The martyrdom in 1015 of the two princely brothers, Boris and Gleb, sons of Vladimir the Great, almost immediately assumed ideological significance for the political and religious thought of Kievan Rus'. Using as a source the 1015 entry of the Tale of Bygone Years (Povest' vremennykh let), Michael Cherniavsky has shown that the Boris and Gleb cult is curious because the two saints appear as the first of a whole line of Eastern Slavic saints, members of the princely family, who achieved canonization for reasons more pro-patria than pro-fide. The clearly political circumstances surrounding the murders created difficulties in formulating an acceptable rationale (in ecclesiastical terms) for the brothers' canonization: the chronicler would have it that Boris and Gleb were murdered by their older brother Sviatopolk in the civil war which erupted after Vladimir's death. In Cherniavsky's terms, Boris and Gleb appear more as "princely saints" than as "saintly princes." But Cherniavsky's suggestions give rise to a whole series of additional questions: From what cultural and social context did the chronicle version of the Boris and Gleb cult arise? What was the nature of the Church's reaction to the tradition? Finally, do other sources of the Kievan period present similar or different images of the significance of Boris and Gleb?

Cherniavsky was perfectly correct in employing the chronicle account for his study. For the purpose of more precisely determining the origins of the tradition contained in the chronicle passage it is necessary to compare it to the Tale of the Holy Martyrs Boris and Gleb (Skazanie o sviatykh muchenikakh Borise i Glebe) which is similar to the chronicle account in both detail and imagery. The Tale is a complex work, composed of four major parts: 1) the narrative of the events surrounding the martyrdom of Boris and Gleb, the fight for the princely inheritance between Iaroslav Vladimirovich and Sviatopolk, the ultimate victory of Iaroslav, and his capture of the Kievan throne; 2) the account of the finding of the brothers' bodies and their burial in Vyshgorod; 3) the history of several miracles which are attributed to the intercession of the saints; 4) the description of the Lazarus feast. The Tale is a complex work, composed of four major parts: 1) the narrative of the events surrounding the martyrdom of Boris and Gleb, the fight for the princely inheritance between Iaroslav Vladimirovich and Sviatopolk, the ultimate victory of Iaroslav, and his capture of the Kievan throne; 2) the account of the finding of the brothers' bodies and their burial in Vyshgorod; 3) the history of several miracles which are attributed to the intercession of the saints; 4) the description of the Lazarus feast. The Tale is a complex work, composed of four major parts: 1) the narrative of the events surrounding the martyrdom of Boris and Gleb, the fight for the princely inheritance between Iaroslav Vladimirovich and Sviatopolk, the ultimate victory of Iaroslav, and his capture of the Kievan throne; 2) the account of the finding of the brothers' bodies and their burial in Vyshgorod; 3) the history of several miracles which are attributed to the intercession of the saints; 4) the description of the Lazarus feast. The Tale is a complex work, composed of four major parts: 1) the narrative of the events surrounding the martyrdom of Boris and Gleb, the fight for the princely inheritance between Iaroslav Vladimirovich and Sviatopolk, the ultimate victory of Iaroslav, and his capture of the Kievan throne; 2) the account of the finding of the brothers' bodies and their burial in Vyshgorod; 3) the history of several miracles which are attributed to the intercession of the saints; 4) the description of the Lazarus feast. The Tale is a complex work, composed of four major parts: 1) the narrative of the events surrounding the martyrdom of Boris and Gleb, the fight for the princely inheritance between Iaroslav Vladimirovich and Sviatopolk, the ultimate victory of Iaroslav, and his capture of the Kievan throne; 2) the account of the finding of the brothers' bodies and their burial in Vyshgorod; 3) the history of several miracles which are attributed to the intercession of the saints; 4) the description of the Lazarus feast. The Tale is a complex work, composed of four major parts: 1) the narrative of the events surrounding the martyrdom of Boris and Gleb, the fight for the princely inheritance between Iaroslav Vladimirovich and Sviatopolk, the ultimate victory of Iaroslav, and his capture of the Kievan throne; 2) the account of the finding of the brothers' bodies and their burial in Vyshgorod; 3) the history of several miracles which are attributed to the intercession of the saints; 4) the description of the Lazarus feast. The Tale is a complex work, composed of four major parts: 1) the narrative of the events surrounding the martyrdom of Boris and Gleb, the fight for the princely inheritance between Iaroslav Vladimirovich and Sviatopolk, the ultimate victory of Iaroslav, and his capture of the Kievan throne; 2) the account of the finding of the brothers' bodies and their burial in Vyshgorod; 3) the history of several miracles which are attributed to the intercession of the saints; 4) the description of the Lazarus feast.

