

“Tale of the Life of Alexander Nevsky”

text translated from the *Pskov Second Chronicle*

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*Pskov Second Chronicle* version (late fifteenth century)

## B. LIVES OF THE SAINT-PRINCES

## 39. TALE OF THE LIFE AND COURAGE OF THE PIOUS AND GREAT PRINCE ALEXANDER [NEVSKY]

THE heroic personality of Alexander, who was first Prince of Novgorod, then, after 1252, Great Prince of Vladimir and of all Russia, has inspired Russians from the thirteenth century to World War II, when the Soviet government established a military medal in his honor and bearing his name. Indeed, Alexander Nevsky managed to protect Russia's western borders in one of the most tragic periods of his nation's history—when the eastern part was overrun by the Mongols under Batu Khan. The original version of this *vita* was apparently written as a military tale by one of the warriors of his household who witnessed Alexander's last years of life. This version clearly reflects the military and feudal background of its writer, and its very title, "Tale of the Life and *Courage* of Prince Alexander," is unusual for a *vita*. Further, when the author decries the passing of his lord, his words reveal the fealty of a feudal warrior to his lord, for the author says: "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." The details of the deeds of some warriors of Alexander's army also point to the origin of the author. Probably he knew many of the prince's warriors who distinguished themselves in the Battle of Nevá, such as Sbyslav, son of Yakun, and Misha, both known from the chronicles to be representatives of leading Novgorodian families.

Description of some episodes, several metaphors, and similes in this early version testify that it was patterned to some extent after a Byzantine knightly epic cycle known as "The Deeds of Digenes Akrites."<sup>1</sup> The original *Tale of the Life and Courage of the Pious and Great Prince Alexander* [Nevsky] was

<sup>1</sup> Digenes Akrites was the hero of a cycle describing the struggle between the Moslem Arabs and Christian Byzantines of Asia Minor in the ninth century A.D. "Akrites" means a "wandering frontier knight," and "Digenes" means "twice-born." According to legend, Digenes' father was a certain Andronikos, a Byzantine Christian; however Digenes for some time thought that his father was not Andronikos but a Moslem emir at whose court he had grown up and been educated. Hence his name, Digenes, "twice-born."

rewritten later, around 1280, by some ecclesiastic from the city of Vladimir. To the original text he added some deeds, quotations, and motifs from the Bible and, especially, from the Psalms, the First, Second, and Fourth Books of Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Isaiah, and the Apocryphal book of The Wisdom of Solomon. In most cases this second writer drastically rephrased the words of these quotations, as well as the original content, often replacing the names of heroes from antiquity and Byzantine history with those from biblical sources. This reworking is reflected clearly in the text that has reached us, for in some places it destroyed the *Tale's* narrative and stylistic unity and resulted in an unsystematic rearrangement of the source material.

The *vita* is of special interest—being the first one about a prince, a defender of the country and of Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Early Russian *vitae* described the lives of monks or outstanding bishops and such martyrs as Boris and Gleb, who sought to imitate Christ. In the case of Alexander's *vita* the main protagonist is not necessarily a man distinguished by an exemplary Christian life but, rather, the defender of his "holy" nation against invaders of alien faiths who attacked Russia from "countries of the North, West, and East."

This translation follows a fifteenth-century text contained in the *Second Pskovian Chronicle* and published in *Pskovskie letopisi*, Volume II, Moscow, 1955, pages 11–16. The translator on some occasions used the editorial suggestions of Yu. K. Begunov, who prepared for publication another version of the same tale in *Izbornik*, Moscow-Leningrad, 1970, pages 328–342 and 739–742.

The words in brackets have been added by the translator to assist understanding.

By the will of Our Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God.

I, the unworthy and sinful servant of God, will try, despite my poor mind, to write the life of holy Prince Alexander, son of Yaroslav and grandson of Vsevolod.<sup>2</sup> I am glad to tell about his holy, noble, and glorious life in the same way as I have heard it from my father and other older people, as well as about the events I have seen myself, while I lived in his household and witnessed his life. For King Solomon says:

<sup>2</sup> Prince Alexander (1220–1263) was the son of Great Prince Yaroslav of Vladimir and grandson of Great Prince Vsevolod the Great Nest (1154–1212), who was instrumental in transferring the balance of power from declining Kiev in southern Russia to the city of Vladimir in the north, where a new capital of the Russian land developed.

