

Khazaria and Russia: Sovereignty and territory in Eastern Europe in the 9th to the beginning of the 10th centuries

Vladimir J. Petrukhin

Rus; Dnieper trade route; hoards

The Primary Russian chronicle (PVL) begins the history of Rus' (sub anno 859) with the description of the Varangian tribute from Estonian Chud', Slovene (in Novgorod land), Merja (in Upper Volga) and Krivichi (in Upper Volga, Dvina and Dnieper area); the Khazars collected their tribute from the Slavic tribes of Poljane, Severjine in the Middle Dnieper area and from Vjatichi in the Oka basin. In the 9th century the primary Varangian Rus' was forcing the way to the international markets through the river routes controlled by Khazaria. The archaeology, and first of all the numismatics, together with the Arab sources help us realize a certain community of interests that made the Varangians, the Slavs, the Merja and the Chud' unite: from the 9th century the Arabic silver was imported to Eastern and North Europe via Khazaria (cf. Noonan 1983), and the splash of this import can be dated from the 860s – the chronicle date of the calling-in of the Varangian-Russian princes to Novgorod by the former tributaries (Noonan 1992, 226 ff.). Sometimes the hoards of the 9th century Arabic coins in the North of Eastern Europe – in Ladoga, Gorodische of Novgorod and Sarskoje gorodische nearby Rostov in Merja land – are interpreted as the tribute to the Varangians (see for the recent archeological data: Kuz'min 2000; Nosov 2000; Leont'ev 2000). But it is much more likely that they present the evidence of the distribution of the profits – the local upper strata had exercised their right to a part of the treasures and buried it as hoards in their settlements with mixed Slavonic, Finnish and Scandinavian population.

The Russian princes of this multi-tribal union with certain reason (because the union really included a number of peoples – 'tribes') were

claiming the 'imperial' title of khagan. Besides the Arab sources these claims were recorded 839 in the Annales Bertiniani: to the Carolingian emperor with a Byzantine embassy came certain men who said that they, that is, their people were called 'Rhos', their king was known as the 'Chaganus' (Annales Bertiniani, s.a. 839). This is at the same time the earliest mention of the Rus'. The embassy of the Rus' arrived in Constantinople "for the sake of friendship" and asked the permission to return home through the territory of the Carolingian empire. The emperor Louis the Pious who was used to repelling Viking attacks suspected them to be spies as they turned out to belong to the 'gens of the Swedes'. Their fate as well as the aim of their return journey are unknown: whether they wanted to return to Birka or Ladoga, because neither Novgorod (and Gorodishche) nor Kiev in Poljane land of that time are fixed in the data of the written sources or archaeology.

From this viewpoint the latest attempts to find the 'khaganate of Rus' in Eastern (or North) Europe do not seem to be promising, as they are based on a strained interpretation of the sources (cf. Sedov 1999; Zuckerman 2000). The reports of Arab geographers about a mysterious island (or peninsula) of Rus' ruled by a khagan are really dated from the 9th century: but we do not know either its location, or if it did actually exist or was a mere reflection of certain bookish legends – the Biblical about the 'islands of peoples' or the ancient about Thule. The new attempts to associate this island with Novgorod and Gorodishche are based on a direct identification of the toponym meanings in alien languages: the Scandinavian name of Novgorod – Hólmgar r ("Is -

land town" – Franklin/Shepard 1996, 27 f.) and the vocabulary of Arab geographic literature (cf. Konovalova 2000, 400 ff.).

Equally, we have no grounds to associate with Kiev the data about the Rus' from the *Annales Bertiniani* – judging from the finds of coins, the Dnieper route in general had not been in function up to the late 9th century: the Arabic silver flew through the Don and the Oka to the Upper Volga and then to the Baltic (Noonan 1992). Though the Dnieper trade route was blocked, the Khazarian period in the Middle Dnieper region and even in the region between the Dnieper and the Don is marked with an intensive agricultural colonization, both Slavonic and Alanian. On the Don even the migrants from the right-bank Dnieper settled, the bearers of the Lucka Rajckovetskaia culture. It is clear why the Khazars patronized the colonization of the forest-steppe zone: the nomads needed corn. The system of fortresses on the Don and in the basin of the Severskij Donets evidently helped to control these important regions, including the 'Vjatichi' on the Don (the bearers of the so-called Borshevo culture) and the Severjane on the left-bank Dnieper (significantly, their name is connected with the river-name Seveskij Donets; cf. Vinnikov/Pletneva 1998, 38–39).

