Chapter 3

# *Rus Society, Religion, and Culture*

Two phenomena that greatly affected political life also left a strong imprint on Rus's economy, society, and culture. The first was the tribute-and-trading emphasis of the Rus princes and their supporters, and the second was the Rus acceptance of Christianity. Noonan indicated the impact of both these developments in the Kievan principality in the following passage:

> Kiev's trade began in the tenth century but at that time it functioned as a mafioso extortion operation run by the princes. Kiev's true trade only started in the eleventh century and was sparked by the growing local demand for a variety of expensive and sophisticated goods by an increasingly sedentarized ruling class and a new ecclesiastical market. In this process, the Rus' conversion to Orthodoxy seems to have acted as a powerful catalyst in refining tastes, introducing new crafts and advanced methods, and creating markets.[1]

The relationship of the tribute extortioners (the princes and their followers) of the early Rus state with the ruling elite of late Rus is a complex question, but the latter certainly seem to have evolved primarily from the former. Payments extracted from the common people, whether in the form of tribute, taxes, customs duties, fines, or other means, continued to support the ruling elite throughout the Rus period. After the acceptance of Christianity, the church hierarchy became part of this elite, and it too received a share of the people's payments.

In exchange, however, the Rus elite provided some needed services, such as military protection from outside forces. And if Vladimir and the Rus elite supported the establishment of Christianity partly for their own interests, its spread in Rus still produced many positive consequences for the Rus people and their culture.

[1]Thomas S. Noonan, "The Flourishing of Kiev's International and Domestic Trade, ca. 1100–ca. 1240," in *Ukrainian Economic History: Interpretive Essays*, ed. I. S. Koropeckyj (Cambridge, Mass., 1991), p. 144.

## THE TOWNS

It was in urban areas, where the elite mainly resided, that Rus Christianity developed first and only slowly spread into the countryside. The presence of the political, social, and religious elite in the towns, plus the towns' role as centers for tribute-gathering and trade, helped make urban life vigorous in Rus. By the end of the Rus era, almost 300 towns existed. Although many contained fewer than 1,000 people, others were large. According to the historian Tikhomirov's estimates, Novgorod had between 10,000 and 15,000 people in the early eleventh century, and between 20,000 and 30,000 during the early thirteenth century. Noonan estimated that Kiev grew from no more than a few hundred people before c. 880 to several thousand by the early tenth century. In 1200, Kiev had about 40,000 to 50,000 inhabitants. Other fairly large towns included Chernigov, Galich, Pereiaslavl (in the south), Vladimir (in the northeast), Polotsk, and Smolensk. In comparison, Paris had about 60,000 inhabitants in the early thirteenth century and London about half of that.

Although some cities were founded by Varangian princes, others predated their arrival. Even before the establishment of the Rus state, Slavs and other peoples had established fortresses. Usually overlooking a river, they often sat on high ground for defense purposes, and some of them eventually became pre-Rus towns.

During the Rus era, some old fortresses were enlarged or replaced with more secure citadels or kremlins. They were often surrounded by ditches or moats and ramparts made of the dug-up dirt. Topping the wooden fortress walls, there might be a platform surrounded by a wooden parapet with openings for archers to shoot at the enemy. The walls usually contained towers and at least one gate, sometimes made of stone. Although much bigger and stone-walled, Moscow's still-existing Kremlin gives some idea of Rus's citadels, as does the smaller one still standing in Novgorod (see Figure 6.1).

If the citadel symbolized a city's defense, its *posad* (suburb) embodied its trade. Only very small cities, such as frontier fortress towns, lacked a *posad*. Although no absolute segregation existed between those who lived in the citadel and those residing in the *posad*, elite elements were dominant in the citadel, which often sat up on a hill, and tradesmen and craftsmen generally settled and peddled their goods in the *posad*, which was frequently below the citadel and near a river. As a town's suburb grew, authorities also often fortified it but less extensively, for example, by putting earthen walls around it.

Most town buildings were wooden, partly for reasons of warmth. The chief exception was that of major churches. The most common wooden buildings resembled log cabins. Some houses were completely above ground; others, set up in hollowed-out pits, were partly subterranean. In larger cities, streets and walkways were made of logs. (Sergei Eisenstein's great film *Alexander Nevsky* transmits some idea of old Novgorod's look.)

Craftsmen in Rus cities included the following: blacksmiths, bootmakers, bowmakers, carpenters, coppersmiths, glassmakers, goldsmiths, iconographers, jewelry-makers, locksmiths, potters, scribes, saddle-makers, shield-makers, shipbuilders, silversmiths, stonemasons, tanners, tinsmiths, and weavers. (This is only about half the number that could be listed.) In some large towns, craftsmen

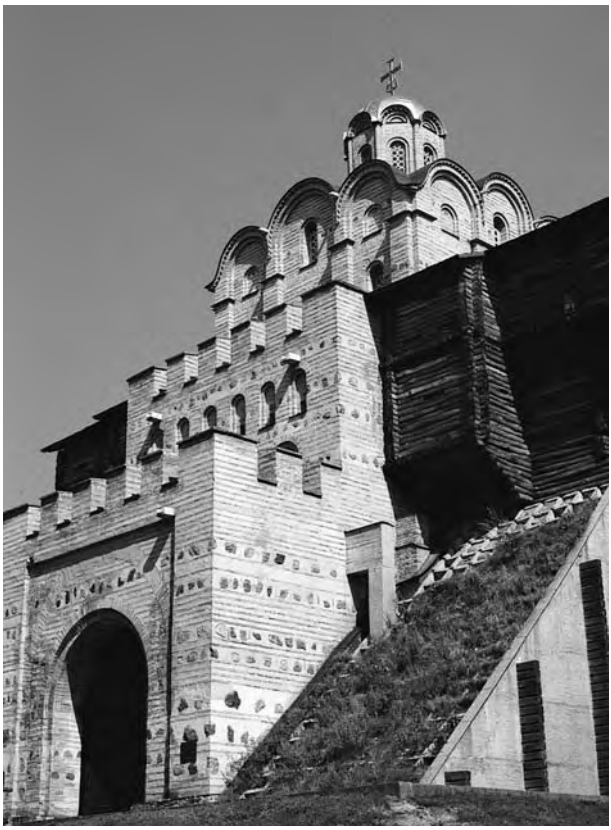

FIGURE 3.1. The Golden Gate of Kiev, a reconstruction of the main entrance to the city of Kiev, built during the reign of Yaroslav the Wise.

