

Introduction

HISTORIOGRAPHY

The history of the dynasty's first hundred years appeared in 1994 as *The Dynasty of Chernigov 1054-1146*. It began with the year in which Svyatoslav Yaroslavich became the autonomous prince of Chernigov and ended with the year in which his grandson Vsevolod Ol'govich died as prince of Kiev. The present volume continues with the succession of Vsevolod's brother Igor' to Kiev and ends with the year 1246, when Vsevolod's great-grandson Mikhail Vsevolodovich died as the last autonomous senior prince of the dynasty. Although his career was investigated in the monograph *Mikhail, Prince of Chernigov and Grand prince of Kiev, 1224-1246* (Toronto, 1981), it merits a re-examination because of the new studies that have appeared over the past twenty years. In this work Mikhail's career will also be looked at chronologically rather than thematically and his achievements will be evaluated in the light of those of his ancestors.

The reasons for writing a new history of the dynasty were discussed in the earlier study, but it will be useful to review them. As it was pointed out, the first written source of Rus' to mention Chernigov is "The Tale of Bygone Years," also known as the "Primary Chronicle."¹ It reports the origin of the dynasty under Svyatoslav Yaroslavich and tells of his activities and those of his sons up to 1117, the year in which it ends. After that a number of Svyatoslav's descendants kept chronicles at their courts, but none of them has survived. The main reason for this is that in the middle of the thirteenth century the Tatars eliminated the princes of Chernigov as a political force. At the same time, the Monomashichi of Suzdalia found favor with the new overlords and, on becoming the supreme rulers in Muscovy during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, had their scribes produce compilations assimilating information from older extant chronicles.

¹ *Dynasty*, pp. 7-8.

We do not know if any of the Chernigov chronicles survived to the fifteenth century. If they did, hostile copyists probably discarded them. Moreover, in assembling information to record the history of their masters, the Muscovite scribes frequently ignored, rejected, or altered the information of the Chernigov sources. Their compilations therefore contain only passing and often deprecatory references to the princes of Chernigov because the latter had been the rivals of the Monomashichi in Rus'. In addition to the Muscovite compilations, a number of regional ones (such as those from Galicia-Volyn', Novgorod, and Pskov) have also survived.

Muscovite chronicle compilations, with their emphasis on the achievements of the Monomashichi, have influenced and even dictated the views of historians. Consequently, although the dynasty of Chernigov did not become ineffectual until the middle of the thirteenth century, many historians relegated it to a place of little importance even before that date. General histories of Rus' written up to the end of the nineteenth century illustrate the relatively insignificant role that their authors attributed to Svyatoslav's descendants. These works are primarily paraphrases of chronicle accounts. Their authors devote little space to examining the aspirations and achievements of the dynasty or to investigating the degree to which its princes observed or transgressed the practices of succession and inheritance.²

During the last quarter of the nineteenth century a number of historians examined the histories of individual principalities. Two of them, P. V. Golubovsky and D. Bagaley, investigated the history of Chernigov.³ These were important studies because, for the first time, the authors assembled all the available chronicle information on the activities of the House of Chernigov. The two historians made little headway towards evaluating the successes of the princes, however, and towards placing them on the proper rung of political importance in Rus'. At a later date Golubovsky also published the first critical identification of the towns that the chronicles reported in the Chernigov lands.⁴

One important nineteenth-century study is different in nature. R. V. Zotov set out to identify all the princes of Chernigov from the time of the Tatar invasion to the year 1362, when Ol'gerd of Lithuania occupied Kiev. In order to do so, however, he also had to identify all the princes before

² See, for example, I. Belyaev, *Razskazy iz russkoy istorii*, second edition (M., 1865), bk. 1; M. Pogodin, *Drevnyaya russkaya istoriya do mongol'skago iga* (M., 1872), vol. 1; N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriya gosudarstva Rossiiskago*, third edition (Spb., 1830-1), vol. 3; S. M. Solov'ev, *Istoriya Rossii s drevneyshikh vremen* (M., 1962, 1963), kn. 1 and 2, and others.

³ P. V. Golubovsky, *Istoriya Severskoy zemli do poloviny XIV stoletiya* (K., 1881); D. Bagaley, *Istoriya Severskoy zemli do poloviny XIV stoletiya* (K., 1882).

