



**Jaroslav Pelenski.** *The Contest for the Legacy of Kievan Rus'.* Boulder, Col.: Columbia University Press, 1998. 325 pp. \$42.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-88033-274-3.



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### Political Ideology and Historical Continuity

This volume consists of twelve essays written between 1967 and 1993, all save one previously published. Eleven concern the problem of the title of the book, the contest for the legacy of Kievan Rus'; the exception, printed as an Appendix, discusses the influence of the Kazan' Khanate upon Muscovite state and society. The chapters appear approximately in the chronological order of the material discussed, not their date of completion or publication; historiographic articles frame the substantive essays by serving as introduction and conclusion. During the elapsed time, Professor Pelenski had not, apparently, changed his mind much; the articles constitute a consistent and coherent study of their theme.

In his "Foreword" and two chapters, Pelenski identifies his major focus as the attempts of differing polities to legitimize themselves by claiming succession from Kievan Rus'. He directs his major criticism against the prevalence in modern Russian and western historiography of the theory of Kievan-Muscovite continuity to the exclusion of Ukrainian claims, although he also addresses Ukrainian views from a scholarly, not a partisan, perspective. Pelenski notes that post-1991 authors in Russia and

Ukraine have mainly reverted to exclusively nationalistic interpretations of the problem. In the final analysis Pelenski accords Ukraine greater claim to the Kievan inheritance than Russia (p. xxii).

In his overview of the evolution of the debate between Ukrainian and Russian historiographies (Chapter One), he states his adherence to an interpretation of Kievan Rus' as a socially heterogeneous, not a unified, integrated, "national" state. He contrasts Galicia-Volynia and Vladimir-Suzdalia in the twelfth century as "different civilizational and commercial communities" (p. 14), which diverged in their responses to the Mongol conquest. In terms of religion and dynastic continuity, he credits Vladimir-Suzdalia with the greater claim to the Kievan legacy, but considering other factors, ethnicity, territory, social and institutional traditions, he gives priority of place to Galicia-Volynia. In Chapter Eleven, which appears in print for the first time, he addresses an early stage of modern scholarly debates, an exchange of books, articles and letters in the 1840s through the 1860s over the language and demographics of Kievan Rus'.

Two chapters discuss the Kievan period. Chapter

Two analyzes the attempt of twelfth-century northeastern princes to assert hegemony over Kiev, or, failing that, to displace it by securing their own metropolitan in the city of Vladimir. In this campaign, the armies of Andrei Bogoliubskii sacked Kiev in 1169, an act to which Pelenski ascribes ideological significance. He devotes Chapter Three to the chronicle accounts of that sack. Pelenski concludes that the southern chronicles treated Kiev with respect, but that the northeastern chronicles viewed Kiev with ill-disguised hostility which Pelenski considers evidence against the Kievan-Vladimirian-Muscovite continuity theory.

Five chapters and the Appendix pertain to Muscovy, especially its burgeoning ideological claims to the Kievan legacy. Chapter Four discusses ecclesiastical claims, notably the transfer of the metropolitanate from Kiev to Vladimir to Moscow, the canonization of metropolitans who died in Moscow, and Muscovite and Byzantine opposition to the fragmentation of the eparchy to satisfy Polish or Lithuanian aspirations for a separate hierarchy for the Orthodox populations of their realms. Pelenski dates official Muscovite claims to the Kievan inheritance (Chapter Five) to the middle of the fifteenth century, in the Expanded Redactions of the chronicle narratives about the battle of Kulikovo Field in 1380, and the death of Dmitrii Donskoi *sub anno* 1389. In the reign of Ivan III, dynastic, legal and historical claims to the Kievan legacy crystallized in assertions of sovereignty over Novgorod and in diplomatic correspondence, in which ambitions to regain the city of Kiev came to the fore.