practicing a similar craft often resided near each other, and chronicles mentioned such areas as tanners' streets or carpenters' quarters.

In most towns, the busiest area was the *posad* marketplace. Here town criers often issued orders and made announcements. Here, besides urban craft products, people could buy grain, bread, salt, fish, meat, furs, honey, wax, flax, lard, and peasant-made artifacts. Prices fluctuated according to supply and demand.

## FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC TRADE

Even before the beginnings of Rus recorded history, foreign and domestic trade was important in the future Rus lands. The city of Staraia Ladoga, for example, was a multiethnic international trading center already in the late eighth century. Archeological findings here and elsewhere, including silver coins from the Middle East and amber from the Baltic area, indicate an active trade that linked Europe with the Muslim world. Besides the Volga River, traders used the Don and Donets rivers to bring silver northward from Muslim areas in the Caucasus and beyond.

After the early Varangian princes gained control over numerous trade routes and integrated their tribute gathering with international trade, the Dnieper route to Constantinople gradually gained more prominence. Rus trade with the Volga

Bulgars and peoples of the steppe remained important throughout the Rus era. In the north, Novgorod gradually emerged as an important Baltic trading area, with foreign Baltic merchants residing in the city.

Chief Rus exports were furs, honey, wax, and especially in the early Rus period, slaves. Other exports included flax, lard, hemp, hides, hops, sheepskin, walrus bones, and some handicraft items. Among the major imported goods were silver (for monetary and other uses), arms, fabrics, fruits and wine, glassware, expensive pottery, horses, amber and metal products, silver, silks, spices, and gems. The upper classes and the church were the primary buyers of such imports.

Demand for luxury items fostered their production, when possible, within Rus lands. Craftsmen in Kiev, for example, began producing increasing amounts of expensive jewelry. Some of it, along with other products such as religious wares and glass bracelets (which became commonplace), was sent to other cities, reflecting a growing intercity trade. Although not a great deal is known about Rus business practices, recent archeological discoveries of birchbark credit tallies and other financial information have led two scholars to refer to the Rus's "advanced system of credit and moneylending."[2]

## RURAL LIFE

Although town life was vigorous, at least four-fifths of the Rus population probably lived in the countryside, many of them clustered around towns. The rural inhabitants were primarily responsible for paying tribute or direct taxes—small cities paid lesser amounts, large cities were exempt, and the upper classes were exempt regardless of where they lived.

Most peasants eked out an existence for themselves by supplementing their farming yields with what the forests, lakes, and rivers offered. Land near lakes and rivers was more fertile and thus generally preferred. The type of farming practiced depended largely on geographical location and soils available. In the south, in the transitional forest-steppe and steppe lands, two-field and later three-field crop rotation were common. While such rotation, with variations, also existed in the northern forest zone, the "slash-and-burn" technique of clearing new forest lands remained popular. When these lands became exhausted, peasants often moved to new areas and slashed and burnt again. This contributed to the colonization of Rus lands and the dispersion of the Rus peasantry.

In the early Rus era, peasants owned the overwhelming majority of rural lands—the St. Petersburg historian I. Froianov, among others, has argued that this was still true in the late Rus era. Insufficient evidence is available to determine whether most peasant families farmed independently or in some sort of commune.

During the eleventh century, princes, boyars, and the church became important landowners of country properties. Although many newly owned private lands might have been previously uninhabited, it seems likely that others were simply expropriated from the peasants farming them. The lands that princes gave to their

[2]Th. S. Noonan and R. K. Kovalev, "What Can Archeology Tell Us About How Debts Were Documented and Collected in Kievan Rus?" RH 27 (Summer 2000): 145.

boyar followers had no service strings attached. Thus, they were not like Western European fiefs, and feudalism in the sense that Western scholars use the word did not exist in Rus.

The peasants working on upper-class private landholdings were not serfs and thus were not permanently tied to the land of a private landowner. If they wished to farm land for their own use, they had to make payment (in money, produce, or labor) to the landowner. Some became indebted/indentured workers, not free to leave their master's service until they paid their debts. Others were simply hired hands.

If serfdom did not exist, however, slavery did, both in urban and rural areas. Some slaves worked on estates along with the peasants. People became slaves in a variety of ways, including capture in war, being born of slave parents, or running away before repaying a master his debt.

## CLASS STRUCTURE AND THE MILITARY

The best evidence regarding the class structure of Rus comes from the era's law codes. Because we deal with the Christian clergy and the people under their jurisdiction later, here we are concerned only with the secular ladder. Beneath the princes and princesses at the top came the boyars and their families. By the late Rus period, the boyars included both the prince's druzhina, whose members served the prince in various military and governmental capacities, and other prominent upper-class citizens. Beneath the boyars were several classes of free citizens, which included most merchants and urban workers. Next came the largest class, the peasants, including those working for private landowners.

