Chapter 2

Rus Politics

The history of Rus's leading princes and an examination of its political structure revolve around five main domestic issues: (1) the role of the Varangians (Rus Vikings), (2) the tribute and trading emphasis of governing princes and their elite supporters, (3) the significance and impact of the acceptance of Christianity, (4) clan rule and succession questions, and (5) the complex and fragmented nature of political power. Some of these issues are also relevant to Rus's expansion and foreign policy, treated later in this chapter, and to economic, social, religious, and cultural questions, which are mainly dealt with in the next chapter.

VARANGIANS AND THE PRINCES

Most of what we know of the Rus princes comes from chronicles of the time, especially from *The Primary Chronicle*. This important book was compiled and revised, primarily by monks, between about 1040 and 1118. Although it is an invaluable source, sometimes corroborated by other materials, it must be used cautiously. Its compilers were not as faithful to historical accuracy as are most modern historians and sometimes compromised it for other considerations, such as upholding Christianity, the ruling Riurikid dynasty, and the unity of Rus.

The problem of accuracy is almost immediately evident if we look at the entries for the years 860–862. First, Slavic and Finnish tribes refused to pay further tribute to the Varangians and drove them "back beyond the sea." But then almost immediately "tribe rose against tribe." Soon tired of such discord, the tribes got together and sent a delegation to ask a group of Varangians called Russes to "come to rule and reign" over them.[1] The chronicle tells us that the leader of the group was Riurik, and he set himself up in Novgorod.

Historians have debated the believability of the invitation, its date, and the

[1]Samuel Hazard Cross and Olgerd P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor, eds., *The Primary Chronicle* (Cambridge, Mass., 1953), p. 59.

connection of the name "Russes" to the term "Rus," which eventually became the name of the emerging state and its people. Riurik himself remains a semi-legendary figure. And the Rus in the Novgorod region were actually centered in Gorodishche, which was several kilometers upstream on the Volkhov River from Novgorod (meaning new city), which only later became prominent. Exactly how far the rule of these Rus in Gorodishche reached is also unclear.

Many of these controversies are part of the "Normanist Controversy," which has been going on for several centuries. It revolves around the role of the Varangians (or Normans or Vikings) in founding and running the Rus state. Many native Russian and other East Slavic historians have been critical of the "Normanist theory" for overemphasizing the Norman role, and they have emphasized that Rus tribal society was already fairly complex and developed by the mid-ninth century.

What is not open to doubt, however, is that the Varangians had been present on some Finno-Ugric and East Slavic waterways and lands, primarily as traders, for many decades prior to the 860s. Although most of these northerners came from Sweden, some also arrived from Denmark and Norway. Archeological finds reveal a Scandinavian presence in Staraia Ladoga (on the Volkhov River, about thirteen kilometers south of Lake Ladoga) from the mid-eighth century, near the Upper Volga from around 800, and at numerous other Rus sites during the ninth and tenth centuries. The Scandinavians seemed primarily interested in obtaining goods, and furs were one of the most valuable commodities available from the local Finno-Ugric and Slavic peoples. To obtain them the Vikings traded such goods as beads, but also at times resorted to raiding and requiring furs as tribute. But the latest comprehensive study of the Rus emphasizes even more the Scandinavian Rus's quest as "seekers of silver," and it notes that silver coins minted in the Middle East were already present in Staraia Ladoga by the late eighth century.[2] This assessment is in keeping with the findings of Thomas Noonan, a leading scholar of Rus studies for many years. In one of his final essays, he stated that "the primary aim of Viking penetration into European Russia was apparently to obtain silver in the form of Islamic dirhams,"[3] which the Vikings did by providing such goods as furs, slaves, and amber to Islamic and other merchants. By 800 the Vikings were already trading in the Middle East after reaching it by way of the Caspian and Black seas. During the ninth and tenth centuries, trade in the Khazar capital of Itil, near the mouth of the Volga, and further north with the Volga Bulgars also became a means of obtaining silver, and increasingly this silver originated in mints not from the Middle East but from Central Asian cities such as Bukhara and Samarkand.

Besides archeological evidence, contemporary foreign observations mention the Varangians and reinforce the belief that Varangian princes and warriors played a key role in organizing and running the Rus government as a tribute-gathering and trade-pursuing entity.

[2]Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus, 750–1200* (London, 1996), Chapter 1.
[3]"European Russia, c. 500–c. 1050," in *The New Cambridge Medieval History*. Vol. 3, c. 900—c. 1024, ed. Timothy Reuter (Cambridge, Eng., 1999), p. 506.

From Igor to Sviatoslav

Many of the early Rus princes and their followers had Scandinavian names. According to the chronicle, Riurik on his deathbed entrusted his kinsman Oleg with both his realm and the guardianship of his young son, Igor. And Oleg supposedly moved the Rus capital to Kiev in 882 and ruled there until 912. Franklin and Shepard, however, doubt the accuracy of the chronicle account concerning Oleg or that Kiev became prominent before the early tenth century.

Concerning Igor, however, there is solid evidence that he presided in Kiev by the late 930s. He ruled until about 945, when he was killed by the Derevlians. This Slavic tribe residing northwest of Kiev does not fare well at the hands of the chronicle writers, who early on noted that they "existed in bestial fashion, and lived like cattle. They killed one another, ate every impure thing, and there was no marriage among them, but instead they seized upon maidens by capture."[4] Yet it was not their evil ways that led to Igor's death. The chronicle states that he was killed only after he returned to collect more tribute from them after he and his followers had already violently done so before and departed.

