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Primary Education for 'Inorodtsy' in Northern Russia during the Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Centuries¹

The laws of the Russian Empire at no point imposed any restrictions on the primary education available to the section of the population known as *inorodtsy* (put simply, the non-Slavonic population of the country) [Malinovsky 1916: 119].² The earliest project drawn up for *inorodtsy* schools dates from 1723: a certain V. Simanov submitted to the Holy Synod a scheme comprising 13 sub-sections and including plans for the dissemination of the Russian language among *inorodtsy*, for the forcible baptism of non-Christians, and for the consolidation of Christian beliefs in those already converted [*Ob obrashchenii v pravoslavnuyu veru*] 1868: 145–6]. However, the scheme was never

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² The term *inorodtsy*, singular *inorodets*, cannot be adequately rendered by a single word, or even a phrase, in English. Sometimes applied to the nomadic hunter-gatherers of the far North, it was also used more generally, to refer to populations who were at once 'Russian' and 'non-Russian' (cf. the frequent use of the phrase, *russkie inorodtsy*), i.e. citizens of the Empire who were distinct from the Russian majority population in ethnic, linguistic, and religious terms, but who did not constitute an obvious non-Russian 'nation' of the kind represented by the Poles, the Finns, the Balts, the Georgians, or the Armenians. See also John W. Slocum, 'Who, and When, Were the *Inorodtsy*? The Evolution of the Category of "Aliens" in Imperial Russia' // *Russian Review*. 1998. Vol. 57. No. 2. Pp. 173–90. [Editor].

put into practice; over a century later, the institution of parish primary schools, begun in 1836, addressed a range of different problems, but these — at least before 1870 — did not include the Russification of subject populations.

At this stage, the task of the parish school system was held to lie in general education and in religious enlightenment; *'The [parish] schools have the purpose of fostering in the people Orthodox belief and Christian morality and communicating to them the elements of useful knowledge'* [*Pravila o tserkovno-prikhodskikh shkolakh* 1898: 12]. The primary schools were placed under the oversight of the local clergy, and their funding was supplied by the parish guardianships, by church fraternities, *'by the zemstvo or other public or private organisations or persons, by the diocesan and higher ecclesiastical authorities, and from the state treasury'*: [*Pravila o tserkovno-prikhodskikh shkolakh* 1898: 13]. However, by the 1870s the schools' potential as a powerful instrument for the spread of the Russian language was also starting to be recognised.

At a national level, this idea was most clearly formulated by N. I. Ilminsky, an academic specialist in Oriental Studies from Kazan, who was warmly supported by the then Minister of Enlightenment, Count D. A. Tolstoy [Malinovsky 1916: 137–8]. Tolstoy's position with regard to schools for *inorodtsy* is clear from a range of his public statements: for example, *'The final purpose of educating the inorodtsy who dwell within the boundaries of our fatherland must without question be Russification'* [Quoted from Kumanev 1973: 59]. In his view, *'the unification of all the peoples in Russia'* was to be achieved *'not by accommodation of the demands of individual nationalities, but by means of the submission of these nationalities to a government education system that takes the same form all over Russia and where the language of the Russian state is used as the language of instruction'* [Malinovsky 1916: 127]. Not surprisingly, Ilminsky and Tolstoy were soon on terms of mutual understanding. They proposed making *'each tribe's own dialect [...] the instrument of elementary education for that tribe'* [*Uzakonenie mnenii N. I. Ilminskogo* 1913: 20–2]. Teaching was to be done by educated members of the local ethnic minority or Russians who had a knowledge of the local language.

The second stage of assimilation through education, following elementary education (the first stage), involved concentration on Russian: *'As soon as they [the pupils] acquire a large enough store of Russian words and expression, they begin to study Russian grammar'*. During the third stage, instruction was carried out entirely in Russian, and *inorodtsy* and Russian children were taught together [*Uzakonenie mnenii N. I. Ilminskogo* 1913: 20–1].

All the above regulations, one must assume, applied to Olonetsk province as much as they did to any other area. Indeed, parish schools began to be set up here earlier than they did elsewhere in Russia. In 1836, the Synod composed 'Rules for the Primary Education of Village Children, Including Children of the Old Believer Faith', which were at first intended for Olonetsk province alone [Rozhdestvensky 1902: 283]. Later, at the personal wish of Emperor Nicholas I, these rules were applied to other areas of the Empire as well, with the understanding that *'the responsibility for primary education of village children lies in the hands of the local clergy.'* [Rozhdestvensky 1902: 284].

