

THE SONG OF PRINCE IGOR

TRANSLATION AND COMMENTARY BY
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A new English translation of the twelfth-century Igor Tale is accompanied by a commentary that takes into account recent discoveries, including a wealth of folkloric parallels that were previously unknown. The translation of the Igor Tale is followed by translations of the *Hypatian Chronicle* account of Igor's ill-fated 1185 campaign and the fourteenth-century *Tale of the Battle Beyond the Don (Zadonshchina)* – an epic account of the defeat of the Tatars in 1380. For a more detailed study of the puzzles of the Igor Tale see: Robert Mann, *The Igor Tales and Their Folkloric Background* (The Birchbark Press of Karacharovo [wolandusa@yahoo.com], 2005).

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CONTENTS

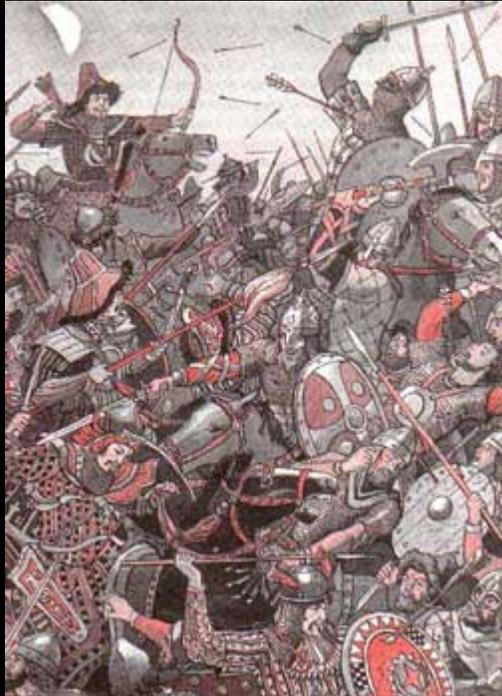
Introduction	6
The Igor Tale	16
The <i>Hypatian Chronicle</i> Account of Igor's Campaign	53
<i>Tale of the Battle Beyond the Don</i>	61
Lenin Library Copy, Undol'skii Collection No. 632	66
State Public Library Copy, Kirillo-Belozersk Monastery Collection No. 9/1086	76

FOREWORD

My interest in the Igor Tale dates from 1970, when I first read the tale in Old Russian and was astounded by its audacious imagery and uncanny instrumentation of sound. I memorized the tale and, as a student of Russian at UC Berkeley, launched my own maniacal investigation of its folkloric background, poring through just about any ethnographic descriptions and collections of Russian folklore that I could get my hands on. My digging led me to the realization that much of the imagery in the Igor Tale derives from the songs and rituals of ancient Russian wedding tradition. Further digging led to more discoveries in *byliny* (epic ballads) and folk texts of other genres. It became clear to me that the oral-formulaic dimension of the Igor Tale had been vastly underestimated by the leading scholars, who all believed that the tale was composed in writing by a brilliant poet of the twelfth century.

Subsequent research has led me to conclude that the Igor Tale was first composed as an oral epic that circulated in many variations before it was written down sometime in the 1200's. My findings have been summarized in four publications: *The Song of Prince Igor* (1979), *Lances Sing* (1989), *The Igor Tales* (2005) and *Pesn' o polku Igoreve: novye otkrytiia* (2009). My goal here is to present a streamlined *interpretation* that will synthesize many of the bits and pieces that were not really coordinated in the previous editions. Readers should bear in mind that I am giving an *interpretation* of the Igor Tale. To my knowledge there are virtually no specialists in early Russian history or philology who will agree with my view of the Igor Tale as the text of an *oral* epic. This is to say, my interpretation is a decidedly *unpopular* one.

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INTRODUCTION

The Igor Tale is the only Russian epic from the early, Kievan era to survive until modern times. It was discovered around 1792 by Count Aleksei Musin-Pushkin, a collector of antiquities in the service of Catherine the Great. The manuscript containing the tale appeared to date from the fifteenth or sixteenth century. Together with a team of learned men who helped to edit the tale, Musin-Pushkin published the text in 1800, but when Napoleon entered Moscow in 1812 the original manuscript was destroyed along with a large collection of early Russian manuscripts that the count had attempted to conceal from the invaders in the basement of his Moscow mansion. No other manuscript copies of the tale now survive, leaving us only with the published edition of 1800 and with scanty notes and copies that were made before the manuscript was burned.

The Igor Tale portrays the unsuccessful campaign undertaken in 1185 by Igor Sviatoslavich, Prince of Novgorod-Seversk, against a much larger force of the Polovtsy (also known as Kumans), an eastern steppe people who were later displaced by the Tatar hordes. Most of his army was annihilated, and Igor was captured together with his son and other leaders of the expedition. Later he escaped, and the tale ends in jubilant tones celebrating Igor's return from captivity.

Twelfth-century Kiev was a flourishing cultural center situated on key trade routes linking northern Europe with Byzantium, Asia and the Mediterranean. But ever since the death of Prince Vladimir I in 1015, the Kievan State was beset by internecine feuds among Vladimir's sons and grandsons. The constant feuding and dissension weakened the Russians' defenses and left cities vulnerable to raids by plundering nomads (Pechenegs and Polovtsy), with whom the Russian princes forged temporary alliances as they fought one another over thrones and fiefdoms. The princes' failure to place the common welfare before their own vainglorious ambitions is bemoaned by eleventh- and twelfth-

century chroniclers, and this theme reverberates once again through the poetic figures and lamentations of the Igor Tale.

We do not know when or by whom the Igor Tale was first written down. The author of the *Hypatian Chronicle* account of Igor's campaign, who wrote no later than the year 1200, appears to have been familiar with an oral version of the Igor Tale, probably a version that differed from the one that has reached us. The opening lines of the Igor Tale refer unambiguously to previously existing tales about Igor's raid: "Was it not fitting, brothers, to begin in the olden words of the heroic tales about the campaign of Igor, Igor Sviatoslavich?" It would have likely taken a number of decades for the words of those tales to be perceived as "olden." And there is little doubt that the narrator has in mind oral epic songs when he refers to familiar "heroic tales." A number of details in the Igor Tale point to the narrator's familiarity with events that transpired between 1195 and 1210. An allusion to Lithuanians' rejoicing in Goroden' suggests that the surviving version of the tale was written down no sooner than 1215-1220, the period when Goroden' passed into Lithuanian control.

The Igor Tale is highly exceptional among extant early Russian literary works from the Kievan period. An uncanny orchestration of rhythm and sound and an intricate filigree of metaphor attest to a long and highly developed tradition that gave rise to the tale. The narrative bears many of the earmarks of an oral epic: rhythmic parataxis, present-tense ("historical present") narration, extremely concrete focus with few abstractions. The narrator refers to his tale as a "song" and he compares his tale to the songs of the epic singer Boyan. The only clear parallels for extensive passages in the Igor Tale come from dozens of oral songs and tales and from a few early Russian texts with definite roots in oral lore. There is no clear evidence that the composers of the Igor Tale even knew how to read. A large number of fixed epithets and metaphors extending sometimes over several consecutive clauses can be traced directly to the Russian oral tradition. However, even though the Igor Tale is a highly rhythmic composition, the meter appears to be quite varied, unlike the regular meter of the oral epics (*byliny*) that in recent centuries continued to be sung in outlying regions of the Russian North. The Igor Tale is richer and more intricate than these epic songs, and this difference in

style has led most scholars to conclude that it could not have been an oral composition.

One of the earmarks of a traditional oral narrative is an abundance of lexical formulae — ready-made word combinations that help the narrator to maintain a swift tempo as he continues to spin his tale. A large repertoire of oral formulae allows a narrator to continue the tale without pausing as he calculates his next move. A writer has more time to pause and combine individual words as his theme requires. The writer is like a bricklayer who patiently lays brick after brick, while a singer of tales builds with larger, prefabricated components consisting of two or more words. Early Russian works of the written tradition abound in literary clichés of their own, but they are of an obvious bookish origin that contrasts sharply with the elemental, folkloric coloring of formulae in the Igor Tale. And the formulaic density of the Igor Tale is far beyond that of any narratives from the written tradition.

Given the abundance of identifiable folkloric motifs in the Igor Tale, one can assume that word combinations that are identical to folkloric formulae undoubtedly functioned as traditional oral formulae when the Igor Tale was composed. Among formulae of this type are a large number of nouns with fixed epithets:

swift steed	golden throne
golden helmet	gold-domed bower
golden stirrup	golden saddle
tempered arrows	green grass
fierce aurochs	stone mountains
fair maiden	bloody wounds
swan's wings	fierce beast
dear true love	open field
bright sun	gray wolf
blue eagle	deep-blue sea
silver shore	silver current
chilling dew	yew bed
brave retinue	black raven
broad plains	crimson shield

Word combinations that differ from, but closely resemble, attested folkloric formulae can also be numbered among the composer's ready-

made formulae. So, too, can word combinations that are simply repeated within the Igor Tale itself. All told, at least a third of the text of the Igor Tale can be said to consist of prefabricated lexical formulae — a far higher percentage than that of other written works from the early period. The Igor Tale's high formulaic density suggests that it was most likely composed orally. However, for two centuries now, students have been taught that the Igor Tale is the work of a lettered and highly talented poet.

The narrator of the Igor Tale repeatedly digresses from the main story of Igor's defeat, alluding to the internecine feuds among Russian princes in previous decades. Together with Kiev Prince Sviatoslav, the narrator chides the princes for failing to mount a united offensive against the enemy and for bringing misfortune and suffering to the Russian land. Many scholars in early Russian studies believe that this ideological engagement attests to a higher level of sophistication than one would expect from an epic bard. However, the need for a people to unite against a common foe is a matter of common sense, not really a sign of literacy, genius or erudition. There is no real evidence to suggest that early Russian epic singers lacked common sense. Even the semi-fossilized epic songs (*byliny*) of recent times display an intense patriotism and love for the Russian Church, land and culture.

Alexander Pushkin once referred to the Igor Tale as “a lonely flower in the desert of Old Russian literature.” The tale is so unique among the chronicles, sermons and saints' lives of the Kievan period that doubts about its authenticity began to be voiced soon after the manuscript was destroyed in 1812. (Skeptics did not raise their voices for over a decade between the time the tale was first published in 1800 and the time when it was lost.) Count Musin-Pushkin himself was even suspected of having composed the magnificent tale. But the doubts and suspicions were temporarily allayed with the discovery of the *Zadonshchina*, a similar but poetically inferior epic portraying the defeat of the Tatars by Dmitrii Donskoi in the Kulikovo Battle of 1380. It appeared obvious that the *Zadonshchina* is an imitation of the earlier Igor Tale, from which it seems to borrow many lexical formulae and narrative patterns. However, many questions remained unanswered and in the 1930's the French scholar André Mazon resurrected the theory that the Igor Tale is a forgery concocted by Musin-Pushkin. A few decades later, the Russian

historian Aleksandr Zimin pushed the authenticity question further, positing an author who employed the *Zadonshchina* as his primary model in composing the Igor Tale *before* its acquisition by Musin-Pushkin. More recently, the historian Edward Keenan has argued that the Bohemian scholar Josef Dobrovsky concocted the Igor Tale and somehow conspired with Russian colleagues who published the tale in 1800. Another scholar has even insinuated that Count Musin-Pushkin's wife forged the tale, armed with her husband's voluminous library and with the feminist grudge of a neglected spouse.

Much of the disagreement concerning both the genre and the authenticity of the Igor Tale stems from confusion about the relation of the *Zadonshchina* to the oral epic tradition and to the Igor Tale itself. Most analyses of the *Zadonshchina* have assumed that this work is an imitation of a *written* text of the Igor Tale, neglecting the important question of oral transmission of the Igor Tale and of other closely similar epics that might have been known to the composers of the *Zadonshchina*. In 2005, while working in the Russian National Library, I examined an overlooked text of *The Tale About the Rout of Mamai* (*Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche*) and soon realized that it comes from the lost first redaction of that tale – a redaction that contains unique parallels to lines in the Igor Tale. The interrelationship of these texts – Igor Tale, *Zadonshchina* and *Skazanie* – can best be explained by oral transmission of both the Igor Tale and the *Zadonshchina*.

As a record of political history, the Igor Tale is of limited value. It is a reflection of historical events, but it transforms history through the prism of the artistic imagination — through metaphor and oral legend. Discrepancies between the Igor Tale and early Russian chronicles suggest that the composers of the tale did not draw upon the chronicles as a source. It appears that the main sources were epic songs about Igor's defeat and about the battles of yore. Regardless how it was originally composed, the Igor Tale is of primary value as the sole surviving example of a flourishing epic tradition that seems to have declined in its magnificence after the Tatar invasions of the thirteenth century.

One of the most fascinating features of the Old Russian epic as we find it in the Igor Tale is its portrayal of battles and death with imagery that associates these violent events with the rituals and song formulae of ancient Russian wedding tradition. The three main movements of the

wedding ritual are the Friday matchmaking, the Saturday *devichnik* (maidens' gathering) and bathing of the bride, and the Sunday *venchanie* (crowning in church), followed by the feasting and celebrating at the home of the groom. The first skirmish between Igor's army and the Polovtsy occurs on Friday, and it is portrayed with details and formulae associated with the matchmaking. The third day of battle is depicted metaphorically as a wedding feast where the "bloody wine" finally runs dry. At many points in the wedding ritual, maidens sing praise songs extolling the bride, groom and other participants in the celebration. At the end of the song, the maidens extend a glass of wedding wine. The person whom they have just praised then drops coins into the glass, drinks wine, and hands the glass with the jingling coins back to the maidens as their reward for the praise song. However, if the reward is too small, the singers launch into a song of reproach that belittles the person whom they praised. This wedding custom lies behind a number of passages in which foreign nations – much like the chorus of an opera – sing praise and reproach to the Russian princes. Germans, Venetians, Greeks and Moravians sing praise to Kiev Prince Sviatoslav for defeating the Polovtsy, but they sing reproach to Igor, who has sunk the Russian gold in the rivers of the enemy. The singing nations play the figurative role of the maidens who sing praise and reproach in the wedding ritual. The rivers correspond metaphorically to the glass of wedding wine into which coins are dropped. Gothic maidens aligned with the Polovtsy sing praise for the ancient time when Gothic King Vinitar defeated the Slavs and Antes, and they sing reproach for the time when the Polovtsian leader Sharokan was defeated by Russian forces. The Gothic maidens stand on the seashore and jingle the Russian gold as they sing. Once again, a body of water is associated with the wedding wine. It is as though the military campaign were a grand wedding procession accompanied by neighboring nations.

