

## Redating the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*

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The time of composition of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* has been generally accepted as the late 13th century, but the reasons for that acceptance need to be reexamined.<sup>1</sup> Establishing the date of composition of the First Redaction of the *Life* is dependent on determining the relationship of it to chronicle accounts; in particular, whether or not the Older Redaction of the Novgorod I Chronicle (Novg. I-OR) served as a source for the *Life*. In addition, I explore the possibility that the *Life* is the reworking of a chronicle tale about Alexander Nevskii. My contention is that the *Life* is indeed based on a no-longer-extant *Tale of Alexander Nevskii*, and that it borrows from the Novg. I-OR. In contrast, the Younger Redaction of the Novgorod I Chronicle (Novg. 1-YR) incorporates parts of the *Life* into its account (for the relationship of these texts, see figure 1, below).

Begunov identified three main redactions of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* that existed by the 15th century. The First Redaction of the *Life* is extant in full in eleven MS copies (one of which dates to the end of the 15th century, the other ten to the 16th and 17th centuries) and in part in two MS copies (one of which dates to 1377, the other to the end of the 15th century).<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The composition that is usually referred to in the scholarly literature as the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* is titled in most MS copies the *Tale about the Life of the Brave, Blessed, and Great Prince Alexander Nevskii*. But the earliest MS copy of the First Redaction of the *Life*, which appears in the Laurentian Chronicle (*16*), merely begins: "That same year Grand Prince Alexander, son of Iaroslav, passed away. We speak [about] his bravery and life..." Five other MS copies (*A*, *B*, *M*, *Ap*, and *O*) of the first redaction amplify the first sentence by adding a date and specific year, November 23, 1263, but repeat the "skazhem muzhestvo i zhit'e ego" part. See "Zhitie Aleksandra Nevskogo (pervaia redaktsiia)," in Iu. K. Begunov, *Pamiatnik russkoi literatury XIII veka "Slovo o pogibeli Russkoi zemli"* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), 159. For reasons that should become clear below, I continue the practice of calling the First Redaction the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*.

<sup>2</sup> The MSS that contain the full *Life*, according to Begunov's listing, are: Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Arkhangel'skoi oblasti (GAAO), sobranie ruskopisnykh knig, no. 18 (*Ap*); Gosudarstvennyi istoricheskii muzei (GIM), sobranie E. V. Barsova, no. 1413 (*B*); GIM, Muzeiskoe sobranie, no. 1706 (*M*); GIM, Sinodal'noe sobranie, no. 154, fols. 156–162v (*11c*); GIM, sobranie A. S. Uvarova, no. 279 (*Y*); Institut russkoi literatury (Pushkinskii dom) (IRL-PD), R. IV, op. 24, no. 26 (*1*); Rossiiskaia gosudarstvennaia biblioteka (RGB), sobranie Iosifo-Volokolamskogo monastyria, f. 113, no. 523 (*B*); RGB,

M. D. Priselkov proposed in 1939 that the original redaction of the *Life* appears in the Laurentian Chronicle (*Лѣ*) and was composed shortly after Alexander's death in 1263.<sup>3</sup> Priselkov did not analyze the relationship of the *Life* to the chronicle accounts. In 1947, D. S. Likhachev pointed out what he considered to be parallels in motifs, style, and words between the Galician Chronicle (GC) and the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*. He attributed the common source of these parallels to the Galician literary tradition, and he saw Metropolitan Kirill as the link between them, either as the author or more probably in commissioning both of them.<sup>4</sup> As further evidence, Likhachev cited the words from the Pskovo-Pecherskii copy of the *Life*: "This was preached by the holy metropolitan Kirill and by his cellarer Sebastian."<sup>5</sup> If Metropolitan Kirill did have something to do with the composition of the *Life*, then that would place the date of its composition sometime between 1263, the year of death of Alexander Nevskii, and 1280, the year of death of Kirill.

It is difficult to see, however, in the version of the quotation that Likhachev cited, which is limited to two (*П* and *Л*) copies of the First Redaction (as reported by Begunov), any evidence of Kirill's writing or commissioning the *Life* to be written. Even less so is there such evidence in this passage with the readings attested to by the other MS copies. Four copies (*Пс*, *Б*, *Р*, and *У*) do not mention the metropolitan by name and indicate the source of the author's information about the funeral: "This was heard from the lord metropolitan and from his cellarer Sebastian."<sup>6</sup> The other six copies (*А*, *В*, *М*, *О*, *Ар*, and *Пз*) that are extant to the end of the *Life* do not mention the metropolitan or his cellarer at all. Begunov thought that *Пс*, *У*, *Б*, and *Р* best represent the archetype, while he considered *П* and *Л* closer to the archetype than *А*, *В*, *М*, *О*, *Ар*, and *Пз*. Instead, I consider *Лѣ*, in the part of the *Life* that it has, to best represent the archetype. I then give priority to *Пз* (and *А*, *В*, *М*, *О*, *Ар* insofar as they support it). In this case, the null reading that they carry (*Лѣ* being non-

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sobranie Moskovskoi dukhovnoi akademii, f. 173, no. 208 (*А*); RGB, sobranie A. N. Ovchinnikova, f. 209, no. 281 (*О*); RGB, sobranie Olonetskoii seminarii, f. 212, no. 15 (*Р*); Rossiiskaia natsional'naia biblioteka (RNB), sobranie M. P. Pogodina, no. 641 (*Пз*). The MS that contains only the beginning part of the *Life* is: RNB, F. IV., no. 2, fols. 168–169v (*Лѣ*). The MS that contains the beginning and end parts of the *Life* is: Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Pskovskoi oblasti (GAPO), sobranie Pskovo-Pecherskogo monastyrnia, f. 449, no. 60 (*П*). Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 159.

