

THE BAPTISM OF RELICS OF OLEG AND YAROPOLK: ETHICAL, THEOLOGICAL AND POLITICAL ASPECTS

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Abstract. A stereoscopic view on a particular historical event, in which contemporary assessments are combined with mental stereotypes of a medieval man, allows a slightly different assessment of the chronicle plot about the posthumous “baptism of bones” of Oleg and Yaropolk, Princes of Kyivan Rus, in 1044. While from theological positions it is perceived as an absurdity and a direct violation of the rules of the church, in the Middle Ages this act did not contradict the mass religious beliefs. From an ethical point of view, the action of Yaroslav the Wise was regarded as concern for the souls of the ancestors who died pagans and therefore did not claim for the salvation. The soteriological optimism that prevailed in the eleventh century in countries of the late Christianization, including Kyivan Rus, gave hope that living people were able to influence the fate of the souls of the dead. From a political point of view, the baptism of the ashes of the ancestors and their reburial in the family tomb of the Princes of Kyiv in the Church of the Tithes was aimed at expanding the circle of heavenly patrons and protectors of the princely dynasty, expanding the period of the Christian history of Kyivan Rus, and, as a result, legitimizing the power of Yaroslav the Wise.

Keywords: Kyivan Rus; Yaroslav the Wise; baptism of relics; mentality; soteriological optimism; ethical aspect; theological aspect; political aspect

1. Introduction

The growth of the influence of Byzantine culture in the countries of Southern and Eastern Europe is associated with the spread of Christianity. The universalist character of Christian values (“There is neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal 3:28)) contributed to the relatively rapid infiltration of the new teaching

into the spiritual life of previously pagan peoples. Almost everywhere – in the Balkans, on the Slavic and Germanic lands, in Moravia and Silesia, in Ireland and Scandinavia, and everywhere in Europe – the so-called “late Christianization” faced the already existing powerful layer of autochthonous culture, which it could not ignore.

The above fully applies to the Eastern Slavs. Their state formation, referred to in historiography as “land of the Rus”, “Rus” or “Kyivan Rus”, became a contact zone between Byzantium, Bulgaria, the Arab East, Western Europe and Scandinavia (Yaroslav Mudriy ta yogo doba 2019, 3). Because of this, Kyivan Rus can be considered an illustrative example of the combination of Christian universalism and vestiges of the paganism.

Conceptualizing this fact, some researchers (Yu.V. Kryanev, T.P. Pavlova, L.R. Prozorov, T.O. Galkin) suggest using the old church term “dual faith” (Kryanev & Pavlova 1990, 304 – 314), although it should be noted that the latter did not find unanimous support from the scientific community and is periodically criticized. Probably, this is not about the syncretism of paganism and Christianity and the dual confessional identity of the population of Kyivan Rus, but about multilevel mental structures. At the same time, the upper levels, represented by Christian ideology, are determinative: they are supported by the ruling elite, book culture, and the authority of the church. The lower levels are felt when ideology, for some reason, “does not work” and archetypes-symbols, mythological images which for centuries have provided a link “man-nature” emerge from the depths of the collective unconscious (Dodonov 1999; Dodonov & Dodonova 2001, 88 – 93). As noted by A. Ya. Gurevich, “under the cover of religious consciousness, whether it be Christianity or paganism, there was a powerful layer of archaic, ‘primordial’ stereotypes of practical or intellectual ‘mastering the world’, hardly amenable to description as religious ones in the strict sense of the word” (Gurevich 1990, 11).

One way or another, for medievalists, the cases of the overlap of various, sometimes contradictory, cultural and religious traditions, which make it possible to trace the paths and specificity of the spread of ideas and beliefs across the Oecumene, are of particular interest. Let us consider one of these cases.

