From the Editors:  
Вивліоѳика 2.0

Welcome to the inaugural issue of Вивліоѳика: E-Journal of Eighteenth-Century Russian Studies. This new electronic publication has been christened with a title written in the old, pre-Revolutionary orthography at least partly in order to honor its eighteenth-century namesake, Древняя Российская Вивліоѳика, the historical and literary monthly that rolled off the presses over 240 years ago. The original Вивліоѳика—now available in full-text, thanks to the digitization projects undertaken by the Russian National and Russian State libraries—was edited by arguably the greatest of all eighteenth-century Russian publishers, N. I. Novikov (1744-1818). And it is with the utmost humility that the editors of Вивліоѳика 2.0 invoke the name of, and express their intellectual debt to our secular patron saint.

Figure 1: Title page of the very first issue of N. I. Novikov’s Древняя Российская Вивліоѳика. Courtesy: Russian State Library, Moscow.
The editors of Вивліо Ѣика also want to express their appreciation to Duke University Library, which has provided the platform and the technical support that has made this free, open-access, online publication a reality. With the advent of the internet, open access has emerged as an alternative to the traditional fee- and subscription-based model of scholarly publishing pioneered in Russia by the Типографическая компания. The technology behind the model that had once helped entrepreneurs like Novikov disseminate their printed publications among their small reading public has in our day helped publishers to limit access only to those who can pay for content and the high overhead costs of printing. Open-access journals, on the contrary, make published research available to anyone who has access to the Internet. And our small contribution to this revolution in scholarly communication has been made possible by Duke University’s commitment to open access.

Dix-huitièmists, of course, love books and paper, Russianists perhaps more than most. As a body of scholars we prefer to have the physical object in our hands rather than on our screen. But as scholars we have little ability to control the economic and technological world in which we work. All of us have witnessed the increased difficulties of producing traditional printed periodicals. Costs have sky-rocketed, institutional financial support has plummeted, and in many cases using subscriptions to make up the difference has been infeasible, pushing costs often beyond what individuals or libraries can pay. We have witnessed the demise of a number of distinguished periodicals, and several others hover at the edge of elimination, with its editors not knowing where the funds for the next issue will come from. This sad circumstance has pushed ever more journals throughout the academic cosmos into electronic form.

Without minimizing these hard realities, the editors of Вивліо Ѣика also wish to point out the opportunities that electronic publishing affords, opportunities that seem to us to be particularly relevant for the fields in which we work. Open-access means that readers may read serious scholarly research online and without cost: no fees or restrictions due to copyright or licenses, no subscriptions, no postage, no worries. Digital media means that the old boundaries of geography, eccentric postal systems, nervous customs officials, and hard-pressed librarians melt away. This is a major step forward, as we all know, overcoming what have been long-standing and daunting problems of access. Colleagues from anywhere in the world will immediately be able to peruse the journal the moment it goes on line.

This technical miracle—or as Novikov might say, mechanical application of human reason and science to the natural world in pursuit of a higher level of civilization and human happiness—has come at a time when our own field has changed dramatically, and once again we are speaking of diminishing or eliminating boundaries. National academic traditions and language-based outlooks continue, of course, but we have become much more interdependent conceptually and discursively than would have been deemed possible just a couple of decades ago. The old rigid dichotomies of the Cold War era, the fixed categories and prescribed (and proscribed) formulations that we lived with—as well as artful narrative strategies that some used to circumvent them—have all but disappeared. In their place has arisen a riot of new lines of research, new outlooks, new sources, and a rediscovery of some older ones that had long been invisible to readers of the printed page. We read and cite each other across these boundaries much more frequently than before, and thanks to the
internet, all the signs point to an even higher degree of scholar-to-scholar interaction in the coming years. The era of circumscribed national scholarly communities is passing, giving way to something more cosmopolitan. This sense of an international textual community is a defining principle of Вивліоѳика, much as the printed publications of the “Republic of Letters” were to intellectuals and scholars of Novikov’s time.

