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(**THE LIVES OF OTTO OF BAMBERG
IN CLERICAL TEXTS AND LEGENDS** /
TRANSLATED FROM LATIN, RESEARCH AND
COMMENTARIES BY ANDREY S. DOSAEV AND
OLEG V. KUTAREV. SAINT-PETERSBURG:
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PAGES OF COLOURED ILLUSTRATIONS.)

Russian Slavistics may be considered relatively advanced in researching Slavic paganism: in the over more than 250 years since Vasily N. Tatishchev and Mikhail V. Lomonosov, many authors from different spheres from history and archaeology through to ethnography and linguistics have studied various aspects of this major topic. Yet, while this is true of the ancient paganism of the Eastern Slavs, the traditions of Southern and Western Slavs have received less attention.

During the 1850s to 1880s, Russia saw the rise of paganism-related studies on the Western Slavs, especially the culture of the Polabian and Baltic Slavs, entailing the work of Izmail I. Sreznevsky, Alexander F. Hilferding, Alexander A. Kotlyarevsky etc. However, after then and throughout the entire 20th century only a handful of major studies focused primarily on the history and social organisation of the Baltic Slavs. The case of the translation of sources was pitiful and paradoxical. Despite the Soviet school of translating ancient sources being on a high level, only a single translation of Helmold of Bosau's "Chronica Slavorum" was released (in 1963).

Still, the beginning of the 21st century has seen a new wave of interest in this

topic in Russia. Since 2005, new editions have emerged of important sources like the chronicles of Thietmar of Merseburg, Adam of Bremen (two different editions at once), Saxo Grammaticus and a number of other German chronicles and annals as well as Scandinavian sagas. Russian translations of classic foreign research have also been released, e.g. those by Henryk Łowmiański and Aleksander Gieysztor. Alexander F. Hilferding's "History of Baltic Slavs" was reissued. Of new noteworthy works, we must mention Andrey Paul's book on the Baltic Slavs on the mediaeval lands of modern Germany. Yet, a lack of new works is felt, especially considering all of the latest findings and research about the heritage of the Baltic Slavs in Poland and Germany.

The mentioned literature has now been enriched with a new major work, "The Lives of Otto of Bamberg", that combines the academic translation of sources with interdisciplinary research. The book was written by two individuals. Andrey S. Dosaev, who in 2017 released a translation of "Gesta Danorum" of Saxo Grammaticus, introduces a fresh translation of a set of Latin sources from the middle and second half of the 12th century. The second author, the religious scholar Oleg V. Kutarev, writes about a set of topics such as the life of Otto of Bamberg, the history of German-Slavic relations during the early and high Middle Ages, the missionary work of the Catholic Church, the hagiography of Mediaeval saints and, of course, the culture and paganism of the Baltic Slavs. Both authors provide extensive comments and indexes.

A short summary of the sources follows: Otto, the Bishop of Bamberg, was invited as a missionary to baptise Pomerania (today, a large territory covering north-western Poland and north-eastern Germany) in 1120s

after those once free pagan lands had been conquered by Poland. During his two visits, Otto managed to baptise the Pomeranians and not only created the basis for a church structure in the region, but assisted with future Germanisation of the local culture. The work includes all the Lives of Otto written by his younger contemporaries and their students. It is interesting that the hagiographic tradition shows a growing number of miraculous elements in each subsequent text, slowly turning a historical character into a semi-mythological saint, with healing powers (Otto was canonised as a saint by the Catholic Church in 1189, half a century following his death in 1139). Information about the Pomeranian customs, pagan belief and rituals is even more valuable. A lot of unique data is contained in those texts only (e.g. a detailed description of the god Triglav or the term «contina» used to describe Slavic pagan temples). It is also important to keep in mind that this data comes from those who actually came in close contact with the Slavic pre-Christian culture.

