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*The Origin of Rus'**

By OMELJAN PRITSAK

I. *The Normanist versus Anti-Normanist Controversy*

1.

On September 6, 1749, Gerhard Friedrich Müller (1705–1783), the official Russian imperial historiographer and member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg, was to deliver an anniversary speech on the origins of Russia, entitled “*Origines gentis et nominis Russorum.*” His talk was based on research published in 1736 by his older compatriot, Gottlieb Siegfried Bayer (1694–1738), who introduced sources like the *Annales Bertiniani* and works by the Emperor Constantinus Porphyrogenitus into East European scholarship. From these, academician Müller developed the theory that the ancient state of Kievan Rus’ was founded by Norsemen, and it was this theory that he began to propound in his speech.

Müller was never to finish this lecture. A tumult arose among the members of the Imperial Academy of Russian national background, who protested such infamy. One of them, the astronomist N. I. Popov, exclaimed, “*Tu, clarissime auctor, nostrum gentem infamia afficis!* [You, famous author, dishonor our nation!].” The affair was brought before the president of the Academy, the future hetman of the Ukraine, Kyrylo Rozumovs’kyj (1750–1764; d. 1803), and the Empress Elizaveta Petrovna (1741–1762), who appointed a special committee to investigate whether Müller’s writings were harmful to the interests and glory of the Russian Empire. One of the referees was the famous author, Mixail Vasil’evič Lomonosov (1711–1762). His testimony was devastating: Müller was forbidden to continue his research in Old Rus’ history and his publications were confiscated

* This article, originally delivered as an inaugural lecture by Professor Pritsak upon his assuming the Mykhailo Hrushevs’kyi Chair of Ukrainian History at Harvard University on October 24, 1975, is an exposition of the principal thesis of a six-volume work entitled *The Origin of Rus’* to be published by Harvard University Press. It is available in a bound brochure for \$2.50 from the Harvard Series in Ukrainian Studies, 1581–83 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02138. To avoid error, transliterations and notations have been left as they appear in the original text.—*Ed.*

and destroyed. The intimidated scholar eventually redirected his scholarly work to a more harmless subject—the history of Siberia.

Nevertheless, September 6, 1749 remains an important date in East European historiography. It marks the birth of the belligerent Normanist versus Anti-Normanist controversy that has continued to this day.

2.

The Normanists believe (the word *believe* is used here to characterize the intellectual climate in question) in the Norse origin of the term Rus'. They consider the Norsemen—or, more exactly, the Swedes—as the chief organizers of political life, first on the banks of Lake Il'men and later on the shores of the Dnieper River.

On the other hand, the Anti-Normanists embrace the doctrine that the Rus' were Slavs who lived to the south of Kiev from prehistoric times, long before the Norsemen appeared on the European scene. To support this thesis, the names of several rivers are cited as evidence, for example, the Ros', a right-bank tributary of the Dnieper. The Anti-Normanists attribute to this "native" Slavic element a decisive role in the state-building process of that period, particularly that of Kievan Rus'. Official Soviet historiography adopted the Anti-Normanist position for the following "scholarly" reason: "The Normanist theory is politically harmful, because it denies the ability of the Slavic nations to form an independent state by their own efforts."

3.

Let us now briefly examine the arguments advanced by the two schools. The arguments of the Normanists, the most important being A. L. Schlötzer, E. Kunik, V. Thomsen, A. A. Šaxmatov, T. J. Arne, S. Tomašivs'kyj, Ad. Stender-Petersen, are essentially the following:

(1) The Rus' received their name from *Ruotsi*, the Finnish designation for the Swedes in the mid-ninth century, which was derived from the name of the Swedish maritime district in Uppland, *Roslagen* (Róðslagen), and its inhabitants, called *Róðskarlar* (< *roðr*—a rowing or pulling). In a modified variant of this etymology, represented by R. Ekblom and Ad. Stender-Petersen, *Rus'* originated from *róð(er)sbyggjar*—the inhabitants of straits between islands (< *róðer*).

(2) The Primary Chronicle includes the Rus' among the Varangian

peoples from beyond the sea, i.e., the *Svie* (Swedes), *Urmane* (Norwegians), *Angliane* (English), and *Gote* (Gauts or Goths).

(3) Most of the names of Rus' envoys who appear in the treaties with Byzantium (911, 944) are obviously of Scandinavian origin, e.g., Karly, Inegeld, Farlof, Veremud, etc. (911).

(4) The *Annales Bertiniani*, a contemporary source, says that c. 839 the *Rhos* envoys (*Rhos vocari dicebant*) who came from the Byzantine Emperor Theophilos to the Emperor Louis I in Ingelheim and whose ruler had the title *Chacanus* (Kagan, also appearing in contemporary Islamic and later Kievan Rus' sources) proved to be Swedes (*eos gentis esse Sveonum*).

(5) The Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus, in his book *De administrando imperio* (written c. 950), quotes the names of the Dnieper cataracts in both Slavic (Σκλαβηνιστι) and Rus'ian (Ῥωσιιστι). Most of the Rus'ian names show derivation from the Old Norse language, e.g., Οὐλβοροί (< ON (*h*)*ulmforsi* (dat.-loc.) equal to Slavic *ostrovni prax* Ὀστροβορονιπράχ = Greek τὸ νησίον τοῦ φραγμοῦ—the cataract of the island).

(6) Islamic geographers and travelers of the ninth-tenth centuries always made a very clear distinction between the *Rūs* and *as-Saqāliba* (Slavs).

4.

In opposition to this, the Anti-Normanists, who include S. Gedeonov, M. Hruševs'kyj, B. D. Grekov, S. Juškov, B. Rybakov, M. N. Tixomirov, V. T. Pašuto, N. V. Riasanovsky, and A. V. Riasanovsky, reply:

(1) The name of Rus' was not originally connected with Great Novgorod or with Ladoga in the north, but with Kiev in the south. Moreover, the Rus' existed in the Kiev area from times immemorial. To support this thesis, two arguments are presented: first, the toponymic, i.e., the existence of the names of several rivers in that area such as the *Ros*'; second, the existence of the "Church History" of Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor, a Syrian source compiled in 555 A.D. (long before the appearance of the Norsemen), which mentions the *Hrōs*, or *Rus*', in connection with some North Caucasian peoples found south of Kiev.

