8

Culture and Everyday Life in Post-Kievan Rus'

Although much scholarship has focused upon the Mongol invasion and some other areas of post-Kievan Rus', culture in these centuries has drawn less attention. A partial explanation for this inattention may be the invasion itself, which evidently dramatically affected the output of works of elite culture, including written sources on which historical scholarship has traditionally depended. The difficulties of sorting out the changing and complex politics of the era when rival principalities followed independent courses also complicates the historian's task. In some ways, then, the history of culture in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries remains underdeveloped.

But as some of the works already introduced demonstrate, these centuries witnessed some remarkable developments. It is clear, for example, that new and sophisticated understandings of the law emerged in this era, as the Novgorod Judicial Charter admirably demonstrates. Increasing reliance upon written proofs and the establishment of an archive in which to house official documents testify to a rationalization of the law. Bureaucratic specialization within the judiciary furthered this process, bringing more dispute resolution within the control of the state. There is unambiguous evidence, then, of cultural change.

In other respects, however, detecting cultural change seems more difficult. Almost until the mid-fourteenth century, literature practically disappears, and even when it emerges, the new works seem slavish copies, dead to innovation. Art and architecture too fall quiet. How to explain this apparent vacuum?

It may be, as A. M. Sakharov argues, that the Mongol occupation really is to blame. Sakharov, a portion of whose work we read above, here continues his appraisal of the Mongol Yoke, focusing attention upon the devastation of the centers of elite culture—the cities. With their destruction, he argues, artists and artisans alike suffered. Not only did the Mongol armies destroy town walls and urban structures, but what was worse, craftsmen who survived confronted lost markets, while artists lost their patrons. In this respect, then, the invasion was highly traumatic for Rus' culture. Everything connected with elite culture suffered, and this undermining of the cultural infrastructure explains the apparent gap in the sources.

All the same, Sakharov finds evidence for a cultural renewal as early as the fourteenth century, when the Moscow principality helped sponsor a new flowering of Rus' culture. Perhaps the highest expression of this efflorescence was Andrei Rublev, arguably the most accomplished painter of this era. Born about mid-way through the Mongol Yoke, Rublev helped pioneer whole new perspectives on painting. Having completed his most famous work some fifty years before the Moscow princes formally overthrew the Mongol domination, the great painter managed then to help nurture an artistic revival irrespective of whatever alien cultural influences the Mongols may have exerted. But Mikhail Alpatov, who here attempts to appraise the significance

of Rublev's art, argues that the importance of Andrei Rublev far transcends the history of Rus', equalling the great humanistic art of better known artists at work in Western Europe.

These essays, of course, concentrate upon elite culture, but for most residents of the Rus' lands in these centuries, it was not the work of chroniclers or icon painters which articulated their cultural values. They celebrated more readily the antics of the minstrels who brought music, acting, and animal acts to village squares. Although we cannot hope ever to rescue the lyrics of their performances, the minstrels almost surely brought satire, romance, and other genres to their audiences, and presented their material in a lexicon readily appreciated and understood by peasants.

But official culture, especially as represented by churchmen, condemned the minstrels. In assaults reminiscent of similar scenes enacted in Western Europe, churchmen vilified the minstrels for the carnival values which they evidently brought to their performances. Dancing with animals, cavorting behind masks, and singing bawdy songs, Rus' minstrels caricatured the world around them. Doubtless these performances delighted village audiences, but they also threatened the social order over which churchmen and officials presided. And, by controlling the written record, these representatives of elite culture succeeded in the main in preventing the minstrels from bequeathing these performances to subsequent generations.

DOCUMENTS

Evidence for Literacy: Novgorod Birchbark Charters (ca. 1220–30s)

Among the most interesting finds excavated at Novgorod are two pieces of birchbark which resemble primers (see facing page), teaching devices known to elementary education for hundreds of years afterward. One text identifies and lists the letters of the alphabet, and the other features the alphabet and basic combinations of letters. Especially arresting is the fact that one of these very clearly belonged to a boy named Onfim, who not only put his name on the birchbark, but also left us his drawing of a horse and its rider (perhaps Onfim himself) spearing some imaginary opponent. The nature of the formal text, together with Onfim's apparently spontaneous doodling, has suggested to some that literacy in Novgorod may have been quite high, and that students may actually have undertaken formal instruction in reading and writing (from which Onfim was distracted to depict his own imaginary conquests). This claim seems extravagant without further evidence, but these elementary primers do pose interesting questions about the teaching of reading and writing in Rus'.

No. 200. . . . This piece of birchbark contains mainly a drawing. A horseman stabs an enemy with a spear. Along the figure of the horseman to the right is a signature in little letters: Onfime. In the right upper corner is written the beginning of the alphabet:

А Б В Г Д Е Ж
З З И І К

Its length is 0.1 meters, its width 0.07 meters. [Dated to 1220s–1230s.]

No. 201. Judging by the hand, Charter 201

Birchbark charter No. 200 (early thirteenth century): Onfim's writing exercises. From V. L. Ianin, *Ia poslal tebe berestu. . .* (Moscow: MGU, 1965), p. 53.

Birchbark charter No. 201 (early thirteenth century). From A. V. Artsikhovskii, V. I. Borkovskii, *Novgorodskie gramoty na bereste (Iz raskopok 1956–1957 gg.)* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1963), p. 22.

does not belong to the author of the preceding [similar] charter. Again we have a school exercise, an alphabet and syllables:

А Б : В Г : Д Е : Ж S :
З И : І К : Л М :
Н О : П Р : С Т : У Ф :
Х Ш : Ц Ч : Ш Щ :
Ъ Ы : Ь Ѣ : Ѵ Ю :
Ж Я : Б А : В А : Г А
Д А : Ж А : З А : К А
Л А : М А : Н А : П А
Р А : С А : Т А : Ф А : Х
Ц А : Ч А : Ш А : Щ А :

Its length is 0.085 meters, its width 0.075 meters. [Dated to 1220s–30s.]

SOURCE: A. V. Artsikhovskii and V. I. Borkovskii, *Novgorodskie gramoty na bereste (Iz raskopok 1956–1957 gg.)* (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1963), pp. 20–22. Translated by Daniel H. Kaiser.