<sup>3</sup> M. D. Priselkov, "Lavrent'evskaia letopis': Istoriia teksta," *Uchenye zapiski Leningradskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*, no. 32: *Seriia istoricheskikh nauk* 2 (1939): 130.

<sup>4</sup> D. S. Likhachev, "Galitskaia literaturnaia traditsiia v zhitii Aleksandra Nevskogo," *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury (TODRL)* 5 (1947): 52. Cherepnin had previously proposed that Kirill had some relationship to the composition of the Galician Chronicle. L. V. Cherepnin, "Letopisets Daniila Galitskogo," *Istoricheskie zapiski*, no. 12 (1941): 245–52.

<sup>5</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 180.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

extant here) is primary. The copies *B*, *P*, *Пс*, and *У* add the reference to information being obtained from the metropolitan and his cellarer Sebastian. Finally, at the last stage, *П* and *Л* add *Kirill* as the name of the metropolitan and change *слышано от* (heard from) to *проповедано* (preached). In any case, the phrase “this was preached” refers to comments at Alexander’s funeral, not to the entire text of the *Life*.

In addition, the stylistic similarities that Likhachev pointed out between the GC and the *Life* are not compelling evidence of single authorship, but only suggestive of possible familiarity of one work by the author of the other or of other common sources. But all of these “parallels” are commonplaces of Rus’ literature that could have derived from other texts. Nor would a common commissioner of both works necessarily have a stylistic or word-borrowing effect on either work.<sup>7</sup>

Begunov dated the first (i.e., the earliest) Redaction of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* to 1282–83 and placed its composition in the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery in Vladimir. His conclusion is based on his observation that “the author of the *Life* devotes special attention to the personality of Dmitrii Aleksandrovich and the basis of his right to the grandprincely throne.”<sup>8</sup> As support for the 1282–83 dating, Begunov pointed to what he called “one curious fact”; that is, the *Life* “does not mention the town that the Germans constructed in the fatherland of Alexander in the winter of 1240/41.” Since the Synodal copy of the Novgorod I Chronicle does mention the name of the town, Kopor’e, “it is obvious,” according to Begunov, “that this naming was consciously dropped by the compiler of the *Life*” because he did not want to allude to the feud that Dmitrii had with the Novgorodians “over the construction of this fort, the taking into captivity by the Novgorodians of two of Dmitrii’s daughters and boyars, and the insulting words of the Novgorodians spoken to the prince: ‘if your men leave Kopor’e, then we will release them.’”<sup>9</sup> The feud involving Kopor’e was reported in the Novg. I-OR under the entry for 1282/83 (6790).<sup>10</sup> If the *Life* “consciously dropped” the name of the town that appears

<sup>7</sup> All of which I have argued in “The Galician Chronicle, the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*, and the 13th-Century Military Tale,” *Palaeoslavica* 15 (2007): 307–24.

<sup>8</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 61. See also Iu. K. Begunov, I. È. Kleinenberg, and I. P. Shaskol’skii, “Pis’mennye istochniki o ledovom poboishche,” in *Ledovoe poboishche 1242 g. Trudy kompleksnoi èkspeditsii po utochneniiu mesta ledovogo poboishcha*, ed. G. N. Karaev (Moscow and Leningrad: Nauka, 1966), 183; cf. drawing 2 following p. 192 “Skhema vzaimootnosheniia tekstov izvestii o Ledovom poboishche russkikh letopisei”; and Jurij Biegunow [Iu. K. Begunov], “Itwory literackie o Aleksandrze Newskim w składzie latopisów ruskich,” *Slavia Orientalis* 18 (1969): 309.

<sup>9</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 61.

<sup>10</sup> *Novgorodskaia Pervaia letopis’: Starshego i mladshogo izvodov*, ed. A. N. Nasonov (Moscow-Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1950), reprinted in *PSRL*, vol. 3 (Moscow: Iazyki russkoi kul’tury, 2000), 324.

in Novg. I-OR, then that would seem to imply the *Life* was secondary in relationship to the Novg. I-OR, but Begunov concluded there was no relationship between the two. He did recognize, however, that the Novg. I-OR influenced the editing of the Second Redaction of the *Life*.

Norman Ingham saw the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* as indicative of "a new trend" in Rus' literature. He stated that "[t]he frame of a hagiographical *Life* is present, with a customary opening (modesty topos; reason for writing; biblical quote; prayer for assistance) and close (the hero becomes a monk; report of his death and burial; lament; a miracle as sign of sainthood)." What he finds "interesting" are "that the central portions (*praxeis*) are distinctly secular in substance and style." In addition, the "[e]vents of Aleksandr's life (almost exclusively military) are related in the pure manner of the *voinski povest* and with few pious motifs." Ingham found the "hypothesis" proposed by some scholars "that a monkish hagiographer had borrowed from a secular work" to be "superfluous." He pointed out that "there was a tendency always to treat military campaigns in this familiar style." Since "[t]he author simply had no model for a purely secular *Life*," he "let subject-matter dictate style."<sup>11</sup>

According to S. A. Zenkovsky, writing in 1974, "[t]he original version of this *vita* was apparently written as a 'military tale' by one of the warriors of his [Alexander's] household who witnessed Alexander's last years of life." Zenkovsky pointed to the title of the work: "Tale of the Life and Courage of Prince Alexander" as being "unusual for a *vita*." He also saw in the author's words upon Alexander's death, "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," evidence of "the fealty of a feudal warrior to his lord." A third piece of evidence that Zenkovsky mentions is the author's describing "[t]he details of the deeds of some warriors of Alexander's army," which indicates that the author "[p]robably ... knew many of the prince's warriors ...." Zenkovsky concluded that "[t]he original *Tale* ... was rewritten later, around 1280, by some ecclesiastic from the city of Vladimir." That ecclesiastic, according to Zenkovsky, "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 Zenkovsky's view, "In most cases this second writer drastically rephrased the words of these quotations, as well as the original contents, often replacing the names of heroes from antiquity and Byzantine history with those from biblical sources." Zenkovsky claimed to have detected evidence of "[t]his reworking ... in the text that has reached us, for in some places it destroyed the *Tale's* narrative and stylistic unity and resulted in

