Chapter 4

The Rise of New Centers

In the late Rus era (1132–1237), new centers arose providing more competition to Kiev for leadership. As the Riurikid clan increased, it found cooperation more difficult. Although control over Kiev remained a prize worth struggling for, princes increasingly concentrated on their own hereditary principalities. Both within Rus and among the Riurikids, centrifugal tendencies gained the upper hand, and new clans were formed among the descendants of the early princes. Kiev no longer produced its occasional strong, unifying ruler, and other political centers assumed increasing importance, partly as a result of growing economies that enabled them to challenge Kiev's former predominance. Three became especially significant: Vladimir-Suzdal (Suzdalia) in the Northeast, Galicia-Volhynia in the southwest, and the city-state of Novgorod in the north.

Of the three, Suzdalia, with its strong princes, became the most authoritarian. Conversely, Galicia's forceful boyars helped make Galicia-Volhynia less authoritarian but also less stable. In Novgorod, where the *veche* was fairly strong, the prince's powers became increasingly circumscribed. Yet Novgorod's practice of selecting outside princes provided pretexts for other principalities to interfere in its affairs. Its city politics was extremely fractious, and the city's wealthy boyars were too factionalized and self-serving to provide consistent enlightened leadership to the city-state.

GROWING RUS DIVERSITY AND THE FATE OF KIEV

For a century after 1132 and the death of Mstislav, son of Vladimir Monomakh, about a dozen separate Rus principalities contended with each other (see Map 4.1). It is even difficult to speak of Rus as a country, although it remained a loose confederation. Only its common Riurikid ancestors, its remembrance of more unified days, and especially its shared religion and culture—which continued spreading further into the countryside and down the social ladder—preserved a tenuous unity.

The Kievan principality especially was afflicted with political instability. Two

MAP 4.1

reasons why were the breakdown of any accepted succession and the gluttonous appetites of surrounding princes. Flux was greatest in three periods: (1) about the middle third of the twelfth century, when Kiev averaged one ruler every two years; (2) the first dozen years of the thirteenth century; and (3) the last five years (1235–1240) before the Mongols captured Kiev.

In 1169, toward the end of the first period of great flux, the forces of Suzdalia's Andrei Bogoliubsky sacked Kiev. Prince Andrei's father was the most famous of the younger sons of Monomakh; he was Yuri Dolgoruki (Yuri the Long-armed), prince of Suzdal and, more briefly, of Kiev. Allied with Bogoliubsky's men were others including Poles and Polovtsy. After besieging the city for weeks, this combined army took it and plundered it mercilessly, including the churches and some of their icons and other valued possessions.

Around 1200, during the second period of great flux, Prince Roman of Galicia-Volhynia captured Kiev and set up a lesser prince to rule there. A few years later, the ruling princely houses of Smolensk and Chernigov managed to put aside their usual rivalry temporarily and sent a combined force to capture and sack Kiev. This sacking seems to have been even worse than that of 1169. The attackers burnt parts of the city, looted the churches and monasteries, killed many people, and allowed Polovtsy auxiliary troops to take captives back with them to the steppe.

Within a few years, the princes of Smolensk and Chernigov once again were battling each other. Kiev bounced back and forth between the two princely houses until 1212, after which the Smolensk princes held the reigns of power for the next twenty-three years.

During the third and last cycle of flux, from 1235 to 1240, Kiev again bounced back and forth (seven times) and once again primarily between the ruling houses of Smolensk and Chernigov. Finally, in 1240, the Mongols abruptly halted the Rus conflict over Kiev by capturing the city, as they had many others in the previous few years.

Besides all the political instability, and in part because of it, Kiev's earlier dynamic growth began to slacken. By 1200, its territory was smaller than that of Novgorod, Vladimir-Suzdal, Smolensk, Polotsk, Galicia-Volhynia, or Chernigov. In addition to the political flux, Polovtsy raids and economic decline have often been listed as reasons for Kiev's increasing problems. But Franklin and Shepard downplay the effect of the Polovotsy raids and maintain that "Kiev remained immensely wealthy."[1] They believe that the main emphasis should be not on Kiev's perceived political decline, but on overall Rus adaptability, which fostered continuing "economic and cultural expansion for the Rus as a whole."[2]

Certainly one reason Kiev was so fought over by various princes was that it was such a great prize. The city itself remained among the two largest in Rus lands, the home of the Rus Orthodox metropolitan—a most important consideration—and a chief center of foreign trade.

