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## "Święta księżna kijowska Olga. Wybór tekstów źródłowych [Saint Olga – Princess of Kievan Rus'. An Anthology of Sources]" ...: [recenzja]

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**ZOFIA BRZozowska, *Święta księżna kijowska Olga. Wybór tekstów źródłowych [Saint Olga – Princess of Kievan Rus'. An Anthology of Sources]*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, Łódź 2014, pp. 217.**

Zofia Brzozowska is one of the few Polish scholars who study the history Rus and Old Rus culture. She studied history and Slavistics at the University of Łódź; her academic interests are focused on the area of *Slavia Orthodoxa*. During her most recent research she focused on imaginings of *Sophia* as *Divine Wisdom* personified. It ought to be stressed that the author has a considerable experience in translating historical sources of Rus origin. She continually published translations from Old Church Slavonic in the journal "Slavia Antiqua" since 2012. Now, we are receiving her translation of the oldest hagiographical and hymnographic works devoted to the Princess of Kiev, Olga. These sources were created between 11<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, and most of them have not been previously translated into the Polish language.

The translation's author divided her book into two parts. In the first one: *Święta księżna kijowska Olga w świetle źródeł historycznych i tradycji cerkiewnej [Saint Olga, Princess of Kiev, in the light of historical sources and Church tradition]*, p. 9–41 she included two chapters, in which she discussed biography of Olga and the origins and development of her cult. At the beginning of the first chapter (*Olga, księżna kijowska – szkic biograficzny [Olga, Princess of Kiev – biographical essay]*) the author noted that the historical sources relating to Olga are highly problematic. Historiographical works come from three different areas – Old Rus, Byzantine and Western European. They present primarily the political aspects of Olga's activity, and differ in their description and interpretation. Meanwhile, the preserved hagiographic and hymnographic works relate exclusively to her sainthood. In the Slavic folklore tales, in turn, the Princess is presented as cruel and cunning (p. 11). Subsequently, Zofia Brzo-

zowska presented conclusions based on analysing information contained in the *Tale of Bygone Years (Primary Chronicle)*, the oldest Kievan chronicle (from 12<sup>th</sup> century), in *Novgorod Fourth Chronicle*, and the life from *The Book of Degrees of Royal Genealogy*. The aforementioned sources agree that the Princess came from Pskov or its vicinity, and that she married Igor, the Prince of Kiev. The 15<sup>th</sup>-century *New Volodymyr Chronicle* offers different information. According to this source, Olga came from Bulgaria. In this case, scholars suspect an error on its author's part: identifying Pskov with the Bulgarian capital, Pliska. Regarding Olga's genealogy, Zofia Brzozowska is inclined to accept the hypothesis that the Princess came from a Varangian background. According to her, the idea is supported not only by the 16<sup>th</sup> century versions of the *Lives* of the saint, but also the Germanic form of her name, 'Ελγα (Helga), found in the Byzantine sources (p. 12–13). Subsequently, the scholar noted the problematic silence of the sources concerning years 903–945. The only (and laconic) remark about Olga from this period is found in the Byzantine–Rus treaty of 944. It mentions the envoy of the Princess and her son, Svjatoslav, as the heir to the throne (p. 13). Attempts to fill in this silence were made in Church hagiography and Eastern Slavic folklore. Church descriptions Olga is presented as a wise and merciful ruler. The folk tradition preserved her image as a power-hungry woman, who did not hesitate to get rid of her husband. Near the end of the year 945 Prince Igor was murdered by the rebelling Drevlians. The author refers here to the dramatic relation of a Byzantine historian, Leo the Deacon. She then rightly noted that it was only the death of Olga's husband that allowed her to realise her own political ambitions. The Princess was

able to rule independently (p. 14). The sources indicate that her position at the court in Kiev equalled that of the now deceased ruler. Zofia Brzozowska stresses that the Old Rus law allowed a widow to publicly fulfil her dead husband's functions, until she re-married (p. 15). The scholar also noted an interesting aspect of the Old Rus customary law. According to it, anyone who wanted to take over a dead knyaz's power had to marry his widow. This is why Drevlians offered Olga marrying their Prince, Mal. She, however, emphatically rejected the offer, since she wanted to ensure the reign over Kiev for her son (p. 15). On the following pages (p. 16–18) we find a critical analysis of the information relating to the revenge the Princess enacted upon the Drevlians over the murder of her husband. Discussing it, the author noted the interesting aspects of the pagan rites and motifs inspired by Scandinavian sagas. The most important event in the Saint's life was, according to Zofia Brzozowska, her visit to Constantinople and receiving baptism according to the Orthodox rite (p. 19). The author compares the sources (of Rus, Constantinopolitan and West European origins) describing these events, and attempts to settle a number of questions; how many times did Olga visit the Byzantine capital? When did the baptism take place? Was the journey intended to result in a marriage? Eventually, the scholar concluded that the Princess visited Constantinople only once, received baptism there, and along with it the name of Helena. Regarding the date of this event, the scholar agreed with a hypothesis by Alexander Nazarenko that it has taken place in the year 957 (p. 20–25). Based on the account from the *Tale of Bygone Years* chronicle, Zofia Brzozowska believes that while being hosted by the Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetus, the Princess promised to assign some of her warriors to serve in the Byzantine army (p. 26). On the following pages the scholar devoted her attention to the Christianisation of Rus. The preserved descriptions indicate that Olga made attempts to baptise Svjatoslav and all of the subjects. Furthermore, Church tradition ascribes to her founding of several Christian temples. A liturgical book *The Apostle*, created in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, claims

she founded in Kiev the Church of Divine Wisdom. Olga could not, however, convince Svjatoslav to convert to Christianity. She also opposed his plans to move the capital to Pereyaslav on Danube. In 968 she endured the siege of Kiev, where she became trapped with her grandsons. She died on 11<sup>th</sup> of July 969. In 1007 her body was exhumed and moved into the newly build Church of the Tithes (p. 27–29).

