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**SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DIMENSIONS  
OF THE OLD RUSSIAN LITERATURE OF THE 11–12 CENTURIES  
(PHILOSOPHICAL AND CULTURAL ESSAY EXPERIENCE)**

**Abstract:** The purpose of the study is to consider Old Russian literature of the XI–XII centuries within the context of Russian culture, which is of lasting significance. The main tasks are to comprehend high spirituality, patriotic love, and Christian universalism, as well as to identify the spiritual and moral dimensions of Old Russian literature. Mental constructions are embodied in the diversity of cultural creations, and their objective, comprehensive analysis requires involvement of not only verbal, but also non-verbal monuments. The attraction to a lively vivid word, a special interest in moral, historical subjects may be considered as certain advantages, because they raised the philosophical significance of culture as a whole and were addressed to the most topical issues of historical life. Following the development of Russian philosophical thought of the 11–12 centuries, we can trace the process of its gradual formation and the development of sustainable traditions. In the Old Russian milieu, certain notions about the development of world and domestic thought are being formed, and what can be called historical and philosophical knowledge is arising. A lot of research by historians, philosophers, and art historians addressed the relations of old Russian culture with Russian culture of 17–20 centuries. One of the vital tasks of modern Russian philosophical thought is the recognition of its unity with the more than a thousand-year-old tree of Russian culture, the development of those enduring values that were created by our people over many centuries of their constant creative work.

**Keywords:** Typological, Philosophy of History, Existence, Spiritual, Moral, Heritage, Research, Annals.

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**ДУХОВНО-ПРАВСТВЕННОЕ ИЗМЕРЕНИЕ  
ДРЕВНЕРУССКОЙ КНИЖНОСТИ XI–XII ВВ.  
(ОПЫТ ФИЛОСОФСКО-КУЛЬТУРОЛОГИЧЕСКОГО ЭССЕ)**

**Аннотация:** Цель статьи — рассмотреть духовно-нравственное измерение древнерусской книжности XI–XII вв. в рамках русской культуры, которая имеет непреходящее значение. Основные задачи — осмысление высокой духовности, патриотической любви и христианского универсализма, а также выявление духовно-нравственных измерений древнерусской книжности. Ментальные конструкции воплощены в разнообразии культурных творений, и их объективный, всесторонний анализ требует привлечения не только вербальных, но и невербальных памятников. Тяготение к живому яркому слову, особый интерес к нравственным, историческим сюжетам, эти черты можно рассматривать как определенные преимущества, потому что они поднимали философское значение культуры в целом и были обращены к самым животрепещущим вопросам исторической жизни. Прослеживая развитие русской философской мысли XI–XII вв., мы можем увидеть процесс ее постепенного становления и развития устойчивых традиций. В древнерусской среде формируются определенные представления о развитии мировой и отечественной мысли, зарождается то, что можно назвать историко-философским знанием. Много исследований историков, философов и искусствоведов было посвящено связям древнерусской культуры с русской культурой XVII–XX вв. Одной из жизненно важных задач современной русской философской мысли является признание ее единства с более чем тысячелетним древом русской культуры, развитие тех непреходящих ценностей, которые были созданы нашим народом за многие века его постоянного созидательного труда.

**Ключевые слова:** типологический, философия истории, бытие, духовный, нравственный, наследие, исследование, летописи.

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At the center of art and literature throughout history, there is a man. As a social being, he does not remain unchanged every time, reflecting the peculiarities of his epoch. The Old Russian society gradually developed its own moral canons of human behavior. Being embodied in the literature of that time, they reflected the combination of archaic phenomena of pagan culture with new forms of feudal Christian ideology. The principle of the formation

of ethical ideas in the 11–12 centuries was the generalization of the phenomena of society, moral relationships of people, and their rethinking on Russian soil. These historical and cultural processes have left imprint on the figurative system of literary monuments having a specific character, since the development of writing in Russia up to the XVII century had a spiritual character.

Our ideals have been inherited from our fathers and grandfathers. They have deep roots in Russian history and culture, their spirit and content are considered to be clearly understandable. In the article, “Conversations about the far and near” D.S. Likhachev wrote: “Нам надо усваивать уроки нашей многовековой культуры, нашей великой литературы, главный среди которых — урок наивысочайшей нравственности” (We need to learn the lessons of our centuries-old culture from our great literature, the main lesson of which is the lesson of the highest morality) [5].