Thus, the schools in Olonetsk province were under the jurisdiction of the clergy right from the outset. And in this province, at any rate, linguistic problems made themselves felt immediately. As documented in a report written by Ignaty, Bishop of Olonetsk and Petrozavodsk, to the Synod, *'Two thirds of the female population can speak no other tongue than Karelian [...] The children of both sexes are able to speak only their mother tongue.'*¹ This situation was not peculiar to Olonetsk province. In Yarensk district, Vologda province, the local authorities made a comparable statement in the early twentieth century: *'Some of the males in the non-Russian population [the Zyrians] understand Russian [...] but females understand very little Russian and speak none at all'* [*Osvyashchenie zdaniya* 1903: 50]. This sad set of circumstances (from the point of view of the church authorities) meant that parish schools were destined to play a considerable role in the life of Archangel, Vologda, and Olonetsk dioceses.

Yet the situation remained dispiriting. Everywhere, parish schools met with significant difficulties, above all a chronic shortage of premises and of textbooks. An 1861 report on Olonetsk diocese also suggests that the language barrier was a persisting problem, and that *'the poverty and illiteracy of parents themselves, and their total lack of knowledge of the Russian language, also form a considerable barrier to the education of children.'*² In Kemska district, Archangel province ('White Sea Coast Karelia'), the local population's difficulties in Russian persisted into the early twentieth century, and remained just as pressing as before. Evidence turned up by the historian of education O. P. Ilyukha indicates that even after completing the primary school course, *'in some schools, half and more pupils could not be admitted to the leaving examinations, so weak was their knowledge of the Russian language'* [Ilyukha 2000: 77].

¹ Natsionalnyi arkhiv Respubliki Karelii [National Archive of the Republic of Karelia] [henceforth NA RK] f. 25 op. 20. d. 78/906, l. 37.

² NA RK f. 25 op. 15 d. 66/1445, l. 38.

In August 1877, Count D. A. Tolstoy, then Minister of Enlightenment, who was known for his approval of the church primary school as a mechanism of Russification, himself visited Petrozavodsk, where his actions were entirely consistent with what had gone before. Expressing concern that education should be offered to the *'ignorant Karelian tribe'* that he had learned was settled in *'some districts of Olonetsk province'*, he decreed that *'appropriate measures be taken for the founding of primary church schools in settlements with a Karelian population on the model of the already existing [...] one-class primary schools under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Enlightenment.'*¹ Moving to carry out the orders of his superior, the local Director of Schools reported in his missive to the Governor of Olonetsk that *'the Karelian tribe is for the most part settled in Petrozavodsk, Olonetsk, and Povenetsk districts'*, and that *'there are presently no more than thirty-two schools for the Karelian population'*; at the same time, *'the number of children of school age [in these districts] is in the region of 4796 souls'*. In conclusion, the Director of Schools stated that it was essential to *'create at least sixteen further primary schools in places with a Karelian population.'*²

The Director of Schools, according to statements on the part of the Minister of Enlightenment, could count on significant levels of financial aid *'from the Treasury'*. However, the promised sums covered only part of the expenses expected to be incurred. Accordingly, the Director applied to the district zemstva board *'with a request to assign funds from the zemstvo to support the opening and the running costs of the sixteen schools in settlements with a Karelian population that are planned.'*³ In fact, the zemstvo authorities categorically refused to support the proposal made by the Minister and the Director. Thus, the Petrozavodsk authority *'did not deem it possible to open the above schools during the course of next year'*, but made a decision to *'seek support for the transformation of the zemstvo school in Munozersk into a model institution'*. The Olonetsk zemstvo assembly, *'despite its full sympathy for the cause of popular education'*, nevertheless opted to turn down the Director's proposal, *'since the main contributors to the zemstvo are fiscally overburdened as it is.'*⁴

The position of the parents of the potential school pupils was another factor that impeded the development of the educational infrastructure. A report by the provincial zemstvo chief of police sent to the Governor of Olonetsk claims: *'Levels of literacy in these parts are extremely low; parents send their children to school purely and simply'*

