

Christian Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus' in the Medieval World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 329pp., ISBN: 9780674063846, £39.95.

In *Reimagining Europe* Raffensperger's main object is to present a picture of Kievan Rus' as far more interconnected to the medieval history of 'Europe' than has previously been suggested (p. 4). Kievan Rus' is the name given to the territory around the medieval city of Kiev which, as Raffensperger states, is utilised by historians instead of "Russia", a label which has distinct political and ethnic connotations in the 21st century (p. 5). He briefly sets out the inherent problems of any definition of 'Europe' in the introduction; this context is necessary to ensure, as Raffensperger intends, a depiction of Kievan Rus' during the tenth to twelfth centuries which is not based solely on Byzantine connections (p. 3). Overall, he succeeds in his goal.

Throughout the five chapters of the text, and regardless of the specific topic under discussion, illustrations from Kievan Rus' are woven together with other examples from Western-European kingdoms in a style which usually convinces the reader of his arguments. Although some themes covered in Raffensperger's work have previously been discussed in a comparative manner in non-Anglophone titles, such an extensive comparison across a wide variety of topics, ranging from marriage policy to religion to trade, has not been undertaken before.¹ The reader is presented with an image of Kievan Rus' which is drawn away from the world of Byzantium and placed into a more representative context. This works particularly well in chapter three, 'Russian Dynastic Marriage', where reasons for alliances with Rus' are explored alongside a discussion of the role and power of Russian princesses after they had uprooted their lives from Kiev and settled in the kingdoms and courts of their new husbands. The author's suggestion that kings of Kievan Rus' practiced "speculation" in dynastic marriage when marrying their daughters to exiled

¹ For example, the discussion of trade in *Les Centres Proto-Urbains Russes entre Scandinavie, Byzance et Orient*, ed. by M. Kazanski, A. Nercessian, and C. Zuckerman (Paris: Bouchet/Chastel, 2000).

princes is an interesting rethinking of royal marriage, not only as an immediate gain for kingdoms, but also as a way of gambling on uncertain outcomes.

However, not all Raffensperger's work has the fluency of this analysis. The first chapter, 'The Byzantine Ideal', focusses on the historiography of the relationship between Byzantium and Rus' which the author is trying to challenge. Although the arguments presented carry some weight, Raffensperger assumes a certain level of familiarity with Dimitri Obolensky and, in particular, his ideas in *The Byzantine Commonwealth*.² If the reader is not closely acquainted with this earlier text then the theoretical aspects of Raffensperger's argument are hard to follow. This context is necessary in order to distinguish medieval Kievan Rus' from the previous focus on Byzantine connections, but for those less interested in the historiographical argument, it may be worth returning to the first chapter after reading the rest of the text. Much can be gained from the later chapters for those working on medieval kingdoms besides Rus', such as Germany, France and Bulgaria, amongst others. Readers who want to explore a comparative and analytical approach to Kievan Rus', or simply to remedy an ignorance of the territory during this period, will perhaps find these chapters, which are less focussed on the historiography, more useful.

The study of the Christianisation of Kievan Rus' provided in chapter five, the final chapter of the work, demonstrates how the rulers of Rus' were active players in the conversion of their kingdom. Rulers courted various 'micro-Christendoms' in order to limit the political overlordship which could result from adopting a new religion, for example when representatives from four different faiths – Judaism, Islam, Latin Christianity and Byzantine Christianity – visited Kiev in the late tenth century (p. 160). Raffensperger applies Peter Brown's theory of the multipolar religious world of 'micro-Christendoms' to Kievan Rus', a model which supports the

² Dimitri Obolensky, *The Byzantine Commonwealth: Eastern Europe, 500–1453* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1971).

author's adept analysis of the political functions and process of conversion in this territory. He skilfully critiques the traditional narrative of the conversion of St. Vladimir the Great, who ruled Kievan Rus' from 980 until his death in 1015. The reader is informed of Vladimir's initial leanings towards the adoption of an eight-god pantheon rather than Christianity and of the pre-conditions leading to the final adoption of what Raffensperger suggests was "Bulgarian", not "Byzantine", Christianity. Raffensperger does not outline every possible comparative with other medieval kingdoms across the territory of modern-day Europe, but his work allows the reader to build on his narrative and make further comparisons of their own. For example, the story told of Vladimir's grandmother, Ol'ga, and her accompaniment on a visit to Constantinople by a Christian priest, Gregory, bears some comparison to the presence of a Frankish bishop in the entourage of Bertha when she became the wife of Æthelberht, king of Kent, in the late sixth century.

Kievan Rus' in the Medieval World thus provides an excellent starting point for those embarking upon a study of the Russian kingdom for the first time. Approximately one third of the book is taken up by detailed endnotes which point the reader to related historiography. Yet they also demonstrate the extent to which Raffensperger is dependent on this material. The author himself occasionally admits this reliance, for example he states that chapter four, 'Kiev as a Center of European Trade', presents no original research, but instead introduces the previous historiography on trade in Kievan Rus' to his readers (p. 115). This can occasionally make one feel as if in each chapter you have to first navigate the swamp of historiographical narrative in order to reach firmer ground. Nevertheless, Raffensperger's exploration of the interactions between Kievan Rus' and the wider medieval world are a much-needed contribution to English-language research which has rarely viewed Rus' in these terms before. Raffensperger demonstrates that placing Kievan Rus' in such a 'European' context is both viable and valuable.

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