The works, created during that period in Russia, had a tendency to teach “како подобает человеку бытию” (how a person should be) [6]. They preached historiosophical ideas about the requirements imposed on the individual in certain situations about the qualities of a character necessary to fulfill the duties assigned to a person. The great spiritual and moral themes that worried the old Russian scribes and transferred them into literature have not lost their relevance today. The spiritual wealth of old Russian literature is great and it was a part of reality and one of the ways to transform the world around us. The forms of social existence, the relationships between people, found a peculiar reflection in it. The living connection with the ideals of time, the height of moral consciousness, and the desire to answer the main questions of existence and affirm goodness and justice, determined the instructive and educational pathos of the works of old Russian literature.

The literature of that remote time is very complex and diverse: the didactic works of the 11–12 centuries contained the ideals of forgiveness, humility, and the obedience to the authorities, explained by the historical development of Russian society in the Middle Ages. The struggle of ideas, the intensive attempts of various groups of Russian society in the 11–12 centuries to influence human consciousness, eradicating the remnants and correcting faults were embodied in the works of ancient Russian writers. The old Russian literature must have been filled with high spirituality and wisdom, reflecting alongside the positive ideal, all the negative features of Russian society. The works are thought to have been active participants in the life of the past centuries. The best ethical traditions, particularly the moral ideal of self-awareness and patriotism, can and should serve the cause of forming the moral views of a modern generation. Finding a different context in old truths, perceived as having an aesthetic and cognitive value, is the main sense of studying Russian literature of the 11–12 centuries. “Чем ближе мы возвращаемся к Древней Руси и чем пристальнее начинаем смотреть на нее, не через окно прорубленное Петром в Европу, а теперь, когда мы восприняли Европу как свою, которая оказалась для нас окном в Древнюю Русь, на которую мы глядим как чужие — извне, тем яснее для нас, что в Древней Руси существовала своеобразная и великая культура — культура невидимого града Китежа, как бы незримая, плохо понятая и плохо изученная, не поддающаяся измерению нашими европейскими мерками высоты культуры и не подчиняющаяся нашим шаблонным представлениям о том, какой должна быть настоящая культура” (The closer we return to Ancient Russia and the more closely we begin to look at it, not through the window that Peter cut into Europe, but now that we have perceived Europe as our own, which turned out to be for us a window to Ancient Russia, which we look at as strangers — from the outside, the clearer it is for us that in Ancient Russia there was a peculiar and great culture — the culture of the invisible city of

Kitezh, as if invisible, poorly understood and poorly studied, not measurable by our European standards of culture and not obeying our template ideas about what a real culture should be) [3, с. 4].

Ancient Russian literature had a tendency to reflect real life and and multi-dimensionally embrace it, generalizing both the positive and negative features of social development, creating specifically historical and ethical ideals. Responding to the principle of the aesthetic, it performed moral and educational function, revealing the socially significant ideas of its time. The didactic essence of ancient Russian literature identified the depictions of the beautiful and ugly in human behavior. Russian literature of that time is characterized by high moral standards and patterns of behavior. It presented its moral, social and philosophical ideals declaratively, expressing them not indirectly, but directly subordinating everything to this task, leaving nothing to chance. Ancient Russian writers assigned the title role to the teaching word as a means of having an influence on a person. They honored and glorified the word, that “Слово есть образ дела” (The word is the image of the deed) [8, т. 1, с. 1]. The word has the power to be able to make a person do a decent, noble deed and avert from bad decisions. The purpose of the literature of the 11–12 centuries meant having said reasonable words which would be able to encourage people to be wholly dedicated to a perfect life. The role of the book’s edification is thought to have been a guide in order to make a beneficial contribution to the right life choice. The practical purpose of the book for contemporaries and descendants was to fulfill this essential issue. “Не пренебрегай повестью мудрых и упражняйся в притчах их; ибо от них научишься ведению и — как служить сильным” (Do not despise the stories of the wise and live in their parables; for from them you will learn how to lead and how to serve the strong) [1].

The tale of bygone years creates the image of an instructive, all-embracing word, raising the significance of book reading. The chronicler is likely to quote the Slavic princes: Rostislav, Svyatoslav and Kocel turned to the Greek tsar Michael with a request to interpret the holy books in 898; Prince Vladimir Svyatoslavich, who must have loved the book words; prince Yaroslav the Wise [7].

