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Review Article

Post-Modernism and the Study of the Russian Middle Ages

Aleksandr I. Filiushkin

Mariia Borisovna Pliukhanova, *Siuzhety i simvoly moskovskogo tsarstva*. St. Petersburg: "Akropol'," 1995. ISBN 5865850083. 334 pp.

Igor' Nikolaevich Danilevskii, *Drevniaia Rus' glazami sovremennikov i potomkov (IX–XII vv.)*. Moscow: Aspekt Press, 1998. ISBN 5756702199. 398 pp.

Boris Andreevich Uspenskii, *Tsar' i patriarkh: Kharizma vlasti v Rossii. Vizantiiskaia model' i ee russkoe pereosmyslenie*. Moscow: Shkola "Iazyki russkoi kul'tury," 1998. ISBN 5785900718. 676 pp.

Andrei L'vovich Iurganov, *Kategorii russkoi srednevekovoi kul'tury*. Moscow: "Otkrytoe obshchestvo," 1998. ISBN 5708401885. 447 pp.

In recent years many Russian medievalists have become convinced that positivism has outlived its usefulness. Critics despair that historians are trivializing medieval history by retreating into ever narrower topics. Positivism, they maintain, with its endless search for discrete facts, cannot render a new picture of the past and its study. Increasingly, therefore, Russian medievalists are turning toward post-modernism in search of new understanding. Russian historians are taking – albeit belatedly – the post-modernist turn. The following essay will survey some of the recent results of this development.

Let us begin with the work of Mariia Borisovna Pliukhanova.¹ A member of the Tartu-Moscow school of semiotics, she has written extensively on the "themes

¹ In addition to the work under review, see Pliukhanova, "Vitiistvo i russkaia istoricheskaiia mysl' XVI–XVII vv.," *Aktual'nye problemy semiotiki kul'tury (Trudy po znakovym sistemam 20; hereafter "TZS")*, *Uchenye zapiski Tartuskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* (hereafter "UZ TGU"), vyp. 746 (1987), 73–84; idem, "Ritoricheskii stil' Avraamiia Palitsyna (Simvolizatsiia grammaticheskikh kategorii)," *Simvol v sisteme kul'tury (TZS 21)*, *UZ TGU*, vyp. 754 (1987), 42–56; idem, "Zhitie Merkuriia Smolenskogo kak pamiatnik istoricheskoi mysli perioda Moskovskoi gosudarstvennosti," *Semiotika i istoriia (TZS 25)*, *UZ TGU*, vyp. 936 (1992), 35–56; idem, "O traditsiakh Sofiiskikh i

and symbols" (*siuzhety i simvoly*) of the early modern Russian state. These, she says in her book on this topic, were responsible for the "creation of [Muscovy's] statehood and the formation of its self-awareness in history" (12–14).

Her thesis is interesting, but her presentation is far from convincing. She rightly rejects Marxist attempts to force an artificial order on early Russian symbolic discourse. Yet she falls into the very same trap. On the one hand, she argues that "the pronouncements and declarations of the Muscovite period are so varied and have so little in common that they do not constitute a single language" (9–10). On the other hand, she seems willing to try to reconstruct a single language. In this attempt, Pliukhanova seems to create her own reality, at times simply stating what she believes symbols mean without properly demonstrating that they possessed this meaning in the early modern period.

Pliukhanova's presentation itself is fragmented. Despite its title, one cannot find a systematic survey of Muscovy's "themes and symbols" in her work. Her book is not so much a monograph as a collection of essays: "The Protection (*Pokrov*) of the Mother of God over the Muscovite Tsardom"; "The Protection of the Smolensk Mother of God and the Feat of the Warrior Merkurii"; "A Journey with One's Head in One's Hands"; "The Cross of Constantine"; "The Sacrifice at the Founding of the Tsardom"; "On the Nature of Tsardom"; and "The Theocratic Ideal: The Union of the Serpent-Slayer and Wisdom." By themselves these pieces are undoubtedly interesting and important, but they do not make a "book," and they are all rather narrowly focused. Despite the book's (and post-modernism's) promise to give us a new "big picture," none is found here. Rather, what we have are detailed analyses of interesting and important themes.

Alas, most are unconvincing. For example, in her observations on the meaning of the symbol of the Protection of the Mother of God (*omofova*), Pliukhanova equates the symbolic meaning of the Veil of the Mother of God, the Protection, and the icon of the Vladimir Mother of God. But the very sources she cites suggest no such equivalence – the three symbols succeeded one another, each with a distinct (if related) meaning. In examining the way the symbolism of the Protection was used, Pliukhanova considers its architectural embodiment to be the Cathedral of the Protection on the Moat (1555–61) (44–47, 50–51). Yet she completely ignores the arguments of Mikhail Andreevich Il'in, Lev Lebedev, Mikhail Petrovich Kudriavtsev, Nikolai Ivanovich Brunov, and others regarding the Jerusalem symbolism of the cathedral and the connected architectural space

Uspenskikh tserkvei v russkikh zemliakh do XVI veka," *Lotmanovskii sbornik* (Moscow: O.G.I. and Izdatel'stvo RGGU, 1997), part 2, 483–510.

of the Kremlin and Red Square.² She concludes that “the Muscovite state was almost condemned to self-definition through the image of the Church of the Protection, which embodied the idea of defense through the power of miracle and prayer against an external world” (51). Surely the processes of ideological self-definition were more complicated than this would suggest. It is possible that the causal arrow runs the other way, that is, not from symbol to self-definition, but from self-definition to symbol.

Pliukhanova uses her sources selectively, and thus her explanations are often incomplete. For example, when discussing the “Cross of Constantine,” the author focuses on the aspect of the cult connected with Constantine and Helen. Oddly, she barely touches on the theme of the victory over Emperor Maxentius (312 AD), with which the appearance of the “Cross of Constantine” was closely connected. Moreover, precisely this historical image enjoyed great popularity in the Middle Ages and was significant in the development of the idea of divine protection of Rus’.³ Yet she argues that the symbolism of the Protection of the Mother of God spread in Russia *instead* of that of the Cross, explaining the supposed “femininity” of Russian national self-consciousness (105). For all its superficial appeal, this thesis is not confirmed by primary sources.

