

# The Survival of Russian Paganism in Christian Tradition

*Dvoeverie in the folk legend “Egoriy the Brave”*

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## The Christianization of Rus' and Dvoeverie

Russia has always had a conflicting relationship with religion. It began in the 10<sup>th</sup> century with the introduction of a new religious system. Predominantly pagan Rus' was forced into Christianity by their ruler, Prince Vladimir, after his marriage to Anna Porphyrogenita, the sister of the Byzantine emperor, Basil II. This struggle between paganism and Christianity persisted for hundreds of years, as the peasantry found it difficult to completely embrace this new religion that was forced upon them. Religion became even more of a controversial topic after the October Revolution in 1917 when the Bolsheviks took power over Russia and the Soviet Union was formed. The first leader of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Lenin, believed that "religion [was] the opiate of the masses"<sup>1</sup> as he was an avid follower of Karl Marx, the author of *The Communist Manifesto*. A complete rejection of all religions took place within the Soviet Union, as one of its goals was the establishment of state atheism. After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russian Orthodoxy experienced a strong resurgence. Now, almost ninety percent of ethnic Russians identify themselves as Russian Orthodox, according to a 2011 survey taken by the Levada Center.<sup>2</sup> However, despite this religious identity, few people regularly attend religious services. Due to the deep cultural roots of Russian Orthodoxy, extending back to the 10<sup>th</sup> century, most Russian government officials are visibly respectful to the Church. As much of Russia's history is defined by a struggle with religion, it is important to remember how this conflict began, in the 900s with the forced Christianization of pagan Kievan Rus'.

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<sup>1</sup> Marx, Karl and Frederick Engels. *The Communist Manifesto*. Chicago: Pluto Press, 1996.

<sup>2</sup> See "Religioznaia vera v Rossii." *Levada Center*, 26 Sept 2011, <https://www.levada.ru/2011/09/26/religioznaya-vera-v-rossii/>.

Numerous historical accounts, like *De Administrando Imperio*<sup>3</sup> and works from Byzantine historians such as John Skylitzes and Joannes Zonaras, state that Christianity in Rus' predates Prince Vladimir's forced baptism of Kiev. In a letter by Patriarch Photius, the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople from 858 to 867 and from 877 to 886, he states that the Bulgarians turned to Christ in 863 and the Rus' followed suit after the Siege of Constantinople in 860, as recorded in Alexander Vasiliev's novel, *The Russian Attack on Constantinople in 860*. It is significant that the imperial court and the patriarchate viewed 10<sup>th</sup>-century Rus' as Christians, since Rus' themselves did not view themselves completely as such. As the Byzantines viewed the Rus' as Christians after the mid-ninth century, they never recorded the second baptism of Rus' in the 990s. Furthermore, Rus' is listed in *De Administrando Imperio*, on the lists of Orthodox ecclesiastical jurisdictions. The Rus' never identified themselves as completely Christian in any official documents, while the Byzantine's viewed all of Rus' as having accepted Orthodox Christianity.

However, whether this opinion of Rus's early Christianization is actually true or not, the effort to Christianize the Rus' was not lasting. The *Primary Chronicle*, an account of the early history of Rus' written by the monk Nestor, mentions that a significant portion of the population of Kiev was Christian by 944, as shown by the Christian part of the Rus' swearing to God on the Russo-Byzantine Treaty, while the ruling prince and the rest of the pagan population invoked Perun, the Slavic god of thunder and lightning, and Veles, the Slavic god of earth, waters, forests, and the

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<sup>3</sup> *De Administrando Imperio* is the Latin name for the Greek work authored by the 10<sup>th</sup> century Eastern Roman Emperor Constantine VII. He wrote the book as a manual for his son and successor, Emperor Romanos II, and includes sections on the recent history of the empire as well as historical surveys of surrounding nations.

underworld. In 945 or 957, the ruling regent, Olga of Kiev, visited Constantinople with the priest, Gregory, where she was said to have been baptized, according to the story of her reception in the imperial court of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII recorded in *De Ceremoniis*<sup>4</sup> and the *Primary Chronicle*.<sup>5</sup> In contrast to his mother's Christian influences, Olga's son Sviatoslav, a stubborn pagan, worshipped Perun and the other gods of the Slavic pantheon. He believed that if he became Christian, he would lose the respect of his warriors and people. Again, in contrast to his predecessor, Sviatoslav's successor Yaropolk I, was more sympathetic towards Christians. It has even been suggested by some historians, like Alexander Nazarenko in *Drevniaia Rus' na mezhdunarodnikh putiakh*, that Yaropolk underwent some of the preliminary rites of baptism before he was murdered on the orders of his half-brother, and successor, Vladimir.

One of the most prominent figures featured in the history of Rus's Christianization is Prince Vladimir, the Great Prince of Kiev of the Rurik dynasty, who began his reign in 980. In an effort to consolidate his power over Slavic tribes, Vladimir tried to unite all of Rus' and transform Kiev into the religious center of Eastern Slavdom by placing the god Perun as the supreme deity of the Slavic pantheon and erecting a pagan temple with Perun's sculpture that was accessible to all citizens of Rus'. Vladimir ordered Perun's idol, with a golden head and a silver mustache, to be placed on a hill by

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<sup>4</sup> *De Ceremoniis* is a Greek book of ceremonial protocol at the Byzantine court of emperors in Constantinople. The book mainly describes the processions and ceremonies of religious festivals, funerals, marriages, weddings, coronations, births, and celebrations of war triumphs.

<sup>5</sup> The *Primary Chronicle* states "[Olga] was the first from Rus' to enter the kingdom of God, and the sons of Rus' thus praise her as their leader, for since her death she has interceded with God in their behalf" (87).

the royal palace. Vladimir believed that ideological fortification of the Slavic pantheon was needed in order to place Kiev in a dominating position over the Eastern Slavic tribes, the different groups of peoples that inhabited Rus' and shared pagan beliefs and common lifestyles. He also hoped to bring a structure to religion in Rus' as different tribes worshipped different deities over others. However, Vladimir's attempt at religious reform did not gain much success. Vladimir's mistake in his attempt to bring together his entire empire under one pantheon was his attempt to place Perun ahead of all the other gods, as many tribes did not acknowledge Perun as the highest god; so, this religious reform had to be forced upon unwilling tribes. This failure of reform necessitated further religious transformations in Rus'.

Like much of early Rus's history, the exact process for the start of the Christianization of Kievan Rus' is up for debate, one popular story that has been presented by historians, such as Evgenii Anichkov<sup>6</sup>, is that in 986, Vladimir met with representatives from several religions in order to determine what religion best fit with the values of Rus' and would be most attractive to its people. His procedure for choosing the new faith was determining which religion coexisted well with the established pagan traditions and beliefs. Vladimir found Islam to be unsuitable for Rus' because it forbade the consumption of alcoholic beverages and pork, which would come into conflict with the pagan tradition of drinking and feasting. He found Judaism to be similarly unsuitable because the Jews' loss of Jerusalem, he believed, was a sign that God had abandoned the Jewish people. He rejected the Western variant of Christianity because there was a distinct lack of beauty in their churches. Instead Vladimir found Greek Orthodoxy to be

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<sup>6</sup> Evgenii Anichkov, *Iazychestvo i Drevniaia Rus'* (St. Petersburg, 1914)

an attractive prospect. When he arrived in Constantinople, Prince Vladimir was greeted by singing and rejoicing and was shown the luxurious beauty of the Orthodox churches by the patriarch, it almost seemed like Vladimir was in heaven.

After rejecting all of the other faiths and having seen the great churches of the Greeks, Vladimir was left with the decision of converting Rus' to Christianity. By the most detailed account of the Christianization of Rus' presented in the *Primary Chronicle*, in 988, after conquering the Greek village of Korsun', located in what is now Crimea, Vladimir sent messages detailing his victory to Basil II, the Byzantine emperor who expanded the Byzantine Empire's eastern borders. Prince Vladimir demanded that Basil give him his sister, Anna Porphyrogenita, to be his wife or he would sack his city as he did Korsun'. He told Vladimir that he could not allow his good Christian sister to wed a pagan, if Vladimir wanted to wed Basil's sister he had to convert to Christianity. Vladimir accepted this proposal as he had already studied the Greek Orthodox faith when he was examining the different religions of the world. Before the wedding took place Vladimir was baptized and took the name Basil in honor of his new brother-in-law. This sacrament was followed by Vladimir's marriage to Anna as promised.<sup>7</sup>

The *Primary Chronicle* states that after his success in Korsun', Prince Vladimir departed from the city with his wife, the priests of Korsun', the relics of Saint Kliment, the church vessels and icons, as well as two copper *kapishche* (altars), and four copper horses (116). According to historian Igor Froianov, the process of bringing these new trophies to Kiev from Korsun' was a part of a pagan ritual, the transfer of deities. For pagans, this process of parading trophies from a conquered city symbolized the continuity

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<sup>7</sup> To read the actual account of this story see the *Primary Chronicle* pgs. 111-116.

of traditions and an easier adoption of a new faith. Froianov believes that one of the crucial moments of pagan reform is the bringing of gods, which was seen in Rus' for the first time with Veles in response to the unification of Novgorod and the Dnepr territories (9). According to historian, Nikolai Kharuzin, this was a type of pantheon replenishment that occurred as a result of conquest. It was done through the purchase of major deities from other tribes or, important to this specific history, the marriage of foreigners by leaders (171-172). Thus, as stated above, this process of conquered trophies was representative, for the pagans, as the transfer of new deities. Froianov states that Christianity was presented to the Rus' in a "pagan wrapping." Churches were erected on old pagan religious sites, which symbolized a linkage between the new Christianity and old paganism.