*"Wisdom cannot enter a deceitful soul.  
And it will rise,  
and it will watch in the middle of the roads,  
and it will sit at the gates of the mighty."*<sup>3</sup>

Although I am simple of mind, I will still start my work with a prayer to the Holy Mother of God, with the help of the holy Prince Alexander.

#### I. PRINCE ALEXANDER

By the will of God, Prince Alexander was born from the charitable, people-loving, and meek Great Prince Yaroslav, and his mother was Theodosia. As it was told by the prophet Isaiah: "Thus saith the Lord: I appoint the princes because they are sacred and I direct them."

It is really true, for without God's will there would not have been his rule.

He was taller than others and his voice reached the people as a trumpet, and his face was like the face of Joseph, whom the Egyptian Pharaoh placed as the next king after him in Egypt.<sup>4</sup> His power was a part of the power of Samson and God gave him the wisdom of Solomon and his courage was like that of the Roman King Vespasian, who conquered the entire land of Judea. Once, during the siege of the city Jeotapata, the burghers of the city made a sortie and defeated his army and Vespasian remained alone. But he still chased the enemy's army to the city gates and thereafter he jeered at his own army and reproached them, saying: "You abandoned me and left me alone."<sup>5</sup>

And so was this Prince Alexander: he used to defeat but was never defeated. Once, for the sake of seeing him, there came a powerful man from the Western Land, from those who call themselves "the servants of God,"<sup>6</sup> because he wanted to see Alexander at the blossom of his life. He did so in the same way as did the Queen of Sheba, who came to Solomon to hear

<sup>3</sup> This text is a paraphrased version of the Apocryphal book, The Wisdom of Solomon, 1:4 and 6:14.

<sup>4</sup> A reference to the biblical story described in Genesis 41 ff.

<sup>5</sup> A reference to the description of the siege of the city of Jeotapata by Josephus Flavius in his *Great Roman-Jewish War*. Emperor Vespasian (A.D. 69-79) quelled the rebellion of the Jews.

<sup>6</sup> Servant of God: from the German "Gottesritter." The narrator speaks of Anders von Welven, the Great Master of the German Livonian Order, which at that time conquered Livonia, presently Latvia and Estonia.

his wisdom. And thus did this man, whose name was Andreas. He saw Prince Alexander, returned to his people, and told them: "I went through many countries and saw many people, but I have never met such a king among kings, nor such a prince among princes."

#### II. DEFEAT OF THE SWEDES IN THE BATTLE OF NEVÁ IN 1240

The king of the Northern Country,<sup>7</sup> who was of the Roman faith and who had heard about the courage of Prince Alexander, pondered, thinking: "I will go and conquer Alexander's land."

And he gathered a great army 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 Nevá, and, carried away by his madness and filled with pride, he sent his envoys to the city, Novgorod, to Prince Alexander, saying: "If you can, resist me. I am already here conquering your land."

Upon hearing these words, Alexander's heart burned and he went to the Church of Holy Sophia, and, kneeling before the altar, he began to pray, shedding tears and saying: "Glorious and Just Lord, Great and Powerful God, God Eternal, who created heaven and earth, and who determined the boundaries of the peoples. Thou commandedst people to live without oppressing the other countries."

And remembering the song from the Psalter, he said: "O Lord, judge those who offended me. Smite those who set themselves against me and come to my aid with arms and shields."

Having finished his prayer, he got up and bowed to the archbishop and the Archbishop Spiridon blessed him and let him go. Leaving the church, he wiped his tears and began to encourage his regiments, saying: "God is in Truth, not in Power. Let us remember the psalmist who said: 'Some came with weapons and some came on horses, but we called the Lord God to our help and they were defeated and fell, but we got up and stood straight.'"

After having said this, he led his small troop against the enemy, even before the many other regiments came, because he relied upon the help of the Holy Trinity. It was a great sorrow that his honorable father, Yaroslav the Great,<sup>8</sup> did not know that his son, dear Alexander, was attacked; but Alexander didn't have time to send a message to his father because the enemy was nearing. Even many men from Novgorodian lands didn't have time to join him because the prince was in a hurry to start the campaign. On Sunday, July 15th—on the day when five

<sup>7</sup> The narrator gives the name of "northern land" to Sweden.