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<sup>11</sup> Norman Ingham, "The Limits of Secular Biography in Medieval Slavic Literature, Particularly Old Russian," in *American Contributions to the Sixth International Congress of Slavists, Prague, 1968, August 7–13*, 2 vols., ed. William E. Harkins (The Hague: Mouton, 1968), 1: 193–194.

an unsystematic rearrangement of the source material."<sup>12</sup> Thus, as Zenkovsky saw it, the original form of the *vita* was a military tale written by someone who knew Alexander personally; yet all we have to go on is the reworking of it around 1280 by a Vladimir ecclesiastic. Zenkovsky made no guess as to when the original *Tale* was written, although it would have been written between 1263 and 1280. Nor did he state whether he thought the Vladimir ecclesiastic added any eyewitness testimony.

Also in 1974, the Oxford University scholar John Fennell wrote that he found Begunov's argument for the dating of the composition of the *Life* to the 1280s in the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery to be "convincing." Fennell's reasons for accepting Begunov's conclusion about the place and time of composition are these:

1. "the earliest version (*izvod*) is concerned only with Vladimir-Suzdal' information—there is no specifically Novgorodian news";
2. "Aleksandr is portrayed primarily as a Suzdalian ruler, rather than [as] the Novgorodian prince....";
3. the *Life* mentions the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery "as the place of Aleksandr's burial";
4. "the author is clearly connected with" the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery;
5. "this particular monastery was the seat of the metropolitan from the mid-thirteenth century to 1323";
6. "Metropolitan Kirill II, who plays a large role in the *Zhitie*, was closely linked with its writing";
7. "evidence [exists] that the Rozhdestvensky Monastery was the centre of the cult of Aleksandr up to the mid-sixteenth century";
8. "it seems very probable that this local worship of the prince was started by the metropolitan and the monastic authorities";
9. the fact that "the earliest version contains, sandwiched between Aleksandr's final trip to the Horde and his death, the information that Aleksandr 'sent his son Dmitry [nine years old at the time] to the western lands' and that Dmitry 'captured the German land [i.e., Livonia] and took the city of Yur'ev' points to the 1280s as the time of writing";
10. "Dmitry was a patron of the monastery."<sup>13</sup>

In 1984, Fennell added that "the *Life* was written ... or commissioned by a man who had every reason to be antagonistic to the West, particularly to the

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<sup>12</sup> Serge A. Zenkovsky, ed., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, rev. ed. (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1974), 224–225.

<sup>13</sup> John Fennell, "Literature of the Tatar Period (13th–15th Centuries)," in John Fennell and Anthony Stokes, *Early Russian Literature* (London: Faber and Faber, 1974), 108–09.

Catholic West—Metropolitan Kirill.”<sup>14</sup> In 1995, Fennell stated merely that the *Life* was “written in all probability by Metropolitan Kirill II...”<sup>15</sup> Fennell was apparently under the impression that Kirill had died in 1287, not 1280. It might still have been possible, nonetheless, for Kirill to have commissioned a work, which then someone else wrote later, in 1282–83.

Fennell, like Zenkovsky, also claimed to have detected two kinds of writing in the *Life*: “the hagiographical passages are distinct from the annalistic episodes, but sometimes religious sentiments are tacked on to purely military clichés.”<sup>16</sup> The first example he cited of this adding on of “religious sentiments” is when the *Life* describes Alexander’s “returning victorious (*vozvratitsya s pobedoyu*)” after the battle on the Neva, which Fennell called “a stock ending to any military campaign.” Then the author of the *Life* tacks on the phrase “praising and glorifying the name of his Creator.”<sup>17</sup> The second example he cited is Alexander’s treatment of the enemy after he razed the fortress 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.”<sup>18</sup> Fennell commented that “the reader is not allowed to forget that this is, after all, the *Life* of a saint.”<sup>19</sup>

Fennell saw “the style of the ‘secular’ passages” as being “entirely typical of early chronicle battle descriptions” and “[t]he structure of the ‘battle piece’ or ‘campaign piece’ “as being “traditional.” He pointed to “the so-called ‘Paroemia’ reading in honour of Boris and Gleb, which contains a vivid description of the Al’a battle (1019), or the same episode in the *Povest’ vremennykh let* (s.a. 1019)” as being “the model for the” battle piece.<sup>20</sup> In addition, he termed the phrasing “conventional (*byst’ secha zla*: there was a violent battle; *s’stupishasya oboi*: both sides clashed; *poverva i pozhzhe*: he destroyed and burned; *polona vzya bes chisla*: he took innumerable prisoners; *v sile velitse*: in great strength...)”<sup>21</sup> Fennell referred to as “typical not only of folklore but of annalistic battle descriptions” what he called “the epic exaggeration of the battles (the ‘innumerable multitudes’ of participants and killed, the covering of all 1356 square miles of Lake Chudskoe ‘with the multitude of soldiers’,

<sup>14</sup> John Fennell, *The Crisis of Medieval Russia 1200–1304* (London: Longman, 1984), 103.

<sup>15</sup> John Fennell, *A History of the Russian Church to 1448* (London: Longman, 1995), 198.

<sup>16</sup> Fennell, “Literature of the Tatar Period,” 113.

<sup>17</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 168.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>19</sup> Fennell, “Literature of the Tatar Period,” 113.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 113. Cf. A. S. Orlov, “Ob osobennostiakh formy russkoi voinskoi povesti (konchaia XVII v.),” *Chteniia v Imperatorskom obshchestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh pri Moskovskom universitete* (ChOISR), bk. 4 (1902): 8–11.

