THE GOLDEN AGE OF KYIVAN RUS´

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The medieval polity of Kyivan Rus' fully entered the cultural sphere of Byzantium after the time of its Christianisation in 988. Until the capture of Kyiv by the Mongols in 1240, a distinct literary and artistic culture emerged and flourished throughout the Kyivan Rus'. The Golden Age of Kyivan Rus' is a MAPA project that aims to present and describe the artistic and literary endeavours that emerged during that period of almost three centuries and shaped the medieval culture of one of the most successful Slavic polities of the European Middle Ages.

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

The present project emerges from the need to decolonise the history of Kyivan Rus' in the months previous to the full invasion of Ukraine by Russia in February 2022. Kyivan Rus' was the medieval polity that existed in lands currently belonging to three different countries: Ukraine, Russia and Belarus and whose existence was terminated when the Mongols entered and ransacked it for the last time 1240. The project has two main and connected goals: firstly, it aims at contesting the traditional and unilateral appropriation by one modern state, Russia, of the cultural and intellectual heritage of this medieval polity, often portrayed as a necessary forerunner of the Russian Christian nation, or as the step between two imperial projects, Byzantium and Russia; secondly, it aims at contesting the traditional belittling of Kyivan Rus' as a non-state, as an amorphous polity that would only be recognisable as a state once Moscow becomes established, or as a state in formation whose culture merely consisted of a few imports from Bulgaria or Byzantium, lacking in purpose or originality.

Thus, the current project emerged with the idea of representing geographically, as accurately as possible, all the artistic endeavours that saw the light in Kyivan Rus' during its Golden Age using the MAPA project to represent the three main sets of evidence of artistic and literary creativity: monasteries, churches and manuscripts. However, in order to understand the social and economic context in which these manifestations took place it was necessary also to convey some basic data about the process of Christianisation and the origin of the economic resources that made it possible.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE PROJECT

Mapping places

From the very beginning, the idea of mapping cultural achievements faced two main challenges. Firstly, it had to be decided how to represent graphically a polity whose external borders as well as internal ones (between lands and ruling houses) changed quickly over the nearly three-hundred-year period under study.

In the definition of external borders, the challenge was solved by using a time-slider in which new towns and cities appear over time as the external borders expand. They are then added to the colour-coded display of different lands.

In the case of internal borders, the challenge was more problematical, because, as a result of internal wars, cities were under the jurisdiction of one prince or another over time. This resulted in the need to reassess the traditional term of 'principality', which was difficult to apply in the case of Kyivan Rus', in favour of the most common term found in the sources of 'land of'. In the governance model that was in place in Kyivan Rus', each prince received a number of cities and towns upon inheriting office, and if any form of internal civil conflict arrived, the winner, in the majority of cases, rather than individually incorporating specific cities or towns in a piecemeal manner to his own existing realm, would take over somebody else's office, adding another land, with all its dependent cities, towns and settlements, to his previous land. Thus, the governance model did not tie automatically any modern concept of encompassing land within a known or established perimeter, whether it was called a country, nation or state in modern parlance, or a principality or a realm, to a princely office, but rather tied a princely office to the right to exploit trading activities in, and receive tribute from, a series of cities within a certain land. Over time, some princes managed to agglutinate or accumulate within their hands more than one land, and other princes or family branches lost everything. But the land or administrative unit to which any specific city or town belonged did not change, what changed was who was in command in that land. All cities and towns belonged administratively to a land, in a hierarchical system whose apex was one of the capital cities, where taxes from all the cities, towns and enclaves within that land were centralised. This is well attested in legal corpora, and backed by the evidence provided in birchbark letters, in which it is clear that, juridically, each land could also have specific legislations and inhabitants of any land could be held subsidiarily responsible for the crimes committed in other lands by fellow inhabitants of that very same land.

