



# MILITARY TALES OF ANCIENT RUS'

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Russian 2700 (Medieval Rus')

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## “What is a *voinskaia povest*’?” by Anthony Stokes

- Aleksandr Orlov (1902): *voinskaia povest*' as a separate literary genre that incorporates certain fixed formulae
- Two types: chronicle accounts of Igor's campaign vs *Slovo o polku Igoreve*
- *Voinskaia povest*' vs *istoricheskaia povest*'



## What is a *voinskaia povest'*?

- *Voinskie povesti drevnei Rusi*: “[...] V gody tiazhkikh ispytanii voinskaia povest’ napominala chitateliam o tekh silakh, kakie taiatsia v narode—podlinnoi opore gosudarstva, podnimala dukh na bor’bu za svobodu i nezavisimost’ rodiny.”
- Avtomonova: “Voinskaia povest’ predstavliala soboi svetskuiu istoricheskuiu povest’ kak original’nuiu, tak i perevodnuiu, posviashchennuiu izobrazheniu voinskikh podvigov, s opisaniem bitv [...] proniknuto patrioticheskim pafosom, trevogoi za sud’by rodiny, otrazhaet bor’bu russkogo naroda za natsional’nuiu nezavisimost’.”

## What is a *voinskaia povest'*?

- Pereverzev: only one *voinskaia povest'* has survived to this day (*Slovo o polku Igoreve*)
- *Voinskaia povest'* as a separately developed genre vs *voinskaia povest'* as part of a chronicle
- *The Battle on the River Kalka, Tale of the Destruction of Riazan, and Zadonshchina*—*voinskie povesti*?



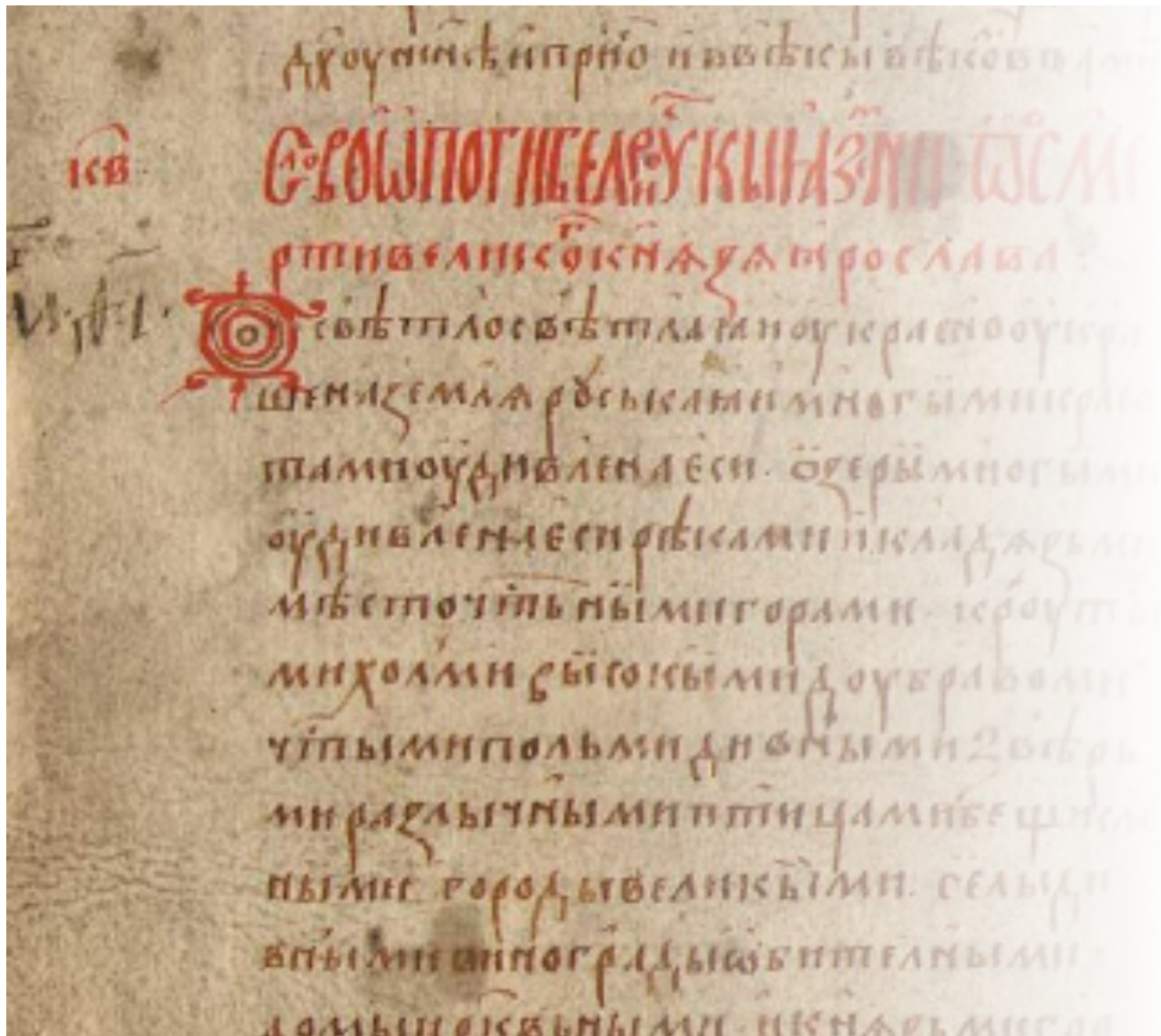
# How does Stokes begin to formulate the “right” questions?

- Orlov’s observations + Likhachev’s “literary etiquette”
- What is a “pure” *voinskaia povest*?
  - *voinskie* povesti were heroic narratives praising military valour, elements of which were taken by later scribes and copiers to form part of the “literary etiquette” of Russian medieval literature and used in descriptions of battles in chronicles
- Prerequisites for the *voinskaia povest*’ to develop in 11 c. Rus’:
  - native heroic oral tradition;
  - translations that could be emulated;
  - writers close to the *druzhina* (prince’s retinue) who knew of oral traditions
- But... no examples of a “pure” *voinskaia povest*’ so far

# The Battle on the River Kalka







## Orison on the Downfall of Russia





## **The Tale of the Destruction of Riazan'**

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On the left: **Batu**

On the right: **Princess**

**Eupraxy**



What are some stylistic features in the *Tale of the Destruction of Riazan'* that can be found in Russian *byliny* (or in the knightly epics of Western Europe)?







Prince Ingvar  
Ingvarevich





St Mercurius – myth or reality?





St Mercurius fighting against the army of Batu







St Mercurius returning to  
Smolensk (N. Rerikh, 1918)

## **"The Defeat and Death of Batu" by Charles Halperin (1983)**

1. How did Batu's image change throughout medieval Russian literature? When did the "anomalous works" emerge? What triggered the more "conservative outlook" on Batu and the Tatars?
2. "The *Tale of the Destruction of Riazan*' is a very heterogeneous text which presents more than one point of view of the Tatars." What viewpoints can we notice in the tale?

## **“Evolution of a Metaphor in Old Russian Literature” by George Krugovoi (1972)**

1. What are the three dimensions of the cup metaphor and how do they relate to the events that unfold in the *Tale of the Destruction of Riazan*’?
2. How do *Slovo o polku Igoreve* and the *Tale of the Destruction of Riazan*’ compare in terms of metaphors and military formulae? Are there any other tales you’ve read that make use of the cup metaphor?



**THE END**

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