

MARGARET ZIOLKOWSKI

Hagiography and Modern Russian Literature



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Literature*

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FOR MY PARENTS

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PREFACE

NO ONE contemplating the embalmed body of Vladimir Lenin lying in state in its tomb on Red Square can doubt the lasting importance of the figure of the saint for Russian culture. Yet in the course of my reading of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Russian novels, stories, and poetry, I became convinced that the impact of hagiography, of the multifarious literature devoted to saints, on modern Russian literature has been both greatly underestimated and tremendously neglected by literary scholars. Examples of the influence of hagiographic writings on individual authors and works are often cited, but the vast extent of this literary phenomenon is nowhere adequately described. In part this reflects lingering prejudices regarding the quality and significance of medieval Slavic literature.

In writing the following pages, I have attempted to produce a discussion suitable for a general audience. However, my work assumes some familiarity with the broad outlines of Russian literature of the past two centuries. Its major aim is the identification and analysis of the most common types of usage of hagiographical material by Russian writers, as well as the variety of purposes that inspired this exploitation of their cultural past. In pursuing this aim, I did not attempt to produce a definitive, comprehensive structural analysis of the genre of hagiography; this would be the task of another, very different book. Rather, my focus is on the perception of hagiography by modern Russian writers themselves. What they regarded as worthy of imitation, or attack, and why—these are the questions I have tried to answer.

In doing the research for this book, I was greatly aided by summer grants from the American Council of Learned Societies, the National Endowment for the Humanities, the American Philosophical Society, and the Kennan Institute for Advanced Russian Studies. My study of hagiography in particular was facilitated by postdoctoral fellowships from the International Research and Exchanges Board and the Andrew W. Mellon Faculty Fellowships in the Humanities at Emory University. As a graduate student, I was supported during the writing of my dissertation on the Life of a medieval saintly prince by a fellowship from the American Association for University Women.

Since I first began to study Russian literary works, several scholars, all former teachers, have had an impact on the development of my inter-

PREFACE

ests. My undergraduate adviser, Richard Burgi, first fostered my curiosity about the use of ancient and medieval literature by modern Russian writers. My dissertation director, Riccardo Picchio, helped me gain an appreciation of hagiography as a flexible and often sophisticated mode of expression. Victor Erlich provided a constant example of the merits of considering literary developments from a broad cultural perspective. More recently, at Princeton University Press I received sympathetic readings for my work and many useful comments.

While I have been engaged in the actual research and writing of this book, I have often turned to members of my family for advice and criticism. My parents, Theodore and Yetta Ziolkowski, and my husband, Robert Thurston, read drafts and made many helpful observations of both a specific and a general nature. My father's typological acuteness, my mother's emphasis on readability, and my husband's knowledge of Russian history were all greatly appreciated. Nor should I overlook the willingness of my brothers, Jan and Eric, to supply me with much needed library materials. My husband, my parents, and my brothers were all unfailingly encouraging during the various stages of this project, and for that I thank them. I also thank my husband for simply listening . . . and listening.

NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION AND DATES

THE SYSTEM of transliteration employed in this work is the one used by the *Library of Congress*, with a few exceptions. Some proper names are given in their more familiar English forms (Leo Tolstoy rather than Lev Tolstoi, for example).

Transliteration in the notes makes no exceptions for familiar English forms of proper names. Tolstoy appears as Tolstoi, Herzen as Gertsen, for example. With works written in languages other than Russian, the names of authors appear exactly as spelled. Chyzhevs'kyi may thus appear as Čiževskij or Tschizewskij, for example.

All dates are given according to the Julian calendar, in use in Russia until 1918. In the nineteenth century this calendar was twelve days behind the Gregorian calendar of the West, in the twentieth century thirteen days.