What often changed was who was in control of a land, to whom ultimately went all the money collected in trade and tribute, but not the administrative division where a city or town was. Unlike

later modern models of state definition and governance, in this model, inimical by definition to map-drawing, borders were neither stable, nor always expanding, but could also contract in the next generation if the office was challenged by the heirs of the losers of previous generations. This has often been perceived as chaotic, defined as a non-state, declared to be in permanent crisis or in constant upheaval.

In this context, it was deemed more appropriate to use the term 'land of' which was stable throughout despite the change of ruler. The map identifies, thus, the cities with colours as they belong to one of the possible 'lands of' for most of the time during the three-hundred-years period and/or by the beginning of the thirteenth century (Civic Structures > Places by Land).

The map includes 148 toponyms of cities and villages whose foundations have been dated up to the mid-thirteenth century (M.N. Tikhomirov 1956; V. P. Neroznak 1983). There were of course many more places, usually much smaller, that have been documented in that period (A. V. Kuza 1989 and 1996). The aim of the present project, is to draw a map as complete and exhaustive as possible of all the dwellings of Kyivan Rus' , geocoding at least those cities where artistic activities of any kind have been so far documented (including all possible churches in smaller places). M. N. Tikhomirov divided the cities into categories: capital cities, most relevant cities, cities with villages (meaning to whom the latter paid taxes), and others. I have followed his classification, and it can be found and displayed under Cities > Cities by Relevance.

Once the Kyivan Rus' map was created, it was time to fill in all the variables we wanted to show.

Economic activity

One of the main concerns of the project was how to link the cultural endeavours that constituted the **Golden Age of Kyivan Rus'** to the economic development that was necessary to finance it. In this sense, it was important to understand the settlement pattern and the economic activity that justified such pattern to be able to draw sound conclusions about the economic power that sustained the cultural development of Kyivan Rus'.

As mentioned above, collecting tributes was one of the main economic activities of Kyivan Rus' and, like the control of the trading routes that passed through those lands, one of the two main reasons why these princes went to war with each other. Trading activity in Rus' has been always known, and the famous route from the Varangians to the Greeks that linked Scandinavia to the Byzantine Empire has been often studied as the entry route of the Vikings into the Eurasian buffer zone that they

turned into a successful polity. But rivers conducted trade also on an East-West direction and allowed the Rus' to trade not only in the north via the Volga River, but to contact with the Via Regia towards the West and link their trade to the old Roman Amber Route. Kyivan Rus' therefore became one of the most important trading hubs of the Eurasian Middle Ages, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious polity in which the presence of Arab travellers from the Caliphate, Jews from Byzantium, as well representatives of various Latin Christian countries in Western Europe entered into contact with one or more representatives of the various lands of Rus'. Having such a high economic dependency on trade meant also that their economy was tremendously reliable on the success or decline of the routes with which they traded. As the Byzantine Empire declined and the Mediterranean was reopened for trade by the Crusaders, the routes that had once provided the main source of revenue were increasingly on the wane, and economic activity in Rus' was displayed to the West and the North. The project includes all the river basins, where almost all settlements were established from the very beginning along the banks of the Dnipro, the Dnister, the Daugava, the Narva, the Niman, the Neva, the Dvina, the Visla or the Volga. It also includes the main and secondary trade routes (Amber, Byzantine, Silk and Via Regia) that connected the trade posts of Kyivan Rus' to almost all Eurasian international trade networks.

Once the places were geo-localised, the lands identified and the economic activities roughly described, it was time to fill in the contents of the project: the culture developed in Kyivan Rus' before the arrival of the Mongols.

THE CULTURAL GOLDEN AGE OF KYVAN RUS'

The name of the current project does not imply that the timeframe studied in it epitomised a golden period by contrast to, or improvement from, any other silver or bronze age. Golden is simply a descriptor, rather than a qualifier. After consolidating all the data available, from the year 996, year of construction of the Church of the Tithe in Kyiv, until the year 1243, year of consecration of the Monastery of St. John the Baptist in Pskov, this is, less than 250 years, *at least* 108 churches, 40 monasteries and 33 manuscripts were composed in Kyivan Rus'. That means one church built every less than two and a half years, a monastery every six years, and a manuscript (of these, probably many more have been lost) every seven and a half years. It is this output that makes it Golden. Since all cultural endeavours are related to the expansion of Christianity, a layer with the foundational date of every bishopric was also added to understand how Christianity expanded across the territory.