<sup>8</sup> See footnote 2 of this Selection.

hundred and thirty Holy Fathers who attended the Council of Chalcedon, as well as the holy martyrs, Kyrík and Julita, are remembered<sup>9</sup>—he moved against the enemies because he relied upon the help of the holy martyrs, Boris and Gleb.<sup>10</sup>

There lived in Izhora a certain notable who was the head of this land and whose name was Pelgusius,<sup>11</sup> and who was in charge of watching the seashore. He was baptized, but lived with his tribe, which remained pagan still; when he received Holy Baptism, he was named Philip. He lived very piously, fasting every Wednesday and Friday, and therefore, God wanted him to see on that day an awesome vision. Let us talk briefly about it:

After Pelgusius reconnoitered and determined the power of the enemy, he went to meet Prince Alexander to tell him about the enemy's camp and fortifications. Pelgusius remained on the seashore watching both roads, and therefore he did not sleep the entire night. And when the sun began to rise, he heard a loud noise from the sea and saw a moving ship, and in the midst of the ship stood the holy martyrs, Boris and Gleb, dressed in crimson vestments and embracing each other. The men rowing appeared as if in clouds.

And Boris said: "Brother Gleb, order them to row in order to help our relative, Alexander."

Pelgusius was awestruck by this vision and by these words of the martyrs, and he did not move until the ship disappeared from sight.

Soon thereafter Prince Alexander arrived. Pelgusius was full of joy when he saw Alexander and told only the prince what he had seen. And the prince said to him: "Do not tell this to anyone."

Thereafter, Alexander decided to charge the enemy at eleven o'clock in the morning [June 15th], and there was a great battle with those Roman Catholics, and he destroyed an endless number of them and with his lance even left a mark on the king's own face.<sup>12</sup> In this battle six men from Alexander's army dis-

<sup>9</sup> The Ecumenical Church Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451). Sts. Kyrík and Julita are remembered on July 16.

<sup>10</sup> The story of Boris and Gleb, indirect forebears of Alexander Nevsky, is given in Selection 21.

<sup>11</sup> Pelgusius was the head of a local Finno-Ugric tribe and was converted to Christianity by the Russians.

<sup>12</sup> Under "Roman Catholic" the narrator meant the Swedes and Norwegians, who at that time belonged to the Roman church. The narrator gives the title "king" to Birger Jarl, regent of Sweden during the reign of the Swedish king, Eric.

tinguished themselves for their bravery because they fought courageously.

1. The first was the son of Alexis, Gabriel by name. He attacked a ship and, noticing there the royal prince<sup>13</sup> supported by two people, he rode onto the gangway. Everyone escaped from him back to the ship, but thereafter they turned and threw him and his horse from the gangway into the Nevá. With God's help he got out of the water uninjured, charged them again and fought courageously with the general, himself, who was surrounded by his warriors.

2. The second, a Novgorodian by name Sbyslav, son of Yakun, on several occasions charged the army and fought only with a battle-ax, no fear in his heart. And several were killed by him and the people marveled at his power and his courage.

3. The third, Jacob, a man from Polotsk,<sup>14</sup> was the prince's huntsman. He charged the enemy with a sword, fought courageously with them, and was praised by the prince.

4. The fourth one was a Novgorodian, by name Misha, who fought on foot with his detachment. He attacked the Latin ships and sank three of them.

5. The fifth, by name Savva, was from a junior regiment. He charged a big, golden-crowned tent and cut its pole. When the tent fell, Alexander's regiments were very much encouraged.

6. The sixth, also the prince's warrior, was called Ratmir. He likewise fought on foot and was encircled by many. He was wounded several times and died from these wounds. All this I have heard from my lord, Alexander, and from many others who participated in this massacre.<sup>15</sup>

There happened a miracle which reminds us of the one which took place in olden times, during the reign of King Hezekiah, when Jerusalem was attacked by Sennacherib, King of Assyria. Suddenly there appeared the angel of the Lord, who killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand Assyrian warriors, and when the next morning came their bodies were found there. The same occurred after Alexander's victory when he defeated the king: on the other shore of the river Izhora, which Alexander's regiments did not reach, there were found numerous enemy who were killed by the angel of the Lord. The remaining enemies escaped and they put the corpses of their warriors into

<sup>13</sup> Royal prince: apparently the son of Birger Jarl.