At the bottom of the ladder came the indentured workers and urban and rural slaves. Frequent law code references to slaves make it clear that slaveholding by the upper classes in Rus was widespread. Some slaves were held only temporarily. Prisoners-of-war who were eventually ransomed fell into this category. Of course, permanent slaves had no rights and could even be killed by their owners, although this made little economic sense and therefore did not occur often.

The Rus class structure was fairly fluid. The boyar class, for example, was open to newcomers who achieved prominence. The distinctions between classes were not as rigid as they might first seem. Despite being entrusted with important administrative and supervisory duties by their prince or boyar, some stewards were themselves slaves. (Partly because of the fluidity of Rus social groupings, some historians have abandoned the use of the term "class" in describing the Rus social structure, but used in a general sense it remains a useful term for this and later periods.)

For a prince and his *druzhina*, fighting was part of normal existence, as was death in battle. In his "Instruction to His Children", Vladimir Monomakh stated that he had participated in eighty-three military campaigns. Standard equipment for a *druzhina* warrior included a helmet, body armor, a shield, a sword, and a spear. When not fighting, a prince and his *druzhina* enjoyed hunting. Vladimir Monomakh related that he hunted a hundred times a year, and, among other

adventures, had been tossed by bison, gored by a stag and by an elk, had his sword torn from his thigh by a boar, and had his kneecap bitten by a bear.

For larger battles, the princes often used city militias and foreign mercenaries. If a prince called upon a militia, he generally provided some of its members with horses. He also provided some of their weapons. Mounted mercenaries from the steppe were especially skillful with bows and arrows and were an important supplement to a prince's own *druzhina* cavalry.

## WOMEN

The position of women in Rus can be divided into two periods, the pre-Christian and Christian. Evidence for the first is murky, but it seems that among other deities, the native Slavs worshipped a Mother Earth fertility goddess and were in awe of other powerful female spirits such as the *rusalki* (water and tree nymphs). The early Rus also paid homage to fictional Amazon-like warrior heroines in some of their folk literature.

For this early period, *The Primary Chronicle* provides additional information. Although no doubt exaggerated in places, the accounts regarding women are generally believable. Although it states that the Polianian tribe respected peaceful marriage customs and monogamy, men in some other east Slavic tribes seized the women they wished by capture rather than by marrying properly, and they practiced polygamy. Princes such as Vladimir, before accepting Christianity, also took women against their will. The chronicle recounts that Princess Rogned refused to marry him, but that Vladimir attacked the forces of her father, the Prince of Polotsk, and, after killing her father and two brothers, took her for his bride. After speaking of his other wives and concubines, the chronicle later adds that he "seduced married women and violated young girls."[3]

In the chronicle account, Rogned's reply to her father's inquiry about marrying Vladimir is: "I will not draw off the boots of a slave's son."[4] Besides alluding to the lowly social position of Vladimir's mother (his grandmother's stewardess), the comment refers to the marriage ceremony custom of the bride removing her groom's boots as a sign of her submission. Another ritual was for the bride's father to hand over a whip to the groom. Both customs leave little doubt that the husband was the intended head of the household.

Yet, there are indications that the position of women in pre-Christian Rus was stronger than in some Western European countries. The story of Rogned tells us that at least in this one case a father did not force his daughter to marry against her will. The rule of the forceful Princess Olga and the chronicle's admiration for her are also notable, as is the presence of a few envoys for Russian princesses among a large Rus peace delegation to Constantinople in 945.

With the coming of Christianity, the position of women changed—no doubt gradually because pagan practices died out slowly in rural areas. In some ways,

[3]Samuel Hazard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, ed, *The Primary Chronicle* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 94.
[4]Ibid., p. 91.

the church view of women was positive, at least regarding pious women. Mary, the mother of Jesus, was greatly revered and in the popular mind took on some attributes of Mother Earth. *The Primary Chronicle* (written and compiled by monks) quoted Solomon in the Bible when he elaborated on how a good woman was more precious than jewels. The church encouraged the proper treatment of widows. It opposed such customs as bride capture and polygamy and encouraged parents not to force their daughters into unwanted marriages. Church legal jurisdiction over matters such as divorce, adultery, rape, and property disputes between husband and wife probably helped women more than it hurt them, but divorce laws reflect more concern with a wife's guilt than a husband's, and church laws sometimes allowed a husband to punish his wife, for example, for stealing from him.

Furthermore, the church displayed a fear of women's sexuality and power. The advice of Vladimir Monomakh to his sons—"Love your wives, but let them not rule you"[5]—reflects well his church's ambivalence toward women. He also warned his sons against conversing with shameless women.

The monastic authors of *The Primary Chronicle* exhibit other examples of wariness about women. After writing of Vladimir I's licentious behavior, they add: "The charm of woman is an evil thing." They go on to quote Solomon: "Listen not to an evil woman. Honey flows from the lips of a licentious woman . . . They who cleave to her shall die in hell."[6] Later in the account of Vladimir's conversion, a Byzantine scholar tells Vladimir: "the human race first sinned through women,"[7] and recounts the Biblical story of Adam and Eve. Further church attitudes toward women are indicated by the prohibition on women from attending church services during their menstrual periods or for forty days after the birth of a child.

The status of women was reflected in civil as well as church laws. By the end of the Rus era, an upper-class woman had the right to inherit and own moveable property, including the dowry she brought into her marriage. She could run the estate of a deceased husband, and her children could not dispose of her portion of her husband's will. Peasant and lower-class urban women's rights, however, were much more limited and generally ignored in legal documents.

Even upper-class women remained far from equal. Men had many economic and political rights women did not, especially regarding landed property and voting—only men could vote at *veche* meetings.

