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ALEXANDER NEVSKII'S "BATTLE ON THE ICE": THE CREATION OF A LEGEND

The main focus of Sergei Eisenstein's epic film *Aleksandr Nevskii* is the battle at Lake Chud in 1242, often called the "battle on the ice," in which the Novgorodians under Alexander Nevskii defeated the Livonian knights.¹ The memorable images of the film include preparations for the battle, the charge of the Livonian knights across the ice of Lake Chud (with their banners flying in the wrong direction), the clash of the opposing armies as the charging knights almost break through the Novgorodian line, the subsequent retreat of the knights, and their drowning as the lake ice breaks up under them, all wonderfully accompanied by Sergei Prokofiev's music.

The seven editions of Nicholas Riasanovsky's popular textbook *A History of Russia* describe the battle in terms that bring to mind images of and completely coincide with Eisenstein's film:

The crucial battle took place on April 5, 1242, on the ice of Lake Chud, or Peipus, in Estonia. It became known in Russian historical tradition as "the massacre on the ice" and has been celebrated in song and story – more recently in Prokofiev's music and Eisenstein's brilliant film *Alexander Nevskii*. The massed force of mail clad and heavily armed German knights and their Finnish allies struck like an enormous battering ram at the Russian lines; the lines sagged but held long enough for Alexander Nevskii to make an enveloping movement with a part of his troops and assail an enemy flank; a complete rout of the Teutonic Knights followed, the spring ice breaking under them to aid their destruction.²

1. The Livonian Order (or Sword Brethren) was founded in 1202 and incorporated as an autonomous component into the Order of Teutonic Knights in 1237. See Eric Christensen, *The Northern Crusades* (London: Penguin, 1997), 79, 102–103. So, although not technically incorrect to call them *Teutonic knights* at this point, I will call them *Livonian knights* in this article to distinguish them from the larger Order.

2. Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *A History of Russia*, 1st ed. (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1963), 87; 2nd ed. (1969), 87; 3rd ed. (1977), 87; 4th ed. (1984), 80; 5th ed. (1993), 80; 6th ed. (1999), 80; + Mark Steinberg, 7th ed. (2005), 75.

Riasanovsky's textbook provides a memorable and evocative discussion of the battle. One may ask, however, how accurate the "brilliant film" of Eisenstein and the description in Riasanovsky's textbook are in regard to our source evidence about the battle.

Recently I raised this question on the Early Slavic listserv.³ The ensuing discussion and responses aided me in constructing the following multi-phase development of the legend of the "battle on the ice." The main sources for the battle include chronicle accounts and the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*. The chronicle accounts are problematic enough. Some chronicle accounts are independent of each other and provide information from differing perspectives, while others are derivative from earlier accounts and add to or modify those earlier accounts, while still others combine different accounts and add testimony to those as well. The puzzle is to figure out which chronicle accounts are the earliest and thus the bases for the derivative accounts. In using the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* for studying the "battle on the ice" one needs to keep in mind V. O. Kliuchevskii's cautionary remarks in regard to the reliability of evidence in saints' *vitae* concerning the events being described therein.⁴ As Norman Ingham has pointed out in discussing the *Life of Feodosii*, a hagiographer tries to convey spiritual truth not historical truth.⁵ Yet, Ia. S. Lur'e makes the point that while sources like saints' *vitae* and legends do not provide reliable historical evidence about the events being described, they can provide evidence to the historian about the understanding of things at the time the source was written.⁶ For the purposes of ascertaining the creation and evolution of legends, then, a saint's *vita*, if properly interpreted, can be a valuable source of evidence.

With these considerations in mind as a frame, I contend that the visual imagery of Eisenstein's film, the textbook description of Riasanovsky, and the general understanding of what happened at the battle are, for the most

3. The discussion occurred at H-EARLYSLAVIC@H-NET.MSU.EDU from July 15, 2005 to August 8, 2005, and can be found at <<http://www.h.net.org/~ess/>> under the subject heading "Nevskii, Lake Chud, and the Ice." I am grateful to all those who responded, but they, I hasten to add, should not be held accountable for any errors I have made.

4. V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Drevnerusskie zhitiia sviatykh kak istoricheskii istochnik* (Moscow: K. Soldatenkov, 1871), 402-38. Kliuchevskii did think, however, that the descriptions of miracles reported at the end of saints' *vitae* could provide valuable information about "the daily aspects of monastic life" and that in them the "local populace appears with its moral and physical illnesses and sometimes with its ethnographic and cultural peculiarities" (*ibid.*, 438).

5. Norman Ingham, "On Historical Truth and Hagiographical Truth: Saint Feodosii's Mother," *Russian History* 18 (1991): 127-41. Ingham in this article was referring specifically to the hagiographer of Feodosii's *Life*, but it can be applied generally to all hagiographers.

6. Ia. S. Lur'e, "O nekotorykh printsipakh kritiki istochnikov," *Istochnikovedenie otechestvennoi istorii. Sbornik statei*, vol. 1, ed. by N. I. Pavlenko et al. (Moscow: Nauka, 1973), 90-91.

part, a legend concocted hundreds of years after the battle, based to be sure on physical possibilities (such as the ability of lake ice to withstand the weight of armies and of armored riders on horseback as well as the ability of horses to gallop across the ice without slipping or falling). In addition I see the development of the legend of the "battle on the ice" as being influenced in its later layers by a variant narrative in the *Povest' vremennykh let* of a battle on a frozen lake in 1016. Several successive chronicle editors and the author of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* contributed to the evolution of this legend. Each editor and author in turn expanded and amplified the version of the account of the battle in their respective exemplar texts through the addition of religious imagery, verbatim statements attributed to the participants, and specific details not found in earlier accounts. In this way, successive layers of accretion piled up on top of each other. Ultimately, a seventeenth-century English epic poem gave shape to the last phase, or topmost layer, of this evolution.

Let us begin with the account of the battle in the *Livonian Rhymed Chronicle (LRC)*, the composition of which has been dated to the 1290s.⁷ The *LRC* is an early source and provides a decidedly pro-Livonian, anti-Rus'ian perspective. For those reasons it gives us a point of reference for discussing the Rus'ian sources.⁸ According to the *LRC*:

7. Jerry C. Smith and William L. Urban, "Preface," in *The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, trans. Jerry C. Smith and William L. Urban (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1977), xxi.

8. Other Western sources that mention the battle are: the Livonian Chronicle of Herman von Wartberge, written in Latin after 1378; the Chronicle of the Teutonic Order, from the second half of the fifteenth century; the Livonian History of Johann Renner from the second half of the sixteenth century; and the Livonian Chronicle of Balthazar Russow, also from the second half of the sixteenth century. See Hermann von Wartberge, *Chronicon Livoniae*, edited by Ernst Strehlke, *Scriptores rerum Prussicarum*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1863), 21; "Auszug aus der Deutsch-ordens-chronik," in *Scriptores rerum livonicarum: Sammlung der wichtigsten Chroniken und Geschichtsdenkmale von Liv-, Ehst-, und Kurland*, 2 vols., ed. by K. E. Napiersky (Riga and Leipzig: E. Frantzen's Verlag-comptoir, 1853) 2.3: 853; Johann Renner, *Livländische Historien*, ed. by Richard Hausmann and Konstantin Höhlbaum (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 1876), 32–33; Balthasar Russow, "Chronica der prouintz Lifflandt," in *Scriptores rerum livonicarum: Sammlung der wichtigsten Chroniken und Geschichtsdenkmale von Liv-, Ehst- und Kurland*, 2 vols., ed. by K. E. Napiersky (Riga and Leipzig: E. Frantzen's Verlag-comptoir, 1853), 2: 17. The relevant sections of these texts along with translation into Russian are conveniently gathered in 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. by G. N. Karaev (Moscow and Leningrad: Nauka, 1966), 232–39. None of these sources provides any information about the battle itself, except for Russow, who repeats the account given in the Livonian Rhymed Chronicle.

