

Title: Sons of Silver? : On the Question of a “Bronze Age” of Russian Culture
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When Russia’s literary underground surfaced in the late 1980s, it brought to average readers and specialists alike the trove of texts, authors, –isms, and history it had been amassing for 30+ years. Critical tools for systematizing the windfall were comparatively meager, a situation aptly reflected by the (formerly) “second” culture’s own self-identification as the “Bronzovyi vek” of Russian letters. Though the term is not (yet) standard, it has frequently been invoked by participants and historians of Russia’s “unofficial” culture, including Ol’ga Sedakova and Vladislav Kulakov, as well as Stanislav Len, who has been persistently promoting the phrase (and asserting his role in its invention) for over fifteen years. If Len is successful, the Bronze Age of Russian culture may well become one of the primary “metaphors we [Slavists] live by,” much as the Silver Age has.

In its pre-industrial, “primitive” associations, Bronze Age is rhetorically synonymous with an oft-invoked label for *samizdat* culture: “pre-Gutenberg.” Not only did the means for producing and distributing texts regress in the uncensored Soviet culture; its poetic personae, whose social profile was often that of “professional lumpen proletariat” (Konstantin Kuz’minsky’s phrase), deflated considerably the lofty image of the poet that had been inherited and perpetuated by the Silver Age “fathers.” As the ironic title of Nina Iskrenko’s essay on the stagnation indicates, however, the “children of Russia’s dull years” (“My - deti skuchnykh let Rossii”) took a revisionist, rather than revolutionary, approach to the socio-literary of status of “the” Russian poet.

Although we have only begun to evaluate the artistic legacy of the Soviet 1950’s-‘80s, it is the contention of this paper that the term “Bronze Age” is a surprisingly appropriate metaphor for the era, reflecting as it does qualities of both the lifestyles and text-styles of many of the humble masters of the period.