

A SIGN OF WOMEN'S POWER

SIGNET RINGS IN MEDIEVAL RUS

CHRISTIAN RAFFENSPERGER

STUDY OF THE medieval history of Western Europe—what we typically label “medieval Europe”—moved away from the male-dominated master narrative decades ago, and studies of elite women and their power have multiplied, as have studies moving down the social hierarchy as far as can be determined.¹ Medieval art history has done the same, in a wider swath of Europe, discussing the important role that women played as makers of medieval art from textiles to manuscripts and from buildings to infrastructure.² In the Slavic world, an important part of medieval Europe, but not of “medieval Europe” as it is generally understood, scholarship on women has failed to receive the same push to prominence as it has elsewhere.³ And yet, when investigating women in the eastern half of Europe, and the medieval kingdom of Rus in particular, we see that they, too, had power.⁴ They could own land and property, could rule (within limits), and held social, cultural,

1 In no particular order, see Livingstone, *Out of Love for My Kin*; Pick, *Her Father's Daughter*; Jasperse, *Medieval Women, Material Culture, and Power*; Garver, “Sensory Experiences of Low-Status Female Textile Workers,” 50–76.

2 Covering women as agents in the creation of material culture, see Martin, ed., *Reassessing the Roles of Women as “Makers.”* Similarly, see the collection Chapman Hamilton and Proctor-Tiffany, eds, *Moving Women, Moving Objects*.

3 This is the case despite an early engagement with the issue by Eve Levin. Levin, “The Role and Status of Women in Medieval Novgorod.” See also Pushkareva, “Women in the Medieval Russian Family,” 29–43. The scholarship on women in Rus has picked up in the second decade of the twenty-first century with my own work as well as that of Ines García de la Puente and Talia Zajac in particular.

4 Raffensperger, *Name Unknown*.

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Figure 4.1. Ring, Kyiv, twelfth century. Silver and niello, h. 1.68 × w. 2.17 × d. 1.92 cm. London, British Museum, inv. no. 1907,0520.18. © The Trustees of the British Museum. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

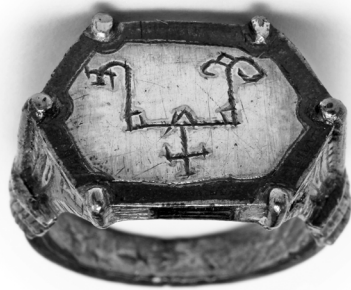


Figure 4.2. Ring, Kyiv, twelfth century. Silver and niello, h. 1.38 × w. 2.20 × d. 2.1 cm. London, British Museum, inv. no. 1907,0520.17. © The Trustees of the British Museum. CC BY-NC-SA 4.0

religious, and economic authority within elite society. The current article examines another aspect of women's power: signet rings. Though the rings are extant as objects of material culture, their relationship to the power of women in medieval Rus has been little studied and is poorly integrated into wider work.⁵ However, as will be made clear, women's signet rings in Rus were markers of their power and demonstrate their influential positions as members of the ruling clan.

The most comprehensive work done on Russian rings, in general, is by T. I. Makarova.⁶ Her focus was on nielloed rings in particular (and did not include a discussion of power or gender), though her study contains twelve rings which bear the clan symbol, or some variation of it, of the ruling family of Rus, typically known as the Riurikids. This name has been contested as part of a wider discussion of Muscovite claims to the medieval past, and in my work I typically use Volodimerovichi (children of Volodimer) to indicate the ruling clan.⁷ Ljudmila Pekarska has updated Makarova's list to include

⁵ Erin Jordan has an excellent discussion of the differentiation between authority and power, and why power matters so much for understanding medieval women. Jordan, *Women, Power, and Religious Patronage*, 22–23. See also Erler and Kowaleski, "Introduction," in *Gendering the Master Narrative*, ed. Erler and Kowalski; and Krause, *Beyond Women and Power*.

⁶ Makarova, *Chernevoe Delo Drevnei Rusi*, 39–48.

⁷ For the argument and rationale see Raffensperger and Ostrowski, *The Ruling Families of Rus*, 39–41.

another dozen rings from Kyiv, made of both gold and silver.⁸ Pekarska's particular focus is on rings from a hoard found in 1906 "just opposite the gates of St. Michael Golden Dome Monastery" in Kyiv, and on two of the eight total rings found within that collection.⁹ The two rings in question showcase Volodimerovichi clan emblems and are seen in Figures 4.1 and 4.2.

