10. Arthurian Literature in East Slavic

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The title of the present chapter requires at least a few clarifications for the non-specialist in medieval Slavic studies. First of all, the term Slavic is, above all, a linguistic identifier. For many decades now, it has been a conventional way of classifying the vast territories stretching from Bohemia to Muscovy and from Gdansk to Dubrovnik. Following the linguistic criteria of the development of Slavic into three big linguistic branches, all those territories were divided into areas of Western –or Central– Slavic, South Slavic and East Slavic. This terminology, however, did not account for religious and cultural differences or the process of formation of modern states.

In the late 1960's the great Byzantinist Dimitri Obolensky coined a term that took into account precisely the cultural and religious history of these territories: the 'Byzantine Commowealth' (Obolensky 1971). It focused, therefore, on the role of Byzantium's political, artistic and religious influence in the formation of the new states and, in doing so, it cut across linguistic differentiations (it excluded Poland, for example, but included Bohemia and Moravia). Focusing rather on the process of textual transmission, Ricardo Picchio established a new difference between two areas that presented, according to him, distinct attitudes towards literacy, literature and textual transmission. Picchio divided the Slavic world into *Slavia Orthodoxa* and *Slavia Romana*, a denomination that condensed in itself all the many accountable differences in literary production. According to Picchio (Picchio 1972), those territories that, after the schism of 1054, had entered within the

sphere of cultural influence of the Roman Church had had a literary and artistic development closer to that of their Western neighbours, whereas those territories that had reminded under the religious authority of Byzantine Orthodoxy had gone through a completely different process of literary development, due to social as well as doctrinal characteristics.

Arthurian literature had a much wider diffusion and impact on vernacular literature in *Slavia Romana* than it ever did in *Slavia Orthodoxa.* While translations and adaptations exist in Bohemia from the 14th century, in *Slavia Orthodoxa*, which included the territories of East Slavic language and part of those of South Slavic (Serbia, Bulgaria and Macedonia), the development of non-religious literature, and indeed of Arthurian romance, was, if not necessarily more sparse, certainly less attested in written from. This should not be surprising if we take into account the fact that literature was strictly restricted to the Orthodox monastic *milieu*, where the compilation in written form of any non-religious text was made only sporadically.

Between these two cultural regions, however, there are 'contact areas' whose turbulent history prevents us from assigning them clearly to any of these groups. One of these permeable areas is the Balkans (Serbia, Croatia and Dalmatia) and another would be present day Belarus and the Ukraine, i.e., those territories that, at some point or another, were part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In the present chapter, we will try to present the evidence currently available to us of the knowledge and transmission of Arthurian romance in *Slavia Orthodoxa*, since its presence in *Slavia Romana* was already been presented elsewhere in the present series (Thomas 2000)[1].

We have indirect evidence from a relatively early time, for example, of the existence of courtly poetry at the courts of the Nemanja dynasty in Serbia, as well as of the intense translating activity of courtly literature in Dalmatia[2].

There is also evidence of the existence of courtly poetry in the East Slavic principalities, what has been traditionally named as Kievan Rus' – but whose limits soon surpassed those of current day Ukraine – who emerged as political entities as the Varangian traders established commercial settlements by the river routes as far as Byzantium.

This courtly poetry, the *byliny*[3] (singular *bylina*) survived only orally until the nineteenth century, when they started to be collected,[4] and subsequently enjoyed a dual existence, oral and written, which contributed to their oral survival by means of a process that Zumthor has called *archéocivilisation.*[5] This process conferred on the *byliny* certain characteristics, such as their limited degree of improvisation[6] and the focalisation of the action at a certain court, in the case of the *byliny* the Kievan court, which becomes the physical and spiritual headquarters of a group of heroes in a permanent campaign situation either of 're-conquest' against a foreign invader, or against a mythical creature.

The *byliny* are poems averaging between 200 and 400 verses in length that were most likely originally sung, not recited, to judge by their verse pattern.[7] Although the name *byliny* traditionally groups together all those poems of loosely understood heroic content that share a common verse type, the differences in content and point of view of the three traditional cycles (the mythological, the Kiev and the Novgorod cycles) are not to be underestimated.[8] The accepted division of the whole corpus into three cycles attempts to

account for the differences in content and ideology among them. In terms of relevance and proportion, which match both structural and ideological parameters, the Kiev cycle constitutes the paradigm of the *byliny*.

