

BİR HALK OZANI OLARAK BOYAN VE ORTA ÇAĞ RUS KÜLTÜRÜNDEKİ ROLÜ ÜZERİNE

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Öz

“Boyan” adı ilk kez Eski Rus edebiyatına ait yazılı kaynaklarda ortaya çıkar. Bu kaynaklardan biri olan *Igor Seferi Destanı (Slovo o polku İgoreve)* adlı yapıtın başlarında Boyan’a yapılan bir gönderme, henüz edebî eleştirinin tanınmadığı 12. yüzyılda, türün Rus topraklarındaki ilk örneklerinden biri olarak kayda geçer. Zira anonim yazar, Boyan’ın destan söyleme geleneğine uymayacağını; şarkısını kendi usulünde okuyacağını dile getirir. Dolayısıyla arkaik sözlü anlatı ritüellerini aşmak isteyen ve dönemin çağdaş eğilimlerine dâhil olmaya ya da bunları bizzat yönlendirmeye istekli görünen anlatıcı, selefini eleştirme yoluna gider. Eski Rus kültüründe Boyan’ın gezici bir halk ozanı, bir saz şairi ve geleceği görme yetisine sahip bir kâhin olduğu kabul edilir. Ayrıca Boyan, pagan tanrılar panteonunda yer alan ve müzisyenlerin hamisi sayılan Veles’in torunu olarak anılır. “Boyan” adı verilen bir akordeon türü, ismini Boyan’dan alır. “Gusli” adıyla bilinen antik bir telli çalgı ile özdeşleştirilen Boyan’ın parmaklarının, kutsal ve sihirli olduğuna inanılır. Öte yandan Rus Ortodoks Kilisesi, *gusli*’nin seküler, dünyevi müziğin hizmetinde kullanılan, lanetli ve şeytani bir enstrüman olduğunu vaaz etmiştir. Kuşkusuz bu tabu, Boyan’ın neden modern hikâye anlatıcılığının dışında kaldığına ilişkin fikir vermektedir. Zira Boyan, Hristiyanlığa değil, antik pagan dünyasına ait bir imgedir. Ayrıca sözlü kültür temsilcisi Boyan, yazılı edebiyatın şekillenmeye başladığı bir çağda geride bırakılması gereken, geleneksel bir anlatıcı tipi olarak değerlendirilmektedir. Eski Rus edebiyatının ve folklorunun önemli figürlerinden Boyan’ın mercek altına alındığı bu çalışmada, onun Orta Çağ kültüründeki rolünün ortaya çıkarılması ve gerçek/kurmaca kimliğine ilişkin hipotezlerin tartışılması amaçlanmıştır. Bu amaçla çalışmada, “boyan” sözcüğünün kökeni üzerine bir taramaya ve Boyan imgesinin edebî eserlerde nasıl betimlendiğine ilişkin bir çözümlemeye yer verilmiştir. Elde edilen veriler ışığında sözcüğün Slav, İskandinav, Bulgar ya da Türk kökenli olabileceğine ilişkin bulgular değerlendirilmiştir. Ayrıca, Boyan’ın bir halk ozanı mı yoksa bir saray şarkıcısı mı olduğuna dair geniş bir kanıt yelpazesi incelenmiştir. Çalışmanın sonucunda, Boyan’ın, millî hafızanın koruyucusu ve kültürel mirasın aktarıcısı olarak tarih kaynaklarına geçtiği ortaya konulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Boyan, ozan, gusli, Orta Çağ Rus kültürü, *Igor Seferi Destanı*.