2. Historical background

Probably the main source from which specialists in the history of Kyivan Rus get information, Laurentian List of “The Tale of Bygone Years”, composed in 1377, was recently digitized and is now available to the general public (Laurentian List 1377). On the back of 52 pages in the record of 6552, there is an indicative story about the posthumous baptism of princes Yaropolk and Oleg:

„В лето 6552. И выгребоша 2 Князя, Ярополка и Ольга, сына Святослава, и крестиша кости ею, и положиша я въ церкви святыя Богородица“ (Laurentian List 1377, 52).

In the "Annales" of the Polish chronicler Jan Długosz, this story dates back to 976: "The love and division of lands established by their father between the sons of Prince of Rus Svyatoslav could not be preserved for a long time. But after the murder of Svyatoslav, as if enormous Rus provinces and lands left by his father became small, a rivalry arose between them for greater power and superiority. In an effort to achieve it, Yaropolk, the eldest by birth, attacked the Varash fortress, in which his brother Oleg seated, killed Oleg and inherited the Drevlyansky principality, having received, in addition, his brother's blood. Vladimir ... fearing that the tyranny of Yaropolk would one day reach him, as if he was intend-

ing to avenge his brother's murder, they would surround the Kyiv fortress and Yaropolk's brother in it, killed his brother Yaropolk, who came to him in peace, at the instigation and advice of his criminal adviser Palatine named Blud, and began to rule alone all three principalities" (Shveleva 2004, 229).

The chronicles do not tell where exactly Yaropolk, killed by Vladimir's Varangians, was buried. It can be assumed that it was in Kyiv itself or, alternatively, in its environs, for example, in the "Rodna city at the mouth of the Ros River", where he held the line. And in 1044, that is, 68 years after death, the Svyatoslavovichs were formally introduced to Christianity – and this was the sacred meaning of the rite of baptism. Moreover, their relics are placed in the prince's tomb at the Church of the Dormition of the Virgin, better known as the Church of the Tithes.

This bold step by Yaroslav the Wise, challenging the dogmas of the Greek Church, was seen as a relapse into paganism and barbarism. Contemporary Orthodox descendants of the ancient Russians read the above lines with frank bewilderment. But is it only a crime against the canon that lies in the shocking Yaroslav's act of 1044?

3. Purpose and methods

The purpose of our research is to reveal the ethical, theological and political aspects of the posthumous baptism and reburial of Oleg and Yaropolk Svyatoslavovich.

To achieve this purpose, we have used the methodology of the "Annales" school, which requires revealing the historically changeable meanings of the actions of people of the past. Historians of the old school used to think that people of the past thought and structured their behavior in the same way as themselves, i.e. guided by the same principles that we are guided by. In this understanding, human consciousness remained a kind of static constant while events developed dynamically. According to the just remark of A.Ya. Gurevich, such a methodology "knows only one point of view – the point of view of an external observer who behaves like an astronomer or etymologist. This methodology, in fact, does not need a person – a person in a group, in society, as a subject of the historical process" (Spory o glavnom 1993, 17). In reality, meanings are historically changeable, and therefore they can be understood only by studying the bearers of a given culture in semantic coordinates. It was for this purpose that the founders of the French "new historical science" introduced the category of "mentality." The "Annales" representatives considered the historian's "immersion" in the mentality of the era he was going to study to be a necessary precondition for their research. That is why it is necessary to move from the chronicle narrative to the interpretation of events, to deciphering the meanings and symbols of the analyzed historical events hidden from contemporaries.

In our article, we have also used the currently popular case study methodology, as a result of which consideration of a specific situation, a single fact, becomes the basis for broader generalizations and conclusions. This method is based on the philosophical principle of the mutual transition of “single” and “general”.

The act of posthumous baptism of Oleg and Yaropolk, recorded in the chronicles, acts as a “case”, and the conclusions of the hermeneutic analysis of the chronicle plot refer to the mentality of the population of Kyivan Rus, their ideas about life and death, virtue and sin, about the other world, etc. The use of general scientific methods, namely, description, comparison, analysis has allowed to reveal the theological, political, ethical, socio-cultural, philosophical aspects of the chosen “case”. After that, the extrapolation of conclusions from the individual to the general level has been performed, which emphasizes the symbolism of the worldview of medieval man, the desire to materialize spiritual symbols (in our case – in the form of relics).