It was known in Dorpat that King Alexander had come with an army into the Order's land to rob and burn. The bishop [Henry] did not sit still, but ordered his men to hurry to the Brothers' army and oppose the Rus'

[Rûzen]. His command was obeyed, and in short order they joined the Brothers' forces. But they had brought along too few people, and the Brothers' army was also too small. Nevertheless they decided to attack the Rus'. The latter had many archers. The battle began with their bold assault on the king's men. The Brothers' banners were soon flying in the midst of the archers, and the swords were heard cutting helmets apart. Many from both sides fell dead on the grass [ûf da3 gras]. Then the Brothers' army was completely surrounded, for the Rus' had so many troops that there were easily sixty men for every one German knight. The Brothers fought well enough, but they were nonetheless cut down. Some of those from Dorpat escaped from the battle, and it was their salvation that they had been forced to flee. Twenty Brothers lay dead and six were captured. Thus the battle ended.⁹

A few points in this description are of particular interest for our discussion. The *LRC* is in agreement with the Rus' sources that the Rus' under Alexander won the battle and the Livonian knights lost. But on almost every other point, the *LRC* and the Rus' sources differ, and the later Rus' sources differ more so than the earlier Rus' sources and even in places differ to such an extent that they cannot be reconciled with the *LRC*'s account. The *LRC* gives no indication of the place of the battle or even that it may have been on or near a lake. Although it claims that the Livonian knights decided to take the offensive, the *LRC* says the archers on the Novgorod side attacked first ("The battle began with their bold assault on the king's men."). This "assault" was not just shooting arrows from afar, but seems to have involved a movement of archers against the knights for "the Brothers' banners were soon flying in the midst of the archers".¹⁰ In addition, the *LRC* makes no mention of ice or snow and specifically states that those who were killed fell "on the grass." It does say that some knights fled the battle, but it makes no mention of a chase. Finally, it provides, as we will see, a much lower figure

9. *Livländische Reimchronik*, ed. By Leo Mayer (Paderborn: F. Schöningh, 1876; rpt. Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1963), 51-52. Translation into English based on that in *The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, 31-32.

10. Just before the description of the battle, the *LRC* states that "Alexander, together with many other Rus', marched out from Suzdal" and that he had "bowmen without number among them. . ." *The Livonian Rhymed Chronicle*, 31. The military historian David Nicolle speculated that these bowmen may have been refugee Qipchaqs (formerly under Khan Köten, who had fled the Mongols and had subsequently taken up service with Novgorod) or possibly Mongol horse-archers (who had accompanied the army of Alexander's brother Andrei). David Nicolle, *Lake Peipus 1242: Battle of the Ice* (London: Osprey, 1996), 35-36. Nicolle interprets the phrase "the king's men" to refer to "vassals of the Danish crown from northern Estonia" (Nicolle, *Lake Peipus*, 74).

than later Rus' sources for the number of knights killed and captured in the battle. To be sure, the account in the *LRC* was not written by an eyewitness and the chronicler is at pains to explain how it is the knights suffered such an ignominious loss (i.e., they were outnumbered 60 to 1), but the Rus' sources were also not written by eyewitnesses. The bias of the *LRC* author in one direction may help in some respects to balance the bias of the Rus' sources in the other direction.

I have categorized the creation of the legend in the Rus' sources about the "battle on the ice" into 5 layers of accretion.

Layer 1. The bottom layer consists of the earliest chronicle accounts, which provide only minimal information about the battle. The Laurentian Chronicle¹¹ tells us:

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 (на озере) and took many prisoners. Andrei returned to his father with honor.¹²

Here the focus is on Andrei rather than Alexander, as, pointedly, it mentions Andrei's returning to their father Grand Prince Iaroslav with honor but not Alexander's returning to Novgorod with the prisoners. The phrase "на озере" can mean "at" or "on", but probably meant "at" since otherwise the chronicler would have included the clarifying word "ice," if it had been "on", so as not to confuse it with a naval battle. No mention is made that the battle was fought on ice or that there was a chase across the ice, and the Laurentian Chronicle does not indicate which lake.

Although this is more information about the locale of the battle than in the *LRC*, there is nothing in the Laurentian Chronicle account that contradicts the Livonian sources.

11. According to Shakhmatov, the Laurentian Chronicle was compiled between 1305 and 1308, or possibly 1316. A. A. Shakhmatov, "Povest' vremennykh let' i ee istochniki," *Trudy Otdela drevnerusskoi literatury (TODRL)* 4 (1940): 14. Priselkov dates it to the Compilation of 1305. M. D. Priselkov, *Istoriia russkogo letopisaniia XI-XV vv.* (Leningrad: Leningradskogo Gos. universiteta, 1940), 96-106. The Laurentian Chronicle is maintained in the Laurentian manuscript, which dates to 1377. Shakhmatov calls the Laurentian Chronicle an "all-Russian compilation" (*obshcherusskii svod*), as it tends to report events from the grand princely, rather than local, perspective.

12. *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei (PSRL)*, 41 vols. (St. Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad and Moscow: Arkheograficheskaia komissiiia, Nauka, and Arkheograficheskii tsentr, 1843-2002) 1: col. 470. In *PSRL* this chronicle is called the "Suzdal' Chronicle according to the Laurentian manuscript."

The Suzdal' Chronicle¹³ 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 [на Чюдскомъ езере] by Raven's Rock. Alexander defeated them and they chased them across the ice [по леду] for 7 versts.¹⁴

The phrase "по леду" can mean "along the ice," but it is unlikely it means that here because the Suzdal' chronicler could have written "along the lake" [по озеру] unless only part of the lake was frozen. We can, therefore, understand the chronicler to mean the chase was "across the ice."¹⁵ It might

13. Published according to 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 dates the composition of this particular entry to the 1260s-1270s. Priselkov, *Istoriia russkogo letopisaniia*, 98.

14. *PSRL*, 1: col. 523. A verst is usually equivalent to 1.067 km.

15. On the Early Slavic listserv in connection with the discussion mentioned above, I asked the question how the horses would have been able to run across ice without slipping. In response, Will Ryan provided an excellent reference to the sixteenth-century Swedish author Olaus Magnus, who has written: "No one . . . need find it marvelous or incredible that horses' hooves can be kept stable on slippery ice, so that not only can they proceed at full gallop, but can also be wheeled and spurred while carrying a fully-armed soldier. The horses are held so steady on their feet by means of curved iron shoes fitted with sharp nails that nowhere, however smooth the surface, need a rider dread falling." Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus: Romae 1555 = Description of the Northern Peoples: Rome 1555*, 3 vols., trans. by Peter Fisher and Humphrey Higgens, ed. by Peter Foote (London: Hakluyt Society, 1996-98) 2: 525. Olaus also writes that "The Swedes and Götar fight against the Muscovites, or Russians, and wage no less aggressive wars on ice than they do on solid ground . . ." and that "[t]he ice is firm enough to bear squadrons of cavalry or infantry, whether disposed in open or close order" (*ibid.*, 2: 524-25) and that "extremely bitter contests have often been waged between the Ruthenians (otherwise known as Russians or Muscovites) and the Swedes or Finns . . . on flat ice and in thick depths of snow" (*ibid.*, 2: 523). In snow, they "entirely strip the horses of their iron shoes, to ensure that with no balls of snow sticking to them they can charge the enemy without impediment" (*ibid.*, 2: 563). Olaus also describes horse racing across the ice for cloaks and prizes (*ibid.*, 1: 56-58). The woodcut at the head of book 1, chapter 28 shows tools for traveling across the ice including horse shoes (*ibid.*, 1: 63). Bogatyrev pointed out that Turberville wrote: "They (Russians) seldom shoe their horses unless they use to ride in post upon the frozen floods, then cause they shall not slide he sets a slender calk, and so he rides his way." The footnote in Crummey and Berry's edition of Turberville identifies the "slender calk" as a pointed piece of iron on a horseshoe to prevent slipping" *Rude and Barbarous Kingdom: Russia in the Accounts of Sixteenth-Century English Voyagers*, ed. by Robert O. Crummey and Lloyd E. Berry (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1968), 82. According to testimony provided by David Nicolle, which he attributes to "local information," on Lake Chud "the ice . . . does not all lie flat in winter.