In chapter two (*Święta Olga – dzieje i specyfika kultu w Kościele wschodnim* [*Saint Olga – the history and nature of the cult in the Orthodox Church*] – p. 31–40) the scholar focused on presenting the cult of St. Olga in the light of hagiographic sources and Church tradition. Reaching for the oldest preserved hagiographic texts dedicated to the saint, Zofia Brzozowska noted that it would appear that the Princess was venerated as early as in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. The sources not only describe the miracles that occurred thanks to her intercession, but also note that her body did not decay. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the metropolitan bishop of Kiev, Ilarion, in his work *Praise of Prince Vladimir*, likened the Kievan ruler with the Emperor Constantine the Great, and his grandmother Olga with the Empress Helena. Undoubtedly, in this way he underscored the contributions of Vladimir and Olga to the Christianisation of Rus. He did not, however, go as far as to call them saints, even though, as the scholar notes, in the *Praise of Prince Vladimir* he did refer to the ruler as equal-to-Apostles. In this way he transposed onto the Rus soil the Byzantine idea of the ruler (p. 31–33). Vladimir was sainted probably at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. The scholar supposes that Olga may have been sainted about a century earlier. Her sainthood was finally confirmed at a council in Moscow in 1547 (p. 35). Another aspect of the cult of St. Olga discussed in this chapter is the official Church iconography. The author brought to attention and interpreted several interesting examples, among them manuscript illuminations, wall paintings, and a portable icon (p. 37–39). Subsequently, she turned her attention to the local cult of St. Olga in Łódź. She presented the history of the founding of the church of St. Olga, which was consecrated on 4<sup>th</sup> of October 1898. She also attempted explaining the factors

that decided about choosing St. Olga as the patron. According to the author, one of the factors may have been the fact that in 1895 a daughter of Tsar Nicholas II, Olga, was born. Perhaps it was in a gesture of loyalty that the church was dedicated to the patron saint of Tsar's daughter (p. 39–40).

In the second part of the book (*Święta księżna kijowska Olga – wybór tekstów źródłowych [Saint Princess Olga of Kiev. A selection of primary sources]* – p. 44–202) the author listed eight source texts, along with their translations. Each of them is preceded by a brief introduction, informing about the time of creation and manuscript tradition. Furthermore, the Author indicated the most important editions of each of the works, the edition she used in the book and the basic literature on the subject. The texts included here are: *Praise of Olga*, a part of the *Remembrance and praise of Prince of Rus Vladimir* by Jacob the Monk, from 11<sup>th</sup> century (p. 44–48); the Prologue Life of St. Olga (Southern Slavic), from 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries (p. 50–54); the Prologue Life of St. Olga (from Rus), 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries (p. 56–60); Canon in Praise of St. Olga, ascribed to Cyril of Turov, 12<sup>th</sup>–13<sup>th</sup> centuries (p. 61–74); *A word about how Olga had herself baptised*, turn of 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries (p. 75–80); Life of St. Olga (so-called of Pskov), from the 1560s (p. 82–94); Life of St. Olga (so-called of Pskov, shortened edition), 16<sup>th</sup> century (p. 95–100); Comprehensive Life of St. Olga, in-

cluded in *The Book of Degrees of Royal Genealogy*, ca. 1560 (p. 102–202).

Each of the texts is accompanied by footnotes. The book is supplemented by a list of abbreviations (p. 203–204), bibliography (p. 205–210) and a subject index (p. 211–217).

The book is a valuable addition to the, rather scanty in the Polish language, collection of the Old Rus texts. Its considerable merit is also the fact that the original texts have been provided along the translations, which enables the readers to verify their (it has to be noted, exceedingly high) quality. It should be noted that the majority of the translated works included in the volume have not been previously translated into Polish.

The discussed book will be, I think, an excellent aid to the didactic process at universities, and will contribute to the development of Polish research on the beginnings of Christianity in Rus. One other aspect of the book deserves attention: the scholar also discussed the history of the Orthodox Church in Łódź, dedicated to St. Olga. One might therefore say that her book will also contribute to the better understanding of Łódź as the city of four cultures, part of which is the heritage of the Orthodox Rus.

I am certain that the work discussed here will find numerous readers, both among the scholars, and wider public interested in the history of Rus.

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**ЛЪЧЕЗАР ПЕРЧЕКЛИЙСКИ, Ахтаровият царственик от 1844 година. Текст и изследване [Ahtaroviyat Tsarstvenik. Text and research], Бюлид-инс, София 2013, pp. 184.**

Łączesar Perčekliyski's work exhibits all the characteristics of the historical-linguistic trend, which has been consistently popular in the Balkans for years, and which entails describing and publicising the most important monuments of literature. This time, the author took upon himself to focus on the edited vari-

ant of the first Revival-period work to address Bulgarian historiography – *Istoriya Slavyano-bolgarskaya [Slaveno-Bulgarian History]* by Paisius of Hilendar (also known as in Western sources as Paisii Khilendarski; it is worth mentioning that this book, which is without doubt a great contribution to the research on the