

First EssayAnalysis of Kievan Sources

Imagine you are a late 20th century historian of Kievan Rus and you are trying to determine what life was like in the years 850-1200. You have at your disposal a number of different types of sources: archaeological evidence, chronicles, foreigners' accounts, law codes and princely charters, treaties, church statutes, and saints' lives.

Choose one or two types of source materials. Using materials available in the library, find examples of your chosen source materials in translation. (Probably the best place to begin your search will be the Modern Encyclopedia of Russian and Soviet History which will give you an initial description plus perhaps some citations of materials written about or translations of the sources you have chosen.)

As you read passages in the source you have chosen (and perhaps some historical materials about them), consider the strengths and weaknesses of this particular type of source. What are the pros and cons of this type of source? Give illustrative citations to support your argument. What are the limits of this kind of source? What does it tell us about the society and culture of Kievan Rus? What questions of veracity does it raise? How can we as historians sort through the questions of "fact" and "myth" in this early period of Russian history? Can we in fact draw a clear dividing line between the two (fact and myth)?

Your paper should be organized around a central argument or theme. You may want to begin with a particularly intriguing example from the source you have chosen or with a strong statement of your thesis. Then proceed to present your argument and evidence in a clear and concise fashion. Be sure to use footnotes to document your sources. You will probably want to summarize your conclusions at the end of the paper. Make sure to proofread your paper before submitting it.

This 5-7 page essay is due February 24 in class. No extensions will be granted without prior approval. We will take some time on March 1 for each of you to give a brief report to your classmates on your findings.