The case we have chosen has previously attracted the attention of researchers, among which the works of A. Alekseev (Alekseev 2003), A. Karpov (Karpov 2001), N. Pohilko (Pohilko 2015), A. Nazarenko (Nazarenko 2006), F. Uspensky (Uspenkyi 2002), A. Schaveljov (Schaveljov 2011), M. Kotliar (Kotliar 1989, 2009, 2016), V. Rychka (Rychka 1997, 2004, 2005, 2008), S. Bondar (Bondar 2010), L. Cherkasova (Cherkasova 2001), G. Kazakov (Kazakov 1992) and others should be noted.

4. Results and discussion

Comparing the available sources and contemporary interpretations of the 1044 act, we would like to focus on such a feature of the early Christian mentality as soteriological optimism. The confidence that the living with the help of prayers, sacraments and other ritual actions can influence the souls of those who left this world prevailed over the feeling of helplessness before the higher forces. During the reign of Yaroslav the Wise, Christian Rus still shared this optimism, which constituted the general background for the events described.

4.1. Ethical aspect

From a moral point of view, the act of posthumous baptism of the relics of Oleg and Yaropolk can be considered as caring for the souls of relatives who died a violent death, who, due to circumstances, could not count on salvation. Yaroslav the Wise was worried about the fate of his father’s brothers who left this world being pagan and were doomed to eternal torment “in the Fiery font.” The Kyiv prince was terrified by the scenes of the hellish torment of the souls of relatives, since “before a person is baptized, heaven is closed to him....” Obviously, Yaroslav harbored hope that at least in this form – through posthumous baptism – he would be able to alleviate the fate of his ancestors.

The ethical motive of concern, which determined the actions of Yaroslav, was reinforced by the conviction that he was doing good. Belonging to Christianity was considered as an unconditional blessing, and, performing the act of baptizing the relics, the Kyiv prince and his entourage had not even given any thought that they could somehow harm the deceased. As noted by A.I. Alekseev, “the awareness of the act of faith as an individual religious choice remained alien to the Middle Ages. If children could be baptized by the faith of their parents (and the people by the will of the prince and the *druzhina*), then the ancestors who died in paganism could be baptized by the will of the descendants. Awareness of this circumstance by persons who were baptized inevitably led them to strive to take care of the souls of their closest relatives who died in paganism” (Alekseev 2003, 105).

So, by the act of 1044, Yaroslav the Wise demonstrated humble concern for the souls of his uncles, counting on the alleviation of their plight. Liturgies and prayers “for the peace” were intended to alleviate the suffering of souls who did not get to the Kingdom of God. It is also likely that the Svyatoslavovichs, who were converted to Christianity “retroactively”, could have received certain preferences at the time of the Last Judgment, when the Lord “will judge the living and the dead” (2 Tim. 4: 1). It is worth recalling that eschatological expectations were very strong at that time.

In addition to the above, Yaroslav also cared about his own soul, because the circumstances of his coming to the Kyiv throne do not allow talking about the crystal purity of his conscience.

It is also possible that Yaroslav was simply afraid of the spirits of the dead, trying to appease them. In the Early Middle Ages, the spirits of the dead often disturbed the living, demanding prayerful care from them.

Finally, it was important for Yaroslav to reconcile the souls of all his ancestors – father Vladimir, his brothers Oleg and Yaropolk, who fought with each other for power in life. A.S. Schaveljov notes that in the ancient Rus chronicles, a certain hierarchy developed in the depiction of the sons of Svyatoslav: “...absolute primacy in the number and volume of references belongs to Vladimir, the winner, whose descendants formed the princely family. The smallest amount of news is related to the name of Oleg. Yaropolk occupies some intermediate position” (Schaveljov 2011, 82 – 83). The extremely negative image of the prince is associated with Svyatopolk, also tainted by the murder of his brothers. Indeed, “the winner writes history.”

