

Savitzky applied to geography the natural system of the botanist, economist, and historian Nicolai Danilevsky (1822-1885), who derived his theories of the development of history from most recent trends in the science of classification. Like Danilevsky, Savitzky refuses to divide the world into clearly defined continents because that would be a “natural classification” following the natural lines of oceans, mountains, etc. Instead Savitzky suggests the term “geographical worlds” in which characteristics can overlap. The unity of Eurasia, for example, is not “natural” but based on a model of convergence: “The influence of South, East, and West constantly alternated and consecutively dominated the world of Russian culture.” [1] Cultures are no “undifferentiated entities” (*nedifferenzirovannij sovokupnosti*) (ibid, 13): without Tartars there would be no Russia [2] and Russia itself is a combination of sedentariness and steppe elements. [3] Unilinear and progressive evolutive systems become impossible: “When the line of evolution extends itself into different branches, there can be neither an ascending movement nor gradual and constant self-accomplishment. This or that cultural milieu or series [of milieus] is an accomplishment from one point of view but looks like a decline from another point of view” (“Evrasijsstvo,” 13).

Later, the Eurasianist historian George Vernadsky (1887-1973) would give historical flesh to Savitzky’s geographical theories by stressing “the decisive significance of the relation between steppe and the forest societies on the enormous Eurasian plain, the ethnic and cultural complexity of Russia, and the major organic contribution of Eastern peoples, especially the Mongols, to Russian history.” [4]

The notion of *mestorazvitie* seen merely as a “natural milieu” avoids determinism because there is no “predestination.” [5] However, some of Savitzky’s thoughts are reminiscent of those of the Japanese philosopher Watsuji. A Watsuji-style climatic determinism is preponderant already in Danilevsky who writes on the first pages of *Russia and Europe* that “our climate is different from that of the West (58).” Watsuji defined civilization as determined by climatic and geographical factors; these definitions come amazingly close to Savitzky who identified “cultural centers” whose developments were linked to climate. This deterministic drawback becomes crucial when it adopts a “totalitarian” scope. If the description of “climate” and “geographical environment” serves no other purpose than locking the human into a certain “space” supposed to be appropriate for “her culture,” then the *Lebensraum* becomes a subjective realm sealed by spontaneity and abstract intuition.

Notes:

[1] Savitzky, *Geograficeskij obzor* 27, 1927. See also Stefan Wiederkehr “Der Eurasianismus als Erbe N. Ja. Danilevskijs? Bemerkungen zu einem Topos der Forschung” in *Studies in East European Thought* 52, 2000, 135. Danilevsky suggests similar things. See Danilevsky, 17.

[2] “Evrasijsstvo” in *Evrasijskij vremennik*. Bd 4 Berlin 1925, 8, 5-26.

[3] ‘Степь и оседлость’ [Steppe and sedentariness, 1922] in Novirkovka & Sisemskaja: *Россия между Европой и Азией: Евразийский соблазн. Антология* (Moscow: Nauka 1993), 123.

[4] See Vladimir Weidlé on the anti-deterministic character of *mestorazvitie* in ‘Russia and the West [1956]’ in A. Schmemmann (ed.), *Ultimate Questions: An Anthology of Modern Russian Religious Thought*. (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminar Press, 1976), 16.

[5] Savitzky: *Rossija—osobyj geograficeskij mir* [Russia—a particular geographical world] (Prag 1927), 30, 31.

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