
Review

Reviewed Work(s): Early Russian Hagiography: The Life of Prince Fedor the Black by Gail Lenhoff

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Gail Lenhoff. *Early Russian Hagiography: The Life of Prince Fedor the Black*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1997. 496 pp.

Gail Lenhoff's new book is a comprehensive study of Prince Fedor Rostislavovich of Smolensk and Iaroslavl' known as "the Black" because he became a monk (died in 1299; canonized by Russian Orthodox Church in 1469). During and especially after his life, Prince Fedor the Black was a subject of numerous writings which represent almost every major school of Russian hagiography. Lenhoff analyzes these mostly previously unpublished materials and attempts to recreate the multifaceted historical and sociocultural context of Fedor's veneration, from the discovery of his uncorrupted remains in the fourteenth century through the pre-Petrine, Imperial and Soviet periods to the present day.

The author uses a method known in German literature as *Formgeschichte* (Form Criticism). I will remind briefly that this method implies to shift attention from the canonical story to its authentic core. Various copies of the text are compared in order to find traces of oral tradition which, according to *Formgeschichte*, was an original source of *Vita*. To achieve this, each *vita* is broken down into separate plots and the form of these plots is studied. This helps to recreate beliefs of the theological system of the *vitae*'s compilers. Generally speaking, *vitae* is viewed not as a historical narration, but as a theologically motivated story which has many sources. This method aims to establish various "blocks" of tradition: historical core, parables, stories about miracles performed by the saint, quotations from the Bible, etc.

Gail Lenhoff's book consists of four parts, summary, bibliography list, very helpful index of manuscripts and general index. In Part I, the sociocultural context of Fedor's earthly life gradually unfolds when Lenhoff discusses the problem of regionalism, Iaroslavl's prehistory, and first accounts of Fedor the Black from the chronicles that cover the thirteenth century. The result of the author's scrupulous work with these sources is an admirable, encyclopedia-entry-like, reconstructed biography of the prince who "have acted on the periphery of a Christian universe" (52), and who deserved from his contemporary chroniclers neither praises as an enlightened ruler nor mentions of his virtues, but an average account of his bleak political moves and campaigns, and a simple final statement that in "1299 Fedor Rostislavovich dies in Iaroslavl', after taking the tonsure in the Monastery of the Savior's Transfiguration"(52).

In Parts II and III, Lenhoff undertakes detailed comparative textological analysis, the result of which is a convincing reconstructed history of Fedor's regional and national veneration. The author also contributes to the theory of hagiographical genre when she concludes that despite commonly accepted view, the diachronical development of a hagiographical work is not simply a part of a general process of evolution, from elementary verbal forms to complex narrative literature. Lenhoff demonstrates that at some critical points in a cult's evolution, sociocultural factors encouraged writers to introduce new kinds of narrative, to edit holistically, adding conventional scenes and borrowing passages from other vitae, and eventually to compose conventional scenes and borrowing passages from other vitae, and eventually to compose dialogues, narrative episodes, and panegyrics praising the subject (203). According to Lenhoff, the trajectory of literary development was dictated by the community's initial cultural level (203-204). Part III ends with the author's generalizations about sacred biography in medieval Rus' which, in important respects, contradict leading theories on its evolution and poetics (212-213). Consistent method of analysis (Form Criticism) and very careful and original interpretation of the facts and texts make these two parts of the book an exemplary and exciting reading for a medievalist. It seems though, that a glossary of terms connected with the saint's veneration would have made this book less challenging for graduate students and broaden the audience considerably.

The appendices constitute almost half of the book and include six primary versions of Fedor's vita and some earliest commemorative hymns (215-385) followed by their description and classification (386-425). Lenhoff does not undertake a critical edition of the texts. Instead, she focuses on some unresolved questions of classification (e.g., menaion redaction and Antonij's redaction). Her beautiful and thought-provoking classification is accompanied by excellent description and interesting and convincing alternate classification of redactions of the same manuscripts by her Russian colleague B.M. Kloss (in Appendix B). As for the texts from the appendices, Lenhoff transcribed the best accessible copies of the previously unpublished redactions with a limited number of variant readings, and reprinted four published redactions in modified form (with simplified orthography, opened ligatures, added punctuation, etc.). All this, coupled with accurate parallel translations into English, converted the texts into accessible reading for all who are interested in sociocultural history of Russian but can't read in Old Russian and Church Slavonic.

The book concludes with a brief summary in German and in Russian. The Russian version has multiple typos of the same kind,

e.g.: *в 1469 год, к 1570 год*, etc. (437, 438, 439, etc.) which, however, do not diminish the overall quality of this intellectually stimulating and carefully produced volume.

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