The Kiev cycle contains some elements that we could call Arthurian, the most relevant of which is, naturally, the court.[9] The court is the starting and the returning point of the *bogatyr*'s, that is, the hero's, quest. It is also the social entity from which he acquires prestige and recognition. Unlike Camelot, however, the court at Kiev is not presided over by a worthy king. Prince Vladimir, a fictional character rather than a historical one, is unfailingly morally inferior to any of the Kievan heroes, whose moral righteousness and military prowess shine the brighter by comparison to their prince. Given the compulsive lack of romance in Slavic epics, it is no surprise that there is no queen Guinevere at the Prince's Court.

Parallel to the function of the hero's journey, his quest, around which all episodes and actions are structured, the court is the central element of what I have called the semiotic universe of the *byliny* (Torres Prieto, 2005: 195–217). This semiotic universe in the *byliny* is conformed to four elements whose characterization is unvarying and which, according to Jauss's concept, fulfilled the 'horizon of expectations' of the audience (Jauss, 1982: 94–7) in terms of defining *byliny* as a genre; they were the hero, the antagonist, the prince and the court. It is precisely in the use, function and disposition of these four elements of the *byliny* semiotic universe where, I would argue, parallels to the Arthurian romance are

more significant and noteworthy.

The *bylinic* hero, the *bogatyr*, is always on the move. There is no such thing as a static *bylina* and very often the narration of the hero's adventures develops as he is travelling, like the Arthurian knight, *au venture*. There are no tournaments in the *byliny* and the hero either sets out to find his antagonist, for example, a dragon, or finds him or her, as he is on his way, usually to the court. The motives for starting his trip, or his quest, are usually two: the defence of the Motherland (*sic*) and the search for a bride. He is always successful in the first quest, and almost always fails in the second one. In fact, the search for a bride, either by abduction or liberation, within the Kiev cycle, is left to minor heroes.

God's intervention is present in more than one instance, either directly or by proxy. There are cases where the assistance is not decisive in the confrontation with the antagonist itself, but very important in the resolution of the episode. The grand triad of Kievan heroes, Il'ia Muromets, Dobrynia Nikitich and Alesha Popovich, all receive the help of God, one way or another, either in the fact that they are aided in the middle of the combat or in the procurement of advice or the means to overcome the antagonist. This feature is essential to the definition of the hero as a fully Christian hero.[10]

The strength of the *bogatyr* relied on three elements: the strength of the *bogatyr* himself, the special qualities of his horse, and the wonderful attributes of his weapons (Putilov,

1988: 68). The horse not only carries the hero across the plains, sometimes galloping impossible distances or at an amazing speed. The horse also acts as an adviser, warning the hero of immediate danger or as a rescuer. The hero and horse constitute a unit and the long descriptions of the hero saddling his horse before departing are some of the most detailed scenes of the *byliny*.

There seem to be three main types of antagonists in the *byliny*: supernatural beings, foreign enemies and women. In the worst of scenarios, the hero will have to face a woman who is also foreign and uses supernatural powers, i.e., a sorceress. The creatures the hero has to fight often have anthropomorphic characteristics or behaviours. The curious mix of animal and human characteristics is certainly not exclusive of the East Slavic or Russian traditions. The process of bestialization of the antagonist, giving way to all kind of strange creatures in medieval literature, particularly in travel books, but also in romances like *Perceforest*, is all the more significant in the *byliny*, where the real, foreign enemies, called generically Tartars, are described as half-human and half-animals.

The heroes have to confront all these different creatures who, even when representing a real and historical threat, are nevertheless described with fantastic attributes. Some would say that this proves a clear influence of the fairytale on the *byliny*, others that this represents a previous step in the development of the *byliny* into the historical-song, in which the enemies are clearly human. Both are possible, but it is also feasible that this is one of the characteristics of the *byliny*, in line with what Alexander called the 'suspension

of disbelief' (Alexander, 1973: 58–60). The equation of a national threat with a semi-human, bestialised creature is, nevertheless, quite strong.