Midway through the tale, Kiev Prince Sviatoslav dreams that he is presented with gifts, including pearls and wine. His dream is patterned after a wedding song in which the bride dreams that matchmakers come with gifts from the bridegroom. In accord with wedding tradition, the bride addresses her parents, reproaching them for being hard-hearted and giving her away too soon. She then turns successively to her brother and other wedding participants, pleading that they bar the gates and defend

her from the groom and his retinue. In one song motif, the bride spills tears over the gold, pearl necklace and wedding wine. Sviatoslav first addresses the two princes Igor and Vsevolod, reproaching them for being hard-hearted and making the land of the Polovtsy cry too soon. He “spills his golden word mixed with tears” as he addresses them – a formulation that juggles the words in the song about the bride. (Later in the tale, another prince “spills his pearly soul through his golden necklace” after being “caressed” by enemy swords on a nuptial bed of bloody grass.) Sviatoslav then turns to his brother and, successively, to the princes in other cities, extolling them and pleading for their aid in defending the land.

Thus, the wedding ritual plays a major role in organizing the tale’s movements. By combining diametrically opposed realms – killing on one hand and procreation on the other – the wedding imagery intrigues and excites the imagination, helping to make the tale multidimensional, a thing of fantasy, full of life and color.

The Igor Tale cannot be understood without some understanding of the epic tales that came before it and provided many of the templates and formulae that it follows. One epic that left a deep imprint on the Igor Tale – and on earlier tales about Oleg Goreslavich and Vseslav of Polotsk – was a song about the conversion of the Kiev State to the Christian faith. We can reconstruct the outlines of this song from fragments that are recognizable in folktales and *byliny*, ancient folk ballads that were recorded by folklorists in the past 200 years. This song must have arisen around 988, the time of the conversion itself. Its hero was Elijah the Prophet (*Prorok Iliia*), who came to Kiev from Constantinople, the cradle of the Russian Orthodox faith. He traveled with divine speed, vaulting on the staff of St. John the Apostle. Entering Rus’ through Tmutorokan and Korchev, he encountered a mythic bird called the Div, who obstructed his way to the Kiev idols. Elijah overcame the Div, entered Kiev, and then destroyed the idol of the thunder god Perun, which was portrayed as a living, talking creature like the “image of the beast” in the Apocalypse of St. John. In this manner he freed Prince Vladimir I and the Kievan populace from the yoke of idolatry. Other pagan gods figured alongside Perun, including Troyan, who was perceived as a dragon. The demise of the pagan gods was seen as the gods’ “seventh millennium,” a figure that was taken from the time

when all Evil is doomed in the Apocalypse. As a reflection of the new Christian ideology that had supplanted the pagan cults, this tale soon became what might be called the national epic of the Kievan State. As centuries passed, it underwent many transformations. Elijah eventually came to be seen as a Russian warrior with superhuman powers, and he was rechristened *Il'ia Muromets* ("Elijah of Murom"). St. John came to be viewed as a giant pilgrim carrying a powerful staff. The idol of Perun was eventually reinterpreted as a gluttonous Tatar invader named *Idolishche* ("Huge Idol"). In portraying the perennial feuding of Russian princes, epic singers would weave motifs from the conversion tale into their songs, extolling princes as new Elijahs for their victories over foreign enemies but applying the Elijah motifs in an ironic fashion when depicting their destructive feuding and military failures. It is reasonably safe to assume that when Igor Sviatoslavich defeated the Polovtsy on Elijah's Day in 1174, he was glorified in imagery that associated him with Elijah's victory over the heathen cults. However, in 1185, after his hasty and ill-planned campaign of that summer failed, he was depicted as a would-be Elijah who sets out in search of pagan idols but ends up in captivity instead. So, too, Vseslav of Polotsk, a famous sower of feuds in the eleventh century, had been portrayed as a power-thirsty prince with pretensions to the glory of Elijah – and this portrayal in previous tales is echoed in a digression about him in the Igor Tale. He vaults to Kiev on a staff in the "seventh millennium of Troyan," but the tide turns against him and he is forced to flee at night like the pagan dragon Troyan, undergoing metamorphoses as he flees.

In the West, the Igor Tale is known primarily through Borodin's opera *Prince Igor*. In Russia, the Igor Tale is studied by every schoolchild and is familiar to every educated Russian. Many have learned parts of the tale by heart. It has inspired writers, artists and composers and has fascinated scholars for two centuries. More has possibly been written about the Igor Tale than any other single work in Russian literature. It is a magnificent poetic display of folkloric simplicity and metaphoric splendor that has no true parallel in world literature. For centuries to come, it will continue to be enjoyed as a monument to the human imagination and as the gemstone of a lost era when the people of Rus' were taking their first steps on the stage of history.



TECHNICAL NOTE

The first printed edition of the *Slovo o polku Igoreve* (1800) – not the later editions with altered readings – serves as the basic text for my English translation. The 1800 edition is the only one that was compiled before the manuscript of the Igor Tale was destroyed in 1812. In my translation of the tale, passages that have been altered or reconstructed by me are indicated with italics.

A number of tales about Igor’s 1185 campaign were known by the time “our” version of the story was written down. Chronicle accounts reflect various different oral tales about Igor, and the opening lines of the surviving Igor Tale allude to these multiple tales. For this reason it makes sense to speak of “the Igor tales” (plural), even though only one version has reached us.

The Tale of the Campaign of Igor, Son of Sviatoslav, Grandson of Oleg

[... ..]
... ..
... ..]¹

1. Wasn't it fitting, brothers,
To begin with the olden words
Of the heroic tales about the campaign of Igor,
Igor, the son of Sviatoslav?²
5. Let this song begin
According to the true tales of our time,
And not according to Boyan's fancy.³
For when Boyan the seer
Wished to make someone a song,

¹ A passage is missing at the beginning of the tale. This is revealed by the past-tense verb in line 1 (“Wasn't it fitting to begin...”). In the later *Zadonshchina*, which follows many patterns of the Igor Tale, the lines corresponding to the opening lines of the Igor Tale *follow* an introductory section that alludes to the Dnepr and the Kiev Hills, details that are out of place in the later, Muscovite

² The formulation “olden words of the heroic tales about the campaign of Igor” alludes to familiar epic songs about Igor's campaign – songs about the 1185 battle that were performed before our version of the tale was narrated and written down. Because the words of these tales are “olden,” it would seem that the version that has reached us was written down a number of decades after the battle of 1185. A number of details later in the tale suggest that the Igor Tale was written down no sooner than around 1220.

³ The Igor Tale and its epic descendant, the *Zadonshchina*, are the only known sources in which the epic singer Boyan is mentioned. According to a later passage in the Igor Tale (lines 656-657), he sang for Prince Sviatoslav – possibly Sviatoslav Yaroslavich, Prince of Chernigov. However, the *Zadonshchina* places him in Kiev and his portrayal suggests that he might have sung for Kiev Prince Sviatoslav.

10. He'd run in thought all through the tree,
As a grey wolf along the ground,
As a blue-grey eagle beneath the clouds.
Recalling the feuds of former times,
He'd loose ten falcons
15. Upon a flock of swans:
The first swan touched
Was the first to sing a song —
To Yaroslav of yore,
To valiant Mstislav,
20. Who cut down Rededya
Before the Kasogian regiments,
And to fair Roman, son of Sviatoslav.⁴
Boyan, though, brothers,
Loosed not ten falcons upon a flock of swans,
25. But lay his magic fingers
Upon the living strings:
It was they who warbled praises to the princes.⁵

Let us, brothers, begin this tale.

From Vladimir of old [*it was 170 years*]⁶

30. To Igor of our day,
Who drew out his mind with his fortitude,
And sharpened his heart with valor,

⁴ The *Primary Chronicle* refers briefly to these legendary figures. Prince Mstislav defeated the Kasogian leader in singlehanded combat.

⁵ In this extended metaphor, the ten falcons are Boyan's fingers. The strings are those of the *gusli*, the traditional instrument of Russian epic singers.

⁶ Prince Vladimir I converted the Kievan State to the Christian faith in 988. He died in 1015. The number of years from his death to Igor's 1185 battle is missing.

And, filled with the spirit of battle,
Led his valiant regiments
35. Against the Polovtsian land
For the Russian land.

Then Igor gazed up at the bright sun
And saw all his warriors
Wrapped by it in darkness.⁷
40. And Igor said to his men:
“Brothers and loyal retinue!
Better to be cut down
Than to be captured!
Let’s mount, brothers,
45. Our swift steeds
That we might see the deep-blue Don!”
Passion burned the prince’s mind,
And the desire to taste of the Mighty Don
Barred the omen from him.⁸
50. “I want,” he said, “to break my lance
At the edge of the Polovtsian plain.
With you, sons of Rus’,
I will lay down my head
Or drink with my helmet from the Don!”

⁷ According to chronicle accounts (based on oral tales) there was a solar eclipse as Igor proceeded with his army toward the Don. In our version of the Igor Tale, the eclipse seems to have been moved to an earlier point in time, although it is mentioned again as he advances.

⁸ Igor is portrayed here as a bridegroom who burns with passion as he sets out for the wedding feast. The figurative “drinking” from the Don is patterned after the drinking of wine at a traditional wedding celebration.

55. O Boyan, nightingale of yore!
 Would that you could trill these troops,
 Flitting, nightingale, through the tree of thought,
 Soaring in mind up under the clouds,
 Weaving praises around our times,
60. Coursing along Troyan's trail
 Over the plains and onto the mountains.⁹
 You would sing such a song to Igor,
 Grandson of Oleg:
 "No storm has swept the falcons
65. Across the broad plains;
 The daws flee in flocks to the Mighty Don . . ."
 Or might the song have thus begun,
 O seer Boyan, Veles's grandson:¹⁰
 "Horses neigh beyond the Sula,
70. Praises ring in Kiev,
 Trumpets trumpet in Novgorod,
 Banners fly in Putivl!"

Igor awaits his dear brother Vsevolod.¹¹

And fierce aurochs Vsevolod said:

75. "One brother — one bright light:

⁹ Troyan was a pagan dragon deity of the East Slavs. Ancient earthen embankments along the Dnepr River are called both "Troyan's Embankments" and "Dragon's Embankments." Boyan is said to "course along Troyan's trail" because he sang epic songs that incorporated motifs from the early tales about the conversion of Rus' and the demise of Troyan.

¹⁰ Veles was the god of the herds. Boyan is a descendant of Veles in the same manner that he descends from Troyan — in the tales that he weaves, incorporating motifs from earlier tales about the end of the pagan cults.

¹¹ Vsevolod was Prince of Trubchevsk, another eastern outpost like Kursk and Novgorod-Seversk.

You, Igor!
We are both sons of Sviatoslav.
Saddle, brother, your swift steeds.
Mine now are ready,

80. Saddled at Kursk before us.
And my men of Kursk are well-known warriors:
Swaddled under trumpets,
Cradled under helmets,
Suckled at the end of a lance,
85. They've travelled the roads,
They've sounded the ravines,
Their bows are taut,
Their quivers are opened,
Their sabres are sharpened.¹²
90. Like grey wolves in the field they bound,
Seeking honor for themselves
And glory for their prince!"

Then Prince Igor stepped into the golden stirrup
And rode out into the open plain.

95. The sun barred his way with darkness,
The moaning night awoke the birds with its storm,
A beastly hissing arose,
The Div calls in the treetop,¹³

¹² This series of rhythmic participial constructions is patterned after wedding songs that praise the bride, groom or other honored participant by describing how they were swaddled, cradled, suckled and fed. "Under trumpets" and "under helmets" have replaced the wedding song formulation "under a canopy." "At the end of a lance" has replaced "at the end [head] of the table."

¹³ In a song about the conversion of Rus' that probably dates from the tenth century, a heroic figure named Elijah (*Il'ia*) frees Kiev from the yoke of pagan

- Bidding the unknown land to listen:
100. The Volga, the Pomorye, and Posulye,
And Surozh, and Korsun,
And you, hewn idol of Tmutorokan!¹⁴
The Polovtsy have fled
By untrod paths to the Mighty Don.
105. Their wagons cry at midnight
Like startled swans.

Igor leads his warriors toward the Don.

idolatry. He encounters the Div, a mythic bird-like creature that bars his way to Kiev. He overcomes the Div and proceeds to Kiev, where he deposes the pagan idol of Perun. This tale appears to descend from Persian lore about the *Simurgh*, a mythical bird that is closely akin to other creatures known as *divs*. In a part of the ancient *Shahname* about the seven feats of Isfandiyar, the hero overcomes lions, wolves, a dragon, a temptress-witch, and the giant Simurgh as well as obstacles in the terrain. This ancient Iranian motif sequence seems to have served as a template for the tale about St. George and Dadian that found its way to Rus' by way of Christian Byzantium. The early song about Elijah, the Div and the idol of Perun appears to be modelled after the song about St. George and Dadian. In its earliest stages, the hero was Elijah the Prophet, who eventually came to be seen as a native Russian hero from Murom.

¹⁴ Tmutorokan had formerly been a Russian principedom. For much of the twelfth century it appears to have been controlled by the Polovtsy, although it was formally a part of the Byzantine empire. The Igor Tale seems to portray Tmutorokan as a Polovtsian stronghold and a place of heathen idol worship. This perception might be fanciful, but there are few historical sources to cast light on twelfth-century Tmutorokan. In the early tale about Elijah and the idol of Perun, Elijah likely entered Rus' via Tmutorokan, proceeding from there to Kiev. Igor sets out from the Kievan realm and heads toward the Tmutorokan idol. The Polovtsy are portrayed as pagan idolators, following the pattern of the early song about the conversion of Rus'. Igor sets out like the glorious hero Elijah on a mission to destroy an idol. Soon, however, his campaign will turn into a fiasco and the irony in the Div-idol motifs will become apparent.

The birds beneath the *clouds* prey on his sad fortune,
Wolves trumpet the storm in the ravines,
110. Eagles with their squalling summon beasts to the bones,
Foxes yelp at the crimson shields.
O Russian land,
You are now beyond the knoll!

The night is long in ending,
115. The day is kindled by the dawn,
A mist has covered the plain;
The trill of the nightingale has fallen asleep,
The chatter of daws has awakened.
The sons of Rus' have barred the broad plains
120. With their crimson shields,
Seeking honor for themselves
And glory for their prince.

From dawn on Friday
They trampled the pagan Polovtsian regiments
125. And, fanning out like arrows over the plain,
They bore off fair Polovtsian maidens
And with them gold and brocades and precious samites.
With coats and cloaks and fur mantles
And with all manner of Polovtsian raiment
130. They began to pave the way
Across the swamps and muddy places.¹⁵

¹⁵ This portrait of the plunder that followed the first skirmish is patterned after wedding songs alluding to the matchmaking ritual, which traditionally took place on a Friday. The groom “paves the way” to the bride by bringing gifts – predominantly cloths and clothing.

A crimson banner and a white pennant,
A crimson plume and a silver staff
For the valiant son of Sviatoslav!

135. Oleg's brave nest slumbers in the field.
Far has it flown!

It was born to be disgraced
By neither falcon nor hawk,
Nor by you, black raven,

140. Pagan Polovtsian!¹⁶
Gzak flees as a grey wolf,
Konchak follows in his tracks to the Mighty Don.¹⁷

Very early on the second morn
A bloody dawn announces the day;

145. Black clouds come from the sea:
They want to cover the four suns,¹⁸
And blue lightning quivers in them.

A mighty thunder there shall be!
A rain of arrows shall fall from the Mighty Don!

