When it comes to writing history, archaeologists like to think they have a better claim to chronological accuracy than linguists. At least, they can rely on more exact, sometimes even independent dates (such as provided by dendrochronological analysis) for studying sequences of change. Linguists, on the other hand, cannot apparently answer any questions regarding homelands and migrations without reference to extra-linguistic data. Until recently, the relations between the disciplines of archaeology and linguistics have been dominated by ideas about language affiliation that were developed without any concern for critical approaches to reconstructing history. Kazimierz Godłowski, the Polish archaeologist whose work had the greatest influence on the current research on the early Slavs, notoriously refused to engage in any discussion of linguistic theories about the Slavic ethnogenesis and homeland. Tongue in cheek, he pretended he was not competent enough to leave the all-too-familiar territory of historiography and archaeology. Others have been less reluctant to delve into neighboring disciplines. The Russian archaeologist Valentin V. Sedov has repeatedly used various, and often contradictory, linguistic theories to prop his own arguments about the Slavic colonization of northwestern Russia. His dating of the Slavic settlement in that region to the sixth or seventh century is explicitly based on A.A. Zalizniak's
linguistic analysis of the birch-bark letters found in Novgorod, all of which post-date A.D. 1000, but were written in a language viewed as extremely archaic because of lacking a sound change called 'second palatalization.' To pay back the service, Sedov strove to offer a picture of the archaeological evidence that would neatly fit linguistic theories about dialect differentiation in northern Russia.

By contrast, linguists have rarely employed the archaeological evidence for backing up their theories, although some have indeed used the lack of such evidence for refuting rival theories. They seem to be convinced that language, and not material culture, is the most important aspect of ethnicity and, as a consequence, it is linguists, and not archaeologists, who should have the last word on

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V.V. Sedov, Slaviane. Istoriko-arkheologicheskie issledovanija [The Slavs. Historical and Archaeological Study] (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 2002), p. 363. The second regressive palatalization is a linguistic innovation that may have originated in the south, perhaps in the Balkans, and gradually spread to the north. In fact, the effects of this change became apparent in northern Russia only after ca. 1200. See H.G. Lunt, 'The progressive palatalization of early Slavic evidence from Novgorod,' Folia linguistica historica 10 (1989), pp. 35-59, here p. 57. For Zalizniak's ideas and theories, see his Drevnenovgorodskii dialekt [The Old Novgorodian dialect] (Moscow: Iazyki slavianskoi kul'tury, 1995). For a brief overview of the current linguistic debates over the birch-bark letters, see S. Franklin, Writing, Society and Culture in Early Rus', ca. 950-1300 (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 88-89.

