

Enlightner of Rus'. The Image of Vladimir Sviatoslavich across the Centuries

Introduction

In 987 or 988 A.D., a Kievan prince named Vladimir Sviatoslavich chose to adopt the Christian religion for his people, a move that earned him a permanent place in history of the East Slavs, roughly definable as the peoples that in Vladimir's time inhabited a realm known as "Rus'" and that now inhabit Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. This book is about representations and preceptions of the prince between the eleventh and the early eighteenth century.

From the time of the earliest extant depictions of Vladimir, writers have shown him not as he was, but as he should have been. This does not mean that early depictions are necessarily one-dimensional. In them, Vladimir the Christian coexists with Vladimir the great warrior and even (in depictions of his pagan period) with Vladimir the great sinner. Yet whoever he is, he is always extraordinary. As the centuries passed, his image would take on new hues that reflected its changing cultural and ideological surroundings. Among other things, he would later be represented as the great ancestor of the Muscovite princes and the great defender of Eastern Orthodoxy against the Latin faith.

The first two chapters of this book examine in considerable detail two early and fundamental depictions of Vladimir. The third explores when, where, how and why the prince came to be regarded as a saint. Later chapters deal with the evolution of his image in the changing cultures of Muscovy/Russia and Ukraine. Different issues come to the fore in discussions of different periods and regions, and I have approached them in different ways as seemed appropriate. I have included some lengthy discussions of topics that some readers may find arcane, such as the dating and geographic origin of certain texts. They are there because these matters are to understand why I take the positions that I do. When I felt that other scholars have already defended a point well, I have cited them and moved on. When I think that a scholar may be right on a controversial point but has not made a strong case (as with Bugoslavskii's argument for the Novgorodian origin of the *Memorial and Encomium to Vladimir*), or that a case has been well made but largely ignored (as with some arguments pertaining to Feofan Prokopovich's play, *Vladimir*), I have discussed the issue in detail, using whatever tools I feel are useful to clarify it. Readers who find such discussions tedious are welcome to skip them.

Two final notes: The book focuses on written texts because no unequivocally orally-based material from the period it covers has survived. Although I refer to my subject using the Russian form "Vladimir" rather than "Volodymer," the name that he bears in Ukraine (and a closer approximation to the name by which he was known to his own contemporaries), the book is intended for readers interested in the development not only of Russian, but also of Ukrainian and (to a lesser extent) of Belarusian literature and culture.