

Graduate thesis

NTNU
Norwegian University of Science and Technology
Faculty of Humanities

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The political organisation of the Kyivan Rus until Volodymyr the Great

A horizontal system turning vertically

Graduate thesis in History with Teacher Education, years 8-13

Supervisor: Leif Inge Ree Petersen

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Kunnskap for en bedre verden

EN: Abstract

This paper explores the evolution of political power within the Rus' during the 9th-11th century, until Volodymyr the Great. By combining primary and secondary literature the discussion primarily revolves around how the various different influences affected what started as a horizontal political structure, where no one ruler having supreme power over the other boyars became vertical. Scandinavian, Slavic, Khazar, nomadic and Byzantine influence are considered, in addition to adding the perspective of contemporary Islamic writings. The paper concludes that the Rus' started out similar to the Scandinavian political landscape, but are assimilated into their subjects and develop a Rus identity, with a Slavonic language and a Christian fate. The conversion to Christianity is marked as the biggest change in the period covered here, turning the horizontal power vertically.

NO: Sammendrag

Denne fordypningsoppgaven utforsker utviklingen av politisk makt i Rus gjennom det 9. til 11. århundre, fram til Volodymyr den store. Gjennom en kombinasjon av primær- og sekundærlitteratur tar diskusjonen hovedsakelig opp hvordan forskjellige innflytelser påvirket det som i utgangspunktet var en horisontal maktstruktur hvor ingen hadde suveren makt over de andre boayrene endte opp vertikal. Skandinavisk, slavisk, khazar, nomadisk og bysantisk påvirkning blir tatt i betraktning, i tillegg til samtidslitteratur fra islamske nedtegnelser. Oppgaven konkluderer med at Ruserene startet likt som det skandinaviske politiske landskapet, men ble assimilert inn i deres undersåtter og utviklet der en Rusisk identitet, med et slavisk språk og en kristen tro. Konverteringen til kristendom blir pekt ut som den største omveltningen i perioden oppgaven dekker, og snudde den horisontale makten vertikalt.

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1. Introduction

The Kyivan Rus' society was affected by a number of factors even before its very inception, and so several foci on precisely which factors marked the Rus more than others have appeared. The Rus saw influence from Scandinavians, the Byzantines, Slavic peoples, the Khazars and nomadic tribes. Additionally, one can also see signs of some Baltic and Finno-Ugrian presence, though this paper will be restricted to discussing the former, covering the Rus' political evolution from the 9th century up to and including Volodymyr's reign. How these cultures and ways of life were reflected at political level is a much more difficult question than just looking at the signs of influence being there. Different lines of thought and foci has resulted in different interpretations when analysing the political structure of the Rus, and so this paper aims to combine both secondary and primary literature to find explore how the Kyivan Rus evolved politically, showing how the different influences carried the most weight at different times, culminating in the horizontal structure being turned vertical.

1.1 Methodology

Several works have been selected to give different perspectives and hopefully contrasting viewpoints. Both recognized literary works like Obolensky's *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500-1453* and Phd. thesis papers have been picked, giving new perspectives on old material. The information and theories presented in the selection will be compared and contrasted to primary sources, as not to entirely rely on secondary literature. Most of these comparisons and analysis will be based on *De Administrando Imperio* and *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia*. There are also mentions and references to the Russian Primary Chronicle, called the Nestor Chronicle or *Povest' vremennykh*, which will be abbreviated *PVL* like in Ostrowski's *Systems of Succession in Rus' and Steppe Societies*.¹ However, one must be particularly careful when discussing it, as it was written down years after the events it describes transpired. A substantial amount of what is written there are obvious inventions, and many events are unrealistic or impossible. It is clearly written from a Christian perspective, which comes especially clear when numerous miracles are described, and it depicts the early Rus as heathens, despite *PVL* being a Rus work. Exaggeration can also be found in Ibn Fadlan's writings, though to a lesser degree.

¹ Ostrowski 2012: 31

The plan for this paper is therefore as follows: Firstly, we shall attempt to gain an overview of the Kyivan Rus from which to base our discussion, briefly covering the general history of the Kyivan Rus, but also discuss the importance of the boyars, who were an important part of the political system. Then we will discuss the main influences on the Kyivan Rus, and explore how the influences affected the Rus, in addition to adding the outside of Islamic writers to contrast the other works used. Then the geopolitical climate of the Rus will be mentioned as the influence of the Rus' neighbours will be covered. The Slavs will also briefly be discussed before the main point of the discussion ends with the Byzantine and Christian influence, as it arguably caused the most drastic political change. At the end there will be a summary of the perspectives, tying them together and seeing if one line of thinking is dominant.

The authors of the literary works used are Swedish, Polish, Ukrainian, American, Russian amongst others, and so a number of perspectives are considered. The aim is for this diversity to open up for differences in tone and interest, perhaps emphasising different factors as being the most relevant. This is not the case for terminology though, where the goal is to be as consistent as possible. The choice of Kyiv over Kiev is deliberate, and the same applies for Volodymyr being used over Vladimir. Igor and Oleg will be referred to by their Slavonic names over the Scandinavian variants Ingvarr and Helgi, as that is what they are called in the *PVL*. Place names will also be used consistently, in accordance with the literature discussed in the paper. While the names have common roots and are variations of each other, the capital of Kyiv is in the historical region of Ukraine, and keeping with the Ukrainian spelling is a recognition of their legitimacy to the Rus' heritage, though this paper is limited to discussing events and influences between the 9th and 11th century.

2. A brief comment on time

As the discussion on various influences will jump back and forth time-wise it is prudent to first establish a timeline of the Kyivan Rus. According to Curta Viking trade in Eastern Europe began close to 840, and they had set up bases in northwestern Russia.² They gradually moved south, founding new settlements along the river during the 800's. From there they expanded, and the Kyivan Rus came to be after Rurik's son Oleg conquered Kyiv in 882 according to the *PVL*³. From there they continued to expand and gain tributaries, warring and

² Curta 2019: 278

³ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953: 61

trading with the neighbouring Khazars and Byzantines in equal measure, as already in 860 did a large fleet attack Constantinople.⁴ The many interactions with the Byzantines would result in several diplomatic treaties, some of whom will be discussed in this paper.

Throughout the 800's the Rus continued to expand, absorb neighbouring territory and trade, gradually developing their identity as a people. One highlight of Kyivan expansion is seen in Sviatoslav's campaign against the Khazars during the 900's, where he conquered their capital and in practice dismantled the Khazars as a significant power in the region.⁵

As time passed the Kyivan Rus experienced a shift in priorities, as further treaties saw the trade routes shifting from the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea, moving the economic beneficiaries of Rus trade away from the Islamic partners and towards the Byzantines instead, both for trade and religion. The main religion of the Rus did gradually change and develop too, with paganism being dominant for the most part of Rus history until Volodymyr's conversion towards the end of the 10th century. There was however a period earlier in the same century where Olga was regent for her minor son Sviatoslav, and she had been baptised by the Byzantine patriarch.⁶ Sviatoslav himself led a pagan renaissance, but he would be the last as his son Volodymyr permanently changed both the state religion and the whole political landscape at the same time.