The adoption of Christianity in 988 diminished the Slavic pantheon of gods, and the former gods were struck down. According to Froianov, in order to fully diminish the influence of the Slavic gods their idols were destroyed, as the overthrown idol ceased to be a god and therefore the belief in it deteriorates. However, this process had no effect on pagan belief, as it did not break from pagan traditions. So, while belief in the pagan gods had significantly decreased, the pagan traditions and rituals that were used to worship them never completely disappeared. Rather, they were adopted into the new Christian religion (Vlasov 17-18). Therefore, the way in which the idols of the Slavic pantheon were destroyed was significant. All of the Slavic gods were smashed and burned, with the exception of Perun, the head of the Slavic pantheon, who was taken down in a very specific manner, from which an interesting interpretation arises (Froianov 11). Once he returned to Kiev, Vladimir ordered Perun's idol to be tied to the tail of a horse and



dragged from his altar before being set upon by twelve men with a staff. He was dragged by the horse along the stream to the Dnepr river as the unbelieving people wept for him. Once they arrived at the Dnepr he was thrown in. Prince Vladimir commanded that “If he touches land anywhere, throw him away from the shore; until he passes the rapids, only then grab him” (Froianov 10). Prince Vladimir’s command was followed and as Perun passed the rapids the wind blew against the *ren’*, the sands, and thus Perun was now called Ren’. Froianov interpreted, from this ritualistic dethronement, that this event was actually the celebration of a pagan festival of the dying and reborn god. However, the manner in which Perun was dethroned is also significantly pagan in practice, for example the dragging, the staff beating, and the drowning are all common pagan rituals done to humiliate the god (11). After Perun was dealt with and discredited, Vladimir could proceed with the baptism of all the Rus’. According to the *Primary Chronicle*, Prince Vladimir ordered the residents of Kiev to go down to the river Dnepr unless they wished to be made his enemies (116). Once the large numbers of people had arrived they were sent into the water by praying Orthodox priests in order to be baptized into the new Christian faith. However, despite their baptism, many residents of Rus’ did not wholly accept Christianity as their faith until much later.

Despite numerous earlier failed attempts to Christianize all of Rus’, paganism still strongly survived in the peasant villages of Russia centuries after the forced Baptism of Kievan Rus’ in the tenth century. The Russian peasantry was forced to accept Christianity in the early sixteenth century, almost six centuries after Rus’s official Christianization, due to the emerging feudal relationships in the centralized state (Vlasov 29). The process of Christianization did not result in enlightenment through Christian dogma or even the

understanding of Christian rites, but rather in the conversion to the church's ritual calendar system and a coming together of the age-old agrarian and meteorological observations. The process of the Christianization of the peasantry occurred predominantly in the first few decades of the sixteenth century when the people of the church adopted the Julian calendar (Vlasov 29). However, the popular orthodoxy that the people favored was in no way the official Orthodoxy of the church. In the sixteenth century, a gap emerged between the cultures of the upper and lower orders, which created a conflict between them. The centralized church proclaimed that the faith of the masses was false and started a campaign to eradicate their half-pagan belief system (Vlasov 40). They produced numerous sermons and pronouncements that never fully reached the masses. Thus, real Christianization was left in the hands of the local church, which occupied a very low position throughout Russia in terms of authority. This allowed peasants to continue to practice their so-called false, half-pagan religion from which comes the idea of the survival of *dvoerverie* [dual faith].

The Christianization of Rus' did not happen instantaneously, it was a process that took several hundred years, especially in the conversion of the peasantry who understood Christianity through their belief in its rituals. Christianity had to respond to the concerns of the peasantry in regard to their day-to-day lives, like their economic needs, problems with fertility, distribution of rainfall, and the pasturing of livestock. Christianity had to replace paganism in the eyes of the peasantry, which presented the problem of supplanting the agrarian cycle with the Christian calendar system (Vlasov 17). Peasant life revolved around tilling the land in rhythm with nature. The seasons of the calendar were an essential part of peasant life as the calendar told them when to plant, when to

sow, when to harvest, and so on. The calendar is also the basis of the annual ritual cycle of any given religion. However, it is possible to use the calendar of a different religious system without ever practicing its religion, but once conversion takes place it is necessary to switch over to that calendar system. Thus, it appeared the peasantry accepted Christianity through their adoption of Christmas-Easter-Whitsunday as calendar milestones rather than Koliada-Iarilo-Kupala<sup>8</sup>. The church compelled the Russian people affiliated with it to transition over to the Christian Julian calendar in the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Ethnographer V. Vlasov, believes that this transition is a reliable indication that the peasantry adopted the Christian ritual cycle at the same time, suggesting that because of the “emerging relationships of the feudal order in the centralized state,” Russian peasants were forced to officially embrace Christianity and church traditions (Vlasov 29).

The adoption of Christianity by the peasantry did not necessarily mean that elements of important pagan beliefs and rituals were rejected, but rather they continued to exist independently of and in conjunction with Christian rituals. Christianity was accepted in accordance with pagan tradition. Until the end of the fifteenth century, there were no rural churches that were open to the general populace, as churches only existed in the courts of princes and boyars. According to Vlasov, in the mid-sixteenth century, inhabitants of rural Russia were documented as incorrectly celebrating church holidays as well as having unseemly conduct in church. However, rural inhabitants viewed themselves as Christians because they celebrated Christian holidays. Despite this, their ceremonies were not Orthodox as they merely practiced pagan rituals on the closest

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<sup>8</sup> Koliada is a Slavic winter festival that is celebrated in early January. Iarilo is a folk festival that is celebrated in late spring or early summer. Kupala is a celebration of the summer solstice that takes place in late June.

major Christian date. Pagan celebrations were not accepted by the church; so, peasants that held to paganism had to embellish church calendar rituals like celebrating the harvest festival on August 15<sup>th</sup>, the day of the Assumption. New members of the Christian church did not conduct themselves in a Christian manner because freedom in behavior was encouraged by pagan traditions, where as silence and immobility were foreign notions (Vlasov 19-20).

The sixteenth century was also a time in which many new Russian saints were canonized, saints that were born among the peasantry, like Aleksandr Svirskii, known for his righteous life and miracles, and Antonii Siiskii, a monk who advocated for monastic control of peasant villages. All of these newly canonized saints, like Aleksandr and Antonii, were children of peasant families who became monks and established new monasteries before becoming Russian saints. They were peasants who embraced Christianity and tried to spread it across Russia. The significant increase in the canonization of members of the peasantry during this time indicates that the Christianization of the Russian peasantry had achieved such a degree that they required their own representatives before God. The canonizations were an attempt in spreading Christianity among a relatively pagan peasantry by elevating members of their own community as a type of religious propaganda. The growing number of venerated saints also indicated, according to Vlasov, an increased number of the faithful, who desired to glorify their local monastery or church (Vlasov 22).

Pagan influences in the Christian tradition were common in Rus' especially in rural regions. Churches, like the Temple of the Ascension in Kolomna province, that were built during the sixteenth century were standing symbols of pagan influence as they

featured hipped roofs that were characteristic of earlier pagan temples, as described by Petro Tolochko (317-318). Pagan beliefs also resulted in the adoption of distortions in the performance of rituals. Ritual movement against the path of the sun is an important part of Christianity (Vlasov 25). However, by the middle of the sixteenth century, processions of the cross in Russian churches were performed with the sun, which is symbolic of a deasil movement characteristic of a pagan cult dance of the sun.

Paganism was transfused into Christianity, pagan magic became Christian miracles and witches became Christian saints. The processes of Christianization for the Russian peasantry are reflected in legends such as the “Legend of Petr and Fevroniia” of Murom, a tale about a sick prince, Petr, who was healed by a young peasant, Fevroniia, and their eventual marriage. Fevroniia was clearly a pagan who healed her future Christian husband using witchcraft instead of an invocation of God. Fevroniia, the former pagan, later became a Christian saint. The formation of fable plots was popular within Russia and was rooted deep within the nation’s past, but the process of the formation of fable plots concluded at the end of the sixteenth century. Fables often reflect elements of pagan ritual as “the hero of the fable only attains his goal if he unswervingly fulfills all the injunctions of this ritual, obeys the all-knowing warlock, and placates the evil spirits” (Vlasov 29). This structure of hero’s fables found in pagan ritual was hidden within Christian tales of Jesus and the apostles as well as legends about the lives of Saints. The surviving elements of pagan rituals further cement the idea that Christianity was accepted within Rus’ under a pagan wrapping.