150. Here lances shall be shattered,
Here sabres shall be battered
Against Polovtsian helmets

¹⁶ Here the slumbering Russian army is portrayed like the bride in a wedding song. In the song, the groom's men ("falcons and hawks") come in the night and carry away a little bird (the bride) from her nest. They give the bird to the groom (an "eagle" or "falcon"), instructing him: "Do not let her be disgraced by falcon nor hawk, nor by any black raven!"

¹⁷ Gzak and Konchak were two of the leaders of the Polovtsy.

¹⁸ The "four suns" apparently represent Igor, Vsevolod and Igor's two sons.

- On the River Kayala¹⁹
 By the Mighty Don!
155. O Russian land,
 You are now beyond the knoll!
- Lo, the winds, Stribog's grandsons,²⁰
 Blow from the sea as arrows
 Upon Igor's valiant regiments!
160. The earth rumbles,
 The rivers run turbid,
 Dust covers the fields,
 The banners speak:
 The Polovtsy advance from the Don
165. And from the sea
 And from all sides.
 The Russian troops retreat.
 The children of the Devil bar the plain with battle cries;
 The brave sons of Rus' bar it with their crimson shields!
170. Fierce aurochs Vsevolod!
 You stand your ground,
 You spray arrows on the foe,

¹⁹ The Kayala, or *River of Reproach*, is a purely figurative name for a river where an army meets an unfortunate fate. The name comes from the ritual of singing songs of reproach (*kaiati*; modern Russian *khaiat'*) to wedding guests who are too tight-fisted in rewarding the maiden singers for their songs of praise. The Igor Tale later refers to another battle that was also fought on the Kayala – even though it was far from the site of Igor's battle. The *Zadonshchina* links the metaphorical Kayala with the devastating defeat suffered by the Russian armies on the Kalka River in 1222.

²⁰ Stribog was the pagan god of the winds.

- You thunder against helmets
With your Kharalug swords!²¹
175. Wherever the fierce aurochs bounds,
His golden helmet flashing,
There lie pagan Polovtsian heads:
Cleft with sabres of tempered steel
Are their Avar helmets —
180. By you, fierce aurochs Vsevolod!²²
What wound is dear, O brothers,
When one has forgotten honor and fortune,
And his town of Chernigov,²³
His father's golden throne,
185. And the wonts and ways
Of his sweet beloved,
The fair daughter of Gleb!
- The millennia of Troyan have ended,
The years of Yaroslav have passed,
190. The raids of Oleg have ended,
Oleg, the son of Sviatoslav.²⁴

²¹ Kharalug was a settlement about 150 miles west of Kiev where iron was mined and smelted.

²² The portrayal of Igor's brother Vsevolod follows patterns found in ritual songs about a goat, bull or other horned animal – all emblematic of the god of rain and thunder in pagan times. Wherever the bull steps, the crops grow. Vsevolod “sprays” arrows like rain, his helmet “flashes” like lightning, and he “thunders” against helmets.

²³ Chernigov was the patrimonial home of Igor and Vsevolod. Both were buried in Chernigov (1202 and 1196, respectively).

²⁴ The “seventh millennium of Troyan” alludes to the time of the conversion of Rus' in the late tenth century, when the pagan gods were officially deposed. (This was the final era, the figurative “seventh millennium,” of the pagan cult

- That Oleg forged feuds with the sword,
 And sowed the land with arrows.
 He stepped into his golden stirrup
195. In the town of Tmutorokan.
 The same ringing was heard by Vsevolod,
Son of Yaroslav the Great of yore,
 While Vladimir stopped his ears each morn in Chernigov.²⁵
 Boris Vyacheslavich
200. Glory led to Judgment,
 And she spread a green shroud on *Nezhata's Field*
 For the disgrace to Oleg,
 The young and valiant prince.
 From the same Kayala
205. Svyatopolk *cradled* his father

of the dragon Troyan.) Oral songs about the conversion patterned the defeat of the pagan gods after the “seventh millennium” of the Apocalypse, in which a dragon and a living “image of the beast” are embodiments of Evil. The portrayal of Oleg opens with the allusion to Troyan because epic singers had employed motifs from the conversion tales – certainly with great irony – in portraying the feuds of Oleg. Yaroslav was a renowned Prince of Kiev in the eleventh century.

²⁵ In the early tale about the conversion, church bells accompanied Elijah as he set out to Kiev on his mission to destroy the idol of Perun. The dragon Troyan was said to plug his ears when the bells rang in that tale. The ringing of Oleg’s stirrup in Tmutorokan is a variation on the bell motif. It was fashioned with the same irony that we find in Igor’s setting out against a pagan idol in Tmutorokan. The battle on Nezhata’s Field is described in the *Laurentian Chronicle* under the year 1078. According to that account, it was Yaropolk, not Svyatopolk, who transported the body of his father Izyaslav to Kiev. The discrepancy casts light on the role of consonance and assonance in the oral epic: the consonance in *Sviatopolk poleleia* (‘Sviatopolk cradled’) was successful in helping to preserve –*polk* in singers’ memory. It is not certain whether *Sviato-* or *Yaro-* is the historically correct form for the first part of the son’s name.

Between two Hungarian amblers
 To Saint Sophia in Kiev.
 In those days of Oleg, Son of Sorrow,²⁶
 Feuds were sown and grown in plenty,
 210. The fortune of Dazhbog's grandson perished,²⁷
 In princely strife
 The lives of men were shortened.²⁸
 In those days throughout the Russian land
 Plowmen rarely cackled,
 215. But often ravens cawed
 As they shared the corpses,
 While the daws talked in their own tongue,
 Eager to fly to the feasting.

Thus it was in those battles
 220. And in those campaigns,
 But there's never been a battle like this!
 From dawn to dusk,
 From dusk to day
 The tempered arrows fly,
 225. Sabres thunder against helmets,

²⁶ The narrator alludes to Oleg with the invented patronymic *Goreslavich*, or "Son of Sorrow."

²⁷ Dazhbog was a solar deity of the East Slavs. The Russian people are "Dazhbog's grandson." The Pskov Apostle (1307) contains a short addendum that reads like an excerpt from a later variant of the Igor Tale. Instead of "The fortune of Dazhbog's grandson perished" it reads: "Our fortune perished."

²⁸ The word for "lives" here is *vetsi* – the same word that means "millennia" in the line that opens the Oleg digression: "The millennia of Troyan have ended." The implication is that people were dying in the princes' feuds in contrast to the time of Elijah's legendary destruction of the idols and his terminating the millennia of the pagan gods.

Kharaľug lances shatter
In the unknown plain,
Amid the Polovtsian land.

230. The black earth beneath horses' hooves
Was sown with bones
And watered with blood,
And sorrow sprouted
Throughout the Russian land.

235. What clamor do I hear,
What rings in my ears
This day before the dawn?²⁹
Igor turns back his troops,
Heavy at heart for his dear brother Vsevolod.
They fought for a day,

240. They fought for another;
On the third day, toward noon, Igor's banners fell.
Here the brothers parted
On the shore of the swift River Kayala.
Here the bloody wine ran dry.

245. Here the bold sons of Rus' finished the feast:
They gave the matchmakers drink,
And lay down themselves for the Russian land.³⁰

²⁹ In Russian wedding songs similar lines are spoken by the bride as she hears the approaching party of the bridegroom.

³⁰ The final day of battle is depicted as a wedding feast. The figurative "matchmakers" (or "in-laws") are the Polovtsy. At the end of the traditional wedding feast, the bride and groom are bedded down in a specially prepared nuptial chamber. At the end of the battle-feast, the Russian army "lies down" in death. The sad "parting" of Igor and his brother appears to be drawn with an eye to the bride's parting with her family – one of the most prominent themes

The grass bends down in sorrow,
And the tree bows down to the ground in woe.

250. Alas, brothers,
An unhappy hour has arisen!
Alas, the plain has covered the troops.
Disgrace has arisen in the forces of Dazhbog's grandson.
As a maiden she stepped onto the land of Troyan.
255. She splashed her swan wings
On the deep-blue sea by the Don.
Splashing, she awakened fat times.³¹
The princes' struggle with the pagans perished,
For brother said to brother:
260. "This is mine,
And that is mine also."
And the princes said of what is small:
"This is big,"
And they forged feuds against themselves.
265. And from all sides the pagans came,
Bringing defeat on the Russian land.

O, far has the falcon flown,

in wedding songs and laments.

³¹ The defeated Russians' disgrace is portrayed with the imagery of wedding songs as a swan-maiden bride who passes from the Russian land (the land of Dazhbog's grandson – i.e., the Russian people) to the land of the pagan dragon Troyan. As a maiden bride, she brings prosperity to the land of the enemy. The apparent opposition between the dragon Troyan and the sun god Dazhbog is echoed later in the tale when Vseslav of Polotsk crosses the path of the sun god Khors while fleeing at night like the dragon. This possibly goes back to mythological motifs that were reflected in the conversion tales.

Slaying birds, toward the sea!
But Igor's brave army cannot be resurrected.

270. Lamentation calls for him,
And grief gallops through the Russian land,
Hurling smoke from a flaming horn.³²
The Russian women weep, saying:
"Alas, our dear true loves!"
275. We cannot think them back with our thinking,
Nor muse them back with our musing,
Nor behold them with our eyes,
And no gold or silver can we caress!"
And Kiev, brothers, groaned in sorrow,
280. And Chernigov in its misfortunes.
Anguish spilled over the Russian land,
Fat sorrow flowed in the land of Russia.
The princes forged feuds against themselves,
While the plundering pagans roamed the Russian land,
285. Taking as tribute one squirrel skin from each hearth.

- For the two brave sons of Sviatoslav,
Igor and Vsevolod,
Awoke the evil that their father Sviatoslav,
The stormy Grand Prince of Kiev,
290. Had lulled to sleep with his storm,
Caressing it with his mighty regiments
And his Kharalug swords.³³

³² Horns were used as funeral censers, as shown by motifs in early Russian miniatures.

³³ Not long before Igor's campaign, in 1183, Sviatoslav had defeated the Polovtsy, capturing their leader Kobvak. Igor and Vsevolod did not take part

He stepped onto the Polovtsian land,
He trampled the hills and ravines,
295. He muddied the rivers and lakes,
He dried up the swamps and streams.
Like a whirlwind he plucked the pagan Kobyak
Out of the arm of the sea
From the mighty iron Polovtsian regiments,
300. And Kobyak fell in Sviatoslav's banquet hall
In Kiev town.³⁴
Now the Germans and the Venetians,
Now the Greeks and the Moravians
Sing praise to Sviatoslav,
305. And sing reproach to Igor,
Who sank his wealth
To the bottom of the Kayala.
The Polovtsian rivers
They filled with Russian gold.³⁵

in this victory.

³⁴ The *Hypatian Chronicle* reports that Sviatoslav mounted the Kiev throne *on Elijah's Day* (July 20, Old Style) in 1177, after a lengthy conflict. The prominence of water in the portrayal of Sviatoslav in the Igor Tale, the reference to his "storm," and his lifting Kobyak like a "whirlwind" are all evocative of the stormy Elijah with his whirlwind and provenance over water.

³⁵ The Germans, Venetians, Greeks and Moravians – as Christian nations and participants in the Crusades – are aligned with the Russians in their crusade against the heathen. As they sing to Igor and Sviatoslav, they are cast in the metaphoric role of maidens who sing songs of praise at a wedding celebration. The person whom the maidens praise is expected to reward them by dropping coins into a glass of wedding wine that the maidens offer. If the reward is too small, the maidens sing mocking songs of reproach. The singing nations reproach Igor because, figuratively speaking, he has spilled all his gold in the wedding glass of the enemy – the Kayala – and has nothing left to reward them for their songs. The same wedding-ritual referent is used a few lines later in

310. Now Igor the Prince
Gets down from his golden saddle
And into the saddle of a slave.
The city walls grow weary
And merriment wanes.
315. And Sviatoslav dreamed a troubled dream
In Kiev, on the hills.³⁶
“Early last night
They wrapped me,” he said,
“In a black shroud
320. Upon a bed of yew.
They ladled me deep-blue wine
Mixed with sorrow.
From the empty quivers of the pagan interpreters
They spilled great pearls upon my breast
325. And treated me tenderly.
The main beam is now missing
In my gold-domed bower.

which Gothic maidens sing on the seashore.

³⁶ The dream of Kiev Prince Sviatoslav is fashioned after wedding song motifs describing what the bride sees in a dream on the eve of the groom’s arrival to take her away from her maiden home. She dreams of the matchmaking ritual, when gifts are brought by the emissaries of the groom. The gifts include wine, cloths and pearls. She dreams that parts of her maiden home, such as the corner beams and main roofbeam have fallen away. Some songs mention birds in her dream that symbolize the family of the groom. In Sviatoslav’s dream, the missing beam (*knes* – close to *kniaz*’ “prince”) is associated with Igor and his army. Instead of emissaries of the groom, enemy interpreters spill out pearls for the Grand Prince, obviously associated with tears for the fallen army. The interpreters’ quivers hold no arrows because the embassy comes unarmed.

All night long
The ravens were cawing *to* Boos
330. In the fields around Plesensk.
They were thicket of Kisan [?]
And I cannot send to the deep-blue sea.”³⁷

And the Boyars said to the Prince:
“Alas, O Prince, woe has captured the mind.
335. For lo, the two falcons have flown
From their father’s golden throne
To seek the city of Tmutorokan
Or drink with their helmet from the Don.
Alas, the sabres of the pagans
340. Have clipped the falcons’ wings,
And they’ve *snares* them in iron snares.
For it was dark on the third day.
The two suns grew dim,
Both crimson pillars burned out,
345. And with them the two young moons,
Oleg and Sviatoslav,
Were shrouded in darkness.”³⁸

³⁷ Lines 329-332 appear to be defective. They are related to lines 357-363, which seem to be the boyars’ interpretation of this part of the dream. Each passage alludes to the Antean prince Boos. The mysterious “*besha depr’ Kisaniu*” in Sviatoslav’s retelling of his dream is suspiciously similar to “*Sharokaniu*” in the boyars’ interpretation. The cawing ravens at Plesensk (literally, “Splashtown”) must be connected with the singing maidens on the seashore.

³⁸ The two “suns” are Igor and Vsevolod, while the “crimson pillars” might allude to their armies. “Oleg and Sviatoslav” might refer to Igor’s two youngest sons or to his middle son Oleg and his nephew Sviatoslav Ol’govich of Ryl’sk.

On the river Kayala
Darkness has covered the light.