The Last Will and Testament of Patrikei Stroev (Late Fourteen–Early Fifteenth Centuries)

The testament of Patrikei Stroev (1392–1427) is one of the oldest extant wills to have originated from a secular hand in Muscovy. But much of the style and substance of this testament very soon became standard form by which to prepare for death. Later Muscovite testaments often proved to be more detailed, not only in enumerating greater properties but also in elaborating upon sentiments about death. There is little of that here, but Stroev does provide a thorough review of his property, giving us insight into the economy of individual freeholders in early Muscovy.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Lo, I, Patrikei, slave of God, departing this world [and] being of sound mind, do write this testament, from whom to take [what is owed me] and to whom to give [what I owe]. Take from Panuta a ruble; for a half-ruble have him mow the hay, and for the other half-ruble take two rams. Take from Panuta's brother, Onisim, a half-ruble; for that [money] have him do the mowing. Take from Ermak Ogofonov a half-ruble and two sheep. Take from Foka and Panetelek a half-ruble and a sheep. Take from Ustinka in [the village of] Okhotino a half-ruble and a pig carcass. Take from Iakusha, son-in-law to the priest Ofonasii, seven grivnas. And give two rubles to Fegnost. Give a half-ruble to Vasiian Ondronov. Give four rubles to my brother Kosten. Give four grivnas to one Klim in Moscow.

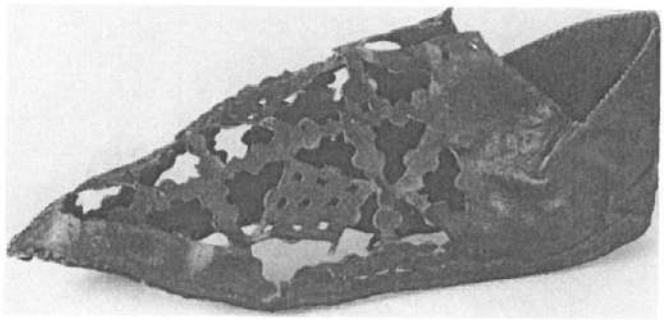
I have given to my two sons, Big Doronka and Fetka, the year-old bay, and to Doronka [another] bay mare and the mixed-color cow, the brown ox, and another black [ox]. To my wife [with] my children [I give] the light brown stallion with a black mane and tail, and the blue mare, two cows, one black the other brown, and the ginger ox. And they are to cast lots for my grain, whether [they get] the rye or the spring wheat. And they are each to take half of the rye which they just sowed.

And I direct my brother Kosten to sell two horses to pay my debts—the raven-black stallion and the chestnut mare.

And for the remembrance of my soul I have given to the Holy Trinity monastery the village of Ignat'evskoe and three beehives.

And I have entrusted to my brother Kosten [the care of] my wife and my children, and the collection and payment of my debts. And [while I composed this testament] my confessor, Abbot Nikon, sat by my head. And present [to hear the testament were]: Ivan Beklemishev, Klim Danilov, Klim Molotilo, and Piantel'i. Vasuk, son of the priest Ivan, wrote this testament. And all the witnesses imprinted [on this testament] a seal of a cross.

On the reverse: According to the testament of my brother, who ordered me to sell two horses and pay his debts, I sold them and paid the debt: to Parfenii I gave three rubles, [and] retrieved the borrowed silver; to Fegnast, the abbot's son, I paid two rubles, [and] to Kas'ian I paid a ruble. From Ermak I took a half-ruble



Leather shoe (fourteenth century). From *Drevnii Novgorod: Prikladnoe iskusstvo i arkheologiia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1985), p. 153. Reprinted courtesy of Iskusstvo Publishers.

and paid it to Vas'ian the elder, and [I gave] two sheep to the Ondronov son. From Foka and Panteleika I took a half-ruble.

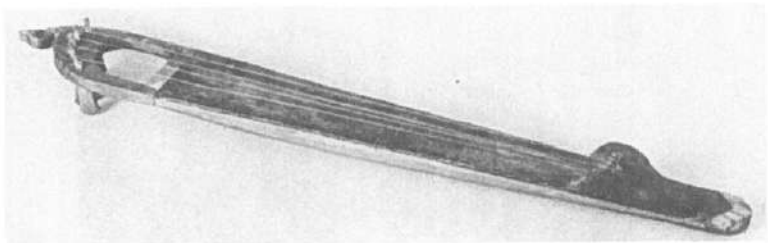
SOURCE: *Akty sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii Severo-Vostochnoi Rusi kontsa XIV-nachala XVI v.*, Vol. 1, no. 11 (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1952). Translated by Daniel H. Kaiser.

Minstrels in Rus': An Immunity Charter (1470)

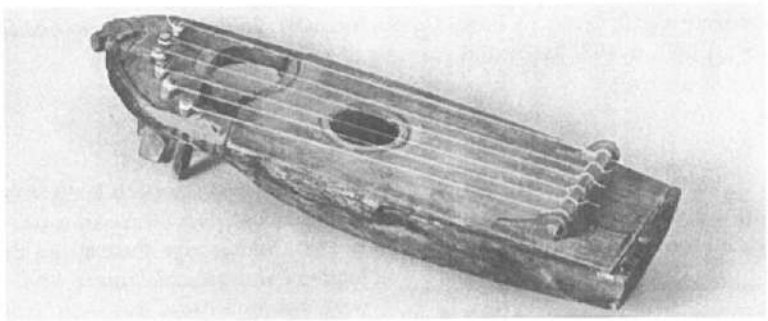
Because so much of elite culture opposed them, Rus' minstrels have left behind little evidence of their activity: no direct descriptions survive, and no narratives from the minstrels themselves. Instead, we have the words of their critics, and some other materials—both verbal and pictorial—with which to reconstruct their place in Rus' culture. Evidently the minstrels played stringed instruments (*gusli*) to accompany their songs, and some very ancient instruments of this type have been unearthed in Novgorod (see p. 132). The Novgorod digs also uncovered a superb leather mask, almost certainly also part of the minstrel's tools (see p. 134). Manuscript illustrations show them as jugglers and animal tamers, and clearly they were also musicians. But their activity was not welcome everywhere. Some landlords sought special immunity from the minstrels, but away from the centers of elite culture the minstrels evidently found a ready welcome. Indeed, surviving village inventories from around the year 1500 list minstrels just as they might some priest or smith, indicating not only a tolerance for such entertainers but also a recognition of their social station and value.

DMITROV PRINCE IURII VASIL'EVICH TO ABBOT SPIRIDON OF THE TRINITY-ST. SERGIUS MONASTERY

Lo I, Prince Iur'i Vasil'evich, have granted to the abbot of the Trinity Monastery, Spiridon, and to all the brothers of the St. Sergius Monastery, or to whoever will be abbot at that monastery, [the following:] that my princes, mili-



A



B

Five-stringed (mid-eleventh century) (A) and six-stringed (early twelfth century) (B) gusli. From *Drevnii Novgorod: Prikladnoe iskusstvo i arkheologiia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1985), p. 28. Reprinted courtesy of Iskusstvo Publishers.

