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Concerning the Ways of Perceiving European Culture in Mid-18th Century Russia: The Lomonosov Circle

by Alexander L. Lifshits

A total of roughly 14,000 books were printed in Russia during the 18th century, which is equal to some 140 a year including works in German and Latin as well as periodicals. This volume is no match for the numbers produced by European states of the time. It is also a surprisingly small number for such an enormous land, whose monarchs from Peter the Great onwards have tried to present the country as a part of the civilized world. It becomes even more surprising if we take a closer look at the situation under different rulers.

It has been calculated that, from 1741 up until 1755 (i.e., from Peter's daughter Elizabeth's assumption of the throne until the advent of Moscow University and its printing press), a total of 321 publications¹ were released – only 21 books a year. It should be mentioned that this historical period, following the dark and brutal reign of Anna Ioannovna (the niece of Peter the Great), was a time when Russian culture blossomed.

Such figures concerning printing by no means indicate that the literate minority – and they were indeed the minority – read nothing. It was simply that their range of interests had little to do with what the few Russian printing houses were publishing. If we ignore those whose interests were confined to the traditional ecclesiastical didactic literature, we see that something, which could be loosely called 'fiction', did exist in the form of handwritten books. Indeed, the graphic presentation and orthography of a handwritten book was usually quite different from what was usual at the printing house of the Academy of Sciences. After all, a handwritten book was something produced by people, who were themselves far removed from the European tradition of education.

Occasionally, the copyists – who at times were working in teams – were members of the lowest rank of the Russian bureaucracy, whose typical occupation was copying documents relating to the judicial life of the Russian Empire. Hence, they were familiar with the traditions not of literary language but of business writing, in which an attempt to convey, say, a phonetic form of the word was not yet considered a mistake. Books copied by such people were not part of the official culture, which declared its orientation towards Europe. Yet it was mainly these books that the literate read.

1 Данилевский Р.Ю. 1725 – начало 1760-х годов: Классицизм [R.Yu. Danilevsky, From 1725 to the early 1760s: Classicism]. In: История русской переводной художественной литературы: Древняя Русь. XVIII век. Т. I. Проза. [The History of Russian Translated Literature: Ancient Rus'. Vol. I. Prose. Ed. by Yu.D.Levin.] Отв. ред. Ю.Д. Левин. СПб., 1995. С. 97-98.

It goes without saying that Russia had its share of European-educated people. These included not only the likes of the great mathematician Leonhard Euler, who was invited to the Academy of Sciences, and the Petersburg resident and long-lived Jacob von Stählin, who was a jack of all trades (he wrote poems, organized fireworks shows and drew sketches for medals). It also included others such as, for instance, Ivan Shuvalov, a favourite of the Empress, an extremely well-educated man, the organizer and first curator of Moscow University. He owned an amazing library, a part of which – more than 450 books – has been well preserved and is now kept in the Moscow University Scientific Library. But there were no books in Russian, and the reason for this is that the texts that Shuvalov (and any Russian intellectual like him) were eager to read had not yet been translated into Russian.

In other words, in the middle of the 18th century, a half century after Peter the Great had put in place his reforms, not all the matters that formed the subject of general discussion in other European language could be expressed in Russian. Moreover, despite the fact that quite a lot of books had been translated by that time, those understanding only the Russian language still could not access European culture – as a rule, only utilitarian texts had a chance of being translated.

Nonetheless, it was the middle of the 18th century that saw a gigantic breakthrough when Russia – and that phrase could be the subject of comment – turned around and started to become a part of Europe. It was the century when European culture began for the first time to exist in Russian. Moreover, we can (with some reservations, of course) indicate the year when this happened.

In 1740, a new generation of people appeared; in their minds European culture and educational standards were harmoniously and closely connected with everyday life in Russia. The most remarkable figure among them was Mikhail Lomonosov, who received his education in Marburg. Moreover, quite a number of people who had been taught in Europe made use of this new experience after returning to Russia. And those who received their education in Russia from teachers arriving from Europe can also be included in the list. They all began to create texts in Russian. Moreover, it was these people who sent out a call for books in Russian that could represent European culture. Along with this, the burning question as to what the new Russian language should be and what a new Russian poetry guided by European example should be like was raised several times.