However, the main challenge was to identify exactly where no longer extant buildings used to be: in GIS without a set of coordinates, it is impossible to place anything. If a particular church and monastery is extant, the exact location is known and has been used. If the building is currently destroyed but the remains have been either preserved or excavated, even if the building is listed as non-extant, the exact location has also been used. If, however, we know of the building because it is mentioned in the sources, but its location is unknown, it has been linked to the closest city or village known, whenever possible. The total number of monasteries/churches/civil buildings are provided according to archaeological evidence and their mention in the sources, the number of monasteries, churches and civil buildings (fortifications, palaces, gates) have been counted for each city. They are displayed in chronological layers to show the development of cities.

Given the fact that the project is not only geographically contained but also temporarily limited, all contents have been uploaded bearing in mind their recorded foundational date. This is not as straight-forward as it may seem. In the case of cities, for example, the foundational date is the first time their name is mentioned in a chronicle or in other historiographic source. Unfortunately, there are places of whose existence we suspect (sometimes now confirmed by archaeological findings) at a much earlier date than when they are first mentioned in the sources, but this rule has been applied nevertheless in all cases. Similarly, in the case of churches or monasteries, the date provided is according to which they have been classified in the Time Slider widgets, is the date of consecration or dedication, if we know it, or when they were started to be inhabited; not the date when the building was initially commissioned or the sources say that works started, which is often the date of their first mention in the sources. So the 'first mention' principle applies differently in the case of cities and in the case of buildings. In the case of manuscripts, if the manuscript is dated precisely by a colophon or any other means, this date has been used, but less than third of the total number of manuscripts can be so accurately dated. Otherwise, they are dated to the first part or the second part of any given century and, if this is neither possible, to the century as a whole.

As in any GIS project, the contents are divided in layers. The layer list on the left of the screen allows the user to select the parameters I thought were relevant in any of the three groups of evidence (monasteries, churches and manuscripts). When clicked, each item displays a pop-up window with the minimum relevant information and a photo of the object (if available) and the websites where further specialised information can be found.

In the case of both monasteries and churches, the year provided is the year of its consecration or opening of the monastery or church for cult or living. This might not coincide with the ruling time of the prince who commissioned the building, and therefore the name of the founder might not coincide with the date provided as foundational, because works can often extend beyond the lifetime of the person who commissioned the work, who might have died before seeing it completed. Nevertheless, I wanted to stress the point of who wanted to build a sacred space with a specific dedication, and therefore the commissioner's name has been recorded. At the same time, a church or a monastery being constructed has no social function or artistic development within it until it is finished and opened to the public, and thus the disparity between both. The new functionality of 'Charts' has helped us to provide a visual snapshot of consolidated data that give a better idea as well of the distribution of cultural achievements by land. In providing these charts, personal interests have been followed, but the possibilities of recombination of the data are multiple.

Monasteries

So far, the parameters for the display and classification of monasteries are whether they were or not a princely foundation and whether they were inhabited by monks or nuns. The monastic scriptoria are also linked to the manuscripts database, as places where the latter were copied in or from where they travelled to serve as master copy elsewhere. This information is not offered about all manuscripts since it is usually only obtainable by scribal colophons, and only about a third of the total number of manuscripts have colophons, often without all necessary information.

Churches

Within the group of churches, searches can be made first on whether they were princely foundations or not. Then, additional searches are possible according to the name of the prince who commissioned them (if they were princely foundations).

