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In Search of the “Korsun Legend”: Looking Back from the Centennial Perspective¹

Framing the Problem: the “Korsun Legend” in Historiography

Prince Volodymer Sviatoslavich’s legacy has been a point of contention between different traditions of historical perception, and political discourses, not least because the evidence is scarce and often conflicting. As Oleksiy Tolochko metaphorically put it in a recent study, the times when the Baptist of Rus ruled “represent a classic black box”²; his words resonate with Fedor I. Uspenskiy’s remark from 1888: the times of St. Volodymer’s baptism “are sealed with mystery, which does not yield to an historian”³. It is a venerable scholarly tradition to believe that the way to unseal the black box lies through the ever more sophisticated critical studies of the texts associated with St. Volodymer, which would reveal their hidden inner core.

This centennial quest is now associated with the name of the great Russian philologist Aleksei Shakhmatov. The study of texts related to St. Volodymer occupies a special place in Shakhmatov’s oeuvre⁴. His views on how the story of St. Volodymer’s baptism first emerged are firmly rooted in his general notions of how the chronicle-writing must have evolved during the eleventh century. Shakhmatov propagated the idea of numerous chronicles preceding the *Primary Chronicle* of 1111–1118, and he attempted to reconstruct several of those: the “Oldest Compilation” of 1039 followed by the compilation of 1070s, followed by the “Initial Compilation” of 1090s, finally culminating in the *Primary Chronicle* as we know it.

1 I am especially indebted to Constantine Zuckerman, Oleksiy Tolochko and Aleksei Gippius who revised and enriched my study.

2 Aleksei Tolochko, *Ocherki nachal'noy rusi* (Kiev and Saint Petersburg), 2015, 299.

3 Fedor Uspenskiy, *Rus' i Vizantia v X veke* (Odessa, 1888), 35.

4 Shakhmatov had prepared but failed to publish a special study on St. Volodymer’s Lives, recently issued as: Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Zhytia knyazia Vladimira*, ed. by Nadezhda Milutenko (Saint Petersburg, 2014).

Shakhmatov believed to have discovered two versions of St. Volodymer’s baptism in the preserved texts. The first, which he attributed to the “Oldest Compilation”, told the story of the prince’s baptism in Kiev. The second told the story of St. Volodymer’s conversion in Byzantine Cherson (slav. Korsun). It supposedly emerged independently of the chronicle and was authored by a certain “Chersonite”, identified by Shakhmatov as one of the “Korsun priests” who arrived in Kiev in the entourage of Volodymer’s wife Anna. Later the two stories were merged into a single account, the one we find in the *Primary Chronicle*. However, the constituent parts can still be recovered since the editor worked with little regard for either style or consistency and hence left some visible marks of his editorial efforts⁵.

The existence of a narration of the prince’s baptism outside the chronicles has occasionally been suggested⁶, but the current academic trend focuses on Shakhmatov’s vision of stages of the eleventh-century chronicle-writing evolution. Scholars who accept Shakhmatov’s project of recovering the lost chronicles as a feasible enterprise share in his conclusions with some variations⁷. Those who dismiss the so-called “Shakhmatov’s scheme”, as well as the very textological premises upon which it has been built, also reject the conclusions stemming from those⁸.

Although dominant throughout the last century, Shakhmatov’s views were challenged. Several competing ideas about the emergence and the early stages of history-writing have been suggested⁹. Some researchers tend to distinguish

5 Shakhmatov developed his ideas in a special study (Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Korsunskaiia legenda o kreshchenii Vladimira* (Saint-Petersburg, 1906) and later modified them in his famous book on the origin of the chronicle-writing (Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Razyskaniia o drevneishykh russkikh letopisnykh svodakh* (Saint-Petersburg, 1908), 134).

6 Nikolai Kostomarov, “Predaniia pervonachalnoy russkoy letopisi v soobrazheniakh s russkimi narodnymi predaniyami v pesniakh, skazaniyakh i obychaiakh,” *Sobranie sochineniy N.I. Kostomarova*, vol. 13, 357–358; Nikolai Nikolskiy, “K voprosu ob istochnikakh letopisnogo skazania o Sviatom Vladimire,” *Christianskoie Chtenie* 7 (1902), 106; Evgenii Golubinskiy, *Istoria Russkoi Tserkvi*, vol. 1 (Moscow, 1901), 105.

