

THIS PAPER IS A ROUGH DRAFT
IT IS NOT TO BE CITED IN ANY PUBLICATION

ON THE TEXTS AND CHANGING CONTEXTS
OF THE *SLOVO O POLKU IGOREVE* AND THE *ZADONŠČINA*

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I.

This morning, Don Ostrowski has presented you with “text-critical arguments” on the *Slovo o polku Igoreve* (henceforth, *Slovo*); and then Olga Strakhov has provided you with the “linguistic issues” of the work. It falls upon me, therefore, as the final speaker on this panel, to address some of the broader problems connected with the separate but related disciplines of history, literature, and culture in regard to the *Slovo*, which most frequently is defined as (i) either the outstanding literary monument of medieval and premodern East-Slavic writing or (ii) or a literary concoction and *pastiche* created in the late eighteenth century.

Yet I offer my remarks not with the intention of separating the historical, literary, and cultural orientations from the fields of textual criticism and linguistics. Indeed, to the contrary, my aim this morning—as I seek both to highlight some of the basic features that inform critical methodologies and interpretative traditions still widely-accepted among scholars and to point out some other possible directions for our research—is to avoid

separating the distinctive features of one approach from another, that is, to refrain from segmenting the text-oriented study of a civilization as a whole into diverse areas of scholarship, by asserting the validity of the oft-maligned “philological method.”

It is important to emphasize that the definition proposed here neither merely identifies “philology” with “source study” nor simply substitutes “philology” for “linguistics.” In other words, our notion of the term does not view “philology” merely as an earlier communicative process—to be studied before undertaking the subsequent hermeneutic stage of investigating texts within their historical environments. What this means is that “philology” is not limited to the narrow study of specific linguistic and textual-critical features. Our definition, instead, is far more extensive and comprehensive, not only concerning itself with “the human spirit in language” [Gröber 1901-1914, 1: 194] and “the entire development of human history ... [as] contained in the human mind” [Auerbach 1959: 197] but also seeking to restore “old philology” to its rightful place and returning it to the manuscript culture of the Middle Ages. As issue here, therefore, is the desire to recognize the continuing validity of a traditional approach to the study of the medieval *literary* texts.

From a purely practical perspective, the application of a philological method would oblige us (i) first to engage in a methodological reevaluation that would help us define the *nature* and *function* of the *Slovo* and (ii) second to reach an assessment of whether—and if so, *to what extent*—the work is in agreement with its broader cultural environment. Finally, if our primary objective were to examine the formal devices and semantic system of the *Slovo*, this type of analysis would be carried out without taking as

a starting point a variety of possible chronological “theories” or by relying excessively on the ideological and “national-patriotic” prejudices that long distinguished much of Soviet (and post-Soviet) scholarship as well as its imperial Russian antecedents.

II.

I also need to emphasize that my remarks this morning do *not* aim to focus on the ever-present and often all-consuming problem of “authenticity.” Indeed, one might even conjecture that it is not advisable to accept the terms of the well-known polemic between “skeptics” and “defenders” as the sole basis for a comprehensive investigation of the *Slovo*. In actuality, the very notion of “authenticity” cannot be of primary concern inasmuch as it points to a previous definition of what the object under analysis is supposed to be. Unless we first have made a preliminary judgment as to the parallels between certain distinctive features of the text of the *Slovo* and what is believed to characterize the writings of a given period and cultural area, we cannot proceed to the next operation, which consists of determining whether this “coincidence of features” (i.e., “authenticity” or “genuineness”) is real or illusory.”

Thus, the fact is that those specialists who believe that the *Slovo* was composed in the late-twelfth century as an ancient epic tale, or others who assert that the work was fabricated in the late eighteenth century as a pseudo-medieval writing, are expressing only two of many possible opinions on the origins of the work. It would appear, however, that there is no reason for us to regard this single hypothesis as a logical pillar of a fundamental dialectic opposition. Indeed, the definition of the *Slovo* as a modern

pastiche or an ancient tale, which implies either a dating in the eighteenth century or in an earlier period, should not lead us to confuse the terms of different problems with their interdependence and logical hierarchical arrangement. Thus, the description and evaluation of particular features that characterize a literary monument must come first; a belief that these features provide signals for a specific dating of the work should follow only as a consequence. It would be proper, therefore—as we shall see—first to determine *what* the *Slovo* is and only then to assess *how* it might be in harmony with historical and cultural categories.

Furthermore, in response to the ideological stance regarding the question of “authenticity” taken by *both* “skeptics” and “defenders” alike, we might wonder whether notions such as “authentic text” (or its antithesis, “forged text”) should be applied to the history of a monument for which we are dealing with the distinctive features of a *manuscript* heritage and *scribal* culture and for which, therefore, we cannot in fact provide (i) precise information on the problems of dating and authorship, (ii) tangible evidence that the *Slovo*, as it has come down to us, is the product of a single author (rather than of co-authors or compilers), and (iii) concrete proof that we are dealing with a “closed tradition” and a compact *textus traditus* (i.e., a process of faithful textual transmission).

If, for example, we cannot exclude the possibility that we are coping with an “open tradition” (i.e., a process of reshaping and revision in the course of textual transmission), how can we legitimately speak of a literary monument that was written in the late twelfth century and in which all of the textual material is of the same age? Thus—and precisely because of the possibility of an “open” textual tradition—there is no justification for

assuming that an analysis of an individual textual portion may be generalized to include the entire text of the *Slovo*. Moreover, 12th-century “reconstructions” of the *Slovo*, “in its original form and language,” while extremely intriguing, should not prevent us from distinguishing clearly between the concrete analysis of the extant textual documentation—which is the legitimate field of textual criticism—and hypotheses beyond the limits of that documentation.