Pliukhanova is least successful in explaining the themes connected with the ideology of royal power in Rus’. She asserts that the idea of the tsar with a cross in his hand “aroused opposition in Russia and was not genuinely assimilated”; that Russian caesaropapism was in fact a distortion of Byzantine political thought; that since the Russians “did not assimilate the correct formula for the conceptualization of royal power,” they had to use “excessive” images of God and Satan in order to understand it (138). It is difficult to explain why Pliukhanova considers that the representation of royal power through the Heavenly Tsar (Christ) – the cornerstone of the concept of supreme power in all medieval

² Mikhail Andreevich Il’in, “Sobor Vasiliia Blazhennogo i gradostroitel’stvo XVI v.,” *Ezhegodnik Instituta istorii iskusstv. Zhivopis’, arkhitektura* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1952), 217–56; idem, *Russkoe shatrovye zodchestvo: Pamiatniki serediny XVI veka. Problemy i gipotezy. Idei i obrazy* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1980); Lev Lebedev, “Bogoslovie ‘Russkoi Zemli’ kak obraza ‘Obetovannoi Zemli Tsarstva Nebesnogo’ (na nekotorykh primerakh arkhitekturno-stroitel’nykh kompositsii XI–XVII vekov),” *Tysiacheletie Kreshcheniia Rusi*, ed. Metropolitan Filaret, 2 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Moskovskoi patriarkhii, 1988–89), vol. 1, 140–75; Nikolai Ivanovich Brunov, *Khram Vasiliia Blazhennogo v Moskve: Pokrovskii sobor* (Moscow: Iskusstvo, 1988); Mikhail Petrovich Kudriavtsev, *Moskva – Tretii Rim: Istoriko-gradostroitel’noe issledovanie* (Moscow: Sol Sistem, 1994).

³ On this, see Andrei Vital’evich Karavashkin and Aleksandr Il’ich Filiushkin, “Sobytiia i litsa Sviashchennoi istorii v poslaniakh Ivana Groznogo i Andreiia Kurbskogo (opyt germe-nevticheskogo kommentarii),” *Russkaia religioznost’: Problemy izucheniia*, ed. Aleksei Ivanovich Alekseev and Aleksandr Sergeevich Lavrov (St. Petersburg: Fond Sv. Dmitriia Rostovskogo, 2000), 84–92.

European states – is something “excessive.” Even less comprehensible and entirely contradicted by sources is the author’s assertion that the Russians “had no interest in royal symbolism and mythology.” A further example of questionable interpretation is the book’s treatment of the idea of royal sacrifice. Pliukhanova analyzes the legend about Constantine’s murder of his son Crispus. In her opinion, the legend implies that the Muscovite image of an ideal Christian ruler contains a “destructive element.” Why? Because Ivan IV adopted “Agapetus’ idea ... that the tsar is God on earth.” But, according to Pliukhanova, the Muscovites were in error: the tsar, unlike God, has no power to resurrect the dead. Thus, to kill one’s son is to destroy the Christian essence of the tsar (150).

As Andrei Vital’evich Karavashkin has convincingly shown (developing an idea put forth earlier by Bjarne Nørretranders), the treatment in medieval Russian consciousness of the idea of royal sacrifice was very different. On the basis of the hermeneutic study of the writings of Ermolai-Erazm, the Epistle of Vassian Rylo, and the writings of Ivan Groznyi and Andrei Kurbskii, Karavashkin reaches the conclusion that the ruler’s sacrifice consisted not only in taking upon himself the responsibility for his subjects and in his readiness to pay for the sins of “the world” at the Day of Judgment, but also in the fact that the tsar willingly or unwillingly should inflict damage to his soul and, possibly, give up his personal salvation “on account of his kingship,” insofar as the purifying mission of power in no way presupposes the unconditional righteousness of the tsar as a human being.

The tsar should sacrifice his soul, committing the most terrible crimes, in order to fulfill his higher calling. This in no way diminishes the “royal essence” of the ruler; moreover, his sinful contemporaries in principle cannot judge the ruler-sinner, for he is subject only to divine judgment. Ivan Groznyi took to its logical extreme the conception of the monarch-tormentor in the name of the tsardom, who differs from tormentors unworthy in the eyes of God by his preservation of the purity of the faith. In this very way all his actions, even the bloodiest, were directed toward the preservation of divine truth. There is no hint here of any destruction of the “Christian essence” of the tsar. Instead there is something else: in the name of this essence, the ruler risks the destruction of his soul, and in that lies the royal sacrifice, the royal feat.⁴

Among the more successful accomplishments of Pliukhanova’s monograph is her study of the origin of several church holidays in medieval Rus’ (the Protection, the Savior, etc.). In contrast to earlier students of the topic, she argues that

⁴ For more detail, see: Bjarne Nørretranders, “Ivan Groznyi’s Conception of Tsarist Authority,” *Scando-Slavica* 9 (1963), 238–48; Andrei Vital’evich Karavashkin, “Mify Moskovskoi Rusi: Zhizn’ i bor’ba idei v XVI veke (Ivan Peresvetov, Ivan Groznyi, Andrei Kurbskii),” *Rossiiia* 21: 1 (1999), 140–53.

the holidays emerged rather late. Pliukhanova's analysis of the impact of holiday calendar on mentalities in early Russia is of great significance (52–61).

Indeed, the Muscovite worldview was formed in large part in an oral culture shaped by church services, holidays, and the rituals connected with them. Precisely here – in the realm of ritual – may lie the key to understanding the medieval Russian mind. Written documents are of limited value, since texts reflected the views of only a small (literate) part of society. Folklore is of even less worth, as it is always distorted by numerous later accretions. The visual arts offer richer, more trustworthy sources, but they are often difficult to interpret with confidence. At the same time, early Russian hymns and religious rituals (preserved in numerous service books of the 13th through 16th centuries) contain a hitherto unread code of medieval Russian culture. To be sure, one must be very careful in analyzing them. As Igor' Nikolaevich Danilevskii has aptly observed in the 1998 work reviewed here: "Most conceptions concealed by the terminology and phraseology of Russian sources were not put into words by contemporaries. This, in its turn, creates additional difficulties for the description and authentic 'translation' of the mental guidelines of early Russian society into the meta-language of contemporary historical scholarship" (7).