The Volyntsevo culture on the left-bank Dnieper, Slavic in its basis, comprises certain elements of the Alanian-Bulgarian Saltovo culture of the Khazars: some settlements have the traces of jurts. Two major monuments associated with the nomad world were also discovered in the left-bank Dnieper region: these are the complexes near Malaya Pereshchepina and Novye Senzshery in the Vorskla basin (cf. Flerov 1996, 33–36; 68–69). Irrespective of the attribution of the famous 'hoard' from Pereschepina to the Bulgarian khan Kubrat or to a Khazarian ruler (cf. Ambroz 1982), it is evident that this region was traditionally (from the 7th century) important for the 'nomadic empires'. The comparison of the archaeological data with the chronicle gives way to the supposition that the Volyntsevo culture was characteristic of the Slavic tribes – the 'confederation' of Poljane, Severjane and, probably, some units of Radimichi – the tributaries to the Khazars. The finds of the Volyntsevo-type monuments near Kiev in the right-bank Dnieper region (cf. Petrashenko 1990) make more clear the stability of the legend of Kij –

the founder of Kiev – as a boatman through the Dnieper: the remnants of a 'Saltovo'-type burial-ground with cremations are discovered in Kiev (Karger 1958, 137).

The transformation of Volyntsevo culture to the Romenskaja (Romny) culture in the 9th century was connected with the disappearance of yurt-like dwellings and appearance of the first silver hoards in the eastern periphery (Khazarian border) of the Severjane tribal territory (cf. Noonan 1983, 273 ff.; Grigorjev 2000). The Khazars (or their allies the Hungarians) had to share their trade profits with the neighbouring Severjane and Radimichi.

Significantly, the Oka segment of the trade route (with Vjatichi – the tributaries to the Khazars) accumulated a large part of the silver coins imported via Khazaria to the North – to the Upper Volga, Novgorodian land and Scandinavia (cf. Kropotkin 1978; Noonan 1983, 273–276). Evidently, the merchants ar-Rus had to share their profits with the local population – i. e. with the Vjatichi who controlled the portages from the Upper Don to the Oka. With the fact that there are only single finds of hoards in the territory of the Khaganate itself, a paradoxical feeling can appear that the tributaries had more possibilities to accumulate silver than the dominating Turkic group (cf. Noonan 1983, 276). It seems that these possibilities were connected with their payments in furs and corn as well as with their fur and corn trade: judging from the Russian chronicle, the tribute from Vjatichi and Radimichi – in both regions with hoards – could be estimated in a monetary unit – the so-called 'shchel'jag'. But it is no less clear why the Slavic tributaries to the Khazars, especially in the Middle Dnieper area, were interested in the alliance with the gangs of the Rus': they also were forcing their way to the international markets.

It is evident that the route of the merchants ar-Rus to Byzantium (Rum) (cf. Ibn Khurdadbekh's data: Konovalova 2000) lead them round Khazaria. The Dnieper route was established not earlier than the raid of the Rus' on Constantinople in 860, after the calling-in of the Varangian princes, when, according to the Primary chronicle, the first prince Rjurik let Ascold and Dyr go there from the Rus' capital in Novgorod. At the same time he widened his sovereignty over Polotsk in Krivichi area, Beloozero in the Finnish Ves' region, Rostov in Merja land and – last but not least – Murom in Muroma

tribal territory in Oka basin. Muroma was the neighbor of Vjatichi, tributaries of the Khazars. Under 882 the Primary Chronicle describes Oleg and Igor – Rjurik's successors – pretending to be merchants travelling 'to the Greeks': this is the first mention of the trade route 'from the Varangians to the Greeks'. Having had Ascold and Dyr murdered, Oleg settled in Kiev and appropriated the tribute which the Khazars had levied on the left-bank Slavs – Severjane and Radimichi: so it is evident that the Volyn'tsevo culture marks the borders of the tributary territory, the dominion of Khazaria.

The 'transfer' of the capital by Oleg to Kiev – 'the mother of Russian towns' was evidently connected not only with the ideas of the princely clan that Russian princes ruled over all the Slavs (such was the viewpoint of the chronicler) but also with their striving for the world markets round Khazaria. The moment was very favourable for this transfer: Khazaria was engaged in a conflict with the joint Magyars and Kavars (Zuckerman 1997; Petrukhin 2002). In this connection it is significant that before the capture of Kiev Oleg had stayed in Ugorskoje and the Black Ugrian migration – through Ugorskoje – to their future motherland in Pannonia was apparently described (under 898) as linked with the preceding settling down of the Rus' in Kiev.

