

HUMANITIES INSTITUTE

RUSSIAN LITERATURE – Postclassical Period

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About the Author

This course has been prepared by Dr. Ayse Dietrich, Professor Emeritus of Russian History, Literature, Language and Linguistics. She has a bachelor degree from Ankara University, Faculty of Letters, Department of Russian Language and Literature. She also has a master degree from the same University. She received a scholarship in 1987 to study in the United States, and received a master's degree from New York University, Department of Russian Language and Literature and a third master's degree and a doctorate from Cornell University, Slavic Department. She was the chair of the Department of Russian Language and Literature at Ankara University since 2008. She is currently working at Middle East Technical University, in the Department of History, teaching courses on Russian and Soviet History. She is the founder and editor of the *International Journal of Russian Studies* (IJORS), published in the U.S.A.

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Readings

English Sources for the 11th – 17th Century Russian Literature:

- 1- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974.
- 2- Mirsky, D.S., *A History of Russian Literature, From Its Beginnings to 1900*, Vintage Books Edition, 1958.
- 3- Waliszewski, K., *A History of Russian Literature*, William Heinemann, London, 1900.
- 4- *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, Edited by Charles, A. Moser, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
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English Sources for the 18th-20th Century Russian Literature:

- 1- *A Companion to Russian Literature*, Edited by Neil Cornwell, Routledge, New York, 2001.
- 2- Bortnes, J., *The Poetry of Prose*, Bergen, 2007.
- 3- Balina, Marina, ed. *Russian Writers Since 1980*. Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 285. Gale 2004.
- 4- Cizevski, D., *History of 19th Century Russian Literature, The Romantic Period*, Vol.1, 1974.
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- 16- Mochulsky, K., *Dostoevsky His Life and Work*, Princeton University Press, 1971.
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- 21- *Russian Novelists in the Age of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky*. Edited by Judith E. Kalb and J. Alexander Ogden. Detroit: The Gayle Group, 2001.
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- 23- Rydel, Christine A. *Russian Literature in the Age of Pushkin and Gogol: Poetry and Drama*. Dictionary of Literary Biography, vol. 205. Gale, 1999.
- 24- Segel, H. B., *The Literature of Eighteenth-Century Russia*, 2 vols., New York, 1951.
- 25- *The Cambridge History of Russian Literature*, Edited by Charles A. Moser, Cambridge University Press, 1992.
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<http://archive.org/details/historyofrussian1910wali>
- 31- Weber, Harry. *The Modern encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet literature*. Gulf Breeze: Academic International, 1977.
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11th - 12th Century Russian Literature

Introduction:

The oldest translation to survive from the 11th century is a decorated religious manuscript written on parchment. This work, written by the deacon Gregory, is the *Ostromir Gospel* (*Ostromirovo evangelie*). Written between 1056-1057, this Gospel also includes rites arranged by the days of the week. The *Apostle* (*Apostol*), which includes 21 books of the New Testament, contains the epistles of Jesus' disciples and accounts of their lives. After these works comes the *Sermon on Law and Grace* (*Novgorodskie sluzhebnye chet'i i mnei*), written in the years between 1095-1097 and containing sacred songs and hymns arranged by day and month. With the acceptance of Christianity proverbs from religious works began to be translated into Old Russian. The most important of these is the *Book of Psalms* (*Psaltyr'*), containing religious hymns.

At the same time during this period Byzantine historical works were translated into the Russian language. The best known of these is the *Alexandria* which contains legends and stories about Alexander the Great, his life and his victories. Another important translated work is the *Deeds of Devgeni* (*Devgenievo deyanie*), about the deeds of the Byzantine epic hero Digenis. All of these translated works were read by the princes, landowners, merchants and churchmen of that period, giving the Russian people the opportunity to become acquainted with other cultures. It is known that from the 11th century on wealthy families had their children, both boys and girls, taught to read and write. For example, Vladimir Monomakh's sister Yanka had a monastery built in Kiev and opened a school for girls' education there.

The most important work written in the period between the end of the 11th century and the beginning of the 12th century is the *Primary Chronicle* (*Povest' vremennyh let*). Other important works from the early 12th century are the *Testament of Vladimir Monomakh* (*Pouchenie Vladimira Monomakha*) and *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*).

Sermon on Law and Grace

Among the most important religious stories of the 11th century is the *Hilarion's Sermon on Law and Grace* (*Slovo o zakone i blagodati Ilariona*). The *Sermon* was written in the time of Yaroslav Mudriy by the first Russian bishop of Kiev, Hilarion, between 1037 and 1050, the Russian state's most brilliant period both politically and culturally. In the *Sermon* Hilarion compares the Old Testament with the New Testament.

