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Literaturnyi avangard russkogo Parizha 1920-1926. Istoriia, khronika, antologiiia, dokumenty. Edited by Leonid Livak and Andrei Ustinov. Pp. 990. Moscow: OGI. 2014. RUB 1084. ISBN: 978-5942826956

The complex and multifaceted phenomenon of the literature of the Russian diaspora has been researched extensively over many decades, especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Leaving aside the ideological frame that distorted the discussion of the ‘russkoe zarubezh’e’ until 1991, both Russian and international academics have paid increasing attention to the literary production of the Russian émigrés of the first and second ‘waves’, trying to assess the quality of their literary production, the dynamics of their communities, the spiritual needs of the émigrés and their impact on their intellectual activity. The work of Lazar Fleishman, Gleb Struve, Fedor Poliakov and many other scholars has produced a clear map of the phenomenon and, at the same time, an accurate panorama over such a wide and composite spectrum of authors, intellectuals, literary and artistic works. Finally, the contribution of research projects such as Oleg Korostelev’s monumental “Emigrantika” (<http://emigrantika.ru>) and “Russi in Italia” (Russians in Italy, see <http://www.russinitalia.it>) has been fundamental in providing what today seems a comprehensive and well-defined picture of the phenomenon.

This voluminous book edited by Leonid Livak (University of Toronto) and Andrei Ustinov (University of San Francisco) has the ambitious task of changing two well-established perspectives within the field, i.e. that the avant-garde was nothing but a meaningless episode in the history of ‘russkoe zarubezh’e’, and that Berlin was the most crucial centre for the creation of Russian émigré literature in the initial period of the Russian diaspora, while Paris became an important literary centre for the Russian émigrés only towards 1925. In the thorough, lengthy and well-documented introductory essay to this book (pp. 11-142) – which is an updated version of the essay published in 2005 in the journal *Diaspora* – Leonid Livak states that the ‘fundamental thesis of the present book [is that] the Parisian period of the first half of the 1920s was no less important for the development of Russian émigré literature than the chronologically parallel Berlin stage, as many of the central figures of the young generation of expatriates – which would in the early 1930s be the face of Russian émigré literature– were artistically formed in the Parisian literary and cultural milieu’ (p. 15).

Livak identifies the reason for the overall understatement of the role of the Parisian initial period of Russian emigration (‘until recent times, the cultural life of the Russian Paris in the first half of the 1920s, and especially of her many “young buds” has remained basically unwritten in the academic sphere’, p. 13) in the very nature of the protagonists of this stage and of the texts they composed in the first half of the 1920s. As a matter of fact, the main figures of this period – e.g. Dovid Knut, Boris Poplavskii, Sergei Shurshun – not only were strongly involved (and in many case *directly* involved) in the avant-garde movement, but remained also sympathetic towards the revolution, thus becoming a somewhat complex object of study and, in a way, a problematic element in the general critical narrative on the Russian diaspora.

In order to comply with the ambitious scope of their book, the editors have opted to present a monumental amount of material, arranged and displayed in such a way that their two main theses are confirmed and supported by hundreds of texts and images. Therefore, the introductory essay shows in abundant detail the steps through which the Parisian Russian community took shape from 1920 onward and established itself within the vibrant cultural context of the French capital. Livak drives the reader through the different phases of the activity of the Russian émigrés, from the interconnections between Shurshun and other émigrés with the Dadaist movement, to the ever-increasing involvement in the Parisian artistic milieu, up to

the creation of the journal 'Udar' in 1922. The author then analyses the rift between the 'ottsy' of Russian emigration in Paris and the 'deti' – that is the young poets – who did not share the anti-Bolshevik feelings of the former (pp. 54-59) by means of an unpublished letter by Il'ia Zdanevich, showing also how this rift eventually led to some of the poets deciding to leave Paris for Berlin. Livak depicts the whole range of activities by the Parisian Russian poets (the formation of the group 'Cherez' in March 1923, the problems with other Paris-based movements after the crisis within the Dada group, the change of the situation with the arrival of other émigrés from Berlin, etc.) until 1925 and beyond. His essay, per se, would be enough to prove that the goals of the book have been achieved.

However, as mentioned above, the editors have decided to provide the readers with all the necessary tools to see with their own eyes that Livak and Ustinov's theses are correct. The array of materials provided also provide the beneficial effect of making the reader confident with the period and the lesser-known authors analysed in the introductory essay. The first section that follows the essay is an outstanding chronology of events from 1920 to 1926, edited by both Ustinov and Livak. This impressive mosaic of events (pp. 145-238) integrates previously published chronologies (such as the one by Michel Beyssac quoted by the editors, see Michelle Beyssac (dir.), *La Vie culturelle de l'émigration russe en France: Chronique (1920-1930)* (Paris: PUF, 1971)) with events referring to the poets of the Russian avant-garde in Paris, thus providing a second contextualisation of their activities.

After this two-fold introduction, the editors present the material on which they have based their research, i.e. the poems of the authors of the literary avant-garde of the Russian Paris. Ten poets and a total of twenty-three collections of poems are presented. This extensive anthology (pp. 239-748) enables the reader to appreciate fully the vigour and variety of this understudied group of poets. In organising the material, the editors have opted to reduce the space given to more renowned poets (Poplavskii, Zdanevich, Sharshun) in favour of lesser known authors who have somehow remained overshadowed, like Vladimir Sveshnikov-Kemetskii, whose collection of poems 'Stone flowers' they foreground.

The volume closes with a conspicuous collection of documents (unpublished letters and translation of essays by the poets of the Parisian Russian literary avant-garde) and a graphic reproduction of all the issues of 'Udar' (pp. 751-990) which, as with the other images of the book (photos of the poets, of their manuscripts, of the places quoted), represents a vital element of this volume and help to harmonise the contents. Finally, the number of collections and archives consulted by the two editors is impressive. A total of sixteen institutions based in six different countries testifies to the effort undertaken by them provide a serious and comprehensive work, putting an understudied topic firmly on the map of Russian studies.

In conclusion, this is an excellent, thoroughly researched, colossal work, which via an enormous number of archival documents and texts traces the history of the Russian avant-garde in Paris in the early 1920s, the events that mark this period, the literature it produced, images of the period and other documents that contextualise the object of this study. By using all possible sources, Livak and Ustinov have managed to support in a very convincing way their initial thesis, and have also produced a lengthy but enjoyable volume which is a necessary reference point for any future study in the field. It is almost impossible to find fault with this work, though the absence of an index at the end of the volume is a notable omission. But it feels unjust on my part to criticize a publisher –the Moscow-based OGI – which has invested substantially in this project and has managed to produce such a vast, weighty and challengingly marketable opus. Rather than concentrating on the only flaw, I can only salute the editors and the publisher for providing the international academic community with an outstanding and fundamental resource.

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