

AN ANTHOLOGY OF

RUSSIAN FOLK EPICS



Translated with an
Introduction and Commentary by

James Bailey and
Tatyana Ivanova

RUSSIAN FOLK EPICS

Folklores and Folk Cultures of Eastern Europe

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Ukrainian Minstrels
And the Blind Shall Sing

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Dedicated to the memory of
Boris Nikolaevich Putilov

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Foreword

M.E. Sharpe's series on the "Folklores and Folk Cultures of Eastern Europe" endeavors to publish scholarly studies and significant collections of primary texts of East European folklore. *Russian Folk Epics*, the second book in this series, is the fruit of a lengthy collaboration between two eminent scholars, American Slavist James Bailey and Russian folklorist Tatyana Ivanova. It brings together in one volume the best of modern scholarship on the Russian folk epic and a large number of texts of these epics—*byliny*—in a vibrant new translation. *Russian Folk Epics* furnishes the English-speaking world with a single, comprehensive source for the study and appreciation of the Russian oral epic.

Bailey and Ivanova's work is unique among Western studies both in the vast scope of its scholarship and in its meticulous attention to detail. The introduction, opening with the remarkable story of the discovery of a living epic tradition among the peasants of Northern Russia in the mid-nineteenth century, provides a useful overview of the history of collecting and interpreting these texts. Specific information about each epic appears in the thorough commentaries preceding the works themselves.

Perhaps the most valuable aspect of this book—and the one that is sure to bring the greatest enjoyment to readers—is the epics themselves. Many of the texts are translated here for the first time. They constitute a representative cross-section of *byliny* in terms of date of collection (from the eighteenth century into the Soviet era), regional distribution, and performers. In addition to texts from the legendary nineteenth-century male bearers of the folk epic, such as Trofim Riabinin, Bailey and Ivanova have included songs collected from talented women artists, such as Anna Pashkova. The translations strive to keep the "flavor of orality" through adherence to the metric line and

the preservation of repetition. The reader can sense that these texts are not from the pen of a particular author, but stem from the collective tradition of the Russian people as transmitted by remarkable, often illiterate, singers. This fine volume of oral epics should delight specialists and general readers alike.

Linda Ivanits, Series Editor

Preface

Some dozen years ago, when I was planning to teach Russian epics in my course on Russian folklore and in another course on epics in the Folklore Program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, I soon discovered that few translations were available, the main ones being those of Nora K. Chadwick, who brought her collection out in 1932. I decided to start translating more songs myself and at first chose some of those in the fine little volume *Russian Folk Literature* that D.P. Costello and I.P. Foote had published with texts in Russian, a glossary, and notes in English. The project received a real stimulus when a grant to translate Russian epics was awarded by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1992. This, together with generous support from the Graduate School at the University of Wisconsin, provided funds for a graduate project assistant and for travel to Russia, where I persuaded Tatyana Ivanova to collaborate with me. She is a folklorist at the Institute of Russian Literature (Pushkin House) of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, is a specialist on Russian epics, for several years has compiled the basic bibliographies of Russian folklore, and teaches courses on Russian folklore at St. Petersburg University. The International Research and Exchanges Board provided travel for her to come to the United States for three weeks to work on the anthology in April 1994.

During the past two or so decades, interest in oral epics has grown considerably, something evidenced by the number of publications that have appeared and by the number of conferences that have been held. This includes the one entitled “Epics and the Contemporary World” that took place April 22 and 23, 1994, at the University of Wisconsin. Unfortunately, the Russian epic has attracted little attention, even though it offers many possibilities for studying oral epics since some three thousand variants were recorded from a living tradition that died

out only in the 1960s. Besides this, Russian folklorists have produced many fine studies of the Russian epic in such subjects as the relationship between history and epics, the role of individual performers, the interaction with Western and Eastern epic traditions, the special poetic language of the epics, the textology or quality of the verbal texts, and the melodies employed by the singers. We hope that this anthology and the information it conveys will help to stimulate the interest of non-Russian folklorists in the Russian epic tradition.

We have intended this anthology for those who may be interested in Russian folklore but read no Russian, for students in a course on Russian folklore or in a general course on epics, and for folklorists working in the epic traditions of other peoples in the world. Rather than attempting to provide a contemporary prose translation, we have tried to preserve as much of the special poetic language of Russian epics as possible. This in particular involves observing the identity of the lines and reproducing repetitions, which are so characteristic of oral poetry. We hope that we have been able to convey some sense of the quality of the originals in this respect. The anthology consists of a general introduction to the main features of the Russian oral epic, translations of thirty songs, short introductions to each work, a glossary of terms that have been retained for the sake of "local color," and a selected bibliography of scholarly studies and of the main collections of Russian epics available in English translation and in Russian. The introduction to each song contains explanations of references, interpretations, and the broad plot outline underlying most variants. The main dictionaries that have been consulted in regard to present-day Russian, Old Russian, and dialects have been listed in a separate bibliography. Glossaries that are sometimes attached to collections of epics have also served as an important source for the meaning of unusual folklore words and expressions. The transliteration system of the Library of Congress has been followed in the bibliography, notes, and bibliographic references because libraries in the United States catalogue books by that method. However, a modified system has been used in the translations and in references to them to give readers a more accessible guide to the pronunciation of Russian names and terms. Thus the following substitutions have been made: *ya* for *ia*, *yu* for *iu*, *yo* for *ě*, and sometimes *ye* for *e*.

We express our thanks and appreciation to many people. First of all, to the National Endowment of the Humanities, without whose help this


anthology would have never seen the light of day, the International Research and Exchanges Board, the Graduate School at the University of Wisconsin, and the University of Wisconsin for the award of a Halls-Bascom Professorship, which provided special research funds to James Bailey. Second, we would like to thank Dennis Nepveu and Bonnie Harkins, who worked as Project Assistants and helped with bibliography and library materials. Third, we especially wish to thank the many people who have read the manuscript, in one form or another, and who have made many suggestions about improving the anthology: Patricia Arant, Margaret Beissinger, Richard Dauenhauer, V.M. Gatsak, Nikolai Gorelov, Niels Ingwersen, Linda Ivanits, Natalie Kononenko, Yelena Minyonok, T.A. Novichkova, B.N. Putilov, Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby, Uli Schamiloglu, J. Thomas Shaw, and Izaly Zemtsovsky. Fourth, we wish to express our appreciation to Onno Brouwer and his staff at the Cartographic Laboratory, University of Wisconsin, for preparing maps of Russia and of Northwestern Russia. Fifth, we want to convey our gratitude to the people at M.E. Sharpe, Inc., in particular Patricia Kolb, Elizabeth Granda, Ana Erlić, and Dobrochna Dyrzcz-Freeman, for their generous help in editing and publishing this anthology. And last of all, we thank the staffs at Memorial Library at the University of Wisconsin, the Russian State Library in Moscow, and the Institute of Russian Literature and the Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences, both in St. Petersburg.

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The Russian Oral Epic Tradition: An Introduction

y the middle of the nineteenth century, it was believed that the Russian oral epic tradition had died out.¹ P.N. Rybnikov, who had been sent into administrative exile to the city of Petrozavodsk on Lake Onega in the northwest, was given the job of collecting vital statistics in the area and had to do much traveling, an activity that allowed him to become closely acquainted with the life of the peasants in the region. In a passage that has since been quoted many times by folklorists, Rybnikov writes about how in May 1860 he was caught in a storm on Lake Onega, found shelter on an island, and accidentally discovered that Russian epics (*bylinas*) were still being sung.

On the island there was a soot-covered *fatera*, a small house where in the summer and fall, during a lull, a contrary wind, or a storm, travelers took cover for the night. Many boats from Zaonezhie were tied up around the dock, and the *fatera* was crammed full of people. To tell the truth, it was so stinking and dirty that I didn't feel like going in for a rest even though it was very cold outside. I lay down on a sack near a small campfire, made myself some tea in a pan, drank it, ate something from my traveling supplies, and, having warmed myself a little by the fire, gradually fell asleep. Strange sounds woke me up. Before that I had heard many songs and religious verses, but I had never heard such a tune. Lively, whimsical, and cheerful, it at times became faster, at times broke off, and recalled something ancient that people of our time had forgotten. For a long while I didn't want to wake up and to listen closely to the words of the song—it was too tempting to remain under the influence of a completely new impression. Despite my drowsiness, I

made out that several peasants were sitting about three steps from me and that a grayish old man with a thick white beard, quick eyes, and a good-natured expression on his face was singing. Squatting by the dying fire, he turned to one neighbor and then to another and sang his song, interrupting it sometimes with a grin. The singer finished and started singing another song. Then I understood that he was singing a *bylina* about the merchant Sadko, the rich guest. Of course I immediately jumped to my feet, persuaded the peasant to repeat what he had just sung, and took it down from his words. I asked whether he knew anything else. My new acquaintance, Leonty Bogdanovich from the village Seredka of Kizhi District, promised to perform many *bylinas* for me: about Dobrynya Nikitich, about Ilya Muromets and about Mikhailo Potyk the son of Ivan, about the daring Vasily Buslavych, about Khoten Bludovich, about forty pilgrims and one, and about Svyatogor the *bogatyř*, but he knew only incomplete variants and somehow never finished telling the words (Rybnikov 1989, 1: 52–53).

