

**On the 11th of July, the holy Church commemorates
the holy Martyr MARKIANOS (MARCIAN),
who was slain by the short sword.**

**On the 11th of July, the holy Church commemorates
the holy Martyr MARTYROKLES,
who was slain by arrows.**

**On the 11th of July, the holy Church commemorates
the holy Equal-to-the-apostles, Grand Princess OLGA of Kiev,
who in holy Baptism was renamed HELEN.¹²**

Olga (Olha), the holy and grand princess, was renamed Helen in holy Baptism, which took place in the year 957 according to Nestor. The vast territory which came to be called Russia had formerly been inhabited by various tribes of eastern Slavs. The open steppes invited nomadic intruders. For one thousand years, there was a succession of Huns, Avars, Magyars, and Pechenegs. Each established a hegemony over an area in which the waterways provided a valuable trade link between the Baltic and Black Seas. Meanwhile, the eastern Slavs, who settled along the great rivers as far as Lake Ladoga to the north, lacked the unity needed to ward off the invading hordes. They welcomed the Varangians, Scandinavians from the north, whom they assimilated into their communities.

On account of the geographical location of Rus close to the Black Sea and the Near East, Christianity was known on the present territory of Ukraine as early as the first century A.D. Converts were first made among the Greek colonists who settled the northern coasts of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. The *Primary Chronicle*¹³ mentions Saint Andrew's mission on the Black Sea

¹² This Life was collected from among the many scattered sources in books and the Internet. See especially <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com> and <http://www.o.ca.org/FSlives.asp>. Icons of Saints Olga and Vladimir are reproduced by courtesy of Holy Trinity Monastery, Jordanville, NY.

¹³ *The Primary Chronicle* or *Povist' vremennykh lit* [*The Tale of Bygone Years*] is a chronicle of events in Kyivan Rus in the 12th C., under the editorship (in the opinion of most scholars) of Nestor the Chronicler. It gives a description of the dispersal of the Slavic tribes in Eastern and Central Europe and a recounting of the sermon of Saint Andrew on the banks of the Dnieper River. The history of Kyiv and the Polianians is central to the narrative. After an account of the founding of Kyiv by Kyi, Shchek, Khoryv, and their sister, Lybed, the chronicle deals with the question of who first ruled Rus. It ascribes the origin of Rus to the summoning of the Varangians and the establishment of the Riurykide Dynasty. Subsequent events in Rus history are described in the form of annals to the year 1110.

coast at Sinope and his blessing of present-day Kiev (Kyiv). It is almost certain that the apostle was allotted Scythia (that is, the territory of present-day Ukraine) for his mission, as Eusebius of Caesarea wrote, basing himself on Origen. From Sinope Andrew was said to have traveled to Transcaucasia, the Black Sea, and Scythia.

According to traditional belief, the popes, Saint Clement I (90–100) and Saint Martin (649–655), were exiled to the Crimea, which belongs to Ukraine today. The proximity of the Slav-settled lands to the Greek colonies on the Black Sea must have been an important factor in the spread of Christianity among the Slavic tribes.

The invasion of the Huns in 375 interrupted the spread of Christianity on Ukrainian territories for a long time. Although not all the Goths migrated west under pressure from the Huns, some still stayed behind in the southern Crimea. Archeological excavations show that there were churches on the Black Sea coast in the 4th–5th C. The oldest church articles discovered in Chersonese Taurica and Kerch date back to the 4th and 5th C.

After capturing Kiev in 860, the Princes Askold and Dyr (Dir) are said to have embraced Christianity. Patriarch Photios wrote in one of his letters that in about 864 he had sent a bishop to Rus. It is uncertain, however, where the eparchy was established—whether in Kiev or in Tmutorokan. It is traditionally believed that the Church of Saint Nicholas was built on Askold's grave. This would indicate that the prince was a Christian.

¹³(...continued)

The *Povist* is based on earlier Kyivan and Novgorodian chronicles, mainly the *Primary Chronicle* written (possibly by the Monk Nikon) at the Kievan Cave Monastery, in which events are described to 1093. It draws on contemporary Byzantine chronicles, such as that of George Hamartolos, and includes the texts of the Rus-Byzantine treaties of 907, 912, and 972. The account of Princess Olha's revenge on the Der-evlians (Drevliany) is also recounted.

Three redactions of the *Povist* were compiled. The first, which is now not extant, was completed in 1113 by Nestor the Chronicler, who edited the *Primary Chronicle* and supplemented it with descriptions of events of the late 11th and early 12th C. The detailed account of the Kievan Cave Monastery in the years 1094–1110 supports the view that Nestor was the compiler of the *Chronicle*. The second redaction was completed in 1116, at the behest of Grand Prince Volodymyr Monomakh, at the Vydubychi Monastery by Hegumen Sylvester. The redaction was preserved in the later *Laurentian Chronicle* and *Radziwill Chronicle*. The third redaction was composed in 1118 at the Kievan Cave Monastery by an unknown author. The redaction was preserved in the *Hypatian Chronicle* ca. 1425.

The language of the *Povist* is a combination of Old Church Slavonic and the contemporary Rus vernacular. See online at <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com>, s.v. "Povist."

Family Tree of the Early Rurikids

Grand Duke Ryurik of Novgorod (b. 830-d. 879) +

Grand Duchess Efenda of Novgorod (b. 850, married 876). One son, Igor.

Grand Duke Igor of Kiev (b. 877-d. 945) +

Grand Duchess Olga of Kiev (b. ca. 890, married 903, d. 969). One son, Svyatoslav.

Grand Duke Svyatoslav I of Kiev (b. ca. 942-d. 972) +

Malusha (b. 944-d. 1002), daughter of Malk of Lubech.

Syyatoslav begat three sons:

1. Yaropolk (d. 978), who had one son: Svyatopolk (ca. 978-1019).
2. Oleg (d. 977).
3. Vladimir (956-1015) of Malusha. Vladimir married Princess Rohnida (b. 962-d. 1002), daughter of Count Rogvolod of Polotsk (b. ca. 936), and many other wives.

Some of Vladimir's Offspring:

1. Svyatopolk (b. ca. 979-d. 1019), son by a captive Greek nun who was raped; actually the nephew of Vladimir who inherited with his sons.
2. Vysheslav (b. ca. 977-d. 1010), by a Czech princess;
3. Izyaslav of Polotsk (b. ca. 978-d. 1001);
4. Yaroslav the Wise (b. ca. 978-d. 1054);
5. Vsevolod of Volhynia (b. 983-d. ca. 1015), son by Princess Rohnida of Polotsk;
6. Svyatoslav of Smolensk (d. 1015);
7. Mstislav of Chernigov (b. 988-d. 1036);
8. Boris (d. 1015);
9. Gleb (d. 1015), by a Bulgarian noblewoman named Adela;
10. Stanislav by a Czech woman;
11. Pozvzd (b. 985-d. 1015);
12. Sudislav of Pskov (b. 986-d. 1063);
13. Premislava (b. 980-1055), daughter; and,
14. Predslava (b. 984-1015), daughter, who was captured by Boleslaw I in Kiev and taken with him to Poland as a concubine.

