
REVIEW ARTICLES

*Eighteenth Century Russian Translations of Western Economic Works**

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Translations of Western economic works into Russian began only in the reign of Peter the Great. Up until then, while western Europe was experiencing « the scientific outburst » and « the century of genius » under the guidance of Harvey, Galileo, Descartes, Boyle, Petty and others, Russia still suffered from the heavy hand of church censorship, low educational standards, isolation and anti-Western feelings. Despite vigorous attempts by a few enlightened individuals like Juri Krizanich and Athanasy Ordyn-Nashchotkin, who believed Europe was « a school in which one can learn not only various crafts but also how to live and think »,¹ the country lacked a forceful ruler who had the power and will to thrust Russia into the mainstream of European thought.

When Peter ascended the throne in 1689, Russia had no scientific societies, no regular exchange with European scholars, no private printing presses, and no printed translations of any sort dealing with economic ideas and principles or, for that matter, with any technical or medical subject. The only inspiration Peter had in the early years before his celebrated visit to Holland and England in 1697 was in the form of personal information received from foreigners living in Russia or the odd noble who had been abroad.

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¹ ALEXANDER VUCINICH, *Science in Russian Culture: A History to 1860* (London, 1965), p. 12.

After Peter returned from his first European visit he drew on discussions he had had in western Europe with numerous merchants, officials, workmen, sailors, and inventors to establish ways to improve internal trade routes in Russia and to speed up the transportation of goods to ports. To lay the foundation for Russia's economic development, a series of educational institutions were established: a gymnasium for translators in 1703, a medical school in 1707, a mathematics school in 1710, a school for engineers and gunners in 1712, and the first navigation school in 1721.²

Peter's aim was simple — to make Russia self-sufficient during its wars with Sweden and Turkey by creating an industrial base with emphasis on exports to countries which could pay in gold and silver. It is therefore not surprising that the first translations dealt less with economic theory and more with practical matters and the « useful arts » such as mechanics, medicine, botany, hydraulics, architecture, and fortifications which would lead to improvement in the military potential of Russia.³

Particularly important in Peter's view was the need to encourage the study of mathematics, as he claimed this branch of knowledge was the basis for progress in all technical, economic and scientific thought.⁴ To foster book printing and the necessary dissemination of this new knowledge of secular subjects, Peter established a « civil press » in 1705 and, at the same time, allowed the Dutch printer Jan Tessing to publish books in Russia on « modern arts and knowledge ». ⁵ Peter also encouraged various interested parties to gather statistical information on the productive forces of Russia.⁶ The culmination of this upsurge was the creation of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1724. The state actively promoted the immigration of foreign scholars and artisans to Russia to aid in the building of new industries and towns throughout most of the country. Thousands came, including some who made lasting contributions in canal construction, ship-building and factory development.⁷

² For a more extensive view, see V. V. DANILEVSKII, *Russkaya Tekhnicheskaya Literatura Pervoy Chetverti XVIII Veka* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1954). Such institutions were sorely needed in the contemporary view of the English engineer John Perry, who said there were not « twenty men in the whole country who knew mathematics ». JOHN PERRY, *The State of Russia under the Present Czar* (London, 1716), p. 211.

³ DANILEVSKII, *op. cit.*, chapter 12.

⁴ NICOLAS HANS, « The Moscow School of Mathematics and Navigation », *Slavonic and East European Review*, vol. 29, 1950-51, pp. 532-3; P. P. PEKARSKY, *Nauka i Literatura pri Petre Velikom* (St. Petersburg, 1862, reprinted 1972), I, p. 271.

⁵ T. A. BYKOVA, *Opisanie Izdaniy Grazhdanskoy Pechati, 1708-Yanvar 1725* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1955), chapter I.

⁶ *Polnoe Svod Zakonov*, VII, # 4443, pp. 220 ff.

⁷ ERIC AMBURGER, *Die Anwerbung ausländischer Fachkräfte für die Wirtschaft Russlands vom 15. bis ins 19. Jahrhundert* (Wiesbaden, 1968), pp. 62-100.

Peter's death brought no halt to the growing interest in western ideas. Under Catherine I, a number of translations from English journals, particularly the *Tatler* and *Spectator*, began to appear in the Russian periodical « Historical, Genealogical and Geographical Notes in the News ». These were mainly on topics such as « On the wealth and trade of Great Britain », « The advantages of shipping », « The Histories of Maritime Nations », and « The use of machines in Industry ».⁸ At the same time, the need to build up an industrial base coupled with the growing importance of Russia as a supplier of naval stores to the maritime nations gave rise to a number of scientific expeditions sent out from St. Petersburg in the 1730's and 1740's to chart the mineral and natural resources of the country.⁹