Women as antagonists of the hero are generally presented using magic. The hero, in these instances, does not set out in search of a wife, but rather he comes across these women, who add to their magic practices their promiscuity as they offer themselves to the hero. Construing the treatment of women in the *byliny* simply as an expression of misogyny is a failure to see that some female characters are also the best helpers of the hero: the mother, the sister and sometimes a good Russian wife. What is more important in the negative portrayal of female characters is their foreignness and their magical practices that antagonize the hero rather than the fact that they are women. The portrayal of women probably suggests a male monastic *milieu* in which the social role of women was linked to motherhood or caritas. More significantly, women help the hero in many instances when other women, or men, have placed the hero in danger.

The prince in the *byliny* is a certain Prince Vladimir who cannot be traced back to any historical figure, though it is very probably a composite abstraction of two of the most prominent rulers of Kievan Rus': Prince Vladimir I Sviatoslavich, the Saint (who ruled between 980 and 1015) and Vladimir Vsevolodich Monomakh (1053–1125). The poems of the Kievan cycle have as one of their recurring scenarios the Prince's court in Kiev and very often the conversations between Prince Vladimir and the Kievan heroes take place in the dining-hall, in the course of a banquet. This is perhaps one of the other main

characteristics of the royal figure: like King Arthur, he is often surrounded by the Kievan heroes, dining at his table, when action breaks out. It is also the Kievan court to which the heroes return after battles, after capturing an enemy or liberating prisoners.

The relation between the heroes and the prince is that of loyalty and respect of the former for the latter. However arguable or dishonourable the behaviour of the prince may be, the heroes pay him unconditional respect and he is the central figure around whom they all gather and whom they always obey. He is thankful to his *bogatyr*s, for bringing back collected taxes, for example. Nonetheless, the Prince can also be depicted quite negatively, and it is sometimes precisely his faulty behaviour what triggers the beginning of a new adventure for the always-righteous hero, who will diligently complete his task without resentfulness.

The Kievan court, the place at which the heroes arrive and from where they depart, has a clear function only in the *byliny* of the Kievan cycle.[11] Only *bogatyr*s are linked to Kiev. Other heroes who might arrive in Kiev, not being *bogatyr*s, are foreigners and their intention when they arrive in Kiev is to ridicule the court and its members. The court is certainly a symbol and functions as the goal of the hero in the poems. It thus plays a similar role as Camelot does in the Arthurian cycle, as a representation of something else, as a metaphor of the unity of the different heroes, as brothers in arms, under the authority of Prince Vladimir.

However, if the existence of courts in reality was a means to enhance the authority of the ruler and to 'reinforce his personal ties with individuals' (Shepard, 2003: 14), the court of Kiev is usually where the hero is scorned, questioned, incarcerated. Of course this is directly linked to the figure of the prince, whose portrayal is not very favourable. So, instead of being an agreeable place suitable for 'the rest of a warrior', like Camelot, or the court of Charlemagne as depicted in the *chansons de geste*, it turns into a hostile but necessary destination. In this sense, the epic Kiev presented in the *byliny* is far from a poetic realisation of the dreams of an ideal government, the place for the recreation of a Golden Age, as it has been traditionally understood. The court of Kiev, while depicted as the necessary place to which a *bogatyr* goes, is not described in favourable tones, nor is Prince Vladimir. Unlike the court of King Arthur, the Kievan court is a place of conspiracy and of dissolute conduct. This hostile and shameful environment, against whose conspiracies the hero has to fight and which denies the hero the glory he deserves, enhances by contrast the virtues of the *bogatyr*, who nevertheless fulfils his duty against all odds.[12]

The *byliny* represent a highly hybrid genre, particularly in respect to the generic classifications made *ad hoc* as it were for narratives that have been preserved in other literary traditions. If analysed from the point of view of their content, the *byliny* lack the intimate approach to courtly love necessary in romance, since it is the defence of the land that constitutes the main task of the hero if he wants to be successful. If the analysis is structural, the quest of the hero and shameful behaviour of the ruler seem to remove both

from the realm of the *chanson de geste*. Are they, then, *chansons de geste* in the form of romance? Or uncourtly romances devoid of love? Or adventure tales closer to Odyssean accounts? Or a little bit of everything? It should not be forgotten that the *byliny* most likely originated at a time when the Rus' principalities were immersed in internal strife as well as fighting external enemies, either the Mongol Yoke or the Teutonic Knights. The permanent state of campaign is clearly reflected in the hero's ethos and in the choice of themes of the *byliny*.

