

VARANGIAN-RUS WARRIOR-MERCHANTS AND THE ORIGIN OF THE RUSSIAN STATE

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ABSTRACT

Kievan Russia, the "mother" of present-day Russia, was an agricultural and commercial state that originated in present-day Ukraine. The emergence of the Kievan State was linked to the Varangian-Rus warrior-merchants who exploited the Dnieper and Volga trade routes between the Baltic and the Caspian and Black Seas in the tenth and eleventh centuries. This Norse military aristocracy played an important role in the integration of disparate Slav tribes into a powerful political unit ruled by the Slavified descendants of the original Norse rulers.

INTRODUCTION

Imperial Rome was replaced by new centers of concentrated demand for goods and services as the Frankish Empire, Constantinople and Baghdad grew to importance. Long-distance trade routes serving these demand centers, disrupted by the influx of Germanic and Slav invaders across the Danube and Rhine, and the advance of Islam, were replaced by routes through present-day Russia. The Varangian-Rus, who controlled these routes in the tenth and eleventh centuries, contributed to the development of Russia by helping the many Slavic tribes to coalesce into the original Russian State.

EARLY MEDIEVAL CENTERS OF CONCENTRATED DEMAND

Imperial Rome's demand for goods supported long distance trade that extended from the Atlantic Ocean to Central Asia, India and China, and from the Danube, the Rhine and the Black Sea to Africa. However, by the third century this demand was faltering, Rome's population was declining, cities were withering and the economy began to break down. In the fourth century the capital of the Empire, now divided into East and West, was moved from Rome to Constantinople. Invasions in the fourth and fifth centuries led to the establishment of Germanic kingdoms that meant the end of the Western Roman Empire as a political unit.

The most successful of the new Germanic kingdoms, the Franks, was founded by the Merovingians; by 539 the Frankish kingdom extended over the area of Western Europe north of the Alps and Pyrenees formerly controlled by Rome. The Carolingians, who succeeded the Merovingians and ruled until the tenth century, extended the Frankish domain into Spain and Italy and north to the Baltic Sea. The ensuing political stability and economic recovery led to an increase in demand for monetary metals and luxury goods for the ruling classes.

The Eastern Roman or Byzantine Empire declined after the death of Justinian in 565. By the end of the seventh century the Empire was reduced to the city of Constantinople, Asia Minor and part of Italy. However, after 876 the Empire began to recover and Constantinople became one of the world's greatest cities, and the heir to Rome, the center of Christian civilization. Unlike Rome, Constantinople developed into a manufacturing center, producing high quality textiles, leather goods, armor, carved ivory, mosaics, porcelain, and enameled metal. The city's location astride major trade routes also made it a center of long distance trade.

Another center of concentrated demand emerged as the Moslem empire expanded and its increased wealth was gathered in administrative centers. The Abbasids, who came to power in 750, established the capital of the Eastern Caliphate at Baghdad on the Tigris, in present-day Iraq. The city grew rapidly both because it was a trading center and because of the Caliphate's silver mines in Afghanistan and central Asia. Although the output of silver temporarily declined during the ninth century new sources were soon discovered and the Caliphate's economy slowly recovered.

Communication among these three demand centers was disrupted by the Moslem expansion into North Africa and Spain in the seventh and eighth centuries. Added to the deep division between Christianity and Islam were conflicts of both

Moslems and Carolingians with the Byzantine Empire. Limited commercial contacts between the Moslem and Christian areas of the Mediterranean were maintained by the Jewish merchants (Rabinowitz 1945). A ninth-century geographer, Ibn Khurradadbeh, speaks of the Jewish merchants called Radanites who "travel from west to east and from east to west, by land and by sea." They sailed from the Mediterranean coast of France to Egypt or Mesopotamia. If they landed on the Egyptian coast they traveled overland to the Red Sea, and then sailed to India and China. If they landed in Mesopotamia, they traveled down the Euphrates to Baghdad and then down the Tigris to the Persian Gulf, and then eastward to India and China. "From China they bring back musk, aloes, camphor, cinnamon, and other products of those parts" to France or Constantinople (De Maynard 1865, p. 513).