¹ NA RK f. 1 op. 11 d. 33/35, ll. 1–1 ob.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid., l. 10, ll. 11–11 ob.

so they can absorb knowledge that is useful in daily life, but even this seldom works, since they are most indifferent to their studies.' Having consulted with 'the most sensible people around', the Karelians, the supervisor asserted, 'give answers that prove their low opinion of the need for literacy'. Allegedly typical comments were cited in the same document: "Let the children keep to the sphere appointed to them by nature, then they will be more modest and not risk becoming immoral, since if they learn to read and write, they will become accustomed to everything that is bad".¹

Part of the reason for this unflattering attitude to education could be traced in the low level of pedagogy characteristic of private teachers: 'Here a young man who has been sent to a private teacher can barely read and write properly at the end of his studies; he does not know the meaning of the words he is transcribing.' The Russian language was 'just as unfamiliar to him when he leaves the class, as it was at the beginning'.² Rote-learning Russian texts was understood as a kind of norm, a vital stage in the study of the language. Thus in 1916, a conference 'on the question of the more effective teaching of Holy Scripture' recommended using 'the mechanical study of the basic prayers' alongside explanation of the meanings of words not understood to the pupils in 'the local language' ['Soveshchanie po voprosu' 1916: 3]. After a set of schools with local teachers started developing in Karelia, Karelian teachers began adapting to the norms of school education, and, by extension, mastering the Russian language.

The teachers in 'Zyrian' schools in Archangel province experienced similar problems. Even the question of introducing four-year schools was under discussion. Bringing up the topic once more, the Mezensko-Pechersky department informed the Schools Council of the Synod that 'the children entering the aforementioned schools usually do not have an understanding of the Russian language'. Thus the teacher 'in the first stages of his work with his pupils, has to teach the elements of the language that is being used for instruction'. The lack of knowledge of Russian inevitably condemned the *inorodtsy* to being thought of as backward. As the document just cited continued, there was little hope that pupils who were poorly acquainted with conversational and literary Russian, 'once they leave school, might take an interest in books and wish to build on their school education by independent efforts' ['Ot Mezensko-Pecherskogo otdeleniya' 1904: 194].

In another part of Archangel province, the Kola peninsula, it was the education of the Saami that was the main task facing the school

¹ NA RK f. 1 op. 1 d. 8/4, l. 79.

² Ibid., l. 79 ob.

for *inorodtsy*. Here the backing for such schools came from individual local clerics, rather than government officials. From 1886 onwards, K. Shchekoldin, the priest of Pazretsky parish, *'decided to teach the Lapp children the most widely-used prayers using the phonetic system, so that they might read and sing them correctly; at every convenient opportunity, he would gather the children in one place, and pronounce the words of the prayers: the children would repeat these after him'* [Kharuzin 1890: 70]. Soon Father Shchekoldin had developed followers in the *'inland parishes of Russian Lapland'*. From September 1889, the newly dedicated school for Lapp children in Notozersk parish began teaching children to read and write. Not long afterwards, a third school — for the Lapps of Kildinsk parish — was opened [Kharuzin 1890: 72].

At the beginning of the twentieth century, efforts in the domain of literacy teaching became better co-ordinated and were much more strongly developed to the needs of the *inorodtsy*. Thus, in Olonets province, the issue of using Karelian in education started attracting sustained attention. A report from the Governor of Olonets, one Protasyev, sent to Petr Stolypin argued that a range of measures in the educational field was necessary in order to resist the ambitions of pan-Finnish propaganda. Above all, a modernisation of the school system was essential: a *'whole range of overnight hostels and boarding houses'* should be set up, and the existing one-class schools transformed into *'ministerial schools with an extended education — over six classes'*. Since *'the population of these remote Karelian settlements has almost no command of Russian,'* the report went on, it was essential that *'primary teachers in such places should have a command of the Karelian language, both in order to impart the elements of education to children, and also — more particularly — so that discussion sessions and readings for parents can be organised'*. To achieve these ends, it was proposed to found 10 stipends for 'Korelyaks' at the seminary for teachers in Petrozavodsk.