Another semiotician, Boris Andreevich Uspenskii, has been studying Danilevskii's "translation" problem for many years in respect to practically the same subjects examined by Pliukhanova. The present review will focus on his recent fundamental monograph, *Tsar and Patriarch*. Its structure is noteworthy. The study proper of the charisma of the tsar and patriarch occupies only 108 pages of this large book. Practically half of each page in this main section consists of empirical and historiographical notes! On pages 109–517, there are 17 historical excurses illuminating one or another theme related to the first section. This arrangement works out well, because to have included this ancillary material in the first part of the book would have obscured the development of the main ideas. These excurses include essays on the enthronement of Ivan IV, Boris Godunov, and False Dmitrii I, on the significance and history of the term "royal doors," on the liturgical status of the tsar in the Russian Orthodox Church, on the circumstances of the proclamation of autocephaly and the installation of Iona as Metropolitan, and others.

Uspenskii approaches his subject through the lens of "Russia's appropriation (*pokhishchenie*) of Europe," which some sociologists consider the essential

characteristic of Russian civilization.⁵ According to the author, Russia was always explicitly oriented toward foreign culture, first that of Byzantium and later the world of Western Europe. Thus, Russia adopted its value system from outside. This mechanism had its peculiarities: “Having fallen on Russian soil, these models take on a completely different substance and as a result form something essentially new, dissimilar both from the culture of the lender (that is, the culture of the country looked to as a guide) and from the culture of the recipient.” According to Uspenskii, the nature of this process is semiotic (5).

His argument in support of this thesis is convincing. The author points out that the peak of the orientation toward Byzantium, both in regard to the charisma of the tsar and the justification for the founding of the patriarchate in 1589, is to be found in the period from the end of the 15th through the 16th century, that is, at the time when in a real historical sense Byzantium had ceased to exist! As a consequence, Rus’ configured itself not in accordance with the real customs of the Eastern Roman empire but according to an ideal (13).

We might add that a similar mechanism can be seen in the views of Russian Westernizers in the 19th century: in the perceptive observation of Dmitrii Ivanovich Oleinikov, “the attitude of the Westernizers toward the West – independently of how one might understand that ‘West’ – was captive to the images of a literary-publicistic mythology.” They largely oriented themselves not toward real European customs, about which they had little insight, but toward an ideal image of the world of “high civilization,” created on the basis of a distillation of various theories, myths, and stereotypical thinking.⁶ Thus, we observe here a process comparable to that which Uspenskii delineates with regard to the Russian Middle Ages.

In the main part of his study, the author examines the emergence in Rus’ of the ritual of the anointing of the tsar and the ordination (*khirotoniia*) of the patriarch. Both contained references to Constantinople, but the ceremonies which developed in Rus’ and their semiotics differed from those of the “source.” In Uspenskii’s words:

In both instances the orientation toward Byzantium in reality led to the creation of a new way of thinking, in particular a new conception of power ... We observe the repetition of a certain sacramental action, which in principle should not be repeated. This gives to the individual being installed a special status – charisma ... As a result, the

⁵ Vadim Leonidovich Tsymburskii, “Tsikly pokhishcheniia Evropy (Bol’shoe primechanie k ‘Ostrovu Rossiia’),” in *Inoe: Khrestomatiia novogo rossiiskogo samosoznaniia* (Moscow: Argus, 1995), 2: 207–56.

⁶ Dmitrii Ivanovich Oleinikov, *Klassicheskoe rossiiskoe zapadnichestvo* (Moscow: Mekhanik, 1996), 74–87.

administrative functions of the head of state and the head of the church (the tsar and patriarch), which in Byzantium were determined by special legal norms, were accepted in Russia as the manifestation of special charisma, the charisma of power. Thus juridical authority is transformed into charismatic authority: the symphony of power is transformed into the symphony of charisma (108).

According to Uspenskii, the anointment of the tsar, which took place after the crowning of the sovereign, had a special semiotic meaning. The coronation in effect corresponded to the sacrament of baptism, and anointment bestowed on the tsar a special power (blessing) of the Holy Spirit, which strengthened the monarch in the fulfillment of his royal duties and elevated him above ordinary people. It ensured that the tsar had a special liturgical status, which was expressed by the very fact that he began to receive the Eucharist as did the clergy. Moreover, whereas in Byzantium and the West through anointment the king was equated to the kings of ancient Israel, in Russia it was to Christ himself (20, 21, 24, 27).

In Uspenskii's view, the distinct characteristic of the ordination of the patriarch lay in its being repeated at the time of the transfer of a bishop from one see to another, and especially his elevation to a metropolitanate. This followed from the well-known perception that ordination is the ritual of the marriage of the bishop to the church (to the throne of the church). In such an interpretation, a new ceremony of ordination was necessary. From the end of the 16th century, it was understood as a special act of consecration, which determined the canonical status of the head of the church: if earlier the primacy of the metropolitan was determined by the position of the see of Moscow, now in addition it was by virtue of the particular conditions of the installation. Also of importance here was the establishment of the Muscovite Patriarchate as the fifth one and its inclusion in the pentarchy of the patriarchal sees, understood in Rus' to be the five senses of the Church, which was considered to be a single organism.⁷

There is no question as to the value of Uspenskii's observations. He has succeeded in demonstrating the superiority of the semiotic method in the study of rituals relating to secular and clerical authority. However, one should admit that Uspenskii's monograph also raises some doubts. Unfortunately, the author has been unable to completely avoid selectivity in his use of sources, as well as problems of a certain "reading in of meaning" that are common to semiotic studies.

The charisma of the tsar in Rus' was a multifaceted concept. The sovereign received it not only because of certain rituals but as well from concepts and theories of royal power. Uspenskii has largely ignored the second aspect. Even in his

⁷ Ibid., 73, 78, 88.

analysis of the ritual of coronation he glosses over the substantive meaning of the church service which accompanied the rite. He devotes little attention to the prayers and didactic texts in the ceremony. In addition, the author does not adequately employ “publicistic” materials and the reflections of the image of the tsar in chronicle and clerical texts. In laying out his idea, Uspenskii concentrates on a rather narrow group of concepts, which in itself then fails to permit the full development of the breadth of his subject. The result is an artificial narrowing of perceptions concerning the nature of royal power in medieval Rus’.

Connected with this difficulty is the problem of the sources of the author’s concepts. His premise is that the ritual of the enthronement was borrowed from Byzantium and was subsequently transformed in Rus’ into a specifically Russian phenomenon. But a question arises about the nature of this transformation: what was the basis for it? Why does Uspenskii consider that anointment entered the Russian ritual of coronation exclusively from imperial rituals of enthronement, thereby ignoring Old and New Testament traditions of anointment?