The century also saw some works in Russian appear in parallel to their publication in other European languages. As in previous decades, these included works in translation. At this time, the Russian reader was in need of a greater knowledge of mathematics and the art of fortification. It was Lomonosov who translated Stählin's poems and a book about the comets by Gottfried Heinsius,²

2 Гейнзиус, Готфрид (1709-1769). Описание в начале 1744 года явившихся кометы купно с некоторыми учиненными об ней рассуждениями [перевел М.В. Ломоносов].

both at the request of the Academy. He also made translations on his own initiative, a significant extract from the “Deutsche Experimental-Physik” of his Marburg professor Christian Wolff³ being an example. However, the results of Lomonosov’s own scientific research continued to be published in Latin.

But the time approached when he would begin to write his research papers in Russian and only afterwards translate them into Latin. By the 1760s, it had become the task of others to translate his scientific research and literary work into Latin, French and German.⁴

In addition, there were translators at the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences, who put together collections of curious and interesting facts for annual publication in the *Sankt-Peterburgskij Kalendar* [*The St. Petersburg Calendar*] and inserted European news into the only Russian newspaper, the *Sankt-Peterburgskije vedomosti* [*The St. Petersburg Record*], in order to teach readers that more and more could be said in Russian.

1755 was the turning point. In that year the first Russian university was established in Moscow. Perhaps even more important, the printing house of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences began to print the first monthly magazine in Russia *Ežemes’ačnye sočinenija k pol’ze I uveseleniju služaschie* [Monthly Writings for Benefit and Amusement], which tried to combine useful reading with entertainment of the audience.⁵

[Heinsius, Gottfried. The Description of the Comet Appearing in Early 1744, Accompanied by Some Speculations on the Matter (translated by M.V. Lomonosov).] – СПб.: Печ. при Имп. Акад. наук, 1744.

- 3 Волфианская Экспериментальная физика. С немецкаго языка на латинском сокращенная. С котораго на российский язык перевел Михайло Ломоносов Имп. Академии наук член и химии профессор. [Wolfian Experimental Physics. From a Shortened Translation from the German into Latin, the Latter Translated into Russian by Mikhail Lomonosov, Member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences and Professor in Chemistry.] – СПб.: При Имп. Акад. наук, 1746.
- 4 Here are some examples: Panégirique de Pierre le Grand prononcé dans la Séance publique de l’Académie Impériale des Sciences, le 26. Avril 1755 / Par Mr. Lomonosow, Conseiller et Professeur de cette Académie; Et traduit sur l’Original Rusien par Mr. le Baron de Tschoudy. – Imprimé à St. Pétersbourg [St. Peterburg: De l’Imprimerie de l’Académie Impériale des sciences, 1759]; Russische Grammatik, Verfasset von Herrn Michael Lomonossow ...; aus dem Russischen übersetzt von Johann Lorentz Stavenhagen. – St. Petersburg: Gedruckt bey der Kayserl. Academie der Wissenschaften, 1764; Kurzgefaßtes Jahr-Buch der Russischen Regenten. Aus dem Russischen des Herrn Etaats-Raths Michaila Lomonoßoff übersetzt durch Peter von Stählin... – Copenhagen; Leipzig: Bey Friedrich Christian Pelt, 1765.
- 5 Ежемесячные сочинения к пользе и увеселению служащих. [Ч. 1]. Генварь–[июнь]. [Monthly Writings for Benefit and Amusement. January – [June]. Part I.] – В Санкт-Петербурге: При Императорской академии наук, 1755.

Finally, in 1755 one more significant event occurred: *Opisanie zemli Kamčatki* [*The Description of Kamchatka Land*] by Stepan Krasheninnikov, Lomonosov's classmate from the Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy, appeared, decorated with engraved illustrations.⁶ For the first time, geographical, botanical and ethnographical research, made in accordance with European standards, was published in the Russian language. Previously unknown territories began to be described in Russian in a manner that had been unimaginable before. Together with Europe, Russia was discovering these new territories in a brand new European language and giving them names. Only eleven years later the book was translated and appeared in German,⁷ thus substantially contributing to the cultural exchange between Russia and Europe.