Although little is known about the economic roles of Rus urban women outside the household, there are legal references to handicraftswomen. One craft they were especially adept at was weaving. Out of hemp and flax yarn, they made both male and female garments. Birchbark letters and documents indicate that women could enter into financial contracts and that wealthy women were important purchasers of luxury goods. In addition, chronicles sometimes mention royal women who commissioned religious art works or gave to charitable causes.

Following Princess Olga's rule, no other Rus woman achieved such

[5]Leo Wiener, *Anthology of Russian Literature: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (New York, 1902), Vol. I, p. 54.
[6]Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, p. 94.
[7]Ibid., p. 109.

prominence, but Pushkareva has briefly treated some other Rus women known for their learning or participation in political affairs. There were, for example, the well-educated daughters of Yaroslav the Wise—one of whom, Anna, played an important political role in France after marrying King Henry I.

## SECULAR AND CHURCH LAW

There were primarily three sources of Rus law: the community, the prince, and the church. In the early Rus period, the judicial functions of a person's community were still of great importance. But with the passage of time and the coming of Christianity, they decreased in comparison to the powers of the princely and church courts.

The first written law code, Yaroslav's *Russkaia Pravda*, was based primarily on the customary law of Rus communities. It detailed which relatives were allowed to avenge a murder and how much compensation had to be paid for various crimes. Cutting off another's arm, leg, mustache, or beard necessitated payment, as did the theft of various articles. Following the death of Yaroslav, his sons and later princes made additions and revisions to the original code. The final revision, completed by the early thirteenth century, is commonly known as the *Expanded Pravda*.

The total effect of the law codes was to replace much blood vengeance with monetary fines. In addition, the revisions added a new class of payments that went to the prince for such crimes as killing his estate workers or stealing from him. The codes reflected both an attempt to change certain types of customary behavior and to enrich princely coffers.

Where possible, restitution for an offense was arranged outside of court. In the courts, the presiding official was often a trusted servitor, sometimes a slave, of the ruling prince. He acted primarily as a referee between a plaintiff and a defendant. While he accepted such proof as eyewitness accounts and written deeds, he often made decisions based upon less reliable evidence.

In a society of few written documents, the presiding official often had to rely on the fallible memories of community members. As a last and frequent resort, he could appeal to Divine intervention to help him reach a decision. Such appeals to God included oaths and ordeals by water or iron. The logic behind oaths was that individuals would not risk Divine displeasure by lying under oath; therefore it was likely that they were telling the truth. The hot iron ordeal, in which Divine intervention would supposedly keep an innocent person from being burnt, was apparently more common than the water ordeal. In the latter, an individual was thrown into the water with a rope attached, and probably with a hand bound to each foot. If the person bobbed back up, he or she was guilty—the pure water rejecting such an "unclean" person. If the individual sank, he or she was innocent—the attached rope presumably enabling the sinking person to be pulled out before drowning.

Although fines were the usual punishment, the *Expanded Pravda* also provided for harsher penalties, such as confiscation of property. Unprovoked murderers, horse thieves, arsonists, and repeat offenders were all liable to such punishment—

and perhaps (the code's wording is unclear) to banishment. Imprisonment was uncommon, and the law did not provide for capital punishment, although it allowed the killing of a thief while caught in the act. This did not mean, however, that princes always refrained from killing other Rus they considered enemies.

An interesting aspect of the law was the collective responsibility for certain crimes. For example, according to late Rus law, a community was responsible collectively for paying a fine if it did not search for and turn over the murderer of one of the prince's men or dependents.

Regarding church legal rights, there is some dispute over the proper dating of statutes granting them. Yet it seems safe to assume that by the end of the Rus era the church possessed such authority as outlined in statutes ascribed to Vladimir I and Yaroslav the Wise, at least in some parts of Rus. By these statutes, the Orthodox bishops exercised legal jurisdiction over not only priests, nuns, and monks, but also over such church people as choir singers; wards of the church; and those who worked in church-run institutions, such as hospitals and asylums. Church courts had general jurisdiction not only over divorce, adultery, rape, and property disputes between husband and wife, but also over such matters as witchcraft, sorcery, soothsaying, kidnapping a girl, calling someone a whore or heretic, or beating one's mother or father. Finally, ecclesiastical courts dealt with various offenses against church property. One code prohibited leading cattle, fowl, or dogs into a church except during an emergency.

As unusual as many practices of Rus law might seem to modern students, many of them, including ordeals, were also once common to other societies. If Rus law in many ways was "behind" Western law, it was largely due to the late arrival of statehood and Christianity. Even during the late Rus period, government and church law still contended with tribal customary law. Perhaps partly because the government's judicial role was not yet as strong as in Byzantium or in many Western European countries, Rus governmental justice seems less harsh in many ways. Both capital and corporal punishment and the use of torture to obtain confessions were more common in the West and in Byzantium than in Rus.

## RELIGION AND CULTURE

In both religion and culture, Rus was strongly influenced by the Byzantine Empire. These Byzantine influences, along with lesser foreign ones, mixed with native Slavic traditions to create a unique religious-cultural blend in the Rus lands.

### *Paganism and the Acceptance of Christianity*

Prior to accepting Christianity, the Rus worshipped deities and spirits. Some had long been present among the Slavs, and others were brought by the Varangians. Much Rus worship was like that of other tribal religions around the world, yet it was especially characterized by a strong worship of earth and ancestor deities and spirits. Among those of the earth were the already mentioned Mother Earth and the *rusalki* (water and tree nymphs). Of the ancestral forces, *Rod* and *Rozhanitsy* were the most important. They were male and female fertility deities representing

the reproductive power of a person's clan—the word *rod* meaning clan. Veneration of the *domovoi* (house spirit), thought to be the founder of the *rod*, also reflected the ancestor cult. Although less "sky"oriented than some pagans, the early Rus revered several deities of the heavens, most notably Perun, the god of thunder.