The Jewish merchants could satisfy only part of the Western demand for Eastern luxury goods. The Carolingians also needed a supply of silver for coinage to support economic and political expansion and raw materials and other goods from the north. The traditional routes between the north and central and southern Europe were disrupted by the Germanic invasions, but the Frisians provided a link to the north. The center of Frisian trade was Dorestad, near the mouth of the Rhine. However, ships sailing north from Dorestad along the North Sea coast encountered the Jutland peninsula. The trading center of Hedeby, located at the end of a long fjord on the southern part of the peninsula, provided easy access to the Baltic. The route through Hedeby required an overland passage of only ten miles to reach the Baltic, compared to several hundred miles to sail around Jutland. At Hedeby the Frisians traded with Swedes and Gotlanders; the main Swedish trading center was at Birka, near present-day Stockholm. (Figure 1)

The silver needed by the Franks was not produced in the north. Baghdad was a major source of silver coins, but direct trade between the Moslems and the Franks was limited by several factors. First, the Franks had little to offer for exchange with the more advanced Moslem civilization. Second, trade routes were disrupted by continued conflict. Third, the Carolingian Church was bitterly opposed to Islam so that trade, or the use of Moslem coins in the Frankish kingdom, would not be politically feasible.

Intermediaries from the north provided a means of overcoming these impediments to trade by developing a three-way exchange system. Baghdad and Constantinople demanded luxury goods and slaves available from the north. Although trade between the north and Constantinople mostly constituted an exchange of raw materials for finished goods, silver constituted a large proportion of payments received from Baghdad. The north, which was less advanced than the Franks, exchanged silver obtained in the south for goods produced in Western Europe. The routes connecting the north with the great cities of Baghdad and Constantinople passed through Eastern Europe.

EASTERN EUROPEAN TRADE ROUTES

West of the Urals, Eastern Europe consists of a vast plain, extending from the Black Sea to the Baltic and the Arctic Ocean, with a system of rivers that generally flow along a north-south axis. Four of the most important rivers rise in the Valdai Hills, about 200 miles northwest of present-day Moscow. The West Divina flows northwestward to the Baltic Sea; the Lovat flows northward to Lake Ilmen, from which the Volkhov leads to Lake Ladoga and the Neva, and into the Baltic Sea. The Dnieper flows south to the Black Sea; the Volga, Europe's longest river, flows south to the Caspian Sea. Ships were moved overland from one river system to another and around rapids to create the Volga and Dnieper routes from the Baltic Sea to the South.

If the Valdai Hills can be imagined as the apex of the letter "A", the eastern leg is formed by the Volga, flowing 2300 miles to the Caspian Sea. The western leg of the letter is formed by the Dnieper, flowing over 1400 miles to the Black Sea. The crossbar of the letter is formed by a route following the Oka that connects the Dnieper with the Volga. An extension of the crossbar westward to the Baltic is formed by the West Divina. (Figure 2)

From the eighth to the eleventh century, when Danes and Norwegians ventured to Western Europe and into the North Atlantic, Swedish warrior-merchants followed the ancient trade routes of Eastern Europe, and became the intermediaries who linked the northern lands to the Black Sea and Caspian. The Swedes, who already had established settlements on the eastern Baltic coast, in present-day Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, moved farther east in the eighth century to gain access to furs and other goods produced in the north. By the mid eighth century Swedish merchants were living in the fortified town of Staraja Ladoga on the Volkhov, near Lake Ladoga, not far from present-day St. Petersburg.

The Swedes sometimes were called *Varangians* and sometimes *Rus*. The latter term, to which Russia is indebted

Figure 1

The Frisian and Swedish Trading Centers:

Dorestad, Hedeby and Birka

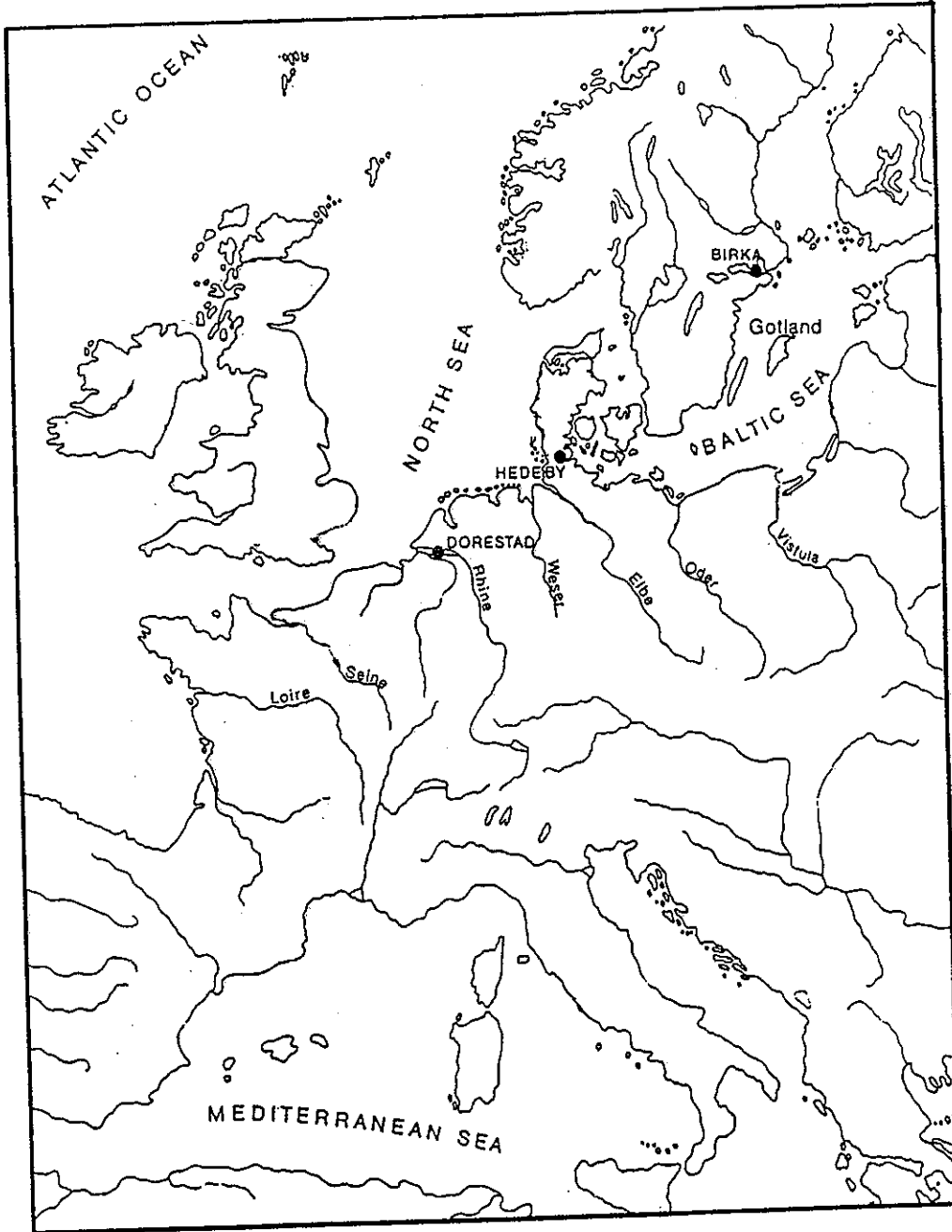
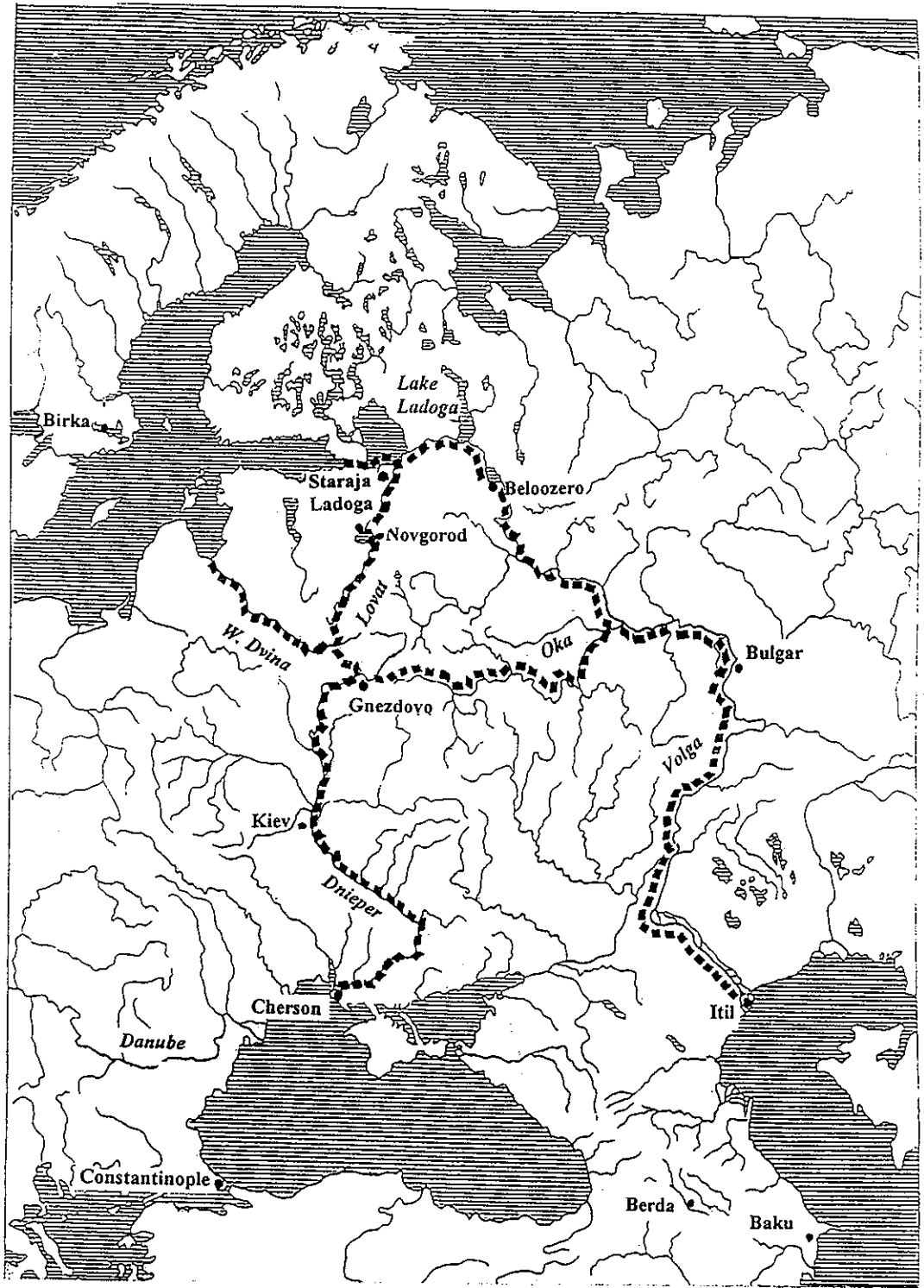