For Russians, traditional peasant culture was created on the basis of religious awareness; so, folk culture was equal to folk religion. Folk religion was the synthesis of

pagan beliefs and Christian dogma that resulted in *dvoeverie* and customary orthodoxy [*bytovoe pravoslavie*] (Bernshtam 35). The survival of pagan traditions and belief that resulted in the idea of *dvoeverie* were the interpretation and reconstruction of archaic forms that were traceable to a mythological source. According to Tat'iana Bernshtam, a doctor of historical sciences, paganism comprises the essential part of a folk belief system that was poorly and obviously masked by Christianity, because by stripping away the cover of Christian tradition, like religious holidays as mentioned above, traditions of pre-Christian paganism are revealed (35). Consequently, interfused unity and equal melding of paganism and Christianity characterized Russian folk culture and religion. *Dvoeverie* describes the conscious or unconscious preservation of pagan rituals and beliefs by Christian communities, usually as two independent belief systems held simultaneously or a syncretic faith comprised of Christian and pagan elements. Elements of *dvoeverie* have survived in the religious literature of Russia, as pagan themes such as magic and animism have permeated Christian stories. However, as these stories featured elements of pagan tradition they have been banned by the Orthodox Church and placed on the lists of “false teachings” like the collections of charms, prayers, folk medicine, mythological fables (especially those that feature shape changers), and so forth (Bernshtam 44-45). In fact, one of the works of the famous Russian folklorist, Aleksandr Afanas'ev, was withdrawn from sale by censorship as the Orthodox Church claimed the collection, *Narodnye russkie legendy* [*Russian Folk Legends*], was blasphemous.<sup>9</sup>

Aleksandr Afanas'ev became interested in Russian folklore and tradition in 1850 and published his first scholarly articles, like “Sorcery in the Ancient Rus” and “Pagan

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<sup>9</sup> “Aleksandr Nikolayevich Afanasev.” *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 2015.

Legends about the Buyan Island.” He believed that legends and stories held information about ancient pagan mythology and expanded on this idea in his book, *Poeticheskiye vozzreniya slavyan na prirodu* [*The Poetic Outlook of Slavs on Nature*]. As a folklorist, his works are compiled into a collection relating to Old Russian history, culture, and tradition. In the early 1850s, Afanas’ev decided to start gathering Russian folktales into one volume. Afanas’ev chose 74 tales out of the archives of the ethnography section of the Russian Geographical Society and added them to the enormous collection compiled by Vladimir Dal’, a lexicographer and founding member of the Russian Geographical Society. He added 148 stories from Dal’s collection to his own as well as a few others. These stories were published in his eight-volume series, *Narodnye russkie skazki* [*Russian Fairy Tales*]. Stories were often given with several variations that were collected from different regions. Afanas’ev’s collection was ahead of its time and played an important role in the preservation of Russian folklore. While Afanas’ev’s collection of Russian fairy tales mostly feature stories like “Vasilisa the Beautiful,” “Ivan the Fool,” and “Koschei the Deathless,” his banned collection, *Narodnye russkie legendy*, was comprised of more religious legends that combined Russian folklore with Christian tradition, containing stories like “The Poor Widow,” “The Brother of Christ,” “The Trip to Jerusalem,” and, most importantly in the context of this project, “Egoriy the Brave.”

Aleksandr Afanas’ev collected three variants of the story, “Egoriy the Brave” [“Egoriy Khrabryy”], from the collection of Vladimir Dal’, one of the greatest Russian-language lexicographers. The first variant of “Egoriy the Brave” details the struggle between Saint Egoriy and the villain-tsar Martemyan and Egoriy’s journey of spreading the holy faith, Russian Orthodoxy, throughout the earth. Saint Egoriy must first suffer at

the hands of Martemyan before he escapes and travels to convert the different elements of nature that he encounters before returning to confront Martemyan. The tale ends in the defeat of Martemyan at the hands of Egoriy's iron mace and the spilling of his blood onto the earth. The second variant of "Egoriy the Brave" describes the troubles that Egoriy and his mother must face at the hands of the terrible khan, Bragim, also known as the Firedrake. Again Egoriy must suffer at the hands of Bragim before he is able to free himself and his mother from his grasp. Egoriy slays Bragim with his spear and the help of a pack of wolves that he encounters on his journey. In the third variant of "Egoriy the Brave" Egoriy must suffer through torture and tribulations for his mother before killing the savage serpent to avenge his mother's blood. Once again, Egoriy encounters a pack of wolves that aid him in his defeat of the serpent. The tale ends with Saint Egoriy slaughtering the firedrake with his spear and the waves enveloping its corpse, dragging it back into the ocean. In all three versions of Saint Egoriy's tale presented by Aleksandr Afanas'ev Egoriy is depicted as a holy warrior who must battle an unchristian foe in order to spread the holy faith or free his mother from bondage.



## Pagan Influences in Christian Tradition

Dvoeverie is a central characteristic of Russian Orthodox Religion. Pagan ideas and rituals have survived in Christian tradition and created new meaning in many religious practices of Russian Orthodoxy. This survival stems from the Christianization of Rus' in the tenth century. The people of Rus' only accepted Christianity under a pagan wrapping, more specifically, they accepted Christianity that was gradually being embedded into pagan traditions, allowing their survival within the practices of newly adopted religious customs. Russian Christian traditions have adapted and warped to coexist with established pagan beliefs which distinguishes them from most other forms of Christianity. This unique blend of Christian tradition and pagan ritual was preserved in Russian religious consciousness because of Russia's separation from the rest of Christian Europe.<sup>10</sup> Due to the isolation of early Russians, they largely did not experience the Renaissance nor did they undergo the Reformation's purging of ancient superstitions (Ivanits 4). The paganism of early Rus' focused on the fantastic spirits of nature, and because of this affinity towards nature the most central figure of pagan life and worship was the deity Mother Damp Earth, whose veneration continued for hundreds of years following the Christianization of Rus'. Many attributes of and worship practices surrounding pagan figures, like Mother Damp Earth, Veles, and other pagan deities, transferred over to Christian figures, such as Mary, Saint George, and various other saints (Ivanits 19).

The central characteristic of Russian paganism was the importance it placed on nature. Russian pagans believed that there were spirits dwelling in the trees, waters,

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<sup>10</sup> This separation is largely due to the political situation of Russia under the control of the Tatar khans at the time.

fields, and homes. These spirits were protectors that ruled over their domains. There were spirit masters of the forest (*leshii*), of the waters (*vodianoi*), and of the fields (*polevoi*) (Ivanits 64). These spirits represented the living nature that surrounded pagans and gave them actual figures to attribute to their worship. According to Linda Ivanits, a scholar of Russian literature, in *Russian Folk Belief*, after the creation of the world, Michael the Archangel cast out hordes of demons from heaven. Those demons that fell into houses became the *domovye*, those that fell into the forests became the *leshie*, and those that fell into the waters became known as the *vodianye* (Ivanits 62). This version of the nature spirits' origin story probably spread after the Christianization of Rus' as a way to discourage peasant belief in them by connecting them to the devil. Church ideas clearly influenced Russian folk belief in the devil who was described as having a combination of human and animal features (Ivanits 39). In religious literature the devil often created topographical features that presented difficulty for man. So, in an effort to Christianize the peasantry the early Russian Orthodox church tried to equate important pagan beliefs with the influence of the devil.

This pagan reverence and belief in the sentience of nature travels over into the fairytales and folk legends of Russia. In the first variant of the folk legend "Egoriy the Brave," Saint Egoriy commands nature to spread throughout the earth. When Egoriy goes out to spread the holy faith throughout the land he is blocked by a thicket of intertwined trees. In order to pass, he proclaims, "Hail to you, dark forests,/ Forests dark and dense!/ Spread, you forests, all over the earth." Egoriy addresses the forests as living beings and commands them to spread throughout the earth. Taking into account the pagan beliefs that have combined with Christianity, Egoriy is actually addressing the *leshii* and

commanding them to spread. Next, Egoriy commands the forests to not believe in the devil but rather, “Believe in Christ Himself,/ Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar.” Egoriy is commanding the forests, the *leshii*, to reject their belief in the devil and instead turn to God. Again and again Egoriy commands different elements of nature like the crowded mountains, the fierce beasts, the three shepherds, and the mother Ostrafil-bird to spread all over the earth and believe in the heavenly tsar, Christ Himself. Really Egoriy is not just commanding trees and mountains to move, but rather the nature spirits that dwell in them. He is commanding the different symbols of the pagan faith to turn away from the devil and embrace Christianity. With each new encounter, Saint Egoriy asks for the same thing to be done. This ritual is practiced again in the third version of Saint Egoriy’s tale. As Egoriy rides out to slay the firedrake he is blocked by a grouping of dense trees, and cries out to the them, “Woods, you woods, stand apart!/ I will build a church out of you.” Once again, Egoriy addresses the *leshii* of the forest and commands them to stand aside. In a way, these lines are a metaphor for the Christianization of Rus’. Egoriy decides that he will build a Christian church out of the symbols of the pagan spirits, literally Christianity in a pagan wrapping, just like the Rus’ accepted Christianity when Prince Vladimir forced it upon them in the tenth century.

A dominant feature of Slavic paganism was the veneration of Mother Damp Earth and the cult of ancestors (Ivanits 15). Mother Damp Earth was one of the idols, referred to as Mokosh, that Vladimir placed with Perun during his attempt to solidify the Slavic pantheon of Gods (14). According to Boris Rybakov<sup>11</sup>, a Russian historian, Mother Damp

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<sup>11</sup> Rybakov, Boris A. *Iazychestvo drevnikh slavian*. Moscow: AN SSSR, 1981.