7 Constantine Zuckerman believes that there existed a certain non-annalistic account termed by him the “Ancient Tale” composed ca. 1017 by a contemporary and an eye-witness; it must have contained the story of St. Volodymer’s baptism (Constantin Zuckerman, “Nabliudeniya nad slozheniem drevneishikh istochnikov letopisi,” *Boriso-glebssky sbornik. Collectanea Borisoglebica* (Paris, 2009), 189–206). Savva Mikheev and Aleksei Gippius, while allowing for a similar narrative, nevertheless place the “Korsun legend” in the Compilation of 1070s or 1060s (Savva Mikheev, *Kto pisal “Povest vremennykh let”?* (Moscow, 2011), 57–59; Aleksei Gippius, “K rekonstruktsii drevneishikh etapov istorii russkogo letopisaniia,” *Drevnyaya Rus i srednevekovaya Evropa: voznikovenie gosudarstv. Materialy konferentsii* (Moscow, 2012), 42–46).

8 See the consistent critique of Shakhmatov’s method in: Tatiana Vilkul, “Novgorodskaiia pervaiia letopis i Nachalny svod,” *Palaeoslavica* 11 (2003), 5–35; Tatiana Vilkul, “Povest vremennykh let i Khronograf,” *Palaeoslavica* 15 (2007), 59–62; Tetiana Vilkul, *Litopys i khronohraf. Studii z domongolskoho kiivskogo litopysannya* (Kyiv, 2015), 38–47; Donald Ostrowski, “The Nachalny Svod Theory and the Povest vremennykh let,” *Russian Linguistics* 31 (2007), 269–308; Aleksei Tolochko, *Ocherki nachalnoi rusi*, 20–34.

9 Cf.: Vasily Istrin, “Zamechaniia o nachale russkogo letopisaniia,” *Izvestia otdelenia russkogo yazyka i slovesnosti* 26 (1923 (1921), 45–102; 27 (1924 (1922) 207–251; Sergei Bugoslavsky, “Povest vremennykh let (redaktsii, spiski, pervonachalny tekst),” *Starinnaiia russkaiia povest* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1941), 7–37. More recently, it has been suggested that history-writing first emerged as an

between “two sources” of the emergence of ancient Rus chronicle writing — a narrative one and an annalistic one¹⁰.

However, the idea of the “Korsun legend” (as well as its twin the “Kievan legend”) seems to have taken deep roots in historiography. It is therefore advisable to revisit the problem and to weight the arguments pro and contra anew.

We will work with the same evidence, as Shakhmatov had before: the *Memory and Eulogy to Prince Volodymer* by Jacob the Monk, several versions of *St. Volodymer's Vitae*, and the text of the *Primary Chronicle* for 6494–6496 (986–988).

Memory and Eulogy by Jacob the Monk

Since its introduction into academic discourse, the *Memory and Eulogy to Prince Volodymer* has been considered as one of the oldest and most important sources that shed light on the circumstances of the baptism of the Kievan ruler. Traditionally, the text was dated to the eleventh century, while its author was identified as the monk of the Caves monastery who had come “from the river of Alta” (“с Летьца”), and whom St. Theodosius had unsuccessfully proposed as his successor¹¹ (as described in the *Primary Chronicle* under 1074)¹². Thus, in the nineteenth century, this “historical” work was believed to predate the *Primary Chronicle* by some fifty years. Therefore, it was tempting to see it as preserving an ancient and independent tradition on St. Volodymer's baptism, different to the chronicle.

Sharing these views, Shakhmatov believed that the *Memory and Eulogy* amalgamated two different parts: the story of victories over the prince's enemies (the Radimichi, the Vyatichi, the Yatvaigs, the “Silver Bulgar”, the Khazars and

annalistic enterprise and only later evolved into a narrative-style chronicles (cf.: Oleksiy Tolochko, “Kievan Rus' around the Year 1000,” *Europe around the Year 1000*, ed. by Przemyslaw Urbanczyk (Warsaw, 2001), 123–140; Oleksiy Tolochko, “Christian Chronology, Universal History and the Origin of Chronicle Writing in Rus’,” *Historical Narratives and Christian Identity on a European Periphery. Early History Writing in Northern, East-Central, and Eastern Europe* (c.1070–1200), ed. by Ildar Garipzanov (Brepols Publishers, 2011), 205–228) and it seems to be gaining ground.