Finally, as regards diverse studies seeking to confirm the exclusively late eighteenth-century origins of the *Slovo*, the fact that the *codex unicus* described in 1800 by the first editors in their *editio princeps* is no longer extant does not provide compelling evidence that work is lacking in a textual tradition. Indeed, from a purely formal point of view, we can define the *Slovo*, like other literary monuments of the Old Rus’ tradition, as a work handed down by testimonies—in this particular instance, of the eighteenth and the nineteenth century—namely, (i) *P* (*Princeps*), (ii) *P*₂ (Variant of *Princeps*), (iii) *E* (Catherine’s Copy), (iv) *K* (Karamzin’s Notes), and (v) *M* (Malinovskij’s Fragments). Here, too, we can use both direct and indirect information in any attempt to prove that this textual documentation does or does not derive compactly from a single antecedent.

III.

Many studies of the *Slovo*, both past and present, in their narrow focus on linguistic matters, and the elucidation of individual words and phrases, have had the effect of reducing a *literary monument* (i.e., a text that a society considers worthy of dissemination and preservation) to the status of a *document* (i.e., a text perceived as a purely utilitarian

use of language [Goldblatt 2006: 235-36]. In other words, an especially serious deficiency in many studies, such as the monograph by Edward Keenan [2003], would be the attempt to offer a “new vision” of the *Slovo* that failed to take into account the “literariness” of the work, that is, the legitimate field of the literary scholar. As Ingham [2004: 10] noted, “[the *Slovo*] needs to be viewed as a coherent work of art, not the casual collection of small pieces that [Keenan] treats it as.”

It would seem that from the standpoint of Ingham, who long has worked on the *Slovo* as a *literary* scholar, such criticism was justifiable, especially in light of the assertion by Keenan [2008] that “the question of the creation of the [*Slovo*] [was] at base a *historian’s* question; even when assistance could be imparted to the historian in interpreting textual evidence, it was to be provided by “historical or comparative *linguistics*” and not by *literary* analysis. Offended and seemingly deprived of his “academic rights,” Ingham [2008] the *literaturoved* stated the following: “It is much easier for Professor Keenan simply to ignore our arguments with the startling excuse that he does not accord us a right to say anything about the subject. Quite a few specialists will be surprised to learn that they have been disenfranchised and perhaps are about to have their doctorates revoked.” This painful cleavage between a distinguished *literaturoved* and a prominent *istorik* hardly augurs well for the future of medieval and premodern Slavic studies in the United States.

One would have hoped that in the “discussions” between Keenan and Ingham there would be room for “*filologija*” as an important discipline of medieval studies that might diminish the separation of critical methodologies and their application to the study of the

Slovo. This was not to be. On the one hand, Keenan [2008] pointed out that there existed a fundamental distinction between philology and history or, more specifically, between the philologist and the historian: “Professor Ingham, like our teacher [Professor Roman Jakobson], considers himself a *filolog*; ... I fancy myself a historian.” On the other hand—despite his affirmation of the study of “literature *qua* literature,” and notwithstanding his stern criticism of Keenan’s “microlevel” analysis, which appeared to substitute for literary art—Ingham, too, saw fit to distance himself and his work from the term *filolog*/philologist, which in one brief recent publication he blithely seems to dismiss, referring to it to as an “old-fashioned European term that, as far as I know, never caught on in the United States” [Ingham 2008: 493].

This is disconcerting news, indeed, for those of us who are specialists in medieval Slavic literature (like Professor Ingham) but who continue to regard the concept of philology, for the discipline of medieval studies, as the “matrix out of which all else springs” [Nichols 1990: 1]. One merely has to consider the past four decades of literary scholarship in the United States—from the passionate defense by the great Romance philologist Yakov Malkiel for the term “philology” in the mid-1960s to more recent attempts to “restore” the challenge of philology to its rightful place and return it to the scribal culture of the Middle Ages—to recognize (at least for some scholars) the continuing vitality of an approach to historical *and* literary texts that “was once among the most theoretically avant-garde disciplines” [Nichols: 1990: 1].

Of equally relevant concern for some scholars has been the study of the *Slovo* as a work made up “fragments,” “songs,” or “self-contained poems that function as free-

standing textual units and “stand apart from the surrounding text” [Keenan 2003: 89]. This view confirms the interpretative attitude held by many scholars that, as Keenan [2003: 70] put it, the *Slovo* is marked by its “lack of narrative consistency, its inexplicable transitions and unmotivated repetitions.” The deeply-ensconced assumption that the *Slovo* is essentially a compendium of “fragments” or “songs” lacking in either thematic uniformity or compositional unity long has been an important aspect of the scholarship devoted to the *Slovo*. To his credit, in his monograph Keenan admirably succeeded in highlighting the presence of important compositional seams and thematic units in the *Slovo*. It is surprising, however, that he never went beyond the process of “deconstruction” and chose not to focus on the significance of thematic and compositional uniformity that might be obtained through *literary* study, viz., the presence of individual components transformed into an artistic and structural unity by virtue of their common ideological function and compositional structure.

IV.