Grand Duke Vladimir put away his wives and concubines, and married in 987/988 Princess Anna (b. 963-d. 1011) of the Byzantine Empire.

Christianity entered Ukraine from the west as well, specifically from Moravia. This is where Saints Kyril and Methodios and their disciples worked as missionaries. They also visited the Crimea on their way to the Khazars and found the relics of the pope, Saint Clement I. According to tradition Christianity spread from Moravia to Galicia, and then to Volhynia where a bishop resided in Volodymyr-Volynskiy before Grand Prince Volodymyr (Saint Olga's grandson) the Great adopted Christianity. The choice of Orthodox Christianity by members of the pagan Norse ruling family of Kievan Rus proved arguably the most important event in the history of Northern Eurasia.

In the year 862, a Norseman, by the name of Rurik (d. 879), had established himself in Novgorod the Great as a leader against the Pechenegs. He eventually consolidated the eastern Slav tribes under his rule. In 882, Rurik's son Igor (b. ca. 877-d. 945) transferred the capital to Kiev. In the *Chronicle* or *Tale of Bygone Years*, where it records the marriage of Igor, it is written about him that "they brought him a wife from Pskov, by the name of Olga." She belonged, so specifies the *Joakimov Chronicle*, to the lineage of the Izborsk princes, that is, one of the many obscure ancient Russian princely dynasties. These dynasties, which during that time numbered no less than twenty, were all displaced by the Rurikovichs. They also merged with them through marriage. Some of them were of local Slavic descent, others of Varangian newcomers. The latter assimilated to the Russian language and manner of life. Olga, born circa 890, also had the Varangian name of Helga, which in Russian is pronounced Olga. The feminine name Olga corresponds to the masculine name "Oleg" (Helgi), which means "holy." Later traditions regard Olga as a native of the village Vybuta, several kilometers from Pskov further up the river Velika. A bridge was pointed out where Olga was met by Igor while he was hunting. Their union resulted in the birth of a son, named Svyatoslav (Sviatoslav), who was born (ca. 942-d. 972) after the death of Rurik. After Rurik, it was Oleg, one of his kinsmen, who became his successor. It was also in his care that Rurik placed his son Igor. Oleg, too, was not interested in Christianity. In fact, Oleg attacked Constantinople in 907. It is certain that many of the Varangians who served in the imperial bodyguard at Constantinople were Christians, and that the Byzantine sovereigns never lost sight of any opportunity of converting them to their own Orthodox Faith, by which they hoped to soften their savage manners. When Emperor Leo VI (886-912) was concluding a peace with Oleg, he showed not only his own treasures to the ambassadors of the Russian prince, but also those splendors of the churches, the holy relics, the precious icons, and the "instruments of the Passion of our Lord," if by any means the Greeks might capture them into the spirit of the true Faith. Upon Oleg's death in 912, Rurik's son Igor reigned.

Now when the Byzantine emissaries arrived in Kiev, conditions along the river Dnieper had essentially changed. At Kiev, also, there was the influence of the Khazar Jews, who did not wish Orthodoxy to enter the land. A pagan opposition had clearly emerged, at the head of which stood the Varangian *voevoda* (military-leader) Svenel'd (or Sveinald) and his son Mstislav (Mtsisha) to whom Igor had given holdings in the Derevlian lands. There is evidence that during Prince Igor's rule Prophet Elias Church existed in Kiev.

During the reign of Emperor Romanos I Lekapenos (920-944) Byzantium defeated the fleet of Igor in 941. The latter was persuaded to sign a treaty. When the 944 Treaty was drawn up at Constantinople, there were Kievans sympathetic to Christianity. They possessed the vision of seeing their land embracing Orthodoxy. Prince Igor acknowledged this direction, but maintained his position that for political reasons he could not become a Christian and introduce it to his subjects. The treaty was carefully worded so that Igor was not under any duress to ratify it in the form of either a pagan oath or a Christian affirmation. Thus, during the signing of the treaty in 944 with the Greeks, some of Igor's deputies took an oath on the Bible while others swore by the pagan deity of thunder, Perun. Igor still decided to remain a pagan. He, therefore, concluded the treaty in the pagan manner, swearing an oath on his sword.

According to the *Chronicle*, after Oleg's death, Igor became the ruler of Russia. He was neither successful in his military enterprises nor popular with the people. A campaign undertaken by him against the Slavic tribe of Derevlians, who lived between Kiev and the present-day Polish border, resulted in his death. The burden of government fell upon the widow of Igor, our Kievan Grand Princess Olga, and her three-year-old son Svyatoslav. Olga, therefore, became regent for their son, Svyatoslav, a post she would relinquish when the prince came of age in 964. She proved to be an effective administrator and leader. Olga, however, felt grief's sharp sting. She avenged the assassination of her husband upon the Derevlians. She had his murderers scalded with steam and hundreds of their followers killed. Those who had sworn oaths on their swords and believed only in their swords, perished by the sword. Here is what took place in greater detail.

"In the year 6453 or A.D. 945, Igor's retinue said to him: 'The servants of thy commander Sveinald are adorned with weapons and fine raiment, but we are naked. Go forth with us, O prince, after tribute, that we may profit thereby.' Igor heeded their words, and he attacked Dereva in search of tribute. He demanded additional tribute, and collected it by violence from the people with the assistance of his followers. After thus gathering the tribute, he returned to his city. On his homeward way, he said to his followers after

some reflection, 'Go forward with the tribute. I shall turn back, and rejoin you later.' He dismissed his retainers on their journey homeward, but being desirous of still greater booty, he returned on his tracks with a few of his vassals.

"The Derevlans heard that he was again approaching, and consulted with Mal, their prince, saying, 'If a wolf comes among the sheep, he will take away the whole flock one by one, unless he be killed. If we do not thus kill him now, he will destroy us all.' They then sent forward to Igor inquiring why he had returned, since he had collected all the tribute. But Igor did not heed them, and the Derevlans came forth from the city of Izkorosten, and slew Igor and his company, for the number of the latter was few. So Igor was buried, and his tomb is near the city of Izkorosten in Dereva even to this day.

"Meanwhile, Olga was in Kiev with her son, the boy Svyatoslav. His tutor was Asmund, and the troop commander was Sveinald. The Derevlans then said among themselves, 'See, we have killed the Grand Prince of Russia. Let us take his wife Olga for our Prince Mal; and then we shall obtain possession of Svyatoslav, and work our will upon him.' So they sent their best men, twenty in number, to Olga by boat. They arrived below Borichev in their boat. At that time the water flowed below the heights of Kiev, and the inhabitants did not live in the valley but upon the heights.

