

70: Novgorod

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Setting the Scene: Actors and Factors

Novgorod's crucial positioning between the Baltic and the Northeastern Rus principalities yielded a textual culture that was highly distinctive, especially in its use of birchbark documents, yet widely connected. The Black Death reached the lands of Novgorod slightly later than in Western Europe, but the results were equally devastating. In 1352 Archbishop Vasilii Kalika of Novgorod travelled to Pskov, a city to the west, hoping to deliver Pskov from the plague by prayer. Having officiated in Pskov, he then died on his way back to Novgorod-- himself, apparently, a victim of the Black Death.

Previously a satellite of Novgorod, Pskov became politically independent in 1348, although it still acknowledged (with some reservations) the ecclesiastical authority of Novgorod's archbishop. In the middle of the fourteenth century Novgorod's territories bordered on the Grand Duchy of Lithuania in the south-west. South of Novgorod lay the principality of Rzheva, contested then by Lithuania and the principality of Tver, Novgorod's powerful neighbour in the south-east. Also bordering, in the south-east, was the small principality of Uglich, which apparently belonged then to the prince of Moscow. In the east Novgorod bordered the principalities of Iaroslavl and Belozero. Novgorod also controlled huge lands in the north and east, stretching from the Arctic Ocean to the Ural Mountains; its north-western neighbour was Finland, then part of the Swedish kingdom.

The political system of Novgorod differed from that of most other East Slavic polities. Novgorod was an oligarchy in which the local elite (*boyars*) dominated the town assembly (traditionally known as *veche*, though the term could have multiple meanings).¹ Different boyar factions competed for positions in the city administration. Their internal struggle occasionally led to violent conflicts, such as the uprising of 1418, which were mediated by the archbishop. Novgorod had no local princely

¹ For a revisionary view of Novgorod's political system, see Sevast'anova.

dynasty and so recruited its princes from other lands. Novgorod princes, unlike those of other East Slavic principalities, enjoyed little more power or status than a military commander. Novgorod escaped Mongol occupation, but had to pay taxes to the Mongol khan, first directly to him and later, in the fourteenth century, through the grand prince, who was installed by the khan. In the second half of the fourteenth century the title of *grand prince* went more and more often to the princes of Moscow. Novgorod tried to strike a balance between Moscow and another major regional power, the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, but was eventually annexed by Ivan III of Moscow in 1478.

Novgorodian culture was heavily dominated by the Orthodox Church. In addition to their spiritual duties, Archbishops Moisei (1325-30, 1352-1359), Vasilii Kalika (1331-1352), Aleksei (1360-1375, 1376-1388), Ioann (1388-1415), and Simeon (1415-1421) also acted as diplomats, judges in civil matters, and administrators, although 'they never attained the level of secular power of the Catholic bishops to their west'.² The archbishop was elected by the *veche* from the local clergy and ordained by the metropolitan. The Novgorodian Church lay in the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople and the metropolitan of Kiev and all Rus (who usually resided in Moscow). However, the Novgorodian archbishopric insisted on its autonomy. In 1385 the Novgorodians took advantage of a conflict between different candidates for the metropolitan see by rejecting the metropolitan's right to hold an appeal court in the city, thereby depriving him of corresponding fees. The matter, which led to Metropolitan Kiprian (1381-82, 1390-1406) temporarily excommunicating the Novgorodians, was referred to the patriarch of Constantinople. Despite the support of the patriarch and the prince of Moscow, neither Kiprian nor his successor Metropolitan Photios (Fotii, 1408-1431) succeeded in fully restoring the right of the appeal court in Novgorod.

Ecclesiastic contacts between Novgorod and Byzantium facilitated the transmission of Byzantine cultural models into Novgorodian literature, icon painting, and church building. Byzantine forms, however, were often transformed in the cultural context of East Slavic Orthodoxy. As elsewhere in Eastern Rus, the impact of classical works and mid-fourteenth-century Byzantine theological disputes on Novgorodian culture was very limited.

² Paul, p. 238.

A lively commercial city, Novgorod was home to one of the largest offices of the Hansa, which included two local branches, the German and Gotland yards. The Hanseatic colony in Novgorod numbered as many as 150-200 people. Two Catholic churches were, or had been, active in the city. One of them, St. Olaf's at the Gotland yard, was probably closed after a fire in 1311, while another, St. Peter's at the German yard, was still standing in 1570. Novgorod's diverse contacts with non-Orthodox peoples (Finno-Ugric tribes, the Swedes, German merchants) are reflected in church texts (which view such contacts in the context of Orthodox triumphalism), and in administrative and judicial texts, which focus on matters of commerce, justice, and diplomacy.

