Dressing a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Toward Understanding the Composition of the Life of Alexander Nevskii

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Dressing a Wolf in Sheep’s Clothing: Toward Understanding the Composition of the Life of Alexander Nevskii

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Abstract
The Life of Alexander Nevskii is written in two styles: a hagiographic style and a secular style. Scholarly views are divided over whether the Life was written by one person in two different styles or by two persons, either a hagiographic writer and secular editor or a secular writer and hagiographic editor. The present article hypothesizes that the Life was probably written initially in a secular style as a military tale (the “wolf”) in the second half of the thirteenth century. This Tale was the foundational layer for the subsequent writing of the Life. Some time later, probably in the second half of the fourteenth century (before 1377), an ecclesiastical redactor edited the text adding phrases in a hagiographic style (the “sheep’s clothing”), thus creating a chronicle tale about the life of Alexander Nevskii. In the second half of the fifteenth century, a further editing took place as anti-Tatar interpolations were added, thus creating the First Redaction of the Life of Alexander Nevskii. Following a text critical analysis, this article reconstructs the First Redaction of the Life, in which the two styles are delineated. Then the article provides a translation into English of the hypothetical version of the non-extant military tale about Alexander Nevskii.

Keywords
Alexander Nevskii, military tale, saint’s life, hagiography, reconstruction, textual criticism

A number of investigators have pointed out that the Life of Alexander Nevskii juxtaposes hagiographic and secular elements. They have, however, interpreted that combination in different ways in regard both to the authorship question and to how the Life was composed.
In the following article, I present my own hypothesis that the composition represented a three-step process. My goal is to shed light on the origins of this singular literary composition. It seems to me that a complete secular military tale was written in the second half of the thirteenth century as a celebratory exposition of Alexander’s military achievements and glory (the “wolf” of the title of this article). Then, some time later, perhaps in the second half of the fourteenth century (before 1377) an attempt was made to transform that secular military tale into a saint’s tale (Повесть о ЗОИТИН) by adding pious sentiments and religious topoi (the “sheep’s clothing”). Only in the second half of the fifteenth century was the final form of the text we know as the First Redaction of the Life completed with the addition of anti-Tatar interpolations.

In 1915, Nikolai Serebrianskii proposed that the Life was written by “a younger contemporary of the prince, a monk of the Rozhdestvenskii monastery” and that it “was written not for placement in a chronicle but for church use.” Thus, he sees the hagiographic elements as preceding many of the secular elements added later, such as the sections pertaining to the six brave men at the battle on the Neva and the khan of the Eastern Country. In 1968, Norman Ingham described in some detail the relationship of the styles; namely, that, although the framing of the text is hagiographic, the middle parts “are distinctly secular in substance and style.” The military events are told as they would be in a military tale but with a “few pious” sentiments subjoined. Like Serebrianskii, Ingham deemed it probable that the author was a monk. In contradistinction to Serebrianskii, Ingham thought this same monk adopted a standard style for describing military matters and did not need to borrow from a secular work or have it added by someone else. Thus, the author, according to Ingham, wrote the Life in two distinct styles.

In 1974, John Fennell also detected two styles in the Life: “the hagiographical passages are distinct from the annalistic episodes, but sometimes religious sentiments are tacked on to purely military clichés.” The first example he cited of this adding on of “religious sentiments” is the description of

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Alexander’s “returning victorious (vozvratisya s pobedyu)” after the battle on the Neva—the author of the Life tacks on the phrase “praising and glorifying the name of his Creator.”4 The second example Fennell cited is Alexander’s treatment of the enemy after he razed the fortress that the Livonian knights had built “on Alexander’s land”: “some he killed, others he took with him, and others he pardoned and let go.” The author of the Life adds, “for he was merciful beyond measure.”5 Also, like Ingham, Fennell thought this was the work of only one individual, “a cleric” who could write in both the style of hagiography and in the style of the chronicle military tale.6 Yet, Fennell implies this may have been a two-step process with the adding-on of pious sentiments to a secular text occurring within an overall hagiographic framework. Fennell pointed to the entry in the Povest’ vremennykh let (PVL) for 1019 and the “Paroemia” of Boris and Gleb, both of which texts describe the Al’ta battle of 1019, as a possible model for the secular parts of the Life.7

Also in 1974, Serge A. Zenkovsky, like Serebrianskii but in contrast to Ingham and Fennell, attributed the two styles to different individuals. Yet he reversed Serebrianskii’s order of stylistic composition; namely, a secular author, who was a “feudal warrior,” and a later redactor, who was “some ecclesiastic from the city of Vladimir.” For his determination that a military tale written by a warrior is at the core of the Life, Zenkovsky cited three pieces of evidence: (1) the title, “Tale of the Life and Courage of Prince Alexander,” is uncommon for a saint’s life; (2) the author’s reflection on the demise of Alexander—“A man may leave the house of his father but he cannot leave the house of his good lord; and if he has to, he should share the coffin with him”—is befitting of someone who owed secular allegiance to Alexander; and (3) the description by the author of the particulars of the deeds of those in Alexander’s army shows that whoever wrote the Tale “[p]robably... knew many of the prince’s warriors.” The redactor, in Zenkovsky’s view, inserted quotations from and allusions to the Bible while altering the

5 Begunov, Pamiatnik, 169.
“narrative and stylistic unity” and rearranging things in an unsystematic manner.\(^8\)

In 1979, A. D. Stokes, after discussing the arguments for and against their being genre of military tales in early Rus’, proposed that the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* had been originally written as a military tale that is no longer extant. According to Stokes, military tales may not have conveyed “a religious message.” Once, however, the land of Rus’ fully adopted Orthodoxy, “the defenders of Rus’ became also defenders of the faith, their martial exploits could acquire a religious significance.”\(^9\) He hypothesized that military tales “that praised the exploits of long-dead heroes in long forgotten struggles would hardly have been of interest to later copyists” so they modified them for “contemporary purposes.” As a result, in his view, no pure military tale is extant, but they exist in “adapted ‘adulterated’” form in which “it is difficult now to discern the true nature of the genre behind layers of later accretions.”\(^10\)

In the present article, I take further Stokes’ proposal that the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* developed from a military tale by attempting to reconstruct that no-longer-extant version of the tale. In contrast to the example of the *Tale of the Destruction of Riazan*, which Likhachev, Fennell, and Stokes saw developing from a bare chronicle account to military tale to a religious tale, I propose that the military tale was used as the basis for the chronicle tale about the saintliness of the life of Alexander Nevskii. The chronicle tale was later modified into the First Redaction of the *Life*. In addition, I incorporate Zenkovsky’s suggestion that a secular author and a subsequent ecclesiastical redactor were responsible for the composition of the work we know as the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*. In doing so, I am not denying the possibility that one

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writer—whether secular or ecclesiastic—could write in both secular and hagiographic styles. I am saying, however, that, in this particular case, the circumstance that the secular passages together form a coherent unity (see below), the positioning and wording of the pious sentiments in an awkward manner in relation to the secular passages, and certain structural peculiarities of the Life tend to corroborate Zenkovsky’s hypothesis of a secular author and ecclesiastical redactor. I have argued elsewhere that the author wrote a secular tale sometime between 1263 (the year of death of Alexander) and the 1290s when the author would have been in his 50s (if one supposes he had been a young man in his 20s in the 1260s). I based this age estimate on the opening lines of the Tale concerning how he had been an eyewitness, while growing up, to some of the events he describes and that he obtained other information about Alexander from “my fathers” (“отъ отца своихъ”). The author also claims that he heard about the details of the Battle on the Neva “from my Lord the Grand Prince Alexander and from others who at that time took part in that battle.”