10 Aleksandr Nazarenko, “Dostovernnye godovye daty v rannem letopisanii i ikh znachenie dlia izucheniia drevnerusskoy istoriografii,” *Drevneishie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy. 2013: Zarozhdenie istoriopisaniia v obschestvah drevnosti i srednevekovya* (Moscow, 2016), 593–603; Timofei Gimon, “K probleme zarozhdenia istoriopisaniia v Drevney Rusi,” *Drevneishie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy. 2013*, 772. Possibly, the first stage of history-writing was connected with “historical graffiti”. Noteworthy that a very interesting group of records, dated by 1160th, has been recently found on the fragments of plastering of St. George Cathedral (Yuriev monastery) in Novgorod. Cf.: Alexey Gippius, Vladimir Sedov. “Nadpis' — graffito 1198 goda iz Georgievskogo sobora Yurieva monastyrya”. *Goroda i vesi srednevekovoj Rusi. Archeologiya, istoriya, kul'tura. K 60-letiyu N.A. Makarova*. (Moscow and Vologda, 2015), 462.

11 Makariy, “Tri pamiatnika russkoi dukhovnoi literatury XI veka,” *Khristianskie Chtenie* 2 (1849), 302–303; Cf.: Nikolai Serebriansky, *Drevnerusskie kniazheskie zhytia* (Saint Petersburg, 1915), 47–48. On manuscript tradition of the text and its interpretations, see: Nikolai Nikolsky, *Materialy dlia povremennogo spiska russkikh pisatelei i ikh sochineniy (X–XI vv.)* (Saint Petersburg, 1906), 229.

12 PSRL 1: 186–187; PSRL 2: 177; NPL: 200–201.

the capture of Korsun); as well as the “annalistic notes” at the end of the work. Shakhmatov conjectured further that the texts had an older version, which only included the “notes” (borrowed from or similar to the “Oldest Compilation”), and a new version with additions taken from the “Korsun legend”¹³.

However, later Sergei Bugoslavsky has convincingly demonstrated that Jacob the Monk as an eleventh-century author is but a myth. The *Memory and Eulogy*, as it comes down in the manuscript tradition, can be dated between the middle of twelfth and the end of the thirteenth century, although some of its constituent parts may be of a somewhat older origin¹⁴. It would seem that the information of this compilation is generally much later than the *Primary Chronicle*.

In order to gauge the possible date of the *Memory and Eulogy* it is important to note the difference in its attitude towards Volodymer and his sons, Boris and Gleb. The author refers to Volodymer as “pious” or “beatific” (never “holy” or “saint”), yet he has no doubts as to the sanctity of his sons¹⁵. While Boris and Gleb were canonized no later than 1072¹⁶, the beginnings of church veneration of their father is a more complicated affair. According to an optimistic estimate, it could have happened in mid-thirteenth century¹⁷, while a more cautious view maintains that the