The book's Applications section includes the translation of a few other small texts, e.g. the Papal bull, adding more political context to Otto's activities. The political aspect is hard to read in the hagiography text as the latter is naturally more concerned with the virtue of the saint and baptism. Nevertheless, "it would be neither a mistake, nor an exaggeration to call Otto of Bamberg during the period of at least the 1100–1120s a politician among other things" (pp. 488).

The translation of sources consumes about half the book (pp. 10–469), including 12 texts: Lives, stories of Otto-related miracles, and Applications. These texts have never been available before in a full Russian translation. Another one-third of the book is devoted to Oleg V. Kutarev's text «The Lives

of saint Otto of Bamberg» as source material for mediaeval culture" (pp. 470–750). The book has 10 chapters, each dedicated to a certain topic. For example, one chapter presents analysis of Otto's biography using the Lives as well as other known sources (Ch. 2), while another chapter considers textual studies of Lives and their authors (Ch. 7). Some chapters are connected (ch. 3–6) and present a narrative about the history and culture of the Baltic Slavs, especially the Pomeranians, from them settling in the region after the Migration period to them vanishing following fighting and assimilating with the Germans and Poles. Here Otto's baptism is presented as a natural part of the entire history of the Baltic Slavs. Readers are provided with a broad context for the information given by the Lives. A separate chapter (Ch. 9) is dedicated to the presence of Otto of Bamberg in Russian literature over the centuries. The analysis of the early stage is quite interesting by showing how the data from the sources became mixed with later speculation that led to many odd curiosities such as Triglava, a female deity who has outshined the source-accurate male counterpart in terms of popularity, being created. In Chapter 10, an innovative idea concerning the textual effect of Otto's Lives on Saxo's "Gesta Danorum" is introduced as part of analysis of the influence held by the Lives on the subsequent culture and literature.

Oleg Kutarev's text qualifies as a large afterword not just for the Lives of Otto but also for all of the translations of sources mentioned above that previously lacked proper scholarly analysis: the text "is seen as a necessary foreword for the topic of the history and paganism of the Polabian-Baltic Slavs today" (pp. 742). It is worth noting that the author includes the leading research

of modern foreign historiography, even though many facts have long deserved a place in Russian literature. For instance, he provides illustrations and descriptions of a wooden Pomeranian idol from a Szczecin city: “the idol was found in 1995 and, as far as we know, has never been mentioned in Russian literature before” (pp. 565–566, pictures 14–15). The book contains over 20 coloured illustrations, chiefly of archaeological findings related to Slavic paganism in Pomerania and a few monochrome paintings mostly dedicated to mythological themes. Some geographical maps are also included. Both the monography and the detailed commentaries contain quotes in fragments (at times quite large) from never-before-translated sources.

The small article by Andrey S. Dosaev (pp. 751–759) considers the ever-topical question of the origin of the Rus people and might seem unrelated to the rest of the book, although the sources do touch on the topic, even if only briefly. One author of the *Lives*, Herbord “calls both Rujanie and Russians by the same name «Rutheni»”. The authors reach a logical conclusion and explain that “Herbord probably just confused the two due to the similarly sounding names” (pp. 527 ft. 4, pp. 824 comment, pp. 723).

Detailed and nuanced commentaries on the sources (more than 820) make up a significant share of the book (pp. 760–834) and are followed by several indexes and a Reference list. The book is well designed and equipped with an elaborate page header, which allows for quick orientation hence and reduces the need to constantly return to the Contents page. The overall number of copies is just 530 books, with the book having been available since early December 2021 and popular among readers and it is hoped that it will not be the last one.

We also hope that, first, the authors will in the future present new works on this still underexplored topic in Russian Slavistics and, second, that this magnificent book will revive interest in this fascinating topic (given that out of all the ancient Slavs the Polabian-Baltic and the Ancient Rus are the two we know the most about, but other Slavic pagan ancient traditions considerably less!) and will also encourage new works, translations and grateful admirers.

Ivan F. Obratsov, Moscow