Figure 2

Varangian-Rus Trade Routes
from the Baltic to the Black Sea and the Caspian



for its name, will be used throughout this paper. The Rus had much in common with their Scandinavian contemporaries, but trade was their primary concern, not conquest and settlement as in Western Europe and the North Atlantic. Ibn Dustah, a Moslem writing c. 912, reported that "Their only occupation is trading in all sorts of fur; they keep in their belts the money they receive for it" (Thompson 1877, p. 30).

Staraja Ladoga could be reached by water from the Baltic and was connected by rivers and portages to both the Volga and Dnieper. This earliest trading and manufacturing center in the northern part of Russia, grew from a small market center in the eighth century into a large fortified town in the tenth. There also were many other towns, on the Dnieper and its tributaries, on the upper Volga, and in the far north, each populated by a different Slavonic tribe. These tribes lacked cohesive political and military organizations and their military weakness forced them to accept, sometimes even to welcome, the protection of foreign princes and their warriors.

An important source of early Russian history, *The Russian Primary Chronicle* (Cross and Sherbowitz-Wetsor 1935), is a twelfth century compilation of older documents and myths. This source states that three brothers from Sweden began to rule in the north. The eldest, the semi-legendary Rurik, took control of Staraja Ladoga about 860, and after becoming the sole survivor of the three brothers a few years later, ruled the entire northwestern region. Rurik's capital was Novgorod, a new town established south of Staraja Ladoga. Novgorod, situated on the Volkhov river, provided access to the Volga and Dnieper routes to the south and became a very important manufacturing and trading center of Medieval Europe.

As the Rus were penetrating inland from the Baltic, Moslem merchants were entering Eastern Europe from the south along the Volga, and the Don, which flows southward between the southern Dnieper and Volga. The silver coins available from the Moslems gave the Rus an incentive to push further south along the Volga toward Baghdad, the source of these coins.

THE VOLGA ROUTE TO BAGHDAD

The upper Volga was reached from Staraja Ladoga or Novgorod after goods were transferred to smaller ships. The route from Lake Ladoga led eastward, following the Svir and other rivers to Beloozero, and from there the Sheksna led southward to the Volga. This route required only one portage of less than five miles. Alternatively, the Volga could be reached from Novgorod by the Msta; again only short portages were required. Large flotillas were assembled both for protection from attack and to provide the number of men needed to move ships around rapids or from one river system to the next.