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ON BOYAN AS A MINSTREL AND HIS ROLE IN MEDIEVAL RUSSIAN CULTURE

Abstract

The name “Boyan” first appears in the written works of Old East Slavic literature. Boyan is referenced in the prologue of one of these sources, *The Tale of Igor’s Campaign (Slovo o polku Igoreve)*, which is presented in Russian-speaking countries as a groundbreaking example of literary criticism that was not recognized in the 12th century. The anonymous author does not comply with Boyan’s epic narrative tradition, stating that he will sing the song in his own way. Therefore, the narrator, who desires to surpass the obsolescent rite of oral narrative and appears keen to join the contemporary trends of the time or direct them himself, chooses to criticize his predecessor. In Old Russian culture, Boyan is considered to be a wandering minstrel, a bard, and a prophet. He is also referred to as the grandson of Veles, a member of the pantheon of pagan gods and protector of musicians. A type of accordion called the “bayan” takes its name from Boyan. The fingers of Boyan, which are associated with an ancient stringed instrument called “gusli”, are believed to be sacred and magical. The Russian Orthodox Church, on the other hand, preached that the *gusli* is a cursed and demonic instrument used in the service of secular, worldly music. This religious taboo explains why Boyan was left out of modern storytelling quite well as the image of Boyan belongs to the ancient pagan world, not to Christianity. Furthermore, Boyan, a representative of oral culture, is considered to be a traditional narrator who should be left behind in an age when the written literature was being established. This study, which focuses on Boyan, a prominent figure in Old East Slavic literature and folklore, aims to reveal his role in medieval culture and explore whether he was a real or fictional character. For this purpose, the study includes an evaluation of the etymology of the word “boyan” and an analysis of how Boyan is depicted in literary texts. In light of the data obtained, the probability of Slavic, Scandinavian, Bulgarian, or Turkic roots of the word is evaluated. The study then delves into a wide range of evidence to provide insight into whether Boyan was a minstrel or a court singer. In conclusion, this study reveals Boyan’s significance as a folk minstrel who served as a protector of national memory and a transmitter of cultural heritage.

Keywords: Boyan, bard, gusli, medieval Russian culture, *The Tale of Igor’s Campaign*.

Introduction

The Tale of Igor's Campaign, the earliest Russian epic poem and a gem of Old East Slavic literature, opens with an allusion by the anonymous author to his predecessor, Boyan the bard. This allusion to the epic figure of Boyan can be considered to be both a homage and a challenge. Actually, today it is widely accepted that the discourse of the unknown author laid the foundations of Russian literary criticism. The masterpiece was translated into English in 1960 by the Russian-American author V. V. Nabokov under the title *The Song of Igor's Campaign: An Epic of the Twelfth Century*. The first lines, in which the narrator salutes the bard, begin as follows in Nabokov's translation, where he chose to keep the word Boyan as it is in the source text:

“Might it not become us, brothers, / to begin in the diction of yore / the stem tale / of the campaign of Igor, / Igor son of Svyatoslav? / Let us, however, / begin this song / in keeping with the happenings / of these times / and not with the contriving of Boyan” (Anonymous, 1961: 29).

[Не начать ли нам, / как бывало, братия, / старым складом / скорбных повестей / слово о рати Игоревой, / Игоря Святославича? / Только впредь и сказывать наново / по былинам нынешнего времени, / не по замышлению Боянову] (Anonymous, 2006: 31).

The evidence from these lines suggests that the narrator may have a variety of reasons for abandoning the archaic tradition of epic performing. The most apparent reason is that *The Tale*, to use the words of Russian medievalist D. S. Likhachev (1972: 72), is a non-genre text that falls between oral and written literature. Therefore, the narrator, who desires to surpass the obsolescent rite of oral narrative and appears keen to join the contemporary trends of the time or direct them himself, chooses to criticize his predecessor. The remaining grounds for such an eager desire to reject a canonical artistic technique, obviously, lie in the etymology of the word boyan.

The present study aims to elucidate the characteristics and role of Boyan, who emerges as a contradictory portrayal in the anonymous narrator's realm of thoughts. For this purpose, it first addresses the debates on the origin of the word, considering etymological dictionaries of old and contemporary Russian language. It also covers the rationale behind the different approaches used by researchers from various schools to trace the roots of the word. The study then delves into a wide range of evidence to provide insight into whether Boyan was a minstrel or a court singer.

Thoughts on the origin of the word “boyan”

Boyan appears as one of the protagonists of *The Tale*, which is estimated to have been written in the 12th century, two centuries after the adoption of Christianity in Kyivan Rus'¹. The anonymous narrator describes the boyan through a dialogic relationship between themselves. As suggested by A. M. Lomov (2012: 275), along with the boundless reverence that the author feels for Boyan, there is a slight, almost imperceptible but still appreciable, cynicism toward his own great predecessor. Sometimes by expressing his genuine admiration for him, and other times by making the implication that his literary taste is outdated, the narrator manages to construct this comparative-dialogic composition. Often considered the founder of the modern Russian literary language, A. S. Pushkin (1949: 147) states that he is having trouble being sure whether the poet herein is reproaching Boyan or praising him. Whatever the anonymous author's intention, the writers of more recent studies have proposed that the physical characteristics and personality traits described in *The Tale* provide researchers with a wealth of information about Boyan.

