

## A Note on the Translation.

IT MAY be asserted with no undue confidence that Old Hussarian is one of the lesser-used tongues to which our linguistic heritage can lay claim: and it may follow, then, that it is one of the least translated also. There are, naturally, excellent historical reasons for this absence of translational effort, not the least of them being - particularly with reference to older sources - the paucity of manuscript material now extant, and the parlous condition of those materials remaining: which condition, without exception, constitutes an enduring challenge to expertise in this specialised field. As any passing familiarity with the general history of Hussaria demonstrates, this should not, of course, be surprising.

This modest note does not, however, presume to introduce itself to the disputatious groves of Hussarian historiology; for, as is well known, the calling of history is most wisely reserved for those best qualified to interpret its records in a socially responsible manner. Nor does it propose to venture any opinion with regard to the place of the text, as translated, within the canons of post-colonial literatures; or, indeed, to comment on the text in any developed way in terms of the *apparatus criticus* of post-colonial literary theory (and in any case the Hussarian experience solicits an interpretation of the concept of post-coloniality which is very strict indeed).

It may be thought appropriate, however, to draw the attention of the attentive reader to the established conceptual tools of historical reappropriation, hybridity, vernacular modes of cultural [take-in here a few pars from something I have already done]: as also to draw his attention to the principal linguistic obstacles which

confront any attempt to render a fluent translation of this portion of the Hussarian Manuscripts (as they will surely come to be known).

The translator of manuscript material is not primarily concerned with phonological considerations; although a familiarity with the phonemic system is certainly something of a prerequisite to advanced effort in the field. We need not, then, concern ourselves unduly with this aspect of Old Hussarian, difficult to the point of notoriety though it most certainly is; other than to recall its curious clusters of gutturals and palatisations along with its discontinuous consonantal gradations, and to remember that stress is highly marked and unpredictably mobile, and varies in accordance with that principle of vowel harmony which gives to the language its unusual musicality of effect.

It may, then, suffice to note that the cadences of the original material on which this present translation draws clearly suggest an oral origin of some antiquity: and the translation has at all times attempted to match these cadences, within the limits of the new language, and within the limits of our understanding of the principal dialect in which they appear to have been rendered.

As for the orthographic system of Old Hussarian: this has long presented something of a difficulty. That it is boustrophedonic is, naturally, no challenge to an articulate eye. That the manuscript and printed forms, as also lower, intermediate and upper case forms, diverge so widely is not in itself an enduring problem: but the unhappy fusion of at least three alphabetic systems in the language, certainly does. Worse is the intermittent omission, subject to rules of very considerable complexity, of the signing of vowels; which vowels, on the occasions when they are marked, may be so identified by either vocalic or consonantal letter or diacritic. Further,

the inclusion of logographic symbols in otherwise alphabetic (strictly, betagamic) text has always puzzled scholars. Nor is it helpful that the sound-values of a number of letters vary as to whether their position is primary, medial or final in the word: which *scriptio continua* word is invariably unseparated from its adjoining fellows. The spelling of the language is, of course, in practically no way any guide to an even-approximate pronunciation.

The peculiar syntactic and morphological structures of Old Hussarian also present very significant difficulties, and this despite the considerable advances in understanding to which recent scholarship in the field can lay some modest claim. That it is analytic at the level of the simple sentence (though these are best considered minor or idiomatic structures) is evident; that it is synthetic when we come to the compound sentence should be obvious; but that it is both synthetic and agglutinative when we approach the complex sentence is a revelation reserved - perhaps as it should be - for the special enjoyment of the advanced scholar, and the advanced scholar alone. That this paradigm alters in relation as to whether the stylistic register is demotic, literary or ecclesiastical (or, on occasion, ceremonial-oratoric), is a further cause for puzzlement to those whose knowledge of the language must be judged deficient. It is, too, often a cause for puzzlement that the paradigm, in a manner which we might now be allowed to call radical, alters relative to the gender of the speaker and the addressee.