<sup>14</sup> Some troops from Polotsk participated in the Battle of Nevá.

<sup>15</sup> In this sentence the author testifies that he was a member of Prince Alexander's retinue.

ships and sank the ships in the sea, and Prince Alexander returned with victory, praising and glorifying his Creator.

### III. CAMPAIGN OF 1242 AGAINST THE GERMAN LIVONIAN ORDER

The next year, after Alexander returned with victory, there came once more the adversary from the Western Country,<sup>16</sup> who built a fortress on Alexander's land. Alexander started a campaign immediately and razed the fortress to its foundations. Some of the enemy were hanged, some others were taken prisoner, and to some others he gave mercy, releasing them because he was more merciful than anyone else.

The third year after his victory over the king,<sup>17</sup> during the winter, Alexander campaigned with a big army in the German country<sup>18</sup> in order to show them they should not brag, saying: "Let us go and conquer the nation of the Slavs."

Indeed, they seized the city of Pskov, and appointed there their own city officers. Alexander captured them, and liberated the city of Pskov from the conquerors. And he destroyed the country of the Germans and took an endless number of prisoners and cut to pieces the others.

Thereafter several German cities<sup>19</sup> concluded a treaty among themselves and decided: "Let us take Alexander. Let us take him prisoner with our own hands." When the enemy approached they were noticed by Alexander's scouts and Prince Alexander put his regiments in battle formation and went to meet the enemy. And the Chud Lake was covered with dead warriors of both armies. [In this battle participated] the troops which his father Yaroslav sent with Alexander's younger brother, Andrew. In this way Prince Alexander had as many brave warriors as in ancient times King David had mighty and strong ones. Alexander's warriors were instilled with the spirit of courage because their hearts were the hearts of lions, and they decided: "O our honorable Prince, it is time for us to sacrifice ourselves for our country."

And Prince Alexander raised his arms to heaven and said: "Judge me, my God, help me in my discord with this proud people, and help me, my Lord, as in the ancient times thou

<sup>16</sup> Western Country: the Livonian Order of German Knights. See footnote 6 of this Selection.

<sup>17</sup> This is a reference to Alexander's victory over the Swedes on the river Nevá.

<sup>18</sup> German country: another designation for the Livonian Order.

<sup>19</sup> Most of the cities of Livonia were populated by Germans.

helped Moses to defeat the Amalekites, and as thou helpedst my forefather, Yaroslav, against the accursed Sviatopolk."

On Saturday [April 5th, 1242] when the sun rose, the two armies clashed. There was horrible bloodshed and such a noise from the breaking of lances and clanging of swords that one could think that the ice itself on the lake was breaking. And the ice itself was so covered with blood that it could not be seen. I was told [by a witness of the battle] that a godly regiment in the heavens came to help Alexander. And so the Germans were defeated with the help of God and the enemy fled and they were pursued and cut to pieces by his warriors so that one could think that these warriors were rushing through the sky. And the enemy did not know whither to escape, and God glorified Alexander here before all the regiments in the same way as Joshua, son of Nun, was glorified at Jericho. And God placed in Alexander's hands those who bragged: "Let us take Alexander with our own hands." And there was nobody to resist him in the battle.

Alexander returned home with great glory. And there were plenty of German prisoners who followed his regiments. And those who once called themselves "the knights of God"<sup>20</sup> were walking barefooted next to the horses of Alexander's warriors. When the prince approached the city of Pskov, the abbots and the priests in vestments and with crosses, as well as the entire population, met him before the city, praising God and glorifying their lord Alexander and singing songs:

"O Lord [once], you helped meek David to defeat the foreigners and [now] you helped our pious Prince Alexander to deliver the city of Pskov from the enemy with the help of the power of the Cross."

And then Prince Alexander said to the Pskovians:

*"O ignorant people of Pskov!  
If in the time of my grandchildren  
you would ever forget God's [miraculous] deeds,  
you would then follow the example of those Jews  
who were fed by God in the desert with manna and quails  
and who thereafter forgot their God,  
who delivered them from the yoke of Egypt."*

And since that time Alexander's name was glorified over all countries, up to the Sea of Egypt, to Mount Ararat, and on both sides of the Sea of the Vikings, and to Great Rome.