be argued that the Suzdal' Chronicle account provides specific information not included in the Laurentian Chronicle account and should be considered to be part of a separate layer. I place the Suzdal' Chronicle account in layer 1 because, like the Laurentian Chronicle account, it is a straight-forward report, not infused with quotations attributed to the participants and because no religious imagery (as in later accounts) has been incorporated. The two are independent in the sense that one is not derivative from the other. So they do not represent separate layers of the accretion of the legend; they each provide a different perspective within the same layer. The Suzdal' Chronicle account goes beyond the *LRC* in describing a chase by the Novgorodians of the escaping Livonian knights for 7 versts across the ice of Lake Chud. But, as with the Laurentian Chronicle account, there is nothing that inherently contradicts the account in the *LRC*, for the *LRC* author may not have wanted to mention the knights were being chased.

Layer 2. The description in the Older Redaction of the Novgorod I Chronicle¹⁶ 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 men of Novgorod and with his brother Andrei and the men of the low country went to the Chud land against the Germans.... Prince Alexander and all 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 Martyrs Boris and Gleb, for whose sake the Novgorodians shed their

Instead it is often piled into small jagged pinnacles and overlapping planks by the prevailing wind as it freezes, partially melts, then freezes again in late autumn." Nicolle, *Lake Peipus*, 69.

16. The Synod copy of this redaction has been dated to the first half of the fourteenth century. 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. But there is nothing compelling about this dating. The Synod copy ends with an entry for 1352, but the thinking has been that the compilation (svod) was in 1330, since that is when a change of hand occurs in the Synod copy (fol. 167). Yet, changes in handwriting occur in any number of chronicles without its signifying an end-of-compilation marker. It is safer to date its composition to the middle of the fourteenth century.

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 [the Novgorodians] fought them for seven versts on 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.¹⁷

The inclusion of the information that Saints Boris and Gleb interceded with God and Holy Sophia on behalf of the Novgorodians as well as that the date of the battle was on the day that the martyr Claudian is commemorated can be seen to represent secondary editing. The cathedral in Novgorod is named in honor of Holy Sophia, while the Novgorodians adopted Boris and Gleb as special patron saints of their city. A specific number, such as the number "400" attached to the number of Germans killed and "50" to those taken prisoner can also be characteristic of secondary editing, especially if there are no numbers given in earlier sources. This source is the first one to testify that any fighting occurred on the ice, as the Novgorodians chased the fleeing Livonian knights and Chud infantry. Here we find the first Rus' source that contains information that is inherently different from the *LRC*'s account. Besides the intercession of Saints Boris and Gleb on the side of the Novgorodians, and that Chuds were fighting with the Livonian knights, the Novgorod I Chronicle (Older Redaction) account indicates the knights' losses were 400 killed and 50 captured in contrast to the 20 killed and 6 captured in the *LRC* account. Nicolle claims that "the casualty figures in German and Russian sources tally, up to a point."¹⁸ He argues that the *LRC* author's count of 20 killed and 6 captured meant only the "elite Teutonic knights," whereas the claim in the Novgorod I Chronicle "of 400 German and Danish dead" and "50 enemy captured" includes more than just the elite knights. His argument coincides with that of Begunov, Kleinenberg, and Shaskol'skii, who state that the numbers of losses reported in the sources "are trustworthy" as long as one understands the numbers in the *LRC* apply only to "members of the Teutonic Order," since the number of the others killed and taken prisoner was not considered.¹⁹ Begunov, Kleinenberg, and Shaskol'skii also pointed out that the total number of Livonian knights at the time was somewhere between 50 and 100. Even if a few extra knights were supplied by the Teutonic Order itself, that would still put the total of knights at the battle around, or just over,

17. *Novgorodskaiia Pervaia letopis'. Starshego in mladshego izvodov*, ed. by A. N. Nasonov (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1950), 78.

18. Nicolle, *Lake Peipus*, 78.

19. Begunov, Kleinenberg, and Shaskol'skii, "Pis'mennye istochniki," 229.

100.²⁰ Fennell, in contrast, while accepting their estimate of the number of Livonian and Teutonic knights in the battle as just above 100, concluded that the number given of 450 killed and captured "is clearly an exaggeration."²¹

It seems likely that, in distinguishing "Germans" from "Chuds," the author of the Novgorod I Chronicle may not have been making an ethnic distinction so much as a functional distinction, in effect distinguishing those on horseback (Germans) from foot soldiers (Chuds). There is no mention of Danes in the Novgorod I Chronicle account of the battle. Nor is there any mention in any source I know of that non-Teutonic German and Danish knights took part in the battle. But given what we know otherwise about the way the Orders fought, it is likely there were sergeants as well as various mercenaries and vassals, all of whom could have been of different ethnicities and who could have been mounted, which would have added several hundred more to the count.²² Therefore, depending upon how many knights of the Teutonic and Livonian Orders took part along with assorted other mounted warriors, the number 450 may be physically possible and thereby not irreconcilable with the number given in the *LRC*. Yet it may be an "exaggeration" nonetheless.

A further secondary editing occurs in the Younger Redaction of the Novgorod I Chronicle. After the words "Raven's Rock" and before the sentence that begins "The army of the Germans and Chuds . . ." the Younger Redaction introduces three elements: 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

20. *Ibid.*, 227-28.

21. John Fennell, *The Crisis of Medieval Russia 1200-1304* (London: Longman, 1983), 105-06.

22. See the numbers that Nicolle provides of the Livonian knights and their auxiliaries before the battle at the Saule River. Nicolle, *Lake Peipus*, 27.

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....²³

The Younger Redaction increases the number of "Germans" killed from 400 to 500, and it changes the name of the saint commemorated on that day from Claudian to Feodul, who also is commemorated on April 5.

None of these accounts makes any mention of the ice breaking up or of anyone's drowning in the water, or even that any of the battle occurred on the ice.

Layer 3. The author of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*²⁴ seems to be trying to combine the testimony of the Laurentian Chronicle with that of the Novgorod I Chronicle, but does so in a rather clumsy way:

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 Lake Chud was covered with many soldiers of both sides. [In this battle participated] the troops that his father Iaroslav sent with Alexander's younger brother Andrei. 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 said, "O our honorable Prince, now is the time [for us] to place our heads [on the line] for you." And Prince Alexander raised his arms to heaven and said, "Judge me, my God, and deliver me from this proud 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 the accursed Sviatopolk." On Saturday when the sun rose, the two armies clashed. There was horrible bloodshed and a noise from the breaking of lances and a sound from the clanging of swords as though the frozen lake moved. And one could not see the ice; the blood covered it. This I heard from an eyewitness who told me that he saw a divine regiment in the sky, which came to help Alexander. And so they defeated them with the

23. Novgorodskaia Pervaia letopis', 295-96.

24. Begunov claims that the first redaction of the *Life* was written in 1282-1283. See Iu. K. Begunov, *Pamiatnik russkoi literatury XIII veka "Slovo o pogibeli Russkoi zemli"* (Moscow: Nauka, 1965), 61; see also Begunov, Kleinenberg, and Shaskol'skii, "Pis'mennye istochniki," 183; cf. drawing 2 following page 192 "Skhema vzaimootnosheniia tekstov izvestii o Ledovom poboishche russkikh letopisei"; and Jurij Biegunow [Iu. K. Begunov], "Itwory literckie o Aleksandrze Newskim w skladzie latopisow ruskich," *Slavia Orientalis* 18 (1969): 309. A more sensible dating places its composition in the fourteenth century (as I will explain below).

