Christian Raffensperger, *The Kingdom of the Rus'* (Kalamazoo and Bradford: Arc Humanities Press, 2017). Print, 92 pp., £11.95, ISBN: 9781942401315.

R e v i e w

Rather than being an overview of the current scholarship of a period or a people, as some of the other books in the Past Imperfect series, in *The Kingdom of the Rus'*, Christian Raffensperger has tackled a single important issue: that of the accurate translation of medieval terminology into modern languages both in editions and in the secondary literature. As he notes, "[t]ranslations, like historical documents themselves, are a product of their time and of their translator" (p. 25), and what may at first seem like a comparatively minor issue in the choice of a word can in fact have far-reaching implications for the study of the period. The word in question here is the Old Slavonic *kniaz'*, which, as Raffensperger points out, is habitually translated as 'duke' or 'prince' in all manner of scholarly texts with only a handful of exceptions. Yet in the medieval texts, the Rusian *kniaz'* is almost always the equivalent of a Latin *rex*, as well as being a cognate to the Old Norse *konungr* and the Old English *cyning*.

The book is very logically and neatly structured, opening with a handy timeline of events for those readers less familiar with the period of tenth to thirteenth century Rusian history, and followed by a brief introduction to the terminology of the Rus'. Chapter One argues that the Rus' were an integral part of medieval Europe, especially of medieval European Christendom after their conversion in the tenth and eleventh centuries, and Raffensperger provides key examples of eleventh century dynastic marriages between the Rus' and the royal houses of medieval Europe. Secondly, he asks the reader to reconsider the traditional idea of the Russian church being aligned solely with Byzantium, for which

he provides examples of its ties to Rome. Chapter Two addresses the historiography of the translation of *kniaz'*, arguing that the modern usage within western scholarship stems from the early modern period when British merchants were in contact with the sixteenth century Muscovite court. By this time, the term had devolved to refer to a hereditary status akin to that of a prince, which was not necessarily accompanied by the full authority of rulership, and this was not the meaning of the term in the Rusian period. Chapter Three takes a step sideways and considers the terminology of medieval kingship, with further examples of early medieval Scandinavian, Irish, Anglo-Saxon, and Polish kings. After the important preceding contextualisation of time, text, and place, in Chapter Four Raffensperger discusses the person and the role of a *kniaz'* in the Rusian sources, while Chapter Five is concerned with how the Rus' and their *kniazia* were represented in non-Rusian sources, taking examples from medieval German, Polish, Norse, and Byzantine sources. And lastly, in Chapter Six, in order to give a more fully rounded meaning for *kniaz'*, Raffensperger looks at how the titles of non-Rusian rulers are translated within Rusian sources, with examples of Polish, Hungarian, Polovtsian[1], and Byzantine[2] rulers.

Only once the whole book has been read, does the radical nature of the title become obvious. Raffensperger signals that not only does he consider the territory of the medieval Rus' to not be in the plural, but that the status of this singular ruler was at least equal to that of the rulers of other medieval European kingdoms. Indeed, in rehabilitating the medieval *Rus'* to the status which they were themselves accorded by their contemporaries, as well as reintegrating this polity within the

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[1] A Turkic-speaking people who incidentally have their own issues with titulature since their *kniazia* are almost uniformly termed 'khans' or 'khagans' in English language scholarship, and Raffensperger also provides the example of the Bulgarian kings, generally termed *rex* in Latin sources, but 'khan' in English translations (Raffensperger, 2018, 73-74).

[2] The Byzantine *basileus*, 'emperor', was a *tsar* in the Rusian sources, not a *kniaz'*.

broader conception of Europe itself, Raffensperger has done a great service to medieval studies by highlighting how it has instead been the modern scholarship on the *Rus'* which has been the radical departure from the medieval texts. Because of the spatial constraints of the book, as with all the books in the Past Imperfect series, Raffensperger is necessarily succinct, illustrating his points with just a handful of key examples rather than the many more which a larger work could easily have incorporated, and which the subject matter could have easily justified. But despite its compact size (or perhaps even because of it), *The Kingdom of the Rus'* presents what could potentially have been a dry subject in clear and engaging prose, and successfully guides the reader, whether they are familiar with the period or not, through the semantic exploration of Rusian and medieval titulature. The importance of this book cannot be overstated, and *The Kingdom of the Rus'* ought to be on the reading list of anyone seeking to understand not just medieval Rusian history, but European medieval history in general.

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