A R T I C L E

R u p t u r e

The Uses of Rupture in Medieval Northern Eurasian History

Nick Evans ⬤

University of Leeds
Email: n.evans1@leeds.ac.uk

Abstract

Will Russia's invasion of Ukraine change bring about a rupture in how we write about and teach the history of medieval Northern Eurasia? Dominant accounts of the region's medieval history invoke ruptures, such as the Mongol invasion, in the service of state-centred narratives. Such narratives obscure the diversity of the region's past and its present. This essay explores the uses of rupture in the historiography of medieval Northern Eurasia. It shows how modern readings of chronicles produced within the monasteries of medieval northern Eurasia have used the device of rupture in the service of a variety of different imperial, national, liberal and conservative historical narratives. This tendency has been remarkably resilient, across modern ruptures such as 1917 and 1991. The essay also addresses the problematic legacy of "Eurasianist" ideas, while pointing to a counter-tradition of Northern Eurasian historiography, which could provide rich resources for a less ethnocentric and statist approach to the region today. The essay concludes by considering the opportunities for such an approach, in the light of current academic disciplinary boundaries, and media- and policy-facing commentary on the region.

> In the same year [1300 CE], Metropolitan Maksim, unable to bear the violence of the Tatars, moved his metropolitan see and fled from Kyiv. All Kyiv fled, and the Metropolitan went to Bryansk. From there he went to the land of Suzdal', with his entire household.[1]

> The fragmentation intensified after Batu Khan's devastating invasion, which ravaged many cities, including Kiev. [...] It so happened that Moscow became the center of reunification, continuing the tradition of ancient Russian statehood.[2]

The chronicles composed, compiled, and copied in the monasteries of medieval northern Eurasia are full of moments of rupture. The chronicle texts and their accounts of rupture structure contemporary

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[1] *Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei*, vol. 1, *Lavrent'evskaia letopis'*, pt, 2, *Suzdal'skaia letopis' po lavren'tevskomu spisku*, 2nd ed. (Leningrad, 1927), col. 485.

[2] Vladimir Putin, "Ob istoricheskom edinstve russkikh i ukraintsev," July 12, 2021, www.kremlin.ru/events/president.news/66181; translation at http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/66181 (last accessed January 7, 2023).

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narratives of Russian, Ukrainian and Belarusian history. Nonetheless, the concerns that shaped the form and content of the chronicle texts were quite different from those that motivate modern historians, commentators, and politicians. The annalistic structure of the chronicle texts provided a means by which the preoccupations of the monks composing them could be included within a framework of universal history.[3] Modern users of the chronicle accounts, including Vladimir Putin, have recontextualized them within a fundamentally different conception of historical time. This essay outlines some consequences of the translation of the chronicle accounts of medieval rupture into the framework of the modern nation-state and surveys the prospects for breaking free from the latter framework in light of the current rupture.

Appeals to ruptures in the history of medieval Northern Eurasia serve state-centered narratives that obscure the diversity of the region's past and present. The 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine has underlined the implications of these narratives. Putin provides a particularly egregious example. He draws a line from Kyivan Rus' to the contemporary Russian Federation, while he invokes the rupture in state form brought about by "feudal disintegration" and the "Tatar yoke" to relegate the post-thirteenth-century history of what is now Ukraine and Belarus to a footnote to a story of Russian statehood. However, Putin is not unique in the use of medieval ruptures to sustain linear narratives that legitimate present concerns. Many competing accounts of the region's history converge on using breaks in state form to hold together linear narratives. This linearity informs how students and scholars encounter, write about, and conceive of Northern Eurasia, most often as a "Slavic" or "Eastern European" space, relegating other linguistic and cultural groups either to the margins or beyond the remit of the authentically "national." Marina Mogilner commented that the 2010 incorporation of "Eurasian" into the name of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies, "was not accompanied by a basic reevaluation of the political and epistemological foundations of exclusion and inclusion that structure our disciplinary boundaries and approaches."[4] This essay aims to contribute to that reevaluation.

