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## ORIGINS OF THE UNITY PARADIGM: UKRAINE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF RUSSIAN NATIONAL HISTORY (1620–1860)

The idea of Russo-Ukrainian unity has been so pervasive that even today, with the existence of an independent Ukraine, many still believe that historically, linguistically, culturally, and even spiritually Ukraine is or should be part of Russia. What are the origins of such views? When and how did they develop? This paper attempts to address these questions by tracing Ukraine's role in the development of the "traditional scheme of Russian history," a grand narrative of the origins and evolution of the Russian Empire.<sup>1</sup> The imperial "grand narrative" combined dynastic, religious, imperial, and Russian national history in order to present a virtually unbroken thousand-year story of "Russia" and the "Russian people." It is in this narrative that Ukrainians and Russians are treated as offshoots of the same people sharing a common historical legacy, a common Orthodox faith, and, therefore, a common national destiny.

Although the idea of a unitary Russia was not fully developed until the mid-nineteenth century, its roots can be traced to the seventeenth century, when Ukraine and Russia first encountered each other. At that time Ukraine and Russia were quite distinct. They differed greatly in political terms: Muscovy was an absolutist autocracy, with little notion of regional or personal rights; Ukraine, on the other hand, was influenced by the political order of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which had an elective monarchy, an autonomous nobility, and well-developed corporate and regional rights. Even the shared Orthodox faith was somewhat different, for Ukrainian Orthodoxy was influenced by Western cultural trends and the Catholic Counter-Reformation.<sup>2</sup>

Although, in the seventeenth century, Ukraine and Muscovy were worlds apart, there were also historical and religious links between them. The Muscovite court was well aware that the rulers of Kyivan Rus', like those of Muscovy, were descendants of the Rurikid dynasty. The Muscovite higher clergy and bookmen certainly knew that they shared a version of Orthodoxy with Ukraine and that the ancient chronicles spoke of the brilliance of Kyiv. Nevertheless, for the Muscovites, such links were far removed in time. Their references to ancient Kyiv served more to establish the legitimacy and primacy of the ruling dynasty and its Orthodox faith, as well as promote the construction of empire, than as a claim to the Kyivan heritage itself.<sup>3</sup> This is clearly apparent in sixteenth-century attempts to connect the Muscovite rulers with the imperial legacy of Byzantium. *The Tale of the Princes of Vladimir* (1520s or 1530s) introduced a new mythical genealogy for the Rus' princes, tracing their descent from the Roman emperor Augustus through his brother Prus, who had ruled the Prussian land and was said to have been an ancestor of Rurik and successive Kyivan princes. *The Tale* also maintained that the eleventh-century Kyivan prince Volodymyr (Vladimir) Monomakh had received gifts, insignia, and an imperial crown from the Byzantine emperor Constantine

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IX Monomachus. As legend had it, the crown, known as “Monomakh’s cap,” had been handed down to the Muscovite rulers and a cap alleged to have been Monomakh’s began to be used in the tsar’s coronation ceremony.<sup>4</sup>

Such concepts were even more elaborately developed in the *Stepennaia kniga tsarskogo rodosloviia* (*Book of Degrees of the Tsarist Genealogy*), compiled in the 1580s. The work was a marked departure from the traditional annalistic form of chronicle writing. No longer bound by the rigid units of years, the *Stepennaia kniga* divided its narrative of the past into “reigns,” subdivided in turn into chapters, each dealing with a single topic. This radical change in narrative form opened new possibilities for historical conceptualization. While the only common thread of the year-by-year chronicle had been the working out of a divine plan (and even this idea was never developed coherently with reference to the Rus’ past), the *Stepennaia kniga* told a story of the rise of the native dynasty. The organization of the work by “degrees” (literally, “steps”) or generations also introduced the notion of causality by bringing together, for the sake of explanation, events that had occurred in different years. The *Stepennaia kniga* thus represented an important innovation in terms of both the form and concept of Muscovite historical writing.<sup>5</sup>