350. Like a pack of panthers
The Polovtsy have spread across the Russian land.
[...] and sank (it) in the sea,
And gave great rejoicing to the *Khinova*.³⁹
Reproof has now come down on praise,
355. Thralldom now has thundered down on freedom,
Now the Div has pounced upon the land.⁴⁰
And lo, fair Gothic maidens
Sing on the shore of the deep-blue sea
As they jingle Russian gold.
360. They sing the days of Boos,
And lullaby revenge for Sharokan.
But we, your loyal retinue,

³⁹ *Khinova* appears to be a pejorative derived from the wedding ritual of singing songs of reproach – the same ritual that inspired the mythical river *Kayala*. The verbs *kaiati* and *khiniti* were both terms for the reproaching of wedding participants who are too miserly in rewarding the maiden singers. The name *Khinova*, applied to the Polovtsy, implies that the enemy are worthy of reproach. Slovenian *hiniti*, related Slovenian forms such as *hinavski* and *hinavec*, and closely similar words in Serbocroatian are all associated with “feigning,” “deceit” and “hypocrisy.” Together with an attested usage of *khyniti* in the meaning ‘deceive’ in Old Church Slavonic, these words open the door to a broad range of possible interpretations for *Khinova* such as ‘spoilers’ or ‘deceivers.’

⁴⁰ These lines, alluding to a shift from praise to reproach, serve as a transition to the Gothic maidens who sing on the seashore and jingle the Russian gold – like wedding singers who sing praise and reproach as they jingle the coins that they receive. It is unclear whether the Div has “pounced onto the (Russian) land” or “plummeted to the ground.” In light of the Div’s alignment with the pagan idol of Tmutorokan, the first reading seems to make better sense. It is supported by a passage in the *Zadonshchina* stating that the “Divo” has been thrown to the ground as the Russians vanquish the Tatars.

Thirst for merriment.”⁴¹

Then the great Sviatoslav

365. Spilled a golden word

Mixed with tears, and said:

“O my sons, Igor and Vsevolod!

Too soon have you set out

To make the Polovtsian land weep with your swords,

370. And to seek glory for yourselves!

But you triumphed without honor,

For without honor you spilled the pagan blood.

Your brave hearts are forged in hard Kharalug iron

And tempered in valiance.

375. What have you done to my silver grey hair?⁴²

⁴¹ The narrator alludes to settlements of Goths on the Sea of Azov or the Black Sea. They praise the time in the fourth century when the Gothic king Vinitar executed the Antean prince Booz, but they nurse revenge for the Russians’ defeat of the Polovtsian leader Sharokan, grandfather of Konchak. This transition from positive to negative echoes the alternation of praise and reproach for Sviatoslav and Igor in a previous passage. Like the singing Germans, Venetians, Greeks and Moravians, the Gothic maidens are cast in the metaphoric role of maidens who sing at a wedding. The Gothic maidens jingle the Russian gold much as maidens at a wedding celebration jingle the coins that they receive from participants and guests. The foreign nations previously reproached Igor for spilling his gold into the Kayala, a figurative wedding wine cup. Here we find the Gothic maidens – aligned with the Polovtsy – as recipients of that gold. The sea seems to be associated here with the wedding wine. It is as though the Russian gold has flowed from the figurative Kayala to where the Gothic maidens stand by the sea. Unlike the rejoicing Goths, who stand beside the metaphorical wine of the sea, Sviatoslav’s boyars “thirst” for merriment.

⁴² The bride-like role that began with Sviatoslav’s dream continues here. His “spilling a golden word mixed with tears” is fashioned after wedding song lines in which the bride “spills tears over gold and over a pearly necklace.” He

- And no more do I see the power of my brother Yaroslav,
 Rich and strong and mighty in warriors,
 With his Chernigov Boyars,
 His Moguts and Tatrans,
 380. His Shelbirs and Topchaks,
 His Revugs and Olbers.⁴³
 Shieldless, and with only a dagger in their boot,
 They conquer armies with their cries,
 Ringing at their grandfathers' glory.⁴⁴
 385. But you said: "Let's prove our manhood by ourselves.

rebukes Igor and Vsevolod for making the Polovtsian land weep too soon – much as in Russian wedding ritual, where the bride rebukes her parents for making her cry and giving her away too soon. The bride accuses her father of being hard-hearted, saying that his “heart is forged in iron and tempered in steel.” Here these traditional lines are transformed: “Your brave hearts are forged in hard Kharalug iron and tempered in valiance.” When the bride is given away, her single maiden braid is parted into the two braids of a married woman, and the bride laments: “What have you done to my light brown braid?” Following the pattern of the wedding ritual, Sviatoslav laments: “What have you done to my silver grey hair?” After rebuking the two princes, Sviatoslav turns to his brother, Prince Yaroslav of Chernigov, much as the bride turns to her brother after addressing her parents.

⁴³ These terms for Yaroslav's fighters appear to be based on Slavic roots. Moguts – mighty men; Tatrans – mountainmen of the Tatr Mountains; Revugs – bellowers; Topchaks – trampers; Olbers – giants. They appear to be purely legendary names or names that were simply invented for fighting units in Yaroslav's army.

⁴⁴ It is unclear whether *zasapozhniki* were boot daggers or spurs. Possibly it is their spurs that “ring.” In the Izborsk region archaeologists have found spurs with spinning serrated wheels dating from the early 1200's – the oldest spurs of that kind. Because these spurs were a recent innovation, one might expect them to make an impression on the epic singers of that time. Compare the “ringing” of Oleg's stirrup (lines 194-196) and that of Vseslav in a passage that seems to allude to his spurs (lines 514-516).

Alone we'll snatch the glory before us
And the glory behind us we'll share alone."

Yet is it a wonder, brothers,
For the old to grow young?

390. When a falcon has moulted
He strikes birds high into the sky;
He will not let his nest be disgraced.⁴⁵
But alas, the princes bring me no aid.
The times have turned inside out!⁴⁶

395. In Rimov they scream under Polovtsian sabres,
And Volodimir screams under wounds.
Woe and sorrow to the son of Gleb!⁴⁷

Grand Prince Vsevolod!

Will you not fly from afar in thought

400. To guard your father's golden throne?
For you can splash the Volga dry with your oars
And drain the Don with your helmets.⁴⁸
If you were here,

⁴⁵ Other Old Russian sources make it clear that the falcon imagery used by Sviatoslav was a familiar oral-folkloric motif in the Kievan period. A wedding motif in lines 125-140 alludes to defending a nest from disgrace. The bird imagery in Sviatoslav's exhortation to his brother most likely comes from the same body of lore – that is, from a wedding song in which the bride pleads with her father to “defend his nest” and not give her away in marriage.

⁴⁶ Before meeting the wedding procession at the gate to her home, the mother of the groom dons a coat or jacket that has been turned inside-out. Sviatoslav's lamenting that “the times have turned inside-out” was inspired by this key moment in the wedding ritual and probably by a familiar formula used by the bride in wedding laments. Needless to say, Sviatoslav means that the days of victory have given way to a time of defeat.

⁴⁷ Vladimir Glebovich, Prince of Rimov, was mortally wounded when the Polovtsy attacked his city soon after defeating Igor near the Donets.

Then slave girls would sell for only a penny
405. And slavemen for only a pound.
For overland you can shoot living *ice floes* —
The valiant sons of Gleb!⁴⁹

You, bold Rurik and David!⁵⁰
Wasn't it your gilt helmets
410. That sailed on blood?
Isn't it your bold retinue
Who bellow like aurochs
Wounded by tempered sabres
On the unknown plain?

415. Step then, lords, into the golden stirrup
For the disgrace of our time,
For the Russian land,
For the wounds of Igor,
The bold son of Sviatoslav!

⁴⁸ After pleading with her brother to defend her, the bride then addresses other wedding participants, exhorting them to come to her aid. In similar fashion, Sviatoslav now turns consecutively to other Russian princes, starting with Vsevolod, powerful Prince of Vladimir and Suzdal'. Vsevolod was known by the epithet "the Big Nest." He launched campaigns against the Volga Bulgars in 1184 and 1186, according to the *Laurentian Chronicle*. However, as Boris Iatsenko has noted, Vsevolod's triumphant Don River campaign did not take place until 1198 (1199 according to the date given in the *Laurentian Chronicle*). This is one of several details that point to sometime after 1198 as the time when the Igor Tale was recorded.

⁴⁹ Vsevolod shoots "living *shereshiry*," a word that is not attested in other texts. It seems to be related to the word *sheresh'*, a term for river ice. "Shooting living ice floes" continues the hyperbolic river imagery of "splashing the Volga dry" and "draining the Don with helmets."

⁵⁰ After Igor's defeat, Belgorod Prince Rurik Rostislavich and his brother David belatedly joined Sviatoslav in mounting a defense.

420. Eight-thoughted Yaroslav of Galich!
You sit high
On your gold-wrought throne,
Bracing the high hills of Hungary
With your iron regiments,
425. Barring the way of the Hungarian king,
Closing the gates of the Danube,
Hurling times across the clouds,
Wielding your judgments as far as the Danube!
Your thunders flow throughout the lands,
430. You open the gates to Kiev,
From your father's golden throne
You shoot down sultans in far-off lands.⁵¹

⁵¹ "Thought" and "wings" are repeatedly associated through metaphors in the Igor Tale. Vsevolod is exhorted to fly in thought (instead of on wings). Boyan flies "in mind" up under the clouds. Princes are called "six-winged" – a reference to seraphim, six-winged angels who guard the throne of God. The epithet "eight-thoughted" is a variation on "six-winged." The exhortation to Yaroslav follows a pattern that is commonly found in folk incantations addressed to Elijah the Prophet. These incantations abound with motifs that go back to pagan times. First, they address a saint or heavenly figure seated high on a gold throne. Then they praise him with hyperbolic praise before invoking him to give aid. He is armed with "fiery arrows" (a metaphor for lightning) that he shoots from vast distances. As the successor to the pagan thunder god Perun in the folk imagination, Elijah controlled rain, thunder and bodies of water. He was also anticipated as a harbinger of the Last Judgment. The praise of Yaroslav adapts motifs from incantations addressed to Elijah. He controls the "gates" to the Danube, his "storms flow" across the lands, and he flings times (instead of lightning bolts) across the clouds. Finally, he is exhorted to aid the Russians by shooting faraway Konchak – just as he shoots sultans at fantastical distances like a saint above the clouds. The first printed edition reads "Roman and Mstislav" instead of "Roman *Mstislavich*." However, there is little doubt that this exhortation was addressed to Roman Mstislavich and

Shoot then, lord, Konchak,
The pagan slave,
435. For the Russian land,
For the wounds of Igor,
The bold son of Sviatoslav!

And you, bold Roman *Mstislavich*!
Daring thought carries your mind to action,
440. High do you soar toward deeds in your valor,
Riding the winds like a falcon,
Keen in valor to overpower a bird.
For you have iron *talons*
Beneath your Latin helmets:
445. They've caused the earth to tremble,
And many nations —
Khinova, Lithuanians,
Yatvingians, Deremela, and Polovtsy —
Have dropped their lances
450. And bowed their heads
Beneath those Kharalug swords.⁵²

that copyists muddled the text, as shown by singular verbs and pronouns used in addressing the prince. Yaroslav's hegemony over the Danube region might be a stretch of the imagination, although, as Nikolai Kotliar has argued, ethnic Slavs inhabited the lower reaches of the Danube and might have been perceived as Yaroslav's subjects.

⁵² "Those Kharalug swords" refers back to the "iron *talons*" that are mentioned in line 443. "Talons" seems to be the intended meaning of the strange word *paporzi*, which has close parallels in *paporzok* ('wing joint'), *pazory* ('talons') and *paznogi* ('talons'). "*Deremela*" does not appear to be the actual name of an ethnic group, but a pejorative derived from a verb that means 'to stammer.' "*Khinova*," derived from the wedding ritual of singing reproach (*khiniti*), refers to the Polovtsy throughout the tale, but in this passage the referent is

But alas, Prince,
The light of the sun has grown weak for Igor,
And, fruitless, the tree has loosed its leaves.

455. Along the Ros and along the Sula
They've divided the towns,
And Igor's brave army cannot be resurrected.
The Don calls you, O Prince,
And summons the princes to victory.

460. The grandsons of Oleg, valorous princes,
Are ready for battle.

Ingvar and Vsevolod and all three sons of Mstislav,
Six-winged ones of no mean nest!⁵³
With lots that never lose you snatched dominions for yourselves!

465. Where now are your golden helmets,
Your Polish lances and shields?
Bar with your sharp arrows the gates to the plain
For the Russian land,
For the wounds of Igor,

470. The bold son of Sviatoslav!
For the Sula no longer flows
In silvery streams toward Pereyaslav town,
And the Dvina flows like a bog
To those stern men of Polotsk

475. Under the cries of the pagans.

unclear. It seems to be placed alongside *Litva* ('Lithuanians') to orchestrate sound: *Khinova-Litva*, much as the final word in the list of tribes, "*Polovtsy*," is placed alongside "*sulitsy*" ('lances').

⁵³ Historians disagree about the identity of these "three sons of Mstislav." Ingvar was Prince of Lutsk, a town near the western frontier, and had close ties with the Poles.

Alone Izyaslav, son of Vasilko,⁵⁴
 Rang his sharp swords
 Against the Lithuanian helmets,
 Caressed the glory of his grandfather Vseslav,
 480. And under crimson shields
 On the bloody grass
 Was himself caressed by Lithuanian swords.
 And with his beloved on a bed [...]

[...] and said: “Your retinue, Prince,
 485. Birds have covered with their wings,
 And beasts have licked their blood.”
 His brother Bryachislav was not there,
 Nor the other, Vsevolod.
 Alone he spilled his pearly soul
 490. From his valiant body
 Through his golden necklace.
 Voices grow weary,

⁵⁴ The identity of this prince remains a mystery. The data pertaining to him do not seem to match anyone who is mentioned in extant chronicles. Judging by the Igor Tale, Izyaslav was a descendant of Vseslav, Prince of Polotsk, and probably lived in the western region known as Black Rus'. When he dies, there is rejoicing in the town of Goroden, situated on the extreme western frontier, close to Lithuania. This suggests that our version of the Igor Tale was not written down until after 1215-1220, the period when Goroden evidently passed into Lithuanian control. Izyaslav is “caressed” by Lithuanian swords on the bloody grass – nuptial-bed imagery that is followed in an incomplete passage by an enigmatic allusion to a bed. Izyaslav’s “spilling his pearly soul through his golden necklace” is modelled after the song motif in which the bride “spills her tears through the pearl necklace and gold” that are brought by the groom. The same wedding motif lies behind Sviatoslav’s “spilling his golden word mixed with tears.” The sad strains about Izyaslav’s absent brothers probably echoes wedding songs that lament the bride’s separation from her family.

Merriment wanes.
Trumpets trumpet in Goroden.