Rybnikov was to learn much more in the following years, but during his first enthusiastic encounter he nevertheless discerned several basic characteristics of the Russian oral epic tradition: the *bylinas* had survived among the peasants in northern Russia, a close relationship existed between the performers and their audience, epics were sung primarily for entertainment, they were usually performed by a single person, they were sung to a distinct kind of melody, they had no instrumental accompaniment, many subjects or themes existed in variants, and the quality of the singers differed considerably. Rybnikov and his correspondents gathered several hundred *bylinas*, as well as other kinds of songs, which were published from 1861 to 1867 in four volumes entitled *Songs Collected by P.N. Rybnikov*. Although this collection forms one of the main compilations of Russian epics, the texts have one serious drawback—they were recorded chiefly from a spoken paraphrase rather than from a sung performance.

In the summer of 1871, A.F. Gilferding decided to take a trip to the same area. Much to his own surprise, he returned to St. Petersburg eight weeks later with over three hundred songs. The next summer, in 1872, Gilferding returned to collect epics in another northern area, but he caught typhus and died. The songs he had recorded earlier were published in 1873 in what became an exemplary collection of Russian epics, *Onega Bylinas Recorded by A.F. Gilferding in the Summer of 1871*. Drawing upon Rybnikov's advice and help, Gilferding (1949, 1:

29–84) further expanded knowledge about the epic tradition and its performers. He noticed, for instance, that the rhythm of the verbal text fell apart during a spoken retelling, and he realized that accurate texts could be obtained only from a sung performance. He solved the problem of transcribing the words during singing by having the performers lengthen the pause for a breath at the end of the lines. Gilferding also made another important contribution in his collection: following Rybnikov's idea, he focused attention on the individual singers and their role in the composition of a song. Instead of grouping all epics on the same subject together as had been the practice before him, Gilferding presented them by village and within each village by singer. For each performer he included a biographical sketch about artistic quality, manner of singing, feeling for rhythm, number of songs known, from whom the epics had been learned, and means of livelihood. Gilferding's practice of including such sketches was followed by later collectors; in time this came to form a treasury of information that folklorists to this day draw upon for studying Russian epics. As a consequence, Russian folklorists were among the earliest, if not the first, to devote attention to the performers and to the performance of epics.

Historical Background

Most Russian epics probably originated from the tenth through the fourteenth centuries, mainly during the existence of what has been called Rus, Kievan Rus (Kievan Russia), or the Russian land.² Roughly speaking, Kievan Rus extended from near the Baltic Sea in the north to the steppe bordering on the Black Sea in the south, and from the Carpathian Mountains in the west almost to the Volga River in the east. In this period one speaks about the East Slavs, since their division into three linguistic and ethnic groups (Byelorussian, Russian, and Ukrainian) took place only in the fourteenth century. While today Kiev is the capital of Ukraine, it is still regarded as the ancient seat of Russian culture.

The Kievan state was founded in the second half of the ninth century. According to an interpretation espoused by many historians, the origins of the Kievan state were exclusively Slavic. According to another, much disputed, interpretation that is called the "Norman theory," the Kievan state was founded by the Varangians, who have been pre-

sumed to have been Scandinavians. This second explanation stems from a legend included in the *Primary Chronicle* under the year 862. Before the founding of the Kievan state, the East Slavs had a tribal organization consisting of twelve tribes that occupied approximately the same territory.

The Russian land consisted of a number of city-states, each ruled by a prince who maintained a personal retinue (*druzhina*), collected tribute, conducted relations with other cities and lands, fostered trade, and was responsible for military affairs. According to a complex system of collateral succession by seniority within generations, the senior member of the princely family became the grand prince in the city of Kiev, while other members received ruling positions in other cities. As time passed, the number of princes increased, competing branches emerged in the family, and seniority became less and less clear. The princes frequently contended with each other for Kiev as well as for other cities, a situation that sometimes led to internecine warfare. As a result, the princes could not present a unified opposition to the Mongols, or Tatars as they have been called in Russian, when they invaded from the east beginning in 1237, devastated many Russian cities, and captured Kiev in 1240, thus bringing an end to the Kievan state.

Owing to its location on the Dnieper River, the city of Kiev became a nexus for the north–south trade route from the Baltic to Constantinople (the “road from the Varangians to the Greeks”) and from Western Europe to the east. In 988 during the reign of Vladimir I, who was grand prince from 978 to 1015, Christianity was accepted from the Byzantine Orthodox Church. The high point of Kievan Rus came in the eleventh century during the rule of Yaroslav the Wise who served as grand prince from 1019 to 1054. At this time Kievan Rus is considered to have been culturally, economically, and politically on a level with other countries in medieval Europe. Not only were close trade and diplomatic relations maintained, but intermarriages took place between West European royal families and the families of Russian princes. Despite the close connections with the rest of Europe, Kievan Rus did not share several social and cultural characteristics that are customarily associated with medieval Europe. Kievan Rus did not develop feudalism, did not have serfdom, and had no knights, chivalry, or courtly love poetry. The term “prince” (*kniiaz*) referred only to a member of the ruling family and not to the son of a king.

Since Kiev was also on the border between the northern forest zone

and the southern steppe (which stretched from the Great Hungarian Plain and the Carpathian Mountains in the west to Mongolia in the east), the history of Kiev was interwoven with the history of the steppe. For centuries the steppe had been not just a highway for nomadic invaders from the east but also the home of local nomadic confederations and states that had political, trade, and even marital ties with Kiev. Several such confederations existed in the steppe during the Kievan period, including the Khazar state (destroyed by Kiev in the tenth century), the Pechenegs, and the Polovetsians (also known as the Cumans). To a large extent Russian epics portray conflicts between these nomadic groups and Kievan Rus from the tenth through the thirteenth centuries.

The other major city was Novgorod, which was located in the northwest on the Volkhov River. The Great Lord Novgorod, as it was addressed, was a trading city that through rivers and lakes had access to the Baltic Sea in the west and to the Volga and the Caspian Sea in the east. The Novgorodians were great sailors and colonizers, eventually settling much of the area around the White Sea and reaching into the Urals and Western Siberia through northern regions. In the thirteenth century, Novgorod developed close trade relations with German cities belonging to the Hanseatic League. The city became independent from the princes, was ruled by an oligarchy, and was noted for its rambunctious assembly called the *veche*. Although Novgorod was not attacked during the Tatar campaigns in the thirteenth century, the city was threatened from the west by the advance of the Swedes and of the Teutonic knights. Russian forces commanded by Prince Alexander Nevsky defeated the Swedes in 1240 and the Teutonic knights in 1242, thus stopping the eastern expansion of these two neighbors.

The Tatar invasion was carried out under the leadership of Batu, a grandson of Genghis Khan. The new Tatar state, which only later was to be called the "Golden Horde," eventually established cities, particularly along the Volga River. These included Kazan, Sarai, and Astrakhan, Sarai becoming the capital. The Tatars were not so much interested in direct control of the Russian populace as they were in receiving tribute, collecting taxes, and imposing levies. Once the Golden Horde accepted Islam, the Tatars did not interfere with the affairs of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Tatar rulers preferred to deal with the Russian princes, recognizing one of them as grand prince by granting him a document called a *yarlyk*. The Russian princes also served as tax collectors for the Tatars. Following the collapse of the

Golden Horde in the fourteenth century, the Moscow princes gradually prevailed over the other Russian princes and began to centralize power around Moscow in the fifteenth century. Tatar domination, also known as the “Tatar Yoke,” did not end abruptly but only slowly over a long period of time. Prince Dmitri Donskoi first defeated a Tatar army at Kulikovo Field in 1380, Ivan III renounced Tatar suzerainty and refused to pay tribute in 1480, and Ivan IV, also known as Ivan the Terrible, captured the Tatar cities of Kazan in 1552 and Astrakhan in 1556.

Perhaps the central question about the *bylina* concerns whether it is an authentic representation of earlier historical periods or an artistic expression of oral literature. Interpretations of the *bylina* will be covered later, but at this time several features need to be mentioned so as to furnish a context for other topics. Russian epics may absorb and incorporate elements from several different historical epochs. For instance, even though many songs probably reflect conflicts with steppe peoples from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries, particularly with the Polovetsians, the Tatar conquest may have been added as an overlay in such a way that most enemies of Kiev have acquired Tatar names. Contrary to historical fact, Russian heroes always defeat Tatar forces or adversaries in the *bylinas*. And finally, Prince Vladimir, as he is depicted in epics, does not represent any specific “historical Vladimir” but a generalized “epic Vladimir” around whom Russian heroes are gathered and accomplish their feats.

Epic Cycles, Genres, and Heroes

Scholars employ the term *bylina* for Russian epics, a word that is derived from the past tense of the verb “to be” and implies “something that was.” The term was introduced in the 1830s by I.P. Sakharov, a popularizer who took the word from the opening of the medieval Russian literary epic *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*. The singers used the terms *starina* or *starinka*, which come from the adjective meaning old.