Scriptoria and book exchange

Book-related activities of the archbishopric were concentrated in its scriptorium, which was probably located at the archbishop's residence adjacent to the cathedral of St. Sophia. The archbishopric could also employ scribes from monastic scriptoria. The copying of a Gospel cost 6 *soroks* (bundles of 40 furs), the cost of low quality parchment used for such a codex being 1 *sorok*. For comparison, a stallion cost 5 *soroks*. A large-format codex of 221 folia was produced by a group of probably five scribes over twenty-four days.³ The main output of local scriptoria was liturgical works for churches and monasteries in the Novgorodian diocese. Such books were the most common types of literary texts circulating among cultured Novgorodians. The repertoire of these works reveals contacts between local literati and other centres of Orthodoxy. Among the surviving books commissioned by Archbishops Moisei, Aleksei, and Ioann are several Gospels, two *Synaxaria* (*Prolog*), two *Menaia*, an *Epistle Lectionary* (*Apostol*), a *Taktikon* of Nikon of the Black Mountain, and an *Hieratikon* (*Sluzhebnik*). All the Gospels belong to the Aprakos type (weekly or service Gospels), and most of them are decorated with terratologic headpieces and initials. The *Menaion* of Archbishop Ioann (1398) follows the Studite typikon. This

³ Stolarova, nos. 385, 482.

indicates that despite Metropolitan Kiprian's attempts to introduce the Jerusalem typikon, the Studite typikon still remained in use in Novgorod during this period.⁴

Some Novgorodian scriptoria cannot be localised, but the Novgorodian origin of their codices can be established on the basis of textual evidence, linguistic features, style of miniatures, and scribal notations. These include two illuminated Gospels (*Khludovskoe Evangelie* and *Evangelie Obolenskikh*, the latter featuring miniatures attributed to Serbian masters), a miscellanea (*Sil'vestrovskii sbornik*) containing 12 works, among them works about saints Boris and Gleb, and the apocryphal Apocalypse of Abraham; and two illuminated *Synaxaria* from the late 14th-early 15th centuries (*Tipografskii Prolog* and *Pogodin Prolog*). The *Pogodin Synaxarion* includes the commemorations of saints Boris and Gleb, of Ludmila and Wenceslas of Bohemia, and of St Clement.⁵

Novgorodian scribes left in their codices numerous notations: supplications to God for help in their work, prayers for their patrons, requests that the reader should correct errors and not blame the scribe, curses on book thieves, complaints about a bad quill, and occasionally expressive statements, such as 'a hare is happy after escaping a snare, and so is a scribe having completed the last line' (*Pogodin Synaxarion*).⁶ The above mentioned *Menaion* of Archbishop Ioann features a notation by the scribe Grigorii Slavets on the victorious Dvina campaign of the Novgorodians against Vasili I of Moscow in 1398. This annalistic record is indicative of Ioann's support of the campaign, which was blessed by him.

Scriptoria of the oldest Novgorodian monasteries seem not to have been very active because these monasteries were *kelliotic*, meaning that their monks lived in individual cells and possessed private property. A monk who had donated a book to the monastery but subsequently decided to leave could take back his book. In these circumstances, the monks of the prestigious monastery of St. George (Iur'ev) preferred to commission books in other scriptoria rather than copy codices themselves.⁷ Unlike St. George's, however, the scriptorium of the monastery of the Nativity of the Mother of God at Fox Hill (Lisich'ia Gorka, 7.5 km from Novgorod, no longer extant) is noteworthy for diversity of output. The productivity of this

⁴ Ianin, pp. 164-5, 292-3, 401, 440; Shvarts, 18-19; Stoliarova, nos. 372, 385, 388. On Kiprian, see ch. 69 above.

⁵ Ianin (ed.), pp. 164, 166, 294, 433, 401.

⁶ Stoliarova, no. 390.

⁷ Bobrov, 'Monastyrskie', pp. 13-23, 41; Stoliarova, no. 228.

scriptorium can be explained by the fact that Fox Hill was a cenobium, in which monks had to give up all property and take part in all works, including book copying. A.G. Bobrov has identified 14 existing and lost codices produced or owned by the monastery between the late fourteenth and earlier fifteenth centuries, including the *Paraenesis* attributed to St. Ephraim the Syrian (with the apocryphal *Story on the Miracles in Persia* by Aphroditian and some other additions), a *Liturgical Menaion* (late 14th c., the earliest Novgorodian *Menaion* following the Jerusalem typicon), a *Synodicon*, a *Fortune-Telling Psalter*, two *Ladders* of John Climacus, and other works.

Some books connected with Fox Hill suggest cultural exchange with Athos. Among them is the above-mentioned *Taktikon* of Nikon of the Black Mountain, commissioned by Archbishop Ioann for the monastery in 1397. O.V. Zvegintseva attributes the manuscript to the archbishopric scriptorium, but Bobrov and L.V. Stoliarova seem correct in asserting that the codex originates from the scriptorium of Fox Hill.⁸ According to the scribes of the *Taktikon*-- Iakov and Pimen, who called themselves *kalugery* (good elders)-- the work was copied from a manuscript brought by the abbot Ilarion of Fox Hill from Athos. The *Story* of Aphroditian, also copied at Fox Hill, reveals abortive attempts to correct the existing Slavic translation using the Greek text. Several of the codices originating from Fox Hill are decorated with headpieces executed in the 'Balkan style'. The *Menaion* of Fox Hill reveals connections with the Serbian *Taktikon*. Such Serbian influence apparently came via Athos.⁹ On the whole, the codices produced at or owned by Fox Hill reflect cross-cultural contacts that fall into the category of what has been vaguely described as the 'Second South Slavic influence'.¹⁰

Organising Historical Memory

In the 1330s a scribe finished copying a manuscript of a Novgorodian chronicle on parchment. Three additional folia with entries covering the period from 1331 to 1352 were later added to the main manuscript. Known by the place of its later storage as the

⁸ Zvegintseva, p. 265; Bobrov, 'Knigopisnaia', p. 82; Stoliarova, no. 385.

