



Winter 2015

Russian Folk Art by Alison Hilton (Review)

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Repository Citation

Rouhier-Willoughby, Jeanmarie, "*Russian Folk Art* by Alison Hilton (Review)" (2015). *Modern and Classical Languages, Literatures and Cultures Faculty Publications*. 7.
https://uknowledge.uky.edu/mcllc_facpub/7

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Russian Folk Art by **Alison Hilton (Review)**

Notes/Citation Information

Published in *Journal of American Folklore*, v. 128, no. 507, p. 99-100.

Published as **Russian Folk Art**. By Alison Hilton, reviewed by Jeanmarie Rouhier-Willoughby, in *Journal of American Folklore*, v. 128, no. 507, p. 99-100. © 2015 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois.

Digital Object Identifier (DOI)

<http://dx.doi.org/10.5406/jamerfolk.128.507.0099>

types. For example, Christiansen only mentioned but did not document a legend about a man who wants to follow a witch to the witches' Sabbath but mispronounces the formula for flying and bumps against obstacles. By contrast, Klintberg creates five types (N1–5) for this plot, based on various expressions of incorrect formula and the man's consequent encounters with various obstacles. Some types are not based on a plot but are representative of a whole cycle of legends connected to a specific person such as Saint Olof (B42) or historical sorcerers and folk healers (M211–7).

The book contains very few mistakes or unclear passages, and my mentioning them here only reveals the precision of the author's approach. Concerning the cataloguing, type C77 "The belly of the dead" is incorrectly indicated as corresponding to ATU 363, while it is actually close to ATU 366. Additionally, I don't understand the author's decision to include type C217 "Chopped off toe-caps" in the subgroup "Murdered child" and type R167 "Farm spirits expelled through felling of tree" in the group "Nature," when there is a more suitable subgroup H41–50, "Employing and expelling a farm spirit." As for typing errors, there are some minor ones (pp. 88, 265, 370, etc.), the term "farm spirit" is mistaken for "farmhand" (p. 142), and two numbers of types (T123–4) were left out in the middle of a subgroup (p. 358).

Overall, Klintberg's type index is an outstanding work presenting a tremendous number of Swedish folk legends from the past in a coherent and well-organized way. The easily accessible text can appeal to a broad range of readers, and folklorists have gained a significant new reference work on an important topic that continues an essential element of folklore scholarship.

Russian Folk Art. By Alison Hilton. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2011. Pp. xiii + 356, glossary, notes, bibliography, index, photographs.)

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Alison Hilton's *Russian Folk Art* is a re-issue of her earlier work. It includes a new preface, but

this new edition lacks the striking color pictures of the first edition published in 1995. The book is comprised of 18 chapters divided into 4 sections: (1) The Arts in Peasant Life, (2) Materials and Forms, (3) Designs and Their Meanings, (4) Preservation and Revival of Russian Folk Art. Hilton's monograph opens with a consideration of the role of folk art within the context of Russian towns and villages, followed by an examination of the "relationships between styles and the physical characteristics of folk art" (p. xvii). The author then examines the significance of the images used in the art in various contexts and historical periods. She completes her study with a discussion of the folk art revival and preservation movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Due to Soviet-era limitations on foreign researchers, she was prevented from participating in fieldwork. Consequently, her research is based on museum collections and on the scholarship of and discussions with (Soviet) Russian scholars of folk art and material culture since the 1980s.