"Olga was notified that the Derevlans had arrived, and summoned them to her presence with a gracious welcome. Olga inquired into the reason for their coming. The Derevlans then announced that their tribe had sent them to report that they had slain her husband. They complained that he was like a wolf, crafty and ravening. They declared that their princes, who had thus preserved the land of Dereva, were good men. They recommended that Olga should come and marry their Prince Mal of Dereva. Olga made this reply: 'Your proposal is pleasing to me. Indeed, my husband cannot rise again from the dead. But I desire to honor you tomorrow in the presence of my people. Return now to your boat, and remain therein with a certain show of haughtiness. I shall send for you on the morrow, and you shall say: "We will neither ride on horses nor proceed on foot; carry us in our boat." And you shall be carried in your boat.' Thus she dismissed them to their vessel.

"Now Olga gave command that a large deep ditch should be dug in the castle with the hall, outside the city. Thus, on the morrow, Olga, as she sat in the hall, sent for the strangers, and her messengers approached them and said, 'Olga summons you to great honor.' But they replied as they were coached: 'We will proceed neither riding on horseback, nor sitting in wagons, nor treading on foot. You are to carry us in our boat.' The people of Kiev then lamented, 'Ah, slavery is our lot! Our prince is killed, and our princess intends to marry their prince.' So they carried the Derevlans in their boat. The latter

sat on the crossbenches in great robes, puffed up with pride. They thus were borne into the court before Olga. When the men had brought in the Derevlans, they dropped them into the trench along with the boat. Olga bent over and inquired whether they found the honor to their taste. They answered that it was worse than the death of Igor. She then commanded that they should be buried alive, and they were thus buried.

“Olga then sent messages to the Derevlans to the effect that, if they really required her presence, they should send after her their distinguished men, so that she might go to their prince with due honor; for otherwise her people in Kiev would not let her go. When the Derevlans heard this message, they gathered together the best men who governed the land of Dereva and sent them to her. When the Derevlans arrived, Olga commanded that a bath should be made ready. She invited them to appear before her after they had bathed. The bathhouse was then heated, and the Derevlans entered in to bathe. Olga’s men closed up the bathhouse behind them. She gave orders to set it on fire from the doors, so that the Derevlans were all burned to death.

“Olga then sent to the Derevlans the following message, ‘I am now coming to you, so prepare great quantities of mead in the city where you killed my husband, that I may weep over his grave and hold a funeral feast for him.’ When they heard these words, they gathered great quantities of honey and brewed mead. Taking a small escort, Olga made the journey with ease. Upon her arrival at Igor’s tomb, she wept for her husband. She bade her followers pile up a great mound. When they had piled it up, she also gave command that a funeral feast should be held. Thereupon, the Derevlans sat down to drink, and Olga bade her followers wait upon them.

“The Derevlans inquired of Olga where the retinue was which they had sent to meet her. She replied that they were following with her husband’s bodyguard. When the Derevlans were drunk, she bade her followers fall upon them. She herself went about egging on her retinue to the massacre of the Derevlans. So they cut down five thousand of them. Now Olga returned to Kiev and prepared an army to attack the survivors.

It was now 6454 or A.D. 946. Olga, together with her son Svyatoslav, gathered a large and valiant army. She proceeded to attack the land of the Derevlans. The latter came out to meet her troops. When both forces were ready for combat, Svyatoslav cast his spear against the Derevlans. But the spear went between the ears of his own horse, and struck its feet; for the prince was but a child. Then Sveinald and Asmund remarked, ‘The prince has already begun battle. Press on, vassals, after the prince.’ Thus they conquered the Derevlans. The outcome was this: the Derevlans fled, and shut themselves up in their cities. Olga hastened with her son to the city of Izkorosten, for it was there that her husband had been slain; and they laid siege to the city. The

Derevlians barricaded themselves within the city, and fought valiantly from it.”¹⁴

The avenging widow then took her army to the fortified city of Izkorosten, where Igor had been slain. She laid siege for one year, but her men were unable to take the city. Olga then conceived a plan. She dispatched a courier to the city gate to announce to the natives that she would retreat if they made reparations for the loss of her husband. She sent the following message: “Why do you persist in holding out? All your cities have surrendered to me and submitted to tribute, so that the inhabitants now cultivate their fields and their lands in peace. But you had rather die of hunger, without submitting to tribute.” The Derevlians replied that they would be glad to submit to tribute, but they feared that she was still bent on avenging her husband.

Olga answered them: “Since I have already avenged the misfortune of my husband twice on the occasions when your messengers came to Kiev, and a third time when I held a funeral feast for him, I do not desire further revenge, but am anxious to receive a small tribute. After I have made peace with you, I shall return home again.” The Derevlians then inquired what she desired of them. But since the battle of attrition left the city wanting, they responded that they had nothing to offer her in tribute, save for honey and furs. Olga responded that she had no need at that time for either honey or furs. She sent back her messenger, instructing him to say that “Olga would be satisfied with a token gift of three live pigeons and three sparrows from every house. I do not desire to impose a heavy tribute, like my husband, but I require only this small gift from you, for you are impoverished by the siege.” The people rejoiced at this demand, laughing up their sleeves at such a meager demand, and happily complied. Olga knew that even if the city had nothing else to offer, they were overrun with birds. Olga indeed received the birds with their greetings of the Derevlians.

Olga then instructed them, in view of their submission, to return to their city, promising that on the morrow she would depart and return to her own capital. Concurrently, Olga gave to each soldier in her army a pigeon or a sparrow, and ordered them to attach by a thread to each pigeon and sparrow a match bound with small pieces of cloth. The *Chronicle* reports that “when night fell, Olga bade her soldiers release the pigeons and the sparrows. Predictably, the birds flew to their nests, the pigeons to the cotes, and the sparrows under the eaves. Thus the dovecotes, the coops, the porches, and the

¹⁴ See Serge A. Zenkovsky’s “Epics and Stories from the Chronicles: Igor’s Death and Olga’s Revenge,” *Medieval Russia’s Epics, Chronicles, and Tales* (NY: Penguin Books, 1974), pp. 54-57. See also <http://www.tourcenter.kiev.ua/en/Monuments/HistorycultureMonuments/PrincessOlga/>.

