Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus' in the Medieval World by Christian Raffensperger
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Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus′ in the Medieval World. By Christian Raffensperger. Harvard Historical Studies, no. 177. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012. 329 pp. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Figures. Maps. $55.00, hard bound.

The main argument of Christian Raffensperger's book is that early Rus′ was part of Europe. The assertion sounds trite, but for Raffensperger it is a radical departure from traditional thinking, not only among historians of early Rus′, but among historians of Europe in general. His target is the "traditional" idea that Rus′ should be viewed as an appendage to Byzantium, defined as a member of, in Dimitri Obolensky's influential phrase, the Byzantine Commonwealth. He seeks to demonstrate that Rus′ had more lively and diverse political, economic, and to some extent cultural, interactions with other parts of Europe.

Raffensperger starts with political ideology, with the "Byzantine Ideal" and its projection in the prestige imagery of seals and coinage, luxury arts and decoration. He points out this is no indicator of a special relationship between Rus′ and Byzantium, since a "Roman" notion of political authority was common to much of Europe.

Next in the line of investigation comes matrimony. The meatiest sections of the book deal with dynastic marriages: first (chapter 2) as a general practice in Europe, then (chapter 3) as a key feature of the Rusian engagement (so to speak) with Europe. It has long been known that members of the Rusian ruling dynasty found spouses from and in countries to the west and north incomparably more often than from Byzantium. Raffensperger asks what this actually meant. He concludes that the imbalance is of fundamental importance as evidence of the place of Rus′ in the medieval world. Dynastic and political marriages were not just unions between two people. Spouses could come with substantial entourages (sometimes including churchmen), and they could lead to regular contacts and exchanges between the two families and countries, and to the recognition of mutual obligations. Direct evidence for the broader consequences of Rusian dynastic marriages is sparse, so Raffensperger depends largely on the force of analogy. He does, however, make an interesting argument that spousal influence is reflected in onomastic evidence, in the naming of the offspring of such marriages.

The fourth chapter deals with economic relations: specifically, with trade. Rather than focus on the *Primary Chronicle*'s much-cited north-south axis linking the "Varangians" (that is, Scandinavia) and the "Greeks" (that is, Constantinople), Raffensperger focuses on east-west routes linking Rus′ with Poland and Germany, and on the northern trade via the Baltic. This is a synthesis, not a new investigation, but it maps well onto the chapters on dynastic marriages, providing a context for economic relations and exchanges.

In the fifth and final chapter, Raffensperger tackles what would seem to be the safest bastion of Byzantinocentric particularism: religion. Or rather, he finds a device to make the walls fall down by themselves. He calls for a reconceptualization of the religious landscape. Instead of a bipolar division into Latin/Greek, Roman/Byzantine, papal/patriarchal, and so on, he takes

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up Peter Brown's notion of medieval "micro-Christendoms."[1] Yes, Rus′ had links with Byzantium, but both before and after the conversion it maintained multilateral relationships with other "micro-Christendoms," including, for example, the adoption of non-Byzantine saints and their festivals.

This is a polemical book, more about historiography than history. It is not a study of Rusian relations with other parts of Europe but a justification for the claim that this is what historians of Rus′ and of Europe ought be producing. For Raffensperger, Europe in the tenth to twelfth centuries stretched from the Atlantic to the Volga. It cannot be properly represented without Rus′, and Rus′ cannot be properly represented without it. At the broadest level he is clearly right. For example, the relevant chapter in the country-by-country volume of the *New Cambridge Medieval History* (1995–2005) lumps Rus′ together with Bulgaria and the South Slavs; and in the associated volume of European themes Rus′ is barely mentioned at all. At the level of specifics, however, Raffensperger's arguments and hypotheses are sometimes overcooked. It is an occupational hazard in books with a thesis (or books from a thesis) that nuances can become flattened, that the imagined "other" can turn into a caricature. In places Raffensperger pushes at doors long open or takes aim at a supposed "traditional view" that, at least among historians of Rus′, would be hard to locate. Sometimes, by contrast, he misses opportunities to strengthen his own argument. Overall he risks replacing one oversimplification with another. If he likes the idea of diverse micro-Christendoms, why argue as if all the thematic micro-histories (political, economic, cultural) need to coincide?