Fennell cited of two pious motif interpolations, but one can ask how many more of the pious expressions were added during the process of redacting the Tale into the Life. My resulting hypothetical reconstructions (see appendices A and B) are an experiment in progress. I wanted to see how much of the religious wording and other interpolations of the Life it was possible to eliminate and still have a text that made sense. Somewhat surprisingly, I found that all the religious components could be dispensed with and a coherent narrative remain. Whether the original military tale about Alexander Nevskii had no, a few, or many religious components I cannot say. Some scholars may consider this exercise to be pointless, for they may, as Ingham and Fennell did, see only one author of the Life, which was written then as a complete work at one time (although Fennell does seem to imply a kind of two-step process could have been involved). Other scholars may agree that two individuals—an author of the core military tale and a redactor who added hagiographic phrases—are involved but are unwilling to accept that the military tale was written without any expression of pious sentiments. They are welcome to add back religious components as they see fit, but I hope that, when doing so, they will provide reasons for what they are restoring.

The First Redaction of the Life is extant in full or in part in 13 MS copies (one of which dates to 1377, two of which date to the second half of the fifteenth century, seven to the sixteenth century, and three to the seventeenth century). The MSS that contain the First Redaction of the Life are listed here in alphabetical order according to the sigla that Begunov assigned them:12

- A = RGB, sobranie Moskovskoi dukhovnoi akademii, fond 173, № 208 [ca. 1550];
- Ap = GAAO, sobranie rukopisnykh knig, № 18 [1550–1575];
- E = GIM, sobranie E. V. Barsova, № 1413 [ca. 1600];
- B = RGB, sobranie Iosifo-Volokolamskogo monastyr, fond 113, № 523 [1550–1575];
- J = IRLI, R. IV, op. 24, № 26 [ca. 1550];
- Jh = RNB, F. IV, № 2, fols. 168–169v [1377] (first part only);13
- M = GIM, Muzeiskoe sobranie, № 1706 [1550–1575];
- O = RGB, sobranie A. N. Ovchinnikova, fond 209, № 281 [ca. 1650];
- Pi = GAPO, sobranie Pskovo-Pecherskogo monastyr, fond 449, № 60 [1450–1475] (beginning and end only);
- Th = RNB, sobranie M. P. Pogodina, № 641 [1550–1575];
- Te = GIM, Sinodal’noe sobranie, № 154, fols. 156–162v [end of 15th century];14
- P = RGB, sobranie Olonetskoi seminarii, fond 212, № 15 [1625–1650];
- Ye = GIM, sobranie A. S. Uvarova, № 279 [1650–1675].

Five versions of the First Redaction of the Life of Alexander Nevskii have been published.15 In 1882, Archimandrite Leonid (L. A. Kavelin) published the Life from the MS. Moscow Ecclesiastical Academy (MDA), no. 208

In 1913, Vilho Mansikka also published the *Life* from *A*. Neither Leonid nor Mansikka provided a critical apparatus of readings from other copies. In 1915, Serebrianskii published *II* and *P* in parallel columns with variants from *A*.

Also in 1915, S. A. Bugoslavskii, in a review of Mansikka’s book provided the first publication of the *Life* with a critical apparatus of readings from multiple copies. Bugoslavskii used Mansikka’s diplomatic edition of *A* as his copy text and provided variants from seven copies: *lo*, *IIc*, and *II* from already published versions; *IIi* from the MS; and *B*, *P*, and *Y* from readings for those copies that Mansikka gave in his monograph. Bugoslavskii noted that, because Mansikka did not provide all the readings from *B*, *P*, and *Y*, his (Bugoslavskii’s) readings from those MSS “are not able to be fully exact.” Instead of altering the copy text, Bugoslavskii separately proposed three pages of improvements to it. In suggesting these improvements, Bugoslavskii depended mainly on agreements of *lo* and *IIc* where *lo* is extant, and on agreements of *IIc* and *IIi* where *lo* is not extant. Begunov was dismissive of Bugoslavskii’s publication: “The attempt of S. A. Bugoslavskii at publishing the ‘original’ redaction of the *Life* according to the Academy copy (MS. GBL, MDA, № 208, XVI c.) with introduced variants from other copies is hardly able to be considered successful.” Furthermore: “The publication of S. A. Bugoslavskii was not exact: the variants are provided from the cited text in Mansikka’s monograph and not from the manuscripts.” This criticism is a little harsh since Bugoslavskii acknowledged that the readings for three of the copies he used were incomplete and based on whatever he could glean from Mansikka’s comparisons, but the readings for the other four were complete, being based on three published versions and one de visu examination of the MS. For 50 years, until Begunov’s editions superceded it in 1965,

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16 Archimandrite Leonid, *Skazanie o podvigakh i zhizni sv. blagovernog velikogo kniazia Aleksandra Nevskogo*, (St. Petersburg, 1882).
17 Vilho Mansikka, “Zhitie Aleksandra Nevskogo (Razbor redaktii i teksty),” *Pamiatniki drevnei pis’mennosti*, 180 (St. Petersburg, 1913).
18 Serebrianskii, *Drevne-russkie kniažeskie zhitiiia*, Teksty, 109–120.
22 Begunov, “K voprosu,” 349, fn. 5.
Bugoslavskii’s was the best critical edition of the First Redaction available but was rarely cited.

In 1947, V. I. Malyshev published a diplomatic edition of \( \mathcal{J} \) with facsimiles of the first three folios (fol. 317–318). In 1965, in an analysis of the relationship of the *Slovo o pogibe Russkoi zemli* to the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*, the researcher Iu. K. Begunov focused solely on the First Redaction of the *Life*. In order to depict the relationship of the known-by-that-time 13 copies of the First Redaction, Begunov constructed a three-branch stemma codicum in which \( \mathcal{J}_6 \) occupied its own distinct branch (see figure 1).