Following his death, political power passed to his wife, Olga, who ruled as a regent for their young son Sviatoslav. She was the first woman ruler in Kiev and its first Christian ruler—after her baptism in Constantinople sometime in the middle of the century. In one of its most colorful, but no doubt embellished, stories, the chronicle relates how she began her reign by revenging her husband's death. By various stratagems, including getting some of the Derevlians drunk, she buried alive, burned to death, and had her followers "cut down" varying numbers of them. After burning down one of their cities and giving some of them away as slaves, she imposed a heavy tribute on them. To prevent tribal rebellions in the future, she attempted—at least in some areas—to replace tribute-gathering expeditions with a regular system of tax collecting. After her death in 969, the chronicle states: "She was the first from Rus to enter the kingdom of God."[5] She was later canonized a saint by the Russian church.

Olga's son Sviatoslav, who ruled from 962 to 972, was one of Kiev's greatest warrior-princes and expansionists and the first with a Slavic name. In 971, he was described by a Byzantine source as broad-shouldered, with a gloomy and savage look, a long bushy mustache, a shaven head except for a lock of hair on one side, and a golden earring in one of his ears. On his various campaigns, this hardy warrior led by example, disdaining special comforts. Even though his mother had become a Christian, he did not follow her example. Nor did he wish, like her, to remain in Kiev. Several years after capturing Pereiaslavets on the Danube from the Bulgarians, he announced that he wished to reside there, at the center of his riches. After his mother's death, he appointed his three sons to rule in Kiev, Gorodishche-Novgorod, and among the Derevlians, and he set off for Pereiaslavets. But a Byzantine-Bulgarian coalition defeated him and forced his retreat back to the land of Rus. Before he could reach Kiev, the nomadic Pechenegs attacked him and his men at the dangerous Dnieper cataracts in the steppe, a few hundred miles south

[4]Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetzor, p. 56.
[5]Ibid., p. 87.

of Kiev. They killed Sviatoslav and then took his skull—so the chronicle tells us—and made a drinking cup out of it.

Vladimir I and Yaroslav the Wise

In 980, after eight years of strife between the three sons of Sviatoslav, the youngest and lone survivor, Vladimir, emerged victorious in Kiev. In 988, after earlier attempting to strengthen paganism, he took the most momentous step of his regime: He accepted Christianity and began imposing it on his subjects.

If only half the chronicle account of Vladimir is true, he was indeed a remarkable figure. He warred against Poles and Pechenegs, against Byzantines and Bulgars. No doubt exaggerating the contrast between his life before and after converting to Christianity, the chronicle notes that the pagan Vladimir was "insatiable in vice."[6] It credits him with 800 concubines and five wives, including the daughter of a defeated Polotsk prince, two Czech women, a Bulgarian woman, and his oldest brother's widow. The last was a former nun, brought back because of her beauty by Vladimir's father from one of his many campaigns. In the colorful and embellished chronicle account of Vladimir's survey of religious options for himself and his realm, he rejects Islam because "circumcision and abstinence from pork and wine were disagreeable to him. 'Drinking,' said he, 'is the joy of the Russes. We cannot exist without that pleasure.'"[7]

The chronicle has Vladimir accepting Christianity after a careful examination of other options, including dispatching envoys to other countries to investigate their religions. Services in Constantinople's beautiful St. Sophia Cathedral especially moved Vladimir's men (see Chapter 3). Other advisers to Vladimir added that his wise grandmother Olga would not have chosen such a faith if it were evil. The chronicle also mentions another reason for the conversion: The Byzantine Emperor, Basil II, required it before he would allow the marriage of his sister Anna to Vladimir.

Of all the reasons stated in the chronicle, this last one seems most likely to have been true and significant. Basil II had requested, and subsequently received, Rus help in putting down rebellious subjects, and in exchange Vladimir wanted to marry Anna. His desire for such a wedding was not surprising. Among Rus's neighbors, the Byzantine Empire was the strongest political, trading, and cultural magnet. Accepting Christianity from the Byzantines offered many advantages. It was not just a religion, but, in present-day terms, an ideology.

In the Byzantine Empire, Christianity helped unite a multiethnic empire under an emperor, whom Byzantine churchmen taught was God's representative on earth. Although we can only guess what weight Vladimir and his advisers gave to various personal and political considerations, it is logical to conclude that Vladimir believed that Christianity would offer similar unifying advantages for Kievan Rus and himself. Christianizing Rus offered the promise of helping to overcome such divisions as that between the tribute-tax collectors (the princes and their followers) and those who paid, between different tribes and ethnic groups, and between

[6]Ibid., p. 94.
[7]Ibid., p. 97.

FIGURE 2.1. The Dnieper River from a Kiev hill overlooking part of the Kievan Crypt (*Pecherskaia*) Monastery.

political factions. Furthermore, nearby Bulgaria had already accepted Christianity a century earlier from the Byzantines. This meant that Slavic clergy and Christian materials and rituals in a Slavic language understandable to the Rus could quickly be imported.

Byzantine religious and cultural influences, many via Bulgaria, soon flooded Rus. After the great schism of 1054, between Orthodox Byzantium and Western Christendom, the Rus followed the Byzantine lead. They became part of an Eastern Orthodox sphere, different in many ways from Western Christendom, to which the Poles recently had adhered.