help of God, and the warriors gave their shoulder [fled] and they fought them, chasing, as through the air. And the enemy did not know where to escape to. Here God glorified Alexander before all the regiments just as Joshua, son of Nun, before Jericho. And God placed in Alexander's hands those who bragged, "Let us take Alexander with our own hands." And no opponent is ever to resist him in battle. Alexander returned home with great glory. And there were a multitude of prisoners who followed his regiments. And those who called themselves "the knights of God" were walking barefoot next to their horses.²⁵

First, the hagiographer has Alexander going against the Germans as the Novgorod I Chronicle 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 Novgorod I Chronicle have. Finally, he incorporates the account of the Novgorod I Chronicle with Alexander's appeal to God and the chase across the ice. Thus, the account in the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* appears to be derivative from earlier chronicle accounts, specifically those found in the Laurentian and Novgorod I chronicles. This conclusion brings into question the assertion that the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* was written in the 1280s. It could not have been written before the account in the Novgorod I Chronicle, which as I indicate above most likely was written in the middle of the fourteenth century. And it is difficult to date the composition of the *Life* before the mid fourteenth century.

The hagiographer does, however, add a statement that the noise of the lances and swords was so great that it seemed as though it was ice noise: "There was . . . a noise from the breaking of lances and a sound from the clanging of swords as though the frozen lake moved." Clearly this statement refers to the sounds of tremors through the ice.²⁶ While the *LRC* does mention the sound of arrows cutting through helmets, the notion that the sound of battle was so loud that it seemed as though it was coming from the

25. V. Mansikka, "Zhitie Aleksandra Nevskogo (Razbor redaktsii i teksty)," *Pamiatniki drevnei pis'mennosti* 180 (1913), 31. Cf. "Zhitie Aleksandra Nevskogo," preparation of text by V. I. Okhotnikova, in *Pamiatniki literatury drevnei Rusi*, 12 vols. (Moscow, 1978-1994), ed. By L. A. Dmitriev and D. S. Likhachev, *XIII veka*, 432. The English translation here is a modified version of the one in Serge A. Zenkovsky, *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles and Tales*, rev. and enl. ed. (New York: Meridian, 1974), 231.

26. As those who have heard it can attest, such ice noise can be quite loud. According to the Flat Ice and Travel & Rescue website in a message posted by Struan Gray with the subject heading: "Frozen Lake Safety, info/FAQ": "Noise does not necessarily indicate too weak ice." Furthermore, "spring ice can break up without any noise." <<http://www.sarinfo.be.ca/Library/Skills/IceRescu.skl>> (Jan. 5, 1995).

ice depends on the number of troops involved. Nicolle estimates the numbers that took part in the battle as 2600 on the Crusader side (among which he includes 800 Danish and German knights, 100 Teutonic knights, 300 Danes, 400 Germans, and 1000 Estonian [Chud] infantry), and 5000 on the Novgorodian side (which includes 600 in Alexander's retinue, 400 in Andrei's retinue, 2000 Novgorod militia, 1400 Finno-Ugrian tribesman, and 600 horse archers).²⁷ He writes that estimates of the Crusader number "are pretty reasonable" but that estimate of numbers on the Novgorodian side "involves inspired guesswork."²⁸ Shcherbakov and Dzys' place the number significantly lower on both sides – 700 to 750 for the Crusaders, 1700 to 2000 for the Novgorodians.²⁹ Other scholars have estimated much higher numbers. The military historian Razin estimated 10,000 to 12,000 on the Crusader side and 15,000 to 17,000 on the Novgorodian side.³⁰ Stokov, another military historian, proposed that a combined total of 30,000 on both sides participated in the battle.³¹ Kirpichnikov put the numbers at between 10,000 and 17,000 "for each side."³² In sum, estimates for the Crusader numbers range between 700 and 15,000; and for the Novgorodian side between 1700 and 17,000. It is anyone's guess how many troops were involved. If the lower figures are accepted, then it must have been a relatively quiet ice noise for the hagiographer's simile to work.

The phrase "Lake Chud was covered with many soldiers on both sides" is the first mention in the sources that the battle itself occurred on the ice of Lake Chud. The claim that "one could not see the ice [for] the blood covered it" differs from the statement in the *LRC* that the dead fell "on the grass." It is also the first mention in the sources that any deaths occurred on the ice. An argument that only the "elite knights" fell "on the grass" while others fell on

27. Nicolle, *Lake Peipus* 92; cf. 41.

28. *Ibid.*, 92.

29. Aleksandr Shcherbakov and Igor' Dzys', *Ledovoe poboishche 1242* (Moscow: Eksprint, 2001), 65, 68.

30. E. A. Razin, *Istoriia voennogo iskusstva*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Voennogo izdatel'stvo, 1955-61), 2: 160.

31. A. A. Stokov, *Istoriia voennogo iskusstva*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Voennogo izdatel'stvo, 1955), 1: 262; *idem*, *Istoriia voennogo iskusstva* (Moscow: Voennogo izdatel'stvo, 1966), 61. In the footnote to an article published in 1982, Stokov makes clear he was accepting the estimates Razin gave and that the figure "30,000" was the result of combining the numbers at the upper range for each side. A. A. Stokov, "Istoricheskaia pobeda na Chudskom Ozere v 1242 godu," *Voенно-istoricheskii zhurnal* 3 (1982): 55, note 10.

32. A. N. Kirpichnikov, "Dve velikh bitvy Aleksandra Nevskogo," in *Aleksandr Nevskii i istorii Rossii. Materialy nauchno-prakticheskoi konferentsii 26-28 sentyabria 1995 goda* (Novgorod: Novgorodskii gosudarsvennyi obedinennyi muzei-zapovednik, 1996), 38; *idem*, "Ledovoe poboishcha 1242 g. (novoe osmyslenie)," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 5 (1994): 162.

the ice would be a stretch. Therefore, this difference with the *LRC* should be considered an irreconcilable one.

The Pskov Chronicles also belong to this 3rd layer in terms of describing the battle.³³ In the Pskov I Chronicle, the events, as expected, focus on Pskov:

In the year 1242 [6750]. Prince Alexander came and defeated the Germans in the town of Pskov, and the town of Pskov was delivered from the godless Germans, with the help of the Holy Trinity. And they fought with them on the ice; and God helped Prince Alexander and the Novgorod and Pskov men. He [Alexander] killed some and, having bound the others, led them barefoot across the ice. This battle was on April 1, and there was great joy in the town of Pskov.³⁴

The Pskov chronicles differ from the Novgorod sources in dating the battle to April 1 rather than April 5. They also have the Holy Trinity rather than "God and Holy Sophia" helping Alexander probably because the main church in Pskov was the Holy Trinity Church. Like the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* the Pskov Chronicles indicate the battle itself was fought on the ice, differing thereby from earlier chronicle accounts, which mention only that the retreat of the Germans, and pursuit by the Novgorodians, occurred across the ice. Like the *Life* they have the prisoners walking barefoot. But whereas the *Life* has them walking barefoot next to their horses, the Pskov chroniclers have the prisoners walking barefoot on the ice. None of these accounts makes any mention of the ice breaking up or of anyone's drowning in the water.