495. Yaroslav and all grandsons of Vseslav!
Lower your banners,
Sheathe your sundered swords!
For you have leaped out of your grandfather's glory.
For with your feuding
500. You brought the pagans
Onto the Russian land,
Onto the wealth of Vseslav.
For it was from *feuding* that hardship came
From the Polovtsian land.
505. In Troyan's seventh millennium
Vseslav cast lots for the maiden he loved.
Leaning on his staff,
He vaulted to Kiev town,
And touched with his banner pole
510. The Kiev golden throne.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ According to the *Primary Chronicle*, in 1067, Vseslav of Polotsk sacked Novgorod, the dominion of Yaroslav the Wise and his descendants. Later that year, the three sons of Yaroslav defeated Vseslav in a battle on the Nemiga, a stream near Minsk. Vseslav fled, but surrendered when promised he would not be harmed. The solemn promise was broken and Vseslav was imprisoned in the Kiev dungeon of Prince Izyaslav. However, in 1068, he was freed in a rebellion against Izyaslav. Vseslav occupied the Kiev throne for seven months until Izyaslav returned with Polish reinforcements. Vseslav escaped to Belgorod, and from there he fled at night to Polotsk. In the Igor Tale, the digression about Vseslav does not follow the same sequence of events, partly because the tale's composer was guided by the templates of the oral epic tradition and probably by motifs in previous tales about Vseslav. (Moreover,

- As a fierce beast at midnight
 He leaped away from them out of Belgorod,
 Draped in deep-blue mists.
 On the morrow *he rang with his spurs*,
515. Opened the gates of Novgorod,
 Smashed the glory of Yaroslav,
 Leaped as a wolf to the Nemiga,
 And cleared the threshing floor on the Nemiga.
 They spread heads on the sheaves
520. And thresh with Kharalug flails:
 On the threshing floor they lay down life
 And winnow soul from body.
 The Nemiga's bloody shores weren't sown to be fruitful —
 They were sown with the bones of Russia's sons.
525. Vseslav the Prince judged the people
 And dealt out cities to princes,
 But then at night he coursed as a wolf.
 Before cock's crow he coursed from Kiev to Tmutorokan,
 Crossing, as a wolf, the path of the mighty Khors.

the chroniclers probably followed oral tales that differed somewhat from those that are reflected in the Igor Tale.) In the conversion tale, Elijah vaults to Kiev on a bishop's staff, which he then uses to destroy the pagan idol of Perun. The pagan dragon Troyan flees, undergoing metamorphoses as he runs. This all takes place in the "seventh millennium" of the pagan gods – their doomsday. Like the heroic Elijah, Vseslav vaults to Kiev on a staff – a motif that bears no resemblance whatsoever to the events described in the less imaginative chronicles. When the tide turns against him, he flees at night like the dragon Troyan, changing into a wolf and crossing the path of the sun god Khors as he flees. (Old Russian *liutyi zver'* ['fierce beast'] sometimes refers to a dragon.) All of these allusions to the pagan gods ultimately derive from motifs in the conversion tale, probably through the filter of tales about Vseslav that incorporated conversion motifs in an ironic fashion.

530. They tolled early morning matins for him
 On the bells at Saint Sophia in Polotsk,
 But he heard the ringing in Kiev.⁵⁶
 Though a wizardly soul in another body,
 Yet he often suffered tribulations.
535. It was to him that the wizardly Boyan first sang wisely:
 “Neither the clever nor the crafty,
 Nor the wizardly bird
 Can escape God’s Judgment.”⁵⁷
 Oh, the Russian land must moan,
540. Recalling her former days
 And her princes of old!
 Old Vladimir of yore
 Could not be nailed to the Kiev Hills!⁵⁸
 Lo, now the banners of Rurik
545. And of David have risen —

⁵⁶ This “ringing” motif might allude to Vseslav’s “vaulting” to power in Kiev. Like the epic hero Il’ia Muromets (the modern-day transformation of the prophet Elijah), Vseslav vaults with unnatural speed. He leaps from Polotsk as the church bells ring and hears the bells still ringing as he arrives in Kiev. According to another interpretation, the ringing signals the return of Kiev Prince Iziaslav. The dragon in the conversion tale hears the ringing, plugs his ears and flees. Vseslav hears the ringing and soon flees. Compare the “ringing” of Vseslav’s spurs (a reconstruction: *pozvoni strikusy/strekusy*) in lines 514-516 and the “ringing” of Oleg’s stirrup in the digression about the Nemiga battle (lines 194-198).

⁵⁷ These lines attributed to the singer Boyan come from the Russian oral tradition. They are almost identical to a familiar proverb: “Neither the clever nor the crafty, neither rich nor poor, can escape God’s Judgment.”

⁵⁸ “Nailing to the Kiev Hills” alludes to Vseslav’s imprisonment in Iziaslav’s dungeon. The heroes of *byliny* are sometimes bound in chains that are nailed to the dungeon walls.

But their tails wave in opposite ways!⁵⁹

Lances sing on the Danube.

Yaroslavna's voice is heard;

An unknown cuckoo, at dawn she calls:

550. "I shall fly as a cuckoo down the Danube," she says.⁶⁰

"I shall dip my beaver sleeve in the Kayala.

I shall wipe the bloody wounds

On my prince's sturdy body."

Yaroslavna weeps at dawn

555. On the walls of Putivl, saying:

"O Wind, O Sailor Wind!

Why, lord, do you blow so strongly?

Why do you fling with your weightless wings

⁵⁹ When the brothers Rurik and David mustered their forces to join Sviatoslav in mounting a defensive campaign against the marauding Polovtsy, Rurik joined up with Sviatoslav, while David hesitated and turned back.

⁶⁰ "Lances sing on the Danube" is a metaphoric variant of "Maidens sing on the Danube," a formula that accompanies Igor's entry into Kiev near the end of the tale. Even though Igor's wife Yaroslavna is placed on the ramparts of Putivl a few lines later, here her voice resounds among the lances that sing on the Danube, and she resolves to fly down the Danube to the figurative Kayala. Clearly, Yaroslavna cannot be in two places simultaneously. Putivl is in accord with the chronicle accounts, which all state that Yaroslavna sought refuge there. The Danube motif must be explained by other circumstances. In the perception of the composer of the Igor Tale, the Galich region stretching as far as the Danube was the realm of Yaroslavna's father. In this context, it could be considered to be her maiden home, a setting that endows her once again with the aura of maidenhood – a prerequisite for Yaroslavna to be part of a traditional "singing-maidens" motif. Moreover, in previous tales about Igor's victory over the Polovtsy on Elijah's Day in 1174 (only two years after their being wed), Yaroslavna might have still been associated with the Danube and her maidenly realm around Galich. The Igor Tale might have partially resurrected that portrayal.

- The arrows of the Khinova
560. Upon my beloved's warriors?
Was it too little for you to blow *high* beneath the clouds,
Rocking the ships on the deep-blue sea?
Why, my lord, did you scatter my joy
Over the feathergrass of the prairie?"
565. Yaroslavna weeps at dawn
On the walls of Putivl town, saying:
"O Dnepr, Son of Renown!
You have cut through stone mountains
Across the Polovtsian land!
570. You rocked upon you the long boats of Sviatoslav
As far as the army of Kobyak.
Rock back, O lord, my beloved to me
That I might not at dawn send him tears to the sea."⁶¹
Yaroslavna weeps at dawn
575. On the walls of Putivl town, saying:
"O Bright and Thrice-Bright Sun!
You are fair and warm for all!
Why, my lord, did you reach down with your sweltering rays
Upon the warriors of my beloved
580. And warp their bows with thirst on the waterless plain,
And close their quivers with sorrow?"

⁶¹ According to the *Hypatian Chronicle* (year 1183) Sviatoslav captured Kobyak, two of Kobyak's sons, and other leaders of the Polovtsy who lived south of the Dnepr and along its lower reaches. Sviatoslav could have reached this region by boat, although the *Hypatian Chronicle* states that he traveled overland. However, it is questionable whether Yaroslavna's pleading with the Dnepr to rock Igor back to her in Putivl makes sense geographically. Her lament follows traditional patterns that are found in folk laments.

The sea splashes at midnight,
 Waterspouts whirl in mists.
 God shows Prince Igor the way
 585. From the Polovtsian land
 To the Russian land,
 To his father's golden throne.
 The evening glow has faded.
 Igor dozed, Igor arose,
 590. Igor measured the fields of the foes
 From the Mighty Don to the little Donets.
 A steed *called*,
The earth rumbled,
The grass rustled,
 595. *The Polovtsian tents stirred.*⁶²
 Ovlur whistled at midnight from the other shore —
 He bids the prince to heed:
 Prince Igor is to be no more!⁶³
 And Igor the Prince sped as an ermine to the reeds,
 600. And as a white mallard into the water.
 He leaped onto the swift steed,
 And sprang off it as a barefoot wolf,
 And fled to the Donets meadow,
 And flew as a falcon under the mists,
 605. Slaying geese and swans
 For breakfast, lunch, and supper.

⁶² In the first printed edition of the Igor Tale, the text that is italicized here comes after line 598, where it makes no sense. This passage was somehow transposed by a copyist, leaving “steed” without a predicate.

⁶³ According to chronicle accounts, Igor was told that the Polovtsy were planning to kill him after their leaders returned from their rampage across Rus'.

When Igor flew as a falcon
Then Vlur fled as a wolf,
Sprinkled by the chilling dew.

610. For both had worn out their swift steeds.

The Donets said: “Prince Igor!
Great is your glory
And great is the chagrin of Konchak,
And the joy of the Russian land!”

615. Igor said: “O Donets!

Great is your glory:
You rocked the Prince on your waves,
You spread him a bed of green grass
On your silvery shores,

620. You wrapped him in warm mists
Under the shade of the greenwood tree.

You watched over him with mallards on the water,
With gulls on the currents,
With black ducks on the winds.⁶⁴

625. Not like this,” he said, “was the river Stugna:

Endowed with a meager current,
She swallowed other brooks,
And reached out with her streams onto *both brush-lined banks*,
[. . .] the youth, Prince Rostislav [. . .]

⁶⁴ Igor’s praise of the Donets is patterned after songs of praise addressed to the mother of the bride or groom. In these songs, she is praised for rocking, swaddling, feeding and watching over her baby. In recent times these songs are most commonly known as *velichal’nye pesni* (‘glorifying songs’). The refrain that opens Igor’s speech to the Donets as well as the Donets’ praise for Igor, “Great is your glory!” (“*Ne malo ti velichiia*”) probably lies at the origin of the term that is used today (*velichal’nye*).

630. Closed the Dnepr [. . .] dark shore(s).
Rostislav's mother weeps for the youth, Prince Rostislav.⁶⁵
The flowers grow weary with sorrow,
And the tree bows down to the ground in woe."

It is not magpies that chatter:

635. On Igor's trail Gzak and Konchak come riding.
Now the ravens have ceased to caw,
The daws have grown silent,
The magpies do not chatter,
The *serpents* only slither.

640. The woodpeckers with their tapping
Show the way to the river,
And the nightingales announce the day with happy songs.
Says Gzak to Konchak:
"Since the falcon flies to his nest,

645. Let us shoot the falcon's son
With our gilded arrows."
Says Konchak to Gzak:
"Since the falcon flies to his nest,
Let us snare the falcon's son with a fair maiden."

650. And Gzak says to Konchak:

⁶⁵ According to the *Primary Chronicle*, Prince Rostislav drowned in 1093 while fleeing from the Polovtsy. He was only twenty-two years old at that time. The chronicle account seems to follow an oral legend like that which served as a source for the composer of the Igor Tale. The chronicle relates that Rostislav's brother Vladimir (Monomakh) saw him drown in the Stugna, a river that flows into the Dnepr about twenty miles south of Kiev. Vladimir then crossed the Dnepr and wept for his brother on the far shore. The chronicle, like the Igor Tale, mentions that Rostislav's mother wept for him when his body was brought to Kiev.

“If we snare him with a fair maiden,
Then we will have no falcon’s son
Nor will we have the fair maiden,
And the birds will begin to slay us
655. On the Polovtsian plain.”⁶⁶

Said Boyan and Khodyna,
Sviatoslav’s songmakers from the olden days of Yaroslav:
“O lover of Oleg the Khagan!
It is hard for the head without the shoulders,
660. Bad for the body without the head” —
For the Russian land without Igor!⁶⁷
The sun shines in heaven,
Igor the Prince is in the Russian land!

Maidens sing on the Danube,
665. Their voices weave across the sea to Kiev.⁶⁸
Igor rides up the Borichev Way

⁶⁶ The snaring of falcons in this dialog alludes to the marriage of Igor’s eldest son Vladimir, who was married off to a daughter of Konchak while still in captivity. In 1187, he was set free and returned to Rus’, where a Slavic wedding was held.

⁶⁷ This is the only known reference to the singer Khodyna, who figures here alongside Boyan. Their words are addressed to the wife of Oleg Sviatoslavich, apparently when Oleg was captured by the Khazars and sent into exile in Byzantium (around 1080).

⁶⁸ “Maidens sing on the Danube” is the formulaic model for “Lances sing on the Danube,” which introduces the lament of Yaroslavna. The “weaving” of the maidens’ voices across the sea is reminiscent of Trinity Day rituals in which girls toss wreaths onto rivers or lakes. According to belief, a girl will marry the man who finds her wreath. While lances “sing” on the Danube, Yaroslavna speaks of flying down the Danube to find Igor. Now the Danube maidens’ voices seem to find Igor in Kiev.

To the Blessed Virgin of the Tower.⁶⁹

The lands are happy,

The towns are gay,

670. Having sung a song to the old princes

And then to the young.⁷⁰

Let us sing: Glory to Igor, son of Sviatoslav,

To fierce aurochs Vsevolod,

To Vladimir, son of Igor!

675. Health to the princes and to their men

Fighting for Christians

Against the armies of the pagans!

Glory to the princes

And to their men — amen!

⁶⁹ The Borichev Way is the route by which the statue of Perun was dragged down from the Kiev Hills when the pagan gods were deposed in 988. Thus, it evokes associations with the entry of Elijah into Kiev in the songs about the conversion of Kiev. Igor's initial departure, linked in ironic fashion with Elijah's mission to destroy pagan idols, and his return are both drawn with an eye to the conversion tales.

⁷⁰ The singing lands and towns are the same nations that were portrayed metaphorically as maiden singers at a wedding: the Germans, Venetians, Greeks, Moravians and Danube maidens on one hand; the Gothic maidens on the other.



The Hypatian Chronicle Account of Igor's Campaign

Sometime after 1187, when Igor's son returned from captivity, an account of the campaign was included in a compilation of the *Hypatian Chronicle* that was made by the year 1200. Unlike the highly metaphoric Igor Tale, this account is written in the sober prose of early Russian annals. It elucidates many details of Igor's campaign and, when carefully analyzed, it provides insights into the question of the genesis of the Igor Tale.

The year 1185. [...] At that same time the son of Sviatoslav, Igor, grandson of Oleg, set out from Novgorod on Tuesday, the 23rd day of April, taking with him his brother Vsevolod from Trubchevsk and his nephew Sviatoslav Olgovich from Rylsk and his son Vladimir from

Putivl. And from Yaroslav he asked for the help of Olstin Oleksich, grandson of Prokhor, with his Chernigov mercenaries, and thus they proceeded, quietly gathering their retinue, for their steeds were exceedingly fat.

