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Prince of the Borderlands

THE APPEARANCE OF SAINT VOLODYMYR IN RUSSIAN-
UKRAINIAN POLITICAL DEBATES SINCE 1988

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By J.J. van Binsbergen

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*Front matter contains image of:
"Saint Volodymyr Ukraine" via:
https://images.glavred.info/2016_08/1471937065-96896147.jpg*

Introduction

Welcome and congratulations on the opening of the monument to Holy Great Prince Vladimir, Equal of the Apostles. This is a major, significant event both for Moscow and the entire country and for all Russian compatriots. It is symbolic that the opening is being held on Unity Day here, in central Moscow, by the walls of the ancient Kremlin, the very heart of Russia. The new monument is a tribute to our prominent ancestor, an especially revered saint, national leader and warrior, and the spiritual founder of the Russian state. Prince Vladimir went down in history as a unifier and defender of Russian lands, and a far-sighted politician who created the foundations of a strong, unified, centralised state, which eventually united different peoples, languages, cultures and religions into one big family. His epoch was full of achievements, and the Baptism of Rus was of course the most important, defining and essential of them. This choice was the common spiritual source for the peoples of Russia, Belarus and Ukraine, and laid the foundations of our moral standards and value priorities which continue to define our lives to this day. It is this solid moral foundation, unity and solidarity that helped our ancestors overcome difficulties, live and achieve victories to the glory of the Fatherland, strengthening its power and greatness from one generation to the next. And our duty today is to work together to confront modern challenges and threats, while relying on spiritual covenants and the invaluable traditions of unity and harmony, and to preserve the continuity of our thousand-year history as we move forward.¹

Vladimir Putin
November 4, 2016

Recent confrontations between Russia and Ukraine, such as the Euromaidan Revolution and the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, caused both a widespread anti-Russian sentiment and a rise of Ukrainian nationalism in Ukraine.² In Russia these events have resulted in an increase of Russian nationalism combined with heavy critique on Ukraine and the West.³ In 2016, Russian president Vladimir Putin (1952-) unveiled a statue of a medieval saint in central Moscow. It demonstrated that modern tensions between Ukraine and Russia were expressed on the level of cultural heritage and national identity.⁴ This Saint Vladimir the Great (ca. 958-1015) was a prince of the Kievan Rus', a medieval empire that covered major parts of modern-day Russia, Ukraine and Belarus.⁵ His name in Ukrainian is Volodymyr. Many Ukrainians were clearly not in favour of Moscow's dedication to the statue of Volodymyr, as former Ukrainian president Petro Poroshenko (1965-) had critically commented on the statue in Moscow as being "a hybrid appropriation of history" by which I understand to mean that that Russia misappropriated a history that was theirs, but was not the 'proper' Ukrainian appropriation.⁶ In addition to the discussion, Ukraine's national twitter account tweeted on the exact same day of the unveiling: "Don't forget what real Prince

¹ Vladimir Putin "Monument to Vladimir the Great opened in Moscow on Unity Day" (speech, Moscow, November 4, 2016), The Kremlin: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53211>.

² Volodymyr Kulyk, "Ukrainian Nationalism since the Outbreak of Euromaidan" in *Ab Imperio* no. 3 (2014), 94-122.

³ Pål Kolstø and Helge Blakkisrud, *Russia Before and After Crimea: Nationalism and Identity, 2010-2017* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 1-17.

⁴ Per-Arne Bodin, "The Monument to Grand Prince Vladimir in Moscow and the Problem of Conservatism" in *Contemporary Russian Conservatism: Problems, Paradoxes, and Perspectives* ed. by Mikhail Suslov, and Dmitry Uzlauer (Leiden, Boston: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2020), 304-318.

⁵ Christian Ravensperger, *Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus in the Medieval World* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2012), 1-9, 191.

⁶ Bodin, "The Monument to Grand Prince Vladimir", 307.

Volodymyr monument looks like. Kyiv brought Orthodox Christianity to the Rus. Kind reminder to [@Russia](#).”⁷ A picture of the Volodymyr monument in Ukraine’s capital Kyiv was added to this post.

Putin’s speech at the unveiling is remarkable in various ways. First, given that Volodymyr’s ancient empire, the so-called Kievan Rus’, covered more contemporary countries than only Russia, one has to question why Putin called them “Russian lands.” Besides, considering Volodymyr as a Russian is questionable as there are numerous scholars that question Volodymyr’s Russian ethnicity and identity.⁸ Secondly, the Russian Federation has lived under secular rule for so long, that it seems contradictory to qualify a Christian saint as a “spiritual founder of the Russian state”, and a man who’s values “continue to define our lives to this day.” Poroshenko’s comment on the speech is also worth some attention. Per-Arne Bodin, a scholar of Slavistics, explained Poroshenko’s comment as “a gradual appropriation of another less powerful or subordinate culture.”⁹ Thus, according to Bodin, Poroshenko interpreted Volodymyr as a part of exclusive Ukrainian history which has been unrightfully appropriated by the dominant Russian Federation. Poroshenko underlined this in the same speech in which he argued that the Russians unveiled a monument of an undoubtedly Ukrainian saint.¹⁰ Clearly, Poroshenko participates in a discussion between us (the Ukrainians) against them (the Russians). He regarded the monument as a Russian misinterpretation of the ‘real’ history. In his opinion Volodymyr is inseparable from Ukrainian history. Therefore, if someone does want to honour the prince’s history, he should honour the Ukrainian history. This view raises several questions about whether the monument is a case of wrongful misappropriation, and how politicians react to misappropriation while bearing the ‘real’ history in mind. In order to clarify the discussion between pro-Russians and pro-Ukrainians about Volodymyr the Great, I will need to outline the three basic assumptions that underpin this thesis.

First of all, the basic purpose of using Saint Volodymyr in political speeches has always been to support nationalist causes. The interpretation of his history has namely been transformed parallel to the transformations of nationalism. The thesis will provide examples of a nationalistic unifying Volodymyr in times of peace and will also present that this interpretation is adjusted in times of Russian-Ukrainian rivalry.

Secondly, and related to the first assumption, this thesis argues that the Saint Volodymyr myth is an example of ‘nationalized religion’. Although myths and legends have overlapping aspects, there are some crucial distinctions between them. Unlike a historical legend, a myth “retains a permanent and active presence in contemporary societies. Here they (myths) are expressed through rituals which, although they may no longer hold any conscious significance for individuals, are able to evoke the unconscious mythological memories of a society.”¹¹ Some scholars even claim that national boundaries have been defined by myth.¹² The Volodymyr legend seemed to be transformed to such a

⁷ Twitter, November 4, 2015, 12:37 p.m.

https://twitter.com/Ukraine/status/794488777838305281?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E794488777838305281&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theguardian.com%2Fworld%2F2016%2Fnov%2F04%2Fvladimir-great-statue-unveiled-putin-moscow .

⁸ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine : A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 22-25; Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 52-54.

⁹ Bodin, “The Monument to the Grand Prince Vladimir”, 307.

¹⁰ Petro Poroshenko, “Unveiling of a monument to prominent Ukrainian poet and philosopher Hryhoriy Skovoroda” (Speech, Ljubljana, November 8, 2016), Petro Poroshenko’s official Facebook Account <https://www.facebook.com/petroporoshenko/videos/880591362075257/?v=880591362075257> .

¹¹ Guido Bolaffi, Rafaella Bracalenti, Peter Braham, and Sandro Gindro, *Dictionary of Race, Ethnicity and Culture* (London, Thousand Oakes, New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2003), 190-192.

¹² Bolaffi, a.o. Ibidem.

myth for both Russian and Ukrainians. In doing so, it has become a product of a collaborative transformation of both religion and secular nationalism. Peter van de Veer, who is a scholar in the field of religion and nationalism, introduced the term 'nationalized religion'. With this term he argued that religion, as many pre-modern traditions and identities, is nowadays often supporting nationalist expressions.¹³ However, 'inventing' or 'imagining' national traditions is not done from scratch. Rather, it happens on the foundation of, "a discourse in which different versions compete with each other in social debate and conflict."¹⁴ In order for these religious stories to serve the nationalist cause, "histories of religious conflict have to be tailored to fit a tale of national unity. Religious worship comes to be connected to moments of national glory and national remembrance."¹⁵ However, "this process of homogenization is never entirely successful, because nationalism not only unifies but also diversifies by sprouting alternative nationalisms or regional identities."¹⁶ There is latitude between myth and history which is filled by this nationalist struggle. Nevertheless, the importance of these struggles and discussions should not be underestimated. According to Van der Veer, it is the discussion about history that is essential to the production of nationalism.

Saint Volodymyr is a suiting example of this homogenization process which is commissioned by nationalism. Prior to the October Revolution Ukrainian nationalists had already appropriated the saint as the founder of the Ukrainian state. Once they had done so, Ukrainian nationalists and politicians would have to defend their appropriation until today. This regularly resulted in confrontations with Russian nationalists and politicians who claimed that the prince is vital to their history. Therefore, both Ukrainians and Russians tailored Volodymyr's history to such an extent that it legitimized their state and political actions. As the discussion is vital for the production of nationalism, this thesis will amplify each political reuse of Volodymyr. These political reuses namely both form and reflect the discussion about the medieval ruler.

Finally, interpretations of Saint Volodymyr mirror the political tensions between Russia and Ukraine. During all these tensions his legacy served as a 'lieux de mémoire' (site of memory). This term, which was initially concentrated on places and monuments, has been introduced by the French historian Pierre Nora. He argued that a 'lieux de mémoire' is a symbolic arrangement of memory. It fractures, unfolds, and ruptures continuities. As such a 'lieux de mémoire' becomes an expression of values.¹⁷ Willem Frijhoff, a Dutch historian, expanded this idea by translating the term to a 'buoy of memory.' Frijhoff interprets a 'lieux de mémoire' as flexible point of attachment. The buoy directs to the place of memory, the bond with the past. A buoy does however still have a lot of latitude, in which it can sway on the waves of different cycles, or be replaced on these waves if necessary. Frijhoff's memory metaphor adds to Nora's theory by including elements of cultural continuity and cultural dynamic at the same time.¹⁸ This thesis will demonstrate that different waves arise from certain political tensions which result in shifts in interpretations of a certain historical memory.

Volodymyr the Great's legacy can be considered as a 'lieux de mémoire', because in modern Russian-Ukrainian political speeches it embodies a certain historical continuity. Frijhoff's 'buoy of memory'

¹³ Peter van der Veer, "Religion and Nationalism" in *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Nationalism* ed. by John Breuilly (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 655-671.

¹⁴ Van der Veer, "Religion and Nationalism", 657-658.

¹⁵ Van der Veer, *ibid.*

¹⁶ Van der Veer, *ibid.*

¹⁷ Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire*, VII-XXII.

¹⁸ Frijhoff "Toe-Eigening als Vorm van Culturele Dynamiek" in his introduction to his 2001 Masterclass *Tussen Droom en Daad: Betekenis geven aan Toe-Eigening*, at the university of Antwerpen via: http://www.academia.edu/download/48902567/toeeigening_inleiding_volkskunde.doc.

reflects continuity more often than discontinuity. This is also the case with Saint Volodymyr's history, which's continuity is a model for the future of both nations. Both Russian and Ukrainian politicians desire to return to the successful rule of Volodymyr. If there are any discontinuities, politicians seem to recall the days of prince Volodymyr. His story is one of success, and will therefore always be linked to current politicians with positive national achievements. As Van der Veer's theory has already shown these are more or less tailored interpretations to serve the creation of the nation. Therefore, the 'lieux de mémoire' of Saint Volodymyr used by both Russians and Ukrainians is as flexible as the buoy presented by Frijhoff. This medieval history sways as a buoy on the waves of the political tensions from a Russian saint to a founder of Ukraine, or from a Slavic brother to a pro-European businessman. In this thesis, Frijhoff's metaphor will be repeatedly be applied to the political reuse of the saint to provide a more detailed analysis of the conflicts about Volodymyr between Russia and Ukraine.

This thesis will examine the reuse of Saint Volodymyr in Russian and Ukrainian political speeches since 1988. It will first give a brief overview of the life of Volodymyr the Great, and the myths that are attached to his legend. Secondly, the thesis zooms in on every specific moment on which Volodymyr is mentioned in Russian-Ukrainian political statements or speeches in a chronological order. This part includes an analysis of the reuse and the description of each specific political background of a certain reuse. In addition, Volodymyr's reuse will be examined by Frijhoff's buoy of memory theory. In its conclusion, the thesis will point out how the Ukrainian-Russian political conflict about prince Volodymyr exactly functions.