ABBREVIATIONS USED
IN THE NOTES

<i>Pss</i>	<i>Polnoe sobranie sochinenii (Complete Works)</i>
<i>Psst</i>	<i>Polnoe sobranie stikhotvorenii (Complete Poems)</i>
<i>Ss</i>	<i>Sobranie sochinenii (Collected Works)</i>
<i>SEEJ</i>	<i>Slavic and East European Journal</i>
<i>TOdl</i>	<i>Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury (Proceedings of the Department of Old Russian Literature)</i>

*Hagiography
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Everyone of us has met people sitting reverently lost in thought over some Life of Eustathius and Placidus or Feodosii of the Caves,—and everyone must admit that they could ponder over this more deeply and fruitfully than over much of our contemporary literature.

Vasilii Kliuchevskii

The hem of our Russian caftan shows below the European frock-coat; we have shaved our beards, but have not washed our faces.

Ivan Kireevskii

IN 1880 a flood made attendance at Easter services impossible for people in the vicinity of Abramtsevo, then the estate of Savva Mamontov, a wealthy Moscow industrialist and enthusiastic patron of the arts. This incident gave rise to the idea of building a church on the estate itself. Those involved in the project, members of Mamontov's artists' colony, decided to construct the church in medieval Novgorodian style. Before finishing the designs, they visited Iaroslavl' and Rostov-the-Great, which were considered to possess some of the finest examples of Old Russian art and architecture. By the time the church was completed in 1882, several of the most prominent artists of the latter part of the nineteenth century had participated in its planning and construction.¹ The result was a building which, though representative of a highly stylized interpretation of Old Russian architecture, pays eloquent tribute to an enthusiasm for medieval art.

¹ The church itself was designed primarily by Apollinariii Vasnetsov and Vasilii Polenov, the iconostasis and wall paintings were done by Il'ia Repin, Mikhail Nesterov, Apollinariii Vasnetsov, and Polenov, while the mosaic floor of the church was designed and partially laid by Viktor Vasnetsov. The group concerned itself with every detail; Polenov even applied himself to designing the embroidered vestment and covers. For discussion of the project, see Camilla Gray, *The Great Experiment: Russian Art 1863–1922* (New York, 1962), 14–15.

Far from being an isolated episode in the history of Russian culture, the church at Abramtsevo is only one illustration of the growing interest throughout the eighteenth and especially the nineteenth centuries in pre-Petrine Russia, its art, architecture, music, religion, and literature. This interest expressed itself in part in an effort to recognize and preserve native cultural artifacts. This was the impetus for many scholarly expeditions throughout Russia which sought to record ancient artistic and architectural monuments.² Medieval icons were eventually the beneficiaries of such enthusiastic rediscovery and restoration. This kind of antiquarian approach to medieval culture was evident as well in numerous attempts, like the one at Abramtsevo, to adapt medieval subjects and techniques to contemporary architectural and artistic projects. Buildings constructed in the so-called "Russian style," the Moscow Historical Museum (1873–1883) and city duma building (1890–1892), for example, and paintings like Vasilii Surikov's "Boiarynia Morozova" (1881–1887) and Viktor Vasnetsov's "After the Battle of Igor' Sviatoslavich with the Polovtsy" (1880) all owe their genesis at least in part to the revival of interest in and appreciation of medieval Russia.³ Many artists turned increasingly to subjects characteristic or evocative of medieval Russia. Apollinari Vasnetsov devoted himself to pictorial representations of medieval Moscow, while his brother specialized in icons and fairytale scenes.⁴ At the end of the century several artists produced paintings of scenes of isolated monastic life.⁵ The paintings by Mikhail Nesterov devoted to the life of one of Russia's greatest saints, Sergii of Radonezh (1314–1392), provide an excellent example. Such endeavors often involved an interrelationship between different spheres of cultural activity. Thus the ethnographic novels of Pavel Mel'nikov-Pecherskii to some extent inspired Nesterov, while Il'ia Repin agreed to produce illustrations for Nikolai Leskov's adaptations of medieval hagiographical legends.⁶

² For more details, see Tamara Talbot Rice, *A Concise History of Russian Art* (New York, 1963), 234.