It is fair to say that what Keenan considered his “significant new reading”—as a number of scholars have noted—was not an interpretation of the *Slovo* but rather a “meticulous, almost word-for-word analysis of the language” [Keenan 2003: dusk jacket] accomplished “in the presence of a hypothesis already declared” [Keenan 2003: 137]. Keenan [2003: 139] himself would have pointed out that his detailed line-by-line commentary was to make sure the text made sense *internally* “within a defined context of specific, real, and hypothetical Slavic forms and languages.” In reality, Keenan’s *a priori*

presumption that the *Slovo* was a forgery, which severely prejudiced his running commentary, had the unfortunate consequences of distorting the linguistic reality of the work, as well as misrepresenting intrinsic connections to an extra-linguistic reality, with the ultimate aim of imposing a historical and cultural context which would support the notion that Josef Dobrovský was the “only person of his generation who could properly understand the *Slovo*” and, in all likelihood, its “creator.” Yet as Ingham [2004: 8] observed, “theory should be made to confirm with facts, not the other way around.” In other words, as we noted above, it is correct to state that the description and evaluation of particular features that characterize a literary monument must come first; but a belief that these features provide signals for a specific dating of the work should follow only as a consequence. As we have already stated, it would be proper, therefore, first to determine *what* the *Slovo* is and only then to assess *how* the work might be in harmony with particular historical and cultural categories.

Hence, any adequate investigation takes as a starting point the need to conduct a separate inquiry into the individual components of the sign system of the *Slovo* but not to confuse their function as part of a general *langue* with their particular place in the *parole* of the work. What this means, among other things, is that it would be a mistake to date the text only on the basis of some of its components. To do so would make no more sense than attempting to date a cathedral by considering the geological age of its marble pillars or of its cornerstone.

It is true, therefore, that—according to traditional philological principles—the *intrinsic* features of the text, and not its *external* cultural environment, should serve as the

main object of textual analysis. This does not mean, however, that we can examine the text in isolation from its surroundings or as anything but products of a historical process. There is no mistake in stating that the description of a text must rely on recognizing textual components that are of various origins and derived from diverse sources. It is no less true, however, that the particular history (i.e., *origins* and *formation*) of each of these building blocks represents something quite different from the history of the text itself, which *functions* as a new and autonomous semantic unit.

V.

Our task, therefore, is to analyze and interpret the thematic set of criteria pertaining to the *Slovo* against the backdrop of its cultural environment. It is evident that we cannot examine the semantic system of the *Slovo* without highlighting some of the distinctive features that characterized the *langue* of Orthodox Slavic civilization generally and Old Rus' literature in particular. Thus, if we pose the question, "Do the subject matter, and ideological treatment of the *Slovo* belong to a traditional ideological repertoire, or do they betray rare or even unique thematics," it is essential to define the traditional ideological repertoire in question. In other words, before we can decide whether the *Slovo* does or does not represent a "deviation" from the mainstream of (or an "anomaly" at odds with) the literary civilization of *Slavia orthodoxa*, it stands to reason that we need to have a clear idea of the principal literary conventions and "rules of the game" that conditioned the production and transmission of Old Rus' literary monuments.

There appears to be sufficient evidence to conclude that a large part of Orthodox Slavic literature was marked by fixed and consistent principles which, if correctly understood and evaluated, might help us reconstruct the code and rules that governed the literary system of *Slavia orthodoxa*. This applies to both a general conception of literary *poiesis* which was compelled to remain faithful, on the one hand, to a semantic domain of absolute truth revealed by the Word of God and, on the other hand, to the use of particular compositional devices that were intended to aid the reader in fully assimilating the true meaning conveyed by literary messages.

It is important to emphasize that the semantic code of Orthodox Slavic literary civilization did not depend on a “free” or “independent” use of fictional devices. Its conceptual foundation, instead, resided in the belief that the main obligation of a Christian orthodox writer was to convey nothing but true messages, wherein “fiction” as such was condemned as the equivalent of “falsehood.” In other words, according to the rules of Orthodox Slavic literary civilization, fiction was to be identified with “Hellenic” writings, which were deprived of the divine light of truth and relied, instead, on the “devious stratagems” (*xytrosti*) and the “deceitful weavings” (*pletěnija*) that had been created by the “pagan” philosophers and rhetors. In contrast with not only the “profane literature” of classical antiquity, which offered historical or secular meanings, but also the *polysemia* that characterized Western medieval literature, which was grounded in diverse meanings that could even make use of “mendacious” verbal signs and “mutable” *fictiones* as referents to spiritual truth, Orthodox Slavic *synsemia* offered a discourse that had to reveal a message that was truthful according to *both* its “literal sense” (*sensus*

litteralis) and its “spiritual sense” (*sensus spiritualis*) [Picchio 1983]. The Orthodox Slavic conception of literary *poiesis*, therefore, rejected any form of “poetic falsehood” and had to adapt what was not true in and of itself to the semantic domain of what was absolute truth because it had been revealed by the Word of God.

Thus, Orthodox Slavic authors relied on the revealed Word as the only true and supreme referent. Indeed, as Friedrich Ohly [2005: 19] has rightly pointed out, “since the time of the church fathers, every interpretation of the Bible was predicated on the conviction of the unique quality of Holy Scripture, which distinguished it fundamentally from all [other types of writing].” Nonetheless, the use of this language of revelation was the privilege granted only to a limited number of elected men, such as the “inventors” of the sacred Writ and divine Liturgies, the apostles, the church fathers, and the authors of other Writings that the Church recognized as divinely-sanctioned and inspired [Mathiesen 2008].

How, then, could the Christian writers of *Slavia orthodoxa* express a perfect truth if only the imperfect language of human error was available to them? Indeed, mere recourse to human “craft” or “techniques” was, by definition, clearly insufficient for dispensing divinely-true messages. The only certain guide and touchstone could be provided by the righteous teachings of the Orthodox Church and its “true doctrine,” that is, by the established principles of its untainted “orthodoxy.” This would appear to explain why no “secular” treatise offering an Orthodox Slavic theory of literature has come down to us.