In that context we think it essential that Вивліоѳика define the field as inclusively as possible. This conclusion informs the editors’ decision to be decidedly российский in the broadest and most eclectic sense possible, rather than specifically русский. We see our journal as a platform that can bring together new scholarship being produced from across the old Imperial spaces—including for example Ukraine, Belarus’, Poland—as well as other locations where our field is seriously pursued. In that sense we are following the laudatory example set by Ab Imperio and Kritika, which have usefully problematized Russian space: the political, social, and cultural realm defined as “российский,” but populated by multiple linguistic, confessional, ethnic and regional subjects with centers other than simply the political metropole of St. Petersburg. Consequently we welcome contributions that focus on these other peoples and realms of the Russian Imperial world, especially during the century that witnessed the full-flowering of the imperial idea, if not the full extent of Russia’s colonial possessions in Eurasia.

Some modes of integration are not at all new, specifically the long-standing desire of our academic community to make disciplinary boundaries subservient to chronological ones. This reversal of the more traditional approach has been one of the characteristic features of eighteenth-century studies more-or-less everywhere. The names of our journals, Восемнадцатый век and before that Осмнадцатый век, Век просвещения, Eighteenth-Century Studies, Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century, and many others reflect that outlook. Rooted in the old ideas of the Enlightenment as a cosmopolitan, even universal, project of reason and human progress that strove to bring all the human sciences together (eg. Encyclopédie) this model of a multi-disciplinary field has endured, outliving its ideological beginnings and remaining vibrant even now. We all benefit from our field’s openness to a multi-disciplinary rendering, and Вивліоѳика embraces that self-definition. We want to cultivate scholarly conversations across the disciplines, and we anticipate this open-access peer-reviewed journal becoming a platform for them.

Within that time-bound model, we joyously proclaim ourselves fully enamored of the long eighteenth century, possibly the very long eighteenth century, beginning, let us say, with the arrival in Moscow of Samuel Piotrowski-Sitnianowicz of Polotsk (Semen Polotskii or Symeon Polots’kyi) and ending more or less with the Decembrists. Since epochal chronologies are every bit as subjective and constructed as any others, we could even be convinced to stretch the limits further if someone had a sufficiently clever and well-reasoned justification for it. Still, куликовская битва will always fall too early and пятилетки too late.

A comment about peer review and word lengths. The editors are committed to maintaining the rigorous standards of traditional academic periodicals. Вивліоѳика will follow the standard practices of anonymous peer review, typically two readers per submission. Readers’ reports will be decisive in determining whether or not to publish a given piece. Regarding word length, we all have seen the benefits and drawbacks of
an electronic medium that is unrestrained by the material limits of paper and ink. The journal can be flexible in this regard, and we are open to longer than usual submissions. However, we encourage authors to maintain the same degree of self-discipline and control over their scholarly writing that they would regularly employ for submissions to paper journals.

In sum, the new Вивліофіка is not only free and entirely electronic, but also peer reviewed. It welcomes submissions in any relevant discipline and on any subject that relates to a very widely conceived notion of Russian history. The editors also expect it to be multilingual and welcome submissions in any of the primary languages in which scholarship in our field is written. Even the briefest perusal of Вивліофіка’s international advisory board demonstrates that we have endeavored to be as expansive as possible, linguistically, geographically, and intellectually. Several colleagues from a number of countries have additionally offered to serve as readers and textual editors, thereby allowing us to review and publish at a high professional level. All of this reflects our conviction that it is both necessary and desirable to take advantage of the possibilities that electronic media offer. Initially the journal will appear once per year. If interest and energy permit, the editors may publish multiple issues in the future, although we are unlikely to reach the one-a-month output of the original Вивліофіка. After all, there was only one Novikov.

We are pleased to begin this enterprise and look forward to hearing from you.