⁹ Shvarts, pp. 27-8; Bobrov, 'Knigopisnaia', p. 90-95; Birnbaum, 'Serbian'.

¹⁰ See ch. 69 above.

Synod copy (S) of the *Novgorodian First Chronicle*, this manuscript is now the oldest extant copy of a Rus chronicle (*letopis*).¹¹ A *letopis* is a collection of discrete records arranged by years. In terms of format, a *letopis* is closer to Western annals than to Byzantine chronicles (which are usually arranged not by years, but by the reigns of individual emperors).¹² Like many Western annalistic works, Rus chronicles were open-ended, designed to be continued as the years went by. This has generated various opinions about the purpose of chronicle writing in Rus, including Novgorod. The traditional interpretation holds that the chroniclers were serving the political interests of their patrons (princes and bishops). Recent studies, however, suggest that the chronicles were conceived as a form of documentary evidence, similar to modern minutes, or as books recording the works of the dead to be produced on Judgement Day (Dan 12:1, Rev 20:12).¹³

S in its present form is a manuscript made up of different parts written in different hands and covering the period 1016 through 1352 (the beginning of the manuscript and the quire for 1273-1298 have been lost). It records various political, military, economic, and ecclesiastical events in Novgorod and the lands under its rule. S was probably connected with St. George's monastery, although it is unclear to what extent the monastic scriptorium was involved in its production. The scriptorium might have been responsible for assorted records made at the end of S in the 1350s, many of them dealing with the monastery, but the rest of S may have been produced elsewhere. Like practically all existing Rus chronicles, S is a compilation of several earlier chronicles. Scholars assert that its main sources were two hypothetical works: an early chronicle of St. George's monastery, and the official chronicle of the Novgorodian archbishopric. Started around 1116 as a princely chronicle, the latter was taken over by the bishop of Novgorod in the 1130s and then sustained all the way to the annexation of Novgorod by Moscow in 1478. It is assumed that this archiepiscopal chronicle was a 'living' chronicle similar to the *Annals of Inisfallen*.¹⁴

¹¹ Tikhomirov, *Novgorodskaja*; PSRL 3 (Moscow, 2000), 15-100; Michell, pp. 2-144. S is also known as the Older Recension of the *Novgorodian First Chronicle*. See Timberlake; Guimon, 'Novgorodian'.

¹² Gimon and Gippius, 'Russkoe'; Gimon, *Istoriopisanie*. This closeness is purely typological as there is no evidence that Western annals influenced East Slavic chronicles in any way.

¹³ Danilevskii; Gimon, 'Dlia chego'. Henrik Birnbaum (*Novgorod*, p. 134) downplays the creativeness of Novgorodian bookmen in arguing that, unlike elsewhere in Rus, chronicle-writing in Novgorod was the preferred form of straightforward historical recording, but did not serve the purposes of entertaining, edifying, or pursuing any genuinely literary ambitions.

¹⁴ 'Living' chronicles were composed by one man up to his own time and then edited and/or continued by him and by others: see Gransden, pp. 29-20

A.A. Gippius attributes different parts of S to chroniclers of particular bishops on the basis of a sophisticated formal analysis of S and a related later chronicle.¹⁵ Such reconstruction is, however, impeded by the complex textual history of the existing Novgorodian chronicles, many parts of which derive not directly from the non-extant diocesan chronicle, but rather from intermediate manuscripts, also lost.

Unlike S, with its focus on Novgorod, a set of interrelated texts known as the *Novgorodian Karamzin Chronicle* (named after a later owner of its manuscript) demonstrates wider interest in other territories of Rus. The manuscript contains two annalistic texts, one (NK1) ending in 1411, another (NK2) continuing up to 1428. Although the existing copy dates to the late 15th-early 16th centuries, the texts themselves were compiled earlier. G.M. Prokhorov and Bobrov see them as two distinct chronicles. According to Prokhorov, they were ‘living’ chronicles: the compilers of NK1 worked continuously over the course of the period 1185-1411. NK1 influenced (through an intermediate chronicle) NK2, whose lifespan was shorter: started in 1347, NK2 was finished in 1428. Bobrov accepts Prokhorov’s view of the relationship between NK1 and NK2 with some modifications, but sees their preparation not as a continuous process, but as one-offs occurring in the years when the chronicle accounts end: NK1 was thus created in 1411 and NK2 in 1428.¹⁶