The biblical kings, priests, and prophets underwent the ritual of anointment upon assuming their positions and through it, as is assumed, God’s favor was bestowed on them so that they were termed the “anointed of God” (see Exodus 30:23–33; II Kings 19:10; III Kings 1:39; 19; 15–16, etc.). Saul (I Kings 10:1) and David (I Kings 16:13) were anointed by Samuel, Solomon by the priest Sadok (III Kings 1:39). The Greek term “Christ” means “anointed” (cf. Psalms 2:2; Isaiah 59:1) in the messianic connotation it acquired upon the manifestation of the Trinity, when Jesus was enthroned on the right hand of the Father and was anointed by him with oil (Hebrews 1:8; cf. Psalms 44:7). Finally, one should note the charismatic baptism mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 8:39; 10:34–38; 19:2–6).

There is no question that early Russian clerics knew and took into account the Byzantine tradition. But in creating their own rituals, they might also have been influenced by the “primary source.” It is worth noting that in the first coronation ceremonies (Ivan III’s grandson Dmitrii in 1498, and the short version of the coronation of Ivan IV in 1547), which were unquestionably based on Byzantine texts, there is no anointment.⁸ It appears only in the “Formulaic Version” of the mid 1550s, precisely when a specifically Russian conception of royal power was developing. It also may be appropriate to mention the apt observation by Pliukhanova that Rus’ joined “the Christian world in a period of particular development of church theology and thereafter preserved an exceptional dedication to the idea of the Church, to the symbols of the Church, and to church buildings” (30).

⁸ Pierangelo Catalano and Vladimir Terent’evich Pashuto, eds., *Ideia Rima v Moskve XV–XVI veka: Istochniki po istorii russkoi obshchestvennoi mysli* (Rome: Herder editrice e libreria, 1989), 67–71.

Thus the Holy Scripture itself may have served as the tool early Russian clerics used to re-interpret (and Russianize) Byzantine rituals. This is underscored by the fact that the Extended Redaction of the coronation ceremony of Ivan IV speaks directly of the typological predecessor of the Russian anointed tsar: "The Lord our God, King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who through the prophet Samuel chose thy servant David and anointed him as king of his people of Israel!" (from the prayer of the Metropolitan at the moment he places around the tsar's neck the Life-giving Cross).⁹ Uspenskii, however, does not explore even the possibility of such a direct reference, although he speaks of anointment as a direct attribute of the royal rank that goes back to a biblical archetype (112, note 3).

Also insufficiently demonstrated is Uspenskii's attempt to question the traditional viewpoint about the equivalency of the terms *tsar'*, *tesar'*, and *imperator*. In the author's opinion, when translated into Greek, the equivalent of *tsar'* would be the title *basileus*, but when translated into Latin, it would be *rex* (king), not *imperator*. He supports this argument with reference to the title of the Russian emperors from 1815 to 1917, in which the "tsardom (*tsarstvo*) of Poland" is supposedly a translation of the "Kingdom (*korolevstvo*) of Poland" (129, note 23).

Yet he fails to take into account both the linguistic and historical aspects of the problem. Most Slavic etymologists believe that *tsar'* is an abbreviation of *tesar'* or *imperator*.¹⁰ In order to support his viewpoint, Uspenskii first must show the weakness of the accepted view. However, he does not do so. With regard to Western translations of Russian *tsar* as "king," Uspenskii fails to consider the historical aspect, among other things the struggle over the title of the Muscovite ruler in the 15th through 17th centuries. To call him *tesar* of all Rus' would have meant recognizing his rights to the former lands of Kievan Rus', i.e., practically three-fourths of the lands of the Kingdom of Poland and Grand Duchy of Lithuania. Apart from the obvious contradiction of the interests of the Polish crown, here arose as well a conflict with the Catholic Church. It had been pushed out of much of Europe by the Reformation and was attempting to absorb new territories in Eastern Europe. Rome could not accept the pretensions of an Orthodox monarch to the given territories. It was no accident that Poland recognized the imperial title of the ruler of Muscovy only in 1634 and the Vatican only at the beginning of the 18th century.¹¹

⁹ *Ideia Rima*, 83.

¹⁰ Maks Fasmer, *Etimologicheskii slovar' russkogo iazyka* (Moscow: Progress, 1987), 4: 290–91, where one can find the various views about the etymology of the term.

¹¹ For more detail, see Vladimir Ivanovich Savva, *Moskovskie tsari i vizantiiskie vasilevsi: K voprosu o vliianii Vizantii na obrazovanie idei tsarskoi vlasti Moskovskikh gosudarei* (Khar'kov: Tip. M. Zil'berg, 1901), 305–400; Anna Leonidovna Khoroshkevich, *Russkoe gosudarstvo v sisteme*

Right up to that time in many European texts the Russian title *tsar'* = *tesar'* = *imperator* was avoided and in its place were used the titles "grand prince" and "sovereign," which corresponded to the European "king." Indicative is the fact that Prince Andrei Kurbskii, wishing to inflict an even more painful insult on Ivan IV, called his pamphlet about the times of the rule of the monarch-tyrant "The History of the Muscovite Grand Prince." Thus, one should think that the replacement in Western texts of the Russian "*tsar*" with "king" was connected not with conflicting translations, as Uspenskii believes, but with political machinations.

In studying the ideological components of the Russian medieval institution of tsardom, one must take into account the historical influence of the legacy of the Golden Horde. Indeed, for the chroniclers "tsars" were the Mongol khans; it was no accident that in the 16th century the conquest of Kazan' was equated with the confirmation of the imperial status of Ivan Groznyi and the transfer to him of the authority of the Tatar "tsar."¹² In Uspenskii's book the "Eastern aspect" of the problem is not even discussed. Nor does the author devote any attention to the connection between conceptions about the sovereign and the peculiarities of the social history of medieval Muscovy – in particular, the development of non-contractual service directly to the ruler.¹³

All this renders the study under review incomplete in that it one-dimensionally elaborates its stated theme, the explanation of the nature of the charisma of royal power. This topic, in essence, is reduced by Uspenskii to the symbolism of certain ritual actions and the liturgical status of the monarch. Thus, for all the undoubted virtues of his work, the author cannot escape the main failings of the semiotic approach – excessive attention to narrow, symbolic aspects of the phenomenon in question; the rendering as absolutes of the author's

mezhdunarodnykh otnoshenii kontsa XV–nachala XVI veka (Moscow: Nauka, 1980); Aleksandr Il'ich Filiushkin, "Titul russkikh pravitelei kak predmet politicheskoi i kul'turno-tsivilizatsionnoi bor'by v Vostochnoi Evrope v period srednevekov'ia," in *Rossia: Gosudarstvo, obshchestvo, lichnost'. Materialy mezhvuzovskoi nauchnoi konferentsii*, ed. Aleksandra Iur'evna Bakhturina (Moscow: RGGU, 1997), 12–21.

