



Christian Raffensperger,
Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus' in the Medieval World

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This book by Christian Raffensperger is written in a very comprehensive form and suitable for a wider audience rather than only for scholars of Russian History. The work is focused on the main idea that the medieval Rus' in the 11th and 12th centuries was an organic part of the total European political space. This idea is illustrated by the author through a wide range of material, his study refers to the matrimonial ties of the Russian princely dynasty with the ruling families of Europe, regarding the capital of the Kievan Rus' as a center of European trade. He analyzes the features of difference and similarity in the transformations of the Christian tradition in Scandinavia and Rus', his main interests being obviously focused on the genealogical ties and dynastic names that most safely reflected the Russian-European contacts of the epoch.

Such an approach seems rather efficient. Quite doubtless in my opinion is the author's concept about the Rus' being incorporated in the cultural and political con-

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text of Medieval Europe. Certainly, this assertion is not at all new for Medievalists: it is already found, for example, in the historiography of the turn from the 19th to the 20th century and it has presented the generally accepted point of departure for a large number of Russian historians and philologists during the last two decades. This does not mean that there are no other perspectives on this subject in contemporary Russia, nor does it exclude the useful, clear and consecutive wording of this statement today.

The names of the rulers and dynastic marriages are known to be a minimum analyzable quantity of information that the medieval sources preserve for us, in spite of the fact that data on the international connections of this or that time may be scarce. On the other hand, the fact that European rulers were eager to make matrimonial alliances with the Rurikids may be reliably indicative of the high status of Russian princes and the country they ruled. The borrowing of dynastic names from new relatives, names typical of the dynasties, strengthened to a great extent the prestige of these dynastic ties.

However, speculations in the field interdynastic genealogy and historical onomastics requires a high degree of accuracy because one mislaid brick may cause many levels of a building to fall.

In the matter of facts regarding whom the Russian princes and their daughters married from among their Western neighbors and the names of the off-spring born from these alliances, much in this field has been done by historians, but at the same time a lot of lacunas and mysteries remain to be explored. It would not be an exaggeration to say that studies in the genealogy and matrimonial ties of the Rurikids have become a focus of scholars' attention in recent years.

Christian Raffensperger does not undertake almost any independent investigation of Old Russian, Old Norse or any other sources. His study is founded on secondary literature, and he obviously prefers and refers foremost to the genealogical reconstructions of Nikolai Baumgarten [BAUMGARTEN 1927]. Baumgarten's impressive work, presenting a wide picture of marriages and genealogies of the Russian princes, was published in 1927 and was already much criticized at that time for the author's failure to distinguish reliable facts from his own guesses and reconstructions. During the 90 years since that time, many amendments were made to Baumgarten's work: a number of marriages presented in his text were shown not to have existed and, on the other hand, a large number of his assertions concerning matrimonial alliances of Russian princes were denounced. Unfortunately, this long and careful work is not reflected in Raffensperger's book. For example, on p. 56 to provide grounds for his correct thesis of the importance of affinity in the Rurikids' dynasty, the author speaks of allied connections between the Chernigov prince Sviatosha Davidich and the Kievan prince Sviatopolk II that had occurred, in his opinion, because Sviatosha had married Sviatopolk's daughter Anna. However, neither the marriage, nor even that Sviatopolk had a daughter named *Anna* is recorded in the sources. Both are the product of Baumgarten's more than dubious reconstruction that has been denounced many times [HAЗАРЕНКО 2009: 152–153]. The analysis of the marriages of Agafia Iaroslavna and Edward the Exile and of Ladislaus the Bold with a certain daughter of Vladimir the Saint from which Andrew I was supposedly born are also under criticism (pp. 98–99, 104, 236, fn. 145). There is no data on these marriages in the medieval sources. The existence of the first is rather doubtful, while the existence of the second has no basis

at all, not to mention that the identification of Ladislaus as Andrew's father is dubious. Consequently, this obviates discussing the onomastic exchange that supposedly occurred as a result of these marriages.

An approach that takes the whole of Baumgarten's tables as the primary source without distinguishing between attested facts and denounced hypotheses excludes the necessity of further investigation into the Rurikids' genealogy of pre-Mongol time, a necessity, which, as a matter of fact, is very important. The real situation is that our data for half of Rurikids' marriages with foreigners in the 11th and the first half of the 12th centuries is rather incomplete with regards to the names and origins of the partners, so that sometimes their unambiguous identification is simply impossible or in any case needs detailed discussion of the old and new sources if any are available. But Raffensperger evidently avoids discussing multiple lacunas and controversy in the picture of the dynastic alliances in Europe of that epoch.