The introduction to the work announced that the seventeen “steps” of the Rurikid dynasty formed an “unfaltering stairway to heaven,” while tracing the venerable origins of the dynasty to Emperor Augustus through his brother Prus. Despite this mention of pagan ancestors, the *Book of Degrees* derived princely power from a Christian source. It did not include as a separate degree the founder of the dynasty, Rurik, or his pagan successors Ihor (Igor) and Sviatoslav. The narrative began with a hagiographic account of the life of “Grand Princess” Olha (Olga), the first Christian among the Kyivan rulers, yet even this was not the first “degree” but a kind of additional introduction. Significantly, a table of contents was inserted after the story of Olha. The first degree was represented by her grandson Volodymyr (Vladimir), whom the author called “co-equal with the apostles, holy and blessed Tsar and Grand Prince” or “Autocratic Tsar and Grand Prince.” Thus, the line of princes originated with Rurik, who in turn was linked to the Roman emperors, but genuine “imperial” sovereignty and legitimacy derived from the first Christian “tsar.” The work ended with Ivan IV, who represented “the seventeenth degree from the first holy Vladimir.”<sup>6</sup>

In both cases, Kyiv is a transmission point of alleged royal lineage or linkage with the Byzantine Empire, but that does not exhaust its significance. Because of Volodymyr’s acceptance of Christianity, Kyiv is also the point of origin for both Orthodoxy and tsardom, which are ultimately transferred to Moscow. Kyiv would thus figure as the first “step” in any Muscovite narrative. At the same time, there is no claim to contemporary (as opposed to ancient) Kyiv. There is no assertion of ethnic affinity, nor is Kyiv treated as territory lost to Muscovy/Russia. Even Aleksei Romanov’s addition of “tsar of Little Russia” to his title in 1654 was not prompted by a claim to some long-lost Rurikid patrimony, but resulted directly from the Pereiaslav Agreement with the Ukrainian Cossacks (although the patrimonial claim was soon “remembered” by the Muscovite authorities).<sup>7</sup>

It was not so much Muscovite scribes as Ukrainian clergymen who began linking Ukraine with Russia through a combination of history (Kyivan Rus’), dynasty (the Rurikids), religion (Orthodoxy), and even a vague sense of ethnicity (the *slaveno-rossiiskii narod* or the Slavo-Russian people). Part of the Ukrainian clergy sought to involve Russia with Ukraine, and vice versa, while preserving native cultural and political traditions. The clergy’s primary interest was in a

*Slavia Orthodoxa*—a world based on the Orthodox faith and on the Slavonic language of the liturgy and of high culture. A portion of this elite wanted to obtain the protection of the only truly independent Orthodox monarch, the Muscovite tsar, against the constant difficulties—if not outright persecution—suffered by Orthodox residents of the Roman Catholic Commonwealth. It was this elite that developed the ideological links associating the Muscovite tsar with the world of *Slavia Orthodoxa*. Such links were adumbrated in the 1620s and developed over the two decades following the great revolt of 1648, which liberated much of Ukraine from Polish rule, and the Pereiaslav Agreement of 1654, whereby the leader of the Ukrainian Cossacks, Bohdan Khmelnytsky, recognized the suzerainty of the Muscovite tsar in exchange for promises to respect Ukrainian “rights and liberties.” A fierce struggle between Muscovy and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth for control over Ukraine was the backdrop against which the Ukrainian clerics formulated their views.

The most influential work that linked dynasty, Orthodoxy, and the Slavo-Russian people was the *Sinopsis*, first published by the Kyivan Cave Monastery Press in 1674. Citing Ukraine’s historical ties with the house of Rurik and its Orthodox faith, the *Sinopsis* treated the Ukrainian part of Rus’, or, as it was beginning to be referred to in the 1670s–80s, “Little Russia,” within a larger all-Rus’ or all-Russian context. Although the work recognized considerable ethnic diversity, it also combined the various peoples it discussed into a larger Orthodox Slavo-Russian people (*pravoslavnyi slaveno-rosiiskii narod*) inhabiting the territory ruled by descendants of the house of Rurik. That territory was identified as *Rossiia*, which included both Muscovy and Little Russia (Ukraine). The author further implied that *Rossiia* and the entire *rossiiskii narod* were to be ruled by an Orthodox autocrat—the Muscovite tsar descended from the house of Rurik (the fact that the tsars were no longer Rurikids, but representatives of the Romanov dynasty, was never mentioned).<sup>8</sup>