The upper Volga flows southeastward to Bulgar, the capital of the Volga-Bulgars, near present-day Kazan. Bulgar, where the Volga leaves the forested north and turns sharply south through the steppe, to the Caspian Sea, was an important trading center. Here the Volga is joined by the Kama, which provided a route to the north, from which furs were obtained, sometimes as tribute. It also was at Bulgar that the Silk Road, that ran through Central Asia to China, met the Volga.

A Moslem geographer reported that the goods sold here in 985 included: "Sable, deer skin, ermine, steppe fox, fox, beaver skins, colorful pheasants, goat skins, wax, arrows, birch bark, coins, fish bones, fish teeth, castorum (a substance from a gland in beavers), amber, shagreen (probably silk), honey, hazelnuts, hawks, swords, armor, maple wood, Slav slaves, small livestock and cattle" (Wilson 1980, p. 202).

Silver was a common means of payment, but the face value of coins was not important to the Rus merchants because the northern economy was not monetized; coins were not minted in Sweden until the late tenth century. Value was calculated by weight; coins, ingots or jewelry, and pieces of these items, were acceptable forms of payment. Merchants carried folding scales and sets of weights to establish the proper amounts for transactions. Pieces of coins and other silver items, called "hack-silver," brought back to Sweden would meet the needs of the Franks who could use Moslem coins only when they were melted down to disguise their origin and used to mint new coins.

The Abbasid Caliphate sent envoys to the north to discover new markets and negotiate trading terms. Ibn Fadlan, an ambassador to the Volga-Bulgars, reached Bulgar in 922 and recorded his impressions of the Rus merchants that he met there:

I saw with my own eyes how the Rus had arrived with their wares and pitched their camp along the Volga. Never did I see a people so gigantic: they are tall as palm trees, and florid and ruddy in complexion. . . the men among them wear a garment of rough cloth, which is thrown over one side, so that one hand remains free. Every man carries an axe, a dagger and a sword, and without these weapons they are never seen (Crichton 1976, p. 32).

From Bulgar the Volga flows through the steppes, reaching the Caspian Sea and the Khazar capital of Itil, present day Astrakan. The Khazars, who occupied the area between the Black and Caspian seas, exchanged a largely nomadic life for trading in the seventh century. Since the Khazars were strong enough to be a bulwark against the nomads of the eastern steppe, goods from the steppe moved westward through the Khazar kingdom across the Black Sea to the Byzantine Empire. Except for the region controlled by the Volga-Bulgars, areas to the north of Itil paid tribute to the Khazars.

The earliest written record of the Rus following the Volga to Itil is found in Ibn Khordadbeh's *Book of Routes*, written in the 850s. The Rus brought beaver and fox skins and swords to trade, and were charged a ten percent duty by the Khazars. The Rus sometimes sailed past Itil into the Caspian and to the south coast, from which goods were carried overland to Baghdad by camel (Meynard 1865, p. 514). The profitable trading opportunities meant that efforts were made by the Caliphate, the Rus and the Khazars to maintain good relations. However, not all Rus voyages into the Caspian were peaceable; several attacks on Moslem lands were made from the Dnieper.

THE DNEIPER ROUTE TO THE BLACK SEA

From Novgorod, merchants could follow the Lovat south and then move their ships overland to the Dnieper at Gnezdovo, just west of present-day Smolensk. Two additional routes passed through Gnezdovo. First, the Volga could be reached by following the Dnieper and its tributaries eastward and carrying ships overland to the Oka, a tributary of the Volga. Second, Gnezdovo could be reached from the Baltic by following the West Divina. The route following the West Divina and the Dnieper, which the *Primary Chronicle* calls "the route of the Varangians," offered the shortest journey from Sweden to Constantinople. The use of the route across the Gulf of Finland through Novgorod to the Dnieper, suggests that Novgorod and other northern trading centers had become important enough to justify the longer journey.

From Gnezdovo it was over 300 miles down the Dnieper to Kiev, where the river leaves the northern forests and begins to cross the steppes. After Rurik took control of Novgorod, two of his followers, Askold and Dir are said to have conquered Kiev and founded a new kingdom. Kiev and Novgorod were rivals until about 882 when Kiev was conquered by the Rus prince Oleg, said to be a descendant of Rurik. Oleg and successive rulers brought many East Slavic tribes together and Kiev became the capital of a group of towns ruled by Rus chieftains that stretched from the Baltic almost to the Black Sea (Figure 3). This state, which became known as Kievan Russia, was the precursor of modern Russia.