2.1 A discussion on the authority of the boyars

One important point this paper considers is the authority of the boyars, who were an important part of the political system of the Rus. Instead of just focusing on the ruler it is vital that their role is discussed and kept in mind when going through the various changes that affected the Rus, as they for most of this period were the political system. In the 944 treaty between the Kyivan Rus and Byzantium they are described as not being members of one clan, but instead being autonomous leaders in their own rights, inheriting power and controlling their respective territories.⁷ It is on the basis of this, combined with the mentions in *PVL* that we use boyar to describe a prince, here being defined as an independent ruler of a territory within the Kyivan Rus. Technically they were under the authority of the Grand prince in Kyiv, though in practice they were autonomous. The number of boyars mentioned in the 944 treaty matches the number of archons cited by Constantine's writings on the meeting.⁸

⁴ Obolensky 1971: 180

⁵ Curta 2019: 296

⁶ Obolensky 1971: 189

⁷ Stefanovich 2016: 538

⁸ Stefanovich 2016: 538

Soloviev translates “ἄρχοντες” to “archon”, meaning prince.⁹ It is used to reference these boyars, and so boyar and prince are used synonymously, with the boyar in Kyiv being the grand prince, above in theory but first among equals in practice.

Although Igor was recognized as the ruler and Grand-Prince of the boyars he was not recognized by all Rus leaders as the head of state, so the Kyivan Rus did not hold absolute dominion over all Rus. Several other rulers were mentioned, such as Rogovolod ruling Polotsk, and a ruler with the name Tury.¹⁰ There has been found several burial grounds in the Scandinavian style, dating back to the 10th century. The burial grounds in the Chernigov are of particular stature according to Stefanovich, which could be an indication for a dynasty in its own right ruling there. This division resembles the petty kingdoms of Scandinavia more so than a united nation, and is an indication of the Scandinavian rulers exercising power as they would have done at home. It would therefore be prudent to instead consider the Kyivan Rus as the largest political entity of the Rus, though they would eventually come to dominate all Rus as increasing centralisation of power and territorial expansion continued, with Volodymyr’s supreme authority being the culmination of that trend towards a vertical political structure.

The 944 treaty mentions that there were 24 boyars, who all recognized the grand prince, which at the time was Igor.¹¹ Igor ruled Kyiv, and Kyiv was seen as the capital and the most important seat in the realm. It was not the sole place of importance though, and Constantine names other cities along the Dnipro as important too.¹² The settlements were placed along the trade route down to Byzantium, and thus they would be very economically profitable for the princes to hold. Financial independence could result in the rulers having the means to operate independently of Kyiv, despite being part of the same political entity. Precisely what amount of power Igor exercised over his fellow boyars is unclear, and the lack of a definite description of the Rus’ leader supports the viewpoint of the grand prince having little power beyond his own principality until Volodymyr. In addition, not all of these boyars could have been from the Rurik dynasty, though most were Scandinavian. As others have pointed out it was not until the 11th century that we see the *PVL* reference a dynastic power reigning,

⁹ Stefanovich 2016: 537

¹⁰ Stefanovich 2016: 539

¹¹ Stefanovich 2016: 538

¹² Jenkins 1967: 75

coincidentally falling to the same period as Volodymyr's centralisation. This can therefore be seen as political bias retroactively influencing the nation's history, as the Rus were Christian when the *PVL* was written, and could therefore want the state to appear united and sovereign from the onset, led by the same divine right bestowed upon Volodymyr.

The willingness of the Rus to expand for better trade, such as the shift towards the Black Sea and Byzantium instead of the past Caspian routes show the importance of economic power,¹³ and can also be seen as a display of unity among the Rus boyars. Despite the power structure being horizontal the expansion of the individual boyars had the effect of expanding their sphere of influence, further expanding the borders of the Kyivan Rus and thus both legitimizing and empowering it as a political entity. In addition, the expansion also served to increase the influence of the individual boyars. The powers of the boyars would therefore not only continue to expand in tact with the Rus' territorial and economic expansion, but also diminish as the grand prince outgrew their power. As the Kyivan Rus gathered more tributaries and territory, they would gain more wealth and power, but it was not the same unconditional power they held when the Scandinavians first established a foothold, where they all operated independently of each other without being part of the same political entity. This would however change over time, and it is interesting to keep the boyar's political authority in mind, and not just look at the theoretical head of state, as political structure is dependent on more than one person to function.

3. The perspectives

In this chapter the various schools of thought will be discussed, and the various influences that affected the Rus will be highlighted and compared to each other, in an effort to find either a consensus or a definition of which is more correct than the other. There has been an attempt to sort them by introduction, with the influences first affecting the Rus being covered first, though the continuous ones with long-term effects like the Byzantine perspective will come last, as it is deemed the most relevant towards the end of the time period covered in this paper.

3.1 The Scandinavian start

Scandinavia did undoubtedly matter when it comes to discussing the foundation of the Rus. After all, the Rus came from Scandinavians travelling eastwards, and so the question is what

¹³ Curta 2019: 296

influence it had on the Rus, rather than if at all. This chapter argues that there are many similarities that can be drawn to the Scandinavians, but that as time passed and the Rus were assimilated into the majority populations already present the direct influence would decline, such as in language and culture. The majority of the boyars were however Scandinavian, and the grand princes carried Scandinavian names for a number of years. The political structure was much like the petty kingdoms in Scandinavia, with a horizontal political system where each ruler operated independently of each other, and the theoretical ruler being limited in the power they could exercise over the other boyars. Therefore, the Scandinavians seem to have been more important for the political structure and hierarchy than for the culture and language, though the political influence would decline as a result of the rise of Christianity and Volodymyr's centralisation.

One of the proponents for research and emphasis on the Scandinavian influence on the Rus is Tore Gannholm, hailing from Gotland. He bases his arguments in "*How Russia became Russia*" in "*Gotland the Pearl of the Baltic Sea Center of commerce and culture in the Baltic Sea region for over 2000 years*", on archaeological evidence, Byzantine, and Islamic primary sources. Most of the Scandinavians who travelled eastwards into Rus' lands were Swedish, and many of those were from Gotland.¹⁴ Although he primarily writes about the Swedish influence, especially the Gotlandic the arguments and thoughts he mentions apply to the rest of Scandinavia. The case is mostly based on archaeological excavations, especially that of Staraya Ladoga, which was established in the 750's.¹⁵ He also references the works of geographers and travel writers Ibn Kordābeh and Ibn Rustah, using their references to the Rus' traders to distinguish between the Scandinavians who went east, and were talked of as al-Rus and Varangians. The Vikings according to them, chiefly went west, and they were mentioned less. This means that we already here see a divergence in Scandinavian culture, with the Rus evolving into its own separate entity.