<sup>20</sup> See footnote 6 of this Selection.

## IV. WARS WITH THE LITHUANIANS

At that time the people of Lithuania<sup>21</sup> began to expand and they started to sack Alexander's lands. But he campaigned against them, and defeated them. During one campaign he happened to defeat their seven armies, killed their numerous princes, and captured many. And his servants jeered at the enemies, attaching them to the tails of their horses, and from that time they [the Lithuanians] began to fear his name.

## V. PRINCE ALEXANDER AND KHAN BATU

About the same time there was a certain powerful Khan [Batu] of the Eastern Country,<sup>22</sup> whom God let conquer many peoples from the Orient to the Occident; that Khan heard Alexander was very brave and courageous and he sent to him his own envoys, whom he ordered to say [to the Prince]: "Alexander, don't you know that God let me conquer many peoples? You are the only one who does not submit to my power; but if you want to preserve your land from calamity, come immediately to me to see the glory of my reign."

At that time, after the death of his father [Yaroslav], Alexander came to the city of Vladimir<sup>23</sup> with a large army. It was a redoubtable arrival and the news of it reached the very mouth of the Volga.<sup>24</sup> And the women of the Moabites<sup>25</sup> began to frighten their children, saying: "Alexander the Prince is coming."

But [in 1246] Prince Alexander decided to go to the Khan's

<sup>21</sup> Lithuanian and Indo-European people who lived in present-day Lithuania and the northern part of present-day Poland (Prussia) preserved tribal organization until the beginning of the thirteenth century when, under pressure from the German orders of Teutonic and Livonian Knights, they began to form a more tightly organized nation. The German knights fought them under the pretext that the Lithuanians were pagans, which they remained until the late fourteenth century.

<sup>22</sup> Eastern Country: the narrator's name for the Golden Horde, a part of the Mongolian empire, which extended from Vietnam and Korea to the Adriatic Sea, and which conquered Russia in the 1230s.

<sup>23</sup> After the death of Yaroslav, Alexander's brother, Andrew, became the Great Prince of Vladimir.

<sup>24</sup> The center of the Golden Horde was located at the mouth of the Volga River.

<sup>25</sup> Moabites: a Semitic tribe that lived in Palestine; see Genesis 19:37. Russians used this name to designate nomadic tribes, especially the Mongols.

Horde and the Metropolitan Archbishop Cyril<sup>26</sup> blessed him to do it. When Khan Batu saw him, he marveled at him and said to his dignitaries: "I was told the truth—that there is no other prince like Alexander."

And he rendered him due honor and let him go. Later, Khan Batu became angry with Alexander's younger brother, Andrew, and [in 1252] sent his general, Nevruy, to sack the Suzdalian land.<sup>27</sup> After Nevruy's invasion, Great Prince Alexander rebuilt the destroyed churches and the cities and gathered to their homes the people who had run away from the cities during the invasion.

The prophet Isaiah said about such [princes]:

*"To be good for his country a prince is to be according to the image of God, quiet, friendly, meek and peaceful, he should not seek wealth; he should not be alien to the just life; he should administer justice to orphans and widows; he should like charity and not gold; he should be good to his household and hospitable to those who come to him from other lands. God rewards such a prince during his life with his Grace, for God wants to provide peace not only to his angels but also to men, whom he rewards generously with his Grace, whom he teaches, and to whom he provides his Grace already in this world."*

And God endowed [Alexander's] land with wealth and glory and extended his years.

## VI. THE ENVOYS OF THE POPE

Once there came to him the envoys of the Pope from Great Rome<sup>28</sup> saying: "Our Pope spaketh the following: I have heard that thou art worthy and glorious and that thy land is great. Therefore I send to thee Golda and Gemond, two most wise out

<sup>26</sup> Metropolitan Archbishop Cyril was head of the Russian church from 1249 to 1287. He transferred his see from devastated Kiev to Vladimir.

<sup>27</sup> Nevruy's raid actually took place in 1252 when Batu died and Sartak ruled the Golden Horde.

<sup>28</sup> It could have been Pope Alexander IV (1256–1261) or Urban IV (1261–1264) who tried to involve Russia in an all-European coalition to fight the Mongols. Alexander refused to participate in it because he realized that Russia was too weak and open to Mongol retaliation.

of my twelve cardinals, to give you the opportunity of hearing their teaching about Divine Law.”