![Figure 1 Begunov’s stemma for the Life of Alexander Nevskii](image)

The readings of \( \mathcal{J}_6 \), thus, should have equal status in determining the archetype with the readings of the common protograph of \( EBcP'J \), on one

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hand, and 

\textit{ArVLMOPPg}, on the other hand. Begunov provided two edited versions of the text of the \textit{Life}. In the first version, he presented a diplomatic edition of \textit{Пс} with a full critical apparatus containing variant readings from the other 12 MS copies.\textsuperscript{26} He corrected \textit{Пс} only when he thought there was a scribal error in it. In the second version, Begunov “reconstructed” what he considered to be a text closer to the archetype of the \textit{Life} than any single MS. He used \textit{Пс} as his copy text and provided readings from other MSS only when he changed it.\textsuperscript{27} Begunov did not follow his stemma in his reconstruction of the \textit{Life}. For example, he added the word “ДОМОЧАДЕЦЬ” after the phrase “Гоголе в слышах от отець своих,” in the introductory paragraph of his reconstruction (187.3), although that word is testified to only by \textit{E} and \textit{P}. By the rules of stemmatics it could not have been in the archetype for it would require positing an independent dropping of that word in three different places in Begunov’s stemma—in \textit{Лв}, in the protograph of \textit{Пс} and \textit{У}, and in the protograph of the right branch. As a result of this and similar counter-stemmatic changes,\textsuperscript{28} his “reconstruction” turns out to be further from the archetype than his diplomatic edition of \textit{Пс}.\textsuperscript{29}

\textsuperscript{26} Begunov, \textit{Pamiatnik}, 158–180.

\textsuperscript{27} Begunov, \textit{Pamiatnik}, 187–194.


\textsuperscript{29} In 1969, Begunov reprinted this version as a plain text in his “Зятие Александра Невского,” on the even-numbered pages in “Izbornik.” \textit{Sbornik proizvedenii literatury drevnei Rusi}, ed. L. A. Dmitriev and D. S. Likhachev (Moscow: Khudozhestvennaia literatura, 1969), 328–343. It has no italics where he had changed his copy text, no footnotes, and no final hard signs on words. A translation into modern Russian appears on
In 1997, Michele Colucci reassessed Begunov’s stemma and, although accepting for the most part the relationship of copies that Begunov proposed, made one major adjustment. Colucci moved \( \mathcal{L}_6 \) to the right (\( \mathcal{A}\mathcal{A}\mathcal{P}\mathcal{B}\mathcal{L}\mathcal{M}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{P}\mathcal{P}_1 \)) branch of the stemma (see figure 2). Thus, he argued, in effect, that \( \mathcal{L}_6 \) should not be given its own equal status with the other two branches in determining primary readings, but that \( \mathcal{L}_6 \) and \( \mathcal{A}\mathcal{A}\mathcal{P}\mathcal{B}\mathcal{L}\mathcal{M}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{P}\mathcal{P}_1 \) (his \( n.a.t \)) together determine readings that are equal in status to those of \( \Pi\Pi\zeta\Pi \) (his \( y_f \)). He attributed those cases where the readings of \( y_f \) agree with \( \mathcal{L}_6 \) against those of \( \mathcal{A}\mathcal{A}\mathcal{P}\mathcal{B}\mathcal{L}\mathcal{M}\mathcal{O}\mathcal{P}\mathcal{P}_1 \) to a secondary contaminative influence of \( \mathcal{L}_6 \) on \( y_f \). In addition, he attributes the agreements \( \Pi \) and \( \mathcal{L} \) with \( \mathcal{P} \) and \( \mathcal{U} \) to a contamination of \( n \) on \( y \). Colucci pointed out that Begunov did not use his own stemma in reconstructing the text of the Life. Not using a stemma, even though one was diagrammed, usually with the designation “a schema of the relationship of copies,” was typical for Soviet textology, which, following D. S. Likhachev, held that a using a stemma to help determine readings was “mechanistic textology.” Colucci also expressed doubt about

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30 Koluchchi, “Pervonachal’naia redaktsiia ‘Zhitii Aleksandra Nevskogo’: zametki po istorii teksta,” \textit{TODRL} 50 (1997): 252–260. Colucci’s cases of when \( \mathcal{L}_6=y\neq y_f \) are 162.8–11, 166.92–99, 167.42–43, 167.45–47, 167.51, 167.62–63, and 168.88–92. Of these, all but the first involve a lacuna in the left-branch’s \( \Pi\zeta \) and \( \mathcal{Y} \), which presupposes their absent readings had they existed would have agreed with those of \( \mathcal{E} \) and \( \mathcal{P} \). Even Colucci’s first case is not entirely solid since \( O \) of the right branch agrees with \( \mathcal{E} \) and \( \mathcal{P} \) of the left. Colucci’s cases of when \( \mathcal{L}_6=y\neq a \) are 160.53, 161.17, 161.28, 161.51, 163.97–100, 163.1–2, 165.41, 165.52, 166.93, 166.6, 166.12, 167.18, and 168.12. Of these, all but the first involve a lacuna in the left-branch’s \( \Pi\zeta \) and \( \mathcal{Y} \), and 165.52 involves an idiosyncratic reading of \( \Pi\zeta \). The idiosyncratic readings of \( \mathcal{L}_6 \) that Colucci considers to have “real editorial significance” he gives as 166.8–86, 166.1–5, 166.97–99, and 167.25–26. Colucci numbers his cases according to the page number and variant of Begunov’s critical edition (Begunov, \textit{Pamiatnik}, 158–180).


32 See the section titled “Krizis literaturovedcheskoi mekhanicheskoi tekstologii,” in D. S. Likhachev, \textit{Tekstologia. Na materiale russkoi literatury X–XVII vv.}, 1\textsuperscript{st} ed. (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1962), 6–20; 2\textsuperscript{nd} ed. (Leningrad:
Begunov’s use of a “codex interpositus”—that is, a hypothetical intervening copy “between a manuscript (or group of manuscripts) and its protograph” (253). Use of such an intervening copy between the archetype and the readings suggested by the MS copies was also characteristic of Soviet textology. It allowed the modern editor to overrule the testimony of the MS copies by claiming readings for the archetype that were not supported by the MSS.

Here I will limit myself to discussing briefly how I edited the text and why I chose to place \( \mathcal{L} \) above the common protograph of all the other copies. In editing a text for publication, an editor has several options, which are dependent on the goal of the edition and on the relationship of the extant manuscripts to each other. As I wrote recently in the journal *Kritika*:

If one copy is clearly best representative of the archetype or authorial text, then it should be used as the copy text and variants provided from the other copies only to show the history of the development of the text. If no single copy is best and if the manuscript tradition is “open” (i.e., no clear genealogical relationship

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can be established among the copies, then picking and choosing readings from
different copies based on the knowledge, skill, and intuition of the editor is to be
preferred. If the manuscript tradition is “closed” (i.e., a clear genealogical rela-
tionship can be determined), then a stemma should be used.33

In the case of the First Redaction of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*, we have a
hybrid situation in regard to the MSS. For the first 44.5% of the text of the *Life*,
in my opinion, a “best” copy exists in *Lv*, but the last 55.5% of the text of the
*Life* is missing in that copy. For the remainder of the text of the *Life* to the end,
a closed tradition exists whereby no one copy is demonstrably better than all
the others, although a clear genealogical relationship can be established. Thus,
for the last part of the text, I resorted to a stemma to help determine the “best”
(i.e., closest to the archetype) reading.

