

International Conference

Translation of Socio-Political Literature and Formation of the Language of "Civil Sciences" in Russia, late 17th – early 19th Century

Deutsches Historisches Institut Moskau, Higher School of Economics
February 10-11, 2017

The conference is devoted to the influence that European literature in translation had on the formation of the socio-political lexicon in Russia during the “long” 18th century.

In the history of Russia, the 18th century was a turning point in the development of Russian secular culture and in the formation of a new social conscience. The adoption and use of Western ideas and practices played an important role in this process. The most important intermediaries in the cultural transfer were translators who, due to the pressing demands of the times, translated more in volume and frequency than their Old Russian predecessors. This expanded the repertoire of translated works: from technical manuals and textbooks to philosophical treatises and poetical compositions. The formation of a new rational language aiming to describe social reality was associated with the active translation of political and legal literature that had begun in the Petrine era. Arguably, the process of translating European works during the period became a kind of "workshop" serving to create a new socio-political language used in the original writings of Russian speakers and writers, statesmen and historians.

At the time, socio-political literature itself was quite diverse and included books that cannot be classified using modern notions such as "sociology", "political economy" or "law". Researchers who study the formation of the Social Sciences claim that the European literature of the period is characterized by an intersection of disciplinary discourses: although already in the 17th century, there was an attempt to describe this discursive field as "civil science" (*civilis scientia*), contrasting it with *ars rhetorica*, a close relationship between the "scientific" and the literary text continued to exist. Therefore, a political treatise could be a collection of specific instructions (Machiavelli, Guicciardini, Seriol), a book of graphic logos containing a metaphorical description of "posts" held by the sovereign and his subjects (Saavedra Fajardo), or a collection of historical examples of specific political "incidents" (Lipsius, Bessel, Fredro). Conventionally, these might include texts which are now classified as social philosophy, political theory, history, economics, literary works of a political nature (political novel, tragedy, pamphlet, opinion journalism, etc.), as well as guidelines, handbooks, dictionaries and tutorials on these subjects. To understand the ways socio-political views in Russian culture developed during the period, it is necessary to clarify and to nuance the process of development of the language of "civil sciences" by studying a broader source base, which includes handwritten translated works.

The main sections of the conference:

- Research in the field of translations into Russian: methodology, theory, practice.
- Social history of translation: commissioners and translators.
- Translation strategies: in what ways did translators try to convey the meaning of the text to the Russian reader?
- Translation and transfer of socio-political concepts in Russia.
- From translation to an "original" work: the impact of translated socio-political essays on Russian authors.

The conference will examine the following issues:

- Selection of the text: who selected the text for translation, was it the commissioner or the translator? How can one explain the choice of a particular text for translation? How did the network of clients and translators function in Russia at the time?

- Cultural and linguistic issues: what is the source language? How did the language situation in Europe and the intermediary role played by some of the languages influence the choice of the source language? In what way did the practice of double translation impact the final text and the formation of socio-political vocabulary in the Russian language during that period?

- Translation practice in Russia and the work on the translation: what techniques did translators use? In what way did they work on the translation of "socio-political" terminology? How did they find a semantic match for unknown lexical items in their native language?

- Distribution and significance of a particular text in Russian culture: who was the main consumer of translated literature? How wide was the readership? What happened to a translated text: did it remain a manuscript, or was it printed, and what was the reason for that? How can one assess the extent of its spread and its impact? What was the proportion of printed and handwritten texts during different periods in Russia and how can one explain it?

- Reception of ideas and concepts: how did a translated text introduce new concepts and meanings? How did words and ideas represented in translated works consolidate and spread? Is it possible to trace a relation between translated works and original Russian texts during that period, in particular, to identify borrowings, (direct or indirect) citations, or an appeal to the ideas represented in the translated text? To what extent did a translated work influence the worldview of a statesman, a writer, a scholar or a simple reader?

The conference languages are Russian and English.

Please submit your applications and abstracts (about 300 words) in Russian or English. The deadline is September 5, 2016. The Organizing Committee will communicate its decision before October 1, 2016.

Papers (about 5 thousand words) will be sent to all participants for preliminary examination and must be submitted no later than December 25, 2016.

A collection of conference papers will be published in the follow-up of the conference.

The organizers cover travel and accommodation expenses in Moscow for the duration of the conference.

You can contact the organizers at the following addresses:

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