<sup>21</sup> Fennell, “Literature of the Tatar Period,” 113–114. Cf. Orlov, “Ob osobennostiakh,” 11–49.

etc.).<sup>22</sup> He cited examples of the “chronicle formulas” in the *Life*: “*byst’ zhe v to vremya*: and there was at that time; *po pobeded zhe Oleksandrove*: and after the victory of Aleksandr; *v vtoroe zhe leto*: and in the second year; *po plenii zhe Nevryueve*: and after the invasion of Nevryuy....”<sup>23</sup> Finally, he said, “the syntax is identical to that of the chronicle *voinskaya povest’*—short clauses joined together by the conjunction *i* (and), absence of subordination except for the occasional participle/gerund used to relieve the monotony.” He cited as “[a] good example of this bald, unadorned impartial military style ... the laconic description of” Dmitrii Aleksandrovich’s campaign against Iur’ev that appears toward the end of the *Life*:

Prince Dmitrii went in great strength  
and invaded the German land,  
and took the town of Iur’ev  
And returned to Novgorod with many  
prisoners and with great booty.<sup>24</sup>

Nonetheless, Fennell, like Ingham, did not see evidence of two authors at work, only one: “There can be little doubt that all the secular passages were written by the same person who wrote the introduction and the end: the differences are not so great as to warrant the assumption of different authors.”<sup>25</sup> He asserted that “the author is simply using the conventional language of the *voinskaia povest’* in its basic, crudest form, a technique which could have been assimilated by any writer capable of manipulating the greater subtleties of the hagiographical style” and that “[t]here, then, seems to be no reason why we should not assume that this was an attempt by a cleric to write the *Life* of a layman.” The author, according to Fennell, merely “fitted the purely secular episodes” into a “hagiographic framework [that] is [already] there.” In the end, the author created something that “can only be called semi-secular hagiography or semi-clerical biography, a new departure in the history of Russian biography.”<sup>26</sup>

Although Fennell is correct that a cleric could fairly easily learn the style of a military tale, I find that I cannot agree with Fennell’s assessment that the “hagiographic framework is there” for the author to insert military tale-like episodes. Although the work is, as Ingham pointed out, “framed” as a *vita*, the structure of the *Life of Alexander* does not conform to the standard “frame-

<sup>22</sup> Fennell, “Literature of the Tatar Period,” 114.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 177.

<sup>25</sup> Fennell, “Literature of the Tatar Period,” 110.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

work” of a saint’s *vita*.<sup>27</sup> Instead, Fennell’s observation that the author is tacking on, sometimes in a rather gratuitous way, religious comments is a more accurate way of describing the composition process. This work does indeed appear to be “a new departure.”

If we accept the testimony of the *Life*, then we have to rule out Metropolitan Kirill as the author. The *Life* states that the author is recounting “what I heard from my father and I am an eyewitness to [while] growing up.”<sup>28</sup> He would appear to have been a younger man than Kirill was in the 1260s or 1270s. Kirill had been metropolitan of Rus’ since 1242. Instead, it sounds very much like someone who was no older than 15 or 20 years when Alexander died in 1263.

The suggestion that the *Life* was based on an earlier military tale to which religious elements were later added has its appeal.<sup>29</sup> It would explain the statement that the author grew up at the court of Alexander Nevskii as well as the author’s going into some detail about military aspects of the battles on the Neva and on Lake Chud. When reworking the *Tale* into the *Life*, the ecclesiastical reviser decided to keep the introductory testimony of the *Tale*’s author. It is unlikely Metropolitan Kirill would have commissioned the writing of a military tale about Alexander. Evidence of textual relationships also rules out the possibility that Kirill commissioned the rewriting of the *Tale* into the *Life* because, if such a reworking of a military tale into a saint’s life occurred, then it was done, as I discuss below, not earlier than the middle of the 14th century, some 70 to 90 years after Kirill’s death.

The relationship of the *Life* to the chronicle accounts is key to dating the probable time of its composition. I argued elsewhere that in regard to the 1242 Lake Chud battle, Novg. I-OR derived from the Laurentian and Suzdal’ chronicles, and that the *Life* derived from the chronicles, and was not a source of them.<sup>30</sup> The Laurentian MS (dated to 1377) contains an account of Alexander’s battle against the Livonian knights in 1242 (col. 470).<sup>31</sup> This account is

<sup>27</sup> For a description of the standard framework of a saint’s *vita*, see Ihor Ševčenko, *Three Byzantine Literatures: A Layman’s Guide* (Brookline, MA: Hellenic College Press, 1985), 16.

<sup>28</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 159.

<sup>29</sup> It should be mentioned that there are those who, like Zhivov, believe “military tales as a genre are a fictitious invention of literary scholars.” Viktor Zhivov, review of Frithjof Benjamin Schenck, *Aleksandr Nevskij: Heliger—Fürst—Nationalheld. Ein Erinnerungsfigur im russischen kulturellen Gedächtnis (1263–2000)*, in *Kritika* 8: 3 (2007): 664n5.

<sup>30</sup> See my “Alexander Nevskii’s ‘Battle on the Ice’: The Creation of a Legend,” *Russian History* 33 (2006): 298–99.