These considerations seem to be sufficiently well-founded, even though they represent only the initial results of an innovative type of research devoted to the nature of medieval and premodern Orthodox Slavic “poetics.” One might wonder, in this regard, whether it is because of the dearth of studies of this type that previous scholarship did not investigate systematically the general principles governing Orthodox Slavic literature. This is a problem of crucial importance that applies directly to a correct understanding and interpretation of the *Slovo*. It stands to reason that before one concludes that this controversial work of East-Slavic provenance, which treats important aspects of Old Rus’ culture, does or does not comply with a particular literary code, it would appear advisable to devote all our efforts to defining that code.

Inasmuch as the principles that governed Orthodox Slavic literature were not established by philosophers and rhetors but were derived from the dogmatic teachings of Christian Orthodoxy, it is possible to suggest that the texts of sacred Scripture represented a supreme model. The language of these divinely-inspired Writings was, by definition, the highest carrier of revealed truth, which had been given to man as a touchstone by a merciful God. By establishing the unchanging relationship between that medium of perfect truth and the language of human error, it was possible to overcome and correct the imperfections and distortions of human thought. The texts of Scripture, therefore, were regarded as the foremost referent and were believed to reveal the divine identity of signifier and signified. Even though that identity could not be comprehended, and only perceived in state of real grace, it represented the foundation of any means of communication among the users of human tongues.

What the above-presented observations suggest—and what is of crucial importance for this study—is that Orthodox Slavic writers were supposed to observe well-established criteria in their use of citations from Scripture. More specifically, because verbal signs had to be interpreted according to the double code of *both* their immediate context and their models, many works of Orthodox Slavic literature could be regarded as examples of scriptural exegesis. What this meant was that the semantic function of the sign often relied on a general referent placed outside of the individual texts. Thus, inasmuch as many Orthodox Slavic literary works sought to imitate the sacred and authoritative Writings of the Christian heritage, they were comprehended by well-trained readers according to different *levels of meaning*. Indeed, studies of the past few decades on works written in different parts of old *Slavia orthodoxa* demonstrate that the semantic structure of these works was based on *two* “levels of meaning” [Picchio 1977]. The higher or “spiritual” level of meaning (*sensus spiritualis*) could only be grasped if the entire message were “figurally” interpreted in accordance with a system of references to sacred Scripture. The doctrine of the *sensus spiritualis*, grounded in the New Testament, had received its basic formulation in the writings of Origen of Alexandria (185-c.254) and been sanctioned in the exegetical tradition established sanctioned in the exegetical tradition established by the church fathers. The lower or “literal” level of meaning (*sensus litteralis*) was to correspond, instead, to the “plain” meaning of the text and would be accessible even to those readers who lacked theological training [De Lubac 1959, 1: 117-69]. These two levels of meaning could be independent from each other only insofar as the measure of the reader’s training and practical understanding were

concerned. In their essence, however, the levels of meaning formed part of a superior “intertextual” unity in which they both were to function as rhetorical *figurae*, that is, as “figures [which] *preserve* literal meanings in their generation of figurativeness” [Dawson 2002: 14].

This type of semantic organization was clearly patterned after the historical and allegorical *senses* of Scripture, which had been sanctioned by a long-lasting practice of Christian scriptural exegesis and pedagogical practice that had its origins in both Hellenistic and Jewish interpretative traditions employed even before the time of Origen. Nonetheless, it was above all Origen—whose marked and pattern-producing influence on the scriptural exegesis and speculative theology of the writings of later church fathers cannot be overestimated—whose vast body of work, which survives only partially, sought in synthetic form to demonstrate how the literal sense of scriptural passages veiled a spiritual or allegorical sense that had been intended by God.

Thus, the “letter” of any biblical text, important as it was and truthful as it might be, could result only in a limited comprehension of the text’s actual meaning. As a consequence, it was the obligation of any well-trained Christian reader to move on to the higher (i.e., ethical and spiritual) meaning, inasmuch as this *sensus* provided not only moral *exempla* but also the hidden allegorical meanings of the New Covenant in Christ. These truths could lead man to the knowledge of a universal truth that transcended any earthly event or situation. According to Christian exegesis employed even before Origen, “the truths unfolded might also be about the soul’s progress, back to the perfection from which it has fallen, through purification and progressive reintegration with the true Logos

of God. Platonic perspectives and Christian perspectives were deeply intertwined in a complex vision of God's providential purpose in which the exegesis of scripture played a major salvific role" [Young 1997: 293-94].

Of crucial importance in Origen, and in later church fathers heavily indebted to him, such as Gregory of Nyssa (d. c.395), is that "figural readings [were not to] depend on a binary division between what texts literally [said] and what they non-literally [meant]. In other words, they [could] not assert that a given Old Testament text [was] 'really about' some event or experience that can be clearly stated apart from that text without loss" [Ayres 2006: 17]. As John David Dawson [2002: 15] has pointed out in his monograph on Christian figural readings and the fashioning of identity, "the spirit that makes all things new [was] threatening [to the literal reading] unless one [could] imagine a newness that [did] not repudiate what [was] "old" or "former"—a new embodiment that [did] not simply reject the "old" fleshly body, a new relation to history that [was] perhaps more but not less than the old relationship, a new identity in which ... former things were spiritually transformed."