Primary Chronicle

The *Primary Chronicle* consists of manuscripts written by Nestor in the Pecherskiy Monastery in Kiev some time in the first half of the 12th century, and covers the history of Russia between the years 1040-1118. The *Chronicle* begins with the genealogy of the Slavs.

Testament of Vladimir Monomakh

The *Testament of Vladimir Monomakh* holds an important place in the literature of the 11th and 12th centuries. The work is written in the form of a will addressed to Vladimir Monomakh's children shortly before his death.

The Tale of Igor's Campaign

Another significant work composed in the last years of the 12th century is *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*. The *Tale* was first brought to scholarly attention in the 18th century by the manuscript collector Musin Pushkin. It was written in the principality of Kiev-Chernigov in a period when the Kievan state was divided among feudal princes, its political and cultural importance had been lost, and campaigns against the Cumans ended in defeat.

Reading Assignments:

- 1- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974, p. 85-90.
- 2- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974, p. 101-105.

- 3- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974, p. 153-160.
- 4- Mirsky, D.S., *A History of Russian Literature, From Its Beginnings to 1900*, Vintage Books Edition, 1958, p. 3-17.
- 5- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974, p. 43-83.
- 6- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974, p. 43-84.
- 7- Roman Jakobson, "The Puzzles of the Igor' Tale", *Selected Writings. IV.*, pp. 380-410.
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- 9- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974, p. 167-190.
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- 11- *Russian Epic Studies*, Edited by Roman Jakobson and Ernest J. Simons, American Folklore Society, Philadelphia, 1949.
- 12- Dietrich, A., *13th -15th Century Russian Accounts of Constantinople and their Value as Historical Sources*, Russian Literature, Elsevier Publishing, Netherland, 2006.
- 13- Majeska, G.P., *Russian Travelers to Constantinople in the 14th and the 15th Centuries*. Dumbarton Oaks Studies, Washington DC, 1984. <http://libgen.info/view.php?id=673468>

Questions:

1. Describe the cultural and the religious life during the reign of Yaroslav the Wise.
2. What do Medieval Russian records from the 11th century reveal about the style of writing?
3. How do the writings about saints' lives differ from modern biographical stories?
4. What different literary genres are found in the *Primary Chronicle*? What are the characteristics of the *Chronicle*?
5. Talk about the style and structure of the *Tale of Igor's Campaign*.
6. Talk about the period in which the *Tale* was written.
7. Read the *Tale of Igor's Campaign* and discuss how it is different from earlier texts?
8. Why are the Russian travelers' accounts important?

13th – 14th Century Russian Literature

The most important documents written on birch bark at the beginning of the 13th century were the *Novgorod Birch bark Writings* (*Novgorodskaya berestyaniya gramota*) from around the year 1200, and personal and commercial letters.

The other important works of this century are the *Supplication of Daniil Zatochnik* (*Molenie Daniila Zatochnika*), *The Battle on the River Kalka* (*Povest' o bitve na reke Kalke*), *The Tale of the Destruction of Riazan by Batu* (*Povest' o razorenii Ryazani Batiem*), *The Tale of the Downfall of Russia* (*Slovo o pogibeli Russkoy zemli*) and *The Tale of Life of Aleksander Nevsky* (*Zhitie Aleksandra Nevskogo*).

The themes of almost all works composed in the 14th century are the establishment of the centralized Russian state, the unity of Russian territory, the struggles to re-establish the independence of the lands invaded by the Tatars, and the crushing defeat inflicted on the leader of the Golden Horde, Mamai Khan, at the Battle of Kulikovo in the late 14th – early 15th centuries.

The most important literary works of this century are the *Story About the Bloody Battle of Grand Prince Dmitrii Ivanovich with Mamai* (*Povest' o poboishche velikogo knyazya Dmitriya Ivanovicha na Donu s Mamaem*), *Zadonshchina* (*Zadonshchina*), *Story About the Bloody Battle of Mamai* (*Skazanie o Mamaevom poboishche*), *The Life of the Metropolitan Peter* (*Zhitie metropolita Petra*), and *The Story About Timur Aksak* (*Povest' o Temir Aksake*).

Supplication of Daniil Zatochnik

An important early manuscript written in the 13th century is *Supplication of Daniil Zatochnik*, in two versions, the *Supplication* and the *Address*, found in copies from the 16th and 17th centuries. Both are believed to derive from an original version composed in the last decades before the Tatar invasions.