Layer 4. The Moscow chronicle compilations of the late fifteenth-early sixteenth century, including the Sofiia I Chronicle,³⁵ the Moscow Chronicle of the End of the fifteenth century,³⁶ and the Nikon Chronicle,³⁷ incorporate

33. Nasonov dates the composition of the Pskov I Chronicle to "the 1450s or the beginning of the 1460s." Although he also points out that the manuscript (Tikhanov) that he used as is copy text for the Pskov I Chronicle is from the 17th century, he sees it as deriving from a virtual compilation of 1469. "Predislovie," *Pskovskie letopisi*, 2 vols., ed. By A. N. Nasonov (Moscow and Leningrad: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1941, 1955), 2: 6. The other manuscript copies of the Pskov I Chronicle he sees as deriving from virtual compilations that can be dated no earlier than the 1480s (*ibid.*, 1: LXIII).

34. *Pskovskie letopisi*, 1: 13. Cf. Pskov II Chronicle (*ibid.*, 2: 21); and Pskov III Chronicle (*ibid.*, 2: 87-88).

35. The two copies of the Sofiia I Chronicle date to the late 1470s-early 1480s. B. M. Kloss, "Predislovie," *PSRL*, vol. 6 (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 2000), V-VIII. According to Lur'e, both the Sofiia I Chronicle and the Novgorod IV Chronicle derive from the virtual compilation of 1448. Lur'e, *Obshcherusskie letopisi XIV-XV vv.*, 62.

36. Although this chronicle ends with the entry for 1492, the editor of the 1949 edition for PSRL proposed that this was not the intended ending. Instead, several folios are missing from the

the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* into their narrative. But they also add certain phrases not found in earlier versions of the *Life*, such as that the Master of the Livonian Order took part in the battle and that the 50 captured Germans were "prominent commanders." In addition, these chronicles are the first sources to explicitly state that some combatants drowned.³⁸ The Moscow Chronicle of the End of the Fifteenth Century has the phrase "others drowned in the lake"³⁹ while the Sofiia I Chronicle and the Nikon Chronicle have the phrase "the water drowned others."⁴⁰ Although none of the chronicles that have these phrases distinguish whether only German knights and Chud infantry drowned or soldiers from both sides drowned, one can understand from the context of the description, which is about Crusader casualties, that only Germans and Chuds are meant. Shcherbakov and Dzys' accept the validity of the reports about these drownings and interpret them to refer to the "thin ice" of the Téploe ozero, and that it affected only a "part of the fleeing Germans."⁴¹ But they do not make clear on what basis they make this conjecture. Finally, the testimony that drownings happened differs markedly from the account of the *LRC* and from the early Rus' chronicles, none of which makes any mention of such an occurrence.

Four miniatures that appear in the *Litsevoi letopisnyi svod* depict events associated with the battle.⁴² The first miniature (fol. 937v) merely shows the rival armies lined up against each other in a stylistic way before the battle is

end of the manuscript, which may have carried the narrative into the sixteenth century. "Predislovie," *PSRL*, 25: 3.

37. According to Kloss, "the original redaction of the Nikon Chronicle could not have been composed earlier than the 1520s-1530s." B. M. Kloss, *Nikonovskii svod i russkie letopisi XVI-XVII vekov* (Moscow: Nauka, 1980), 44.

38. The military historian David Nicolle has asserted that the notion of the knights falling through the ice did not enter the sources before the sixteenth century. Nicolle, *Lake Peipus*, 85. But it is more accurate to date the entry of the drownings into the legend to the second half of the fifteenth century.

39. *PSRL*, 25: 135: "инии на езере истопша".

40. *PSRL*, 6.1: col. 314: "иных вода потопи". This phrase also appears in the account in Stroeov copy of the 3rd Pskov Chronicle (*Pskovskie letopisi* 2: 82), which Nasonov dates to the 1560s (*Pskovskie letopisi* 1: IX-X; 2: 4).

41. Shcherbakov and Dzys', *Ledovoe poboishche*, 77.

42. V. Okhotnikova, N. Rozov, and V. Smol'kov, *Zhitie Aleksandra Nevskogo. Tekst i miniatury Litsevogo letopisnogo svoda XVI veka* (Leningrad: Avrorra, 1990), fols. 937v. Kloss proposes that work on the *Litsevoi svod* began in 1568 and was completed by 1576. Kloss, *Nikonovskii svod*, 245-49. According to Amosov, the *Litsevoi svod* was worked on from "not earlier than 1569" until the early 1580s. A. A. Amosov, *Litsevoi letopisnyi svod Ivana Groznogo: Kompleksnoe kodikologicheskoe issledovanie* (Moscow: Editorial URSS, 1998), 184-222. Morozov makes the point that work on the *Litsevoi svod* had to have continued at least through 1586. V. V. Morozov, *Litsevoi svod v kontekste otechestvennogo letopisaniia XVI veka* (Moscow: Indrik, 2005), 254.

joined. The second miniature (fol. 938) is composed in horizontal registers. In the top register, Alexander on horseback, with his sword drawn over his head, and the Novgorodians on foot battle two Livonian knights, also with their swords drawn over their heads, and presumably Chuds on foot. In the middle register three horsemen on the Novgorodian side battle two horsemen on the Livonian side with various infantry. No one is fleeing in either register. In the bottom register, 12 soldiers, 6 from each side, with just their heads showing (as well as the arm of one presumably Novgorodian [from the way he is facing] soldier) are in the water among the ice slabs much as in Eisenstein's film. From the closed eyes of those in the water, one could suppose they are dead, but then their heads should not be above the water if they had drowned.

Two miniatures appear on the same folio (fol. 938v), one immediately after the other.

The first of these (the third miniature overall) shows an army of angels on horseback, swords carried on their shoulders, and two saints (presumably Boris and Gleb) interceding with an icon.⁴³

The second of the miniatures on this folio (the fourth overall) is arranged in horizontal registers. In the top register, two angels on horseback, with swords drawn over their heads, are chasing enemy soldiers, who are on foot. The angels seem to be flying through the air as described in the *Life of Alexander Nevskii*. The next lower register, which may be part of either the top register or the next register below it, shows Alexander Nevskii on horseback, sword drawn, in the same way the angels have their swords drawn chasing the enemy, who again are fleeing on foot. In the next register, two Novgorodians on horseback swords drawn along with assorted infantry, are chasing two knights on horseback along with other enemy soldiers on foot. In the bottom register, five heads are shown above the water and broken ice, four of them facing toward the Crusader side. It looks as though the horses above them are actually running through the water and broken ice over the heads of those in the water. Again, this is physically possible since the lake remains shallow even some distance from the shoreline.⁴⁴ Although the second and fourth miniatures show broken ice, none of the sources explicitly states the ice "broke up" under the fleeing knights (I will return to this point below). Nor do the dead or dying in the water seem to be affecting the main

43. The icon is a Deisis image showing Christ seated on a throne, but without a face (presumably as the result of being unfinished). Two figures, a male (John the Baptist) and a female (Virgin Mary), are on the left and right sides, respectively, of the seated Christ. My thanks to Vera Shevzov for allowing me to consult with her about this image.

44. See Nicolle, *Lake Peipus*, 74, which has a picture of a man wading ankle deep through the water near Pirissar Island. The caption reads: "the shores of Lake Peipus generally present an impenetrable wall of reeds, though the water is extremely shallow."

body of fleeing knights. If one "reads" the miniatures in a top-down chronological sequence, then it could be suggested that the intent of the miniaturist was to indicate the ice broke up under the main body of knights. But that suggestion does not work because the top registers of both the second and fourth miniatures depict events that are occurring simultaneously. Each of the miniatures is meant to represent a different chronological aspect of the battle and no progression of time occurs within any one of them.

In sum, the sources (both written and visual) of layer 4 have some combatants in the water. The written sources say they drowned, but the visual sources have them floating as though they were killed before they fell in the water. Neither the written nor the visual sources of this layer indicates that only those on the Crusader side drowned or fell into the water, and the visual sources (i.e., the miniatures in the *Litsevoi svod*) seem to have both Novgorodians and their enemies in the water.