Thus, Orthodox Slavic authors generally patterned their works after authoritative Christian writings and specifically used scriptural readings as semantic touchstones to fashion the true meaning of their literary compositions. In other words, their compositions were to imitate the sacred Scriptures and be governed by the notion they represented additions to the "preexistent body of 'true texts,' that is, to the general book of truth in which only inspired words could be included. It is not surprising, then, that the patristic network of "plain" and "figural" senses that conditioned the "reading of

Scripture and the enterprise of Theology” was adopted by Orthodox Slavic authors for whom “sacred models provided ... stylistic and conceptual clichés, that is, an entire ‘vocabulary,’ whose semantic effectiveness depended on the reader’s interpretation of verbal symbols based on the ‘lexicalization’ of pre-established exegetical equivalences” [Picchio 1972: 445].

For relating human events (i.e., any aspect of the phenomenological experience of human life), Orthodox Slavic writers would have had recourse to historically-marked sets of signs. Their factual accounts were historically true if what actually took place on earth was described faithfully. This circumstance, however, was not sufficient to render true the historical narrations of the authors at the higher level of Christian exegesis. Belief in the intrinsic reality of earthly events would have represented an inaccuracy—and even a grave sin—comparable to the error committed by those who trusted in the words of human tongues and were unaware that these words were nothing but arbitrary signs unless inspired grace connected them with a higher referent.

In other words, the two levels of meaning corresponded to dogmatic principles, which provided the only possible justification for the spiritual use of human words and images. The plain meaning of both the events and the images of events could become fully comprehensible only if one connected them with a figural meaning. From a formal point of view, as suggested above, this fact applied to current events as well as to the events described in the sacred Scripture. Nonetheless, the scriptural accounts were, by definition, linked with the highest referent inasmuch as they were part of a body of revealed texts.

In order to assert the true meaning of the factual accounts of any historical period, Orthodox Slavic writers were obliged to establish that these accounts were functionally equivalent to certain events offered by a scriptural text. In other words, two different “tales” or “stories” became functionally comparable if one could reduce them to a common semantic denominator. This type of operation could be made possible when the gap separating the historical and spiritual levels of meaning was bridged through the use of spiritual words and expressions. From a practical standpoint, this operation resided in the application to the historical meaning of a human writing the same spiritual meaning that had long been accepted for the non-literal (i.e., figural) interpretation of a corresponding biblical passage. Any word or sentence in a factual account could hint at other “perfect” words and sentences that had been revealed by Scripture. As has been pointed out elsewhere, “these ‘hints’ might be scattered formal devices or the main thematic motifs of a narrative. In the latter case, the entire structure of a written work would imply reference to “types” [or “figures,”], that is, to patterns or perfect examples in accordance with the rules of biblical typology.” It would appear correct to assert that “any well-trained reader would have known that these two levels of meaning, which corresponded to the “senses” of Scriptures, were equally true” [Picchio 1977: 5]. It is also true that those readers who were not capable of grasping the “higher meaning,” that is, the the hidden or “spiritual” sense were not left in the dark, [for] the literal sense of a work could also act as a self-governing structure capable of conveying an edifying teaching. Nonetheless, it is a fact that to reduce the above-mentioned words and sentences to their literal sense alone would have resulted in a truly limited and only

partial comprehension of its actual meaning. Indeed, we may wonder if precisely this limitation is still affecting our interpretation of many works of medieval Orthodox Slavic literature.”

VI.

It goes without saying that no adequate description of the *Slovo* is possible if one does not fully comprehend the work’s general meaning, that is, the “true” nature of the message conveyed by the work. Since its discovery and the publication of the *editio princeps*, the *Slovo* has been defined and described in many different ways: (i) as a work of an epic-heroic orientation (e.g., the *chanson de geste* or the *Nibelungenlied*) that celebrates the adventurous raid of Igor Svjatoslavič against the Polovcians in 1185; (ii) as a pamphlet that deplores the lack of unity in the land of Rus’ and the discord among its princes; (iii) as a monument that offers Igor’s tale as an intersection of history and myth; (iv) as an oral song or fanciful *lai* (*pěsnb*) that draws heavily from folk sources and non-extant epic cycles (seemingly still reflected in modern folklore); (v) as a lament (*plačb*) that expresses grief and sorrow over the defeat of Prince Igor at the hands of the Polovcians and the “disgrace” (*obida*) that has entered the land of Rus’; (vi) as a tale or story (*pověstb*), that relates the historical events connected with Prince Igor's campaign, his subsequent defeat, and ultimate escape from captivity; and (vii) as a discourse (*slovo*) that is didactic in character and offers the generalized language of commentary rather than the analytical language of a narrative account.

Finally, many scholars long have sought to define the work's intent by determining and identifying its ideological function within its concrete historical context. The *Slovo*—at one stage in the work's history—may indeed have been written to support the central power of the grand prince against the spread of autonomous trends among the lesser princes of Rus'. The *Slovo* also may have been composed to celebrate the deeds and exploits of a local dynasty linked to Igor Svyatoslavič or some other prince; or it may have been employed as an instrument of political agitation. Finally, from the standpoint of the "skeptics," it may even have been conceived as a crypto-exaltation of Russian expansion during the reign of Catherine the Great.