Another socio-cultural fact to bear in mind is the lack in East Slavonic society of what Sarah Kay has called the 'clerical department' of aristocratic households (Kay, 2000: 85–6). Indeed, in the *Slavia Orthodoxa*, the literary activity was mainly restricted to the monasteries, except for a very few sporadic examples. It was within the monastic, and not the courtly environment, as was the case in *Slavia Romana*, where the translations and adaptations of epic works were made or epic songs were most likely created. In both cases, the absence of courtly love would first and foremost reflect the ideology of the translator or copyist, through whom any romantic elements were filtered and who would impose on the epics and romances created or adapted in the monasteries a Christian moralistic approach.

Notwithstanding that acquaintance with Arthurian material in Early Rus' principalities cannot be documented, either through one of the above-mentioned routes of cultural

influence, or through the much discussed Norse route (Mel'nikova, 1996), certain references to Arthurian literature in the *byliny* do seem to be present, and they seem to provide us the information lacking in the preserved versions to grasp the full meaning of some of the poems. These parallels are to be found particularly with the story of Tristan. For example, Dobrynia forces his wife to recognise him when he returns to Kiev from Constantinople, by placing his wedding ring in her wineglass, a motif transmitted in the Tristan legend.[13] And the action of Marinka scraping off Dobrynia's footprints after his escape from her castle, a fact that has puzzled scholars for decades and to which many possible interpretations have been given, might be better understood in light of the trap set for Tristan by the dwarf Frocin with the flour on the floor. However, the very late written record of the *byliny*, and the absence of evidence of their transmission for centuries, renders any comparative approach speculative, subject to the easy temptation of finding parallels in motifs that could be literary universals or secondary additions introduced during centuries of oral transmission. Is the literary existence of a court presided over by a ruler at whose service a phalanx of heroes perform great deeds conclusive evidence that Arthurian literature was known in Rus' and that, furthermore, a local narrative tradition, the *byliny*, was modelled upon it? Maybe. Despite a healthy dose of scepticism in light of the materials *currently available* to us, the fact is that even if the Arthurian tradition was transmitted by second or third hand, even if oral adaptations were never written down, even if the attested literature is but a distant echo of Camelot, the Early Rus' found the means to create a parallel courtly universe in which they could also recreate their own 'myth of common identity' (Franklin, 1998: 188).[14]

Of all the heroes linked to the ruler of Camelot, Tristan was, without a doubt, the most popular in Slavic, an not only in East Slavic oral tradition, as we have seen. In addition to the Czech 'Tristan' produced in Bohemia, his adventures also became known in Belarus in the sixteenth century. The latter two translations, however, were not made from the same originals and they did not arrive in the Slavonic realm by the same route.[15] Like *Tandariáš a Floribella*, the long fourteenth-century Czech adaptation *Tristram a Izalda* (around 9,000 verses), was based on German sources – on Eilhart von Oberge's twelfth-century version, Gottfried von Strassburg's courtly romance *Tristan*, and Heinrich von Freiberg's continuation of Gottfried's romance[16] – but the sixteenth-century Belarusian translation *Tryščan* was made from an Italian adaptation of the French prose version, Luce del Gat's *L'Estoire de Monseigneur Tristan* (ca 1235), popularly known as the Prose Tristan.