Bobrov links the compilation of NK1 with the literary activities of Archimandrite Varlaam of St. George’s monastery, former abbot of Fox Hill, during his stay in St. Sergii’s Holy Trinity monastery (78 km from Moscow) in 1411-1412. St. Sergii’s Trinity, then home to such luminaries as the hagiographer Epifanii the Wise and possibly the icon painter Andrei Rublev, was experiencing an outburst of creative activity. Bobrov plausibly identifies Archimandrite Varlaam with a scribe of the same name who copied the *Ladder* of John Climacus in St. Sergii’s Trinity. Varlaam might have travelled to north-eastern Rus in connection with Archbishop Ioann of Novgorod’s mission to Moscow. The aim of Ioann’s voyage was to meet the new metropolitan Photios, who demonstrated a more balanced attitude to Novgorod than his predecessor Kiprian. Varlaam or somebody from his entourage took advantage of the improved relations between Novgorod and the metropolitan to create a chronicle that would combine Novgorodian chronicles with annals from other parts

¹⁵ Gimon and Gippius, ‘Novye’, p. 29; Gippius, ‘Novgorodskaja’.

¹⁶ PSRL 42 (St. Petersburg, 2002); Prokhorov; Bobrov, *Novgorodskie*, pp. 93-166; Bobrov, ‘Novgorodian’, p. 1157. For an alternative view of NK1 and NK2 as parts of one non-extant chronicle, see Lur’e’s introduction to PSRL 42. 3-13.

of Rus. A later copy of that chronicle, which Bobrov calls the *Compilation of 1411*, has come down to us as NK1.

NK1 reveals keen interest in Kiev, and (naturally) Novgorod, but tends to ignore the principality of Vladimir, which included Moscow. Prokhorov thinks that NK1 was created with a view to adding information about Vladimir later. Atsuo Nakadzava suggests that such selective coverage may reflect the complexity of relations between the Novgorodian archbishopric and Moscow-based metropolitans.¹⁷ The chronicler's (or his patron's) concern about that matter may have led to the inclusion in NK1 of two letters relating to the instalment of Metropolitan Photios in 1410: a letter of the Byzantine Emperor Manouel II and the Patriarch Matthaïos I of Constantinople to the Novgorodians, urging them to respect the judicial prerogative of the metropolitan; and a letter from Photios to Novgorod which diplomatically avoids the problem of jurisdiction and focuses on piety and obedience to canon law.

Chronicles and Creative Writing

Like Western annals, the Novgorodian chronicles often include individual literary works and epistles. Such texts tend to evolve from one chronicle to the next, with later chroniclers adding or inventing more details. Thus S contains an early version of the *Tale of the Battle between the Novgorodians and the Suzdalians in 1170*. The rhetorical element in the narrative is limited to standard clichés about divine forces interceding to assist the Novgorodians. NK2 adds to the tale a story about the miracle-working icon of the Mother of God from the Church of the Saviour on Il'ina street. When Suzdalian arrows fell upon Novgorod like rain, the icon, which had been installed on the city walls, turned its face to the city. Darkness fell on the Suzdalians, and the Novgorodians easily defeated them. This miracle led to the establishment of the feast of the Sign of the Mother of God.¹⁸ The chronicle tale in NK2 is textually linked with a separate work, the *Sermon about the Sign (Slovo o znamenii)*. Written probably in the 1340s-1350s, the *Sermon* presents a dramatised account of the miracle. Interest in the victory of 1170 might have been enjoying a topical revival in Novgorod, given the military conflict with Moscow in 1340. In 1354-5, Archbishop

¹⁷ Prokhorov, p. 174; Nakadzava, *Issledovaniia*, p. 266.

¹⁸ PSRL 3. 33; 42. 104.

Moisei commissioned a church dedicated to the Sign of the Mother of God on the same Il'ina street mentioned in NK2. The cult of the Sign was later to generate numerous works and icons dedicated to the miracle.¹⁹

Uneasy relations between Novgorod and Sweden resulted in the creation of the fictional *Testament of King Magnus of Sweden* (*Rukopisanie Magnusha*), which appears in NK2, the *Sophia First Chronicle* (So1C, manuscript of the late 15th century), and later chronicles. In 1347-9, Magnus Eriksson, king of Norway (1319-1355) and Sweden (1319-1364), launched a crusade against the lands of Novgorod. The campaign ended in Magnus' defeat, and he died in a shipwreck off Norway on 1 December 1374. The purported *Testament of Magnus* tells of his allegedly surviving the shipwreck on a piece of ship's planking, reaching an Orthodox monastery on the banks of a river, and becoming an Orthodox monk. Now, nearing his death, he instructs the Swedes to avoid attacking Rus. Nakadzava, dating the *Testament* to ca 1411-1413, proposes that it was compiled during a conflict between pro-Moscow and pro-Lithuanian groupings at the archbishop's court (because the *Testament's* reference to Rus, rather than Novgorod, may reflect a Muscovite perspective). John Lind links the *Testament* with the Valaam monastery, and specifically with the intrusion of subjects of the Swedish crown into the monastery's neighbourhood at the turn of the fourteenth to fifteenth centuries.²⁰

The *Testament* and other records in NK2 thematize the triumph of Orthodoxy by juxtaposing the image of Magnus, intent on converting the Novgorodians to Catholicism, with that of Archbishop Vasili Kalika, a defender of Orthodoxy. In 1347, prior to his campaign against Novgorod, Magnus had requested Vasili to organise a religious disputation: but the archbishop had refused, referring the king to Constantinople (whence the Novgorodians received their faith). Following his conversion, Magnus, according to the *Testament*, took the monastic name Grigorii. From the perspective of narrative strategy, it is hardly coincidental that Grigorii was the archbishop's lay name. One may also note that despite the fact that Magnus actually died in 1374, the chronicler placed his *Testament* under 1352, the year of Vasili's death.²¹

¹⁹ Dmitriev, pp. 95-148.