Kyiv was taken from the Khazars in 882 by these Varangians, who also established a long line of strongholds along the Dnipro river with Oleg as king.¹⁶ This marked the beginning of the Kyivan Rus, and Gannholm further discusses how the Principality of Kyiv evolved from this starting point by conquering neighbours and expanding their territory, and concludes with briefly mentioning the Byzantine Empire's influence in converting the Kyivan Rus to

¹⁴ Gannholm 2019: 3

¹⁵ Gannholm 2019: 4

¹⁶ Gannholm 2019: 1

Christianity. The conversion marks a turning point in Rus' culture, and the changes will be discussed later on. One must therefore keep in mind that the Scandinavian influence primarily focuses on the time of the Rus before Volodymyr. The process was however long and gradual, and one can already from the onset of Rus statehood see signs of Christendom. Gannholm corroborates Patriarch Photius' letter to the eastern patriarchs, which states that the al-Rus followed the Bulgars in converting in 867, with further comments from Ibn Kordābeh saying they "Style themselves as Christian" in 880 and Al-Marwazi in 912 writing that they have settled into Christianity, abandoning pagan raids.¹⁷ This marks a shift in culture, moving further away from Scandinavian influence and closer to Byzantine. However, Ibn Fadlan's travel diary from the early 900's vividly depicts Rus people performing pagan rituals,¹⁸ showing conflict in the statements. Volodymyr is also said to have baptised all his boyars upon his own conversion in 988,¹⁹ furthering disproving the statement that the Rus already were Christian as early as 912. In fact, Scandinavians were in charge during the conversion.²⁰ There was probably some truth to Al-Marwazi's writings, but his description does seem superfluous and without proper insight. The Scandinavian influence on religion persisted through the 900's, and though declined it is difficult to disparage the importance and effect it had on shaping the early Rus.

Scandinavian influence on the Rus' state appears to be at its strongest during its foundation and early years. The Kyivan Rus' state were founded by Scandinavians travelling eastwards, establishing themselves in a few settlements, first Staraya Ladoga before Novgorod came to prominence²¹. From there they conquered Kyiv from the Khazars, and after that they continued with expanding their political influence and direct territory.²² In addition, wider territories also fell under their indirect control, becoming tributaries of the Rus.²³ The description of the founding does however fail to mention other influences, and is very much Scandinavian-centred. According to the narrative Scandinavians went east, conquered, and were then civilized through Christian, especially Byzantine, influence. The full picture is a bit more complex. Kyiv was conquered from the Khazars, but their lingering effect on the Rus is not mentioned, nor is the influence of the already established Slavic people there. Their

¹⁷ Gannholm 2019: 4

¹⁸ Frye 2010: 65

¹⁹ Clark 2003: 96

²⁰ Gannholm 2019: 5

²¹ Frye 2010: 104

²² Gannholm 2019: 4

²³ Curta 2019: 290

influence will be discussed in a later chapter. The evidence of Scandinavian presence gathered from the archaeological excavations Staraya Lodaga and other sites provide a good foundation and proof of the Scandinavian presence. What it does not, however, is provide a clear insight into how the Rus were governed, and into how the political entity of the state was organised.

What one can do to find evidence of Scandinavian influence on the political organisation of the Rus can be seen in a few treaties between the Rus and Byzantium found in the *PVL*, one from 911 and one from 944,²⁴ with the latter treaty carrying significant importance. They list the envoys that went from the Kyivan Rus to Constantinople in diplomatic meetings, with the latter also naming the rulers who sent the envoys. From the names listed one can see that there some Slavic, Baltic and some Finno-Urgic names, but the majority of names are Scandinavian.²⁵ The majority being Scandinavian indicates, by virtue of representation that the leadership was primarily Scandinavian. This shows us that not only was The Rus' state established by Scandinavians, but they remained with a majority at the top of the political hierarchy, holding major positions of power despite being a minority population-wise. However, the most important name listed is that of Igor, who was the ruler of the Rus at the time. His heritage was Scandinavian, but his son, Sviatoslav, was given a Slavonic name, showing signs of the Scandinavian culture merging with the others to create a common identity. Stefanovich also cross-references the names and statuses of the envoys with a later treaty from 957 to ensure that the people listed were in fact rulers,²⁶ so one can be fairly confident in the accuracy of the lists and thus use it to confirm the rulers primarily being Scandinavian.

However, there is one point that weakens the perspective of Scandinavian influence being dominant in Rus society. Old Russian vocabulary has very little Norse adopted into it, being limited to somewhere between 15 and 20 words.²⁷ This, when combined with the rulers being given Slavonic names as time passed is an indication that the assimilation into the melting pot of cultures in the area caused the distinctly Scandinavian parts of Rus' society to become general parts of Rus' society, rather than the Rus being a Scandinavian society. This does not disparage the importance Scandinavian influence had in the establishment of the Rus' state,

²⁴ Stefanovich 2016: 530

²⁵ Stefanovich 2016: 533

²⁶ Stefanovich 2016: 537

²⁷ Stefanovich 2016: 531

as without the Scandinavians travelling down the rivers for trade and plunder there would be no Rus, state. What it does mean, is that as with many other conquerors, like the Mongols in China the minority assimilates into the majority despite being the rulers. The first Scandinavian settlers along the Volga were Scandinavian, but rulers like Oleg and Igor were each described as the “great prince of Rus” in the Byzantine-Rus treaties.²⁸ They were at this point not considered to be Scandinavian, but the Rus were recognized as its own ethnos. Seeing how the peoples around the Volga evolved with time, establishing states and assimilating cultures it is fair to consider the Rus to becoming a people separate people from the Scandinavians, despite sharing common ancestry.