By the middle of the century, development was sufficiently advanced to support an essential feature in the spreading of economic ideas — that of setting up a journal devoted to the subject. Fostered by its two great patrons, Lomonosov and Empress Elizabeth's favourite, Count Ivan Shuvalov, the journal *Ezbemeshtchnaya Sochinenie*, « Monthly Essays », quickly turned out translations of some of the most important thinkers of the West. Men like Belloni, de Ulloa, Charles King, Galiani, Oxienstierna and others all had their most influential works printed in part or in whole in the decade of the journal's existence (1755-1764). Intermingled with the western views were those of Russian economists and historians like Gmelin, Rychkov, Müller and Reichel who applied many Western ideas to Russian conditions. As if to give official approval to the views expressed in the journal, a considerable number of them found their way into the economic sections of Empress Catherine's *Nakaz*, « Instructions », written for the Legislative Commission in 1767.¹⁰

The success of the « Monthly Essays » led directly to the establishment of The Free Economic Society in 1765. Sponsored by Catherine, its fundamental goal, to encourage the development of agriculture and the economic prosperity of Russia, was consistently outlined in its worthy journal, *Trudy Vol'nogo Ekonomicheskogo Obshestva k Poosbchreniiu v Rossii Zemledeliya i Domostroitel'stva* (« Works of the Free Economic Society for the Encouragement of Agriculture and Husbandry in Russia »).¹¹ Its policy

⁸ A. N. NEUSTROEV, *Istoricheskoe Rozyskanie o Russikh Povremennykh Izdaniyakh i Sbornikakh, 1703-1802* (St. Petersburg, 1874), pp. 12-40.

⁹ VUCINICH, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

¹⁰ N. N. FIRSOV, *Pravitel'stvo i Obshestvo v ikh Otnosheniakh v Vnesbney Torgovle Rossii v Tsarstvovanie Imperatritsi Ekaterini II* (Kazan', 1902, reprinted 1972), p. 38.

¹¹ For a detailed description of the first years of the Free Economic Society, see MICHAEL CONFINO, *Domaines et Seigneurs en Russie* (Paris, 1963), pp. 1-35.

helped many educated Russians to realize that drastic measures were needed to improve the country's economic position.¹²

Numerous other periodicals publishing foreign economic translations appeared in the next twenty-five years: these included the *Akademicheskaya Izvestiya* (« Academic News »), the *Sobranie Luchshikh Sochinenie* (« Collection of Better Essays »), the *Moskovski Vedomost'* (« Moscow News ») (published by the great enlightened man of the 1780's, N. I. Novikov), and the *Ekonomicheskoy Magazin* (« Economic Magazine »). The latter journal declared in an article « Political discussion about commerce » that « trade, navigation and manufacturing are clearly the source of prosperity, and [they] benefit many people and provide work... where this happens, people will willingly live and help the state ».¹³

Considerable good work was also done by a group called the « Association of those who are dedicated to the translation of foreign books into Russian », which Catherine established with a grant of 50,000 roubles. Its journal and books reflected the entire range of economic debate at the time: cameralism of Justi and Bielfeld, physiocratism of Diderot, Voltaire and Rousseau, whiffs of free trade theory of Hume and Robertson, and works of mercantilist persuasion by Frederick II.¹⁴

While this article focusses on translations of a commercial nature, it should be recognized that a number of other fields were related to the improvement of the country's economic prosperity. One such category was medical translations of western books on hygiene, smallpox prevention, detection of diseases, and sanitation, which fit into the pattern of mercantilist and cameralist concern for the national health of the population as an important factor in the economic prosperity of a country. The great names in western preventative medicine, Buchan, van Swieten, Dimsdale, Pringle and others were avidly read by Russians and did much to improve the conditions for selected working populations in the largest cities, on some private estates, and in the armed forces.¹⁵

¹² An example can be found in a speech on Russian trade given by the President of the Academy of Sciences, Gldenstadt, in 1776; see N. K. KARATAEV, *Ocherki po istorii ekonomicheskikh nauk v Rossii XVIII veka* (Moscow, 1960), p. 200.

¹³ N. K. KARATAEV, *Ekonomicheskie Nauki v Moskovskom Universitete, 1755-1955* (Moscow, 1956), p. 35.

¹⁴ See V. P. SEMENNIKOV, *Sobranie, strausbcheesya o perevode inostrannykh knig, uchrezhdennoe Ekaterinoy II, 1768-1783* (St. Petersburg, 1913), and N. K. KARATAEV, *Ocherki...*, pp. 219 ff. The appearance of a new nationalism in literary journals is described in HANS ROGGER, *National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), chapters 3-4.

¹⁵ A comprehensive list of medical books translated into Russian in the 18th century is given in S. M. GROMBAKH, *Russkaya Meditsinskaya Literatura XVIII Veka* (Moscow, 1953), pp. 273-280.