In Appendix A, I present my reconstruction of the First Redaction
archetype. For the most part, my reconstruction is similar to the version of the
First Redaction that Begunov edited and published in 1965. It differs from his
version in two major respects. First, I used *Lv* for the copy text for the first
part of the text and resorted to a stemma for the last part, whereas Begunov
used *Pc* as his copy text throughout. Second, my understanding of the rela-
tionship of the MS copies to each other differs from his (see figure 3). As a
result, in particular choice of words and phrases, I accepted the primacy of
readings in the MS copies in a different hierarchical order; namely, where *Lv* is
extant, I accepted the reading of *Lv* except to correct scribal accidentals; oth-
erwise, I considered *γ* and *δ* to be of theoretical equal value in determining *β*.
In practice, *δ* tends to represent *β* more often. As Colucci demonstrated the
readings of right-branch MSS are more often closer to *Lv* than are those of left-
branch MSS. The agreements of *Lv* with *Pa* that Colucci sees as placing *Lv*
in the right branch of the stemma might better be understood as occurrences of
agreements of the right-branch copies with the primary reading of *Lv* (α). Thus,
where *Lv* is not extant, I tended to favor the agreements of *δ* (agreements of
*Pi, A, and P*) over *γ* (agreements of *Pc, Y, E,* and *P*), when the
two disagree. Finally, I rarely looked to *LP* alone or *AAfEMO*, except

A. Artamanov, vol. 1: *Povest’ vremennykh let*, vol. 2: *Drevnerusskie literaturnye
proizvedeniiia o Borise and Glebe*, Moscow: Iazyki slavianskich kul’tur, 2006–2007; A.
L. Nikitin, *Tekstologiiia russkih letopisei XI–nachala XIV vv.,* vypusk 1: *Kievo-Pecher-
skoe letopisanie do 1112 goda*, Moscow: Minuvshee, 2006; *Galitsko-Volynskaiia
letopis’*. *Texn. Kommentarii. Issledovanie*, compiled by N. F. Kotliar, V. Iu. Franchuk,
and A. G. Plakhonin, under the editorship of N. F. Kotliar, St. Petersburg: Aleteiia,
insofar as they agree with \( \Pi_t \) or are able to correct some scribal accidental in \( \Pi_t \). In the case of certain readings, this represents an almost complete reversal of Begunov’s hierarchical placement and results in a reconstruction that is closer to the text that would result from Bugoslavskii’s proposed improvements than either to Begunov’s critical apparatus version or to his reconstruction. I also see contamination of the common protograph (\( \theta \)) of \( \Pi_c \) on the common protograph (\( \epsilon \)) of \( \Lambda \Pi \), whereas Colucci saw the contamination going in the opposite direction. Although I agree with Colucci in general terms concerning the dangers of using a \textit{codex interpositus}, I propose having \( \beta \) as in effect an intervening hypothetical copy between the MSS and \( \alpha \) is justified here.

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{stemma.png}
\caption{My preferred stemma for the \textit{Life of Alexander Nevskii}}
\end{figure}

When turning the military tale into a saint’s tale, the fourteenth-century redactor inserted new sections (indicated as the italicized parts in Appendix A). But, even then in the second half of the fifteenth century, three additional sections were interpolated (indicated with the bracketed designations C-1, C-2, and C-3 in Appendix A). Toward the end of the Tale, “a mighty khan of the Eastern Country” summons Alexander to him (section A-1 below). Then Alexander goes to Vladimir with his army. News of his coming reaches the
mouth of the Volga River, and the Moabite women frighten their children, 
warning them of Alexander’s coming (C-1). He receives the blessing of Met-
ropolitan Kirill to go to the khan (B-1). Alexander goes to the khan who hon-
ors him and lets him go (A-2). No explicit description of Alexander’s return 
from the khan is given in the text of the Life at this point, as the reader is left 
to construe from the ensuing section that he did return. In that section, Khan 
Batu gets angry at Alexander’s brother, Andrei, and sends his general Nevruy 
to devastate the Suzdalian land (C-2). Alexander rebuilds the cities and 
churches and returns the refugees to their homes. From Alexander’s rebuild-
ing activities, the reader can suppose that Alexander had returned from his 
visit to the khan, unless he undertook the rebuilding of Rus’ cities and 
churches from Sarai. A quotation from Isaiah 1: 16, 17, 23 and 56: 1–2 and a 
peroration about how God had endowed the land “with wealth and glory” fol-
lows.

Then the reader is told about the sending of a letter by the Pope to 
Alexander asking to be allowed to send two cardinals to instruct him in 
Catholicism, but Alexander turns the request down (B-2). In the next section, 
“foreign peoples” (inoplemenniki) are violently forcing the Rus’ to serve in the 
ranks of the army, but Alexander goes to the khan and pleads with him not to 
drive his people into misery (C-3). The description that Alexander “went” 
(poide) to the khan is another indication in the Life that Alexander had 
returned from his previous trip. In the next section Alexander sends his son 
Dmitrii to the Western country, where he conquers some German land and 
takes the city of Iur’ev returning with prisoners and booty. The Life then 
abruptly begins to describe Alexander’s return from the khan without transi-
tion. After the previous section describing Dmitrii’s campaign in the Western 
country, the α reading merely states: “КНЯЗЬ ВЕЛИКИЙ АЛЕКСАНДРЪ 
ВЫХЪ ОТЪ ИНОПЛЕМНИКЪ” (“Grand Prince Alexander went from the for-
eign peoples”). ПсBRU attempt to smooth the transition from the previous 
section by adding the phrase “Отець же его” (“His father”) at the beginning 
of the sentence.

The general assumption among scholars is that transmission of the text 
of the Life remained stable for almost 200 years after it was first composed, 
from ca. 1280s to the second half of the fifteenth century and that the First 
Redaction represents the late thirteenth-century version. Only then did

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34 As Zenkovsky pointed out, the campaign of Nevruy against Andrei Iaroslavich 
occurred under Batu’s successor Sartaq. Zenkovsky, Medieval Russia’s Epics, Chronicles, 
and Tales, 233, fn. 27. For an analysis of the chronicle accounts of this campaign, 
transmission become volatile with the text undergoing many changes over the course of the next 100 or so years. I have proposed that the text originally composed in the second half of the thirteenth century underwent a major transformation in the mid to late fourteenth century. What resulted was a sequence of nested insertions within a foundational layer framework; that is, these interpolations may have occurred in the mid to late fifteenth century when the First Redaction was created. I have designated that foundational layer with the letter “A”, the first layer of insertions with the letter “B”, and the second (later) layer with the letter “C”.

