

MEDIEVAL RUSSIAN HISTORY

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Migrations

Huns. Huns who were possibly a Turkic tribe, came west out of Central Asia and in 370 CE and swept all before them in the region, eventually reaching Western Europe.

Avars. After the Huns, the next people to occupy this territory around 558 CE were another Turkic tribe, the Avars. The Avars establish a vast state that extended from the Volga to the Elbe. The settlement of the Slavs in the Balkans and Bohemia, and the establishment of their first political organization are believed to be due to the influence of the Avars.

Slavs. It is uncertain exactly when the Slavic tribes settled in the valley of the Dnieper. However, Byzantine sources record that the first Slavs came from central Europe in the 6th century and that they served with Avar troops. The first information concerning the settlement of the first Slavic tribes in the lands of Rus is found in a work written during the time of the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I (527-565). The 6th century statesman and author Procopius mentions the Sclavenes and Antes living in the lands of Rus in his work *History of the Wars*.

Khazars. In the 7th century another Turkic tribe, the Khazars, become dominant in the lands of Rus. The Khazars established the largest political organization in Eastern Europe, built castles and cities, and established a large state in the region of the lower Volga and Don Rivers and the region where the Terek River approaches the Caspian Sea. They collected taxes from the Volga Bulgars and some East Slavic tribes that were subject to them. The Khazars halted the Arab assaults that threatened Europe in the 8th century and brought peace, stability and religious tolerance to the region. It is said that the Khazars, who accepted Judaism in the 9th century, are among the ancestors of the eastern European Jews.

Vikings. In the 8th-9th centuries we see that the Vikings coming from Scandinavia to the lands of Rus, along the length of the Dnieper to the Black Sea. Starting from this time the Vikings would put the Slavic tribes around Lake Ladoga and Lake Ilmen under their rule and began to establish cities.

States

Kievan State. Vladimir the Saint accepted Christianity in 988 and the various Slavic tribes were united by the new religion during the 10th and 11th centuries. Throughout the 11th century the grand dukes of Kiev held what centralizing power there was.

Mongols. Kiev was destroyed by the Mongols in 1240 and the Russian territory was divided among a number of smaller states. Russia was put under the rule of the Khanate of the Golden Horde, a part of the Mongol Empire that extended across most of the Asian continent. Over the next two centuries Moscow would gradually become the provincial capital and the center of the Orthodox Church in Russia.

Muscovite State. Ivan III acquired Novgorod and Tver in the late 15th century and threw off Mongol domination. The first Muscovite tsar, Ivan IV, the Terrible (1533-1584) is regarded as the founder of the Russian state. Although he destroyed the power of rival princes and boyars (landowners), Russian retained the characteristics of a medieval state until the reign of Peter the Great (1689-1725).

Reading Assignments

Dolukhanov, P.M., *The Early Slavs*, Longman, London & New York, 1996.

Heyman, N.M., *Russian History*, McGraw-Hill Inc., 1993.

Martin, J., *Medieval Russia*, Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Milner-Gulland, R., *The Russians*, Blackwell Publishers, 1997.

Procopius, *History of the Wars*, Books VI.16-VII.35., Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1992.

Montgomery, J.E., Ibn Fadlan and the Rusiyyah,
<http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/montgo1.pdf>

Questions

How does Procopius in his *History of the Wars* talk about the Slavs?

What is the origin of the name Rus'? Who are the Russians?

Why does Russian literature begin after the adoption of Christianity? How was it influenced by Russian sources, and what are the elements which stand out from these sources?

Origin of Rus'

Varangian Theory, Normanists and anti-Normanists, Primary Chronicle

Introduction

The Varangian theory, or, as some proponents refer to it, the Norman theory about the origins of the Early Russian state was developed by a number of western and Russian historians. Its starting point was an entry in the Russian *Primary Chronicle (The Tale of Bygone Years) (Povest vremennykh let)*, the principle source for early Russian history.

On the basis of the *Primary Chronicle*, written by the monk Nestor from the Pecherski Monastery, supporters of this theory claim that the Early Russian state was established by Scandinavians, the Varangians, who had been called to come and rule the Russians.

Some branches of the Varangians at the center of this controversy had conducted campaigns which had extended as far as Russia, Belarussia and the Ukraine in the 9th and 10th centuries. Varangians who were involved in trade or worked as mercenaries controlled all the river systems and took control of Gardariki, the trade routes of the first Russian state, Kievan Russia. Their campaigns eventually reached as far as the Caspian Sea and the capital of the Byzantine Empire, Constantinople.

In the 18th century, based on these lines German-Russian historians working in Russia in the Academy of Sciences such as Müller, Bayer, and Schlözer proposed the Varangian theory on the origins of the Russians. This theory was supported and expanded in the 19th century by the Russian historians Karamzin and Solovev. In the same century the historians Pogodin and Thomsen from Denmark also published works supporting this theory.

In the same century, some Russian historians, in particular Vasili Tatishchev, came out strongly against this theory. Another historian who strongly opposed the Varangian theory in the same century was Mikhail Lomonosov.

Readings

Plokhy, S., *The Origins of Rus'*, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations, Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus*, Cambridge University Press, 2006, p.10-49.

Jonathan, S., *The Origins of Rus'*, *The Cambridge History of Russia*, edited by Maureen Perrie, 2006, Vol. 1, p. 47-73.

Zenkovsky, S.A., *Medieval Russia's Epics, Chronicles, and Tales*. Revised and Enlarged Edition, Meridian Books, 1974, p. 49-51.

Shepard, J., *The Origins of Rus'*, *The Cambridge History of Russia, From Early Rus' to 1689*, Edited by Maureen Perrie, Vol. I, 2006, p.47-72.

Questions

Who are Varangians? What is the Varangian theory?

What were the anti-Normanists' arguments? Why did they oppose the theory?

Can we consider the *Primary Chronicle* a valuable source for the early history of Russia? Why or why not?