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- 13 Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Razyskaniia*, 19–21. It seems that the compiler of the “Chronicle Notes” inherited the Byzantine tradition of calculation according to the years of ruler’s reign. He probably used the source which contained only the date of Volodymer’s accession and death and had no accurate information about the main events of the Prince’s life. The author connected chronologically the facts of the Volodymer’s reign, operating with the number of 28 years of his life after the baptism (borrowed from the Chronicle) and the approximate date of the christening (the “tenth year” after the murder of Yaropolk). More arguments in: Aleksandr Romensky, *Imperiya romeev i tavrskifiy. Ocherki russko-vizantiiskikh otnosheniy posledney chetverti X veka* (Kharkov, 2017), 130–134.
- 14 Sergei Bugoslavsky, “K literaturnoi istorii ‘Pamiati i pokhvaly kniazhu Vladimiru’,” *Izvestia otdeleniia russkogo yazyka i slovesnosti* 29 (1925), 105–137. Cf.: Iaroslav Shchapov, “‘Pamiati i pokhvala’ kniazhu Vlaimiru Svyatoslavichu Iakova mnikha i Pokhvala knyagine Olge,” *Pismennye pamiatniki istorii Drevnei Rusi*, ed. by Ya.N. Shchapov (Saint Petersburg, 2003), 181–183; Andrzej Poppe, “Vladimir Sviatoi. U istokov tserkovnogo proslavleniia,” *Fakty i znaki. Issledovaniia po semiotike istorii* 1 (2008), 85. Anton Vvedenskiy believes that the *Memory and Eulogy* was used in the *Prologue*, so it was compiled before 1160-ies. However, Vadym Aristov proves the opposite view. Cf.: Anton Vvedenskiy, “Ob istochnike Prolozhnogo zhytiia Knyagini Ol’gi,” *Vostochnaya Evropa v drevnosti i srednevekovie* (Moscow, 2016), 44–48; Vadym Aristov, “Pokhodzhennia istorychnykh povidomlen ‘Pamyati ta pohvaly kniazhu Volodymyru’ Yakova Mnikha,” *Ruhenica XIII* (2016), 50–82. Neither one nor the other opponent is completely persuasive.
- 15 Nadezhda Milutenko, *Sviatoi ravnopostolny kniaz Vladimir i kreshchenie Rusi* (Saint Petersburg, 2008), 474. It is remarkable that the *Memory, Primary Chronicle* as well as some versions of the “Ordinary Life” consistently claim the absence of miracles after the death of Volodymer, which might be interpreted as important evidence of sainthood in the Byzantine Church. Cf.: Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Zhytiia knyazya Vladimira*, 275, 281 (the forth and fifth versions of the Ordinary Life), 345–346 (*Memory and Eulogy*); PSRL 1: 131. The same problem of canonization the person without any proof of miracles appears at the same time in Scandinavia. See Galina Glazyrina, *Saga ob Ingvare Puteshestvennike* (Moscow, 2002), 245–246 (original text), 270 (Russian translation).
- 16 For the dating, see: Ludolf Müller, “O vremeni kanonizatsii Svyatykh Borisa i Gleba,” *Russia Medievalis* 8 (1995), 1–20; Andrzej Poppe, “O zarozhdenii kulta sviatykh Borisa i Gleba,” *Russia Medievalis* 8 (1995), 21–68; Andrzej Poppe, “Zemnaia gibel i nebesnoe torzhestvo Borisa i Gleba,” *Trudy Otdela Drevnerusskoy Literatury* 54 (2003), 325–332. Cf.: Aleksandr Uzhankov, “Sviatyie stastotertsy Boris i Gleb: k istorii kanonizatsii i napisania zhitiy,” *Drevnyaya Rus: voprosy medievistiki* 1 (2001), 37–38.
- 17 See most recently: Petr Tolochko, “O meste i vremeni krescheniya i kanonizatsii Vladimira Sviatoslavichia,” *Vizantiiskiy Vremennik* 70 (2011), 100–104.

process was rather lengthy and before being finally recognized as a saint, Volodymer had been venerated as a matter of tradition and custom rather than an officially sponsored cult¹⁸. In any case, there are no indisputable evidence for Volodymer's canonization before the turn of the thirteenth century. However, Andrzej Poppe pointed out that the memory of person not yet recognized as a saint but venerated for the merits before the church could be celebrated in the form of the annual funeral service¹⁹. It would seem that the *Memory and Eulogy* reflects this very tradition.

Vitae of St. Volodymer and the “Korsun Legend”

Several hagiographic texts tell the story of Volodymer's baptism in Korsun after “tripling the faiths”.

One such texts is *Life of the blessed Volodymer* (often called the “Ordinary Life”). One of its versions is accompanied in manuscripts by the *Memory and Eulogy* by Jacob the Monk and includes some elements from the *Tale of SS. Boris and Gleb*²⁰. Scholars date this *Life* from the fourteenth or the fifteenth century²¹ and admit that it derives from the *Primary Chronicle*, reporting essentially the same events and using its information as a source²². Although a few minor details differ²³, their sources, if any, are but impossible to determine. It would seem that the *Ordinary Life* emerged as part of the already established church veneration of St. Volodymer.