After Vladimir's conversion, he vigorously set out to destroy paganism and implant Christianity and a Christian culture among his people. Such efforts were not unusual for medieval monarchs. Although works about his life no doubt exaggerate his new saintliness, they do contain some truth. He apparently became more charitable to the poor and championed church building and education for the children of the elite. He warred less against fellow Christians and concentrated more on defeating the pagan Pechenegs.

But if Christian teachings were able to modify some princely behavior, they were unable to transform it completely. Many princes continued to struggle for larger shares of lands, tribute, and trade revenues. Just as Vladimir came to power only after a fratricidal struggle, so too some of his many sons battled against each other. For about a decade after his death in 1015, the strife continued.

At first, his oldest surviving son, Sviatopolk, seemed the victor. He took over in Kiev and became infamous in Russian history for killing several of his younger brothers, especially Boris and Gleb.

The murder of Boris and Gleb and the religious cult that developed around them and proclaimed them saints indicate better than any other evidence the extent of Christianity's influence on Rus political culture. On the one hand, the acceptance of Christianity did not prevent Sviatopolk or many other Rus princes from killing their brothers and other relatives; on the other hand, the cult that made Boris and Gleb the most honored saints in Rus revered the brothers because the stories about them insisted that they had refused to take up arms against their older brother and died like martyrs. Not only did the clergy hold up these two brothers as models for the Rus princes, but also many of the Rus princes themselves furthered the cult. The princes participated in services and ceremonies honoring the two saints and built numerous churches throughout Rus lands in their honor. The brotherly love attributed to Boris and Gleb became at least an ideal, if not often a reality.

The cult of Boris and Gleb was associated with a sanctification of princely power that extended beyond them to many other princes. The historian Michael Cherniavsky once calculated that one-third of about 180 Rus saints were rulers. The writers and artists of the time, most of them churchmen and often dependent on princely good will, generally depicted Rus rulers as doing God's work by furthering Christianity in Rus lands and fighting against non-Christians. If killed in the course of performing such duties, the princes were often considered saintly martyrs.

FIGURE 2.2. Saints Boris and Gleb from an early fourteenth-century icon. (*Sovfoto*.)

Like many other systems of belief, Rus Christianity was furthered by an elite partly for self-serving reasons, but this did not prevent it from exercising some positive transforming influences.

Although Sviatopolk was successful in eliminating Boris, Gleb, and still another brother as potential rivals for the power and wealth he desired, he was not so fortunate in his dealings with a fourth brother, Yaroslav. At the time of Vladimir's death, Yaroslav was the prince of Novgorod and was expecting his father to attack him because Novgorod had refused to pay its tribute. Instead, he and the Novgorodians now warred against Sviatopolk and Kiev. Sviatopolk turned to Poles and nomad Pechenegs for help but was defeated by Yaroslav in 1019 and died in retreat.

Yaroslav, however, still had another brother to contend with—Mstislav. Only in 1024 did they fight their last battle and then divide many Rus lands between them, with the Dnieper as a boundary: Yaroslav obtained Kiev and the area west of the river as well as the Novgorodian lands, and Mstislav ruled east of the Dnieper with his capital at Chernigov, which he intended to transform into the greatest of Rus cities.

In 1036, however, Mstislav died without heirs, and Yaroslav reunited most of the lands of Rus and ruled until 1054. For his intelligent leadership and love of wisdom, he became known as Yaroslav the Wise. Although he battled against foreign foes, his main achievements were domestic ones. He ordered the translation, production, and collection of many books, especially religious ones. He also oversaw the construction of the magnificent St. Sophia Cathedral in Kiev and furthered the development of the Russian church. Many historians believe that he mandated the compilation of the first written code of laws, *Russkaia Pravda* (Rus Justice). In a final testament to his five remaining sons, Yaroslav apparently apportioned various cities to them and admonished them to love one another and to live in peace without quarreling.

Sviatopolk and Vladimir Monomakh

Although the descendants of Yaroslav, as well as other Riurikid princes, alternated between peace and civil war, neither circumstance produced another prince worthy of note until the Kievan reigns of two grandsons of Yaroslav. The first was Sviatopolk, who ruled from 1093 to 1113, and the second was Vladimir Monomakh, who reigned from 1113 to 1125. Although often passed over by historians, Sviatopolk was clearly the senior prince participating in many princely conferences that hammered out some principles of cooperation, both among the princes themselves and against the common threat of the Polovtsy steppe warriors. Upon his death, riots occurred in Kiev and its people asked his cousin Vladimir Monomakh, prince of Pereiaslavl, to become their ruler. Vladimir soon restored order and reduced the economic exploitation of the lower classes, which had helped lead to the uprising. Like his grandfather, Yaroslav the Wise, he left a testament to his sons, which gives us some idea of his character.

Following the death of Vladimir Monomakh in 1125, his son Mstislav ruled until his own death in 1132. Although Rus would continue for another century after 1132, it would become increasingly fragmented (see Chapter 4).

DOMESTIC POLITICS OF RUS

Although it is safe to say that in the Rus territory autocracy (legally unlimited power exercised by a single ruler) never existed, it is more difficult to decipher exactly what did exist. Ingredients in the Rus political pot included the relationship of Varangians to Slavs, of princes of different cities to one another, of political institutions within any one city to each other, and of chief cities with smaller towns and the surrounding countryside. Finally, political rebellions spiced up the pot's contents.