The historical concept developed in the *Sinopsis*, originally designed to meet the expectations and interests of the Ukrainian clerical elite, in fact provided an expanding dynastic empire with a larger historical framework and identity. Many writers regard the *Sinopsis* as the first history textbook ever written in the Russian Empire. The work was immensely popular, with some thirty reprints appearing by 1836, twenty-one of them in St. Petersburg. Although later Russian historians expressed reservations about the *Sinopsis* as a historical text, its general concept continued to serve as the basis of imperial Russian historiography and provided the empire with historical and political legitimacy. By the end of the eighteenth century, the *Sinopsis*, with its pseudo-chronicle format and emphasis on an Orthodox Slavo-Russian realm, seemed antiquated. Although there were several attempts at producing a new synthesis in the eighteenth century, they enjoyed only marginal success. The first comprehensive and scholarly outline of what will here be defined as the “traditional scheme” of Russian history was written by Nikolai Karamzin. Abandoning the linkage of dynasty, religion, and people in the *Sinopsis*, Karamzin reverted to the previous Muscovite emphasis on dynasty, but departed from tradition in equating the ruling dynasty with the Russian state. Thus Karamzin’s *Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo* (*History of the Russian State*, 1816–24) traced the development of autocracy and statehood from primitive society to highly evolved monarchy.<sup>9</sup> Following the *Stepennaia kniga*, Karamzin begins his story with a “Kyivan period,” but explains that the twelfth-century Prince Andrei Bogoliubsky abandoned southern Rus’ (the Ukrainian areas) because it was embroiled in feuds and decided to establish himself in the

northeast (the Russian areas), “where the people did not have a rebellious spirit.” He also writes that Southern Rus’ sank more deeply into disorder from the end of the twelfth century, while the north grew in power and prestige thanks to autocracy.<sup>10</sup> Thus the political center of the “Russian” state, originally located in Kyiv, shifted to Vladimir-Suzdal, then to Moscow, and finally to St. Petersburg. For Karamzin, “Russianness” is embodied in autocracy and statehood, not in a specific territory. Consequently, the Russia described in his work moves wherever Russian autocracy and statehood can find their best expression. Continuity between Kyiv and Moscow is not cultural, religious, or ethnic but political.

In Karamzin’s scheme, Russian history begins in Kyivan Rus’ in the ninth and tenth centuries. By the thirteenth century, Ukraine drops out of Russian history, only to reenter it in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But what is the status of Ukraine during the long hiatus between the thirteenth and seventeenth/eighteenth centuries, when it is not linked to a Russian state? How can the “cradle of Russia” exist outside Russia for more than five centuries? This obvious gap in Karamzin’s *magnum opus* was filled by the historian Nikolai Ustrialov. He produced the first officially approved textbook of Russian history written with the specific aim of demonstrating the “unity of Polish, Lithuanian, and Russian history” and the “Russian character” of the southwestern part of the empire (i.e., Ukraine).<sup>11</sup> Ustrialov argued that there was a need for a “pragmatic history of Russia” that would emphasize the “historical unity” of the Eastern Slavs and refute Polish claims to the Ukrainian and Belorussian lands.<sup>12</sup>

According to Ustrialov, “Rossiia” already existed as a political nation with a common language and a shared belief in autocracy in Kyivan times. He challenged the accepted practice of deriving Russia’s origins from Vladimir-Suzdal and Muscovy (after 1157) by claiming that the Grand Duchy of Lithuania had also been a “Russian” state. Thus the two parts of the Russian nation had in fact been alienated by the establishment of Polish rule over Ukraine and Belorussia, and the major trend of Russian history was the “reestablishment of the Russian land within the [eleventh-century] borders it had under Iaroslav [the Wise].”<sup>13</sup> It was within this framework that Ustrialov incorporated, perhaps for the first time in imperial Russian historiography, extensive periods of Ukrainian history into his general survey of “Russian” history.