But Prince Alexander, after consulting with his wise men, answered him, saying:

*“From Adam to the Flood;  
from the Flood to the confounding of the languages;  
from the confounding of the languages to the birth of Abraham;  
from Abraham to the crossing of the Red Sea by the children of Israel;  
from the Exodus of the sons of Israel to the death of King David;  
from the beginning of the reign of Solomon to the time of Augustus, the Emperor;  
from the beginning of the time of Augustus to the birth of Christ;  
from the birth of Christ to the Passion and Resurrection of the Lord;  
from his Resurrection to his Ascension into heaven;  
from his Ascension into heaven to the reign of Constantine;  
from the beginning of the reign of Constantine to the First Council;  
from the First Council to the Seventh Council,  
all the happenings we know well, all of this [sacred history],  
and we do not accept your teaching.”*

And they returned home empty-handed.

#### VII. THE DEATH OF PRINCE ALEXANDER

And his days lasted in great glory because Alexander loved the priests and the monks, and the poor, and because he respected the metropolitan archbishop and the bishops, and because he obeyed them as he would have obeyed Christ, himself. And there was at that time great violence from foreign peoples [of the Golden Horde]: they oppressed the Christians, forcing them to campaign in the ranks of the army; but Great Prince Alexander went to the Khan and beseeched him not to drive his [Russian] people into misery.<sup>29</sup>

In the meantime he sent his son, Dmitry, against the Western Land [to command the army in his absence] and with him he

<sup>29</sup> Alexander succeeded this time in convincing the Great Khan of the Golden Horde not to use Russian troops in his campaign. In later years, however, Russian armies were forced to lend a hand in the Mongol's conquest of China.

sent all his regiments and many warriors from his own household, telling them: “Serve my son as you used to serve me, not sparing your life.” And Prince Dmitry campaigned with this large army and conquered some of the German lands and took the city of Yuriev and returned to Novgorod with many prisoners and great booty.

Returning from the Golden Horde, his father, Great Prince Alexander, reached the city of Nizhny Novgorod and remained there for several days in good health, but when he reached the city of Gorodets he fell ill:

*O woe to me, poor man.*

*How am I able to describe the passing of my lord?*

*How is it possible not to lose the eyes together with the tears?*

*How is it possible not to have a broken heart from our sorrow?*

*A man may leave the house of his father, but cannot abandon the house of his good lord,*

*and even if he has to, he should share the coffin with him.*

Great Prince Alexander, who was always firm in his faith in God, gave up this worldly kingdom and became a monk because it was always his greatest desire to receive these angelic orders [before death]. God even permitted him to receive [the supreme angelic orders of] the ascetic Schema.<sup>30</sup> And then he gave up his soul to God and died in peace on November 12th [1263], on the day when the holy Apostle, Philip, is remembered.<sup>31</sup>

[At his burial] Metropolitan Archbishop Cyril<sup>32</sup> said: “My children, you should know that the sun of the Suzdalian land has set. There will never be another prince like him in the Suzdalian land.”

And the priests and the deacons and the monks, the poor and the wealthy, and all the people said: “It is our end.” His holy body was taken to the city of Vladimir. Metropolitan Archbishop Cyril, with the entire clergy, with the princes and boyars and the entire population, from youths to elders, met the body in the city of Bogoliubovo with candles and censers. The people

<sup>30</sup> Schema: in Russian, “Skhima,” second extremely severe vow in the Orthodox Church that required complete repudiation of all ties to worldly life. In the Middle Ages it was common usage among the princes and aristocracy of Russia to take first monastic vows and the Schema on their deathbed.

<sup>31</sup> Alexander died in Gorodets but his body was taken and buried in Vladimir.

<sup>32</sup> Archbishop Cyril was aware of Alexander's importance in these hard years of Russian history and supported him in his attempts to unify Russia and come to terms with the Mongols.

crowded because everybody wanted to touch the honorable couch on which the holy body was lying. And there was crying and shedding of tears and such sighing as has never been before, so that even the earth quaked. On November 23rd, the day when Holy Father Amphilotheus is remembered, his body was laid in state in the Church of the Nativity of the Holy Mother of God in the Great Abbey.