It is significant, that the date '1755' appeared on the title page of the famous "Russian Grammar" by Lomonosov, although it was not issued by the press until two years later.⁸

Attention should also be drawn to one of the people who prepared the path for the rapid progress in 1755 but was left almost unnoticed by his contemporaries and successive commentators.

In 1746, a book called *A Short Latin Grammar* was published in the press of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences.⁹ The number of printed copies was 2,400, which was quite a large number for that time.¹⁰ This book did not have a Russian author, instead, it was a translation of a Latin grammar manual, called the *Compendium grammaticae latinae* – a work repeatedly printed in various German towns, including Marburg. The title page bore the translator's name – Vasilij Lebedev. It is rather sad that in Russia we often know rather little about the names and lives of our eminent compatriots. Fortunately, some materials about

6 Описание Земли Камчатки. Сочиненное Степаном Крашенинниковым, Академии наук профессором. [A Description of the Kamchatka Land. Written by Stepan Krasheninnikov, Professor of the Academy of Sciences.] - СПб.: При Имп. Акад. наук, 1755.

7 Beschreibung des Landes Kamtschatka. Lemgo 1766.

8 Российская грамматика Михайла Ломоносова. [Russian Grammar by Mikhail Lomonosov.] В Санкт-Петербурге: Печатана при Императорской Академии наук, [1757].

9 Сокращение грамматики латинской: В пользу учащагося латинскому языку российского юношества. Переведено чрез Василья Лебедева, переводчика при Академии наук. [A Shortened Latin Grammar: For the Benefit of Young Russian Students of Latin. Translated by Vasilij Lebedev, Translator at the Academy of Sciences.] – СПб.: При Императорской Академии наук, 1746 (СК XVIII, № 6683). About this book see: Keipert H. Vasilij Lebedev und sein *Sokrašćenie grammatiki latinskoj* (S.-Petersburg 1746). In: Res Slavica. Festschrift für H. Rothe zum 65. Geburtstag. Paderborn/München, 1994. Pp. 117-133.

10 The Proceedings of the Academy of Sciences (entry for February 26 1745) mention the publication of 1200 copies of "The Latin Grammar" (Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg: СФРАН, ф. 3, оп. 1, книга 94, л. 477).

Vasilii Lebedev have survived in the archive of the St. Petersburg Academy of Sciences.

Lebedev, the son of a soldier in the Tobolsky Regiment, was born in 1716. We do not know how he came to be among the students of the Slavic-Greek-Latin Academy (the first educational institution in Russia comparable to the European universities in terms of educational quality, though only in the fields of languages and theology). However, we know that in 1735 he was taken to St. Petersburg together with eleven of the other best students – chosen to become some kind of ‘Enlightenment Apostles’ – to continue his education at the so-called ‘Academic University’.¹¹

Among these twelve were Lomonosov, the abovementioned Stepan Krasheninnikov, the future astronomer and academician Nikita Popov, the inventor of Russian porcelain Vinogradov (who later studied in Marburg together with Lomonosov), and Ivan Golubtsov, who became a translator at the Academy of Sciences. The names mean little to us today, even to specialists. The destinies of these students diverged. A report submitted to the Senate in 1738 said that Golubtsov and Lebedev “have a great talent for studying languages, on account of which it was decided to teach them the Latin, German and Russian languages perfectly, in order that they could be employed in the translation of books, for which special enthusiasm is needed, or as teachers.”¹²

In 1740, Lebedev was appointed as a translator at the Academy, with an emolument of 120 roubles a year. This was not a large sum of money, but it marked a striking contrast to the 36 roubles which were paid somewhat irregularly to the students of the Academic University: the files of the Academy of Sciences include their complaints stating that this money was not enough even for firewood and candles.

As an Academy employee, Lebedev translated official papers for academic needs, the minutes of Academic conferences, articles for the *Sankt-Peterburgskije vedomosti*, the only newspaper at that time, and ‘reports’ and ‘dispatches’ for professors of the Academy.