A-1: The khan summons Alexander

C-1: At the death of his father Iaroslav, Alexander goes to the city of Vladimir and news reaches the mouth of the Volga. Moabite women frighten their children by saying “Alexander the prince is coming.”

B-1: Alexander consults with Metropolitan Kirill who gives him his blessing to go.

A-2: Alexander goes to the khan, who renders him honor and lets him go.

C-2: Batu gets angry at Andrei and sends the general Nevruy with an army to ravage the Suzdal’ land. Prince Alexander rebuilds the destroyed churches and the cities gathering the home of the people who had fled during the invasion. Quotation from Isaiah.

B-2: The Pope writes to Alexander wanting to send two cardinals to teach him about the Catholic faith, but Alexander turns his request down.

C-3: The foreign people were violent forcing the Rus’ to serve in the ranks of the army, but Alexander goes to the Khan and pleads with him not to drive his people into misery.

B-3: Alexander sends his son Dmitrii against the Western land. Dmitrii conquers some of the German land and takes the city of Iur’ev, returning to Novgorod with prisoners and booty.

A-3: Alexander returns from “the foreign people” (“отъ инопле-менници”), goes to Nizhni Novgorod, then Gorodets where he falls ill and dies.

Thus, if one reads sections A-1 / A-2 / A-3 one after the other, one has a complete narrative: Alexander is summoned by the khan, he goes to the khan, is
honored, and returns from the khan. This sequence is what I posit was the way
the Tale originally read; that is, the foundational layer. The second (B-1),
fourth (B-2), and sixth (B-3) interpolations were most likely added in the four-
teenth century (pre-1377) when the military tale was turned into a saint’s tale.
Thus, one can read the sequence as A-1 / B-1 / A-2 / B-2 / B-3 / A-3 for the
sequence as it probably was in the continuation of Ḥī. The first (C-1), third
(C-2), and the fifth (C-3) interpolations were most likely added in the
post-1448 period, when anti-Tatar rhetoric began to pervade Church literature
about the steppe people.35 That is the sequence of the First Redaction as we
now have it.

For the sake of consistency, I normalized the text throughout, which
includes standardizing spelling, expanding abbreviations, adding front and
back yers after superscript consonants in final position, and inserting modern
punctuation. I have not provided variant readings, for which one may consult
the diplomatic edition of Ḥī with critical apparatus that Begunov edited and
published in 1965. Those parts that I believe were added to the Tale to trans-
form it into a Life are italicized. In Appendix B, I provide an English transla-
tion of the non-italicized parts; that is, of the Tale as it may have existed
before attempts were made in the fourteenth century to turn the military tale
into a saint’s tale. Here we see a spare but structurally well-organized Tale
with an introduction, in which the “thematic clue” is a story about a brave
ruler; in this case, the Emperor Vespasian. Then follow three stories—the first
involves a ruler from the Northern Country, the second involves a ruler from
the Western Country, the third involves a ruler from the Eastern Country. The
Tale closes with Alexander’s death and a lament by the author. Into this found-
dational layer were added religious sentiments, biblical allusions and quota-
tions, and digressive stories in the mid-fourteenth century to make the saint’s

35 See my Muscovy and the Mongols, 23, 138–141, 164–247. A case in point is the
treatment of Nevruy’s campaign in the chronicles. Early chronicles either do not men-
tion it or state that he went against Andrei Jaroslavich and chased him beyond the sea.
The Suzdal’s Chronicle adds that “the Tatars scattered over the land” (presumably in
search of Andrei) and “caused much misery when they left” (presumably because of
the many captives, horses, and cattle they took). Later chronicles state that Nevruy
grew against the Suzdal’ land as well. PSRL 1 (2nd ed., 1928), col. 524; 3 (2nd ed.,
“Andrej Jaroslavič and the Struggle for Power in 1252: An Investigation of the
tale, almost half of which appears in Le, and then into the First Redaction in the second half of the fifteenth century.

Appendix A

Житие Александра Невского. Первая редакция (реконструкция)

Такова житья. Преставися великий князь Александръ сынъ Ярославъ. Скажемъ же мужество и житье его. О Господни нашей Иисус Христъ Сынь Божий азъ худы тръпны недостойны начинатъ писати житье великого князя Александра сына Ярослава внuka Всеволода понеже слыша отъ отцевъ своихъ и самовидецъ есмь вързасту его и радъ быхъ иользоватъ святые житье и честное и славное ко яко же Приложнъ рече. Въ злогощту душу не видятъ премудрость на высокихъ въ раихъ есть посредъ житье Свѧтѧ его имѣнна подъ враты врѧщать сыны ихъ. Прочь отъ ради его и грубо есмь умолнъ молящею святые Господи Богородицы послѣдніе святыя князя Александра начинать положо.

Си бъ князь Александръ Богомъ рожень отъ отца милостивага и мужа лица пачекъ князя великого Ярослава и матери святаго Федосы. Яко же рече Исаия пророкъ: “Тако глаголеть Господь: “Князѣ азъ училъ священи бо суть азъ божии” 38 и юности безъ Божия бо повележи не бѣ княжение его. Но и вързасъ его паче иныхъ человѣка, и гласъ его—жена труба въ народѣ и лице его—аки лице Иосифа39 иже бѣ поставили его Египетскаго цесара втого цесаря въ Египетѣ. Сила бѣ его—часть отъ силы Самиона. Да жь бѣ ему Богъ премудрость Соломонную и храбрство же акы цесаря Римскаго Еленинаны иже бѣ плывши всю Подмосковную землю и ныдъ исполнися къ граду Атапату приступити и шедше граждане и оувидѣша полъ его, и остася едины, и, възврати силу ихъ ко вратомъ ко граднимвъ, и посмѣся дружинъ своенъ, и укори я, река: “Оставите мя единаго.” Такоже и си князь Александръ бѣ побѣжа а не побѣдимъ.

36 Cf. Wisdom 1: 4; Proverbs 8: 2–3.
37 азъ божъ changed from а вързасъ in Le.
38 Cf. Isaiah 13: 3.
39 Иосифа changed from Есива in Le.
И сего ради нькто сие въззхват отъ Западная страны иже нарицается слуги40 Божья отъ тѣхъ приде, хотя видѣти дивны то взрастъ его яко же древие цесаря Ужель приходи къ Соломону хотяи съмнити премудрость его. Также и се именемъ Андрѣяны, видѣвъ цесарь Александръ возвратися къ своимъ и рече: «Прощедь страны, и языки, не видѣлъ таковаго и въ цесаря ни въ князахъ и цесарь».

Се же слышавъ, король части Римское отъ полунощнаго страны, такое мужество цесарь Александра и помышли въ собѣ: «Да пойду плѣнью землю Александрову ». И собра силу велью наполни корабля многи полковъ своихъ подвижся въ силъ тажъ исполнися духомъ ратнымъ. И прииде въ рѣку Неву шатая безумьемъ, послѣ сла загордевъся ко цесарю Александру въ Новгородѣ рече: «Аще можешь противиться мнѣ то се емь здѣ уже плѣнью твою».