³ For a more extensive list of buildings constructed in the "Russian style," see M. A. Il'in and E. A. Borisova, "Arkhitektura," in *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, vol. 9, pt. 2 (Moscow, 1965), 265, 268.

⁴ Gray, *Great Experiment*, 16.

⁵ For a list of such paintings, see I. I. Nikonova, "M. V. Nesterov," in *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, vol. 10, pt. 1 (Moscow, 1968), 298–99.

⁶ On Nesterov, see Nikonova, "M. V. Nesterov," 297. On the collaboration between

In the music world, the Balakirev circle, which included the composers Mili Balakirev, César Cui, Modest Musorgsky, Aleksandr Borodin, and Nikolai Rimsky-Korsakov, revealed an enthusiasm for native folk, historical, and religious motifs that helped to introduce a renaissance in Russian music.⁷ Here as well their activities included both preservation and adaptation. Balakirev, who is remembered for his collection of folk songs that appeared in 1866, later also transcribed ancient liturgical chants.⁸ As in art, in music historical and legendary themes became popular. Examples include operas like Musorgsky's *Boris Godunov* (1872), which was based on Alexander Pushkin's drama of the same name, Borodin's *Prince Igor* (1890), and Rimsky-Korsakov's *The Legend of the Invisible City of Kitezh* (1903–1904).

In literature, the second half of the nineteenth century also witnessed a rash of efforts to locate and collect medieval and folk monuments of various kinds, both oral and written. While the ethnographer Aleksandr Afanas'ev sought out popular tales and legends, scholarly and religious groups published new editions of saints' Lives and other types of religious literature. The novels of Mel'nikov-Pecherskii, which described the peculiarities of isolated communities of schismatics, attracted attention, as did historical fiction like Aleksei K. Tolstoy's dramatic trilogy devoted to the Time of Troubles, the violent interregnum at the turn of the seventeenth century. A particular area of interest was literature concerned with saints. In the 1870s and 1880s the adaptation of hagiographical legends and tales from the Middle Ages enjoyed a certain vogue, while throughout the latter half of the century several writers, most notably Fedor Dostoevsky, applied hagiographical techniques to contemporary characters and situations. The variety of ways in which writers throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries exploited hagiographical literature and its conventions in their own writings is the subject of this study.

The background to the exploration of hagiography as an area of literary endeavor is of paramount importance in appreciating its cultural significance. It would be a mistake to regard the widespread enthusiasm for pre-Petrine culture that manifested itself in the late nineteenth century as a spontaneous development. The roots of this minor renaissance

Repin and Leskov, see Leonid Grossman, *N. S. Leskov: Zhizn'—tvorchestvo—poetika* (Moscow, 1945), 225.

⁷ Richard Anthony Leonard, *A History of Russian Music* (New York, 1968), 65.

⁸ Leonard, *History of Russian Music*, 75–76.

can be traced at least to the beginning of that century and involve a variety of complex historical, religious, and ideological considerations. When viewed in this light, the accomplishments at Abramtsevo appear less a beginning than a logical culmination of established trends.

The developing curiosity about medieval Russian literary and artistic productions was to a large extent preceded by an heightened interest in Russian history. As early as the eighteenth century, a gnawing sense of cultural inferiority vis-à-vis the West drove some members of the educated elite to seek inspiration in the past, "to show that Russia, no less than other countries, had produced great men, and that she was no Johnny-come-lately in the family of nations."⁹ This purposeful search through the past was in part encouraged by a growing recognition by some upper-class Russians that the reforms introduced by Peter the Great had not been an unmitigated blessing.¹⁰ Increased public demand for a lively, colorful, and suitably flattering account of Russian history was eventually met by the popular author Nikolai Karamzin, whose *History of the Russian State* (*Istoriia gosudarstva Rossiiskogo*, 1818–1829) enjoyed an unprecedented success. Karamzin and some of his contemporaries, the publisher Nikolai Novikov, for example, recognized that history could serve a propagandistic function by instilling patriotism.¹¹ Karamzin's magnum opus contributed to the fulfillment of this end, not only for the early nineteenth-century reading public, but for subsequent generations as well. "I grew up on Karamzin," Dostoevsky wrote to the publicist and literary critic Nikolai Strakhov, who himself had as an adolescent greatly admired the historian's writings.¹² Throughout the century, Karamzin's tendentious views were eagerly embraced by many conservatives.