(2) No tribe or nation called *Rus*' was known in Scandinavia, and

it is never mentioned in any of the Old Norse sources, including the sagas.

(3) The Scandinavian names of the Rus' envoys who visited Ingelheim in 839 and signed the treaties with the Byzantine Empire in the tenth century do not prove that the Rus' were Scandinavians (Swedes). The Norsemen were only representatives of the Slavic Rus' princes, specialists who carried out commercial and diplomatic functions. For that reason, they were looked upon as men "of Rus' descent" (*ot roda rus'skago*).

(4) One of the oldest Islamic writers, Ibn Khurdādhbeh, who wrote c. 840–880, clearly calls the *Rūs* a tribe of the Slavs.

(5) Archaeological material from the towns and trade routes of Eastern Europe indicates that few Scandinavians were present in this area.

5.

A critical examination of these arguments reveals both their weaknesses and why the debate has continued unresolved to this day. The connection of the Rus' with the Finnish *Ruotsi* and *Róðslagen* is doubtful. *Ruotsi* goes back to **Rūzzi*, not Rus'. Also, the Anti-Normanists are correct in doubting the existence of a Scandinavian (Swedish) tribe called Rus', even if they were peasants and not empire-builders as formulated by Stender-Petersen. In the words of V. Mošin (1931), "one finds oneself in a quagmire when one begins to operate with terms derived from *rus* or *ros* [especially since *Ros*' goes back to *Rōs*, not *Rōs*]. . . ."

The Syriac *Hrōs* (555 A.D.) found in the work of Pseudo-Zacharias Rhetor, and introduced into East European history by J. Markwart in 1903, proved to have no relation whatever to Rus'. In an addenda to Rhetor's "Church History," there is a very interesting report about the Christian mission of a certain Kardast among the Huns in the Northern Caucasus, including a list of Hunnic tribes. This report stimulated the learned copyist to quote an Amazon episode from a Middle Persian version of the Alexandersaga, in which the Greek term *heros* (hero) is used for the gigantic mates of the Amazons. In the Syriac adaptation, this Greek term assumed the form *hrōs*.

The Anti-Normanist explanation, which maintains that the possible existence of Scandinavian specialists at the court of some Rus'

princes does not necessarily prove the identity of the Rus' with the Scandinavians, cannot be easily dismissed. However, Ibn Khurdādhbeh does not identify Rus' with the *Ṣaqāliba* (meaning "Slavs"). The Arabic term *jins* (< Lat. *genus*) has the primary meaning of "kind" or "sort." It may be assumed that in introducing the name *Rūs* into Arabic scholarship Ibn Khurdādhbeh was generalizing ("and they are a kind of *Ṣaqāliba*") as to who these new trading partners on the horizon of the Abbasside empire were. Within the Arab cultural sphere (< Mediterranean culture), the term *Ṣaqḻab* (*Sclav-*), meaning "fair-headed slave," was known earlier (sometime in the sixth century) than the name *Rūs*. Because the *Rūs* came from the north and corresponded to the anthropological criteria of the term *Ṣaqḻab* (meaning "red-haired and ruddy-faced" in comparison with the peoples of the Near East), the author added this phrase by way of explanation.

The historian might rightly ask the question posed by British archaeologist David M. Wilson (1970): "Why is there so little archaeological material of the Scandinavian period in the Russians towns?" One may answer, says Wilson, only by analogy:

In England, the only town to yield really convincing Viking antiquities in any quantity is York, and even this number has been exaggerated. Structures from the Anglo-Danish period are rarely found in York; even those that have been are not specifically Viking in character. The other Viking towns in England [known from historical sources—O.P.] have produced hardly any Viking antiquities. Yet, we know that the Vikings were there.

6.

In summarizing the controversy, one must be critical of scholars who have considered the issue from a narrow perspective and an almost exclusive concentration on the term Rus'. Such an approach is about as useful as studying the etymology of the name America in order to understand the emergence of the Constitution of the United States.

That the debate has continued unresolved to this day is due, in my view, to the following reasons: historians have often substituted political (or patriotic) issues for improved techniques of historical methodology in their discussions; they have had limited knowledge

of world history; and they have used source materials in a biased way. The work of the historians in question can be compared to mosaicists who piece together excerpts from sources of different provenance, and who often disregard the semantics of the original, since they have usually relied on simple translation instead of acquiring knowledge of the sources and their cultural sphere.

II. *Proposed Methodology*

1.

The origin of Rus' is foremost a historical question. In analyzing this problem, archaeology and linguistics are of secondary importance. The latter are certainly revered scholarly disciplines, but they have their own methods and goals, and their own spheres of responsibility. History begins—and I shall put stress on the word *begins*—with written sources. It is impossible to extend history back to a period without such sources, although archaeological and linguistic data can be very useful in elucidating certain facts and situations. Contrary to the conviction of Soviet scholars, however, archaeology cannot be regarded as *pre-history*. There is no causal connection between archaeology and history! History, which reflects the highest stage of human experience, cannot appear *deus ex machina* from archaeology. Only people with history can bring it to territories without historical consciousness.

As an example of the frontier between history and archaeology, let us take the year 1620. On the one hand, it marked the beginning of history for New England, yet, on the other, it was the end of an archaeological era in North America. Here, we can clearly see that the subsequent historical period neither emerged nor developed from the archaeological one (as Soviet archaeologists claim for Kievan Rus'), but was brought from the outside by those with previously-developed historical consciousness. In this sense, history and archaeology are on mutual non-speaking terms.

2.