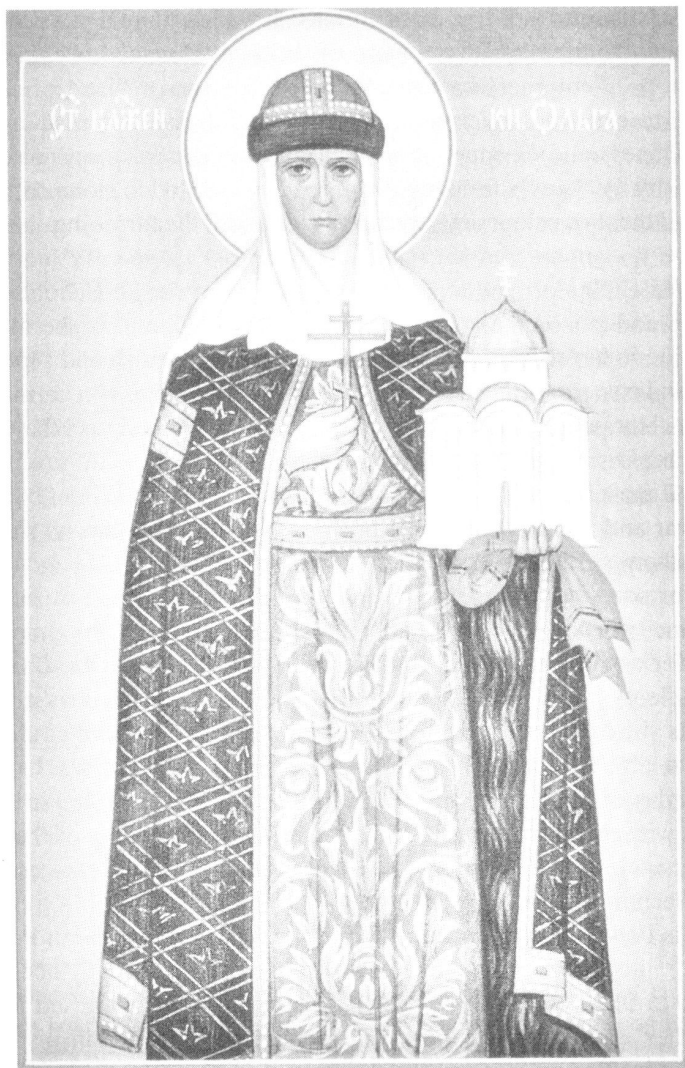
haymows were all set afire. There was not a house that was not consumed, and it was impossible to extinguish the flames, because all the houses caught fire at once. The people fled from the city, and Olga ordered her soldiers to catch them. The tribesmen who had assassinated her husband ran out of the city and into the midst of Olga's waiting troops. Thus she took the city and burned it, and captured the elders of the city. Some of the other captives she killed, while she gave others as slaves to her followers. The remnant she left to pay tribute. She imposed upon them a heavy tribute, two parts of which went to Kiev, and the third to Olga in Vyshegorod; for Vyshegorod was Olga's city. She then passed through the land of Dereva, accompanied by her son and her retinue, establishing laws and tribute. Her residences and hunting preserves are there still. Then she returned with her son to Kiev, her city, where she remained one year.¹⁵ Olga's fame as a fierce woman spread while her subjects called her "Olga the Wise." Her reputation stood at a zenith as a woman of exceptional shrewdness and strength of mind.

Though Olga was still a pagan, the Kiev Christian Church and its heavenly patron, the holy Prophet of God Elias, helped her gain the victory over the Derevlans. For the assassins, who were fire worshippers, were in thrall to the dark powers of paganism and were contrary to the spread of Christianity.

Olga then took the reigns of power to bring about good and peace. She did not remarry, since that would encroach upon her autonomy and possibly her son's succession. She did not need a husband to define her aspirations or tell her what she needed to do. Her initiatives settled upon building up the civic life and culture of Kievan Rus. She had a queenly manner that was engaging, bestirring herself to act according to her power. The chronicles are filled with accounts of her uninterrupted visits throughout her domain that she might improve the life of her people. In order to dislodge the power of the petty local princes in Rus, Olga centralized the whole of state rule with the help of the system of *pogosti* (administration centers of trade and law courts). In order that her son should be fit to rule, she took him along on state visits. In the year 946, Svyatoslav accompanied her through the Derevlian land where she imposed tribute and taxes. She noted and assessed the villages, inns, and hunting establishments, that is places liable for inclusion in the Kiev great-princely holdings. The following year, 947, Olga went to Novgorod. She established administrative centers along the rivers Msta and Luga. There was nothing that she touched that she did not adorn and show traces of her incessant activity, which survived long after her: Olga's hunting preserves, boundary signs, administrative centers, and even her sleighs. Her centers of administration and

¹⁵ S. A. Zenkovsky, pp. 57, 58.

courts became a critical network of the ethnic and cultural unification of her nation. Later, when she became Orthodox, it would be at these *pogosti* that Russia would build her churches and Christian cemeteries.



Saint Olga

The energetic princess also fortified her land's defenses. Vyshgorod (or Detintsa, Kroma) was encircled with stone and oak battlements. Since she upheld princely power and the unification of her country, she took up residence on the hill over the Dnieper, behind the battlements of Kievan

Vyshgorod ("Verkhna-gorod" or "Upper-city"). The chroniclers report how she spent the tribute money that was collected. Two-thirds of the tribute was transferred to the Kievan *veche* (city-council). One-third of it was spent by Olga for defense and building fortifications. It was during Olga's regency that the first state frontiers of Russia were established. Her land became a nation of workshops. Foreigners hastened to her Gardarika or "land of cities," as they came to call Rus which was being filled with merchandise and crafts. Swedes, Danes, and Germans hastened to volunteer as mercenaries in her army. Gradually, Kiev's fame spread abroad, which led to stone construction in Kiev. All these developments were fostered under the farseeing and decisive Olga.

While Olga proved an excellent manager of the household affairs of her people and raised their standard of living significantly, she also had a spiritual side to her nature. She longed to see the heathenish and superstitious practises and customs abolished from the life of her people. Her capital was no backwater. Her people had become a great power. She believed that only two European realms might match her land: the old Byzantine Empire in eastern Europe and the kingdom of Saxony in the west. Since she did not believe that through war and military might her people would find greatness, she wished to elevate them spiritually through the Christian religion.

Her son, though still an adolescent, had been trained by her. It was summertime when Olga entrusted Kiev to Svyatoslav. She, meanwhile, prepared for a pilgrimage, to find the true Faith. She embarked on a ship of her great fleet, bound for Constantinople. Of course this was a peaceful mission, as she let it be known that she was coming on not only a diplomatic mission but also a religious pilgrimage. Concurrently, she was wishing to make a display of the military might of Rus on the Black Sea. She, in turn, was impressed with the grandeur of Constantinople and the beauty of the city that was dedicated to the Mother of God. Princess Olga attended services at Hagia Sophia, Vlachernai, and other places.

It is believed by many that during the tenure of Patriarch Polyefktos (933-956),¹⁶ the Kievan princess received holy Baptism. With Princess Olga's regency (945-962), we have the first Christian ruler of a unified Rus. The details of her Baptism and subsequent request for a Christian bishop from Germany, on account of gaps and lacunae in the records, have remained controversial even to this day. Patriarch Polyefktos is also mentioned in connection with Olga's Baptism in two other late 17th-C. chronicle compilations. The only reliable and precise dates of Princess Olga's visits to

¹⁶ See the Life of Saint Polyefktos, commemorated by the holy Church on the 5th of February, for other notes regarding Saint Olga's Baptism.