Chapter 1: The Prince

Volodymyr's history is complexly interwoven with Russian and Ukrainian culture in multiple facets. In order to correctly analyse the current discussions, this thesis starts by providing a historical overview of his life and the Kievan Rus'. Many scholars argue that the founders of this Rus' empire did not have roots in Slavic culture but in Varangian (Viking) Scandinavia.¹⁹ Hence, their name was 'Rus' as it derived from the old Nordic word 'Roslagen', which was presumably the name for the east of Götland.²⁰ Much has been written about this term, for it is generally accepted among scholars that the etymological root for this word paved a way for the naming of 'Russia'.²¹ Undoubtedly, the tribal people living in the regions between ancient Novgorod (contemporary Russia), and Kyiv before the ninth century were East Slavs, but they had never succeeded in forming a unity. According to a twelfth-century manuscript, which mixed facts and legends about Russian history, these tribes sought a leader. After a search they agreed to install the Scandinavian Oleg of Novgorod (ca. 845-912) as a ruler over Kyiv. This city was soon united with ancient Novgorod by Oleg. In doing so he established the so-called 'Kievan State'.²² This view on history is called 'normanist' as the theory holds that the Kievan State was found by Varangians who were also known as 'Normans'. The theory has been challenged by a number of historians over time, especially by Ukrainian scholars who have argued against this normanist view. According to them the normanist theory wrongly implied that Slavs were incapable of state-making, therefore these scholars joined the anti-normanist opposition.²³

The designation of 'Kievan Rus' was not commonly used until the reign of prince Volodymyr the Great.²⁴ In a comparable fashion to his predecessors, he too was likely of Scandinavian descent. Transmissions of kings appeared to be one of the most comprehensive problems in early Rus' times. When Volodymyr came to power, he had to kill his predecessors and capture Kyiv before becoming its new ruler.²⁵ When Volodymyr took office in 980, the Kievan Rus' was shaped differently than in Oleg's time. The state had expanded southwards, and it had defeated the Khazars on the Pontic steppes (north of the Caucasus).²⁶ Nevertheless, the reign of Volodymyr and his descendants would turn out to be a major modification, such that historians have named Volodymyr as "the sole prince of the Kievan Rus."²⁷

This success of Volodymyr is a result of two major implications. First, as a military strategic ruler, he expanded the Kievan Rus' drastically.²⁸ Secondly, and more significantly was his conversion to Orthodox Christianity, confirmed by his baptism in 988. This decision was not made without context. Volodymyr's grandmother, St. Olga of Kyiv (ca. 915-969), had already converted to Christianity a few years earlier. Nevertheless, this had remained a personal choice without any religious consequences

¹⁹ Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine : A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), 19-25.

²⁰ Sigfús Blöndal, *The Varangians of Byzantium: An Aspect of Byzantine Military History*, ed. and trans. Benedikt S. Benediktz (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 1-14.

²¹ Paul Robert Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 67-68.

²² Charles E. Ziegler, *The History of Russia* (Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO LCC, 2009), 9-10; Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 56.

²³ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, 22-25; Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 52-54.

²⁴ Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 67.

²⁵ Janet Martin, *Medieval Russia 980-1584* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 1-6.

²⁶ Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 61.

²⁷ Martin, *Medieval Russia*, 2; Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 65.

²⁸ Lawrence N. Langer, *Historical Dictionary of Medieval Russia* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002), 242-245. Walter K. Hanak, *The Nature and the Image of Princely Power in Kievan Rus', 980-1054* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2013), 10-14.

for the Rus'. Her son Sviatoslav (ca. 933-973), Volodymyr's father, had stubbornly remained loyal to pagan religions. Sviatoslav's dream of one day constructing a new pagan empire, initially seemed to be fulfilled by Volodymyr's reign.²⁹ In the beginning of Volodymyr's princely career, he erected a pantheon for diverse Scandinavian pagan deities.³⁰ However, this changed by his acute conversion to Christianity.

Scholars seem to be divided about Volodymyr's motives for converting to Christianity. Two potential motives have chiefly formed the centre in historical debates. First, an almost mythical story circulates about Volodymyr, which argues that he had sent out servants burdened with the task to test each religion on whether it was suitable for the Kievan Rus' or not. They were sent out to the surrounding areas of the Kievan Rus', which were not only pagan, but also Christian, Islamic, and Jewish. According to this tale, Volodymyr eventually chose Christianity, because he found the Jewish God was unacceptable given that he allowed his people to be exiled, and because Islam prohibited the consummation of alcoholic beverages.³¹ The historian Diarmaid MacCulloch writes about this interpretation that "given the political circumstances, it is unlikely that Volodymyr had any real hesitation in his Orthodox baptism, but it is a satisfying story for Orthodox Russia, rather reminiscent of the self-congratulatory foundation tale which the Anglo-Saxons told about Pope Gregory the Great."³² Secondly, the prince has frequently been 'accused' of undergoing a political conversion. Some scholars claim that Volodymyr "had no choice but to come to terms with Constantinople's military success, yet the new intimacy between his world and theirs also gave him a chance to exploit the internal struggles of the Byzantine imperial family."³³ Thus, when Volodymyr got the chance to marry the Byzantine princess Anna Porphyrogenita (963-1011), he did not seem to hesitate to be baptised at the Crimean town of Chersonesus, and to order all of his people to be converted.

Whatever the reason for Volodymyr's conversion was, its influence and legacy were evidently and undeniably present in the history of Kievan Rus'. Similarly, it is present in contemporary Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarussian culture. Chronicles reveal how the Dnieper river, which is located in modern-day Ukraine, became the scenery for both mass baptism and the overthrow of many pagan relics.³⁴ Nevertheless, the baptism of Volodymyr did more than the obvious increase of Christian churches in the Kievan Rus'. This 'new religion' did not come to them from Rome, but from Byzantium. Later, this would be crucial to the determination of the further religious history of Eastern-Europe. However, initially, the schism of 1054 did not seem to be more than a quarrel between churches to many of the empire's inhabitants. Besides, Christianity had altered the Rus' dramatically by creating a clearer national identity and providing the state with a highly developed Byzantine culture.³⁵ The latter caused a real bloom of art, literature, and law in the Kievan Rus'.

The conversion of the Kievan Rus' presents identical characteristics of conversion legends among the Germanic peoples around the same time. Both follow a course in which the non-Christian society stands to lose all, and in which conversion involves political subjugation.³⁶ Normans had been using

²⁹ Hanak, *The Nature and the Image of Princely Power*, 10-12.

³⁰ Langer, *Historical Dictionary of Medieval Russia*, 243.

³¹ Martin, *Medieval Russia*, 7.

³² MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity*, 506.

³³ MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity*, 506-507.

³⁴ Walter G. Moss, *A History of Russia: Volume I To 1917* (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 43; Magosci, *A History of Ukraine*, 72

³⁵ Nicholas V. Riasanovsky, *Russian Identities: a Historical Survey* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 18-21.

³⁶ Carole M. Cusack, *Conversion among the Germanic People* (London, New York: Cassell, 1998), 1-29.

this technique and similarly chronicled these histories in the same period of Volodymyr's conversion.³⁷ Whether or not Volodymyr was a Norman, it is clear that his death in 1015 left a void, which was soon filled by other successful rulers. Scholars generally speak in terms of 'a golden age' of Kievan Rus' or the rise of the three charismatic leaders of this kingdom, which includes Volodymyr's reign.³⁸

³⁷ Cusack, *Conversion among the Germanic peoples*, 22.

³⁸ Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 65-66.

Chapter 2: The Prince and Nationalism from the Romanovs until 2000

This thesis will analyse Saint Volodymyr's political use since 1988. In this specific year, Volodymyr returned to the political arena due to Gorbachev's 'liberation of religious policies'.³⁹ However, Volodymyr's history was already used by politicians prior to this specific year of liberation. Therefore, this chapter will start by providing a brief historical background on the re-use before 1988, starting with Russia's last tsar Nicholas II (1868-1918). The chapter will end with Volodymyr's reuse during the first years of Ukraine's independence until 2000.

When it comes to Christianity, Nicholas II was a 'devoted' emperor who gave permission to the construction- and attended the blessing- of the Saint Volodymyr Cathedral in Kyiv.⁴⁰ His motives for approving are clear, as he seems to agree with the words of the former Moscow Metropolitan Philaret (1782-1867) about the erection of a church being the best way to honour St. Volodymyr, instead of making a statue. According to Philaret one "cannot erect an idol of a saint who rejected idols."⁴¹ Although Nicholas had clear admiration for Volodymyr's legacy, he never linked the saint with the construction of the Russian or Ukrainian state.

During the Romanov reign, some Ukrainian nationalists did make a connection between their desired state and Volodymyr. However, the contemporary Ukrainian state was far from established. In the beginning of the twentieth century major parts of contemporary Ukraine were called "Little Russia" or simply "Ukraine" which meant "borderland."⁴² The future country's western territories belonged to Austria-Hungary, while the east was under the rule of the Russian Empire.⁴³ Nationalists were determined to establish 'Ukraine' anyhow. Prior to the First World War and the October Revolution, a significant upswing for Ukrainian nationalism arose. Political scientist John A. Armstrong discovered that Ukrainian nationalism experienced a significant growth in 1917 when the Orthodox church was cut off from its former Russian controller, the so-called 'Holy Synod'. According to him the roots of Ukrainian nationalism are very connected with the Ukrainian religion.⁴⁴ Among these nationalists was an influential anti-normanist historian named Mykhailo Hrushevsky (1866-1934). The anti-normanist view on history implies that Volodymyr's medieval Kievan Rus' empire was established by Slavic people, and not by Vikings. Hrushevsky's earlier works even claimed that "history was impressive proof of the maturity of Ukrainian scholarship; it was also a major cultural and political state-strengthening Ukraine's claim to national distinctiveness and ultimately supporting the cause of its political independence."⁴⁵ According to him, Ukraine existed long before the Kievan Rus', and he credited Ukrainians for the creation of the Kievan Rus'.⁴⁶ In Hrushevsky's view, Volodymyr reflected the high point in the development of the Ukrainian state.⁴⁷ The Ukrainian borders he had in mind

³⁹ John Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics in the Soviet Union and Successor States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 137.

⁴⁰ Sergei L. Firsov, "Emperor Nicholas II as an Orthodox Tsar: On the Question of an Autocrat's Religious Views and Religious Perceptions" in *Russian Studies in History* no. 4 (2012), 79-90.

⁴¹ Bodin, "The Monument to Grand Prince Vladimir", 307.

⁴² Faith Hillis, *Children of the Rus': Right Bank Ukraine and the Invention of a Russian Nation* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2013), 12, 196; Magosci, *A History of Ukraine*, 171-172.

⁴³ Stephen Velychenko, *State-Building in Revolutionary Ukraine: A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureaucrats, 1917-1922* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: University of Toronto Press, 2011) XI-14.

⁴⁴ John A. Armstrong, *Ukrainian Nationalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), 188-210.

⁴⁵ Serhii Plokyh, *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 6-7.

⁴⁶ Georgiy Kasianov, "'Nationalized' History: Past Continuous, Present Perfect, Future..." in *A Laboratory of Transnational History: Ukraine and Recent Ukrainian Historiography* ed. Georgiy Kasianov & Philipp Ther (Budapest and New York: Central European University Press, 2009), 7-23.

⁴⁷ Plokyh, *Unmaking Imperial Russia*, 179.

were roughly shaped in the same way as Ukraine's borders under the Russian Empire, Soviet Union and as a current independent nation. These borders were invented by seventeenth-century leaders who "reimagined the region as the centre of an epic struggle for survival among coherent and hostile confessional communities."⁴⁸ They had also called the Orthodox east Slavs as "native" inhabitants of the land surrounding the Dnieper river.⁴⁹ However, Ukrainian nationalists in Hrushevsky's time still struggled for independence as 'Ukrainophiles' had been considered as enemies of the tsarist Russian Empire.⁵⁰ Even Hrushevsky had been persecuted by the tsarist regime, because of his role in the demise of the old imperial Russian narrative and the forging of a new Ukrainian paradigm.⁵¹ This old imperial Russian narrative argued among other things that the Kievan Rus' was the precursor of the Russian Empire.⁵² Naturally, the Ukrainian nationalists used their opportunity to gain independence, when the tsar was deposed by the October Revolution in 1917. Shortly, there was a functioning independent 'Ukrainian People's Republic' which had its own national anthem, flag and coat of arms. The latter reflected a symbol believed to be used by Volodymyr the Great.⁵³ However, this predecessor of modern Ukraine was soon taken over by the invading Soviet Union in 1921.⁵⁴

Unsurprising is the absence of Volodymyr's political usage in speech and writings after the fall of the 'Ukrainian People's Republic', given that both Lenin and Stalin fiercely advocated Marx's idea that religion should be considered as 'the opium of the people', and that it is more of an obstacle than an ally. This view led to the shackling of the churches and Christians until the collapse of the Soviet Union.⁵⁵ Ukraine and its religious history was still used by Ukrainian nationalists during the harsh Soviet regime. Not only did it legitimize their state, but it also opposed the Russian dominance that legitimized itself by the Kievan Rus'.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, the Ukrainian attempts to build an independent state had failed under the dominant communist regime.⁵⁷ Communism could however not accomplish an eternal concealment of religion. This is why St. Volodymyr returned to the Russian-Ukrainian political arena since 1988.

Celebrating the Prince in 1988

National heritage is unignorable for politicians. They simply have to deal with national heritage and culture at some point. At utmost politicians could shift the content of the memory to their own political causes by reinterpretation. In this case, however, the Soviet regime successfully ignored religious figures such as Volodymyr. There was a turning point in this view in 1988. In this year, Soviet president Gorbachev even organized a national Soviet celebration for the Christian Saint Volodymyr.

In the past years, scholars have repeatedly asked themselves how and why religion could return to countries that have been under strict secular rulership. Some believe that former Soviet republics are adequate examples of states that rejected the former atheist politics, and replaced it by a new form of nationalism in which religion plays a dominant role. Often it is thought that religious nationalism

⁴⁸ Hillis, *Children of the Rus'*, 21-22; Subtelny, *Ukraine: a History*, 3-5.

⁴⁹ Hillis, *ibidem*.

⁵⁰ Magocsi, *A History of Ukraine*, 465.

⁵¹ Plokhy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia*, 5-6.

⁵² Plokhy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia*, 168; Hillis, *Children of the Rus'*, 21-87.

⁵³ Velychenko, *State-Building in Revolutionary Ukraine*, 15-225.

⁵⁴ Velychenko, *ibidem*.

⁵⁵ Dermaid MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity: the First Three Thousand Years* (London: Penguin Group, 2009), 816, 863-864, 917-920, 966, 999-1004.

⁵⁶ Plokhy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia*, 37, 168.