Karamzin's *History* did not win the complete approval of all segments of the literate population. Its avowedly pro-autocratic ideological stance provoked the scorn of many liberals. Yet even as it irritated or enraged,

⁹ Hans Rogger, *National Consciousness in Eighteenth-Century Russia* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 188.

¹⁰ Cf. J. L. Black, *Nicholas Karamzin and Russian Society in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in Russian Political and Historical Thought* (Toronto, 1975), 7, 26, 29.

¹¹ Cf. Rogger, *National Consciousness*, 244.

¹² Dostoevsky's comment occurs in a letter of 2 December 1870. See F. M. Dostoevskii, *Pis'ma*, vol. 2 (Moscow, 1930), 300. On Strakhov, see Linda Gerstein, *Nikolai Strakhov* (Cambridge, Mass., 1971), 6.

it often awakened or intensified an interest in Russian history.¹³ The case of Karamzin and his supporters and detractors amply demonstrates that from very early in the century, adherents of political perspectives ranging from the most conservative to the most radical exhibited a desire to analyze the Russian past. One way in which this desire expressed itself was in attempts to amass information and locate ancient literary monuments, like chronicles, tales, or saints' Lives.

Some of these efforts preceded the appearance of Karamzin's *History*. The activities of the members of the Rumiantsev circle in the second and third decades of the nineteenth century are especially significant.¹⁴ The nobleman Nikolai Rumiantsev (1754–1826) used his vast wealth both to acquire manuscripts, books, and other antiquities and to support the work of several scholars on a variety of topics, many of which related to the Slavic Middle Ages. His collection eventually became an important part of the Lenin Library holdings. From the late eighteenth century on, various other societies, circles, and enterprising individuals also collected and studied chronicles and other literary works, as well as folklore and Old Russian verse.¹⁵ Karamzin himself made use of some previously unexploited sources, including certain saints' Lives.¹⁶ As the century progressed, efforts aimed at locating and examining the literature of the past continued to increase.

It was not only an uneasy sense of inferiority that contributed to the growth of concern for the Russian past, but also a nationalistic spirit fueled by contemporary political events. Like many Europeans, conservative Russians were tremendously worried by the French Revolution and its aftermath. As hostility developed in the early years of the nineteenth century between Napoleon's France and Alexander I's Russia, nationalism found increasing expression in artistic renditions of glorious episodes from Russian history.¹⁷ For example, Vladislav Ozerov's

¹³ Cf. Anatole G. Mazour, *Modern Russian Historiography* (Princeton, 1958), 69.

¹⁴ For more details on the activities of the Rumiantsev circle, see Peter K. Christoff, *The Third Heart: Some Intellectual-Ideological Currents and Cross Currents in Russia, 1800–1830* (The Hague, 1970), 40–41.

¹⁵ On the collection of folklore in particular, see Christoff, *Third Heart*, 20, 31.

¹⁶ J. L. Black, "The Primečaniia: Karamzin as a 'Scientific' Historian of Russia," in J. L. Black, ed., *Essays on Karamzin: Russian Man-of-Letters, Political Thinker, Historian, 1766–1826* (The Hague, 1975), 131, 143.

¹⁷ Edward C. Thaden, "The Beginning of Romantic Nationalism in Russia," *American Slavic and East European Review* 13 (1954): 513.

play *Dmitrii Donskoi* (1807), which deals with the Russian victory over the Mongols in 1380, had a highly successful response when it premiered shortly after the battle of Preussisch-Eylau.¹⁸ Such patriotic literature, which often descended into bathos and crude jingoism, became a regular component of the Russian literary scene. The Russian defeat of Napoleon, the Polish uprising of 1831, and later the Crimean War, as well as periodic outbursts of nationalistic exhortations by the tsarist government, contributed to an atmosphere that fostered this tendency.