As they were approaching the Donets River in the evening hour, Igor looked up to the sky and saw the sun standing like the moon, and he said to his boyars and to his retinue: “Do you see? What does this sign mean?” Looking up, they saw it and hung their heads and said: “Prince, this sign is not a good one.” And Igor said: “Brothers and retinue! No one knows God’s mysteries, and God is the Creator of this sign and of all of His world. And it is not for us to know whether that which God creates is for good or bad.”

And saying this, he forded the Donets. And thus he arrived at the Oskol River and waited two days for his brother Vsevolod, who had set out by a different route from Kursk. And from there they proceeded to the Salnitsa, where the scouts who had been sent to capture a prisoner joined them. And the scouts said: “We saw warriors, armed warriors riding. Either go swiftly or return home. The time is not ours.”

And Igor spoke with his brethren: “If we return without a fight, our shame will be worse than death. Let it be as God wills it.” Thus deciding, they rode through the night.

The next morning, when Friday had dawned, they encountered the regiments of the Polovtsy at midday. And the Polovtsy were ready for them and had sent their wagons behind them, assembling young and old on the far side of the Syuurli River. And the Russians deployed six regiments: Igor’s regiment at the center, his brother Vsevolod’s on the right, his nephew Sviatoslav’s on the left; and up front were his son Vladimir’s regiment and that of Yaroslav with Olstin and his mercenaries; and a third regiment in the vanguard was formed from archers chosen from all the princes. And thus they deployed their regiments. And Igor said to his brethren: “Brothers! This is what we sought for. Now let us advance!” And thus they set out against the Polovtsy, placing their hope in God.

And as they drew near the Syuurli River, archers rode out from among the regiments of the Polovtsy and each shot one arrow at the Russians before galloping away. Before the Russians had crossed the Syuurli River, those forces of the Polovtsy who stood a good distance

from the river also galloped away. Sviatoslav Olgovich, Vladimir Igorevich, Olstin with his mercenaries and the archers then raced in pursuit of them, while Igor and Vsevolod proceeded slowly, not allowing their regiments to loosen ranks. Those Russians who were in the vanguard slew the enemy and took captives. The Polovtsy fled past their own wagons, and when the Russians reached the wagons they took many captives, and others returned at night with more captives. And when they gathered all the captive Polovtsy together, Igor said to his brethren and to his men: “Behold how God has brought defeat upon our enemies, while to us He has brought honor and glory! We have seen how numerous are the regiments of the Polovtsy. Almost all of them have gathered together here. Now let us ride through the night, and others can follow us in the morning. Otherwise, if all go now, then only the best riders will make it and God save the rest of us.”

And Sviatoslav Olgovich said to his uncles: “I have chased the Polovtsy far — my steeds can go no further. If I set out now, I will only be left behind along the way.” And Vsevolod supported him, and they decided to camp where they were.

And Igor said: “It is no wonder, brothers, to die knowingly.” And they camped there.

When Saturday dawned, the Polovtsian regiments began to emerge like forests. Because they were such a countless multitude, the Russian princes were confused and did not know who of them should go where. And Igor said: “Behold! We have brought upon ourselves the whole land: Konchak and Kza Burnovich, Toksobich Kolobich and Etebich and Tertrobich!” And they all agreed to dismount from their steeds, hoping to fight their way to the Donets River. And they said: “If we flee and escape by ourselves, leaving the commoners behind, then we shall have sinned before God, surrendering these men while we escape. Nay, let us either die or remain alive all together in one place!”

And saying this, they all got down from their steeds and fought their way on foot. And thus, as God willed it, Igor was wounded in the arm and he lost the use of his left hand. And there was great sorrow in his regiment. And his marshal was captured in the vanguard after being wounded. And thus they fought that day until evening, and many were wounded and killed in the Russian regiments. And when Saturday night came, they set out fighting their way on foot. As Sunday dawned, the

mercenaries revolted and fled. At that time, Igor was mounted on his steed because he was wounded. He went over to their regiment, hoping to turn them back to his regiments. Realizing that he had already gone far from his men, he raced back to his regiments, removing his helmet in order that those who had fled might recognize the Prince and return. But no one returned except Mikhalko Giurgovich, who recognized the Prince and returned, for not many had bolted with the mercenaries, only a few of the commoners or boyars' sons. All fought well, proceeding on foot, and Vsevolod showed more than a little bravery among them. And as Igor was drawing near to his regiments, they cut him off and captured him at a distance of an arrow's flight from his regiment. And as they held him captive, Igor saw his brother Vsevolod fighting fiercely, and he wished for death in his soul rather than see his own brother fall. Vsevolod fought so much that he ran out of weapons in his hands. And they fought as they moved around the lake on foot. Thus it was that on the day of the Holy Resurrection the Lord brought His wrath down upon us. Instead of joy He brought weeping, instead of merriment He brought us mourning on the river Kayala.

And Igor said: "I recall my sins before the Lord my God. I have caused much killing and bloodshed in the Christian land. I did not spare even Christians, capturing the town of Glebov near Pereyasavl. Then innocent Christians suffered much evil, fathers were separated from their children, brother from brother, friend from friend, wives from their husbands, daughters from their mothers, girls from their maiden friends, and all was troubled by sorrow and captivity. The living envied the dead, while the dead rejoiced, having accepted the trials of this world like holy martyrs burned in fire. Old men were slaughtered, youths endured fierce and merciless wounds, men were cut in two and hewn to pieces, women were defiled — and it was I who caused all of this," Igor said. "I did not deserve to live, and now I see the vengeance of the Lord my God. Where now is my beloved brother? Where now is my brother's son? Where is the child that I have fathered? Where are the boyars who give counsel, where are my brave men? Where are the regimental ranks? Where are my steeds and precious weapons? Have I not been stripped of all this? Has not the Lord delivered me as a captive into the hands of these heathen? Behold, the Lord has given me retribution according to my transgressions and according to my evil deeds, and today my sins have come down upon

my own head. The Lord is Truth, and righteous are His judgments. Now there is no place for me among the living, for today I see others accepting the crown of martyrdom. Why could not I, who alone am guilty, accept the suffering for all these? But, Lord God my Master! Do not forsake me, Lord, but as Thy will is, so is Thy mercy for us, Thy servants.”

And then, when the battle was over, they were each led away to separate tent-wagons. It was one of Targa’s men, a man named Chilbuk, who had captured Igor, while Roman Kzich captured his brother Vsevolod. Sviatoslav Olgovich was captured by Eldechuk of the Voburtseviches, and Vladimir was captured by Kopti of the Ulasheviches. Then, on the battlefield, Konchak stepped forward for Igor, his daughter’s father-in-law, for he was wounded. Few of the many men survived by chance, for it was impossible for those who fled to get away. They were surrounded by the Polovtsian regiments as though by strong walls. From among the Russians fifteen men escaped and even fewer mercenaries, while others drowned in the water.

At this time Grand Prince Sviatoslav Vsevolodich was on his way to Karachev and was gathering troops from the upper reaches of the Oka, planning a campaign for the whole summer against the Polovtsy near the Don. When Sviatoslav was near Novgorod-Seversk as he returned, he heard that his brother princes had set out against the Polovtsy in secret from him, and this was not pleasing to him. Sviatoslav was travelling in boats, and when he reached Chernigov, Belovolod Prosovich came running and told Sviatoslav about the Polovtsy and what had happened. Hearing this, Sviatoslav sighed deeply and wiped away his tears and said: “Oh, my dear brothers and sons and men of the Russian land! God allowed me to subdue the pagans, but without restraining your youth you have opened the gates to the Russian land. May God’s will be done in all things. As I was grieved by Igor before, so now do I lament for my brother Igor even more.”

After this, Sviatoslav sent his sons Oleg and Vladimir to the Seym River region. Hearing the news, the towns along the Seym fell into turmoil and there was sorrow and great mourning unlike anything that had been before in the Seym region and in Novgorod-Seversk and in the whole Chernigov domain. Princes had been captured, their retinues were captured or killed. People thrashed about as though in a net, towns rose up, and one’s close ones were no consolation. Many were ready to give

their souls as they mourned for their princes. Then Sviatoslav sent to David in Smolensk, saying: "We had agreed to set out against the Polovtsy, spending the summer on the Don, but now the Polovtsy have defeated Igor and his brother and son. Ride forth, brother, and guard the Russian land." David went to the Dnepr, where other support arrived, and they took up a position at Trepol, while Yaroslav gathered his warriors and stood ready in Chernigov.

After defeating Igor and his brothers, the pagan Polovtsy, buoyed up by great arrogance, gathered together their whole tribe against the Russian land. And there was a dispute among them. Konchak said: "Let us go in the direction of Kiev, where our brothers were defeated along with our grand prince Bonyak." And Kza said: "Let us go to the Seym River, where they have left their women and children. They are ready captives, gathered already. We can take those towns without fear."

And they split their forces. Konchak went to Pereyaslavl and besieged the city, and they fought there the whole day. Vladimir Glebovich was Prince in Pereyaslavl. He was bold and strong in battle. He rode out of the fortress and a few of his retinue dared to follow him, and they fought them fiercely, but many Polovtsy surrounded them. Then, seeing their prince fighting fiercely, others came racing to him out of the fortress and rescued their prince, who was wounded by three spears. This good Vladimir went back into his fortress, wounded and suffering, and wiped away the sweat of the valorous deeds which he had performed for his patrimony. Vladimir sent to Sviatoslav and to Rurik and to David, saying: "The Polovtsy are here. Help me!"

Sviatoslav sent to David, and David was positioned at Trepol with the men of Smolensk. The men of Smolensk held counsel, saying: "We have come as far as Kiev. If there had been a battle, we would have fought. But if we have to seek out another battle, we are too exhausted for that."

Sviatoslav and Rurik set out against the Polovtsy, entering the Dnepr basin with other reinforcements, while David returned with the men of Smolensk. Hearing this, the Polovtsy turned back from Pereyaslavl. As they passed Rimov, they lay siege to it, and the people of Rimov barricaded themselves in the fortress and mounted the walls. And so it was that, by God's will, two parts of the wall collapsed with the people on them, falling toward the warriors. And the other townspeople were

seized by fear. Those who left the fortress and fought their way along the Rimov swamp were saved. All who remained in the town were captured.

Vladimir sent to Sviatoslav Vsevolodich and to Rurik Rostislavich, urging them to come to his aid, but they delayed as they waited for David and his men of Smolensk. So it was that the Russian princes arrived too late to find them. The Polovtsy had left after capturing the city and taking captives. The princes then returned to their homes, full of sorrow for Vladimir Glebovich, who was wounded with mortal wounds, and for those Christians who were captured by the pagans. Thus did God bring down upon us the pagans to punish us for our sins, showing us no mercy and punishing us and turning us to repentance that we would refrain from our evil deeds. Thus He punishes us with pagan onslaughts that we might submit and turn from our evil path.

Meanwhile, the other Polovtsy went in the other direction to Putivl. With strong forces Kza subdued these lands and burned their villages and set fire to the fort outside Putivl and returned whence they had come.

At that time Igor Sviatoslavich was in Polovtsian captivity. He said: "I have deservedly accepted defeat according to Thy will, Lord, and not because the pagans' arrogance broke the strength of Your servants. I do not regret that I must accept all that is necessary for my evilness, and I have accepted it." The Polovtsy, as though abashed that he was a leader, did him no harm but assigned fifteen sentries to him, choosing them from among their sons, and from among the sons of their khans they chose five more — twenty in all. But they gave him the freedom to ride wherever he wanted and to hunt with falcons, riding with five or six servants. The sentries obeyed him and honored him and went wherever he commanded them without dispute. He had brought a priest from Rus' to perform the holy services for him, for he did not know the will of Providence and presumed he would be in captivity a long time. But the Lord rescued him thanks to the prayers of Christians who wept and sorrowed greatly for him.

And while he was among the Polovtsy, there was a man there named LAVOR, a Polovtsian by birth, who made a righteous resolve and said: "I will go with you to Rus'." At first Igor placed no trust in him but harbored the daring, youthful plan of taking a man and fleeing to Rus'. And he said: "For honor's sake I did not flee then from my retinue, and so neither do I intend to follow a dishonorable path now." For his

marshal's son and his groom were with him there, and they urged him, saying: "Go, Prince, to the Russian land, if God wills it that you be saved."

But the opportunity for which he waited did not come. As we said previously, the Polovtsy were returning from Pereyaslavl, and his advisers said: "You harbor an audacious plan that is not pleasing to God. You are seeking to take a man and flee with him. But why do you not consider what we have heard: the Polovtsy will return from their war intending to kill the prince and all of you — all of the Russians. Then you will have neither honor nor life." Prince Igor took their counsel to heart and, fearing the return of the Polovtsy, sought the opportunity to flee. But he could not flee, night or day, because the sentries guarded him. The only time he found was at sunset. And Igor sent his groom to Lavor, saying: "Ride over to the other side of the Tor and take a second steed with you." He had agreed with Lavor to flee to Rus'. At that time, the Polovtsy were drunk from their fermented horse milk and it was evening. The groom came and told Igor, his Prince, that Lavor was waiting for him. Then Igor arose, filled with fear and trembling, and bowed down before the holy icon and the sacred cross, saying: "Lord, who sees into men's hearts! Save me, Master, unworthy though I am!" And placing upon him the cross and the icon, he raised the tent door and crept away. His sentries were playing and making merry, and they assumed the Prince was sleeping. Igor came to the river, forded it and mounted the steed; and thus they made their way through the tents. The Lord sent this deliverance on Friday, in the evening. And Igor went on foot for eleven days as far as the town of Donets, and from there he went to his own Novgorod, and all rejoiced at his arrival. From Novgorod he went to his brother Yaroslav in Chernigov, requesting aid for a campaign along the Seym. Yaroslav rejoiced for him and promised to give him aid. From there Igor rode to Grand Prince Sviatoslav in Kiev, and Sviatoslav was happy for him, and so was Rurik, his son's father-in-law.