The same document also mentioned that it was essential to introduce to the seminary and to the diocesan school for girls *'the study of the Karelian language for all pupils, male and female, who intend to dedicate themselves to work in Karelia'*.¹ But at the same time, the education authorities categorically forbade any and all measures to boost the development of the Karelian language or indeed to enhance its prestige. In 1907, the Inspector of People's Schools instructed his subordinates: *'The teacher in Karelian schools must have some acquaintance with the language: enough to understand the local population and explain Russian concepts to children without too much difficulty.'* But that, he continued, was quite enough: *'Under*

¹ NA RK f. 1 op. 1 d. 105/61, l. 3 ob.

*no circumstances is instruction in the Karelian language itself to be allowed.*¹ At the same time, teachers who knew no Karelian at all were subjected to harsh criticism. Thus, one of the participants in a conference of representatives of the dioceses of Archangel and of Finland felt compelled to publish the following remarks about a young woman teacher in Voknavolok village school, who, as he discovered on a visit to there, *'has a poor knowledge of the local Karelian language and seems to be quite unacquainted with the new methods of tuition in inorodtsy schools'* [*'Panfinskaya propaganda v Russkoi Karelii'* 1906: 45]. The induction of children in Russian was intended as a way of influencing parents as well.

It did not take long, at least in some places, for the success of schooling in the Russian language to make itself felt. As Protasyev, the Governor of Olonetsk, observed, the work of Povenetsk district zemstvo in the sphere of education was *'quite overwhelming'*: *'From autumn 1907, when the government made a grant to support the introduction of universal primary education, the provision of this education became a reality'*. He continued — here to some extent passing off ambition as fact — *'Almost all the Karelian population under the age of 25 has undergone primary education and has a fluent command of Russian.'* Only among women and old people *'does one sometimes find people who speak Russian badly or not at all, especially in remote villages'*.² In fact, as this source also makes clear, Karelians themselves now felt that instruction in Russian was preferable. Governor Protasyev had himself visited Reboły village and talked to the local population there. *'In response to a question we put to the Karelians, they replied that they were very glad to have an additional service in Karelian (with readings of the Gospels, the Our Father, and a sermon), since they understood the language better, but in response to the question of what language they wanted to learn in school, the Karelians (a group of about 200) answered unanimously, "We are ourselves Russian and we wish to learn the Russian language."*³

Yet instruction in Russian was still faced with serious difficulties. Parents feared losing control over their children if the latter were, unlike themselves, to receive a systematic school education. But no less did they fear that their children might sacrifice the chance of obtaining a good position in society. They understood quite clearly that reaching such a position in Russian society was only possible by use of the Russian language. Here the interests of the older and younger generations coincided. Among the Finns of North European Russia, *'speaking Russian, even among fellow Finns, was, by the late nineteenth cen-*

¹ NA RK f. 1. op. 1. d. 102/1, l. 141.

² Ibid., ll. 8–8, ob.

³ Ibid., l. 8.

ture, a sign of belonging to “high society” in much the same way as speaking French for Russian members of the nobility and gentry during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries signified demonstrating one’s cultural solidarity with “Europe” [Kalinin 2000: 77].

Concepts of the prestige of the Russian language and of Russian forms of leisure made a firm mark on Karelian village daily life, and thus influenced education as well. Among Karelian young people during the early twentieth century, the same forms of entertainment were in circulation as among Russians: *‘the same “gatherings” [besedy] all winter with Russian songs, for instance chastushki, and with Russian dances — the kadrel [quadrille], vodyat utushku [leading the duck].*¹ At the same time, not having learned Russian to perfection, they also made great efforts to learn Russian dance, round dance, and ‘leading the duck’ songs [V-Gov 1913: 256]. It is notable though that in Northern (Archangel) Karelia it was often Finnish songs *‘with a connection to dance music’* that were the prestigious form of musical entertainment [Bogdanov 1929: 78].

