

Conference Reports

RIABININ READINGS 1999

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The third International Scholarly Conference "Riabinin Readings" took place from September 20-24, 1999 in Petrozavodsk. (1). The conference takes its name from the outstanding performer of Russian epics Trofim Riabinin. The Museum and repository of Kizhi and the Government of Kareliawere the main organizers of the conference. The conference took place in Petrozavodsk and in attendance were folklorists, ethnomusicologists, ethnographers, linguists, architects, restorers, and art historians from Moscow, Petersburg, Vologda, Archangel, Syktyvkar, Novosibirsk, Nizhni Novgorod, Kursk, Kiev, Vilnius, Paris, and, of course, Petrozavodsk. Both plenary meetings and parallel sessions were held. The main themes of the conference were: the Folk Art and Crafts of the Russian North, The Christian Culture of the Russian North, and Folklore Traditions of the Russian North. Since the author of this communication took part in the work of the last section, this report will concentrate on folk culture.

In accordance with the decision of the preceding conference, Riabinin Readings-1999 was dedicated to the topic: The Master and the Folk Artistic Tradition of the Russian North. This was also the title which the chair of the organizing committee of the conference, Corresponding Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences, K. V. Chistov (St. Petersburg) chose for the talk with which he opened the first plenary meeting on September 20th. Chistov isolated the main problems which emerge in connection with the figure of a master in folk culture. These include: mythologization of the singer in the people's consciousness (a belief that his ability to sing was acquired by miraculous means); the problem of professionalism and the framing of this concept in Russian folk culture; the transmission of skills and of mastery, and the mechanisms for the reproduction of the tradition; variation within the tradition; and the principle of variation in the work of a master. Specific application of these problems was made in each of the reports presented during the conference. As at past conferences, the Russian epic (*bylina*) (and, more broadly, the sung epic of Russians and other peoples) continued to be the focus of many speakers' presentations. In his report "The Meaning of Duplicate Recordings of a Folklore Transmission from Both Participants (Teacher and Pupil), as seen in the art of the Altai singers Kalkin, M. V. Gatsak (Moscow) demonstrated the methodological significance of a synoptic comparison of variants. The variants in questions were performances recorded at different times from

a teacher and from his pupil. In her paper "Religious Verses: Tradition in the Light of Folklore Recordings," V. A. Bakhtina (Moscow), also drawing on multiple recordings of a single item, in this case religious songs, urged listeners to pay attention to questions of the stability of folk tradition. She looked at the relationship between the expression of tradition and the form of presentation or recording. The forms she examined were: manuscript recording; sung performance of a verse; its reading as a versified variant; performance in which singing is interrupted by prose asides; and prose paraphrasing of the entire item. N. A. Krinichnaia (Petrozavodsk) brought to the attention of the conference participants a paper entitled "The Making of a Performer: The Role of the Communal Principle." She showed conclusively that the Russian community sanctions the devotion of each of its members to tradition. The performer, in her opinion, was a spokesman for communal ideals. Thus, she finds it natural that traditional folk poetry began to die out at the same time as communal life became less important and allegiance to the community declined. S. V. Vorobeva (Petrozavodsk) concentrated on the phenomenon of families of epic singers. Certain families produced a number of outstanding performers and, drawing upon extensive documentation (birth records and confessional books), the speaker showed the family and godparent relationships of Ignatii Andreev and Konon Savinov. These were epic singers from whom we have no recordings, but whose art we know through the performances of their descendants. T. G. Riabinin belonged to the circle of I. I. Andreev, who was himself related to another famous singer; he was the cousin once-removed of Kizhanian. S. Z. Vorobeva revealed information about T. G. Riabinin which had previously been unknown. She reported that she had found documents which gave the date of the famous singer's birth as April 15, 1801 (old style) and the place as the village of Garnitsa. A. N. Vlasov (Syktyvkar) in his paper, "The Family School of Pinega Performers of Bylinas," also looked at "dynasties" of epic performers, in his case the Chuprov family. In the Ust-Tsilem and Pinega tradition, many performers were also preceptors and the epic tradition was characterized by conflation. The geographical locale of this tradition, the area around the Pechora River, was settled rather late (in the beginning of the eighteenth century) and owed much to the exodus of Old Believers into areas distant from the Russian capital. The late date of settlement and the influence of Old Believers might account for both features of the local epic tradition. Thus, in the Chuprov family, epic singers frequently were both preceptors (*nastavnik*) and scribes (*knizhnik*).

