: in the book's introduction the translator had published religious views and had not given the Marxist interpretation of this Buddhist work. One hundred fifty copies of the book had already been sold (with a print run of 40,000). However, all was not lost. Toporov hoped that at least a small portion of the copies would reach the bookstores. He soon sent me a copy. Still it was difficult to stop the book's distribution, since the chief editor was the famous Russian orientalist Yuriy Rerich. I liked the introduction to the book very much and Nikita Tolstoy was particularly delighted by it. I was also intrigued by the fact that the book had been dedicated to the memory of a certain V. S. Vorobyov-Desyatovski. I didn't know who this man was. Nikita Tolstoy explained to me that Toporov had probably never met this man, but still he felt for him a special respect. Considerably later I learned that he was a Russian orientalist who had not even lived to the age of 30. When Nikikta Tolstoy began to talk about Toporov's modesty, he said: 'You know - he is just a saint.' It seems to me now that Tolstoy's words were a very appropriate characterization of Toporov's personality.

The translation of 'Dhammapada' with the 'scandalous' introduction has now been published for the 7th time, most recently in Novosibirsk.

My indirect acquaintance with Toporov began in the spring of 1956. I heard about him first from Zigmantas Zinkevicius. My former teacher talked about this Moscow linguist, whom I had not heard about before, with great respect, he said he was very friendly and simple. Later at one time he showed me a letter from Toporov in which my name was mentioned. There he wrote that he was already indirectly acquainted with Sabaliauskas. It seems that in some library where he had asked for Endzelin's book 'The Old Prussian Language' they told him that it had already been checked out by Sabaliauskas. This book has some kind of symbolic significance in my relationships with Toporov. When in 1959 the Latvian linguist, D. Zemzare, gave me this book I sent it immediately to Toporov. He made himself a copy, which was undoubtedly within arm's reach on his desk.

In 1957 as a doctoral candidate at the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature I got a month's leave to work in Moscow. Z. Zinkevicius asked me to take a letter to Toporov. One day I telephoned the number which had been given to me. I still remember the uncomfortable situation when my friend from university times who was taking care of me collapsed in laughter when I had to pronounce the name and the patronymic. I could say 'Vladimir' all right, but when it came to Nikolayevich I would either completely forget it, or I couldn't pronounce it correctly. Even later I had problems with Russian names and patronymics. I remember that I asked Toporov once if instead of 'Samuil Borisovich' I could say 'Professor Bernshtein.' He said that one could say that, but that people would understand that as showing a slight lack of respect, if one had already been introduced.

I finally decided to go to Toporov's place and I walked all the way from Red Square. When, fairly exhausted, I arrived at Leningrad chaussee 68/70 (Toporov and his wife were living at that time with the wife's parents) it seemed to me that I had traversed half of Moscow. Toporov himself let me in. He was then a rather young, somewhat stout, bearded, blue-eyed man with glasses and he spoke with a mellifluous voice. His appearance bespoke a man of 19th century Russian culture. He differed perhaps only in that he was wearing a blue sport outfit. He excused himself saying that he had just gotten up, because he had the bad habit of liking to work late nights. I was met very nicely. I felt as if I had come across old friends whom I had not seen in a long time. Toporov's wife, Tatyana Elizarenkova, said that they had vacationed in Lithuania and that they knew Vytautas Maziulis and Zigmantas Zinkevicius. She seemed to me to be a pretty and very elegant woman, considerably younger than her husband (although in fact only a year younger) and with eastern features. And such features harmonized with her specialty, Indic philology. Her mother, who still looked rather young, also had an intellectual face with similar eastern features, but perhaps a bit more severe.

After a few days I was again at their place. Toporov and I walked about the city and he showed me the more interesting parts of the old city. He pointed out to me the house where his parents had lived. Not far from there was a Catholic church, where he had come across Lithuanians for the first time. On his way to school sometimes he met people coming out of the church and who spoke a language which was completely unintelligible to him. Only much later did he learn that they were Lithuanians. Toporov also told me that the paving in front of the church had been changed over night. It seems that Charles de Gaulle, a Catholic, might want to pray there.