Chapter Six discusses chronicles accounts of the sack of Kiev of 1484 by the Crimean khan Mengli Girei, who was acting at Moscow's behest, which forms a counterpoint to Chapter Three. Pelenski interprets different chronicle depictions of this event as reflections of different attitudes toward Ivan III; whether he was to be excoriated or spared blame for the sacrilege of authorizing and benefitting from the desecration of the holy sites of Kiev depended upon the political stance toward grand prince of the chronicler. Here, too, Kiev is treated as a foreign city, indicating that the problem of the Kievan inheritance had not yet been fully resolved.

Chapter Seven treats the well-known "Tale of the Princes of Vladimir" as an obviously spurious attempt to elevate the ideological significance of Kievan Rus', from which Muscovy claimed legitimacy, by projecting on to it Imperial Roman descent, titulature, and regalia. Chapter Ten adumbrates the major Muscovite historical, legal, religious and national claims to the Kazan' Khanate, treated

at length in his 1974 monograph, *Russia and Kazan: Conquest and Imperial Ideology, 1438-1560s*.

The Appendix attributes to Kazan' the institutional inspiration for the Muscovite *zemskii sobor* in the *quriltai*, and Muscovite *pomest'e* in the *soyournghal*. He argues that historians have neglected both Byzantine and Turco-Mongol influences in Muscovy because of their uncritical acceptance of the Kiev-Moscow continuity theory of the medieval Muscovite ideologues and their "neo-constitutionalist" emphasis upon "western" parallels to Muscovite political institutions. Instead, Pelenski strongly contrasts Muscovite authoritarianism and despotism, symbolized by Ivan the Terrible's *oprichnina*, with the constitutional regime in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth.

Two chapters focus on Lithuania and that Commonwealth. Chapter Eight analyzes the process by which Lithuania wrested control over Kievan territory from the Golden Horde, culminating in the 1362 victory at the battle of the Blue Waters, only to see its greatest ambitions, power over the Golden Horde itself, shattered by the Lithuanian defeat at the battle of the Vorskla river in 1399. Chapter Nine, the longest in the volume, discusses the incorporation of Ukrainian lands of Kievan Rus' into Crown Poland as a result of the 1569 Union of Brest. Pelenski examines the material motivations of the Poles and Ruthenians for this action, which he views as "modern" admissions of "interest" politics, and the largely fictitious historical and legal justifications advanced by Polish spokesmen.

Although in general Pelenski contrasts traditional Muscovite ideology with more "advanced" Polish Renaissance political theory, he does note that the "right of conquest" was claimed by both at about the same time, by Muscovy toward Kazan' and Poland toward the lands of Kievan Rus'. Pelenski interprets the incorporation of Ruthenian lands into Crown Poland as a decisive and final phase in the long struggle between Poland-Lithuania and Moscow for Kievan territories.

The strengths of the book are Pelenski's assimilation of the competing East European historiographies and textual analysis. Long translated excerpts from primary sources illustrate and substantiate his points. There is little doubt that the factors that made the topic of the Kievan legacy a political football in the past have if anything increased in potency of late, and, unfortunately, Western scholarship, which should have no vested interests to cloud its objectivity, has not always lived up to that standard. (Pelenski does not examine the prime

cause of this bias, namely the role of Great Russian emigres in founding Slavic studies in the West.) Pelenski's solid, competent, and lucid articles make a definite, if hardly earth-shattering, contribution to our understanding of the contest for the legacy of Kievan Rus'.

At the same time, Pelenski draws some questionable, if not outright dubious, conclusions. It is unconvincing that the description of the sack of Kiev in 1203 was designed to minimize the impact of that of 1169. Pelenski uncritically regurgitates the Ukrainian myth that proto-Ukrainian rulers resisted the Mongols with more determination than the craven proto-Muscovites. Daniil of Galicia-Volynia and Mikhail of Chernigov both fled rather than fight the Mongols, and both later voluntarily submitted, whereas grand prince Yurii of Vladimir-Suzdalia died at the battle of the river Sit'. Pelenski underestimates the significance of the Mongols in Galicia-Volynia. Similarly, it is unwarranted to infer from Daniil's willingness to agree to a church union with the Papacy, unfulfilled because promised military assistance against the Mongols never arrived, that Galicia-Volynia was more tolerant of Catholicism than the northeast.