Among the surviving archival materials is an autobiographical note by Lebedev from the year 1754, where he enumerates the landmarks of his career.¹³ Here are the details: In 1742, his emolument was increased to 150 roubles, in

11 By some strange coincidence of circumstances, V. I. Lebedev, along with another of the twelve (Ivan Golubtsov) was not mentioned under “the eminent alumni of the Academic University” (Кулябко Е. С. Выдающиеся выпускники Академического университета. [Kuljabko E. S. Eminent Alumni of the Academic University]. Ленинград, 1977).

12 Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg: СФРАН, ф. 3, оп. 2, ед. хр. 34.

13 Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, St. Petersburg: СФРАН, ф. 3, оп. 1, кн. 2332, л. 36.

1748 it was 250, and then after 1751 it becomes 350 roubles. One should not forget inflation. Even considering the fact that in the middle of the 18th century the rouble exceeded the present-day Russian rouble significantly in terms of purchasing power, Lebedev had only a rather modest income.

Beyond these scarce facts of Vasiliy Lebedev's biography there are the books which he translated. Already mentioned above, the "Grammar of Latin" (entitled "Short Latin Grammar") was republished eleven times, the last edition appearing in 1817. On 15 January 1748, Lebedev wrote a "humble report" to the Office of the Academy of Sciences: "In the hours free from my academic labours in the past year [1746], I have translated two books on my own initiative for the benefit of my fatherland, namely the "Physics" of Loescher¹⁴ and Cornelius Nepos."¹⁵ Then a request was made to consider the translations he had presented and to decide whether they were worth printing and whether their author was deserving of a reward. Let us remember that Lebedev's regular salary was rather meagre. In 1748, his translations were reviewed by Lomonosov, who heavily criticized Lebedev's "Physics", as he believed the original itself to be wholly bad,¹⁶ but the work of the ancient author Cornelius Nepos was approved and printed.¹⁷

Apart from that, the translator was sternly told that he should henceforth not waste his time on such worthless texts and instead submit the books chosen for translation to the Chancellery of the Academy of Sciences for approval.¹⁸ However, Vasiliy Lebedev continued to spend the time that he had free from "academic labours" on translations. Thus, in July 1749, he wrote to the chancellery: "'Domestic Talks', which I had translated in time that I had free from academic duties, has already been printed."¹⁹ The fact that his "academic duties" were

14 The book of the German physicist M.G. Loescher: "Loescher M.G. Physica experimentalis compendiosa... Vitembergae, 1715" or, probably, "Loescher M.G. Physica theoretica et experimentalis compendiosa... Vitembergae, 1728".

15 Материалы для истории Императорской Академии наук. [Materials for the History of the Imperial Academy of Sciences.] Т. 9 (1748-1749). СПб., 1897. С. 17.

16 "...as far as Loescher's "Physics" is concerned, its translation is poor, as well as the original itself, especially when it comes to chemistry and natural history (Ломоносов М.В. Полное собрание сочинений [M.V. Lomonosov. Complete Works]. Изд. АН СССР. М., Л., 1955. Т. 9. Служебные документы 1742-1765 гг. С. 619).

17 Корнелия Непота Жития славных генералов. В пользу юношества с латинского языка переведены Васильем Лебедевым Академии наук переводчиком. [The Lives of Glorious Generals by Cornelius Nepo. Translated from Latin for the Benefit of Young People by Vasili Lebedev, Translator of the Academy of Sciences.] – СПб.: При Имп. Акад. наук, 1748.

18 Материалы для истории Императорской Академии наук. [Materials for the history of the Imperial Academy of Sciences.] Т. 9. СПб., 1897. С. 63-64.

19 Материалы для истории Императорской Академии наук. [Materials for the history of the Imperial Academy of Sciences.] Т. 10. (1749-1750). СПб., 1900. С. 61. This refers to the book containing parallel Russian, French, German and Latin texts: Платс Г.Ф.

mentioned here is very characteristic. Vasiliy Lebedev feared that the authorities would blame him for making translations of his own choice instead of what was required by virtue of his position.