The comparisons in the first and final chapters, for example, are in some respects misplaced. Few these days would claim that Rus′ subscribed to a *political* Byzantinism. To be sure, there were episodic flirtations with Byzantine imagery and rhetoric of authority, but this was not the norm, and it barely (and rarely) affected even the representations of rulership in Rus′, let alone the actual practices of rule: dynastic succession; lawmaking; internal and external diplomacy and alliances; and, yes, dynastic marriages. By contrast with many reflections of the "Byzantine Ideal" that Raffensperger identifies elsewhere in Europe, the Byzantinism of Rus′ was *ecclesiastical* and, above all, *monastic*. Raffensperger is correct to stress that consistent East Slav political Byzantinism was a later, Muscovite phenomenon; but ecclesiastical and monastic Byzantinism was embedded in Kievan Christian culture and institutions: not just objectively in the predominantly Byzantine derivation of texts (often via Bulgaria) and rituals, but also explicitly, in the high-profile legitimizing rhetoric and narratives of the mid-eleventh to early twelfth centuries.

Raffensperger objects that the authority of Byzantine metropolitans in Rus′ was limited. This is an unrealistic criterion. Byzantium itself was not very Byzantinist if you look behind the image. Real practices of authority are almost always more diverse and fractured than ideologists like to represent them, but the sense of legitimation remained intact, and its real consequences should not be underestimated. Throughout its existence (and one can quibble about the chronology of its establishment) the metropolitanate of *Rhosia*

1. Peter Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom, Triumph and Diversity, A.D. 200–1000* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996, 2003).

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did remain an ecclesiastical province of the patriarchate of Constantinople. When, in the 1160s, Andrei Bogoliubskii sought ecclesiastical emancipation from Kiev, even he accepted the (negative) verdict of Constantinople.

Raffensperger makes much of the fact that both the *Primary Chronicle* and the *Life of Feodosii of the Caves* express support for the ousted Iziaslav Iaroslavich, despite the latter's Polish connections and diplomatic overtures to the Pope; but the Rusian texts are here concerned only to make a point about the defense of dynastic legitimacy. In his rule in Kiev there is no hint that Iziaslav sought to introduce a different ecclesiastical order, and indeed he was a strong supporter of the Caves monastery, which itself traced the legitimacy of its *rule* (*ustav*) from Constantinople. Besides, these texts tell only part of the story. Iziaslav was twice ousted from Kiev, once by a faction of the population, once by his own younger brothers. One can hardly make a case for his overwhelming popularity, though of course we can only guess at the reasons for his troubles.

Elsewhere Raffensperger can ignore woods while inspecting trees. He resurrects and presents as fact a speculative hypothesis that Vladimir Monomakh's decision to write his *Pouchenie* was influenced by his Anglo-Saxon wife, since there are Anglo-Saxon analogies to the genre. The cogent fact, however (supporting Raffensperger's own larger argument), is that, regardless of generic provenance, Vladimir's representation of rulership in the *Pouchenie* owes nothing to Byzantium anyway. Raffensperger alludes to the atypicality of blinding as a punishment but again ignores the substantive (and generally acknowledged) point about princely law in Rus′: the main cumulative code, *Russkaia pravda* likewise owes little or nothing to Byzantium; indeed, there is a significant body of scholarship linking it to Germanic codes.

On the question of cultural autonomy or dependency, Raffensperger is of course right to object to what he calls (again with reference to Brown) the "hydraulic" view of the spread of culture: "cultures do not behave like water, seeking to become level across boundaries" (15). Indeed not; a point that has been made repeatedly and emphatically, with regard to Rus′ as to anywhere else, for at least half a century. As for the conversion itself: who are the historians who have "often perceived" it to be a "Byzantine-driven action" (163)?

Such comments are perhaps unfair. Raffensperger has attempted a compact treatment of an enormous theme requiring polyglot erudition across a formidable range of primary and secondary materials (the 189 pages of text are supported by 129 pages of notes and bibliographies). One can always nitpick, but the accuracy is impressive in a work of this scope. Technical lapses are few, and minor: T. V. Rozhdestvenskaia does not say what she is reported to have asserted on the textual history of the Rus′-Byzantine treaties. The extensive opening quotation is correctly attributed but wrongly referenced.

Overall this is an impressive and useful book. It is not a history of Rus′ relations with Europe, nor does it claim to be. If it provokes others to look more closely at what such a history or histories might be, it will have served a worthy purpose.

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