I got acquainted with the manuscript of Toporov's doctoral dissertation, which consisted of two volumes with 600 pages each. I knew that during the course of the dissertation defense, both evaluators said that this dissertation was worth not only the candidate's degree (= western doctor's degree) but a doctor's degree (= contemporary European Habilitation or Lithuanian 'habilituotas daktaras'). In 1961 this was published as a separate book with the title 'The Locative in the Slavic Languages.' In it the history of the Lithuanian locative case is exhaustively studied also. Toporov's library made a great impression on me. He himself drew my attention to some of the books. The volume 'For Roman Jakobson' lay on his desk. This was a collection of articles dedicated to the honor of the 60th birthday of this philologist. Toporov told me a great deal about this scholar whom I had never heard about until this time. But when I saw that in this book in addition to many other interesting articles there was an article by Alfred Senn entitled 'Vincas Kreve and Lithuanian Folklore', I could not resist the urge to ask to take this book home for a few days. At that time A. Senn was forbidden fruit for us, although it had become possible to talk a little bit about Vincas Kreve-Mickevicius only a short time before. Even though that was not Toporov's book, he lent it to me gladly. I became even more convinced about how much this man knew and how pleasant it was to listen to his

stories. When I asked his opinion as to who was the greatest contemporary Russian poet, he answered to my surprise and without hesitation, that it was Boris Pasternak. He began to recite some excerpts of his poetry. Until that time this poet was unknown to me. And in Toporov's opinion the greatest Russian linguist was the still very young Vyacheslav Ivanov. For me these were all new discoveries. And in my eyes Toporov became even younger.

In those days I was a special admirer of Sergei Esenin. And whenever the occasion arose I recited his verse out loud. Even now if I am in a good mood and I have an appropriate audience I can't help reciting 'Letter to my mother' (in Salomeja Neris' Lithuanian translation). I wanted very much to visit the poet's grave, which I had not found in the Novodevichee cemetery. Toporov knew where the grave was and suggested visiting it the following day. I have forgotten the name of the cemetery, but I remember that a number of Russian artists are buried there (Surikov, Savrasov). At that time on Esenin's grave there was a very simple grave-stone. Several fresh bouquets of flowers met the eye. What moved one most was the fact that right next to it was the modest grave-stone of the woman who had decided to end her life at the grave of her beloved. Toporov showed me also the Armenian cemetery close by.

Again I had to go to Toporov's place. Each time I was entertained. During the conversation I was constantly amazed at his knowledge of Lithuanian linguists and their work. I returned from Moscow very happy, since I felt that I had found people there that I would like to visit again.

The first person who had urged Toporov to take up Lithuanian studies was Prof. Mikhail Peterson. This professor had acquainted the first-year student Toporov and a group of his friends with the fundamentals of Sanskrit. And in the following year he taught Lithuanian in the Philology Department. Almost all of the students were the same as in the above-mentioned Sanskrit course. Although it was already 1948 they were still reading Lithuanian tales from August Schleicher's German book published in Prague in 1857, Lithuanian Reader and Glossary (Litauisches Lesebuch und Glossar). Therefore Peterson's lectures to his students were a good stimulus to learn German better as well. During one vacation Toporov went over Peterson's lectures by himself very carefully. He was particularly intrigued by the fact that he was able to find so many interesting facts for the study of the Slavic languages. Toporov came to Lithuania during the first year of his graduate studies. Before the trip he, his wife and Tatyana Bulygina spent two weeks in intensive study of spoken Lithuanian. This time their teacher was the Moscow university student, economist and future advanced schools' docent and at one time even chairman of a collective farm, Alfonsas Bunkus.

Toporov knew many languages and he learned them easily. But he did not have the 'parrot talent.' He could speak Lithuanian fluently only with children, when adults could not hear him.

When he taught languages to his daughters, within two or three months they began to criticize their father's pronunciation. His wife, who had graduated as a specialist in English, could pronounce Lithuanian words very well.

Once at the Curonian Spit the Toporovs desperately needed a room, but couldn't get one. His wife got the idea that they should use Lithuanian to try to get a room. Toporov wrote out a polite scenario. His wife learned it so well that they got a room immediately. The hosts were careful of what they said in the presence of his wife, but in the presence of Toporov they felt quite at ease because he apparently would not understand.