[1]Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus, 750–1200* (London, 1996), p. 367.
[2]Ibid., p. xix.

RISE OF SUZDALIA

During the twelfth century, the northeastern area of Rus, between the Oka and Volga rivers, became increasingly important. By 1200, Vsevolod III, prince of Vladimir-Suzdal, was the strongest prince in all the Rus lands. He called himself "grand prince," and many other princes recognized him as the senior prince among the many descendants of Vladimir Monomakh. In that year, he sent his two-year-old son to be prince of Novgorod and appointed his ten-year-old son as prince of Pereiaslavl, a principality to the east of Kiev. To the south of Suzdalia, Vsevolod had dominated the princes of Murom-Riazan throughout the quarter century he had been in power.

What was the secret of his success? There were several, starting with geography. The principality he ruled was blessed with many rivers, including most of the upper Volga. Because some of these same rivers flowed out of or into neighboring territories, Suzdalia was in a good position to act as a middleman in east-west, north-south trade. During the late twelfth century, Vladimir became an especially important center for east-west trade that flowed westward from the Volga Bulgars through to Smolensk and beyond. Suzdalia was also ideally situated to interfere with Novgorodian trade that depended on the Volga and with Novgorodian tribute-gathering in the southeast portion of its territory.

In addition to its rivers, Suzdalia contained rich soil—the cities of Suzdal and Vladimir both lay within the fertile Vladimir Opole region. Furthermore, Suzdalia was not as harassed by foreign enemies as were the people of Kiev or Novgorod. By the end of the twelfth century, Suzdalia had its chief foreign foe, the Volga Bulgars, on the defensive.

Many historians have maintained that large numbers of Slavs migrated to Suzdalia mainly because of its more secure position during the late Rus era, especially from the less secure and stable south. Certainly many new cities sprang up in the Suzdalian region, and by 1200 it was one of the most populated Rus principalities.

While geography provided Suzdalia the opportunity for increasing its power, four princes actualized this potential. The first was Yuri, who picked up the appellation Dolgoruki because of his interference or long reach into other principalities. In 1125 (the year his father, Vladimir Monomakh, died), he moved his northeast capital from the ancient city of Rostov to Suzdal. Until his death by poison in Kiev in 1157, he pursued a multifaceted policy that his two strong successors would imitate. It involved developing and colonizing Suzdalia—then still lightly populated by Finno-Ugrians and Slavs—and establishing control, or at least increased influence, in other important territories. These included the principalities of Kiev, where he became grand prince in 1155, Novgorod, Murom-Riazan, Chernigov, and the Volga Bulgar area.

The second important prince of Suzdalia was Andrei Bogoliubsky, Yuri's son by a Polovtsy princess. Although his father spent his last few years in Kiev, Andrei thought it unnecessary to go there to exercise whatever authority a grand prince could by then apply. Instead, after his forces sacked Kiev in 1169, he remained in Vladimir, which he had made the new capital of his northeast principality. Earlier, in an unsuccessful attempt to weaken Kiev and strengthen his capital, he even

tried to persuade the Orthodox patriarch of Constantinople to appoint a separate metropolitan in Vladimir. Like his father, his life ended violently: In 1174 some of his boyars assassinated him. And like his father's death, his own prompted additional violence. When Yuri had died, the people of Kiev had sacked and pillaged his palace and estate and killed some of his Suzdalian followers. Now following Andrei's death in Bogoliubovo—the site of his princely palace near Vladimir and meaning the place "loved by God"— some inhabitants sacked and pillaged his palace and the property of some of his officials.

After several years of conflict, Andrei's brother Vsevolod III assumed control and held it for thirty-six years until his death (of natural causes) in 1212. We have already examined his power in 1200. Like his father and brother, he strengthened Suzdalia, especially at the expense of Novgorod and the Volga Bulgars. Only toward the end of his reign did he suffer some serious setbacks. In the south in 1206, his son Yaroslav was kicked out of Pereiaslavl by the prince of Chernigov, who shortly before had succeeded in taking Kiev. A few years later, another son was forced out of Novgorod.