Russian epics are customarily divided into three general groups: *Mythological epics*, the *Kievan* or *Vladimir cycle*, and the *Novgorod cycle*. Mythological epics may have originated long before the Kievan state was founded, have no definite historical setting, involve songs about the supernatural and perhaps shamanism, and depict the mysterious figures Svyatogor and Volkh Vseslavyevich. The Kievan or Vladimir cycle consists of songs that comprise the largest group, relate events taking place in or near Kiev, and concern heroes and other



European Russia

people gathered around Prince Vladimir. The Novgorod cycle is devoted to Sadko the *gusli* player and merchant and to Vasily Buslayev, who rebels against his native city. On the basis of details from everyday life depicted in a song, several scholars have included other epics, such as "Khoten Bludovich," into the Novgorod cycle (Smirnov and Smolitskii 1978: 430–33).

Although folklorists disagree about the precise generic classification of Russian epics and their relationship to other narrative songs, they nevertheless delineate several epic subgenres largely according to thematic distinctions (Astakhova 1966: 15–21; Putilov 1968). Generally speaking, the overall chronological development of the *bylina* may be conceived as beginning with works essentially involving myth and gradually shifting over a period of several centuries to the “factual” historical song that emerged as the Kievan period and then the Tatar period came to an end and ceased to stimulate the creation of new epics. *Heroic epics*, which are concerned mainly with fighting the enemies of Kiev, actually represent a relatively small proportion of the songs in the Russian tradition. Instead, many *bylinas* involve typical epic themes such as bride taking, confrontations with a monster, or a husband returning home to his wife’s wedding. The *bylina-novella* represents an adventure tale in which there is no fighting but only an engaging story. The term *religious verses* (*dukhovnye stikhi*) covers a variety of Biblical and apocryphal stories, medieval church legends, and saints’ lives that to one degree or another have been blended with folklore and in some cases have been transformed into a *bylina*.³ The term *skomoroshina* refers to a group of satirical songs that are attributed to the Russian medieval minstrels, the *skomorokhs*, and that in some instances are connected with the *bylina*. Such songs include the humorous *fabliau*, parodies of the *bylina*, and the absurd *nebylitsa* or anti-*bylina* (Ivleva 1972). The French term *fabliau* refers to a kind of anecdote in verse that especially relates sexual adventures and treats them as low comedy. *Historical songs* became fully developed as a new genre in the sixteenth century, are initially concerned with Muscovite Russia, and relate events about actual historical persons. While the *bylina* depicts the distant past, the historical song portrays the recent past. *Ballads* constitute a much different kind of narrative than the *bylina* in regard to length, subject matter, types of characters, rapid pace, and sensationalism (Balashov 1966; Kulagina 1977). Representative examples of all these types of songs have been included in the present anthology in an effort to convey a sense of the diversity existing in the Russian tradition. Even though they do not constitute *bylinas*, two historical songs and one ballad have been chosen because they form part of the performers’ repertory, they are performed to the same melodies, they all are called *starina* by the peasant singers, and they help to bring the features of the *bylina* itself into sharper relief.

The heroes grouped around Prince Vladimir in Russian epics are

called *bogatyry*, larger-than-life figures but nevertheless basically men who for the most part accomplish their deeds as people in the real world and seldom resort to magic. Among the three main bogatyrs, *Ilya Muromets* is the central one and represents the ideal hero for peasant performers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The second is *Dobrynya Nikitich*, who knows how to do things the proper way, is known for his knowledge or courtesy (*vezhestvo*), serves as a diplomat for Prince Vladimir, and represents the dragon slayer in the Russian tradition. The third is *Alyosha Popovich*, who may be regarded as the trickster in the Russian epic since he usually defeats enemies by stealth rather than by strength. Various other heroes and figures are also met from time to time, including the drunkard Vasily Ignatyev, who leaves his nook in a tavern to save Kiev from a Tatar attack; the wealthy "snob" Dyuk, who visits Kiev and finds everything inferior; and the "Don Juan" Churila Plyonkovich, who charms the women at court, much to Vladimir's chagrin. Just as the knights of the Round Table are gathered around King Arthur, so the bogatyrs are grouped around *Prince Vladimir*, who performs no exploits himself. An equally diverse portrait gallery of women includes *Princess Apraxia* as the medieval ideal of feminine beauty ("Dunai"); her sister Nastasia as a *bogatyarka* (a warrior maiden resembling an Amazon—"Dunai"); the epic hero's perceptive mother, who is often named Amelfa Timofeyevna ("Dobrynya and the Dragon"); the wise wife Vasilisa Nikulichna, who cleverly saves her foolish husband from prison ("Stavr"); and Marinka as a sorceress who turns young men into aurochs ("Dobrynya and Marinka"). Princess Apraxia may be Vladimir's wife or daughter. When she is his wife she may be presented negatively ("Alyosha and Tugarin"), but when she is his daughter she is always idealized ("Ilya Muromets and Kalin Tsar"). *Princess Zabava*, who may appear as Vladimir's niece ("Dobrynya and the Dragon"), represents the heroine whom a hero in a magic tale rescues. Prince Vladimir and a few others have a personal retinue called *druzhina*, a form derived from the word for friend (*drug*).

Oral Poetics and Language

The term *epic ceremonialism* is used to describe the poetics of Russian epics or the devices used to compose them. Occasionally a song opens with an interlude called *zapev* that has no connection with the ensuing

story. Although examples occur in “Solovei Budimirovich” and “Vasily Ignatyev,” perhaps the most famous one appears in a song from the eighteenth-century collection of Kirsha Danilov (1977: 201).

High is the height under the heavens,
 Deep is the depth of the ocean-sea,
 Wide is the plain across the whole earth,
 Deep are the pools of the Dniester River,
 Miraculous is the cross of Lebanon,
 Long are the reaches of the Chevylesk River,
 High are the Saracen Mountains,
 Dark are the Brynsk forests,
 Black are the Smolensk swamps,
 And fast are the lower reaches of a river.

An introduction called *zachin* frequently opens an epic. The following illustration occurs in the translated variant of “Ivan Godinovich” and describes a banquet scene at Prince Vladimir’s palace where bragging breaks out.

In the city, in Kiev,
 At gracious Prince Vladimir’s,
 There was held, there was held a feast of honor.
 All at the feast ate their fill,
 All at the feast drank their fill,
 All at the feast burst out bragging.
 One bragged about his father and mother,
 Another bragged about his young wife.

Usually a terse, proverb-like ending called *kontsovka* informs listeners that the song is over. The following example taken from “Dobrynya and Alyosha” is revealing because it refers to the calming effect that the performance of a song, perhaps magical in intent, was believed to have on the weather and the sea. This demonstrates one possible function of a bylina among northern singers.

Since then they’ve been singing the old song
 about Dobrynya
 To the blue sea for ensuring calm weather
 And to you good people for listening.

Another poetic feature concerns the *Slavic negative antithesis*, in which a comparison is implied but in a negative form that denies the comparison.⁴ In Russian this type of poetic device usually consists of a few lines that a singer may insert at an appropriate point in a song. The following excerpt taken from “Ilya Muromets and Kalin Tsar” provides an example.

A bright falcon didn't swoop down on the geese,
on the swans,
And on the small migratory gray ducks—
A Holy Russian bogatyr
Swooped down on the Tatar army.

When performers wish to dwell on a passage, they may expand and ornament it through repetition and parallelism, two of the most prominent stylistic attributes of oral poetry. The following section, which is repeated and rephrased several times in “Ilya Muromets and Kalin Tsar,” could be summarized simply as “No one but Ilya Muromets can stand up for Kiev.” Albert Lord (1965: 54–55) used the expression *adding style* to describe such passages in which line after line is added, a type of syntax that consists of simple sentences (parataxis) rather than of complex sentences with dependent clauses (hypotaxis).

“The old Cossack Ilya Muromets isn’t alive,
There’s no one to stand up now for the faith
and for the fatherland,
There’s no one to stand up for God’s churches,
There’s no one to stand up for the city of Kiev,
There’s no one to protect our Prince Vladimir
And Apraxia the Princess!”

Although singers may use such features as repetition or parallelism to slow down the pace of an epic and to induce what is termed *epic retardation*, they nevertheless tend to focus on the main events in a story. Once they finish a high point in the action, they may quickly move to the next high point through *rapid transitions* in time or place. For instance, in “Dobrynya and the Dragon,” Dobrynya defeats the dragon in the Saracen Mountains and three lines later meets Prince

Vladimir in Kiev. Or a long period of time may pass, as occurs in “Dobrynya and Alyosha,” where Dobrynya has been away from home for twelve years but abruptly returns in time to prevent his wife from marrying Alyosha.