The works of ancient Russian writers determined moral and philosophical issues of existence closely interrelated with political concerns, striving for moral improvement and orientation to the education of the heart. The didactic trend of ancient Russian literature is believed to have been aimed at improving morality. Observations on a person’s inner world are considered to have been developed in chronicles, historical stories and legends. The literature of Russia in the 11–12 centuries was a school of life for Russian medieval society. In spite of the fact that the works were different in subject matter and problems, they were united by patriotism. All the moral categories embodied in the teaching works had a socio-class conditionality, and the principles of figurative reflection in literature were subordinated to the interests of the early feudal state.

Analyzing life, the Old Russian writers created ideas about the proper against the background of the ideal transformation of reality and the idealization of specific phenomena. They encouraged people to improve themselves to the level of the ideal. There must have been the principle of the connection of living life with the theoretical categories of the Christian ethical system on the one hand, and the principle of applying theoretical knowledge in practice on the other. The diversity of the life activities of Russian medieval society determined the extended views of the problems of instructive works, from teaching against pagan superstitions and prejudices to edification. The authors rose to the understanding of the most complex ethical criteria, putting them among the eternal truths — religious doctrines.

From teaching sermons on the most important Christian-moral categories to philosophical understanding of the criteria of the Christian ethical system (solemn sermons). All of them equally served the purpose of edifying a person on the right path. The authors of the “common civic virtues” teach perseverance, bravery, indefatigability and courage. They blamed malice, lies, flattery, greed, idleness, anger, fornication. Edification was supposed to be based on the same principles, the most important of which were the systematic recurrence of fundamental truths and the sequence of their presentation with the necessary accessible explanations. The principle of the representation of moral categories in the words of “the Elector of 1076” was based on the awareness of ethical criteria. The former would apply to the metaphor language, making a comparison with the real, well-known phenomena, ordinary symbols’ descriptions of scenes from everyday life that serve as an allegory. The principle of gradual increase of difficulty from the simple and habitual to the complex symbolism, allegory and the philosophical understanding of ethical categories is the basis of the method of Kirill Turovsky's solemn words.

These ideological and artistic techniques used in ancient Russian sermons were determined by a single task of the scribes: to form a new person in the conditions of strengthening Christianity as a state ideology. The teachings are thought to have consistently been dominated by the authority of nature, the ancestor, the family, and God's commandment. The latter eventually determined the principle of a moral and Christian background that is uniform and common for all types of didactic works. The idea of the fear of God and excommunication from the kingdom of heaven for earthly sins determined the principle of the image in the edification of the prophets.

Taking into account the principle of contrasting paganism as a symbol of sin with Christianity as a symbol of virtue, the authors of the teachings are believed to have entirely relied on other authorities of significance. Russian writers often used traditional folk views on nature, personifying its phenomena, they would clarify the main concepts of Christian, ethical doctrine, and converse about the unnatural nature of human vices. Based on the principle of education of patriotism, Russian didactic literature of the 11–12 centuries fostered in Old Russian society a high moral sense of civic consciousness. The categories of ethical and aesthetic organically merged in the mind of the medieval writer. Goodness is said to be always beautiful and full of light and glory, whereas evil has a direct connection with darkness and obscuration of mind. An evil person is like a wild beast and even worse than a demon, because the devil is afraid of the cross, and an evil person doing evil is afraid of nothing and no one. The medieval writer's works are typically based on the contrast of good and evil, ideal and negative characters. He demonstrates that the high moral qualities of a person are the result of his constant hard work and moral feats. He is convinced that “имя и слава почетнее человеку, нежели красота, ибо слава вечно прибывает, а лицо после смерти увядает” (a name and glory are more honorable to a person than beauty, because glory always arrives and the face fades after death) [2]. The notable feature of modern cultural life is the growing interest in the development of the historical past. This gives rise to a sense of the compactness of time, as if a shrinking distance separates modernity from antiquity, causing a heightened sense of historicism, the desire to determine one's own place in the historical connection of times, in the dialogue of the present century with the past. The craving for ancient Russian culture is a symptomatic phenomenon, and it was primarily caused by the intention of turning to their national traditions.