Byzantium are mentioned in the second *Book of Ceremonies*, authored, or at least edited, by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos.¹⁷ A detailed description is given by him of two events which took place on Wednesday, the 9th of September, and Sunday, the 18th of October. Regrettably, no year was recorded in the document. Nevertheless, scholars have shown that only September of 946 or October of 957 could be considered potential years, when only the 9th and 18th fall on Wednesday and Sunday, respectively. It is remarkable, however, that there is no mention in the emperor's account of the princess' Baptism during her stay in the capital. He only writes that "Olga has given me the slip." No one has been able to figure out these puzzling words of Constantine.¹⁸ Presbyter Gregory (Hryhorii), who is mentioned by Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos, was a member of her retinue. Some researchers argue that Olga most likely visited Constantinople twice: the first time in 946, when she was received by the emperor on Wednesday, the 9th of September, but was still a pagan who had come to reconfirm the stipulations of the 944 Treaty; and, the second time in 957, when she saw the emperor on Sunday, the 18th of October, and was by that time a newly converted Christian. The holy Baptism would have been conducted by Patriarch Polyefktos, probably a day or so before.

This would have been a private ceremony. This was a personal conversion, a solemn act of conscience. Helena was the name Olga had received in Baptism, presumably in honor of the mother of Emperor Constantine I the Great, Saint Helen. It may also have been a gesture of courtesy toward the ruling emperor, Constantine VII (Porphyrogenetos), whose spouse's name was also Helena. At her Baptism, the holy Polyefktos prophesied: "Thou art blessed among all the women of Rus; for thou hast rejected darkness and desired the light. Moreover, in every generation, the children of thy land shall bless thee—from thy grandson and great-grandson to thy furthestmost descendants!" The patriarch also taught her about prayer and explained the rules of fasting, as well as the commandments of chastity and

¹⁷ *De caerimoniis aulae Byzantinae*, ii, 594-598, in *P.G.* 112.

¹⁸ The Kiev Tourist Information Center writes: "There is an interesting legend which glorifies Olga's shrewd mind. After she had arrived at Konstantynopol (Tsargrad), the meeting with the emperor was delayed for about six months. Eventually, after the emperor met Olga, he paid more attention to her beauty. He wished to take her to wife. Princess Olga was against it, and not only because he was already married but also because she was subtle. She offered a deal that she had wanted to convert herself to Christianity and see the emperor as her godfather. Konstantin agreed to her terms and became her godfather. But when he started to speak about marriage again, he was asked ironically if his daughter ought to become his wife? After realizing he had been played by her, the emperor let her go with gifts to Kiev."

almsgiving. Monk Nestor writes: "She bowed her head and stood, literally like a sponge absorbing water, listening to the teaching, and bowing down to the patriarch, she said, 'By thy prayers, *despota*, let me be preserved from the wiles of enemies.'" So the Archontissa of Rus, "the ruler," as the Byzantines called her, was baptized. She was given special head attire as a newly-baptized Christian and venerable deaconess of the Russian Church. This scene is depicted in icons. Beside Princess Olga, in the same attire of the newly-baptized, is Malusha (b. 944), the future mother of the equal-of-the-apostles Saint Vladimir (Volodymyr).¹⁹

Saint Nestor the Chronicler relates in the *Tale of Bygone Years* that Olga's Baptism took place in 954 or 955, that is, the biblical year of 6463. This year also corresponds to the account of the Byzantine chronicles of Kedrinos.²⁰ Another Russian Church writer of the 11th C., Yakov Mnikh, in his work *Eulogy and Laudation to Vladimir...and How Vladimir's Grand-mother Olga Was Baptized*, speaks about the repose of the holy princess in 969—after which recording he notes that she lived as a Christian for fifteen years. This being the case, he places her Baptism in 954. This latter date, therefore, corresponds within several months of Nestor's timing of the event. In contrast to these statements, Constantine Porphyrogenetos leads us to understand, in no uncertain terms, that his meeting with the princess occurred in the year 957.

So how does one reconcile the testimony of the emperor with that of Russian Church historians? A number of possibilities could have occurred. First, Saint Olga made a second journey to Constantinople in the year 957, to continue negotiations with the emperor. Second, she was not baptized at Constantinople, having previously been baptized at Kiev in 954. If the latter is the case, as a pious Orthodox Christian, she was simply making a pilgrimage to Byzantium.

According to the Byzantine Court *Book of Ceremonies* mentioned earlier, of which one copy is extant, Emperor Constantine had bequeathed us a description of the ceremony surrounding the visit of Princess Olga among the Byzantines. The emperor describes a triumphant reception in the famed Magnavra Palace, the ceremonial hall situated on the periphery of the Great Palace. Magnavra had the form of a basilica with apses to the east and two lateral aisles supporting galleries. The central apse housed Solomon's Throne flanked by lions. The west facade opened onto alleys of trees. As it was used for receptions of foreign ambassadors, many were often impressed by the hall's *automata*. These were devices powered by compressed air from bellows

¹⁹ Saint Vladimir is commemorated by the holy Church on the 15th of July.

²⁰ *Chronicle of Cedrenus*, p. 329, of Vol. ii in the Bonn edition.

or by water. The throne of Solomon could be lifted high in the air. There were mechanical singing birds, perched in a gold tree, that also fluttered their wings. The Magnavra *automata* included roaring golden lions. These were all set to work when Olga and her retinue visited. She had one hundred and eight men, not counting the men of Svyatoslav's company. Negotiations took place in the narrower chambers of the empress. A state dinner was conducted in the hall of Justinian. As it happened, a very providential event took place. Four ladies sat down together: Olga was to be the grandmother of Saint Vladimir. Her companion, Malusha, was to be the mother of Saint Vladimir. Empress Helena was to be the grandmother of Saint Vladimir's future spouse Anna. Her daughter-in-law, Theophano, was to be the mother of Anna. After the passage of fifty years, at the Desyatin Church of Theotokos at Kiev, there would be the marble tombs of Saints Olga, Vladimir, and Anna.

At one of the receptions given in Princess Olga's honor, Constantine Porphyrogenetos relates the following: the Russian princess was presented with a golden plate inset with jewels. Saint Olga offered it to the vestry of the Sophia Cathedral. The large plate was adorned with precious stones, set in such a way that they spelled the name of Christ.

Olga-Helena returned home and joined the Varangian-Rus Orthodox community at Kiev. Her expedition had not been a success in all quarters. Yes, she opened up Russian trade within the territories of the Byzantine Empire. She also reconfirmed the peace accord that her husband had concluded in 944. But she did not succeed in two points that were dear to her heart. She wished to arrange the dynastic marriage of Svyatoslav with a Byzantine princess. She also wished to restore the Orthodox metropolitan to widowed Kiev, as there had been one at the time of Askold. Her disappointment in the latter two proposals is detected in her response, given upon her return to Kiev, which was given to emissaries dispatched by the emperor. He had inquired after the promised military aid, saying, "Inasmuch as I bestowed many gifts upon thee, thou didst promise me that on thy return to Rus that thou wouldest send me not only many presents of slaves, wax, and furs, but also considerable soldiery to aid me." She, thinking herself insulted, curtly replied through the emissaries, "If the emperor would spend as long a time with me in the Pochainya (Pocajna) as I had remained on the Bosporos, I would grant his request." With these words, she dismissed the envoys. What did she mean by this remark? The Kievans explain that after Olga arrived in Constantinople, she was not granted an interview with Emperor Constantine for six months. She would now repay him with the same coin. When the emperor's ambassadors arrived at Kiev, they were kept on the river bank of the Pochainya for about half a year before

being introduced to her.²¹ They could not pretend that they did not understand what was meant by that delay.