History, like any other *exact science*, is an abstract, intellectual discipline. It is concerned first with establishing and systematizing historical facts by analytic "experiments," i.e., research into specific issues, and then the construction of relevant hypotheses. However,

since the historian can neither reconstruct the past "wie es eigentlich gewesen" (contrary to Ranke), nor "re-experience" or "re-enact the past" in his own mind (contrary to Dilthey and Croce), he must place his analytic "experiment" in a broader theoretical context. As expressed by Marc Bloch, the basis for a proper understanding of any "historical experiment" is the study, at the universal level (contrary to Toynbee, however, there is only one, universal historical development, not that of separate cultures), of the *function* of selected "historical facts" that are part of a larger system, and *not* the study of the historical facts themselves. This system or pattern contains various points of intersection along lines demarcated by economic, cultural, and political developments, which occur at both synchronical, i.e., static, and diachronical, i.e., dynamic, levels. The real task of the historian is to recognize the system and to discover its common denominators.

Now, a few words about source study. One should never approach a source without prior philological and historical analysis. Conversely, reflecting the perspectivism of Ortega y Gasset, it is necessary to embrace all the sources of a given epoch in order to reconstruct the multiperspectivity inherent in them. History, I stress again, is an exact science that can produce accurate answers only when the full perspective of a given problem is discerned.

3.

Before dealing with the problem of the "Origin of Rus'," it is necessary to settle some methodological questions. From what has already been said, it is clear that there is only one possible way to discuss the emergence of the Rus' state, and that is as a historical experiment within a larger system.

History begins at Sumer in Mesopotamia in the third millennium B.C. The ancient Greeks, who discovered the human being and scientific history, together with the Romans, those pragmatic empire-builders, transferred the focal point of western historical development to the basin of the *Mare Nostrum*, or Mediterranean Sea. Until the ninth-tenth centuries A.D., history was essentially concentrated in the *Mare Nostrum*. Because China was isolated from Europe at that time, it is excluded from discussion here.

Within this time span, i.e., from the period of the Roman Empire

to the ninth century, three significant historical events, each producing chain reactions, took place that are relevant to the emergence of Rus' in the ninth century:

(1) The desertion of the Roman *Limes* (Rhine-Danube line) by the Roman legions (c. 400 A.D.);

(12) The organization of a new type of steppe empire—the Avar realm centered in present-day Hungary (c. 568–799 A.D.);

(3) The intrusion of the Arabs into the basin of *Mare Nostrum* (c. 650 A.D.).

The first historical event, the desertion of the Roman *Limes*, provoked the migration of peoples and the organization of Germanic semi-civilized realms and nomadic *Paces* within Imperial territory and/or regions closest to the Roman frontiers. The most important of these was the Germanic Frankish realm established first in the Netherlands and then in Gaul, since the Franks were the only barbarians who adopted the “correct,” catholic variant of Christianity. Their cooperation with Papal Rome was to become the cornerstone of Western European development.

4.

Before discussing the significance of the next two historical events, the emergence of the Avar realm and the Arab intrusion, I wish to present and define three sets of terms: 1) “*officina gentium . . . velut vagina nationum*”; 2) “nomadic empire” and “nomadism”; and 3) “the nomads of the sea,” specifically the Vikings and Værings (*Varjagi*).

The first concept was introduced by the Gothic historian Jordanes (551 A.D.). In describing the fate of the Goths he remarked: “From the same Scandza Island [Scandinavia], which acts like a manufactory [workshop] of peoples (*officina gentium*), or to be more exact, like a *vagina* of nations, went out, according to tradition, the Goths with their king Berig.” There were two places in Eurasia where the great migrations of peoples normally originated: the Arabian Desert in the west—the “home” of all Semitic peoples; and the Gobi Desert in Mongolia—the true *vagina nationum* of all Altaic peoples, i.e., the Huns, Turks, Mongols, and Mandju-Tunguzes. For centuries scholars advanced various theories to explain this unusual state of affairs. Some medieval scholars even suggested that the nomads, like locusts,

were born at regular intervals from the sand and therefore reappeared in periodic population explosions. We, certainly, cannot accept this ingenious explanation and must also dismiss some recent theories, e.g., that climatic changes dessicated the steppe and caused movements that became a chain-reaction migration. Climatological studies have proved that no significant changes in climate occurred during the historical millennia. Also, careful study of primary sources, such as the Chinese annals, has made it clear that the nomads could migrate only if their horses were well-fed, healthy, and strong. Therefore, population movement never took place during times of famine or restraint. Arabia and Mongolia became the centers of population migrations not because both were deserts, but because both were located on the crossroads of important commercial highways that connected agricultural and political centers. Having moved there, the nomads assured themselves control of these commercial routes and, at the same time, gained the opportunity to blackmail the given sedentary power with options for retreat or escape.

As for the terms "nomadic empire" and "nomadism," it is necessary to point out that a nomadic *pax* is a confederation of several tribes whose primary source of existence is the grazing of livestock. The military mobility of these tribes ensures the functioning of international trade and the control of trade routes, which are the real bases of the nomad economy. A nomadic *pax* cannot emerge nor exist *per se*. Rather, it always develops in response to the challenge of a sedentary society. For instance, the moment a given agricultural empire (Rome, Iran, China) developed economic stability and achieved a measure of prosperity (i.e., established international commercial ties), nomads were tempted to try their luck in obtaining a portion of its *El Dorado*. The typical pattern was as follows.

Within a nomadic tribe in Arabia/Mongolia, a daring leader might appear who is successful in robbing a wealthy caravan. His fame immediately spreads, and people from the surrounding areas flock to his territory in order to take part in the promising enterprise. Now begins the period of training, like the one so vividly described in all primary sources dealing with the emergence of the Mongolian power led by Temüjin/Činggis Qa'an. Raids become more frequent and grow constantly in size until the time is ripe for the leader to unite

all Eurasian nomadic tribes—kindred and alien—and to start an open war against the given sedentary empire. If the nomads are victorious, their charismatic clan replaces the sedentary dynasty and within two or three generations the acculturation of the most active nomadic elements occurs. Thus, one nomadic cycle is concluded.