Although Vladimir had earlier constructed a pantheon dedicated to pagan gods, *The Primary Chronicle* tells us that after accepting Christianity, he ordered the pagan idols destroyed. Sources indicate, however, continued pagan manifestations and resistance, especially in rural areas. Moreover, vestiges of Rus paganism continued up to modern times in folklore and certain folk customs. For many generations of Rus descendants, a strong love and regard for their ancestors and for mother earth was especially characteristic. The East Slavic nations were among only a small number of European peoples who continued using patronymic names—for example, Ivanovich or Ivanovna, indicating a son or daughter of Ivan. And the awareness of being part of a larger clan continued to affect Rus descendants' attitudes about community and personal destiny.

As in other countries, with the coming of Christianity certain elements of pagan feasts and rituals lived on in new, but subordinate, guises. For example, painting eggs at Easter had been earlier associated with pagan rituals welcoming the corning of spring. And Christian saints sometimes took over roles of pagan deities. The prophet Elijah for instance was ascribed the thunder-making powers of Perun. Church leaders tolerated some minor mingling of pagan vestiges with Christianity, but they severely criticized the continuing influence of sorcerers, whom many Rus continued to value for their magical and healing powers. Ironically, as W. F. Ryan emphasizes, it was not only various types of pagan sorcerers who practiced magic, but lower clergy also sometimes used magic and divination. He notes that as late as the eighteenth century, clergy remained among the chief categories of those accused of witchcraft.

For a long time, scholars have written of *dvoeverie* (double-faith) to characterize Rus and Russian folk religion, which they believed remained basically pagan underneath its Christian surface. More recently, however, this approach has been criticized for failing to recognize that premodern believers of all social strata approached the world far differently than most modern Christians. Medieval Christianity and paganism shared many qualities that in today's more rationalized world are thought characteristic only of pagan beliefs. Scholars using the *dvoeverie* concept frequently drew too sharp a line between a Christian elite and pagan folk and failed to acknowledge that beliefs of commoners influenced the Christian elite and vice-versa.

Following Vladimir's baptism (see below) the chronicle reports that a great multitude went into the Dnieper the next day to be baptized. Vladimir also forced children from leading families to be instructed in the new faith. In other cities, the chronicle says that he began "to invite"[8] the people to accept baptism, but undoubtedly Rus authorities—like those in many countries under similar circumstances—applied more pressure than that. Freedom of religion was not a characteristic of medieval life.

[8]Ibid., p. 117.

### *Vladimir Christianizes Rus*

The following account is an excerpt from Leo Wiener, *Anthology of Russian Literature: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (New York, 1902), Vol. I, pp. 67, 70. It is a translation from *The Primary Chronicle* for the years 987–988. This story of the conversion is shrouded in myths but reflects two important truths: The Rus greatly valued the beauty of Byzantine liturgy and church art and architecture, and Vladimir imposed Christianity and attacked Rus paganism. Bracketed material and ellipses are mine.

*Said Vladimir "The men we have sent away have come back. Let us hear what has happened!" And he said: "Speak before the druzhina!" and they spoke: . . . "We went to Greece [Byzantium], and they took us where they worship their God, and we do not know whether we were in heaven or upon earth, for there is not upon earth such sight or beauty. We were perplexed, but this much we know that there God lives among men, and their service is better than in any other country. We cannot forget that beauty, for every man that has partaken of sweetness will not afterwards accept bitterness, and thus we can no longer remain in our former condition". . . .*

*Upon his return [from the Crimean city of Kherson, where the chronicle says Vladimir was baptized], he ordered the idols to be cast down, and some to be cut to pieces, and others to be consumed by fire; but Perun he had tied to the tail of a horse, and dragged down the hill over the Borichev to the brook. . . . As he was dragged along the brook to the Dnieper, the unbelievers wept over him, for they had not yet received the holy baptism, and he was cast into the Dnieper. . . .*

*After that Vladimir proclaimed throughout the whole city: "Whosoever will not appear tomorrow at the river, whether he be rich or poor, or a beggar, or a working-man, will be in my disfavour"*

## *Church Organization and Byzantine Influences*

The Rus church was under the jurisdiction of the patriarch of Constantinople, who normally selected its head, the metropolitan of Kiev. The metropolitan, in turn, at least in theory, appointed the Rus bishops. Local princes also had a say, as, to a lesser extent, did the populace, especially in Novgorod. Partly as a result of the wishes of princes in lesser towns, the number of Rus bishops increased from about three or four under Vladimir I to fifteen by 1237. Many of the bishops during this more than 200 years came from Byzantium, as did all but two metropolitans.

Underneath the bishops were parish priests and deacons (white clergy), monks (black clergy), and nuns. As in Byzantium, only married men could become parish priests, whereas monks were not married, and only they could be ordained bishops. During the Rus period, the number of clergy, churches, and monasteries greatly increased. From 988 to 1240, records reveal the construction of 450 churches and monasteries, but Fennell is undoubtedly correct in assuming that these *known* constructions were only a small percentage of the total, especially of churches. The most famous monastery was the Kievan Crypt Monastery, founded in the middle of the eleventh century. Like some of the other monasteries, but even more so, it

served as a center of writing and learning, and many later bishops of various principalities had earlier been monks there.