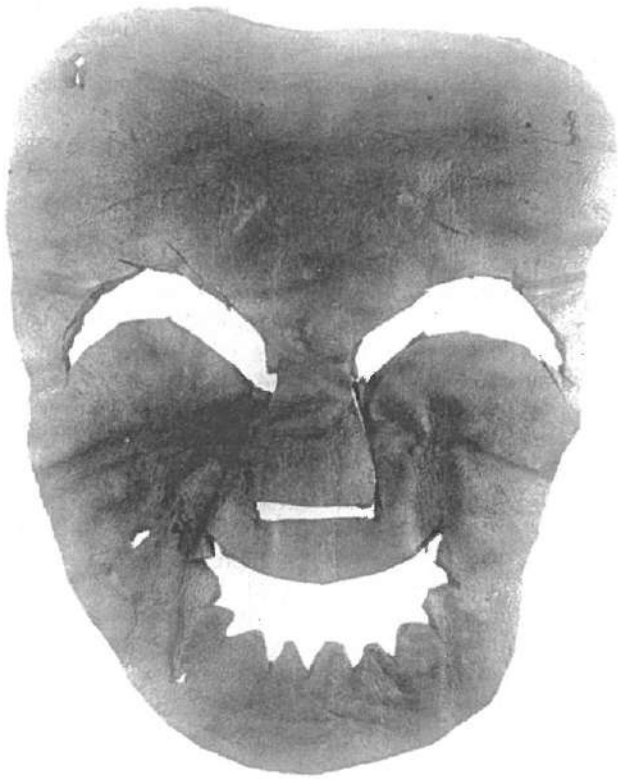
tary commanders, servitors, and all impost collectors, kennel keepers, fishermen, beavermen shall not be placed in their villages in Inobozhskii canton, namely, Ozerskoe, Zholtikovo and Abramovskoe, with all their settlements, neither shall they collect maintenance provisions, cart obligations, except when someone is in pursuit with my post-horse charter. Likewise no minstrels shall play among them in their villages.

If someone in violation of this my charter takes from them [fees or provisions] or if someone offends against them, he shall receive punishment from me.

This charter was given in the year 6978 [=1470] on the 14th day of January.

On the reverse: Prince Iurii Vasil'evich.

SOURCE: *Akty sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii Severo-Vostochnoi Rusi XIV-nachala XVI v.*, vol. 1 no. 393 (Moscow: AN SSSR, 1952). Translated by Daniel H. Kaiser.



Leather minstrel's mask (second half of the thirteenth century). From *Drevnii Novgorod: Prikladnoe iskusstvo i arkheologiia* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1985), p. 30. Reprinted courtesy of Iskusstvo Publishers.

LITERATURE

RUSSELL ZGUTA

Russian Minstrels: A Modern View

Historians of Russia, long having concentrated upon questions of state administration and economy, have perhaps too often overlooked the history of popular culture. Difficult to reconstruct in any case, given the ephemeral character of much of its expression, popular culture has seemed to generations of historians relatively unimportant. But for persons who lived in remote villages in late medieval Rus' (and most people of the era lived in these circumstances), the visit of a minstrel was almost certainly of more moment than any edict or monument of elite culture. In the selection which appears below, Russell Zguta traces the history and activity of these entertainers, introducing such scant evidence as we have to circumscribe their role in Rus' culture.

Upon leaving the strife-torn Kievan lands in the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, the *skomorokhi* [minstrels] proceeded in two directions: directly north toward Novgorod and northeast toward Vladimir-Suzdal. In both areas they left indelible traces of their early settlement and widespread activity by giving their name to numerous villages and hamlets. . . . Their primary objective . . . was Novgorod and Pskov. . . . At no time . . . were secular music and entertainment proscribed in Novgorod until Aleksei's universal ban on the *skomorokhi* in 1648 . . .

The migration and resettlement of the Russian minstrels in the north were completed by the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries. Evidence for this can be found in the series of initials, or miniature letter-figures, from Pskov, Novgorod, and Riazan, which art historians have identified as depicting *skomorokhi*. The earliest of these initials dates from the late thirteenth or early fourteenth century and is found in a Pskovian Psalter. . . . The initial in question is an Old Slavonic **Т** depicting a standing *skomorokh* dressed in a knee-length tunic and playing a five-string triangular-*gusli*. . . .

The earliest of the Novgorod initials date from 1323 and are found in the . . . collection of Sunday Gospels [see p. 135]. . . . Two are in the form of the Old Slavonic letter **Р** and four in the form of **В**. Of these six, two are animal tamers in the act of giving a performance; the animals they are handling are stylized dogs. The other four can be described as actors; one is sitting, another standing, and two are crouched on one knee, holding an axe and a cane respectively. All are wearing costumes . . . described as the standard attire of the *skomorokhi*. . . . In addition, several of the figures are wearing elaborate headdress.

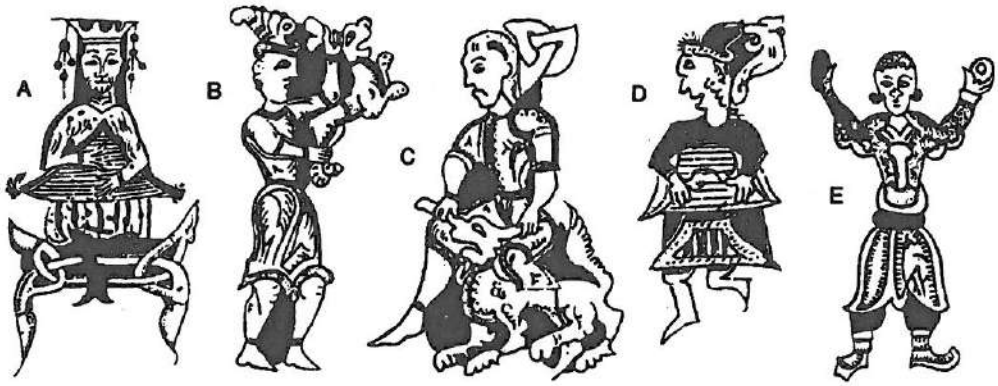
In another group of Novgorod letter-figure initials, taken from a 1355 edition of the [Sunday Gospels], two actors and a juggler are represented, both in the form of the letter **В**. A third version of the [Sunday Gospels], dating from 1358, contains an initial **Р** depicting a musician playing an oval, nine-string *gusli* (using a feather as a plectrum) and simultaneously dancing. Above and to the left of the letter-figure are inscribed the words *gudi gorazdo* ("play skillfully"), probably added by someone other than the copyist-artist by way of marginalia.

Perhaps the most interesting of the Novgorod initials are two from the mid-fourteenth century, one of which appears in a Psalter, the other in a Sluzhebnik, or Liturgicon. Both are in the form of the letter Д and depict flamboyantly dressed musicians [p. 135]. The Psalter *skomorokh* plays the oval *gusli* and is pictured in a squatting position, as if engaged in a dance. . . . Without a doubt, these two miniatures provide us with the most accurate visual description of early Russian minstrels to be found anywhere. Among the miniatures from Riazan [is one]. . . from the 1544 edition of the [Sunday Gospels]. . . . The letter Ч is represented by a *skomorokh*-juggler [see p. 135].