As to the question of *what* the "true message" of the *Slovo* is, some earlier studies, written by me together with Riccardo Picchio [Goldblatt & Picchio 1995, 2006, 2007, 2008 & 2009*] have demonstrated a concern for thematics that has as its basis the importance of the above-mentioned levels of meaning and referential models for the work. More specifically, these studies successfully have shown that the text of the *Slovo* reflects formulaic usage and marked conventionality in the spirit of an ecclesiastic tradition and thereby expresses a message which complies with the particular code that conditioned the production of Old Rus' literary texts. The research carried out to date appears to indicate that throughout the *Slovo* authoritative words of Scripture could be perceived not only in accordance with their biblical context but also in a new contextual form, that is, as components of an autonomous message.

VII.

As recent studies have suggested, many scholars continue to accept the notion that the *Slovo* is a unique product of “high secular culture”—with an “epic-heroic” orientation, a “density of poetic devices, and specific features of orality”—perhaps inscribed into the written literary tradition as part of the “courtly culture” that flourished among the princes of Kyivan Rus’ [Živov 2006]. It is thereby, according to these commentators, out of place and a deviation from the “clerical landscape” of Kyivan literature, that is, at odds with the mainstream and fundamentally Christian message of other medieval East-Slavic literary monuments. In the opinion of these scholars, the *Slovo* focuses on the ultimate defeat of a valiant warrior-prince who despite facing great odds “goes down fighting.” There are scholars who have aimed to demonstrate that, notwithstanding the above-mentioned positive interpretation imparted to Igor’s “raid,” what emerges is a certain “ambivalence” on the part of the poet-story-teller, who—chiefly, but not exclusively, through Grand Prince Svjatoslav—reproaches Igor for his rash behavior leading to his defeat and encouraging the Polovcians to descend upon the land of Rus’. Yet even they believe that, in the final analysis, the narrator cannot bring himself truly to regard Igor’s search for “vainglory” (*slava*) as iniquitous or sinful.

Indeed, having not been condemned outright by *Slovo*’s storyteller, Prince Igor seemingly escapes from captivity in an “Epilogue” that for most scholars would appear to place little or no emphasis on any *change* that has taken place in Igor’s mode of behavior or attitude to what has transpired. Thus—as seen from this perspective—despite his foolhardy blunder, Igor Svjatoslavič would apparently return to the land of Rus’ at the

end of *Slovo* seemingly unchanged and certainly unrepentant. According to this interpretation, therefore, the *secular* and *artistic* content presented in *Slovo* sharply contrasts with the *religious* and *didactic* “story of Igor” found in the Laurentian and the Hypatian chronicle accounts.

In earlier studies [Goldblatt & Picchio 1995, 2006, 2007, 2008 & 2009], moreover, it was demonstrated that the *Slovo* should not be regarded as either a tale of initial victory and ultimate defeat—which for many scholars represents a “mirror image” of the story of early defeat and later victory presented in the *Zadonščina*—or the epic exaltation of a courageous warrior. The work should be viewed, instead, as a religious *exemplum*, which provides an *ethical* and *edifying* message that appears to be well grounded in Christian teachings. On the basis of this interpretation, what seems of paramount significance is not the tale about the *defeat* of Prince Igor’s host but rather the story surrounding the *plight* of Prince Igor’s soul. In the words, the text of the *Slovo* may well reflect marked conventionality in the spirit of an ecclesiastic tradition, which focuses on motifs such as sin, redemption, and salvation and in accordance with the particular code that conditioned the composition and transmission of Old Rus’ writings. In other words, the decision of Igor Svjatoslavič to lead his “brave hosts to the Polovcian land” without consulting the Grand Prince Svjatoslav ought to be regarded not merely as “rash behavior” but as what was referred to in earlier studies referred to as a “sin of pride” and, indeed, a violation of the religious and political law of Kyivan Rus’.

It is especially important to note that the “Epilogue” to the “story of Igor,” which treats the prince’s escape from imprisonment and ultimate return to Rus’, may well be

linked with a decisive *change* in Igor's attitude of mind regarding his actions. What can thus be detected—as we move from the opening section to the concluding portion of *the Slovo*—are not only Igor Svjatoslavič's raid against the Polovcians, subsequent defeat, and ultimate escape from captivity but also a gradual process of *transformation* from the spiritual bondage of sin to liberating redemption [Goldblatt & Picchio 2009*].

Thus, if the reader interprets the *Slovo* in accordance with both the semantics highlighted above and the internal system of its moral and political references, the work emerges as a sort of religious *paradeigma*, written in the spirit of an ecclesiastic tradition and on the basis of the particular code that marked the composition and transmission of writings throughout the community of *Slavia orthodoxa*. If this conclusion is correct, further investigations of this controversial literary monument become easier. More specifically, one of the major obstacles that has long puzzled scholars of succeeding generations—namely, the allegedly secular (i.e., non-religious) character of the *Slovo*—would be removed as an object of concern.

These conclusions have profound consequences for our definition of the nature and function of the *Slovo*. More specifically, the term *slovo*, which is found in the extant title of the work, appears to be used to underscore its highly *oratorical* and *discursive* nature. Indeed, the *Slovo* is not to be considered either a “song” (*pěsnь*) or a “tale” (*pověstь*) about the raid of Prince Igor; rather it is to be regarded as a “*logos-sermo*”—or “*homilia-tractatus*”—that is, a product of *homiletic literature*, wherein the aim of “discourse” (*slovo*) is not directly to *relate* a historical treatment of Igor's raid but rather to *evoke* a response—often through the direct address of protagonists other than the narrator in the

course of the composition—to the “story” of Igor’s “willful” decision to go beyond the land of Rus’ and “break a lance at the border of the Polovcian field.”