<sup>31</sup> According to Shakhmatov, the Laurentian Chronicle was compiled between 1305 and 1308, or possibly 1316. A. A. Shakhmatov, “‘Povest’ vremennykh let’ i ee istochniki,” *TODRL* 4 (1940): 14. Priselkov dated it to the Compilation of 1305. M. D. Priselkov, *Istoriia russkogo letopisaniia XI–XV vv.* (Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Leningradskogo



minimal, more concerned with the actions of Grand Prince Iaroslav in Vladimir than with Prince Alexander in Novgorod:

Grand Prince Iaroslav sent his son Andrei to Great Novgorod in aid of Alexander against the Germans and defeated them beyond Pskov at the lake and took many prisoners. Andrei returned to his father with honor.<sup>32</sup>

The Suzdal' Chronicle also contains an account of the battle.<sup>33</sup> It mentions Lake Chud and Raven's Rock specifically as the location of the battle as well as a chase along or across the ice:

Alexander Iaroslavich went with Novgorodians against the Germans and fought with them at Lake Chud by Raven's Rock. Alexander defeated them and they chased them across the ice for 7 versts.<sup>34</sup>

The Novgorod I Chronicle is extant in two redactions—an Older Redaction and a Younger Redaction. The Novg. I-OR is maintained in a single copy, the Synodal. Shakhmatov and Likhachev dated the Synodal copy to the first half of the 14th century.<sup>35</sup> Kloss dated the first part of the Synodal copy, including part of the entry for 1234 (fols. 1–118<sup>v</sup>), to the second half of the 13th

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gosudarstvennogo universiteta, 1940), 96–106. The Suzdal' Chronicle is also contained in the Moscow Academy copy (MAk), which dates to ca. 1500. According to Lur'e, MAk represents "the Rostov or Suzdal'-Rostov compilation ... from 6747 [1239] to 6927 [1419]." Ia. S. Lur'e, *Obshcherusskie letopisi XIV–XV vv.* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1976), 97. Priselkov dated the composition of this entry to the 1260s–70s. Priselkov, *Istoriia russkogo letopisaniia*, 98. The last entry for the Laurentian Chronicle is 1305. In *PSRL* 1 (1926), cols. 290–487, where the section of the Laurentian Chronicle that runs from 1111 to 1305 is called the "Suzdal' Chronicle according to the Laurentian Copy."

<sup>32</sup> *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei (PSRL)*, 41 vols. (St. Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad and Moscow: Arkheograficheskaia komissiiia, Nauka, and Arkheograficheskii tsentr, 1843–2002) 1: col. 470.

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<sup>34</sup> *PSRL*, vol. 1: col. 523. A verst is usually equivalent to 1.067 km.

<sup>35</sup> A. A. Shakhmatov, *Obozrenie russkikh letopisnykh svodov XIV–XVI vv.* (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1938), 128–32; D. S. Likhachev, *Russkie letopisi i ikh kul'turno-istoricheskoe znachenie* (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1947), 440–43.

century on the basis of the handwriting.<sup>36</sup> A second handwriting fills most of the second part of the Synodal MS, from the entry for 1234 to the entry for 1330 (fols. 119–66<sup>v</sup>). Then four different hands in turn write the entries for 1331–33, 1337, 1345, and 1352 (fols. 167–69).<sup>37</sup> The Synodal copy ends with the entry for 1352, but Kloss, Gimon, and Gippius have proposed that the compilation (*svod*) was made in 1330, since it is after this entry that a change from hand no. 1 to hand no. 2 occurs (fol. 167).<sup>38</sup> Yet, changes in hand are not necessarily sufficient enough evidence for dating when a compilation was made. Another explanation to be considered is that the Synodal copy was compiled in 1352 at the earliest and that the chronicle-copying project that constituted the Novg. I-OR may have been intended to go to at least 1352, perhaps to coincide with the reign of Archbishop Vasilii (1330–52). The Black Death could have led to changes concerning which monks were copying the chronicle, especially toward the end of the project. My difference in views with Kloss, Gimon, and Gippius, however, does not significantly affect the argument I present here. So we can set that issue aside for the moment.

The Synodal copy includes the information testified to in the Laurentian Chronicle that Alexander's brother Andrei was at the battle. And it coincides with the testimony of the Suzdal' Chronicle about the chase being across the ice. But it also adds that the chase went to the Subol shore (understood to mean the western shore of Lake Chud). It adds *Uzmen* as the name of the area near Raven's Rock where the battle was fought and includes a plea by Boris and Gleb on behalf of Alexander Nevskii to God during the battle:

In the year 1242 [6750] Prince Alexander with the Novgorodians and with his brother Andrei and the low country men to the Chud land went against the Germans.... Prince Alexander and the Novgorodians drew up their forces at Lake Chud at Uzmen by Raven's Rock. The army of the Germans and Chuds rode at them driving themselves like a wedge through their army, and there was a great battle with the Germans and Chuds. God and Holy Sophia and the Holy

<sup>36</sup> B. M. Kloss, "Predislovie k izdaniuu 2000 g.," in *PSRL* 3 (2000), v. It was previously thought the first part of the MS contained two handwritings, but Gippius identified them as a single hand. A. A. Gippius, "Novye dannye o ponomare Timofee–novgorodskom knizhnikhe serediny XIII veka," *Informatsionnyi biulleten' MAIRSK* 25 (1992): 59–86.

<sup>37</sup> *Novgorodskaia kharateinaia letopis'*, ed. M. N. Tikhomirov (Moscow: Nauka, 1964), 334–41.

<sup>38</sup> Kloss, "Predislovie k izdaniuu 2000 g.," v; G. V. Gimon, "Pripiski na dopolnitel'nykh listakh v Sinodal'nom spiske Novgorodskoi I letopisi," in *Norna u istochnika: Sbornik statei v chest' Eleny Aleksandroovny Melnikovoi*, ed. T. N. Dzhakson, G. V. Glazyrina, I. G. Konovalova, S. L. Nikol'skii, and V. Ia. Petrukhin (Moscow: Indrik, 2001), 59. My thanks to Aleksei Gippius for bringing Gimon's article to my attention.