A number of reports were devoted to specific Russian epic masters. The mechanisms of repertory formation in the art of one of the great epic singers were demonstrated in the paper presented by Iu. A. Novikov (Vilnius), "The Making of a Master: The Repertory of I. T. Fofanov within the

Context of the Prionega Epic Tradition." The investigator argued that the performer's repertory, when that singer is of master caliber, is not determined by his early years alone, but continues to grow and develop throughout the course of his entire life. "The Strange Bylina of Trofim Riabinin" was the title of the report given by Iu. I. Smirnov (Moscow) who examined Riabinin's version of "Skopin," an epic in which Mikita Romanovich unexpectedly appears. In her paper "The Repertory of M. D. Krivopolenova in the Folklore Tradition of the Pinega Region, Archangel Oblast," A. A. Ivanova (Moscow) raised a question about layers of epic song. In the art of the famous Makhonka there are two layers: a local (Pinega) one and non-local one borrowed from neighboring North-Russian traditions. As the speaker showed, in the Pinega area, these two layers developed differently in the ensuing years. T. G. Ivanova (Petersburg) devoted her report to the topic "The Performer and Official Folklore Policy in the 1930's." She concentrated on the well known, but highly controversial, page in the history of the country's scholarship when folklorists allowed themselves to direct the art of folk performers and to guide them toward the creation of epic songs glorifying Soviet reality. Noting the ideological component behind these processes, the speaker tried to show that traditional and indigenous forces were simultaneously also at work and aided in the creation of "newsongs" (*novina*) and laments for Soviet leaders. In his paper, "The Idiolect of the Epic Singer: A Dictionary of the Language of Russian Folklore," A. T. Khrolenko (Kursk) raised the important question of the performer as linguistic personality. The investigator told the participants of the conference about the work of Kursk folklorists in compiling a dictionary of the language of the *bylina*. Linguistic topics also were explored in another group of reports: "Realization of Potential Words in the Individual Speech of a Performer" (L. P. Mikhailova, Petrozavodsk), "Vocabulary of Baltic-Finnic Origin in the Epics Recorded by P. N. Rybnikov and A. F. Gilferding" (S. A. Myznikov, St. Petersburg), and "A Performer's Perception of Color" (E. I. Novikova, Petrozavodsk).

When a conference meets in Karelia, papers on the topic of runes are a given. Thus E. S. Kiruru (Petrozavodsk), in his talk entitled "The Creative Method of Arhippa Perttunen," showed how E. Lennorot's meeting with this famous rune singer influenced the composition of the "Kalevala" and its style. In her report, E. G. Rakhimova (Moscow) examined the role of artistic comparisons in the repertory of the rune singers Perttunen and Maura Martini. In her communication, "A Comparison of the Characteristic Singing Timbers Used by Traditional Runes and Russian Epics Performers," I. B. Semakova (Petrozavodsk) emphasized that, when it comes to singing timber, the epics of these two peoples do not coincide and runes appear much more archaic than Russian epics. The figure of the master tale-teller also occupied an important place at the conference. E. A. Kostiukhin (St.

Petersburg) devoted his report to the famous tale teller from Zaonezhia, F.P. Gospodarev, who was a Belarusian by origin. The speaker emphasized that, if in the study of the Russian epics the concept of "school" is meaningful, then, when it comes to the investigating the processes governing tale repertory and its composition, it is necessary to go beyond the concept of "tradition" and look for schools here also. K. E. Korepova (Nizhni Novgorod) in her paper based on the works of M. M. Korguev, "A Northern Tale Teller and Popular Print Media (lubok)," proposed reexamining some assumptions about this talented bearer of the folk tradition which have become fixed in scholarly consciousness. A. N. Nechaev, who discovered M.M. Korguev, assumed that monumental style and ascribing psychological motivation to tale characters were tokens of his individual style and his style alone. As Korepova shows, these traits actually reflect the teller's acquaintance with popular prints (*lubki*). In her paper "The Individual Style and Mastery of the Komi Tale Teller I. I. Igushev," N. S. Korovina (Syktyvkar) also raised the problem of the relationship between tale teller and popular prints. As it turns out, Russian books of popular prints influenced not only the Russian tale tradition, but also the folklore repertory of neighboring peoples.