Speaking of the potential opportunities intrinsic to a ruler who intended to marry, Raffensperger is quite right to draw attention (after Constance Bouchard and Ruth Macrides – [BOUCHARD 1981: 268–287; MACRIDES 1990]) to the important limitation put by the Church on marriage to kin. Close relatives and also people tied by affinity were not to marry each other, although such a marriage could be profitable from the political perspective. It is evident that the cases when these rules were broken are extremely valuable for a historian and require special consideration. Some examples of such rule-breaking are noted by Raffensperger which is valuable as it is. Nevertheless, a number of such cases remain unnoticed. There is no mention, for instance, of a very strange and expressive incident from the field of Russian-Scandinavian contacts when two sisters (Mal(m)frid and Ingeborg Mstislavna) became wives of two brothers (Knud Lavard of Denmark and Erik Eriksson), though all these persons are presented in Raffensperger's book in one way or another. However, composing a complete list and systematic analysis of rule-breaking of this kind is perhaps beyond the goals of the study of the author. It is important that speaking of consanguinity in marriage (and about Russian dynastic marriages in general), Raffensperger quotes and analyzes in detail a remarkable work by C. Bouchard devoted to the matrimonial alliances of Burgundy nobility, but he does not discuss, for instance, the study by Alexander Nazarenko directly devoted to the consanguinity in dynastic marriages among the Rurikids in the 11th and 12th centuries [НАЗАРЕНКО 2001: 559–584]. In addition, he does not mention (even in the bibliography) the careful studies by Dariusz Dąbrowski, who deals in detail with controversial problems of the Rurikids' genealogy and reviews different opinions on the subject; he also does not mention a number of articles published on the topic in recent decades [DĄBROWSKI 2002; DĄBROWSKI 2008]. It reflects the development of a plurality of sciences among which American Russian History is only one of several sciences of Russian History that are not well enough in dialogue with one another.

Similar drawbacks can be found in the onomastic part of Raffensperger's study. Thus, discussing the problem of how names borrowed from the Rurikids' appeared in the Danish dynasty, the author practically ignores the existing works on this theme, though his own conclusions only reproduce the results of predecessors. Besides this, in the Scandinavian and Scandinavian-Russian genealogies, there are a number of inexact data and mistakes. For instances, the Danish king Waldemar the Great had at least three not two sons (p. 103); his wife Sofia, in contrast to the long since denounced hy-

pothesis of Baumgarten, was not a granddaughter of Vsevolod of Novgorod [GALLÉN 1976: 273–288] (the work of Abbot Wilhelm referred to by Raffensperger in this case does not provide such genealogy of the princess) (p. 238, fn. 168); even in the English Wikipedia one can find a more professional viewpoint on Sofia's origin. Consequently, Raffensperger's speculations on consanguineous marriage of Waldemar and Sofia are in vain. Especially unlucky are the royal nephews in Raffensperger's study. The king of Norway Magnus the Good was by no means a nephew of Iaroslav the Wise's wife Ingigerd (p. 85), because he was not born in wedlock (his mother was a concubine of Olaf the Saint). But on the other hand, Mieszko, married to some Russian princess, was only a nephew of Vladislav-Hermann, not his son, opposite to Raffensperger (pp. 229–230, fn. 51). As for the exact identification of Mieszko's wife, because of the scarceness of the source data, a whole number of versions exists [BALZER 2005: 205], of which Raffensperger mentions only one, the same that one can find in Baumgarten's tables. Iziaslav Iaroslavich, in turn, was not and could not be Dobronega-Maria Vladimirovna's own brother (p. 88), which can be easily guessed according to their patronymics (one must remember that there were no uterine brothers among the pre-Mongol Rurikids), he is only a nephew of Dobronega-Maria Vladimirovna. From these observations it follows that all the author's assertions of the inappropriateness of their marriages from the viewpoint of relation and affinity must be reconsidered.

The list of the errors of this kind can be continued.

The general statements of the author concerning the structure of power for the countries he writes about do not acknowledge much of the doubt surrounding them. For instance, he states that the Rus', Hungary and Denmark in the first third of the 11th century had some striking similarity in the problems of throne succession where the eldest of the blood relatives succeeds to throne (the main candidate being elected via a certain assembly) (pp. 100, 103–104). This may be considered at least incorrect. We have not enough data on the rules of succession in Hungary of that period. As for the Rus', it is evidently wrong, or in any case no regular assemblies were not observed in that period in connection with the election of the ruler. On the whole, though the family worlds of Scandinavia and Rus' in the 11th and first half of the 12th century were quite similar, their mechanism of succession to power differed significantly.