Earth was the great mother goddess of the Eastern Slavs. Her idol, created by Prince Vladimir, depicted a woman with uplifted hands that was flanked by two horsemen. Mokosh was the goddess of fertility, bounty, and moisture. She was the protectress of women's work and the fate of maidens. Early pagans in Rus' believed in the "absolute sanctity" of Mother Damp Earth and continued to worship her and practice rituals connecting them to her as late as the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Ivanits 15). Mother Damp Earth was an important part of daily peasant life. According to Ivanits in *Russian Folk Belief*, peasants swore oaths by swallowing a mouthful of dirt, measured boundary lines by walking them with piles of dirt atop their heads, confessed their sins to the earth when no priest was present, and protected their homes and herds from plagues and pestilence by digging a furrow around them in order to release the life-bearing nature of the earth (15). Peasants even practiced a ritual in which they implored the earth for forgiveness before they died. This fervent admiration for and worship of Mother Damp Earth is the culmination of the pagan's belief in the sentience of nature. The influence that Mother Damp Earth has had on Christian rituals and traditions is clearly apparent in the folk legend "Egoriy the Brave" as both Egoriy and the peasants of Rus' turn to the earth for aid and protection.

Similarly to how Egoriy the Brave commands nature and beasts, he also calls upon Mother Damp Earth for aid in the first variant of the legend "Egoriy the Brave." In the last few verses of the legend, after killing Martemyan with his spear and soaking himself and the earth in Martemyan's blood, Egoriy invokes the name of Mother Damp Earth. He cries out to her, "Hail to you, Mother Damp Earth!/ Take the Jewish blood into

yourself,/ The Jewish, unchristian blood.”<sup>12</sup> Egoriy’s actions seem almost like a sacrificial ritual to Mother Damp Earth, calling upon her to devour the freshly spilled blood of his enemy. Although sacrifice does feature in Christian traditions, with God calling upon Abraham to sacrifice Isaac to him as a test of his faith, it is much more prevalent in pagan rituals. The following lines seem to support this idea of Egoriy’s actions as an offering to Mother Damp Earth. In the next lines of the first legend, Mother Damp Earth has parted into “two sides, into four quarters,/ Has devoured the Jewish blood,/ The Jewish, unchristian blood.” In these lines it seems as though the sacrifice made to Mother Damp Earth has been accepted and she moves to split into the four hemispheres of the earth. Mother Damp Earth was a powerful figure in Russian paganism that peasants turned to for protection. Mother Damp Earth’s role as protectress of the fate of young maidens played an important part of her worship, as many pagans turned to her in times of need. In the second legend, when the angry khan, Bragim, comes and starts to take the young maidens of the region, “All the Orthodox fled to the woods, [and] built themselves dugouts.” This is a clear reference to the pagan tradition of digging a furrow around a property in order to call upon Mother Damp Earth for protection from ill fortune. Instead of retreating to a temple of God to seek protection from an invading enemy, the Christians of this tale run to the protection of Mother Damp Earth, through their dugouts, and the protection that is provided to them by the forest (the leshii), in the form of wolves. In the end, the protection of the forest and Mother Damp Earth is more powerful than that of God as his temples are laid waste and destroyed, leaving nowhere to

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<sup>12</sup> It is important to note this derogatory reference to Judaism in the folk legend of “Egoriy the Brave.” These seemingly equate the pagans of Rus’ to early Jews, playing into the newly Christian rhetoric.

pray to God behind. Mother Damp Earth was an important figure for many centuries in Russia, both before and after its Christianization.

While Mother Damp Earth is not as popular in Russia today as she was even a century ago, her influence remains in Christian tradition as much of the practices of earth worship have transferred to the veneration of Mary, another mother figure in religious belief (Ivanits 21). Unlike other Christian faiths, such as Catholicism, Russian Orthodoxy does not stress the pure nature of the Virgin Mary, but rather her divine motherhood. Mary, the *bogoroditsa*, has assumed the place of the Trinity in the Russian Orthodox faith. She is depicted in her icons as a more maternal figure, with her face pressed against her baby's head (Figs 321). This emphasis of Mary's maternal role in Russian religious consciousness stems from the paganism of Rus' and, more specifically, the cult of Mother Damp Earth. In its most ancient form, the paganism of Russian peasants was the religion of the soil (321). So, in keeping with pagan veneration of Mother Damp Earth, the true center of Russian religion was Divine Motherhood. However, Mother Damp Earth was not the only pagan deity that survived after the Christianization of Rus'.

After the Christianization of the peasantry, the ancient personages of pagan Rus' lived on under Christian names. In peasant Christian-pagan religion, saints and pagan gods were interchangeable. Similarly to how Mother Damp Earth has influenced the depiction of Mary in Russian religious consciousness, other pagan gods have become intertwined with certain Christian saints. Veles was the pagan god of the dead, master of the forest, and protector of flocks (Ivanits 17). After Christianization, many traits that were attributed to Veles became patronages of Saint George, known in Russian as Saint Egoriy (28). Saint Egoriy assumed authority over the forest and waters, connecting him

to the forest (leshii) and water (vodiano) spirits (29). Saint Egoriy became the patron saint of livestock and shepherds as well as wild and domestic animals. Through these patronages, Saint Egoriy adopted many rituals that connect him to the cattle god, Veles. Egoriy's spring holiday marked the day upon which peasants' cattle were turned out to pasture for the first time each year (27). In fact, many peasants imagined that on this day Saint Egoriy rode out on his white horse giving special protection to animals. The most important of Saint Egoriy's rites are connected to his patronage of livestock and shepherds.<sup>13</sup> Peasants prayed to Egoriy for protection of their flocks from wild animals and cattle plague. Peasants also asked Saint Egoriy for protection from wolves and other predators. In pagan tradition, wolves were believed to be the leshii's favorite among forest beasts, and in folk belief, Egoriy had sovereignty over wolves, connecting him to the forest spirits through his patronages of wild animals. It is through these patronages that the influence Veles had on the image of Saint Egoriy in Russia is most apparent.

In Christian belief, Saint Egoriy functions as a holy warrior, martyr, and as the savior of a Christian maiden from a dragon (Ivanits 26). In the tales of "Egoriy the Brave" collected by Aleksandr Afanas'ev, Saint Egoriy fulfills almost all of these functions. In the first and second variants of the folk legend, Saint Egoriy presents himself as a holy warrior, ready to defeat the evil tsar Martemyan and the angry khan who has captured his mother. In the third variant, Saint Egoriy functions as the savior of his Christian mother from a savage serpent. Egoriy is depicted similarly to a shepherd, like Jesus, he brings the holy faith to his flock: the shepherds, the beasts, the forests, and the mountains he encounters on his mission. In the first legend, Saint Egoriy's mother

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<sup>13</sup> For more information about Veles' Christian personage, Saint George, see Linda Ivanits' book *Russian Folk Belief*, pp. 26-29.

commands him to go out into the world and spread the holy faith. Saint Egoriy does so by commanding nature, humans, and animals to go out into the world and believe in Christ. In the second legend, Egoriy is depicted as a holy warrior who saves his mother from a terrible khan. After falling in love with Egoriy's mother, the khan, Bragim, steals her away. Saint Egoriy goes on a quest to free his mother from the grasp of the khan and does so by slaying him. In the third legend, Egoriy, once again, suffers at the hands of his foe, a savage serpent, in order to free his mother. Once more Egoriy kills the serpent with his spear. This image of Saint Egoriy striking down his enemy with a spear or sword is common throughout all of the legends. However, in the later two variants, Egoriy slays his opponent with the help of the wolves that he commands through his patronage of the forest and wild animals, echoing his past role as the pagan god, Veles.

In all three versions of "Egoriy the Brave" that Afanas'ev collected, Saint Egoriy demonstrates his sovereignty over wild animals, his role as the protector of shepherds, and his connection to the forest as the Christianized version of the pagan deity, Veles. The first variant of Egoriy's tale demonstrates Saint Egoriy's power over wild beasts as he commands the wild snakes and beasts to scatter all over the earth. When Egoriy encounters three shepherds with "unclean spirit" tending to a flock of beasts and snakes, he smites the animals. Then, turning to the shepherds he tells them to go to Jerusalem and "bathe in the Jordan River;/ You are full of wicked spirit,/ Wicked spirit, unchristian spirit." It is important to note that in these lines Saint Egoriy tells the shepherds that they are full of wicked, unchristian spirit. Saint Egoriy is telling these pagan shepherds to renounce their faith and turn to Christ, the heavenly tsar. In fact, Saint Egoriy is commanding them to be baptized in the Jordan River, to cleanse themselves of their



original sin in order to be welcomed into the Kingdom of God. In this section of the folk legend, Saint Egoriy is functioning both in his role as the patron saint of shepherds, guiding them to the true faith, and in his role as sovereign of wild animals, as he smites the flock of beasts. In the following lines, Saint Egoriy encounters the Ostrafil-bird, a bird of Russian folklore. Egoriy commands the bird to come down from its place on top of Jerusalem's gate and fly to the sea and raise its kin there. Once again, Saint Egoriy is displaying his sovereignty over wild animals as he commands the Ostrafil-bird to reject its pagan faith and instead turn to God. This display of Saint Egoriy's pagan influenced patronages is not unique to the first variant of his folk legends, as these displays are prominent in all three versions.