Many conference reports dealt with the problem of a master and his relationship to other (usually meaning non-epic) folklore genres. The paper by I. A. Razumova (Petrozavodsk), "The Professional Status of the Individual through the Prism of Family Folklore," provoked lively interest. She examined a large group of contemporary legends existing in families, narratives which tell about an ancestor's profession and how that profession came to influence the names of his descendants. She also looked at narratives which involve various kinds of predictions determining future profession. I. I. Mullonen and N. N. Mamontova (Petrozavodsk) discussed the art of informants who possessed information about local toponyms. Drawing on extensive materials collected in the field, N. V. Drannikova (Archangel) in her paper "The Image of the Citizen of Archangel as Expressed in Nick Names" examined nicknames extant among residents of the Archangel Oblast'. She drew upon actual nick names and also proverbs, songs (some performed as part of Carnival), legends, and anecdotes. I. Iu. Vinokurova's (Petrozavodsk) report was dedicated to contemporary Veps performers of memorates about animals. I. B. Teplova (St. Petersburg) offered listeners a portrait of N. I. Karaseva, a performer of incantations from the Gdovsk region, Pskovoblast'. T. V. Krasnopolskaia (Petrozavodsk) described another performer - Anastasiia Soboleva, a singer from Pudoga. Video materials accompanied both reports. In his talk "The Role of a Master in the Establishment of Major Folk Instrumental Music Forms" Iu. E. Boiko spoke about the work of A. P. Stepycheva, an accordion (*garmon-minorka*) performer from the Tikhvin region, Leningrad oblast'. In his talk "True and Pseudo Sorcerers of

Zaonezhie" K. K. Loginov (Petrozavodsk) proposed that true sorcerers be distinguished from pseudosorcerers based on whether they possessed extrasensory talents or used props. In his opinion, those who used various substances, such as bear tallow for stopping a wedding train, would be working for their own self-seeking purposes and would fall under the rubric of pseudo-sorcerers. Iu. V. Rozanov's (Vologda) talk "The Writer in the Mask of a Performer: Examining the Influence of Master Performers on Literature" was devoted to the works of A. M. Remizov. In the opinion of the speaker, when P. N. Rybnikov and A. F. Gilferding discovered a living Russian epic tradition, they introduced the figure of the performer into the cultural consciousness of the Russian intelligentsia. This, in turn, influenced literature, as can be seen in the writings of A. M. Remizov and N. A. Kliuev, who would sometimes assume the mask of a performer. Supplementing and at the same time opposing each other were the communications of R. B. Kalashnikova (Petrozavodsk), "The Mastery of the Performers of Winter Round Dances of Zaonezhie: Verbal and Non-Verbal Aspects," and M. L. Lurie (St. Petersburg), "The Masters of Mummery in Traditional Folk Culture." The first report showed how the ideal image of a bride and the ideal world of her existence were created at get-togethers (*beseda*). In the second, the world of Christmas pranks with their complex opposition of "disguised" (*riazhenyi*) and "not-disguised" was presented. O. A. Cherepanova (St. Petersburg) proposed in an examination of the mythologeme of the journey and its realization in various folklore genres.

The concluding plenary session took place on September 24th, the last day of the conference. That day was devoted to the one-hundredth anniversary of the death of the outstanding Zaonezhie lamentress Irina Andreevna Fedosova: June 10, 1899 (old style) or June 22 (new style). In 1997 K. V. and B. E. Chistov brought out the first new scholarly edition of E. V. Barsov's "Laments of the Northern Country" to appear since the collection was first published. (2) S. M. Loiter's (Petrozavodsk) report was devoted to this edition. As the speaker herself aptly put it, the new edition was the product of three masters: the talented folk poetess I. A. Fedosova, the conscientious and devoted collector and publisher E. V. Barsov, and the outstanding researcher of folk culture, K. V. Chistov. K. V. Chistov's commentary to "Laments of the North Country," brings together an extensive and profound textological, linguistic, sociological, juridical, economic, mythological, literary, and, of course, folkloristic fund of information. The accompanying paper "I. A. Fedosova and the Vygzero School of Lamentresses," placed the outstanding wailer and her wedding laments within the context of the local tradition. Video recordings were included here also. In their communication N. D. Gusarova and N. Iu. Fedorenko (Petrozavodsk) examined traditional rhetorical devices in the laments of I. A. Fedosova. The poet and specialist on local lore I. A. Kostin (Petrozavodsk) offered listeners a paper entitled "The