3.2 The Islamic perspective

An outside perspective on the Rus’ people can be found in several Islamic travel writers’ works, where they highlight various aspects of the Rus’ society, ranging from trade routes to burial rituals. Although the direct effects Islamic influence had on the Rus appear to be limited to being a recipient of trade through their sphere of influence and therefore being perhaps the most important beneficiary of Rus trade the many written works by various travel writers help give an outsider’s perspective on how the Rus were governed and progressed as a people. We however see a decline in the amount of Islamic writing on the Rus towards the latter half of the 10th century, coinciding with trade routes shifting from the Caspian to the Black Sea, increasing the volume of trade with Byzantium.²⁹

Urbańczyk writes about the influence and culture of the Rus people, citing the traditional Scandinavian origin theory when explaining that the word “Rus” itself means people who row, referring to the Scandinavian warriors and merchants specifically.³⁰ However, the name was made commonplace through Byzantine movements, who promoted it and spread it because of their diplomatic foothold in the area.³¹ In contrast to this, Arabic sources from the 9th century seems to disregard ethnic groups and instead focuses on the economic and political role played by the people in the area.³² One does however see a clear distinction marking the Rus and the Slavic neighbours as different groups in Arab descriptions from the 900’s, showing how the Rus people had established its statehood. Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn al-Husayn ibn Ali al-Mas’udie’ writes in *Murug ad-dahab wa maadin al-gawahir* in 947 that

²⁸ Stefanovich 2016: 532

²⁹ Curta 2019: 296

³⁰ Urbańczyk 2014: 229

³¹ Urbańczyk 2014: 229

³² Urbańczyk 2014: 230

the Rus were a people of many nations, with impressive skill in many crafts,³³ which can be interpreted as saying their skill is a result of their diversity. The Scandinavians arrived more than a century earlier and had by this point become the Rus, and in the process acquired new ways of thinking, fighting, and believing. These quotes and descriptions of the Rus support the depiction of them evolving from a relatively homogenous group of Scandinavian merchant-warriors into a people in their own right.

Ibn Fadlan's account mixes several cultures when describing the Rus,³⁴ and his travel diary provides a different perspective to the archaeological finds. During the Scandinavian perspective we discussed how the Rus started as a relatively homogeneous group of Scandinavians, who as they expanded and settled wider areas of land mixed with the many meeting influences of Eastern Europe. Like others, they too were affected by the cultures and lands around them, seeping into both politics and culture resulting in them becoming the Rus. The mixture of various cultures might not have been poor oversight from Ibn Fadlan, but instead being a reflection on how the Rus' society had integrated and adopted the cultures around them, and therefore corroborating that view. The wooden symbols used as idols came from the Volga-Bulghars, although Scandinavians too erected wooden idols³⁵, with the Rus' traditions here perhaps being a mix of the two cultures.

Ibn Fadlan travelled along the Volga River when he met the group of Rus people, and it is possible that he had not yet reached Kyivan Rus territory proper,³⁶ but instead was still in the lands of the Volga-Bulghars. His writings might therefore not be taken at face value and used as a description of all Rus people. However, they are still an important description of the group of Rus' people he encountered, who appear to have been a merchant group as they carried slaves and various goods with them intended for sale.³⁷ They are also described as having large, Frankish swords,³⁸ though the role of both merchant and fighter was applicable for Rus groups travelling long distances through potentially hostile land.

The majority of his writing on the Rus group he encountered focuses on the burial ritual he observed, which gives an indication on how the Rus had developed culturally. Although there

³³ Urbańczyk 2014: 230

³⁴ Urbańczyk 2014: 230

³⁵ Hraunda 2013: 102

³⁶ Hraunda 2013: 100

³⁷ Frye 2010: 64

³⁸ Frye 2010: 63

is the caveat of this group of Rus perhaps not being able to fully represent all Rus, especially those in the western stretches of the territories it still shows their incorporation of other influences. The Rus used Abbasid and Samanid dirhams as their currency,³⁹ signifying the importance of trade for the Rus, especially over longer distance. Having adopted using the currencies common for their trading area means that the trade can have been frequent, which combined with the sizes of the groups travelling is an indicator of the importance the trade routes had for the Rus' economic power and by extension, political power.

3.3 The neighbours' influence – Khazars and Pechenegs

While the cultural impact from the Scandinavians appears to have been limited, the neighbours of the Rus' seems to have had a higher effect on them culturally, with even building traditions being adopted from the local tribes⁴⁰. The Pechenegs, who would surpass the Khazars as the most powerful neighbour would too be important for the political system of the Rus. They would effectively keep them in check from raiding the Byzantines unless they were cooperating in the venture. In addition, the political system that seemed quite similar to the Scandinavian model also has similarities to the ones used by nomad tribes, though the Rus would eventually come to adopt the linear succession of the Khazars, exemplifying their movement from a horizontal towards a vertical state.

Androschuk heavily emphasises the lack of thorough cohesiveness in both territory and political power spanning the princedoms of the Kyivan Rus, with there being no strong state apparatus nor a common law. He argues that a proper state did not appear until Volodymyr's centralization.⁴¹ This is in direct opposition to the *PVL*, which tells a story of togetherness from the onset. This contradiction is primarily based on archaeological finds in places such as Gnezdovo near Smolensk, which has a large concentration of burial mounds and hoards containing gold.⁴² Other excavations show Khazar, nomadic and Byzantine remnants from places such as Glodosy, which the Rus first conquered in the 10th century.⁴³ The area was already a melting pot of different cultures, and the Rus therefore added to what was already

³⁹ Frye 2010: 108

⁴⁰ Androschuk 2022: 94

⁴¹ Androschuk 2022: 91

⁴² Androschuk 2022: 95

⁴³ Androschuk 2022: 93

present, and both adopted and integrated what they found into themselves. However, during the 800's only a few places were considered to be permanent settlements, and they quickly adapted local traditions and building techniques instead of using traditional Scandinavian methods.⁴⁴ The relatively small number of settlements and excavations of hubs like Gnezdovo points to the early period of Rus' activity primarily being one of exploration, trade, and accumulation of wealth rather than establishing a definite state with a clear political system. After all, the Rus were present in the region for a number of years before the conquest of Kyiv in 882.

The Pecheneg threat and dominance depicted in *De Adminstrando Imperio* was not there when the Rus first arrived, as the Khazars dominated the area. Kyiv was conquered from the Khazars, and the Khazars' fall can be seen as a direct consequence of Sviatoslavs campaigns against them, as it resulted in the sacking of the Khazar capital of Itil towards the later part of the 10th century.⁴⁵ Although the Khazars ceased to be a dominant force in the area, the effect they had on the Rus was lasting, as they had occupied much of the same territory the Kyivan Rus came to control. Even before becoming a state what would become the Rus operated and traded in Khazar lands, and it is likely that the Rus attacks on Constantinople in 860 originated in Khazar territory.⁴⁶ This shows that despite being the downfall of the Khazars the Rus were not always enemies with them, but also traded and fought for them. This makes sense when one considers the origins of the Rus as Scandinavians coming eastwards in smaller, decentralised groups, lacking the political unity and statehood that would come later. One example of the similarity between the two can be found in the population centres where the Rus first settled, as some Islamic sources has referred to the leader as a kaghan, similarly to the leaders of the Khazars.⁴⁷ Even though several others, including Ibn Fadlan, did not, there are enough points to argue for the importance of Khazar influence. They will have needed permission from the Khazar kaghan to trade in their lands in the first place, and to some extent will have cooperated in launching raids and other military expeditions. In addition, Volodymyr adopted the linear succession system from the Khazars.⁴⁸ This ties heavily in with his aims and work on centralising and upheaving the power-structure, turning the state vertical with and increased amount of power to the sovereign, similarly to what the

⁴⁴ Androshchuk 2022: 94

⁴⁵ Curta 2019: 296

⁴⁶ Androshchuk 2022: 94

⁴⁷ Hraunda 2013: 181

⁴⁸ Ostrowski 2012: 41

Khazars had. Khazar influence would therefore continue to remain with the Rus all the way from their arrival and through their first centuries.