To exemplify the parallelism and synchronism which existed between the nomadic races and sedentary empires, let us recall that the third century B.C. was a time of development for not only three sedentary empires (Rome, Arsacide Iran, and the Han dynasty in China) but also for the nomadic *pax* of the Huns (Hsiung-nu) centered in Mongolia. By about 220 A.D. the power of all four of these states had nearly simultaneously collapsed.

Hence, economic achievements, not natural calamities, were responsible for the activity of the *vagina nationum* of the Eurasian desert steppe in the period 200 B.C.—220 A.D., just as later the economic decline of the sedentary empires effected the disintegration of the Hunnic Pax.

With regard to the last term, one may read about the nomads of the steppe and the nomads of the sea already in the history of ancient Egypt, and see there the cooperation which existed between the two. In studying the so-called Viking Age in European history, one cannot but see a striking similarity in the emergence and structure of the realms established by the nomads of the sea. In their emergence, the role of *vagina nationum* was placed either by some rocky island coast or peninsula (e.g., Jutland, Scandinavia, Estonia), or by a marshy interior, whose great lakes were connected by waterways to a sea (Ladoga, later Novgorod) that was located near important trade routes. The mobility that the nomads of the steppe attained by using horses or camels was assured to the nomads of the sea by their ships.

Here let me also mention the role of capital which was provided by professional international merchants. The latter were, of course, interested in maintaining peace along international trade routes. Until the sixteenth century only nomadic realms were in a position to provide such a service. Therefore, we witness the close cooperation that existed between the international merchants of Eurasia and the nomadic charismatic clans. For instance, the future Činggis Qa'an was certainly a military genius, but without the capital provided to him by the Muslim Khwārizmian merchants (who at that time con-

trolled the tradeways from Iran to China), he would have been unable to maintain his enormous army and to supply his soldiers with arms and provisions. The moment a promising unifier of the steppe emerged, the international merchants of the region did everything possible to secure his cooperation. Therefore, we should not be surprised to learn from the sources that, after China and Eastern Europe were conquered by the Mongols, Iranian merchants from Central Asia ruled them as governors, tax farmers, and the like.

Throughout the Middle Ages the towns in the Eurasian steppe as well as those within the sphere of the *Mare Balticum*, or the Baltic Sea, were created not by the native population, but by foreign international traders. In Eurasia, these were, as already mentioned, Iranians; in northeastern Europe, they were first Jews and Frisians, and later Saxon-Germans of the Hansa.

Up to this point, I have used the terms "nomadism" and "nomads" in the traditional sense. But these terms, taken from anthropology, have no relevance as historical concepts. If we read that between 550 A.D. and 740 A.D. the Turks of Central Asia were masters of a "nomadic" empire, and the Ottomans, being Turks, *ergo* nomads, created an empire, we are faced with the following problem: Was the Ottoman empire also "nomadic"? The answer is "no," since the common denominator in that syllogism is not "nomadism," but empire.

The only permanent element in the so-called Eurasian "pastoral nomadism" was the idea of an empire, or *pax*. This was created to produce economic profit and therefore always resulted in cooperation between a steppe aristocracy and an elite among international traders, who were usually of Iranian origin. This symbiotic relationship was recognized by Kāšgharī, a philologist of the eleventh century, who noted a Turkic proverb: *Tātsiz Türk bolmas, bašsiz börk bolmas*—"There is no Tāt [Iranian merchant] except in the company of a Turk, [just as] there is no cap unless there is a head to put it on." When any ruling class of the steppe *pax* lost its charisma, it was replaced by another. Similarly variable was the territory of the *pax*; if necessary, a new territory would be acquired provided it had similar significance from the viewpoint of economic strategy.

In order to keep the empire running, it was essential to maintain a standing army and to have a functioning bureaucracy. As was the

case in contemporary Western Europe, it was impossible for the creators of the steppe *pax* to produce enough cash to pay for these essentials until the thirteenth century. The only alternative was to use the profits of a pastoral economy for that purpose—a solution reminiscent of Western feudalism. But the Ottomans had no Eurasian steppe at their disposal. Their solution was, therefore, to create a huge bureaucratic machinery without individual allegiances that would produce cash from the conquered territories. Both this machinery and the elite military units (*yeniçeri*) were recruited from specially trained slaves under the *Qulluq* system, an invention of the Iranian long-distance merchants of Central Asia, who were often absent from their homes for long periods of time. The system was so perfectly constructed that even the head of the Ottoman Empire, the Sultan, had to be the son of a slave girl.

But the Ottomans were not the first to introduce into history the system of training slaves to produce a state's ruling elite. This had already happened in the middle of the sixth century, when a small band of young but enterprising adventurers from Inner Asia—of both Altaic and Iranian origin and numbering a few thousand—appeared in Europe. They called themselves Avars, a name which had belonged to a formerly strong steppe power. Use of this name assured the new group the obedience of distant tribes which the former Avars once terrified.

Having arrived in Central Europe, the pseudo-Avars chose the Slavs, a hitherto unknown people, to serve two purposes. First, they selected from the Slavs recruits for command posts, and, after thorough training, these recruits became the so-called *fšū-pāna* (> Slavic *župan*), literally “the shepherds of the (human) cattle.” Second, they used the Slavic masses as cannon-fodder, called *befulci* by the contemporary Frankish chronicler Pseudo-Fredegar, “because they advanced twice to the attack in their war bands, and so covered the Chuni [meaning Avars].” The selection by the pseudo-Avars of the Slavs marked their discovery and at the same time their entrance into history.

5.

From the eighth to tenth centuries there were only two types of trading settlements in Eurasia: in the East there was the Persian *var*, a version of an Oriental city (owned by an individual), or a mixture

of *var* with a classical *polis*; in the West there was a permanent or semi-permanent trading place for traveling merchants called in Germanic *vík* (in Romance, *portus*), located in the vicinity of a burgh or bishop's see. The frontier between the *var* and *vík* types of settlements was the river Elbe.

