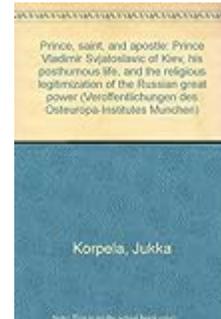




**Jukka Korpela.** *Prince, Saint and Apostle: Prince Vladimir Svjatoslavic of Kiev, his Posthumous Life, and the Religious Legitimization of the Russian Great Power.* Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001. 267 pp. EUR 49.00 (paper), ISBN 978-3-447-04457-8.



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## Saint Vladimir and Kievan Rus': Between East and West

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Professor Jukka Korpela of the University of Joensuu, Finland, has written a detailed, professional analysis of the “imaginary life” of Vladimir Sviatoslavovich, whose acceptance of Byzantine Orthodox Christianity in the tenth century is usually treated as a seminal event in East Slavic history. He argues that Vladimir’s action did not have the consequences or significance attributed to it by later ideologues bent on justifying Muscovy’s political legitimacy and power.

Korpela claims that there are no contemporary, reliable sources about Vladimir’s conversion. He distrusts not only texts admittedly written later, such as Metropolitan Ilarion’s “Sermon on Law and Grace” and the monk Jakov’s *Pamiat' i pokhvala*, but also supposedly contemporary accounts, such as those in the Primary and Novgorodian Chronicles, preserved only in later manuscripts. Korpela views very skeptically claims that Vladimir was the “baptizer” of Rus', noting that there were Orthodox Christians in Kiev before the “official conversion” and that there was no mass baptism after it,

only a very slow process of the diffusion of Orthodox Christianity to cities and then the countryside, which took centuries. Moreover, Korpela also has a problem with assertions that as a result of Vladimir’s conversion, Kievan Rus' became “Byzantinized,” that Byzantine culture and the Greek language became widespread in Rus', and especially that as a byproduct of that cultural assimilation, Rus' adopted an attitude of hostility toward Latin Catholicism. Korpela effectively cites evidence of extensive diplomatic, political, dynastic, and commercial ties between Kievan Rus' and in particular Central and Eastern Europe, and of continued Catholic religious influence, through the thirteenth century.

Vladimir only became a saint in the late thirteenth century, probably at the behest of Metropolitan Maksim and the church council in Vladimir in Vladimir Suzdal'. Even Ilarion and Jakov had not viewed Vladimir as a saint. However, new developments in the thirteenth century—the rise of a militant, reformed Catholic Papacy which treated Orthodox as heathens and the objects of missionary activity, and the revival of Byzantine political and ecclesiastical power following the accession of

the Paleologue dynasty in Constantinople, reconquered from the Latin Crusaders in 1261—led Maksim to see Vladimir as a useful link between Byzantium and Rus'. A 1311 Novgorodian church dedicated to Vladimir testifies to the promulgation of his sainthood. Vladimir's cult remained no more than a "curiosity" (p. 187) until the composition of literary works about the 1380 battle of Kulikovo Field, at which Grand Prince Dmitrii Donskoi of Moscow defeated the Tatars, or even until the end of the fifteenth century, when Muscovite ideologues, in particular monks, began propagating Vladimir's cult as evidence of Muscovy's divine mandate, culminating during the reign of Ivan the Terrible in the composition of Vladimir's vita for Metropolitan Makarii's Book of Degrees and the dissemination of the concept of Moscow as a new Kiev, a new (and Third) Rome, a new Jerusalem, the new universal empire.

Genuine Byzantine cultural influence over Muscovy began only in the fourteenth century, reaching its apex in the seventeenth century. Even then, most of society remained "unByzantinized." The revival of interest in Vladimir in Ukraine dates to the seventeenth century. Korpela also mentions Petrine and subsequent invocations of Vladimir in very different cultural contexts, up to a 1996 statement by the Communist Party leader of post-Soviet Russia, G. Zjuganov.

Rejecting claims that Vladimir's conversion resulted in a mass baptism of the Rus' to Orthodox Christianity is the key to Korpela's argument that Kievan Rus' remained open to Catholic religious influence after Vladimir's death.

*Prince, Saint and Apostle* is an impressive piece of specialized research. It is hardly surprising that Korpela's bibliography lists no fewer than thirteen previous publications by him (three in German, four in English, six in Finnish), going back to 1990. Korpela brings to bear upon his analysis of Kievan Rus' a profound appreciation of medieval and East European history, and an extensive knowledge of the historiography, including works in Scandinavian languages and, of course, Finnish, probably less well known to an American audience, with which he carries on a continuing dialogue in his footnotes.