The rings were made of silver and utilized a combination of construction techniques to make each of the various parts. Those parts were then soldered together using a powdered solder of unknown type held on by glue and heated to bind the pieces together.¹⁰ This method of construction was much more time- and money-intensive than simple casting, and thus it is suggested by Pekarska that this means the rings were custom designed and built for an elite customer.¹¹ The diameter of the two rings is quite small, more suggestive of a woman's finger than a man's; especially when we compare it with a known man's ring from this period of Rus which is substantially larger.¹² Thus, it has been suggested that these were women's rings. The bezels of the rings are shaped differently, one circular and one hexagonal. But despite the difference in shape, both rings are held on by a series of claws, four in one case and six in the other. For both rings though, the back of the bezel in each case is reinforced by "a thin silver lap" to provide comfort to the wearer, but also to provide additional strength for the bezel. This is one sign that these rings were used as signet rings. The bezel itself is surrounded by a niello design, however, the niello does not extend to the symbol in the centre. This causes Pekarska to suggest "that these rings had a double purpose—both ornamental, and functional to impress wax seals."¹³ The final indicator that these are signet rings is that the design is carved in reverse, so that when the ring is used, it appears in its proper orientation—leading to the conclusion that "[s]uch rings were probably used to seal documents and letters."¹⁴ While the rings

8 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 83.

9 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 19, 81–92. The rings can be found in the British Museum's online collection at www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1907-0520-17 and www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/H_1907-0520-18.

10 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 85.

11 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 85, 91.

12 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 91–92. Additionally, the entire hoard of which these rings were a part was of women's jewellery. For a discussion of ring size and gender, see the Jitske Japserse's opening chapter to this volume.

13 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 90.

14 Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 90. Proper orientation of symbols such as

may have had this practical purpose, it is also impossible to discount the very real possibility that simply owning, wearing, and displaying a ring bearing the clan emblem would be a mark of status. These two rings are fascinating objects about which we would love to relate an intricate history, however there are at least two problems when we attempt such an investigation. The first is that the symbol displayed on the rings is akin to, but not the same as, the typical symbol of the Volodimerovichi. The second is whether or not Russian women even used seals, given their absence from much of the material record. Each of these problems will be taken in turn in an attempt to better understand the context for these rings in Rus.

The first problem relates to the clan emblem, often called a *tamga* or symbol, which is displayed prominently on the rings, and was the symbol of the wearer embossed into wax (most likely) to signal their approval, permission, or at least intent.¹⁵ Half a century ago, V. L. Ianin created a comprehensive catalogue of all the extant seals from Rus which forms the basis for modern discussions about seals.¹⁶ Within that group are a number of seals which depict the Volodimerovichi symbol. For the symbol of the ruling clan, Ianin created a typology which suggests that from a relatively simple base of two parallel lines connected at the bottom, with a small additional line dropping down from the connecting piece—something akin to a tuning fork—there proceeds an evolution over time into the increasingly complex “trident” models which are seen in later symbols (Figure 4.3).¹⁷ Ianin’s typology has recently been updated and developed by A. V. Mikhailov and S. V. Beletskii, with a special focus on those symbols from the tenth and eleventh centuries found in southern Pskov.¹⁸ Their collection of twenty-five symbols contains three of the bident type and thirteen of the trident type. One of the bidents and seven of the tridents contain crosses. This collection adds to

these may be difficult to discern and Pekarska’s conclusion, which I accept, is based on a comparison with the extant seals.

15 *Tamga* is the word typically used in Russian scholarship for this symbol. *Tamga* is a Turkic word, used later during the Mongol period of Rus for the symbol of a ruler or even a simple maker’s mark. For the period under discussion, it works as a term, but is “othering” in that it creates a unification with a later period, based in Central Asia, that was not in use in the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

16 *Aktovye pechati drevnei rusi X–XV*, ed. Ianin.

17 *Aktovye pechati drevnei rusi X–XV*, ed. Ianin, 1:38–41, with a table illustrating the change over time suggested by Ianin on 40 as related to coins.

