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The Christianization of Rus'
in Soviet Historiography:
Attitudes and Interpretations (1920–1960)*

DONALD OSTROWSKI

In examining the views of historians within the borders of the Soviet Union about the acceptance of Christianity in Rus', I have approached the topic, not as a Western scholar with preconceived ideas about Soviet historical views, but as a future historian might approach it, that is, relying almost solely on the internal evidence of the texts. In so doing, I have consciously restrained whatever inherent presuppositions I have or conclusions I have drawn from studying other aspects of Soviet historiography. My intent is primarily to establish what the unwritten "rules of the game" or attitudes of Soviet historians toward this topic have been. Secondarily, I seek to provide a basis for comparing these "rules," with the rules governing historiographic practice both in Western scholarship and in Soviet scholarship toward other topics.

My use of the term "rules of the game" is not meant as a value judgment. It is meant to convey the concept that historiography is subject to patterns of development, whether internally within the relevant scholarly community or externally through the impact of the society in which the historian lives. As such, historiography must be considered a vital part of intellectual history—a legitimate area of study for the *mentalités* of different cultures and eras.¹ By differentiating between the patterns of historiographic development, on the one hand, and the idiosyncratic views of individual historians, on the other, one can hope for a better understanding of what constitutes the Soviet historiographic tradition toward the coming of Christianity to the East Slavic peoples. In the process, I hope to demonstrate how historiographical study can contribute to the study of intellectual history.

The working hypothesis of this article is that it is not enough to look only at a historian's model or interpretation of the past in order to comprehend that historian's intellectual position. One must also evaluate

* I intend to devote a separate article to the views of historians in the Soviet Union since 1960 toward Christianization.

¹ See, *inter alia*, Harry Elmer Barnes, *A History of Historical Writing*, 2nd ed., New York, 1962, p. ix: "a history of historical writing must necessarily be, to a large degree, a phase of the intellectual history of mankind."

each historian's views concerning what other historians have or have not accomplished, as well as examine each historian's approach to and treatment of the primary source base. Thus, in evaluating each historian's work, I investigated three areas: (1) the attitudes of each historian toward the work of other historians, including (a) pre-Revolutionary imperial historians, (b) foreign historians, and (c) other historians in the Soviet Union; (2) the attitudes of each historian to the sources in general as well as to specific sources; (3) the model that each historian describes concerning the acceptance of Christianity in Rus', especially (a) the relationship of Volodimer's conversion to previous Christianity in the area and (b) the relationship of Volodimer's conversion to Byzantine politics and economics. In investigating the third area, I wanted to determine whether Soviet historiography put greater emphasis on internal developments within Rus' or on influence from Constantinople.

To facilitate my study, I focused on five historians—S. V. Bakhrushin, I. U. Budovnits, B. D. Grekov, M. N. Pokrovskii, and M. N. Tikhomirov—rather than attempt a comprehensive survey. I have omitted the works of historians who write little about the acceptance of Christianity, except insofar as their works may have affected the views of these five. I will discuss in roughly chronological order the writings of the five historians on this question.

I

Neither Pokrovskii² nor Grekov³ discuss the views of other historians on the Christianization in any detail. Pokrovskii mentions in rather dismissive terms the “fairy tales” that “modern historians” have extracted from the

² Pokrovskii presents his views on the Christianization of Rus' in his *Russkaia istoriia v samom szhatom ocherke. Ot drevneishikh vremen do vtoroi poloviny 19-go stoletii* (Moscow, 1920). This work was republished in M. N. Pokrovskii, *Izbrannye proizvedeniia*, bk. 3 (Moscow, 1967). Pokrovskii does not discuss the Christianization directly in his other major survey, *Russkaia istoriia s drevneishikh vremen*, 5 vols. (Moscow, 1910–12).

³ Grekov's discussion of this issue first appeared in his *Kievskaiia Rus'* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1939), pp. 249–53. On the title page, this work is described as the “third edition, revised and supplemented.” However, there was no first or second edition of *Kievskaiia Rus'*. Instead, the third edition incorporates Grekov's earlier monograph *Feodal'nye otnosheniia v Kievskom gosudarstve* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1934, 1936), and doubles its size. Subsequent revisions of *Kievskaiia Rus'* appeared in 1944, 1949, and 1953: B. D. Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus'* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1944); B. D. Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus'* (Moscow, 1949); and B. D. Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus'* (Moscow, 1953). Unaccountably, Mazour refers to the edition of 1949 as the “2nd ed.,” although that was the third edition of *Kievskaiia Rus'* and the fifth edition overall. Anatole G. Mazour, *The Writing of History in the Soviet Union* (Stanford, 1971), p. 55, fn. 20 All citations to *Kievskaiia Rus'* are to the edition of 1939 unless otherwise noted.

chronicles, “fairy tales that even now may be read in the worthless history books distributed by the tsarist government.”⁴ While not citing any historian by name, Grekov does refer to other views through the device of “some. . . others. . .” (одни. . . другие)⁵ and, in the designation of two views, “first . . . second . . .” (первый . . . второй).⁶

In 1937, a Soviet government commission establishing rules for writing history for high school textbooks wrote that the “introduction of Christianity was progressive in comparison with pagan barbarianism.”⁷ The practice of citing the pronouncements of official committees for scholarly opinions may seem a little odd to a Western scholar, yet a survey of Soviet historiography published in 1978 cites the same commission, as well as the pronouncement of the Committee for Artistic Matters published 14 November 1936, which decreed that the acceptance of Christianity was “a positive stage in the history of the Russian people.”⁸

References to such official declarations as the pronouncement of 14 November 1936, are significant. The pronouncement itself seemed to allow the publication in the Soviet Union of discussion of the Christianization process.⁹ Indeed, S. V. Bakhrushin begins his article on the baptism of Kievan Rus’¹⁰ with a reference to the same pronouncement (as well as to an earlier one of 16 May 1934 that bore the names of Stalin, Zhdanov, and Kirov) and sees it as a charge to Soviet historians for “the overthrow of the

⁴ Pokrovskii, *Russkaia istoriia* (1920), p. 36.