The thematic inspiration [for these illustrations] was provided by the *skomorokhi* themselves, who, as these miniatures clearly show, were not only widely dispersed throughout the north and northeast by this time, but were evidently also so well known that the illuminators could use them as easily identifiable models. With their flamboyant, colorful costumes and versatility of repertoire (the initials show them as musicians, dancers, actors, jugglers, and animal tamers), they offered the artist a wide range of possibilities, enabling him to execute any letter in the Old Slavonic alphabet in singularly eloquent fashion.

Finally, the thoroughly nonsecular nature of the manuscripts in which these miniatures appear (that is, Psalters and Liturgicons) might lead one to conclude that the Russian minstrels found conditions in the north far more favorable to the professional development than those in the south, where no such miniatures of *skomorokhi* have been found. . . .

With the sole exception of the *Zlatoust*, a late fourteenth-century translation of sermons and other didactic literature from the Greek Fathers, there are no further written references



Five manuscript initials depicting (A) a minstrel playing the Psalter (mid-fourteenth century), (B, C) taming animals (1323), (D) dancing (1358), and (E) juggling (1544). Reprinted courtesy of Russell Zguta.

to the *skomorokhi* until the second half of the fifteenth century. In the *Zlatoust* the *skomorokhi* are condemned, along with a host of other worldly amusements, for preparing the road to perdition for themselves and their listeners. It appears that, though the minstrels had found greater tolerance in the north, the church's official attitude toward them, particularly in the Muscovite lands, had changed little.

Their reputation and popularity continued to grow nonetheless. . . .

Revealing in this regard is a clause in a charter, or letters patent . . . , granted by Prince Iurii Vasil'evich of Dmitrov in 1470 to the Trinity-Saint Sergius Monastery (located some forty-eight miles north of Moscow). Here the *skomorokhi* are specifically forbidden to entertain in the villages and hamlets belonging to the monastery. Allowing for the ecclesiastical status of the petitioner, it is nonetheless significant that the first reference to *skomorokhi* in Muscovite sources is a negative one. Similar charters granted to both ecclesiastical and non-ecclesiastical petitioners in the early sixteenth century also evince varying degrees of antipathy toward the *skomorokhi*: in some they are forbidden to set foot in specified towns, villages, and hamlets; in others they are allowed to enter provided they refrain from loud or boisterous entertainment. Thus, while the civil authorities may not have shared the Muscovite clergy's traditional contempt for the *skomorokhi*, they were willing to grant certain communities the right not to be entertained against their will. The tolerant atmosphere that enabled the Russian minstrels to flourish in the northwest evidently did not prevail in the northeast. . . .

Sixteenth-century sources confirm the Muscovite church's virulent opposition to the *skomorokhi*. Maksim Grek, the controversial Greek scholar-translator living and writing in Moscow in the 1520s, addressed himself at length to the subject in one of his "Instructions". . . . He begins by stating that the *skomorokhi* have learned their trade from Satan himself and by virtue of this are already cursed and damned. . . . He lashes out at their sinful abuse of animals such as bears, whom they train to dance and engage in other Satanic games to the accompaniment of various musical instruments, and finally, he links them to witchcraft, which compounds their pernicious influence among the people. . . .

So the Muscovite *skomorokhi*, faced with relentless hostility from the ecclesiastical authorities, found it not only necessary for professional reasons (in order to reach a wider

audience), but also expedient for personal reasons (to elude the authorities) to take to the road. . . .

Upon examining the cadastres, census books, and customs duty records, it becomes clear that many of the *skomorokhi* were well integrated into the economic structure of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Russia. They could be found in the city and in the country, as taxpayers and with tax-exempt status. Some of them were relatively well to do, others eked out an existence as members of the lower taxpaying class . . . , while still others were poor, landless peasants . . . , or even serfs, not infrequently living off the church as paupers. Some were engaged in business and commerce, and a few were involved in small industry. There were also *skomorokhi* who doubled as professional soldiers. . . . Women were not excluded from their professional ranks, and there is at least one recorded instance of a *skomorokh*'s son who became a priest. . . .

In the course of their long history one musical instrument—the *gusli*—became a trademark of the *skomorokhi*. The term *gusli* itself is quite broad in meaning. Among the Eastern Slavs it ultimately acquired the meaning of "horizontal harp." In the early Russian sources it was used to denote strings and the sound that they made; a musical instrument in general; and a stringed musical instrument, as distinct from a percussion or wind instrument. . . . Not until the first half of the sixteenth century did *gusli* acquire the meaning it has today. Evidence . . . suggests that the *gusli* the early *skomorokh* carried was probably a small, light instrument of maple wood, resembling a four-sided horizontal harp. It had three or more strings of woven horse hair and was always played with the hand or fingers, never a bow. Prior to the eighteenth century it was used primarily to provide accompaniment for the singer. . . .

By the thirteenth century the oval or half-moon *gusli*-psaltery had become popular among the Eastern Slavs, especially in the northwest. This instrument, though frequently thought of as a variant of the traditional *gusli*, did not derive from it but was probably borrowed by the northern Slavs from the Balto-Finns. . . .

As the oval *gusli*-psaltery was gaining in popularity, a triangular version of the instrument also came into vogue; late thirteenth- and early fourteenth-century miniatures from Pskov and Novgorod bear this out. Like its oval counterpart, the triangular *gusli*-psaltery was probably of Balto-Finnic origin.

The *skomorokhi* began very early to favor the versatile *gusli*-psaltery, both oval and triangular, over the traditional four-sided version; in fact, this is the instrument depicted in all of the extant illustrations of *skomorokhi* playing the *gusli*. . . . Its popularity can be explained by the simple fact that the traditional *gusli* . . . must be played in a sitting position, with the instrument resting on one's lap or on a table. The *gusli*-psaltery, on the other hand, can be played either sitting or standing (with the instrument propped up against one's chest), giving the performer much greater freedom of movement and even enabling him to dance while playing. The miniature from the 1358 collection of Sunday Gospels and another one from a fourteenth-century Novgorod Liturgicon show how this can be done. . . .

The other stringed instrument with which the *skomorokhi* are frequently identified is the *gudok*. . . . This instrument, which resembles the modern cello, made its appearance very early in Russia, apparently imported from central Asia. Onion-shaped, with three strings, the *gudok* was held in a vertical position and played with a bow. Two of its strings were tuned in unison; the third, a fifth higher.

During the sixteenth century, and perhaps even earlier, the *skomorokhi* are known to have used several other instruments: the *domra*, which eventually gave birth to the modern Russian *balalaika*, the drum, the fiddle, the flute, and the horn. None of these, however, approached the *gusli* and *gudok* in popularity. With the exception of the *domra*, they seem to have been used primarily to provide musical accompaniment for dancing.