Every culture is likely to look for connections with the past, referring to one of the cultures of the past. For instance, the Renaissance and classicism turned to antiquity, whereas

our modern culture refers to the epochs of the struggle for national independence and to heroic themes. The study of our past can enrich our modern culture. A modern interpretation of the ideas, images and traditions can teach us a lot. A constant active interest in the historical past, including very distant epochs, is stated at various levels of modern public life. The celebrations of the anniversaries of Kiev, Novgorod, Yaroslavl and other ancient cities of our motherland have become truly national events in the cultural life of the country.

“Развитие культуры не есть только движение вперед, простое перемещение в пространстве — переход культуры на новые передовые позиции. Развитие культуры есть прежде всего накопление культурных ценностей” (The development of culture is not only a movement forward; a simple movement in space is the transition of culture to new advanced positions. The development of culture is primarily the accumulation of cultural values) [4, p. 231]. Cultural values do not know aging. In the cultural development of modernity, not only the values that have just been created take part, but also the increasingly significant ones that have been created by the people of the past. The study of the essential cultural monuments of the past can never culminate; it is immortal and allows you to penetrate deeply into the richness of culture. The aesthetic study of monuments of ancient art is important and relevant. The values of the past should become active participants in the life of the present. The issues of interpretation of cultures and individual civilizations are now attracting the attention of historians, philosophers, and literary critics all over the world. The history of culture stands out sharply in the general historical development of mankind. The process of cultural history is not only a process of change, but also a process of preserving the past, the process of discovering the new in the old, the accumulation of cultural values. The continuity of cultural values is their most important property. With the development and deepening of our historical knowledge, the ability to appreciate the culture of the past, humanity gets the opportunity to rely on the entire cultural heritage.

The study of the history of literature, painting, architecture, music is as important as the preservation of cultural monuments. One of the most important evidences of the progress of culture is the development of an understanding of cultural values of the past, the ability to preserve them, accumulate and perceive their aesthetic value. And this development of understanding of other cultures merges to a certain extent with the history of humanism. This is the development of tolerance in the good sense of the word, peacefulness, and respect for people and other people. The discovery of the new in the old accompanies the movement forward and the development of humanism.

The disclosure of the aesthetic value of the monuments of the verbal art of Ancient Russia is a task of great importance. An attempt to reveal the aesthetic value of Old Russian literature was made by F.I. Buslaev, A.S. Orlov, and I.P. Eremin, who made a huge contribution to the understanding of Old Russian literature as art. This study should begin with the discovery of its aesthetic originality, and it is necessary to start with what distinguishes old Russian literature from new literature. Scientific research, on the other hand, should be based on the belief in the cognizability of past cultural values and the possibility of their aesthetic development. We are gradually beginning to realize that the solution to the history of Russian literature in its classical period is impossible without involving the history of ancient Russian literature. The voice of our medieval literature is not loud, and yet it impresses us with the monumentality and grandeur of the whole. It also has a strong folk humanistic principle, which should not be forgotten.

The Tale of Bygone Years is not only a chronicle, our first historical document, it is an outstanding literary work that speaks of a great sense of national identity, a broad view of

the world, and the perception of Russian history as part of the history of the world, connected with it by indissoluble ties. And with what expressiveness and strength, with what human sympathy, the author tells us about the blinding of Vasilka Terebovsky by rival princes.

Here the Polovtsy are leading Russian prisoners across the steppe. They wander sad, bound by the cold, blackened by the body, wandering through a foreign land with a tongue inflamed with thirst, naked and barefoot. The chronicler thus conveys their conversation: Один говорил: “Я был из этого города”, а другой отвечал ему “Я был из того села” (One said: “I was from this city”, and the other answered him: “I was from this village”) [7]. “Was” and not “is” — for them all in the past. These episodes are great artistic finds worthy of great literature. Ancient Russian literature has the right to a prominent place in the history of human culture and to a high appreciation of its aesthetic merits. Before us is literature that rises above the centuries as a single grandiose whole, as one colossal work, striking us with its subordination to one theme, a single struggle of ideas, contrasts entering into a unique combination. The fashion for Old Russian ceases to be superficial and becomes a deeper and broader phenomenon that is worth looking at. In order to deeply join any of the cultures of the past, there is no need to renounce modernity, to move spiritually into the past, or to become a man of the past. It is unlikely to occur because ancient Russian literature itself was turned into the future, looking for the realization of its ideals not only directly in the present but also in the distant future. In order to understand modernity, to understand the modern era, its greatness, and its significance, it is possible only against a huge historical background. Russian literature, like the literature of the whole world, should be intensively studied throughout its entire course. We must always have a thousand-year perspective of Russian literature. This is important for understanding the present and for penetrating into the future. Tomorrow will continue not only today, but also yesterday and those days that were a long time ago. Modernity can be appreciated only against the background of centuries of history. Our modern literature deserves its assessment from the perspective of the world-historical development of literature.