⁵ That is, “some believe that this [baptism] occurred in the Dnieper, others say that the Kievans were baptized in the Pochaina—a tributary of the Dnieper.” Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1939), p. 249.

⁶ In reference to the letter of Patriarch Photius: “In our science . . . there are two views: first, that the remarks of Photius apply basically to Kiev, since Kiev was then the main center of Rus’; second, that he spoke about Tmutorokan’ Rus’, closest to Byzantium.” Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1939), pp. 250–51.

⁷ The text of the pronouncement can be found in “Postanovlenie zhiuri pravil’stvennoi komissii po konkursu na luchshii uchebnik dlia 3– i 4–go klassov srednei shkoly po istorii SSSR,” *K izucheniiu istorii. Sbornik* (Moscow, 1937), p. 38. The pronouncement originally appeared in *Pravda*, 22 August 1937.

⁸ *Sovetskaia istoriografiia Kievskoi Rusi* (Leningrad, 1978), p. 173.

⁹ Within three years, a number of items devoted specifically to this topic appeared: A. Kozaichenko, “Kreshchenie Rusi,” *Istoricheskii zhurnal* 1 (1937):71–83; B. Belopol’skii and A. Taidyshko, *Kreshchenie Rusi* (Leningrad, 1939); R. V. Zhdanov, “Kreshchenie Rusi i Nachal’naia letopis’,” *Istoricheskii zapiski* 5 (1939):3–30; M. Iankovskii, “Kreshchenie Rusi,” *Uchenie zapiski LGU*, 1939, no. 36, pp. 45–61.

¹⁰ S. V. Bakhrushin, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi,” *Istoriik-Marksist*, 1937, bk. 2, pp. 40–77.

mistaken anti-scientific views of the so-called 'historical school of M. N. Pokrovskii.'"¹¹

Bakhrushin exhibits a mixed attitude toward the pre-Revolutionary historians. He seems disappointed in Solov'ev, "the greatest bourgeois historian," for not freeing himself from the mindset of the chroniclers who present the acceptance of Christianity in Rus' as "a psychological aspect in the personal life of Prince Volodimer." However, Bakhrushin goes on to argue: "Solov'ev was too great a scholar. . . not to attempt a broader conceptualization." Bakhrushin commends what he sees as Solov'ev's "attempt to connect the baptism with a definite stage in the history of the social life of the East Slavs."¹² While Bakhrushin emphasizes that he is writing his article against Pokrovskii's ideas, there is nothing in Bakhrushin's assessment of Solov'ev that Pokrovskii would have disagreed with in principle.¹³

Likewise, Bakhrushin seems surprised that "[e]ven E. E. Golubinskii, the most radical of Russian Church historians," presented the conversion to Christianity from the psychological viewpoint of Volodimer, who "from the very beginning of his reign was already more or less inclined toward Christianity." However, as in his evaluation of Solov'ev, Bakhrushin sees a positive aspect in Golubinskii's treatment, in that "he accurately (верно) perceived the necessity of studying the question of the baptism in connection with the history of the formation of the state (государства)."¹⁴

In contrast, Bakhrushin has a low opinion of the writing of the "so-called 'liberal' bourgeois" historians who, although they were opposed to the Church as a feudal institution, nonetheless contributed little to the discussion. Indeed, according to Bakhrushin, Miliukov obfuscated the historical significance of the baptism by arguing that it did not change anything in Kievan Rus' because "the masses remained pagan as before."¹⁵

Bakhrushin points to Nikol'skii as the first to attempt "to construct the history of the baptism anew, in the spirit of 'economic materialism.'"¹⁶ But Bakhrushin faults Nikol'skii for not being able "to give a Marxist, that is, the only scientific, formulation of the question." Because Nikol'skii was still under the "nihilist" influence of the liberal historiography, wrote

¹¹ Bakhrushin, "K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi," p. 40.

¹² Bakhrushin, "K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi," p. 41.

¹³ See, e.g., M. N. Pokrovskii, *Istoricheskaia nauka i bor'ba klassov* (Moscow and Leningrad, 1933), pp. 298–99, where he argues that "one almost need not translate it [any conscientious historical work] into Marxist language; it already is Marxist."

¹⁴ Bakhrushin, "K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi," p. 42.

¹⁵ Bakhrushin, "K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi," p. 42.

¹⁶ Bakhrushin, "K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi," p. 42.