The year 1054 marked not only an important political milestone—the death of Yaroslav the Wise—but also a religious event of momentous consequences for the Rus people and their descendants. A legate from the pope in Rome excommunicated the patriarch of Constantinople. Because earlier tensions had existed between the two offices and it was by no means clear in 1054 that an irreconcilable schism had occurred, contemporaries did not then realize how significant that year's split would become.

The main cause for it was a dispute over papal authority, but doctrinal differences over certain aspects of the Holy Trinity—the famous *filioque* clause—also played an important part. Whether the Holy Spirit descended from just the Father (as Constantinople maintained) or from the Father and the Son (as Rome insisted) was a matter of utmost importance to many Christians of the time. This was especially true in Constantinople, where such religious issues were passionately discussed in the streets.

Although the effect on the Rus church was gradual, and animosity toward Rome was not strong during the Rus era, from 1054 Rus Christianity was part of the Orthodox world. Eventually, this would contribute to animosity toward the West.

The influence of Byzantium on the new Rus church was great. More than 100 years before Vladimir's conversion, two Byzantine missionaries, Cyril and Methodius, had gone to Moravia (most of which today is in the Czech Republic) to convert the Moravians. The missionaries brought with them a Slavic alphabet and a written language based on a spoken Slavic dialect. This written language was almost immediately used for liturgical purposes. In the following generation, the successors of the two famous missionaries brought the new language to the Slavs of Bulgaria. By the end of the tenth century when the Rus converted, numerous Byzantine theological works had already been translated into a written language close to that spoken by the Rus. Modified slightly in the course of a century, it became known as Old Church Slavonic. It became the language used in Rus church services and in many of their written works. Numerous translations from Byzantine religious works into this language flowed into Rus and supplemented the presence of the Byzantine-sent metropolitans and bishops. Thus, Kievan Christianity naturally took on many characteristics of Byzantine Christianity.

## *Additional Characteristics of Rus Christianity*

Despite Byzantium's overwhelming influence, Rus's pre-Christian past and its own unique developments gave the new faith a special Rus coloring. It is revealed in Rus Christianity's religious ideals and emphases, which do not necessarily reflect the behavior of most Rus Christians.

A good place to begin is with the veneration of Boris and Gleb, already mentioned in connection with Rus's political culture. Rus Christians believed that by not resisting their brother's plot against them, the two princes humbly imitated the suffering and death of Christ. Some other prominent Rus saints, especially Abbot Theodosius of the Kievan Crypt Monastery, were also credited with displaying great humility and the willingness to suffer in following Christ's example.

Rus Christianity was colored by other tints that highlighted the spiritual transformation of all life and nature, the beauty of Christian liturgy and art, and the significance of the historical and eschatological. The eleventh-century "Sermon On Law and Grace" is a good example of the historical emphasis. In it, Ilarion, one of the two native Rus metropolitans, contrasts the faith of the Jews before Christ with that of Christians, and he concludes by considering Vladimir's contribution within this historical context. The historical perspective introduced along with Christianity helped differentiate the Rus mentality from that of most nomadic cultures, which were less concerned with historical continuity. The Rus also concerned themselves with the traditional eschatological subjects of the end of time, the Apocalypse, and the Last Judgment.

Despite the emphasis on suffering for Christ's sake and eschatology, the Rus were not morbid or pessimistic. Their asceticism was moderate, and many of their religious works were full of Christian optimism. Again Ilarion's "Sermon On Law and Grace" illustrates the point. In it, he calls upon the dead Vladimir I to:

> See also your city beaming in its grandeur! See your blossoming churches, see the growing Christianity, see the city gleaming in its adornment of saintly images, and fragrant with thyme, and re-echoing with hymns and divine, sacred songs! And seeing all this, rejoice and be glad, and praise the good God, the creator of all this.[9]

Finally, there was the Rus ethical hue. In the "Life of St. Theodosius" by the monk Nestor, we read not only of the saint's humility, meekness, and asceticism, but also of his love and charity. He cared for the poor and sick, sent bread to prisoners, and interceded with judges for those treated unfairly. He was not afraid to extend his strong ethical awareness into the realm of politics. After Sviatoslav II (son of Yaroslav the Wise) usurped the Kievan throne from his brother Iziaslav, Theodosius openly criticized him and refused to recognize his right to it. He also attempted to keep peace between warring princes.

Peacekeeping and mediation efforts were the most common types of religious intervention into the secular political arena. The church's attitude toward political authority was generally to support the existing legal order and to emphasize that political power came from God. Church leaders encouraged princes not only to avoid fratricidal wars, but also to rule justly and with love for their subjects (especially the poor, orphans, and widows) and to protect and strengthen Rus against her enemies who were not Christian or, by the end of the Rus period, not Orthodox. Works such as Vladimir Monomakh's "Instructions" (see Chapter 2) indicate that religious teachings strongly influenced at least some princes' views of ideal princely behavior. In turn, however, princes also exercised influence on the church, for example in sometimes helping to determine who became metropolitans, bishops, or hegumens (superiors of monasteries).

As compared with Western religious thinkers, Rus churchmen devoted little effort to reconciling religion and reason. For various reasons, including the use of old Church Slavonic, there was less familiarity in Rus than in the West with ancient

[9]Wiener, Vol. I, p. 50.

pre-Christian rational thinking. In the medieval West, the discovery and translation into Latin of various works of the Greek philosopher Aristotle especially helped to stimulate a turn to rational, philosophical, and semiscientific thought. This thrust left an important mark on both Western religious thought and on the culture as a whole. In Rus theology and culture, however, we see no such imprint.

## *Christianity and Society*

Although some historians have emphasized the church hierarchy's support for the Rus princes and a social structure dominated by elite men, other historians have stressed the church role in humanizing social and cultural life. Marxism, the celebration (in 1988) of the millennium of Rus's Christianization, the collapse of Communist power in Russia, and feminist historical criticism of Christianity's male bias have all influenced the debate.