In addition to these works, numerous translations of western books on the mechanical arts appeared. The most important work printed in Peter the Great's time was Charles Plomier's *L'Art de Tourner en Perfection* (1716), which had a great influence on a young Russian engineer named Andrei Nartov who later went on to translate numerous technological works and lay the foundations for a native machine tool industry.¹⁶

While one cannot say that the Russian economic advance in the 18th century was due entirely to the proliferation of foreign books and translations, it is possible to speculate that the translations made minor officials, manufacturers, merchants and gentry, who did not know western languages, more aware of the technological and economic changes that were going on in Europe and so prepared them for their eventual implementation in Russia.

APPENDIX

The following Russian translations of Western mercantilist writings have been culled from a number of sources, the chief being the invaluable work edited by I. P. KONDAKOV, *Svodnii Katalog Russkoy Knigi Grazhdanskoy Pechati XVIII Veka, 1725-1800*, 5 vols. (Moscow, 1962-67), hereafter cited as *SK*. Although this work is most useful because of its thoroughness, the index is badly organized and the detection of foreign names in eighteenth century Russian spelling is most difficult. As it is also somewhat weak on the coverage of periodicals, one has to turn to A. N. NEUSTROEV, *Ukazatel' k Russkim Povremennym Izdaniyam i Sbornikam za 1703-1802 gg.* (St. Petersburg, 1874). Particularly useful is his index to the journal *Ezhemesiachnaya Sochinenie* (1755-1764), hereafter cited as *ES*. An interesting narrative concerning the course of foreign translations in the eighteenth century is found in N. K. KARATAEV, *Ocherki Po Istorii Ekonomicheskikh Nauk v Rossii XVIII Veka* (Moscow, 1960).

Finally, a caveat to the reader: this bibliography represents only translations of various Western European texts. It does not indicate the first exposure of many of the ideas into Russia; this had doubtless been achieved in the original language which only a very small percentage of the elite could read.

ACCARIAS DE SÉRIONNE, *Les Interêts des Nations de l'Europe développés relativement au Commerce* (Leiden, 1766), translated into Russian by Basilov (a friend of Mikhail Chulkov, the economic historian). St. Petersburg, 1771; 491 pages. Ref: CH. BACMEISTER, *Russische Bibliothek* (Leipzig, Riga, 1776), VI, 375; *SK*, I, item 74.

BEAUSOBRE, LUDWIG VON, *Introduction générale à l'étude de la politique, des finances, et du commerce* (Amsterdam, 1765), 2 volumes, translated into Russian. Moscow, 1774. Ref: Bacmeister, III, Bk. 2.

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¹⁶ On Nartov, see F. N. ZAGORSKY, *Ocherki po istorii metallorzhushchikh stankov do seređiny XIX veka* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1960).

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- COYER, G. F., *La noblesse commerçante* (London, 1756), translated into Russian by Denis von Vizin. St. Petersburg, 1766; 288 pages. Ref: SK, II, item 3018.
- CULPEPPER, T., *A tract against Usurie* (London, 1621), translated into French by George Butel-Dumont in 1755 while working as secretary to the French Ambassador in St. Petersburg, and translated into Russian in 1758, appearing in the December, 1758, issue of *ES*. Ref: *Biographie Universelle Ancienne et Moderne* (Paris, 1843 ff.), X, 305-6; Neustroev, 59.
- DIDEROT, D., et al., *Encyclopédie* (Neuchatel, 1765), various articles dealing with commerce, manufacturing, state revenue and finance translated into Russian by A. P. Shuvalov, A. Mel'gunov and others in a three-part work printed in Moscow, 1767; 122, 158, 126 pages. Ref: SK, III item 5164; Karataev, 250. See also V. A. BIL'BASOV, *Didro v Peterburge* (St. Petersburg, 1884, reprinted 1972).
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- FLORINUS, FRANCISCUS, PFALZGRAF VON SULZBACH, *Oeconomus Prudens et legalis oder allgemeiner Klug und Rechts Verständiger Haus-Vatter*, translated into Russian, St. Petersburg, 1738, 1833 copies. Five editions were printed by 1794. Ref: SK, III, items 7826-30.
- FORBONNAIS, F. VERON DE, A Russian translation of «Sur le Commerce» which appeared in volume 3 of the *Encyclopédie*. Moscow, 1781. On pages 3 to 12 of the translation, there was a dedication by Catherine II to the new Commercial College recently established in St. Petersburg. Ref: SK, I, item 941.
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- GOYON DE LA PLOMBAIN, HENRI, An abridged Russian translation of *Vues politiques sur le Commerce, Ouvrage dans le quel on traite particulièrement des denrées et ou l'on propose de nouveau moyens pour encourager l'agriculture et les arts, et pour augmenter le commerce general du royaume* (Amsterdam, 1759). St. Petersburg, 1771, 288 pages. Ref: SK, III, item 8822.
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