Even at the elementary level, the syntax of Old Hussarian is baffling, with the order of the conventional elements changing very significantly - sometimes, it must seem, unpredictably - in relation to the stylistic register: though it is to this syntactic flexibility (and the

elusive nature of semantic coherence) that we must chiefly attribute the remarkable fluidity of sound and meaning in the language.

The accidence too is complex, though it is often said to be not unduly irregular. In the verb - insofar as that is a concept justly applicable to Old Hussarian - we may recognise in the paradigm four persons, four numbers, six tenses (so-called), five moods and an equal number of aspects, and no less than four (or perhaps five) voices and four participles. As to the other parts: it may be noted that the noun allows of no less than 27 case-forms (rather more in the minor dialects), four numbers and four genders, organised in either 17 or 18 declensions; and the adjective attributive, whose position relative to the noun it qualifies is a matter of notorious complexity, must agree on almost every occasion. In special cases, usually in literary usage, both noun and adjective can inflect to mark time. The accidence of the numeral, and indeed the numeric system of Old Hussarian, is entirely outwith the scope of this present note; as, of course, is any reference to the pronoun, and its extraordinary range of in-fixed diminutives and augmentatives. It may, however, come as something of a relief to know that Old Hussarian does not allow of the use of an article, definite, indefinite or zero: although exception is made in the case of the honorific rituals of stylised discourse, when the application of each article, fully inflected as appropriate (the zero article being represented by no more than its inflections), is, naturally, essential.

In the realms of semantics, meantime, we confront - and as should be obvious - very formidable difficulties indeed. Providentially, these difficulties are outwith the scope of this note.

Any reference to the cultural anthropology of Hussaria is also entirely beyond the remit of this present note, and it would surely be

tedious for the translator to have to recount once more the curious means by which this portion of the Manuscripts made its way to his hand.

But it may be proper to offer a word on some particulars of the translation itself. It is, for instance, earnestly hoped that Major Gweene's victory song (as also the Concubines' Dance of the Diggers) captures something of the burlesque flavour which we may suppose to have been the authentic voice of the early ballad form in Hussaria. Many of the songs in the original material, of course, have been omitted, having proved entirely resistant to coherent translation: among these being Adeline's mighty song-cycle in 114 sonnets (a cycle that will yet be celebrated as the famous 'mortuary-sequence'), which takes as its subject the charms and temptations of conjugal violence and courtly love.

Other material has been omitted on account of deficient space: while yet more has been omitted on account of serious damage, by fire, to the manuscripts. Here, and most notably, we must count the record of what appears to have been (though we cannot be certain) Old Jacob's eve-of-battle peroration to his army; as also the full account of Finnegan's night at 'the clubbing' with the three wee cousins.

Yet more has been omitted as clearly inconsistent with modern standards of decency. In this respect, we are required to recall in particular that song which Helena sings on her first visit to the Jacob household. It has, sadly, been omitted - with the exception of a few bare lines - as it has proved impossible to recover the text in its entirety; and in any case the fragment extant vigorously defies almost all prevailing expectations of taste and decorum: and, indeed, credulity.

It should be noted, too, that much (though not all) of the copious illustrative material with which the manuscripts were initially decorated still remains, at date of writing, to be located.

A final note on the reconstruction of the story may not be out of place.

The letters, here published in two sequences, were discovered in a codex which was separate from that in which the remaining narrative material was found. These letters are the only surviving from what, evidently, was a much larger collection. Although they are now undated, on account of extensive marginal deterioration of the folios, it is clear that some belong to an earlier part of the narrative, and some to a later: and they have been so placed in the text.

Some of the story is clearly missing; though not so much as should cause any problem to the prescient reader. One example should suffice. It is, for instance, perfectly clear from a number of fragments that the relationship between on the one hand Finnegan and Vanessa, and on the other Finnegan and Wee Alex, was much more intimate than we might otherwise suspect: but there is now no way of determining exactly what this intimacy comprised, in either case, without offence and damage to the conventions and boundaries of the proper historical method.