Singers are conscious of an audience’s reactions and strive to maintain its attention by using various means to heighten the drama, sharpen contrasts, or produce sudden effects. To recite a good story and to keep their listeners interested, performers particularly like to employ *epic hyperbole*. For instance, when a singer in the song “Volkh Vseslavyevich” says that Volkh, as a child, asks his mother for a mace that weighs 300 poods (10,400 pounds), listeners realize that this is an outrageous statement but understand that Volkh is destined to become a strong warrior. In the same song, Volkh, as a teenager but also as a future chieftain, gathers a *druzhina* of 7,000 instead of the usual number of 30. Such exaggerations exemplify what are termed *epic numbers*. The bylina “Ilya Muromets and Nightingale the Robber” is enclosed within a time frame that forms an overall hyperbole. Ilya leaves home after matins and, after several adventures, including the single-handed defeat of an army near the city of Chernigov and the capture of the monster Nightingale the Robber, arrives in Kiev in time for vespers on the same day. When Nightingale the Robber whistles, all the trees droop, the grasses become entangled, the flowers lose their blossoms, and people lie dead. Hyperbole represents an integral element in the style of the bylina and in the manner of telling a tale.

Since Russian epics were performed orally for a listening audience, they, by the very nature of an oral verbal art, condition and shape the compositional techniques employed by singers in several ways. *Time and plot in the bylina are basically linear*—normally one continuous passage of time is presented in logical sequence without flashbacks, simultaneous actions, or subplots (Likhachev 1967; Putilov 1988: 33–38) because listeners cannot readily grasp such complexities. For a similar reason, relatively few personages play important roles in the plot of a bylina. As a part of their oral presentation, singers use special *tag lines* to inform listeners who is talking to whom in speeches and dialogues. Although present-day readers may be annoyed by a repetition of the phrase “hail to you,” which frequently opens tag lines, in oral poetry these words function as a signal telling the audience that a speech is about to be addressed to someone. The abundance of pas-

sages involving direct speech also underscores the comparative rarity of indirect speech in the language of Russian epics. The following example of tag lines appears in the song "Dunai."

Prince Vladimir of capital Kiev spoke:
"Hail to you, Dobrynya Nikitich!"

During the past several decades, Russian scholars have accomplished much toward the description, analysis, and definition of the language in various genres of Russian folklore, a relatively new discipline that has been named "linguofolkloristics."⁵ Some investigators believe that the linguistic idiom of folklore is expressed entirely within the dialectal speech of peasant performers, while others consider that this idiom is supradialectal and represents a special *koine*. Despite such disagreements, most nevertheless concur that the traditional language of Russian folklore forms a distinctive and perceptible subcode of present-day Russian. The tenacity and age of the folklore style is indicated by its presence in some works of Old Russian literature written during the Kievan period. The inclusion of numerous epithet-noun phrases constitutes one of the more obvious stylistic features in Russian folk poetry. A few examples in English translation are *on the blue sea*, *in the dark forest*, *the pretty maid*, *on the fine steed*, *mother damp earth*, or *young bright falcon*. In regard to the bylina, archaic morphological, syntactic, and lexical items may occur in texts that have been recorded since the middle of the eighteenth century. Such traditional elements lend the language of epics a poetic quality and raised tone that differ considerably from contemporary Russian speech or prose.

In several studies, Patricia Arant (1967; 1990) has demonstrated how the songs of one of the finest Russian singers, T.G. Riabinin, adhere, with some modification, to the formulaic technique that, as Albert Lord discovered, underlies the composition of Serbo-Croatian oral epics. Besides features such as epithet-noun phrases and repetitions that may qualify as formulas or formulaic expressions, Russian epics contain many *commonplaces*, *pattern scenes*, or, as Lord terms them, *themes* that comprise entire passages (Lord 1965: 68-98). Examples are a hero taking leave of his mother, saddling a horse, entering a council chamber, or bragging at a feast; departure over the wall of a city; depiction of a journey; a hero urging on his horse; battle description; a hero dressing in the morning; the exchange of taunts by adver-

saries before a fight; two heroes becoming blood brothers; and one combatant asking another for mercy at the end of a fight. Gilferding (1949, 1: 57–58) noted such scenes (or “common places”) in the *bylina* and pointed out how each singer develops an individual expression of these compositional elements and includes them in song after song. Later investigators have shown that performers vary such passages depending on the context and do not repeat them verbatim. Considered on the level of an entire work, the *bylinas* contain plots or subjects that occur in many epic traditions. A few examples are the birth and childhood of a hero, the fight of a father and son, a battle with a monster, the imprisoned or reluctant hero who at a critical moment emerges to save his city, matchmaking or bride taking, a husband returning after a long absence to his wife’s wedding, and a hero’s encounter with a sorceress who turns men into animals.

Russian epics predominantly consist of a *single episode* and contain three to five hundred lines, although at times they may exceed a thousand. In other traditions, epics amounting to many thousands of lines often represent *composite epics* that combine several episodes about one hero. On the whole, the Russian tradition did not develop composite songs, but nevertheless some occasionally appear and suggest that an incipient inclination toward composite forms existed (Astakhova 1948: 98–105; Putilov 1988: 15–16, 33–38). For instance, the selected variant of “Dobrynya and the Dragon” has been taken from a song in which several episodes about Dobrynya have been joined together. The version of “Churila Plyonkovich” included here represents a composite of the two episodes about this particular personage, the translated variant of “Sadko” comprises all three episodes about this Novgorodian figure, and the song “Svyatogor” contains both stories about this mythological hero. Length alone is an inadequate basis for judging whether a narrative is an epic. If one considers a group of equally pertinent features—the types of heroes, special poetic language, distinctive melodies, traditional pattern scenes, typical plots, the devices of an oral narrative oriented toward a listening audience, and an epic view of the world—one would have to conclude that for the most part *bylinas* satisfy these criteria and should be regarded as epics.

Music, Verse, and Performance

Epics recorded in northern Russia in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were performed essentially by single singers without an instru-

mental accompaniment.⁶ The *gusli*, a stringed instrument that is plucked and resembles a psaltery, is occasionally mentioned as being played by the *skomorokhs* in the songs themselves, suggesting that such an instrument was perhaps used in the past. A few instances of two and sometimes more singers performing a *bylina* have been recorded in the Mezen and Pechora regions (Dobrovolskii and Korguzalov 1981: 24, 43). Narrators have their own melodies and ordinarily employ only one, two, or three with their epics, showing that many songs may be sung to the same melody. In some areas the tunes are performed as a kind of recitative, while in others they are sung in a more lyric fashion. The melody and verbal line usually coincide so that *the bylina is stichic*, that is, it is composed line by line; furthermore, the lines are unrhymed, have no stanza form, and most often have a two-syllable ending, or *clausula*. However, in the Onega area, performers may introduce variations of the melody in such a way that it develops a loose and flexible stanza form. Such musical *tirades* involve a varying number of lines but are not evident in the verbal texts themselves (Dobrovolskii and Korguzalov 1981: 23–24, 29). The rather elastic *long epic line* ranges approximately from nine to seventeen syllables and consists of several verse forms: (1) trochees varying from four to eight feet; (2) three-stress accentual verse having a set number of main stresses per line but a varying number of syllables between them; and (3) meterless verse in which the lines are distinguished only by the *clausula* (Bailey 1978). The *short epic line* contains mainly eight to ten syllables, has an unrhymed “playful ending,” and appears in just a few songs that do not belong to “high epics.” Two examples of works composed in the short epic line have been included in the present anthology: “Kostryuk” represents a historical song that parodies a heroic epic, and “The Merchant Terenty” is a comic song involving the *skomorokhs*.

Collections and Collectors

The earliest collection of Russian epics was attributed to Kirsha Danilov, was compiled in the middle of the eighteenth century, and was published for the first time in 1804 under the title *Ancient Russian Poems Collected by Kirsha Danilov* (Danilov 1977). On the basis of recently discovered documents in the archives of the wealthy Demidov family that lived in the Urals, A.A. Gorelov (1995) concluded that

Kirsha Danilov was indeed a real person, was a trusted and highly respected servant of the Demidov family, was a genuine epic performer, and was a *skomorokh*. Some twenty-five bylinas appear in Danilov's collection, which contains some of the most archaic texts and includes melodies arranged apparently for violin (Korguzalov 1994).

In the 1830s, P.V. Kireevsky (1808–1856) became interested in collecting folk songs and inspired a group of people to take down and send him texts from many parts of Russia. Only after Kireevsky's death did P.A. Bessonov publish ten volumes entitled *Songs Collected by P.V. Kireevsky* (Kireevskii 1860–74). The bylinas in the first five volumes are important because many were taken down in parts of Central Russia where the epic tradition soon disappeared. S.I. Guliaev (1805–1888), a person of varied interests and abilities, collected folk songs, including epics, in southwestern Siberia near the city of Barnaul in the Altai region. Some of his recordings were included in Kireevskii's compilation, but they were first published as a separate and complete collection only in 1939 (Guliaev 1988). To the already mentioned activities of P.N. Rybnikov (1831–1885) and A.F. Gilferding (1831–1872) it needs to be added that Rybnikov's collection contained 220 texts and Gilferding's 318.