Varangians, Slavs, and Interprincely Relations

Even though some of the Slavic tribes rebelled against paying tribute to Varangian princes and their followers, Varangian-Slavic intermarriage soon diluted any possible ethnic shading to the resentment. Besides, today's concern with ethnicity and nationality was not part of the mentality of the time, and other ethnic groups such as Balts, Finno-Ugrians, and peoples from the steppes also often intermingled with Slavs and Varangians.

More significant is the question of interprincely relations. Were there any agreed-upon principles stipulating what the relationship should be? Apparently some feeling of clan solidarity existed among the Riurikid descendants of Prince Igor, and they seemed to view Rus as a large area to exploit collectively for their own gain. During the rule of Vladimir and his son Yaroslav, each of these princes of Kiev was recognised as the most powerful of Rus princes. Both men appointed others, including their sons, to govern and exact tribute and taxes from other cities and surrounding territories. Furthermore, from Vladimir's time until the late twelfth century, when Prince Andrei Bogoliubsky of Suzdal broke the precedent, no senior prince provided the opportunity to rule in Kiev had declined. But how much power any Kievan prince exercised over other city-states varied depending upon his strength and leadership and on the willingness of other princes to cooperate with him. As we have seen, even the strong Vladimir was defied by his son Yaroslav in Novgorod, who refused to pass on to his father some of the tribute he had collected.

Another aspect of princely relations is the question of succession to the throne in Kiev. Some historians contend that in theory and with some exceptions the right to rule in Kiev was to pass collaterally, that is from oldest brother to next oldest brother and even to cousins before moving on to the next generation. But even if princes recognized such a principal, they often ignored it in practice or violated its spirit. Vladimir and his son Yaroslav, for example, were both next in line to become princes of Kiev by succeeding an older brother on the throne, but neither waited for the natural death of the older brother, but overthrew him.

The last testament of Yaroslav to his five sons apparently attempted to prevent such conflicts. He bequeathed to each a large territory and admonished the four younger brothers to obey their oldest brother, Iziaslav, who was to be prince of Kiev and was to intercede for any brother wronged by one of the others.

Yaroslav no doubt wished his younger sons to maintain the ideal relations of lesser princes to the Kievan prince. Most specifically, these included answering his

Vladimir Monomakh's Instructions To His Sons

In the material excerpted—from Leo Wiener, *Anthology of Russian Literature: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (New York, 1902), Vol. I, pp. 53–54—we see the type of prince that Vladimir desired each of his sons to be. John Fennell and Antony Stokes, *Early Russian Literature* (Berkeley, 1974), pp. 64–79, provide a good analysis of the whole testament and correctly warn us not to assume too much about Vladimir's own behavior from it. Nevertheless, the advice given here does at least tell us something of Vladimir's view of ideal princely behavior. Ellipses are mine.

When you are riding and have no engagement with anyone, and you know no other prayer, keep on repeating secretly: "Lord, have mercy upon me!" for it is better to say this prayer than to think idle things. Above all, forget not the destitute, but feed them according to your means, and give to the orphan, and protect the widow, and allow not the strong to oppress the people. Slay neither the righteous, nor the wrongdoer, nor order him to be slain who is guilty of death, and do not ruin a Christian soul.

Whenever you speak, whether it be a bad or a good word, swear not by the Lord, nor make the sign of the cross, for there is no need. If you have occasion to kiss the cross with your brothers or with anyone else, first inquire your heart whether you will keep the promise, then kiss it; and having kissed it, see to it that you do not transgress, and your soul perish. As for the bishops, priests and abbots, receive their benediction in love, and do not keep away from them, but love them with all your might, and provide for them, that you may receive their prayers to God. Above all, have no pride in your hearts and minds, but say: "We are mortal, alive today, and tomorrow in the grave. All that Thou hast given us, is not ours, but Thine, and Thou hast entrusted it to us for but a few days." Put away no treasure in the earth, for that is a great sin.

Honour the elders as your father, and the younger ones as your brothers . . . If you start out to a war, be not slack, depend not upon your generals, nor abandon yourselves to drinking and eating and sleeping. Put out the guards yourselves, and lie down to sleep only after you have placed the guards all around the army, and rise early. Do not take off your armour in haste, without examination, for man perishes suddenly through his negligence. Avoid lying and drunkenness and debauchery, for body and soul perish from them.

Whenever you travel over your lands, permit not the servants, neither your own, nor a stranger's, to do any damage in the villages, or in the fields, that they may not curse you. Wheresoever you go, and wherever you stay, give the destitute to eat and to drink . . . . Call on the sick, go to funerals, for we are all mortal, and pass not by a man without greeting him with kind words. Love your wives, but let them not rule you.

call for military assistance against Rus foes—he, in turn, was to assist them if so threatened. Although Yaroslav did not spell all this out, he did tell his sons that if they loved one another and cooperated, they would vanquish their enemies. And if they did not, they would perish and bring destruction upon the Rus lands.

Some scholars also think that Yaroslav bequeathed a more troubling legacy: the so-called rota system, by which he linked princely succession to certain territories.

Accoring to this theory when the oldest brother ruling in Kiev died, he was to be succeeded by his next oldest brother, ruling in the next most important city, Chernigov. Then the next oldest brother would move up one slot to Chernigov and so on up the ladder.