⁴ Golubovsky.

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the Tatar invasion, beginning with the dynasty's progenitor, Svyatoslav Yaroslavich. By comparing the names of princes and princesses that he found recorded in the previously little-studied *Lyubetskiy sinodik* with the names that the chronicles reported, he was able to verify and expand the list of known princes.⁵ Since, however, his objective was to establish the correct genealogy of the dynasty, he did not investigate its political history.

In 1891, the Ukrainian historian M. Hrushevsky wrote the most penetrating study so far on the political activities of the princes of Chernigov.⁶ Since his main task was to write the history of Kiev, however, he studied the activities of the princes of Chernigov only insofar as they affected Kiev. Later, he published another analysis of the dynasty's activities in his work on Ukraine-Rus'.⁷ Since this was a general history, he again failed to adequately examine the importance of the House of Chernigov.

Soviet academics generally belittled the history of Chernigov. Following the examples of their nineteenth-century predecessors, they focused their attention on the dynasties of Suzdalia, Galicia-Volyn', Smolensk, Ryazan', and the town of Novgorod. Their failure to produce a monograph on Chernigov during the course of some seventy years shows how little importance they attached to the dynasty. There were, nevertheless, dissenting voices. A. N. Nasonov challenged the accepted Soviet view. He argued that in the twelfth century two of the strongest principalities, Chernigov and Rostov-Suzdal', initiated a struggle for supremacy in Rus'.⁸ Moreover, B. A. Rybakov was one of the most prolific Soviet archaeologists writing on the Chernigov lands. The number of his published works in the bibliography, notably his oft-cited study on Chernigov's antiquities,⁹ testifies to the importance that he attached to the town.

Some twenty-five years ago, the Soviet scholar A. K. Zaytsev wrote a study on the principality of Chernigov.¹⁰ His focus, however, was the identification of the principality's towns, boundaries, and districts. Two Ukrainian scholars also wrote important theses on Chernigov and its lands, but their works never appeared in published form. V. I. Mezentsev examined the historical topography of the town. He argued persuasively that in the twelfth

⁵ Zotov.

⁶ *Ocherk istorii Kievskoy zemli ot smerti Yaroslava do kontsa XIV stoletiya* (K., 1891).

⁷ *Istoriia*.

⁸ "Vladimiro-Suzdal'skoe knyazhestvo," *Ocherki istorii SSSR: period feodalizma IX-XV vv.*, B. D. Grekov (ed.) (M., 1953), pt. 1, pp. 320-34.

⁹ "Drevnosti Chernigova," *Materialy i issledovaniya po arkheologii drevnerusskikh gorodov*, N. N. Voronin (ed.), vol. 1, in *Materialy i issledovaniya po arkheologii SSSR* (M.-L., 1949), nr. 11, pp. 7-93.

¹⁰ Zaytsev M., 1975, pp. 57-117.

and thirteenth centuries Chernigov outstripped Kiev in size and successfully competed with it for supremacy.¹¹ V. P. Kovalenko investigated the provenance of chronicle towns in the Chernigov lands from the ninth to the thirteenth centuries.¹² His many publications are based on the extensive excavations that he has conducted on the citadels of many of these towns.

Since 1990, Ukrainian and Russian archaeologists have excavated new medieval sites in the Chernigov lands and published their findings. T. N. Nikol'skaya is doing extensive work on the Vyatichi lands; G. P. Polyakov is studying Karachev and the surrounding district; A. P. Motsya and the now deceased A. V. Kuza studied medieval Novgorod Severskiy and other towns; E. A. Shinakov and V. V. Minenko specialize in the towns of the Podesen'e; O. A. Makushnikov is researching Gomiy and its environs; A. V. Shekun and E. M. Veremeychik are investigating the towns and trade routes in the region around Lyubech; Yu. N. Sytyy specializes in the towns of the Zadesen'e; O. V. Sukhobokov, V. V. Pryimak, and Yu. Yu. Morgunov are specialists on the Seym river basin; L. N. Bol'shakov studies the architecture of Chernigov; and V. Ya. Rudenok is investigating its monastic history.