Александру же, слышавъ словеса ихъ, разгорься сердцемъ и вкни въ церквѣ святую Софию, падь на колѣнъ предъ олтаремъ, нача молитися со слезами: «Боже хвалень, и правдѣны Боже велики и крѣпки Боже правдыны созданны небо и землю и постави предѣлы зыкокъ и повелъ жити не престуная въ чюдѣ части».41 И въприимь псалмскую пьесь рече: «Суди, Господи, обидящимъ ми вѣбрани борощимся со мною, приими оружье и идеть стани въ помощь мнѣ».42 Скончавъ молитву встать поклонился архиепискому. Архиепископъ же Спиридонъ благослови его и отпусти. Онъ же выйде изъ церкви утира слезы, и нача крѣптити дружину свою, и рече: «Не въ силахъ Богъ ны въ правдѣ. Помилуй Псалмословиа “Си во оружье си на конецъ мы же во имя Господа Бога нашаго призовемъ ти сплить бысы и падшы мы же встахомъ прости бышымъ”.43 И си речѣ пойде на ны въ маль дружинѣ, не сождавъся со мною силою своею, но упалъ на святую Троицю.

Жалостно же и слышати яко отецъ его, честны Иярославъ велики не бъ вѣлѣять такого встанье на сына своего, милого Александра, ни ономъ бысть послати когда вѣсть къ отцу: еже бо ратніи приближися. Тѣже мнои Новгородцы не
совокупились бьша понеже ускори князь похоти.

И прийде на ны въ день вскресенья, на память салянъ ономъ 600 и 30 бывши збора въ Халкидонъ и салянъ мученику Корику и Устину и салянъ князя Володимера крестившаго Русскую землю и мьяше же въру велику къ тьмъ мученикомъ Бориса и Глѣб.

И бъ некто мухъ старышина въ земли Ижерск[о]й именьмъ Пелота поручено же бысть ему стражъ морск[ая]. Всприят же салянъ крещение и живлишь посредъ руду своего пошана суща. И нарече бысть и мое его въ салянъ крещеніе Филить. Жившее бо угодно въ среду и въ пятокъ пребывавъ въ ачъбь. Тым же сподоби его Богъ видѣть видныя страциво во ть день. И сказыемъ вкратцѧ.

Мышыя сильну ратныхъ, иде противу князя Александра, да сказыемъ ему станы и обратыя ихъ. Столько же ему при край моря, стражаешь животъ путь, и пребысть всю коц во бдьмъ. Якоже нача всходить солнце и снымася шлемъ страцишъ по морю и видъ насадъ единъ гребитъ, посредъ насадъ стояла мученику Бориса и Глѣбъ въ одежахъ червлыхъ, и бысть руцъ держали на рали гребиже създѣли ако милою одынъ. И рече Борисъ: Брате Глѣбъ, посемъ трести да помогдемъ сродника своему Александру видѣть же таковы виднье и сныма таковыя глазъ ономъ мученику, стоящемъ трепеткъ, дондѣже насадъ очь его.

Потомъ скоро прийде князь Александру, онъ же видаць князя Александра радостнымъ на очыма исповѣди ему единому. Князь же рече: Сего же рцъ никому.

Оттолѣ потомъ увѣсть на ны въ 6 часъ днѣ [въ лѣто 6748]. Бысть съча веника надъ Римляни, и изби множество бесчислено ихъ и самыми королево вложи печать на цѣ острымъ своимъ конемъ.

Здѣ же явишася 6 мухъ храбрыхъ [съ самыми с нимъ ис полку его].

Единъ именемъ Гаврило Алексичь се[47] нѣха на шенку

44 Corrected from Жерск[о]й.
видьъ королевича мча под руку и възъѣха по досцѣ и до самаго коробля по ней же ѣхаху с королевичем иже текоша передь нимъ а самого емше свергна и с конемъ въ воду48 з досцѣ и Божьему милосрѣдствѣ неврежень49 бысть и паки наѣха, и бись с самыѣ воеводою середи полку ихъ.

2 именемъ Свѧдѣвѧ Якуновичъ Новгородецъ, сей50 наѣхну многажды на полкъ ихъ и бѣльшевъ единцымъ топоромъ не имѣлъ страха въ души своєй. И паде нѣколико отъ руку его и подвишався силь и храбрѣству его.

3-и Яковъ родомъ Полочанинъ ловчий бѣ у князя. Сей51 взѣха на полкъ с мечемъ и похвали его князь.

4 Новгородецъ именемъ Мѣша. Сей52 пышъ ватецѣ на корабли и погуби. З корабли з дружиною своєю.

5-и Сей молодыхъ его именемъ Сава. Сей53 взѣха въ шатерѣ велики, королевъ золотоверхий и подъ съ столы патерны. Потомъ Александрови, видѣвъ шатеръ паденіе възрадовашся.

6-и Сей слугъ его именемъ Ратмѣръ. Сей55 бисъ пышъ и оступиша и мною. Оть же отъ многѣхъ ранѣ паде и тако скончаша. Си же вся слышахъ отъ господина своего великаго князя Александра и отъ инѣхъ, иже въ то время обрѣтоша въ тои сѣчи.

Бысть же въ то время цѣлды даны, яко же во древняя дни при Ехони цесарь, едѣ пришѣ Сенакиримъ, Асуринскій цесарь на Иерусалимъ домъ палмины56 градъ святны Ерусалимъ въерашу и оку юже Господинъ узби и отъ полка Асуринска 185 тысячь. И въставъ утро обрѣтошася трупы мертвы всѣ. Такоже бысть при побѣдѣ Александровѣ, едѣ побѣдъ корола обѣ онъ полкъ рѣки Ижевъ, иже же не бѣ проходиа полку Александрову. Эдѣ

47 сей changed from се in Лв.
48 ААрВДМОП: море; БР: Неву; IIIсУ: lacuna.
49 Corrected from непрѣстъ in Лв.
50 сей changed from се in Лв.
51 Сей changed from Се in Лв.
52 Сей changed from Се in Лв.
53 Сей changed from Се in Лв.
54 Corrected from взѣха
55 Сей changed from Се in Лв.
56 палмины changed from палмины in Лв.
обратила много множество избеных отъ ангела Господня. И остановъ побьже трюпъ мертвыхъ своихъ настьмаша корабл корабля въ мори. Князь же Александръ возвратился съ побьдою, хвала и слава имя своемъ Творца Отца и Сына и Святоя Духа.

Въ 2-е же лть по возвращении съ побьдою князя Александрова, накъ придошла отъ западной страны и въградиша градъ въ отчествѣ Александрова. Князь же Александръ исцѣл на на воскоре и изверже градъ ихъ изъ основання, а самехъ изъ ша итъ съ собою приведе, а иныхъ, по молвъ, отпусти: бь бо множество пае мяры.