The Governor of Olonetsk certainly did not intend resting on his laurels, pleased though he must have been to get such good news from the outposts of Karelia. A meeting that he convened of representatives of the local church school authority, the directors of primary schools run by the Ministry of Popular Enlightenment, and the representatives of local zemstvo boards *‘concluded that a whole range of other educative measures was essential in Olonetsk as well’*. It was proposed to establish ten stipends for *‘Karelians at the teacher seminary in the town of Petrozavodsk, with special preparatory courses providing them with instruction in how to promote Russian Orthodoxy in Karelian schools’*. This measure was acknowledged as of great topical importance, since *‘the population of the remote Karelian settlements speaks almost no Russian at all. A teacher in such a place absolutely must know the Karelian language, both in order to instruct children in the elements of education, and also to organise discussions with parents.’*²

On the White Sea coast of Karelia, which at this period was part of Archangel Province, it was planned to use Finnish as the language of instruction. This was intended as a way of making the schools seem more prestigious and attractive to the Karelian population. Materials from a conference of representatives from the Dioceses of Archangel and Finland held in Ukhtinsk in 1906, bear out this point. The delegates of the conference, endorsing the desires of the Karelians themselves, moved in favour of teaching children Finnish *‘so*

¹ *Chastushki* are humorous rhymed ditties; ‘leading the duck’ is a local name for a *khorovod*, or round dance. [Editor].

² NA RK f. 1. op. 1. d. 102/1, l. 3 ob.

that the Orthodox faith and Orthodox services can be more effectively disseminated by the [Karelian] people', and 'in order to weaken Pan-Finnish propaganda and Protestant proselytism in Karelian parishes'. It was planned 'immediately to introduce the teaching of Finnish in church schools across the Karelian region', and also to 'generate support' for the foundation of 'mobile schools' in certain villages [*Panfinskaya propaganda v russkoi Karelii* 1906: 6].

Simultaneously, at the start of the twentieth century, work to prepare staff for *inorodtsy* schools was starting up. Thus, the abolition of Karelian language teaching at the Olonetsk seminary was now recognised as a mistake, and plans were made to introduce there, and to the diocesan school for girls, and to the Petrozavodsk teachers' seminary (where primary school teachers were trained), 'the study of the Karelian language for all pupils, male and female, who intend to dedicate themselves to service in Karelia.'¹ Finally, 'since the dialect of the Olonetsk district Karelians (to the west of Olonetsk province) is so distinct from the dialect of Karelian used in the northern part of Povenetsk district, and also Kemska district of Archangel province, these different groups of Karelians cannot understand each other at all. Therefore, in order to service the schools in Povenetsk and Kemska districts, it is essential to open a seminary for teachers in the centre of Northern Karelia in the village of Rugozero, or Padany, Povenetsk district.'²

Similar projects were also being put forward with regard to 'Zyryansk' schools. Professor K. Zhakov, for instance, advocated making a more active use of native languages in the *inorodtsy* schools. In his words, 'As for the *inorodtsy*, it is essential to organise teaching of their language in the elementary classes, though in the senior classes, teaching should be in Russian. To take this attitude to Russian literature would be rational and wise; a pupil who emerged from primary school would not have lost touch completely with his or her language.' He was sharply critical of the arrangements in operation at the time: 'In our times and in the past, when teaching was conducted in Russian from the very beginning, the result was that graduates of primary schools ended up not knowing either Russian or Zyransk properly.' But the existing system of education also had more far-reaching consequences: as a result, primary school graduates 'ended up with no respect for their homeland and for the peasant way of life, yet at the same time their mental horizons had not been expanded' [Zhakov 1915: 69].

All in all, we can observe that it was precisely schools, and parish schools among them, that became one of the most important centres absorbing the masses of the *inorodets* population into the empire of

¹ Ibid., l. 4.

² Ibid.

the Russian language. Paradoxically, too, the development of schools also stimulated publishing in the languages spoken by this population. Thus, by 1914, *'more than twenty-five books on religious subjects had been published [in Karelian], using a modified form of Russian script as the alphabet'* [Antikoski 2000: 35]. There is evidence that primary school teachers working in diocesan schools located in other Russian dioceses with significant proportions of *inorodtsy*, including Kazan province, for instance, engaged in a range of similar activities [Mironositsky 1903: 12].