Saint Egoriy's sovereignty over wild beasts is an important feature of the third legend of Egoriy the Brave. In this legend, Egoriy must slay a savage serpent, a Firedrake. In order to do so Saint Egoriy commands different animals that he comes across in his pursuit of the serpent to aid him. When Saint Egoriy encounters a pack of wolves in a forest he orders them to prepare for a "frightful fight." In the following lines of the legend Saint Egoriy encounters a flock of birds that he commands to fly to the ocean and prepare for a "bloody feast." Saint Egoriy is demonstrating his sovereignty over wild beasts as he calls upon them for aid in his defeat of the serpent. These different animals do aid Egoriy in his slaying of the Firedrake, just as he intended them to do. The wolves bite at the serpent as Egoriy readies his spear and as he slays the serpent with it the flocks of birds peck at the firedrake. Saint Egoriy's use of animals as tools further emphasizes the command that he has over them through his connection to the pagan god of wild beasts and the forest, Veles.

The second legend is riddled with even more references to Saint George and his past echo of Veles. When the angry khan arrived, all the Orthodox peasants fled into the forest for protection, “built themselves dugouts and lived with the wolves.” In the forest these peasants survived with the animals that were subject to the will of Saint George. When Saint Egoriy returned once again to the forest he met a pack of wolves and sends them after the formidable khan, Bragim. When the wolves could not finish him off, Egoriy took his own spear and killed him. In the third tale, Saint Egoriy again met a pack of wolves and sent them after the savage serpent. In Russian folk religion, wolves are under the command of Saint Egoriy and “if a wolf has something in its teeth – George gave it” (Ivantis 28). Wolves were known in pagan belief as the favorite animals of the leshii, the forest spirits, who were under the domain of the pagan god of the forest, Veles. The pagan gods of early Rus’ survived within Christian tradition by transforming into Christian saints. The saints in Russia differ from their counterparts in other Christian religions because for Russians “saints are so much the stuff of legend that it is impossible to find a historical model” (Ivantis 23). Today many of the patronages of saints can be traced back to the powers and domains associated with certain pagan gods, just like the importance placed on Mary’s divine motherhood can be traced back to the mother goddess of pagan religion, Mother Damp Earth. Despite Prince Vladimir’s attempt to destroy the Slavic pantheon and the peasants’ belief in paganism, pagan rituals and traditions are still apparent in Russian Orthodoxy.

When Prince Vladimir Christianized Kievan Rus’ he tore down the pagan idols that he had constructed. Prince Vladimir ordered for the idols to be ritually destroyed because, for pagans, the overthrown idol ceases to be a god and the belief in it

diminishes. In all three variants of the folk legend “Egoriy the Brave” Saint Egoriy must suffer through various tortures at the hands of his foe. What is interesting is that these tortures and the order of them are common throughout all of the collected legends. In the first variant of the legend, the villain-tsar Martemyan captures Saint Egoriy. Martemyan tells Egoriy to renounce his faith in Christ and instead believe in the devil, really turning away from Christianity and embracing paganism. However, Saint Egoriy refuses and angers Martemyan. Martemyan orders Egoriy’s body to be cut by axes, but the axes cannot cut Egoriy’s holy body. Instead, the blades of the axes break against his skin. Martemyan again commands Saint Egoriy to renounce his Christian faith and turn to paganism and again Egoriy refuses. So, Martemyan orders for Egoriy to be boiled in tar. However, the tar does not affect Egoriy and, instead, he swims atop the boiling tar singing “cherubic verses” of the New Testament.<sup>14</sup> Again and again Martemyan orders Egoriy to renounce his Christian beliefs and each time Saint Egoriy refuses. With each new refusal Martemyan orders Saint Egoriy to be killed in different ways. First, he orders him to be cut by saws. Instead, the teeth of the saws break against Egoriy’s holy body. Next, Martemyan orders Saint Egoriy to wear iron boots while standing on top of cast iron plates atop a fire. However, Saint Egoriy is not affected by the flames. Next, Martemyan orders Egoriy to be locked inside a deep cellar with heavy boards and sand placed on top. But Egoriy is freed by God with a mighty storm that blows away the boards and sands. Martemyan’s attempts at killing Saint Egoriy are reminiscent of the process that Prince Vladimir employed to ritually destroy the idols of the pagan gods in the tenth century. Really, this process is Martemyan’s attempt at diminishing Saint

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<sup>14</sup> In this legend, Judaism has been equated with paganism, so it is important to note that Saint Egoriy sings verses from the New Testament instead of the Old Testament.

Egoriy's, and the peasants', belief in God. However, because these attempts did not succeed, their faith in God never diminished and, instead, this process further cemented their belief in Him. This process of ritual destruction is not unique to the first legend of Egoriy the Brave. In fact, both variants of the story share this same process.

In the second legend of Egoriy the Brave Saint Egoriy must save his mother after the terrible Tatar khan, Bragim, steals her away. When Saint Egoriy confronts Bragim he is captured and Bragim orders him to be killed in a similar process to what Martemyan ordered to be done to Egoriy in the previous legend. First, Bragim orders Saint Egoriy to be cut by saws and axes, but the teeth of the saws break against Egoriy's skin and the blades of the axes are knocked out. Next, Bragim orders Saint Egoriy to be boiled in tar, but Egoriy only swims on top, unaffected by the boiling tar surrounding him. Finally, Bragim orders Egoriy to be placed into a cellar. Egoriy sits there for thirty years, praying to God as he has done throughout all of the tortures that have been delivered unto him. Hearing his prayers, God sends a storm into Rus' that blows away the oaken boards that cover the cellar, freeing Saint Egoriy. Once again, Saint Egoriy survives many death sentences because of his trust in God. Because Saint Egoriy survives these attempts on his life with help from God, the peasant belief in God is assured through pagan traditions.

Saint Egoriy, once again, undergoes these tortures in the third variant of the legend "Egoriy the Brave." In this legend, Saint Egoriy must defeat the savage serpent in order to avenge his mother's blood. Before starting on his quest, Saint Egoriy prays to God for his mother. First, Egoriy is sawed by saws and cut by axes, but the teeth of the saws and the blades of the axes are knocked out against his holy body. Next, Egoriy is boiled in tar, but the water freezes around him and Egoriy swims there, unaffected by

anything. Then, Egoriy is placed inside a cellar that is hammered closed with oaken boards and covered by heavy sands. Egoriy sits there for thirty years before a storm blows away the sands and lifts up the oaken boards. These attempts on Egoriy's life do not affect him at all because of his faith in God. Egoriy stands tall and unrelenting against the ritualistic deaths that he is ordered to endure. Once more, pagan traditions and rituals have cemented peasant belief in the Christian God.

The Russian Orthodoxy that emerged out of the Christianization of Rus' is much different than the Orthodox religion that Prince Vladimir adopted from the Greeks in the tenth century. It has been influenced by the prevalent paganism of early Rus' and warped to adhere to its practices. Christianization was accepted in Rus' under a pagan wrapping. Pagan rituals, like the ritual dethronement of the overthrown god, were used to place the Christian god, who was presented by Prince Vladimir, above the former Slavic pagan gods, like Perun and Veles. During Christianization there was an attempt by the church to diminish the importance that pagans placed upon the sentience of nature by equating the nature spirits, like the *leshii* and the *vodianoi*, to demons that were cast out of Heaven by Michael the Archangel when the earth was created. However, this had no real effect on the peasants' worship of nature. In fact, this belief in nature heavily influenced Christian beliefs. Mother Damp Earth was the embodiment of pagan belief in nature. She was the central figure of Russian paganism and the peasant veneration of her still echoes in Russian Orthodoxy today, in the importance placed upon Mary as the *bogoroditsa* and her divine motherhood. This connection between Mary and Mother Damp Earth is not the only influence that pagan deities had on Christian saints. The pagan god, Veles, has survived in his Christian personage, Saint Egoriy, specifically through Egoriy's role as

the patron saint of shepherds, livestock, wild animals, and the forest. In Russian folk legends, this synthesis of old paganism and new Russian Orthodoxy is most apparent. In legends like “Egoriy the Brave,” it is clear that with the adoption of Christianization in Rus’, important elements of pagan beliefs and rituals, like Mother Damp Earth and the other pagan deities, nature, and the practice of ritual dethronement, were not rejected but rather continued to exist independently and combine with Christian rituals. In Rus’, Christianity was not a distinct religion, but rather accepted in accordance with pagan tradition. In the words of Boris Rybakov, “the new does not replace the old, but is layered on top of it, is added to the old.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Rybakov, Boris A. *Iazychestvo Drevnei Rusi*. Nauka, 1988, p. 754.