Such a leap from abortive political opportunism to social attitudes lacks corroboration. It is odd that Pelenski lauds the Union of Brest as the final phase of the contest for Kievan territory. A very different picture of the victor in the battle for political control of Kievan territory would emerge, had he extended his scope to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, on which he has published other articles. Similarly, seventeenth-century Ukrainian attitudes toward Catholicism would hardly fit his contrast between "tolerant" southwest and "intolerant" northeast. Pelenski's choice of chronological limits for his study has decidedly influenced his conclusions. Finally, I am unconvinced that Muscovy borrowed institutions from Kazan'.

Pelenski concludes that in terms of ethnicity, civilization, and socio-political institutions, Vladimir-Suzdalia and Galicia-Volynia were drastically distinct. Perhaps, but he presents no serious arguments to substantiate that view. The problematca of the essays which comprise this volume are fairly narrowly defined: the contest for territory and claims of historical continuity. Pelenski does not evaluate the legacy of Kievan Rus' institutions on later polities or the perpetuation of its legal codes, saints' lives and sermons, architectural or artistic models, or frescoes and icons (save the Vladimir Icon of the Virgin) in Vladimir-Suzdalia/Muscovy or Galicia-Volynia. Certainly if "Kievan Rus'" is defined as the Dnepr' river val-

ley, then by the territorial criterion Ukraine rather than Russia would have greater claim to its succession.

But this is a constrictive definition. It would take a much more comprehensive investigation to evaluate cultural continuity, and Pelenski is too quick to dismiss continuity of religion and dynasty as less significant than of territory. In sum, Pelenski's studies of claims to historical continuity from Kievan Rus' are far more persuasive than his assertions about historical continuity itself.

Pelenski's observations about Muscovite authoritarianism and "despotism" might need to be revised in light of more recent research which has emphasized the operational limits of Muscovite centralization, the social and religious constraints upon the exercise of arbitrary authority by the Muscovite grand prince and tsar, and the theological opposition to tyranny.

The usual price one pays for the convenience of being able to access a corpus of essays by a single historian in one book is the facsimile format of Variorum Reprints. That is not the case here. Each article was reset into a uniform format with endnotes for each chapter; the originals, save Chapters One and Four, had the preferred footnotes. Pelenski notes that he has mostly left the originals unchanged, correcting typographical errors and some minor factual mistakes, improving some translations, and making minimal revisions. His concession that there is some repetition of material probably understates the case; passages, paragraphs, and citations reappear in several articles, and there is considerable, if unavoidable, repetition of citations, not to mention Pelenski's cross-references to his own publications.

The reformatting of the notes introduced some spacing flaws. Inevitably, some original typographical errors were not caught, and some new ones were introduced: N.D. Tikhomirov published in St. Petersburg in 1895, not 1985 (p. 74 n. 11), and "still unsophisticated and unsophisticated" on page 72 originally read "still rudimentary and unsophisticated." In Chapters Seven and Nine, translations previously printed in parallel now appear consecutively. The volume contains seven maps and forty-one black-and-white illustrations not found in the original articles, which are barely integrated into the essays.

If Pelenski was willing to violate the thematic unity of the volume by including an Appendix on Kazanian influence on Muscovy, he might also have considered reprinting his comparison of Muscovy and Poland-Lithuania (cited n. 37 on p. 243). It would have been impossible to provide a comprehensive updated bibliography for this

volume, because it covers too much material, but whatever principles animated Pelenski's selection (pp. 299-310) remain obscure, since it includes items of no apparent relevance to the contents of the book and overlooks numerous directly relevant studies.

Pelenski mentions that these essays were "conceived as preparatory material for a comprehensive work on the contest for the legacy of Kievan Rus'" which he still

hopes to write (p. xix). It is to be hoped that Professor Pelenski succeeds in completing that work. Until then, this volume of collected articles will serve as a valuable introduction to the topics.

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