The annalists and compilers of early Rus’ history and writers of hagiographical and literary works acknowledge the achievements of Vladimir I (ca. 980–1015) and his son Jaroslav the Wise (1019–1054), although these same sources recall laconically the actual accomplishments of these princes (sg. кнѧдь, кнѧдь, pl. кнѧдѧ, кнѧдѧ). Whether we can explain these terse statements in historic or literary terms remains to be addressed. Or whether these elaborations on princely achievements and failures reflect the formative nature of the newly Christianized state and behooves us to recognize the early stage of annalistic and literary accomplishments that were emended in subsequent redactions of the succeeding centuries. On the other hand, the princely sovereignties of Svjatopolk (1015–1019) and thereafter of Mstislav (1019–1036), the latter sharing a divided realm with his brother Jaroslav, are described without the annalists and writers’ willingness to admit fully the unfolding historical processes or significance. The rise to power of these four princes coincides with the ushering in of a new era in Kievan history—the introduction of Christianity and the implementation of its teachings—but

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1 I have at this initial stage and will hereafter in this study hesitate to employ the phrase “grand prince (князь великѧ кнѧдѧ/кнѧдь)” for the obvious reason that its introduction into the annalistic and literary tradition is rather late and its usage to 1054 remains a controversial and unresolved point. There exist insufficient contemporaneous sources to clarify clearly this question of usage. Among later Muscovite sources, И. ПСРЛ 21/1: 60, and passim, identifies Olga as a “grand princess,” and Vladimir as a “grand prince.” Cf. infra, n. 5. The term “grand prince” is also ascribed to Jaroslav upon his death in 1054. Cf. infra, n. 177. Modern scholars, however, are not in agreement exactly when Rus’ writers first employed the title with specific reference to the prince of Kiev, granting to him a superior status and paramount authority over all other princes. Less certain is its usage by contemporaneous foreign writers. Where the phrase appears in Rus’ texts prior to 1054, its language use is often unclear and could mean nothing more than “great” or “outstanding” in individual accomplishments, since it is applied equally to lesser princes and even nobles who distinguished themselves in particular undertakings. For a substantive discussion of this issue, cf. A. Poppe, “Words that Serve the Authority: On the Title of ‘Grand Prince’ in Kievan Rus’,” АРВ 60 (1989): 159–184, with substantial bibliography in the footnotes; the article was reprinted in idem, Christian Russia in the Making, Variorum Collected Studies Series 867 (Aldershot, 2007), essay IX, with two addenda, pp. 185a–191a.
this period also brings to scholarly attention the difficult questions of defining rulership in its political and other contexts within this new framework. For the compilers and writers of the age the basic problem was how to express the actual distinguishing qualities of princely power, but preserving for posterity a praiseworthy image of princely rulership. Their task was formidable. They were confronted with the issue of age-old regional and tribal influences, as well as foreign influences that could challenge, modify, or even nullify their understanding of Kievan princely power. Thus their works frequently reflect local biases, but at the same time also admit the presence of foreign currents. The annals and literary works as we shall observe portray incomplete and varying images of these princes. Nor do these sources presuppose the orderly establishment of a political hierarchy. Rather, we are confronted with a chaotic period of princely succession and outlooks that required the writers of that age to record, as best as they could, events and accomplishments of their leading princes.

The Повесть временных лет (The Tale of Bygone Years) or more commonly designated the Russian Primary Chronicle was one of the first major

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2 For historiographic studies of this question, cf. S.V. Iushkov, Общественно-политической строй и право киевского государства. Курс истории государства и права СССР, 1 (Moscow, 1949): 69–75; and V.P. Shusharin, Современная буржуазная историография древней Руси (Moscow, 1964), pp. 156–181.

3 Hereafter cited as ПВЛ. I have consistently translated the term Летопись as “annal,” to distinguish from the term Хроника, that is a “chronicle,” although in modern usage the terms are interchangeable and are regarded as being synonymous. Cf. T.V. Gimon and A.A. Ginnius, “Русское летописанию в свете типологических параллелей (к постановке проблемы),” in Жанри и письменной культуре Средневековья (Moscow, 2005), pp. 174–200, esp. p. 176, where they note that in medieval Rus' annalistics “annal” was terminologically used rather than “chronicle.” For a discussion of this inconsistency in terminological usage, its derivation from Byzantine, Bulgarian, and Serbian annalistics, and its implications for textual composition, cf. V.N. Demin, Русь летописная (Moscow, 2002), pp. 211–213; and the introductory section to W.K. Hanak, “Bucharest ms. No. 1385 and The Tale of Constantinople, 1453: Some Reconsiderations,” Bs 69 (2011): 267 f.

On the authorship of the ПВЛ, see especially the introduction to RPCLT, pp. 6–12. Though many of the following studies are dated, they merit scholarly attention for their varying interpretations concerning authorship, compilation, and emendation. Also these studies address the contributions of Nestor, Sylvester, and others in the compilation of the ПВЛ. Cf. e.g., G.F. Miller, "О первомъ летописателе россійскомъ. Преподобномъ Несторе, о его летописи и о продолжателяхъ," ЕС (April, 1755), pp. 299–324; J.B. Scherer, Das heiligen Nestors und der Fortsetzer desselben älteste Jahrbücher der Russischen Geschichte vom Jahre 858 bis zum 1203 (Leipzig, 1774), pp. 3–36; A.L. Schlözer, Nestor. Russische Annale in ihrer slawonischen Grundsprache, 1 (Göttingen, 1802): 1–119; M. Pogodin, Несторъ, историческо-критическое разсужденіо о началѣ русскихъ летописей (Moscow, 1839), pp. 61–112; D.I. Ilovaisky, Исторія Россіи, 1 (Moscow, 1876): 176–182; N.K. Nikol'sky, Материалы для повременного списка русскихъ писателей и ихъ сочинений (X-XI вв.) (St. Petersburg, 1906), pp. 417–434.