The present volume continues our study of the long-neglected and controversial political history of the dynasty. It should be pointed out once again, however, that the available sources provide little information on the social and agrarian conditions of the period under investigation. We also know little about the nature of landownership, legal administration, and the tribute system. Archaeological, sphragistic, architectural, artistic, and numismatic findings have thrown light on such matters as crafts, masonry architecture, and trade between the towns of Rus' and with other lands. It is the chronicles, however, that remain the chief source of information on the personal and political lives of the princes. They record their births, marriages, deaths, building projects, relations with the Church, oath taking, oath breaking, alliances, squabbles, internecine wars, and campaigns against the Polovtsy. Consequently the chronicles will, to a large extent, determine the course of our investigation.

The main purpose of this book is to examine the achievements and failures of the princes of Chernigov in order to put them into their proper place in the political history of Rus'. We will attempt to establish how powerful different senior princes were in relation to each other and in relation to

¹¹ *Drevniy Chernigov: Genezis i istoricheskaya topografiya goroda*, Doctoral dissertation, The Institute of History of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, K., 1981.

¹² *Proiskhozhdenie letopisnykh gorodov Chernigovo-Severskoy zemli (IX–XIII vv.)*, Avtoreferat dissertatsii na soiskanie uchenoy stepeni kandidata istoricheskikh nauk, K., 1983.

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senior princes of other dynasties. We will attempt to ascertain whether, in their contests with other dynasties, the princes of Chernigov violated the tradition governing succession to Kiev. We will examine the role that marriage alliances played in inter-dynastic relations. We will also evaluate whether, in their rivalries among themselves, the princes of Chernigov breached the practice of inheritance and the system of lateral succession. In order to determine the latter, it will be necessary to establish, insofar as available evidence allows, the identities of all the princes and their places in the dynasty's order of genealogical seniority.

THE FIRST HUNDRED YEARS

The princes of Chernigov owned one of the largest domains in Rus'. Even after they lost the Murom and Ryazan' lands in the 1120s, their territorial base was second only to Novgorod's seemingly limitless hinterland. During the second half of the twelfth and the first half of the thirteenth centuries, they controlled the vast territories stretching from below Moscow in the north to the reaches of the upper Donets river in the south, from the Dnepr in the west to Kursk in the east. Chroniclers identify by name some seventy towns in this domain, but the total number was closer to several hundred. Numerous smaller settlements also dotted the countryside. In the central region of Chernigov alone, archaeologists have identified more than 500 settlements. Indeed, they assert that the princes of Chernigov ruled a larger population than any other dynasty (map 1).¹³

Chernigov, the dynastic capital, testifies to the political importance, wealth, cultural enterprises, and foreign contacts of its princes. It is located on the river Desna some 150 km northeast of Kiev. Specialists have estimated that, at its zenith in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, it covered an area of some 400–450 hectares and was arguably the largest town in Rus'. Kiev encompassed some 360 to 380 hectares.¹⁴ Chernigov, unlike Kiev, had a hereditary dynasty. Its bishop was second in importance to the metropolitan in Kiev. It was a major hub of crafts and commerce; its merchants, as we shall see, traded with the Rhine region, the Volga Bulgars, Novgorod, and Byzantium.

¹³ V. P. Kovalenko, "Chernigovo-Severskaya zemlya v sisteme Drevnerusskikh knyazhestv XII–XIII vv.: istoriograficheskie traditsii i real'nost'," *Otechestvennaya i vseobshchaya istoriya: metodologiya, istochnikovedenie, istoriografiya* (Bryansk, 1993), 83–5.

¹⁴ Mezentssev, *Drevniy Chernigov*, p. 150, and his "The Territorial and Demographic Development of Medieval Kiev and Other Major Cities of Rus': A Comparative Analysis Based on Recent Archaeological Research," *The Russian Review* 48 (1989), 161–9.



Map 1 The lands of Rus' in the middle of the twelfth century

As a cultural center it competed with Kiev and had its own school of architecture. Three of its eleventh- and twelfth-century masonry churches have survived: the bishop's Cathedral of the Transfiguration on the citadel (figure 1), the Church of the Assumption at the Elets'kiy Monastery, and the Church of St. Elias at the entrance to the Caves Monastery. Two of its medieval churches have been restored: the Paraskeva Pyatnitsa in the market square and the Church of SS. Gleb and Boris on the citadel. Written sources

Cambridge University Press
0521824427 - The Dynasty of Chernigov, 1146-1246
Martin Dimnik
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Figure 1 Holy Saviour Cathedral and medieval Chernigov: a fragment from the icon of the Elets'kiy Monastery

and archaeological probes conducted during the Soviet period testify to the existence of episcopal courts, princely courts, and other masonry buildings on the citadel (map 2).