The same pattern takes place under Yaroslav, who had a much greater potential for scribes than his ancestors. Chroniclers portrayed Yaroslav as an ideal ruler, bearer of Faith, Hope, Love, Wisdom and other Christian virtues. And being the righteous person, Yaroslav could not but want reconciliation between his father’s brothers, even if not in this world, so in the afterlife.

4.2. Theological aspect

From a theological point of view, posthumous baptisms are absurd, since the immortal soul and the deceased body are separated and then exist autonomously. Any external manipulations with the body no longer lead to a change in the state of the soul. These circumstances were specially recorded by the Council of Carthage in 397. Thus, Canon 26 directly concerns the prohibition of the baptism of the deceased: "It also seemed good that the Eucharist should not be given to the bodies of the dead. For it is written: 'Take, Eat' (Matt. 26:26), but the bodies of the dead can neither take nor eat. Nor let the ignorance of the presbyters baptize those who are dead."

The formalization of this prohibition was necessary due to the fact that in the first centuries of Christianity there were several cases of baptism of the dead. The origins of this can be found in the Jewish custom of "washing." Baptism rites for the dead were periodically encountered in the history of the early Christian Church, as evidenced by the words of the Apostle Paul from II Corinthians ("Otherwise what will they do who are baptized for the dead? If the dead are not raised at all, why also are they baptized for them?" (2 Cor. 5:29)). Misinterpreted, these words subsequently gave rise to some supporters of the Christian doctrine to accept baptism for the dead, which was repeatedly criticized in the writings of the Church Fathers. Posthumous baptism was common among the Montanists. Angelov D., Vasiliev P. connect the practice of baptism of the dead in Kyivan Rus with the activities of the Bogomils (Angelov 1954; Vasiliev 1891). It is no accident that Nikodim, Bishop of Dalmatia and Istria noted in a commentary to Rule 26 of the Carthaginian Council that this custom "was introduced for religious reasons and the belief that baptism regenerates the human body" (Pravila pravoslavnoy tserkvi 1912, 163).

With a high degree of probability, it can be argued that in Kyiv in the 11th century, this prohibition was well known. The reasons for its direct violation were explained by the absence of the Greek Metropolitan in Kyiv in 1044, because the current hierarch Theopempt, left Rus in connection with the outbreak of the Rus-Byzantine War. In particular, at the dawn of the 20th century, this circumstance, as well as the ignorance of the Kyiv clergy, was explained by P.P. Sokolov (Sokolov 1913, 44 – 45). Indeed, the possibility of Yaroslav's making a decision on the reburial of the Svyatoslavovichs following the teaching and by the blessing of the Kyiv hierarchs or, perhaps, some outside mentors in the Christian faith, whose views did not fit into the framework of the Byzantine canon, cannot be excluded.

Later, Orthodox authors tried to justify the extravagant act of Yaroslav the Wise: "Some people, astonished, thought this unusual act was shameful, while others, arguing, said that it was not without God's Providence that this was done, and not without the will of the newly enlightened autocrat Yaroslav, and not without advice and the blessings and acts of the hierarch" (The Book of Degrees of

the Royal Genealogy 1908, 165). In support of his words, an unknown Moscow scribe of the 16th century cited various examples from biblical and Byzantine history, referring to the authority of such great pillars of Orthodoxy as the saint kings Constantine and Irina (Elena). It turns out that even in their time the bones of “Plato, the Hellene”, the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, who allegedly prophesied about Christ, were baptized (Karpov 2001, 395). Moreover, in the “Book of the Prophet Daniel” there is a mention of the baptism of the relics of the Old Testament righteous Azarias, Ananias and Misail, who entered the fiery furnace at the behest of the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar and miraculously emerged from there unharmed, in the waters of the Jordan River (The Book of Degrees of the Royal Genealogy 1908, 166 – 167). Perhaps some of the above arguments were known at the time of Yaroslav, and the scribes of the Kyiv prince could refer to them in substantiating the legality of his actions.