Several explanations have been offered on the etymology of the word boyan. There are primarily two groups of researchers who suggest a variety of hypotheses for the origin of the word considering the depictions provided in *The Tale*. In contrast to the second group, which contends that the word boyan is used as a proper noun, the first group claims that the term presumably refers to a common noun. In the 20th century, S. S. Sovetov (1958: 131) revealed that the image of the boyan appears as an epithet in the form of an adjective or a kind of lexical novelty to many people. His research explores that the boyan is not, however, used as a proper name. Sovetov proposed that it can be defined as a symbolic denomination that meets the need to highlight the preservation of national values by an unsung hero.

From the perspective of proponents of the first hypothesis, as L. A. Dmitriyev (1960: 326) also stated, the correct spelling of the word *boyan* [боян] is actually *bayan* [баян]. The latter is taken to mean a “storyteller”, a “literator”, or an “orator” in general since it is rooted in the Church Slavonic *bayati* [баяти]. According to the *Etymological Dictionary of the Russian Language* by A. G. Preobrazhensky (1910: 20), the verb *bayat'* [баять] is defined as “to say”, “to speak”, “to tell”, or “to narrate”. Therefore, it can be assumed that the name *bayan*, derived from the verb in question, refers to a performer of oral tradition, as Dmitriyev previously suggested.

The abovementioned etymological arguments help to explain why the word appears in two versions (*boyan* / *bayan*) both in academic literature and cultural writing. Although the concept of *bayan* was well known among Old Rus' society, it first appeared in dictionaries in 1935. In his *Explanatory Dictionary of the Russian Language*, D. N. Ushakov (1935: 98) describes the word as a musical instrument, a large harmonica with a sophisticated system, which is named after the fabulous Old Russian poet *Bayan*, mentioned in *The Tale*. On the other hand, nowadays, the name of the bard is given as both *Boyan* and *Bayan* without any reference to the instrument itself in various sources. In the *Historical and Etymological Dictionary of the Modern Russian Language*, a *bayan* is defined as a large accordion. Furthermore, the words *bayan* (instrument) and *bayanist* (musician) are used as Russisms in other Slavic languages: In Ukrainian and Bulgarian as *bayan* and *bayanist*; in Czech as *bojan* and *bojanista*; and in Polish as *bajan* and *bajanista* (Chernykh, 1999: 80).

In the contemporary Russian language, the verb *bayat'* [баять] is associated with *Boyan* the bard. According to notable Russian lexicographer and Turkologist V. I. Dal's (1905: 1471) *Explanatory Dictionary of the Living Great Russian Language*, it is obvious that the multidimensional meanings of the word are discussed in accordance with the roles the *boyan* played among ancient Slavs. The verb *obayavat'* [обаявать] means to “charm someone” [*obayat' kogo* / обаять кого], “to bewitch” [*okoldovyvat'* / околдовывать], or “to enchant” [*ocharovuvat'* / очаровывать]. The noun *obayatel'* [обаятель], sharing the same root, refers to a “charmer” [*charodey* / чародей] or a “sorcerer” [*koldun* / колдун]. Lastly, the adjective *obayatel'nyu* [обаятельный] denotes a set of adjectives, such as “charming” [*ocharovatel'nyu* / очаровательный], “magical” [*volshebnyu* / волшебный], and “healing” [*znakharskiy* / знахарский].

According to the *Etymological Dictionary of Russian Language*, *Boyan* is used as a proper noun. In this context, it is emphasized that the word also refers to the ancient singer mentioned in *The Tale*. As prominent Russian-German linguist M. Vasmer (1986: 203) suggests, it seems more plausible that the term is related to the root *boy* [бой] meaning “battle”. On the other hand, the word might be referenced as Turkism² in a way that means “wealthy”, albeit relatively less precisely.

Multiple hypotheses on *Boyan's* most likely Scandinavian, Bulgarian, or Turkic origins as well as his Slavic descent have been also offered by researchers who believe him to be a real historical figure. Although the first speculation appears to have been inspired by the so-called Norman Theory, it actually evolved with regard to the geographical closeness of early Slavic and Scandinavian tribes. Besides, beginning toward the end of the 19th century, a group of scholars claimed that *Boyan's* poetics had a *scaldic* character.