SOURCE: Russell Zguta, *Russian Minstrels: A History of the Skomorokhi* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press,

1978), pp. 23–7, 30–2, 37, 105–7 (excerpted). Reprinted by permission of Russell Zguta.

A. M. SAKHAROV
The Mongols and Cultural Change

Some historians have determined that whatever the economic and political consequences of the Mongol invasion, the cultural consequences were far more significant. Cut off from Western Europe by the Mongols and oriented instead toward Asia and nomadic culture, Rus' developed independent of the great humanizing influences embedded in the Renaissance and Reformation. Others go further, and observe that economic consequences—like the destruction of Rus' cities—determined certain cultural costs as well, destroying objects of cultural value (books, buildings, etc.), robbing Rus' of its most accomplished artisans, and simultaneously depriving artists of their patrons. In the selection reproduced here, A. M. Sakharov makes this point, observing that the Mongols failed to introduce any cultural innovations in their place. All the same, Sakharov detects a cultural revival in the fourteenth century which coincided with the gradual rise of the Moscow principality.

The extermination and exiling into captivity of masses of craftsmen undermined the very foundation of material culture, craftsmanship, which in the middle ages rested upon manual tools and involved many years of practice to develop the required skills for mastering the trade . . . Slate spindles and cornelian beads, glass bracelets and amphora-pots disappeared; the art of making enamel with ultra-fine partitions was lost forever; polychrome building tiles disappeared, and filigree and stamping of metal disappeared for a century and a half.

Russian architecture, which achieved such astonishing perfection and grandeur in the pre-Mongol period, suffered severely from the invasion. Masonry construction ceased entirely for half a century for lack of the material means and of master builders. The resumption of building with masonry at the end of the thirteenth century was accompanied by the loss of many devices of construction technique that had previously been used. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Moscow builders returned to building walls of trimmed stone alone, whereas as early as the first half of the thirteenth century the architects of Vladimir-Suzdal' were able to combine stone and brick, dense limestone and limestone tuff. The remarkable art of carving whitewashed stone, which made twelfth- and thirteenth-century structures so decorative, disappeared. Many devices of building technique were lost, and structures recently erected or just being built collapsed on more than one occasion (as occurred, for example, with the new Uspenskii Cathedral in Moscow in 1474).

A vast number of artifacts of the written word perished in the course of repeated invasions. The chronicle names only a few instances of the loss of collections of books, but from these one can picture how seriously Russian writings suffered from the onslaughts of the Mongol-Tatars. In 1382, when the Muscovites beat off a sudden attack by Tokhtamysh, the townsfolk and inhabitants of the nearby villages brought their books to stone churches to protect them against fire, and these books were so numerous that they filled the interiors of the Kremlin cathedrals to their roofs. All these riches were lost when Tokhtamysh succeeded in breaking into the city by treachery. It is no accident that many of the surviving monuments of the literature of ancient Rus' reached us via Novgorod, which was not destroyed by the Mongol-Tatars. The discovery at the end of the eighteenth century of the only copy of *The Lay of the Host of Igor* is clear evidence of what works of ancient Rus' literature might have disappeared forever during the invasions of the Mongol-Tatars and to what a degree, in probable consequence, our notions of ancient Rus' culture of the pre-Mongol period have been impoverished.

The damage done to literature by the Mongol-Tatar invasion was not limited solely to destruction of written legacies: the very character of works of literature changed. The writing of chronicles declined for a period, as manifested, in the words of D. S. Likhachev, "above all in total cessation of the maintaining of chronicles in a number of towns which were either entirely wiped from the face of the earth, like Staraia Riazan, or devastated and culturally bled white, as in the case of Vladimir, Chernigov, and Kiev." But even in those centers where chronicling activity suffered less destruction, "the writing of chronicles nonetheless became narrower, paler, laconic, and lacking ... that broad Russia-wide horizon characteristic of the Russian chronicles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries."

Both painting and applied arts suffered decline after the Mongol-Tatar onslaught.... Wherever the Mongol-Tatar conquerors went in Asia and Europe they brought death, destruction, and the downfall of culture. Nor did the fact that the conquerors made use, in their destruction, of improved means of military equipment and devices of troop organization borrowed from China and the Arabs, convert their destructive role in the conquered territories into the organization of any higher culture. The Mongol-Tatar invasion was a terrible calamity for Russian culture: that is an indisputable historical fact....

It may be taken as established that the second half of the fourteenth century marked the beginning of a new upsurge of Russian culture, determined by the successes of economic development and the major triumph over the conquerors at the historic Battle of Kulikovo [1380].

Reborn and developing Russian culture retained its national character in full. The Mongol-Tatars enriched it with nothing whatever, and their influence was quite insignificant in practice. A small number of Eastern words that entered the Russian language via the Mongol-Tatars (*bazaar, magazin* [store], *cherdak* [garret], *altyn* [monetary unit], *sunduk* [chest], *zenit* [zenith], *kaftan, tiufak* [mattress], etc.), some motifs in applied arts, in the clothing of the feudal elite—this essentially is the totality of the Mongol-Tatar influence upon Russian culture. The opinion held by some scholars to the effect that certain negative customs such as the sequestration of women came to Rus' with the Mongol-Tatars, as did a "spoiling of morals," have long since been cast in doubt ... [I]t must not be forgotten that both in Rus' itself as in all countries in the Middle Ages, there was much that was dark and savage from the standpoint of present-day notions of manners and morals, and was determined by the times, the epoch ...

Neither in legislation, nor in social thought, nor in literature, nor in painting is it possible to observe anything borrowed from the Mongol-Tatars. The most reliable indicator in this respect is the evaluation of the Mongol-Tatar invasion and yoke by the people themselves. Everything we know of oral folklore of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries testifies unequivocally and categorically to the sharply negative evaluation the people gave to the Mongol-Tatar invasion and yoke....

A number of stages in the process of cultural history in Rus' from the latter half of the thirteenth to the end of the fifteenth centuries can be identified, corresponding to stages of general historical development.

The first stage (from the Mongol-Tatar invasion approximately to the middle of the fourteenth century) is characterized by a notable decline in various spheres of material and intellectual culture. However, at the same time, the first signs of the beginning of a rebirth are to be seen as early as the end of the thirteenth century. In Tver, Novgorod, and later in Moscow, stonemasonry was revived and new centers of chronicle-writing appeared (Moscow and Tver). There was a general change in the geography of cultural centers, with the former centers of culture—Vladimir, Suzdal', and Rostov—retreating into the background. This was related to the change in the relationship of political forces in Rus', and also with the shattering of the towns by the Mongol-Tatars. In this period Russian culture's external connections proved to be almost totally interrupted. Only Novgorod and Pskov retained

communication with the countries of the West. Those two cities have a special place in the history of Russian culture in the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries. Having survived the Mongol-Tatar pogrom and established the political structure of feudal republics, they reached the apex of their economic and cultural development in the period in question. Here the traditions of old Rus' literature, architecture, and painting were preserved and continued. Culture acquired noticeable democratic features. Novgorod and Pskov were major centers of the European culture of their time. This is persuasively testified to by the results of the work of Soviet archeologists during recent decades, including the finding, in 1951, of the celebrated birch-bark documents.