Kiev was the staging point for annual trading ventures to the Black Sea. An important source of information about these ventures is a document prepared by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus sometime between 948 and 952. Although written in Greek, this document is known by its Latin title, *De administrando imperio*, that was given to it later. Constantine provides a contemporary description of preparations and the expedition down the Dnieper. Each November the Rus left Kiev to collect the tribute from neighboring Slav tribes that provided the furs and slaves that were exchanged in Constantinople. The Rus returned to Kiev in April when the ice left the river, and with the help of the Slavs built the ships needed to reach the Black Sea.

The flotilla departed in June, when the spring floods subsided so that the Dnieper became navigable. South of the modern town of Dnepropetrovsk the Dnieper flows for forty miles through a series of rapids. Constantine's description of the first rapid mentions that the river is very narrow and "in the middle of it are rooted high rocks, which stand out like islands. Against these, then, comes the water and wells up and dashes down over the other side, with a mighty and terrific din." In this and some other instances, the ships were unloaded and guided through the rapids. But the fourth set of rapids made it necessary to carry the ships and their freight for a long distance while facing attacks from hostile tribes:

At this [one] all put into land prow foremost, and those who are deputed to keep watch with them get out, and off they go, these men, and keep watch for the Pechenegs. The remainder, taking up the goods which they have on board the [ships], conduct the slaves in their chains

Figure 3

The Kievan State in the Mid Eleventh Century



past by land, six miles, until they are through the [rapids]. Then, partly dragging their [ships] partly portaging them on their shoulders, they convey them to the far side of the [rapids]; and then, putting them on the river and loading up their baggage, they embark themselves, and again sail off in them (Moravcsik 1967, pp. 59-61).

The Rus also were subject to attack at the seventh set of rapids. Having passed through the entire series of rapids the Rus next had to negotiate shallows and sandbars until—six weeks after leaving Kiev—they reached the Dnieper delta. Among the channels of the river as it made its way into the Black Sea was an island where the Rus would rest and refit, and offer sacrifices to ensure that their trade would prosper.

On reaching the Black Sea the Rus could sail eastward to Cherson, the main Byzantine town on the northern coast, where a customs house was located and duty was collected. The Rus also could sail farther east, around the Crimean peninsula, to the Sea of Azov and to the mouth of the Don where they traded with Jewish merchants who in turn carried the goods to Itil or Armenia and Baghdad. The Khazars collected duty at this point. Alternatively, from the Sea of Azov the merchants could sail north up the Don further into Khazar territory. Furthermore, the Volga could be reached by moving ships overland from the Don.

The Rus also could sail westward from the mouth of the Dnieper along the shores of the Black Sea to the mouths of the Dniester and Danube and other rivers, where they would stop to refit as needed. But the ultimate objective was Constantinople, which would have been unlike any settlement the Rus had ever seen. With a population of half a million, it was the largest city and greatest trading center in the western world and represented unmatched trading opportunities for the Kievan Rus. Constantinople was known in the north as “the place of houses ‘filled with gold’” where a trader could obtain “jewelry and articles wrought from precious metals, fine clothing, dyes unknown at home, and weapons.” One merchant returned to the north with “a mazer (goblet) girt with silver, and a bowl of silver gilt filled with silver pennies, and two gold rings that weighed together a mark, and a cloak of brown purple lined with white skins” (Matthews 1932, p. 37).

THE INTEGRATION OF KIEVAN FOREIGN POLICY AND TRADE

The first contact between the Rus and Constantinople may have been in 839. The earliest written reference, found in the *Annals of St. Bertin*, refers to an embassy sent from the Byzantine Emperor to the Carolingian King that included some Swedes who were called “Rhos” (Nelson 1991), which many authorities hold to mean “Rus.” A Byzantine coin from this period, found in a grave excavated in Birka, offers some support for such an interpretation of this literary reference (Oxenstierna 1965, p. 78).

The purpose of this early Rus embassy to Constantinople is unknown, but the purpose of later Kievan foreign policy cannot be in doubt. The economic and political strength of the Kievan State depended on the control of markets and the routes to these markets. A series of military ventures undertaken to achieve these ends demonstrate the merger of foreign policy and trade interests.