The legacy of epic production unique to the Slavic *Boyan* and the Scandinavian *skald* (Old Norse poet, composer) was the subject of comprehensive comparative analysis written by Russian philologist and folklorist M. G. Khalansky as early as 1894. Following Khalansky, D. M. Sharypkin (1976: 22) argues that if there are any Scandinavian influences in *The Tale*, they do not create a coherent stylistic framework, in contrast to *Boyan's* hymns of praise, where *scaldic* imagery and methods formed a strong stylistic structure. Following the reasoning set forth by many scholars, N. Yu. Bubnov (2003: 125) claims that *Boyan* can be considered to be a storyteller or a wordsmith. On the other hand, he was not Russian in origin but Varangian-Scandinavian. To put it in the perspective of *The Tale*, the name *Boyan* is a calque of the name *bragi*, meaning *skald*.

As Soviet linguist, Turkologist, and ethnologist N. A. Baskakov (1985: 143) suggests, *Boyan* (also spelled as *Bayana*, *Bayan*, *Buyan*, or *Poyan*) is used as a given name in Poland, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, as well as among some Turkic communities. Taking a closer look at the names of some political and religious

figures who lived in Southern Europe might clarify this argument. Batbayan, for instance, is the first son of Khan Kubrat, who was the ruler of Old Great Bulgaria in 632-650 A.D. Boyan-Enravota, who was born in the early 9th century A.D., on the other hand, is considered to be the first Bulgarian-Christian martyr and the earliest saint of the nation.

The question of how and from where the songwriter came to Kyiv to serve Svyatoslav Vsevolodovich has been preoccupying the researchers for some time. One of those, V. P. Zalygalin (2019: 208), trying to prove that Boyan is a real historical figure, claims that Kogan, a songwriter of the old times, served Yaroslav Vsevolodovich, Prince of Chernigov (1139-1198), who was the grandson of Oleg Svyatoslavich (c. 1050-1115). Boyan, a songwriter of the ancient times, served Grand Prince Svyatoslav Vsevolodovich (1125-1194) in Kyiv. When Boyan died, the singer Kogan, who had previously been in the service of Yaroslav Vsevolodovich, was invited to Kyiv from Chernigov to take his place (Figure-1). Besides that, as we learned from *The Tale*, the Russians could not withstand the powerful and numerous Polovtsian (Polovtsians, also known as Kipchak Turks, were Turkic nomads) armies and had to withdraw from the battlefield. Only the Russian *druzhina*³ continued to fight till the end in order to destroy their enemies in this bloody war, and were eventually, contrary to what was naively hoped, almost completely destroyed. Thus, according to Zalygalin's (2019: 210) assumptions, it is apparent that the author of *The Tale*, the one who survived to tell the story, is most likely of Turkic origin.

Taking into account the above speculations, it can be suggested that the existence of a Turkic Boyan is possible but highly debatable. The central question then becomes how might the Turkish-speaking community affect the epic tradition of Old Rus'. Here, it should be remembered that as scientific data shows, the word boyan in Slavic folklore has its roots in Turkic dialects. Thus, the similarity in question occurs through linguistic interaction, in other words, through the exchange of artistic concepts between nations. However, besides a number of personal names of Indo-European origin, Baskakov (1985, 146) claims that the ancient Russian pantheon of pagan gods contains names of ancient Turkic origin as well, such as Mokosh, Veles, and Boyan, proving the deep interactions between Slavic and Turkic languages and cultures.

Panslavist linguist A. A. Potebnya (1914: 21), going beyond all these discussions, finds a significant correlation between Boyan and the construction of Russian national identity. He suggests that the author of *The Tale* may be Boyan's grandson, either by blood or in spirit. When someone assumes that the latter is true, then it can be said that the narrator serves as a guardian of Russian legends. It is obvious that Potebnya has chosen a middle ground between the two opposite poles in the debate from a patriotic point of view. Without taking sides, he highlights Boyan's historical mission of keeping the Russian collective memory alive.

The role of Boyan in medieval Russian culture: A wandering minstrel or a court musician?

As can be seen in the first section, researchers are divided into two main camps regarding the category of the word boyan. This discrepancy drives them to look for its roots in various regions of the world. Likewise, it is difficult to say that academia agrees on Boyan's real identity and his role in the medieval world. Some of these arguments have been formalized by the followers of the school of thought that believes Boyan to be a proper noun and they are trying to prove that he was an actual historical figure.