¹² See Ihor Shevchenko, "Muscovy's Conquest of Kazan: Two Views Reconciled," *Slavic Review* 26: 4 (1967), 541–47; Jaroslav Pelensky, "Muscovite Imperial Claims to the Kazan' Khaganate," *Slavic Review* 26: 4 (1967), 559–76; Frank Kämpfer, "Die Eroberung von Kasan 1552 als Gegenstand der zeitgenössischen russischen Historiographie," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 14 (1969), 7–161; Aleksandr Il'ich Filiushkin, "Terminy 'tsr'" i 'tsarstvo' na Rusi," *Voprosy istorii*, no. 8 (1987), 144–48.

¹³ For more detail, see Vladimir Borisovich Kobrin and Andrei Lvovich Iurganov, "Stanovlenie despoticheskogo samoderzhavii v srednevekovoi Rusi (k postanovke problemy)," *Istoriia SSSR*, no. 4 (1991), 54–62.

reading of one or another symbol; and the imposition of specific meanings without proper or complete documentation.

Despite their infelicities, the work of semioticians such as Pliukhanova and Uspenskii has demonstrated the possibilities for a new reading of the sources. A further and more successful example is found in the work of Igor' Nikolaevich Danilevskii on the earliest period of the development of Rus', the 9th–12th centuries.

Danilevskii's writings are infused with the influence of post-modernism. In his *Drevniaia Rus'*, he declares that the facts of medieval Russian history have largely been established, but that we have not yet come to grips with their meaning. Understanding old Rus' is difficult: according to Danilevskii, the ancient chronicler trying to communicate with us is "a missionary in a country of unbelievers." He and his readers express in one and the same vocabulary different meanings; moreover "it is almost impossible to establish how distant or close are the transmitted image and the pale reflection of it which we absorb – in the great majority of cases, we lack objective criteria for comparison." As a result, he asserts, "in most cases we do not even understand what we are taking from the chronicle text" (57, 11, 13).

It is difficult to undermine Danilevskii's position, since the post-modernist epistemology in principle is practically incontrovertible (in this regard one can compare it with a philosophical solipsism: everyone knows that it is somehow questionable, but to reject a solipsism by any logical argument is complicated). Moreover, much in his position is justified: among the unquestionable virtues of the author's argument is the severe blow he inflicts on our historiography's prevailing "presumption of the identity of the thinking of the chronicler and the modern scholar" (8).

This latter concept, which is popular among the positivists, derives from Wilhelm Dilthey's theory of the text. According to Dilthey, the opinion of an author may easily be determined from his composition, the interpreter is entirely contemporaneous with its author, and their chronological distance is entirely relative.¹⁴ It follows from these propositions that it is possible for a modern person to understand any text and historical event. In the USSR and in contemporary Russian academic circles, this tendency is most clearly represented in the

¹⁴ For more detail, see Vil'gel'm Dilti [Wilhelm Dilthey], "Tipy mirovozzreniia i obnaruzhenie ikh v metafizicheskikh sistemakh," *Novye idei v filosofii* [St. Petersburg], no. 1 (1912); idem, "Vvedenie v nauku o dukhe," *Zarubezhnaia estetika i teoriiia literatury XIX–XX vv.: Traktaty, stat'i, esse*, ed. G. K. Kosikova (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1987); idem, "Nabroski k kritike istoricheskogo razuma," *Voprosy filosofii*, no. 4 (1988), 135–53.

philological school of Academician Dmitrii Sergeevich Likhachev, who wrote, “it seems to me that to pose the question of the special character of the thinking of medieval man is largely inappropriate: human thinking in all ages was largely the same.”¹⁵ As Danilevskii has correctly noted, it is precisely such views that have led to the crisis of medieval Russian studies, when it became clear that confidence in the ability to understand the Middle Ages was nothing but an illusion.

At the same time it should be emphasized that one must not over-simplify the position of Danilevskii and reduce it to an apologia for post-modernism. His thought seems closest to the ideas of Roger Chartier, Gabrielle Spiegel, and Pierre Bourdieu, who believe that merely because history is difficult to comprehend does not mean that reality does not exist. There exist both a past as objective reality and discourse as an independent historical factor. Roger Chartier describes the task of historical study as follows: it is the branch of knowledge “that has as its goal to elucidate the means by which individuals operating in society give meaning to their activities and discourses.”¹⁶ The past exists, and our job is to find out what it meant to people in it.

Danilevskii also notes that one should not speak about “the impossibility in principle of understanding medieval texts sufficiently.” In his view, the solution is in the “calibration of questions” asked by the researcher by means of a detailed, multi-faceted juxtaposition of the texts and the views of historians regarding them. A hermeneutic situation emerges as a result. To overcome it requires etymological analysis of lexicon, content analysis of the text with the goal of elucidating the lexical-semantic fields, linguistic hermeneutics, and determination of the meaning of the texts cited directly or indirectly by the author of the source. It is also necessary to discuss separate events or aspects of the historical process from the standpoint of their psychological substance, and to describe the significance and meanings which participants in those events attached to their actions or by which their contemporaries were inspired (either in reality or in the representation created by the author of the source).

True, Danilevskii himself is inclined to connect the perspectives opened by new methods with the development of a historical-anthropological approach. But one should note that, but for a few sections, his book is not an anthropological study (7–8, 14, 16). His methodology might still best be characterized as hermeneutic, with the application of the achievements of historical analysis – from post-modernism to comparativism – in the study of narrative.

¹⁵ Dmitrii Sergeevich Likhachev, *Poetika drevnerusskoi literatury*, in his *Izbrannye raboty v trekh tomakh* (Leningrad: “Khudozhestvennaia literatura,” 1987), 1: 331.

¹⁶ Rozher Shart’e [Roger Chartier], “Istoriia segodnia: Somnenniia, vyzovy, predlozheniia,” *Odissei* (1995), 198; Lorina Petrovna Repina, “Vyzov postmodernizma i perspektivy novoi kul’turnoi iz intellektual’noi istorii,” *Odissei* (1996), 28, 31.