The price to be paid for making Korpela's research accessible to a wider audience in English[1] is the quality of his English prose, as well as proof reading. I have read worse, and it is rare for the language of the monograph to be an obstacle to understanding Korpela's conclusions. The text and notes are repetitious at times, which is both good and bad. The author's choice of terms

in English is far too distracting. I cannot understand anyone in English using "Tartar," despite the tendency of many word processing software dictionaries to treat "Tatar" as an error. "Godmother" for *Bogoroditsa* reduces the "Mother of God" to a God parent, or worse, summons allusions to "fairy godmothers"; why not just translate it as "Virgin"? While Korpela tries to be sensitive to the differences between "Rus'" and "Russian," my sense is that he is inconsistent, and I remain unreconciled to "Rus'ian" in any circumstances. On the whole, Russian-language and not Ukrainian-language nomenclature appears, despite the current political location of Kiev/Kyiv and Chernigov/Chernihiv.

While Korpela roots his analysis in an explicit post-modern, cultural-history methodology, he readily admits that much of what he writes is well known, and fully credits other historians who have advanced similar views. Certainly every student of Kievan Rus' is indebted to Nazarenko for highlighting its relations with Germany and Central Europe. Korpela draws on Franklin's critical analysis of knowledge of Greek in Kievan Rus', and Thompson's revisionist conclusions on the extent of intellectual borrowing from Byzantium. Korpela does not cite Kaiser's study of legal texts attributed to Kievan Rus', which similarly views them as more informative about thirteenth-to-fifteenth-century history, when the manuscripts were written, than about Kievan Rus'. [2] It is noteworthy that Butler's more recent literary study of images of St. Vladimir presents a chronology compatible with Korpela's. [3] Therefore, while Korpela may be one of the few historians currently working on Kievan Rus', he is not alone, and his views are not outside the mainstream, although none of the other scholars I have cited might share Korpela's methodology.

It is easy to sympathize with Korpela's astonishment at the number of scholars who take the Primary Chronicle's narrative at face value and spin off fantastic theories about Vladimir's psychology on its basis. [4] Nevertheless, it is ironic that a monograph so committed to avoiding projecting anachronistic images of Vladimir from the fourteenth or sixteenth centuries back onto a tenth- or eleventh-century reality should so diffidently employ the term "Iron Curtain" (in the title and text to subchapter 3.2) to describe the post-thirteenth century relationship of Catholicism and Muscovy, or to allude to "Holy Rus'" (p. 103) or "Holy Russia" (p. 195) without examining the provenance of that term. Korpela seems to think that Askol'd and Rjurik were historical, rather than legendary, figures (p. 67). It is odd, given Korpela's strict source criticism, that he should so casually mention

unique information in Dlugosz (p. 162 n. 898). "Khan Tamerlane" (pp. 175, 191) is just wrong; Timur was not a Chinggisid.[5] That Kievan Rus' was "one of the most powerful countries in the world" (p. 87) is too romantic for my taste. Korpela's own evidence suggests that the cult of Vladimir never became "widespread" (p. 13). Finally, whether Ivan the Terrible thought of himself as a universal ruler poses a very broad question about which I have severe doubts.

But nitpicking aside, although Korpela is by and large convincing, at times I suspect he has oversold his conclusions. The so-called 1040 Schism did not prevent the Byzantine Empire from actively engaging Catholic political entities, so why should its effect on the Kievan princes be different? What Korpela does not provide is any credible evidence that after 988-89 any grand prince of Kiev ever seriously tried to change the ecclesiastical affiliation of the East Slavs to Catholicism and its Latin liturgy, opportunistic ploys of vassalage to the Papacy notwithstanding. And that is perhaps what admittedly exaggerated paeans to the significance of Vladimir's conversion for Byzantine influence on East Slavic culture boil down to; without an official conversion by the ruler, without the adoption of Orthodox Christianity as the state religion of Kievan Rus', all of the long-term cultural input from Byzantium to the East Slavs might not have occurred. The die was cast by Vladimir.

It is a fitting testimony to the quality of Korpela's *Prince, Saint and Apostle* that it inspires such all-encompassing questions about the nature of Kievan Rus'. No book could have a more positive recommendation

than that.

#### Notes

[1]. Professor Korpela previously published a monograph in German, *Beitraege zur Bevoelkungsgeschichte und Prosopographie der Kievan Rus' biz zum Tode von Vladimir Monomah* (Jyvaeskylae: University of Jyvaeskylae, 1995), which examined the multinational society of Kievan Rus'. This novel study merits more attention than it has received.

[2]. Daniel H. Kaiser, *The Growth of Law in Medieval Russia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

[3]. Francis Butler, *Enlightener of Rus': The Image of Vladimir Sviatoslavovich across the Centuries* (Bloomington: Slavica Publishers, 2002). Like Butler, Korpela overlooks the trenchant criticism of Golubinskii's "canonization" model of the Rus' church by Paul Bushkovitch, *Religion and Society in Russia: The Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), pp. 75ff. Butler, p. 801, is better on prologue and menology versions of Vladimir's vita than Korpela, p. 183.

[4]. Quite properly Korpela does not cite Vladimir Volkoff, *Vladimir, the Viking King* (Woodstock: Overlook, 1985), a ludicrous case in point I sincerely regret having wasted the time to read.

[5]. The index s.v. Tamerlane/Timur (p. 266) calls him an "oriental conqueror" and lists pp. 173, 174, 190; all these page numbers are in error. It would appear that the index should be used with caution.

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