Ustrialov’s “pragmatic schema” of Russian history combined the new idea of Russian nationhood with the old concept of dynastic patrimony in order to produce a compelling and politically utilitarian interpretation of Ukraine’s relationship with Russia. His description of Ukrainian history in the light of the “desire for union” with Muscovy/Russia became the cornerstone of the official interpretation of the history of the Ukrainian lands in Russian historiography. Ustrialov’s account served as the principal model for most subsequent general histories of Russia, which came to treat the past of Ukrainian, Belorussian, Lithuanian, and even some Polish ethnic territories as part of “Russian” history.<sup>14</sup>

If Ukraine had always been a Russian land inhabited by Russians, how was official historiography to account for the substantial differences between Russians and Ukrainians in speech, custom, and outlook? A new thesis advanced in 1856 by Mikhail Pogodin claimed that Kyivan Rus’ had indeed been inhabited by Russians, but the thirteenth-century Mongol invasion had resulted in a massive emigration of this Russian population to the northeast, while new tribes from the Carpathians settled in Ukraine during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, forming the ethnic basis for the Ukrainian people.<sup>15</sup> Although the occurrence of

such a population exchange could not be substantiated, Pogodin's theory enjoyed some popularity in the nineteenth century and is still echoed in the writings of some Russian historians today. Unlike Pogodin, most later Russian historians saw the differences between Russians and Ukrainians as resulting primarily from the corruption of a basically Russian ethnos by Polish influences.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the Russian grand narrative had been fully formed. It attained virtual canonicity when it was incorporated into the writings of Russia's two most influential nineteenth-century historians, Sergei M. Solov'ev and Vasilii O. Kliuchevsky. In his monumental *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen* (*History of Russia from the Most Ancient Times*), Sergei Solov'ev viewed Ukraine as nothing more than the Polonized and Catholicized "western Russian" lands that had constantly striven to maintain a "Russian" national identity and were historically destined for reunion with Great Russia. These views were echoed by Solov'ev's student Vasilii Kliuchevskii in his *Kurs russkoi istorii* (*A Course in Russian History*).<sup>16</sup>

But the Russian grand narrative was not the only viewpoint. Between the seventeenth and early nineteenth centuries, Ukrainians developed their own narrative. While one tradition, exemplified by the *Sinopsis*, stressed Ukraine's affinity with Muscovy/Russia in religion, dynasty, high culture, and even ethnicity, another tradition, without denying these affinities, insisted on Ukraine's political and social distinctiveness. The latter viewpoint found its exponents mainly in Ukraine's secular political elite, the Cossack officers and administrators who ruled Ukraine as a state enjoying *de facto* autonomy under the terms of the Pereiaslav Agreement (1654) with the Russian tsar. This elite produced a new genre of historical writing, the Cossack chronicles. Two of the most influential works in this genre were those of Hryhorii Hrabianka (1710) and Samiilo Velychko (1720).

The authors of these and other Cossack chronicles and histories were not interested in justifying tsarist rule on the basis of dynastic claims or in linking Ukraine with Russia on the basis of religion or ethnicity. They wanted to show how their homeland, Cossack Ukraine, had come into existence and particularly how the great liberator, Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky, had freed their ancestors and the Cossack polity from Polish rule. At the same time, the chroniclers connected the Cossack polity with an ancient and honored lineage, that of Kyivan Rus'. They attempted to show that there were in fact two Rus' entities, Russia and Ukraine (Little Russia), that the two lands were linked in a personal union by a common tsar, that Little Russia had entered into voluntary agreements first with the Polish king and then with the Muscovite tsar, and that Little Russia and its people had always retained their "rights and liberties."<sup>17</sup>