Another memorable meeting with Toporov took place on the 21st of February, 1958. Preparing to present the Lenin prize to J. Endzelin for his Latvian grammar on the occasion of this great linguist's 85th birthday the Latvians had prepared a big celebration. Numerous guests had been invited from various republics. Even some Baltic area military commander congratulated the Latvian linguist. An irony of fate:

in 1941 the Soviet Latvian government had planned to destroy the work, because in the foreword of the 1922 German edition there was a sentence describing the events of the October revolution in a negative way, but now they were awarding him the Lenin prize for this very book.

On the eve of the ceremony I saw Toporov hurrying down the street with some unknown young person with a very young looking face, almost a child's face. I immediately suspected that it was the 'still very young,' but in Toporov's opinion, the most distinguished contemporary Russian linguist. I was not mistaken. Then, of course, I could not anticipate how successful the activity of these two good friends, often co-authors, would be in the field of Baltic linguistics and ancient history.

In the summer of that same year I met both linguists again in Vilnius. And the meeting was very important, since Toporov, at the request of the assistant director, Jonas Kruopas, had agreed to be an examiner for my dissertation.

I even remember our dinner at the restaurant of the Hotel Vilnius. When we had agreed on what to eat I asked our guests what we should drink. Toporov said that he was a teetotaler.

Ivanov said, that as an old sailor, he drinks everything but kerosene and water, and sometimes even kerosene, but never water.

The following day, with a group of researchers of the Institute of Lithuanian Language and Literature we traveled to the isolated Lithuanian communities located in Belarus, this favorite but unfortunate land of world linguists starting already at the end of the 19th century. We were worried about how our guests, accustomed to the intellectual life of the big city, would feel. We worried unnecessarily. Our guests did just fine. At that time there were a number of Lithuanians in the area of Zietela and Lazunai. We were met everywhere very cordially. True, we did not avoid some problems with the hospitality.

Already on the first day of the expedition the owner of a small plot of ground came to greet us. He was holding a bottle of home brew and a glass. First he poured some out for Toporov, but Toporov shook his head. Our host was amazed: A Russian, even one with a beard doesn't drink whiskey?! The day was saved unexpectedly, however, by a woman who asked, whether Toporov might be a Baptist. Toporov answered: 'Yes, I'm a Baptist.' This magic word helped Toporov during the entire expedition. The honor of the participants in the expedition was saved by Ivanov. When they poured out a glass for him, he drank it right down without a frown and thanked the host in a very pleasant voice. After the second drink his voice became even more pleasant. But don't think he was an alcoholic. I never saw him drunk.

But there were other problems too. One day all three of us got really separated from our base point. When we asked the way back, we were told that going around the swamp the distance would be about five kilometers, but if we went through the swamp it would be about half the distance. We chose, of course, the shorter route. Unfortunately we made a real mistake. There were moments when we thought that we would never get out of the swamp. In my youth I had run around all kinds of places with little hillocks and was used to jumping from one to the other. But my friends weren't able to do this. They were getting soaked in the swamp. Toporov could see practically nothing through his fogged-up glasses. Perhaps it isn't proper to brag, but taking them by the hand I led them out of the swamp. When our frightfully exhausted feet reached firmer ground, Ivanov smiled and said that it was most probable that in just such a landscape that the Indo-European language developed.

I remember one sleepless night. I learned then a Russian word, which I still remember after a half a century, i.e., komar 'mosquito' which probably has the same root as Lithuanian kamane 'bumble-bee.' But at that time it seemed to me for some reason or other that the Slavic name for the mosquito, like the Lithuanian name for the same insect, uodas, should be connected with the verb denoting 'to eat.' For our night's lodging we had selected a large barn at some

distance from the huts. We made ourselves comfortable in the hay. However we heard some sort of distant buzzing. The buzzing kept getting closer. At last we felt what kind of frightful creatures swamp mosquitoes are. Our resistance was in vain. At about 2:00 a.m. we abandoned our sleeping places and headed off in the direction where we thought the sun would come up. Going barefoot at night through a refreshing peat bog and contemplating a starry sky was a pure delight. The mosquitoes did not bother us then. The fundamental topic of our conversation then was the incorporation of Lithuania into the Soviet Union. They were most interested in my childhood impressions of these events.

