ONCE AGAIN ABOUT THE DATING
AND PROVENANCE OF THE SKAZANIE
O KNIAZ’IAKH VLADIMIRSKIKH

During his illustrious career Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Zimin left us many fundamental studies of important historical sources. Among these sources, few are as important as the Skazanie o kniaz’iakh vladimirskikh. True, Aleksandr Aleksandrovich never devoted a monograph to its study; yet the problem of its origin clearly troubled him because he returned to it numerous times — in a review, in an article, and in one of his last monographs.¹ It is generally conceded that the Skazanie provided the central myths for coronations and other public ceremonies, and was reflected in official art and chronicles and in diplomatic documents which sustained the authority of the rulers of Muscovite Russia: It fit Muscovite Russia into the scheme of world history in a manner that made its rulers the descendents of Roman emperors and the first rulers of pre-Mongol Rus’ in Kiev; it legitimized imperial claims for Moscow by introducing the legend according to which Greek Orthodox churchmen brought the imperial regalia from the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople to Volodimer Monomakh in Kiev (d. 1125), from whom it was handed down to Moscow’s rulers; and it substantiated Moscow’s claims of hegemony over “west Russia” by purportedly showing that the origin of the ruling house of Lithuania was both humble and had been in dependency to that of Moscow.² That these claims became official justifications of the coronation of Ivan IV Groznyi in 1547, there can be no doubt.³

There the consensus ends. Although R. P. Dmitrieva published critical editions of variants of the Skazanie over forty years ago, Zimin, Ia. S. Lur'e, and A. I. Gol'd'berg have taken issue with her regarding when and how the legend appeared and who might have been its author. Zimin and Lur'e also argued that the major components of the legend regarding the regalia were present already in the ceremony by which Ivan III crowned his grandson Dmitrii Ivanovich in 1498. In support of this they cited several descriptions of the coronation in Russian chronicles, and in the account of Muscovy by Sigismund von Herberstein, the emissary of the Western Emperor Maximilian to Russia in 1517 and 1526. Moreover, Zimin disputed which of the extant variants was primary, and took an opinion very different from that of Dmitrieva. It is therefore appropriate that my contribution to a volume honoring A. A. Zimin is a reexamination of this complex problem. Since Dmitrieva published her critical edition of the relevant texts in 1955, the outlines of the controversy have changed remarkably little. This despite the subsequent discovery of an early manuscript containing a variant of the version of the Skazanie known as the Poslanie Spiridona-Savvy, and Dmitrieva's revelation of a common source for a part of the Poslanie known as the Rodoslovie of Lithuanian Princes, a work accompanying other versions of the Skazanie as well. Nevertheless, it seems to me that placing these additional pieces of evidence in the proper perspective may yield a plausible resolution to the problem. My own conception of the problem goes back in time almost as far as the controversy, specifically to a doctoral seminar at Columbia University, New York City, in the spring of 1959, and was influenced not a little by its director, Professor Ihor Ševčenko. To understand the issues under discussion, it is necessary that I first review the main lines of the controversy regarding the primacy, dating, and authorship of variants of the Skazanie.

In her seminal work on the Skazanie, Dmitrieva described the manuscripts containing the legend and grouped them into editions. Primarily from a comparison of parallel passages in these editions, she decided that the earliest was