Olga set out to work with zeal for the building up of the Church. Although she did not establish a Church hierarchy within her country, she prepared for it with major construction, even as David of old readied everything for Solomon. She took up the life of Christ and distressed the demons. She built church after church. She gave her people the Churches of Saint Nicholas and Holy Wisdom (Sophia) at Kiev.²² The Wisdom Church was erected over the grave of Dir, a confessor. The foremost sacred treasure in the Holy Wisdom temple was a piece of the true Cross, brought by our new Helen from Constantinople. She had received it as a blessing from the Constantinopolitan patriarch. Olga, the first mother of the Rus, planted the Tree of life, the Cross of Christ, in her native land, thereby opening Paradise to the faithful that came after her. The relic of the Cross, by tradition, was hewn out from an entire piece of the life-creating Wood of our Lord. Upon the Wood was inscribed the following: "The Holy Cross for the Regeneration of the Russian Land, Received by Noble Princess Olga." Also at Kiev, it was over the grave of Askold that the Saint Nicholas Church was erected.²³ It was there,

²¹ The Pochainya was a stream that flowed below the hills on which the older part of Kiev was situated. It was separated from the Dnieper by a sandpit. The Pochainya incident, as described herein, is found in the *Primary Chronicle*, and given by the Kiev Tourist Information Center.

²² The Kievan Church of the Holy Wisdom of God, which she commenced building soon after her return from Constantinople, was consecrated on the 11th day of the month of May, in the year 960. This day, thereafter, was observed in the Russian Church as a special Church feast day.

²³ Askold (Oskold) and Dir, according to the *Primary Chronicle*, were two of Rurik's men who ruled Kiev in the 870s. The *Chronicle* implies that they were neither of his kin nor of the nobility. The *Primary Chronicle* relates that Askold and Dir were sanctioned by Rurik to go to Constantinople. The Rus attack on Constantinople in June of 860 took the Greeks by surprise, "like a thunderbolt from heaven," as it was characterized by Patriarch Photios in his famous oration written for the occasion. Although the Slavonic chronicles tend to associate this expedition with the names of Askold and Dir (and to date it to 866), the connection remains tenuous. Oleg, Rurik's successor, attacked and conquered Kiev around 882. According to the *Primary Chronicle*, he tricked and slew Askold and Dir using an elaborate scheme. Vasily Tatischev, Boris Rybakov, and some other Russian and Ukrainian historians interpreted the 882 coup d'état in Kiev as the reaction of the pagan Varangians to Askold's Baptism. Tatischev went so far as to style Askold "the first Russian martyr." A Kievan legend identifies Askold's burial mound with Uhorska Hill, where Olga later built two churches, devoted to Saint Nicholas and to Saint Irene. Today this place on the steep bank of the river Dnieper is marked by a monument called Askold's Grave. See http://www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Askold_and_Dir

according to some accounts, the princess herself was later interred. The tireless worker for Christ also built the Church of the Annunciation Vytebsk, and the Church of the Trinity at Pskov. Another church, built at the river Velika, was set upon a spot pointed out to her from on high, according to the chronicler, by a "light-beam of the thrice-radiant Divinity." That church stood for more than one hundred and fifty years. Then, in 1137, holy Prince Vsevolod-Gabriel replaced this wooden temple with one made of stone. In 1363, the same church was rebuilt and replaced finally with the presently existing Trinity Cathedral.

The Kievan Sophia Church stood for half a century, that is, until it was burned in 1017. On this spot, in 1050, Yaroslav the Wise built the Church of Saint Irene. The sacred relics of Olga's Sophia temple were transferred into a stone church of the same name now standing as the Kiev Sophia, started in 1017 and consecrated circa 1030. In the 13th-C. *Prologue* we read that the Cross brought by Olga to her people is now at Kiev in Saint Sophia, on the right side of the altar. The plundering of Kiev's holy things, which after the Mongols was continued by the Lithuanians who captured the city in 1341, did not spare even the precious Cross. Under Jagiello in the period of the Liublin Unia, which in 1384 united Poland and Lithuania into one state, the Olga Cross was plundered from the Sophia Cathedral and carried off by the Papists to Lublin. It is no longer known what became of this true relic of the Cross.

In Princess Olga's time, even after building a church to the Wisdom of God, a significant number among the nobility, the palace personnel, and the people, hated it. Zealot pagans looked forward to the sole rule of Olga's son, Svyatoslav I, who would not hearken to his mother's exhortations. He argued with her and remained angry. He refused to humble his proud heart under the meek Christ. He, deliberately unreceptive, defiantly said to her, "My men would laugh at me if I took up with a strange religion." Despite this, he still held much affection for his mother. He agreed not to persecute the Christians. He allowed them freely to make open profession of their Faith under the protection of Princess Olga. Meanwhile, Olga exercised her own entitlement to independence, not only over her own future but also over others with regard to the Baptism of her entire realm. She did not wish to postpone it any longer.

²³(...continued)

Dir. Constantine Porphyrogenetos and other Greek annalists relate that, in the lifetime of Askold, there was a Bishop Michael who was sent to the Russians by Emperor Basil the Macedonian and Patriarch Ignatios. In Condinus, *Catalogue of Sees Subject to the Patriarch of Constantinople*, the see of Russia appears as early as 891. See Internet article on "The Introduction of Christianity into Russia (A.D. 988-1015): Conversion of Vladimir the Great," by A. N. Mouravieff, at www.ellopos.net/elpenor/greek-texts/fathers/mouravieff-russia.asp.

She still possessed power, without bothering to demure about it. She turned to the professional missionaries of Otto I, following the advice of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII who soon died in November of 959.²⁴ Constantine VII maintained lively diplomatic relations with foreign courts, exchanging embassies with Otto the Great. Since this took place well before the Great Schism of 1054, those in the west still belonged to the undivided Church. The attempt, nevertheless, failed. In the meantime, Olga's son, now of age, kept resisting her pleas that he become a Christian. As it is known, Otto I responded to Olga's request favorably. The following is recorded under the year 959, by the German chronicler named "the Continuant of Reginon": "To King Otto I there came emissaries of Helen, queen of the Russes, who was baptized in Constantinople, and who sought for her nation both a bishop and priests." King Otto, the future founder of the German Empire, willingly acceded to Olga's request, but he urged that the matter not be decided in haste. The following year, 960, during the Feast of the Nativity, there was established a Russian bishop, name Libutius, from the monastery brethren of Anatolius Alban am Mainz. Libutius, however, soon died in March of 961. In his stead, they ordained Adalbert of Trier. King Otto generously furnished all needs for the mission to Russia. Details have not been left to us. The delay proved detrimental. In 962, when Adalbert finally arrived at Kiev, his mission soon failed. He, too, admitted that his efforts were unsuccessful and for nought. On his return trip home, certain of his companions were slain. Bishop Adalbert, as well, barely escaped danger. The failure of the Germans was also providential lest the Russian Church should come to be under papal domination.