⁵⁷ Andrew Wilson, *The Ukrainians: Unexpected Nation* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2015), 152-171.

formed an alternative for the pessimism that USSR inhabitants expressed to a communist future (pessimism in the field of ideology, science, economics, etc.) during the mid-eighties of the twentieth century.⁵⁸ Indeed, the communistic vigorous assault on religious ideas and institutions under Khrushchev (1894-1971), and the absence of religious policies under Brezhnev (1906-1982) abated in the USSR that was ruled by Gorbachev. When Gorbachev was chosen by the Politburo to serve as a leader of the Soviet Union in 1985 he was determined to make changes. Historians argue that Gorbachev's rule altered the USSR's general attitude towards religion from then on.⁵⁹ However, this thesis will argue that it is overstated to argue that Gorbachev wanted to replace Marxist ideologies with religious nationalism. When Gorbachev organized the 1988 celebration of Volodymyr's baptism it revealed that he had another idea in mind. Therefore, it is worth to take a closer look at Gorbachev's use of religion and Volodymyr.

Gorbachev's 're-introduction' of religion started during his foreign business trips. The Soviet leader, who was raised Christian, had the habit of bringing his wife along on these many trips which would frequently face him with prosperous views and orderly societies. Often, this was exactly how he wanted the Soviet Union to be.⁶⁰ While Gorbachev himself visited the renowned Reykjavik Summit in 1986 his wife, Raisa Gorbachev (1932-1999), visited a Lutheran Church. Both his visit to the United Kingdom and the United States also incorporated moments on which the USSR president met with church leaders or paid a visit to a church building.⁶¹ In his first months of office however, Gorbachev did not touch upon religion as a key issue in his reformation of his country. Instead, his focus seemed to be on the broader topic of "human rights." This has to be considered as a distinct protest against earlier Soviet policies.⁶² Nevertheless, he was not concerned with removing Soviet policies. Gorbachev was concerned with renewing Soviet politics. This would however turn out to have major implications for the USSR's view on religion. This all becomes clear in his speech during an almost legendary meeting with the Patriarch Pimen (1910-1990) and five Metropolitans in the Kremlin in 1988. In this speech, the Soviet president admitted mistakes of the past. Moreover, Gorbachev argued that "Believers are Soviet people, workers, patriots, and they have the full right to express their convictions with dignity. *Perestroika*, democratisation, and openness concern them as well – in full measure and without any restrictions. This is especially true of ethics and morals, a domain where universal norms and customs are so helpful for our common cause."⁶³

This quotation demonstrates that there was initially no intention to replace communism by religion. Religion is simply interpreted as a subjected element of the state. This idea is carried by the fact that Gorbachev talked about a 'common cause' which is directly referring to the principle of Marxism-Leninism stating that "We have a common history, a common motherland and a common future."⁶⁴ These quotes imply that religion has been considered as a community that supported "the renewal of socialism."⁶⁵ Historian Daniel H. Shubin joins this perspective by writing about this event "As with the

⁵⁸ Victoria Smolkin, *A Sacred Space is Never Empty: A History of Soviet Atheism* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018), 194-227; George W. Breslauer, *Gorbachev and Yeltsin as Leaders* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 41-44; Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), *The New Cold War?*, 110-150.

⁵⁹ Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics*, 1-37, 137-181.

⁶⁰ Michael Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990), 24, 39.

⁶¹ Bourdeaux, *ibidem*.

⁶² Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, 33-35.

⁶³ Moscow Patriarchate, *Celebration of the Kievan Rus'* press release no. 1, 4-5 (in Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, 44)

⁶⁴ Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, 44.

⁶⁵ Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, 44-45.

amelioration of ROC [Russian Orthodox Church] oppression in earlier times, the Gorbachev Soviet government was initiating such reforms, not for the sake of the ROC, but because the Communist Party felt this would be in the best interests of the Soviet state.”⁶⁶ All in all, one can easily conclude that Gorbachev’s approach of religion is far more liberal than his predecessors. The activity that followed this meeting underlined this. During his meeting with the patriarch, it is namely decided that the one-thousandth anniversary of the baptism of the Rus’ (baptism of Volodymyr) would be a national celebration.⁶⁷ Not only is this the first time that a religious tradition is celebrated on a national level, but it also is the first time that Saint Volodymyr is mentioned by a politician since the October Revolution. Naturally, celebrating Volodymyr on a national level connected the saint immediately with both the state and religion.

The Orthodox Millennium thus was celebrated all over the USSR in June 1988. For this occasion monasteries and churches were re-opened, as were religious educational institutes and publishers. A documentary about the Russian religion was also broadcasted on Soviet channels.⁶⁸ Soviet press did definitely not fail to report on these events in a true Soviet fashion. According to Michael Bourdeaux, who is a scholar specialized in the Russian Orthodox Church, Patriarch Pimen made in an interview the statement that there was an unconditional support among believers for “the architect of Perestroika.” Bourdeaux even claims that Pimen had a “profound impression” of Gorbachev, adding that Perestroika was named more often in his interviews than God.⁶⁹ When the celebration of the Orthodox Millennium had ended in the Ukrainian city of Charkov guests were informed about the celebration that “the laying of this foundation is the incarnation of Leninist principles.”⁷⁰ Volodymyr’s reappearance in political debates functioned as a model for the renewed Soviet Union that accepted religion.

What the Soviet press did however fail to report was a controversial nationalist struggle between Russians and Ukrainians, that awoke with the celebration of Volodymyr’s baptism. These Ukrainian nationalists had protested against the celebration of the Orthodox Millennium, because Moscow appeared to be the focal point of celebration in this, while they argued that Kyiv should have been the centre of the baptism of the Rus’.⁷¹ Bourdeaux argued that this centralized attention to Moscow stressed the city’s dominance over Kyiv. However, Kyiv was not passed over by the celebration. On the 7th of June in 1988 the Pechersk Lavra was festively reopened. This cave monastery in Kyiv is a memorial place to Volodymyr the Great, because many believe he died here.⁷² Soviet television even aired the re-opening, and only a week later a liturgy would be held in the Lavra. Kyiv’s celebration even concluded with an open-air service at the statue of Saint Volodymyr on the hill, which was attended by thousands despite the heavy



Figure 1 Baptism in the Dnieper River in Kyiv by Ukrainians during the Orthodox Millennium Celebrations. Kyiv, Aid to the Persecuted (1988).
Via: Michael Bourdeaux “Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel” (1990)

⁶⁶ Daniel H. Shubin, *A History of Russian Christianity: Tsar Nicholas II to Gorbachev's Edict on the Freedom of Conscience* (New York: Algora Publishing, 2006), 171.

⁶⁷ Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity*, 1001.

⁶⁸ Jane Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church: Triumphalism and Defensiveness* (London: Palgrave, 1996), 27-42; Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, 42-64; MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity*, 1001.

⁶⁹ Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, 44-47.

⁷⁰ Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 30.

⁷¹ Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel*, 47; Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 30.

⁷² MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity*, 507-508.

rain.⁷³ All in all, Kyiv was definitely incorporated in the celebration of 1988, but the nationalists' critique on the celebration was avoided by the Soviet press.

The Prince and his Borders in 1991

The Ukrainian nationalist dream of an independent state became reality in 1991. In that time the Soviet Union had undergone major changes. The country had fallen apart into smaller independent nations such as the Baltic states, Moldova, Georgia, and Armenia. In the meantime, Gorbachev was replaced by Boris Yeltsin (1931-2007) who became the first president of the new Russian Federation.⁷⁴ While this transfer of power took place in 1991, Ukraine declared its independence after they held a referendum. An impressive 90.3 percent of the participants supported Ukrainian independence. Remarkable is the great support from Western Ukraine, while the peninsula of Crimea was least supportive of an independent Ukrainian state.⁷⁵

As mentioned, Ukraine temporarily enjoyed independence during the October Revolution. Plans for the creation of a Ukrainian statehood could easily be imitated from this Ukrainian People's Republic of 1917. The act of independence and the Ukrainian constitution thus reused identical aspects from this earlier independence. Without speaking explicitly about the Kievan Rus', the act of independence claims the 1991 independence is a result of "continuing the thousand-year tradition of state development in Ukraine."⁷⁶ An article named *Statehood and Law of the Independent State of Ukraine* published by the High Qualification Commission of Judges of Ukraine does explain this sentence by stating that "the idea of constitutionalism in Ukraine has long historical roots. It dates back to the Kievan Rus period, when the Chamber concluded agreements between the Prince and the people, as well as between the Prince and his forces, this fact is reflected in different editions of "Ruska Pravda" [law in Kievan Rus']."⁷⁷ Prince Volodymyr is briefly named in Ukraine's constitution, which had only be adopted in 1996. While this same constitution states a clear separation between church and state, it also stated that "the main element of the Great State Coat of Arms of Ukraine is the Emblem of the Royal State of Volodymyr the Great (the Small State Coat of Arms of Ukraine)."⁷⁸ This trident symbol, is a reference to Saint Volodymyr, and is roughly the same symbol that Ukrainian nationalists used in 1917.⁷⁹



Figure 2 Lesser Coat of Arms of Ukraine, which refers to Saint Volodymyr (2007, design 1918) via Wikimedia

Ukraine's exit from the Soviet Union became a significant alteration in Ukrainian-Russian relations. Ukrainian nationalists had achieved their goal, but many Russians were not at ease with this state of

⁷³ Ellis, *The Russian Orthodox Church*, 30.

⁷⁴ David Satter, *The Age of Delirium: the Decline and Fall of the Soviet Union* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2001), 53-89.

⁷⁵ Peter J. Potichnyj, "The Referendum and Presidential Elections in Ukraine" in *The Canadian Slavonic Papers/Revue Canadienne des Slavistes* no. 2 (1991), 123-138.

⁷⁶ Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, *Act of Declaration of Independence of Ukraine* (Kyiv, August 24, 1991), Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Government),

http://static.rada.gov.ua/site/postanova_eng/Rres_Declaration_Independence_rev12.htm.

⁷⁷ High Qualification Commission of Judges of Ukraine, *Statehood and Law of the Independent State of Ukraine* (Kyiv, 2014), Вища кваліфікаційна комісія суддів України, (High Qualification Commission of Judges of Ukraine), <https://vkksu.gov.ua/ua/about/visnik-vishoi-kvalifikatsiynoi-komisii-suddiv-ukraini/statehood-and-law-of-the-independent-state-of-ukraine/>.

⁷⁸ Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, *Constitution of Ukraine* (Kyiv, June 28, 1996), Verkhovna Rada (Ukrainian Government), <https://zakon.rada.gov.ua/laws/show/254%D0%BA/96-%D0%B2%D1%80?lang=uk>.

⁷⁹ Victor Basiuk "Ukraine: Towards a Viable National Ethos" in, *Ukraine: the Search for a National Identity* Ed. by Sharon L. Wolchik & Volodymyr Zviglyanich (Lanham, Boulder, New York and Oxford: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 41.

affairs. They argued that it was clear that the USSR could not survive without Ukraine. According to them, Ukraine was the founding member of the Soviet Union. At least, this was Yeltsin's point of view according to Ukraine's first president Leonid Kravchuk (1934-).⁸⁰ Historian David Marples described the Ukrainian-USSR relationship as follows: "Ukraine was the heartland, the granary, and the location of several key industries. It was also the nurturing point for many Soviet leaders: Kaganovich, Khrushchev (who had lived and worked in Ukraine though born near Kursk), Brezhnev, Shcherbytsky, and others."⁸¹ He also argues that Ukraine's independence had a major impact on the creation of nationhood in both nations. Ukraine's strong appropriation of Saint Volodymyr, and Kievan Rus' heritage in general, led to a disparaging threat made by Yeltsin when he got the first notions of Kyiv's wish for an independent Ukrainian nation.⁸² Yeltsin must have felt that a sense of 'shared heritage' was torn apart. Another historian, Andrew Wilson concluded about the appropriation of Kievan Rus' heritage by Ukraine:

Until the equation of 'Rus' and 'Russia' is no longer universal, modern-day Russians are bound to suffer an existential blackout whenever they are confronted with Ukrainian historiography. They will also have a distorted understanding of their own national origins. Most importantly, however, they will continue to find it difficult to engage with the political reality of an independent Ukrainian state.⁸³

Ukraine's exit from the Soviet Union, did not only enlarge the sense of a split Ukrainian-Russian heritage, but also led to calls for Ukrainian religious independence. As a general rule, Orthodox churches acquired autocephaly (independence) as part of their nation-building processes.⁸⁴ Despite disapproval of the Russian Orthodox Church, this independence could only be granted by the Ecumenical Patriarch. It was however the Russian Orthodox church who granted Ukrainian churches a unique status in the Russian Orthodox Church, a few years prior to the 1991 independence. After this 1991 one part of the churches wanted more far-reaching independence. The Pro-Russian wing of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church proclaimed that "independence" was heretical and against the loyalty to Moscow. This led to the existence of a pro-independence Ukrainian Church under Kyiv Patriarchate, and a pro-Russian Ukrainian Church under Moscow Patriarchate. The latter remained the canonical church officially recognized by the ecumenical patriarch, unlike the much 'weaker' Ukrainian Church under Kyiv Patriarchate.⁸⁵

Ukraine developed a growing appropriation of Rus' heritage. A great example of this growing appropriation is the appearance of Saint Volodymyr and Mykhailo Hrushevsky on the new Ukrainian currency. Even the currency's name "Hryvnia" derived from the name of the currency in the Kievan Rus'.⁸⁶ However, the newly formed Ukrainian state also experienced obstacles in their appropriation of Kievan Rus' heritage. The Ukrainian peninsula Crimea was strongly connected with prince Volodymyr as his iconic and influential 988 baptism took place in the Crimean town of Chersonesus.⁸⁷

⁸⁰ Wilson, *The Ukrainians*, 169.

⁸¹ David R. Marples, *The Collapse of the Soviet Union 1985-1991* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 108-109.

⁸² Marples, *The Collapse of the Soviet Union*, 109.