During the rule of Askold and Dir in Kiev a fleet came down the Dnieper into the Black Sea and attacked Constantinople, with no advance warning. The city was unprepared; its fleet and the Emperor were abroad conducting a campaign against the Moslems. On a Sunday during the attack the patriarch Photius preached a homily that provides a contemporary account of the attack:

I see a fierce and savage tribe fearlessly poured round the city, ravaging the suburbs, destroying everything, ruining everything—fields, houses, herds, beasts of burden, women, old men, youths—thrusting their swords through everything, taking pity on nothing, sparing nothing. The destruction is universal (Logan 1983, pp. 189-190).

The attack was especially galling because it was mounted by an obscure and previously insignificant nation:

An obscure nation, a nation of no account, a nation ranked among slaves, unknown, but which has won a name from the expedition against us—once insignificant but now famous, once humble and destitute but now splendid and wealthy—a nation dwelling somewhere

far from our country barbarous, nomadic, armed with arrogance, unwatched, unchallenged, leaderless, has suddenly, in the twinkling of an eye, like a wave of the sea, poured over our frontiers (Logan 1983, p. 191).

It is not known why the attack was limited to ten days or why it was confined to the outlying areas rather than being carried to the city itself. However, since Kiev's military power was hardly equal to that of the Byzantine Empire, it is likely that the purpose of this first attack was simply to explore the city's defenses and to acquire booty. Another military effort was made sometime between 864 and 884; a Rus fleet attacked Abaskun on the southeastern shore of the Caspian. To accomplish this the attackers sailed down the Dnieper, around the Crimea into the Sea of Azov, and up the Don to the present-day Volgograd. Here they moved their ships overland to the Volga and sailed south, past Itil, the length of the Caspian. This too seems to have been an action with limited objectives.

By the end of the ninth century the Kievan State was much stronger. Prince Oleg (c. 882 - 913), who unified the territories of Novgorod and Kiev, had a large military force under his control. In 907 Oleg led an attack on Constantinople that was repulsed. Nevertheless, the Rus obtained an advantageous commercial treaty with Constantinople that regularized the relationship between the two parties:

The Rus who come hither shall receive as much grain as they require. Whoever come as merchants shall receive supplies for six months, including bread, wine, meat, fish and fruit. Baths shall be prepared for them in any volume they require. When the Rus return homeward, they shall require from your Emperor food, anchors, cordage and sails and whatever else is needed for the journey (Davidson 1976, p. 90).

The Rus were not permitted to establish a permanent trading center at Constantinople and they were required to live outside the city during their annual visits. Rus merchants were allowed to enter Constantinople only through a specified gate and then only if they were unarmed and accompanied by an official. However, they were permitted to conduct business without paying taxes.

Following this treaty Kiev and Constantinople remained at peace for thirty years. However, small scale raids continued in the Caspian Sea. In 910 sixteen ships pillaged the Persian coast. Two years later Kiev launched a major attack on Baku, on the southwest coast of the Caspian, penetrating inland a distance of three days' journey. Apparently the Rus gained permission to pass through the Khazar territory by promising to share the rewards of their venture with the Khazars. However, the Rus plundered, took slaves and massacred the defenseless inhabitants to such an extent that the Khazars became enraged, and despite earlier promises, attacked and destroyed the homeward bound Rus at the mouth of the Volga.

Oleg's successor, Igor, ended the peace with Constantinople by an unsuccessful attack in 941. Three years later Igor aborted an attack on Constantinople in return for tribute and gifts. A new peace treaty, with provisions not unlike those of the 911 treaty, was signed in 945. The importance of trading interests in this treaty is suggested by the twenty-five merchants who were included among the envoys sent by Igor to negotiate with the Greeks (Moravcsik 1967, p. 73).

Although peace ruled in the Black Sea, military ventures continued in the Caspian. In 943 the Rus sailed up the Kura river, which emptied into the Caspian south of Baku, and penetrated deep into Azerbaijan, capturing the ancient capital of Berda. The Rus may have intended to found a settlement on the Kiev pattern, for they remained for several months and permitted the people of Berda to live in peace and to practice their Moslem faith as long as they agreed to recognize the Rus as their overlords. However, the Rus were under continual Moslem attack, negotiations broke down, and the Rus left.