Again, however, even if some such system was recognized in theory, it did not work well in practice, for princely sons often wished to keep the lands ruled by their fathers and not see them pass to one of his brothers or cousins. The forty years following the death of Yaroslav in 1054 were full of princely strife.

In 1097, apparently recognizing that their recurring conflicts were more helpful to their pagan Polovtsy foe than to themselves, the grandsons of Yaroslav the Wise gathered for a conference at Liubech. At this Chernigov city they recognized each other's right to rule over the principalities Yaroslav had granted to their now deceased fathers. Although lessening conflict, this conference and others that followed did not put an end to it. Before the year was out, an agent of Prince Sviatopolk attacked a less prominent prince named Vasilko with a knife and put out both his eyes.

The Boyar Duma and the Veche

In addition to princely power being limited by the appetites of competing princes, it was restricted in various principalities by two other institutions of government: the boyar duma (council) and the *veche* (town assembly).

The composition and procedures of boyar dumas were flexible and based on custom, rather than written law, and princes seem to have regularly consulted them about important decisions. The boyars included the prince's *druzhina* (a military retinue of perhaps several hundred men, originally living in or around his household) as well as other prominent citizens. Whereas normally a prince perhaps consulted only with a handful of his *druzhina*, he often called together a larger group of boyars when he felt more broad-based support was required. High-ranking clergymen also sometimes participated in these larger meetings.

Although the *veche* may have had its roots in older tribal practices, little mention of this more democratic institution is made in the chronicles until the eleventh century. The principal assemblies were in the capital cities of each principality. By ringing a special *veche* bell or using a town crier, a prince, official, or any other citizen could call together a meeting. All freemen were eligible to take part, but only male heads of household could vote.

Participants discussed and voted on local political issues and on major matters such as war or peace, especially if the prince wished to use the town militia to supplement his *druzhina*. Some assemblies even decided who should, or should not, be the ruler of a principality. The *veche* of Novgorod—often manipulated by powerful boyars—was especially notorious for showing an unwanted prince "the way out." Town meetings were often stormy affairs, and blows were sometimes exchanged before townsmen reached a consensus—decisions were supposed to be unanimous. Occasionally, Novgorod majorities even tossed unbending opponents off the Great Bridge, crossing the Volkhov, or expelled them from the city.

The legal system of Rus also makes it clear that princes' powers were limited,

especially in Novgorod. If invited to rule by a *veche*, a prince might have to sign an agreement restricting the amount of money he could extract from the populace.

The relationship between the three main political institutions—the office of the prince, the boyar duma, and the *veche*—varied considerably depending on time and place. Until the end of Yaroslav the Wise's reign (1054), the princes were dominant. But with the escalating princely conflict after his death, the town assemblies became more prominent in many areas. If in the latter Rus period Novgorod was famous for its *veche*, Galicia was more notable for the undisguised strength of its boyars and Suzdal for its ruling princes.

Dominance of the Capital Cities and Rebellions

All three political institutions operated chiefly in each principality's capital city, which dominated the rest of the principality. In the eleventh century, for example, the prince of Polotsk ruled not only that city, but also over rural areas and other towns such as Minsk. By the early thirteenth century, the city of Novgorod presided over an empire that stretched east to the Ural Mountains and north to the White Sea.

The prince of a capital city usually appointed boyars or minor princes to administer and to collect taxes in outlying smaller cities and rural areas of his realm. Sometimes, like in the vast Novgorodian region, this involved a less direct rule over non-Slavic tribes and the occasional use of force to keep the taxes (or tribute) flowing. Under the jurisdiction of the prince's administrators, locally elected officials also participated in running local affairs. Although residents of smaller towns had the right to take part in meetings of the capital's *veche*, practical considerations prevented this from often occurring.

Some of the rebellions that occurred in Rus, such as that of the Derevlians against Prince Igor in 945, were due to the excessive financial demands of the Riurikid princes. *Veche*-princely strife and Christian-pagan conflicts were other leading causes of revolts.

A major uprising occurred in Kiev in 1068–69. It was precipitated by Prince Iziaslav's refusal of a *veche* request for arms and horses to continue a struggle against ravaging Polovtsy tribesmen. The anger of the townspeople led to the temporary flight of Iziaslav and the appointment of another prince. Several years later in the frequently rebellious city of Novgorod, a magician turned many of the people against their prince and Christianity before the prince "smote" him with an axe.[9]

Although there were other rebellions, just one more deserves consideration here: It occurred in Kiev in 1113. It began after the death of Prince Sviatopolk and after Vladimir Monomakh apparently had at first refused a *veche* invitation to become the prince of Kiev. Mobs attacked the palace of a government official and the property of other govermnent officials and some Jews. Upper-class elements now became alarmed and also implored Vladimir to take the throne, warning that if he did not, the property of boyars and the monasteries would be attacked and plundered. The legislation that Vladimir enacted after heeding their call

[9]Ibid., p. 154.

clarifies the situation that led to the revolt. Sviatopolk and some upper-class elements had been exploiting the lower classes, in both city and countryside, by such means as a salt monopoly and high interest rates.