По побьдо же Александрова, яко побьди короля, въ третии годѣ, въ зимнее время, пон де на землю немецкую въ силъ велицъ, да не хвалися, ркуще: «Укоримъ Словенския языкъ ниже себѣ».

Уже бо бяще взать градъ Исковъ, и тиуны у нихъ посажени. Техъ же князь Александръ иыма и градъ Исковъ свободи отъ плена. А землю ихъ повоева и пожже и полона вза бе число, а овъ ихъече. Они же, изъ городъ, совокупишеся и рыша: «Пондемъ побьдимъ Александра и иметь его руками». Ёгда приближисяся, и похотиша страже. Князь же Александръ оплюшла и поиша противу себѣ, и наступила море Чудское боиже множества. Отецъ же его Ярославъ послъ бъ ему на помощь брата меньшаго Андрія въ мнозе храбрыхъ, яко же дрvelle у царя Давыда силицъ, крѣпцы. Тако и мужи Александрова исполнися духа рати: бдѣ бо сердца ихъ, аты любъ, и рыш: «О книге нашъ дратьи! Нынѣ присъ брѣзи намъ положи макъ свои за тя». Князь же Александрова, воздвѣлъ рѣдъ на небо, и рече: «Суди, Боже, и разсуди про мое отъ языка великаго и помоги мнѣ. Боже, яко же дрvelle Моисеевъ на Амаллакъ и прароду моему Ярославу на сажения Солополя». 58

Бь же тогда день судный, въходяю солнцу, стущишашся божи. И бысть сия гла и трускъ отъ хори земленья и звукъ отъ мечаго сечения, яко же море помрэлию двинутись, не въ видимы леду; покры бо ся кровию.

57 въ гра changed to въградиша in Le. End of Le.
Си же сказа́ть от са́мовида, иже рече ми, яко виды́х полкъ Божии на влъду, пришедши на помощь Александру. И побойд я помощью Божею, и даша патники плаща своє и спича́ть я, гоноче, яко по аеру, и не бь въ како утеши. Зе же просе́дже Богъ Александра предъ всѣми полкы, яко Иосиф Наванина у Ерыкаса. А иже рече: «Ипемъ Александра руки мои», сего дасть ему Богъ в рую его. И не обрушился противникъ емужь въ брани ника́да же. Возвратися кня́ж Александру съ побо́дъ славною. Быше множест́во полону въ полку его, ведаху бося подле ко́ни, иже именову́тся ридали.

И яко же прибли́жися кня́ж къ граду Пекову, изуменже и къ попове и вси народъ срѣ́тоша предъ градомъ, подающе хвалу Богови и славу господину князу Александру, приищъ пьемъ: «Посо́бивычъ господи, кроткому Давиду побо́дити иноплеменникы и въпому князу нашему оружеемъ крестнымъ побо́дити градъ Плесовъ отъ иноземныхъ рукъ Александра». 

«О, невмѣсчи плесковчи! Аще се забудете и до правоучи́ть Александровыхъ, уподобите Жидовъ, ихъ же препита господь въпустыни манкою и кра́стемъ печеными, и сихъ всѣхъ забива́ Богъ своею, изведяша я изъ работы Египетьская». 

И начал сы́ти имя его по свяму странамъ и до моря Египетьского, и до горъ Ара́тыхъ, и обону страну моря Варя́жского, и до великаго Рима.

Въ то же время умножи́ся язы́къ Литовскими и началъ пакостити волость Александровъ. Онъ же, выезда и нача изби́вать я. Единою клю́ться ему выехать, и побйди 7 рати́ единьмъ выездомъ, множествъ князей ихъ избить, а овъ ихъ рукамъ изъымь; слуги же его, ругающеся, взаха́зять я къ хвостомъ коней своихъ. И началъ блю́сться имене его.

[A-1] Въ то же время некто царь силенъ на Вѣ́сточныя страны, eti ae be Bogw pokoribw mnogiu azyki, otw wstoka daae i do zapaeda. Ты же царь, снача́лъ Александра тако славна и храбра, послаботъ къ нему послы и рече: «Александре, вѣ́си ли, яко Богъ покори ми многи́я зыки. Ты ли единь не хочешь покоряться си́ле моей? Но аще хочешь събытъ землю свою, то скоро приинди къ мнѣ́, и да узришь честь царства моего». 

[C-1] Кня́ж же Александро прииди́ во Волыпи́ меръ по умершин ю́ща своего въ си́лъ величъ. И бысть тро́жень прииди́ его, и промчался въсть и до усть Волы. И началъ жены
По велению своего величества, царь Александр, в славе и чести, отпусти и.

[B-2] Никогда же приходил к нему после отъезда, из велико Рима, руку: „Папа наш, тако глаголешь: "Слышишь ли ты, князь церкви и дина, и церкви твоя велика. Сего ради послал к тобо отъ двоенадесети кординалу два жытрема – Аллаха да у Гьомонта, да послушает ученые их о законе Божий"." Князь же Александр, здравствуй съ мудрець своими, въ посвящень к нему и рече: „Оть Адама до потопа, ость потопа до разделения змыхъ, до начала Авраама, оть Авраама до пропови Исашиа сынае Церемонное море, отъ сего сыновь Исашиа, до умертвия Давида царя, оть начала царства Соломоны до Августа и до Христова рооества, отъ рооества Христова до страсти и воскресения господни, оть въсякесения же его и до вселенства на небеса, отъ въсякесения на небеса до царства Константинова, отъ начала царства Константинова до перваго собора, оть перваго собора до седьмого – съ всьи добрь свпведемъ, а оть всьи учения не приемлесъ. Они же въеатишеи въ свейи. И умножилась дни живота его. Богь во иооелебец и многолюбец и князь любя, митрополитъ же и

епископы чтись и аки самому творца.

[C-3] Ес же тогда нужда велика отъ поташы: тонуху тъ християнъ, вселище съ собою воинствовати. Князь же велики Александъ понде къ царево, давы отомель люди оть бды.

[B-3] А сына своего Дми́трия посм на Западных страны, и вся полыхъ своихъ послами съ кнмъ, и близнихъ своихъ домочадцемь, речи къ кнмъ: "Служите сыновь моему, аки самому мнь, всъмъ живополъ своимъ." Понде Ярослвь съ сыновцымъ своимъ въ силъ величъ, и плавица градъ Юрьевъ, и възерналися въ новые съ многимъ полономъ и съ великю честю.

[A-3] Князь велики Александъ взыде отъ ионплеяпиннъ и доеди Новагорода Нижнаго и ту пребывъ мало здравъ, и доедъ Города, разболся.

О, горь тобъ, бдный человече! Како можеш написати кончицу господина своего! Как не испадета ти зныщи вкупъ съ слезами! Како же не урвется сердце горкъ тутъ! Отца бо человкъ можетъ, а добра господина не могу оставити: аще бы ля, и въ гробъ бы лялъ съ нимъ!