In addition to nationalistic sentiments, another factor that stimulated a fascination with the past in the early nineteenth century was the influx of romantic literature, particularly the historical novels of Sir Walter Scott. While a knowledge of English was not common among upper-class Russians, in the 1820s many were exposed to the writer's works through French or Russian translation.¹⁹ Some of the latter were produced by foremost Russian poets, like Vasilii Zhukovskii. These works did much to remedy the low opinion many Russians had of the Middle Ages in general. Moreover, as Peter K. Christoff points out in his discussion of the impact of romanticism on Russian intellectuals, "from thoughts of England, it was but a step to the medieval Slavic world."²⁰ Scott's captivating descriptions of the medieval period did much to dispel any lingering doubts some liberal Russians may have had about its suitability as an object of admiration.²¹ In addition, in the following decades the vogue for native "Waverley" novels, which began with Mikhail Zagoskin's enormously popular *Iurii Miloslavskii, or the Russians in 1612* (1829), further enhanced the popularity of the Russian Middle Ages. The enthusiasm for such novels continued for many years; as late as 1862, Aleksei K. Tolstoy produced *Prince Serebriannyi*, which reflected Scott's strong influence. Not everyone shared the reservations expressed by the critic Vissarion Belinskii, whose attitude towards medieval Russian culture is cuttingly expressed in his comments on Old Russian literature:

Without any doubt, our literature began in 1739 when Lomonosov sent his first ode from abroad . . . Is it necessary to try to

¹⁸ Thaden, "Beginning of Romantic Nationalism," 513; and D. S. Mirsky, *A History of Russian Literature From Its Beginnings to 1900* (New York, 1958), 68.

¹⁹ Christoff, *Third Heart*, 60.

²⁰ Christoff, *Third Heart*, 62.

²¹ Cf. Christoff, *Third Heart*, 62.

prove that the "Lay of Igor's Campaign," "The Legend of the Don Battle," the eloquent "Epistle of Vassian to Ivan III," and other historical monuments, folk songs, and scholastic spiritual oratory have exactly the same relation to our literature as the monuments of antediluvian literature, if they were discovered, to Sanskrit, Greek, or Latin literature?²²

Throughout the early and mid-nineteenth century, many Russians succumbed to a greater or lesser extent to the lure of the past. As a group, none fell so fully under its sway as the Slavophiles, a circle of thinkers who found inspiration in the cultural legacy of Old Russia and the Orthodox Church. They played an important role in bringing various aspects of medieval and traditional Russian culture to the attention of their contemporaries.

The Slavophile conception of medieval Russia was a highly idealized and romanticized one.²³ One of the most astute observations about their attitude was enunciated by the writer Sergei Aksakov regarding his son Konstantin, a Slavophile historian, when he commented that it would be desirable for the latter to "remain his entire life in his pleasant state of error, for enlightenment [would be] impossible without grave and bitter disappointment; so let him go on living and believing in the perfection of Rus'."²⁴ There was indeed something touchingly naive about the Slavophile devotion to Old Russia and rejection of the westernizing tendencies introduced by Peter the Great. Konstantin Aksakov's fellow Slavophile, the eminent folklorist Petr Kireevskii, is said to have expressed regret that he bore the same name as Peter, while the philosopher and wit Petr Chaadaev observed with tongue in cheek that Aksakov himself wore 'native' clothing, including a sheepskin hat, only to be mistaken on the streets for a Persian.²⁵ Their personal foibles

²² V. G. Belinskii, *Ps*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1952), 65 (footnote).

²³ For more discussion of this point, see Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russia and the West in the Teaching of the Slavophiles: A Study of Romantic Ideology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), 172.

²⁴ Cited in V. D. Smirnov, *Aksakovy, ikh zhizn' i literaturnaia deiatel'nost'* (St. Petersburg, 1895), 67.