All sides have made some valid points. The church did receive part of the prince's tribute and increasingly became a major landowner. While not condemning slavery, however, it encouraged humane treatment of slaves and others from the lower classes; engaged in some charitable and philanthropic activities; and furthered education, literacy, literature, and art. Estimates about literacy and formal schooling vary widely for the Rus period. But by the early twelfth century a variety of sources, including birchbark letters and graffiti, indicate considerable male and female urban literacy. Following the example of Vladimir I, princes and others founded various schools, many of them on church property. In this spread of literacy and learning, the clergy played a major part, as it did in promoting literature and art.

## *Literature and Art*

Church influence on literature and art is intricately connected with Byzantium, which was the chief foreign influence on Rus culture. South Slavic literature (which also owed a strong debt to Byzantine Christianity) and Scandinavian literature were other sources of inspiration. The South Slavic liturgical language, Church Slavonic, became the basis of a Rus literary language. Again, as with religion, however, native Rus traditions and creativity intermingled with Byzantine and other lesser foreign influences to create a literature of some originality.

Of the different types of literature, the chronicles and religious writings were the most important. The chronicles were far more than just historical records. The monks and others who compiled them in different regions of the country often incorporated such diverse materials as folktales and didactic writings—for example, the "Instructions of Vladimir Monomakh." Some short tales, especially those embellishing the lives of princes and princesses, reflect Scandinavian influence. More plentiful than the chronicles were the religious writings, especially translations from Greek (sometimes arriving via Orthodox Bulgaria). Of native Rus religious works, several sermons by Ilarion and Cyril of Turov and accounts of saints' lives (Boris and Gleb, Theodosius) are the most impressive.

A third prominent type of literature was more secular and poetic and included both oral and written works. Among the oral literature, the *byliny* hold first place.

FIGURE 3.2. Cathedral of St. Sophia, Novgorod, 1043–1050.

FIGURE 3.3. Cathedral of St. George at the Yuriev Monastery, Novgorod, 1119.

These epic poems were repeated for generations until finally written down many centuries after their first appearance. They deal with such legendary fictitious characters as the incredibly brave and strong Ilia of Murom, one of the brave *bogatyri* (knightly heroes) who served Prince Vladimir. Although of considerable literary merit, it is difficult to know which elements of these *byliny* set in Rus times originated back then and which were added later.

With a secular written work such as *The Tale of Igor's Campaign* we are on surer footing—despite some doubters who contend that the work is an eighteenth-century forgery. It deals with an unsuccessful campaign of Prince Igor and other minor princes against the pagan Polovtsy in 1185. The unknown author praises the courage and bravery of the Rus princes but also laments the princely disunity that characterizes the times and benefits their enemies.

Like some other Rus writings, it is not easy to classify. It contains neither a regular meter nor stanzas, and yet it is full of poetic devices and images. Omens and nature symbolism abound. For example, a solar eclipse occurs before the princes race into the steppe like "grey wolves," and Igor's wife laments like a cuckoo for her captured husband and calls upon the Dnieper to bring him back to her. The writer obviously felt at home in the world of nature, and the tale reflects an almost pagan veneration and respect for it. Because of its many artistic qualities, most critics consider it the greatest Rus piece of literature that has survived.

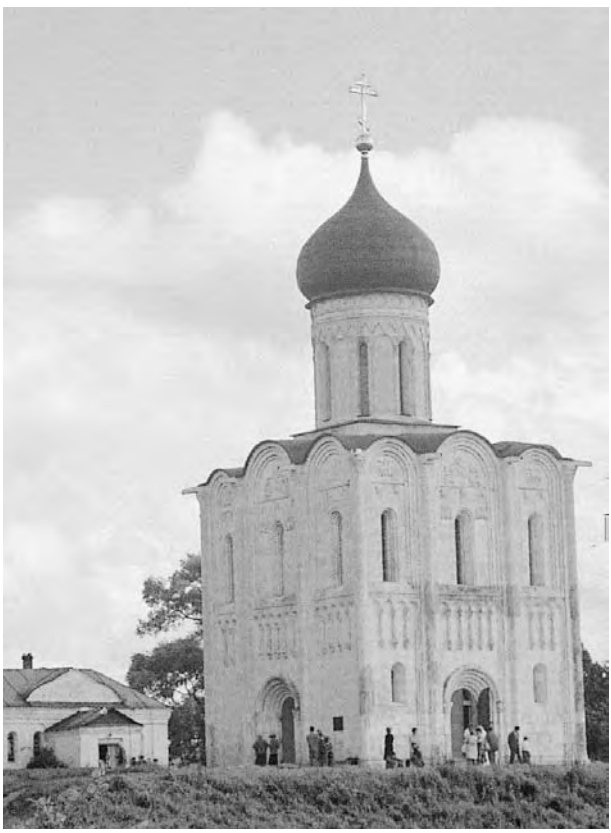

FIGURE 3.4. Church of the Intercession of the Virgin on the Nerl, Bogoliubovo, 1165.

In contrast to areas of the West or Asia (especially Persia) at that time, in Rus there was no love poetry. The lament of Igor's wife is about as close as we get. Nor was there any writing comparable to the Western goliardic verse or fabliaux stories, both of which were often satiric in tone and sexual in content.

In art and architecture, Byzantium influence and native Rus traditions are again blended, especially in the vital religious sphere. Church architecture was of two types, wooden and stone, with the first being more prevalent. But fire and time have destroyed all the wooden churches of the era, whereas about two dozen stone churches have survived of the few hundred that were constructed.