Martyrs Boris and Gleb, for whose sake the Novgorodians shed their blood, by the great prayers of those saints, God helped Prince Alexander. The Germans fell there and the Chuds gave shoulder [fled], and pursuing them they fought them for seven versts across the ice to the Subol shore. There fell a countless number of Chuds, and of the Germans 400. They captured 50 and brought [them] to Novgorod. They fought on April 5, the Commemoration Day of the Holy Martyr Claudian, to the glory of the Holy Mother of God, on a Saturday.<sup>39</sup>

Begunov concluded that “a comparison of the Synodal copy with the three copies of Novgorod I Chronicle of the Younger Redaction ... shows that neither the chronicle information of the Synodal copy served as a source for the *Life of Prince Alexander* nor was the information of the *Life* a source of information of the Synodal copy.”<sup>40</sup> He went on to point out that “totally absent in the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* is any Novgorodian information of 1238–1263, concerning the marriage of the prince, the arrangement of towns along the Shelon River, the feuds and arguments of Prince Alexander with the Novgorodians, his leaving from Novgorod for the Suzdal’ land, details about the Battle on the Ice known to the Novgorod chronicler, no discussion concerning the German embassy after the Battle on the Ice, concerning the approach of Alexander to them in 1256, concerning the dispute of Alexander with his son Vasilii and his družiniki, [and] concerning the Tatar treaty.”<sup>41</sup> While all this may pertain to the *Tale of Alexander Nevskii*, the redactor of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* is indeed aware of the Novg. I-OR and manages, it seems to me, to incorporate passages from it into the basic structure of the *Life* in at least three places, one in its description of the battle on the Neva and two in its description of the battle on Lake Chud. First, in describing the day when the battle on the Neva took place, both the Novg. I-OR and the *Life* use the same formula:

## Novg. I-OR

On July 15th, on the commemoration day of Holy Kiurik and Ulita, on the Sunday [neděliu] of the Council of the 630 Holy Fathers in Chalcedon<sup>42</sup>

## Life of Alexander Nevskii

On Sunday [vskresen’ia], on the commemoration day when 630 Holy Fathers who were at the Council in Chalcedon, as well as the holy martyrs, Kiurik and Ulita and holy Prince Volodimer who baptized the Rus’ land....<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> PSRL 3 (2000), 78.

<sup>40</sup> Iu. K. Begunov, “Zhitie Aleksandra Nevskogo v sostave Novgorodskoi 1-oi i Sofiiskoi 1-oi letopisei,” *Novgorodskii istoricheskii sbornik* 9 (1959): 230.

<sup>41</sup> Begunov, “Zhitie Aleksandra Nevskogo v sostave Novgorodskoi 1-oi i Sofiiskoi 1-oi letopisei,” 230.

<sup>42</sup> PSRL 3: 77.

Although, at first glance, the similar phrasing may appear to be only a topos in identifying particular days in their religious context, the combining of mention of the commemoration days of both the 630 Holy Fathers of Chalcedon and the martyrs Kiurik and Ulita is unusual. This formula does not appear in either the Laurentian or Suzdal' Chronicles. I propose that the coincidence of this combination is an indication of direct textual borrowing. If borrowing between the Novg. I-OR and the *Life* occurred, then the direction of that borrowing would more likely have been from Novg. I-OR to the *Life* than vice versa because if the Novg. I-OR borrowed from the *Life*, then it is unlikely the phrase "and holy Prince Volodimer who baptized Rus'" would have been dropped.

A second textual borrowing by the author of the *Life* from the Novg. I-OR occurs when the hagiographer has Alexander going against the Germans as the Novg. I-OR or the *Tale* does. Then he tells us Iaroslav sent Andrei to help Alexander as the Laurentian Chronicle does. He incorporates the information about the place of battle that the Suzdal' Chronicle and the Novg. I-OR have. Finally, he incorporates the account of the Novg. I-OR or the *Tale* with Alexander's appeal to God and the pursuit. In particular the following passage indicates a probable textual borrowing:

Novg. I-OR

The Germans fell there and the Chuds *gave shoulder and chasing them they fought them* for seven versts across the ice....<sup>44</sup>

*Life of Alexander Nevskii*

And they defeated them with the help of God, and the warriors *gave their shoulder and they fought them, chasing as* through the air....<sup>45</sup>

The similar phrasing of "gave shoulder and chasing them they fought them" in Novg. I-OR and of "gave their shoulder and they fought them, chasing" in the *Life* is striking. It seems unlikely, if the Novg. I-OR borrowed from the *Life* that the phrase "with the help of God" would have been dropped. Instead that phrase seems to be an addition to a textual borrowing from the Novg. I-OR.

<sup>43</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 164. Note: I have created my own text from the evidence of the critical apparatus that Begunov provides for his edition of the *Life*. See my "Dressing a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing: Toward Understanding the Composition of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*," in *Centers and Peripheries in the Christian East: Papers from the Second Biennial Conference of the Association for the Study of Eastern Christian History and Culture*, ed. Eugene Clay, Russell Martin, and Barbara Skinner, vol. 3 of *Eastern Christian Studies*, ed. Jennifer Spock (Columbus, OH: Center for Slavic and East European Studies, forthcoming). For my translation of passages from the *Life* into English, I consulted Zenkovsky's translation in his *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*, 225–36.

<sup>44</sup> *PSRL* 3: 78.

<sup>45</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 171.