Although the Khazar Kaganate fell soon after Sviatoslav's campaigns, the Rus did not gain power over the whole eastern landmass, and former Khazar tributaries and enemies would fill the void created, with the Pechenegs being considered their largest successor.⁴⁹ The Pechenegs were a steppe tribe who would come to control much of the former Khazar territory along the coast of the Black Sea. According to *De Administrando Imperio*, Kyiv was a day's travel from the Pecheneg border,⁵⁰ meaning that the two peoples had to be in constant contact. Contact would entail both conversation and conflict, and the plethora of archaeological finds along the rivers around Rus settlements show heavy influence from nomadic tribes like the Pechenegs.⁵¹ It is further written that they both fight and cooperate, and that the Rus needs to have peace with the Pechenegs to be able to go abroad to raid and conquer, lest their own lands be raided by the Pechenegs in turn.⁵² As with most neighbouring states in the area one can see there being no status quo but rather tensions going back and forth between the Rus and neighbouring Pechenegs. Although *De Administrando Imperio* points out the threat the Pechenegs posed to the Rus, they still joined forces in an attack against Byzantium in 969-970.⁵³ One can draw similarities to the relationship between the Rus and the Khazars, but with the Pechenegs the Rus had become more established and centralised. To the Byzantines they acted as counterbalances, keeping each other in check. This indirectly comments on the strength of the Rus and their growth as a regional power, as the Pechenegs are described as vastly superior to the Bulgars, Chersonites and other neighbouring groups.⁵⁴ At the time of *De Administrando Imperio* being written down Sviatoslav was the ruler of the Kyivan Rus, and his expansion of their power indicates movement towards political unity, or at least heavy cooperation among the boyars, which his successor would take advantage of.

⁴⁹ Obolensky 1971: 180

⁵⁰ Jenkins 1967: 95

⁵¹ Androshchuk 2022: 95

⁵² Jenkins 1967: 51

⁵³ Obolensky 1971: 180

⁵⁴ Jenkins 1967: 53

3.3.1 A steppe comparison

The steppe tribes were, like Stefanovich's view of the Rus before Volodymyr, horizontally structured politically. Although there was no single definitive central structure the steppe societies were not brotherhoods, loosely organised and just bound together by a sense of comradeship and togetherness.⁵⁵ This horizontal structure shows that there was a lack of one supreme political power, and that it came top-down, but from the aristocracy, spread out over several powerful members. The question is therefore not whether they had any governing body at all, but rather how the aristocracy ruled. Ostrowski writes that the power was decentralised and distributed through an aristocracy, becoming like a social relation. The aristocracy worked and governed together and had to engage with each other when making decisions, as they could not override each other.⁵⁶ This is very much like the system we see among the Kyivan Rus', where the boyars were all quite equal in strength and had to interact with each other until Volodymyr's consolidation. Although focusing on the 12th century, Vukovich's *Gift Economy of the Princes of Rus* highlights the importance of gift-giving as a means of establishing political hierarchy and upholding goodwill among the aristocracy.⁵⁷ It is likely that the means of gift-giving as a political tool predates that time, and was relevant for upholding relations between boyars even before the centralisation of the Rus.

Another important piece of evidence backing up the lack of central authority in the first centuries of the Rus comes from the term "Rurikid", relating to the lineage of Rurikid I not existing as a term until centuries later.⁵⁸ The depiction of the Rurikid dynasty as a royal dynasty over a sovereign state first appeared in the 15th century,⁵⁹ and was likely used to legitimize the ruling dynasty. This is probably because tracing power back generations was more important to keeping power than during the earlier years of the Rus, as one can see in the *PVL* that it makes no attempt at tracing the various rulers down to Rurik, the founder of the dynasty.⁶⁰ Instead, it focuses on who attacked Byzantium as prowess in battle appears to have been a more important virtue than being of a certain birth. In fact, the *PVL* makes no attempt to connect the later princes of the Rus with the earlier ones genetically,⁶¹ which

⁵⁵ Ostrowski 2012: 30

⁵⁶ Ostrowski 2012: 42

⁵⁷ Vukovich 2019: 79

⁵⁸ Ostrowski 2012: 30

⁵⁹ Ostrowski 2012: 30

⁶⁰ Ostrowski 2012: 31

⁶¹ Ostrowski 2012: 31

would have been one of the obvious ways of attempting to legitimize a dynasty, as can be seen with the later invention of Rurikid. Thus, that the rulers were related to each other seems to have had little effect on governance, as the rulers themselves did not have the supreme power often found in later ruling dynasties where absolute power resided in family, passed through generations. An example of this contrast can be seen during the Muscovites' expansion in the 15th and 16th century, where long genealogies tracing all the way back to Volodymyr begin to appear.⁶² This shows the difference in the necessity of genealogical legitimisation, with the Muscovites needing to justify their rule by stretching their dynasty back hundreds of years to justify their positions.

Although much of the political structure and the source of power in the state came from the established Scandinavian petty kingdoms model, there are some differences, such as the boyars formally recognising a grand prince and the Kyivan Rus technically therefore being one state compared to the petty kingdoms where each kingdom was independent. The system is more similar to the steppe tribes' horizontal power structure as the boyars all belonged to the Kyivan Rus, but the tribes lacked an overarching head of state that the Rus had, though in practice the head did not have the authority of a supreme ruler. This horizontal power structure of the Rus was turned vertical through the later influence of Byzantium and Christianity, but already before Volodymyr adopted the Khazar system of succession one can see heavy influence from the steppe tribes in how the boyars were succeeded.