⁸³ Wilson, *The Ukrainians*, 20.

⁸⁴ Lucian N. Leustean, and Vsevolod Samokhvalov, "The Ukrainian National Church, Religious Diplomacy, and the Conflict in Donbas" in *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* no. 2 (2019), 199-224.

⁸⁵ Lucian N. Leustean and Vsevolod Samokhvalov, *Ibidem*.

⁸⁶ Russel Zguta "Kievan Coinage" in *The Slavonic and East-European Review* no. 133 (1975), 483-492;

T.V. Охрименко, (T.V. Orchimenko) "Національна Валюта в Історії Етноса" in *Лінгвокультурний Дискурс у Парадигмі Професійної Освіти* ed. by I. A. Колеснікова а.о. (Kyiv: КНЕУ, 2015), 148-153.

⁸⁷ Hanak, *The Nature and the Image of Princely Power*, 34.

For this reason, Crimea must have reflected an essential part of the Ukrainian identity in the minds of Ukrainian nationalists. Unfortunately for them, it was exactly this part of Ukraine that was least supportive of an independent Ukraine during the 1991 referendum. Besides, Crimea also had decided earlier in the same year that it desired to be an autonomous state within the Soviet Union. When the Soviet Union had collapsed and Crimea joined Ukraine, Crimean civilians urged Ukraine to accept an autonomous Crimean legislation. For almost two years Crimea had lived under these autonomous rules until Kravchuk's Ukrainian government decided to return the peninsula under Ukrainian law in 1994. During these autonomous years Crimea even had its own pro-Russian president Yurii Meskov (1945-2019).⁸⁸ The pro-Russian sentiment can be explained by statistics that presented that around 58.3% of the Crimeans are ethnic Russians.⁸⁹ The Russian Federation had reacted negatively on Kravchuk's decision to reclaim control over Crimea. Pro-Russian inhabitants of Crimea agreed. According to them, Crimea was merely connected with Ukraine since Khrushchev placed them under the Soviet region of Ukrainian in 1954. Many Crimeans had argued that they were historically connected with Russia. In addition to Crimea's religious connection with Russia by the baptism of Saint Volodymyr, Russia was connected with the peninsula by the Crimean war. This battle was fought in the 1850s and became a part of Russian political and military mythology. Russian and Ukrainian politicians avoided the issue of the historically justified control over Crimea in the years that followed, given that their relationship would remain stable as long as Crimea would be treated as a "third trail" in discussions.⁹⁰

In conclusion, it must be said that since his appearance in political debates in 1988 Saint Volodymyr the Great has immediately been connected with the state. Soviets interpreted the celebration of his baptism as a practise of the 'renewed' Soviet introduced by Gorbachev.⁹¹ However, Volodymyr's most significant contributions took place in modern-day Ukraine. Therefore, Ukrainian nationalists and anti-normanist historians were convinced that Volodymyr's history was not legitimizing the USSR, but an independent Ukrainian state. This was the reason for Ukrainian nationalists to protest against the celebratory focus on Moscow, a city where the saint himself had never been.⁹² This commemoration of Volodymyr as the model for the renewed USSR must have underlined the idea that Ukraine could not be a legitimate state in the mind of Ukrainian nationalists. The dominant Soviet interpretation left no place for this interpretation. They had argued that Volodymyr's history supported the Soviet unity between Russia and Ukraine. If one applies the 'buoy of memory' theory by Frijhoff, which compares memory to a buoy attached to history swaying on the waves of social tensions, it becomes clear that Volodymyr's buoy was anchored and interpreted in a shared Russian-Ukrainian history.⁹³ This unity was more or less maintained in the Soviet era. The declaration of an independent Ukraine in 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union, caused cracks in this unifying interpretation that the Soviet Union had imposed on their citizens. In the years that followed the independence, Ukraine developed a growing appropriation for Volodymyr and its Kievan Rus' heritage that would only be supporting and legitimizing the Ukrainian state. It would not support a

⁸⁸ Charles R. Wise & Trevor L. Brown "The Consolidation of Democracy in Ukraine" in *Democratization* no. 1 (1998), 116-137.

⁸⁹ Ukrainian Government, *All Ukrainian Population Census '2001*, (Kyiv, December, 2001), Ukrainian Government:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111217151026/http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/>

⁹⁰ Marvin Kalb, *Imperial Gamble: Putin, Ukraine and the New Cold War* (Washington D.C.: The Brookings Institute, 2015), 119-139.

⁹¹ Anderson, *Religion, State and Politics*, 142.

⁹² Bodin, "The Monument to the Grand Prince Vladimir", 307.

⁹³ Frijhoff "Toe-Eigening als Vorm van Culturele Dynamiek"

http://www.academia.edu/download/48902567/toeeigening_inleiding_volkskunde.doc.

Russian or Soviet state. As if Ukraine warned Russia that the buoy of memory was now anchored in Ukrainian history, and clearly not in Russian history. As if the Rus' history was theirs solely. Their radical appropriation meant that Russians would depend on Ukrainian history if they desired to appropriate this history. Adopting Volodymyr to enrich Russian identity would in all probability only worsen the relationship between Russians and Ukrainians. Therefore, Russia's interpretation of Volodymyr changed in the early 2000s. From then on Russian politicians would approach him as the unifying saint of the distinctive nations.

Chapter 3: The Prince in the Early 2000s

A significant shift in the Ukrainian and Russian interpretation of Volodymyr can be observed in the early 2000s. The main reason for this shift is related to a revolution that took place in Ukraine in 2004, which pressured the Ukrainian-Russian relationship. Frijhoff's theory about the buoy of memory gives a unique insight into these dynamics.⁹⁴ Applying Volodymyr's re-use in the early 2000s to this theory shows that until the revolution Russian-Ukrainian interpretations of Volodymyr swayed on calm waves just as a buoy. In this period both Russians and Ukrainians found peace in the interpretation of Volodymyr as a unifier of the nations. The so-called "Orange Revolution" in 2004 changed this unifying interpretation drastically. The revolution resulted in a distinct Russian and a distinct Ukrainian interpretation which challenged each other. In order to present the differences in interpretations, one has to analyse the Russian-Ukrainian relations before and after the revolution.

Yeltsin's scepticism about an independent Ukrainian state that he had expressed before 1991, did not withhold a good relationship between the Russian Federation and the former "Little Russia." The Russian president frequently visited Ukraine in the nineties. During these visits, both Yeltsin and Kravchuk did not speak about Kievan Rus' history in their public appearances. The successor of the Ukrainian president Kravchuk was Leonid Kuchma (1962-) who emphasized in his inaugural speech that "Historical memory, having an insight in who we are, and what kind of species we are, will help to strengthen state and secure the nation."⁹⁵ However, in a similar trend as Kravchuk, Kuchma kept silent about Saint Volodymyr in his speeches. In contrast, Boris Yeltsin's successor, Vladimir Putin, was from the start of his presidency very eager to publicly include Russian history. Kievan Rus' heritage in particular got Putin's attention. Putin stated that Orthodox Christianity was the foundation for Russian history and most probably his own history, given that he was raised by a very devoted Orthodox mother.⁹⁶ It was clear that he remained loyal to this religion in his personal life.⁹⁷ Similar to Gorbachev's idea that history supports the Russian state, Putin's inauguration speech in 2000 stated that Russians "must know their history."⁹⁸

At the beginning of his reign, Putin continued the strong Russian-Ukrainian relationships that Yeltsin and Kravchuk started. The new Russian president even attended the annual independence day of Ukraine on multiple occasions, and had 'informal meetings' with Kuchma.⁹⁹ Kuchma and Putin visited the place of Saint Volodymyr's death, the Pechersk Lavra, during Putin's visit to Kyiv in 2004.¹⁰⁰ In his speech to the hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate Putin said:

Today, the Ukrainian Orthodox Church is fully independent of the Russian Orthodox, and of anything else. The only contacts remaining between our Churches are canonical and theological. I see it as an essential part of the unity of our nations. It is the precious little something that stays intact in this unity. We must cherish and preserve it for our children and grandchildren. (...)Thank you

⁹⁴ Frijhoff "Toe-Eigening als Vorm van Culturele Dynamiek"

http://www.academia.edu/download/48902567/toeeigening_inleiding_volkskunde.doc.

⁹⁵ Leonid Kuchma, "Inauguration Speech" (speech, Kyiv, December 1, 1999) BRAMA

<http://www.brama.com/news/press/991130kuchmainaugural.html?fbclid=IwAR0MQY2zwcjk4gJKiiAs2sz0GMxgMAQh6mgbDLNjQExbPOTSSStPXWTLloDk>. Own translation of: „Історична пам'ять, розуміння того, хто ми і якого роду, допоможуть зміцнити державу і зцементувати націю.”

⁹⁶ Richard Sakwa, *Putin: Russia's Choice* (London, New York: Routledge, 2008), 3, 226-227.

⁹⁷ Richard Sakwa, *ibidem*.

⁹⁸ Vladimir Putin, "Speech at the Inauguration Ceremony" (speech, Moscow, May 7, 2000), The Kremlin:

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/21410>.

⁹⁹ The Kremlin, *President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma continued their informal meetings* (August 9, 2002) via: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/27273>.

¹⁰⁰ MacCulloch, *A History of Christianity*, 507-508.

for your service to the people of Ukraine and the entire Orthodox world. As I have said, we remember that Christianity came to Russia as the Dnieper turned into a font when Prince Volodymyr started the baptism of Russia here. Our spiritual unity took source here.¹⁰¹

In this quotation, Putin made a direct connection between Volodymyr's baptism and the modern Russian Federation. For example, he called this historical moment "The baptism of Russia." Putin's address also aimed at stressing some sort of historical connection between Russia and Ukraine. He follows up on the idea that Saint Volodymyr is not exclusively Ukrainian, but crucial to Russia. Thus, on the one hand, Putin admits that Russian history and identity is depending on Ukraine. He admits that Volodymyr's legacy is anchored in Ukrainian history, because his major events took place here. On the other hand, Putin gently criticized former political decisions such as the independence of Ukraine as they had not contributed to the unity. Arguably, Putin implies that the Ukrainian church under Moscow Patriarchate (which he claims is independent) must be credited for keeping intact the unity, which the Ukrainian nationalists and Kyiv Patriarchate had not done by their exit from the Soviet Union in 1991.

Interpreting Volodymyr as a symbol of unification of contemporary states, is a reoccurring theme in Putin's speeches in the 2000s. Not only is it shaped in such a way that it connects Russia and Ukraine, but the medieval saint has also been openly depicted as a unifier in Putin's meeting with the Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko (1954-). Already in 2000 Putin organized a meeting together with Lukashenko and Kuchma in the Russian city of Belgorod.¹⁰² Putin stressed the connection between Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus during the same trip. In order to underline their historical unity Vladimir Putin, Alexander Lukashenko and Leonid Kuchma enjoyed a sightseeing tour in the Russian city of Belgorod and laid flowers at the monument of St. Vladimir the Prince Equal-to-the-Apostles.¹⁰³



Figure 3 Laying Flowers at the Monument of Saint Vladimir the Great by (from left to right) Kuchma, Putin, and Lukashenko. Prokhorovka, Russia (2000). Via the Kremlin.

Saint Volodymyr himself has only been depicted as a unifier of states by Putin in a Russian, Russian-Ukrainian, or Russian-Belarussian political context. It could however be possible that the Kievan Rus' heritage, or history in general, has also been touched upon by the Russian president as a uniting component between Russia and multiple other contemporary Eastern European states. Putin did this in a message which congratulated Lithuania by their 750th anniversary of King Mindaugas (ca. 1203-1263) in 2008. This king of Lithuania contested the Kievan Rus' when he abandoned Christianity after the golden years of the Kievan Rus'. Nevertheless, Putin interpreted a continuing unity between the Russian Federation and contemporary Lithuania in this medieval history.¹⁰⁴ In a message to the Lithuanian president, he wrote: "These are examples of the closely interwoven fortunes of our

¹⁰¹ Vladimir Putin, "Address to Hierarchs of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under the Moscow Patriarchate" (speech, Kyiv, January 24, 2004), The Kremlin <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/22334> .

¹⁰² The Kremlin, *Acting President Vladimir Putin, Ukrainian President Leonid Kuchma and Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko visited Sts. Peter and Paul's Church in Prokhorovka Field*, official report published by the Kremlin in 2000 <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/38093> .

¹⁰³ The Kremlin, *Vladimir Putin, Alexander Lukashenko and Leonid Kuchma attended the unveiling of a monument to the soldiers killed in battle in Prokhorovka Field*, official report published by the Kremlin in 2000, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/38094> .

¹⁰⁴ Giedrė Mickūnaitė "Mindaugas (Mindowe, Mindovg)" in *The Oxford Dictionary of Medieval History* ed. by Robert E. Bjork (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

peoples (...)The personality of King Mindaugas, (...)the history of his relations with Russian princes and, above all, with one of the key statesmen of Rus during that period (...)is symbolical in this sense. The two did not always find a common understanding and occasionally sent their armed forces against each other, but with the years came to the conclusion that good-neighbourliness and a close union were a must."¹⁰⁵

Even though prominent historical events in the Kievan Rus' took place in contemporary Ukraine, Putin appropriated the Rus' heritage as a part of Russian identity in this message. However, the medieval empire covered Russia among other modern states. Therefore, Putin frequently interpreted the heritage as a unifying history of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. In his visits to these countries, Putin would stress this interpretation of spiritual unity, while recognizing an independent Ukrainian state. The continuation of this chapter will explain how Putin, his successor Dmitri Medvedev (1965-), and Ukrainian politicians were forced to reinterpret Volodymyr's history as new political tensions arose.