Igor's son, Svyatoslav, undertook more extensive military efforts than his predecessors. In 965 he began a campaign to the east in which he defeated the Bulgars and Khazars, bringing the Volga under Rus control. However, destroying these relatively peaceful neighbors opened Kiev to attack by the Pechenegs, who dominated the south Russian steppes. Svyatoslav conquered western Bulgaria in 967, and again threatened Constantinople. Although the Kievan forces were defeated once more, this did not affect the privileged trading status of the Rus.

Vladimir, who became the ruler of Kiev after the civil war that followed Svyatoslav's death, established close ties with Constantinople. In 988 he accepted the Greek Orthodox Church and undertook to convert his subjects. Additional evidence indicating the normalization of relations between the Rus and the Greeks was Vladimir's dispatch of 6,000 fighting

men to serve the Byzantine Emperor. This may have been the beginning of the famous "Varangian Guard," the elite corps of Rus who served as the Emperor's household troops. Vladimir's death in 1015 was followed by dissension among his sons, but in 1019 Iaroslav the Wise emerged as the ruler of the Kievan State. This was the apogee of Kievan Russia; the entire Dnieper trade route was brought under Kievan control.

In 1043 a final Russian attack on Constantinople was sparked by the murder of several Rus merchants in the city (Vernadsky 1953). Since earlier treaties prevented the Rus from entering the city with weapons, it was the responsibility of the Greeks to protect them. However, the refusal of a Greek offer of compensation suggests that the underlying reason for the attack was the Rus belief that internal conflict within the Byzantine Empire had made Constantinople too weak to repulse an attack. This assumption was incorrect, and the Rus were defeated with heavy losses.

The Volga route had been disrupted in the late tenth century, partly because of Svyatoslav's war with the Khazars and the subsequent advance of the eastern nomads into Khazar territory. Moreover, the flow of silver from Baghdad began to diminish after 965 as the Moslem silver mines became exhausted. Although the eastern trade routes were abandoned by 1015, the memory of trading opportunities in the east persisted. A disastrous effort to reopen the Volga route was made in the mid eleventh century. A military expedition from Sweden, led by Ingvar Vittfarne, went down the Volga to the Caspian, and eastward into Asia, but failed with very heavy losses.

By the end of the eleventh century it was clear that Kievan attempts to extend their control of markets and trade routes southward were futile. The Rus lacked the military power to defeat not only the Byzantine and Moslem forces, but also the Pecheneg and Polovtsy invaders. As these invaders moved along the shores of the Caspian and the Black Sea, communication between Russia and the south was disrupted. Moreover, changes in Mediterranean trade patterns destroyed the commercial advantage of the Eastern European routes. The revival of the Mediterranean as an economic region provided connections with the East that were more advantageous than the routes through Russia. From the beginning of the eleventh century the maritime cities of Italy made a place for themselves in Mediterranean trade. Venice rid the Adriatic of pirates; Pisa, Genoa and Amalfi reduced the predominance of the Moslems. Trade routes now passed from Italy north by the Brenner Pass and across the western Alps to the great Champagne fairs where Italian and Oriental goods were exchanged for goods from the north.

CONCLUSIONS

The Varangian-Rus warrior-merchants provided a catalyst for the creation of Kievan Russia. It was the initiative of these first rulers that brought together the Slavic tribes to create the state as a political entity. They created or enlarged many Rus towns to form vigorous trading centers, and with these towns they controlled the north-south commercial routes. And it was these routes that maintained commercial links between Western Europe and the East while the Mediterranean routes were disrupted by the Moslems. It also was largely due to the Rus that Russia experienced rapid growth in the tenth century. Finally, the trading connections established between early Russia and other nations, and the resulting political and cultural ties, brought Russia into the world community.

Although the rulers of Kievan Russia were of Norse extraction they became Slavicized and eventually considered themselves to be Russian. During the tenth and eleventh centuries the rulers of Kiev begin to have Slavic names such as Svyatoslav, Vladimir and Iaroslav. The Slavicization of the Swedes paralleled the assimilation of the Danish and Norwegian Vikings with the peoples of Ireland, England and Normandy. The blurring of distinctions between the Swedes and Slavs probably was accelerated because the choice of Kiev as the center of the Russian state moved the rulers farther from the influence of their original homeland. The decline of Kiev shifted the center of power north to the original capital of Novgorod, which became the next leading city of Russia. However, by this time the Swedes had become no more than one of Novgorod's many enemies.

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