In both types there were local or foreign workers who served the merchants as guards, mercenaries, shippers, etc., much as the later *qazaqs* (Cossacks) did in Eastern Europe. To the west of the Elbe these people were called Vikings; to the east of the Elbe, they were known as *Værings* (> *Varjag*). From time to time these workers wrested their independence from their employers. Since they had learned all the details of a given trade, their coups were usually successful and then interpreted by the medieval chroniclers as "miraculous tragedies."

It is futile to attempt to establish the nationality of the Vikings and *Værings*. They had none! They were, above all, professionals ready to serve anyone who needed their skills and could pay for their services.

Here one should mention that the sources also confirm the cooperation through trade between the nomads of the sea and rivers and the nomads of the steppe, as well as between the nomads of the steppe and their local helpers in towns—Viking, *Væring/Varjag*, or anyone else. One clear example is the case of the ancestors of the Hungarians, originally Fennic nomads of the rivers, who became partners of the Turkic nomads of the steppe.

III. *Eastern Europe Enters the Historical Scene (Ninth Century): Emergence of Rus'*

1.

Eastern Europe entered the historical scene, i.e., the era for which written records exist, in the ninth century as a result of its discovery by the civilization of the *Mare Nostrum*, which created there its colonial "duplication," the economic-cultural sphere of the *Mare Balticum*. One may ask the legitimate question: Why did this occur in the ninth century, and not in the fifth or twelfth? What incentive stimulated the culture of the *Mare Nostrum* to discover Eastern Europe shortly before the ninth century?

The emergence of the Arab Muslim empire c. 650 had split the *Mare Nostrum* into two independent parts, the Muslim southern and

eastern littoral, and the Christian northern shore. The greatest event in the history of the *Mare Nostrum* after that was the Abbasside revolution in 750. What caused this turning point? By 740 the Arabs had already conquered all the territory they could control. In the north, they had gone as far as Frankish Gaul, but Tours and Poitiers convinced them that the Pyrenees were a reasonable frontier. In the south, they had reached the Sahara Desert, but their camels could not cross it, and so the Sahara became the frontier. To the east they touched the Syr Darya and the Taraz rivers, where their encounter with the waiting Chinese persuaded both sides that this, too, should be accepted as a frontier.

There were no economic problems during this heyday of Arab conquest, for immense booty supported the kind of welfare state system that was emerging. But by 740 booty was no longer being captured, and it became imperative to exchange the war economy for a system of production. This meant that both the old Roman (Western and Eastern) and the Persian factories had to be restored to productive capability. The Abbasside government then confronted a problem that is familiar to all of us today—that of energy generation. Until the industrial revolution of the nineteenth century, the only profitable source of energy was slave labor. But where was one to get slaves at that time? Neither Muslims nor Christians were permitted by their religion to enslave their own believers. Wars waged between the Christians and Muslims produced prisoners of war whom both sides sought to exchange. But there was a vast territory beyond the cultural world of that time, east of the Elbe River and west and north of the Syr Darya River. This territory was soon recognized as a reservoir of potential slaves, who were now appended to the Mediterranean term *Şaqḻab* = *Sclav*. The idea of slave trade may be repugnant to us today, but we should not forget that in the Middle Ages, as in the days of the Roman Empire, slaves were regarded as an important commodity. The importation of slaves was a highly respected profession, requiring experience, expediency, and proficiency.

3.

The territory called *Şaqḻabiya*, described above, now became (as did Africa from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries) a hunting

ground from which one could obtain the important commodity called *ṣaqāliba*, or slaves. Arabic geographers during the Classic period of Islamic science (tenth century) give a detailed description of how hunters from the Christian West (Franks, Spaniards) and from the Islamic East (Khwārizmians) pursued their trade. Special factories whose purpose was the production of eunuchs were established in Verdun in the west and in Khwārizm in the east.

The ninth-century Arabic author, Ibn Khurdādhbeh, who, as chief of the Abbasside intelligence system, had expert knowledge of trade routes and trading companies visiting the Caliphate, informs us that only two international trading companies engaged in the Eurasian slave trade: the Jewish Rādhāniya and the non-Jewish *Rūs*. A detailed analysis of this source reveals that the two trading companies were not active simultaneously, and that the former operated earlier. In fact, the corporation of the *Rūs* replaced the corporation of the Rādhāniya in Eastern Europe. Along with the *Annales Bertiniani*, which mention the existence of a ruler of the *Rūs* (Rhos) in 839, Ibn Khurdādhbeh's information, written sometime between 840 and 880, is the earliest mention of the *Rūs* in the "existing" sources.

Now we are faced with an unexpected phenomenon. The *Rūs*, who had just emerged from obscurity, were already skilled international merchants. Who were these *Rūs*? They were certainly not a primitive tribal group with no knowledge of geography, foreign languages, or economics. They must have possessed an idea of the law of the merchant and—a very important point—they must have attained creditability in the world of commerce.

4.

History shows us that international trade is closely tied only with those empires which can protect the merchant, gain for him attraction, and assure him creditability. Only an imperial political tradition could provide such elements for groups of international traders. In the eighth-ninth centuries only two such traditions existed: the Roman (Western or Eastern) and Arab (Sasanian) imperial heritages. As my research has proved, the Rādhāniya and the *Rūs* were both based in Roman Gaul, the Rādhāniya around Arles and Marseille, the *Rūs* in a region of present-day south-central France near Rodez (the old *Rutenicis*, from Celto-Latin *Ruteni* or *Ruti*, which had

changed into *Rusi* in Middle France, and into *Rūzzi* in Middle German).

5.

The Rādhāniya discovered Eastern Europe as a commercial base shortly after 750 and, as numismatic data has confirmed, their activity continued until the 830s. They traded slaves for silver coins, called *dirhems*, struck in Qayruwān in North Africa. The hoards of *dirhems* found in Eastern Europe are limited to those minted between the 760s and 830s.