The Prince in the Revolution of 2004-2005

"Slavic brothers" is an expression used by both Ukrainians and Russians to describe the firm relationship that the nations maintained.¹⁰⁶ The numerous meetings between officials of these "Slavic brothers" emphasized the devout political Russian-Ukrainian relationship that took a hard blow in 2004. The reason for this hard blow can be detected in the elections for a new Ukrainian president that were announced that year. Kuchma had been suspected by the press of serious corruption. Furthermore, he was suspected of assassinating a journalist who was willing to write about this corruption scandal. Therefore, Kuchma decided not to run for a third term.¹⁰⁷ Instead, he supported his prime minister Viktor Yanukovich (1950-) in his political campaign. Yanukovich's opposition was formed by the pro-European leader of the party "Our Ukraine", named Viktor Yushchenko (1954-).¹⁰⁸

According to a scholar of Ukrainian studies, Andrew Wilson, there was a clear distinction between the two candidates which was rooted in their interpretation of the Kievan Rus'.¹⁰⁹ Yushchenko, who was holding back in Russian-Ukrainian relations, was known for repeatedly telling the history of Anna (ca. 1030-1075) a princess of the Rus'. In her marriage contract with a French king Anna had written her full name, while the illiterate French monarch signed with an 'X'. Presumably, Yushchenko used this story as an attempt to convince people that Ukraine is a European country. He argued that if Ukrainians want to be in accordance with European standards they should know multiple languages such as Russian, German, French, and English.¹¹⁰ However, in his view the Ukrainian language was key. Russians and Russian speaking Ukrainians were nevertheless convinced that Yushchenko was a Ukrainian nationalist who would ban the use of Russian language once he was president. The fact that he retold this narrative so frequently also reflected his desire to make Ukraine an EU-country. Opposed to Yushchenko's pro-European party, and in line with his predecessors was Viktor

¹⁰⁵ Vladimir Putin, *President Vladimir Putin sent a congratulatory message to Lithuanian President Rolandas Paksas on the occasion of a national holiday — the 750th anniversary of the coronation of King Mindaugas*, (message, Moscow, July 7, 2003), the Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/28993>.

¹⁰⁶ Timothy Snyder, "A Way Out for Ukraine?" in *The New York Review of Books*, 2013, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2013/12/05/ukraine-protests-way-out/>.

¹⁰⁷ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2005), 51-55, 79-80.

¹⁰⁸ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, 633-645.

¹⁰⁹ Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*, 25-45.

¹¹⁰ Laada Bianiuk, *Contested Tongues: Language, Politics and Cultural Corrections in Ukraine* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2005) 200-201.

Yanukovych. His programme could easily be interpreted as “pro-Russian.”¹¹¹ The different approaches of both candidates somehow demonstrated Ukraine’s polarizing multi-ethnic character. A census organized by the Ukrainian government presented statistics claiming that 17.3 percent of the Ukrainian citizens were ethnic Russians. The majority of them were housed in the Eastern parts of Ukraine.¹¹² On the statistics of language in Ukraine, there is much discussion, but the renowned Radzumkov Centre estimated that 44.5 percent of the Ukrainians used Russian as their everyday language.¹¹³

When the presidential campaigns started, supporters of Yushchenko soon felt that his campaign was sabotaged by the Ukrainian and Russian government. According to them, television advertisements merely reported on Yanukovych’s campaign, which was largely funded by a Kremlin-controlled energy giant.¹¹⁴ Moreover, there were suspicions that a pro-Yanukovych team (Zoriany team) had access to the Central Election Commission’s computer base. An infamous all-time low in the campaign was reached when Yushchenko himself was dangerously poisoned by his opposition.¹¹⁵ After two rounds of controversial elections, Yushchenko supporters were determined to protest against the appointment of Yanukovych as president. This protest would last for several days and took place on Kyiv’s Independence Square. Among protesters, it was called the ‘Orange Revolution’ as many protesters were wearing orange ribbons. This colour referred to the colours of Yushchenko’s campaign.¹¹⁶ Eventually, the revolution resulted in the decision of the Supreme Court of Ukraine to reorganize elections lawfully. The results of these elections favoured Viktor Yushchenko.

Yushchenko’s inaugural speech and his speech at Ukraine’s independence day presented new changes in the approach to Prince Volodymyr.¹¹⁷ Independence day was already modified as it was for the first time not attended by a Russian president. Yushchenko’s speech on this celebration stated: “Rus'-Ukraine freely chose its religion and Prince Volodymyr was christened not a leader of a subjugated nation but a leader of a state that stretched from Korus in the Crimea to the Baltic shores. Byzantium, the Muslim world and European states sought alliances with that ancient Ukraine. From those times we have sustained confidence that we can decide our own fate, we can be equal among other peoples. (...) We, the Ukrainians, have learned a significant historic truth: only freedom can save the people, only independence can lead them to a prosperous and peaceful world.”¹¹⁸

Yushchenko’s interpretation is remarkable in three ways. First, his speech depicted the Kievan Rus’ clearly as a precursor of modern-day Ukraine, and he emphasized this by explicitly mentioning the historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky in the same speech. Hrushevsky can be considered as a founder of the connection between Kievan Rus’ and modern-day Ukraine. The complete transcript of Yushchenko’s

¹¹¹ Ivan Katchanovki, “Regional Political Cleavages, Electoral Behavior, and Historical Legacies in Post-Communist Ukraine” in *Aspects of the Orange Revolution III: The Context and Dynamics of the 2004 Ukrainian Presidential Elections* ed. Valentin Yakushik and others (Stuttgart: Ibidem Press, 2014), 54-77.

¹¹² Ukrainian Government, *All Ukrainian Population Census ‘2001*, (Kyiv, December, 2001), Ukrainian Government:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111217151026/http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/>

¹¹³ Radzumkov Centre, *Poll: Most Ukrainians speak Ukrainian at Home* (Kyiv, August, 2011), TCN <https://tsn.ua/ukrayina/opituvannya-bilshist-ukrayinciv-spilkuyutsya-vdoma-ukrayinskoyu-movoyu.html> .

¹¹⁴ Wilson, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution*, 118.

¹¹⁵ Wilson, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution*, 1, 91, 96-104.

¹¹⁶ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, 633-639.

¹¹⁷ Viktor Yushchenko, “Inaugural Address by President Viktor Yushchenko” (speech Kyiv, January 23, 2005) , *Ukrainian Weekly*: <http://www.ukrweekly.com/old/archive/2005/050523.shtml> .

¹¹⁸ Viktor Yushchenko, “President Yushchenko’s Ukrainian Independence Day speech” (speech, Kyiv August 24, 2005), *The Ukrainian Weekly* <http://www.ukrweekly.com/old/archive/2005/360523.shtml> .

speech at Ukraine's independence day reveals that he carefully avoided using the words "Russia" or "Russian." Meanwhile, he used the words "Europe" or "European" on five occasions during his speech. This is rather unsurprising, given that he desired to abate the Ukrainian-Russian relation and join the European Union. Secondly, Yushchenko compared the Kievan Rus' with post-revolutionary Ukraine. According to the president, Ukraine's 'newly gained democracy' which was initiated by the Orange Revolution can be paralleled with Volodymyr's time in which the Kievan Rus' and Saint Volodymyr had freely chosen its own religion. In reality, the conversion of the medieval empire, was most likely not done by means of a 'freely chose'. Historian Charles Ziegler described the Volodymyr's Christianisation of the Kievan Rus' as "a forcible conversion to Christianity."¹¹⁹ In his inaugural address, Yushchenko even compared his taking office as president with the moment on which the Kievan Rus' received its first laws. This law was established by the Byzantine connections that Saint Volodymyr had established.¹²⁰ Finally, this speech abolished Volodymyr from his position as unifier. The Ukrainian president argued that Volodymyr is exclusively the founder of a democratic modern Ukraine, and not as the founder of Russia and Ukraine as Putin had argued. This aggressive exclusive appropriation of history became a reoccurring theme in his speeches. Moreover, Yushchenko considered post-revolutionary Ukraine as a democratic nation that opposed modern-day Russia. Thus, he reinterpreted Volodymyr's history in such a way that it supported his accusation against Russia's undemocratic interference in the Ukrainian elections. Apart from his political motive to use these stories one has to bear in mind that Yushchenko's interpretations are driven by an inner religious motivation. He was considered a regular churchgoer by the press.¹²¹

Obviously, Yushchenko's attitude towards Russia created an uneasy relationship between the "Slavic brothers." In 2008, a few years after Yushchenko's inauguration as president of Ukraine, there would be an event of critical importance to this Ukrainian-Russian relationship. The celebration of the 1020th anniversary of the baptism of the Kievan Rus' was on the agenda. When president Putin met Yushchenko in February that year, he promised the press that they agreed to celebrate this event in "worthy fashion." Yushchenko had presented a shift in the political Ukrainian interpretation of prince Volodymyr, but Putin did not attempt to change his interpretation of this history. Instead, he continued speaking about his interpretation of a unifying Volodymyr. During the press conference in February 2008 after he met with Yushchenko, he said: "We discussed the issue of how to approach the common history that our countries and peoples share. We are very conscious of the great mutual sympathy and respect our fraternal peoples [Slavic brothers] feel for each other."¹²² Whatever underpinned his promise, neither Putin nor his political replacement Dmitry Medvedev visited Ukraine that year to celebrate the baptism of the Kievan Rus' in the usual "worthy fashion" as in 2003.

Dmitry Medvedev, who succeeded Putin as president of Russia from 2008 until 2012, could however not ignore the celebration entirely.¹²³ Instead of visiting Ukraine, Medvedev decided to attend the celebration in the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow. Prior to this event, he wrote a message to

¹¹⁹ Ziegler, *The History of Russia*, 10.

¹²⁰ Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, 15-17.

¹²¹ Zenon Zawada, "UOC-MP threatens Sanctions against President Yushchenko" in *The Ukrainian Weekly* May 14, 2006, <https://web.archive.org/web/20061231061731/http://www.ukrweekly.com/Archive/2006/200607.shtml> .

¹²² Vladimir Putin, "Press Conference following Talks with President of Ukraine Viktor Yushchenko and the Second Meeting of the Russian-Ukrainian Intergovernmental Commission" (speech, February 12, 2008), The Kremlin <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24833> .

¹²³ Graeme Gill "The Medvedev Presidency" in *The Routledge Handbook of Russian Politics and Society* ed. Graeme Gill & James Young (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 27-32.

the Bishop's Council of the Russian Orthodox Church on the 24th of June. At a glance, one will notice that Medvedev's interpretation of the Rus' is highly concentrated on Russia and Moscow. In contrast to Yushchenko's speech, there is no use of the word "Ukrainian" or "European" at all. In fact, history is solidly connected with modern-day Russia in his speech. Medvedev argues that the importance of Volodymyr's baptism is linked with present themes such as "questions of spiritual and moral upbringing and the ideals of kindness, mercy, and justice that are important, not only for a religious organization, but also for society, our national traditions, and moral foundations. Today they enable Russia to preserve its historical roots and its cultural and spiritual autonomy."¹²⁴

Medvedev, who once admitted in an interview that he was baptized to Russian Orthodoxy at age 23, linked the Volodymyr legend with Russia through "values."¹²⁵ It remains unclear what exactly is meant with the values of the Rus'. According to Medvedev, the "Motherland had always adhered to these values." Does Medvedev create a parallel to the same Kievan law as Yushchenko when he talked about "mercy and justice"? Is he reacting to Yushchenko by arguing that Russia is in fact a democratic country? The values he refers to will remain unclear, but it will be unlikely that Russia had adhered to these values during the Soviet regime.

A few days later on the 29th of June, the Russian president visited the Christ the Saviour Cathedral in Moscow to mark the beginning of the celebration of the baptism of the Rus'. His interpretation of the Rus' as an exclusive Russian history continued in the speech he held. Medvedev repeated that the adoption of Christianity by Volodymyr enriched Russia's values. Remarkably, he added that Russia shared these values with Europe. He also mentioned the role of the Orthodox Church, which he stressed was centred in Moscow. Medvedev described the church's role as follows: "This common heritage to this day unites not only the many millions of Russians but also creates ties between many peoples baptized in the same font and bound by a common historical destiny and spiritual and cultural space. Evidence of this can be seen in the current Synod, which was attended by clergy from Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova."¹²⁶ In his view, this unity helps to resolve problems such as extremism. It is not unthinkable that the latter is an accusation against the Orange Revolution.



Figure 4 Medvedev handing over Saint Vladimir's relics at the 1020th anniversary of the Baptism of the Rus'. Moscow (2008). Via the Kremlin.

Medvedev seems to respond to Yushchenko's aggressive interpretation that incorporated Volodymyr's history as a part of an exclusive Ukrainian history. In contrast, Medvedev connected the Kievan Rus' heritage with the modern Russian Federation. According to him, Russia had been "returned" to its original roots of the Rus'. Or as he put it in his speech: "a revival of Russia's traditional faith." This contrasts Yushchenko's address which had claimed that Ukraine returned to the original Rus'. Even more surprising is Medvedev's interpretation of the Rus', which seemed to

¹²⁴ Dmitry Medvedev, *Dmitry Medvedev sent a greeting to participants and guests of the Bishops' Council of the Russian Orthodox Church*, (message, Moscow, June 24, 2008), The Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/528> .

¹²⁵ Dmitry Medvedev "Простые истины" in an interview with Andrey Vandenko, *Итоги* February 18, 2008, <http://www.itogi.ru/russia/2008/8/3759.html> .