Ancient Russian writers often talked about the past and the present and rarely recalled the earthly future. Pre-Christian Russia was familiar with two representations of time, circular and epic, and both preserved in oral folk art. The feeling of what was happening was lost in the annually recurring ceremonial calendar holidays, as if everything existed again in the current one, forming a time circle contained within the present. In later epics associated with the events of the 11–12 centuries, the past epic time appears. Any event had a beginning and an end and could not be repeated — it became the past. Christianity brought to Russia new ideas about time and history, closely related to each other. The new time was not closed, although it knew the past and the present, and thus was not like its predecessors. It was not limited to the day and remained open to the future. It was possible to draw a straight line from the present to the past and constantly extend it at the expense of the future. According to the Old Russian writer, this was the exact direction in which time was moving. Linear time has entered the written literature. Under the pen of Nikon, the Pechersk chronicler, historical legends and current events for the first time found their specific place in time-turned into history. Chronology became the basis of chronicles. Its continued evolution is linked to Nestor's work as the compiler of the Tale of Bygone Years. Nestor's exposure to world history through translated Christian literature aided in his understanding of Ancient Russia's role and significance. At the end of the 11 and beginning of the 12 centuries, the development of the linear length of time and history took place. Human history was first predetermined in the imaginations of the writers of the time, and its progression within a specific time range

followed God's plan. The predestination of events occurred when each had to take place in the time allotted to it from above and the chroniclers tried to reflect. According to the Christian view, the development of mankind's history was not limitless, and as a result, the universal end of the world was to arrive on earth, so we can only talk about the relative openness of linear time. Through various prophecies of the church fathers, this earthly future was moving away. Consequently, up to this point there was a concrete earthly future for all people and for each person, limited only by the individual end of death. According to the writers of the epoch of the 11–12 centuries, the concrete future of man is known to God and no one can know it. A true Christian, if there was no will from above, could not predict himself, much less predict the future. The chronicler Nestor tries not to look ahead in specific life cases and not to use the forms of the future tense of the verb to be. Neither the chronicler nor his heroes dared take on the responsibility of boldly predicting that someone would be alive at that time. After all, their fate is entrusted to the will of God.

Nevertheless, in the treaty of Svyatoslav with the Greeks (971), the future tense of the word “to be” is used: “Да аще инъ кто помыслить на страну вашю, да и азъ буду противень ему и борюся с нимъ” (Yes, if anyone thinks about your country, and I will be disgusted with him and fight with him) [7]. And then the Russians swear: “Если не соблюдут обещанное, то своим оружием да исечени будем” (If they do not keep what they promised, then let us be with our weapons) [7]. But this is not a prediction of the inevitability, but only a definition of the actions of the Russian prince arising from the stipulated conditions, which are equally possible and impossible in the future. This is an unreal future, because it is conditional. In the cases considered, the writers do not predict or anticipate events, but only make their own assumptions. Unfounded, unsupported predictions of the Magi are condemned by them. But at the same time, they are taken as harbingers of events-signs that are sent from above to warn. It was not by chance that Igor was warned by the eclipse of the sun against an unauthorized campaign of the Polovtsians, which was not coordinated with the elder prince. His outcome as a punishment for ambitious thoughts was predetermined from the very beginning. And the author had no doubt about it. The sign-the eclipse of the sun-was the first harbinger of that. Igor, however, did not heed the warning, and a tragic fate befalls him. The Old Russian scribe was a fatalist. Like the present, the future seemed to him to be a fate. However, boldly describing the present, he was likely to be afraid to look into the future. What is the fate of one person facing the universal earthly end? And therefore, the author of the “Word about Igor's regiment” is limited in the description of earthly life to two times — the past and the present. The original Old Russian monuments to humanity's destiny, which in the Christian worldview is usually marked by a tense experience of the end of the world, the Last Judgment, drew very little attention. The future in the Old Russian chronicles is understood only as a continuation of the present — as a future campaign. The chronicles end with events contemporary to their compilers, remaining open to the future.

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