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Franklin, Simon and Jonathan Shepard. *The Emergence of Rus, 750-1200*. New York: Longman, 1996. Pp. xxii, 450. $25.00. ISBN: ISBN 0-582-49091-X.

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The publication of the eight-volume *Longman History of Russia* has been a welcome event, especially for those who teach the earlier periods of that history. While most volumes have been justifiably praised, as with any such series problems may arise in trying to fit the volumes into the chronological boundaries assigned by the editors and in curbing the inclination of contributors to write a monograph rather than a book (as the series advertises) intended "for students and non-specialist readers." Thus, Robert Crummey's volume on the emergence of Muscovy is in many ways eminently satisfactory as a textbook, yet suffers from a chronological limitation that interrupts discussion of a topic as important as the development of serfdom. John Fennell's treatment of the troubled thirteenth century, on the other hand, is hardly "textbook" material and reflects both the strength of his interest in political history based on meticulous analysis of the chronicles and the unfortunate narrowness of such a focus. None of the authors of the other volumes in the series faced as formidable a challenge as did those of the volume under review. While it may not prove to be very accessible to students (or, for that matter, non-specialist Russianists who teach survey courses), its originality has revolutionary implications for the way we will teach our subject.

The volume challenges the traditional "kievo-centric" interpretation of early Rus, a paradigm that has all roads leading to and from Kiev and interprets the history of these early centuries as that of the rise and fall of a Kievan "state." Modern understandings of "state" or models of socio-political organization (e.g., "feudalism") have no place here; as the authors warn us early on, they have no intention of lingering at all the "traditional landmarks" that appear in the standard histories. In this lies both the strength and weakness of the book. The picture of diversity and change which emerges flows unimpeded from a careful, largely chronological, examination of the evidence. Whereas most traditional accounts are fixated on the very problematic written sources, here, thanks largely to the expertise of Shepard, the critically important archaeological record receives full play. At times this leaves the feeling that the written sources (e.g., some of the Arabic ones) should have received more coherent and thorough treatment, but the shift of balance has been much needed. More serious is the fact that by not always addressing explicitly or fully the traditional historiographic schemes, the authors have left their readers with too little direction. Anyone who either knows a bit about this period or who might turn to some of the existing literature, may well feel there is no secure harbor in sight.

In fact, although most of what is here cannot be found in conventional textbook treatments, as the authors abundantly document, not all is new. Recent decades have seen a proliferation of important specialized studies of the period. For those who would teach the period, there is now a relative abundance of accessible monographs and translations of sources in English. What Shepard and Franklin have done is to provide the first major synthesis of the recent literature; no subsequent study or textbook will be able to ignore their book.

Their history does not begin with the "calling of the Rus," bringing Riurik and his brothers to the Russian north in the mid-ninth century and finding their heirs ensconced in Kiev a generation later. Not only does Riurik almost vanish from the landscape and, blessedly, from the head of the genealogical chart of the dynasty named for him, but so also for the earliest stages of the history of the Russian north do the Slavs--it was primarily other peoples that those early Rus first interacted with. There are various possible early centers of the Rus, the most likely candidates for early primacy being either "Riurikovo Gorodishche" just south of Novgorod, where the Volkhov river debouches from Lake Ilmen, and settlements in the Volga-Oka triangle. The scheme is not without problems. One might argue that this is all too "rus- ocentric," for likelihood of various pentrations of northmen from various places might well be emphasized. Moreover, I am not fully convinced by the argument for the primacy of Gorodishche, especially in the absence of significant Scandinavian artifacts there. However, for years, influenced by the published and unpublished, often incomprehensible work of Omeljan Pritsak (who deserves more entries in the bibliography here) and the synthesis in lectures by Edward Keenan, I have been trying to persuade my classes of the importance of the Volga-Oka triangle for the early Rus and argue that their firm establishment in Kiev probably did not come before ca. 930, another of the major conclusions of Franklin and Shepard.