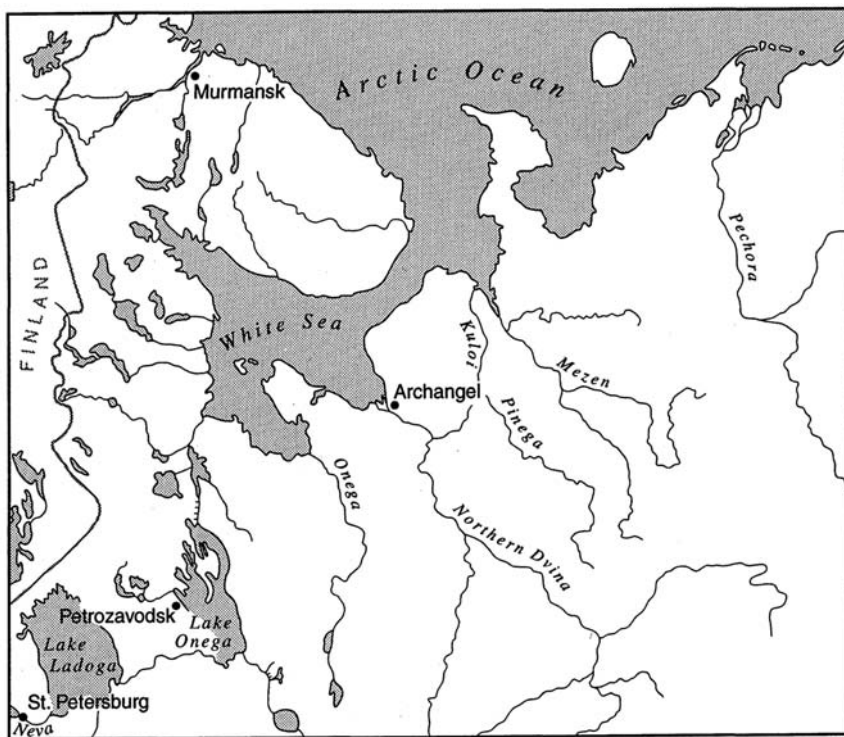
Despite all their merits and the importance of their work, these early collectors in the nineteenth century were amateur folklorists. Around the turn of the century, they were succeeded by professionals who had been trained in the new discipline of folkloristics and who undertook the search for a living tradition in northern regions around the White Sea and along the Kuloi, Mezen, Pechora, and Pinega Rivers.⁷ The next stage in the recording of Russian epics began when A.V. Markov (1877–1917) spent the years 1898 to 1899 on the Winter Shore of the White Sea, took down 116 songs, and published them in the volume *White Sea Bylinas Recorded by A. Markov* (Markov 1901). A.D. Grigorev (1874–1945) spent the years 1899 to 1901 on expeditions in Archangel Province and collected 424 texts that he brought out in three volumes under the title *Archangel Bylinas and Historical Songs Collected by A.D. Grigorev from 1899 to 1901* (Grigorev 1904–39). Despite the immense difficulties that traveling in the far north entailed, Grigorev took along a phonograph and recorded the opening lines of about 150 songs. During the years 1901 to 1902, N.E. Onchukov (1872–1942), who had no training in folklore, compiled his collection called *Pechora Bylinas* (Onchukov 1904), which included 101 bylinas from the region along the Pechora River.

Although folklorists discovered no new areas with a living epic tradition after the first decade of the twentieth century, they continued field work by making new recordings in the same places where previous collectors had been. From 1926 to 1928, the twin brothers Iu.M. Sokolov (1889–1941) and B.M. Sokolov (1889–1930) organized three expeditions to Karelia, called them “In the Footsteps of Rybnikov and Gilferding” (Iu.M. Sokolov 1927; B.M. and Iu.M. Sokolov 1932), and published 280 texts in the collection *Onega Bylinas* (Iu.M. Sokolov 1948). On the basis of songs obtained from several expeditions to far northern regions, A.M. Astakhova (1886–1971) compiled the two-volume collection *Bylinas of the North* (Astakhova 1938–51), which contains 232 texts and includes extensive commentary about the songs and performers. In the 1930s one of the centers for the study of Russian folklore was established in the city of Petrozavodsk on Lake Onega. The center published several collections based on archival materials: V. Bazanov, *The Bylinas of P.I. Riabinin-Andreev* (1939); G.N. Parilova and A.D. Soimonov, *Bylinas of the Pudoga Region* (1941); and A.M. Linevskii, *The Singer F.A. Konashkov* (1948). The volume *Russian Epic Songs of Karelia* edited by N.G. Cherniaeva (1981) contains bylinas that had been taken down from 1930 through 1960.

The last stage in the collection of Russian epics took place from the 1940s to the 1960s, when the tradition died out. A.M. Astakhova’s volume *Bylinas of Pechora and the Winter Shore* (1961) contains 161 epics, historical songs, and ballads that were recorded in 1942 and from 1955 to 1956. N.P. Kolpakova’s collection *The Sung Folklore of Mezen* (1967) includes 54 epics that were taken down in 1958 and 1961.

Epics have also been collected among the Cossacks in southern Russia, in the Urals, and in Siberia, but especially among the Don Cossacks. Unlike the tradition in the far north, Cossack songs were sung by a male chorus, were essentially lyrics, and were relatively short. A.M. Listopadov (1873–1949), the main collector of Don Cossack songs, transcribed hundreds of lyrics and some epics and brought out five volumes entitled *Songs of the Don Cossacks* (1949–54), which included 64 Cossack epics.

During the past three or so decades, several trends have taken place in the publication of Russian epics. One involves providing new and revised editions of older collections and supplying them with detailed commentary, one example being *Songs Collected by P.N. Rybnikov* (Rybnikov 1989–91). Yet another trend concerns collections of songs



Areas in Northwestern Russia where epics have been recorded

about specific epic heroes or of songs from a single geographic area. Several examples are A.M. Astakhova, *Ilya Muromets* (1958); Iu.I. Smirnov and V.G. Smolitskii, *Dobrynia Nikitich and Alyosha Popovich* (1974) and *Novgorod Bylinas* (1978); and Iu.I. Smirnov, *Russian Epic Poetry of Siberia and the Far East* (1991). The long-cherished dream of Russian folklorists to publish a multivolume compilation of all Russian epics has unfortunately yet to be realized.

The majority of the transcriptions in the nineteenth century were made without the music. Sound recordings, which began to be made in 1896, at first consisted only of fragments and only much later of full texts. In the remarkable compendium *Bylinas: The Russian Musical Epic*, which contains texts, music, and commentary, B.M. Dobro-

volskii and V. Korguzalov (1981) have gathered most Russian epics recorded with their melodies. Furthermore, they have distinguished the essential musical features of the regional epic traditions in northern, central, and southern Russia. The Phonogram Archive at the Institute of Russian Literature in St. Petersburg, a major repository of folklore materials, has issued several records of epic performers through the firm "Melodia," one example being *Bylinas of the Russian North* in 1985.

Thanks to the efforts of many collectors, folklorists have accumulated some three thousand texts of Russian epics, of which about two thousand have been published. Approximately sixty to eighty themes or subjects appear in the Russian tradition; they exist in just a few to as many as 150 variants, and in some instances they represent repeated recordings of the same song from the same performer. As a consequence, students of the Russian epic have had an opportunity to trace the development and to study the characteristics of a living tradition over a period of approximately two hundred years. One of the most valuable aspects of the Russian materials as a source for studying oral epics is that the texts have not been adapted to the literary ideals of some particular period nor have they been artificially joined to produce lengthy composite songs, as was the case, for instance, with Elias Lönnrot's publication of the Finnish *Kalevala*.

