
REVIEWS

THE NIKONIAN CHRONICLE FROM THE BEGINNING TO THE YEAR 1132
(VOLUME ONE). Edited by *Serge A. Zenkovsky*. Translated by *Serge A.* and *Betty Jean Zenkovsky*. Princeton, N.J.: Kingston Press, 1984. lxxxi, 255 pp. Tables. \$35.00.

Studies of medieval Russian history that use the chronicles as sources too often suffer not so much from the inability of scholars to understand the words of the texts as from their inadequate understanding of the basic methods of textual criticism. There is no better example of this problem than in the use of the Nikonian Chronicle (*Nik.*), the massive sixteenth-century Muscovite "historical encyclopedia" that scholars often turn to because of its unique information or because its versions of events are "fuller" or "historically more interesting" than those found in its numerous sources. If a translation of a chronicle is "to serve the purposes of studies of Russian history"—as the Zenkovskys hope will be the case for this volume and the remaining four in their ambitious project—it must not only be scrupulously faithful to a well-defined text but must also be accompanied by extensive commentary to help the uninitiated avoid the minefields of a particularly problematic source.

Unfortunately the editor of this volume does not appear to understand the difference between *text* and *copy* and the necessity for establishing clearly which text he is translating. His discussion of this matter in the introduction is quite muddled (not to mention the fact that some details of which folios contain what are irrelevant for those who may need this translation). Moreover, some of his assertions are alarming to the reader: "When the text of *Litsevoi svod* [one of the secondary redactions of *Nik.*] was more detailed and seemed historically more interesting than the corresponding texts in *Obol.* and *Patr.* [the two earliest MSS containing *Nik.*], the translators followed the former"; "for easier identification of persons and sites, such supplemental words as 'prince,' 'voevoda,' 'river,' or 'city' have been added, *sometimes* [my emphasis] in brackets." In some instances "corrections" by the editor are indicated too vaguely in the notes (for example, p. 43 n. 22, p. 49 n. 35), and "improvements" have been made, apparently with reference to other sources but without any indication whatsoever that the text has been changed (for example, p. 120, completion of the quotation from Psalm 41, and p. 121, "Sviatopolk . . . kept it secret" for *potaiasha i*—the subject is "they"). In other instances, substitutions—presumably for clarity—really cannot be justified (for example, p. 17, "in Russia" for *v Kieve*, and p. 36, "[in order to reach the Golden Horn]" for *k gradu*). In short, what we are being offered is a twentieth-century version of *Nik.*, not a sixteenth-century text that really existed. Explicit identification of editorial changes would have avoided many of these problems.

Even where the text is well established in the published Russian version, the translation is not sufficiently reliable. Although in the largest part of the sections I have checked there are no problems, I have found too many instances of careless omissions (including p. 2, line 6 up—"Dvina"; p. 4, l. 14—"po Desne"; p. 6, l. 1—"Divno . . . slovenstei"; l. 3—"nazi"; p. 8, bottom—"Buzhane"; p. 21, l. 12 up—"Ignatia . . . v'zvodit"; p. 38, l. 14—"Velmid . . . Aktevu"; and p. 39, l. 13—"Russkim . . . leta"). There are also a surprising number of outright errors: p. 15, l. 12—"said" for *rekshe*, "that is"; p. 17, l. 13 up—"Black Sea" for *Chernye* [var., *Chr'mnya*] *reki*, a river the identification of which is, admittedly, problematic; p. 29, l. 18—"them" for *nam*, "us," which compounds an unclear rendering of the whole sentence; p. 38, l. 11—"for this other consultation" for *ravno drugago soveshchania* [for clarification, consult Dmitrii Likhachev's commentary in *Povest' vremennykh let*, 1950 ed.]; and p. 42, l. 13 up and 2 up—"which he had not ridden" for *ne ezdit na nem*, "not to ride it" [or, "for it not to be ridden"].

The annotation both in the introductory material and in the footnotes also leaves much to be desired. Obviously practical concerns influenced some of the decisions that

were made, since to provide really detailed commentary would have prevented the project from ever being finished and would have frightened away prospective publishers. I think, however, that the reader needs a more systematic treatment of the unique features of the text and more on the problems of the chronology of the early entries in the chronicle than the general introduction provides (as far as it goes, Zenkovsky's discussion of the dating systems is very helpful). Zenkovsky is careful in his notes to tell us what portions of *Nik.* are not to be found in chronicles that contain otherwise similar material, but at times the reader really would like to know more than simply the fact that "substantial differences" exist among texts. A note to the effect that other texts of the Primary Chronicle are "abbreviated" compared with *Nik.* misleadingly implies that the longer version in *Nik.* is primary. Moreover, some of the notes are simply wrong (for example, p. 21 n. 62 and p. 26 n. 80).

The foreword dealing with specific problems in vol. 1 of the translation is quirky. There is some material on the evidence concerning the founding of Kiev, and a longish excursus in support of the information in *Nik.* concerning the baptism of Askol'd and Dir in the ninth century. Zenkovsky argues in favor of what he terms the "generally" accepted theory about the Bulgarian origin of the first bishops in Rus' (the theory is certainly not generally accepted, nor is it clear from the notes that Zenkovsky has read the relevant literature). Yet we never find in the foreword an adequate discussion of why Zenkovsky is so convinced Riurik is mythical, or why "Russia" and "Russian" are adequate translations for "Rus' " and its adjectival forms. Although he mentions the "Normanist question," he does not say enough about it to inform the reader what the question is.

Inadequate proofreading and repetitiveness in the notes are additional indications that the volume went to press without the benefit of a strong editorial hand. This is regrettable, for to undertake the translation of this long and complicated text and to provide it with a glossary, genealogical tables, and, in the final volume, indexes, is obviously a labor of love. May those who use the result do it ever so carefully.

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