The second stage (approximately from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries) was that of the economic rise of Rus', the strengthening of local governmental structures, the upsurge of Moscow, Tver, Novgorod, Nizhnii Novgorod, and Riazan as large and powerful economic and political centers. . . . This period saw the rise of Russian culture, and it was also the period when the idea of the unity of the Russian land and some highly distinctive local features appeared. Andrei Rublev and Theophanes the Greek, so great and dissimilar from each other; the *Words of Praise of the Monk Foma*; the chronicle tale about Prince Mikhail Iaroslavich and the contrasting chronicling done in Moscow, which persistently advanced the idea that Moscow had been divinely chosen and that the descendants of Kalita had the right to the political direction of the Russian lands; the flourishing of the distinctive architecture of Novgorod and Pskov—all these and many other phenomena of Russian culture bore distinctive testimony . . . to the fact that it was unquestionably on the rise . . .

This was the period when the isolation of Russian culture, brought about by the Mongol-Tatars, began to be broken down, and connections with Bulgarian and Serbian cultures were established. While coming under South Slavic influence, Russian literature, however, retained its national character to the full and was noticeably enriched by virtue of that influence both as art and, in part, in the realm of ideas. Elements of the psychological made an appearance in literature, and then grew stronger . . . Anticlerical "heretic" currents arose, and bold rationalist thinking made its appearance in embryonic form. Novgorod, Pskov, and Tver, where these heresies spread, were in open contact with the culture of the West. Russian social thought sought on the whole—still within the framework of the religious world-view—to interpret and connect the past and present of the Russian land. All these are the characteristic features of that distinctive stage in the development of Russian culture that D. S. Likhachev [the leading contemporary scholar of early Russian culture] called the "Pre-Renaissance."

The new stage in the process of cultural history pertains to the second half of the fifteenth century and continues into the beginning of the sixteenth century. This was the time of the unification of the Russian lands with all its consequences, both progressive and conservative. The interpenetration of local cultures intensified. Master builders from Pskov made an appearance in Moscow and local chronicles followed events in Moscow with great care. Having become the country's center of government, Moscow became the center of the culture of the Russian nationality then taking shape. . . . Connections with the countries of the West were further expanded and intensified, but cultural contact with them was blocked by the Church with its stubborn struggle against "Latinism," and everything new and foreign. The Russian "Pre-Renaissance" was not succeeded by an actual Renaissance, and this is primarily due to the features of the socioeconomic basis of the unitary Russian state, which had risen and developed on the foundation of feudalism and serfdom. The lag and weakness of the towns was particularly strongly felt in the fate of Russian culture. . . .

Thus, the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were a time of reestablishment and upsurge of the culture of the Russian lands after the terrible Mongol-Tatar devastation, and of the beginning of the shaping of the culture of the Russian (Great-Russian) nationality. It was pre-

cisely during that period that it was enriched by such very major achievements as the painting of Rublev and Dionysius, which were the apex of the development of the culture of Rus' and rested upon its entire multiform advance. . . .

SOURCE: A. M. Sakharov, "Rus' and Its Culture in the Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries," *Soviet Studies in History*, 18, 3(Winter 1979–80): 37–46 (excerpted). Reprinted by permission of M. E. Sharpe, Inc.

MIKHAIL ALPATOV

The Historical Significance of Andrei Rublev

Perhaps the best proof for those who contend that a cultural revival did occur in the fourteenth century is the work of Andrei Rublev (ca. 1370–ca. 1430). Probably first a monk at the Trinity St. Sergius Monastery, Rublev later joined the Andronnikov Monastery in Moscow. By early in the fifteenth century, he had become an acknowledged master, painting icons and frescoes for some of the most important and beautiful new churches of his time. Sometimes compared to the Italian painter Giotto, Rublev brought to his painting a similarly deeply humanistic sensibility and an ethereal palette which contrasted sharply with the more severe, spare painting of an earlier time (see p. 141). In the selection reproduced here, Mikhail Alpatov ascribes even more importance to Rublev, observing that Rublev lived in an era of great inequality, a time of regimentation of art, both of which limitations he destroyed with his brush.

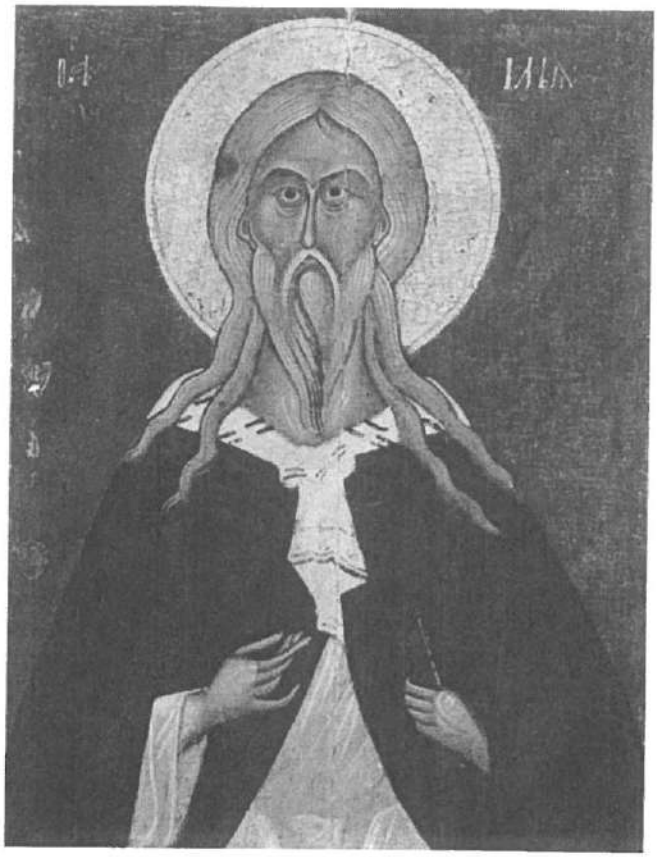
In old Rus' people infrequently praised a great artist. All the same, the name of Rublev was surrounded by general recognition and honor. It became almost a common noun by which to signify a genuine artist . . . People did not find in the works of Rublev depictions of their contemporaries, or of contemporary events, especially battle victories of the Rus' army. Nevertheless, people discerned in his works an incomparable charm which can characterize only the works of genius. They were proud of Rublev, they valued his masterpieces, and they rejoiced in the fact that they possessed them, and through him they communed with the highest artistic creation. By his art Rublev elevated humankind.