The specific chronicle mention of mobs attacking and robbing Jews merits a pause to consider any possible antisemitism. The historian Vernadsky believes the rebellion was not antisemitic and suggests that Jewish financiers and wealthy merchants were attacked only because of their connection with Sviatopolk's financial policies. Even though it is true that modern racist views did not then exist in Kiev and the city usually displayed an admirable cosmopolitan spirit, it is difficult to rule out at least a tinge of anti-Jewish hostility in such circumstances. Christians in Kiev certainly believed their religion superior to Judaism, and violence had been perpetrated on Jews in other parts of Europe less than two decades earlier, at the time of the first Crusade. Kievan Christians might have been less prejudiced than some of their Western counterparts, but we cannot be sure.

Despite the likelihood that the chronicles of the times underreported and downplayed rebellions, it is clear that both the rural and the urban lower classes rebelled occasionally against what they considered excessive princely and upper-class financial demands. According to the clerical chroniclers, commoners, egged on by pagan magicians or soothsayers, also sometimes resisted the new Christian teachings.

SLAVIC-VARANGIAN EXPANSION AND FOREIGN POWERS

On the borders of Rus and beyond, the new state dealt with numerous non-East Slavic groups and powers. The frontiers were fluid, and attacks originated from both sides of the borders. This latter fact and the scant sources available make it unwise to pin labels like "imperialist" on combatants, whether they be Rus or Rus neighbors.

Usual reasons for Rus attacks included the desire to collect tribute and to facilitate and protect trade, communication, and frontier defenses. Rus's acceptance of Christianity and Vladimir I's marriage to the Byzantine princess Anna certainly upgraded Rus's international prestige and affected its dealings with other peoples and countries. Subsequently, Rus sources sometimes depicted attacks on pagan peoples like the Pechenegs and Polovtsy of the southern steppe regions as battles against "godless" or "infidel" foes. Yet during the Rus era, economic considerations rather than religious ones continued to be more significant in determining Rus relations with neighboring peoples.

The Rus were most successful in imposing tribute upon some of the pagan Baltic and Finnish tribes that extended from their northwestern to their northeastern boundaries. Starting in the northwest and moving along the periphery in a clockwise direction, let us now examine the situation more closely.

Tribes of the North

Vladimir I, Yaroslav the Wise, and Roman of Volhynia (d. 1205) all temporarily subjugated Lithuanian Yatvigians. Princes of Novgorod and Polotsk also dominated Baltic tribes, at least sporadically, such as the Estonian Chud. *The Primary*

MAP 2.1

Chronicle mentions that the Varangians imposed tribute upon the Chud already in the middle of the ninth century, and Chud tribesmen often served on the side of Varangian princes such as Igor and Vladimir I. In 1030, Yaroslav the Wise conquered the Chud and founded the city of Yuriev, modern-day Tartu.

By the early thirteenth century, Novgorod and Polotsk were having trouble maintaining control over Baltic tribesmen south of the Gulf of Finland. This was due mainly to increasing competition from Germans, including crusading German knights, who moved eastward into the Baltic lands. The Novgorodian chronicle from 1190 to 1240 relates many battles against the Lithuanians and Chud, the latter especially being subjected to plunder, burnt villages, slaughtered cattle, and Novgorodian demands for tribute. After 1240, Novgorodians would be forced to contend directly with the more threatening Germanic knights, who dominated the Chud lands and Livonia (see Map. 4.1).

On the northern shore of the Gulf of Finland, the Rus sporadically imposed tribute on the Finnish Yam. In the early thirteenth century, Novgorodian forces also subjugated Karelians to their east and, on orders from the Novgorodian prince, converted many of them to Christianity. Southeast of the Karelians, in the White Lake area, the Rus from the beginning collected tribute from the Finnish Ves and soon integrated them into the expanding Rus state.

From east of the Northern Dvina to the Urals, the Novgorodians attempted to gain tribute, especially furs, from three additional Finnish tribes: the Perm, Pechora, and Yugra. Although sometimes successful, they also faced rebellions. In 1193, for example, the Yugra cut down most of the troops sent to impose Novgorodian demands. Besides native rebellions, Novgorod faced twelfth- and thirteenth-century competition from Suzdalia (Vladimir-Suzdal), whose Rus princes also had their eyes on the lucrative furs.

Suzdalia was the chief Slavic antagonist of still another Finnish tribe, the Mordva, located to the east of Suzdalia. In 1221, the Suzdalian prince Yuri II began building the fortress town of Nizhnii Novgorod in Mordva territory at the Volga and Oka rivers junction. During the next decade and a half, he coordinated numerous campaigns against the Mordva, burning their lands; slaughtering their cattle; and killing, capturing, or scattering many of their people.

The Volga Bulgars and the Peoples of the Steppe

Before his successes against the Mordva, Yuri had first attacked the Volga Bulgars, who for generations had been collecting tribute from the Mordva. Competition for tribute and control of the furs in the forest lands of the Volga Finnish peoples had long been the chief source of contention between the Volga Bulgars and Rus.

The former had come to the Volga lands after the Khazars had defeated a Bulgar steppe confederation in the late seventh century—another Bulgar group moved westward into modern-day Bulgaria, where they subjugated the local Slavs. Originally Asiatic nomads, the Bulgars on the Volga, while continuing some nomadic grazing practices, gradually developed a more settled existence. They became major grain producers, Bulgar cities and crafts developed, and the Bulgars collected large quantities of furs from the northeastern Finnish peoples. They became adept traders; their location on the middle Volga put them at the center of

north-south, east-west trade connecting Europe and Asia, Christian and Muslim civilizations. In the early tenth century, they converted to Islam.