18 Mikhailov and Beletskii, “Geraldicheskaia podveska s territorii iuzhnoi pskovkhschiny,” 321–26.

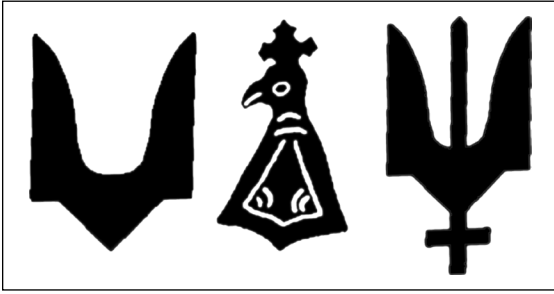


Figure 4.3. Symbol of the ruling clan of Rus. Adapted from A. V. Mikhailov and S. V. Beletskii, "Geraldicheskaia podveska s territorii iuzhnoi pskovkhschiny," in *V kamne i v bronze: Sbornik statei v chest' Anny Peskovoï*, ed. A. E. Musin and O. A. Shcheglova (St. Petersburg: RAN, 2017), 321–26, here figs. 3 and 4 on pp. 323–24. Adapted by Sarah Tagg.



Figure 4.4. Volodimerovichi symbols. Adapted from *Aktovyie pečhati drevnei rusi X–XV vv*, vol. 1, *Pečhati X-nachala XIII v*, edited by V. L. Ianin (Moscow: Nauka, 1970), nos. 291, 292.

our understanding of the symbols which "signified property belonging to kin, and formed the basis for various kinds of personal and family heraldic emblems."¹⁹

However, the symbols on the rings in Figures 4.1 and 4.2 only loosely fit the typologies depicted in Figure 4.3. Both feature bident symbols with dependent crosses. Only one of the three bidents from Mikhailov and Beletskii contains a dependent cross, and five of the thirteen tridents.²⁰ This makes the dependent crosses on the rings rare/unique, but in addition, the bidents themselves are not the standard two lines, connected at the bottom by a horizontal. Instead, in both of these symbols, we see additional decorative items. Studying Ianin's collection of images of seals, one can see the typology. However, it is a rough guide, for it does not cover the variability of the symbols used. The lack of variability could most likely be explained by Ianin's focus on wider clan symbols and symbols of male rulers. Figure 4.4 displays two additional symbols of which there are five and ten examples respectively.

Figure 4.4 (left) does not have the defined dependent cross we see in the rings (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2), though a cross can be visualized. Other pos-

¹⁹ Pekarska, *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 82.

²⁰ Mikhailov and Beletskii, "Geraldicheskaia podveska s territorii iuzhnoi pskovkhschiny," 322.

sible comparands include a fleur-de-lis or an early symbol of the Volodimirovichi which looks like a bird swooping to attack.²¹ Figure 4.4 (right) adds to the impression that the designer wanted something dependent, but here we see a foliate design. The symbols in Figure 4.4 also correspond to the foliate motif extending off the upright element on the right side of the rings in Figures 4.1 and 4.2. The left upright depicted on the first ring (see Figure 4.1) is capped, and there is no additional design. The bident appears off centre, but when considering the extended floral motif, the entire width of the symbol is centred within the circle of the bezel. Though the foliate motif also appears upright on the ring presented in Figure 4.2 it is less elaborate, without the curlicues descending. The left upright bends to the outside, akin to what we see in slightly different forms in the two symbols present in Figure 4.4. Additionally, the left upright in Figure 4.2 ends with what appears to be a sun symbol.²² There are several extant eleventh-century coins from Rus which have a cross at the end of the left upright, but no explicit sun symbols.²³ There are further additions inside of the bident, which Pekarska suggests are a series of three triangles. However, while the middle one, capping the dependent cross does appear to be a triangle, the two at the junction of the uprights and the base seem to be English right-angle markers, more than triangles. The end result of our comparison points out the similarities to existing seals, though we do not have a precise match from amongst them.

A related question would be: where did the designers of these seals find the style or motif they chose to incorporate into the base Volodimirovichi symbol? The rings discussed above were found in Kyiv and date to the early twelfth century. One of the most well-known sites of Kyiv in this period was the church of Holy Sophia. Originally erected in the middle of the eleventh century by the ruling couple Iaroslav and Ingigerd, the church has continued as a sanctuary in the city until the present day. The church is decorated with a variety of frescoes, though it can be difficult to differentiate between what was original and what was part of the Ukrainian Baroque remaking of the church much later.²⁴ In the borders of some of the mosaics,

21 For images of the bird as a symbol and further discussion, see Kovalev, "Grand Princess Olga of Rus' Shows the Bird," 460–517.

22 This identification is Pekarska's, challenging an earlier suggestion that this was a cross. *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 61, 85. A different type of sun symbol, eight-armed rather than four, appears on another Kyivan ring of the period. *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, pl. 5.4c.