It is clear why the Rādhāniya were the first traders to enter Eastern Europe. With the division of the *Mare Nostrum* about 660, neither Muslims nor Christians could travel and trade freely on the sea, since they were in a continuous state of war. Only former Roman subjects who were of Jewish faith could travel without danger from Marseille to Qayruwān (North Africa) and from there to Constantinople. Their destination was the capital of the Turkic Khazars, where it was easy to get slaves. The Volga and Don Rivers soon developed into a highway of slave trade, known in Arabic sources as *Nahr aṣ-Ṣaqālība*, which means the "Highway of the Slaves," not the "Slavic River," as patriotic historians of Eastern Europe often render it.

As a result of the cooperation between the Rādhāniya and the Khazars, the military and economic leaders of the Khazar state converted to Judaism. This act caused internal conflict, since the theoretical ruler of Khazaria, the *Khagan*, felt duty-bound to maintain the Old Turkic religion.

6.

In the meantime, the non-Jewish fellow merchants from Rodez/*Rutenicis* had determined to seek access to this eastern *El Dorado*. Since they could not use the *Mare Nostrum*, they (like Christopher Columbus at a later date) decided to circumnavigate.

Old Scandinavian tradition knows a paramount event whose date modern scholars have established as c. 770. I refer to the Brávellir battle between the Old Danish (*Skjöldungar*) and Frisian (Rutenian) dynasties, which ended with the victory of the latter. Since among the battle's participants the name *Rus'* and its correspondences are attested, we may assume that by that time the Rodez company had already entered into competition with the Rādhāniya.

The Frisians began their maritime ventures with the Anglo-Saxon colonization of Britain (c. 440 A.D.), and maintained a monopoly on navigation in the north for a considerable time. But, as their trading activity developed, they passed on more and more navigational experience to the Scandinavians, who during the eighth century made astonishing progress in shipbuilding. Dorestad, a Frisian emporium or "market town," located between a Carolingian fort and the fork of the Rhine Delta, specialized in Eastern European ventures. Having established their main *berik* (judicial district) and chief market at Reric (< Beric) in the western Baltic Obodriti territory (probably in the vicinity of the later Lübeck), the Frisians gradually took control of the *Mare Balticum* in cooperation with Scandinavian chiefs who were eager to acquire new income. Soon "Birch" (*Birka*) settlements sprang up at every prospective harbor place along the *Mare Balticum*. These were the precursors of cities in the later Hanseatic League, and among them was *Birka*, in the Swedish Uppland, which acquired a leading role because of its commercially strategic position. It seems that at one time the terms Rus' and/or *Birka* (Birch) were a kind of trademark for the companies from Rodez.

7.

Helped by Frisian intermediaries, the Rodez/Rus' trading company had at their disposal navigators, disciplined by fierce Scandinavian kings, the *konungar*. They soon developed a "Danish" society that I call "the nomads of the sea," and by the end of the eighth century started their activity as Vikings.

The Scandinavian peninsula was soon circumnavigated and the area called Biarmia (*Zavoločskaja čud'*) was discovered. A route was also discovered from Birka in the Swedish Uppland via Birca on the Aaland archipelago and the Gulf of Finland to the Neva River. Both routes continued to the Volga Basin. New routes to *El Dorado* followed, and along these the trading company Rus' established settlements. The most important was located on the peninsula near Jaroslavl' and the later Rostov (*Sarskoje gorodišče* of the Old Chronicle), originally populated by the Fennic Merjans. It was managed by the charismatic Viking clan of Ynglingar. Another Frisian-Rus' trans-Baltic route went from the Wendish Berik (> Reric, after 804 A.D. the Danish Haithabu) to the mouth of the Western Dvina River

(Düna), continuing along its course until it reached the river Oka, the main western tributary of the Volga, through a system of portages.

In Gnezdovo, near the later town of Smolensk, 3826 grave mounds (*tumuli*) bear witness to Varangian activity during the eighth to tenth centuries. Under the leadership of the Gothic Ylfingar clan, two important trade towns, Polock and Smolensk, developed. They were colonized by Baltic Wends, whose neighbors called them *Kriviči*. Those settlements which acquired town status organized themselves into city-states or into confederations of city-states, and invited experienced members of the West Baltic charismatic clans to rule over them. This was the case with the confederation of three towns, Aldeigjuborg (Ladoga), Beloozero and Izborsk, each representing a different "nationality" (Ladoga—the Ests, Beloozero—the Vepsians, and Izborsk—the Slavonic Wends), who invited the mighty Frisian Danish king Hrærik (Rjurik) to be their ruler. Novgorod chose Gostomysl from a Wendic charismatic clan.

In short, by the period 800–860 Eastern Europe had already been apportioned into two spheres of interest. While the south remained divided between three formerly nomadic *paces* (Avars, Bulgars, and Khazars), northeastern Europe ("Great Sweden" = *Magna Scythia*) became the dominion of a newly-activated society of the *Mare Balticum*, led by charismatic clans and agents of the Rus' company.

Unhappily, no accounts of peoples who followed the routes established by the Frisian-Rus'-Viking cooperation have survived. But there is no reason to doubt that enterprising individuals and groups of seafaring peoples tried their luck in East European trade, regardless of their origin or ties to the aforementioned trading companies. On the other hand, some agents of the Rus'-Frisian business emporia could seek their fortunes outside this vast foreign country.

Let us now characterize the developing society of the *Mare Balticum* region. It was certainly not a national culture in the modern sense. The "Danes," the Frisians, and the Rus' operating there appear as a multiethnic, multilingual and non-territorial community composed of "nomads of the sea" and of urban dwellers in Oriental (owned and controlled by lords) and partly *polis* type towns and trading settlements. Confirming the theory that the market, as an economic organization, is the creation of traders and not of farmers

or artisans, the Rus' and Frisians appear as international merchants. In this kind of professional society, i.e., in a "lower" type of culture, there is as yet no place for *one* literary or sacred language, which is the basis of a "higher culture." In urban trading settlements, different languages served different functions. Vernacular (everyday speech) was the medium of communication within the family and clan, while a system of at least two or more *linguae francae* were reserved to referential usage. In short, a professional society developed a low level, professional culture that was bound neither to a specific territory nor to a higher religion that might be expressed through *one* sacred, written language.