Another option is to search for churches according to their dedication, since this information indicates which saints and cults were more popular and spread in a certain territory as well as at a certain time. This information is also relevant in understanding which texts were more popular (copied more often) across the monastic network.

When the church is a building belonging to a monastery with no different dedication, it is not listed. However, if the church in the monastery has a different, special dedication that is different from the name of the monastery, it is listed separately.

Many more churches were built than the ones recorded here. In many cases, there are only archaeological remains to attest their previous existence, but the sources are silent about them. In this case, since the name of the commissioner or the dedication is unknown and often their foundation date is only approximate by archaeological dating; in absence of a clear reference in the sources, the church is not listed. P. A. Rappoport lists all possible remains, including churches and non-ecclesiastical buildings, in his surveys listed herein in the bibliography.

Manuscripts

The manuscript database includes a basic codicological description and a minimum description of the contents. Each manuscript is linked to one or several websites where further information is available. Whenever possible, data from manuscript catalogues has been grouped also under headings denoting literary genres, such as hagiography, as well as individual names, such as the scribe, if it can be obtained, or the place of composition, if at all available in a colophon or if it could be inferred by linguistic analysis. Manuscripts are linked to one or several places. If no place is sufficiently endorsed by all possible evidence, it is linked to the capital of the land where its provenance is most likely justified.

CONCLUSIONS

After the collection and consolidation of the data available, the project opens more avenues for research than it closes, and that is the most important aspect of it. The project has managed to showcase the indisputable role of international trade as well as the indispensable role of Christianity in the cultural and artistic flourishing of the Kyivan Rus' in the pre-Mongol period. Some of the most relevant findings are to be found in the charts added to the map. For example, the number of both civic and religious buildings built in the first part of the thirteenth century in the lands of Chernihiv, Halych, Volhynia or Smolensk, makes the thesis of the crisis of Kyivan Rus' increasingly untenable, and should make us question the received narrative, mainly derived from later Muscovite chronicles, that Kyiv was in permanent state of chaotic disarrangement, a thesis that fits best the biblical narratives that chroniclers composed mirroring the tales of the chosen people of God that maybe looking at data of economic development. Likewise, it seems increasingly possible that the economic decline experienced in the Kyivan land, whose development had been traditionally linked to a prosperous Byzantine empire and the ties to the Eastern routes ending in the Caliphate, has more

to do with an economic decline of trade with either partner, including the decline in slave trade, than with any incompetence or mismanagement on the part of the southern princes.

If we analyse the section dedicated to churches, for example, some more intriguing data emerge as well. Not only princely patronage might not have been as determinant as previously thought (it amounts to 62%), but also their dedication shows the relevance of the cult to the Mother of God, the Theotokos, together with the cult to the local saints Boris and Gleb.

In the area dedicated to monasteries, one of the most relevant findings was that almost a quarter of them were feminine, although only three were undoubtedly founded by women, four by men and of two the founder remains unknown. As expected, the vast majority were built either in the lands of Kyiv and Novgorod, having fourteen foundations each. Far behind in the number of monastic foundations was Rostov-Suzdal with three followed by Chernihiv, Smolensk and Polatsk with two each and finally Riazan, Halych and Pereiaslavl with one.

Finally, the analysis of manuscripts showed, as expected, an overwhelming majority of liturgical manuscripts, but, more importantly, an unexpected majority (64%) of manuscripts with colophons, of which a detailed study is currently underway.

These are just some of the preliminary findings of the project. As it was expected from the beginning, the visualisation and consolidation of data has contributed to a better understanding of the earliest history of Kyivan Rus', somehow modifying some of the truisms that were repeated in later chronicles, and that have been traditionally adopted uncritically by academia. The aim of this project was to create a useful tool for researchers, professors and students for the study of the past of Kyivan Rus' by showcasing the cultural achievements of a multi-cultural and prosperous Christian society that, far from being in a purported permanent crisis from which Muscovy would emerge triumphantly, displayed a remarkable economic and cultural vibrant activity until the arrival of the Mongols.

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