The Czech *Tristram a Izalda* dates to the turn of the fifteenth century and is preserved in two fifteenth-century manuscripts (1449 and 1483).[17] Compared to its German models, the Czech *Tristram*, as noted by Thomas, 'alternates between medial-style realism and low-style burlesque' (Thomas, 2000: 253). This departure from the 'courtly ethos of the German romance' responds, according to Thomas, to a change of audience, from the Bohemian court to the 'increasingly influential Czech-speaking members of the gentry and the merchant class' (Thomas, 2000: 252).[18]

In Belarus, the story of Tristan, *Tryscǎn*, is extant in a single manuscript whose dating is far from precise, although indirect evidence allows us to postulate the last quarter of the sixteenth century as the date of the redaction, which, needless to say, however, is not the date when it can be assumed that Tristan's adventures were first translated or known in Belarus. The same codex that contained this Belarusian *Tryscǎn*, owned by the Unikhovski family, also contained a Slavic translation of *Buovo d'Antona* (*Istorija o knjažati Kgvidone*), the Italian translation of the Anglo-Norman romance of *Bevis of Hampton*,[19] and a translation of the Miklós Oláh's *Athila*, via a Polish translation of the Latin original by Cyprian Bazylik's *Historia spraw Atyle kroal węgierskiego* in Krakow in 1574. This date is, in fact, the *terminus post quem* of the manuscript. The *terminus ante quem* would be the date of the first annotation made in the codex by a member of the Unikhovski family, in 1594.[20]

This single manuscript of *Tryscǎn* (MS. 94) is currently at the Raczynski Public Library in Poznan. It was discovered and described for the first time by O. M. Bodianskii in 1846 (Bodianskii, 1846). The Belarusian 'Tristan' occupies the first 127 pages of the 344 pages of the codex (pagination was added by a later hand). Written in cursive script, in a single column, the *incipit* reads: 'Here begins the tale of the knights from the Serbian books, in particular the famous knights Tristan, Antsolot [Lancelot] and Bovo, and many other valorous knights'.[21] The *incipit* already provides a clue to its provenance, and it also is the source of an ongoing controversy, namely, is this 'Tristan' *really* Belarusian.

In the first edition of the manuscript by Veselovskii, the language is identified as sixteenth-century Belarusian (Veselovskii, 1888: 127). Sgambati further points out that the Belarusian used, while being a literary language, is rather a combination of the local vernacular and both East Slavic and Polish. It is, after all, a form of codification of the vernacular with some literary features rather than a Belarusian recension of Church Slavonic (Sgambati, 1983: 13 and notes 1 and 2 on that page). The text is pervaded, in any case, by Italianisms and Serbisms, which clearly betrays its Dalmatian-South Slavic origin. The fact that the name of the translator, or even the name of the person for whom the translation was made, or the one who could have commissioned the translation, remains unknown does not contribute to clarifying the place where the translation took place.[22]

The Belarusian *Tryščan*, at least its first part, presumably was directly linked to the Italian *Tristano Veneto*, probably through a no longer extant Serbian text, although the absence in *Tryščan* of errors and omissions in the *Tristano Veneto* (as attested by the manuscript cod. 3325 of the National Library of Vienna) points rather to the existence of a prototype for these two related texts that has been lost (Sgambati, 1983: 24–46).[23] The Belarusian *Tryščan* has a second part, however, that has not been attested as such in any other text of the Tristan tradition,[24] although Sgambati has tentatively traced echoes of the Tuscan Tristan tradition in it (Sgambati, 1983: 47–68). Some of the episodes, though not in the same sequence, could indeed derive from the *Tavola Ritonda* and the *Tristano Riccardino*, but others are, simply, a new creation, as will be seen. That the second part of

Tryscǎn has a different textual origin than the first is well attested by factual incongruences between it and what is narrated in the first part, such as Tryscǎn's statement, upon returning Ižota to King Marko, that it was the *second* time that he had recuperated his wife with his sword, although in *Tryscǎn* he does not engage Palamidež (Palamedes) in combat because he escapes on his horse.