The Tale of the Battle Beyond the Don (*Zadonshchina*)

In 1380, the armies of Prince Dmitrii Ivanovich of Moscow clashed with the forces of the Tatar leader Mamai on the Kulikovo Field ('Snipe Field') near the Don River. The battle was perceived in Moscow as a great victory. For the first time the Russian princes had managed to hold

their own in a major encounter with the Tatar hordes. The momentous event inspired a number of literary tales, including the famous *Zadonshchina*, or “Tale of the Battle Beyond the Don,” which has reached us in five manuscript copies. The oldest copy dates from the late fifteenth century, while the other four copies appear to date from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Like the Igor Tale, the *Zadonshchina* abounds in formulae that are similar or identical to those of Russian folk epic tradition, it abounds in syntactic rhyme and other symmetries like those of oral epic songs, and, as in the Igor Tale, its narrator speaks of *singing* praise to the heroic princes. The resemblance to the Igor Tale is so close that most specialists in Old Russian conclude that the *Zadonshchina* is actually patterned after the Igor Tale. They believe that the *Zadonshchina* refashions formulations of the Igor Tale alluding to the Russians’ defeat in 1185, manipulating them to refer to the Russians’ victory of 1380. For example, the sun is eclipsed as Igor sets out against the Polovtsy, but in the *Zadonshchina* the sun shines brightly as Prince Dmitrii Ivanovich sets out against the Tatars. In the Igor Tale, Gothic maidens jingle Russian gold as they celebrate the victory of the Polovtsy, while in the *Zadonshchina* it is the Russian women who jingle the defeated Tatars’ gold. Although the *Zadonshchina* lacks the precision, clarity, balance and metaphoric consistency of the Igor Tale, the two works appear to spring from a single narrative tradition.

Usually it is argued that each work is the creation of a poet who wrote in a literary tradition that drew upon the colorful imagery of folklore and oral epic songs. According to this view, both the Igor Tale and the *Zadonshchina* are a kind of literary stylization of an epic song and it is for this reason that the narrator in each tale refers to his poem as a “song” and writes in a style that is close to that of court singers whom he cites. However, the inevitable question arises: in view of the rhythmic parataxis and the enormous role of oral formulae in both works — and given the circumstance that no undisputed Russian epic songs recorded before the seventeenth century have survived into modern times — how do we know that the Igor Tale and the *Zadonshchina* are not themselves transcripts or prose retellings of epic songs? This hypothesis has not really been tested by most studies, although it best accounts for the textual divergences among the various copies of the *Zadonshchina*,

particularly those cases where parallel passages in the copies contain different attested variants of a single oral formula. These variants appear to point to oral transmission with variation along oral formulaic patterns. The tale might be the text of an epic song with accretions from a later period when it circulated as an oral prose tale before it was committed to writing.

Circumventing the issue of the possible oral origins of the *Zadonshchina*, most studies posit a single, written composition as the ultimate prototype for the five extant copies and proceed to deduce two recensions to which the five extant copies belong. Regardless whether the *Zadonshchina* was oral or written when it was first composed, it appears to date from sometime soon after the battle of 1380, as suggested by the jubilant, emotionally heightened tone of the tale.

The hypothesis that the *Zadonshchina* is patterned after the Igor Tale was challenged by Louis Leger, André Mazon and Aleksandr Zimin, who argued that the Igor Tale is actually a recent pastiche that was concocted in imitation of the *Zadonshchina*. The controversy over the authenticity of the Igor Tale generated much discussion in the 1960's and 1970's. Although neither side admitted defeat and no formal truce was signed, the debate eventually subsided, seemingly because both sides were simply short of breath. However, the textual enigmas of the *Zadonshchina* and the Igor Tale remain largely unresolved — partly because both sides in the controversy subscribe to the same presupposition that the relationship of the texts can be explained in terms of a written, copying tradition. If either the Igor Tale or the *Zadonshchina* was originally an oral composition, then both sides are wrong in their common assumption.

The widely held belief that the *Zadonshchina* is patterned after the Igor Tale should be regarded with caution because the narrator of the *Zadonshchina* never alludes explicitly to the Igor Tale. Instead, he evokes the Tatars' first victory over a Russian army on the Kalka in 1223. Theoretically, an epic song about the Kalka battle that was formulaically similar to the Igor Tale might have served as a primary template for the *Zadonshchina*. This question will be examined later.

Like the Igor Tale, the *Zadonshchina* is a relatively short composition intended to entertain an audience and glorify familiar national heroes, not really to provide information about the battle of

1380. A far more elaborate account is provided by the more prosaic “Tale about the Battle with Mamai” (*Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche*), which is extant in over a hundred different manuscript copies.

Translations of two different copies of the *Zadonshchina* are included here in order to give an idea of the degree of variation among the different versions of the tale. Garbled, confused passages are not “corrected” but rendered in their defective form. Instead of the actual texts of the *Zadonshchina*, anthologies customarily include textologists’ “reconstruction” of a hypothetical prototype from which they believe the five different copies derive. However, if the *Zadonshchina* was originally an oral tale, then textologists are doubtless mistaken in their assumption that discrepancies among the copies are primarily due to the errors and alterations of copyists. “Reconstructed” versions of the *Zadonshchina* are Old Russian compositions dating from the twentieth century. How closely they correspond to an actual text of the late fourteenth century is highly debatable. For this reason, translations of actual texts, and not “reconstructions,” are provided here.



The Tale of the Battle Beyond the Don (*Zadonshchina*)

Lenin Library Copy, Undol'skii Collection No. 632
The Tale About Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and About His Brother,
Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, How They Defeated Their Foe, the
Emperor Mamai

Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother Vladimir Andreyevich and their marshals were at a feast given by Mikula Vasilyevich. We have learned, brother, that the Emperor Mamai has come to the Russian land by the swift Don and is coming to us in the land of Zalesye.

Let us go there, brother, to the north, the lot of Japheth, Noah's son, from whom glorious Rus' was born. Let us go up onto the Kiev Hills and gaze from the smooth Dnepr and gaze across the whole Russian land — and from there to the east, the lot of Shem, Noah's son, from whom the Khinovia, the pagan Tatar Muslims, were born. For it was they who defeated the descendants of Japheth on the River Kayala. And ever since, the Russian land has been sad. And from the Kalka battle to the battle with Mamai they were covered with sadness and woe, weeping and recalling their children, princes and boyars and bold men who left all their homes and wealth, wives and children and herds, receiving the honor and glory of this world, they lay down their heads for the Russian land and for the Christian faith [in the tradition of] those who are born and bred.

Before, I wrote the lament for the Russian land, adding more from the books. Then I copied the lament and praise for Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother Vladimir Andreyevich.

Let us come together, brothers and friends and Russian sons, let us add word to word and make the Russian land rejoice and cast sorrow to the east, to the lot of Shem, and serve up to Mamai his defeat and to Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, praise. And let us say these words: It is better for us, brothers, to begin to narrate in other words than these words of praise and about the tales of our day praise to Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich

and his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, grandsons of Grand Prince Saint Vladimir of Kiev. Let us begin to narrate according to deeds and true tales. Let us not fly in thought through the lands, let us recall the times of bygone years and praise the [wizardly] boyar who was a deft *gusli* player in Kiev. That boyar lay his deft fingers on the living strings — they sang glory to the Russian princes: to the first Kiev prince Igor Byarikovich, to Grand Prince Vladimir Vseslavyevich of Kiev and to Grand Prince Yaroslav Vladimirovich.

I shall recall Sofonii of Ryazan and shall praise with songs and *gusli* words this Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, grandsons of Grand Prince Saint Vladimir of Kiev. Singing to the Russian princes for the Christian faith.

And from the Kalka Battle to the battle with Mamai it was 170 years.

Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, prayed to God and His most pure Mother, girded their mind with hard fortitude and sharpened their hearts with valor and were filled with the martial spirit. They deployed their brave marshals in the Russian land and recalled their forefather the Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev.

O skylark, bird of flight, joy of beautiful days! Fly up beneath the blue skies, look toward the mighty town of Moscow, sing praise to Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and to his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich.

Is it a storm that has carried the falcons from the land of Zalesye into the Polovtsian plain? Steeds neigh in Moscow, glory rings throughout the whole Russian land, they trumpet on trumpets in Kolomna, they beat the drums in Serpukhov, banners fly on the shore of the great Danube. The men of Novgorod stand by Saint Sophia the Most Wise, and they say: “Now we cannot be in time to aid Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich.” And when they uttered these words, they flew together like eagles. Those were not eagles flying together — the marshals were heading out of Novgorod the Great with an army of 7000 to Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, toward the glorious town of Moscow. All the Russian princes converged and they spoke these words: “The pagan Tatars are beside the Danube, and the Emperor Mamai is on the river Mech between Churovo and Mikhailovo. They want to cross and to hand over their lives to our glory.”

And Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich said: “Brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich! Let us go there, let us buy glory for our lives, a tale for the old, for the young to remember, and let us test our brave men and fill the river Don with blood for the Russian land and for the Christian faith.”

And Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich said to them: “Brothers and Russian princes! We have been the nest of Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev. By birth we were in disgrace before neither the falcon nor the hawk, nor the black raven, nor this pagan Mamai.”

O nightingale, bird of flight, would that you, nightingale, could trill praise to Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and to his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, and to their two brothers from the Lithuanian land, the Olg[er]d[ov]iches, Andrei and Dmitry, and to Dmitry of Volynsk. For they are brave sons, hawks in wartime and well-known marshals beneath trumpets, beneath gilt helmets in the Lithuanian land.

Andrei Olgerdovich said to his brother: “Brother Dmitry, we are two brothers, sons of Olgerd, grandsons of Doment, great grandsons of Skolomend. Let us gather together, brother, the good brave nobles of brave Lithuania, brave warriors, and let us mount our good steeds and see the swift Don! Let us test our Lithuanian swords on Tatar helmets and German lances on the Muslims’ armor!”

And Dmitry said to him: “Brother Andrei, we shall not spare our lives for the Russian land and for the Christian faith and for the offense to Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich. Already, brother, quaking quakes and thunder thunders in the stony town of Moscow. That, brother, is the quaking from the great, mighty army of Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother Prince Vladimir Andreyevich! It is the bold Russians thundering with their gilt armor and crimson shields of Moscow. Saddle, brother Andrei, your good steed. Mine is ready and saddled. Let us ride out, brother, into the open field and look at our regiments. How many bold Lithuanians are there with us, brother? There is an armed force of 7000 bold Lithuanians with us.”

Already, brother, stormclouds come wafting across the sea to the mouth of the Don and the Dnepr. A bloody dawn comes out of them and strong lightning flickers in them. A mighty quaking there will be on the river Nepryad between the Don and the Dnepr. Human corpses will fall on the Kulikovo Field, blood will be spilled on the river Nepryad.

Already wagons squeak between the Don and the Dnepr, the pagan Khinovia approach the Russian land. And gray wolves come running from the mouth of the Don and the Dnepr, and they stand howling on the river. They want to enter the Russian land by way of the Mech. But those are not gray wolves — the pagan Tatars have come. They want to go howling through the Russian land.

Then geese began to honk and swans splashed with their wings, but the pagan Mamai came to the Russian land and brought his marshals. And now the winged birds fly beneath the clouds and prey on their misfortunes, ravens often caw, and the daws speak in their own speech, eagles call and wolves howl ominously, and foxes bark on bones!

Russian land, now you are as in the time of King Solomon!

Already the hawks and falcons of Belozersk swoop up from their gold perches in the stony town of Moscow. They've flown up beneath the blue skies, thundered with their gilt bells on the swift Don.

Then Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich stepped into his golden stirrup and took his sword in his right hand and prayed to God and to His most pure Mother. The sun shone to the east for him and showed him the way, while Boris and Gleb offer up a prayer for their kinsmen.

What resounds, what thunders early before the dawn? Prince Vladimir Andreyevich positions his regiments and leads them toward the Mighty Don. And he said to his brother Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich: "Do not yield, brother, to the pagan Tatars. Already the pagans are invading the Russian plains and taking away our patrimony."

And Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich said to him: "Brother Vladimir Andreyevich, we are the grandsons of Grand Prince Vladimir of Kiev. Our marshals are assembled: 70 boyars and the mighty princes of Belozersk, Fyodor Semyonovich and Semyon Mikhailovich and Mikula Vasilyevich and the two Olgerdoviches and Dmitry of Volynia and Timofei Voluevich and Andrei Serkizovich and Mikhailo Ivanovich. And we have an armed force of three hundred thousand warriors. Our marshals are assembled, our retinue is well known, and we have good steeds beneath us and gilt armor on us and Circassian helmets and Moscow shields and German lances and Frankish daggers and swords of steel. And they ardently want to lay down their heads for the Russian land and for the Christian faith. The banners wave as though alive. They seek honor and a glorious name!"

Already those falcons and hawks have swiftly flown across the Don and have struck against many flocks of swans. Those were the Russian princes who attacked the Tatar forces. And they struck with *faraug* spears against Tatar armor, and swords of steel thundered against the helmets of the Khinovia on Kulikovo Field by the river Nepryad.

The black earth beneath the hooves they sowed the fields with Tatar bones, and the ground was flooded with their blood. And the mighty regiments clashed together, and they trampled the hills and meadows, and the rivers and streams and lakes were turbulent. And the Divs called in the Russian land. And [the glory] smashed at the Iron Gates, to Karanach, to Rome and to Kafa-on-the-Sea and to Kotornovo and from there to Constantinople in praise of the Russian princes, and they overpowered the Tatar army on Kulikovo Field by the river Nepryad.

On that field mighty stormclouds clashed, and often lightning flashed inside them and great thunder thundered. Those were the bold Russian warriors who clashed with the pagan Tatars for their great offence. And in their ranks their mighty gilt armor flashed, and the Russian princes thundered with their swords of steel against the helmets of the Khinovia.

And they fought from morning to noon on Saturday on the holiday of the Nativity of the Holy Virgin.

It was not aurochs that thundered by the great Danube on Kulikovo Field. And it was not aurochs who were defeated by the great Danube, it was the Russian princes and boyars and the marshals of Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich who were cut down, it was the Belozersk princes, Fyodor Semyonovich, Semyon Mikhailovich, Timofei Voluevich, Andrei Serkizovich, Mikhailo Ivanovich and many others from the Prince's retinue who were defeated by the pagan Tatars.

They brought the monk Peresvet, boyar from Bryansk, to his place of Judgment. And the monk Peresvet said to Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich: "It is better for us to be cut down than to be captured by the pagan Tatars." How Peresvet did bound on his good steed and flashed with his gilt armor! And others lay slain by the great Danube on the shore. And at such a time the old must grow young and bold men must test their shoulders. And the monk Oslyabya said to his brother, the monk Peresvet: "Brother Peresvet, I see great wounds on your body. Your head, brother, is about to fly onto the prairie grass and your child Yakov is about to lie on the green prairie grass on Kulikovo Field by the river

Nepryad for the Christian faith and for the Russian land and for the offence to Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich!”

And at that time across the land of Ryazan by the Don neither plowmen nor shepherds called in the field. Only the ravens cawed for human corpses. It was ominous and sad to hear then, for the grass was flowing with blood and the trees bowed down to the ground in woe.

And the birds began to sing sorrowful songs. All the princesses and boyars’ wives and marshals’ wives began to weep for the slain. The wife of Mikula Vasilyevich, Fedosya, and Dmitry’s wife Mar’ya wept at dawn standing on the walls of Moscow, and they said: “Don, Don, swift river! You have dug through stone mountains and flow into the Polovtsian land! Rock back my master Mikula Vasilyevich to me!” And Mar’ya said the same thing about her master, and the wife of Timofei Voluevich wept the same way and said: “Now my merriment has waned in the glorious town of Moscow, and no longer do I see my sire Timofei Voluevich! He is gone from this life!” And Andrei’s wife Mar’ya and Mikhail’s wife Aksinya wept at dawn: “Now the sun has grown dim for both of us in the glorious town of Moscow, news of our loved ones has come flying from the swift Don, carrying great misfortune, and the bold warriors have fallen from their good steeds onto their place of Judgment on the Kulikovo Field by the river Nepryad.