There is little doubt that the so-called *Tale about baptism of Volodymer after capturing Korsun* (“Slovo o tom, kako krestisya Vladimer vozmya Korsun”), which has survived in many copies from the fifteenth to the sixteenth centuries and is attributed to a certain Theodosius, is secondary in its relation to the chronicle. Shakhmatov believed that it drew on an unspecified additional source, but admitted that the text is late, probably composed by Theodosius, the editor of the *Caves Paterikon* of the early fifteenth century²⁴.

18 Boris Uspensky, “Kogda byl kanonizirovan kniaz Vladimir Svyatoslavich?,” *Palaeoslavica* 10 (2002), 271–281.

19 Andrzej Poppe, “Vladimir Sviatoi. U istokov tserkovnogo proslavlenia,” *Fakty i i znaki. Issledovania po semiotike istorii* 1 (2008), 103.

20 The fourth redaction in Shakhmatov's classification, cf.: Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Zhytia kniazia Vladimira*, 261–276.

21 Nikolai Nikolskiy, *Materialy*, 242; Nikolai Serebriansky, *Drevnerusskie kniazheskie zhitia*, 49; Boris Kloss, “Zhytie kniazia Vladimira,” *Pismennyye pamiatniki istorii Drevney Rusi*, 200.

22 Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Zhytia kniazia Vladimira*, 207–208.

23 The *Life* estimates the period of Volodymer ambassadors' residence in Constantinople as “8 days”; the duration of the siege of Cherson as “6 months”; instead of an eye disease the prince was affected by “ulcer”; the church where the baptism took place is named after St. James, and the church built “in Korsun on the mountain” — after St. Basil; among the plundered treasures instead of “copper horses” “icons and books” are mentioned; the place of baptism of Kievan people is called the Pochayna river, and not the Dnieper (Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Zhytia kniazia Vladimira*, 222–227, 232–234, 237–240, 254–257, 268–272, 277–280, 285–289).

24 Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Korsunskaiia legenda*, 37–38. On the contrary, Nikolsky considered it to be a source for the chronicle, yet on a rather meager evidence (Nikolai Nikolskiy, “K voprosu ob istochnikah letopisnogo skazaniya o sviatom Vladimire,” *Khristianskoie Chtenie* 7 (1902), 97–98; Idem, “Materialy dlia istorii drevnerusskoï dukhovnoï pismennosti, №№ I–XXIII,” *Sbornik otdelenia russkogo iazyka*

A version preserved in the collections of the Chudov Monastery and dating to the second half of the sixteenth century can be considered as a variation of the *Ordinary Life*²⁵. It describes Anastasius of Cherson as bishop, mentions the healing of the prince from “scales”, and contains an interesting topographical detail: Volodymer “built the church on the mound Likothros” (“постави церковь Св. Василья на горе, рекомеи Ликофрос”) after his baptism²⁶. Shakhmatov suggested, rather boldly, that this information is traceable to certain “Tale of Volodymer’s baptism”, but the overall late outlook of the source makes it very unlikely.

The *Synaxarion (Prologue) Vitae*, in their various versions, were traditionally considered as reductions of the *Ordinary Life*. Their dating depends on the overall dating of the *Prologue*, for which recently the second half or even the end of the twelfth century have been suggested²⁷. The oldest fragment of the *Prologue* with the *Life of St. Volodymer* is dated to 1220²⁸.

In this bleak landscape, Shakhmatov was able to identify one hagiographical work on St. Volodymer, dating from the fifteenth century, that apparently did preserve an independent ancient, tradition on the princes’ conversion. The scholar dubbed it the “Life of a Particular Composition”²⁹. As early as 1888 Aleksei Sobolevsky suggested that it tapped on an “ancient, no doubt, and very important but lost source” on the circumstances of the conversion³⁰. Indeed, the text carries some unique data, for instance on the boyar Zhibern and a military commander named Oleg. Yet it offers for the rest a heavily “folklorised” version of the story³¹, and it takes textological daring of a Shakhmatov’s caliber to proclaim it dependable and ancient source³².

i slovesnosti 82 (1907), 4–6). According to Boris Kloss, this text, which is a compilation of late chronicle accounts and *Synaxarion (Prologue)*, was written in the first half of the fifteenth century (Boris Kloss, “Zhytie kniazia Vladimira,” 201).