Olga perceived that the pagan reaction was strong and violent. Those who suffered were not only the German missionaries but also some Kievan Christians who were baptized in Constantinople. By order of Svyatoslav, Olga's Christian nephew Gleb was slain. Some churches built by Olga were also destroyed. Olga, as a result of the fanatical pagans, kept her piety private. She trusted God, and God comforted her as she awaited His will. Her pagan son, Grand Prince Svyatoslav I Ihorovych, known as Khorobryi ("the Brave"), noted military commander, was now head of the government, though all difficult issues were referred to her on account of her wisdom in governance. Svyatoslav had three sons—Yaropolk, Oleg, and Vladimir—but not by the same wife. Meanwhile, Svyatoslav was often away from Kiev and heavily

²⁴ The successor of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos of the Macedonian Dynasty was his son, born of Helena (daughter of Romanos I Lekapenos), the youth Romanos II (959-963) who died soon thereafter. Romanos II's wife, Theophano, assumed the regency for her two small boys, Basil II and Constantine VIII.

involved in what seemed to be incessant military expeditions and engagements. Governance, again, devolved on his mother.



Saints Vladimir and Olga

Olga's longed-for Baptism of Rus was removed by her son and his co-religionists from the government agenda. This was ultimately bitter for the holy Olga, who regarded the salvation of her people as the chief business. She had spurned the glory of this world. Uppermost in her mind was her love for Christ. As we already mentioned, while Svyatoslav was a minor, Olga was regent of the Kievan state. The lad was raised by a steward, Asmund. Now,

however, while he was abroad, Olga had much positive influence over her grandsons. Furthermore, the Christians in the realm, who respected her, were confirmed by her. The young grandson Vladimir observed all these things, but was caught up with the world of power around him. Nevertheless, the saving impressions that she instilled on the Christians of Rus and on that particular grandson endured. Nothing sinks so deep into the heart as the simple and affectionate words of mother or grandmother. During Svyatoslav's reign the territory of Kievan Rus was expanded to an enormous degree. In his campaigns to the east, between 964 and 966, he defeated the Khazars near Itil and captured the White Tower fortress in Sarkil. Twice, in the years 965 and 969, the armies of Svyatoslav went through the lands of the foolish Khazars, shredding the power of their Jewish rulers of Priazovia and lower Povolzhia. He later conquered the Volga Bulgars and forced the Yasians and the Kasogians in northern Caucasia to pay tribute. By means of the latter victory, he opened the way for Rus merchants to the coast of the Caspian Sea. In 966, he subjugated the Viaticians and exacted tribute from them. The emperor of Byzantium, Nikephoros II Phokas (through the offices of the patrician Kalokir of Chersonese Taurica), convinced Svyatoslav to attack the Balkan Bulgars. He obliged the Byzantines in either 967 or 968. He captured many cities, even eighty according to the chronicles, including Dorostol and Pereiaslavets on the Danube River. This was an important trading center, where he eventually planned to transfer his capital.

Threatened by Svyatoslav's Balkan expansionism, Byzantium convinced the Pechenegs to attack Kiev where Olga and her grandsons were without the army. Olga sent a dispatch to her son in the spring of 969: "The Pechenegs have besieged Kiev. It is impossible to lead the horses to water, for the Pechenegs stand at the Lybeda." The message resulted in the reluctant return of Svyatoslav and his army. They did drive the Pechenegs back to the steppe. Actually, they had already been repelled from the city thanks to Olga who headed the defense of the capital. Svyatoslav, relieved to find his mother and sons alive, embraced them heartily. He then told his mother, "It no longer pleases me to abide at Kiev. I prefer to dwell at Pereslavl' on the Dunaj (Danube), since that is the center of my land holdings." Svyatoslav desired to create an empire from the Danube to the Volga. He wished to unite all Rus, Bulgaria, Serbia, the Black Sea region, and the Azov region (Priazovia). He desired that the border should extend to Constantinople itself. (In fact, after Olga's repose, he consolidated his control of Kievan Rus and appointed his sons as viceregents: Yaropolk I in Kiev, Oleg in the Derevlian land, and Vladimir in Novgorod the Great.)

Olga the Wise, nevertheless, knew that all the bravery and daring of the Russian troops could not outmaneuver the forces of the Byzantine Empire.

But more important, she did not wish to see her son or her own subjects fighting against the Orthodox Empire of the Byzantines. She foresaw that his expedition would fail. Hoping to keep him in Kiev, she finally said to him, "Thou seest that I am unwell. Why wilt thou forsake me now? After thou hast committed me to the grave, then go wheresoever thou dost wish." His dream of creating a vast Russian holding proved stronger. In July of 969, Svyatoslav embarked on a second campaign in the Balkans. He looked to strengthen the conquered cities and to punish Byzantium for provoking the Pecheneg attack on Kiev. His mother, meanwhile, kept cautioning him not to engage the Byzantines. He did not heed her advice, for which Solomon writes: "A foolish son sneers at his mother and is a grief to her."²⁵ Despise not thy mother because she is grown old.²⁶ Reject neither her rules nor her ordinances."²⁷

Svyatoslav was met by stronger opposition from a combined Bulgarian and Byzantine force. The relatively small size of Svyatoslav's army and the lack of assistance from Kiev were responsible for his defeat near Dorostol (now Silistra). He was besieged by the Byzantine army from the 23rd of April to the 22nd of July, in the year 971. He was compelled to sign a peace treaty on the 23rd of July, under which he ceded his territories in the Danube region. On the way back to Kiev he was ambushed by Pechenegs near the Khortytsia Island (once again at the behest of Byzantium). His army was destroyed, and he was slain. The *Primary Chronicle* praises Svyatoslav as a heroic figure and describes his cordial relations with Malusha. It also remarks on his practise of warning the enemies he was about to attack, with the message *Idu na vas* ("I am coming at you").

Saint Olga did not live to see the death of her son. She reposed on the 11th day of the month of July, in the year 969. With great lament they mourned her: her son and grandsons and all the people. In her final years, she kept near her Presbyter Gregory, who had attended Constantinople with her in the year 957. Since she knew that her earthly sojourn was coming to a close, she forbade her subjects to conduct pagan solemnities for the dead. She commanded that she was to receive burial in accordance with the funeral ritual of the Orthodox Church. Presbyter Gregory fulfilled her request. Thus, having lived a life that glorified God in Trinity, she surrendered her soul in peace to Christ Jesus, our Lord. As her prophetic testament to succeeding generations, with deep Christian humility, she confessed her faith concerning her nation: "May God's will be done! If it pleases God to have mercy upon my native Russian land, then they shall turn their hearts to God, just as I have received this

²⁵ Prov. 15:20; 10:1.