The Tale of the Battle on the River Kalka

The consequences of the Mongol invasions are depicted in the *Tale of the Battle of the River Kalka*, which survives in four separate versions: 1 - Lavrent'yev chronicle, 2 – First Novgorod chronicle, 3 - Īpat'yev chronicle, 4 - Tverskiy manual.

The Tale of the Destruction of Riazan by Batu

Written in the mid-13th century, *The Tale of the Destruction of Riazan by Batu* centers on the historical events during the Tatar's invasion of Ryazan on December, 1237.

The Tale of the Downfall of Russia

Another important composition from the same period is the *Tale of the Downfall of Russia*. It is an anonymous work focusing on the Tatar invasion of Russian territory. However, a complete version of the *Tale* does not exist.

The Tale of Life of Aleksander Nevsky

The *Tale of the Life of Alexander Nevsky*, written at the end of the 13th century, relates the life of Alexander Nevsky (1221-1262) and the important events that occurred during his reign. The main subjects of this work written after the death of Alexander Nevsky are the wars with the Livonian knights at Lake Cud, with the Swedes at Lake Neva, and his victories in other wars.

Story about the Bloody Battle of Grand Prince Dmitrii Ivanovich with Mamai

One of the first works of the 14th century, the *Story about the Bloody Battle of Grand Prince Dmitrii Ivanovich with Mamai* relates events prior to the Battle of Kulikovo. The epic ends with the murder of Mamai by Tokdamish, Tokdamish becoming the Golden Horde's new khan, the failure of the Russians (who had been weakened after the

Battle of Kulikovo) to muster the courage to start a new war against the Golden Horde which was marching on Moscow, the siege of Moscow and the Russians' agreement to pay tribute.

Zadonshchina

Another work composed in the last years of the 14th century and whose subject is the Battle of Kulikovo is the *Zadonshchina*, written by Sofoniy. It relates how the failure of the princes in Kayala to unite owing to the disputes among them resulted in Prince Igor's defeat. Inspired by the rhetoric in *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, this work seems to criticize the defeat described in *The Tale* and shows how victory should have been won.

Story about the Bloody Battle of Mamai

The main theme of this work written in the mid-15th century is the unity and integrity of the princes. The predominant idea in the work is the necessity for the Russian princes to unite in the war with Mamai for the sake of the Russian lands.

The Life of Metropolitan Peter

Prepared by Prokhor of Rostov and re-written by Kiprian in the 15th century, *The Life of the Metropolitan Peter* appears to be a work in which Kiprian defends himself through the personality of Peter.

The Story about Timur Aksak

Composed of two parts, the first part of *The Story about Timur Aksak* contains a legendary biography of Timur. The second part relates how an icon of the Virgin Mary was brought from Vladimir to Moscow after it was learned that Timur was on the borders of Russia, and Timur's withdrawal from Russian territory.

Reading Assignments:

- 1- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974, p. 193-198.
- 2- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974, p. 224-236.
- 3- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974, p. 249-255.
- 4- Petäys, M., The political narrative of the Life of Alexander Nevskiy as an instrument of Russian identity and order,
http://www.uta.fi/conference/PAG/PAG_papers_mari_maki_petays.pdf
- 5- Supplication of Daniil Zatochnik <http://clover.slavic.pitt.edu/zatochnik/>
- 6- Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, Meridian, 1974, p. 211-223.
- 7- Skazanie o poboishche velikogo knyazya Dmitriya Ivanovicha na Donu c Mamaem
<http://www.vostlit.info/Texts/rus8/Mamaj/text.phtml?id=895>
- 8- *Zadonshchina*
http://www.shsu.edu/~his_ncp/Zadon.html
- 9- *Zhitie metropolitana Petra* <http://people.ds.cam.ac.uk/jrh11/petmetpar.doc>
- 10- *Povest' o Temir Aksake*
http://www.gumer.info/bibliotek_Buks/History/Article/pov_temir.php

Questions:

- 1- Are there any stylistic changes in writings after the Mongol conquest?
- 2- Which Medieval Russian sources talk about the Mongol conquest? How are the Mongols described in the tales?
- 3- Describe the major events which occurred in the 13th century and their significance.
- 4- What sources mention the battle of Kulikovo?
- 5- Was the battle of Kulikovo the end of Mongolian domination?
- 6- What is the connection between the *Zadonshchina* and the *Tale of Igor's Campaign*? What similarities do you see to the *Tale*?