¹²⁶ Dmitry Medvedev, "Speech at Christ the Saviour Cathedral marking the start of Celebrations of the 1020th Anniversary of the Baptism of Rus" (speech, Moscow, June 29, 2008), The Kremlin: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/592> .

have no real priority in modern-day Ukraine. Instead, he draws attention to his idea that “over the course of several centuries it grew into an independent patriarchate with its centre here in Moscow.” Although other countries such as Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova have been named, their function is merely that they are dependent upon the centre of a “common historical destiny and spiritual and cultural space”, which is Moscow. In his speeches and messages, Medvedev argued that Saint Volodymyr’s legacy is anchored in a shared Russian-Ukrainian history. However, according to him, this history is preserved by the Russian Orthodox Church. Therefore, if politicians want to reuse this history they do depend on Russia for its continuation of this history in the form of the Russian Orthodox Church. Only five years prior to this speech, Putin had argued otherwise. He had mentioned that Ukraine and its church (even the Ukrainian Church under Moscow Patriarchate) were independent of the other Orthodox churches.

Medvedev’s Russian interpretation of Saint Volodymyr does not exclude the saint’s European character that Yushchenko had introduced. Medvedev explicitly mentioned “Europe” in his speech and message. In all probability, the Russian president again argued against Viktor Yushchenko’s earlier speeches. Yushchenko did only mention Ukraine and Europe in his speeches. He did not foresee a fortunate prospect in connecting with Russia after the serious allegations against Russian intervention in the presidential elections in 2004. Therefore, he wanted Ukraine to join the European Union. It has often been mentioned that Ukraine is split into a pro-Russian camp and advocates of European collaboration. Kuchma had frequently made clear that Ukraine could either join the EU or Russia, a differentiation that would divide Ukraine in two.¹²⁷ In his speech in Moscow, Medvedev tried to bridge this conflict by claiming that there is no irreconcilable difference between Russia, Europe, and Ukraine because they have a common history in the Rus’ period. According to him, their histories are interwoven and are have as a result of this a similar democratic character. Therefore Medvedev defends Russia against Yushchenko’s accusation in which is proposed that Russia is an undemocratic state. On the contrary, the Russian president argued that Russia is a country “open (...) to other faiths and cultures” and is characterized by “peace and harmony” which developed since the Kievan Rus’ history.

It must be concluded that both Russian and Ukrainian politicians have to deal with Volodymyr’s legacy that is anchored in a shared history just as a buoy of memory (not in the least place because the majority of residents in both countries have ‘affiliations’ with Orthodoxy).¹²⁸ Politicians are having discussions about this history due to the fact that Ukraine and Russia both benefit and struggle with this history. Yushchenko benefits from the story because it legitimizes the Ukrainian state as a nation with a centuries years old history. However, the state also unifies Russia and Ukraine. In his opinion, this was not desirable. Volodymyr’s history was Ukrainian and could simply not be Russian in his point of view. Therefore, Yushchenko changed the perspective on Volodymyr’s history, stressing the European and democratic nature of the Kievan Rus’. According to him, this opposes the Russian state, so that a unity between Ukraine and Russia is excluded. Medvedev benefits from the story because it supports his idea that Russia is an ‘open’ Federation. He also struggles with the history as it could make Russia’s state-making dependent upon Ukrainian history. This is clearly not what he had intended as Russia should be independent in its reuse of history. Certainly, Russia should be independent of historical reuse when it would otherwise depend on a country that accused Russia. His solution is to turn the tables. Ukraine is depending on Russia for this history, because Russia is continuing the values of Volodymyr by the existence of the leading Russian

¹²⁷ Wilson, *Ukraine’s Orange Revolution*, 190-192.

¹²⁸ PEW Research Centre, *Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe* (Washington D.C., May 10, 2017), <https://www.pewforum.org/2017/05/10/religious-affiliation/>.

Orthodox Church. All in all, Saint Volodymyr is no longer the unifier that Putin had proposed, but he seems to be separated in a Ukrainian and Russian version. These polarizing dynamics will continue in the years that followed. The buoy of memory found itself in disharmony again when a second revolution took place in 2014.

Chapter 4: The Euromaidan Prince Annexed

In the years after Yushchenko's reign, Ukraine and Russia found themselves in a less tense relationship. However, when a new revolution took place in Ukraine in 2013, the relation between the two nations worsened. In this time Volodymyr had been frequently reused in political speeches. Bearing in mind the political tensions of that time, it is worth interpreting the reuse of Volodymyr as a buoy of memory.¹²⁹ In this chapter, this theory by Willem Frijhoff will again present the usage of Volodymyr as a legitimization of the state and a condemnation of the deeds of the opposition in political speeches in Russia and Ukraine from 2010 until 2015.

Prior to these tensions Russia and Ukraine formed an almost amicable relationship due to Ukraine's change of government. Despite the objections of Yushchenko's political companion, Yulia Tymoshenko (1960-), the Ukrainian presidential elections of 2010 resulted in a win for her pro-Russian rival Viktor Yanukovich. Unlike his 2003 campaign, which was overshadowed by the Orange Revolution, Yanukovich organized a successful campaign. In 2010 he was officially inaugurated as president of Ukraine. Similar to the situation in 2003, the country was still split between pro-Russian and pro-European Ukrainians. In 2010 Yanukovich again expressed an interest in a forceful Russian-Ukrainian relationship. In the meantime, the new president seemed to prioritize Ukraine's membership in the European Union.¹³⁰ His inaugural address stated that Ukraine needed to be "a bridge between East and West, an integral part of Europe." Besides, he mentioned that "Humanity, and Ukraine, needs the EU in its global reading." However, he added that "By EU I mean Earth Unity as the force capable to guarantee peaceful coexistence of various civilizations along with energy, environmental and food security."¹³¹

Whatever Yanukovich's perception of the European Union exactly was, it was clear that he desired to remain loyal to his political relationship with Russian officials. Inevitably, this forced him to adopt another interpretation of Volodymyr than Yushchenko's anti-Russian interpretation. Yanukovich therefore accepted the perspective of a unifying Volodymyr. This became visible in a blessing Yanukovich organized right before his inauguration. As an active member of the Ukrainian Church under Moscow Patriarchate, he invited Metropolitan Kirill (1946-) of the Moscow Patriarchate to bless him at Saint Volodymyr's place of death, the Pechersk Lavra. The blessing was highly controversial as a survey showed that eighty percent of the Ukrainians were not in favour of the event.¹³² One Ukrainian nationalist responded on the blessing via the Kyiv Post saying: "As a citizen of Ukraine, Viktor Yanukovich has a right to practice any religion or be an atheist. But getting a blessing for the presidency from the head of a foreign denomination, from a Russian politician, who considers Ukraine part of the 'Russian world' and 'the Ukrainian people – his own people,' openly humiliates the majority of Ukraine's denominations, and wants to return Ukraine under the rule of Moscow, is a disgrace to our state, which Yanukovich is going to lead."¹³³ Indeed, Kirill presented his belief in a

¹²⁹ Frijhoff "Toe-Eigening als Vorm van Culturele Dynamiek"

http://www.academia.edu/download/48902567/toeeigening_inleiding_volkskunde.doc .

¹³⁰ Paul D'Anieri, *Ukraine and Russia: from Civilized Divorce to Uncivil War* (Cambridge and London: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 175-210.

¹³¹ Viktor Yanukovich, "President Victor Yanukovich's Feb. 25 Inaugural Speech in Parliament" (speech, Kyiv, January 25, 2010) *Kyiv Post* <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/president-victor-yanukovychs-feb-25-inaugural-spee-60475.html> .

¹³² Michael Moser, *Language Policy and the Discourse on Languages in Ukraine under President Viktor Yanukovich (25 February 2010-28 October 2012)* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2014), 155-156.

¹³³ Interfax Ukraine "Ukraine's Nationalists Outraged at Invitation of Moscow Patriarch Kirill to Yanukovich's Inauguration" in *Kyiv Post* (10-02-2010) <https://www.kyivpost.com/article/content/ukraine-politics/ukraines-nationalists-outraged-at-invitation-of-mo-60178.html> .

strong relationship during a speech he held. This ‘unifying’ speech was identical to earlier addresses by Putin. According to the metropolitan, Yanukovych will “rebuild traditional ties with Slavic neighbours.” During the blessing, he repeatedly spoke about the “Holy Rus” which connected Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova. It remains unclear if Kirill considered this Holy Rus as a political, ethnical, or spiritual matter, given that he also mentioned Moldova in this unity.¹³⁴ However, Krill has drawn parallels between Yanukovych and Volodymyr, who both create(d) the national ties between Russia and Ukraine. Implicitly, his speech accused Yushchenko of discontinuing these ties.

Naturally, Russian politicians gladly accepted Yanukovych as Ukraine’s new pro-Russian president. Several years later, Medvedev had even publicly acknowledged that working with Yushchenko was “very, very difficult”, but that relations had changed under Yanukovych’s rule.¹³⁵ Historical topics had carefully been avoided in every published meeting or message between Medvedev and Yanukovych. When Vladimir Putin returned to the position of a Russian president in 2013 he did not attempt to erase the Kievan Rus’ heritage from the political arena. His inaugural speech clearly referred to this history.¹³⁶

Ukraine’s change of government also opened the opportunity to invite the newly re-elected Putin to the Ukrainian celebration of the 1025th anniversary of the baptism of the Rus’. In contrast to his predecessors, Yushchenko had not invited Russian officials to Kyiv for this celebration, but Yanukovych did not hesitate to invite Putin. A few hours before the start of the official service, which was also attended by the Serbian and Moldovan presidents, Putin spoke with the Holy Synod of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under Moscow Patriarchate. During this conversation, the Russian president continued with sharing his interpretation of Saint Volodymyr’s baptism as the manifestation of the spiritual unity between Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. He even seemed to transform his interpretation in a way that it fitted Yanukovych’s renovation of the damaged Russian-Ukrainian relationship which was caused by Yushchenko. Putin stated that the spiritual unity is “not subject to any action by any authority: neither government authorities nor, I would even go so far as to say, church authorities.”¹³⁷ Indirectly, Putin accused Yushchenko of trying to subject the spiritual unity to his government and authority. Nevertheless, by doing so, he temporarily healed the wounds in the Ukrainian-Russian relationships. Ukrainian and Russian politicians found an agreement in the interpretation of Volodymyr as a unifying saint.

During this celebration, there was another remarkable argument made by Putin. He had argued that the converted prince was strongly connected with Ukraine, and with Kyiv in particular. The Russian leader had stated “today’s visit was linked first and foremost with our common celebration, the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Rus. Indeed, this is the main goal of our visit to Ukraine, to Kiev, today. For any person who feels a spiritual connection to the Dnieper, Kiev baptistery, it is a special kind of pleasure and a special honour to touch these relics, worship them.”¹³⁸ In another speech, Putin also connected the Rus’ with Ukrainian lands and Russia. He had spoken triumphally about this Ukrainian-Russian relationship in 2013 while visiting Crimea together with Yanukovych for the celebration of the Russian navy day: “We can feel this shared legacy especially strongly over

¹³⁴ Moser, *Language Policy*, 155-156.

¹³⁵ Dmitry Medvedev, *Interview to Russian TV Networks* (interview, Moscow, April, 26, 2012), The Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15149>.

¹³⁶ Vladimir Putin, “Vladimir Putin Inaugurated as President of Russia” (speech, Moscow, May 7, 2012), The Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/15224>.

¹³⁷ Vladimir Putin, “Meeting with Members of Holy Synod of Ukrainian Orthodox Church of Moscow Patriarchate” (speech, Kyiv, July 27, 2013), The Kremlin

<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/18960>.

¹³⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Meeting with Members of Holy Synod” *ibidem*.

these days as our countries celebrate the 1025th anniversary of the Baptism of Holy Rus. Our blood and spiritual ties are unbreakable.”¹³⁹

The Russian-Ukrainian tensions that would drastically alter the perspectives on Volodymyr started with the downfall of Yanukovich’s office at the end of 2013. Since his inauguration, Yanukovich had continued Yushchenko’s negotiations with the EU in hope of an EU-membership for Ukraine. His approach to EU-membership was considered as very advanced.¹⁴⁰ So much the more, many Ukrainians were surprised when their government cancelled all negotiations with the EU, right before a summit which could have been valuable for the Ukrainian access to the European Union.¹⁴¹ Moreover, Yanukovich had publicly backed away from an association agreement between Ukraine and the EU.¹⁴² As a result, protesters occupied Kyiv’s Independence Square, the so-called “Maidan Square.” This square had also formed the scenery for the Orange Revolution. The protest would last for three months, and Yanukovich and his regime tried to dissolve the chaos with extensive violence.¹⁴³ In contrast to the peaceful 2004 revolution, this new “Euromaidan Revolution” resulted in more than two hundred deaths among militaries and protesters.¹⁴⁴ When it appeared that Euromaidan formed a potential threat to the regime, Yanukovich fled from his villa in Kyiv to take refuge in the Russian Federation.¹⁴⁵ Together with Putin, Yanukovich repeatedly asserted that he remained the only legitimate president of Ukraine, despite his impeachment by the Ukrainian government.¹⁴⁶ Both argued that Euromaidan was an illegal coup organized by the West. Russia’s ministry of foreign affairs even published a ‘White Book’ which condemned Euromaidan as a criminal offence against democratic policies and human rights.¹⁴⁷ In addition, Putin argued that in Ukraine “nothing had changed for the better” during the last regimes and that “corruption has reached dimensions that are unheard of here in Russia.”¹⁴⁸

The bond between Russia and Ukraine, the ‘Slavic brothers’, seemed to be irreversibly destroyed by the Euromaidan Revolution. Therefore, neither Putin, nor Yanukovich, nor Yulia Tymoshenko (who was released by Euromaidan protesters after her imprisonment on unclear grounds by Yanukovich) talked about Kievan Rus’ heritage.¹⁴⁹ If they would have done so, Volodymyr’s legacy risked to be fiercer contested than in the Orange Revolution. The tensions were simply too high for a discussion about history or national identity. Not much later the topic of Saint Volodymyr would be

¹³⁹ Vladimir Putin, “Celebrations of Russian Navy Day and Ukrainian Navy Day” (speech, Sevastapol, July 28, 2013) The Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/18963> .