There were some exceptions to the similarities between succession among the Rus and the steppe tribes. The Hsiung-nu tribe had periods with more than 10 successful successions in a row, and a period of more than 100 years without a power struggle with power passing peacefully from father to son.⁶³ This was however the different to the majority trend, which was horizontal succession. In that system the title goes to eldest brother four times before moving to the eldest son of the eldest brother, which was common among Turkic peoples.⁶⁴ Precisely which system used by the Rus in the early years is unsure though, according to Pritsak.⁶⁵ Coming to a precise conclusion that covers all the Rus is difficult, as one cannot look away from the amount of independence each boyar of the Kyivan Rus had. It would therefore be a higher chance of accuracy in assume that there was a degree of variation

⁶² Ostrowski 2012: 36

⁶³ Ostrowski 2012: 37

⁶⁴ Ostrowski 2012: 38

⁶⁵ Ostrowski 2012: 41

between them, allowing room for the boyars' own authority to show. However, the inaccuracies in theory here do not apply to Volodymyr, whom we know adopted the Khazar tradition of linear succession. The main goal of this was to keep the realm united by having one line keep authority over the other boyars, moving towards a vertical state and away from the looseness similar to the steppe tribes the Rus neighbored. Doing so would keep the state authority clear and remove doubts on who should rule, but one must also include the possibility of it being done for egotistical reasons.

3.4 The Slavic state

There is numerous evidence to prove that the Kyivan Rus were a melting pot of cultures and ethnicities and therefore having several directions for cultural and political development available to them. Magyar, Baltic, Slavic, Scandinavian and other influences have been found to mark the various aspects of Rus' society. Despite the ruling hierarchy and the boyars primarily being Scandinavian, there has been relatively few archaeological finds of Scandinavian influence, with a much larger number of finds containing primarily nomadic and some Slavic influences.⁶⁶ As Gannholm mentioned the early Rus' settlements were few in number and primarily revolved around trading hubs.⁶⁷ This might be an indication for the overall numbers of the population, with Khazars still living on the same land, Pechenegs to the east and other tribes outnumbering the Scandinavian settlers and their descendants. This would particularly apply to the Slavic peoples native to the area settled by the Rus. Though mentioned when discussing nomadic influence, the Rus' adoption of local building techniques would include Slavic too⁶⁸, meaning that they too melted into what would become the Rus' identity. There is however little one can see when it comes to political influence on the Rus, and so it seems that Slavic influence on the Rus resulted in identity and culture rather than a political system.

There was no established caste system between ethnicities, but as most boyars were of Scandinavian origin they might be seen as generally being the ruling class. Such a make-up is understandable though, as the Scandinavians were not native to the area, and those who travelled there in the first place must have been of a certain wealth and power, with those not having the means staying back. This top-heavy balance of Scandinavians is also reflected in

⁶⁶ Urbańczyk 2014: 231

⁶⁷ Androshchuk 2022: 95

⁶⁸ Androshchuk 2022: 94

De Administrando Imperio, where the names of rivers are written in both the Slavonic and Russian versions of their names,⁶⁹ showing that even though they were outnumbered the Scandinavian population still were an important part of the Rus. The piece of *De Administrando Imperio* describing these rivers is from a part that covers the routes taken by Rus travelling southwards in *monoxyla*, dugout canoes, built by the Slavs and sold to the Rus.⁷⁰ They are here differentiated as different economic entities, and by extension as different political entities. This distinction marks a point towards establishing the Kyivan Rus as a political entity, solidifying it as its own state instead of being just a cultural group intertwining with others in the area.

However, the Slavic identity became more and more important to the Rus as they further expanded and mixed with the local population, leading to increased influence of both culture and ethnical makeup. Igor, who ruled after Oleg named his son Sviatoslav, and unlike his predecessors Sviatoslav is an originally Slavonic name whereas Igor, Olga and Rurik are all Scandinavian in origin.⁷¹ This can be seen as a sign of the increased Slavic influence on the Rurikids, whom after having now lived for several generations in Russia were likely to feel more at home there than in Scandinavia. Although numerous in the west, there is a steady decline of Scandinavian artifacts found the further east one goes.⁷² When acclimatising oneself with the environment and assimilating various cultures into a new one it is logical that people of different backgrounds end up together. The Scandinavians always were a minority compared to the native inhabitants of the areas around the Dnipro, and therefore each generation would mix with each other, resulting in a more homogenous culture that could be seen as the Rus' culture. Byzantine hymns were translated into old Church Slavonic,⁷³ becoming another indication of the sponge-like behaviour of the Kyivan Rus, which although Byzantine in origin were translated to the Slavonic liturgical language rather than Scandinavian or other. The term Rus at the time of Christianisation could not apply to the Scandinavians rowing through the rivers for trade and raiding, but had instead become the term for the people living there.

⁶⁹ Jenkins 1967: 61

⁷⁰ Jenkins 1967: 59

⁷¹ Urbańczyk 2014: 231

⁷² Hrauda 2013: 134

⁷³ Clark 2003: 99

3.5 Business with Byzantium and Christianity as a political tool

Especially two things came from Byzantium to the Rus. Trade, and Christianity. Though the Byzantines and the Rus often fought, the trade route along the Black Sea would become very important to the Rus, leading to them foregoing the one further east towards Islamic territory. The economic relationship between the two was therefore of some significance, but it seems surpassed by the sheer impact Christianity had for the political organisation of the Rus. The conversion was likely both based on personal relations and political ambition, with the triggering factor being conversation as the condition for the marriage to a princess. The result was Volodymyr turning the horizontal system similar to the Scandinavian and nomadic political systems vertically, centralising power towards himself and making the boyars subservient to him in both theory and practice, in addition to establishing himself as a dynastic power. It is through the conversion that we see a true change in Rus' politics, with effects that would carry through time.

Clark is immediately sceptical of the narrative in the *PVL*, in “*Did Baptism Change the Rus?*”, which describes the Rus boyars as being closely knit together and governed vertically, which has been argued against earlier. The chronicle further mentions that the Rus were closely connected to and had strong ties with Byzantium, highlighting the importance of the two states' relationship. However, according to Clark, there is no evidence of that unity from a Byzantine perspective,⁷⁴ and so the influence between the two sides must have been quite one-sided. In *De Administrando Impero* the Rus are just depicted as a threat kept in check by the Pechenegs,⁷⁵ though there is a detailed description of their yearly travels around their tributary states and how they come down to Constantinople.⁷⁶ From this one can gather that the travelling patterns of the Rus are important, likely because the set pattern keeps them occupied certain parts of the year, and thus know when they can potentially threaten Byzantium. Coming in large enough numbers to threaten Constantinople also means that they had amassed significant power, and will have needed a coordinated effort from the boyars as they came together to journey south, meaning the horizontal power structure did not diminish outward expansion. The Byzantium need for the Pechenegs to keep the Rus in check would however change with the Christianisation of the Rus.