Ivanov recalled these events in one of his recent publications, 'Linguistics of the third millennium' (Moscow, 2004).

I met Ivanov and Toporov again in Moscow in the fall of 1958 at the Fourth International Congress of Slavists. For me this congress was an extraordinary event. I saw many legendary figures whose names I had known only from the covers of books, journal articles and the pages of encyclopedias. It was thanks to Kostas Korsakas, that I, who had not yet defended a doctoral dissertation, had the chance to go to this scholarly gathering. Ivanov and Toporov's lecture on the relationships of the Baltic and Slavic languages made a great impression on me.

I had occasion to participate along with Ivanov and Toporov in a lottery.

In 1939 the Finnish Academy of Sciences had published Valentin Kiparsky's book 'Die Kurenfrage' (The Curonian Question). This book was not to be found in any library in Lithuania or Moscow, most likely as a result of the Russo-Finnish war. The author of this work, at that time a professor at the Free University of Berlin, had brought two copies with him to Moscow. But how to divide them up? There were two books and three persons. Nevertheless he decided to give me one, since that way there would be one book in Lithuania and for the remaining one lots were drawn. Ivanov won the lottery.

For V. Maziulis, Z. Zinkevicius and myself the conference ended with a party at Toporov's place. In addition to us and our hosts, participants included Dmitri Shmeliov, the specialist in the history of the Russian language (later an academician) and his wife, Tatyana Bulygina, one of the closest friends of the Toporov family. There was a lot of talk about the congress and its participants. The International Congress of Slavists had taken place in Moscow for the first time. The government had a lot of concerns. Many emigrants and their children had come. There was talk that they hadn't wanted to admit Vladimir Mayakovski's friend, Roman

Jakobson. Jakobson's talk had had to be rescheduled from the original room to the central hall, since so many people had wanted to attend.

From my dissertation defense perhaps I remember best the 'necktie' incident. Toporov and I were walking around the 'old city' quarter of Vilnius. When there was only about an hour left until the defense Toporov suddenly said that he had to go to my room (I was staying in the doctoral students' dormitory of the Academy of Sciences), because he had to get his brief-case. I said that there wouldn't be any need for that, because I had his evaluation of the dissertation with me. Unfortunately the problem was more complicated. Toporov's wife had asked him to wear a necktie to the dissertation defense. He had promised, but the necktie was in his briefcase. We had to hurry. The defense took place in the university's so-called Hall of Columns. Everything went well. After the defense at his first step outside the hall, Toporov hastily tore off the necktie and stuck it in his pocket.

Not wishing to make difficulties for the person defending his dissertation my examiner left for Moscow late in the evening of the same day. Along with the other examiner, Prof. Merkelis Rackauskas we had supper in the railroad station restaurant. Rackauskas was amazed by the guest's 'Baptist' abstinence from liquor. Still he soon became very happy. He related all kinds of adventures of his life. He explained that he was older than Prof. Juozas Balcikonis, who, like Toporov, didn't drink at all. But notice which one looks better. Our conversation was so animated that the guest almost missed the train. And many years later on meeting Toporov and I remembered that supper and Prof. Rackauskas' stories.

But Toporov was not only remarkable for his scholarly achievements. In the summer of 1968 Simas Karaliunas and I were staying at Toporov's place waiting for our trip to Prague where the Sixth International Congress of Slavists was to take place. The situation then was tense. It wasn't clear who would arrive first in Prague, we or the tanks. But we left and the tanks came later.

At that time Toporov and I had agreed to go some place together. The appointed time came and he still wasn't there. Finally through a window I saw someone approaching at a run. All out of breath he apologized for his tardiness. One of the employees at his institute had just brought home a baby from the hospital, but didn't know how to wash it. Toporov had gone to help.