Remembering the difficult time when Rublev lived and worked, one cannot help but be amazed by the fact that he succeeded in creating such an accomplished art. In his rise and later in his death there was a kind of historical regularity. The struggle with the Mongols who had invaded from the East . . . demanded from the Russian people enormous exertion of physical and moral strength. And the art of this time gave birth to this moral upsurge. . . .

The Russian people went to battle [against the Mongols in 1380] under the banner of [Prince] Dimitrii [Donskoi] in order to break the force of the Mongols, and no one could have foreseen then that Moscow would become the stronghold of autocracy, that the people would exchange the Tatar yoke for enserfment, that both in the life of the church and in that of the state the police regime would triumph, the tsar's authorities would subordinate art to themselves, would thrust on artists their own program, and reduce their role to being simply illustrators. . . . And if in art something lively and poetic was preserved, then it was in spite of what the authorities did. This whole time, until the complete disappearance of old Russian painting under Peter, there was not one master equal to Rublev or Dionysii.

One must ask why the art of Rublev did not become the beginning of prolonged development. It was the result of a brief opening in the historical tragedy of the nation. Rublev used this brief period of creative liberty to express in the creations of his genius the most memorable representations of the world, of humankind, and of beauty, and to express his dreams and ideals. Later artistic geniuses of Russia could only guess at this fleeting dream.

Rublev lived at a time when Russian society



Icon of "The Prophet Elijah" (late fourteenth century). From V. N. Lazarev, *Novgorodskaia ikonopis'* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), plate 25. Reprinted courtesy of Iskusstvo Publishers.

was strictly subordinated to an order which claimed the right to control everything, including art. The inequality which prevailed between the highest and lowest layers of society burdened many people of that time. But the founder of the Trinity monastery, St. Sergei himself, lived like an ordinary peasant his whole working life. His contemporaries often remarked that all people, both the highest-ranking and the most simple, were children of Adam.

Every great artist of that time was obliged to work to the orders of the social elite. The patrons of Rublev were the Grand Prince Vasilii Dmitrievich, the father superior of the Trinity Monastery, Nikon, and perhaps Prince Iurii of Zvenigorod. Only these people possessed the means to finance the creation of significant and sizable monuments of art. And this inevitably led to the fact that art became a privilege of the social elite.

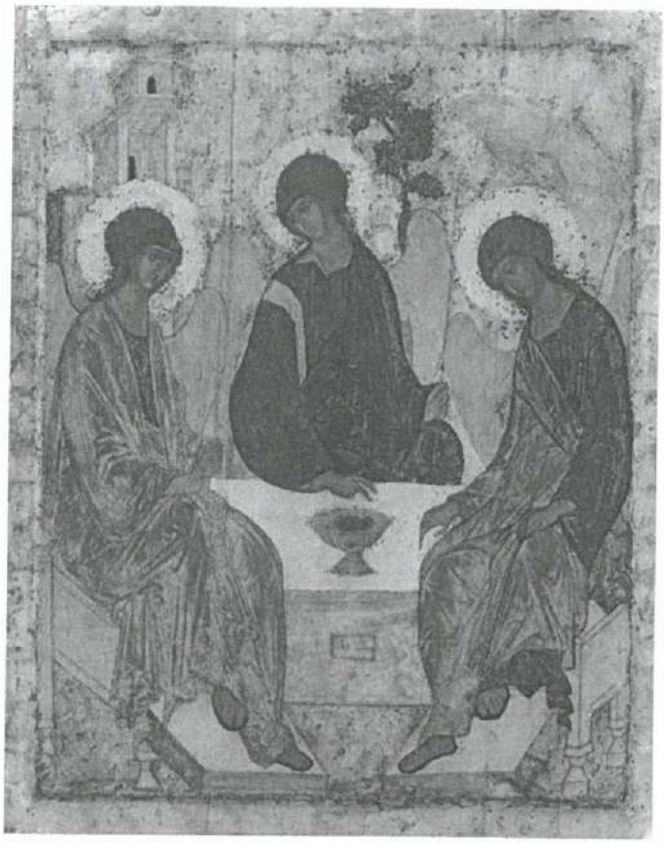
One can imagine that a peasant, educated in the "primitive" letters of the Russian North, would wonder at the absence in Rublev's "Trinity" of Patriarch Abraham and Sarah [see p. 143]. He might be troubled by the fact that in Rublev's "Last Judgment" the sound of the angels' trumpets did not provoke fear

"Old Testament Trinity" from the Novgorod Quadripartite icon (fourteenth–fifteenth centuries). From V. N. Lazarev, *Novgorodskaia ikonopis'* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1976), plate 34. Reprinted courtesy of Iskusstvo Publishers.

among those being resurrected from the dead, as popular religious poetry of the time suggested. On the other hand, for Rublev and for people of his circle, the crudeness, the wild fanaticism in the icons of peasant masters alienated them. In fact, most icons which then existed in Rus', especially icons which were deeply revered, were not Rublev-like in character or spirit.

Indeed, between Rublev and the Novgorod school there were wide differences. The "Trinity" icon of the so-called "Quadripartite Icon" from the Church of St. John in Novgorod depicts a mighty divinity in the company of associates wholly submissive to his will. In the Novgorod icon there is no trace of "triple harmony" of the world; rather hierarchy prevails here, expressed in a pyramidal composition, the subordination of the lesser to the greater. Only clear, brilliant coloring deprives the icon of the fearful force of an idol. . . .

The icons and frescoes of Rublev were intended to beautify churches. The themes of his painting are borrowed from Scripture, and in that way silently took part in the Orthodox liturgy. Of course, Rublev served his art because he believed deeply, and this faith overflowed from him, and inspired him in his creative



"Old Testament Trinity" icon by Andrei Rublev (ca. 1411). From V. N. Lazarev, *Moskovskaia shkola ikonopisi* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), plate 35. Reprinted courtesy of Iskusstvo Publishers.

achievement. But this does not exhaust the explanation of that which came from his hands. In his art Rublev served the Church, but he also always remained an artist, an artistic genius. Many other ordinary masters, like Rublev, recognized the dogmas of the church and scrupulously observed its rituals. But only he had that which distinguishes him from the ordinary icon-painter—great insight, penetration into the world of the human spirit. His art is like an inspired song, like an exciting vision, like prophecy. He had revealed to him the truth, the fate of humankind, its good and beauty. Therefore the value of Rublev does not lie in the fact that by his brush or the colors he gave to it he expressed that which previously the fathers of the church had put into words. Rublev expressed in his painting things which no one else before him had ever expressed—or had ever even thought. Each of his icons is a triumphant hymn, a psalm of praise, a prayer. There are no words, no texts or even lyrics which could duplicate that which even now conquers us in the works of Rublev. . . .