Russian folklorist and ethnographer A. N. Afanasyev (1865: 408), for example, considers a boyan as a folk singer, sharing some common characteristics with more recent bandura player [bandurist / бандурист], kobza player [kobzar / кобзар], and gusli player [gusliar / гуслиар]. They wander around the villages, fairs, and festive games, singing *duma*⁴ accompanied by a musical instrument, exactly like Boyan did. According to Afanasyev, undoubtedly, boyan is a general term that refers to all musicians who embody the minstrel heritage and his musical approach cannot be confined to a particular historical figure.

Contrary to the Mythological School, of which Afanasyev is one of the leading figures and offers that Boyan should be considered within the framework of the minstrelsy tradition, some researchers draw attention to his position in the Rus' principalities. Likhachev (1985: 111) argues that Boyan, obviously, was a court poet rather than a genuine folk minstrel. His arguments are also supported by numerous historians,

although practically all of their arguments are controversial. A. Kh. Vostokov (1935: 391), for example, states that a Russian poet assigned to the court of the *knez* (ancient sovereign or prince), were known as bayan.

To answer this question, we begin by taking a closer look at the role of the patronage system in early Russian music. As M. V. Shchepkina (1960: 77) suggests, both Boyan and his grandson were singers of the princes of Chernigov, Oleg Svyatoslavich, and Igor Svyatoslavich. On the other hand, *The Hagiography of Theodosius of Kyiv*, one of the earliest written works in Russian literary history, mentions a group of royal singers of the Grand Prince of Kyiv, Svyatoslav Yaroslavich, who was the ancestor of the Olegovichs (Figure-1). The musicians under the auspices of the princes, as is customary, used to play various instruments accompanying their songs and compositions. Based on these insights, researchers believe that the court singer position dates back to the 11th and 12th centuries in the northern principalities.

Russian literary critic V. G. Belinsky (1955: 365) claims that in Old Rus', undoubtedly, there were singer-songwriters [pesel'nik / песельник], storytellers [skazochnik / сказочник], jokers [balagur / балагур], and joke-tellers [pribautochnik / прибауточник] similar to performers of the 19th century. From his perspective, however, it can be clearly concluded from *The Tale* that the name Boyan belongs to a certain person and can by no means be considered a common noun. Regardless of the conclusions reached by many researchers and critics, it is obvious that an association between the etymology of the word bayan and the musical identity of Boyan the bard needs to be formed.

An anonymous author of modern times: Successor and critic of Boyan

Likhachev (1955: 58-59) points out that Boyan as an ancient musician is both the composer and performer of his own songs and accompanies them by playing a *gusli*. On the other hand, the author of *The Tale* not only compares his own verses with the songs of Boyan but also implies how outdated Boyan's songs as a form of expression. To make it clear why he refuses the customary methods of narration, the unknown author vividly characterizes the skillful, but unacceptable to him, poetic manner of Boyan, whom he calls prophetic or vatic [veshchiy / вещий], in other words, a wizard or magician.

“For he, vatic Boyan, / if he wished to make a laud for one, / ranged in thought / [like the nightingale]⁵ over the tree; / like the gray wolf / across land; / like the smoky eagle / up to the clouds.” (Anonymous, 1961: 30).

[Ибо вещий Боян, / ежели желал кому / песню творить / мыслию взмывал по Древу, / рыскал по земле серым волком, / сизым орлом под облаками] (Anonymous, 2006: 31).

A significant correlation can be found between several interrelated historical reasons and the anonymous author's rejection of Boyan's narrative tradition. The first reason is that the anonymous author positions himself as a modernist of his time. As a so-called modern narrator, he therefore wants to show that he is eager to withdraw from oral tradition and turn to written literature. Moreover, he aspires to be a pioneer of this course of transition. This is precisely why the prototype of criticism in the history of Russian literature was presented by the author of *The Tale*.

The second reason is that Boyan, within the framework of his unique epic narrative style, eulogized warriors and nobles, whereas the anonymous author assumed the identity of a historian and wanted to report historical events objectively, as they happened. Obviously, the author of *The Tale* developed a compassionate humanitarian approach to both Prince Igor and other historical figures, and even to the Polovtsians on the enemy side. In many parts of the work, it is possible to see that the anonymous author does not actually antagonize anyone; quite the opposite, he makes a warning, an appeal to the Russian princes, on the danger of dissolution. However, in order to be impartial like an ideal historian, the author shows no inclination to hero-worship, choosing to construct his own mode of expression rather than being an imitator of Boyan.