Homeland of Irina Fedosova." Papers dealing with the lament traditions of other ethnic groups were also presented. Thus, O. O. Mikitenko (Kiev) talked about "Tradition and Improvisation in Serbian Laments." A. S. Stepanova (Petrozavodsk) concentrated on the repertory of P. S. Saveleva, a Karelian performer from the Medvezhiegorsk region, in particular her laments. The report of V. A. Lapin (St. Petersburg) occupied a special place at the conference. In it, the late Boris Nikolaevich Putilov, who helped inspire past Riabinin Readings, himself emerged as a performer and a bearer of the folk tradition of the Greben Cossacks. At the last conference, V. A. Lapin was fortunate enough to record from Putilov a historical song about how Ivan the Terrible rewarded the Cossacks with lands on the River Terek. Comparison of this recording with recordings from folksingers unquestionably confirmed the authenticity of B. N. Putilov's performance. The author himself unfortunately could not come to Petrozavodsk so E. E. Vasileva presented his talk. On September 22nd the participants of the conference visited the island of Kizhi. In the famous Pokrov Church, where divine service has now been renewed, a liturgy was performed for the deceased Kizhi performers Trofim (Riabinin), Domna (Surikova), Kuzma (Romanov), Vasili (Shchegolenok) and others. The name of Boris, that is Boris Nikolaevich Putilov, who departed this life on October 16, 1997 was included in the list of performers.

As a part of the conference, the thoughtful hosts of the Riabinin Readings presented the participants an intensive and interesting cultural program. One event in the program was the staging of a fragment of the Zaonezhie wedding ritual: showing the bride to the groom after match making. It was performed by members of the Folklore-Ethnographic Theater of the Museum Preserve and their teenage children and directed by E. V. Gerasimov. This performance was held on the island of Kizhi, in the house that had belonged to the singer Iakovlev, which is now one of the exhibits of the museum of wooden architecture. All guests at the conference noted not only the high artistic, but also the genuine scholarly level of this reproduction of the wedding ritual fragment. The scholarly director of the theater, R. B. Kalashnikova, said that, in addition to the item performed for the conference participants, the program of the theater also included a Zaonezhie get-together (*beseda*) collected by P. N. Rybnikov, a get-together from the 1920's, a fragment of the ritual "visit of the bride among the guests," an evening meeting (*vecherina*) of young people in Pomorie, a peasant dance dated somewhere between the second half of the nineteenth century and the 1920's, along with other items. Of equal interest was another form live exhibit which has recently been added to the museum: the revival of traditional trades and crafts. The houses which constitute the displays of the museum were being used by Kizhi participants of the live exhibit to prepare wooden toys. Also being prepared were

small figures of the heroes called "panki" which are based on popular prints and are likely to be an evolution of the pagan idols that had been wide spread in Zaonezhie. In addition, women's adornments were being made out of beads as they once had been made out of river pearls. On display also was the technology of sewing on a pillow, embroidery with satin slit stitch and chain stitch, gold needlework, and work on a loom. On the evening on September 22nd, in Petrozavodsk, M. I. Milchik presented a lecture and slide show: "On the Architectural Monuments of Scandinavia." This lecture let listeners see for themselves how much the wooden architecture of Norway and the Russian North have in common and, at the same time, how individual the culture of each people is. On September 24th a round table took place and there commendations of the conference were discussed. A decision was taken to publish the materials of the conference, (3) and to recommend to the organs of the local self government of Petrozavodsk and Medvezhegorsk that they examine proposals for memorializing the names of the performers of the Riabinin family. The summary document noted with approval the experiment of the Museum-Preserve in the creation of live revived expositions. It was decided to hold the next Riabinin Readings in 2003.

Notes

(1) See our account about the second conference: T. G. Ivanova, "The Conference: Riabinin Readings," *Zhivaia starina*, no. 4 (1995): 62-63.

(2) *Prichitania Severnogo kraia, sobrannye E. B. Barsovyim* [Laments of the North Country Collected by E. V. Barsov], prepared by B. E. Chistova and K. V. Chistov, SPb., 1997, 2 vols.

(3) The materials of the Second Riabinin Readings have been published: *Mezhdunarodnaia nauchnaia konferentsiia po problemam izucheniia, soxraneniia i aktualizatsii narodnoi kultury Russkogo Severa: Riabininskie chteniia 1995: Sbornik dokladov* [International scholarly conference on the problems of study, preservation, and actualization of the folk culture of North Russia: Riabinin readings 1995: Collection of reports], Petrozavodsk, 1997. 11