The Rus both traded and fought numerous wars with them as the two rivals clashed over territory and tribute-gathering from Finnish peoples in northeastern lands. Around 966, Sviatoslav attacked the Volga Bulgars. Vladimir I followed his father's example and assaulted them again in 985 and after battling them, made peace. According to *The Primary Chronicle*, the Bulgars stated: "May peace prevail between us till stone floats and straw sinks." Of course, peace did not last quite that long. Yet for the next hundred years Rus-Bulgar relations were characterized much more by trade than by war.

In 1088, the Bulgars captured the Rus city of Murom (originally the home of the Finnic Murom people) and in succeeding decades became an increasing threat to the eastern borders of Murom-Riazan and Suzdalia. During the twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, however, Suzdalia became significantly stronger and gradually gained the upper hand over the Bulgars.

In 1220, Yuri II's large army captured and devastated much Bulgar territory. The vanquished sought and agreed to terms, including the loss of some territory, and peaceful relations were restored. Unbeknownst to either side, they were soon to encounter a much greater danger than each other—the Mongols.

Southwest of the Bulgar territory, the Rus faced successive Asiatic peoples who roamed the southern steppes north of the Black Sea and Caucasus. Three major groups followed each other in dominating the region: the Khazars, the Pechenegs, and the Polovtsy.

Dominant in the area after defeating the Bulgars in the late seventh century, the Khazars constructed a major empire centered on the lower Volga. In the beginning of the tenth century, this empire still included the Volga Bulgars and some Eastern Slavs among its tributaries. Most of Rus's early Asiatic trade passed through Khazar lands.

By the mid-tenth century, however, the Khazars had begun to weaken. By then the Volga Bulgars no longer paid tribute to them, and Byzantium, which before 900 had often supported them, now more frequently allied with another Turkish people, the Pechenegs, who had moved across Khazar lands and into the steppe region west of the Khazars. In the 960s, the forces of the mighty Sviatoslav inflicted a shattering series of defeats on the Khazars, capturing and plundering some of their lands. In this same period, Sviatoslav subjugated the Slavic Viatichians, who resided along the Oka River and had been paying tribute to the Khazars. They now became his tributaries.

No doubt worried about Rus successes so close to its Black Sea possessions, the Byzantine Empire soon bribed Sviatoslav to divert his attention and forces westward against the Bulgars of Bulgaria. For this and other reasons, Rus influence on the lower Volga failed to develop. The death of Sviatoslav at the hands of the Pechenegs in 972, less than a decade after his great victory over the Khazars, foreshadowed more conflict ahead with these formidable nomads.

Prior to the defeat of the Khazars, the Pechenegs had not been especially threatening to the Rus. In fact, Pecheneg mercenaries had assisted Igor in a campaign of 944 against the Byzantines. From 968 to 972, however, they allied with the Byzantines against Sviatoslav, who by then was threatening Byzantine interests in

Bulgaria. From this period until Yaroslav the Wise drove them back from attacking Kiev around 1036, the Rus fought numerous battles with these nomads. This was especially true under Vladimir I, who fostered colonization along the Rus southern borderlands and built a series of forts there. Conflict over these border territories and the desire for booty and other economic gains—perhaps emanating from the Rus as well as the Pechenegs—seem to have been the main reasons for the warfare. Some historians have suggested that Vladimir was further motivated by a desire to unify Rus, and attacking the pagan Pechenegs was a means to this end.

As we have seen earlier, however, these conflicts did not prevent Sviatopolk, Vladimir's son, from using some Pecheneg mercenaries in his civil war against his brother Yaroslav. And if the entire history of Rus-Pecheneg relations is taken as a whole, it was characterized much more by mutually beneficial trading relations than by warfare.

In the 1060s, a new group of Turkish nomads, the Polovtsy (or Cumans) began dominating the southern steppe. Like Rus-Pecheneg relations, Rus-Polovtsy dealings included countless raids and wars. Vladimir Monomakh's claim that he signed nineteen peace treaties with the Polovtsy, either on his own or acting for his father, indicates how frequent the wars preceding the peaces must have been. A great classic of Rus literature, *The Tale of Igor's Campaign*, deals with a battle against the Polovtsy in 1185.

Yet Rus princes also traded with them, sometimes married their princesses, and often engaged bands of them to help fight against other Rus princes, especially in the early thirteenth century. At times Polovtsy even fought against each other in the service of contending Rus princes.

Although Rus's relations to the southeast were primarily with the Khazars, Pechenegs, and Polovtsy, the Rus state also dealt with some of the many peoples of the Caucasus. This was especially true when Mstislav, the brother of Yaroslav the Wise, ruled over Tmutarakan on the Black Sea and over Ossetians and Circassians further inland—our knowledge of Rus rule over the remote Tmutarakan during the tenth and eleventh centuries is sketchy, but it certainly was an exception to the steppe peoples' general dominance of the zone north of the Black Sea.

Byzantium and Bulgaria

Mention of the Black Sea now brings us to one of Rus's most important neighbors, Byzantium. Although in decline from its earlier heyday, this empire, with its capital at Constantinople, was still a great center of civilization. It controlled most of the Balkan Peninsula. And it won not only the Rus, but also most of the Balkan Slavs over to Christianity, radiating its religious-cultural influence over their lands.