Considering this situation, Constantine Porphyrogenitus recorded the names of the Dnieper cataracts in the two *linguae francae* used by the representatives of the *Mare Balticum* culture along the recently established tenth century Dnieper trade route. Along the Volga route, Khwārizmian and Bulgarian-Hunic were used as *linguae francae*, while in the North-Dvina Basin Čudian (Estonian) and Middle Persian (Pahlavi) continued to serve as a means of international communication.

Clearly, then, it is impossible to speak of a national Swedish culture in the eighth to tenth centuries. In the society of the *Mare Balticum*, all peoples, whether Norsemen, Wends (Slavs), Balts, or Finns, were equal members. Since the most ancient and highly-developed religious cult of the time was centered in Swedish Uppsala, a base suited by nature for seafaring adventure, personal names of Scandinavian origin held great attraction for the region's peoples, regardless of their ethnic origin. It was also a contemporary custom (known from its usage by the Rurikids) to have two or three names, depending on spheres of activity or marital connections.

The Kābar revolution in Chazaria, described by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, was the struggle of the Khagan and his supporters to free the realm from the supremacy of the majordomo (*beg*) and the Judaism he imposed. After his defeat, the Khazar Khagan was forced to leave the country and found refuge in the Rus' company's settlement near Rostov. The Old Scandinavian and Oriental sources hint that he later married a girl of the originally Uppsala-based clan Ynglingar, the most illustrious dynasty within the sphere of the *Mare Balticum*. Since the Khagan had political charisma, his stay in the

commercial settlement of the Rus' company elevated it to the status of an "imperial" political center different from the colonies headed by other Rus' representatives, as, for example, the Dvina Ylfingar. The result was the emergence of the K(h)aganat Rus', about which our first information is dated 839 A.D.

It was probably not accidental that the Byzantine emperor was concerned with the security of the *Rhos* envoys, because since the time of Heraclius (d. 641) a traditional friendship had existed between the Byzantine and Khazar dynasties. The famous sermon by Metropolitan Hilarion, *Slovo o zakone i blagodati*, had styled Volodimer the Great as *Kagan*. This meant that he was allowed to marry Anna, who was *porphyrogenita*, that is, she was conceived in the royal bedchamber. For that same reason, Anna was previously refused to the western Emperor Otto II, who was considered a parvenu.

Already during the 830s the Volga Rus' were to eliminate the Rādhāniya from competition in Eastern Europe.

IV. *The "Southern" Impact on the Emerging Rus' State*

I.

Up to this point, we have observed the East European scene primarily from a northern perspective, from that of the *Mare Balticum*. Yet we have also noticed the interaction on the steppe that developed into a typical cooperation between the "nomads of the sea" (the so-called Vikings/Værings) and the "nomads of the steppe" (the Khazar Dynasty). This synthesis resulted in the Volga-Rus' Khaganate of the ninth-tenth centuries. By the turn of the tenth century, however, two sets of developments had occurred in the sphere of the *Mare Nostrum* which affected this synthesis, namely, Charlemagne's conquest of the Avars and the Cyrillo-Methodian mission.

The first began with Charlemagne's conquest of the mighty East Central European Avar realm, which resulted in the *Renovatio Imperii* of 800 A.D. and the "pacification" of the Slavs, the slaves of the former Avar Pax (863-885 A.D.). There can be no doubt that Charlemagne's action had an economic goal—i.e., to establish a land route to the Khazarian Itil, the famous "highway" Regensburg (Ratisbona)-Itil along which Kiev and later Vienna were to develop.

The pacification of the Avars was not a simple undertaking. By

the 860s, both Romes (even though they were on non-speaking terms—I refer here to the alienation between Patriarch Photius and Pope Nicholas I) decided to fill the vacuum left by the dissolution of the Avar realm by elevating the former slaves of the Avars, the Slavs. Their barbaric tongue was now to become a sacred language alongside Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. Since at that time only Constantinople had scholars who could create a new literary language and eventually translate Christian religious writing, the brothers Constantine/Cyril and Methodius, friends of Photius, journeyed from the eastern capital of Christendom to Moravia, located on territory claimed by the Roman pope.

2.

The paradox of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission was that the Moravian princes, those *homines novi* who inherited the charisma of the Avar Pax, failed to take advantage of the extremely important cultural weapon they were offered. Having adopted Christianity in the Slavonic rite in the hope that their Bavarian neighbors would treat them as equals, they were angered to realize that they had chosen the wrong rite to serve this vital purpose. The Moravians banished the Slavic missionaries and exchanged their “inferior” rite for the Latin faith.

But by that time the Bulgarian rulers, who for almost two centuries had been decimating their strength in a struggle for supremacy with the Byzantine emperors, decided to merge with their Slavic slaves into one state. They too were obliged to embrace Christianity in order to be recognized as a European power. After long consideration, Khan Bogoris personally accepted the Greek rite. His son, Symeon, however, seized upon the opportunity to appropriate the abandoned Slavonic rite. He invited the banished Byzantine missionaries to his domain and began to lay the foundation for an independent Slavic Bulgarian high culture. In contrast to the Moravian princes, Symeon, a scion of the Attila dynasty, had no inferiority complex: in his view the Byzantine emperors were the parvenus.

The Danube Bulgars were probably helped by the Black Bulgars of the Taman peninsula who, as the descendants of Kobrat's *Magna Bulgaria* (sixth and seventh centuries), remained on territory where the Hellenistic culture of the Bosphorus Kingdom survived. In the

ninth and tenth centuries this was the only spot in Europe where the idea of the transfer and fusion of cultures was alive. It was here that Constantine/Cyril learned Hebrew and was initiated into the art of translation. As long as the Bulgars were pagans, the danger they posed was considerable, but not critical. The emergence of a proud Bulgarian version of Eastern Christianity, however, was a direct threat to Constantinople's cultural and religious hegemony, and this led Emperor Basil to undertake swift and repressive action, which earned him the title, "Slayer of the Bulgars." After 1018 Bulgaria ceased to exist as a political power, and after 1036 as a cultural power as well.