A separate issue within the framework of the theological aspect of the posthumous baptism of the Svyatoslavovichs is considered the problem of ritual actions performed on their relics. Today we can only guess what rituals were performed on the remains of Yaropolk and Oleg. Most likely, the elements of this act were the consecration with the sign of the cross, sprinkling with holy water, and reading the appropriate prayers. Indeed, in the sacrament of baptism, it is water and the Holy Spirit that play a leading role. “Man consists of body and soul” is written in the Greek Nomocanon of Manuel Malaxos, “That is why Christ gave people the double effect of baptism. On the one hand, the water is sanctified by the prayers of the priest and transferred to the purification of the body. On the other hand, the Holy Spirit invisibly descends from God with the help of pure faith.” The Nomocanon of Cotelarius says: “if someone dies without accepting Christianity, within two years those who survived must carry out 24 liturgies and pay 100 bows.” Another rule of this Nomocanon says about the need to “pour 40 buckets of water on the grave of the deceased without repentance.” The belief that after the death of a person, consecrated water could help to alleviate his plight, continued to exist throughout the entire period of the Middle Ages. Elements of this belief can be traced on the material of the burials of unbaptized children. They were often buried parallel to the outer contours of the church walls in such a way that rainwater, rolling down the church roof, was consecrated and dripped onto their graves (Alekseev 2003, 105).

The central place of holy water in church sacraments has led to the fact that the very word “baptize” in some cases means “ablution”, “immersion into water”, “washing.” In 1893, I.I. Sreznevsky tried to interpret the message of Nestor the Chronicler in precisely this context – without further assigning the princes to the number of Christians (Sreznevsky 1893, 1343). But this interpretation is unlikely to stand up to serious criticism. Content analysis of “The Tale of Bygone Years” conducted by O.V. Tvorogov indicates that the word “*крѣстуму*” occurs

18 times in the chronicles – and all these times exclusively in the meaning of ritual actions (Tvorogov 1984). N.P. Pohilko adds that “A different interpretation of the word is opposed by the very context of the narrative about the transportation of bones to the church, under the vaults of which the remains of members of the prince’s family who died in Rus, already enlightened by the Baptism of 988, were kept and reburied in 1007 during the reign of Prince Vladimir. The chronicler in his article in 1007 does not report any additional ritual actions, confining himself to the words: *‘Пренесени си въ святую Богородицу’*” (Pohilko 2015, 204 – 205).

A lot of controversy among researchers was caused by the question of the degree of Oleg and Yaropolk’s belonging to the Christian faith. It is one thing if during their lifetime they were convinced pagans, it is another if they were adherents or even fully accepted Christianity. As is known, the baptismal ceremony consisted of several stages. The first of them, the announcement, assumed the fixation of the individual’s intention to accept Christianity. After that, “the audient was taught the basics of the Christian faith and life, prohibitive prayers were pronounced, the catechumen renounced Satan and accepted Christ, then the catechumen pronounced a confession of faith, followed by baptism. The ancient catechetical practice, as a rather lengthy process, by the time of the Christianization of Rus regressed in Byzantium towards short-term child proclamation” (Pohilko 2015, 208). But in the countries of late Christianization, including Kyivan Rus, in the rite of catechism and baptism, the rite of joining the faith of the pagans was given. Sometimes the distance between the catechism and baptism extended into time, but if the catechumen suffered sudden death, then in the opinion of his Christian relatives this did not serve as an obstacle to posthumous baptism.