1. The chronicle account of the events of 1015 is found in: Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei, 31 vols. (Moscow and St. Petersburg-Leningrad, 1841-1968), I: Lavrent'evskaja letopis' i suzdalskaja letopis' po akademicheskому spisku (Moscow, 1962), cols. 131-140. [Hereafter Lavrent'evskaja letopis', PSRL] The non-chronicle sources used in this paper are found in Die altrussischen hagiographischen Erzählungen und liturgischen Dichtungen über die Heiligen Boris und Gleb, Ausgabe von Ludolf Muller, Slavische Propyläen, Band 14, (München, 1967). [Hereafter Boris und Gleb] This compilation consists of some, but unfortunately not all, of the texts published in D. I. Abramovich, Zhitiia sviatykh muchenikov Boris i Gleba (Petrograd, 1916).


4. Scholars have generally been wary about accepting the version as found in the chronicle. V. D. Koroliuk presented an illogical candidate for the role of villain simply because of his insignificance during the reign of Vladimir. V. D. Koroliuk, Zapadne slaviane i Kievskaia Rus' (Moscow, 1964) pp. 235-239.

5. Boris und Gleb, pp. 27-66. Hereafter the citations to the Tale will appear in parentheses within the text.
of the holy brothers; 4) finally, an additional narrative which relates the development of the Boris and Gleb cult from the reign of Sviatoslav Iaroslavich (1054-1076) to the reign of Vladimir Monomakh (1113-1125). For reasons which shall become apparent as we examine the content of the Tale, the “princely saint” element is most apparent in the first of these four parts, up to the point where Iaroslav enters Kiev. It is this fragment of the Tale which we shall deal with in order to determine the origins of the Boris and Gleb cult.

Three different explanations of the origin of the Tale, each proceeding from divergent sets of assumptions, have been suggested. Bugoslavskii believed that the work was written in stages. He dated the appearance of the first complete narrative (comprising the first two parts of the Tale, according to the division outlined above) during the later part of the reign of Iaroslav the Wise and suggested that the author wrote with the intention of praising that prince. Shakhmatov, on the other hand, proposed that the first narrative was composed with a significant section of the remaining material in the 1080’s. Il’in attempted to date the appearance of the work in the early 1070’s, connecting it with a campaign to recognize the sanctity of Boris and Gleb. Poppe refined Il’in’s scheme even further and has concluded that the first part of the Tale was written between May, 1069, and 20 May, 1072. More recently Poppe has admitted that the cult of Boris and Gleb could have arisen in the fifties or sixties of the eleventh century. This seems to imply that the Tale could have been written during this early period, as well. But, like Il’in, Poppe chooses to view the development of the cult within the narrow confines of a campaign to canonize the brothers, thus eliminating the possibility of the interplay of other cultural and political factors.

Any attempt to determine the provenance of a literary work must be based not only on textual considerations (i.e., using the factual material found within the text to establish the dating of the work) but must also draw on clues provided by the ideological content and imagery found in the work as well. Some useful suggestions concerning these later aspects can be found in the literature about the Tale. Golubinskii, for instance, suggested that the work was written in the form of a historical narrative. He also emphasized that the writer employed numerous dramatic elements. Bugoslavskii added several important observations about the nature of the Tale. First, he pointed