¹⁴⁰ Wilson, *The Ukrainians*, 347.

¹⁴¹ Wilson, *The Ukrainians*, 347-348.

¹⁴² Rajan Menon & Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine: the Unwinding of the Post-Soviet Order* (Cambridge and London: MIT Press, 2015), IX.

¹⁴³ Wilson, *The Ukrainians*, 348-349.

¹⁴⁴ Wilson, *Ibidem*.

¹⁴⁵ Rajan Menon & Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 53-86.

¹⁴⁶ Viktor Yanukovich, “Transcript: Ukraine’s Viktor Yanukovich on the Situation in his Country” (speech, Rostov-On-Don, March 11, 2014) The Washington Post https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/transcript-ukraines-viktor-yanukovich-on-the-situation-in-his-country/2014/03/11/ffb8fefe-a942-11e3-8599-ce7295b6851c_story.html .

¹⁴⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, *White Book: on Violation of Human Rights and the Rule of Law under Ukraine (November 2013- March 2014)* (Moscow: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 2014) , officially published by the Kremlin, <http://static.kremlin.ru/media/events/eng/files/41d4da83fd4fce188b83.pdf> .

¹⁴⁸ Vladimir Putin, “Vladimir Putin answered journalists’ questions on the situation in Ukraine” (interview, Novo-Ogaryovo, March 4, 2014), The Kremlin <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20366> .

¹⁴⁹ Rajan Menon & Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 55, 70-71.

unavoidable. The Russian Federation had namely prepared itself for the annexation of the saint's place of baptism.

The Annexed Prince

Politicians were more or less forced to reinterpret Volodymyr's history when the Russian Federation annexed Crimea. This complicated place of baptism can only be understood by its past. The peninsula, which held an autonomic position under the independent state of Ukraine, had reacted drastically on the reports of the Euromaidan Revolution.¹⁵⁰ Over the years, Crimea expressed pro-Russian sentiments not in the least place because the majority of Crimean inhabitants are ethnic Russians.¹⁵¹ Districts on the peninsula had massively supported both Yanukovich's 2004 and 2010 elections, and were afraid for "extremism" if Euromaidan Ukrainians would seize power. During the Euromaidan Revolution in Kyiv, numerous armed Crimeans gathered in Sevastopol in hope for a new pro-Russian Crimean prime minister. Soon they fulfilled their own wishes. When Sergey Aksyonov (1972-) was installed as Crimean prime minister he immediately requested Russian military assistance in order "to ensure peace and tranquillity."¹⁵² Initially, Putin denied the invasion of Russian soldiers crossing the border, but it did not take long before Ukrainians, Europeans and, Americans realized that the Russian Federation had successfully executed the annexation of Crimea. Despite their condemnation of such an action, Putin organized a controversial referendum. It turned out to be in favour of a Russian Crimea.¹⁵³

Putin never attempted to hide his joy over this newly Russian Crimea. The re-use of Saint Volodymyr could not have been left out in his formal address about Crimea's access to the Russian Federation. On the 18th of March 2014, the Russian president organized a grand ceremony which was attended by Crimean officials. According to Putin, one could understand why the referendum favoured collaboration with Russia by looking at the history. He stated that "everything in Crimea speaks of our shared history and pride. This is the location of ancient Khersones, where prince Volodymyr was baptized. His spiritual feat of adopting Orthodoxy predetermined the overall basis of the culture, civilization and human values that unite the peoples of Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. In people's hearts and minds, Crimea has always been an inseparable part of Russia."¹⁵⁴ So much the more Putin disapproved of Ukraine's domination over the peninsula since 1991. He argued that "they were handed over like a sack of potatoes." Although the Russian president still referred to Ukraine as "fraternal", he rejected both the Orange Revolution and the Euromaidan Revolution. When he turned to Ukraine in his speech he promised them that Russia did not want to hurt their national feelings. According to Putin, the annexation was simply inevitable. In his view, it was the result of the idea that Crimea is Russian, Ukrainian, and Crimean Tartar. Nevertheless, Putin adds that "Crimea is our common historical legacy and a very important factor in regional stability. And this strategic territory should be part of a strong and stable sovereignty, which today can only be Russian."¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁰ Wilson, *Ukraine's Orange Revolution*, 36.

¹⁵¹ Ukrainian Government, *All Ukrainian Population Census '2001*, (Kyiv, December, 2001), Ukrainian Government:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111217151026/http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/>

¹⁵² Agnia Grias, *Beyond Crimea: The New Russian Empire* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2016), 127.

¹⁵³ Rajan Menon & Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, 83.

¹⁵⁴ Vladimir Putin, "Address by President of the Russian Federation" (speech, Moscow, March 18, 2014), The Kremlin <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603>.

¹⁵⁵ Vladimir Putin, *Ibidem*.

In this notorious speech, Putin visualized Volodymyr as a Crimean phenomenon. Thus, the historical connection between Russians, Ukrainians, and Belarussians did not start in Ukraine or Russia according to him. The connection was established in Crimea. This is an important change of perspective as he had stated that Crimea was wrongfully added to Ukraine in 1991, but that the peninsula “was and remains a Russian, Ukrainian and Crimean-Tartar land” which he imagined could only be Russian on this very moment. In other words, Volodymyr’s baptism had not taken place on Ukrainian lands. Instead it took place on a peninsula that was both Russian, Ukrainian and Tartar. Moreover, Putin argues that the pluriform peninsula that connected the Slavic brothers by the baptism of Volodymyr must be considered as “historically Russian land.” According to this same address, Putin admits that there were even negotiations about the annexation of Crimea dating back to Kuchma’s rulership. He presents the annexation as a democratic solution against the undemocratic Ukraine of Yushchenko and Euromaidan. This view drastically differs from the interpretation Putin presented during the 1025th celebration of the baptism of the Rus’. At that time he referred to Volodymyr as a Ukrainian saint.

Several weeks after Crimea joined the Russian Federation, Putin paid a visit to the new Russian territory. Officially, his visit was concentrated on the celebration of the 70th anniversary of Sevastopol’s liberation from the Nazi’s. For this reason, Putin had to visit the Saint Vladimir Cathedral. Well-known Russian naval officers had been buried in this church. Nonetheless, to Ukrainians, it must have looked highly provocative that he visited the former Ukrainian peninsula and honoured the heritage that they had considered their own even before 1991. Worsening a potential rivalry between the countries was the Kremlin’s report on the visit, which described the building as “a symbol of Russia’s spiritual presence in the Black Sea region.”¹⁵⁶ In the years that followed, Putin would often travel to Crimea while paying attention to the baptism of the Kievan Rus’. In every single trip he would mention the importance of Crimea for Russia’s history, a history that he acknowledged, is intertwined with Ukrainian and Belarussian history. One notorious trip to the peninsula was Putin’s 2015 visit to Chersonesus with the controversial Italian ex-prime minister Silvio Berlusconi (1936-). According to the Kremlin, the Russian president had proposed “to set up a Christian historical and cultural centre near the preserve that would cover all the branches of the largest religion in the world” during a guided tour at the Chersonesus excavations.¹⁵⁷ Berlusconi who joined the visit because he just “wanted to see it”, was impressed and had responded to journalists that this was “the place where Christianity in Russia actually started.”¹⁵⁸



Figure 5 Berlusconi (left) and Putin (right) touring the Crimean sites of Chersonesus. Chersonesus, Crimea (2015). Via the Kremlin.

This chapter argued that the buoy of memory had calmly swayed on the Russian and Ukrainian political waves during Yanukovich’s reign. Both Putin and Yanukovich were satisfied by reusing Volodymyr as a unifier of the two countries. Metropolitan Kirill even perceived Yanukovich as a unifier of Russia and Ukraine in the same way that Volodymyr was a unifier. In addition, Kirill and

¹⁵⁶ The Kremlin, *Visit to Cathedral of St Prince Vladimir Equal to the Apostles*, report in 2014, the Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20991>.

¹⁵⁷ The Kremlin, *Visit to Saint Vladimir’s Cathedral*, report in 2015, the Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50276>.

¹⁵⁸ Silvio Berlusconi and Vladimir Putin, “Answer to Journalists’ questions” (interview, Sevastapol, September 12, 2015), The Kremlin: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50277>.

Putin accused Yushchenko as a breaker of this fraternal relationship. However, the Euromaidan Revolution and the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation altered the use of Saint Volodymyr in political speeches. Earlier, Putin had unofficially named Ukraine the birthplace of Russian Christianity. After the annexation, Crimea took over this historical role in Putin's speeches. All in all, Putin still treated the Kievan Rus' as a unifying history between Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus. He would still refer to Ukrainians as "fraternal" even though he condemned their politics. In conclusion, Russia both benefits and suffered from the re-use of Volodymyr's legacy. On the one hand, Putin can use Volodymyr the Great to legitimize the annexation of Crimea. It was a historical moment that linked Russia and Crimea. On the other hand, Volodymyr's history took predominantly place in modern-day Ukraine. Adopting Volodymyr in political speeches, made Putin therefore dependent upon Ukrainian history. Hence, Putin reinterpreted the nature of the baptism. He concluded that this history is not Ukrainian, but Crimean. And so the buoy of memory swayed in another direction. In the years after the annexation Ukrainians will react on Putin's interpretation as some kind of 'heritage theft.' As if Russia had stolen a heritage that theirs solely.

Chapter 5: The Prince of the Battling Countries

The perspectives on Saint Volodymyr got more polarized as the clash between Russia and Ukraine evolved in a military conflict in the Ukrainian-Russian border regions. This chapter will examine the interpretations of Volodymyr since this military conflict until now. It starts with providing an overview of the origins and start of the conflicts in the Eastern Ukrainian territories of the Donbass region, Donetsk and Luhansk.

In a similar way to Crimea, the Eastern Ukrainian Donetsk region was inhabited by a significant amount of pro-Russian separatists, whose income was largely depending on Russia.¹⁵⁹ Unlike Crimea, which was inhabited by more ethnic Russians than ethnic Ukrainians, the Donbass region population only contained approximately 38.6 percent ethnic Russians.¹⁶⁰ However, most Donbass inhabitants speak Russian and their power should not be underestimated. An example of this is their creation of a political project that declared an autonomous South-East Ukrainian Republic in the turbulence of 2004. Ten years later, when tensions between Ukraine and Russia arose again, this escalated into a military conflict in the border region Donbass. Ukraine was not able to control its borders with Russia at that time, which led to the occupation of several regions in Donbass which declared themselves as “Novorossiia” (new Russia).¹⁶¹ In the midst of these hectic circumstances, Ukraine elected its new president Petro Poroshenko who was a former businessman. Although he did not speak frequently about his personal faith, the press reported that he was a practicing member of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church under Moscow Patriarchate.¹⁶² Facing both a Russian-Ukrainian war and a Russian annexation, Poroshenko was determined to sharpen his political tone towards the Russian Federation. Only on a few unique occasions, Poroshenko met with Putin during his presidency, and a small number of brief phone conversations have been archived by the Kremlin. In his inaugural speech, Poroshenko condemned the annexation of Crimea and the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine for which he held Russia responsible. It was clear that he was a pro-European instead of a pro-Russian, given that he titled Europe “Ukraine’s motherland” in this same address. Other historical topics, such as Volodymyr, were avoided in his inaugural speech.¹⁶³

Poroshenko’s avoidance of Saint Volodymyr in his earliest speeches did not alleviate the Russian-Ukrainian conflict about the prince. Putin continued his visits to Crimea after the annexation. There he repeatedly emphasized that history united the Slavic brothers. This was a statement that was likely not approved of by Ukrainians. The cultural tensions reached their most visible climax when Putin unveiled a massive statue of prince Volodymyr in the centre of Moscow in 2016.¹⁶⁴ In his speech, the Russian president controversially called Saint Volodymyr the “defender and unifier of the Russian lands.”¹⁶⁵ Putin also addressed Ukraine and Belarus as they were united by this history according to him. In contrast to his pre-Euromaidan addresses, there is no mentioning of neither

¹⁵⁹ Kalb, *The Imperial Gamble*, 220-222.

¹⁶⁰ Ukrainian Government, *All Ukrainian Population Census ‘2001*, (Kyiv, December, 2001), Ukrainian Government:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20111217151026/http://2001.ukrcensus.gov.ua/eng/results/general/nationality/>

¹⁶¹ Mikhail Suslov, “The Production of ‘Novorossiia’: a Territorial Brand in Public Debates” in *Europe-Asia Studies* no. 2 (2017), 202-221; Rajan Menon & Eugene Rumer, *Conflict in Ukraine*, XI-XVI.

¹⁶² Andriy Skumin, “The Return of the Prodigal Son, Who Never Left Home” in *The Ukrainian Week* March 30, 2012, <https://web.archive.org/web/20131030002842/http://ukrainianweek.com/Politics/46136> .

¹⁶³ Petro Poroshenko. “For the Record: Inaugural address by Petro Poroshenko” (speech, Kyiv, June 7, 2014), *The Ukrainian Weekly*, http://ukrweekly.com/archive/pdf3/2014/The_Ukrainian_Weekly_2014-24.pdf .

¹⁶⁴ Bodin, “The Monument to Grand Prince Vladimir”, 304-318.

¹⁶⁵ Vladimir Putin “Monument to Vladimir the Great opened in Moscow on Unity Day” (speech, Moscow, November 4, 2016), *The Kremlin*: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/53211> .