Among the themes most successfully developed by Danilevskii are those relating to early Russian chronicle-writing. He connects the creativity of the chronicler with stages in the development of thinking and language. In the earliest stage, words are extremely precise and are used primarily as proper names. The second stage marks a transition to the verbal designation of whole classes of phenomena. In the third stage there is the creation of a conceptual terminology – the word is transformed into the instrument or means for expressing understanding. According to Danilevskii, the chronicle corresponds to the second stage – it is not yet terminological but already permits typologization of that which has occurred. The chronicler classifies events by analogy – with reference either to history or to Scripture.¹⁷

Danilevskii's conception is echoed in the observations of Andrei L'vovich Iurganov, who, in his 1998 work on "the categories of Russian medieval culture," noted that

[a]n event is important for the chronicler only insofar as it can be connected with the biblical tale of Creation. Therefore direct and indirect citation of the Bible is the normal and only acceptable way to describe that which has occurred. The chronicler refers to biblical antiquity, in order to find in Scriptural events the explanation for that which occurs in the present. Scripture is the eternal semantic source in which one can find ready models for understanding the experience of one's own life. Through this experience biblical history and its events, which are considered to be genuine reality, are re-lived ... (316).

These postulates are very interesting and open up broad perspectives. By re-constructing the exegetical concepts of the old Russian bookman it is possible to re-create the very code of meaning of ancient Rus', something which many authors have claimed is impossible. The problem lies in the fact that our understanding of East Slavic medieval exegetics is quite fragmentary, and it is precisely here that we need broad, "positivist" studies of an encyclopedic nature. They will allow us to compile a distinctive dictionary of early Russian man's perceptions and analogies. Only then, in turn, will theoretical understanding and conceptual description of the system of thought and views of the society of that time become possible.

Danilevskii applies his method quite successfully, and on its basis he is able to make a series of interesting observations. One should note the way in which, following German Markovich Barats and others, he stresses the coincidence of the underlying idea of the chronicle legend about the calling of the Varangians with the account by Widukind of Corvinus [*Korveiskii*] concerning the invitation

¹⁷ Ibid., 9–10.

of the Saxons by the Britons, and with Psalm 111. One therefore can speak confidently about a specific kind of stereotype of tales concerning the founding of a state by three brothers who come from the outside.¹⁸

In addition, we can note that the very legend of the calling of Riurik arose in the 12th century and contains a number of mythological features. As recent studies by Valentin Lavrent'evich Ianin have shown, Novgorod did not yet exist at the time of Riurik. The oldest archaeological layer in it should be dated to the 950s, although the academician is also inclined to accept the viewpoint of Evgenii Nikolaevich Nosov that the chronicle account under the year 862 relates to Riurikovo gorodishche, where there is a cultural layer from the 9th century.¹⁹ The geographic setting of the legend is in any event subject to dispute. Beyond that is the real issue: the conditions of the "calling" of Riurik remind one very much of the agreement by which Novgorodians in the 12th century invited their princes; thus one should take into account the influence of 12th century Novgorodian political practice on the creation by the chronicler, who was in fact the author of the legend.

Also of considerable interest are Danilevskii's observations about wealth in early Rus'. He convincingly demonstrates that for one living then, "a person's possessions embodied directly a certain part of the possessor himself." Thus, one can speak confidently of the fact that in early Russian society wealth fulfilled a specific social function consisting in the acquisition and elevation of personal prestige by the transfer of property to others. This was the principal meaning of wealth.

The perspectives which Danilevskii's method open in the analysis of early Rus' texts can be seen in his interpretation of one chronicle phrase which, it would seem, had long ago been explained and discussed. This is the well-known passage "clear the paths and re-plank the bridges" (*trebite put' i mostite most*), a sentence which Vladimir supposedly spoke in 1014 when he was preparing to campaign against Iaroslav. This sentence is usually connected with the routes of communication in early Rus'. But Danilevskii has drawn attention to its similarity with a citation from the book of Isaiah (57: 14). What is striking is the fact that following it in Isaiah is the text about God's punishment of those dominated by self-interest. In this context, then, the fragment acquires a completely different meaning: the subject is not the roads in Kievan Rus', but the condemnation of a ruler who does not wish to share. Hence, in Danilevskii's words,

¹⁸ Ibid., 42–43.

¹⁹ Valentin Lavrent'evich Ianin, "Osnovnye itogi arkheologicheskogo izucheniia Novgoroda," *Trudy VI Mezhdunarodnogo Kongressa slavianskoi arkheologii*, vol. 2, *Slavianskii srednevekovyi gorod* (Moscow: Institut arkheologii RAN, 1997), 9–10.

“what is important for the chronicler in the given instance was not the ‘separatist’ ways of Iaroslav but his greed” (120–21).

By bringing to light biblical references to explain the “obscure places” in the works of early Russian literature, the author is able to elucidate the meaning of many passages that normally have been considered defective or have not yielded to any convincing explanation. Particularly striking here is his excursus concerning the severed hand of Andrei Bogoliubskii. According to the tale about his murder, the conspirators cut off the prince’s right hand. The study of his remains in 1934, however, showed that the right hand in fact was uninjured and that his left hand had been lopped off. One should not suggest that this is an involuntary mistake by the chronicler – the miniature of the Radziwill Chronicle that illustrates the tragedy of 1174 portrays a woman near the slain prince holding his severed left hand. Historians have assumed that the chronicler distorted the source for the effect of “intensifying the color” of the story: that is, the unfortunate victim was deprived of his right, “main” hand.

Danilevskii’s explanation is rather more convincing. He connects the “change of hands” with the fact that Prince Andrei in his lifetime was considered to be a sinner – if not the Antichrist himself, then his precursor (it is well known that people who venerated the Antichrist were marked by a sign specifically on the *right* hand). And the severing of the hand with that mark would in effect symbolize that the victim of the conspiracy “was bathed in the martyr’s blood of his sinfulness” (232–33).

At times, however, Danilevskii gets carried away in his search for biblical parallels. His comparison of the norms of the *Russkaia Pravda* with laws cited in the books of the Old Testament provide one such example of excessive zeal.²⁰ Despite the obvious verbal similarities and the undoubted temptation to speculate about the influence of the Bible on early Russian juridical practice, it seems one must be extremely cautious. What we may have here is in fact synchronous development, when societies in analogous stages of development (especially those formed by voluntary association [*u potestarnykh*]) display a close similarity of legal norms. It is well known that the *Russkaia Pravda*, especially in its oldest version, has many parallels with the barbarian “laws” of medieval Europe,²¹ but this does not mean that Prince Iaroslav copied his regulation from the Salic, Saxon, Bavarian, Alemannic, Frisian, or other early legal codes! Moreover, to what degree can one speak in general about the influence of the Bible on early Russian jurisprudence? It acts (as, incidentally, Danilevskii himself admits) as a

²⁰ Ibid., 155.