After the death of Vsevolod III in 1212, his sons spent the next six years either warring against each other or licking their wounds and waiting for another chance. Finally in 1218, Vsevolod's son Yuri took over undisputed control of Suzdalia and remained in power until 1238, when he died in battle at the hands of

FIGURE 4.1. Golden Gate of Vladimir. This main entrance to the city was built in 1164 and later altered.

the Mongols. This fourth strong prince of Suzdalia fought successful campaigns against the Volga Bulgars and the Finnish Mordva. Yet he remained primarily at peace with other Rus principalities and never exercised the influence over some of them that his father had. His rule enabled Suzdalia to be the most stable of the Rus principalities in the final decades before the Mongol invasion.

SIGNIFICANCE OF SUZDALIA

Besides its prominence in the late Rus era, Suzdalia is significant for the historical controversy it has aroused. The dispute centers on the continuity of the region (including Moscow) with earlier Rus history.

Early Russian historians such as Karamzin and Pogodin had few doubts that a strong continuity existed. While still recognizing considerable continuity, later nineteenth-century historians such as S. Soloviev and Kliuchevsky noticed some strong differences between Kiev and Suzdalia. Kliuchevsky, for example, believed that before the twelfth century, Suzdalia was a frontier area of primarily Finnish peoples. Then its strong colonizing princes and a great influx of Slavic peoples from the less secure south changed the region. The intermarrying of Slavs and Finns created a new ethnic type, the Russian or Great Russian. Overseeing colonization, the Suzdalian princes became more powerful than those in more developed Rus areas, where the boyars and veches (*vechi*) were more entrenched.

Furthermore, Kliuchevsky argued, the attitude of these strong northeastern princes toward the land they ruled was more proprietary than in other areas of Rus. They thought of it as their own private property, to rule or dispose of as they wished. The American historian Richard Pipes has developed these ideas even further and argued that this proprietary attitude is the key to understanding the Russian "patrimonial regime" that gradually evolved. Such a regime, according to Pipes, failed to distinguish between political rule over a territory and private ownership of one's lands. This resulted in the Russian princes attempting to rule their lands as they would their own private estates and households.

The Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Hruchevsky also saw differences between Suzdalia and Kiev but took the debate in a new direction. He argued that it was primarily the southern principalities of Galicia and Volhynia (in modern-day Ukraine), and not Suzdalia and then Moscow, that best carried on the traditions and culture of Rus. He thought the claim of Russian historians to the Rus legacy was false and that Russian history began only with the emergence of Vladimir-Suzdal. Rus history then belonged most properly to Ukrainian history.

During the Soviet period, most twentieth-century émigré Ukrainian historians followed Hruchevsky's example. Opposing this view, many Russian historians reiterated what Moscow apologists desirous of gaining former Rus lands had stated as early as the fifteenth century: that Moscow had the greatest claim to the Kievan legacy. A middle position—one taken here and by many historians—is to leave aside who has the greatest claim and simply recognize Kievan Rus as a legitimate part of the history of all three East Slavic nationalities: the Russians, Ukrainians, and Belorussians.

GALICIA AND VOLHYNIA

Galicia and Volhynia became distinct entities only in the eleventh century, but by 1200 they had combined to become another important new area. Both principalities included disputed territories along the Rus-Polish border. Galicia was the smaller of the two and the most western-reaching Rus territory. It shared a border with not only Poland, but also Hungary and extended northeastward from the foothills of the Carpathian Mountains. Its capital, Galich, was one of the fastest-growing cities in Rus before the Mongol invasion. Volhynia was to Galicia's north and shared its northern border with Lithuanian tribes.

The geography of these two principalities helped decide their fate. Their lands were fertile and well populated; Galicia contained valuable salt deposits; and both territories possessed important rivers and cities that linked them with north-south and east-west trade. Although less threatened by steppe nomads than the southeastern Rus lands, both sometimes struggled with Poland, and Galicia contended with Hungary. These conflicts blended with internal political instability to prevent the southwestern area from becoming a more dominant force in late Rus politics. Hungary, for example, often supported Volhynia against Galicia or intervened in battles between Galician princes and boyars.

The boyars of Galicia were the strongest in all Rus. Their fertile lands and trading activities, especially the salt trade, provided a strong economic base, and they were not afraid to challenge their prince. They even forced the strong Yaroslav Osmomysl (eight-minded), who reigned from 1153 to 1187, to discard his second wife, Anastasia, and later had her burnt at the stake. They ousted his son Vladimir, who had committed bigamy by marrying a priest's wife, until he returned with the support of foreign troops. In 1213, they took the unprecedented step of crowning one of their own as prince of Galicia—the only known case of a non-Riurikid prince on a Rus throne.