The second part (chs 32–43), therefore, recounts the escape of Tryscǎn and Ižota to Domolot,[25] to the court of King Artiuš and Queen Ženibra; Tryscǎn's first encounter with Antsolot (Lancelot); Geush's (Kay's) challenge to Tryscǎn and his defeat. Then it narrates Antsolot's pursuit of the lovers and his second encounter with Tryscǎn. The three decide to return to Domolot, and this is followed by Tryscǎn's fight with Gavaon (Gawain) and other knights at King Artiuš's court. At this point, King Samsiž (Lasansis of Enchanted Arms?) of Black Island arrives at the court of Domolot. After defeating all knights, including Antsolot, he also defeats King Artiuš and they are all taken as prisoners to the Black Island. Queen Ženibra, following Antsolot's request, begs Tryscǎn to rescue King Artiuš and his knights. They embark in Tryscǎn's vessel (Tryscǎn, Ižota, Ženibra and Govornar (Governal) and arrive first at an island where a queen demands that all the newcomers be castrated before they may pay homage to her, or else be incarcerated. Tryscǎn refuses to be castrated and he is taken to the dungeons, from where he escapes when Ižota manages to throw his sword to him. He subsequently liberates all the other incarcerated knights, kills the queen and her brother and, after refusing the offer to become the lord of those lands, departs with Ižota, Ženibra and Govornar in search of

King Samsiž. On their voyage, they dock at yet another harbour where a treacherous crusader lives who makes a fortune by killing every guest and taking his possessions. Trysčan kills the treacherous crusader and he is, once again, invited to stay in that land as lord of the realm. He again refuses, but realising that, at this pace, he is never going to arrive at the Black Island where King Samsiž dwells, he decides to disguise himself and Govornar as merchants (with 'Latin vestments') and have both Ižota and Ženibra dress as nuns. Pretending to be a merchant, under the name of Sir Latin, and after having refused a few offers to sell the ladies, whom he passes off as his sisters, and even his chessboard, he is challenged by King Samsiž to fight for the ladies and his kingdom. Claiming he does not know how to fight, his real self is revealed in the middle of the battle, and King Samsiž begs for clemency. Thereupon, King Artiuš and all his knights are freed and they can all return to Domolot. Trysčan and Ižota continue their trip to King Marko's court and, on their way, Trysčan successively fights a French knight of King Peremot (Faramon), Smerdodug the infidel, Palamidež, Antsolot (a fight whose fatal outcome is eventually prevented by Ižota), Divdan (Dinadan), Iaščor (Hector des Mares), Librun (Le Brun?), Galets (Galahad) – these last two along with Antsolot – until they finally arrive at King Marko's court, where Trysčan delivers Ižota to his uncle. Trysčan eventually departs and arrives at a tournament in the land where Ižota of the White Hands lives. There, Trysčan fights Klimberko and Erdin (Kaherdin), whom he kills. While trying to recuperate from his many wounds, he receives 'a letter from the air' in which Ižota protests her love ('My lord, just as a fish cannot live without water, I cannot live without you'). Trysčan sends a letter to King Marko asking him to permit Ižota to come and heal

him. Ižota arrives at the place where Tryscǎn is and begins healing him, and at this point the narrative abruptly stops. The last lines of the manuscript read: ‘I do not know whether he recovered from those wounds or died. This is all that is written about him’.

Aside from this second part, the differences between *Tryscǎn* and the traditional legend of Tristan and Yseut are many, even in its first part where the text corresponds to the Veneto version. For a start, Tryscǎn and Ižota fall in love before taking the potion, which renders the love potion meaningless and thus invalidates one of the main aspects of the myth of the doomed lovers, who are attracted to each other because they are mistakenly put under a spell that was not intended for them.[26] In the more Christianised versions of the romance, the potion was certainly used to unburden the lovers of any guilt. The invalidation of the role of the love philtre in *Tryscǎn*, where Ižota's father, King Lenviz (Anguin) even encourages her love for Tryscǎn, does not necessarily indicate a less Christian-moral approach to the poem. It rather reveals the absence of interest in the love story at all, clearly represented by the lack of romance or intimate episodes between the two protagonists. In *Tryscǎn* they do not escape to the Forrest of Morrois, since there is none in the Belarusian version, and therefore the time they spend in other versions secretly living their love in isolation is missing from our version. Likewise, their early departure from King Marko's court ‘precludes all clandestine love-making between the lovers’ (Kipel, 1988: xvi), which is precisely one of the reasons for their medieval, and modern, success. The Belarusian *Tryscǎn* is, paradoxically, not a story about love, either doomed or of any other kind. It is an account of the deeds of a bold hero and his fights,

adventures and death.