And the women of Kolomna wept, and they said: “Moskva, Moskva, swift river! Why have you rocked our men away from us into the Polovtsian land?” And they said: “Can you, Sire and Grand Prince, dam up the Dnepr with your oars? Close, Sire and Grand Prince, the gates of the river Oka so that the pagan Tatars will come to us no more! The battle has already exhausted our men!”

That same day, on the Saturday of the Nativity of the Holy Mother of God, the Christians slew the pagan regiments on Kulikovo Field by the river Nepryad.

And giving a deft battle cry, Grand Prince Vladimir Andreyevich galloped among the pagan Tatar regiments and flashed with his gilt helmet, and he galloped with his entire army. And they thundered with swords of steel against the helmets of the Khinovia. And he praised his brother, Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich: “Brother Dmitry Ivanovich, now at this evil hour you are an iron wall! Do not relent and urge your regiments on against the foe! For the pagan Tatars have entered the

plains and they have slain many of our brave men, and the swift steeds cannot gallop among the human corpses and they wade in blood up to their knees! And now, brother, it is sad to see the Christian blood.”

And Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich said to his boyars: “Brothers, boyars, marshals and boyars’ sons! Here are your sweet Moscow meads and your places of honor! Here you can win places of honor for yourselves and your wives! Here, brothers, the old must grow young and the young must win honor!”

And Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich said: “Oh Lord my God! I place my hope in Thee that I not be disgraced forever and that my enemies not mock me.” And he prayed to God and to His Most Pure Mother and all His saints, and he wept bitterly and wiped away his tears.

And then like falcons they flew swiftly. And Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich galloped about with his regiments and with his whole army. And he said: “Brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, now is the time to drink the cup of mead! With our strong regiments let us attack, brother, the army of the pagan Tatars!”

Then the Grand Prince attacked the Tatar army. And swords of steel thunder against the helmets of the Khinovia. And the pagan Muslims covered their heads with their hands. Then the pagans swiftly retreated. And the banners of Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich bellow, and the pagans flee. And the Russian princes and boyars and marshals and all the great army barred the fields with their cry and lit it up with their gilt armor. For the aurochs was standing his ground. Then Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich turned back the regiments of the pagans and began hewing and slaying them, those Muslims, deftly and without mercy. And their princes fell from their steeds and thundered and sowed the fields with Tatar corpses, and the rivers flowed with their blood.

Then the pagans went separate ways and fled by untrod paths to the bend of the sea, gnashing their teeth and tearing their faces and saying: “Now, brothers, we cannot return to our land or see our children, and we cannot invade Rus’ or ask safe passage from the Russian people. Now the Tatar land is moaning, for their hearts are ecovered with sorrow and misfortune and their princes [have lost] their eagerness and bravado for raiding the Russian land. Now our merriment has waned, for now the Russian sons have robbed our embroidered Tatar cloths and armor and

steeds and oxen and camels and wine and sugar and dear embroidered cloths. Now the Russian women are jingling Tatar gold!”

Now merriment and wild rejoicing have spread across the Russian land, the Russians’ glory has risen over all the land, and reproach and doom for the evil Muslims have gone forth against the pagan Tatars. Now the Divo has been flung to the ground. And now the storms of Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, flow across the lands. And the Grand Prince defeated the pagan Mamai with his bravery and with his men for the Russian land and for the Christian faith! Now the pagans have flung their weapons to the ground and bowed their heads beneath Russian swords. And their trumpets do not trumpet, and their voices have grown weary.

And galloping away from his retinue, the pagan Mamai howled as a gray wolf and he fled to the town of Khafest. The Phrygians said to him: “Why, pagan Mamai, have you tried to take the Russian land? The Zalesye horde has defeated you! It is not your lot to be an Emperor Batu. The Emperor Batu had 400,000 armed warriors and he defeated all of the Russian land from east to west. God punished the Russian land for its transgressions. And you came to the Russian land, Emperor Mamai, with many forces, with nine hordes and 70 princes. And now, pagan, you are fleeing with eight men to the bend in the sea, and you have no one to winter with in the field. Have the Russian princes treated you and your princes and your marshals generously to drink? Have you drunk your fill by the swift Don on the prairie grass on the Kulikovo Field? Flee from us, pagan Mamai, [as you fled the Zalesye to us] from the Russian land.”

You are like a dear infant with its mother. Thus did the Lord God bless the Russian princes, Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother Vladimir Andreyevich, between the Don and the Dnepr.

And Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich stood with his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, and with his other marshals on the bones on Kulikovo Field by the river Nepryad. It was sad and ominous to see then, as the Christian corpses lay by the great Danube on the shore, and the river Don flowed with blood for three days. And Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich said: “Brothers, count how many of your marshals have fallen and how many young men.” Then the Moscow boyar Mikhailo Aleksandrovich said to Prince Dmitry Ivanovich: “Sire and Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich! 40 Moscow boyars have fallen, Sire, 12 Belozersk

princes, 30 Novgorod councilmen, 20 Kolomna boyars, 40 Serpukhov boyars, 30 Lithuanian nobles, 20 Pereslavl boyars, 25 Kostroma boyars, 35 Vladimir boyars, 8 Suzdal boyars, 40 Murom boyars, 70 Ryazan boyars, 34 Rostov boyars, 23 Dmitrov boyars, 60 Mozhaisk boyars, 30 Zvenigorod boyars and 15 Uglich boyars. 253,000 were slain by the godless Mamai. Glory to Thee, O Lord our God! Thou hast spared us.”

And Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich said: “Brothers, boyars, princes and boyars’ sons! Here is your place of Judgment between the Don and the Dnepr, on the Kulikovo Field by the river Nepryad. And you have laid down your heads for the holy churches, for the Russian land and for the Christian faith. Forgive me, brothers, and bless me in this life and in the next. And let us go, brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, to our land of Zalesye to the glorious town of Moscow and let us rule over our principedom. We have won honor, brother, and a glorious name! Glory to our God!”



The Writing of the Monk Sofonii of Ryazan. Bless, O Father. The Battle Beyond the Don of Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and His Brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich

(State Public Library Copy, Kirillo-Belozersk Monastery Collection No. 9/1086)

Let us go, brother, to the north, the lot of Japheth, Noah's son, from whom glorious Rus' was born! From there let us go up onto the Kiev Hills! First of all let us praise the wizardly Boyan in the town of Kiev, the deft *gusli* player. For that wizardly Boyan, laying his golden fingers upon the living strings, would sing praise to the Russian princes: to the first prince, Rurik, to Igor Rurikovich and to Sviatoslav Yaroslavich and Yaroslav Vladimirovich, praising them with songs and resounding *gusli* words — the Russian prince and Sire Dmitry Ivanovich and his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, for it was their courage and ardor for the Russian land and for the Christian faith.

From that battle until the battle with Mamai.

And I, the Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich, and his brother, Prince Vladimir Andreyevich, sharpened their hearts to valor, and standing with fortitude, recalled their forefather, Prince Vladimir of Kiev, the Russian emperor.

O skylark, joy on beautiful days, rise up beneath the blue clouds! Sing praise to Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and to his brother Vladimir Andreyevich! For they took flight like falcons from the Russian land to the Polovtsian plains.

Steeds neigh in Moscow, drums beat in Kolomna, trumpets trumpet in Serpukhov, glory rings across the Russian land, banners stand marvelously by the mighty Don, the gathered pennants wave, gilt armor gleams, the council bells ring in Novgorod the Great. The men of Novgorod stand by Saint Sophia and they lament: "Now we cannot be in time to aid Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich."

Then like eagles they flew together from all over the north. Those were not eagles who came flying together, it was all the Russian princes coming to the aid of Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich, saying: "Sire and Grand Prince, now the pagan Tatars are entering our fields and are taking away our patrimony. They stand between the Don and the Dnepr on the

river Chech. And we, Sire, shall go beyond the swift river Don, we shall win the lands wonder, a tale for the old, for the young to remember.”

Thus spoke Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich to his brothers, the Russian princes: “My dear brothers, Russian princes, we have been the nest of Grand Prince Ivan Danilyevich. Until now we have in no way been disgraced by falcon nor hawk nor gyrfalcon nor by that pagan dog Mamai!”

Nightingale bird, would that you had trilled these two brothers, the two sons of Volyard, Andrei Polovetsky and Dmitry of Bryansk! Those were vanguard regiments, born on a shield, singing under trumpets, cradled beneath helmets, suckled at the end of a lance, given drink from a sharp sword in the Lithuanian land!

Andrei said to his brother Dmitry: “We are two brothers, children of Volyard, grandsons of Ediment, great grandsons of Skoldimer! Let’s mount, brother, our swift steeds! Let’s drink, brother, the water of the swift Don with our helmet. Let’s test our swords of steel! Now, brother, a quaking quakes and thunder thunders in the glorious town of Moscow. That, brother, is not a quake that is quaking or thunder thundering, that is the quaking from the mighty army of Grand Prince Ivan Dmitrievich! The brave warriors thunder with their gilt helmets, with their crimson shields. Saddle, brother Andrei, your swift steeds! Mine are ready, saddled ahead of yours.”

Now strong winds rose from the sea, rocking a mighty stormcloud to the mouth of the Dnepr onto the Russian land. Bloody clouds came out of the stormcloud, and blue lightning flashes from within them. A mighty quaking and thunder there will be between the Don and the Dnepr! The Khinela are entering the Russian land. Gray wolves howl — those were not gray wolves — the pagan Tatars came. They want to pass through [howling], to take the whole Russian land.

Then the geese honked and swans splashed with their wings. Those were not geese honking nor swans splashing with their wings — that was the pagan Mamai bringing his warriors to Rus’.

The birds of the skies preyed up under the blue clouds, ravens caw, the daws speak in their own tongue, the eagles call, wolves howl ominously, foxes often bark — they expect victory over the pagans as they say: “Russian land, as you were before now, in the time of King

Solomon — so be you again now, in the time of Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich!”

Then falcons and gyrfalcons and Belozersk hawks ring their gilt bells.

Now a quaking quakes and thunder thunders early before the dawn. That is not quaking that quakes nor thunder that thunders — Prince Vladimir Andreyevich leads his vanguard regiments toward the swift Don, saying: “Sire and Grand Prince Dmitry, do not yield, Sire! The pagan Tatars are entering our fields and taking away our warriors!”

Then Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich stepped into his golden stirrup, mounted his swift steed, taking his lance into his right hand. The sun shone down to him brightly on Wednesday, September 8, on the Nativity of the Most Blessed Mother of God, and showed him the way. Boris and Gleb say a prayer for their clansmen.

Then the falcons and gyrfalcons and Belozersk hawks swiftly flew across the Don and struck at the geese and swans.

Kharalug lances thundered, and swords of steel, and light axes, and Moscow shields and Muslim pikes.

Then the fields were sown with bones and watered with blood. The waters cried out and sent the news through [various] lands, beyond the Volga, to the Iron Gates, to Rome, to the Cheremiss, to the Czechs, to the Poles, to Ustiug of the pagan Tatars, beyond the foaming sea. Then it was not fitting for the old to grow young!

The brave Peresvet bounds on his magic gray steed, barring the fields with his whistling and saying: “It is better that we fling ourselves upon our swords than to fall at the hands of the pagans.” And Oslyabya said to his brother Peresvet: “Already, brother, I see the heavy wounds on your heart. It is now time for your head to fall onto the white prairie grass and my son Yakov. Now, brother, shepherds do not call, nor do trumpets trumpet, only the ravens often caw, cuckoos cuckoo, falling upon the corpses.”

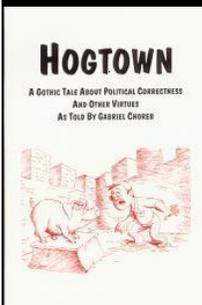
Then it was not aurochs that bellow on the Kulikovo Field by the river Nepryadna, those slain by the pagans [cried] out: great princes and high-ranking boyars, Prince Fyodor Romanovich of Belozersk and his son, Prince Ivan, Mikula Vasilyevich, Fyodor Memko, Ivan Sano, Mikhailo Vrenkov, Yakov Oslyabyatin, the monk Peresvet and many other men.

Then the boyars' wives wept bitterly for their masters in the fair town of Moscow. Mikula's wife Maria wept, saying these words: "Don, Don, swift Don! You've passed through the Polovtsian land, you've beaten through kharalug shores. Rock back my Mikula Vasilyevich!" Ivan's wife Fedosya wept: "Now our praise has waned in the glorious town of Moscow!"

Many a mother [lost] her child, and the boyars' wives lost their husbands and masters, saying to each other: "Now, sisters, our husbands are not among the living, they've laid down their heads by the swift Don for the Russian land, for the holy churches, for the Orthodox faith together with amazing brave men and bold sons."

The battle with Mamai was in the year 6888 beyond the Don at the mouth of the Nepryadva. Then it was the Annunciation, before Easter. The battle was in the third year after the death of Metropolitan Aleksei. In the year 6889 on the holiday of the Lord's Ascension Metropolitan Cyprian arrived in Rus' from Constantinople, a year after the battle beyond the Don. In the year 6890 on August 20 there was the battle when Takhtamysh set out against Prince Dmitry Ivanovich and took Moscow and caused much evil. In the year 6091 Grand Prince Dmitry exiled Metropolitan Cyprian, the third year after the battle beyond the Don. In the year 6896, on May 19, Grand Prince Dmitry Ivanovich died, the eighth year after the battle beyond the Don. In the year 6897 Metropolitan Cyprian returned from Constantinople with two emissaries of the Metropolitan. In the year 6900 on September 25 Archimandrate Sergii died, 13 years after the battle beyond the Don. That same autumn, on October 24, Grand Prince Vasily Dmitrievich came out of the Tatar Horde. In the year 6915, on September 15, Metropolitan Cyprian died after shepherding God's church for 30 years. Praise to our Lord!

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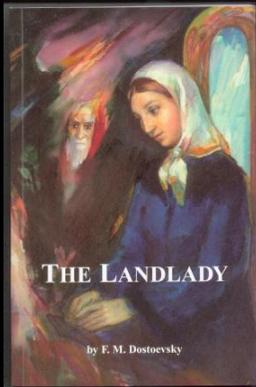
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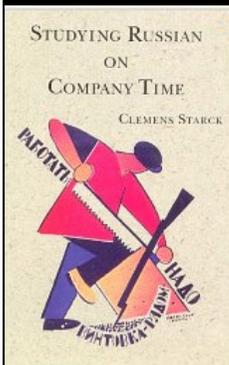
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... AN UNORTHODOX GUIDE

YURI MARMELADOV

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