²⁰ Nakadzava, *Rukopisanie*; Lind, 'Religiozno-politicheskie predposylki'.

²¹ Nakadzava, *Rukopisanie*, pp. 37, 81 n. 10. Nakadzava thinks that the *Testament* was initially written as a separate document and was later included in a hypothetical chronicle compilation prepared under Metropolitan Photios in 1418-19. However, the parallels between the literary images of Magnus and

In the context of this literary juxtaposition it is significant that in So1C Magnus' request for a theological disputation is followed by an *Epistle* ascribed to Vasilii Kalika and addressed to Bishop Fedor Dobryi of Tver.²² The *Epistle* purports to be a response to a controversy over paradise among the Tverian clergy, during which Fedor allegedly argued that the original, earthly paradise perished and that paradise was now only a spiritual, noetic construct. Without denying noetic paradise, the creator of the *Epistle* argues that 'we have not heard about the downfall of the [earthly] paradise, and Scripture says nothing about that'. To sustain his argument, the compiler quotes Scripture, the *Prophetologion*, the *Synaxarion*, John Chrysostom, church hymns, as well as some apocrypha about people visiting the earthly paradise, plus legends about Novgorodian travellers witnessing this paradise and hell on earth. Such eclecticism poses difficulties for scholars. Some try to reconcile the appearance of ecclesiastic texts and travel legends in the *Epistle* by arguing that Vasilii shared the naïve-realistic views of the urban population, and even that he was tolerant of the *strigol'niki*, a heretical movement that rejected the priesthood, the sale of requiems and confession, and that advocated a mysterious practice of confessing to the earth.²³ However, there is no positive evidence that the *strigol'niki*, who are first mentioned in the sources in 1375, existed during Vasilii's lifetime. Furthermore, we have no texts produced by them.²⁴ Other scholars see Vasilii as an Orthodox zealot, but do not explain why the *Epistle* includes colourful travel legends that are atypical of the letters of Novgorodian bishops (explored below).²⁵

The chronicle text of the *Epistle* reveals important literary parallels with the *Testament of Magnus*. Both works defend Orthodoxy: the *Testament* from the Catholics, and the *Epistle* from internal discord allegedly inspired by the devil. Both texts are based on established literary models. The *Testament* replicates the format of Novgorodian wills.²⁶ The *Epistle* is partially modelled after the First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians, from which it directly quotes 1 Cor 2:9. Like Paul, the compiler of the *Epistle* embarks on a mission of correcting internal disorder after learning about

Vasilii detected by Nakadzava make sense only in the context of the chronicle. This suggests that the *Testament* was intended for the *Compilation* of Photios or some other chronicle from the very start.

²² BLDR, 6. 42-49; PSRL 6, 1 (Moscow, 2000), pp. 422-428.

²³ Kazakova, Lur'e, pp. 36-37; Khoroshev, pp. 69-70.

²⁴ B.A. Rybakov's attempts to attribute some codices and works of art to the *strigol'niki* are unconvincing: see Rybakov, *Strigol'niki*, plus Lur'e's, review of Rybakov; Alexeev, 'A few notes'; Goldfrank, 'Burn', and his chapter (69) in this volume.

²⁵ Klibanov, p. 141; Kirillin, p. 771; Lonchakova, 'O kruge'.

²⁶ Nakadzava, *Rukopisanie*, pp. 75-79.

conflicts within a church community (cf. *1Cor* 1:10, 11). The compiler's claim of having personal, albeit naturally indirect, experience of Christ's earthly life during his travel to Jerusalem echoes Paul's personal witnessing of Christ (*1Cor* 9:1).

Furthermore, the *Testament* and the *Epistle* utilise Western sources. The creator of the *Testament* knew about Magnus' life in Sweden and Norway and the real circumstances of his death. Some details of Magnus' biography outlined in the *Testament* are corroborated by Swedish sources. The compiler of the *Testament* might have received information about Magnus from Swedish merchants residing in Novgorod, or via Gotland. The *Epistle*'s stories about travels to the earthly paradise find parallels in medieval German authors, in particular Heinrich von der Neuenstadt, and in Irish tales of sea voyages (*imram*).²⁷ Novgorod's commercial relations with Western Europe might easily have facilitated the transmission of Western travel tales; the theme of sea travel is prominent both in the *Epistle* and the *Testament*.