The lack of the romantic element is consistent with the translations and versions of other epic poems and romances in Slavic, such as the various adaptations of the *Alexander Romance* and of the Byzantine romance of Digenis Akritas. Whether this is due in the case of Bohemia, as Thomas has argued (2000: 254–55), to the mentality of the merchant elites, or in East Slavic to the stern control of the Church, the point is that it is, in actual fact, the unifying feature common to all translations made throughout the Slavic realm and one of the defining characteristics of heroic poetry in Slavonic (Torres Prieto, 2009). Consequently, it is also absent from the Russian tradition of oral heroic poetry, the *byliny.* This lack of interest in the romantic element, in sheer contrast to the devotion to the heroic one, along with the social and production reasons mentioned above, made of the adapted Tristan the most suitable hero for a society in bad need of military prowess.

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[1] The earliest Arthurian romance in a Slavic language is the Czech *Tandariáš a Floribella* from around 1380 and preserved in three fifteenth-century manuscripts. This is a translation of the relatively unknown thirteenth-century German romance *Tandareis und Flordibel* by Der Pleier, which focuses on the love of the eponymous couple and their conflict with King Arthur who opposes the union. A second Czech Arthurian romance, *Tristram a Izalda*, dates from around 1400.

[2] On both these aspects, see Torres Prieto 2009.

[3] The best collection of *byliny* in English (introduction and translation) is still that by Bailey and Ivanova, 1998. In Spanish, see my own (Torres Prieto, 2003). Many are the excellent studies on *byliny* by the Russian school, particularly those by B. N. Putilov (1988, 1999). For a general introduction to *byliny*, particularly their relation to history, in English, see Torres Prieto, 2010.

[4] P. N. Rybnikov published the first collection of *byliny* (224 songs in total) in four volumes (1861–7). In 1804, another collection of 25 texts was published under the name *Ancient Russian Poems collected by Kirsha Danilov*, comprising songs from Western Siberia, from the province of Perm. The latter, however, did not imply the direct collection of the texts from the singers of Northern Russia, from the province of Olonets, as Rybnikov did, a task that was to be followed by A. F. Gil'ferding's collection of songs from the same region (318 songs), which was published posthumously in 1873, since Gil'ferding fatally contracted typhus in his last trip to that province.

[5] On the mutual influences of this process, see Zumthor, 1983: 35–7. In the case of Russian *byliny*, this process has been masterfully studied by Novikov (2000).

[6] The different degree of improvisation was already noted by Vesterholt, 1973, and further confirmed by Nobikov's research (2000).

[7] This is a stress pattern, rather than a rhyme or stanza pattern, based on the long epic line (the asymmetric decasyllable), that usually ended on two syllables (Jakobson, 1953: 22ff).

[8] On the differences between the mythological and Kiev cycles, see Mendoza Tuñón and Torres Prieto, 2009.

[9] The quest of the hero is the structural element that brings the *byliny* closer to the *romantz*. It is essential to the structure of the poem, since it is, in Jakobsonian terms, the *dominant,* but it differs from the Arthurian quest in that it lacks a romantic element, which in the *byliny*, if it does exist, brings about, precisely, the failure of the hero's quest. See Torres Prieto, 2005: esp. 184–94.

[10] On the reflection of Christianization in the *byliny*, see Torres Prieto, 2004.

[11] The city of Novgorod, as a geographic point from which to depart and at which to arrive, fulfils the same function in the *byliny* of the Novgorod cycle, those dedicated to Sadko and Vasilii Buslaev. It is also in Novgorod, where they have to prove their worth, like the *bogatyrs* in Kiev.

[12] This understanding could re-open the question of the place of origin of the *byliny*, which is beyond the scope of the present chapter. For further discussion on the time and place of origin of the *byliny*, see Torres Prieto, 2010.

[13] Precisely, a detail absent in the Belarusian *Trysčan*, as we will see.

[14] A parallel situation was proposed for the popularization in South Slavic oral epics of the Byzantine epic of *Digenis Akritas.* See Torres Prieto, 2009:121, n.26.