Performers

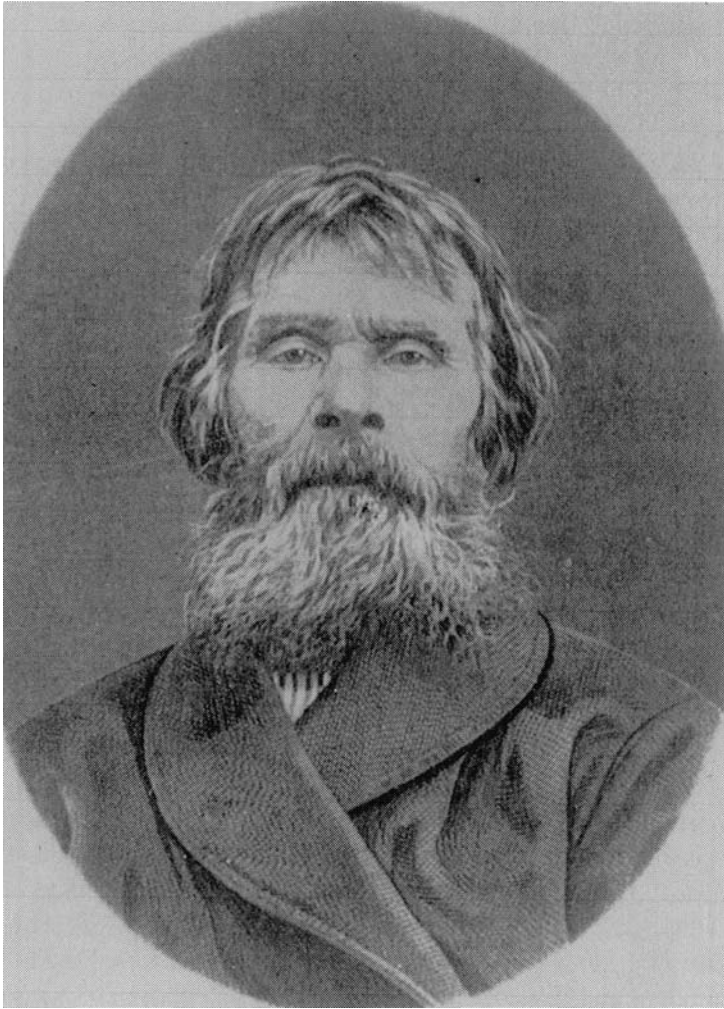
Although peasants were the sole bearers of the Russian epic tradition by the time collecting began in earnest in the nineteenth century, several other groups have undoubtedly taken part in the creation, performance, and dissemination of the bylina. Since the institution of court singers was known in medieval Europe and has been commonly encountered in other places where epics have flourished, such singers may be assumed to have existed under similar circumstances in Kievan Rus. As Felix J. Oinas (1984: 32–43; 1987) has indicated, the Kievan prince, princes in other cities, their courts, and their retinues formed an upper class whose ideals—a code of honor, fighting, and hunting—are expressed in the bylina. It is difficult to conceive that peasant singers in Kievan Rus would have had sufficient direct knowledge to depict the details of courtly and urban life appearing in many songs.

The *skomorokhs*, wandering minstrels similar to the medieval French *jongleurs* and the German *Spielmänner*, were also bearers of

the epic tradition (Findeizen 1928, 2: 105–70; Zguta 1978), from time to time appear in epics, and probably composed satirical songs termed *skomoroshina* and some novelistic bylinas. In the middle of the seventeenth century during the reign of Tsar Alexei Mikhailovich, state and church authorities started persecuting the skomorokhs; they were forced to leave Moscow and Central Russia and settled in out-of-the-way northern villages where they eventually were assimilated by the peasants. V.N. Tatishchev (1962, 1: 114–15), a Russian historian in the first part of the eighteenth century, reports that he heard skomorokhs perform old songs about Prince Vladimir, Ilya Muromets, Alyosha Popovich, and Nightingale the Robber. By the nineteenth century the skomorokhs had disappeared from Russian culture, but their heritage of songs, including epics, did not disappear—it entered the repertory of peasant singers. Wandering pilgrims (*kaliki perekhozhie*) represent another group that may have served as transmitters of bylinas and may have carried them to distant parts of Russia. They differed from the religious pilgrims who traveled from Kievan Rus to Greece and to the Holy Land in medieval times (Maksimov 1989; Tikhonravov 1898). On the contrary, these “modern pilgrims” were mendicants who performed mainly “religious verses” for alms at churches and monasteries on church holidays or at fairs. Members of this group of people, who in many instances were professionals belonging to special guilds in pre-revolutionary Russia, may have adapted some biblical and religious subjects to the poetics and style of the bylina.

In the introductory essay to his collection, “Olonets Province and Its Folk Rhapsodists,” Gilferding (1949, 1: 44) noted that the way a person earned a living had a direct bearing on whether that person might learn and perform epics. In the far northwestern part of Russia, this especially concerned fishing, hunting, and lumbering. Cooperatives called *artels* invited singers to take part as shareholders and to perform epics during breaks in work or during bad weather. The trades of itinerant tailors and shoemakers were also conducive to the singing of epics. However, it needs to be pointed out that women were also fine performers of Russian epics, so that occupation was not the sole inducement for creating a favorable atmosphere and a vibrant tradition.

Collectors not only discovered a number of outstanding performers and several families of singers among northern peasants, but they also were able to delineate “schools” of performers who had had the same teacher. One prime example concerns T.G. Riabinin (1791–1885), who



The singer T.G. Riabinin. Lithograph originally published in the collection by A.F. Gilferding, *Onezhskie bylina, zapisannye Aleksandrom Fedorovichem Gilferdingom*, St. Petersburg, 1873.

was the first of four generations in a family of singers.⁸ The elder Riabinin, whom many folklorists consider to have been one of the finest Russian epic singers and from whom Rybnikov and Gilferding collected songs in Olonets Province, learned many of his songs from Ilia Elustafev, who died in the 1830s at the age of ninety and from whom several other

performers also had acquired some of their songs. In November and December 1871, Riabinin, invited by Gilferding, came to St. Petersburg and performed his epics before members of the Russian Geographic Society, which at that time was a center for ethnography and the study of folklore. The elder Riabinin passed on his mastery to his son I.T. Riabinin (1844–1908), who in 1893 and 1894 performed in St. Petersburg and Moscow; in 1902 he again gave concerts in the Russian capitals and then visited Kiev, Odessa, Sofia, Belgrade, Vienna, Prague, and Warsaw. Two later members of the family, I.G. Riabinin-Andreev (1873–1926) and P.I. Riabinin-Andreev (1905–1953), also sang bylinas.

In the biographical sketches or commentaries accompanying their collections, transcribers have included remarks about the quality of the singers, particularly in regard to their musical sense, their sensitivity to poetic rhythm, their mastery of the special language of folklore, and their ability to tell a story. Needless to say, only a few exceptionally talented individuals are capable of mastering the composition of what is undoubtedly the most demanding of genres—the oral epic. Collectors and scholars have constantly faced the question of deciding which singers were worth recording and studying. In the field, recorders soon learned that the easiest way to find the finest performers was to seek out the ones with the best reputation among the populace. In order to define differences among performers more precisely, A.M. Astakhova (1938, 1: 70–89), one of the most experienced field collectors and knowledgeable investigators of the bylina, has classified singers into three types: (1) transmitters who simply passed songs on as they had learned them; (2) creators who re-created the songs in their own manner but remained within the tradition; and (3) improvisers who injected much of their own invention into each performance of a song, thus making the text both original and unstable. In Astakhova's opinion, the creators represented the finest singers and furnished the most artistic texts.

Geographic Distribution

One of the main questions about the Russian epic concerns the reason why it originated in Kievan Rus but in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was discovered only among peasants living in the peripheries of Russia (Zguta 1972). After the East Slavs had separated into three ethnic and linguistic groups in the fourteenth century, one would have antici-

pated that all would have inherited the Kievan epic tradition. However, this did not occur. Bylinas have not been recorded in the territory of Belarus or of Ukraine, where Kiev has become the capital; furthermore, only a few texts having little artistic merit have been collected in Central Russia. Instead, epics have been found in the outlying areas of Russia in the far north, to the east of Moscow along the Volga River, in the Don region, and in several parts of the Urals and Siberia.

A number of hypotheses have been proposed to explain the disparity between the origin of the bylina in Kievan Rus and the geographic distribution of the genre in recent times.⁹ According to one interpretation, the Novgorodians disseminated the epics when they colonized the far northern areas as well as parts of the Urals and Western Siberia. According to another explanation, which takes a comprehensive view of geographic data into account, the bylina was preserved in those areas where a Russian population had close contacts with other peoples, particularly with Finno-Ugric and Turkic groups. For instance, in Zaonezhie, the area to the north and east of Lake Onega, the Karelians have been neighbors with Russians for hundreds of years. In other northern regions, along the middle of the Volga River, and in the northern Caucasus, Russian newcomers have also encountered other ethnic peoples. A similar situation existed in parts of Siberia, which was joined to Russia in the second half of the sixteenth century. Thus a milieu inhabited by other ethnic groups, several of which had their own epic traditions, compelled Russian settlers to become aware of their own identity. For peasants living in Central Russia and having no contact with other peoples, ethnicity was not an issue, but in the peripheral parts of the country, Russian inhabitants were stimulated to sustain their ethnic heritage. Language and folklore played a particularly important role in encouraging and communicating ethnic self-consciousness. In this respect, epic songs about Kievan Rus and Kievan bogatyrs helped a Russian population preserve and transmit memories about Russia's history and culture.

Interpretations of the Bylina

Since the middle of the nineteenth century, Russian folklorists have used a variety of approaches to study the bylina; each in its own way has added to knowledge about the subject and has contributed to an understanding of the genre.¹⁰ Some approaches have followed European trends, and others have been essentially Russian in conception.

Folklorists have sought answers to questions such as the following: When and where was the bylina created? What are the sources of the plots and characters? What have people contributed to its creation and development? What have the main stages in its evolution been over the centuries? What is the relationship of the bylina to history, historical events, and historical personages? Can details of everyday life in a song be ascribed to a particular historical place or period? To what degree have ancient plots, motifs, and characters been transformed into a Kievan setting? How do singers compose oral epics, and do they rely exclusively on memory or improvisation? How does oral literature differ from written literature, and how do the two interact? The approaches surveyed here should be viewed within the context of two factors. First, in the second part of the nineteenth century the study of folklore was only slowly emerging as an independent discipline having its own purposes, subject matter, and methods. Second, a thriving epic tradition furnished Russian scholars with a “living laboratory” that provided a stream of new variants, collections, and information about the singers. As a result, a fortuitous set of circumstances gave scholars both an opportunity and an incentive to seek new interpretations, to test theories, and to propose answers to key questions not only about the bylina but also about oral epics in general. Only the main trends and a few scholars can be mentioned here.