²⁵ On Petr Kireevskii's regrets, see Andrzej Walicki, *The Slavophile Controversy: History of a Conservative Utopia in Nineteenth-Century Russian Thought*, trans. Hilda Andrews-Rusiecka (Oxford, 1975), 123. Chaadaev's witty observation is mentioned by Herzen in his memoirs. See Aleksandr Gertsen, *SS*, vol. 9 (Moscow, 1956), 148.

aside, however, the Slavophiles did much to bring medieval and traditional Russian culture to the attention of the educated public:

They were vociferous and consistent advocates of the need for returning to the original and native sources of Russian life. To effect this goal, many of them took action: Peter Kireevskii collected folk songs, Ivan Kireevskii helped the monks at Optina Pustyn' to edit the works of fathers and monastic reformers of the Eastern Church, Constantine Aksakov and Alexis Khomiakov wrote books or articles concerning Russian history and Orthodox Church theology, Constantine Aksakov studied Russian peasant customs and traditions, and Iurii Samarin participated in the preparatory committees whose work paved the way for the emancipation of the Russian serfs.²⁶

In spite of their efforts, the influence of the Slavophiles nonetheless remained limited, and at times their attitudes encountered opposition not only from their more European-oriented contemporaries, the so-called Westernizers, like Alexander Herzen and Belinskii, but from the conservative tsarist government as well. But with the development of the Russian Panslavist movement, which has been called the "ideological heir of Russian Slavophilism," an often chauvinistic attitude towards Slavic culture attracted a widespread following.²⁷ Stimulated to some extent by the Crimean War, the movement later gained impetus from the events leading up to the Russo-Turkish War of 1877–1878. In Panslavism, which in Russia more often assumed the form of a thinly veiled Panrussianism, nationalism and a romanticized conception of Slavdom coalesced with the expansionist political aims of many conservatives. Given some official recognition, in the late 1850s and 1860s the Panslavists established Slavonic Benevolent Committees, organizations interested in strengthening ties among the Slavs, which sought to promote their efforts largely through various educative efforts.²⁸ The membership of these organizations drew on university,

²⁶ Edward C. Thaden, *Conservative Nationalism in Nineteenth-Century Russia* (Seattle, 1964), 32.

²⁷ Michael Boro Petrovich, *The Emergence of Russian Panslavism, 1856–1870* (New York, 1956), 32.

²⁸ On the aims of the Slavonic Benevolent Committees, see Michael T. Florinsky, *Russia: A History and An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York, 1953), 2: 990; and Frank

ecclesiastical, and political circles, as well as on conservative intellectuals like Dostoevsky.²⁹

There is no doubt that many Russians remained firmly convinced of the need to emulate European models to achieve progress at home. At the same time, however, the combination of nationalism with a romantic idealization of the past helped create an atmosphere conducive to the examination of Old Russian culture. For many, this culture was inseparable from Russian Orthodoxy. In this regard, a comment made by the Slavophile Ivan Kireevskii on the benign role of the Church in pre-Petrine Russia is illuminating: "fathoming all the intellectual and moral convictions of people, it [the Church] invisibly guided the state to the realization of the highest Christian principles, while never interfering with its national development." In the same context, he also observed that "Russian society developed independently and naturally, under the influence of a single internal conviction fostered by the Church and everyday tradition."³⁰ Such an idealized conception of the role played by Orthodoxy in Russian historical development was by no means limited to the Slavophiles. In a review of a new edition of saints' Lives that began to appear in 1868, the historian Vasilii Kliuchevskii observed:

Perhaps nothing better than a saint's Life allows us to sense that this immense field was not cleared and ploughed up by an axe or wooden plough alone, and that not only the notorious Moscow Ivans gave the state such vitality, but that their material creation was also served by the best moral forces of the people, in the form of [the Moscow metropolitans] Petr and Aleksii, Sergii [of Radonezh], and many others. Perhaps we would look more seriously at ourselves and at our future, if we knew and appreciated better these moral forces that labored for us in the past.³¹

The equation here of the best of medieval Orthodoxy with the best of popular impulses is typical of a romantic attitude embraced by many pre-revolutionary Russian intellectuals. In *The Brothers Karamazov*

Fadner, *Seventy Years of Pan-Slavism in Russia: Karazin to Danilevskii 1800–1870* (Washington, D.C., 1962), 241.