In this way, the *Slovo*—by offering a series of evocative and oratorical “panels” that aims to elicit a reaction and call up memories about both past and present “feuds” (*usobicě*), and the search for “glory” as well as the condition of “vainglory” (*slava*), in Rus’—serves as a commentary, which is based, as we shall show, on a *scriptural* truth that sought both to explain the *literal* meaning and highlight the *spiritual* significance of Igor’s decision to lead his “brave hosts to the Polovcian land.” Hence, the *Slovo* appears to be neither a historical tale nor a work of an epic-heroic orientation celebrating the adventurous raid of Prince Igor’ against the Polovcians in 1185; it is, instead, a *discourse* that—in deploring the lack of unity in the land of Rus’—is to be viewed as a coherent whole that seeks to influence others through both the communication of ideas and a desire for action.

According to I. P. Eremin [1956 & 1963], the *Slovo* is a work of “rhetorical eloquence” and a written “monument of epideictic oratory.” However, in contradistinction to the generally-accepted view, the *Slovo* is a *ceremonial* oration not of praise and approbation but *of blame and censure*. In other words, the decision of Prince Igor to lead his “brave hosts to the Polovcian land” without consulting the Grand Prince Svjatoslav ought to be regarded not merely as “rash behavior” but as a “sin of pride” and, indeed, a violation of not only the political law but also the religious code of Kievan Rus’. Hence, the search for “glory” (*slava*), as well as the commonplace attributes of “boldness” (*mužestvo*) and “hardness” (*крѣнocmь*), used to describe Igor’s behavior in the the *Slovo*,

need to be evaluated within and conditioned by the larger context of the work. More specifically, a direct connection can be established between Igor's negative actions in certain portions of the *Slovo* and the wholesale condemnation of "vainglory" (*slava*) and "discord" (*kramola*) that distinguishes other parts of the *Slovo*.

On the basis of what has been adduced above, we conclude that the entire *Slovo* can be regarded as an oratorical "discourse," "treatise" or "sermon" that can be viewed as a commentary or oratorical response to the "tale" of Prince Igor's raid against the backdrop of other past and present examples of "discord" and "vainglory" in Rus'. In other words, the "style" or "type" of writing referred to in the *Slovo* as *pověstb* is to be placed in a position subordinate to the form of writing known as *slovo*, which is to be considered more authoritative and possessed of greater significance in the hierarchical arrangement of Orthodox Slavic literary compositions and which aims to reveal the "higher" meaning of any "tale" [Goldblatt 1993].

VIII.

Finally, let us turn to a brief discussion of the medieval Russian literary monument commonly known as the *Zadonščina* (hereafter *Zad*). For more than 150 years, scholarly analyses carried out by literary specialists, historians, linguists, and philologists alike have focused, among other topics, on the textual tradition of the *Zad* (as represented by six extant testimonies), the authorial tradition of the *Zad*, its date of composition, and its relationship to other works in the "Kulikovo Cycle." While it is fair to say that previous scholarship has yielded many positive insights and has helped us better understand the

nature, function, and origins of the *Zad*, one might wonder whether specialists in different fields of inquiry have succeeded in avoiding *a priori* assumptions or conclusions that would “prejudge” empirical examinations of the work. Indeed, as recent studies have confirmed, the critical investigations carried out by succeeding generations of scholars have only rarely engaged in autonomous inquiries into the rich textual tradition of the work. More frequently, instead, they have focused on the textual documentation of the *Zad* in relation to the *Slovo* in order to demonstrate that either that the latter is “original” and “primary” (i.e., an ancient product of Old Rus’ literary civilization) or “fabricated” and “secondary” (i.e., a modern *pastiche* of the late eighteenth century). It is important to emphasize, in this regard, that—for *both* “skeptics” and “defenders” alike—the high degree of attention devoted to the “authenticity” of the *Slovo* not only has depended on the apparent “scribal borrowings,” “textual connections” and “common readings” between the *Slovo* and the *Zad* but also has conditioned the conceptual framework within which the manuscript tradition of the latter work has been analyzed.

Nonetheless, it remains a matter of conjecture whether the studies devoted to the *Zad* that have been carried out primarily, or even exclusively, against the backdrop of arguments *pro* and *contra* the “genuineness” of the *I.T.* have permitted scholars to consider fully (i) the task of analyzing the seams and compositional units of the *Zad*, (ii) of identifying the precise limits of different textual units in the work, and (iii) of linking the composite character of the monument with the techniques of textual transmission that distinguished medieval Rus’ literary civilization. More specifically, one might ask whether scholars have sufficiently pondered the complex conditions that governed the process of textual

transmission in regard to the “changing texts” of East Slavic literary monuments such as the *Zad*, wherein the extant testimonies may have been affected by the scriptorial activities of an “open tradition” that maximized the possibility of reshaping and alteration at different times and in accordance with new needs. In the particular case of the *Zad*, moreover, the substantial evidence of redactional intervention in all extant testimonies permits us to wonder whether it is appropriate to proceed with textual comparisons as if it were possible to posit an “original text” or “archetype” for the work. In other words, one might question whether it is possible to demonstrate the unity of the *Zad* as it was prior to its complex evolution and to attempt a “reconstruction” that seeks “to check up on alleged extrapolations, to elicit the actual ones, and by a systematic comparison of the divergent variants to sift out everything not belonging to the actual archetype” [Jakobson & Worth 1966: 546].