The following year, in March 1750, the Chancellery of the Academy of Sciences stated: “[On] this day, the translator Vasiliy Lebedev submitted a book entitled “The Circumnavigation of the World completed by the English Admiral Lord Anson” translated by him from German into Russian [during] the time free from his academic work in order to print it, after obtaining approval, for the good of the people.”²⁰ The book was sold out by 1751.²¹ Previously, in 1750, “The Description of the Siberian Kingdom” by Gerhard Friedrich Müller appeared among the translations of Lebedev.²² Both books were reprinted in the 1780s, which provides evidence that the language had not become obsolete over the years.

Домашние разговоры. [Plats G.P. Domestic Conversations.] СПб., 1749 (СК XVIII, № 1969); Plats G.P. Nouveaux Dialogues François-Allemands, Des Choses les plus communes & les plus necessaires, accommodés au stile du tems. Nürnberg: Monath, 1724.

20 Материалы для истории Императорской Академии наук. [Materials for the History of the Imperial Academy of Sciences.] Т. 10. (1749-1750). СПб., 1900. С. 317.

21 Уолтер, Р. Путешествие около света, которое в 1740, 41, 42, 43, 44, годах совершил адмирал лорд Ансон, будучи главным командиром над эскадрою военных кораблей его великобританского величества, отправленную для поисков в Южное море, собранное из его записок и документов и под собственным его смотрением в свет изданное Рихардом Валтером, проповедником на бывшем в том походе корабле его величества, Центурионе; А с немецкаго на российской язык переведенное Академии наук переводчиком Васильем Лебедевым. Со многими гравированными фигурами и ландкартами. [R. Walter, A Voyage around the world which Lord Anson made while the senior commander of a warship squadron of his British majesty sent to the South sea for the search in 1740, 41, 42, 43, 44. A compilation of his notes and documents published under the author's supervision by Richard Walter, preacher on the Centurion, ship of his Majesty which went on the said voyage; translated from German into Russian by Vasiliy Lebedev, a translator of the Academy of Sciences; with many engravings and maps]. СПб.: [Тип. Акад. наук], 1751 (Des Herrn Admirals, Lord Ansons Reise um die Welt, welche er als Oberbefehlshaber über ein Geschwader von Sr. Grossbritannischen Majestät Kriegsschiffen, die zu einer Unternehmung in die Südsee ausgeschickt worden, in den Jahren 1740, 41, 42, 43, 44 verrichtet hat: Aus dessen Aufsätzen und Urkunden zusammengetragen und unter seiner eigenen Aufsicht an das Licht gestellt von M. Richard Waltern, aus dem Englischen in das Deutsche übersetzt. – Leipzig; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck 1749.). The dossier concerning the publishing of the book are preserved in the archive of the academy (СФАРАН, ф. 3, оп. 1, книга 138, л. 458-486. February 26 1750).

22 Описание Сибирскаго царства и всех происшедших в нем дел: От начала а особливо от покорения его Российской державе по сии времена; Сочинено Герардом Фридриком Миллером, историографом и профессором Университета Академии наук и Социетета аглинскаго членом. [Перевели Василий Лебедев и Иван Голубцов]. [The description of the Siberian Kingdom and all the events that took place here; from its first years and especially from the Russian conquest until the present day. Written by Gerard

Moreover, Lebedev translated “The History of the Present State of the Polish Government”, written by a Polish Catholic bishop, Anton Sebastian Dembovsky,²³ and Antonio de Solis y Ribadeneira’s “History of the Conquest of Mexico”²⁴ in two volumes. The dates of publishing cannot serve as a record of the date of actual translation. For instance, on January 30th 1764 Lebedev wrote a new report²⁵ where he mentioned one of his latest translations, a book called “Ladies’ Amusements”, three volumes of which were published in 1765-1766.²⁶ In the meantime,

Frederick Müller, historiographer, professor of the University of the Academy of Sciences and member of the English Society. Translated by Vasilii Lebedev and Ivan Golubtsov]. - СПб.: При Имп. Акад. наук, 1750.

23 Дембовский А.С. История о нынешнем состоянии правительства польского. С немецкого языка переведена секретарем Васильем Лебедевым. [A.S.Dembovsky, The History of the Present State of the Polish Government. Translated from German by the secretary Vasilii Lebedev.] – СПб.: При Имп. Акад. наук, 1766 (СК XVIII 1754).