In Volhynia, the boyars were not so strong, and stronger princes were able to emerge there. A good example is Roman, who ruled from 1173 until 1205. In 1199, he brought Galicia under his control and at the beginning of the new century occupied Kiev and placed a minor Volhynian prince on its throne. He thus became the chief authority in most of the territory of modern-day Ukraine. Moreover, he fought successfully against the Lithuanians and Poles. According to legend, he even used Lithuanian captives in place of oxen to pull the plows on his estate. Although perhaps not literally true, the legend tells us something about this prince who liked to say: "You can't enjoy the honey without killing the bees."[3]

Even before Roman's death, however, Vsevolod III of Suzdalia had taken steps to limit his growing influence. After his death in 1205, the Galician boyars forced his widow and two young sons out of Galicia. Decades of Galician princely-boyar conflict and foreign intervention followed. Only in 1238 did Roman's oldest son, Daniel, retake part of Galicia. The following year he took Kiev, but to little avail, for in 1240 the Mongols vanquished it. Early the following year, they swept through Galicia and Volhynia, beginning a new chapter in the history of the region.

[3]Quoted in Orest Subtelny, *Ukraine: A History*, 2d ed. (Toronto, 1994), p. 60.

NOVGOROD

Although its growth in the late Rus period was not as impressive as Suzdalia's, the region of Novgorod (or Lord Novgorod the Great, as it sometimes was called) was still on the rise. Despite certain disadvantages—poor agricultural conditions, the growing danger of formidable foreign enemies, and the interference of other regions in its princely selection process—Novgorod's population and economy continued to expand. Its prosperity rested upon its trade, handicrafts, and tribute-collecting.

Located on both sides of the Volkhov River, the city itself was connected by rivers, lakes, and portages to three great water trade routes: the Baltic Sea and the Volga and Dnieper rivers. Novgorodian merchants and ships traveled abroad, especially in the Baltic, and foreign merchants, primarily from Scandinavian and German lands, resided in Novgorod. To the southwest, near the territory's western border, lay the city of Pskov, which possessed political institutions similar to those of the larger Novgorod. To the east of Novgorod, additional rivers furthered Novgorod's tribute-collecting in its vast hinterlands stretching to the Ural Mountains and the White Sea.

Besides being prosperous and large, Novgorod became increasingly tough on its princes. Earlier the oldest son of the grand prince of Kiev often ruled there—both Vladimir I and Yaroslav the Wise had been princes in Novgorod before

FIGURE 4.2. Church of St. Paraskeva Piatnitsa on the Marketplace, Novgorod, 1207, later modified and partly reconstructed. The church was built by merchants, who venerated Paraskeva; later on, many women adopted her as a special patroness of women.

becoming grand princes in Kiev. Although always guarding their rights vis-à-vis their prince, the people of Novgorod became increasingly insistent on them as Kiev weakened. In 1136, the Novgorodians arrested their prince, Vsevolod, son of Mstislav of Kiev, who had died four years earlier. They held him, his wife, children, and mother-in-law under guard until they selected a new prince from Chernigov. Then they expelled Vsevolod and his family.

The chief cause of the Novgorodians' displeasure with Vsevolod was a crushing defeat they had just suffered in a battle against Suzdalia, but there were other reasons too. They accused him of not caring for the common people, of desiring to become prince of another area, and of cowardly behavior in battle.

Prompted by their anger with Vsevolod, the Novgorodian *veche*, dominated by powerful boyars, took steps to weaken the powers of the princely office further. The Novgorodians began selecting their prince from a variety of other principalities, especially those of Suzdalia, Smolensk, and Chernigov. When they got tired of their prince, they increasingly "showed him the open road." They also restricted the prince's landowning rights in the city and confined him more to his headquarters out of town—the fortress of Gorodishche, which sat on the Volkhov, south of the city. As the century continued, the town's citizens further limited the prince's administrative and judicial duties. The one vital role he continued to perform was commanding Novgorod's military forces.

To see how Novgorod dealt with its princes in the late Rus era, we need only look at the city's chronicle, where the Novgorodians are continually chasing their prince out and obtaining a new one. Between 1154 and 1159, for example, they averaged better than a prince a year and ended the decade by arresting their prince, Sviatoslav Rostislavich, and his wife. Townspeople also sacked their possessions before sending envoys to Andrei Bogoliubsky in Suzdalia asking him to send a new prince. After he sent his nephew, a year later the Novgorodians dismissed him.