23 Spasskii, *Russkaia monetnaia sistema*, 46.

24 Pevny, "The Encrypted Narrative of Reconstructed Cossack Baroque Forms,"

which feature saints and archangels, and do date to the medieval period, one can see similar foliate motifs to those that appear on the rings featuring the same series of dual three-quarter loops extending off of a tendril.²⁵ Perhaps a more immediate comparison could be made to a very interesting feature of some of the frescoes of the archangels displayed in the cupola, also original as we understand it. Dating to the middle of the eleventh century, these images are fairly traditional showing a genderless though feminized figure with wings on their back and wearing a loros. In the archangel's right hand is a sceptre, often surmounted by a cross, while their left hand cups an orb with a cross emblazoned on it.²⁶ The cross is in the patriarchal style, though four of the five archangels pictured have additions at the bottom of the cross. One seems simply to be set on a pedestal, something one can see on medieval Roman coinage from this period.²⁷ However, the other three all display elements similar to the foliate motifs on the rings mentioned above. In one instance, the bottom of the cross splits into two, with each side gently curving upward to form a half circle.²⁸ A second utilizes the same base design, though here the lines of the half circles proceed to the top bar of the patriarchal cross. The half circles also have foliate designs extending off of the inside of the half circle, towards the cross, on each side.²⁹

The final example (Figure 4.5) is more elaborate, for it still has the split at the bottom and each side is curving up but in a figurative "s" design.³⁰ Both sides seem to have a foliate motif soon after the split, and both sides have something on the terminus of the line. The right side appears to have a vegetal ending while the left side appears to have the same sun symbol seen in Figure 4.2. One of the persistent questions in dealing with makers of medieval art is their agency and the origin of their inspiration.³¹ If we are

471–520; Boeck, "Believing is Seeing," 167–80.

25 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 55.

26 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 96–100.

27 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 100. For the coins, see the copper folis of Alexios Komnenos in the Dumbarton Oaks collection, www.doaks.org/resources/coins/catalogue/BZC.2009.032/view.

28 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 97.

29 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 99.

30 Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski*, 96.

31 Therese Martin has dealt with this in detail in her collection *Reassessing the Roles of Women as "Makers" of Medieval Art and Architecture*, and one of her suggestions is that women who inspire and / or pay for the object are makers as well. Martin, "Exceptions and Assumptions."



Figure 4.5. Archangel from the Holy Sophia Church cupola.
Reprinted from V. N. Lazarev, *Drevnerusskie mozaiki i freski XI–XV vv.*
(Moscow: Isskustvo, 1973), fig. 96. Public domain.

searching for sources of inspiration for designs, we could do much worse than a location, the Holy Sophia Church, where we know that the elite of Kyiv—the find spot of the rings—spent a good deal of time on a regular basis. The resemblance is evident, though we cannot make a direct connection between the two, thus it is also possible that there is a common source for both images which was used by makers in Rus. What does this mean for the construction of the rings? It is possible that, drawing on a common base of the bident form, the Russian women who wore these rings added motifs to express their own design sensibility and create a symbol that would represent them to the wider world.³²

32 This is not uncommon in the world of signet rings. In Byzantium almost all individuals of a certain status had their own, unique, signet ring. Hostetler, “Reading

The second problem we mentioned is whether or not Russian women used or would even need signet rings. Beginning with the textual history, it is important to note that little of it is contemporary to the eleventh and twelfth century. The first extant chronicle source is from the later fourteenth century, though it was compiled in the early twelfth.³³ This chronicle, known as the *Povest' vremennykh let* (PVL), named after its first line, situates Rus into biblical history beginning with the flood, but with regular entries only in the tenth century, increasing in the eleventh. Interpolated into the tenth century entries are two treaties between the Russians and the medieval Roman Empire. The language and style of these treaties strongly suggest that they are actual documents, as the entries also make explicit.³⁴ The 944 treaty stipulates that the ruler of Kyiv must provide "gold seals" for his emissaries and silver ones for merchants.³⁵ In the same provision of the treaty, those seals are associated with charters that must be sent, suggesting where those seals would be applied. The 971 treaty makes it explicit that the ruler, Sviatoslav in this case, uses seals saying, "we have ... sealed with our seals."³⁶ The PVL, the bulk of whose text covers the eleventh and very early twelfth century, does not reference seals or sealing again, and neither the PVL nor other medieval Russian chronicles mention women's seals. Nor do any of the textual sources describe what symbol may be on the seal.