Oleg came to Kiev with his *Varangian* and *Slovene* army which was called *Rus'*: the chronicle and other data demonstrate that Ibn Khurdadbekh's gloss about the merchants *ar-Rus* as the 'sort of Slavs' goes back to the 880s though the whole work is dated from the 840s (cf. Konovalova 2000, 397 ff.). The gloss itself was connected with the dynamics of the situation in Eastern Europe.

Was Oleg's state consolidating many Slavic and Chudian tribes from the Volchov and the Upper Volga region to the Middle Dnieper the Russian khaganate? The sources give evidence, that Russian princes kept on claiming the title of *khagan* – the rulers of vast 'nomadic empires' dominating over many peoples and tribes – the Avarian and the Khazarian khaganates. In the early medieval diplomatic practice it was considered equal to the title of emperor and therefore the claims of the first Russian princes and other rulers to this title were disputed in the 9th century diplomatic docu-

ments. In 871 the Carolingian emperor Louis II wrote to the Byzantine emperor Basil I: "In Latin codes the title 'khagan' is used in respect of the ruler of the Avars but not of the Khazars or the Northmen, or to the Bulgars" (Nazarenko 1999). The grandson of Louis the Pious evidently meant that the Northmen were *Rus'*.

The break-through of the Rus' to the South – to Kiev and Constantinople (c. 860) was connected with the establishment of the direct way to Byzantium by the Dnieper (the way 'from the Varangians to the Greeks') and its securing for the Rus' after Oleg's campaign. The appropriation by the Russian prince of the Khazarian tribute from Severjane and Radimichi (under the years 884 and 885 in PVL) and the formation of the Dnieper Slavs group on the territory controlled by the Khazars obviously resulted in the conflict with Khazaria and the trade blockade of Eastern (and North) Europe: in the last quarter of the 9th century the entry of the Arabic silver through the Khazarian territory was in a crisis (Noonan 1985; 1987, 200 ff.). The inflow of the Arabic silver to Rus' resumed in the 910s, but now it went from the Samanid State in Central Asia through Volgo-Kamian Bulgaria – around Khazaria. Bulgaria became the main trading station for the international trade with Rus'.

The Middle Dnieper region matched the Middle Volga. Here the maximum of silver coins (more than 10000) fell on the first quarter of the 10th century – the hoards were found on the both Dnieper banks (the data from T. Noonan) including Kiev – and these are the first Kievan hoards (NAR, 359–360). The zone of the Khazarian tribute became the princely domain, the Russian land (in narrow sense – cf. Nasonov 1951): this territory is 'marked' with the Varangian chamber graves from the 10th century (Petrukhin 1992; 1995, 98 ff.) Oleg who had firmly established himself in Kiev continued the expansion along the way 'from the Varangians to the Greeks'. Having united in his army all his subject tribes he undertook a campaign against Constantinople (in PVL under 907) and concluded a treaty with the Greeks in 911 (its text is preserved in PVL). In this treaty, however, Oleg was titled the great prince (*archon* is the corresponding Greek title) but not the *khagan* – the Khazarian khaganate with a legitimate ruler still existed.