In other words: if the reader presumes to expect of this jewel of Old Hussarian literature a simple, or even simplistic, clarity of narrative line - to expect that apparence of narrative unity generally supposed to be the principal characteristic of elementary fiction - then he will be disappointed at its absence. In any case, these disjunctions are not so indelicate that we cannot at all times propose a reasonable sequence of connected events: while it is, after all,

these very disjunctions which pre-eminently confer upon the text its essentially persuasive spirit of authenticity.

As to the precise nature of the great plant: there is, at least, some cause for unanimity of opinion with regard to its chronology and function. Evidently, Major Gweene had identified the bog as an ideal location on account of its remoteness from the great centres of power and influence, and on account of the custodial relationship enjoyed with that bog by the Jacob household. It is possible, indeed, that the household had a tenurial claim over the bog, perhaps in the way of grazing rights for those sheep to which there are a number of references in the manuscripts. That Finnegan was already involved in the production of what clearly appears to have been psychotropic stimulants, albeit on a personal rather than (as would soon be the case) an industrial scale, may have been counted an additional benefit. Clearly too, there was some form of exchange involving these tenurial rights and Finnegan's appointment as managing-director emeritus of the great plant.

As to the concept itself: it bears the hallmark of Gweene's evidently-considerable strategic genius and characteristic military daring. That plan, after all, was to erect on the bog, with government and private-sector funding from two leading investment banks, a gigantic process-utility dedicated to the production of a complete range of domestic and recreational comestibles: each and every one of these products being artificially enhanced most handsomely in the way of psychotropic and, or, narcotic additives. Ethno-pharmacologists, however, remain divided on the precise composition of these additives: and can only speculate that, in the case of the presumed narcotic element, the on-site team of production engineers and process chemists had devised a means of

rendering the additive immune to neutralising enzymes in the digestive tract, thereby ensuring that its potency in oral form was equivalent to that in any other form.

That the enterprise eluded detection - if we quite properly discount the pettifogging obstruction of the common police force - should not, of course, be surprising in any way: governing authorities of many sorts, and over very many years, have been blind to many much simpler deceptions in the cause of regional industrial developments. Indeed, had the rising in Hussaria not provoked the great popular agitation, which in turn led to Gweene's constitutional rising with the aid of the armed forces of the neighbouring great power, it is quite likely that the plant would have continued to operate freely for many years. That, certainly, we may suppose to be the considered opinion of those industrial historians who will in due course grant the matter their responsible and expert consideration.

Scholarly cartographers, meantime, will long puzzle over the identity of the small nation in which the principal action of the story takes place. That it enjoys the jealous protection of a neighbouring great power is obvious. Evident too is its absence of a voice in foreign affairs, or any possession of armed forces over which its governing authorities exercise control. That it can, quite lawfully, be invaded and laid-waste as necessary by the neighbouring great power is perfectly clear: as, indeed, is the constitutional power of that neighbouring great power to abolish - overnight, if need be - the limited degree of administrative autonomy to which it, by permission, lays claim. Beyond that, however, the question of its identity must remain, for the time being at least, a mysterious one.

That these elements of the story are of necessity absent from the translated version is, naturally, a matter of some regret: though their absence does, of course, contribute to the markedly compressive nature of the narrative - and that, 'in these modern times of bother and rush', may well be counted an advantage.

It is in any case to be most earnestly hoped that what has been translated will serve as an introduction to the remaining literature of folk-legend in the Old Hussarian tongue: and may, even, attract those of an inquisitive disposition in the direction of its remaining literary treasures and enduring linguistic delights.

In this connection, and should the quality of demand merit the gesture, it is entirely possible that selected documents from the Manuscripts may in due course be made available to the intelligent public, by means of the intercession of reputable scholars [if they can be found], at an approved and appropriate place: which is, however, yet to be identified.

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