The third reason for the rejection of the tradition that Boyan pioneered lies in the Byzantium worldview. After the Christianization of Kyivan Rus', like all other shamanic wise men, Boyan the prophet began to be seen as a pagan relic. Even though the anonymous author refers to ample amounts of pagan imagery, perhaps feeling obliged to do so out of respect for his ancestors, he was, after all, a Christian writer

trying to distance himself from paganism. He thus tried to integrate his art into the new religion, which in the 12th century Rus' was accepted as a sign of modernity. In other words, he saw himself as an outstanding and progressive storyteller in all respects, far from being obsolete like Boyan.

It should certainly be mentioned that the church had considerable influence on the rejection of the minstrelsy practice. A primary reason for this is the fact that Boyan plays a *gusli*, which resembles a harp, a musical instrument the church considered to be demonic at the time (Lomov, 2012: 274-275). The following lines from *The Tale* highlight the role of the *gusli*, which was a significant part of Old East Slavic music culture, in Boyan's art:

“His own vatic fingers / he laid on the live strings, / which then twanged out by themselves / a paean to princes” (Anonymous, 1961: 31).

[Он на струны живые воскладывал / вещи свои персты, / и струны сами / славу князьям рокотали] (Anonymous, 2006: 33).

As Lomov (2012: 276-277) suggested, the author of *The Tale* needs such a comparative description in order to purposefully isolate himself from Boyan. Therefore, despite all his admiration for his predecessor, he emphasizes that Boyan was a singer rather than a poet. The author implies that Boyan was a jester [skomorokh / скоморох] of the greatest rank, as well as a servant [milostnik⁶ / милостник] of the prince, and most importantly, his artistic style and perspective were outdated. As also supported by Bubnov (2003: 121), the author of *The Tale* contrasts his poetics with those of his predecessor, the prophetic Boyan. In this context, the author was likely attempting to mask the extensive pagan content of the epic in front of the Christian audience. Therefore he, as a Christian author, avoids juxtaposing himself with the pagan composer of old times.

According to Sharypkin (1976: 16), Boyan's odes represent a transitional period between folklore and literature when the very concept of poetry gradually emerged. The transformation from a singer into a poet, from the domination of anonymous folkloric creativity into conscious and individual authorship, took place then. Thus it is possible to hear the author's voice in the text, although *The Tale* is referred to as an anonymous text and the identity of its author is a controversial issue. To put it more clearly, the author is trying to write an epic that he wishes to be associated with the very creator, rather than an anonymous one. One should return again to Sharypkin's (1976: 22) remarks that, compared with Boyan's songwriting, *The Tale* is a new, higher stage in the history of literature, generated by the intensive growth of the folk origins of Russian culture. It seems that the anonymous author considers himself to be the most contemporary interpreter of the poetics of his time who transcends the epic tradition of Boyan.

L. V. Sokolova (2004: 193) questions why the author then refuses to be a follower of Boyan's chanting. In her opinion, this rejection comes from the fact that Boyan sings something ambiguous, which could be either praise or blasphemy, a disrespectful attitude towards religion. The author of *The Tale*, on the other hand, intends to formulate a new genre of rhetoric, like *bylina* [былина], a type of Russian oral epic poem, without compromising historical accuracy. Given that the 12th century was still a stage of transition from polytheism to monotheism, it seems reasonable that the author did not want to imitate a method regarded as blasphemous and avoided confrontation with the Christian authorities.

As Shchepkina (1960: 79) emphasizes, as a consequence of the Christianization of society and the establishment of the new state structure, the pagan *zhrechestvo* [жречество] practice disappeared. *Zhretsy* [жрецы], members of the strata of pagan priests, made a living as healers and magicians but had been persecuted by the church since the 10th century. Singers were not accepted by the church either, but nevertheless, their art accompanied all moments of social and family life. Despite all this, the bards survived to the present day, if not as artists then at least as storytellers.