⁷⁴ Clark 2003: 95

⁷⁵ Jenkins 1967: 51

⁷⁶ Jenkins 1967: 61

There are several motives for conversion, of which especially personal relationships played a part. Volodymyr the Great's mother was a servant of his grandmother Olga, who had converted to Christianity.⁷⁷ There were also Christians among the Rus in some numbers already in the 800's,⁷⁸ though the trigger for the conversion appears to be Volodymyr's marriage to Anna, sister to Byzantine emperor Basil II. Volodymyr converting was the only condition for the marriage, which was allowed by Basil after Rus help against a rebel general.⁷⁹ The marriage and conversion would tie the Kyivan Rus and the Byzantines closely together in a way that had not been possible prior to this, both because of the close political marriage making Volodymyr part of the royal family, and by technically becoming subservient to the Byzantines. The head of the Orthodox community, which the Kyivan Rus now were part of was always the Byzantine emperor,⁸⁰ meaning he technically held divine jurisdiction over the Kyivan Rus.

More important however are the changes to the Kyivan Rus introduced by Christianity, as the upheaval of the old pagan ways brought a new culture and way of thinking along with faith. Conversion meant new townships, a new legal system, church-led education, and improved international diplomatic relations with other states, especially the Byzantines.⁸¹ The increasing urbanisation meant that churches were built near towns so that they could dominate the area,⁸² and one can also see why people would move towards urbanisation so as to be closer to the church and be part of the parish. Faith spread quickly and became an integral part of the Rus, much thanks to Byzantine efforts. Several hymns in Church Slavonic have Byzantine origins, with many being word for word translations from Greek,⁸³ which along with the Rus being orthodox and not catholic emphasises just how important Byzantine influence was in the Rus' adoption of Christianity.

However, the Byzantine influence on the Rus was not just limited to what was created through Christendom, as Curta points to how the geographical expansion of the Rus' territory coincided with a shift in trade routes, as the eastern Islamic trade routes declined during the 900's and 1000's in favour of an increased volume of trade with the Byzantines.⁸⁴ The

⁷⁷ Clark 2003: 92

⁷⁸ Obolensky 1971: 183

⁷⁹ Obolensky 1971: 194

⁸⁰ Obolensky 1971: 201

⁸¹ Clark 2003: 99

⁸² Clark 2003: 102

⁸³ Clark 2003: 99

⁸⁴ Curta 2019: 296

foundation of the Kyivan Rus as a state was to better manage trade, and with trade therefore being such a vital part of the state's sovereignty it appears logical for the Rus' priorities to shift according to where the profits lie. The Rus expanded southwards, settling along the Middle Dnipr not just to expand their political sphere and collect tributaries from the local tribes, but also to better their opportunities of trade with Byzantium.⁸⁵ Androschuk points out the emergence of Shestovitsa as an important trading centre as evidence of this, as excavations found remains of iron mining, smithing, boat maintenance, in addition to evidence of both Scandinavians and contact with Byzantium.⁸⁶

Another important factor in the centralisation of Volodymyr's power was increasing urbanization of the Rus' people towards the end of the 10th century. Previously, religion and population were both highly decentralized and with no final authority, though towns were on the rise. There were pagan magicians, but they lacked the authority, organisation, and purpose of the clergy, which became a new social class upheaving the previous established merchants as the upper class above the commoners.⁸⁷ Clark cites Vlasto's *The Entry of the Slavs into Christendom*, saying that there were no stone buildings in Russia before 988,⁸⁸ and Volodymyr began construction of the church of the Tithe in 998. Christendom was therefore a tool to shape and reform society through urbanisation and modernisation, which was made heavy use of. Clark's description on how the Rus developed shows that the question is not whether baptism changed the Rus, but rather how it changed them. Volodymyr had worked on concentrating his power already before converting, so one must see the conversion as a means to an end rather than a great revelation. The conversion of the Kyivan Rus can therefore be considered well-timed, with established doctrines and canon of the Orthodox teachings mixing well with Volodymyr's aspirations of greater power. The embellishment of the importance of Christendom can be seen in the *PVL*, where heroic feats are depicted, such as a Rus' warrior tearing the skin and flesh off a charging bull with his bare hands.⁸⁹ Although likely false due to the improbability of such an event happening, depictions like that one emphasise the importance of Christendom and how ingrained in Rus society it would grow to become.

⁸⁵ Androschuk 2022: 96

⁸⁶ Androschuk 2022: 96

⁸⁷ Clark 2003: 97

⁸⁸ Clark 2003: 102

⁸⁹ Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953: 120

Religion has been ingrained into politics and seems to have been an important part of any leader, and one cannot have one without the other. One question the conversion to Christianity brings is therefore how it affected the political influence of Volodymyr himself, when compared to Byzantium. How Volodymyr turned the political landscape vertical will be discussed in the next subchapter, but although he managed to gain a lot more power the ties he had with Byzantium put some restrictions on him. The Russian state church was put under the authority of the patriarchate of Constantinople, though Volodymyr himself ordered the construction of several churches along the rivers⁹⁰. The marriage played an important role in the relationship between the Rus and the Byzantines, and when one adds the conversion to Christendom one understands why hostilities between the Rus and Byzantines ceased, despite the many former conflicts. Both sides benefited from one less foe, and the easier access to trade will have meant that both sides benefited from the deal, and perhaps Volodymyr himself most of all.

As time passed there is a clear indication of the Scandinavian influence that was so top-heavy during the first centuries of Rus' presence pewtering out, and that the Byzantine, especially the Christian influence would come to dominate Rus' society. The first example is found when looking at the rulers, after Sviatoslav no longer had Scandinavian names, indicating that the Rus identity was becoming more apparent. Another sign is found in the Old Russian vocabulary, where only a few words are of Scandinavian origin⁹¹. The largest change is perhaps that of faith, though both Scandinavia and the Rus came to adopt Christianity only the Rus adopted the eastern Orthodox faith, as Scandinavia held to the Latin church. With Christianity came Christian traditions and burials, and the funeral where a ship is burned so vividly in Ibn Fadlan's accounts⁹² were moved away from. Instead of a horizontal structure resembling the Scandinavian petty kingdoms the Rus turned vertical, and so there was little left of the Scandinavian origin by the end of Volodymyr's reign. Despite this, contact with Scandinavia did not cease, as Olav Tryggvason spent time with the Rus in exile⁹³

⁹⁰ Obolensky 1971: 198

⁹¹ Stefanovich 2016: 531

⁹² Frye 2010: 66-70

⁹³ Curta 2019: 298

3.5.1 Turning horizontal power vertical

The main principality of Kyiv had always been reserved for the ruling family of the Grand Prince, and the other principalities were left to the boyars. While the boyars for a long time operated independently of each other they all fell under Volodymyr, giving further importance to Kyiv not just as a symbolic capital, but as the seat of power among the Kyivan Rus. As the boyars had to both convert themselves and therefore recognize Volodymyr's divine right to the throne,⁹⁴ the role of the Grand Prince changed from that of strongest among equals to having no equal, as the boyars now placed were placed below Volodymyr in the hierarchy.