25 Mikhail Speransky, “Bibliograficheskie materialy A.N. Popova. XIX. Sobornik belorusskiy Chudova monastyrya,” *Chtenia v obshchestve istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh* 3 (1889), 1–101 (5th pag.).

26 Mikhail Speransky, “Bibliograficheskie materialy A.N. Popova, 36–38.

27 Boris Kloss, “Zhytie kniazia Vladimira,” 200; Olga Loseva, *Zhytia russkikh sviatykh v sostave drevnerusskikh Prologov XII — pervoi treti XV vv.* (Moscow, 2009), 135.

28 Olga Loseva, *Zhytia russkikh sviatykh*, 76, 122–123.

29 Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Korsunskaya legenda*, 58–59; Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Zhytia kniazia Vladimira*, 314–315.

30 Aleksei Sobolevsky, “Pamiatniki drevnerusskoi literatury, posviaschennye Vladimiru Sviatomu,” *Chtenia v Istoricheskom obshchestve Nestora Letopistsa* 2 (1888), 11–12. The *Life* came down in a miscellany from the Pligin collection. There is also a similar concise version, which Sobolevsky called the “Extended Prologue Life”.

31 Essentially, it is a variation of a traditional folk tale of “acquiring of a bride”. Volodymer goes on a military expedition against Korsun because of an unsuccessful courtship to the local ruler’s daughter. After the capture of the city the family of the “Korsun prince” follows the fate of the Princes of Polotsk: “[Volodymer] seized the prince and princess of Korsun and took their daughter to his tent, where, having tied the prince and princess to the pole of the tent, performs lawlessness with their daughter in front of them.” Three days later, the “prince” and “princess” were put to death and their daughter was given to the new governor of the city, boyar Izhbern (Zhd’bern). Later, the same Izhbern together with the military commander Oleg were sent to Constantinople to woo the Princess Anna, and so on, and so forth. Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Zhytiya knyazy Vladimira*, 316–317 (Pligin’s compilation), 318–319 (17th c. chronicle compilation).

32 In fact, the text is full of errors. Its author does not know the topography of Cherson and was confused by historical details: he baptised the warriors of Volodymer in a river which does not exist on Heracleian

Volodymer's Conversion in the *Primary Chronicle*

The previous discussion of hagiographic texts was intended to demonstrate of their late origin and how their offer inauspicious prospects for recovering an “ancient tale” on Volodymer’s conversion, or any other subject for that matter.

It leaves us with the chronicle as a possible source of some earlier accounts on the conversion. Let us turn to the structure of its narrative.

The story of Volodymer’s baptism in the chronicle begins with the religious debate and the representatives of various confessions (the Bulgarians, the Germans, the Khazar Jews and later the Byzantines represented by “Greek the Philosopher”) in Kiev. Dissatisfied with their missionary efforts Volodymer, having consulted with the top of his retinue (the boyars and the “elders”³³), decides to send ten “good and reliable” men for extra testing of “how others serve God”. Being affected by the beauty of worship in the Constantinople church of Sophia the Rus’ ambassadors preferred the “law of the Greeks”. The advice of the boyars and an example of prince’s grandmother Olga led to the selection of the Greek religion. The question of the place of baptism arises but the Prince is advised to accept it “where he prefers”. A year later, the ruler had already decided on the place, but instead of the expected trip to the bishop and preparation for the adoption of the sacraments he launches an attack on Korsun³⁴. Thus, the salvation of his own soul is made dependent on military luck. The victory is gained not because by the military success but by God’s favor. According to the logic of the text, it is God — through Anasthasius of Cherson — who showed a way to win. After receiving his principal trophy in Porphyrogenita Anna, Volodymer, however, puts off his pledge and procrastinates. For that he is punished with blindness (or clods or “plague”, according to the *Lives*), of which he is cured only in the baptismal font³⁵. The miracle of conversion of Saul to Paul performed again.

Shakhmatov has detected the artificial connection between the three versions of the baptism of the prince (in Kiev, after talks with “Greek the Philosopher”; also in Kiev on the basis of a “testing the faiths”, and in Korsun, after a miraculous healing) in this classic text³⁶. This was the main argument for the existence of a separate “Tale of Baptism”. A trained philologist can clearly see inconsistencies within the text. However, the question is, would the same standard apply to the medieval author?