A third case of textual borrowing from the Novg. I-OR occurs in the description of the death of Alexander Nevskii:

## Novg. I-OR

and he came to Gorodets and was shorn *on November 14, the commemoration day of the Holy Apostle Philip*. He died the same night and they took him to Volodimir and laid him in the monastery of the *Nativity of the Holy Mother of God*. And the bishops and hegumens *having come together with the Metropolitan Kiuril and with all the hierarchical rank and monks and with all the Suzdal'ians*, they buried him honorably on the *23rd* of the same month, Friday, [the day] of *Holy Amfilokhii*<sup>46</sup>

## Life of Alexander Nevskii

Great Prince Alexander Iaroslavich, who was always firm in his faith in the Lord God, giving up this worldly kingdom and desiring the heavenly kingdom adopted the angelic form of a monk's life.... And then *he* gave up his soul to the Lord and *died* in peace *on November 14, on the commemoration day of the holy Apostle Philip*.... His holy body was carried to Volodimer. The *Metropolitan with the rank*, the princes and boyars and all the people.... His body was laid in the *Nativity of the Holy Mother of God* in the Great Abbey, on November *23rd*, the commemoration day of *Holy Father Amfilokhii*.<sup>47</sup>

Although the formulas regarding November 14 as the commemoration day of Philip and November 23 as the commemoration day of Amfilokhii can be regarded as religious topoi, the juxtaposition of these two topoi with the descriptions of the taking of Alexander's body to Vladimir, of the presence of the metropolitan with the prelates, and of the placing of the body in the Nativity of the Holy Mother of God monastery suggests that the author of one text used the other as a source. Since the wording in the Novg. I-OR is less expansive than the wording in the *Life*, it is more likely the Novg. I-OR was the source text. These formulas do not appear in either the Laurentian or Suzdal' chronicle accounts.

Thus, the account in the *Life*, in addition to being based on the *Tale*, appears to include interpolative passages from earlier chronicle accounts, specifically those found in the Laurentian Chronicle and the Novg. I-OR. In contrast, the information in the Novg. 1-YR interpolates a passage from the *Life*.

The Novg. 1-YR is extant in three MS copies: (1) Commission (dated to ca. 1450);<sup>48</sup> (2) Academy (dated to ca. 1445);<sup>49</sup> and (3) Tolstoi (dated to the

<sup>46</sup> PSRL 3: 83–84.

<sup>47</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 178–79.

<sup>48</sup> Kloss "Predislovie k izdaniuu 2000 g.," vi.

1720s).<sup>50</sup> It was probably compiled in the mid-15th century. I base this conclusion on two pieces of evidence. First, the last entry for the Commission copy is 1447. Second, Novg. 1-YR contains derogatory epithets to describe the Tatars that the Novg. 1-OR does not have. This second point indicates that its composition occurred in the post-1448 period. The Novg. 1-YR increases the number of "Germans" killed from 400 to 500, and changes the name of the saint commemorated on that day from Claudian to Feodul, who also is commemorated on April 5. In addition, after the words "Raven's Rock" and before the sentence that begins "The army of the Germans and Chuds ...," the Novg. 1-YR interpolates a passage that contains three components: a comparison of Alexander with the biblical David in that both of them had "brave warriors"; a declaration by Alexander's soldiers, after the chronicler compares their hearts to those of lions, that they were ready to put their lives on the line for him; and a plea by Alexander Nevskii to God just before the battle in which he asks for the same help that God provided Moses against the Amalekites as well as Iaroslav against Sviatopolk:

And they gathered at Lake Chud: there were many soldiers of both sides. Prince Alexander had as many brave warriors; as of old during the time King David had strong and mighty ones. Also Alexander's men were filled with the spirit of courage, for their hearts were like those of lions, and they said, "O, our honored *and worthy* Prince, now is the time to place our heads [on the line] for you." And Prince Alexander raising his hands to the sky, said, "Judge, my God, and deliver me from this haughty people, and help me, my Lord, as in the ancient times you helped Moses to defeat the Amalekites, and as you helped my forefather, Iaroslav, against accursed Sviatopolk." On Saturday when the sun rose....<sup>51</sup>

This interpolated passage in the Novg. 1-YR also appears in the *Life*, and I propose below that the compiler of the Novg. 1-YR borrowed this passage from the *Life*. The words *and worthy* appear in the Novg. 1-YR, but not in the *Life*:

*Life of Alexander Nevskii*

"O, our honored Prince, now is the time...."

Younger Redaction of Novg. I

"O, our honored *and worthy* Prince, now is the time...."

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., vi–vii.

<sup>51</sup> *PSRL* 3: 295–96.

These words were more likely to have been added in the Novg. 1-YR than dropped in the *Life* since both works seek to extoll Alexander.<sup>52</sup> I suggest, then, the following relationship among these texts (see figure 1).

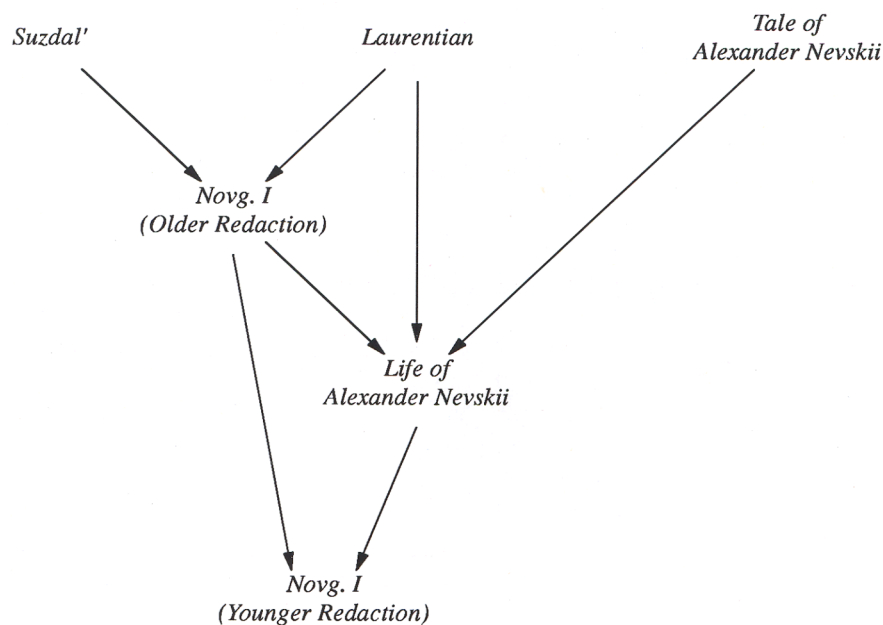


Figure 1: Relationship of Chronicle Accounts and *Tale of Alexander Nevskii* to *Life of Alexander Nevskii*