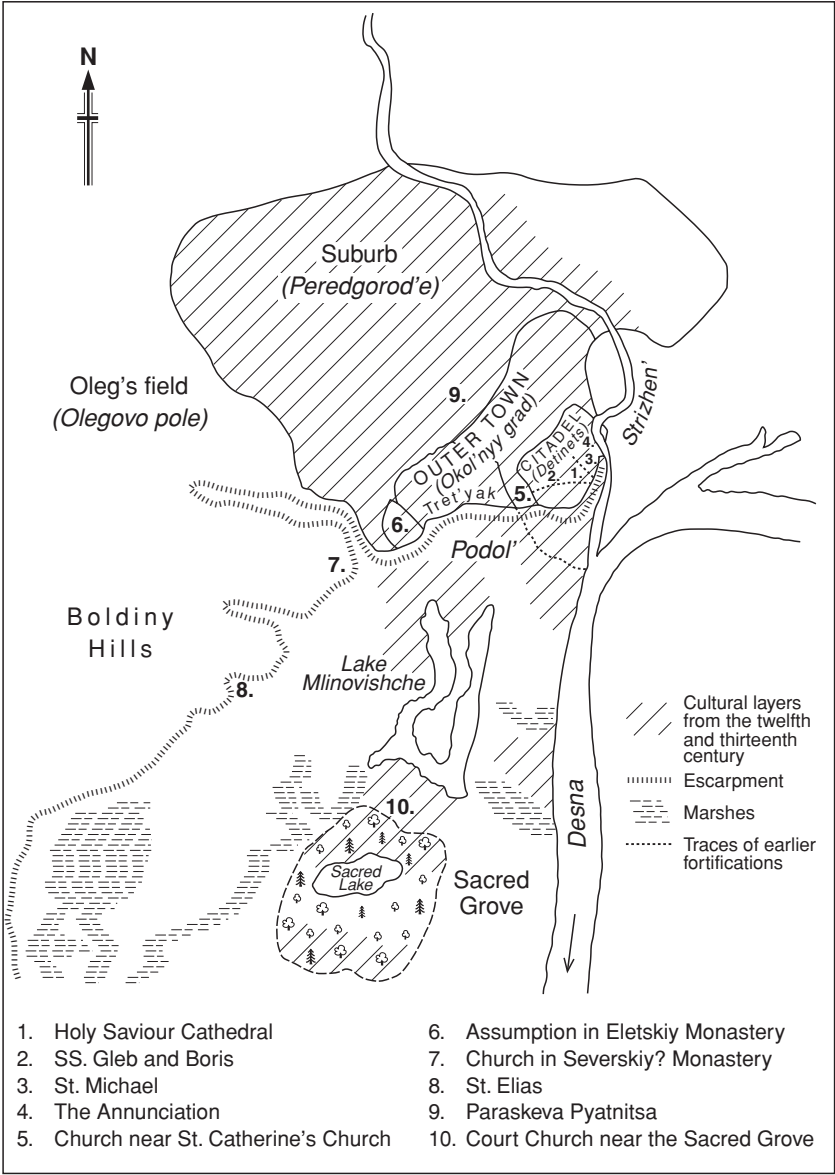
No chronicle has survived from Chernigov, but others that have come down to us have copious information concerning its princes. This is so because the latter were closely associated with the history of Kiev. Indeed, their involvement in the inter-dynastic rivalries for supremacy in Rus' helps us to understand better the fluctuating balance of power between the dynasties, the process of succession, and the practice of inheritance. As has been noted, the history of their first hundred years was examined in *The Dynasty of Chernigov 1054-1146*. Since these events influenced the policies of later princes, let us review the more important developments.