Layer 5. A widespread understanding is that the ice gave way under the main body of fleeing Livonian knights, as represented in the wording in Riasanovsky's textbook and in the images of Eisenstein's film. An on-line encyclopedia calls this the "traditional interpretation":

The knights started to retreat in disarray onto the ice and the appearance of the fresh Russian cavalry made them run for their lives. Under the weight of their heavy armour, the thin ice started to collapse, and many knights drowned. Only the Grand Master, some bishops, and a handful of mounted knights managed to return to Tartu.⁴⁵

It is this common understanding of the battle that I am assigning to the fifth (or topmost) layer. If the date for the battle given in the sources from layer 2 on – that is, April 5th (or April 1st as in the Pskov Chronicles), is accurate – then it is possible for the ice to have broken up under the weight of the knights. Olaus Magnus tells us: "as the season verges on the beginning of April, no one trusts the thickness, still less the strength, of the ice, unless he walks on it at dawn; the ice becomes so brittle during the day under the eye of the sun that, where a short time before it supported armoured riders, it can now hardly bear one unarmed man."⁴⁶ So there is nothing physically impossible in the 5th-layer "traditional interpretation." On the other hand, anyone familiar with the region could make the same connection. To be sure, the claim can be made that the fullest account of the battle represents what

45. Absolute Astronomy Reference, "Battle on Lake Peipus"
<http://www.absoluteastronomy.com/encyclopedia/b/ba/battle_on_lake_peipus.htm>.

46. Olaus Magnus, *Historia de gentibus septentrionalibus: Romae 1555* = Description of the Northern Peoples: Rome 1555, 1: 62.

really happened, and the individual sources report only different aspects of the battle. But such a claim does not explain what would then be the elimination of religious elements in some chronicle accounts and not in others, nor the dropping of verbatim statements or the changing of specifics to generalities. A more coherent explanation results from beginning with those chronicle accounts that contain little or no religious elements, few or no quoted words, and generalities as in the earliest accounts. It is more likely that a chronicle editor would incorporate religious elements, include spoken words, and turn the general to specific than the reverse.

The Younger Redaction of the Novgorod I Chronicle and the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* have Prince Alexander alluding to a battle that his ancestor Iaroslav fought against Sviatopolk. Both the *Povest' vremennykh let* (PVL) and versions of the *Tale of Boris and Gleb* refer to a battle on a frozen lake in 1016 in which Iaroslav and his forces defeated those led by Sviatopolk. We are told that Sviatopolk and his troops were situated between two lakes near the Dnepr River.⁴⁷ We are further told that because of the lake (which one is not specified), the Pechenegs could not bring aid to Sviatopolk. We are also told that the water had begun to freeze. The α text of the PVL, testified to by the Radziwiłł, Academy, and Hypatian copies, reads:

They went against each other and met upon the field. The conflict was fierce. The Pechenegs could not help because of the lake. Sviatopolk with his warriors were driven toward the lake. And when they went onto the ice, Iaroslav began obtaining the advantage. Seeing this, Sviatopolk fled and Iaroslav won. Sviatopolk fled to the Liakhs.⁴⁸

Significantly, after the words "they went onto the ice," the Laurentian and Khlebnikov copies of the PVL include a phrase about the ice beginning to break up. The Laurentian copy reads: "and the ice weakened under them" (и обломися с ними ледъ). The Khlebnikov copy adds that "many drowned in the waters" (мнози потопоша въ водах).⁴⁹ At least three copies of the Sil'vestr redaction of the *Tale of Boris and Gleb* refer to the troops of

47. Barsov proposed that these are bodies of water no longer in existence but that they correspond to what were known as Dolobskoe Lake and Podliubskoe Lake near Liubech. N. P. Barsov, *Ocherki russkoi istoricheskoi geografii* (Warsaw: Varshavskogo uchebnogo okruga, 1885), 128.

48. *The Povest' vremennykh let: An Interlinear Collation*, 3 vols., compiled and edited by Donald Ostrowski; associate editor David J. Birnbaum (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2003), 142, 12-142, 19.

49. *The Povest' vremennykh let: An Interlinear Collation*, 142, 16-17. The Laurentian copy omits the sentence "Seeing this, Sviatopolk fled and Iaroslav won."

Sviatopolk "weakening" [обломишася]⁵⁰ when Iaroslav's troops begin to gain the upper hand after the battle moves onto the ice. The Radziwiłł, Academy, and Hypatian copies of the PVL do not make any mention of ice breaking up at the 1016 battle. Nor do the other copies of the Sil'vestr redaction of the *Tale*. Instead of the ice breaking up, it makes more sense to read the passage as telling us that Sviatopolk and his troops were driven out onto the ice where Iaroslav's troops began to carry the day. That way, Sviatopolk (probably with his retinue and what was left of his forces) was able to flee across the frozen lake and escape. In any case, the similarity between Sviatopolk and his army's fleeing across the ice and that of the Livonian knights doing the same some 226 years later is striking.

I have suggested elsewhere that the phrases "weakening" (обломишася) (in one of the branches of the Sil'vester Redaction of the Tale of Boris and Gleb), "and the ice weakened under them" (и обломися с ними ледъ) (in the Laurentian copy of the PVL), and "the ice weakened under Sviatopolk's soldiers and many drowned in the waters" (и обломися лед с вои стополчи и мнози потопоша въ водах) (in the Khlebnikov copy of the PVL) represent an interpolative progression (i.e., from Sil'vester to Laurentian to Khlebnikov).⁵¹ Furthermore, the notion of the ice giving way seems to have been added by a scribe of the Laurentian sub-branch to heighten the drama such that even nature was turning against Sviatopolk, just as nature or God seemed to be turning against the Livonian knights in the layer-5 version. The inclusion of the description that there were drownings as a result of the ice weakening appears only in the Khlebnikov copy of the PVL, which dates to the 16th century, just shortly after the idea begins to be added to the legend of the "battle on the ice" of 1242. In addition, the "weakening" (обломишася) of the Sil'vester Redaction of the *Tale of Boris and Gleb* does not refer to ice breaking up but to the soldiers of Sviatopolk (3rd-person plural reflexive aorist), and the verb refers to the weakening or giving way of Sviatopolk's forces.⁵² A scribe is more likely to have changed the обломишася form referring to soldiers to the обломися form and have added the word "ice" to make the reference clear than change the обломися form referring to ice to the обломишася form referring to soldiers and delete the word "ice." Such a

50. Sergii Bugoslavskii, *Ukraïno-rus'ki pam'iatki XI-XVIII v.v. pro kniaziv Borisa ta Gliba* (Kiev: Vseukrains'kaia akademiia nauk, 1928), 87.

51. See my "Scribal Practices and Copying Probabilities in the Transmission of the Text of the *Povest' vremennykh let*," *Palaeoslavica* 13:2 (2005): 60-61.

52. Cf. meanings of обломитися in I. I. Sreznevskii, *Materialy dlia slovaria drevne-russkogo iazyka po pis'mennym pamiatnikam*, 3 vols. (St. Petersburg: Otdeleniia russkogo iazyka, 1893-1912), 2: col. 527; and *Slovar' russkogo iazyka XI-XVII vv.*, ed. S. G. Barkhudarov, 26 vols. (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1975-2005), 12: 86-87. I am grateful to David J. Birnbaum for allowing me to consult with him about this passage.

conclusion is in keeping with the principle that additions tend to be intentional, deletions accidental. I contend that the similarity between the later layers of the legend of the 1242 battle and the narrative variants of the 1016 battle is more than mere coincidence. It indicates a direct connection between the evolution of the accounts of the 1242 battle on the ice with the evolution of the accounts of the 1016 battle on the ice.

