
The translation and annotation of old Russian texts is an unenviable task, owing to their complexity and obscurity. This is indeed true of the Galician-Volynian Chronicle (covering the years 1201-92), which has received insufficient attention and has never been rendered in a proper scholarly translation, much less one in English. Professor Periecky offers a "free (but faithful) rather than a literal interpretation of the chronicle." He has "found it necessary to substitute indirect
for direct discourse” in certain instances and “for the sake of clarity to identify
princes, substitute nouns for pronouns (and vice versa), translate participles by
verbs and add words within the text itself,” being careful to set off all such addi-
tions and substitutions by brackets (p. 15). These guidelines provide a great deal
of leeway indeed for “interpretation” and create certain problems.

In those portions of the text which I have checked, Perfecky has been quite
scrupulous, with the result that in many respects his translation is much more
accurate than the Cross version of the Povest vremennykh let and is free from
the occasional blunders of Panov’s 1936 modern Russian translation of portions
of the Galician-Volynian Chronicle (to which Perfecky curiously does not refer).
Perfecky does make a few mistakes (such as rendering o reku Seret’ as “for
the possession of the Seret,” and po oltsi svoem as “while his father was still alive”).
More serious, it seems to me, is the potential inherent in the “free interpreta-
tion” and extensive bracketing of Perfecky’s translation for misleading the reader about
what the text actually contains. A few of the more extreme examples will illus-
trate the point. I see no reason for the inclusion of clauses such as “[But they persist-
ently hacked away at them]” (p. 19) or the awkward “[to come to (1206) rule
and reign over them]” (p. 18) when these words are not in the text and are not
necessary to clarify it. Providing historical identification and interpretation is
extremely dangerous, especially when the translator tries to persuade us that as a
nonhistorian he cannot “assume any responsibility for the correctness of the
historical information” in his annotation (p. 15). Not uncommon are passages
such as “[Prince] Oleksander [Vsevolodovič of Belz] came with his allies [the
Polish Princes] Lestko [of Cracow] and Kondrat [of Mazowie]” (p. 19; for
“Vozvede Oleksandr Lest’ka i Kondrata”), and “[they were led by the Galician
boars] Jurij Domanevič and . . . “ (p. 29; for “Be bo s nimi Domancer’ lek’i i
. . .”). Distortion of the text can result from overly free interpretation, as one
sees in the rendering of “zidish’ moi nevomosch’ oshe nekogu a vi u me nee deti”
as “Behold my illness [and] that I am not able [to beget. Therefore since] I have
no children . . . ” (p. 99). The nekogu needs no explanation and can be translated
simply as “I am ill.”

Perfecky is often insensitive to the literary devices of the text, not only in a
number of instances where he has eliminated parallelism but in countless cases
where without good reason he has changed direct into indirect discourse. While
I recognize the difficulty of comparing an English translation of an old Slavic
text with a modern Slavic translation, I venture to suggest that Teofi Lostrušču’s
1936 translation of this chronicle into modern Ukrainian for popular consump-
tion is more faithful to the original than Perfecky’s.

Although no textual commentary can be entirely satisfactory, there are aspects of
Perfecky’s admittedly nonexhaustive annotation about which the reader should
be warned. He states no criteria for deciding what deserved comment and what
did not, with the result that he passes over in silence many obscurities in the text
or important names, while in other cases he provides superfluous commentary.
The historical information in the notes (and often in brackets in the text) derives
almost entirely from the secondary works of Hrushevsky and Pashuto, whose
source in some cases was none other than this same chronicle.

Providing adequate commentary for this difficult text is obviously a task for
a team of specialists, such as the one now preparing comprehensive editions and
annotation of all the old Russian chronicles under the guidance of Professor Prittsk,
the editor of the volume under review. Although offered as the first installment of that important project, Perfecky's volume was in fact prepared originally under different auspices as a doctoral dissertation. Therefore, the reader would be wise to heed the editor's warning that the Perfecky volume "shows the present state of research" (p. 7) and will need revision. As indicated by my critical comments, there is some justification for going one step further and suggesting that its publication was a bit premature.

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