From the vantage point of hindsight it would appear that, from the earliest times, the princes of Rus' apparently acknowledged a practice of succession governed by genealogical seniority. According to this tradition, after the prince of Kiev died his eldest surviving brother succeeded him. After all the brothers had ruled in rotation, succession passed to the genealogically eldest surviving relative in the next generation. Svyatoslav Igorevich (d. 972), who had no brothers, seemingly followed this practice by appointing his genealogically eldest relative, his son Yaropolk, to Kiev. Yaropolk and his younger brothers Oleg and Vladimir were evidently the first princely family which had the opportunity of putting the principle of the so-called "lateral system of succession" into practice. Nevertheless, their conduct neither confirms nor refutes the observation that they were expected to occupy Kiev in rotation. Yaropolk killed Oleg and, in revenge, Vladimir killed Yaropolk and became the sole ruler. In the test case, so to speak, fratricide pre-empted any advocated peaceful process of succession.

Even though Vladimir himself used violence to seize supreme power, the chronicler claims that before his death he designated his successor to Kiev according to a recognized procedure. Contrary to his own wishes, he conceded that his alleged eldest son Svyatopolk was the rightful claimant.¹⁵ According to another tradition, Svyatopolk was the son of Vladimir's eldest brother Yaropolk. The latter, we are told, had abducted a Byzantine nun. When she was already pregnant with Svyatopolk, Vladimir, in turn, abducted her from Yaropolk after killing him.¹⁶ According to this view, therefore, Svyatopolk was Vladimir's eldest surviving nephew. In either case, whether Svyatopolk was Vladimir's eldest nephew or his eldest son,

¹⁵ M. Dimnik, "Succession and Inheritance in Rus' before 1054," *Mediaeval Studies* 58 (Toronto, 1996), 87-117.

¹⁶ *Emergence of Rus*, pp. 190-1.



Map 2 Chernigov in the twelfth and thirteenth century (adapted from B. A. Rybakov)

the news that he recognized Svyatopolk as his rightful successor shows that Vladimir acted, or reveals that a later chronicler writing the report believed that Vladimir acted, in keeping with a principle of succession governed by genealogical seniority.

The inheritance of patrimonies was distinct from succession. Vladimir, like his father Svyatoslav, allocated to each of his sons a domain that was evidently to become his permanent possession. Despite Vladimir's seeming desire to abide by pre-existing practices of succession to Kiev and of granting patrimonies, his sons violated the process of the peaceful transition of power once again. Many Kievans opposed Svyatopolk's occupation of Kiev and supported his younger brother Boris. Svyatopolk's fear of usurpation, and his determination to consolidate his rule by depriving his brothers of their patrimonies, prompted him to initiate fratricidal wars. In the end, his younger brother Yaroslav, who became known as "the Wise" (*Mudryy*), emerged the victor.¹⁷

Yaroslav adopted his father's practice of allocating hereditary domains by giving each of his sons a patrimony. He also honored the system of lateral succession as it was generally practiced. He changed the procedure of succession to Kiev, however, in order to obviate future internecine wars. He designated his three eldest surviving sons and their descendants as successors to Kiev. For convenience let us speak of these three families as the "inner circle." Yaroslav therewith debarred his two youngest sons from occupying Kiev. He named his eldest son, Izyaslav, as his successor. After Izyaslav died he was to be replaced, in a peaceful manner, by Svyatoslav, the next in precedence. After he died the youngest, Vsevolod, would occupy Kiev. After Vsevolod's death, succession would pass to the next generation, presumably, to Izyaslav's eldest surviving son. The process would then be repeated according to genealogical seniority among the members of the inner circle.

To ensure that the prince of Kiev was the most powerful of the three and able to maintain order among the other princes, Yaroslav gave his three eldest sons patrimonies adjacent to Kiev. Izyaslav got Turov, Svyatoslav got Chernigov, and Vsevolod got Pereyaslavl'. As each, in turn, occupied Kiev he would rule the Kievan land in addition to his patrimony. This, Yaroslav believed, would give the prince of Kiev military superiority over each of his brothers. The system was based on the premise that the three princes would live in brotherly love and abide by Yaroslav's directive to succeed each other peacefully. This, to judge from the evidence, was Yaroslav's innovation to

¹⁷ Concerning the power struggle, see *Emergence of Rus*, pp. 184–93.