²¹ Concerning this, see Mikhail Borisovich Sverdlov, *Ot zakona russkogo k Russkoi Pravde* (Moscow: Iuridecheskaia literatura, 1988), 37–47, 51–66.

precedent, but not as a conceptual model, as would be the case if the codifiers based their work on norms found in Scripture.

Danilevskii characterizes Kievan Rus' as a state founded on the all-encompassing idea of being chosen by God – thus it is essentially a millenarian or chiliastic state. Under “millenarianism” we are to understand the teaching about the millennial kingdom of Christ that precedes the end of the world. In this context Danilevskii's reading of the first sentence of the *Povest' vremennykh let* is interesting: “Se *po vesti* vremennykh let” – i.e., the chronicle was written “in accord with the knowledge” about the coming of the final days and was thus intended to summarize the role of Rus' in the preparation for the coming of the Kingdom of Christ.²² Thus, Danilevskii singles out the soteriological function of the state in the defense of righteousness as the most important characteristic differentiating Rus' from medieval European states. Moreover, a certain share of sacral functions was delegated to the monarch, and his right to intervene in important ways both in the affairs of the church and in the life of society was recognized. In the author's words, “the idea of atonement for the sins of the world by one's own suffering has been characteristic for all of Russian history down to our own times. It justified any – even the highest – price which the Russian people had to pay for the defense of their state, which existed above all in order that it be so defended” (180–81).

Danilevskii's ideas are further developed in a monograph whose appearance must be considered one of the most significant scholarly events of recent years, Iurganov's *Kategorii russkoi srednevekovoi kul'tury* (1998). Like Danilevskii, Iurganov has been influenced in important ways by post-modernism. He openly professes that “there neither is nor can be any reality other than the historical source.” Iurganov, however, is not a complete skeptic. He agrees that complete confidence in the accuracy of historical reconstructions is impossible. But he also believes that through intense scholarly study, historians can offer compelling, accurate depictions of the past. According to Iurganov, a solution to the contemporary epistemological crisis of medieval studies is eminently possible.²³

His solution is as follows. He singles out a feature of medieval sources he calls “honorable deceit”: the old Russian bookman believed religiously “that what was expected of him was not that ‘truth’ which shows how things were ‘in actual fact,’ but that which *should have been*, whatever our own knowledge about ‘reality’ may be.” That which is unbelievable from the standpoint of questions

²² Igor' Nikolaevich Danilevskii, “Zamysel i nazvanie ‘Povesti vremennykh let,’” *Otechestvennaia istoriia*, no. 5 (1995), 105, 107.

²³ Iurganov, *Kategorii*, 7–8.

asked of the text by the positivist historian, is believable (that is, deserving of faith) in the context of the medieval understanding of historical events.

One of Iurganov's examples is especially telling. As is well known, the "cap of Monomakh" was originally a Central Asian hat of the 14th century. But for Ivan Groznyi it was undoubtedly one of the royal regalia sent Vladimir Monomakh in the 12th century from Byzantium. Moreover the actual origin of the object was absolutely unimportant – what was significant was only the symbolic meaning invested in it by contemporaries. By noting errors of this type we can attain a different level of understanding of a medieval text and its author, and thus of history itself (10, 11, 13).

According to Iurganov, the historical phenomenology which he declares to be his method (true, as with Danilevskii, in combination with hermeneutics) can provide a theoretical basis for such an approach. In the author's understanding, its essence lies in this: "the historical source itself as the realized product of the human psyche is the object of cognition." Thus the study of history is a process of self-cognition which, moreover, presumes (and this is very important!) a certain self-analysis by the historian. As the author notes,

the description of culture by categories (*kategorial'noe opisaniie*) offers the possibility of hermeneutically *understanding medieval man*, starting from the way in which he conceived himself. Thus we are able to look at him through his own eyes ... The act of understanding the "Other" is the most difficult task for one's own psyche, an act by which one must be able to move outside the boundaries of familiar situations into a kind of "cosmos," into that "territory" where various cognitions of oneself come into contact. (14, 438–39)

For Iurganov, the way to realization of the historical-phenomenological approach lies through category analysis, which "opens perspectives for the study of culture as a unified phenomenon of the human spirit." One must penetrate the meaning of a source above all through its language, understood in the broadest way, in order to obtain access to the deep structures of human consciousness and existence. As the author says, "categories in our understanding are 'symbolic principles,' derived from nowhere but from themselves. With regard to history and culture this means that the self-determined principles of self-consciousness and the presumed meaning (*smyslopologanie*) of man and society are studied phenomenologically." The author asserts that "category description of medieval culture is not an analytical conception with its own hierarchy of theoretical assumptions, but a research model for the reconstruction of the self-defined principles of the self-cognition of the subject of the historical process, with whose help one can explain that which is individual through a kind of elucidated 'multiplicity.'"

Inasmuch as the tool for self-cognition is language, it is necessary to analyze its special features. In Iurganov's words, "in order to get as close as possible to the sphere of presumed meaning it is almost always necessary to undertake additional work to elucidate lexico-semantic fields of one or another concept, in order to provide a multi-level commentary on the sources of semantic content (*napolnenie*) of one or another lexeme with the help of synonyms or other self-definitions as well as 'related' texts."

It is necessary to take into account one additional feature of medieval Russian thinking:

Any sacral language (whether letter or gesture) is accepted unconditionally, since the sphere of sacral knowledge is infused with the Holy Spirit through people sanctified by God and known as prophets and apostles. This attitude can be called unconventional: the sign is not the conditional signifier of a certain designator (*denotat*), that is of a conception about something, but itself is a mystical designator. (93)

Let us now examine Iurganov's method in action. The most successful application, in our view, is found in his investigations of Russian society's interpretation of power, of human freedom, and property relations (chapters 2 and 3), and also his exploration of eschatological expectations and eschatological symbolism (chapter 4).