Ukraine nor Kyiv as a starting point for Eastern-European Orthodoxy. He simply called it “the Rus” instead of “Kievan Rus.” Remarkably, Putin does not even suggest that Crimea or Kyiv should be regarded as the historical place of baptism. A statement he had made before. As a reaction to the ceremony the official Ukrainian Twitter account “reminded” Russia that there is already a monument dedicated to Volodymyr in Kyiv, which truly was the city that brought Orthodox Christianity to the Rus’.¹⁶⁶ In a response, the official Russian Twitter account wrote: “Kind reminder to @Ukraine: Prince Vladimir/Volodymyr united our people through Orthodoxy while you're abusing it by spreading hatred among us.”¹⁶⁷

Many Ukrainians would have considered it offensive that Putin interpreted the prince as a unifier, given that he forcefully “united” Crimea to the Russian Federation in their perspective. Besides, many held Putin responsible for the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine. However, using Volodymyr as unifier is a strategic option for Putin for three reasons. First, it depicts Putin as a peaceful politician who in the tradition of Volodymyr desired nothing more than a peaceful Ukrainian-Russian unity. Secondly, if Putin is depicted as the peaceful seeker for unity than Ukraine is accused of being the one initiating and maintaining the military conflict. Lastly, a unifying Volodymyr could legitimize the annexation of Crimea. As if the annexation was an embodiment of this unification of Russia and Ukraine.

Petro Poroshenko had also made a comment on the new Russian monument claiming it was a “hybrid appropriation of history.”¹⁶⁸ This probably must be understood as his idea that Russians can honour this saint, but should include Ukraine in this argument. That would be the ‘proper’ interpretation in Poroshenko’s vision. In a speech during his visit to Slovenia, he phrased the situation as follows: “they have unveiled a monument of our first apostle of Kyiv, prince Volodymyr.”¹⁶⁹ This all carries the idea that Poroshenko is convinced that Volodymyr is a part of an exclusive Ukrainian history. Moreover, his critique seems to imply that this exclusive national Ukrainian heritage has been stolen by an domineering Russia. As if the Volodymyr myth was only attached to a Ukrainian history, while Russia unrightfully adopted him as part of their history. He however avoids the obvious critique that Putin had stressed, namely that the history of Kievan Rus’ unites Russia and Ukraine. Therefore, the Russian appropriation of Volodymyr can easily result in the depiction of Ukrainians as dividers. Of course, Russia’s twitter account depicted Ukrainians quite literally in this way. Meanwhile, the Russian appropriation intends that the Russians themselves are unifiers. Naturally, they are contested by Ukrainians who claim that Russians are historical forgers of their history. Furthermore, most Ukrainians held Russians responsible for disunifying circumstances such as the military conflict in Eastern Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea.

This discussion about the attachment of the political reuse to its history continued in the following years. In 2018, when a military parade was taking place in Kyiv, Poroshenko would indirectly respond for a second time to Putin’s controversial unveiling of the monument. In his speech he underlined

¹⁶⁶Twitter, November 4, 2016, 12:37 p.m.

https://twitter.com/Ukraine/status/794488777838305281?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E794488777838305281&ref_url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.theguardian.com%2Fworld%2F2016%2Fnov%2F04%2Fvladimir-great-statue-unveiled-putin-moscow .

¹⁶⁷ Twitter, November 5, 2016, 09:25 a.m. <https://twitter.com/Russia/status/794817949295144960> .

¹⁶⁸ Bodin, “The Monument to Grand Prince Vladimir”, 307.

¹⁶⁹ Petro Poroshenko, “Unveiling of a monument to prominent Ukrainian poet and philosopher Hryhorii Skovoroda” (Speech, Ljubljana, November 8, 2016), Petro Poroshenko’s official Facebook Account <https://www.facebook.com/petroporoshenko/videos/880591362075257/?v=880591362075257> .

Kyiv's importance in the distribution of Eastern European Christianity.¹⁷⁰ The Ukrainian president also argued that Volodymyr's baptism led to a specific Ukrainian religion. Therefore, Poroshenko gave permission to the establishment of a recognized and fully independent Ukrainian Orthodox Church.¹⁷¹ This autocephaly was granted to the Kyiv Patriarchate by the Ecumenical Patriarchate in the same year. Not only religion, but Ukraine in general should free itself from Russia (and connect with the EU), according to Poroshenko. All in all, his speech argued that Volodymyr's history legitimizes a Ukrainian state which is separated from Russia.

Putin seems to echo this form of a disunifying interpretation during the celebration of the 1030th baptism of the Rus'. It was celebrated by the Russian president in Moscow instead of Kyiv. Only his prime minister, Dmitry Medvedev had done so in the problematic Russian-Ukrainian relationships under Viktor Yushchenko. Putin's speech in Russia's capital could be considered as more provocative than his speech at the Volodymyr monument two years before. He had namely not mentioned "Ukraine", "Kyiv" or "Crimea" once. In this speech, the Russian president carefully titled the prince as a unifier of- not of Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus- but of the "people living in the ancient Rus."¹⁷² In fact, Volodymyr had been approached as the establisher of Russian statehood and identity, and the one responsible for giving Russia "a thousand year history."

Ukraine elected a new president after Poroshenko's presidency whose name was Volodymyr Zelenskyy (1978-). The conflicts between pro-Russian separatists, Ukraine, and the Russian Federation had not been calmed since 2014. Therefore Zelenskyy, who had ironically played the Ukrainian president as an actor in a television-show, demanded the return of military imprisoned Ukrainians by Russians, and was willing to have a dialogue.¹⁷³ The cultural discussion about Volodymyr the Great that had started under Putin and Poroshenko, continued under Zelenskyy. In a similar fashion to Poroshenko, Zelenskyy, who is Jewish himself, argued in his speeches that Volodymyr's baptism legitimized an independent Ukraine that is "centuries old."¹⁷⁴ Meanwhile, Zelenskyy acknowledged that Ukraine is a young country whose struggle for independence only started a hundred years ago. His opinion that Ukraine's Volodymyr history was distanced from Russia resembled Poroshenko's line of thought. Remarkable is Zelenskyy's perception of the Ukrainian. In his inaugural address, he argued that being Ukrainian was a matter of the heart. During independence day he added that the Ukrainian has "the desire for independence" "embedded in our genetic code." Thus, history and genetics constructed Ukraine according to Zelenskyy. As a result, this perception excludes Russia from Saint Volodymyr's history, as they do not belong to this specific "genetic code."

¹⁷⁰ Petro Poroshenko "President Petro Poroshenko's speech at the military parade in Kyiv" (speech, Kyiv, August 31, 2018) Presidential Administration of Ukraine in *The Ukrainian Weekly*, <http://www.ukrweekly.com/uw/wp/president-petro-poroshenkos-speech-at-the-military-parade-in-kyiv/>.

¹⁷¹ Lucian N. Leustean, and Vsevolod Samokhvalov, "The Ukrainian National Church, Religious Diplomacy, and the Conflict in Donbas" in *Journal of Orthodox Christian Studies* no. 2 (2019), 208-212.

¹⁷² Vladimir Putin, "1030th anniversary of Baptism of Rus celebrations" (speech, Moscow, July 28, 2018), The Kremlin, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58123>.

¹⁷³ Government of Ukraine, "Biography Volodymyr Oleksandrovych Zelenskyy", officially published by the *President of Ukraine Website* in 2019 via: <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/president/biografiya>.

¹⁷⁴ Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "Speech by the President of Ukraine during the Independence Day festivities" (speech, Kyiv, August, 24 2019), The Ukrainian Government, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/vistup-prezidenta-ukrayini-pid-chas-urochistostej-z-nagodi-d-56937>; Volodymyr Zelenskyy, "Inaugural Address" (speech Kyiv, May 20, 2019), The Ukrainian Government, <https://www.president.gov.ua/en/news/inavguracijna-promova-prezidenta-ukrayini-volodimira-zelensk-55489>.

When Poroshenko was still in power he mentioned that the establishment of an independent Ukrainian Orthodox church goes far beyond religion.¹⁷⁵ This might be true given that Ukraine's relationship with religion has influenced their politics and view on history. However, views on history were not merely variable in Ukraine, but also in Russia. After the confrontations between the countries in 2005 and 2014, it appeared that using Volodymyr has its advantages, but also its downsides. If using Volodymyr gives too many disadvantages politicians will certainly tailor his history in such a way that it supports their politics at that moment. The speeches by Putin, Poroshenko, and Zelenskyy from 2015 until now demonstrated that appropriating Volodymyr as a unifier is as controversial as denying him as a unifier. Poroshenko and Zelenskyy's speeches made clear that Volodymyr's history was Ukrainian and could not be considered Russian. At this moment the buoy of memory sways back and forth on the waves of political tensions. Every specific confrontation between the countries will mean a potential alteration to the perspective on Volodymyr. In the end, Russian and Ukrainian politicians both aim at using Volodymyr to legitimize their own national identities, and to condemn the actions of their opposition.

¹⁷⁵ Petro Poroshenko "President Petro Poroshenko's speech at the military parade in Kyiv" (speech, Kyiv, August 31, 2018) Presidential Administration of Ukraine in *The Ukrainian Weekly*, <http://www.ukrweekly.com/uwvp/president-petro-poroshenkos-speech-at-the-military-parade-in-kyiv/>.

Conclusion

This thesis has examined the appearance of Saint Volodymyr in political Russian-Ukrainian debates since 1988. Volodymyr's baptism and his successful establishment of the Kievan Rus' are reasons for Ukrainian and Russian politicians to reuse Volodymyr as a valuable historical model for contemporary politics. Volodymyr's legacy can be approached as a 'buoy of memory'. This is a term introduced by historian Willem Frijhoff. It compares historical memory to a buoy that is attached to the 'real' history while swaying along with the waves of political tensions. In both Russia and Ukraine he is considered as the founder of the nation who massively contributed to their culture and religion. However, the buoy of memory is more flexible than this static reuse. Due to this flexibility, the buoy is able to sway parallel to the waves of the Russian-Ukrainian political tensions. Its movements, in the form of reinterpretations, demonstrate how the cultural conflict about Volodymyr between the two nations operated and currently operates.

Volodymyr's empire connects the modern countries of Russia and Ukraine. This resulted in problematic situations on the occasions that politicians were not in the position of unifying the states. Therefore, an aggressive appropriation in which Volodymyr could only be exclusively Russian or Ukrainian reappeared often since 1988. This happened for example during the pro-European presidential term of Yushchenko's who tried to distance itself from relations with Russia. His political statements could not permit him to interpret Volodymyr as a unifier of Russia and Ukraine. If such complications occur, it is necessary for politicians to interpret history in such a way that it legitimizes their political actions without disconnecting from the 'real' history. Hence, earlier interpretations of Volodymyr that would make Russia's reuse dependent upon Ukrainian history had to be tailored when Putin annexed Crimea. He could not adopt Volodymyr as the Ukrainian saint, as he did before. It would depict Putin as a Russian leader who unrightfully occupied Ukrainian lands. The prince had to be reinterpreted in order to legitimize Putin's political actions on this peninsula. Therefore, Putin provided a 'Crimean' interpretation of Volodymyr after the annexation of Crimea, given that the peninsula was and is Russian according to him. Not only can the myth of Volodymyr be transformed in such a way that it legitimizes their political actions. In some cases, a certain interpretation of history can additionally accuse the opposition. For example, Yushchenko presented Saint Volodymyr as a democratic leader. This interpretation did not only legitimizes the Ukrainian state under Yushchenko's reign. Moreover, it indirectly condemned Russia's involvement in the Ukrainian elections of 2004. Putin also used Volodymyr to accuse his opponent. He used the saint to argue that the Russian-Ukrainian bond cannot be subjected to any government. Implicitly, Putin accused Yushchenko's government of trying to diminish this relationship. Thus, the medieval ruler can both legitimize political actions and condemn the opposition. Both have been used in Russian-Ukrainian politics since 1988.

The flexibility of interpreting Volodymyr is limited. When it reaches its boundaries, bystanders will unavoidably initiate a historical discussion. Poroshenko's reaction to Putin's speech at the unveiling of a Volodymyr monument in Moscow was an example of such a discussion topic. He argued that Russians unveiled a monument of the Ukrainian Volodymyr. According to Poroshenko Russia's interpretation reached the boundaries because they honoured a national Ukrainian symbol without mentioning Ukraine. However, Poroshenko would not have succeeded in excluding Russia from Volodymyr's history, as the Kievan Rus' simply covered contemporary Russia. Besides, the history's influence on Russia is undeniable. This last point presents the most momentous problem for the appropriation of Volodymyr the Great, which is his function as a unifier. That is, a unifier of the Rus', but not necessarily of the modern states. Of course, this aspect makes Volodymyr a useful tool for politicians to showcase the bond between the nations. Nevertheless, using Volodymyr as a unifier

appears to be controversial in times of conflict. Especially when politicians use this history to legitimate their own disunifying political actions.

Images:

- Figure 1: “Baptism in the Dnieper River in Kyiv by Ukrainians during the Orthodox Millennium Celebrations” Kyiv, Aid to the Persecuted (1988). In: Michael Bourdeaux, *Gorbachev, Glasnost and the Gospel* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1990).
- Figure 2: “Lesser Coat of Arms of Ukraine, the so-called ‘Tryzub’”. Kyiv, (2007, design 1918). Wikimedia, online via: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Lesser_Coat_of_Arms_of_Ukraine.svg .
- Figure 3: “Laying Flowers at the Monument of Saint Vladimir the Great by (from left to right) Kuchma, Putin, and Lukashenko” Prochorovka, Russia (2000). The Kremlin, online via: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/38094/photos>
- Figure 4: “Medvedev handing over Saint Vladimir's relics at the 1020th anniversary of the Baptism of the Rus” Moscow (2008). The Kremlin, online via: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/592/photos>
- Figure 5: “Berlusconi (left) and Putin (right) touring the Crimean sites of Chersonesus” Chersonesus, Crimea (2015). The Kremlin, online via: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50276/photos>

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