Almost since the discovery, at the end of the eighteenth century, of the work presumed to be the greatest monument of old Russian literature, the Slovo o polku Igoreve, there have been those who have questioned its authenticity. To be sure, supporters of the Slovo’s genuineness have all along been in the great majority, and until recently it was impossible to find any doubts on the matter in print in the Soviet Union. Even in the West the Slovo’s supporters have at the very least been much more articulate than its detractors. Despite the reams of scholarly prose produced on the subject of the Slovo, the current state of knowledge about this poem permits no final settlement of the problem of authenticity, in my estimation, although the Slovo’s supporters would disagree with this statement, holding that it has been demonstrated beyond contention that the work is genuine. Nevertheless, there still stubbornly exist those who believe that on balance the Slovo is more likely to be an imitation pearl than a real one (to stand Alexander Brückner’s celebrated phrase on its head). It is the purpose of this article to summarize the case against it, and then detail an argument for a particular candidate as its eighteenth-century forger which is in my view considerably stronger than any other so far advanced.

Scepticism as to the Slovo’s authenticity has flourished at two principal periods during the more than 150 years since the manuscript’s discovery. The first began soon after the work’s publication and lasted for half a century. Thus the well-known literary historian Metropolitan Evgenii (Bolkhovitinov) was at one point of the opinion that it had been written probably no earlier than the fourteenth or fifteenth century, rather than in the twelfth century. In the 1830’s there was a “sceptical school” in Russian academic circles which denied the authenticity, not only of the Slovo, but also of other documents surviving from the earliest period of Russian history. And in the 1850’s a fairly extensive article attacking the Slovo was published by Osip Senkovskii, the brilliant though unscrupulous editor of the journal Biblioteka dlia chtenia.
In the latter half of the nineteenth century the dispute over the *Slovo* seemed to have subsided and to have been resolved in favor of the *Slovo*’s supporters, as their opponents maintained silence for some time. But the seeds of disbelief were still there, nurtured by such men as the French scholar Louis Léger,4 and the second period of open doubt was heralded by the appearance of André Mazon’s articles published in the *Revue des études slaves* in the last years of the 1930’s and as a separate book in 1940 (*Le Slovo d’Igor*, Paris). In his book Mazon undertook to demonstrate that the *Slovo* was a forgery based in large measure on the *Zadonshchina*, a late fourteenth-century poem which had previously been considered a pale imitation of the *Slovo*. In order to prove his thesis, Mazon had to upgrade the *Zadonshchina* while downgrading the *Slovo*, so as to bring the two works within aesthetic range of each other, and to point out a number of linguistic and stylistic features in the *Slovo* which seemed suspicious to him. Mazon’s cause found support at the time and since from such men as Henryk Paszkiewicz and Juljan Krzyzanowski.5 About 1940, then, there began a new period of active scepticism concerning the *Slovo*.

As could only have been expected, Mazon’s arguments have encountered no little opposition in the scholarly press. Evgenii Liatskii moved to refute Mazon very early;6 later there appeared articles directed against Mazon’s book by N. K. Gudzii,7 and especially by Roman Jakobson.8 George Vernadsky and Dmitrij Čieževskij have also contributed to the *Slovo*’s defense.9 In 1962 the USSR Academy of Sciences published an extensive collection of articles demonstratively entitled *Slovo o polku Igoreve: pamiatnik XII veka*. This book, which contains contributions by outstanding Soviet scholars in the field of old Russian literature, summarizes the arguments against Mazon’s view and demonstrates that in many instances he was careless in the formulation of his criticisms. The authors make several telling points in the *Slovo*’s favor which cannot be ignored by those treating the problem of the work’s authenticity.

And yet, after all these rebuttals, it suddenly became known that a Soviet scholar specializing in medieval Russian history, A. A. Zimin, had prepared for publication a book generally favorable toward Mazon’s thesis, and that Zimin had lectured on his researches at the Academy of Sciences in May, 1964. Although to this day Zimin’s book has not been permitted to appear, so many rumors spread about his ideas that the editors of *Voprosy literatury* decided in 1967 that he should be given space for a brief exposition of his viewpoint.10 They did this, they explained, because they con-