Hilton begins with an overview of the nature of folk art. She emphasizes the importance of, in the words of Arkhip Ershov, a maker of distaffs from Semenovno, the "thread of tradition" (p. 4). This section introduces the reader to the complexity of folk art in the Russian context, laying out the dilemmas for its study: the intersection of village and urban art (including church and court art as well as the craft trade); its interaction with historical events; and the origins of its motifs and techniques, whether Slavic or borrowed from other cultures present on the Russian territory. This section includes an overview of village life, house design and decoration, and toolmaking, including a thorough discussion of the decoration. It also includes a chapter on regional folk art specialization and particularly renowned folk artists. Hilton focuses on two artists, a distaff maker and a birch-bark carver, to demonstrate the "continual process of give and take between local customs and external influences" (p. 56). The second section expands on these topics through a detailed study of the motifs and styles of, in turn, wood carving, painting on wood, textile arts and costume, urban folk art, and specialized crafts associated with particular regions, such as bone carving, metalworking, *lubki* (block printing on paper for a mass

audience using folk motifs), lacquer, pottery, and toys. As an art historian, she is particularly astute at outlining the visual and aesthetic characteristics of the folk arts and at making parallels between different folk art traditions. For example, she examines how carving is related to textile art, and she studies how special designs on ritual breads are also connected to similar patterns in carving and embroidery. This section also outlines the effect of mass production and industrialization on folk art, in particular, on textiles as well as on wood carving, since the tools required to spin and weave have become obsolete.

The third section focuses not on “matching folk art and ritual with archaic prototypes,” as many Russian scholars have done, but on “the complex and irregular evolution of forms through the interaction of several artistic traditions” (p. 136). Hilton is quite successful at the latter goal, tracing the evolution of visual motifs derived from pre-Christian Slavic, Iranian, Finno-Ugric, and Scandinavian sources and their adaptation to the Russian Orthodox artistic tradition after 988 CE as well as in folk arts of various kinds, including painting, textiles, and carving. Hilton is particularly astute at taking into account the historical forces at work. These include the Mongol invasions of the thirteenth century, Ivan the Terrible’s sack of Novgorod in the sixteenth century, and the subsequent rise of Muscovy and events in Peter the Great’s reign 1682–1725. Despite the quality of this portion of the analysis, this section, billed as a study of the meaning and symbolism, will likely disappoint folklorists. Hilton makes some rather provocative statements that seem to belie her contention that her goal is not to match up motifs with ancient prototypes, for example, referring consistently to women with upraised arms in embroideries as the earth goddess Mokosh. At other points, she is a bit more restrained in her claims, but does not make much headway into the actual meaning of the forms to the artists and their communities, beyond saying that they clearly retained their import over the centuries. In this sense, the study was hampered by a lack of fieldwork and by relying on the work of others, particularly Soviet-era specialists who insisted on the persistence of *dvoeverie* (dual faith) in the folk tradition. The

section culminates with a discussion of how scenes from everyday life, a significant shift in the tradition, were incorporated into folk art beginning in the eighteenth century, a trend that ultimately led to so-called serf art.

The book concludes with a consideration of folk art revivals in the late nineteenth century and during the Soviet era. Hilton highlights the detrimental effects of formal training under the auspices of folk art workshops, sponsored both by noble families and the Soviet authorities, as well as the effects of industrialization in the twentieth century. She also traces continuity and innovation in various folk art genres in the face of these social shifts. Of particular note is her treatment of the perception of the folk in this period and the role it played in the development of folk art and, indeed, in the professional art that incorporated traditional motifs. All in all, this volume represents a fine source on the evolution and range of Russian folk art and is the only comprehensive such study available in English. Readers are left to wish that the author had expanded the new edition to include folk art in post-socialist Russia. Such an addition, particularly with her skill at teasing out the role of social trends in art, would have been invaluable in this volume, and it will provide an important area of research for subsequent scholarship.

Just Folklore: Analysis, Interpretation, Critique. By Elliott Oring. (Los Angeles: Cantilever Press, 2012. Pp. xix + 388, acknowledgments, introduction, references, 13 photographs.)

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Folklore is dense with intricate, interconnecting concepts: belief, identity, culture, significance. In *Just Folklore*, Elliott Oring tackles some of the most foundational of these concepts and exposes them to his always insightful analysis and critique. At the heart of this exploration—and at the heart of the book’s title—lies a challenge to the idea that folklore is worthy of dismissal. As Oring notes, “[t]hat’s just folklore” shares elbow room with “[y]ou must be joking,”