Пострада бо Богови крлко, остави же земное царство и бысть мнъ: бо бо же умръ его ячы миръ ветхий образъ. Спождъ же его Богъ больши чинъ прияти – склумъ. И тако Господеви будь свой предать, съ миромъ месяца ноября въ 14 день, на память святого апостола Филиппа.

Митрополить же Кирилы глагоми: "Чада мои, разумыши, ико уже здя сотие земли Судьласковъ! Первы и диакони, черкозы, ницы и богатши, и вси люди глаголаху: "Уже почишься!"

Святъ же тѣло его покосомъ въ граду Володимерь. Митрополить же Кирилы и боле, и вси народъ, маги и величи, сркъмъ и въ Боголюбовь съ своими и съ кандиы. Народы же сънятаху, хполъ приклонялся честникъ онымъ святого тѣла его. Бысть же вопль и кричание, и туча, яко же пыль быа, тако, я и земли потрястися. Положено же бысть тѣло его въ Рожестве святи Богородица, въ архиандрицы величи, месяца ноября въ 24, на память святого отца Амфилохия.

Бысть же тогда чудо дивно и памяти достопо. Едва убо положено бысть святого тѣло его въ руку, тогда Савастинъ иконы и Кирилы митрополить хотя посылао ему руку, да
That same year [6771] Grand Prince Alexander, son of Iaroslav, passed away. Let us speak [about] his courage and life as I have heard it from my fathers, as well as that which I was an eyewitness to while growing up.

Prince Alexander was born from a father Grand Prince Iaroslav, and from a mother Theodosia. He was taller than other men, and his voice as a trumpet reached the people. His bravery was like that of the Roman emperor Vespasian, who conquered the entire Judean land. Once, during the siege of the city of Jotapata, the burghers of the city sallied forth and defeated his regiment, and he remained alone. But he still chased their force to the city gates and thereafter he jeered at his own retinue and reproached them, saying: “You left me alone.”

So also was the Prince Alexander: he used to defeat [others] but was never defeated. Once, because of this, a certain powerful man, whose name was Andreas, of those who call themselves “the servants of God,” came from the Western Country for he wanted to see the marvel in the fullness of his life. He saw Prince Alexander, returned to his people, and told them: “I traveled through many countries and saw many people, but I have never met such a king among kings, nor such a prince among princes.”

Hearing about the courage of Prince Alexander, the king of the Roman part of the Northern Country, thought to himself, “I will go and conquer Alexander’s land.” And he gathered a great force and filled numerous ships with his regiments and he moved forth with great strength being inspired by a martial spirit. He came to the river Neva and, being carried away with madness, sent his envoys, filled with pride, to Prince Alexander in Novgorod, saying, “If you are able to resist me then [do so for] I am here already conquering your land.”
Upon hearing these words, Alexander’s heart burned and he led his small retinue against them, not waiting for the large force. It is a pity to hear that his honorable father, Iaroslav the Great, did not know of such an attack on his son, dear Alexander. Alexander did not have time to send news to his father for already the enemy was approaching. Even many Novgorodians had not joined him because the prince had already set out against them. He decided to go against them in the sixth hour of the day. There was a great battle with the Romans, and he killed a numerous amount of them. On the face of this king, he left a mark with his sharp spear. Here six brave men appeared.

The first was Gabriel by name, son of Alexis. He attacked a ship and, seeing there the royal prince sword in hand, he rode onto the gangway. Everyone escaped from the king back to the ship, but thereafter they turned and threw him and his horse from the gangway into the water. He got out of the water uninjured, charged them again and fought with the general, himself, among his troop.

The second, a Novgorodian Sbyslav by name, son of Iakun, on several occasions charged their troop and fought only with a battle-ax, not having fear in his heart. And several fell from his hand. The people marveled at his power and his bravery.

The third, Iakov, a man from a Polotsk clan, was the prince’s huntsman. He charged the troop with a sword, and the prince praised him.

The fourth one was a Novgorodian, Misha by name, who fought on foot in the stream against the ships. He destroyed three of the ships with his detachment.

The fifth, also from his young [men], Savva by name, entered into a large, royal golden-crowned tent and cut the tent pole. When Alexander’s regiments saw the tent fall, they were joyful.

The sixth, also from his servitors, Ratmir by name fought on foot and was encircled by many. He fell from many wounds several times and subsequently died. All this I have heard from my Grand Prince lord Alexander and from others who at that time took part in that battle.

In the second year after the return of Prince Alexander with his victory, they came once more from the Western Country and built a town on Alexander’s patrimony. Prince Alexander went quickly against it and razed the town to its foundations. Some of the enemy were executed and others were taken prisoner.

In the third year following Alexander’s victory, when he defeated the king, in the winter, Alexander went with a great force against the German land, “Let them not boast saying, ‘Part of the Slavic nation is beneath us.’” They had already taken Pskov town and installed their agents. Grand prince
Alexander Iaroslavich captured them and freed Pskov town from bondage. And he waged war against and set fire to their land. He took numerous prisoners and cut others to pieces. In the towns, they got together and said, “Let us go and subdue Alexander and take him with [our] hands.”

When they approached, the guards saw them. Prince Alexander drew up his regiments and went against [their] warriors. And when they came to Lake Chud there were many soldiers on both sides. His father Iaroslav sent him help [in the form of] his younger brother Andrei along with many brave men.

Prince Alexander returned from the victory with great glory. There were a multitude of prisoners accompanying his regiment. They who called themselves knights were walking shoeless next to the horses. When the prince approached Pskov town, the entire population met him in front of the town glorifying lord Prince Alexander.

And they began to hear his name throughout all countries, up to the sea of Egypt, to Mount Ararat, and on both sides of the Varangian Sea, and to Great Rome.

At that time, the Lithuanian nation was increasing and they began to sack Alexander’s territory. Going out against them, he began to defeat them. During one campaign, he defeated seven armies, killed many of their princes, and captured others. Mocking them, his servants tied them to the tails of their horses. And, they began to be aware of his name.

At that time, there was a powerful khan of the Eastern Country. That khan, hearing of the glory and courage of Alexander, sent him envoys, saying, “Alexander, do you not know that God has submitted many nations to me? You are the only one who is not willing to submit to my power. But if you want to save your land, then come soon to me and you will see the honor of my khanate.”

Having given due thought, Prince Alexander went to the khan. Upon seeing him, the Khan Batu marveled and said to his dignitaries: “I was told the truth—that there is no other like this prince.” Bestowing on him honor, he let him go.

The great Prince Alexander went from the foreign people to Nizhnii Novgorod and stayed there a few days in good health, but when he reached Gorodets, he became ill. Woe to you, poor man. How are you able to describe the passing of your lord? How do your eyes not fall out with tears? How does your heart not break from bitter straits? A man may leave his father, but cannot leave a good lord, and if need be, he lies with him in the grave.