²⁹ Florinsky, *Russia*, 2: 990.

³⁰ I. V. Kireevskii, *Ps*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1911), 205–206.

³¹ "Velikie minei chetii, sobrannye vserossiiskim Mitropolitom Makariem," *Sbornik statei*, vol. 3, *Otzyvy i otvety* (Petrograd, 1918), 10.

(1880), Dostoevsky's Father Zosima expresses sentiments about the national significance of Russian holy men very similar to those of Kliuchevskii.

The attraction to medieval Russian culture that intensified in the course of the nineteenth century did indeed include a large component of interest in Russian Orthodoxy in general and religious literature in particular. Of the various types of religious literature, saints' Lives easily came to exert the most broadly based appeal, largely because of the dramatic excitement their often fanciful narratives had to offer.³² Understanding the type of exposure to hagiographical literature experienced by the Russian reading (and listening) public is critical to an appreciation of its cultural role. Before turning to this question, however, one should consider briefly some additional factors that facilitated an interest in religion and, more specifically, in hagiography.

In his history of the Orthodox Church, Timothy Ware comments on the unfairness of considering the synodical period of Russian Orthodoxy, which began with Peter the Great (1682–1725), “simply as a time of decline.”³³ This criticism of a popular conception regarding the condition of the Church in the nineteenth century will bear close scrutiny. While a common view of the Church both then and now centers on a drunken and debauched priesthood and monkhood of the type depicted by radical painters like Vasilii Perov, known for his satirical portrayals of rural Russian life, and while certainly elements of the clergy were subject to the kind of corruption described by the provincial priest Ioann Belliustin in his anonymous exposé, *Description of the Rural Clergy* (*Opisanie sel'skogo dukhovenstva*, Leipzig, 1858), this is by no means the entire story. Rather, within the limits of its circumscribed position in relation to the state, from the late eighteenth century on the Church enjoyed a revival in several spheres of its existence.

One of the areas of ecclesiastical life in which a very noticeable spiritual renaissance occurred was in the monasteries. Towards the end of the sixteenth century the state had begun to curb both the accumulation of monastic wealth and the number of monks.³⁴ In the eighteenth century these efforts reached a peak when the number of monks was

³² On the interest in saints' Lives in Russia through the centuries, see A. Iakhontov, “Zhitiiia sviatykh v ikh znachenii dlia domashnego chteniia,” *Strannik* 3 (1892): 682–704.

³³ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Baltimore, Md., 1963), 137.

³⁴ Sergius Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics* (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1977), 52.

severely curtailed and Peter the Great abolished the office of patriarch, replacing the latter with the Holy Synod, which consisted of a number of clerics headed by a lay official, the ober-procurator. Later in the century Catherine the Great continued the campaign against the monasteries, closing many of them and confiscating much monastic property.³⁵ It was only under Paul I (1796–1801) and his successors, Alexander I (1801–1825) and Nicholas I (1825–1855), that the Church was able to regain some of its influence and monasticism was again permitted to flourish.³⁶ Yet even as early as the end of the eighteenth century, there were indications of an Orthodox monastic revival both inside and outside Russia.

Two of Russia's greatest mystics, Tikhon of Zadonsk (1724–1783) and Serafim of Sarov (1759–1833), were active at the end of the eighteenth and the beginning of the nineteenth century. While both monks were greatly venerated and eventually canonized, Tikhon in particular commanded the respect of many educated Russians. In the early part of the century his writings were read by some members of Masonic circles.³⁷ Later he met with a positive reaction from writers as diverse as Nikolai Gogol, Leo Tolstoy, and Maxim Gorky.³⁸ Perhaps the most famous instance of an admiration for Tikhon by a Russian writer is that of Dostoevsky, who used the holy monk at least to some extent as a model in creating the characters of both Father Zosima and the retired bishop Tikhon in *The Possessed* (1872).