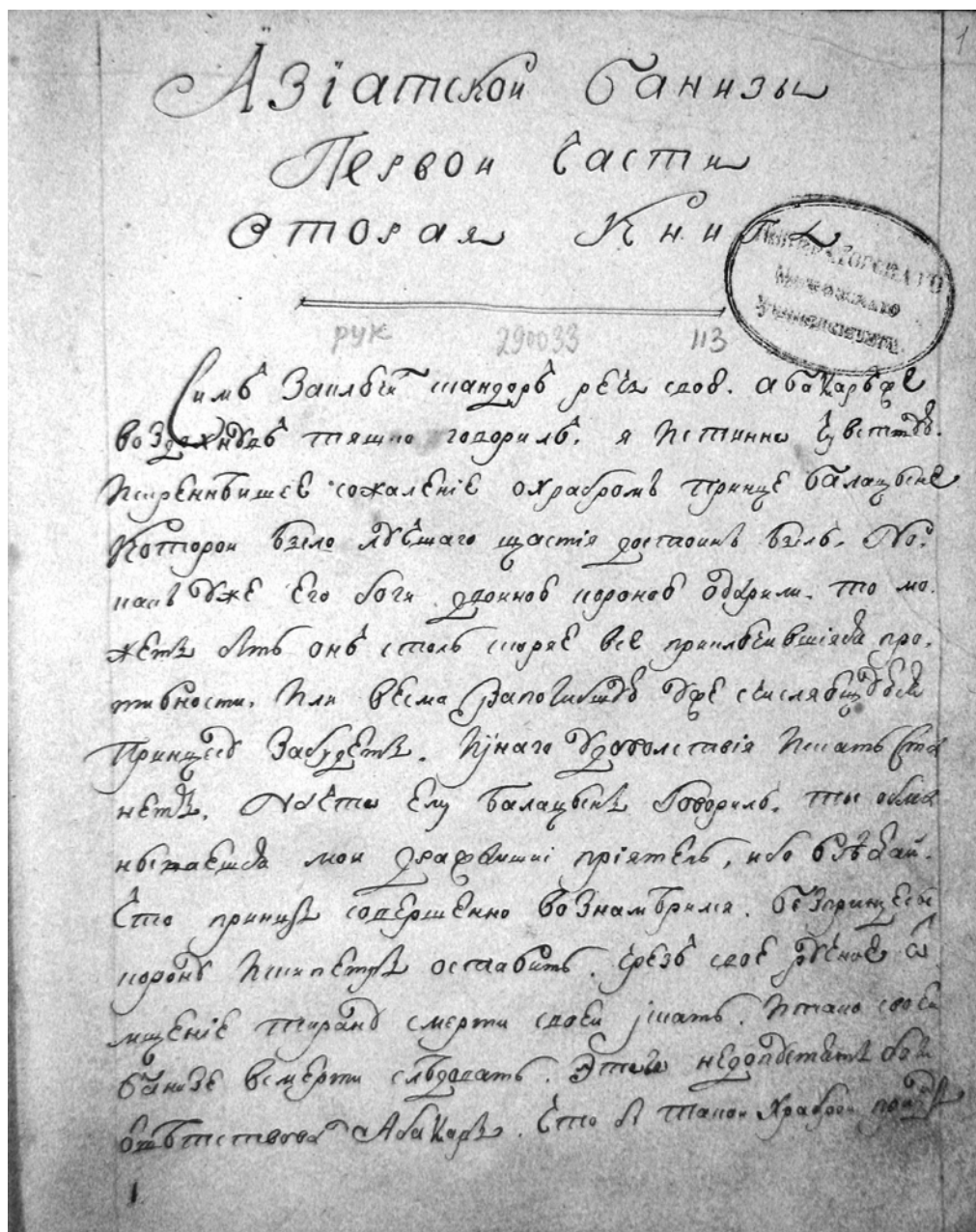
24 Солис-и-Рибаденейра А. Антона Солиса История о покорении Мексики. Переведена с немецкого языка Академии наук переводчиком Васильем Лебедевым. [Antonio de Solis’ History of the Conquest of Mexico. Translated from German by the translator of the Imperial Academy of the Sciences Vasilii Lebedev]. Ч. 1-2. СПб.: При Имп. Акад. наук, 1765; Antonio de Solis y Ribadeneira. Geschichte von der Eroberung Mexicos. Copenhagen, 1750.