²⁶ Prov. 23:22.

²⁷ Prov. 1:8; 6:20.

gift.” Indeed, the Lord had sent a woman for the conversion of the Rus. The Baptism of the all-glorious Olga laid the foundation for the enlightenment of her people unto the salvation of a multitude of souls. The Spirit of God rested upon her even as on the judge and prophetess of old, Deborah. Her ways and words were remembered by Vladimir, so that he, as Barak of old, finally received Baptism in the Dnieper, vanquishing Satan even as Barak overcame Sisera at the brook of Kishon.²⁸

Our Savior glorified His handmaid as a worker for Orthodoxy, who initiated the Faith in the Russian land. When she was alive she was shown to be a new teacher, speaking of the Gospel in the cities and villages. She disbursed myriads of gold pieces to the poor, while making spoil of the idols. After her smooth passage to the afterlife, she, by divine grace, performed miracles through her incorrupt relics. A hundred years after her blessed repose, God continued to glorify the venerable body of His servant Olga with incorruptibility.

Under her grandson, holy Prince Vladimir, ca. 1007, the relics of Saint Olga were transferred into the Desyatin Church of the Dormition of the Most Holy Theotokos.²⁹ The relics were placed within a special sarcophagus, such as was customary to enclose the relics of saints. This church, built by her blessed grandson, contained her tomb and a small opening that faithful

²⁸ Judg. 4.

²⁹ Church of the Tithes (*Desiatynna tserkva*) is the first and largest stone church in Kiev and the burial place of the Kievan princes. Dedicated to the Dormition, it was built by Byzantine and Rus artisans between 989 and 996 amid the palaces of Grand Prince Volodymyr the Great, who set aside one-tenth of his annual income for its construction and maintenance (hence the name). The church was besieged and ruined in 1240 by Batu Khan's Mongol horde. Between 1828 and 1842, the Russian administration leveled the remaining ruins and erected a new stone church that occupied half the original area. Its Russian style had nothing in common with that of the original structure. In 1935, Soviet authorities dismantled the 19th-C. church.

Excavations of the foundations of the original church indicate that it was a three-nave structure. It had six pillars and galleries on the side that were wide and covered. It occupied an area of approximately 1,700 square meters. Its numerous cupolas in cruciform arrangement—a feature recorded in a 14th-C. source—distinguished it from Byzantine prototypes and made it a model in the further development of Ukrainian architecture. The plan and surviving fragments of the mosaic floor, marble columns, capitals, ceramic tiles, ornamental slate, frescoes, and sarcophagi (that is, of Volodymyr the Great and his grandmother, Princess Olha) testify to the artistry of the early period of Ukrainian architecture. The artifacts collected on the site of the church are preserved in the Saint Sophia Museum in Kyiv. See online at <http://www.encyclopediaofukraine.com>, s.v. “Tithes.”

pilgrims might behold Olga's body lying therein whole and intact. The Monk Iakov (11th C.) wrote: "Let whoever has faith go and open the window and see the noble body lying whole, and he will marvel at such a miracle that the body has been lying uncorrupted in the coffin for so many years. The faithful who see such a miracle praise God and marvel at the mercy which God has for His saints. O how marvellous and awesome and most glorious the miracle, brethren! This noble body is worthy of every praise, for it rests whole in the grave as if in sleep. 'Wondrous is God in His saints; the God of Israel [Ps. 67: 35].' Seeing this, the faithful will glorify God, Who glorifies His saints! But others do not come with faith and do not open the coffin's window, and they do not see this noble body but only the coffin. God thus glorifies His servant, Princess Olga of Rus, who was named Helena in holy Baptism. After her holy Baptism the blessed princess Olga lived for fifteen years and pleased God with her good works."³⁰



Saints Vladimir and Olga

Saint Nestor the Chronicler describes Saint Olga as "a precursor in the Christian land, like the dawn before sunrise or the twilight before the light." The holy equal-of-the-apostles, Grand Prince Vladimir, himself giving thanks

³⁰ Monk Iakov, "Memorial and Encomium," *The Hagiography of Kievan Rus'*, Vol. II, trans. by Paul Hollingsworth (Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature, 1992), p. 165 ff.

to God on the day of the Baptism of Rus, witnessed before his countrymen concerning his grandmother, Saint Olga, with the remarkable words: "The sons of Rus bless thee, and also the generations of thy descendants."³¹

The truth is that, at her repose in 969, Russia was still a largely pagan country. No matter how powerful and ruling her personality, she was constrained to cede definition and control to others with regard to establishing Orthodoxy as the state religion. Nevertheless, her life was an eloquent protest over the cruel and frustrating limitations imposed upon her vision for her people and her eventual triumph when the seeds she planted came to fruition. Her son Svyatoslav, although mostly abroad on campaigns, allowed a Christian community to develop in Kiev. Unwittingly, he gave an opportunity for the Christianization of the Ukraine by his son and Olga's grandson, Vladimir the Great. Thus, Saint Olga's grandson, Vladimir, with the help of God, fulfilled her dream of converting the Russian nation. Metropolitan Ilarion (Hilarion) initiated her veneration in the eleventh century. The Orthodox Church canonized her during the first half of the thirteenth century. In the Ukrainian Church, Saint Olha is considered an equal to the apostles.

**On the 11th of July, the holy Church commemorates
the venerable Father NIKODEMOS,
ascetic struggler in the environs of Athonite Vatopedi Monastery,
who was the spiritual teacher of Saint Gregory Palamas
and who reposed in peace.**

**On the 11th of July, the holy Church commemorates
the venerable New-Martyr NIKODEMOS,
who suffered at Elbasan of Albania
and was slain by the sword (1722).³²**

Nikodemos, the ever-memorable new-martyr, was born to pious parents at Elbasan,³³ a town in Albania. (We do not know his secular name, for

³¹ Cf. Ps. 44:17; Lk. 1:48.

³² The account of the martyrdom of the venerable New-martyr Nikodemos was borrowed from the publication of Nikodemos the Hagiorite's *Neon Martyrologion*, 3rd ed. (pp. 112-114) and incorporated into *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek). The text was translated, revised, and edited from the Greek into English by Leonidas J. Papadopoulos, Holy Apostles Convent, and Dormition Skete.

³³ Elbasan or Qarku i Elbasanit (41°06'N 20°04'E) is located in central Albania, capital of the Elbasan District, on the Shkumbin River, near Tirana. The city is a market center for the area, where tobacco, olives, fruit, grapes, cotton, grains, and vegetables are grown. Industries include production of olive oil, wine, cigarettes, leather, textiles,

(continued...)