

Down the Volga

Vniz po matushkye po Volgye, po Volgye,
po shirokomu razdolyu, razdolyu,

razygralasya pagoda, pagoda,
pagodushka vyershovaya, vyershovaya.

Nitshevo v volnakh nye vidno, nye vidno,
tolko lodotshka tshernyeyet, tshernyeyet.

Tolko lodotshka tshernyeyet, tshernyeyet,
parusa na nye byelyeyut, byelyeyut.

Na grebitsakh shapki tyemnyeyut, tyemnyeyut,
kushaki na nyikh alyeyut, alyeyut.

Sam khazyayin vo naryadye, naryadye,
v tshornom barchatnom kaftanye, kaftanye.

Ush kak vzgavarit khazyayin, khazyayin:
"A my gryanemtye, ribyata, ribyata,

vniz po matushkye po Volgye, po Volgye
po shirokomu razdolyu, razdolyu."

Down the Volga, Mother Volga,
over the wide sheet of water,

there rises a thunderstorm,
a huge thunderstorm.

Nothing is to be seen on the waves,
there is only a small black ship.

There is only a small black ship
with glistening white sails.

The oarsmen have dark caps,
and their belts are shining red.

Their leader is dressed up, too,
in a long cloak made of black velvet.

Now their leader begins to speak:
"Let us sing our song, boys, let it sound

down the Volga, Mother Volga,
over the wide sheet of water!"

Words and music: Russian folksong

Pronunciation:

a as in "bar", *e* as in "bed", *i* as in "bid", *o* as in "bore", *u* as in "blue"

y = as in "yellow" / *ý* = dull *i*, as in "bill"

s = always voiceless, as in "son" / *z* = voiced, as in "zone"

sh = voiceless, as in "mesh" / *zh* = voiced, like the *s* in "measure"

kh = mostly rough, like the *ch* in Scotch "loch", but smooth when "e" or "i" follows

a, e, i, o, u, y = the underlined vowel signifies the stressed syllable of a word.

Transcription and analogous translation: Kai Kracht

Comment:

This song is performed slowly, almost solemnly. The bound tones imitate the waves of the river Volga, first sedate, then increasing towards the middle of the verse, and finally calming down again and dying away at the end of each verse.

The audacious men who brave the thunderstorm in their small sailboat for sure are no ordinary sailors. They are important enough to sing this song in their honour, and they wear uniform and precious clothes. The song gives a very exact description of their clothing – perhaps in order to indicate who these men were without telling their name, which maybe was not opportune.

There is a German translation of this song where these men are called "pirates". But on account of the well-meaning, encoded description I am inclined to assume that they are rebellious cossacks, and their daring leader in his long coat of black velvet probably is the legendary Ataman of the Don Cossacks, Stenka Razin, who was the leader of the biggest insurrection of peasants in the Russian history, in the 17th century, and who is known to have also, for a certain time, commanded a fleet on the river Volga.

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