An equally influential, if less well-known, contemporary of Tikhon of Zadonsk was Paisii Velichkovskii (1722–1794), a dedicated monastic reformer who left the Russian empire at an early age, partially because of the official persecution of monks, and spent the rest of his life on Mount Athos and in Rumania.³⁹ Paisii was instrumental in reinstilling a high degree of spiritual commitment among many Slavic Orthodox

³⁵ For more discussion of these actions, see Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics*, 56–57; and Igor Smolitsch, *Russisches Mönchtum: Entstehung, Entwicklung und Wesen 988–1917* (Würzburg, 1953), 406–13, especially.

³⁶ On this period, see Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics*, 99–101.

³⁷ Nadejda Gorodetzky, *Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk: Inspirer of Dostoevsky* (Crestwood, N.Y., 1976), 216.

³⁸ See Gorodetzky, *Saint Tikhon*, 217; M. Gor'kii, *Lev Tolstoi*, A. P. Chekhov, V. G. Korolenko (Moscow, 1928), 52; L. N. Tolstoi, *Pss*, vol. 28 (Moscow, 1957), 56.

³⁹ On Paisii and his disciples, see Bolshakoff, *Russian Mystics*, 79–98; and Smolitsch, *Russisches Mönchtum*, 482–95.

monks of his own and subsequent generations. One of his most important achievements was the translation into Slavonic of the *Philokalia*, an anthology of Eastern Orthodox mystical and ascetical writings published in Venice in 1782.⁴⁰ This translation was published in Russia in the late eighteenth century. Regarding the impact of the *Philokalia*, the theologian Georges Florovsky has written: "Publication of the Slavonic-Russian *Philokalia* was an event not only in the history of Russian monasticism but generally in the history of Russian culture. It was both an accomplishment and a stimulus."⁴¹

Together with the proselytizing activities of Paisii's disciples, the *Philokalia* did much to revive the institution of the elder (*starets*), the type of spiritual director immortalized in Dostoevsky's Zosima. Ivan Kireevskii summarized the crucial role the elder played for many Russians, both lay and ecclesiastical: "More essential than all possible books and thoughts is to find an Orthodox starets to whom you can reveal each of your thoughts, and from whom you can hear not your own more or less reasonable opinion, but the judgment of the Holy Father."⁴² In the nineteenth century the major center for the implementation of theories of eldership (*starchestvo*) was the monastery of Optina Pustyn' near Moscow. The increasingly well-known elders in residence there attracted the attention and visits of lay believers, and even sceptics, from all classes of society. In addition, by the 1870s readers could read the thoughts of the Optina elders in brochures and religious magazines.⁴³ And the publication of *The Brothers Karamazov* contributed indirectly to the popularization of the institution of eldership.

The ecclesiastical revival in the nineteenth century was not, however, limited to the development of the spiritual talents of individual monks. The Church evinced a desire for reform in other ways as well. One area in particular need of improvement was the ecclesiastical

⁴⁰ For more specific details on the contents of the *Philokalia*, see *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Religion* (Washington, D.C., 1979). Some excerpts from the *Philokalia* have been translated into English. See E. Kadloubovsky and G.E.H. Palmer, eds., *Early Fathers from the Philokalia, together with some writings of St. Abba Dorotheus, St. Isaac of Syria, and St. Gregory Palamas* (London, 1954).

⁴¹ Georgii Florovskii, *Puti russkogo bogoslovii* (Paris, 1937), 127.

⁴² Cited by Metropolitan Seraphim (of Berlin and Germany) in his *Die Ostkirche* (Stuttgart, 1950), 306.

⁴³ Dmitry F. Grigorieff, "Dostoevsky's Elder Zosima and the Real Life Father Amvrosy," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 11 (1967): 26.