Rather unexpected is the author's statement that the princely name *Vladimir* among the Rurikids was as a rule given to a first-born son (pp. 102, 238, fn. 161). This is not confirmed by any statistical material. On one hand, many examples may be given when this name belonged to younger sons (Vladimir Mstislavich, Vladimir Davidich etc.). On the other hand, it was not always that the one who was the eldest of the brothers in his mature age was really the first born. There is a convincing hypothesis (unknown in Baumgarten's time) that Vladimir was not the first born son of Iaroslav the Wise; that he had an elder brother named *Iliia* born in other marriage. The tradition of name-giving for the Russian princes was that any name could be given to a son, older or younger, only in the case that his direct ancestor, the holder of this name, had died (see: [ЛИТВИНА, УСПЕНСКИЙ 2006: passim; УСПЕНСКИЙ 2008: 7–8]). The name *Vladimir* is no exception at all, regardless of seniority, it could belong to the son of a prince after the death of his direct ancestor who bore that name.

Raffensperger's idea on the subject of with whom the Russian princes preferred to make matrimonial alliances is rather controversial. Sometimes the author seems

to assume these were the Scandinavians, sometimes the Byzantines, although really the matrimonial strategy of the rulers in that epoch was far more complicated and its motivation cannot be described in terms of simple general preferences.

Raffensperger's supposition that royal widows of Russian origin used to return to their home country (p. 69) can hardly be approved. The number of cases when they really did so is rather modest, while other variants are quite typical: they stayed in the countries of their husbands or even more often got married to some other foreign ruler (or even to a royal subject). One can mention here, for instance, Anna Iaroslavna, the mother of Philip I, or the Russian princess Sofia, the widow of Waldemar I, who after his death married unluckily to the Count of Thuringia, and finally Mal(m)frid Mstislavna, who was first the Queen of Norway and then, due to her second marriage, became the Queen of Denmark. Her sister Ingeborg Mstislavna, who actually returned to the Rus' for some time when her husband Knud Lavard was killed, later came back to Denmark where her son began the struggle for the Danish throne. The examples given to support the assumption of this tradition (the obligatory return of the royal widows to the home country) being spread among other European nations in 11th and 12th centuries, seem dubious. Referring to *Heimskringla* by Snorri Sturluson, Raffensperger states that Astrið, a daughter of Olaf of Sweden and the wife of Olaf of Norway, came back to Sweden after the death of her husband (p. 69). However, in *Heimskringla* the story of Astrið does not end with this. After the death of Olaf in Norway, where the foreign rulers, king Sven and his mother, are known to have come to power, Olaf's son Magnus had been earlier safely sheltered in the Rus' with the family of Iaroslav the Wise and Astrið's sister Ingigerd. It is not surprising that Olaf the Saint's widow preferred to go to Sweden, but her return was hardly conditioned by the natural end of her mission in Norway, discussed by Raffensperger. In any case, when her stepson, Magnus the Good, managed to obtain power in Norway, his stepmother Astrið settled with him in Norway (not in her home country) and was much respected there.

As for the quite expected comparison of the Rus' and Scandinavia in the Conversion period, we face again some errors decreasing the value of the author's presentation. For instance, already in the introductory remarks, Raffensperger declares that Norway was converted earlier than the Rus' (p. 137). This is by no means true. On p. 147, the author erroneously states that there was a church of Saint Olaf in Kiev in the 11th century, yet, we do not possess any source for the fact (there were churches of Saint Olaf in Novgorod and Constantinople). Besides, speaking of the foundation of churches and the baptism of rulers preceding the conversion of the whole country, Raffensperger does not mention such important figures for pre-Christian history of Norway and the Rus' as king Hakon, Æthelstan's fosterling, baptized in England, and the princess Ol'ga, converted in Constantinople (p. 258, fn. 36). More than that, this part of the book is not free of the same drawback as the chapters about marriages and names: some information unattested in medieval sources is given without any discussion – as facts – though some of them are at least dubious (the reader must be left to guess what secondary source they could originate from). This is the case with the statement that the Swedish king Ingi the Old happened to live in Rus' for some time (p. 148), though not one of the sources gives such information directly. On the other hand, many facts recorded in the sources that are important remain unnoticed,

not to speak of multiple research hypotheses and speculations offered by non-English language scholars for the last two or three decades.

All the above said certainly does not decrease the value of the ideas about the Rus' having an integrated role in the medieval world of the West, about the importance of dynastic marriages and dynastic names as indicators of international ties, about the typological vicinity and common penetration of the Christian microtraditions in the medieval Rus' and Scandinavia, ideas that have become familiar in modern medieval studies. If one assumes that the Kievan Rus' in the Middle Ages was a part of the Western space, then it would be desirable that this idea of unity were extrapolated to modern science, so that one must not deal with several isolated sciences: American Russian History, German Russian History, Polish Russian History, and, finally, Russian Russian History.

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