In the last quarter of the eighteenth century, the autonomy of this Cossack polity was abolished, prompting another spurt of historical writing. The most important work of this period, dating from the early nineteenth century, was an anonymous anti-Russian polemic, *Istoriia Rusov* (*History of the Rus' People*), which reiterated, summarized, and even expanded the alternate narrative. The work's underlying thesis was that Ukrainian Rus' and the Little Russian people had a natural, moral, and historical right to their own political development. Moreover, this southern or Ukrainian Rus' nation had existed as a political entity since Kyivan times: "As is well known, once we were what the Muscovites are now: government, seniority, and the very name of Rus' went over to them from us."<sup>18</sup> The people of southern Rus' had lived independently under the rule of their princes until the Tatar threat compelled them to establish contractual relations with Lithuania and Poland "as equal with equal, and free with free."<sup>19</sup>

*Istoriia Rusov* applied the same contractual theory to the Pereiaslav Agreement and posited the subsequent existence of an autonomous Little Russia within the Russian Empire.<sup>20</sup> Thus Ukrainian Rus' was never conquered and entered successive unions with Lithuania, Poland, and Muscovy as a free and equal partner.

For a variety of reasons, this storyline was never taken into account or even seriously considered in the creation of the Russian grand narrative. For most of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, the Cossack chronicles and histories circulated in manuscript form and were not readily available to Russian historians. Moreover, it was very difficult to present the Ukrainian vision of "Little Russia" and its relationship to "Russia" and its tsar while simultaneously justifying the abolition of Ukrainian autonomy. Finally, the Ukrainian claim of "rights and liberties" ran counter to the emerging leitmotif of the Russian grand narrative—that the very essence of Russia was its unbroken tradition of autocracy and centralized statehood. The alternate narrative, when noticed at all, was considered a defect that threatened to weaken the Russian monarchy, state, and ultimately people or nation.

By the second half of the nineteenth century, the imperial "grand narrative" or "traditional scheme" of Russian history was fully formed. It began with the establishment of a pedigree for the Muscovite dynasty (the *Stepennaia kniga*), evolved into a story of an Orthodox Slavo-Russian realm (the *Sinopsis*), turned into an account of an evolving and territorially shifting Russian state (Karamzin), and was finally transformed into the national history of Russia and the Russian people. Although Ukrainians had developed an alternate narrative, it had little impact on the evolution of the Russian grand narrative. In its fully developed form, the Russian grand narrative became an assertion of historical priority, a claim to privileged possession of territory and statehood, and a justification of a Great Russian ethnolinguistic definition of "Russianness" and Russian identity. It was this paradigm of historical, religious, and ethnic unity that had to be challenged if Ukrainians were to assert their own identity. Although Ukrainians went on to conceptualize a distinct national history, the unity paradigm of the Russian grand narrative continues to overshadow current perceptions of both Russia and Ukraine.

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## NOTES

1. In this paper, I repeat some points made in a previous article of mine on the development of Ukrainian national history. See "The Development of Ukrainian National Historiography in Imperial Russia," in Thomas Sanders, ed., *Historiography of Imperial Russia: The Profession and Writing of History in a Multinational State* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999), 453–77.

2. The best analysis of Ukraine's culture within the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth is Ihor Ševčenko's *Ukraine between East and West* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1996).

3. The question of Muscovy's claim to the Kyivan heritage has been the subject of a protracted debate. Some of the most important contributions have been: Jaroslav Pelenski, *The Contest for the Legacy of Kievan Rus'* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1998); Charles J. Halperin, "Kiev and Moscow: An Aspect of Early Muscovite Thought," *Russian History/Histoire russe* 7, 3 (1980): 312–21, and "The Russian Land and the Russian Tsar: The Emergence of the Muscovite Ideology, 1380–1408," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 23 (1976): 7–104; Edward L. Keenan, "Muscovite Perceptions of Other East Slavs Before 1654—An Agenda for Historians," in Peter Potichnyj et al., eds., *Ukraine and Russia in Their Historical Encounter* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992), 20–38; and "On Certain Mythical Beliefs and Russian Behaviors," in S. Frederick Starr, ed., *The Legacy of History in Russia and the New States of Eurasia* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1994), 19–40.