His Grace Makarios (Bulgakov) considers the situation when both princes were announced at the court of their grandmother, Princess Olga, but did not manage to be baptized during their lifetime (Makarios (Bulgakov) 1995, 59). F.B. Uspenckyi follows the same version (Uspenckyi 2002, 166), analyzing the Scandinavian contacts of the Kyiv-Rus princes. A.V. Nazarenko hypothesized that Yaropolk had already been baptized by German missionaries during his lifetime, while Oleg died a pagan. And then, perhaps, only the relics of Oleg were baptized, but the chroniclers mistakenly recorded this act as the posthumous baptism of both princes (Nazarenko 2006). On the basis of the following recording in the First Novgorod Chronicle Younger Version (MSS from the 15th century) *“Ярополкъ княжи 8 летъ. А въ крещении кнѣжи 7 летъ”*, A.S. Schaveljov confirms the Christianity of Yaropolk (Schaveljov 2011, 81).

“If Yaropolk and Oleg”, as Pohilko concludes, “died catechumens according to the Greek rite or did not undergo confirmation according to the Roman rite, their remains could be reburied in a consecrated church without additional actions and without hindrance. But, probably, there was still an obstacle.” In his opinion, this

obstacle consisted in Oleg and Yaropolk's deviation from the orthodox Christian teachings towards the Bogomil heresy that came from Byzantium (Pohilko 2015, 210 – 211). And Yaroslav sought to overcome it by the act of 1044. But the main thing for Yaroslav, in our opinion, was not the theological, but the political meaning of what was accomplished.

4.3. Political aspect

The act of the baptism of bones and the solemn reburial of Yaropolk and Oleg in the Church of the Tithes was aimed at legitimizing the power of Yaroslav the Wise by increasing the Christian pantheon of Kyiv princes and strengthening the break with the pagan tradition. It seems that political considerations together with a temporary diplomatic break with Constantinople outweighed the importance of church rules.

There is no doubt that by the posthumous baptism of his deceased relatives, Yaroslav the Wise and his priests tried to artificially “increase” the duration of the Christian history of the Kyiv state. Indeed, after the official adoption of Christianity in 988, not even six decades had passed before the act of baptism of Yaropolk and Oleg, and for political reasons it was important to extend the Christian era of Rus at least to Olga, the first Christian princess on the Kyiv throne. The belonging of the rulers to the Christian faith in the Middle Ages played an almost decisive role in determining the foreign policy and diplomatic relations of the ruling dynasties. The baptism of the state took place from the top down, vertically: first the prince, his family, his inner circle, then the squad (“druzhina”), the boyars, and only then the “people.” At the last stage, it was not without violence, it is enough to remember how Dobrynya baptized Novgorod “by fire and sword.” The “people”, deprived of full subjectivity, did not have much choice how to follow their prince. In other words, in the act of the baptism of Rus, everything depended on the will of the first person. From a political point of view, the baptism of Olga in 955 in Constantinople and the invitation of Greek bishops to Kyiv could well have been considered as the first step on this path for the whole country.

That is why it was important for Yaroslav to emphasize that Christianity in Rus had more ancient roots, at least for the ruling dynasty. Both Oleg and Yaropolk, brought up by their grandmother Olga in the Christian spirit, did not join the Christian faith only as a result of tragic circumstances, which Yaroslav tried to correct by the act of 1044. Vague information about the possible baptism of Yaropolk “according to the Roman rite” only strengthened the position of Yaroslav.

The transfer of the relics of both princes to the Church of the Tithes made it possible to strengthen the status of the ancestral burial vault of the Christian rulers of Kyivan Rus. By the time the Svyatoslavovichs were reburied, the remains of Princess Olga and Vladimir the Great had already been buried there. The presence

of the official burial place of the Kyiv princes, according to the plan, was to expand the circle of the heavenly patrons of Rus, since the deceased members of the princely family were unofficially “equated” with the saints.