Boyan's kinship with other mythological figures

The figure of Boyan first appears in medieval literature. In *The Tale* and *Zadonshchina*, Boyan is characterized as a prophetic chanter; in *Palea* and the *Book of Daniel*, on the other hand, Boyan is described as a clairvoyant and sorcerer (Baskakov, 1985: 143). However, he plays his most critical role, beyond any

doubt, in *The Tale*. Therefore, Boyan was still mentioned in 19th-century Russia, like in *The Tale*, a masterpiece of the 12th century. In his epic fairy tale *Ruslan and Lyudmila*, published in 1820, A. S. Pushkin pictures him as a minstrel with a magic instrument:

“Talk mingled in a muffled hum; / the guests were buzzing merrily, / when all at once a fine voice rang / to a clear-toned gusli’s rippling notes. / The hall was hushed to hear Bayan: / the sweet-tongued minstrel hymned Ruslan, and / winsome Lyudmila, / and the garland the god of love had plaited for them” (Pushkin, 2017: 9).

[Слилися речи в шум невнятный; / Жужжит гостей веселый круг; / Но вдруг раздался глас приятный / И звонких гуслей беглый звук; / Все смолкли, слушают Баяна: / И славит сладостный певец / Людмилу-преlestь, и Руслана, / И Лелем свитый им венец] (Pushkin, 1977: 9).

Boyan’s name frequently appears in literary works with an emphasis on his various magic abilities. In this respect, he is referred to as Boyan the seer, Boyan the wise, or Boyan the nightingale. Aside from his supernatural talents, Boyan is also defined as Veles’ grandson. In the world of Slavic mythology Veles, also spelled as Volos, represents one of the leading gods of the pantheon. He is not only associated with the earth, the underworld, magic, and alchemy but is also believed to be the protective deity of musicians and animals, especially cattle. Furthermore, he is commonly linked to harvest, prosperity, and fortune. In a broader sense, Veles can be defined as a pagan Slavic god of fertility, creativity, and magic. In this context, it does not seem surprising that the prophetic Boyan, who is gifted in foretelling as well as artistic creativity, is believed to be the grandson of Veles.

It is possible to offer some historical justifications for Boyan’s attributed ability to predict the future or foretell the unseen. A persistent theme in Russian folklore is that the Boyan is an elderly wise man who frequently sings heroic epics for the masses. Boyan is, naturally, supposed to prophesize, taking into account his vast amount of life experience. During the years of war, he builds up the hopes of the army and the civilian population, anxiously waiting for some good news from the front. In this regard, these explanations complement each other and help to illuminate that he is a real historical figure.

Several reasons behind the attribution of divine abilities to Boyan must be explored in the spiritual gap left as a result of the triumph of Christianity over paganism. The Russians, protected by many different gods in the polytheistic belief system until 988 A.D., began to need figures in flesh and blood to replace their gods in the new monotheistic system. In this respect, Boyan was seen as reminiscent of a god, Veles, who could cast a spell on things, foresee the future, support musicians, and protect animals, as well as symbolizing fertility. It cannot be ignored that the existence of a magical and wise figure provided a sense of spiritual satisfaction and relief to the people who were trying to adapt to the new religion.

According to historian N. M. Karamzin (1964: 156), neither the time when Boyan lived nor the themes of his charming hymns are exactly known. However, the need to characterize the oldest Russian bard arose from the desire to keep his glory and memory alive. In this context, it is possible to describe Boyan as someone who listens to a *nightingale’s song* and attempts to imitate him by playing his lyre. Karamzin, citing the epic, uses the nightingale as a metaphor here. A metaphor for the archetype of the Russian bard who plays, sings, tells, is fascinated with his *gusli*, and whose image has survived for centuries in the public imagination.

Conclusion

The earliest literary critique in the history of Russian literature is attributed to a reference to Boyan the bard. He is certainly the founder of a folkloric school, but overshadowed by his successor in a new 12th century epic. All in all, Boyan’s artistic genius and sanctity bestowed upon him juxtapose two different modes of expression, criticism, and appreciation, in *The Tale of Igor’s Campaign*.

In academic literature, there are many diverse perspectives on the origin of the word boyan and the identity of the Boyan as a bard. The etymological arguments are largely focused on the word’s probable Slavic, Scandinavian, Bulgarian, or Turkic roots. In this context, most academics attempt to demonstrate that Boyan is a real historical figure. However, other schools of thought believe that boyan is a common noun

used for folk minstrels in medieval times. Clearly, some of the propositions that the researchers have offered are not entirely unique as the historical sources support both points of view in balance.

