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NOTES ON PUSHKIN'S TEXTS

1. The Genre of Verbal Contest: Problems of History and Comparison

Pushkin's "Zoloto i bulat" is a translation of an anonymous French poem using the common device of trochaic tetrameter to render foreign verse of the romancero type. The whole architecture of the poem reflects the main binary opposition; "les noms de ces deux métaux, sujets parlants métonymiques, sont substitués l'un au richard et l'autre au guerrier, par l'intermédiaire usuel du glaive."1 The French original belongs to the genre of débats et disputes. It was already extremely popular in Old French (and Provençal) literature as well as in Medieval Latin letters.2

As Panovsky puts it, "in the Western Middle Ages, contest literature was passionately cultivated in Latin as well as in the vernacular languages, and the number and kind of contestants were varied ad infinitum. Wine competes with Water or Beer; Winter with Summer; the Mountain with the Valley; the Swan with the Crow; the Cleric with the Layman, Peasant or Knight, Worldly Glory with Pious Renunciation; Fortune with Philosophy; the Body with the Soul."3 The contest of the Heart and the Body as described in Villon's "Le débat du cœur et du corps de Villon" has its origin in the earlier, similar "Contest of the Head and the Body" by Deschamps and other works of the débats genre. The genre continued to be developed in Russian Acmeist poetry of this century, for example, the Contest of the Body and the Soul (to both of which the Self is added) in a poetical triptych by Gumilev (who was Villon's admirer and translator). In another work Panovsky cites at some length "the perhaps even more charming

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Debate between Helen and Ganymede, where Helen, assisted by Nature, defends normal love while Ganymede, supported by Grammar (or, as we would say, Philology), praises the other kind.\textsuperscript{4} I think it is important that Pushkin translated a poem belonging to the type so popular in Medieval French literature. While studying possible links between Pushkin's poetry and the French Medieval tradition, one should keep in mind that some later French texts translated by Pushkin (such as the original of "Zoloto i bulat") could have been influenced by Old French (and Latin) poetry.

The steel is called in the poem "Zoloto i bulat" by a name with definite Oriental connotations. It was borrowed in Russian from Persian through Turkic mediacy.\textsuperscript{5} Although the word was a favorite in Pushkin's poems (cf. important lines with the rhyme mlat-bulat in "Poltava")—some special reasons for its use in this poem might be found. The Oriental name of a steel weapon and of the metal itself is phonetically close to the Church Slavic form of the name for gold: "la même groupe /-lát/ avec la seule occlusive dentale du poème rapproche les racines nominales 1, 3 zlát- et 2, 4 bulát-. Dans les vers impairs, les deux mots du deuxième hémistichic skazálo zláto se trouvent forgés ensemble par toute une chaine de sons semblables /ázálazlá/, tandis que dans la proposition skazál bulá ce lien des deux mots est réduit au double voisinage des phonèmes /á/ et /l/. La correspondance /á/-/l/ est commune aux hémistiches finaux de chacun des quatre vers."\textsuperscript{6}

Just as the word bulat "steel; a sword made of steel" might have Oriental connotations, so also the literary genre of contests has its early precursors or typologically similar parallels in Persian munázare and earlier Middle Persian Rangstreitgedicht.\textsuperscript{7} Of course it would be an exaggeration to suppose that Pushkin could consciously unite a Russian word of Persian origin with a type of poetry common in Persian literature. Bakhtin's notion of the "genre memory" might be useful here. The French poem translated by Pushkin had in its


\textsuperscript{6} Jakobson, "La facture d'un quatrain de Pushkin," p. 346.