Vasilii Kalika had close contacts with the princely family of Tver;²⁸ the possibility of his actually writing a letter to the bishop of Tver thus cannot be excluded.²⁹ But the chronicle version of Vasilii's *Epistle* is surely a result of later editing, or of creative writing. It probably originates from the same circles that produced the *Testament of Magnus* in the 1410s, most likely some Novgorodians involved in preparing a chronicle. The interest taken by these creative bookmen in Magnus' crusade was apparently extended to Magnus' religious opponent, Archbishop Vasilii. The extent of these bookmen's contributions to the existing text of the *Epistle* is hard to determine, however, because the chronicle version of the *Epistle* is the oldest surviving version of the work.³⁰ The compiler of the *Testament* obviously took an interest in sea adventures. It is almost certain that the circles that created the *Testament* were responsible for the appearance of the travel legends in the *Epistle*.

It is possible that other parts of the *Epistle*, perhaps its entire text, were also produced in the 1410s. Views of paradise similar to those attributed to Vasilii in the

²⁷ Veselovskii.

²⁸ SKKDR 1: 94.

²⁹ If such letter existed, it should be dated to the period extending from the beginning of Fedor's episcopacy in 1342 to Vasilii's death in 1352; the chronicle date of 1347 is a literary convention.

³⁰ There are different variants of the chronicle version of the *Epistle*, all of them lacking an ending. Seventeenth-century copies of the *Epistle* feature a conclusion. G.A. Lonchakova thinks that 17th-century scribes accessed an older, fuller version of the *Epistle*, but the 'conclusion' is most likely a later addition (Lonchakova, 'Poslanie').

Epistle can be found in a fifteenth-century Slavonic translation of Gregory the Sinaite.³¹ Such parallels suggest that the ‘theological’ parts of the *Epistle* about paradise also originated in the fifteenth century. They might have been anachronistically attributed to Vasilii Kalika, remembered as an influential cleric with diverse contacts beyond Novgorodian territory.

The chronicle version of the *Epistle* formed part of attempts to extend the influence of the Novgorodian archbishopric in neighbouring territories under Archbishops Ioann and Simeon (see below on their epistles). As a literary text, the *Epistle* is interesting because its mystical terminology and emphasis on spiritual experience reflect the general impact of hesychasm, with its stress on a more personal form of religion.³²

‘Authorial’ Texts

In addition to the *Testament of Magnus* and the *Epistle* ascribed to Vasilii Kalika, some other Novgorodian texts are attributed to individual persons. These ‘authorial’ works have often come down to us in later copies, something that makes it hard to distinguish between their original versions and later recensions. Still, unlike the *Testament* and the *Epistle*, the content of these texts is normally rather traditional.

Archbishop Ioann is credited with writing an epistle to the population of the Dvina region about the installation of an abbot and the establishing of daily service in the local St. Michael’s monastery, c. 1397. His broader aim was to secure Novgorodian presence in the disputed territory during a conflict with Moscow, in which Ioann took an active part (see his *Menaion*, discussed above). He also issued a decree and a letter to the peasants of St. Sophia concerning a miracle of an icon of three martyrs which took place in 1410. The miracle, probably revealing the identities of some thieves of church vessels, prompted Ioann to instruct his servitors on using the icon and on praying to the martyrs when administering justice. The extant oeuvre of Ioann’s successor, Archbishop Simeon, is devoted to strengthening the position of his see in Pskov following Novgorod’s peace with Pskov in 1418. Simeon delivered a sermon in Pskov on obeying the archbishopric and wrote an epistle to a Pskovian

³¹ Uspenskii, p. 108.

³² Meyendorff, pp. 127-128.

monastery about the irregularities of monastic life and the judicial autonomy of the monastery.³³

Novgorodians' perception of holy places is exemplified by Stefan of Novgorod's account of his pilgrimage to Constantinople. The earliest extant manuscripts date to the sixteenth century but, from textual evidence, Stefan's journey can be dated to April 1349.³⁴ Novgorodians had travelled to Constantinople as early as the turn of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Such contacts were facilitated by the Novgorodian archdiocese's aspiration to liaise with the patriarch of Constantinople directly, bypassing the metropolitan of Rus. Greek masters, including the celebrated icon painter Theophanes (Feofan), undertook commissions in Novgorod.³⁵ We have, however, no positive information about Stefan beyond the fact that he was from Novgorod, although it cannot be excluded that he wrote his account in Pskov. Circumstantial evidence suggests that he was a wealthy layman travelling on his own initiative. Together with eight companions he visited Constantinople en route to Jerusalem. D.S. Likhachev has argued that Jerusalem was less attractive for Stefan than Constantinople, since Jerusalem played little part in Novgorodian church politics and had fewer objects of art than Byzantium's capital.³⁶ Jerusalem was, nonetheless, Stefan's main destination. References to Jerusalem appear at the beginning and at the end of his account of Constantinople. His description of the equestrian statue of Justinian, whose hand pointed (according to Stefan) in the direction of Jerusalem, suggests that he perceived the cultural geography of Constantinople from the perspective of his voyage to the Holy Land.