There were occasions when Toporov apologized for not being able to see me off at the

railroad station. I would know then that the Moscow Spartacus soccer team was playing and my friend had to hurry to the stadium. Toporov never missed a game of this soccer team. Later I would accompany him and his friends to the Spartacus games. For the most part these were high school friends and the children of his friends. At the stadium Toporov changed completely. Like other soccer fans he would wave his hands and shout. At times he seemed to be a very knowledgeable soccer specialist. I remember a game between Spartacus and the Doneck Shakhtyor (Miners') team at the Luzhniki stadium. A penalty kick was announced at the Shakhtyor goal. The crowd was screaming that the referee had placed the ball too far away. Toporov explained calmly that there was no reason for the protest. If Gavrilov kicks, the added distance would help. Gavrilov kicked and the ball landed in a corner of the goal and saved the Spartacus team from a loss. I was amazed at how much Toporov and his friends knew about Lithuanian sports. Without any trouble they could give the names of all our most distinguished soccer players and say something about their style of playing.

Toporov's connections with 'Spartacus' and his attention to soccer were not accidental. In high school still he had played on the same team as the famous Russian soccer player on the Spartacus team and captain of the Soviet Union's national team, Igor Netto. When a European or World soccer championship was being decided Toporov's work tempo slowed down significantly.

I usually went to Moscow in the beginning of July. Then Toporov's apartment and his huge personal library were at my disposal. He and his family usually stayed at their summer house (dacha) then and rarely came to Moscow.

On the fifth of July I usually went to their summer house. I had to go from the Yaroslavl railroad station about 20 kilometers. I would get off at Valentinovka and Toporov would meet me there. The summer house was in a nice place in the forest. It belonged to his wife's parents. The neighbors were for the most part distinguished Moscow theater personalities. The villa of the famous Moscow comic Yuriy Nikulin was not far away. I didn't remember the places very well and I was afraid of getting lost. Still, when the train would stop at a place called Mystishchi, I would know that I was going in the right direction. Before my eyes would appear the painting by Vasilii Perov entitled 'Drinking tea at Mystishchi.' I loved this painter very much.

Usually the same people would celebrate Toporov's birthday. The regular guests were his sister Irina with her daughters and her husband Pavlik, Tatyana Bulygina, Dmitrii Shmeliov, Pavel Grincer. They were all very nice to me. It seems that only such people could gather at Toporov's place. Speaking about Toporov's family, I must not fail to mention their house-keeper of many years, their daughters' nurse, Aunt Masha. She was a simple,

good-hearted woman from the Russian provinces, very much attached to the Toporov family. I remember her cabbage pirozhki, an especial favorite of my wife. She explained to us that Toporov's house was very solid, because it had been built by German prisoners of war.

I also remember from that household, the beautiful, nice, brown, hairy dog of some kind of English breed. They said that of all the members of the household the dog especially loved Vladimir. The love was apparently mutual, because after the dog had gone through the first volume of Kazimieras Buga's 'Collected Works,' tearing up the volume with all of Toporov's notes, the relationships between the offender and the master did not suffer. So Tatyana Bulygina gave Toporov her copy of the same book

The last time that Toporov and his wife were guests at our place was during the fall of 1994. At that time along with the political scientist, Thomas Remeikis, the Jesuit historian Paulius Rabikauskas and the American Baltist, William R. Schmalstieg, Toporov was awarded an honorary doctorate by the University of Vilnius. Although Vytautas Maziulis, Toporov's graduate school friend, was invited to lunch also, on this day he felt ill and was unable to attend. This would have been perhaps the only time when the most distinguished specialists in the Old Prussian language would have been gathered under one roof. Toporov joked that this was, however, the first time in his life that he had seen himself on television. From his studio the sculptor Konstantinas Bogdanas had brought William R. Schmalstieg and his wife to our place with a considerable delay, since on the way his car had run out of gas and he had to get some gas in a container and then pour it into the gas tank. After Bogdanas had left, Toporov talked about his suffering in the sculptor's studio. In the first place the sculptor had looked right through him with some kind of frightful look. Then he began to hit the clay head with some sticks. Then he spit out some water with his mouth. It seemed to Toporov that the sculptor was taking something out of him and putting it into the watered down clay.

It is sad when you think that that is all in the distant past which will never return. The Russian scholars with whom I had various degrees of contact and whom I liked to a greater or lesser degree have left us one after another. Tatyana Bulygina and Dmitri Shmelyov are no longer with us. Toporov had just time to write an obituary for his friend, the academician Oleg Trubachev. The academician Nikita Tolstoy, who first characterized Toporov for me so aptly, is now resting at Yasnaya Polyana beside his famous great-grandfather, the novelist Leo Tolstoy.