Although the office of Grand Prince was held in higher regard than the other offices, especially after Volodymyr's centralisation, the title of boyar was still important and held significant power. The most important factors in ruling were your legitimacy – if your father had ruled before you were most likely entitled to succeed him, though the genealogy stretching generations back was not as important. However, you also had to be accepted by your fellow boyars.⁹⁵ In principle they were on an equal playing field rank-wise, a weak boyar would be susceptible to undermining by others trying to improve their own station. As the political system was so horizontal and the boyars in practice governed themselves one can understand why they would try to increase their own power, wealth, and territory despite it coming at a detrimental cost to a member of the same state. Therefore, strength of character and rule also played an important part in a boyar's rule. Ostrowski also mentions that the ruler had to be accepted by his subjects,⁹⁶ but that can be seen as a negligible factor, as the subjects often could not do much to resist the new boyars rule anyways.

Because Christianity was implemented top-down from Volodymyr himself, it also further cemented his power. Clark describes how the boyars were baptized just after Volodymyr was, which is unlikely to be a coincidence.⁹⁷ Unlike the previous rulers Volodymyr had the authority to impose his will on them, whether by intimidation or the boyars wanting to stay in his good graces. Converting meant that they would be directly subservient to him, as the leader of the state has his power invested in him by God. This marks a definitive break from

⁹⁴ Curta 2019: 299

⁹⁵ Ostrowski 2012: 49

⁹⁶ Ostrowski 2012: 50

⁹⁷ Clark 2003: 96

the previous horizontal rule of the 900's described by Stefanovich and Androschuk, where the 24 semi-independent ruling boyars operated relatively coherently yet still ruled independently of each other. Converting meant that they placed themselves below Volodymyr hierarchically in both theory and practice.

One other political tool Volodymyr took full advantage of was heraldry and its power as a symbol. The trident, though Khazar in origin,⁹⁸ was adopted by the Kyivan Rus and showed dynastic power, which combined with the Christianisation added extravagance and further importance to the emblem, giving it the meaning of both dynastic power and the Holy Trinity. Coins inspired by Byzantine iconography carried the image of Volodymyr on one side and the trident the other.⁹⁹ The effect of the emblem representing hereditary power can be seen today, as it is depicted on the Ukrainian coat of arms. Iconography, putting out a visual symbol of oneself to the people was therefore an effective tool in securing legitimacy and hereditary power.

Volodymyr successfully changed the political landscape of the Kyivan Rus, and through marriage and using Christianity as a political tool he managed to both secure a tight relationship with Byzantium, which had not been seen before, in addition to securing his dominance over the other boyars for years to come, with the Muscovites tracing their lineage back to Volodymyr from the 15th and 16th century.¹⁰⁰ It can be considered the culmination of hundreds of years of different influences from the neighbouring cultures, and though this centralisation of power happened all over Europe the sheer number of different factors affecting the Rus makes them very interesting to look at.

4. The overarching view

After looking further into the various influences on the Kyivan Rus one can see that the perspectives both overlap and go in different directions. We will therefore try to establish a rough order for the evolution of the Rus' political system using the perspectives discussed in this paper. Firstly, the Scandinavian perspective is the most relevant, as the Rus in their earliest days directly came from Scandinavia. They came from primarily Sweden for trade and plunder, though soon established permanent footholds in places like Staraya Ladoga and Novgorod. From there they expanded and took Kyiv, and the state that developed from there

⁹⁸ Hraunda 2013: 67

⁹⁹ Drápelová 2022

¹⁰⁰ Ostrowski 2012: 30

is what we call the Kyivan Rus. They were organized horizontally, with the boyars generally being autonomous. Scandinavians made up the majority of the leadership despite being a minority, but it seems Scandinavian influence eventually faded as the Rus were assimilated into the various cultures and influences in the region, as can be seen when the grand princes stopped using Norse names in favour of Slavonic.

For a time the most important trade routes went by the Caspian Sea and further south, meaning the Rus had several contacts with the Islamic caliphate, and many Islamic writers thus interacted with and described the Rus, giving an outside perspective on their cultural status at the time. They are described as skilled and diverse, with the focus on the economic aspect not being so helpful when trying to get a better picture of the political situation. Seeing so many independent groups does however give some indication towards a horizontal, decentralized state. On the other side we have the Byzantine perspective, where Constantine VII contrasts the economic and cultural focus of the Islamic writings in *De Administrando Imperio* by almost wholly focusing on the Rus as a military threat, indicating a high degree of cooperation among the political hierarchy to coordinate so large offensive efforts against the Byzantines. The first half of the 10th century therefore indicates that the horizontal system established in the 9th century was tightening.

Closer to the borders however were the Rus' immediate neighbours, the largest being the Khazars and Pechenegs. Both groups were both traded and fought with at various times, and the proximity had effects both culturally and politically for the entirety of the Rus' history. Building traditions were adopted, and much of the Kyivan Rus' territorial expansion came at the expense of the Khazars. It was also from them that Volodymyr adopted the system of linear succession, further turning the political system horizontal.

The boyars underwent changes to their political power too, being at their strongest when the Scandinavian influence seemed to be highest. They were in practice autonomous, free to make their own decisions and expeditions. This would gradually change as Christianity and Byzantine influence gained a foothold, culminating in Volodymyr's conversion forcing the boyars too to convert. This made them subservient to Volodymyr, and firmly established the vertical political system that would remain. The church gained power with increasing urbanisation, which in turn cemented the ruler as supreme. Christianity marked a new era and a reinvigoration of the Kyivan Rus as a political entity, culminating after many years of political influence from many sides.

4.1 Concluding remarks

Deciding that one line of thinking is right and the others are wrong would be difficult after this discussion, as one cannot discredit the various influences as having no effect. What one can do however is try to lay them together like a puzzle, and emphasize different influences carrying more weight at different times. The paper has discussed a period spanning hundreds of years, and it would be odd to see one specific influence carry definite weight over such a long time period. The discussion tells us that the Scandinavian influence stood strongest first, which is reasonable as the Rus originated from those Scandinavians. They established a horizontal power structure, where the boyars had equal power. As time passed, they adopted traditions and cultures from their neighbours and subjects, who they assimilated into the Rus. The horizontal power structure continued to last through the 9th century and most of the 10th, though it gradually got tighter until it finally turned vertical under Volodymyr.

There is still much to look at, and many questions left unanswered, as the scope of this paper is not broad enough to answer everything. The relationship between boyar and subject has not been discussed in detail, nor has the political influence of the merchant class, with the discussion instead primarily revolving around the upper echelon of the hierarchy. This paper has however explored how the Rus established themselves as a political entity, and balanced the different influences against each other. I failed to find evidence of inaccuracies in the secondary literature that was worked with, though the texts focused on one of the specific influences omitted others and was therefore limited, but that would have been its intention in the first place. When put together with other perspectives, as done here the literature combines to present a fuller picture.

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