Bakhrushin, he saw Christianity as “purely external, completely foreign, and not suitable to ‘the circumstances of life in the Dnieper area.’” It was introduced by the greedy Byzantine clergy, who were looking for “new sources of revenue.” Bakhrushin argues that Nikol’skii’s emphasis here on Byzantium contradicts two other assertions that he makes: (1) that “trade interests quickly forced the Varangians and Slavs to abandon the old paganism”; and (2) that “the Church organization put into the hands. . . of the merchant-retinue strata a new weapon for the rapacious exploitation of the subjugated tribes.”¹⁷ What is important here for our concerns is not whether these are contradictory propositions in Nikol’skii’s model, but that Bakhrushin perceived them as such. That is, either Christianity was foisted on the Rus’ by the greedy Byzantine clergy, *or* it was the result of economic and political developments within Rus’; it could not be both, for there is no middle ground that would accommodate an amalgamation of these propositions in Bakhrushin’s view of the problem.

Nor, according to Bakhrushin, does Pokrovskii formulate the question any better. Bakhrushin argues that although Pokrovskii “uncovered the essence of Christianity, exposing it as a weapon in the hands of the ruling class,” he nonetheless saw “the baptism of Rus’ [as] completely anti-historical.”¹⁸ Because Pokrovskii failed to see the “progressive role” that Christianity played, he inclined to a view similar to that of liberal historiography, namely, that the acceptance of Christianity had no significance.

Bakhrushin sees N. A. Rozhkov as a historian who tried to make a break with the clerical tradition and who also adopted the posture of an economic materialist, but who gave an “extremely simplified conception of the baptism of Rus’.” Bakhrushin goes on to argue that Rozhkov was a “typical eclectic,” who attempted to bring into agreement the negative views of the liberal historiography and the positive views of the idealists, like Solov’ev. Thus, Rozhkov sees two stages in Volodimer’s religious reform: a negative one, when he fails to unite all the class gods into one pagan pantheon, and a positive one, when Christianity wins out, because it was “incomparably more organized through social and moral means than paganism.”¹⁹

Bakhrushin thus argues that there are two major trends in the historiography of this question (presumably leaving out the liberal negative view): the purely idealist trend, which looked at the acceptance of Christianity as a phenomenon in morality and its triumph as part of a Volodi-

¹⁷ Bakhrushin, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi,” p. 43.

¹⁸ Bakhrushin, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi,” p. 43.

¹⁹ Bakhrushin, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi,” p. 43.

merian psychological drama; and the "vulgar" economic materialist trend, practiced by those who did not know how to apply the dialectic to Christianity. Bakhrushin asserts that his own article is the first attempt to examine the question concerning the baptism in a scientific, that is, Marxist way. Clearly, Bakhrushin had no compunction about criticizing previous Soviet historiography, nor about using ideology as a weapon in his scholarly arsenal, in contrast to Budovnits and Tikhomirov, both of whom avoided that use.

Budovnits published an article in 1956 (hereafter "K voprosu"),²⁰ and then extensively revised it for inclusion as a chapter (hereafter "Kreshchenie") of his book on social and political thought published in 1960.²¹ These two versions enrich the discussion of Budovnits's views, as we have material for speculating why Budovnits made the revisions he did. For example, in his discussion of the acceptance of Christianity in Rus', Budovnits in "K voprosu" mentions the edition of Grekov's *Kievskaiia Rus'* published in 1949²² and refers to no later work.²³ In "Kreshchenie," Budovnits updates the reference to Grekov's *Kievskaiia Rus'* to 1953,²⁴ but includes no post-1953 work in this chapter. On the basis of textual evidence alone, one could conclude that Budovnits finished work on "K voprosu" as early as 1949, but that it was not published until six years later. Likewise, he may have finished work on "Kreshchenie" as early as 1953, seven years before publication. It would appear that Budovnits should have had time to update the reference to Grekov's *Kievskaiia Rus'* from 1949 to 1953 for an article published in 1956. However, the issue of the periodical *Voprosy istorii religii i ateizma* containing "K voprosu" had been sent to the typesetter (дано в набор) on 13 July 1954, which might indicate that Budovnits had the option of updating the citation but decided not to either because the concomitant revisions in the text would be too extensive or because the change was irrelevant. On the other hand, in "Kreshchenie," Budovnits revised his treatment (although no major revisions were made in the 1953 edition of *Kievskaiia Rus'*)²⁵ by toning down the ideological content of his summary of Grekov's views. For example:

²⁰ I. U. Budovnits, "K voprosu o kreshchenii Rusi," *Voprosy istorii religii i ateizma. Sbornik statei*, 3 (1956): 402–34.

²¹ I. U. Budovnits, *Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia mysl' drevnei Rusi: XI–XIV vv.* (Moscow, 1960), pp. 75–102.

²² Budovnits, "K voprosu," p. 407, fn. 2.

²³ See "K voprosu," p. 429, fn. 3 where he cites *Gramoty Velikogo Novgoroda i Pskova*, ed. S. N. Valk (Moscow and Leningrad, 1949).

²⁴ Budovnits, "Kreshchenie," p. 80, fn. 15.

²⁵ Cf. Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus'*, pp. 471–75 and Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus'*, pp. 475–80.

“K voprosu” (1956)	“Kreshchenie” (1960)
Although the popular masses led the anti-feudal struggle under the banner of the old religion . . . (p. 407)	Although the popular masses stood for the old religion . . . (p. 80)

A comparison of “K voprosu” with “Kreshchenie,” leads one to conclude that Budovnits was a perfectionist who fiddled with his text until the last possible moment. For example, in *Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia mysl'*, Budovnits includes a reference to a work published in 1960, when his book was already *v nabore*.²⁶ A likely explanation is that something occurred between 1954, when “K voprosu” was typeset, and 1960, when “Kreshchenie” was published, that led Budovnits to modify his text. Such a conclusion is important for my investigation because, if we eliminate the likelihood of Budovnits’s personal reassessment of Grekov’s work, we are left with “the thaw” as a possible explanation, that is, that changes in the politics of the society in which Budovnits lived had an impact on his work and allowed him to write in a way that was less blatantly ideological.