This interesting aspect of the problem is pointed out by S.V. Sazonov. Fixing the chronicle descriptions of princely pleas for help to their ancestors in moments of danger, he states: “The dead are seen by chroniclers and their contemporaries in prayer standing before God, in a position that later becomes the privilege of only official saints” (Sazonov 1995, 512). So, Yaropolk Vladimirovich cried out in prayer to his father, Vladimir Monomakh, the son of Yuri Dolgoruky got rid of inevitable death “thanks to the prayers of his father”, Alexander Nevsky was saved from a serious illness by the prayer of his father Yaroslav, etc. The facts of a prayer appeal to deceased relatives who were not considered saints were traditionally explained by the influence of pre-Christian beliefs associated with the cult of the clan. However, even in the Christian tradition itself, especially in the early stages of its spread, the souls of deceased ancestors were considered as patrons of living descendants. Posthumous panegyrics to the princes of Rus in the chronicles in the story about their death use the Old Testament phraseological unit – “and attached to their fathers”, therefore, the Kyiv princely family was likened to the family of righteous Old Testament tsars (Sazonov 1995, 512).

Increasing the number of heavenly patrons, Yaroslav was “completing” a number of Christian rulers of the Kyivan state, begun by Olga, trying to make the Christian history of Rus older for several decades and eliminate that invisible gap that separated pagan Rus from Christian Rus. As noted by A.G. Kuzmin, “Act of 1044 was actually carried out at the state level. Christian Rus united with pagan Rus, as though continuing it” (Quoted in: Karpov 2001, 396).

The idea of the political tradition, taken by Yaroslav the Wise from Vladimir the Baptist, soon was reflected in the famous “Word of Law and Grace” by Hilarion. Referring to the memory of “the great Kagan of our land” Vladimir the Great, Hilarion of Kyiv in every possible way focused on the moment of the continuity of the power of Christian princes from the power of their glorious ancestors: “Old Igor” and “glorious Svyatoslav.” “They ruled not in a bad and unknown land, but in the Rus, which is known and heard in all parts of the earth”, the future Metropolitan concludes (The Sermon on Law and Grace of Metropolitan Hilarion 1997).

Thus, the justification of the unity of the ruling princely family was supposed to contribute to the strengthening of Yaroslav’s personal power, since it was in his person and in the person of his eldest sons that the princely family continued its rule in the Kyiv state.

Conclusions

A stereoscopic view of a specific historical event, in which the interpretations of contemporary researchers are combined with the mental stereotypes

of a medieval person, makes it possible to assess the posthumous baptism of Oleg and Yaropolk Svyatoslavovich by Yaroslav the Wise in 1044 in a slightly different way. Seemingly unambiguously anomalous act of “baptism of bones” with the subsequent reburial of the princes’ ashes in the family tomb in the Church of the Tithes, which clearly went beyond the rules of the Orthodox Church, did not really stand out from the mass perceptions of that era. From an ethical point of view, the act of Yaroslav the Wise was regarded as caring for the souls of ancestors who died as pagans, and, moreover, stained themselves with fratricide, and therefore could not claim to be saved. Soteriological optimism that prevailed in the 11th century in the countries of late Christianization, including Kyivan Rus, inspired hope that living people were able to influence the fate of the souls of the dead. This is one of the differences between the medieval mentality and the contemporary believers’ attitudes. The very attitude to death, which was not considered as the end of all earthly affairs, was significantly different from the contemporary one. The dead continued to influence the life of the family, clan, community, providing prayer support and intercession before the God.

Such beliefs dissipate only in the Late Middle Ages, when the joyful confidence in the assurance of the salvation of all Christians was replaced by the fear of hell and the idea of the extreme difficulty of salvation. The blame of Yaroslav the Wise for the baptism of the relics of his father’s brothers, one of whom was probably already a Christian, and the qualification of this act as a religious crime is a phenomenon of a later period, it does not take into account the peculiarities of the medieval worldview. For the bearer of the latter, there was nothing negative in the act of “baptism of bones.” It is also possible that here the struggle of various theological currents made itself felt, in particular, the echoes of the Byzantine Bogomil heresies. Therefore, the act of Yaroslav the Wise needs to be reassessed outside the context of early Christianity in which it was conducted.

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