Sometimes, sensing danger ahead from dissatisfied citizens, the Novgorodian princes took it upon themselves to flee. One young prince in the early 1220s, Vsevolod, son of Yuri of Suzdalia, twice came in to replace another prince and twice fled, all in less than five years. One cause of the frequent challenging of princes was the lack of consensus among boyar families, who struggled with each other to influence the princely selection process.

As the powers of the prince declined, those of other officials, increasingly elected by the *veche*, grew stronger. The boyar *posadnik* became the chief city-state executive officer and even exercised some judicial powers. Another official was the *tysiatskii*, originally a commander of a 1,000-man city militia. During the twelfth century, his powers were broadened to include jurisdiction over various commercial dealings. Finally, the bishop (archbishop after 1165) of Novgorod, in whose selection the people of the city played a major role from 1156, also exercised increasing influence.

Yet Novgorodians kept a wary eye on these officials, especially their *posadnik*. Occasionally the wrath of the people would turn on him, and they would expel him or, less frequently, even plunder his property or kill him. They also jealously guarded certain autonomous rights in separate city districts or "ends" (numbering five by the end of the thirteenth century).

Novgorodians Versus Their Prince

The following selection is from Robert Michell and Nevill Forbes, eds., *The Chronicle of Novgorod, 1016–1471* (London, Royal Historical Society, 1914), p. 25. Bracketed material and ellipsis are mine. This excerpt illustrates well not only the often stormy relations between Novgorod and its princes—and other officials—but also how other principalities often became involved in such conflicts.

The same year [1167] Knyaz [Prince] Svyatoslav went out of Novgorod to [the city of] Luki, and sent to Novgorod, saying thus to them, that: "I do not want to be Knyaz among you, it pleases me not." And the men of Novgorod having kissed the picture of the Holy Mother of God, said to themselves that: "We do not want him," and went to drive him away from Luki; and he, having heard that they are coming against him, went to Toropets, and the men of Novgorod sent to Russia [i.e., Kiev] to Mstislav for his son. And Svyatoslav went to the Volga, and Andrei [Bogoliubsky] gave him help, and he burned Novi-torg [Torzhok], and the men of Novi-torg retired to Novgorod; and he did much damage to their houses, and laid waste their villages. . . . Andrei combined with the men of Smolensk and Polotsk against Novgorod, and they occupied the roads, and seized the Novgorod emissaries everywhere, not letting Mstislav in Kiev know; imposing Svyatoslav on the town by force, and saying this word: "There is no other Knyaz *for you than Svyatoslav." The men of Novgorod, however, heeded this not, and killed Zakhari the* Posadrlik*, and Nerevin, and the herald Nesda, because they thought they gave information to Svyatoslav.*

At the end of the Rus era, Novgorod was facing increasing pressures from Lithuanians, Germans, and Swedes. Its need for a strong warrior prince increased; it found one in Alexander Nevsky. Even this future hero of Novgorod, however, would have such serious differences with the Novgorodians in late 1240 that he quit being their prince until, frightened by the advance of the Germanic knights, they persuaded him to return in 1241 (see Chapter 5).

CONCLUSION

Much of what is known of the late Rus era comes from chronicles of the times. Reading them makes it difficult to disagree with the nationalist Russian historian Karamzin (1766–1820), who wrote of "internecine wars of faint-hearted princes, who, oblivious to the glory, good of the fatherland, slaughtered each other and ravaged the people."[4] A judgment later applied to this period, to quote Karamzin again, was that "Russia . . . perished from the division of authority." But he added that afterward it "was saved by wise autocracy."[5] The autocracy he referred to was that of later Moscow princes such as Ivan III. Thus, the legacy of the late Rus period was not just increasing political conflict. The era also served later

[4]Richard Pipes, ed. *Karamzin's Memoir on Ancient and Modern Russia* (New York, 1966), p. 105.
[5]Ibid., p. 110.

apologists for autocracy as a concrete example of the dangers of divided political authority.

Of course, this does not exhaust the late-Rus legacy. Some Russians and other East Slavs later chose to emphasize other aspects of Rus, for example, Novgorod's curtailment of princely power; Rus's continuing economic and urban vigor; its extensive contacts with other nations and peoples; or its rich, and increasingly Christian, culture.

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