What is termed the *mythological school* actually consisted of a highly varied group of people who not only had widely divergent views but also changed their ideas and approaches considerably over time.¹¹ These scholars, who were the first to offer a broad interpretation of the Russian epic tradition, elucidated the basic cycles of bylinas and made a distinction between younger and older heroes. These investigators, who were closely familiar with German philology, philosophy, and folkloristics, believed that the tale, the legend, and the epic had emerged over time from an evolution and a transformation of myths. Thus the heroes of Russian tales and epics were related to Slavic mythological figures. For instance, A.N. Afanasev (1826–1871) connected Ilya Muromets with Perun, the Old Russian god of thunder (Afanasev 1865–69, 1: 302–07). Orest F. Miller (1833–1889), who examined Russian epics through the prism of a solar and meteorological myth, believed that in the song “Ilya Muromets and Falconer” the god of thunder (Ilya Muromets the father) engenders and then destroys the storm clouds (Falconer the son) (Orest Miller 1869: 181–85).

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the *theory of borrowing*, which also developed in West European scholarship, succeeded the mythological school and initiated a search for possible Western and Eastern sources. In his work "The Origin of Russian Epics," first published in 1868, V.V. Stasov (1824–1906), the most outspoken advocate of this approach in Russia, asserted that Russian epics contained nothing Russian because their plots, motifs, and characters had been taken from Eastern legends, tales, and epics (Stasov 1894, 3: 948–1260). Furthermore, the *bylina* did not reflect Russian history, personages, or national spirit. In this regard, Stasov's work was directed against the Slavophiles, who idealized medieval Russia, who insisted on the independence of Russian culture from that of Western Europe, and whose ideas played an influential role in Russian society at that time. Vsevolod F. Miller (1848–1913), who later was to become the leading exponent of the Historical School, in an early work concluded that epics about Ilya Muromets had been borrowed from Iranian folklore and that the Russian hero was a transformation of Rustem, the main figure in Iranian narratives (Vs.F. Miller 1892: 117–51). Vsevolod Miller conjectured that the songs of the Polovetsian nomads in the steppe had served as intermediaries between the Iranian and the Russian narratives in the Kievan period.

A.N. Veselovskii (1838–1906), a true comparativist in the study of folklore and literature, has occupied a unique place in the history of Russian folkloristics because he creatively selected, elaborated, and combined elements of the borrowing theory, the migratory theory, and the anthropological school. Using his knowledge of many ancient and modern languages, his vast erudition about many traditions, and his close acquaintance with contemporary works about ethnography, Veselovskii examined and compared plots that existed among various peoples in both oral and written forms. He concluded that an exchange between folklore and written literature took place in both directions. Striving to trace the path of a plot from one ethnic tradition to another within a specific historical setting, Veselovskii focused attention on such items as caravan trade routes, the spread of religious heresies in medieval Europe, and the Crusades. He especially drew upon the concept of "shared trends" and the ideas of the anthropological school, according to which human societies exhibited nearly the same traits at a given stage in their development and evolution. Thus similar motifs and beliefs were conceived to have formed under the influence of

universal human psychic laws and of identical conditions in the life of different peoples at different times. For Veselovskii, literature grew out of folklore, which had evolved into separate genres from a primitive syncretism of poetry, dance, and music. The central vision of Veselovskii's research into all forms of written and oral literature concerned what he termed "historical poetics," a subject to which he devoted many of his works.¹²

Although it had begun to develop in the 1860s, by the 1890s the *Historical School* came to dominate the investigation of Russian epics. Vsevolod F. Miller, the acknowledged head of this school, to which many scholars contributed, wrote a lengthy series of articles reflecting the aims of the historical approach and eventually brought them together in his three-volume work *Essays on Russian Folk Literature* (Vs.F. Miller 1897–1924). Since Russian chronicles compiled beginning in the eleventh century contained a wealth of information about the history and life of Kievan Rus, Vsevolod Miller considered a folklorist's main task to be a search in the chronicles for specific people and events, as suggested through personal names, toponyms, and realia, that could have served as an impetus for the creation of a given bylina. For instance, the epic hero Dobrynya Nikitich was identified with the historical Dobrynya who was the uncle of Prince Vladimir I, the baptizer of Kievan Rus. The bylina "Dobrynya and the Dragon" is interpreted as depicting the baptism of Kievan Rus and the triumph of Christianity over paganism. The first part of the song "Dunai" is regarded as having its historical basis in the chronicle story about the abduction of Princess Rogneda of Polotsk and her marriage to Prince Vladimir I. In regard to the problem about how the bylina came to exist among northern peasants, Vsevolod Miller proposed what has become known as the *theory of the aristocratic origin of Russian epics* (Vs.F. Miller 1897–1924, 3: 28–29; Astakhova 1966: 52–56). According to him, court singers in Kievan Rus created the bylina, skomorokhs absorbed the tradition, and, after being banished in the middle of the seventeenth century, they transmitted the songs to northern peasants.

The adherents of the Historical School also turned their attention to migratory plots. Vs.F. Miller, his pupil A.V. Markov, and others, such as M.G. Khalanskii, A.I. Liashchenko, and S.K. Shambinago, claimed that the creation of a bylina resulted from the imposition of a specific

historical event on a migratory plot. Thus a particular historical person (Dobrynya) and event (the baptism of Rus in 988) were imposed on the ancient story about dragon slaying. This illustrates a process termed *Kievization*—older epic themes were set in Kievan Rus, acquired Kievan heroes, were adjusted to Kievan life, and were adapted to the poetics and language of the bylina. The members of the Historical School also believed that variants collected from peasants in the nineteenth century represented the last stage in the progressive degradation of the original form that court singers had composed in Kievan Rus. In addition, several scholars have assigned the creation of some bylinas to the Muscovite period of Russian history from the fifteenth through the seventeenth century. For example, M.G. Khalanskii (1885: 187–207) concluded that the song “Dyuk,” on the basis of the depicted dress, and customs, and architectural decorations, had been created in Moscow rather than in Kiev.

In the early 1920s, A.P. Skaftymov questioned the basic tenets of the Historical School in his book *The Poetics and Genesis of the Bylinas*. He concluded that the adherents of this school had ignored the aesthetic qualities of the bylina and had treated it basically as an expression of history and historical facts. Skaftymov regarded the epic as a form of oral literature in which certain features occur because they enhance the telling of a story. He pointed out that the hero stands at the center of attention and that everything should heighten the presentation of the hero. Skaftymov coined the term *resonating background* (Skaftymov 1994: 145–46) to explain, for instance, why Prince Vladimir is often portrayed as being passive, incompetent, and even cowardly. This portrayal sets off the hero and produces a contrast that would be nullified if Vladimir were glorified instead. The resonating background further confirms the idea that Prince Vladimir in the bylina is not connected with any of several historical princes having that name but functions as a foil to a hero and represents a generalized figure whom many folklorists refer to as the *epic Prince Vladimir*. Skaftymov’s innovative approach shifted emphasis away from studying the bylina as a historical document to studying the bylina as an artistic work of oral literature.

During the Stalinist period, lasting roughly from the end of the 1920s into the 1950s in the Soviet Union, the study and interpretation of Russian folklore were expected to conform to ideological demands (Oinas 1984: 131–79; Zemtsovsky and Kunanbaeva 1997). These conditions are mirrored in Iu.M. Sokolov’s textbook *Russian Folklore*,

which was published in 1941 and has been translated into English (Iu.M. Sokolov 1950). Among other things, folklorists were compelled to ascribe the creation of all folklore to the “working masses.” In regard to epics, efforts were made to have singers adapt the bylina to contemporary life and to compose “new songs” (noviny) about Soviet heroes and leaders. The Historical School was condemned, in particular because it belittled the role of the peasantry in the creation of the Russian epic and attributed the songs to court singers. The comparative method of Veselovskii was also held in disrepute. During this time, folklorists shifted their attention to other, previously little touched upon aspects of the bylina, such as the investigation of regional traditions (A.M. Astakhova, *The Russian Epic in the North*, 1948), schools of singers (V.I. Chicherov, *Schools of Narrators in Zaonezhie*, written toward the end of the 1930s but published only in 1982), and the songs of outstanding individual singers (numerous articles by A.M. Astakhova, V.G. Bazanov, and others). Contrary to the assertions of the Historical School, Astakhova (1938, 1: 7–105; 1948) demonstrated that the bylina did not degenerate or stagnate among northern peasants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries but continued to evolve and to change in a manner consistent with oral epics. She also noted that peasant singers in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries had created new songs and that they had transformed magic tales and ballads into epics.