The content and syntax of the extant text suggests the influence of earlier travel accounts (especially the twelfth-century account of Hegumen Daniil's pilgrimage to Palestine), plus the instructions of Constantinopolitan local guides, and of prescriptive guidebooks about Constantinople which appeared in Rus in the late fourteenth century.³⁷ Stefan's account provides factual descriptions of the holy places visited in Constantinople and recites legends associated with them. Occasionally, the descriptions are supplemented with clichéd expressions of emotion, such as 'no one can see the instruments of the Passion without tears'. Like the *Epistle* attributed to

³³ Shakhmatov, pp. 145-146; RIB 6 (St. Petersburg, 1880), cols. 305-308, 389-392, 401-402; RFA 3 (Moscow, 1987), 494-495; SKKDR 2.1: 407-6; 2.2: 333-334; Ianin, pp. 224-5; 433.

³⁴ Ševčenko.

³⁵ Speranskii; Majeska; Petrov.

³⁶ Likhachev, 'Literatura', pp. 122-123.

³⁷ Majeska, pp. 106-107; Demin, *O drevnerusskom*, pp. 167-169.

Vasilii Kalika, Stefan's narrative emphasises personal witnessing of the holy sites. Seeing the relics and making physical (kissing) contact with them is obviously more important to him than encounters with Christian texts. He does not quote Scripture, although he mentions some unspecified books in connection with a story about St. Theodosia. Stefan also reports that Theodore the Studite (d. 826) allegedly sent a *Typikon*, *Triodions*, and other books to Rus.

During his visit, Stefan saw the patriarch, who took notice of the Novgorodians and was kind enough to let them kiss his hand. Impressed by the accessibility of the patriarch, Stefan notes that this was very different from the customs of the clergy in his homeland. According to Stefan, the patriarch was so welcoming because he liked the Rus; a skeptical commentator noted, however, that the patriarch was then expecting Rus to provide him with alms.³⁸

Vox populi? Birchbark documents

'Instruction to the priest from the priest's wife. What happened with you is known to Onaniia; Kiur'iak disseminates this now. So, take care of this'.³⁹ Devoted to something that compromised the priest, this laconic letter was incised on birchbark – material that was smooth, moisture resistant, abundant, and cheap – in Novgorod in the late fourteenth century. A thousand birchbark documents dating between the eleventh to fifteenth centuries have been unearthed in Novgorod. Birchbark documents are typically short business messages concerning debts, goods, household management, and commerce. We also find among birchbark documents private correspondence, including love letters, wills, petitions, deeds, and a small number of literary texts. Different 'genres' could easily mix: one document includes a report of a robbery, a list of debtors, and a love spell: 'so, let your heart, your body, and your soul burn [with passion] for me, my body and my face' (1400-1410).⁴⁰

³⁸ Speranskii, pp. 47, 63, 64.

³⁹ Zalizniak, *Drevnerusskii*, p. 628, no. 538. Other editions of birchbark documents include *NGB* and <http://gramoty.ru>

⁴⁰ Zalizniak, *Drevnerusskii*, p. 654-656, no. 521. Hereafter the dates of birchbark documents are given in brackets. Scholars date birchbark documents using a combination of stratigraphy and dendrochronology (i.e. the position of a document in the ground in relation to dendrochronologically datable layers of wooden pavement), as well as palaeographic, textual, and linguistic evidence.

Birchbark literacy was widespread among the urban elite-- which was predominantly lay and male, and included boyars and their relatives and agents. However, as the above example shows, other social groups, including women, were not excluded. There is much uncertainty about who actually *wrote* the birchbark documents. Indication of the sender in the third person may simply imply the commissioning of a scribe: in this case our priest's wife, referred to in the letter in the third person, would likely have hired somebody to write for her. At the same time, some senders obviously possessed the requisite literate skills, as birchbark texts include pupils' exercises, alphabets, and instructions to teach children how to read and write. This is why A.A. Zalizniak, a leading authority on birchbark documents, thinks that the priest's wife would not have trusted the writing of her confidential letter to a third party.⁴¹ But would she herself have written to her husband in such an impersonal style?

Unlike literary works, which are normally written in or heavily influenced by Church Slavonic, most of the birchbark documents are in the Old East Slavic vernacular (also known as the 'Novgorodian dialect'). Language barriers, however, were penetrable. Church Slavonic appears in wills and in the text of a church hymn recorded on birchbark. A riddle, based on the apocryphal *Conversation of the Three Hierarchs*, also mixes Church Slavonic and the vernacular: 'there is a city between the earth and the sky; a messenger is going to it without having a way, bringing an unwritten letter'.⁴² Deviations from Orthodox culture were discouraged, but no doubt existed. One birchbark text contains invectives against some 'heathens' who became involved in 'unlawful' affairs, apparently pagan practices or heresy (1340s-1360s).⁴³ Some texts teeter at the borderline between Orthodox culture and other cultural traditions. A spell against fever (1380s-1390s) reinterprets an apocryphal legend of St. Sisinnius (an Aramaic legend also known from Jewish, Syrian, Arabic, Greek, Coptic, Ethiopian, Armenian, Romanian, and Slavic literary sources).⁴⁴ The format of this document suggests that it is a fragment of a birchbark book.

Birchbark documents reveal linguistic interactions with other languages. Novgorod's diverse commercial contacts explain the appearance of words borrowed

⁴¹ Birnbaum, *Novgorod*, 79; Franklin, p. 39; Zalizniak, *Drevnerusskii*, p. 628.