As readers will discover, one problem with their scheme is its messiness, but honesty with the sources hardly allows a neat tying of the knots. Perhaps though, some of the loose ends might have been better secured: for example, to discuss interpolations in the 10th-century treaties with Byzantium is appropriate, but why focus specifically on the obvious anachronism of their mentioning Pereiaslavl without addressing the more critical issue of the inclusion of Kiev? If it seems that certain of the chronological boundaries established long ago by V. L. Ianin for the finds of dirhams are still valid, then why not attempt, as he did, a mapping that would illustrate change over time in the trade routes, rather than conflate them in a somewhat misleading way on a single map? I think the authors too often fall over backwards to avoid summary and schematization, for fear it would perpetuate misleading generalization.

When the Rus finally make it to Kiev, as the authors rightly argue, its centricity and political importance were by no means guaranteed. Their coherent discussion of the consolidation under Prince Vladimir I (e.g., the building of the "snake ramparts") will be of particular interest for those who wish to understand that process. Perhaps more striking is their emphasis on the tardiness of Vladimir's son Iaroslav in establishing his hegemony and that of Kiev. For most readers, the idea that Chernigov was potentially the more important political capital (until the untimely death of its prince in 1036) will be new. Whether there developed any kind of political "system" during the 11th century is a particularly important issue. Here the authors do themselves a disservice by eschewing a fuller explanation of collateral succession as at least one element in a situation that otherwise indeed may be best characterized by "flexibility" and adaptivity. Their discussion of the emerging polity does accept and reiterate clearly arguments presented earlier by Daniel Kaiser about the limits of princely intervention in the legal sphere, but one might have wished too for a fuller explanation of how the "horizontal" resolution of legal disputes operated.

As with much else in the book, the treatment of society is very selective. The urban disorders at the beginning of Vladimir Monomakh's reign in 1113 serve as a useful springboard for a discussion of various social groups, with particularly good syntheses being provided regarding monks and women. Yet even at the risk of stretching what the sources permit, one wishes for more discussion somewhere in the book regarding rural life and the peasants. To say that, however, is not to ask for a re-hash of the literature on the status of the smerd--we can be thankful the authors chose to avoid such a pointless exercise.

Given my personal interest in the cultural evolution of Rus, I find the sections principally authored by Franklin on the Church and the emergence of Orthodox Christian culture to be particularly satisfying. He is perhaps uniquely qualified to place the written culture of the period in perspective. However, as with other sections of the book where we are treated to elegant interpretation, rather than mere reiteration of facts, the discussion might be the more meaningful if the interpretive problems of the earlier scholarship had been more clearly outlined at the start. That said, I do appreciate Franklin's technique of developing the thread of an argument from examination of a particular example illustrated in a primary source quotation. For example, his discussion of how by the 12th century a largely Byzantine-focussed borrowing had given way to an indigenized cultural synthesis opens with the juxtaposition of texts from Metropolitan Nikifor's largely abstract and stylized homily to Prince Vladimir Monomakh and the latter's more concrete and practical "Instruction" to his sons.

The final major section of the book takes up the important subject of the "Rise of the Regions" in the twelfth century. Here the critical argument is that the growing political, economic and cultural importance of the southwest or northeast (to name two of them) was not an indicator of the decline of Kiev and the middle Dnieper region. In fact, according to the authors, the picture is one of steady growth and development, in which Kiev too participated. Thus, we cannot interpret the sack of Kiev in 1169 as the beginning of the end, or the Mongol conquest in the next century as an inevitable result of political decline and disunity. To a considerable degree those traditional images emerge from an idealization of the Kievan experience found initially in 12th-century writings and developed as expressions of Russian cultural angst in subsequent centuries down to our own. In teaching this material over the years, I have dragged my feet in accepting such a reinterpretation of Kiev's "decline," but now I am convinced.

Having been so bold as to order this book for my course on "medieval" Russia that begins in a week before having had a chance to digest it, I am still not sure how best to help my students appreciate it. Do I go back to discussing all the traditional landmarks that are not dealt with here? Will I have to spend the first weeks of the quarter doing a careful explication of the text? Even though Franklin and Shepard write well and there is a generous allotment of maps and genealogical tables, the book is not very "user-friendly." One thing I certainly will do is begin to create a web-based anthology of visual materials, which are so badly needed here to illustrate the text.

In general, the complexity of the material and novelty of many of the interpretations in this book will challenge even the "specialist." Uncomfortable as this may be, our understanding of the early history of Rus has been transformed forever.