Budovnits is critical of “gentry-bourgeois historiography,” including N. M. Karamzin, S. M. Solov’ev, and S. F. Platonov. He perceives their arguments about the acceptance of Christianity as a biased favoring of the new faith over paganism. Instead, he argues, they should explain why Christianity, if it was so superior, was not accepted in Rus’ before Volodimer. After all, Budovnits argues, “in the ninth century and first half of the tenth century in Byzantium there were enough experienced and articulate missionary-philosophers,” yet the Byzantines were not able to convert Oleg to Christianity.

A noteworthy alteration in “Kreshchenie” of “K voprosu” is the inclusion in “Kreshchenie” of a critique of the pre-Revolutionary work of V. A. Parkhomenko.²⁷ It is not likely that Budovnits did not know of Parkhomenko’s work when he wrote “K voprosu,” and only learned about it by the time he revised it for “Kreshchenie.” Parkhomenko was a fairly well-known historian and a colleague of Budovnits. What occurred in the meantime that Budovnits felt obliged to include criticisms of Parkhomenko’s pre-Revolutionary work? Why did he choose not to

²⁶ Budovnits, *Obshchestvenno-politicheskaia mysl'*, p. 42, fn. 35. This particular reference was to a work published by Tikhomirov, which raises the question why Budovnits did not include in “Kreshchenie” mention of Tikhomirov’s article on the Christianization of Rus’, which appeared in 1959.

²⁷ See, especially, V. A. Parkhomenko, *Nachalo khristianstva Rusi* (Poltava, 1913), pp. 75–189.

mention the work Parkhomenko published during the Soviet period? As an answer to the latter question, one must rule out the idea that Parkhomenko wrote about different topics during the Soviet period, because Parkhomenko published an article in 1940 precisely about the topic under discussion: "The Character and Significance of the Epoch of Volodimer Who Accepted Christianity."²⁸ We can also rule out in this case the possible hypothesis that Budovnits felt any compunction about criticizing a living colleague, since Parkhomenko died in 1942 during the siege of Leningrad. Budovnits might have been hesitant about leveling criticism at colleagues for their pre-Revolutionary writings, especially if these criticisms might be taken as ideologically, rather than scholarly, motivated. During the period of "the thaw," in contrast, Budovnits may have felt that criticisms of a historian's pre-Revolutionary work would be more likely to be understood in a scholarly sense. He may not have wished to take that risk, however, in critiquing works of colleagues published since the October Revolution.²⁹

Budovnits went on to scold the gentry-bourgeois historians for ignoring the internal development of Rus' society and their tendency to reduce important historical events to (1) spiritual crises of separate individuals, (2) personal sympathies and inclinations, (3) effective impressions, (4) naive imitation, and (5) mechanical borrowing of cultural benefits from neighbors who were more developed. Budovnits asserts that Soviet historiography did try to connect the phenomenon of Christianization with social development, and that the first historian to do so was Bakhrushin in 1937. This last assertion is remarkable for two reasons. First, Budovnits does not explain how Bakhrushin connected the acceptance of Christianity with internal social developments. Indeed, he criticizes Bakhrushin for overemphasizing the role of Byzantium not only in the Christianization process, but even in his "huge mistake" of describing *Slovo o polku Igoreve* as having been compiled according to the forms of translated poesy; thus, Bakhrushin "completely ignored the national source of development of the culture of Kievan

²⁸ V. A. Parkhomenko, "Kharakter i znachenie èpokhi Vladimira, priniavshego khristianstvo," *Uchenie zapiski LGU*, 1940, no. 73, pt. 8, pp. 203–214.

²⁹ A similar consideration may have led to Budovnits's not mentioning Tikhomirov's article on the origins of Christianity in Rus', although he may have had an implicit disagreement with Tikhomirov's views (see below). Another possibility is that since Tikhomirov's article appeared abroad, it might not have reached Budovnits for some time. One would also like to know more about the relationship between Budovnits and Tikhomirov, specifically whether Tikhomirov would have shown Budovnits a rough draft of that article, and about the incidence of Soviet historians' citing the works of Soviet colleagues published abroad.

Rus'."³⁰ Such statements by Budovnits contrast with his hesitancy in criticizing the works of other historians in the Soviet Union, so his views on the issue must have been strong. Second, Budovnits does not mention the work of Rozhkov, Nikol'skii, Pokrovskii, or Priselkov, all of whom made some attempt to connect Christianization with broader considerations than the impact of one individual's decision. While Budovnits might have considered Nikol'skii and Priselkov bourgeois specialists, certainly Rozhkov and Pokrovskii could not be classified so. Besides, Nikol'skii's views on Christianization for the most part coincide with those of Pokrovskii. Perhaps Budovnits meant that Bakhrushin was the first to attempt such a connection in any detail. In any event, by foregoing discussion of the views of these other historians, Budovnits manages to avoid some swampy ground.

A last notable aspect of Budovnits's discussion of the acceptance of Christianity in Rus' is his quoting in "K voprosu" from the rules of 1936 about writing history for high school textbooks.³¹ Budovnits dropped this citation in "Kreshchenie," an omission that may represent changing attitudes toward the Cult of Personality during the late 1950s.

