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THE RISE AND DEMISE OF THE MYTH OF THE RUS' LAND

by

CHARLES J. HALPERIN

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I FIRST BECAME interested in the myth of the Rus' Land when writing my doctoral dissertation on early Muscovite thought. Although Russia and the Mongols and then Ivan the Terrible became my primary research interests, periodically I explored additional aspects of the topic. Discussing my latest article on the Rus' Land in Ukraine, Serhii Plokhy suggested that I publish all the articles together, which inspired the current book. I hope he is not disappointed in the result. *The Rise and Demise of the Myth of the Rus' Land* is not a facsimile reprint of my articles. I have tried here to integrate this material, published over a long period in a wide variety of venues, into a coherent, consistent, and credible synthesis. I have deleted duplications and added material. I have restructured the presentation by moving material from one chapter to another. Occasionally I indicate my changes of opinion from my earlier published views. Cross-chapter references should assist the reader to see the "big picture." This book is hardly comprehensive, but I hope that it sheds new light upon the development of the myth of the Rus' Land and its cognate terms and inspires other historians to pursue this theme.

Material from the following articles has been utilized with the kind permission of their publishers: "The Concept of the Russian Land from the Ninth to the Fourteenth Century," *Russian History* 2, no. 1 (1975): 29–38, Brill, originally a paper at the American Association for the Advancement of Slavic Studies Convention, New York City, 19 April 1973; "Tverian Political Thought in the Fifteenth Century," *Cahiers du monde russe et soviétique* 18, no. 3 (July-September, 1977): 267–73 and "Novgorod and the 'Novgorodian Land'," *Cahiers du monde russe* 40, no. 3 (July-September, 1999): 345–64, École des Hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris; "The Concept of the *ruskaia zemlia* and Medieval National Consciousness from the Tenth to the Fifteenth Centuries," *Nationalities Papers* 8, no. 2 (Spring 1980): 75–86, Cambridge University Press, originally a paper at the American Historical Association Convention, San Francisco, December 29, 1978; "Ivan IV and the *russkaia zemlia*" in Charles J. Halperin, *Ivan IV and Muscovy* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2020), 329–40 and "Pskov and the Pskov Land" in Halperin, *Ivan IV and Muscovy* (Bloomington: Slavica, 2020), 309–28, Slavica Publishers; and "The Absent Rus' Land and Bohdan Khmelnytsky," *East/West: Journal of Ukrainian Studies* 7, no. 2 (2020): 99–115, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies. "Alexander Nevskii and the Suzdalian Land," is based upon a paper circulated at the conference "Alexander Nevskii: the Person, the Epoch, and Historical Memory," St. Petersburg, May 25–27, 2021.

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I have previously erroneously translated "*russkaia zemlia*" for the Kievan (Kyivan) period as the "Russian Land." Because the East Slavs had not yet divided up into Ukrainians, Belarusians, and Russians, technically *russkaia zemlia* should be translated as the "East Slavic Land." The translation "Russian" represents Great Russian chauvinism toward the Kievan inheritance. In an effort to finesse that prejudice, some scholars

invented a hybrid anglicization of *Rus'* as an adjective, the "Rus'ian Land." I find both "East Slavic Land" and "Rus'ian Land" artificial, and awkward. I prefer to lose the grammar but keep the content by translating it as the "Rus' Land," despite the fact that "Rus'" is not an adjective. I am not alone in such usage. Of course, *russkii* referring to the Muscovite grand principality and later tsardom from the fourteenth to the seventeenth century could legitimately be translated as "Russian," but that would entail employing two translations of the phrase, "Rus' Land" for the Kievan and Mongol periods as well as for early modern Ukraine, and "Russian Land" for early modern Muscovy. Because I am trying to emphasize the evolution of a single myth I have for that reason preferred to use only a single form. For simplicity's sake I will disregard variant medieval spellings such as *ruskaia* and variants such as *rustaia* and use only the normative spelling. I have previously too often used other noun place names as adjectives when preceding "land," for example, the "Novgorod Land." To accentuate the uniqueness of the Rus' Land I have now standardized all cognate terms using adjectival forms, ergo the "Novgorodian Land."

Following then common usage I also referred to the Rus' dynasty as the Riurikids, descendants of the mythical "founder" of Rus' the Varangian Riurik. In deference to recent research primarily by Christian Raffensperger,[1] I have instead identified the dynasty as Volodimerovichi (Volydymyrovichi), descendants of the historical Grand Prince of Kiev and later Saint Vladimir.

Although I argue that some "land" phrases were no more than phrases, not concepts or myths, I have sometimes in the past used lower-case "land" to distinguish, for example, the "Novgorodian Land" from the "Novgorodian land." Here I wish to emphasize the technical and grammatical uniformity of the "land"-terminology system, so I have uniformly capitalized "land" even when discussing purely descriptive phrases. I have also as much as possible avoided putting "land"-terms in quotation marks unless they are included in quotations with additional words to avoid their distracting effect upon the reader.

1 For example, Christian Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe: Rus' in the Medieval World, 988–1146* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012) and Raffensperger, *The Kingdom of Rus'* (Kalamazoo: Arc Humanities Press, 2017). See also Donald Ostrowski, "Was There a Riurikid Dynasty in Early Rus'?" *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 52, no. 1 (March 2018): 30–49.