Having analyzed the features of princely power in Kievan Rus', the author concludes that it was incapable of finding a formula for its extension through the whole land of Rus'. The emergence of the given formula occurs only in the era of Mongol rule, "the clan of Ivan Kalita in a way replicated in miniature the path of Mongol society of the empire of Chingis Khan, who created a state for himself and for his family." Iurganov shows the connection of the Russian concept "bestow" with the Turkic "soyurga" (*soiurgal* in the 14th and 15th centuries was a type of possession held in return for service). The fact that right down to the 18th century in Russian society there was no unconditional guarantee of the property rights of landholders has to be connected with the influence of the Mongol approach to distributing the lands of a state which belonged to the whole ruling clan.

This idea has already been expressed on more than one occasion, but only Iurganov has really succeeded in demonstrating it with a coherent scholarly argument. Indeed, there are many analogies between the systems of Muscovy and the Horde. One clan is singled out from a hereditary aristocracy and then subordinates to itself all the others and strengthens its power over a given territory. The subordinated elite serves in return for land, which it can make use of within certain limits, but which the supreme power at any second can confiscate on completely legal grounds. Similar too is the typology of internal conflicts in the

Horde and in Rus': more often than not a ruling nephew and his uncle come into conflict and the object of dispute is power and the system of succession to it (from father to son or from brother to brother) (155, 160, 162–63, 165).

These similarities allow Iurganov to suggest that "this type of power relations and property in the understanding of contemporaries was by its nature such that it is hardly correct to speak of the existence in Rus' of feudal relations." The most important mark of feudalism – immunity – did not have a vertical character (the well-known formula, "the vassal of my vassal is not my vassal") but a horizontal one (defense from external encroachment of a possession that has been granted). Iurganov defines the system of relations of the lord with his subjects as that of direct, non-contractual service (*ministerialitet*), expressed in the formula of official address to the monarch: "I am thy slave."

From this follow two more very important features of the socio-economic structure of Muscovy: the presence of the system of precedence (*mestnichestvo*), which made sense only with the establishment of the supreme power of a single family; and the appanage system, which existed so long as the royal family – the supreme arbiter of property – granted rewards. It is symptomatic that the appanage system was liquidated in the second half of the 16th century, practically simultaneously with the end of the dynasty of Ivan I Kalita. The accession to power in 1598 of the "sovereign not born to rule," Boris Godunov, provoked a severe crisis of power and property, since the former "sovereign's slave" Boris could not become the "sovereign over slaves" in the minds of contemporaries. Thus, he had no right to dispose of the appanage of the descendants of Kalita (171, 198, 222–24).

Iurganov's *Categories of Medieval Russian Culture* to a considerable degree elucidates the eschatological components of medieval consciousness. Of particular interest is his explanation that the well-known "horseman" depicted on the arms of Moscow is an eschatological symbol based on the image described in the "Revelation" of Methodius of Patara. This is the figure of the tsar-conqueror and represents the Russian sovereign, who is destined to return power to God at his Second Coming. In essence, this is the symbolic-heraldic embodiment of the idea of the Third Rome, of the Kingdom of Salvation. In the given composition the horse is the Orthodox faith itself, which the rider (the tsar) should preserve in purity; the scepter-spear, which defeats the serpent personifying the power of the Antichrist, symbolizes the belief in the victory of Christ in the final struggle with evil. Only later was this well-known image equated with St. George, although when that happened the basic concept of the composition was not violated: on the horse as before was a holy warrior (336, 345, 349).

Also deserving of attention is Iurganov's interpretation of the Oprichnina executions and rites as a kind of distinctive Russian ritual cleansing in

anticipation of the Final Judgment. The mystical symbolism of the Oprichnina and its similarity with chivalric religious orders has often been noted in the past.²⁴ Iurganov, however, has managed to demonstrate the complex nature of the Oprichnina eschatology as a whole. This is to be seen in the very date of its inception, which was clearly connected with the years (from the Creation) 7070 and 7077, when the End of the World was once again anticipated. Related too is the assumption by the tsar of pastoral functions, conjoined with his incarnation of “the justice of the world,” with the mysterious rites of the Oprichnina executions and with the symbolism of the Oprichnina court. Groznyi attained the fullness of power as the instrument of the Divine Will in punishing human sin and in affirming “true” piety not only for the salvation of his own soul, but of those sinners whom he condemned to death. Afterwards, Ivan IV confessed that he had “succumbed to temptation” and incorrectly understood his authority received from God, and he sought to do penance. This spiritual crisis was most clearly embodied in the sovereign’s testament of 1579 (369, 374–75, 385–93, 404).

Iurganov’s book is indubitably a success. The only questions which arise in reading it are connected with the problem of the representativeness of his sources. The author analyzes the texts he uses clearly and profoundly, but to what degree are they all-encompassing? Would not the sources left out of the “frame” change the picture the author reconstructs?²⁵ How do the concepts elucidated by Iurganov interact among themselves, and where do they fit in regard to other “categories” not described in the book? In this regard, Iurganov’s study still has a fragmentary character, rather like a collection of essays. True, in the final lines the author promises to continue the historical-phenomenological and hermeneutic study of the culture of medieval Rus’. One may hope that in so doing he will provide answers for some of the most pressing questions that remain.

By way of conclusion, let us summarize some results from this survey of methodological innovation in contemporary Russian medieval studies. First of all, the very recognition of the limits of positivism is extremely important, as is the application of contemporary methodologies in the humanities. Secondly,

²⁴ Ivan Ivanovich Polosin, *Sotsial’no-politicheskaia istoriia Rossii XVI–nachala XVII vv.* (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1963), 154; Andrei Leonidovich Nikitin, *Sataninskaia zautreniia* (Moscow: Progress, 1995), 187–98.

²⁵ See, for example: Aleksandr Borisovich Kamenskii, “‘Srednevekov’e’ i ‘Novoe vremia’: Granitsy poniatii v kontekste russkoi istorii,” *Istoriik vo vremeni: Tret’i Ziminskii chteniia. Doklady i soobshcheniia nauchnoi konferentsii* (Moscow: RGGU, 2000).

Russian medieval studies are a receptive field for application of these methodologies. On the one hand, the Russian Middle Ages is considered to have been well studied in many respects, and only new approaches can overcome a certain stagnation in the scholarship. On the other hand, deeper investigation of new territory should uncover a larger number of unexplained areas, which may be understood by new methods. At the same time, despite the initial, quite hopeful symptoms of a renovation of Russian medieval studies, certain obstacles must be overcome. It is still essential that there be a broader assimilation of Western theoretical approaches by Russian scholars. It is apparent that many of us, in searching out new techniques, are reinventing the wheel.

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