Many lead seals have, however, been preserved in Rus and have been excavated in the past two hundred years. One of those seals is a seal of Svyatoslav, the ruler referenced in the 971 treaty, confirming the validity of the textual source, at least in regard to the existence of seals and sealing.³⁷ In the corpus of seals, there are also numerous examples which have been identified with women. Talia Zajac has suggested that we can divide women's seals in Rus into three categories.³⁸ First, seals depicting a female saint,

and Displaying Monograms." Women also wore monogram rings in the Merovingian period, see Moreira, "Rings on Her Fingers."

33 *The Povest' vremennykh let*, ed. Ostrowski, xvii–xviii. Three hundred Russian manuscripts and books, mostly ecclesiastical, exist from the period before 1300, with twenty-three from the eleventh century and eighty-three from the twelfth century. Franklin, *Writing, Society and Culture in Early Rus'*, 23.

34 For a full analysis of the treaties see Wozniak, Jr., *The Nature of Byzantine Foreign*, 1973.

35 "The 944 Treaty," transl. Kaiser in *The Laws of Rus' – Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, 9.

36 "The 971 Treaty," transl. Kaiser in *The Laws of Rus' – Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, 13.

37 *Aktovye pečati drevnei rusi X–XV*, 1:166.

38 Zajac, "The Social-Political Roles of the Princess in Kyivan Rus'," 134.

which may be associated with a queen. Second, an image of a saint and a “mysterious talismanic Cyrillic inscription” on the opposing side. And third, seals with an actual name and an inscription such as “Lord help thy servant.” The third category is the easiest to deal with as we have some good examples of seals with women’s names on them. For instance, there is a “[s]eal of Maria Momakhis, noble arkhontissa.”³⁹ Maria is a common name, and we do know of several powerful Marias in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Rus. One Maria (d. 1179), the daughter of Mstislav Volodimerich and wife of Vsevolod Olgovich (both rulers of Kyiv), has a second seal well identified with her. It bears an image of a woman in medieval Roman-style dress, including a crown with pendilia labelled with the name Maria, as well as an inscription on the other side asking for protection for your servant Maria.⁴⁰ Arkhontissa is a Greek word that is used in medieval Roman sources for female Slavic rulers; such as in the *De ceremoniis* of Constantine VII when the famed “princess” Olga visits Constantinople in the mid-tenth century.⁴¹ The name, or title, Momakhis, is much more problematic and multiple interpretations have been offered for what this may mean.⁴² One of the most famous seals from Rus also bears a woman’s name. This seal has a Greek inscription which says: “Lord, help thy servant Theophanu, arkhontissa of Rus, Muzalonissa.”⁴³ The alternate side has an image of two female figures with halos gesturing toward a disc between them in which Christ appears. Ianin has investigated this seal extensively and suggests that Theophanu was a member of the medieval Roman Mouzalon clan and she married Oleg Sviatoslavich in the eleventh century.⁴⁴ As interesting a theory as this is, it seems unlikely given other evidence.⁴⁵

Frustratingly for our search for context, none of these lead seals, however, were made by the extant signet rings. This may not be surprising given the preservation history of medieval Russian objects. Pekarska has suggested that “[s]uch rings were probably used to seal documents and letters” and those

39 *Aktovye pechaty drevnei rusi X-XV*, 1:17–19.

40 *Aktovye pechaty drevnei rusi X-XV*, 1:71, 259, no. 161. See also Dimnik, “The Princesses of Chernigov,” 170–71.

41 *Constantine Porphyrogenetos*, bk. 2, ch. 15, 594–98. Olga is typically referred to as a “princess” in the literature, but I would call her a “queen.”

42 For more discussion of this, and other, seals with female figures or owned by women and their relevance, see Raffensperger, *Name Unknown*, ch. 3.

43 *Aktovye pechaty drevnei rusi X-XV*, 1:25, 251 no. 30.

44 Ianin, “Pechati Feofano Muzalon,” 76–90.

45 Kazhdan, “Rus’–Byzantine Princely Marriages,” 414–29.

may have been discarded and lost over time.⁴⁶ The preservation of objects over time varies by location and by soil content. The particular conditions which make the preservation of birch bark documents possible in the north of Rus do not exist around Kyiv, for instance.⁴⁷ Lead and other metal seals would have been more durable as well. For the moment, the only conclusion we can reach is that women did have seals, and that they likely owned and/or wore seal rings. The latter is especially true given Iulia Stepanova's excavations of women's burials in the Volga region of Rus where she concluded that, "[f]inger rings appear in 37 percent (165) of all female burials with dress details."⁴⁸ The only things more common are temporal rings, which were hung from a headband or head covering of another type at or near the temples. Sadly, none of the rings in the excavated burials were signet rings.