⁴² Zalizniak, *Drevnerusskii*, pp. 617, 619, 641-642, nos. 10, 42, 128. In this riddle the city is to be understood as Noah's ark, the messenger is the dove, and the letter an olive branch.

⁴³ Zalizniak, *Drevnerusskii*, p. 558, no. 317.

⁴⁴ Zalizniak, *Drevnerusskii*, p. 694, no. 930; Gippius, "Sisnieva".

from Old Czech and Low German describing different kinds of cloth. The ethnic heterogeneity of population in the Novgorodian lands manifests itself in the petitions of Karelians, written in impeccable East Slavic (obviously by a hired scribe). They contain complaints to the Novgorodian authorities about border conflicts with subjects of the Swedish crown. A Novgorodian tax collector jotted a glossary of Karelian (Finnic) phrases relating to his occupation.⁴⁵ Latin was alien to the Novgorodians, although Westerners residing in Novgorod followed the local custom of utilising birchbark as material for writing. One birchbark document, discovered at the site of the Gotland yard (1380-1400), features a Latin inscription executed by an accomplished scribe. The text includes fragments of the daily liturgy (the beginning of Psalm 94 and a hymn to the Virgin) and probably served as *aide memoire* for a member of St Peter's church choir.⁴⁶

* * *

Despite the officially isolationist stance of the Orthodox Church, Novgorod's close commercial links with Catholic merchants and the geographical proximity of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Sweden inevitably led to political and cultural interaction with Western Christianity. At the height of the conflict between Novgorod and the metropolitan in the early 1390s, Novgorodian envoys to Constantinople threatened the patriarch, who supported the metropolitan, with Novgorod's conversion to Catholicism.⁴⁷ There are no signs that Catholicism enjoyed any serious support among the Novgorodian elite. But such rhetoric, as well as the political ambitions of the Grand Duke of Lithuania and tactical alliances between Novgorod and some Lithuanian princes, stimulated the interest of Catholic activists in Novgorod. Pope Martin V named Jagiello (Władysław II) and Vytautas of Lithuania as Catholic legates for Novgorod and Pskov at Constance in 1418.⁴⁸

A Teutonic knight of Burgundian origin, Ghillbert de Lannoy, visited Novgorod in 1413. In his memoirs de Lannoy describes the climate, geography, fortifications, political system, and economy of Novgorod. According to him, unlike the Pskovians,

⁴⁵ Zalizniak, *Drevnerusskii*, pp. 597, 598, 622-625, nos. 130, 403, 248, 249.

⁴⁶ *NGB 1962-1976*, pp. 80-83, 167-191, no. 488. On Latin in Rus, see Franklin, p. 108.

⁴⁷ RIB 6. *Prilozheniia*, cols. 255-258.

⁴⁸ Turgenev, 1. 117-119; Brandmüller, 2. 409.

both Novgorodian men and women braided their hair.⁴⁹ Novgorodians with braids bringing bundles of furs to Hanseatic merchants also appear in the carved pews of St. Nicholas' Church at Stralsund (1270-1360).⁵⁰ These Baltic German images represent the Novgorodians as a forest people engaged in hunting and logging. But this people also had resourceful bookmen who left us a diverse and highly distinctive written culture which, while profoundly Orthodox, reflects cross-cultural interchange with many locales, near and far.

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⁴⁹ Mund.

⁵⁰ Recent research suggests that the scene may take place in Riga rather than in Novgorod. Weitzel, pp.184-189, 400; Wemhoff, pp. 42-48; <http://www.novgorod1150.com/ganza/novgorod/> (accessed 23 August 2010).

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Abbreviations

BLDR –Likhachev, D.S. and others (ed.). *Biblioteka literatury Drevnei Rusi*, 20 vols projected (St. Petersburg, 1997–).

NGB 1962-1976 – Artsikhovskii, A.V. and Ianin, V.L. (ed.). *Novgorodskie gramoty na bereste: Iz raskopok 1962-1976 gg.* (Moscow, 1978).

NIS - *Novgorodskii istoricheskii sbornik*, 21 vols to date (Leningrad, St. Petersburg, 1936-2008).

NK1 – Novgorodian Karamzin chronicle, text 1.

NK2 – Novgorodian Karamzin chronicle, text 2.

RIB – *Russkaia istoricheskaia biblioteka*, 39 vols. (St. Petersburg-Leningrad, 1872-1927).

PSRL – *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, 43 vols. to date (St. Petersburg, Petrograd, Moscow, 1841-2004), reprints and new editions.

RFA – Pliguzov, A.I. and others (ed.). *Russkii feodal'nyi arkhiv XIV-pervoi treti XVI veka*, 5 vols. (Moscow, 1986-1992)

S – Synod copy of the Novgorodian First Chronicle

SKKDR – Likhachev, D.S. (ed.). *Slovar' knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnei Rusi*, 3 vols. in 7 issues (Leningrad, St. Petersburg, 1987–2004).

So1C – Sophia First Chronicle

TODRL – *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury*, 60 vols to date (Moscow, Leningrad, St. Petersburg, 1934-2009).