The image of Boyan is endowed with legendary traits and kinship. He is thought to be the grandson of Veles, the pagan deity of fertility and patron of musicians. These attributions derive from the fact that Boyan is seen as a shamanic storyteller. Indeed, this is one of the reasons why *The Tale*'s anonymous author renounced his tradition. Boyan is a mythological bard who sprung from pagan culture. Pagan elements, on the other hand, are supposed to be left behind in Christian society.

It is a well-known fact that Boyan is portrayed with a stringed instrument called *gusli*, peculiar to Russian folk culture. The Russian Orthodox Church, on the other hand, preached that the *gusli* is a cursed and demonic instrument used in the service of secular, worldly music. Admittedly, this religious taboo explains why Boyan was left out of modern storytelling quite well. The boyan belongs to the ancient pagan world, not to Christianity, which functioned as a universal display of modernity in the 12th century. Furthermore, the boyan has been associated with wandering singers and jesters. Leaving his talent in the shadow of ongoing debates, Boyan was eventually excluded from the realm of written literary culture. Furthermore, Boyan, a representative of oral culture, is considered to be a traditional narrator who should be left behind in an age when the creative style for written literature was being established.

Despite all the etymological arguments and conflicts over whether he symbolizes minstrelsy or was a real historical figure, Boyan emerges as one of the major images in the poetics of nationalist movements. These movements, which dialectically emerge throughout history to save cultural heritage, give nations the chance to broaden their artistic consciousness, and rediscover their past. In this sense, Boyan is remembered throughout Slavic history as a prominent archetype of the keepers of collective memory and stewards of cultural heritage.

Endnotes

¹ The apostrophe represents a soft sound that doesn't exist in English. The apostrophe has become a part of the word and it is widely used by professional historians and scholars today.

² A word borrowed from Turkic languages/dialects.

³ The Kyivan Prince's retinue.

⁴ It is a special genre of folklore, epic poetry of Ukrainian origin.

⁵ Square brackets are used here by Nabokov to dwell upon the nightingale motif repeated throughout the text.

⁶ *Milostnik* is a category of princely servants in Russia in the 12th-13th centuries. The name comes from the word *milost'* meaning "mercy".

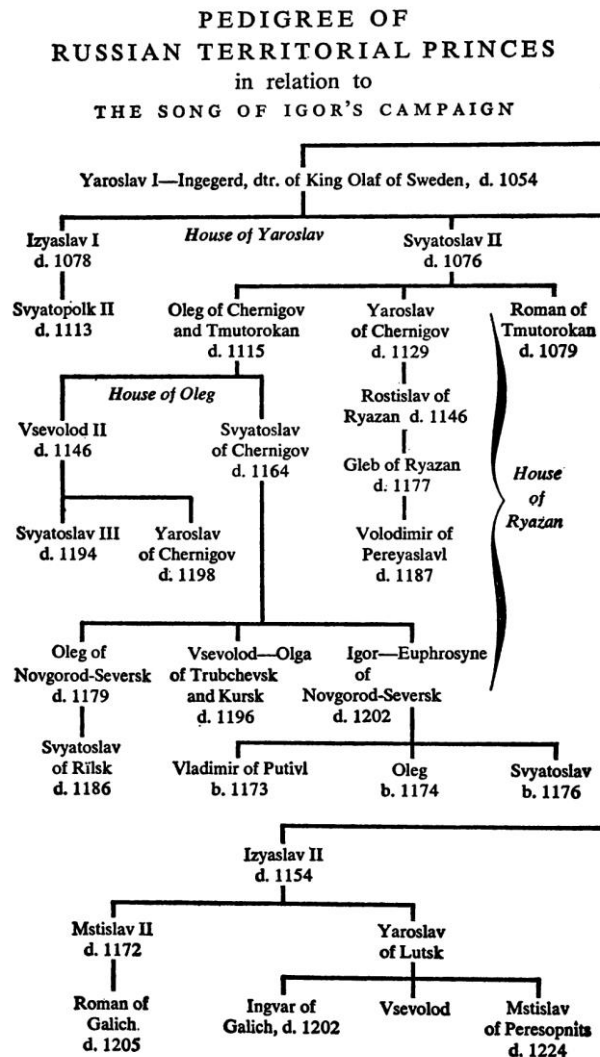


Figure-1. Pedigree of Russian territorial princes in relation to *The Tale* (Anonymous, 1961: 24).

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