Bibliography

- Ambroz 1982 A. K. Ambroz, "O Voznesenskom komplekse VIII v. Na Dnepre – vopros interpretatsii", in: *Drevnasty epokhi Velikogo pereselenija narodov*, Moscow 1982, 204–222.
- Annales *Annales Bertiniani*, rec. G. Waitz, Hannoverae 1883.
- Flerov 1996 V. S. Flerov, *Rannesrednevekoye jurtoobraznyje zhlischa Vostochnoj Evropy*, Moscow 1996.
- Franklin/Franklin 1996 S. Franklin/J. Franklin, *The Emergence of Rus 750–1200*, London/New York 1996.
- Grigoriev 2000 A. V. Grigoriev, *Severskaja zemlja v VIII – nachale IX veka po archeologicheskim dannym*, Tula 2000.
- Karger 1958 M. K. Karger, *Drevnij Kijev*, Moscow/Leningrad 1958. V.1.
- Konovalova 2000 I. Konovalova, "Les Rus sur les voies de commerce de l'Europe orientale d'après les sources arabo-persanes", in: M. Kazanski/A. Nersessian/C. Zuckerman (eds.), *Les centres proto-urbains Russes entre Scandinavie, Byzance et Orient*, Paris 2000, 395–408.
- Kropotkin 1978 V. V. Kropotkin, "K topografii kladov kuficheskikh monet IX v. v Vostochnoj Evrope", in: *Drevnjaja Rus' i slavjane*, Moscow 1978, 111–117.
- Kuz'min 2000 S. Kuz'min, "Ladoga, le premier centre proto-urbain russe", in: *Les centres proto-urbains Russes*, 2000, 123–142.
- Leont'ev 2000 A. Leont'ev "Sarskoje et Rostov: deux centres de la Rus' du Nord-Est aux IXe–Xle siècles", in: *Les centres proto-urbains Russes*, 2000, 199–214.
- NAR *Novoje v archeologii Kijeva*, Kijev 1981.
- Nasonov 1951 A. N. Nasonov, "Russkaja zemlja" i obrazovanije territorii Drevnerusskogo gosudarstva, Moscow 1951.
- Nazarenko 1999 A. V. Nazarenko, "Zapadnoevropejskije istochniki", in: E. Mel'nikova (ed.), *Drevnjaja Rus' v svete zarubezhnyh istochnikov*, Moscow 1999, 259–406.
- Noonan 1983 T. S. Noonan, "What does historical numismatics suggest about the history of Khazaria in the ninth century?", in: *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 3, 1983, 265–281.
- Noonan 1985 T. S. Noonan, "The first major silver crisis in Russia and the Baltic. C. 875–900", in: *Hikuin* 11, 1985, 41–50.
- Noonan 1987 T. S. Noonan, "Khazaria as an intermediary between Islam and Eastern Europe in the second half of the ninth century: the numismatic perspective", in: *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 5, 1987, 179–204.
- Noonan 1992 T. S. Noonan, "Fluctuations in Islamic trade with Eastern Europe during the Viking Age", in: *Harvard Ukrainian studies* 5, 16, 1992, 237–253.
- Nosov 2000 E. Nosov, "Riurikovo Gorodišče et Novgorod", in: *Les centres proto-urbains Russes*, 2000, 143–172.
- Petrashenko1990 V. A. Petrashenko, "Volyntsevskaja kultura na Pravoberezhnom Podneprov'je", in: *Problemy archeologii Juzhnoj Rusi*, Kijev 1990, 47–50.
- Petrukhin 1992 V. J. Petrukhin, "The Normans and the Khazars in the South of Rus': The Formation of the Russian land in the Middle Dnepr area", in: *Russian History*, vol. 19, 1992, 393–400.
- Petrukhin 1995 V. J. Petrukhin, *Nachalo etnokul'turnoj istorii Rusi IX–XI vv*, Moscow/Smolensk 1995.
- Petrukhin 2002 V. J. Petrukhin, "Khazaria, vengry i Rus' u Constantina Bagrjanorodnogo", in: *Khazary. Vtoroj Mezhdunarodnij colloqium*. Thesis, Moscow 2002, 78–81.
- PVL D. S. Likhachev/M. B. Sverdlov (eds.), *Povest' vremennykh let*, Sankt-Peterburg, "Nauka", 1996.

- Sedov 1999 V. V. Cedov, *U istokov vostochnoslavjanskoj gosudarctvennosty*, Moscow 1999.
- Vinnikov/Pletneva 1998 A. Z. Vinnikov/S. A. Pletneva, *Na severnyh rubezhah Khazarskogo kagana-ta. Majatskoje poselenije*, Voronezh 1998.
- Zuckerman 1997 C. Zuckerman, "Les Hongrois au pays de Lebedia. Une nouvelle puissance aux confins de Byzance et de la Khazarie ca 836–889", in: N. Oikonomides (ed.), *Byzantium at war*, Athens 1997.
- Zuckerman 2000 C. Zuckerman, "Deux étapes de la formation de l'ancien État russe", in: *Les centres proto-urbains Russes*, 2000, 95–120.

Address

Vladimir J. Petrukhin
 Institute of Slavonic Studies
 Russian Academy of Sciences
 Butyrskaya ul. 53/63–176, RU–11 7334 Moscow
 vpetrukhin@mtu-net.ru