The broader trend in medieval studies to include and integrate women, especially among elites, has not reached Russian studies. Thus, though such an emphasis would be passé for Western Europe, it seems important to make clear that elite women in Rus did have power and thus would have needed a method of validating their transactions, such as the use of a signet ring. There is a good amount of evidence in the primary sources that women could own land and exercise legal powers. The law code from Rus, the Expanded Pravda, includes provisions for female land ownership and the ability to act under the law.⁴⁹ Treaty sources from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries are clearer on elite female ownership of property. The "Statutory Privilege Charter of the Smolensk Prince Rostislav Mstislavich [1128–60]" lays out the required tributes to support the church and court in his lands.⁵⁰ The charter includes provision "6. And [I hereby order my lieutenants] to extract for the Holy Mother of God a tenth of the tribute [paid in whatever] regions are called Smolensk [lands], and to make no subtraction whatever, whether [the tribute be] great or small, prince's or princess's, or whoever else's [it

46 *Jewellery of Princely Kiev*, 90. A similar problem exists with Byzantine signet rings of which metal seals are extant, but of which the wax seals typically impressed with images from rings, are not preserved. And see also Labarta on the Umayyad ruler of al-Andalus in this volume.

47 The corpus of these documents is online at <http://gramoty.ru/birchbark/>.

48 Stepanova, *The Burial Dress of the Rus'*, 56–57.

49 "The Russkaia Pravda," trans. Kaiser in *The Laws of Rus' – Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, arts. 90, 91, 93, 101, 102, 103, 106. For an analysis of them see Raffensperger, *Name Unknown*, ch. 4.

50 "Statutory Privilege Charter of the Smolensk Prince Rostislav Mstislavich," trans. Kaiser in *The Laws of Rus' – Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries*, 51–55.

may be].”⁵¹ Elite women and elite men are both included, explicitly. Since this document is not specifically about women in any way, there should be no reason to disbelieve the inclusion of this group. Similarly, both “The First Treaty of Novgorod with Tver’ Grand Prince Iaroslav Iaroslavich [1230–71], ca. 1264–65,” and the “Treaty of Novgorod with Tver’ Grand Prince Mikhail Iaroslavich [1271–1318], 1304–5,” contain similar provisions which state that: “Neither you, nor your princess, nor your boyars, nor your courtiers are to hold any villages throughout the Novgorod lands.”⁵² Finally, there even exists a graffito from the Holy Sophia Church in Kyiv which attests to female land ownership—“Vsevolod’s princess ... purchased Boian’s land,” which also includes information on purchase price.⁵³ We could expand this to look at the chronicle sources which also mention female land ownership and property ownership in general, in desultory detail indicative of regular attention i.e., not special and therefore not suspect.⁵⁴

Brigitte Bedos-Rezak, who has studied western medieval seals extensively, notes that, “[t]he seal is a sign of and conveys specific representations of the sealer’s identity within a juridical context, and it is this legal function that distinguishes it from virtually all other iconographic sources.”⁵⁵ Similarly, in the medieval Roman Empire, the model of rulership *par excellence* in the Middle Ages, legal agreements typically required the validation of a signet ring, leading to their consumption and use by a broad spectrum of the populace, including women.⁵⁶ Both of which confirm our suggestion that women needed seals and potentially signet rings to manage their legal affairs, providing a context, even if not the full story, for these women’s signet rings. Studying signet rings for Rus, especially in relation to wider medieval European (inclusive of the medieval Roman Empire/Byzantium) trends, helps scholars to develop an appreciation for the ways that material culture can help us expand and flesh out our relatively thin written source base related to women and power in the kingdom of Rus.

51 “Statutory Privilege Charter of the Smolensk Prince Rostislav Mstislavich,” art. 6.

52 “The First Treaty of Novgorod with Tver’ Grand Prince Iaroslav Iaroslavich,” art. 12.

53 Pevny, “Dethroning the Prince,” 75. For an extended look at this inscription see Drobyshcheva, “Graffito No. 25 iz Sofii Kievskoi,” 130–45.

54 Women’s property ownership in both legal and chronicle sources is covered in Raffensperger, *Name Unknown*, ch. 4.

55 Bedos-Rezak, “Medieval Women in French Sigillographic Sources,” 1–2.

56 Vikan and Nesbitt, *Security in Byzantium*, 16.

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