In point of fact, the situation we confront in the study of the *Zad* might well oblige us to conclude that “the grouping of the testimonies does not show the branching out of a *traditio textus*, but the development of redactional variants around the body of common textual material” [Picchio 1977: 343-44]. It might be more appropriate, therefore, to speak of multiple *Zadonščiny* [Colucci 1977], wherein it is possible to distinguish in the extant textual documentation between “variant textual material,” which points to the partial autonomy of the textual witnesses, and “common textual material,” which reveals a fragmentary or partial *textus traditus* (i.e., textual units that have been transmitted more or less in an integral manner).

These considerations seem to be sufficiently well founded and should give us pause before we accept the stances taken and certain conclusions drawn by succeeding generations of scholars regarding the textual patrimony of both the *Slovo* and the *Zad*. Indeed, one may wonder whether notions, such as “authenticity” and “original text” or “forgery” and “fabrication,” as well as questions, such as “*When* was the *Slovo* and the *Zad* written?” or “*Who* wrote the *Slovo* and the *Zad*?,” can be applied to the history of works for which we cannot in fact provide (i) precise information on the problems of dating and authorship, (ii) tangible evidence that *Slovo* and *Zad*, as they have come down to us, are each the product of a single author (rather than of co-authors or compilers), and (iii) concrete proof that we are dealing with a “closed textual tradition” (i.e., the process of faithful textual transmission). Thus—and precisely because of the possibility of an “open textual tradition”—there is no justification for assuming that an analysis of an individual textual portion of the *Slovo* or the *Zad* may be generalized to include either the entire text or an analysis *en bloc* of the two literary monuments.

Of crucial importance for our purposes this morning is that the limited documentary significance of individual textual units for the history of both the *Slovo* and the *Zad*, one might conclude that new perspectives needed to be advanced beyond well-established ideas and concepts, such as “direct textual borrowings,” “lineal dependence,” “diptych structure,” and “centonical palinode,” for an understanding of the correct relationship between the *Slovo* and the *Zad* in general, and an elucidation of the precise contextual role and function of their “common textual material” in particular.

IX.

A cursory examination of main interpretative traditions regarding the interdependence of the *Slovo* and the *Zad* reveals two oppositions of particular relevance. First, largely on the basis of Roman Jakobson's studies that underscore the primacy of the *Slovo*, scholars frequently have contrasted the motif of defeat in the *Slovo* to the theme of victory in the *Zad*, wherein the latter has been viewed as a "deliberate replique" to the former. [Worth 1985: 526]. Indeed, for some of Jakobson's "loyal" followers, such as Ingham [2007: 835], the *Slovo* serves as the *subtext* of the *Zad*, that is as "a previous text [*Slovo*] to which the present work [*Zad*] is responding in one important sense or another, in a relationship which a competent audience is required to perceive."

Second, largely grounded in the "Romantic shadow of Ossian" and the definition of the *Slovo* as a "heroic epic" [Keenan 2003: 1-4], defenders of the "authenticity" thesis often have distinguished between the "secular" and "profane" thematics of the former work and the "firmly Christian framework" of the *Zad*. Indeed, for "skeptics," such as Keenan [2003: 204-05, 400-04], who believe that the *Slovo* must have been composed *after* the appearance of the *Zad*, not only is the text of the former unquestionably dependent on the textual material of the latter but in matters of lexicon and semantics the *I.T.* has been "deChristianized."

Third, some scholars recently have sought to make the case that, as Donald Ostrowski [2009: 12] pointed out in his paper for this panel, the *Slovo* "is not primary but not a fabrication either. Both Šibaev [2003] and Bobrov [2005] consider it to be an authentic work of the third quarter of the fifteenth century, but attributed it to different

authors [i.e., Sofonij of Rjazan and Efrosin of the Kirillo-Beloozerskij Monastery]. Both scholars argue that their respective candidate worked on it while he was working on *Zadonščina*. In this way, they can explain readings in *Zadonščina* that seem to be second in relation to the [*Slovo*] and vice versa.”

In any event, the real issue for many “defenders” and “skeptics” alike is the notion that the *Slovo* betrays a “secular narrative” that is in sharp contrast with with the ecclesiastic motifs that pervade the literary culture of Old Rus´ and Muscovite Russia. For many scholars, therefore, the “epic conventions” as well as the presence of “locally-inspired topoi” appear to set the *Slovo* apart from the conventions of the medieval East Slavic literary patrimony; more specifically, in their view, the references to *pagan* deities and *mythological* creatures would seem to be presented in direct contradistinction to the *Christian* thematics of the *Zad*. As I have already tried to point out, this opposition of secular-profane/religious-sacred that allegedly marks the relationship between the *Slovo* and the *Zad* is in serious need of reassessment.

X.

In conclusion, on the basis of the traditional methods of textual criticism, some innovative results can be achieved through a comparative analysis of portions of “common textual material” between the *Slovo* and the *Zad*, and a close examination of the motifs in the relevant textual units, but without any assumption of the direct textual interdependence that long has governed past and present critical debates. The comparison aims to elucidate the *contextual* function of the constituent elements in the two works in

order to ascertain whether—and if so, to what extent—the programmatic intent and thematics of the *Slovo* and the *Zad* provide similar, or totally diverse, stories [Goldblatt & Picchio 2009]. This type of research might well elucidate the complex relationship between the *Slovo* and the *Zad*, demonstrating that the two works—despite the presence of “common textual material”—lay bare quite different motifs and very distinct portraits of the “psychological states” for the protagonists of the two works. Through an admittedly partial study of “common textual material” within the “changing contexts” of the *Slovo* and the *Zad*, we might be able to conclude that the predominant scholarly trend mentioned above, which discusses the relationship of the two works primarily in terms of “direct influence,” “deliberate replique,” or “text and subtext,” appears to be in urgent need of revision.