The most famous is St. Sophia (meaning Holy Wisdom) in Kiev, begun under the direction of Yaroslav the Wise. Originally it had thirteen cupolas, representing Christ and his twelve apostles, but over time, especially in the eighteenth century, more cupolas were added and its exterior modified. The interior of the church, however, is today more faithful to its original appearance, even if time has dimmed the beauty of its once vivid mosaics and frescoes. Mosaics such as that of Christ the Pantocrator (All-Ruler), in the main dome, and the Blessed Virgin Orans, in the altar apse, are works of high quality. Altogether, mosaicists used more than 100 different shades of glass cubes in the church's mosaics.

In Novgorod, two other famous churches still stand: another eleventh-century

FIGURE 3.5. The Cathedral of St. Demetrius, Vladimir, 1194–1197.

St. Sophia and the twelfth-century Cathedral of St. George at the Yuriev Monastery. Both are marked by their simple austerity. Their narrow windows and more elongated domes—as compared to the flatter domes favored by the Byzantines or even the original ones of Kiev's St. Sophia—reflect the needs of a harsher, more northern Novgorod climate. Reminiscent of warriors' helmets, the domes prevent the type of snow buildup flatter ones would allow. In the twelfth century, the stone exterior of Novgorod's St. Sophia was whitewashed, a practice that was often imitated in other parts of the country.

Three other impressive and still-standing twelfth-century churches are in the Suzdalian area, two in Vladimir and the third in nearby Bogoliubovo. The first to be constructed (1158–1160) was the Cathedral of the Assumption (or Dormition), but it soon suffered extensive damage and was rebuilt in the late 1180s (see Figure 5.1). It would later become a model for the church of the same name in Moscow's Kremlin.

Prince Andrei Bogoliubsky was responsible for the original Assumption Cathedral, and in the mid-1160s he also had a few churches built at his Bogoliubovo headquarters. The most beautiful was the Church of the Intercession of the Virgin on the Nerl (River)—some art historians consider it the finest of all medieval Rus and Russian churches.

In the mid-1190s, Vsevolod III had another impressive church constructed, this time back in Vladimir near the reconstructed Assumption Cathedral. It was named after a military saint-warrior, St. Demetrius of Salonika. The Cathedral of St. Demetrius (or Dmitri) resembled in several ways the Church of the Intercession of the Virgin on the Nerl. In contrast to the great churches of Kiev and Novgorod, the

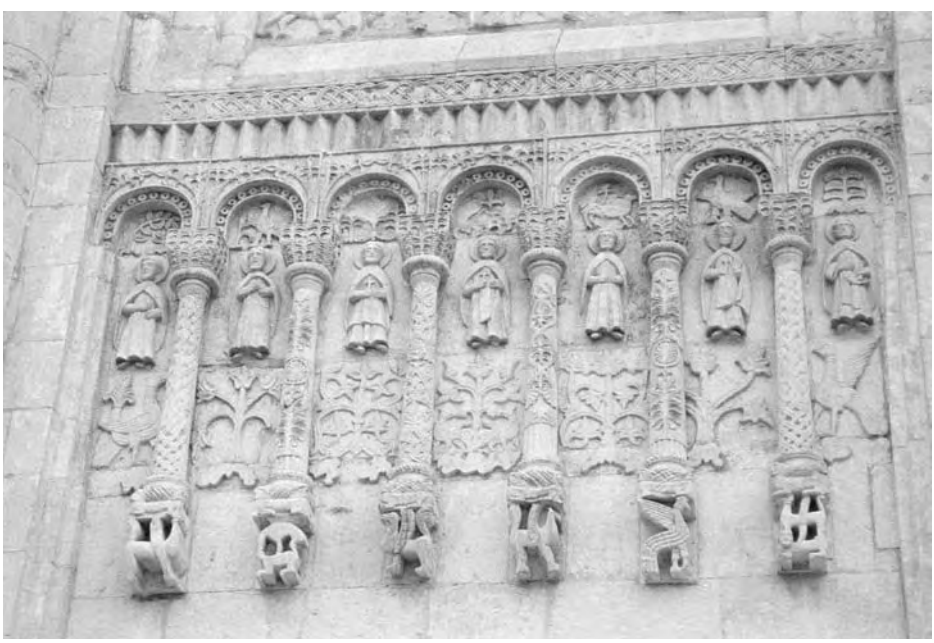

FIGURE 3.6. The Cathedral of St. Demetrius, Vladimir, decorative detail of exterior wall.

outside walls of these two Suzdalian churches were richly decorated with human, animal, and plant carvings, which served both a decorative and a symbolic purpose. The domestic and foreign inspirations for these carvings are disputed. Especially prominent on both churches, however, were the carvings of the warrior and wise ruler of Biblical times, King David. No doubt princes Andrei and Vsevolod both wished to present themselves as similar warrior-rulers.

ln addition to frescoes and mosaics, icons were also present in the Rus churches. Although the great age of icon painting would come later, painters in Rus were already practicing this art inherited from the Byzantines. These religious pictures painted on wood were intended to instruct, both those who were literate and illiterate, and to be a promise of the eventual glory of a redeemed, transfigured world. Icons depicting Christ, the Virgin Mary, and Archangel Michael were popular, as were those of warrior saints like St. George and St. Demetrius. Individuals as well as churches possessed various sized icons, sometimes of their patron saints or special protectors—warriors, merchants, and other groups all had special saints. The belief that icons and other religious artifacts such as crosses protected Christians, either individually or collectively, was widespread.

Although Rus would become increasingly politically fragmented during the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, its Christian literature and art would help maintain a consciousness of its religious and cultural oneness. It would prove to be an important legacy in the future.

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