3.

The second half of the ninth century was also to be of basic importance for Eastern Europe, for during that time Kiev and the area of the present-day Ukraine entered the realm of history. The impetus for this development was the emergence of Constantinople as the economic capital of Eurasia. This occurred during the rule of the able, so-called Macedonian Dynasty of Byzantine emperors, who decisively defeated the Arab fleets and restored Byzantine supremacy over the *Mare Nostrum* (especially at the battle of Mayyāfāriqīn in 863). Naturally, Constantinople then won the attention of the "Vikings," the only society in Eurasia, apart from Byzantium and the Arabs, which maintained naval fleets during the ninth and tenth centuries. The Carolingians, for instance, remained complete strangers to the sea until after their demise.

Soon after the Rus' military encounter in Constantinople in 860 A.D., the famous "Route from the Varangians to the Greeks" came into being. The Dnieper River replaced the Volga, and Kiev, the former Khazarian garrison point on the Dnieper ford, emerged in the second half of the tenth century as a promising satellite of the new economic capital of the world—Istanbul (εἰς τὴν πόλιν), or Constantinople. Around 930, Igor of the Volga Rus' Khagan dynasty conquered Kiev.

4.

There are at least three periods in the history of the Khagans of Rus': the Volga stage (c. 839–930), the Dnieper stage (c. 930–1036),

and the Kievan stage (1036–1169). During the first two, the Rus' ruled over peoples rather than specific territories. They eliminated competitors when necessary (like the Polock Ylfingar), extracted tributes, and controlled the marketplaces along the following two main international routes: 1) the Volga and Dvina trade routes, important during the ninth and the first half of the tenth centuries, with their two branches of Islamic-centered commerce—the Bulgar and the Itil; and 2) the Dnieper trade route of the tenth century from the Varangians through Kiev to Greek Constantinople, then the center of international economy. The third, or Kievan stage marked the beginning of the cultural consolidation of Rus' and an attempt at their nationalization.

5.

After 1036, the Kievan ruler Jaroslav routed the Pečenegs (the nomad successors of the Khazars) and established his own version of the Roman *imperium*, centered now at St. Sophia in Kiev. He adopted Church Slavonic (which, following the fall of the Danube Bulgars, was again without an owner) as the realm's sacred language.

Jaroslav also began the transformation of Rus' into a territorial community consisting of the lands of Kiev, Černihiv, and Perejaslav. The terms *Rus'* and *rus'skaja zemlja* (Rus' land) then appeared in the second half of the eleventh century and beginning of the twelfth century with the new, specific meaning of Southern Rus' (the Ukraine of today). Only now, during this time, did a cultural revolution take place. Transformed from a multiethnic, multilingual, and non-territorial community with a "low" culture, Kievan Rus' was endowed with a new "high" culture based on a foreign, written, and sanctified Slavic language (traditionally known as Church Slavonic), and as a result appeared on the stage of East European history.

This solution, whereby Kievan Rus' emerged as a political and religious center, appears all the more logical since, after the fall of the independent Danube Bulgarian state, its church and Slavonic rite, with its relatively solid corpus of ecclesiastical and state "political" texts, were left without an owner. Consequently, it was possible for Kievan Rus' to acquire immediately a cultural province without the danger of loss of identity. Thus the Rus' rite (*rus'kyj jazyk*) originated with a Slavonic sacred language and the Cyrillic

script. This Slavonic Rus' rite became the basis for the "nationalization" or fusion of Slavic Polanian and non-Slavic Rus'ian elements into one Rus'ian land (*rus'skaja zemlja*) that became the permanent settlement for the Rus', specifically on the territory of the Kiev, Černihiv, and Perejaslav principalities, i.e., on the central Ukrainian territories.

Up to that time the Rus' were only the foreign ruling class based on a primitive organization of nomads of the sea and nomads of rivers who periodically collected taxes (*poljud'je*) for their prince but were not connected with any territory. In order to invest Jaroslav's dynasty with Christian legitimacy, it was necessary to revive the cult of his half brothers, Boris and Gleb. Although slain in an ordinary power struggle, these sons of a Bulgarian princess were canonized by the Kievan Metropolitan Joan, himself a Bulgarian, almost immediately after their deaths (c. 1020). Jaroslav, the proper founder of the Rus' dynasty, succeeded in establishing his new image as a good brother who avenged the death of the saintly innocents (although he himself was probably involved in their slaying) and in taking over for himself and his dynasty the charisma of SS. Boris and Gleb.

He decreed that "the new feast of the Rus' land" (*prazdnik novyi Rus'kyja zemlja*) in commemoration of Boris and Gleb be celebrated with extraordinary solemnity six times annually, with July 24 as the central feast-day. It was on that date in 1072 and 1115, on the occasion of the transfer of the relics of these saints, that massive "all-national" manifestations took place. In both cases these manifestations were used to publish redactions of original analistic collections created especially for the occasion at the first intellectual center in Eastern Europe—the Caves Monastery of Kiev. Only now, in their Kievan stage, with the realization of their own historical consciousness, do the Rus' emerge as a legitimate historical entity.

V. *Conclusions*

The two-hundred-year-old Normanist versus Anti-Normanist controversy has been unable to solve the problem of the origin of Rus'. Therefore, it has been replaced here by another theory based solely on historical criteria and in the broader context of universal development.

In the eighth and ninth centuries there emerged a multiethnic,

multilingual, unified social and economic entity (of a "low" culture type) represented by the maritime and trading society of the *Mare Balticum* and transplanted by the bearers of the culture of the *Mare Nostrum*. It took more than two centuries for the multiethnic and multilingual commercial ventures of some trading companies and nomads of the sea to adapt the political structure and charisma associated with empires of the steppe and to transform this into a Christian and linguistically Slavic high culture that became Kievan Rus'.