The layer-1 accounts of the 1242 clash between the Livonian knights and the Novgorodians make no mention of a month and day for the battle. We can tentatively assign a time for this 1st layer of the late thirteenth–early fourteenth century. The layer-2 accounts add the date April 5 or (in the case of the Pskov chronicles) April 1. We can assign a beginning date for the 2nd layer to the mid to late fourteenth century. In layer 3, the hagiographer of the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* has Alexander making a plea to God to help him the way he helped his ancestor Iaroslav in his battle against Sviatopolk. The hagiographer also asserts that the sound of battle was very loud, as though it was ice noise. We can assign a beginning for the 3rd layer to the mid-fifteenth century. Knowing that ice can begin to break up on lakes in early April, layer-4 editors took their cue from the layer-3 simile in the *Life of Alexander Nevskii* of ice noise as well as the reference to the battle in 1016 between Iaroslav and Sviatopolk. They looked to the narrative variants that appear in the Laurentian copy of the PVL that describe ice “weakening” under Sviatopolk’s troops. They then added the description of ice breaking up and the drowning of some combatants to the 1242 narrative. We can assign a beginning for the 4th layer to the late fifteenth century. Finally, in layer 5, the drownings were applied to the main body of Livonian knights as they were chased back across the frozen lake. But when is the 5th layer accreted to the legend? For the answer to this question we have to look at the historiography because there is no further development of the legend in the sources.

A quick survey of the historiography reveals a tendency to rely on layer-2 and layer-3 sources, sometimes on those of layer 4 and rarely on layer 5. In other words, the “traditional interpretation” turns out to be not so traditional after all at least in the works of scholars. In discussing the battle, Karamzin, Solov’ev, Petrushevskii, Khitrov, Platonov, Grekov et al., Vernadsky, Razin, Myakotin, Pashuto, Fennell, and Kirpichnikov, for example, mention that it was fought on the ice, yet none of them says anything about the ice breaking up or anyone’s drowning.⁵³ Kliuchevskii and Pokrovskii do not mention the

53. N. K. Karamzin, *Istoriia gosudarstva Rossiiskogo*, 12 vols., 5th ed. (St. Petersburg: Voennaia tipografiia Glavnogo shtaba, 1842; rpt. Moscow: Kniga, 1988), 4: col. 20 and “Primechanie k IV tomu,” col. 13; S. M. Solov’ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*, 15 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo sotsial’no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1960-66), 2.3: 154-55; A. Petrushevskii, *Skazanie o sv. blagovornom velikom kniaze Aleksandre Nevskom* (St. Petersburg:

battle at all.⁵⁴ In the second half of the eighteenth century, M. M. Shcherbatov, and in the 1920s, N. A. Klepinin, an emigré scholar, while relying on 2nd- and 3rd-level sources for describing the battle of 1242, added that drownings occurred. Shcherbatov writes: "many Germans drowned in the polynyas [в полыньях] of Lake Chud" and Klepinin that: "Many drowned in the lake, falling into the polynya [в полыньи]."⁵⁵ In this respect, Shcherbatov and Klepinin stay within the context of layer-4 sources, for they are referring to an unfrozen part or parts of the lake, not to ice breaking up under the fleeing Livonian knights. Tatishchev and Strokov also discuss the battle as occurring on the ice and quote from the Moscow Chronicle of the End of the fifteenth Century that "some drowned in the lake."⁵⁶ But they make no mention of the ice breaking up under the fleeing knights. Buganov in an article in the *Soviet Historical Encyclopedia* in 1965 does state that "the ice broke up [проламы-вался] under those fleeing and many drowned,"⁵⁷ which definitely puts his description in layer 5. But such statements in the

M. M. Stasiulevich, 1885), 40-41; M. Khitrov, *Sviatyi blagovernnyi velikii kniaz' Aleksandr Iaroslavich Nevskii* (Moscow: I. D. Sytina, 1893; rpt. Panorama, 1991), 98-99; S. F. Platonov, *History of Russia*, trans. E. Aronsberg, edited by F. A. Golder (New York: Macmillan, 1925), 79; *Ocherki istorii SSSR*, 9 vols., edited by B. D. Grekov et al. (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1953-1958), vol. 3: *Period feodalizma IX-XV vv.*, 848-51; George Vernadsky, *The Mongols and Russia* (New Haven, CT: Yale Univ. Press, 1953), 57; Razin, *Istoriia voennogo iskusstva*, 2: 160; V. Myakotin, "The Regions of Russia from the Beginnings to the End of the Tartar Invasions," in Paul Miliukov, Charles Seignobos, and L. Eisenmann, *History of Russia*, 3 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968-69), vol. 1: *From the Beginnings to the Empire of Peter the Great*, 92; V. T. Pashuto, "Bor'ba narodov Rusi i Vostochnoi Pribaltiki s agresiei nemetskikh shvedskikh i datskikh feodalov v XIII-XIV vekakh," *Voprosy istorii*, 7 (1969): 116. Fennell, *The Crisis of Medieval Russia*, 105-06. Kirpichnikov, "Dve velikh bitvy," 34-40; and idem, "Ledovoe poboishcha," 162-66. Sidenote: Karl Marx also wrote that the battle occurred on the ice, but did not mention anyone's drowning. Karl Marks [Marx], "Khronologiskie vypiski," *Arkhiv Marksa i Engel'sa*, vol. 5 (Moscow: OGIZ, 1938), 344.

54. V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia*, 8 vols. (Moscow: Gos. izdatel'stvo polit. literatury, 1956-1959). M. N. Pokrovskii, *Ruskaia istoriia s drevneishikh vremen*, 4 vols. (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoe izdatel'stvo, 1933-34).

55. *Sochinenie Kniazia M. M. Shcherbatov, Istoriia Rossiiskaia ot drevneishikh vremen*, 5 vols., ed. by I. P. Khrushchov and A. G. Voronov (St. Petersburg: M. Akin'ev and I. Leont'ev, 1902) 3: col. 46; N. A. Klepinin, *Sviatoi blagovernnyi Velikii Kniaz' Aleksandr Nevskii* (Paris: YMCA Press, 1927), 103.

56. V. N. Tatishchev, *Istoriia rossiiskaia*, 7 vols., ed. by S. N. Valk and M. N. Tikhomirov (Moscow: Akademiia nauk SSSR, 1962), 5: 32-33; Strokov, *Istoriia voennogo iskusstva* (1955) 1: 266. In the one-volume abridgement that appeared in 1966, Strokov does not mention the drownings. Idem, *Istoriia voennogo iskusstva* (1966), 61-63. In an article published sixteen years later he again mentions the drownings, citing the Sofia I Chronicle. Idem, "Istoricheskaia pobeda," 56.

57. V. I. Buganov, "Ledovoe poboishche 1242," in *Sovetskaia istoricheskaia èntsiklopediia*, 16 vols., edited by E. M. Zhukov (Moscow, 1961-76), 8: col. 524.

historiography are rare and post-date Eisenstein's film. Thus, until other evidence comes to the fore that I am presently unaware of, I must tentatively assign the beginning of the 5th layer of the legend of the "battle on the ice" to 1938 – that is, the date of the film *Aleksandr Nevskii*, in which ice breaks up under the knights as they flee the Novgorodians.