And then there happened a wonderful miracle, which is befitting to be remembered. When the holy body was placed in the coffin, Sebastian the Cellarer and Metropolitan Archbishop Cyril wanted to open the hand [of the prince's body] to put into it the charter [with a prayer asking for the remittance of his sins]. But Alexander himself, as if he were alive, extended his hand and took the charter from the hand of the metropolitan archbishop. And they were so seized by awe that they had difficulty stepping away from the coffin. I heard this from my lord, the metropolitan archbishop, and his Cellarer, Sebastian.

Who would not marvel at this [miracle? Because Alexander] was dead and his body was brought from far away in winter.<sup>33</sup> So did God glorify his pious servant.

Glory be to God, who glorifies his saints, forever and ever. Amen.

#### 40. NARRATIVE OF THE PIOUS PRINCE DOVMONT AND HIS COURAGE

The *vita* of Prince Dovmont grew to a large extent out of the *Tale of the Life and Courage of the Pious and Great Alexander* [Nevsky]. It is another story of Orthodox Russia's prince-defender against enemies of different civilizations and faiths. Many features of Dovmont's *vita* clearly indicate that its author used the original version of the *Tale of the Life and Courage of the Pious and Great Prince Alexander* [Nevsky] as a prototype for his work. The name of the Byzantine epic hero, Akrites, which disappeared from the final version of Alexander's *vita*, remains preserved here, and the characteristics of both princes are very similar. The author of Dovmont's *vita* even used the same biblical expressions to characterize his hero, and in both *vitae* the commanders of the inimical armies are wounded in the face by the lance of the holy prince.

Dovmont was a Lithuanian by birth and the prince of the Nalshenay land. He was a relative of the Great Prince of

<sup>33</sup> This final section of the *vita* was apparently added to the original version by Cellarer (Treasurer) Sebastian.

Lithuania, Mindaugas, who wanted to unify Lithuania and eliminate the feudal rulers. Dovmont participated in a conspiracy that led to the assassination of Mindaugas, but he escaped the revenge of the latter's son and went to Pskov, where he became the elected prince and defended the Pskovian land from the Lithuanians and German knights of the Order of the Sword in Livonia. The Pskovians venerated his memory and in the sixteenth century he was canonized by the Orthodox Church. Throughout the *vita* the author stresses Dovmont's merits in the defense of Orthodoxy.

The translation follows the text of the *vita* of Dovmont as it appears in the Sinod and Stroev manuscripts of the *Pskovian Chronicles*, Volume II, Moscow, 1955, pages 16–18 and 82–87. The words in brackets have been added by the translator to assist understanding.

In the year 6773 (1265) fratricidal strife began in Lithuania, and therefore the blessed Prince Dovmont,<sup>1</sup> together with his household, left his fatherland, the land of Lithuania, and escaped to the city of Pskov. This Prince Dovmont, a Lithuanian by birth, had been born a pagan and, according to the traditions of his fathers, used to worship idols; but God wanted to choose him to be among the newly converted and inspired the prince with the Grace of the Holy Spirit. And the Prince awakened from the sleep [of paganism], broke away from the worship of idols, and, together with his boyars, decided to receive Holy Baptism in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. And he was baptized [in Pskov] in the Church of the Holy Trinity<sup>2</sup> and was christened Timothy. And there was great joy in the city of Pskov and he was chosen by the men of Pskov as the prince of their city.<sup>3</sup>

In the year 6774 (1266) Dovmont decided to campaign with three troops of ninety men each from Pskov. He invaded the Lithuanian lands and raided his [own former] principality. He

<sup>1</sup> The assassination of the Lithuanian ruler, Mindaugas, in 1263 led to the disintegration of state unity (see footnote 21, Selection 39, *Tale of the Life and Courage of the Pious and Great Prince Alexander*) and to war among the tribal princes.

<sup>2</sup> The Cathedral of Pskov was dedicated to the Holy Trinity, considered the protector of the city.

<sup>3</sup> Pskovians used to elect their princes. Dovmont was elected Prince of Pskov not in 1265, but in 1266. (The discrepancy in the dating of the event reflects a different beginning of the year in Russian medieval chronology.) After his baptism and election Dovmont married the granddaughter of Alexander Nevsky.