Peninsula; among the contemporaries of the prince he name the metropolitan “Larion” who held the cathedra in times of Yaroslav the Wise. There are some other errors and distortions, such as 23 years lived by Volodymer after the baptism (instead of 28) or the date of the siege, which is given as 6096.

33 These later are borrowed from the chronicle’s chronographycal sources, cf.: Tetiana Vilkul, “Startsi” ta “stareishyny” v Povisti vremennykh lit i davnioslovianskomu Vosmyknyzhzhi,” *Ukrainskyi Istorychny Zhurnal* (5 2012), 165–176.

34 PSRL 1: 109; PSRL 2: 95.

35 PSRL 1: 109; Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Zhytia kniazia Vladimira*, 270.

36 Aleksei Shakhmatov, *Korsunskaiia legenda*, 1–8.

What we have in the chronicle story is essentially the testing of the true faith staged in three parts: first with the missionaries, then with one’s own folk, and finally with the military luck. When all three point in the same direction, the decision is made. It only helped that Christian God also had revealed himself by performing one of his customary tricks: a miracle of instantaneous curing from an affliction.

The sources and models for the chronicle story have been established with sufficient certainty³⁷. In view of these findings, the chronicle story appears to be a rather well-thought and coherent, well above the standards of a medieval narrative. Some experts insist that the possible source of the narration about the “choice of faith” is the story of the conversion of the Khazar Khagan to Judaism³⁸; however, the plot similarities could pass from one written tradition to another. Healing as a result of baptism is also a wide-spread plot, going back to the evidence about the healing of Constantine the Great in the *Chronicle of George Hamartolos*³⁹.

On the contrary, the chronicle story of the siege of Korsun’ reveals great familiarity with the topography of the city. The story is certainly written in hot pursuit by an eyewitness who may have been personally involved in the vicissitudes of the siege. The author notes the dislocation of the Rus’ fleet indicating the exact distance from the city: “вб онъ полъ города в лимени . дали. града ст[р]ѣлище едино”⁴⁰. Most likely, Rus’ placed their ships in the Streletskaya Bay, while Volodymer resided in a camp located in 200–250m from the western gates of the city of Cherson⁴¹. The author refers to the earthwork of the besiegers

37 Cf. among others: Petr Bitsylli, “Zapadnoe vlianie na Rusi i Nachalnaia letopis,” Petr M. Bitsylli, *Izbrannye trudy po srednevekovoi istorii: Rossia i Zapad* (Moscow, 2006), 590; Vladimir Petrukhin, “Vybor very: Letopisnyi syuzhet i istoricheskie realii,” *Drevnerusskaia kultura v mirovom kontekste: arheologia i mezhdistsyplinarnye issledovania* (Moscow, 1999), 73–74; Allan Timberlake, “Point of View and Conversion Narrative: Vita Constantini and Povest Vremennykh Let,” *Miscellanea slavica. Sbornik statei k 70-letiu B.A. Uspenskogo* (Moscow, 2008), 256–272; Tatiana Vilkul, “O proishozhdenii ‘Rechi Filosafo,’” *Palaeoslavica* 20, 1 (2012), 6–14.

38 Vladimir Petrukhin, “Vybor very: Letopisnyi syuzhet i istoricheskie realii,” 73–74; Petrukhin V. Vybor very v evraziyskoy istorii: Khazaria i Rus. Tatiana Kalinina, Valeriy Flyorov and Vladimir Petrukhin. *Khazaria v krosskul’turnom prostranstve* (Moscow, 2014), 159–160. Noteworthy that the similar plot on testing the faith and debates we can see in narrative tradition of Eurasian steppe empires, such as the polemics in Uyghur Khaganate or later authentic story about a religious dispute in front of Möngke Khagan. Cf.: Sergey Klyashtorny, *Runicheskiye pamyatniki Uyghurskogo khaganata i istoriya evraziyskikh stepey* (St.-Petersburg, 2010), 265–275; Peter Golden, *The Conversion of the Khazars to Judaism. The World of the Khazars* (Leiden, Boston, 2007), 128–129; Anastasius Van Den Wyngaert (Ed.). *Itinerarium Willelmi de Rubruck. Sinica Franciscana*. Vol. 1. (Quaracchi-Firenze, 1929), 292–297; *Puteshestviya v vostochnye strany Plano Karpini i Rubruka* (Moscow, 1957), 169–173; Peter Jackson and David Morgan D. (eds). *The Mission of Fryar William of Rubruck. His journey to the court of the Great Khan Möngke* (London, 1990), 230–235.