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Appendix: “Egoriy the Brave”[«Егорий Храбрый»]

First Variant:

<p>Как во граде, во Ерусалиме,          При царе было, при Фёдоре,          При царице было, при Софии,          Породила она Фёдору три дочери,          Ещё четвертаго Егория Харабраго.</p>	<p>As it happened in the city of Jerusalem,          In the reign of Tsar Fyodor,          In the reign of the Tsarina Sofia,          She gave Fyodor three daughters,          Yet the fourth was Egoriy the Brave.</p>
<p>Выходит из той земли, из жидовския,            Жидовския, босурманския,          Царища Мартемьянища.          Полонил он у Фёдора три дочери,          Ещё четвертаго Егория Харабраго.</p>	<p>Coming out from the land, from the          Jewish land,          The Jewish, unchristian land,          The Tsar Martemyan.          He captured Fyodor’s three daughters,          Yet the fourth he captured was Egoriy          the Brave.</p>
<p>Злодей-царища Мартемьянища          Святому Егорию глаголет:          «Ох ты гой еси, Егорий Храбрый свет!          Ты не веруй самому Христу.          Самому Христу, царю небесному;          А ты веруй сатане-врагу со          диаволом».</p>	<p>The villain-tsar Martemyan          To Saint Egoriy says:          “Hail to you, dearest Egoriy the Brave!          Do not believe in Christ Himself.          Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar;          Rather believe in the enemy, Satan, the          devil.”</p>
<p>Святой Егорий глаголет:          «Я не верую сатане-врагу,          Сатане-врагу со диаволом;          А я верую самому Христу,          Самому Христу, царю небесному!»</p>	<p>Saint Egoriy says:          “I do not believe in the enemy, Satan,          The enemy, Satan, the devil;          But I do believe in Christ Himself,          Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar!”</p>
<p>Злодей-царища Мартемьянища          На святаго Егория осержается,          На святое тело опаляется,          На святое тело на Егорьево:          Повелел Егория в топоры рубить.</p>	<p>The villain-tsar Martemyan          Is angry with the holy Egoriy,          He burns with fury at the holy body,          The holy body of Egoriy:          He ordered Egoriy’s body to be cut with</p>

<p>Не добре Егория топоры берут, У топов лезвья посломались От святого тела Егорьева.</p> <p>Злодей-царица Мартемьянища Святому Егорию глаголет: «Ох ты гой еси, Егорий Харабрый свет! Ты не веруй самому Христу, Самому Христу, царю небесному; А ты веруй сатане-врагу, Сатане-врагу со диаволом».</p> <p>Святой Егорий глаголет: «Я не верую сатане-врагу, Сатане-врагу со диаволом; А я верую самому Христу, Самому Христу, царю небесному!»</p> <p>Злодей-царица Мартемьянища На святого Егория осержается, На святое тело опаляется, На святое тело на Егорьево:</p> <p>Повелел Егория во смоле варить. Не добре Егория смола берет, И поверх смолы Егорий плавает, Сам стихи поёт херувимские, Он гласы гласит все евангельские.</p> <p>Злодей-царица Мартемьянища На святого Егория осержается,</p>	<p>axes. The axes cannot cut Egoriy easily, The blades of the axes are breaking Against the holy body of Egoriy.</p> <p>The villain-tsar Martemyan To Saint Egoriy says: “Hail to you, dearest Egoriy the Brave!  Do not believe in Christ Himself, Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar; Rather believe in the enemy, Satan, The enemy, Satan, the devil”.</p> <p>Saint Egoriy says: “I do not believe in the enemy Satan, The enemy, Satan, the devil; But I do believe in Christ Himself, Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar!”</p> <p>The villain-tsar Martemyan Is angry with the holy Egoriy, He burns with fury at the holy body, The holy body of Egoriy:</p> <p>He ordered Egoriy to be boiled in tar. The scalding tar cannot boil Egoriy easily, And on top of the tar Egoriy swims, Singing cherubic verses, He sings the voices of the New Testament.</p> <p>The Villain-Tsar Martemyan Is angry with the holy Egoriy,</p>
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<p>На святое тело опаляется, На святое тело на Егорьево:</p>	<p>He burns with fury at the holy body, The holy body of Egoriy:</p>
<p>Повелел Егория во пилы пилить. Не добре Егория пилы берут, У пил зубья посломалися От святого тела от Егорьева.</p>	<p>He ordered Egoriy to be cut by saws. The saws cannot cut Egoriy easily, The saw's teeth are breaking Against the holy body of Egoriy.</p>
<p>Злодей-царища Мартемьянища На святого Егория осержается, На святое тело опаляется, На святое тело на Егорьево:</p>	<p>The villain-tsar Martemyan Is angry with the holy Egoriy, He burns with fury at the holy body, The holy body of Egoriy:</p>
<p>Повелел Егорию сапоги ковать железные, Становить на плиты на чугунные, на каленные. Не добре Егория сапоги берут, В сапогах стоит – Сам стихи поет херувимские, А гласы гласит все евангельские.</p>	<p>He ordered iron boots to be forged for Egoriy, To stand on scorching cast iron plates,  The boots cannot burn Egoriy easily, In those boots he stands – Singing cherubic verses, And sings the voices of the New Testament.</p>
<p>Злодей-царища Мартемьянища Святому Егорию глаголет: «Ох ты гой еси, Егорий Харабрый свет! Ты не веруй самому Христу, Самому Христу, царю небесному; А ты веруй сатане-врагу, Сатане-врагу со диаволом».</p>	<p>The villain-tsar Martemyan To Saint Egoriy says: “Hail to you, dearest Egoriy the Brave!  Do not believe in Christ Himself, Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar Rather believe in the enemy, Satan, The enemy, Satan, the devil.”</p>
<p>Святой Егорий глаголет: «Я не верую сатане-врагу со диаволом,</p>	<p>Saint Egoriy says: “I do not believe in the enemy, Satan, the devil;</p>