Tikhomirov, in an article published in 1959, in describing the coming of Christianity to Rus',³² adopts a guardedly positive attitude toward the works of pre-Revolutionary Church historians. He mentions the works of Metropolitan Makarii (Bulgakov) and Golubinskii as "especially noteworthy." But Tikhomirov points out that it had been fifty years since the publication of Golubinskii's works and that "many of his views are out of date and in need of revision." Tikhomirov does not explicitly mention ideological considerations here, although he could have. That is, he does not criticize Makarii and Golubinskii for un-Marxist, pre-Marxist, or anti-Marxist views, but leaves open the possibility that subsequent research alone may have rendered many of their views obsolete. Tikhomirov might have used this same formula in assessing any previous historiography without implying any deficiency in it. Such a formulation is in keeping with the Soviet view that scientific study should be cumulative and progressive.

In contrast, Tikhomirov's attitude toward works published beyond the borders of the Soviet Union is decidedly negative. He castigates Baumgarten, Paszkiewicz, and Stender-Petersen for works that "are extremely tentative," for their "almost total rejection of the Russian sources," and

³⁰ "K voprosu," p. 407; "Kreshchenie," p. 79.

³¹ Budovnits, "K voprosu," p. 434.

³² M. N. Tikhomirov, "The Origins of Christianity in Russia," *History* 44 (1959): 199–211.

their "inadequate knowledge of Russian Church practice and of Russian literature."

Toward historians in the Soviet Union, Tikhomirov expresses less a criticism than a comment that their treatments of Christianity in Rus' have "deal[t] with specialized aspects," and that even Grekov "deal[s] but briefly with the baptism of Russia in 989."³³ Tikhomirov's comment could support two alternate interpretations. The less generous interpretation would argue that because of the anti-religious attitude of the Soviet government, historians have found it difficult to discuss questions of religious history. The more generous interpretation would argue that scholars in the Soviet Union have dug deeper into specifics of the topic but have not yet synthesized their results. However, Tikhomirov chooses in this context not to mention the works of Pokrovskii, Bakhrushin, and Budovnits, all of whom could be considered to have attempted a synthesis. As I will argue below, Tikhomirov may have had serious disagreements with the views of each of these scholars concerning their views on the Christianization process and use of sources, but he may have chosen not to air his disagreement explicitly in an article published abroad.

II

Neither Pokrovskii nor Grekov discusses fontology very much in general or on this particular issue. Pokrovskii maintains that the chroniclers were biased in their praise of the Rus' princes not only because they were courtiers. To support his claim that very few laymen in Rus' were literate, he points out that there is no mention in the *Rus'skaia pravda* of written contracts. Therefore, "all literary work was done by the clergy," who were indebted to the princes and boyars for their support of the Church.³⁴

Grekov's fontological approach to this issue can only be described as uncritical. He refers five times to "our [or "the] chronicler," without specifying the *Pověst' vremennykh lēt* (PVL). He finds the "dramatized form" in which "the chronicler" tells "how Volodimer became familiar with various faiths" to be "quite plausible."³⁵ He cites the Treaty of 945 as evidence that "from the beginning of the tenth century, Christianity in Kiev was well known."³⁶ He refers to the sermons of Hilarion and Kirill of

³³ Tikhomirov, "The Origins of Christianity in Russia," p. 199. Note that Tikhomirov places the conversion a year later than the traditional date of 988.

³⁴ Pokrovskii, *Russkaia istoriia*, p. 36.

³⁵ Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1939), p. 250.

³⁶ Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1939), p. 251. Subsequent editions change the date of the treaty to 944: *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1944), p. 278; *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1949), p. 473; *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1953), p. 477.

Turov as indications of the “level of culture attained by the [only] layer of society that at that time had the possibility to be taught.”³⁷ And he chooses the *Sermon on Law and Grace* as well as the *Tale of Igor’ s Campaign* for special praise. At no point does he indicate that there might be any problem with the source base.

Both Bakhrushin and Budovnits discuss the source base more extensively than Pokrovskii and Grekov, and are more cautious about accepting the testimony of the sources at their face value.

Bakhrushin points out the absence of contemporary Rus’ source testimony about the conversion; the earliest source testimony dates to the period after the death of Volodimer in 1015. He dismisses the *Eulogy to Volodimer*, attributed to Metropolitan Hilarion, as being pure panegyric and of being “more important for the history of Iaroslav the Wise, in whose honor it was composed, than for the history of his father.”³⁸ But he reserves most of his discussion to assessing and dismissing the reliability of the main source for the Christianization, that is the *Tale about Prince Volodimer*, contained in the *PVL*. Drawing on previous analysis by S. G. Vasil’evskii, Bakhrushin points out the similarities and parallels between the information contained in the *PVL*, on the one side, and Khazarian religious folklore, the *Life of Cyril*, and a tenth-century Arabic narrative about the conversion of the Khazars to Islam, on the other. Bakhrushin asserts that even the aphorism about the Rus’ loving to drink, “in which other serious investigators have seen an expression of the ‘national’ Russian joy, . . . has its prototype in the literature of Islamic propaganda among the Khazars.”³⁹

Furthermore, Bakhrushin sees the literature of other neighboring peoples, including Greek and South Slavic legends and Scandinavian epics, as being the sources for other motifs in the chronicle account. He concludes that, as a result, it is impossible to find any reliable historical facts in these legends and that the account of the conversion “was not written in Rus’ during the life of Volodimer, but was reconstructed in a literary way significantly later when the details were already forgotten.”⁴⁰ Even when Bakhrushin seems willing to accept the testimony of an indigenous Rus’ source, it is done so only in relation to the chronicle account. That is, if the testimony of the *Life of Volodimer* or Iakov’s *Eulogy to Volodimer* differs from the *Tale about Volodimer* in the chronicle, then Bakhrushin argues that the compiler had access to more reliable information from earlier

³⁷ Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1939), p. 252.