4. R. P. Dmitrieva, *Skazanie o kniaz'ia kh vladimirskikh* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo AN SSSR, 1955).
5. David B. Miller, "The *Velikie Chetii* and the *Stepennaia Kniga* of Metropolitan Makarii and the Origins of Russian National Consciousness," *Forschungen zur osteuropäischen Geschichte* 26 (1979): 263–382.
6. The *Stepennaia Kniga* was published in volume 21 of the *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei* (PSRL); cited here are pt. 1, 5 (on Olha); pt. 1, 135 (on Volodymyr); pt. 2, 629 (on Ivan IV).
7. Keenan, "Muscovite Perceptions," 28–38; the patrimonial claim may be gleaned from the occasional addition of "Prince of Kyiv" to the tsar's title. See, for example, *Vossoedinenie Ukrainy s Rossiei; Dokumenty i materialy v trekh tomakh*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1953), 3:506.
8. For my study I have relied on the expanded 1681 edition of the *Sinopsis*; the publication by Hans Rothe includes an extensive introduction and examination of the scholarly literature. See Hans Rothe, ed., *Sinopsis, Kiev, 1681: Facsimile mit einer Einleitung* (Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 1983). An interesting recent addition to the literature on the *Sinopsis* is Gianfranco Giraudo, "Russkoe nastoiashchee i proshedshee v tvorchestve Innokentiiia Gizelia," *Medievalia Ucrainica: mental'nist' ta istoriia idei* (Kyiv: Naukova dumka, 1992), 1:92–103.
9. N. M. Karamzin, *Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo*, 5th ed., 12 vols. (St. Petersburg, 1842–43). On Karamzin, see J. L. Black, *Nicholas Karamzin and Russian Society in the Nineteenth Century: A Study in Russian Political and Historical Thought* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1975).
10. Karamzin, *Istoriia gosudarstva rossiiskogo*, 3:28, 160, 165.
11. David B. Saunders, "Historians and Concepts of Nationality in Early Nineteenth-Century Russia," *Slavonic and East European Review* 60, 1 (1982): 44–62.
12. N. Ustrialov, *O sisteme pragmaticheskoi russkoi istorii* (St. Petersburg, 1836), 37–8. Quoted from Stephen Velychenko, *National History as Cultural Process* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies Press, 1992), xix–xx.
13. N. G. Ustrialov, *Ruskaia istoriia* (St. Petersburg, 1839), 1:16.
14. Velychenko, *National History*, xix–xx.
15. On Pogodin's views, see vol. 7 of his *Issledovaniia, zamechaniia i lektsii o russkoi istorii* (Moscow: Imp. Moscovkoc ob-vo istorii i drevnostei rossiiskikh, 1856), 425–8.
16. Sergei M. Solov'ev, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen*, 15 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi literatury, 1959–66). On Solov'ev's view of the history of the empire's non-Russian nationalities, see Carl W. Reddel, "S. M. Solov'ev and Multi-National History," *Russian History/Histoire russe* 13, 4 (1986): 355–66; Vasilii O. Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia*, 8 vols. (Moscow: Gospolitizdat, 1956–59), and *Kurs russkoi istorii*, 5 vols. (1904–21; repr. Ann Arbor: Edwards, 1948). A helpful survey of Kliuchevskii's views is Robert Byrnes, "Kliuchevskii on the Multi-National Russian State," *Russian History/Histoire russe* 13, 4 (1986): 313–30.
17. See Frank E. Sysyn, "Concepts of Nationhood in Ukrainian History Writing, 1620–1690," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 10, 3–4 (1986): 393–423, and "The Cossack Chronicles and the Development of Modern Ukrainian Culture and National Identity," *Harvard Ukrainian Studies* 14, 3–4 (1990): 593–607.
18. *Istoriia Rusov ili Maloi Rosii* (Moscow: Moscow University Printing House, 1846), 204. This edition of *Istoriia Rusov* identifies Archbishop Georgii Konisskii (Heorhii Konys'kyi) as its author. Later scholars established that he did not write this work.
19. *Istoriia Rusov*, 6–7, 209.
20. *Istoriia Rusov*, 209, 229.

