Through most of his short life, Prince Vasilii (Vasil'ko) Konstantinovich of Rostov (1209-38) faithfully served the interests and policies of his uncle, the Vladimir grand duke Iurii Vsevolodovich, and it was in the service of the grand duke that Vasil'ko Konstantinovich died. The grand duke was killed in a battle on the Sit' River, soon after the capture of Vladimir by the invading Tatars, and Vasil'ko, taken prisoner and abducted to the Tatars' encampment, was killed soon after him. According to some accounts, including that found in the Laurentian Manuscript,¹ Vasil'ko was killed by the Tatars not only because he had fought against them but also because of his steadfast Christian faith, which he refused to abjure even under torture, and because he refused to fight on their side.

Even in death, the fate of Vasil'ko Konstantinovich remained intertwined with that of Iurii Vsevolodovich. Soon after the battle, the body of the grand duke was found by Bishop Kiril of Rostov, who brought the body back to his own (and Vasil'ko's) city and buried it (Lavr. 162.3.13 ff.); however, as is explained elsewhere,² the body was found decapitated, and the bishop was unable to find the head. Eventually (Lavr. 163.1.6 ff.), Bishop Kiril learned of the location of Vasil'ko's body as well, and had it, too, brought back for burial together with the grand duke in the episcopal

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² For example, in the seventeenth-century manuscript (copied from a compilation of 1534) known as the Tverskoi sbornik (PSRL, 15, Letopisnyi sbornik, imenuemyi Tverskoiu Letopis'iu [Moscow: Nauka, 1965, photoreproduction of the edition of 1863]), s.a. 1238, col. 372.
Church of the Holy Virgin. In the course of the burial of Vasil'ko, the hitherto missing head of the grand duke also reappeared and was, in the chronicle accounts, interred with the two bodies; according to church accounts, the head and body of the grand duke actually became rejoined. In view of the evident importance in the Russian church of the integrity of the bodies of saints, Vasil'ko's posthumous stimulation of the reappearance of Iurii's head can be viewed as a considerable final service to the grand duke; more crucially, however, the return of the head can be construed as evidence of Vasil'ko's own wonder-working powers. Since wonder-working powers were a prerequisite for canonization in all except a very few special cases, the restoration of the grand duke's head may be presumed to have advanced the cult of Vasil'ko Konstantinovich's own veneration. Both men were canonized, in any case no later than by the seventeenth century, and there seems to have been a local cult of veneration within a few decades of the deaths. In connection with their canonization, it would be expected that a service for each of them would have been prepared, and, at least in theory, a life as well. In Vasil'ko Konstantinovich's case, material suitable for church use was probably accumulated by his widow Mariia Mikhailovna, and her work presumably also served as material


4. Ibid.


6. Ibid., pp. 140-41.

7. Ibid., pp. 41-42.

8. At his death, Vasil'ko Konstantinovich left two sons, Boris and Gleb, but even Boris was only six years old; in a period in which the Russian princes were rapidly either being killed in battle or fleeing for their lives, power evidently devolved on Vasil'ko's widow Mariia, the daughter of Prince Mikhail of Chernigov. The chronicles contain frequent and honorific mention of Mariia Mikhailovna from the time of her marriage in 1227 up to her death in 1271; for example, she is mentioned in the installation of Bishop Kiril in Rostov in 1231, and again in the narrative of how her husband's body was recovered from the forest where it had been hidden. In both instances, a more active role was evidently played by others, but her name is given a prominent place. Similarly, in some versions of the death of Vasil'ko, the dying prince is shown asking God's mercy for those dearest to him; in one instance, he prays for his young sons and for Bishop Kiril, but in another manuscript, he prays for all of these and, in addition, Mariia Mikhailovna. The same chronicles also contain frequent mentions of the activities of Mariia Mikhailovna's two sons, as well as detailed accounts of the death not only of her husband but also of her father, who was killed.