25 Archive of the Russian Academy of Sciences, СФАРАН, ф. 3, оп. 1, кн. 280, л. 369.

26 Увеселение женского пола, или Собрание разных приключений. С немецкого языка переведено Академии наук переводчиком Васильем Лебедевым. Ч. 1-3. [Ladies’ Amusements, or A Collection of Various Adventures, Translated from the German by the Imperial Academy of Sciences Translator Vasilii Lebedev. Parts 1-3.] В Санктпетербурге: [Тип. Акад. наук], 1764-1765. The second edition appeared in 1792, it contained the following works: Т. 1. Победа любви и добродетели в неволе и на престоле, или Похождения Мулея Абелмеулы, им сами описанные (с. 3-177); Премещение любви, или Двойное притворство (с. 178-318); Знатная крестьянка, или похождения графини Н.Н. (с. 319-402); Переодевшаяся женщина, или Похождения девицы Менвили (с. 403-494); Т. 2. Приключения Осмина и Дараксы (с. 3-206); Измаил, владетель Персидского престола, часть 1 (с. 207-453); Приключения Эмилии (с. 454-540); Т. 3. Бералдо, принц Савойский (с. 3-146); Наказанная неверность, или Приключения двух братьев (с. 147-261); Измаил, владетель Персидского престола, часть 2 (с. 262-526); Приключения графа Розевилля (с. 527-549). [Volume 1. The Victory of Love and Virtue in Bonds and on the Throne, or Muley Abelmeul’s Escapades, Described by Himself (pp. 3-177); Love Alteration, or Double Pretence (pp. 178-318); A Noble Peasant Woman, or Menvile’s Escapades (pp. 403-494); Volume 2. Osmin and Daracks’s Adventures (pp. 3-206); Izmail, the Persian Lord, Part 1 (pp. 207-453); Emilia’s Adventures (pp. 454-540); Volume 3. Beraldo, Prince of Savoy (pp. 3-146); Punished Infidelity, or Two Brothers’ Adventures (pp. 147-261); Izmail, the Persian Lord, Part 2 (pp. 262-526); Adventures of Count Roseville (pp. 527-549). The German Source of the collection is: Frauenzimmer Belustigungen, oder Sammlung verschiedener Begebenheiten, welche von den besten Schriftstellern abgefasst worden: Aus dem Französ. Frankfurt/Leipzig 1750-1753 (See: Рак В.Д. Испанские и псевдоиспанские повести в русских переводах XVIII века.

original copies of the translations – which are partly preserved in the archive of the Academy of Sciences – are all dated from the first half of the 1750s.

Lebedev also translated a remarkable and rather substantial volume “The Asiatic Banise” and its continuation.²⁷



III. 1. “Die Asiatische Banise, Erster Teil, Zweites Buch” by Heinrich Anshelm von Ziegler und Klipphausen, translated into Russian. Manuscript, c. 1750 (MSU, 1Ry 532).

[Spanish and Pseudo-Spanish Stories in Russian Translations of the 18th century.] In: Пак В.Д. Статьи о литературе XVIII века. [Pak V. D. Articles on 18th-century Literature]. СПб., 2008. С. 409.

27 See: <http://portal.uni-freiburg.de/ndl/forschung/banise>.

This work was never printed, but nevertheless circulated as a manuscript (Ill. 1). It is possible that in time we will get to know of other translations by Vasiliiy Lebedev.

One sees that to translate was almost a necessity for him. He saw no burden in such work and tried to fill all his free time making translations. Even now, when one has to decipher the complicated handwriting of the 18th century copyists, seeking a way through obsolete grammatical structures, one feels the joy of the translator, happy to have found the right word, the right way to tell us something, which had no means of being expressed in Russian only a moment before.

This is a very short story, and only about Vasiliiy Ivanovich Lebedev. Aloof from the pompous academic disputes about the Russian language, its rules of orthography and poetic licence, he and other inconspicuous journeymen had been improving and refining that very same language into which the entirety of European culture would later be translated.

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