39 Vasilii Istrin, *Knigy Vremennya i obraznyya Georgiya Mnikha. Khronika Georgiya Amartola v drevnem slavyanorusskom perevode*. T. 1. (Petrograd, 1920), 331–332; Volodymyr Rychka, *Vsya korolivska rat (Vlada Kyivskoyi Rusi)*. (Kyiv, 2009), 147–148; Vladimir Petrukhin, *Kreshchenie Rusi: ot yazychestva k khristianstvu* (Moscow, 2006), 134.

40 PSRL 1: 109; PSRL 2: 95.

41 Sergey Sorochan, Aleksandr Romensky. “Korsunskiy pokhod i Kherson XI v.: k zaversheniyu nauchnogo proekta. Review: Sazanov A.V. Kherson i kreshchenie Vladimira. Kherson v X–XI vv. Saarbrücken, 2013.” *Vizantiyskiy vremennik*. 72 (2013), 325.

as well as countermeasures by the Chersonites that are in keeping with the recommendations of Byzantine military treatises of the tenth century⁴². He knows about the location of the sources of city's aqueduct⁴³, as well as the place of the church of baptism and the chambers of Volodymer and his porphyrogenita bride. It is noteworthy that the foundations of secular buildings (triclinium and emvola) were noted in the plans of the Cherson agora made by the architects A.A. Avdeev and K. Vyatkin in the middle of the nineteenth century. They were located 4,27 m behind the altar of the cross-shaped temple N 27 and 8 m away from this temple, between the basilica N 28 and cross-shaped temples N 29. That is, the chronicle data found direct confirmation in the archaeological material. The plumbing cistern which probably supplied water to the central part of the city and the triclinium was found 10 meters from the "chambers"⁴⁴. These facts confirm additionally the authenticity of the evidence about the siege of Korsun'.

It would appear that the story of St. Volodymer's conversion appears firstly within the Rus' chronicle writing. The earlier stages of its textual history still need to be clarified, but the authentic report on the siege probably was in the core of the narration. None of the surviving versions of the text is primary, both the annalistic and the hagiographic one have been reduced and edited. Although *Lives* preserved some reliable information, it seems that the chronicle story served in general as the basis for subsequent hagiographical traditions and revisions of the original plot as reflected in the various editions of the St. Volodymers *Vitae*.

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42 See Denis F. Sullivan, “A Byzantine Instructional Manual on Siege Defense: The De obsidione toleranda: Introduction, English Translation and Annotations,” *Byzantine Authors: Literary Activities and Preoccupations. Text and Translations Dedicated to the Memory of Nicolas Oikonomides*. Nesbitt J. (Ed.). (Leiden, 2003), 140–141, 148, 185–187.

43 On the aqueduct of Cherson cf.: Vladimir Kadeev, *Khersones Tavricheskiy. Byt i kultura (I–III vv. n. e.)*. (Kharkov, 1996), 27. It is noteworthy that the information of the *Ordinary Life* in this passage seems to be more correct, while the text of the *Primary Chronicle* contains some errors. The latter one proclaims that the “sources” of water are situated “to the east” from the Rus'ian military camp (PSRL 1: 109), but in reality they were located on the south. The *Life* rightly places “to the east” not the “sources”, but the water catchment cistern, which was situated on the Cherson's agora (Nadezhda Milutenko, *Sviatoi ravnoapostolny kniaz Vladimir*, 457). Thus, both the *Life* and the *Primary Chronicle* differ from the archetype of the text.

44 Sergey Sorochan, “Ob arkhitekturnom komplekse bolshoyagory vizantiyskogo Khersona,” *Vizantiyskiy Vremennik*, 63 (2009), 184–187.