If this relationship is accurate, then it brings into question the assertion that the *Life* was written in the 1280s. It could not have been written before the account in the Novg. I-OR, which as I indicate above most likely was compiled in the middle of the 14th century. Even if one accepts the argument that the change in hand in the entry for 1330 represents a compilation, that still places its composition no earlier than 1330. Since we have only a partial copy of the *Life* from 1377, one must at least consider the possibility that parts of the rest of the *Life* were not composed before the late 15th century, the date of the earliest copy of the full first redaction.<sup>53</sup> One key to the dating of the *Life* is

<sup>52</sup> For a discussion of the relationship of the *Life* to the Novg. I-OR and the Novg. I-YR, see Begunov, "Zhitie Aleksandra Nevskogo v sostave Novgorodskoi 1-oi i Sofiiskoi 1-oi letopisei," 229–38.

<sup>53</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 16–17 and 195–212: *Ab* (1377); *Pc* (ca. 1486); *Π* (end of 15th century); *A* (mid-16th century); *A* (mid-16th century); *B* (3rd quarter of 16th century); *M*

its general treatment of the Mongols in a neutral way and without demeaning slurs. Fennell pointed out that the author of the *Life* tends “to stress the ‘divine’ role of the Tatars....” In addition, Fennell wrote: “Baty, in his encounter with Aleksandr, is shown in an almost chivalrous light. There are none of the derogatory epithets—‘foul’, ‘thrice-accursed’, ‘evil’, etc.—which in later literature were fastened to the Tatars. The ‘tsar’ and the Tatars are portrayed as some sort of benevolent force in the background....”<sup>54</sup>

While Fennell’s observation is mostly accurate, I did find two passages in the full First Redaction of the *Life* that can be identified as interpolations of the second half of the 15th century. The first of these is the sentence: “And the women of the Moabites began to frighten their children, saying: ‘Alexander is coming.’”<sup>55</sup> The second is: “And there was at that time great violence from foreign peoples: 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 people into misery.”<sup>56</sup> Neither the reference to Tatars as “Moabites” nor any allusion to Christians being oppressed by the Tatar khan is likely to have appeared in a source written in northeastern Rus’ between 1252 and 1448.<sup>57</sup> Without these interpolations, the full version of the *Life* could have been composed before 1448.<sup>58</sup> If, however, the Laurentian copy of the *Life* constituted a full version of the First Redaction (with lost folios accounting for the missing second part), then we can place its composition (or reworking of the secular military *Tale*) between 1352 (or 1330, at the earliest) and 1377.

Scholars, like Fennell, have pointed out the chronicle-like format in the *Life*, such as sentences beginning with the phrase “In that same year.” Although such phrases appear already in the *Tale* (as I have reconstructed it), which (if my reconstruction is correct) indicates the *Tale* was intended for in-

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(3rd quarter of 16th century); *Ap* (3rd quarter of 16th century); *Πz* (3rd quarter of 16th century); *B* (end of 16th–beginning of 17th century); *P* (2nd quarter of 17th century); *O* (mid-17th century); *Y* (3rd quarter of 17th century).

<sup>54</sup> Fennell, “Literature of the Tatar Period,” 119.

<sup>55</sup> Begunov, *Pamiatnik*, 174.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 177.

<sup>57</sup> For the argument that a change in Russian ecclesiastical writing toward the Mongol/Tatars occurred around 1448, see my *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 144–67.

<sup>58</sup> The appearance of these statements in the *Life* along with the absence of a full version of the *Life* before the 2nd half of the 15th century led me to hypothesize that the first full version of the *Life* was composed after the middle of the 15th century. See my article “Alexander Nevskii’s ‘Battle on the Ice’: The Creation of a Legend,” 298n24 and 299. Shortly after the article appeared in print, I realized that a better explanation was available.



clusion in a chronicle, I suggest the revision of it into the saint's tale was also intended for a chronicle. If the military tale<sup>59</sup> was reworked into the saint's tale for inclusion in the Laurentian Chronicle, where it first appears, then we can explain the interest in the saint's tale in Suzdal' and in the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery since the Laurentian Chronicle was copied in the Rozhdestvenskii Monastery in Suzdal'.

If the author of the *Tale* was around 20 years old in 1263 when Alexander died, then he would have been around 50 years old in 1293, which would put him at the upper range of normal life expectancy in the 13th century. Some people did live into their 60s, 70s, and 80s, but if the author had been any older than his 50s, one might expect some reference by him to his age. Thus, we can tentatively place the composition of the military tale about Alexander Nevskii between 1263 and the early 1290s. We might speculate a little further and propose that the author of that tale was someone who indeed did grow up at the court of Alexander Nevskii (as the *Tale* suggests) and may have been the son of one of Alexander's military servitors. Since the *Tale* was intended for inclusion in a chronicle, we can further surmise that at some point the author was tonsured and, at the time of writing the *Tale*, was a monastic scribe. The attempt at reworking a military tale into a saint's tale probably occurred some time between 1352 (or 1330) and 1377. In my view, it could well have been as late as the 1370s and the reworking may specifically have been for inclusion in the Laurentian Chronicle. Only in the half of the 15th century did the text assume the form of what we now call the First Redaction.

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<sup>59</sup> Charles J. Halperin has suggested "chronicle tale" in place of "military tale" as a better description of the genre of the *Tale of Alexander Nevskii*.