If Eisenstein is the innovator of this last layer of the legend, then how did he get the idea for the knights falling through the ice as they fled? Although Eisenstein studied the primary sources for the battle and was advised by prominent scholars, including A. V. Artsikhovskii, Iu. B. Got'e, N. P. Gratsianskii, A. A. Savich, V. V. Syroechkovskii, and M. N. Tikhomirov, none of them seems to have been the source of the idea.⁵⁸ Instead, according to Eisenstein biographer Marie Seton, "When work on the shooting-script began, Eisenstein recalled Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Thus, Milton's imagery of the Battle in Heaven became the Battle on the Ice in *Alexander Nevsky*."⁵⁹ Indeed, Eisenstein's analyses in his book *The Film Sense* of the corresponding passages from *Paradise Lost* do suggest that his model for the battle in the film was the Battle in Heaven. The advance of the Livonian knights parallels Milton's description of the Approach of the "Host of Satan":

. . . at last
 Farr in th' Horizon to the North appeer'd [the Livonian knights]
 From skirt to skirt a fierie Region, stretcht
 In battailous aspect, and neerer view [instruction to change camera setup]
 Bristl'd with upright beams innumerable
 Of rigid Spears, and Helmets throgn'd, and Shields
 Various, with boastful Argument portraid,
 The banded Powers of *Satan* hasting on
 With furious expedition....⁶⁰

Furthermore, the scene where Alexander stands atop Raven's Rock while the Novgorodians gather for battle can be seen to be taken from the movement of the "Heavenly Hosts":

. . . that proud honour claim'd

58. R. Iurenev, *Sergei Eisenshtein. Zamysly. Fil'my. Metod*, 2 vols. (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988), 2: 143-45.

59. Marie Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, rev. ed. (London: Dennis Dobson, 1978), 380.

60. *The Works of John Milton* 18 vols. in 21, ed. by Frank Allen Patterson (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1931), vol. 2: *Paradise Lost, The Verse*, Book VI, lines 78-86. Quoted in Sergei M. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, trans. and edited by Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1947), 59. Eisenstein writes that "Milton is particularly fine in battle scenes" (*ibid.*, 58).

Azazel as his right, a Cherube tall:
 Who forthwith from the glittering Staff unfurl'd
 Th' Imperial Ensign, which full high advanc't
 Shon like a Meteor streaming to the Wind,
 With Gemms and Golden lustre rich imblaz'd,
 Seraphic arms and Trophies: all the while
 Sonorous mettal blowing Martial sounds:
 At which the universal Host upsent
 A shout that tore Hells Concave, and beyond
 Frighted the Reign of *Chaos* and Old Night.
 All in a moment through the gloom was seen
 Ten thousand Banners rise into the Air
 With Orient Colours waving: with them rose
 A Forrest huge of Spears: and thronging Helms
 Appear'd, and serried Shields in thick array
 Of depth immeasurable: Anon they move
 In perfect *Phalanx* to the *Dorian* mood
 Of Flutes and soft Recorders; such as rais'd
 To highth of noblest temper Hero's old
 Arming to Battel. . . .⁶¹

Eisenstein breaks down a section of Milton's text about the Battle in Heaven into a shooting-script "arranged in accordance with the various compositional set-ups . . . where each number will indicate a new montage-piece, or shot."⁶²

Milton's *Paradise Lost*

Eisenstein's proposed "shooting-script"

. . . in strength each armed hand	
I. A Legion, led in fight, yet Leader seemd	1. led in fight, yet Leader seemd each Warriour single as in Chief,
II. Each Warriour single as in Chief, expert	2. expert when to advance,
III. When to advance, or stand, or turn the sway	3. or stand,
IV. Of Battel, open when, and when to close	4. or turn the sway of Battel,
V. The ridges of grim Warr; no thought of flight,	5. open when,
VI. None of retreat, no unbecoming deed	6. and when to close the ridges of grim Warr;
VII. That argu'd fear; each on himself reli'd,	7. no thought of flight,

61. *The Works of John Milton*, 2: Book I, lines 533-53. Quoted in Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, 55. Seton states that "[i]n working with Sergei Prokofiev on the musical score . . . Eisenstein again seems to follow the sound and portrayal of instruments suggested by Milton." Seton, *Sergei M. Eisenstein*, 381.

62. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, 60.

VIII. As onely in his arm the moment lay	8. none of retreat, no unbecoming deed that argu'd fear;
IX. Of victorie; deeds of eternal fame	9. each on himself reli'd, as onely in his arm the moment lay of victorie;
X. Were don, but infinite: for wide was spred	10. deeds of eternal fame were don, but infinite:
XI. That Warr and various; somtimes on firm ground	11. for wide was spred that Warr and various
XII. A standing fight, then soaring on main wing	12. somtimes on firm ground a standing fight,
XIII. Tormented all the Air; all Air seemd then	13. then soaring on main wing tormented all the Air;
XIV. Conflicting Fire: long time in even scale	14. all Air seemd then conflicting Fire:
XV. The Battel hung. . . . ⁶³	15. long time in even scale the Battel hung. . . . ⁶⁴

These compositional set-ups for the Battle in Heaven turn out to be similar to those for the battle scene in the film *Aleksandr Nevskii*.

Seton suggests that the scene of the ice breaking up under the knights as they fled also appears to have been taken from Milton.⁶⁵ She points out that, although Eisenstein does not mention it as his inspiration for that gripping sequence, immediately after the above description in *The Film Sense*, Eisenstein analyzes the following passage in *Paradise Lost* to demonstrate how it could be turned into a shooting-script:

Milton's *Paradise Lost*

Eisenstein's proposed "shooting-script"

Yet half his strength he put not forth, but check'd His Thunder in mid Volie, for he meant Not to destroy, but root them out of Heav'n:	
I. The overthrown he rais'd, and as a Heard	1. The overthrown he rais'd, and
II. of Goats or timorous flock together throng'd	2. as a Heard of Goats or timorous flock together throng'd
III. Drove them before him Thunder-struck, pursu'd	3. drove them before him Thunder- struck,
IV. With terrors and with furies to the bounds	4. pursu'd with terrors and with furies to the bounds and Chrystall wall of Heav'n,
V. and Chrystall wall of Heav'n, which opening wide	5. which opening wide, rowld inward
VI. Rowld inward, and a spacious Gap disclos'd	6. and a spacious Gap disclos'd
VII. Into the wastful Deep; the monstrous sight	7. into the wastful Deep;
VIII. Strook them with horror backward, but far worse	8. the monstrous sight strook them with horror backward,

63. *The Works of John Milton*, 2: Book VI, lines 231-46.

64. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, 60-61.

65. Seton, Sergei M. Eisenstein, 381.

- | | |
|---|--|
| IX. Urg'd them behind; headlong themselves they threw | 9. but far worse urg'd them behind; |
| X. Down from the verge of Heav'n, Eternal wrath | 10. headlong themselves they threw
down from the verge of Heav'n, |
| XI. Burnt after them to the bottomless pit. ⁶⁶ | 11. Eternal wrath burnt after them to
the bottomless pit. ⁶⁷ |

Just as the "Chrystall wall of Heav'n . . . opening wide" and Satan's army fell into "the bottomless pit" of "the wastful Deep," so too the Livonian knights fell through the ice into the "bottomless depths" of shallow Lake Chud. In other words, the "traditional interpretation" of the "battle on the ice" was most likely the result of Eisenstein's cinematic interpretation of the Battle in Heaven from Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

In 1958 and 1959, underwater investigations were carried out in the northern part of the Teploe ozero (which connects Lake Chud with Lake Pskov), near where the battle is presumed to have taken place. The investigations uncovered no remains of, or artifacts belonging to, Livonian knights, Chud infantry, or anything that could be connected to the battle of 1242.⁶⁸ This absence of positive findings in itself is not particularly significant given the relatively limited area explored and the thickness of the silt covering the lake bottom. Yet, if the analysis given here is correct, one would not expect a positive outcome for such an underwater search. Nor is it likely, despite the vivid imagery of Eisenstein's film and Riasanovsky's textbook, any such remains or artifacts will ever be found at the bottom of the lake.

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66. *The Works of John Milton*, 2: Book VI, lines 853-66.

67. Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, 62.

68. G. N. Karaev, "Resul'taty podvodnogo arkheologicheskogo obsledovaniia severnoi chasti Teplogo ozera," in *Ledovoe poboishche 1242 g. Trudy kompleksnoi èkspeditsii po utochneniiu mesta ledovogo poboishcha*, edited by G. N. Karaev (Moscow and Leningrad: Nauka, 1966), 60-64.