The majority of the contemporaries of Rublev submissively, almost mechanically "copied" iconographic canons. Rublev, however, attempted to reach the truth; in the visible forms of reality he surmised the secrets of the

creation of the world, and therefore in the teaching of the Pseudo-Dionysius [neo-Platonist philosopher] he must have been drawn to the conviction that one learns the invisible through the visible, that created beauty is but a reflection of an uncreated beauty, that a heavenly light falls on our earthly things. . . . Rublev could give to icon painting a deep philosophical meaning, inasmuch as he felt that each subject had, beyond its direct meaning, another, allegorical meaning. . . . He did not attempt a precise reproduction of the subject, but contented himself with a "rough similarity," metaphors which help one understand the connection of phenomena. . . .

Most of all there is in Rublev a vitality of understanding of the organic structure of forms, in the communication of the movement of the human figure. . . . In the works of Rublev the tempo is slower, and correspondingly in its contours there is more fluidity and smoothness. . . .

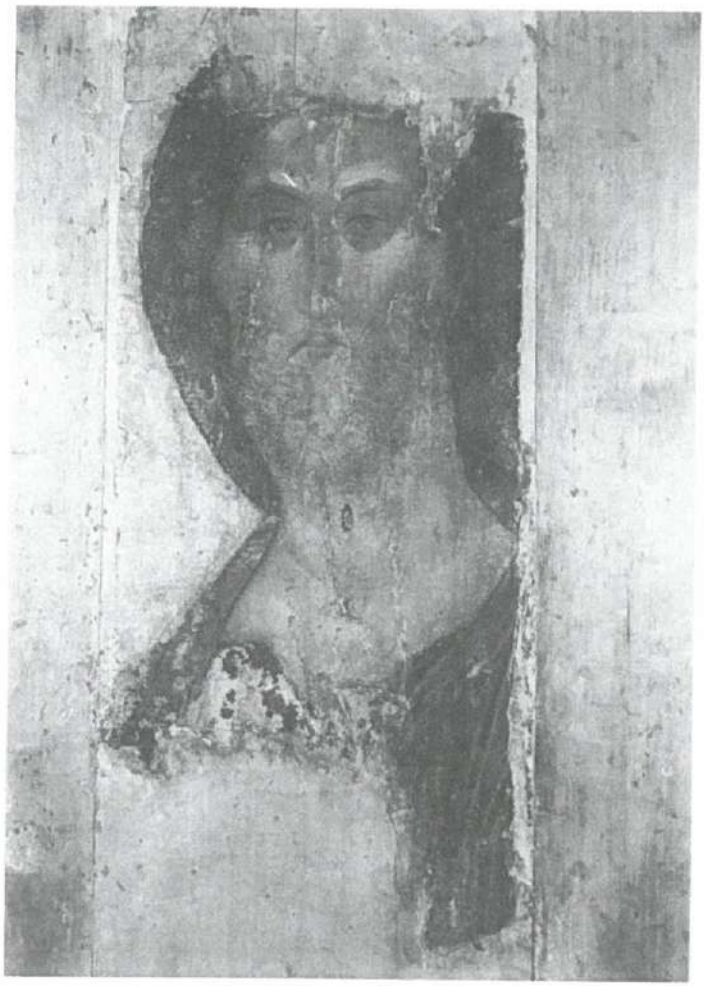
The completeness, the subordination of its parts, is a characteristic quality of the painting of Rublev. In his works one never notices a deformation, an excessive stretching of proportions. He is content to lighten the forms, and lightly he narrows the body extremities. This is noticeable already in his early works, and remained later, and forever distinguishes the works created by Rublev's own hand from the works of his students, who exaggerated figures, and so deprived them of organic integrity. Medieval masters rather often depicted as larger that which was more important. . . . Rublev acted differently. In his "Savior" from the Zvenigorod iconostasis [see p. 145] the outline of the face, especially the eyes, nose, and lips, are considerably decreased in comparison with the rather large figure. Furthermore, its aspect becomes more spiritualized, more refined, narrower.

In the painting of Rublev there is a feminine softness. But the precise definition of forms gives his figures force and firmness. The art of Rublev at bottom is very lyrical, but this is not a modern lyricism in which a person in search of a refuge is saved from the surrounding world. The lyricism of Rublev is a sympathy of the artist for what is personal, and this sympathy is raised to a level of a general human norm. This is why Rublev, like a monumentalist, escaped the cold ceremony which frequently attaches to the works of Byzantine masters.

Rublev was not only an artist, poet and thinker, but he was also a painter, a master of colors. . . . The palette of Rublev startles not so much by the wealth of colors (in this respect Dionysii outdoes him), but by the abundance of different color registers. . . . Color possesses for Rublev a great force, even in half-tones, but it is never dense, never too heavy. . . . Rublev shied away from high light which falls on colors. Color itself emits light in his hand; colors are arranged according to the force of their own light, giving an impression of lightness which dominates his paintings and does not admit any gloominess. In Rublev's world, colors and light breathe lightly and freely.

The colors of Rublev are beautiful, tender, and noble. They never clang, but rather sing. They seem like the expression of something more elevated than they themselves. They open to our eyes something unseen, and draw us to them. The symbol of color, about which thinkers have spoken, does not have decisive significance. Over its conditional language prevails something more generally understood. Pure colors and light express a spiritual beauty. This is the promise, a presentiment of heavenly bliss. . . .

In order to determine the historical place of Rublev one must remember that his younger contemporary was Jan van Eyck, that the "Trinity" of Rublev is also a masterpiece, like the remarkable Ghent altarpiece, "Adoration of the Lamb," done somewhat later. The Dutch masterpiece wins one over most of all by its broad scope of the real world, by its loving appreciation and reproduction of the smallest details in combination with the deep symbolic sense of the whole. The masterpiece of Rublev, on the contrary, conquers one by its ability to express much in a small, laconic allegory embracing the whole world. This attests to Rublev's attachment to ancient tradition. . . .



"Savior" icon by Andrei Rublev (1410–20). From V. N. Lazarev, *Moskovskaia shkola ikonopisi* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980), plate 31. Reprinted courtesy of Iskusstvo Publishers.

Sometimes people call Rublev the "Russian Fra Angelico," since they were both artist-monks, overcoming medieval asceticism and both brought to art faint notes of humanity. They have compared Rublev with other masters of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, like Simon Martin, Brederlam, and Meister Frank. But in distinction from these other masters, Rublev was not an artist of a transitional epoch. Traces of duplicity, artistic eclecticism were deeply alien to him. Rublev marks not a turning point in the development of Russian art, but one of its most remarkable peaks. This is why his art entrances by its wholeness and accomplishment, why with all the relativity of similar designations Rublev may justly be named the "Russian Rafael."

SOURCE: M. Alpatov, *Andrei Rublev* (Moscow: Izobrazitel'noe iskusstvo, 1972), pp. 129–40 (excerpted). Translated by Daniel H. Kaiser.