[15] The two Slavic versions of the Tristan legend also reveal two of the main routes of literary influence from West to East. The most relevant one, in quantitative terms, came from fellow Orthodox South Slavic territories (Bulgaria, Macedonia and Serbia) in two waves, the first at the time of the Rus' conversion to Christianity (988) and the second during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, with the arrival of hesycasm. The second route was from Central Slavic territories (Bohemia, Poland), initially through Novgorod and Galizia and, later on, through the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, since, at the time when it achieved its greatest degree of expansion, which included Poland and Belarus, into which Bohemia had been absorbed, the Grand Duchy bordered directly on the Holy Roman Empire in the west and on Muscovy in the East.

[16] Heinrich von Freiberg's continuation was in fact composed in Bohemia for the nobleman Raimund von Lichtenburg in the late thirteenth century.

[17] For a discussion of the Czech Arthurian romances, *Tristram* and *Tandariáš a Floribella*, adapted in Bohemia, see Thomas, 2000.

[18] Since *Tristram a Izalda* has been discussed by Thomas (2000) in *The Arthur of the Germans*, I shall focus on the Belarusian *Trysčan.*

[19] This Belarusian translation of a Croatian recension of the romance made in Dalmatia, most likely in Dubrovnik, could have been the source for the Russian translation of the latter, *Повесть о Бове королебиче*, which enjoyed enormous popularity until the nineteenth century, both in manuscript form (over one hundred manuscripts are preserved) and in *lubki* (nearly 200 editions). There are specialists who think the Russian version could have been made either from a Polish translation or from the Yiddish *Baba-boek*, which was ultimately also translated from the Italian version.

[20] Brückner (1886: 351) admits this date as valid for the entry of the codex into the family patrimony, while Veselovskii (1888: 130–1) considered that this annotation had been made retrospectively in 1598. The details of both positions can be found in Sgambati, 1983: 4–5. See also Kipel's more succinct survey of the available data (1988: xi–xiii).

[21] Починается повесть о витезях с книг сэрбъских, а звлаща о славном рыцэры Трысчан[е], о Анцалоте и о Бове и о иншых многих витезех до[брых], translation by Kipel, 1988: 3. Apart from Kipel's English translation, and Sgambati's into Italian, there exists another translation into English by S. Janoski, 1977.

[22] Sgambati suggests that the codex could have been purchased by a member of the Unikhovski family in a visit to Vilnus, regardless of where was it made. In any case, the controversy will continue concerning a text whose embryonic stage of literary language does not allow a clear ascription to any of the East Slavic branches and which was, furthermore, made in a territory that was neither politically nor sociologically Belarusian at that time.

[23] Sgambati (1983), in her excellent and unsurpassed study of the Belarusian *Trysčan*, proposes the existence of two intermediary prototypes to explain the particular differences between the texts. Her edition of the text is the one followed here. All references to chapters and paragraphs are, therefore, to her edition.

[24] The break between the first and the second part of *Tryscan* is also a contentious issue. While Kipel places it quite 'arbitrarily' (*sic*) at the recounting by King Marko of his dream to Ižota, on page 100 of her translation (corresponding to Sgambati, ch. 31a), to judge from a change in the spelling of proper names and vocabulary (Kipel, 1988: xv), Sgambati, after presenting a complete episodic collation of *Tryščan* with all other possible sources (Sgambati, 1983: 405–86), concludes that the second part starts with the departure of both lovers to Domolot (Camelot) after the escape of Palamidež (Palamedes), who in *Tryščan* does not fight with Tristan but simply escapes when he hears him approaching (ch. 32a). It should be remembered that the whole codex was written by the same hand, and the differences in orthography cannot be attributed to the copyist of our manuscript.

[25] If Kipel's bipartite division is accepted, it will also include Marko's dream, Ižota's attempt at having Braginia put to death, her rescue by Palamidež, his introduction to King Marko's court and his winning of Ižota in exchange for Braginia, and the visit of Ižota and Palamidež to the church where Tryščan turns up (ch. 31a–n).

[26] This interpretation of Tristan and Yseut's love, in comparison to Lancelot and Guinevere's, was advanced by the French School in the 1830s and it is further discussed by Alan S. Fedrick in his introduction to Béroul's *Tristan* (Fedrick, 1970: 22ff). On definitions and developments of courtly love, see Brownlee, 2000. On the social functionality of the myth and its modernity, see Le Goff's succinct remarks (2005: 236–42).