<p>А я верую самому Христу, Самому Христу, царю небесному!»</p> <p>Злодей-царища Мартемьянища На святого Егория осержается, На святое тело опалается, На святое тело на Егорьево:</p> <p>Повелел Егорию погреба копать, Погреба копать ему глубокие – Длины погреб сорок сажень, Ширины погреб тридцать сажень, Глубины погреб двадцать сажень; Садил Егория во глубокий погреб, А сам, собака, приговаривает: «Не бывать Егорию на святой Руси, Не видать Егорию солнца красного, Не слышать Егорию будет звону колокольного, Не слышать Егорию будет четья, петья[1] церковного!»</p> <p>Защитил он щитом дубовым,  Задвигал он досками чугунными, Засыпал он песками рудожолтыми. Как по Божиему повелению, по Егорьеву умолению Подымались ветры буйные со святой Руси, Со святой Руси – погода и со вихорем;</p> <p>Разносили пески рудожолтые, Раздвигали доски чугунные, Разметали щиты все дубовые.</p>	<p>But I believe in Christ Himself, Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar!”</p> <p>The villain-tsar Martemyan Is angry with the holy Egoriy, He burns with fury at the holy body, The holy body of Egoriy:</p> <p>He ordered cellars to be dug for Egoriy, Deep cellars to be dug for him- The length of the cellar, forty fathoms, The width of the cellar, thirty fathoms, The depth of the cellar, twenty fathoms; He placed Egoriy into the deep cellar, And himself, the mongrel, says: “Egoriy shall not be in holy Rus’, Egoriy shall not see the red sun, Egoriy shall not hear the bell-tower ring,  Egoriy shall not hear the church readings and singing!”</p> <p>He covered the cellar with an oaken shield, Over which he piled cast iron boards, He poured hardened sand on top. As per God’s command, per Egoriy’s appeal The riotous winds have risen from holy Rus’, From the holy Rus’ came weather with a storm; Spreading out the hardened sands, Lifting up the iron boards, Casting away the oaken shield.</p>
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<p>Выходит Егорий на святую Русь, Идёт во свой во Ерусалим-град. Ерусалим-град – он пуст стоит; Одне церкви!.. и стоит одна Церковь Божия соборная, богомольная: Во той во церкви его матушка, Святая Софея премудрая, На святые иконы Богу молится; Молитва ея к Богу доносится.</p> <p>Увидела она Егория Харабраго, Называла милым чадом, А сама говорит таково слово: «Ох ты гой еси, Егорий Харабрый свет! Ты бери себе коня сиваго Со двенадцати цепей железных, Поезжай ты во чисто поле».</p> <p>Святой Егорий поезжаючи, Святую веру утвержаючи, Ещё Егорий наезжаючи, На те леса, на дремучие, - Древо с древом совивалось, К сырой земли(е) приклонялось, Не добре Егорию лъзя проехати,</p> <p>Святой Егорий глаголет: «Ох вы гой еси, леса темные, Леса темные и дремучие! Разойдитесь леса по всей земли, Вы не веруйте сатане-врагу, Сатане-врагу со диаволом; А вы веруйте самому Христу, Самому Христу, царю небесному».</p>	<p>Egoriy comes out to holy Rus', He goes to his home in Jerusalem-city. Jerusalem-city – it's empty; Only churches!... it stands alone One Church of God, righteous:  In that church is his mother, Saint Sofia the wise, Praying to God, to the holy icons; Her prayer is heard by God.</p> <p>She saw Egoriy the Brave, Called him a sweet child, And herself says these words: “Hail to you, dearest Egoriy the Brave!</p> <p>Take a gray horse for yourself From the twelve chains of iron, Go out into the world.”</p> <p>Saint Egoriy travels, The holy faith he establishes, Further Egoriy goes, To those forests, to those dense ones, - A tree intertwined with a tree, Bowed to the damp earth, Egoriy cannot pass easily,</p> <p>Saint Egoriy says: “Hail to you, dark forests, Forests dark and dense! Spread, you forests, all over the earth, Do not believe in the enemy Satan, The enemy Satan, the devil; But believe in Christ Himself, Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar.”</p>
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<p>Разошлись леса по всей земли.</p> <p>И ещё Егорий поезжаючи, Святую веру утверждаючи, И ещё Егорий наезжаючи На те горы на высокия, на толкучия, - Гора с горою сойдется, не разойдется.</p> <p>Святой Егорий глаголет: «Ох вы гой еси, горы толкучия, - Разойдитесь горы по всей земли,</p> <p>Вы не веруйте сатане-врагу, Сатане-врагу со диаволом; Уж вы веруйте самому Христу, Самому Христу, царю небесному».</p> <p>Разошлись горы по всей земли,</p> <p>И ещё Егорий поезжаючи, Святую веру утверждаючи, И ещё Егорий наезжаючи На то стадо на звериное, на змеиное; Не добре Егорию лъзя проехати,</p> <p>Святой Егорий глаголет: «Ох вы гой еси, звери свирепые! Разойдитесь звери по всей земли, Вы не веруйте сатане-врагу, Сатане-врагу со диаволом; А вы веруйте самому Христу, Самому Христу, царю небесному».</p>	<p>The forests have spread all over the earth.</p> <p>And further Egoriy travels, The holy faith he establishes, And further Egoriy goes To those mountains up high, to those mountains so dense, - Mountain will come together with mountain, not parting.</p> <p>Saint Egoriy says: “Hail to you, the crowded mountains, - Spread, you mountains, all over the earth, Do not believe in the enemy, Satan, The enemy, Satan, the devil; So believe in Christ Himself, Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar.”</p> <p>The mountains have spread all over the earth,</p> <p>And further Egoriy travels, The holy faith he establishes, And further Egoriy goes To that beastly herd of snakes; Egoriy will not pass easily,</p> <p>Saint Egoriy says: “Hail to you, fierce beasts! Scatter, you beasts, all over the earth, Do not believe in the enemy, Satan, The enemy, Satan, the devil; But believe in Christ Himself, Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar.”</p>
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<p>Разошлись звери по всей земли.</p> <p>И ещё Егорий поезжаючи, Святую веру утвержаючи, И ещё Егорий наезжаючи На то стадо на змеиное, На змеиное, на звериное,- Пасут то стадо три пастыря, Три милые сёстры. Не добре Егорию лъзя проехати;</p> <p>Святой Егорий Харабрый свет – Слезает он со бера осла (коня?), Берет он своё (с)кипетро вострое[2], И побил он все стадо змеиное, Все змеиное, все звериное.</p> <p>А сам говорит такое слово: «Ох вы гой еси, три пастыря, Три милыя сёстры! Вы подите во свой во Ерусалим-град И купайтесь во Иордане-реке; Набралися все вы духа нечистаго, Духа нечистаго, босурманскаго».</p> <p>И ещё Егорий поезжаючи, Святую веру утвержаючи, И ещё Егорий наезжаючи На те ворота кесарийския, иерусалимская, – На воротах сидит Острафил-птица, Во когтях держит осетра-рыбу. Не добре Егорию лъзя проехати,</p>	<p>The beasts have scattered all over the earth.</p> <p>And further Egoriy travels, The holy faith he establishes, And further Egoriy goes, To that herd of snakes, Of snakes, of beasts, - Three shepherds tend to the herd, Three lovely sisters. Egoriy will not pass easily;</p> <p>Dearest Saint Egoriy the Brave – He climbs down from his white donkey(a horse?), He takes his sharp lance[2], And he smote the whole herd of snakes, All snakes, all beasts.</p> <p>And says these words himself: “Hail to you, three shepherds, Three lovely sisters! Go to your home to Jerusalem-city And bathe in the Jordan River; You are full of a wicked spirit, Wicked spirit, unchristian spirit.”</p> <p>And further Egoriy travels, The holy faith he establishes, And further Egoriy goes, To that Caesar’s gate, in Jerusalem –</p> <p>On the gate sits the Ostrafil-bird, In its claws it keeps a sturgeon-fish. Egoriy will not pass easily,</p>
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<p>Святой Егорий глаголет: «Ох ты гой еси, матрушка Острафил-птица!</p> <p>Ты не веруй сатане-врагу, Сатане-врагу со диаволом; А ты веруй самому Христу, Самому Христу, царю небесному. Полети ж ты, птица, на сини моря, Пей и ешь повеленное, Повеленное, благословенное, И детей води на синём море».</p> <p>И ещё Егорий поезжаючи, Святую веру утверждаючи, И ещё Егорий наезжаючи На того злодея-царица Мартемьянища, Увидел он собака Егория Харабраго, Закричал он собака по звериному, Засвистал он собака по змеиному.</p> <p>Святой Егорий Харабрый свет – Слезает он со бела осла, Берет он свою палицу железную, Поразил он тута царища Мартемьянища. Потопила Егория кровь жидовская, Кровь жидовская, босурманская:</p> <p>По колена во крове(и) стоит – Святой Егорий глаголет: «Ох ты гой еси, матрушка сыра земля! Приими в себя кровь жидовскую, Кровь жидовскую, босурманскую».</p>	<p>Saint Egoriy says: “Hail to you, mother Ostrafil-bird!</p> <p>Do not believe in the enemy, Satan, The enemy, Satan, the devil; But believe in Christ Himself, Christ Himself, the heavenly tsar. Fly, you bird, to the blue seas, Drink and eat the anointed, The anointed, the blessed, And raise your kin at the blue sea.”</p> <p>And further Egoriy travels, The holy faith he establishes, And further Egoriy goes, To that villain-tsar Martemyan,</p> <p>He, the mongrel, saw Egoriy the Brave, He, the mongrel, shouted like a beast He, the mongrel, hissed like a snake.</p> <p>Dearest Saint Egoriy the Brave – Climbs down from his white donkey, He takes his iron mace, Struck here at the tsar Martemyan.</p> <p>The Jewish blood drowns Egoriy, Jewish, unchristian blood:</p> <p>Standing knee deep in blood – Saint Egoriy says: “Hail to you, Mother Damp Earth! Take the Jewish blood into yourself, The Jewish, unchristian blood.”</p>
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<p>Расступилася матрушка сыра земля  На две стороны, на четыре четверти,  Пожрала в себя кровь жидовскую,  Кровь жидовскую, босурманскую.</p> <p>Живучи Егорий мучился на вольном  свете,  От грехов своих очистился.  Богу нашему слава ныне и присно и  во веки веков.  Аминь.</p> <p>(Из собрания В. И. Даля; записана в  Сорокинской пристани  Екатеринбургского уезда Пермской  губернии).</p>	<p>The Mother Damp Earth has parted  Into two sides, into four quarters,  Has devoured the Jewish blood,  The Jewish, unchristian blood.</p> <p>As Egoriy lived in this free world, he  suffered,  He cleansed himself from sins.  To our God be glory now and ever,  forever and ever.  Amen.</p> <p>(From the collection of V. I.  Dal'; recorded in Sorokinsky wharf of  Ekaterinburg parish in Permsky  province).</p>
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Second Variant:

Не в чуждом царстве, а в нашем государстве было, родимый, времячко – ох-ох-ох! В то время у нас много царей, много князей, и Бог весть кого слушаться, ссорились они промеж себя, дрались и кровь христианскую даром проливали. А тут набежал злой татарин, заполонил всю землю мешчерскую, выстроил себе город Касимов и начал он брать вьюниц (молодых женщин. – Опыт Обл. великор. словаря) и красных девиц себе в прислугу, обращал их в свою веру поганую, и заставлял их есть пищу нечистую маханину (лошадиное мясо. – Там же). Горе да и только; слез-то, слез-то что было пролито! все православные по лесам разбежались поделали там себе землянки и жили с волками; храмы Божии все были разорены, негде было и Богу помолиться.

И вот жил да был в нашей мешчерской стороне добрый мужичок Антип, а жена его Марья была такая красавица, что ни пером написать, только в сказке сказать. Были Антип с Марьею люди благочестивые, часто молились Богу, и дал им Господь сына красоты невиданной. Назвали они сына Егорием; рос он не по дням, а по часам; разум-то у Егорья был не младенческой: бывало услышит какую молитву – и пропоет её, да таким голосом, что ангелы на небеси радуются. Вот услышал схимник Ермоген об уме-разуме младенца Егория, выпросил его у родителей

Not in a far-off tsardom, but rather in our land, my friend, was such a time – oh dear! At that time we had many kings, many princes, and God knows whom to obey, they quarreled amongst themselves, fought and shed Christian blood for nothing. And then the angry Tatar came running, flooded the entire Meshchera region, built the Kasimov town for himself, and started to take young women and beautiful maidens as his servants, turned them into his pagan faith, and forced them to eat unclean horse meat. Grief and only grief; and how many tears were shed! All the Orthodox fled to the woods, built themselves dugouts and lived with the wolves; all the temples of God were laid waste, there was nowhere to pray to God.

And so, there lived a kind peasant Antip in our Meshchera side, and his wife Marya was such a beauty that it can not be written with a pen, only told in a fairy tale. Antip and Marya were pious people, they often prayed to God, and the Lord gave them a son of unparalleled beauty. They named their son Egoriy; he grew by leaps and bounds; Egoriy's mind was not infantile: it happened that he would hear a prayer – and sing it, in such a voice, that angels in heaven rejoiced. Here the healer Hermogenes heard about the mind of the baby Egoriy, he begged his parents to teach him the word of God. After crying and grieving, the father and mother

учить слову Божьему. Поплакали, погоревали отец с матерью, помолились и отпустили Егорья в науку.