A new period in the study of the bylina began toward the end of the 1950s with the appearance of V.Ia. Propp’s book *The Russian Heroic Epic* (Propp 1958b). Propp (1895–1970) believed that the bylina, as an artistic phenomenon, had not emerged from factual chronicles but from historically conditioned artistic invention. Propp is not so much against the historical study of the bylina as he is against the equating of the bylina and history. Rather than being derived from specific historical events, an epic is formed through the reinterpretation and transformation of preceding tradition. According to Propp’s conception, the Kievan epic developed from an earlier epic that had existed among East Slavic tribes long before the founding of the Kievan state in the second half of the ninth century. Other scholars, such as S.I. Nekliudov and particularly E.M. Meletinskii (1963) in his book *The Origin of the Heroic Epic*, supported Propp’s conjecture by elucidating an “archaic epic” that had emerged under similar historical and social conditions in the epic traditions of various peoples, particularly those in Siberia and Central Asia.

Propp's book stimulated the formation of the "historical-typological method," which occupies a prominent place in present-day Russian folklore scholarship. Essentially this method attempts to reconcile the conflict between the study of epics from a historical viewpoint and their study from an artistic viewpoint. The vast factual materials that the followers of the borrowing theory, migratory theory, and Historical School had accumulated have consequently received new illumination. The main goal of the historical-typological method is to recreate and to explain the stages of the historical-folklore process on the basis of typological parallels derived from an examination of the traditions of many peoples. On the one hand, a given plot, motif, or character may be manifested in an earlier or in a later form in one specific ethnic tradition; on the other hand, the totality of materials derived from many ethnic traditions permits the delineation of different stages in the development of the same plot, motif, or character. From this perspective, Russian epics have no *Urtext*, and they are not static but undergo adaptation and reinterpretation as they pass through a succession of historical epochs. A given *bylina* may, in part or in whole, embody features from the pre-Kievan tribal period, Kievan Rus, the Tatar Yoke, Muscovite Russia, or later peasant life. From this it ensues that each epic presents a special group of problems that have to be studied by examining all available variants. In 1960 V.M. Zhirmunskii formulated the theoretical principles of the historical-typological method in his paper "Epic Creations of the Slavic Peoples and Problems of the Comparative Study of the Epic."¹³ B.N. Putilov (1971a) and Iu.I. Smirnov (1974) have applied this approach in their studies of epics in Russian and other Slavic languages. In numerous works, Putilov has performed a leading role in defining and applying the historical-typological method to the investigation of the *bylina* with an emphasis on its artistic and ethnographic qualities. He has refined the approach with concepts such as the epic subtext, epic knowledge, epic memory, and epic milieu.¹⁴

Since the 1970s, research on the *bylina* has been characterized by a polyphony of approaches.¹⁵ In their etymological studies, which draw on sources in many languages and traditions, the linguists V.V. Ivanov and V.N. Toporov have given new life to the mythological school by believing, for instance, that a "fundamental myth" about the "thunderer and his adversary" lies at the basis of the folklore tradition of all Indo-European peoples. In regard to the plots of the *bylina*, Ilya

Muromets, Dobrynya Nikitich, and Alyosha Popovich are treated as transformations of this myth (Ivanov and Toporov 1974: 166–72). S.N. Azbelev (1982) has continued the approach of the Historical School, which had already been revived in the 1960s by M.M. Plisetskii (1962), B.A. Rybakov (1963), and R.S. Lipets (1969). V.P. Anikin (1984) has proposed that a historical chronology of all variants of an epic can be established, V.M. Gatsak (1989) and F.M. Selivanov (1977; 1990) have studied the artistic side of the *bylina* and its poetics, and the historian I.Ia Froianov and the folklorist Iu.I. Iudin (1993) have delineated pre-Kievan elements in several epics. Following the lead of A.M. Astakhova (1948: 281–332), Iu.A. Novikov (1995) has shown how the publications of epics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provided singers with an alternate way to learn “new” songs. Once songs appeared in print, particularly in cheap popular editions, they eventually made their way to villages where, even in a largely illiterate population, some people were literate and read the texts to performers. In this way the *bylina* in some cases was transmitted by printed rather than oral means and the traditions of different regions became inter-mixed.

Folklore textology, or the accuracy and reliability of published folklore texts, represents another subject that has attracted considerable attention among Russian folklorists in recent decades.¹⁶ During the preparation of new editions of some “classic” collections of Russian epics, compilers have examined the collectors’ field notes and manuscripts and have discovered that discrepancies sometimes exist between them and the printed version. It became apparent that collecting methods and editorial practices affect the texts¹⁷ and that mistakes, distortions, and changes might occur at all stages in the existence of a text, from its transcription in the field to its final realization in print. One of the main temptations has involved the urge to “improve” a text by standardizing the language in accordance with the norms of the contemporary standard language. With justification K.V. Chistov (1963) and B.N. Putilov (1963) have emphasized that a healthy skepticism should be maintained toward the accuracy of published folklore works at all stages in their study. It stands to reason that the investigation of epics depends just as much on the reliability of the verbal texts as it does on the performances of the finest singers.

In their investigations of folklore textology, in their studies of individual songs, and in their preparation of new editions, Russian folklor-

ists employ the textological concepts of *variant* and *version*. Unlike written literature, which for the most part exists only in a single fixed form once it has been printed, by its very nature oral literature in a living tradition constitutes an open-ended and continuous process that has no initial or final form. On the contrary, a given *bylina* may have been transcribed many times, but its variants, to a greater or lesser degree, always differ. Even repeated recordings of the same epic from the same singer exhibit meaningful divergences; such texts are valuable because their comparison offers insights into the way oral epics are composed and leads toward an understanding of the interaction between memorization and improvisation. The existence of variants, or “multi-forms” as Lord calls them (Lord 1965: 100), carries the implication that there is no “original text” and also that there is no complete or ideal text (Putilov 1976: 191–96; 1988: 149–55). The term *version* describes significant differences in the plot of a particular epic. Thus the song “Ilya Muromets and Falconer” has been collected in approximately 130 variants expressed in two versions of the plot. In the first, less common version, Ilya encounters the bogatyrka Zlatygorka from a distant alien land, lives with her for a time, and leaves. Falconer, the son she later bears from Ilya, grows up and leaves home to attack an outpost manned by Ilya and other bogatyrs. The Russian epic about a conflict between father and son ends when Ilya kills Falconer. The second version of this song omits all the prehistory to this story and begins with Falconer’s appearance at the outpost, but it has the same ending.

Translation

In the introduction to her anthology of Russian epics, which was first published in 1932, Nora Kershaw Chadwick points out that their translation into English began in the middle of the past century. Since she has included a list of earlier translations (Chadwick 1964: 8–9) and T.G. Ivanova (1993b) has made a survey of more recent translations, there is no need to repeat them here.¹⁸ The present anthology has followed the general guidelines that Nora Chadwick laid down: the integrity of the texts is observed, that is, variants are not mixed to produce an “ideally complete song,” and the identity of the lines is maintained to preserve a sense of poetry. The purpose of this anthology is to convey what V.M. Gatsak (1977) calls a “folkloristic translation,”

that is, all types of repetition and parallelism have been retained insofar as is feasible. Since the language of the *bylina*, as would be expected in an orally composed epic, abounds in fixed or nearly fixed phrases and expressions, a deliberate attempt has been made to translate such elements consistently, although it should be understood that even they are subject to variation. Because the spoken language of the performers enters into the idiom of the *bylina* and because direct speech is common, some aspects of colloquial English, especially contractions, have been used when appropriate. It has not been possible to convey the overtones of the hypocoristics (affectionates, diminutives, pejoratives, and augmentatives) that abound in the idiom of Russian epics because direct English equivalents do not exist. Terms for Old Russian weights and measures as well as specifically Russian words (*bogatyř* and *druzhina*) have been retained so as to preserve a certain cultural atmosphere. No effort has been made to reproduce the rhythm of the original, although the English translation has been made "rhythmical" but without consistent regularity. The variation in the length of the lines in Russian has also been maintained. Words or passages that are ambiguous or do not lend themselves to a ready explanation occasionally occur in the texts of songs and have been left as such, although a footnote may be included with a suggested interpretation. The basic purpose has been to provide as readable a translation as possible while preserving as many folklore features of the original Russian as the English language will permit.

This anthology, as was stated earlier, contains examples of all subgenres comprising the Russian epic and, so as to present a cross section of the singers' repertory, also includes two religious verses, two historical songs, and one ballad. Texts have been taken from all periods in the recording of the *bylina* beginning with the eighteenth-century collection of Kirsha Danilov and concluding with several songs recorded in the 1940s and 1950s. As illustrations of the last phase in the Russian epic tradition, one song has been selected from T.S. Kuzmin ("Dyuk") and three from A.M. Pashkova, who was literate and was influenced by her reading ("Svyatogor," "Ilya Muromets Quarrels with Vladimir," and "Churila"). The translated epics come from all main geographic regions where the *bylina* has been collected. For the most part, variants have been selected that have not been translated into English before so that those interested in epics will have an opportunity to compare variants. In a few instances, this was not