The use of Karelian for teaching was to a large extent dependent on the enthusiasm of teachers themselves, as the diocesan presses repeatedly recognised. *'Teachers in diocesan schools,'* asserted the authors of a note published by *Arkhangelskie eparkhialnye vedomosti* [The Archangel Diocesan Gazette] in 1904, *'deeply sense the need for their pupils to engage with the Russian language, both as an immediate goal (an instrument for teaching) and as a long-term educational goal'* [*Ot Mezensko-Pecherskogo otdeleniya* 1904: 195]. In some cases, teachers did not limit themselves to simply educating the children, but also tried to fulfil other cultural needs. Thus, teachers in Vidlitskaya volost came to the conclusion that *'the libraries currently available in schools only satisfy children of school age; there is nothing for them to read once they have left, and therefore everything they cover in school soon gets forgotten.'* And this when at the same time the population just on the far side of the Russian border had the chance to read 'grown up' literature. As the Olonetsk Zemstvo Police Chief reported to the Governor of Olenetsk, *'in schools in neighbouring areas of Finland, one can get books that cater in every respect for mature readers, as is well known to the adult population here.'*¹

In order that the dissemination of Finnish culture might be more effectively resisted, the Olonetsk teachers also decided to set up an 'Educational Society.' Its practical ends were, firstly, to prevent the local population from *'making use of Finnish-published literature'*, and secondly, to spread among this *'local Karelian population an informed understanding of the Russian language.'* Of course, the attempt to achieve these ends effectively also required a serious knowledge of Karelian. The teachers who set up the Society themselves had all the right qualifications: even before it was founded, they had often organised meetings for pupils and local people in the schools and had staged recitals of hymns and prayers in Karelian.²

All in all, these teachers were able to draw on their significant experience of pedagogical activity, and to assess the prospects for the

¹ NA RK f. 1 op. 1 d. 107/89, l. 3.

² Ibid., l. 24.

dissemination of Russian among Karelians fairly optimistically. Thus, a local priest in Yushkozersk wrote in 1912: *'Like all Karelians, my parishioners are an enterprising people; though their literacy levels are low, at the same time they have an astonishing ability to learn languages.'* After a year in Finland, almost every Karelian *'becomes completely fluent'* in Finnish and some in Swedish as well, and after spending some time in America, *'the Karelian will soon be speaking English.'* The same individual remarked that by the secondary year of primary school, pupils who spoke only their native language at home *'would begin being able to explain themselves in Russian to quite a satisfactory level, for foreigners, though inevitably, not without making mistakes. We may hope that the Russian language will also acquire citizenship rights in our Karelia, and that an important step towards Russification will be carried out; the railway line that is to be built will hasten this process especially. In time, Finnish separatists will have no grounds to dream of unification with the Karelians'* [Yushkan-Yarven Pappi 1912: 133].

The teachers' efforts in the neighbouring diocese, Vologda, also had some success. The end result of their work was both the creation of a local intelligentsia drawn from the core populations of the area, and also the creation of a national literature. In the opinion of P. Domokosh, a historian of the Komi people, as a result of the expansion of the schools network, the Komi became *'richer and more mobile than Russians, and more civilised and enlightened than their Southern brothers, the Urdmurts. In the second half of the nineteenth century, they already had a considerable quantity of literature in the vernacular, and by New Year 1917, they had access to a larger and better-qualified intelligentsia population than they do now'* [quoted in Kalinin 2000: 59].

Thus, by the end of the nineteenth century, in Northern European Russia, a system of primary educational establishments emerged, which functioned in a purposive, systematic way to give *inorodtsy* an induction in the Russian language. Yet from the beginning, the activities of the *inorodtsy* schools had a paradoxical character. As one contemporary remarked with irony, *'The difference between the school for inorodtsy and the school for non-inorodtsy lies fundamentally in the fact that in one of them (the Great Russian school), the teaching of the inorodtsy's native language is considered legitimate, while in the second [the inorodtsy school], it is banned'* [Zelenko 1916: 8].

This paradox had other ramifications too. The schools were set up with the intention of squeezing *inorodcheskie* languages out of use in local communities. In Karelia, this aim was further complicated by the desire to impede the dissemination of Finnish and of Lutheran propaganda. But in reality, right into Soviet times, there was a widespread view that Russian schools *'facilitated the spread of literacy*

in Finnish as well', since a person who knew Russian would develop a yen for education in a broad sense and then start 'learning Finnish independently' [Bogdanov 1929: 76]. And it was precisely in the process of forming the system of educational institutions meant to foster Russification that the section of the local intelligentsia whose existence was closely connected with the preservation of native languages came into being.

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