³⁸ Bakhrushin, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi,” p. 45.

³⁹ Bakhrushin, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi,” p. 49.

⁴⁰ Bakhrushin, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi,” p. 50.

sources that are no longer extant. If their testimony agrees with that of the chronicle, then Bakhrushin argues they were unduly influenced by the chronicle account.

Such an assessment of the main indigenous Rus' sources by a historian in the Soviet Union is remarkable in terms of its coming at a time when a resurgence of Russian nationalism was occurring. This national resurgence helps to explain the government's issuing decrees encouraging the study of the religious past. Bakhrushin's article was easily the most important article on the conversion to result from that national resurgence. Especially noteworthy is the fact that it appears in the journal *Istoriik-Markсист*, which would seem to indicate that it had official approval. Yet, not only is Bakhrushin dismissing the main indigenous sources as unreliable and as literary constructs, but he also points to foreign sources, such as Greek, Arabic, and Armenian, as being "very important for us" and as more reliable for understanding the Christianization process. One of Tikhomirov's criticisms of non-Soviet scholars was their "almost total rejection of Russian sources" (see above). Thus, Tikhomirov's criticism may also be an implicit criticism of this same rejection of the indigenous sources by Bakhrushin.

Like Bakhrushin, Budovnits is circumspect about accepting the testimony of the sources. He points out that when the chronicle compilations were being made in the 1030s and 1040s, Christianity had already been established for some time in Rus'. This means that for Budovnits Christian ideology had taken over the consciousness of the feudal class as well as that of the Church hierarchy, which acted as a transmission belt for the ruling class.⁴¹ Budovnits discerns a number of legends about missionary activity in the chronicles. Furthermore, he sees as unreliable the testimony of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, who describes the baptism of Rus' during the reign of Basil the Macedonian and the patriarchate of Ignatius: "in it, it is difficult to discover even a kernel of truth."⁴² Also like Bakhrushin, Budovnits tends to accept non-Rus' sources as being more reliable than the Rus' sources. Budovnits treats the Encyclical of 867 by Patriarch Photius about a Rus' bishop in 860 as reliable, arguing that it is "hardly likely that Photius would make up such an episode in an official document."⁴³ But this conclusion hides an assumption that the letter both is official and is what it purports to be, that is, not deceptive, either genuinely or apparently so. Although Budovnits cites Arabic sources that testify to Christianity among

⁴¹ "K voprosu," p. 402; "Kreshchenie," p. 75.

⁴² "K voprosu," p. 409; "Kreshchenie," p. 81.

⁴³ "K voprosu," p. 409; "Kreshchenie," p. 81.

the Slavs in the 840s and first half of the tenth century, and although he acknowledges that the Treaty of 945 with the Greeks testifies to Christians among the Rus', he does not think it sufficient to conclude that these Christians constituted a political party in Rus', or that Igor' was a crypto-Christian, as suggested by Golubinskii and Priselkov. Finally, Budovnits is convinced that the chronicler was a Normanist who tried to emphasize the extent of Christianity in Rus' before Volodimer,⁴⁴ although he does not explain why a Normanist would want to do so.

Tikhomirov was one of the premier fontologists in the Soviet Union. Yet, in this article we find very little evidence of a critical evaluation of the source base. Instead, Tikhomirov cites sources randomly and haphazardly. Such random references may be a result of the particular genre—a sketchy overview in article form—in which he is writing. For example, he cites the *Life of Avraamii* as though it provides reliable historical information. On occasion he cites the *Pověst' vremennykh lēt* but on other occasions, although he takes his information directly from the *PVL*, he makes no citation, as when he repeats almost verbatim the passage under the year 1037 about Iaroslav's translating from Greek into Slavonic.⁴⁵ In effect, Tikhomirov's treatment of the sources seems to represent a return to the uncritical acceptance of the testimony of indigenous Rus' sources that Grekov represented.

III

Pokrovskii's model is the simplest of the historians discussed here: "as a ruling class formed itself in Rus' cities, it began to turn its back on the religious ceremonies and medicine-men of the Slavs." The ruling class, made up of princes and boyars, imported along with Greek economic items "Greek ceremonies and Greek medicine men, i.e., Christian priests." Thus, the Christian Church, which, according to Pokrovskii's model, owed its wealth and presence in Rus' to the ruling class, overemphasized the importance of the so-called conversion. Pokrovskii sees the change as "purely superficial," merely "a new set of religious ceremonies," because "religious beliefs remained the same after the conversion as before it."⁴⁶ In accord with his model that economic gain was the motive behind Christianization, Pokrovskii asserts "incidentally" that "in the Old Rus' monastery

⁴⁴ "K voprosu," p. 410; "Kreshchenie," p. 82.

