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# Kiev Pechersk Lavra

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## Kiev Pechersk Lavra

Few things in life can be considered to be truly beautiful. The superficial parts of life: a beautiful dress, a grand staircase, or even gorgeous fabrics for example, have no dispute in their beauty. But they are purely manmade. Then, there are those objects in life where their beauty seems to surpass all other words. As one looks out upon open seas and watches as lightening strikes the waters over and over again; there are no words to describe it. It is terrifying and yet leaves you in awe of the world around you. Looking at something like this, in a mere second of life, puts all other worries and fears in life to a silence. Suddenly, you are reminded just how insignificant you are as an individual compared to the natural elements of the Earth.

In Russian, the word *Beautiful* is *Krasivyy* (or красивый). The phrase, *Beautiful in the eyes of God*, is *Krasivaya v glazakh Boga* (or Красивая в глазах Бога). Though to many ears, the Russian language and culture seems to be a crazy mess of tongues, personally I find everything about Russia to be following the idea of Красивая в глазах Бога. Once one strips back the harsh modern history (taking out Lenin, Stalin, and even the harsh division between classes) it can be easy to see the bare beauty of the land. The landscapes, the religious culture that surrounds the place can leave one in fear of God.

One structure that can easily be seen as encapsulating all that is красивый about Russia, is the Near Caves of the Pechersk Lavra in Kiev, Ukraine. Though the Near Caves are in Ukraine today, the duration of this paper will refer to them as being in Russia due to the fact that when they were *created* they were *located* in Russia. Also, to further grant myself some clemency, Ukraine did not fully separate herself from Russia until August of 1991, when the Soviet Union collapsed financially.

The Kiev Pechersk Lavra could be better known for its name of the Kiev *Monastery of the Caves*. To break it down, the Pechersk Lavra can be seen as one whole monastery divided into different sections. Most famously, the Near Caves which played host to many a significant player in Russian history.



Founded in 1051 by a young monk named Anthony, he wanted to be more one with his Creator. Therefore, he sequestered himself in a nearby cave, not far from the village of Berestovo where he was originally from<sup>1</sup>. As more and more villagers became aware of a holy man occupying the cave, more and more became drawn to it. Anthony was known for being among the wisest, so having a sudden surplus of fellow monks traveling to study with him seemed to be far from a surprise. As more monks wished to stay, what started as one cave began to expand into a multitude of caverns. *“Those, who strove for monastic life, asked him to let them stay with him. The monks, who settled in the cave dug for themselves new cells, joined them with underground corridors and at the*

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<sup>1</sup> "Успенская Киево-Печерская Лавра - The Churches of the Holy Dormition Kiev-Pechersk Lavra." *Успенская Киево-Печерская Лавра*. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

*same place they created an underground church*<sup>2</sup>. This original expansion led to what is today known as the Far Caves.

At some point (there seems to be a slight debate as to when exactly) Anthony became restless, suddenly his once peaceful sanctuary was overcrowded. Therefore, he dug a new cell. (In this context, a *cell* is what would be referred to as a room. Each and every cell in the Caves held one monk, where he would do his studying.) The new cell which Anthony dug was what led to the other part of the Pechersk Lavra, the Near Caves.

Perhaps the most fascinating part of the Caves, is one of the residents, Nestor the Chronicler. Russian historian Oleksiy Tolochko describes Nestor as being among the Father's of History, among the names of "*Herodotus, Thucydides, and other(s)*"<sup>3</sup>.

The *Primary Chronicle* is a detailed history of early Russia, or Kievan Rus, starting in the mid 800s and ending 1110. Within his own article, Tolochko quotes Nikolai Karamzin, giving a more precise summation of the importance of Nestor's work, as well as showing how *valid* his work is. "*Nestor, who is to be called the father of Russian history, lived in the eleventh century; he was gifted by a curious mind, he listened with attention to the oral legends of ancient times, to the popular historical tales; he saw the monuments, he saw the graves of the princes; he conversed with patricians, with elders of Kyiv, with travelers, with dwellers of different Rus' regions; he read*

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<sup>2</sup> "ꙗтяя Успенская Киево-Печерская Лавра - The Churches of the Holy Dormition Kiev-Pechersk Lavra." ꙗтяя Успенская Киево-Печерская Лавра. N.p., n.d. Web. 23 Apr. 2015.

<sup>3</sup> Tolochko, Oleksiy. *On "Nestor the Chronicler"* 1/4 ed. Vol. 29. N.p.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2007. 31-59. Print. Ukrainian Philology and Linguistics in The Twenty-First Century.

*Byzantine chronicles, church notes and thus became the first chronicler of our motherland.*<sup>4</sup>

Part of the normal day for the average monk was spent bent over manuscripts, scribing out religious texts, or even history. Nestor was able to compile over three hundred years of history into his own work, due to the work of hundreds of other monks within the Monastery of Caves.

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<sup>4</sup> Tolochko, Oleksiy. *On "Nestor the Chronicler"* 1/4 ed. Vol. 29. N.p.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, 2007. 31-59. Print. *Ukrainian Philology and Linguistics in The Twenty-First Century*.

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