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NEH OSU Institute on Central Asia 2012.

Primary Sources Unit: Islamicization of Central Asia/Christianization of Rus'

Level: 9th /10th Grade World History and World History AP

Materials: Selections from Russian Primary Chronicle for 988 AD

Selections from Traditional Sources on Conversion of Uzbek Khan by the Sufi, Baba Tukles [

The Primary Chronicle story is in the form of presentations by missionaries of major monotheisms to Vladimir, Prince of Kievan Rus' – he will ultimately choose Byzantine Orthodoxy.

The story of Baba Tukles' "presentation" for Islam to Uzbek Khan is that of a miracle worker enduring an ordeal to show that his religion is "better" than the alternative.

Your job: understand and be able to retell the stories. Relate them to the historical, political and religious context of their time. Consider these questions:

1. Why would a ruler choose a new religion for his state? What are the alternatives for Rus' (10th c) and the Uzbeks (14th c)? What about geography and politics influences the possibilities and ultimate choices?
2. The story of the conversion of Rus' is actually at least 3 stories; the missionaries' presentation, the siege of Cherson and offers of the Byzantine emperor; the visit of Rus' envoys to Tsargrad (Constantinople) and Hagia Sophia. Do these have anything in common? Do they contradict each other? Which is the most plausible?
3. For the Baba Tukles story, what aspects of religion seem most important? Does the story contain contradictions and inconsistency? Why does the Khan ultimately choose Islam?
4. The Primary Chronicle account(s) are said to be history. Who wrote them and when? Do you consider them "historical" -- why? why not?

Students can prepare and present in groups, They can research and relate to other conversion tales, in this part of the world (for example, traditions of the conversion of the Khazars to Judaism) or elsewhere.

Also possible:

- *write essay on this topic
- *act it out
- *extra credit: draw a picture, compose a rap, make up a menu for the reception of missionaries.