⁴⁵ Tikhomirov, "The Origins of Christianity in Russia," p. 210. The standard interpretation of this passage has since been challenged by Horace G. Lunt, "On Interpreting the Russian Primary Chronicle: The Year 1037," *Slavonic and East European Journal* 32 (1988): 251–64.

⁴⁶ Pokrovskii, *Russkaia istoriia* (1920), p. 36.

nothing was done without making a donation” and furthermore that “it was impossible to become a monk without paying money.” Pokrovskii concludes that “they were all drunk with the same mercenary spirit as was the entire life of the Old Rus’ town.”⁴⁷ Whether or not one agrees with Pokrovskii’s harsh assessment, one must admit that he does try to connect the bringing of Christianity to Rus’ with internal economic and political developments, and he sees the prime movers (although acting merely as agents of economic forces) to be the Rus’ princes and boyars, not the Byzantine clergy or emperors.

Grekov, like Pokrovskii, places emphasis on internal developments in Rus’, but he presents a more intricate model than Pokrovskii does. Grekov sees Kievan Rus’ of the period being transformed from a tribal society into a class society. The ideology of the tribal society required a faith, paganism, that “had nothing to do with classes and did not demand the subjugation of man by man.”⁴⁸ Christianity, on the other hand, was a class religion that began to penetrate Rus’ “from the ninth century.”⁴⁹ Grekov sees “complications,” however, as both Sviatoslav and initially Volodimer were opposed to the new religion. Here Grekov brings in the idea (rejected by Bakhrushin as a negative throwback to liberal historiography) that Volodimer planned “to gather all the gods that the various tribes worshipped and to create of them a pantheon in Kiev” in order to consolidate the position of the state.⁵⁰ Grekov remarks that “a certain part of Rus’ was familiar with Christianity as early as the ninth century,”⁵¹ and that, from the testimony of a letter of Patriarch Photius, “it is not improbable. . . it was the Kievan state already taking shape at that time”—that is, the reference is to Kievan Rus’, not to Tmutorokan’, as some others have argued.⁵² Grekov thinks it

⁴⁷ Pokrovskii, *Russkaia istoriia* (1920), p. 38.

⁴⁸ Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1939), p. 249.

⁴⁹ Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1939), p. 250. Grekov seemed to have some problem determining exactly when Christianity began to penetrate to Rus’. In the edition of 1944, the preposition “from” (с) was changed to “before” (до), so that the sentence reads “Christianity began to penetrate to us before the ninth century”: *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1944), p. 277. In the editions of 1949 and 1953, the sentence was changed again so that it reads: “Christianity began to penetrate to us long before the tenth century” (задолго до X века): *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1949), p. 471; *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1953), p. 476.

⁵⁰ Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1939), p. 250.

⁵¹ The verb “was familiar with” (познакомилась) was used in the editions of 1939 and 1944: *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1939), p. 251; *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1944), p. 278. In the editions of 1949 and 1953, that verb was changed to “had adopted” (приняла): *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1949), p. 472; *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1953), p. 477. The change increases the strength of the early impact that Christianity had on Rus’.

⁵² Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1939), p. 251. In subsequent editions the phrase “taking shape. . .” (складывающееся) was dropped: *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1944), p. 278; *Kievskaiia Rus’* (1949), p. 472. In the edition of 1953, “Kievan state” was changed to “Old Rus’ state”

important that by the late tenth century the Rus' rulers felt obliged to make Christianity the state religion. The establishment of Christianity, according to Grekov, "signified that the ruling class was sufficiently strong and numerous so that it wielded mighty power."⁵³ The adoption of Christianity was not "the concern of individuals," but was prepared by "all the preceding history of classes in the Kievan state."⁵⁴ Thus, Grekov sees the introduction of Christianity as a positive factor in the development of the Rus' state.

One notices an apparent inconsistency in Grekov's model. If Christianity was known/adopted in Rus' as early as the ninth century, and if it was resisted by the rulers, who were all pagans (except for Ol'ga who was baptized late in life), then why would the ruling class feel obligated to recognize Christianity as the state religion at the end of the tenth century? If they did so because Christianity had made such great inroads among the population or because they were forced by historical and economic forces, then that leaves unexplained why the adoption of Christianity showed the strength of that ruling class. The exact opposite would appear to be the case—that the ruling class was too weak to exert its own program. Nor is it clear in Grekov's model why the general population would demand a religion that exploited them. Even if Grekov meant merely that Christianity made inroads among the ruling class, then that would seem to indicate a ruling class divided between Christians and pagans—hardly an indication of strength.

In addition, Grekov's model allows him to argue that "[i]n the eleventh century, Rus' was not a backward country" and that it "moved

(Древнерусское государство): *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1953), p. 477. Both these changes lend themselves to creating the impression that the Rus' state was formed early and was not limited to Kiev and its immediate environs.

The allusion to Tmutorokan' here may be to the views of Vernadsky, who attached importance to the role of Tmutorokan' in early Rus' history. See, e.g., George Vernadsky, *Kievan Russia* (New Haven, 1973), pp. 64–69. If so, the form of the response would seem to indicate that a method of dealing with historical views propagated outside the Soviet Union is to reject the idea without mentioning the historian who propagated it or to speak of the work of a foreign historian with a dismissive tone but not discuss the substance of it. It is unusual for Soviet historians to discuss the views of foreign historians on Christianization in any detail.

⁵³ Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1939), p. 251.

