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Author's Subject: the new volume of Drevneishie gosudarstva Vost. Evropy

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Drevneishie gosudarstva Vostochnoi Evropy. 2010 god. Predposylki i puti obrazovaniia Drevnerusskogo gosudarstva. Moskva: Universitet Dmitriia Pozharskogo, 2012. 712 pp. ISBN 978-5-91244-092-2.

Doing justice to a collection of articles such as this one is a nigh impossible task, the more so when most are long and complex and deal with subjects that require a specialized knowledge of a huge literature. Not to be deterred, since promotion and tenure are not pressing issues for academic retirees, I will venture here a somewhat selective overview of this volume, which is of sufficient importance to command the attention of those interested in the pre- and early history of Rus. The series, of course, is well established, one of the lasting legacies of V. T. Pashuto and now, it seems, safely hosted by the Institute of General History of the Russian Academy and by Dmitrii Pozharskii University, under the capable editorship of the noted specialist on early Scandinavian sources, E. I. Mel'nikova.

As she explains in her introduction, the subject here is one in which orthodoxies of the Soviet period and other contributions to distortions and methodological failings have left us needing almost a total reassessment of what we thought we knew about the pre- and early history of the emergence of the earliest Rus "state." The growing awareness of possible new approaches and the accumulation of much new data, both from reassessment of "well-known" texts and from the steady accumulation of new archaeological evidence, have not resulted in much interpretive reassessment of larger issues by historians. So the essays here point in new directions of inquiry at the same time that the editor and the authors admit conclusions are but tentative and much is as yet (and might well remain) in the realm of hypothesis.

The material ranges from somewhat abstract theoretical modeling of how best to describe sociopolitical change and its results to concrete summary and analysis of abundant archaeological material. I confess I have less taste for the former (the abstraction and the models) and more for the substance of the latter when it is done particularly well. The most problematic pieces would seem to be the ones where an effort is made to flesh out history with names and dates and events (ultimately relying in the first instance on the textual sources) and correlate them with the material evidence.

There is much here to stimulate new thinking, be it about the application of political anthropology (see the essay by N. N. Kradin on Eurasian "nomadic" empires), the contextualizing of the East European evidence within broader medieval northern Europeans' understandings of geography (Mel'nikova's own contribution), or the relevance of comparative material from as far afield as Benin (a small part of E. A. Shinakov's long and complex analysis of pre- to early state development across a broad swatch of Eastern Europe). For those who know Kradin

mainly for his work on East Asia, his contribution here may come as something of a surprise, but a most welcome one for its comparative perspective and his impressive command of a broad range of important scholarship published in English on the evolution of early "states."

Those with a particular interest in texts want to read P. S. Stefanovich's approach to the the famous chronicle tale of the calling of the Rus, treating it as a kind of generic "origins legend." Also for the text scholars, T. V. Gimon's long analysis of the early chronicle evidence about Novgorod, where he concludes that, *pace* Shakhmatov, there does not seem to have been any major early Novgorodian chronicle compilation before at least some time in the 12th century, will be essential reading for ongoing and necessary reassessment of what we have thought we knew about the history of the earliest chronicle writing in Rus. T. V. Rozhdestvenskaia's article on epigraphic monuments, while respectfully drawing on Simon Franklin's book on writing in early Rus, takes issue with him by inviting the reader to "upgrade" in the hierarchy of written sources the significance of such evidence as the numerous graffiti recorded and published from the walls of early churches.

Given recent skepticism (expressed in a book by by V. S. Flerov which I reviewed in *The Silk Road* 9[2011]: 156-159) about whether one can even talk about Khazar "cities," T. M. Kalinina's analysis of whether one should treat the Khazar state as "nomadic" will be of some interest. Indeed, while its initial rulers were steppe nomads, the substance of their polity was much more of a mixed socio-economic formation, in which sedentary elements loomed large. Among the other essays I found to be particularly stimulating is that by N. I. Platonova exploring what exactly was meant by the term "pogost'" and how its meaning changed over time. One conclusion of the article is to debunk the notion of some kind of administrative organization for the collection of tribute that might be traced back as early as the time of Princess Ol'ga in the 10th century.

The most persuasive contribution of several of these essays is to show how smaller regions that might be defined by particular archaeological assemblages need to be understood and dated if we are to begin to construct any kind of persuasive larger picture of change over time and relate it to "historical" evidence that might be contained in written sources. Whether we conclude that the smaller assemblages relate to what might be termed "tribal" entities, chiefdoms, or proto-states is to my mind less important than the fact that the distribution of related artifacts changes over time, and may not necessarily correlate with what we would expect for a given territory on the basis of the stories the written sources seem to tell. One of the longstanding dilemmas of early Rus history concerns whether we can correlate the chronicle narratives about tribes with specific geographical regions. Of particular interest, of course, are the Poliane, whose association with the emergence of Kiev now must seriously be questioned, as A. V. Komar shows in his 63-page review of the archaeological evidence regarding them and the Severiane. The legends about the importance of the Poliane may well be just that—legends. Not a totally new idea, of course, but one now supported suggestively by the material record. One of the key kinds of archaeological evidence about the changes brought about by the coming of the Rus is the presence or absence of weaponry at excavated sites. A great deal in the arguments about the impact of

the Rus and the chronology of their arrival in the region around Kiev depends on such evidence, which, however, one might imagine is open to alternative interpretations. A. A. Fetisov's article on "The 'Druzhina culture' of Ancient Rus" provides a good framework for understanding this evidence and, inter alia, includes interesting statistical estimates of the size of garrisons. His important conclusion is that the core "Land of the Rus" probably did not emerge as a definable entity as early as A. N. Nasonov had posited.

Apart from the material dealing with the middle Dnieper region and the area between the Dnieper and the Don (where the question of Khazar control looms very large in the discussion—see especially A. V. Grigor'ev's essay), of particular interest here is the substantial material refining our understanding about Gnezdovo (famous for its huge cemetery in which a lot of the graves contained Scandinavian artifacts). V. V. Murahseva writes about the topography and chronology of the site, where there is now evidence about the shift in the course of the Dnieper and the re-location of what once would have been the most important harbor areas. V. S. Nefedov's substantial essay treats the larger region and its connecting routes to the north, west and south. He separates the archaeological evidence into meaningful chronological layers to create a picture of the changes in routes of connectivity and relate those changes to other historical evidence (in particular the rise of the Rus and their extension of control northwards) contextualized with reference to geographical factors.

There is much more in this volume worth reading. It focuses our attention on the importance of local, even "micro-"histories, in the process reminding us of the dangers of applying retrospectively wishful analytical schemes to the very messy realities of a region where communities were small, in many ways self-contained, but also in important ways might be connected to more distant neighbors, if not necessarily under their political control. The processes by which larger political formations emerged remain elusive, but increasingly now we can begin to discuss them while respecting the limits of what the evidence allows.