At first, the Rus chiefly sought favorable trade with Byzantium, but a Byzantine chronicle also noted a Rus attack outside Constantinople's walls in 860. *The Primary Chronicle* of the Rus relates another major attack on Constantinople in 907, but corroborating evidence for such an attack is lacking, though a new trade agreement between the Rus and Byzantines was reached about that time, followed by a more conclusive trade treaty in 911.

In the decades that followed the Rus continued trading and occasionally warring with the Byzantines. By the 940s, the Dnieper River, with Kiev along its middle portion and the important city of Gnëzdovo (old Smolensk) along its upper course, had become the chief Rus approach to the Black Sea and across it to Constantinople. The Rus princes, warriors, and merchants, thanks largely to the tribute goods they collected, sailed down to the Byzantine capital, where they traded furs, wax, honey, and slaves with the Byzantines, primarily for luxury goods.

The Primary Chronicle and other sources recount numerous bloody details of campaigns against Byzantium. In 941, for example, Prince Igor's forces used some captives as targets for their arrows and drove iron nails through the heads of others. On this occasion, however, they were eventually bested and scattered by the Byzantines, who used "Greek fire," pipes through which they directed mysterious flames, on the Rus ships.

Despite such sporadic conflicts, Byzantium desired good relations with Rus. Winning the Rus over to Christianity could help achieve that goal. When Olga was baptized in Constantinople, apparently between 954 and 957, the Byzantine Emperor and Empress acted as her godparents. In the years after Vladimir's conversion in 988, Rus-Byzantine trade flourished, only occasionally marred by differences. Byzantine religious-cultural influences and church leaders began flowing into Rus. Other friendly contacts also increased. Following Vladimir I's example, some Rus princes and princesses married Byzantine royalty, and Rus princes and soldiers on occasion aided the Byzantine Emperor in military campaigns.

To the southeast of Rus stood Bulgaria, where the Asiatic Bulgars had played a role among native Slavic peoples analogous to that of the Varangians in Rus. Despite Bulgaria's adoption of Christianity and significant Byzantine Christian influences on it, the Bulgars often warred against the Byzantines. The Byzantines, however, had no desire to see Bulgaria fall under Sviatoslav's control. Following his successful campaigns against the Bulgars, the Byzantine Emperor sent troops to help defeat him. After Sviatoslav's departure, the Byzantines gradually subjugated Bulgaria to themselves, and Bulgarian-Rus relations were then mainly limited to the cultural-religious domain.

Hungary, Poland, and Other Western Contacts

North of Bulgaria and just across the Carpathian Mountains from the Rus principality of Galicia stood Hungary. Four Hungarian kings in this era had Rus wives. In the interprincely wars of the twelfth century, the Hungarians often allied with Rus Volhynia or Kiev against Galicia. In the late 1180s, the King of Hungary (Bela III) even succeeded in briefly placing his son Andrew on the Galician throne. In the three decades following the death of Prince Roman of Volhynia-Galicia in 1205, the Hungarians were almost constantly involved in Galician squabbles. But they were hardly alone. Other Rus principalities and Hungary's northern neighbor, Poland, also intervened in conflicts involving various Galician factions.

Despite such Polish interventions, the first reported major clash between the Poles and Rus was initiated by Vladimir I. According to *The Primary Chronicle*

entry for 981, "he marched upon the Lyakhs [Poles] and took their cities: Peremÿshl', Cherven, and other towns"[8]—many Russian historians maintain, however, that they were more properly Rus towns and were primarily populated not by Poles, but by East Slavs. Following his conversion to Christianity, according to the chronicle, Vladimir lived in peace with Poland, also recently Christianized, albeit from Rome.

After the death of Vladimir, Poland temporarily regained the cities lost to Vladimir. In 1031, however, Yaroslav the Wise and his brother Mstislav marched into Poland with a large army and ravaged the countryside. They not only captured the disputed cities, but also many Poles, some of whom Yaroslav settled as colonists along the Pecheneg frontier.

During the next 200 years, trade and numerous Rus-Polish dynastic marriages coexisted with interventions in each other's affairs. This was especially true after both countries became more politically fragmented during the early twelfth century. In fact, sometimes the interventions were to help out an in-law—at least eighteen Rus princes or princesses in the Rus period had Polish spouses. During the 1040s, for example, Yaroslav aided his brother-in-law Casimir the Restorer to put down the Polish Mazovians. Of course, princes from both countries also sought gains for themselves, such as disputed border territories.

Although Rus relations with border peoples and states were often punctuated with conflict, dealings with more distant European powers were more peaceful. The Rus traded with Scandinavians and Germans and sometimes married their royalty. A daughter of Vsevolod I of Kiev married the German Holy Roman Emperor Henry IV in 1089. Although Rus relations with France and England were not close, Anna, a daughter of Yaroslav the Wise, married Henry I, King of France; and Vladimir Monomakh married Gyda of England, daughter of King Harold II, who had been killed in the battle of Hastings by William the Conqueror.

As a result of such foreign marriages, the blood of many races ran through the veins of later Rus princes. Vladimir Monomakh, for example, was the son of a Byzantine princess and the grandson of a Swedish princess. Thus, late Rus princes and princesses, who continued such marriage practices, were walking symbols of a society still very much in touch with the larger world around them.

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[8]Ibid., p. 95.

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