А был в то время в Касимове хан какой-то Брагим, и прозвал его народ Змием Горюнычем: так он был зол и хитер! Просто православным житья от него не было. Бывало выедет на охоту – дикого зверя травить, никто не попадайся, сейчас заколет; а молодич да красных девиц тащит в свой город Касимов. Встретил раз он Антипа да Марью, и больно полюбилась она ему; сейчас велел её схватить и тащить в город Касимов, а Антипа тут же предал злой смерти. Как узнал Егорий о несчастной доле родителей, горько заплакал и стал усердно Богу молиться за мать родную, – и Господь услышал его молитву. Вот как подрос Егорий, вздумал он пойти в Касимов-град, чтоб избавить мать свою от злой неволи; взял благословенье от схимника и пустился в путь-дорожку. Долго ли, коротко ли шел он, только приходит в палаты Брагимовы и видит: стоит злые нехристи и нещадно бьют мать его бедную. Повалился Егорий самому хану в ноги и стал просить за мать за родную; Брагим грозный хан закипел на него гневом, велел схватить и предать различным мучениям. Егорий не устранился и стал воссылать мольбы свои к Богу. Вот повелел хан пилить его пилами, рубить топорами; у пил зубья посшибались, у топоров лезвия выбивались. Повелел хан варить его в смоле кипучей, а святой Егорий

prayed and let Egoriy go to study.

And there was at that time in Kasimov a khan, Bragim, whose people called him Firedrake as he was angry and cunning! The simple Orthodox folk had no respite from him. When he would go hunting, to hunt a wild beast, folk would have to flee in haste or be pierced at once; and he would drag young wives and beautiful girls to his Kasimov town. Once he met Antip and Marya, and he fell mightily in love with her; at once he ordered to be brought to Kasimov, and Antip, at once, suffered a gruesome death. Once Egoriy learned about the unfortunate fate of his parents, he wept bitterly and began to diligently pray to God for his mother, - and the Lord heard his prayer. But when Egoriy grew up, he decided to go to Kasimov to save his mother from evil bondage; he took a blessing from a monk and set off on his way. Whether he travelled far and wide, but once he came to Bragim's palace, he saw evil pagans standing and mercilessly beating his poor mother. Egoriy fell to the khan's feet and began to plead for his dear mother; Bragim, the terrible khan, boiled with anger over him, and ordered his capture and torture. Egoriy was not afraid and began to send his prayers to God. But the khan ordered him to be sawed with saws, to be cut with axes; the teeth of the saws were knocked down and the blades of the axes were knocked out. The khan ordered him to be boiled in tar, but on top of the tar Saint Egoriy swam. The khan ordered

поверх смолы плавают. Повелел хан посадить его в глубокой погреб; тридцать лет сидел там Егорий – все Богу молился; и вот поднялась буря страшная, разнесли ветры все доски дубовые, все пески желтые, и вышел святой Егорий на вольный свет. Увидел в поле – стоит оседланный конь, а возле лежит меч-кладенец, копьё острое. Вскочил Егорий на коня, приуправился и поехал в лес; повстречал здесь много волков и напустил их на Брагима хана грозного. Волки с ним не сладили, и наскочил на него сам Егорий и заколол его острым копьём, а мать свою от злой неволи освободил.

А после того выстроил святой Егорий соборную церковь, завёл монастырь, и сам захотел потрудиться Богу. И много пошло в тот монастырь православных, и создались вокруг него келии и посад, который и поныне слывет *Егорьевском*.

him kept in a deep cellar; and there Egoriy sat for thirty years – praying to God the whole time; and then a terrible storm rose, the winds blew up all the oaken boards, all the yellow sands, and Saint Egoriy came out into the wide world. He saw in the field - there stands a saddled horse, and nearby lies a magic sword. Egoriy jumped onto his horse, readied himself and went to the forest; here he met many wolves and sent them to Bragim, the terrible khan. The wolves could not handle him, and Egoriy himself jumped onto him and killed him with a sharp spear, and freed his mother from evil bondage.

And after that Saint Egoriy built a cathedral church, started a monastery, and he himself wanted to work hard for God. And many Orthodox went to that monastery, and built around it cells and a settlement, which still today is known as *Egorevsky*.

Third Variant:

<p>Егорий святой Богу молился  За мать за родную!  Великую он скорбь перенёс  За мать за родную:  Его во пилы пилили,  В топоры рубили;  У пил зубья посшибались,</p> <p>У топоров лезья (лезвия) до обух  выбивались,  И Егорью ничего не деялось!  Его во смоле варили,  В воде студёной топили.  Егорий в воде не утопает,  Поверх смолы плавает!  Вырыли погреб глубокой,  Сажали в него Егория;  Досками дубовыми закрывали,  Гвоздями полужоными забивали,  Жёлтыми песками засыпали  За мать за родную!  Сидел тут Егорий  Тридцать два года;  Поднималась бурна погода  Разнесли ветры жёлтые пески,  Разнесли ветры до единой доски!</p> <p>И собирал Егорий дружину отборну;  И ехал Егорий в церковь соборну;  Тут мать его Богу молилась,  Слеза горяча потоком катилась.  «Поди, поди, Егорий! сядь на коня,  приуправься!  Лютаго змия копьём порази,  Материнскую кровь отомсти».  - Стоит ли, мать, моё рождение  Всего моего похождения?»  «Вдвое стоит твоё рождение</p>	<p>Saint Egoriy prayed to God  For mother for his own mother!  He suffered a great tribulation  For mother for his own mother:  He was sawed by saws,  Was cut by axes;  The teeth of the saw were knocked  down,  The blades of the axes were knocked out  to the feet,  And Egoriy did not do anything!  He was boiled in tar,  In the frozen water he drowned.  Egoriy does not sink in the water,  He swims a top the tar!  They dug a deep cellar,  They put Egoriy in it;  They closed it with oak boards,  They hammered it in with tinned nails,  They engulfed it with yellow sand  For mother for his own mother!  There Egoriy sat  Thirty years;  Stormy weather was rising  The wind blew away the yellow sands,  Winds blew until a single board  remained!  And Egoriy gathered together a select  retinue of men;  And Egoriy went to the cathedral church;  Here his mother prayed to God,  A burning tear rolled down like a stream.  “Go, go Egoriy! Mount your horse,  finish it!  Strike the savage serpent with a spear,  Avenge your mother’s blood.”  – Mother, is my birth worth  All of my ventures?”  “Your birth is worth it twice</p>
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<p>За меня претерпенна мучения!»  Сел Егорий на борза коня,  приуправился!</p> <p>И наехал Егорий на леса валющи:  «Леса, леса, вы привстаньте!  Срублю я из вас церковь соборну,  Поставлю я в ней икону святую  За мать за родную».</p> <p>Въехал Егорий могучий  В великой город толкучий,  И наехал на девок мудрёных:  «Девицы, девицы, к вам речь я веду –  Идите на Ердан реку,  Воспримитесь, перекреститесь!»</p> <p>Въехал Егорий в леса дремучи,  Встретились Егорию волки прискучи,  Где волк, где два:  «Собиритесь вы, волки!  Будьте вы мои собаки,  Готовьтесь для страшных драки».</p> <p>Наехал Егорий на стадо птиц:  «Птицы, синицы!  Летите вы на море,  На пир на кровавой».</p> <p>Наехал Егорий на змия-горюна...[3]  Но Егорий не ужасался,  Егорий не устраhalся,  Острым копьём змия заколол;  Стаи птиц прилетали,  Змия-горюна клевали,  Сине море волной наtekло,  Змия-горюна с собой унесло.</p> <p>(Оба варианта записаны в  Егорьевском уезде Рязанской  губернии).</p>	<p>Over sufferings endured for me!”  Egoriy sat on the gallant steed, finish it!</p> <p>And Egoriy rode into the dense woods:  “Woods, you woods, stand apart!  I will build a church out of you,  I will put in it a holy icon  For my dear mother.”</p> <p>Egoriy the mighty entered  Into the great crowded city,  And he came upon the girls of the wise:  “Girls, girls, I am talking to you –  Go to the Erdan river,  Ready yourselves, cross yourselves!”</p> <p>Egoriy entered into the dense forest,  Egoriy met the biting wolves,  One wolf here, two wolves there:  “Gather you, wolves!  You will be my dogs,  Prepare for a frightful fight.”</p> <p>Egoriy rode to a flock of birds:  “Birds, titmice!  Fly, you all, to the sea,  To the bloody feast.”</p> <p>Egoriy rode to the firedrake...[3]  But Egoriy was not terrified,  Egoriy was not afraid,  With a sharp spear he stabbed the serpent;  Flocks of birds arrived,  Pecked the firedrake,  The blue sea flowed in a wave,  Taking the firedrake with it.</p> <p>(Both variants are recorded in the  Egorevsky district of the Ryazan  province).</p>
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Notes on Translation:

[1] Чтения и пения

[2] За этим стихом в подлинном списке следуют ещё два:

Строгал он во стружачи, во мелкие,

Обратилися стружачи – калены стрелы.

[3] Следующие затем стихи в рукописи совершенно искажены.

Смысл тот: змий грызёт мать Егория, и кровь потоком бежит из ран. Егорий напускает на змия волков прискучих, волки погибают.

[1] Reading and singing

[2] For this verse in the original list there are two more:

He whittled it into shavings, into fine shavings,

The shavings turned into arrows of fire.

[3] The next verses of the manuscript are completely distorted.

The meaning is this: The serpent gnaws on the mother of Egoriy, and blood flows from the wounds. Egoriy lets the biting wolves come down on the serpent, the wolves die.