⁵⁴ The editions of 1939, 1944, and 1949 all read thus: Grekov, *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1939), p. 251; *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1944), p. 279; *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1949), p. 473. The edition of 1953 adds after "classes" the phrase "and the process of feudalization" (процесс феодализации) and changes "Kievan state" (Киевское государство) to "Old Rus' state" (Древнерусское государство): *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1953), p. 478.

ahead of many European countries.”⁵⁵ He bases this argument on his idea that Rus' skipped the slave-owning stage of historical development by jumping from a tribal (or primitive communism) stage directly into feudalism, not unlike how the Bolsheviks were going to leapfrog Russia from the feudal stage over the bourgeois stage right into socialism. However, Grekov's allegiance to this idea tied him to the concept that Christianity, as an ideology reflective of the economic base, had to have been adopted in Rus' earlier than in many other European states.

Bakhrushin, like Pokrovskii, sees the agents for the introduction of Christianity into Rus' to be the boyars, the “prince's men,” such as the Varangian mercenaries “who served as living connections between Kiev and Scandinavia and Byzantium.”⁵⁶ In addition, Bakhrushin places emphasis on the “town elders” who were receptive to the introduction of a feudal-type religion in order to strengthen their feudal positions. He argues that although there is evidence of Christianity in Rus' territory in the ninth century, and although the Treaty of 945 with the Greeks indicates some Christians among the Rus' entourage, it was only during the time of Volodimer when “the first elements of the state as an organized whole began to take shape” that Christianity could be adopted in Kievan Rus'.⁵⁷ Thus, Bakhrushin concludes that the baptism of 988 was not the result of a gradual, long-term process or of the chance conversion of one man, Volodimer, but rather a “very well-thought out political step, which had as its goal the strengthening and consolidation of the rising state” by elite elements in that society.⁵⁸

Both Budovnits and Tikhomirov, in contrast to Bakhrushin, emphasize the long process of the Christianization of Rus'. In this respect, their views are closer to that of Grekov. Tikhomirov places such emphasis on the process that he tends to downplay the year 989, that is, “the official date of the establishment of Christianity” as only the date of “the most prominent event in the process. . . the recognition of Christianity as the

⁵⁵ The editions of 1939 and 1944 read this way: *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1939), p. 253; *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1944), p. 280. The editions of 1949 and 1953 add the adverb “culturally” so that the sentence reads: “In the eleventh century, Rus' was not a culturally (культурно) backward country.” *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1949), p. 475; *Kievskaiia Rus'* (1953), p. 480.

⁵⁶ Bakhrushin, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi,” p. 54. Bakhrushin, since his article is aimed at refuting the views of Pokrovskii, does not point out those areas of agreement with Pokrovskii.

⁵⁷ Bakhrushin, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi,” p. 58.

⁵⁸ Bakhrushin, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Kievskoi Rusi,” pp. 59–60.

official religion.”⁵⁹ He argues that it took “more than a century” after that for Christianity to become “truly established” in Rus’. However, Tikhomirov places “the first conversion” of “the Southern branch of the Eastern Slavs” around the year 860, the time of the Rus’ attack on Constantinople. In his dating of “the first conversion,” Tikhomirov is in agreement with Grekov’s assertion that a certain part of Rus’ adopted Christianity at that time. But Tikhomirov is less willing than Grekov to argue that this was the Rus’ state that had converted, preferring to leave it an open question as to precisely who was converted.

Budovnits also sees “the baptism of Rus’” as “a long process of the spread of Christianity among the population of the Rus’ state; it began long before Volodimer and was not completed by him.”⁶⁰ Yet, as is clear from his criticism of Parkhomenko, Budovnits did not feel that Christianity made much headway among the ruling elite until Volodimer. In contrast to Tikhomirov, Budovnits accepts the year 988 as the date of the official adoption of Christianity in Rus’.

IV

As a preliminary summing up, I venture to suggest that Soviet historiography has gone through three phases of development. The first phase included the works of Rozhkov, Nikol’skii, Pokrovskii, and, to a certain extent, Grekov. Although schematic formulations characterized this phase, a definite attempt was made to connect the process of Christianization with internal economic and political developments in Rus’. The second phase, represented mainly by Bakhrushin, and to a lesser extent by Kozachenko, Belopol’skii and Taidyshko, Zhdanov, and Iankovskii, saw a greater emphasis on a detailed discussion of separate issues, as well as a rejection of previous Soviet historiography (especially the views of Pokrovskii), as well as a critical attitude toward the reliability of indigenous Rus’ sources. The third phase, represented by Budovnits and Tikhomirov, attempted to find some common ground between a schematic formulation and the analysis of detail. Ironically, Soviet historical writings on the coming of Christianity to Rus’ went through a dialectical process of its own, the expression of which seems to be more directly related to political changes than to economic changes in the society.

My tentative conclusion is that, if the attitudes and interpretations of historians in the Soviet Union toward the Christianization of Rus’ are any

⁵⁹ Tikhomirov, “The Origins of Christianity in Russia,” p. 200.

⁶⁰ Budovnits, “K voprosu o kreshchenii Rusi,” p. 409.

kind of indicator, then anyone who deals with historiography as a form of intellectual history might do well to pay attention not only to historians' models of the past (how they think events may have occurred), but also to their opinions of other historians' works (even to the point of whether they mention them or not), and to their approach and treatment of the source base. Of these three, perhaps treatment and evaluation of the sources and of the information they contain is the most valuable indicator of a particular historian's attitudes and views.

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