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Subject: new book: Gritsevskaja on Chtenie

I[rina] M[ikhailovna] Gritsevskaja. *Chtenie i chet'i sborniki v russkikh monastyriakh XV-XVII vv.* (= Studiorum slavico-Orbis, vyp. 4). Sankt-Peterburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 2012. 425 pp. ISBN 978-5-86007-715-7.

This book merits the attention of anyone interested in reading and book culture in pre-modern Russia and really deserves a proper review. My notes which follow are based on a rather hasty reading and limited by the fact that I have not kept up in recent years on some of the abundant published scholarship which underlies a good part of what the author attempts.

In important ways she builds here on her first monograph, *Indeksy istinnykh knig* (SPb.: Bulanin, 2003) in which she classified, described and published the abundant and varied versions of the early Russian indexes of "true" books (that is books appropriate/acceptable for reading). Her earlier book correlated what was listed with what was actually available in the repertoire of early Russian literature. She showed that even the earliest versions of these indexes in the Russian tradition were not merely copies of Byzantine or Bulgarian lists but supplemented them with material specific to what was available in Rus. While she did not elaborate the argument, she asserted that the fact such lists very often appeared in the Russian manuscript tradition alongside copies of monastic rules suggested that the lists were intended specifically to define what was considered acceptable for both communal and especially individual reading by monks.

Gritsevskaja emphasizes that the history of reading in Rus in the first instance is the history of monastic reading, but what was acceptable in a given period might vary from monastery to monastery—individual reading thus apparently being encouraged in the St. Cyril-White Lake Monastery but in certain periods discouraged in the St. Joseph-Volokolamsk Monastery. For any analysis of reading practices, the indexes are one of the most important sources we have.

In the first part of her new monograph, she develops fully her argument about the monastic connection of the indexes. She shows that the compilation of particular versions of such indexes may be associated with some of the most important monastic centers, the earliest instance being associated with the St. Cyril-White Lake Monastery and probably with Cyril himself. When juxtaposed with the repertoire of what we know was actually being copied and read in the same monasteries, the indexes appear to be somewhat outdated or archaic, suggesting that what they enshrined as appropriate was that which already by long practice had come to be accepted reading even if other and newer material was acceptable if not yet "mainstream." The impetus for the first efforts

to compile such indexes was the influx of hesychast works and other texts we associate with the "second south Slavic" influence beginning in the late 14th century. As the indexes evolved, that newly acquired literature eventually entered the lists of acceptable texts. Going beyond her earlier work, the author here also expands on the work of N. A. Kobiak in exploring in some detail (as she had done for the lists of "true" books) the evolution of the early redactions of the lists of "false" books.

Following the distinction developed long ago by N. K. Nikol'skii, who divided monastic texts into categories of what was required by the practices enshrined in monastic rules for collective activity and what was acceptable for individual reading in the monastic cell, Gritsevskaja argues that the indexes are first and foremost the reading lists for individuals. However, for a full picture of reading practices and the repertoire of what was being read, she moves on to analysis of the contents of manuscript miscellanies (florilegia) which are the most common type of manuscript book in the monastic collections. As she discusses at some length, for all the scholarly attention that has been given to manuscript miscellanies, there are disagreements about the appropriate terminology to classify the different types. What she is particularly interested in are what many term "reading miscellanies" (chet'i-sborniki), though that term is hardly sufficiently precise to accommodate either content or function of the books. I am not persuaded her neologism, "tsentonnyi sbornik" (deriving from M. L. Gasparov's definition of a centon as a verse composed of quotations from others' verses) is going to attract many adherents. Among the distinctions made among miscellanies are those with a stable content, and those whose content may vary or be unique; yet here too there are differing opinions as to what "stable" may mean. Many manuscripts combine stable elements (what she analyzes in interesting ways as building "blocks") with unique additions. Also, she follows others in talking about "micro-miscellanies" and "macro-miscellanies," depending on the length and substance of the texts they contain.

Following suggestions by other historians of the book (especially Roger Chartier, whom she has read in Russian translation), she emphasizes that the miscellanies are really the work of readers (and thus tell us about reading), not "authors" or "writers," and in the Middle Ages, the concept of a "book" was not the same as our modern idea. It is only in their late incarnations (in some of the Old Believer literature of the 17th and 18th centuries, which she discusses briefly in her final chapter), that the reading culture of miscellanies begins to acquire "modern" characteristics of authorship. While she uses a range of non-Russian scholarship, she does not cite Francis Thomson's blunt skepticism about the range and depth of the early Russian book repertoire. Her own assessment of "authorship" in medieval Russia is itself rather blunt though: "Only in exceptional cases can one apply the term 'writer' to medieval Russian bookmen. The basic type of their activity as a rule was compilation, editing, the compilation of miscellanies, the 'refashioning' of the texts they had, their adaptation to the particular needs of the reader. For the whole of the Russian Middle Ages, few were the bookmen who created completely new texts, even when they could be based on existing models...New meanings appeared not in new texts but through the alteration and editing of old ones, through the changing of contexts and 'convoys'." (p. 153).

Unlike the first part of the book which focuses on the indexes, her extended treatment of the miscellanies is rather diffuse (perhaps the subject makes this unavoidable). That is, discerning from her evidence a clear line of argument about the culture of reading is difficult, where she is exploring specific examples, many of them drawn from the collections of the Nizhnii Novgorod Regional Library, a collection to which presumably she has special access and which is not as well known as are the collections in St. Petersburg and Moscow. Two of her key examples, which illustrate very different kinds of approaches by the reader/compiler are a collection of texts probably assembled by Varlaam Sinitsa in the Solovki Monastery in the mid-16th century, and the evolution of manuscripts containing as a core text the *Skitskii ustav*. The case of Varlaam's miscellany illustrates the kind of kaleidoscopic selection of text fragments (about which, as she indicates, William Veder wrote, even if she does not seem to share his assessment about the apparently chaotic nature of such collections), which may well have been intended to call up from the reader's memory more complete or extensive texts that were not present in physical copies. In other words, such a collection could connect the world of individual, silent reading with the world of collective, oral reading in a monastic context. That latter, she emphasizes, is essential to appreciate if we are to be able to understand what is or is not in the miscellanies. The case of the *Skitskii ustav* is of interest in part because in the later manuscripts containing it, added texts may not be ones pertinent to the ascetic model of monasticism it defined but rather the form of communal monastic life that prevailed in the places where the manuscripts were being compiled and copied. By virtue of the appended texts (and some deletions in the *ustav* itself), its meaning is transformed.

As Gritsevskaiia emphasizes, it is essential always to place individual texts in the context of their manuscripts—hardly a new idea, but one which often has not consistently and thoroughly been applied when individual texts are being analyzed and edited. Their meanings (insofar as we may thereby be able to divine how readers understood them) may thereby change substantially over time and place. While I come away from her analysis of miscellanies still somewhat puzzled as to whether I have learned as much from it about reading practices as her book promised, her examples certainly do illustrate methodological refinement in the study of book culture which, we might hope, will in the future help expand our understanding of the Orthodox Slavic literary world writ large. We are at the stage where we have a huge, if imperfect, amount of information on the contents of books and libraries and the repertoire of texts that was available. Her study emphasizes the need for more work on how the texts were understood and used.