Paradigms established by the Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Hrushevsky and Russian historian Vasilii Kliuchevsky in the early twentieth century still shape narratives of East Slavic history a century later, notwithstanding the ruptures of revolution and emigration that have intervened.[5] Both historians took novel approaches to historical periodization, giving fundamental place to patterns of agrarian colonization, but simultaneously developing a conception that marginalized non-Slavic cultural groups. It is the resilience of this latter feature in Soviet and post-Soviet historiography and wider commentary that concerns us here. Meanwhile, the term "Eurasia" carries its own baggage. Eurasianist historiography took form in the generation following Hrushevsky and Kliuchevsky, and it provided a means by which one émigré group reconceived the rupture of the October Revolution as a moment within a longer history of Eurasian empire.[6] Eurasianist ideas are a powerful current within contemporary Russian ultranationalism and are often cited as a major ideological influence on Putin, although a more conventional set of ideas is evident in Putin's treatment of the Mongol rupture in Russian history.[7] The sense in which "Northern Eurasia" is invoked in this essay is not to be confused with the normative and imperial claims of the Eurasianists. Instead, it is proposed, following the example of the recent textbook edited by Il'ia Gerasimov, as a neutral term to describe a zone inhabited by a range of cultural and linguistic groups without any predetermined destiny, whether "European," "Asian," or "Eurasian."[8] A more inclusive historical framework need not treat interactions with non-Slavic groups as ruptures in a national or state-centered story.

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[3] On the claim's "anachronistic and ideologically motivated" nature see Jaroslaw Pelenski, "The Origins of the Muscovite Ecclesiastical Claims to the 'Kievan Inheritance,'" [1993], reprinted in his *The Contest for Legacy of Kievan Rus'* (New York, 1998), 62.

[4] Marina Mogilner, "When Race is a Language and Empire Is a Context," *Slavic Review* 80 (Summer 2021): 207.

[5] Serhii Plokhy, *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge, England, 2006), ix, 16–17.

[6] Caspar Meyer, "Rostovtzeff and the Classical Origins of Eurasianism," *Anabases* 9 (2009): 185–98.

[7] Stephen M. Morris, "'The East is a Delicate Matter': Russian Culture and Eurasianism," *Russian Review* 74 (April 2015): 187–88.

[8] Il'ia Gerasimov, ed., *Novaia imperskaia istoriia Severnoi Evrazii*, vol. 1 (Kazan', 2017), 9–10. See also Bruce Grant, "We are all Eurasian," *NewsNet: Bulletin of the Association for Slavic, East European, and Eurasian Studies* 52.1 (2012): 1–6.

Less ethnocentric and statist approaches to Northern Eurasian history can, and do, draw upon the resources of important historiographical counter-traditions that have challenged the dominant narratives of medieval rupture. They can also connect with emerging understandings of the "Global Middle Ages" that emphasize historical contingency and challenge ideas of "rupture" that underpin narratives of Western exceptionalism.[9] However, this scholarship has had only partial success in shifting how most undergraduate students encounter medieval Northern Eurasia, and still less in shifting the frameworks for media and political commentary on the region. The invasion of Ukraine comes at a time when discussions about decolonizing curricula are occurring across many different fields. When applied to our own field, such discussions have not always had the necessary analytical clarity about the nature of the imperial situation in question.[10] This essay builds on the insights of Marina Mogilner, who has traced the epistemological shifts that accompanied imperial modernization in late Tsarist Russia, notably in the embrace of racialized categories of analysis.[11] Understanding how dominant frameworks for Russian and Ukranian medieval history were forged in the same moment is key to moving past them now.

RUPTURES IN TIME

For the chroniclers of medieval Rus', the Bible and translated extracts from Byzantine sources supplied the point of departure. The first dated year in manuscripts containing the above notice is 6360 AM (852 CE], the (misdated) beginning of the reign of the Byzantine emperor Michael III, during which the Rus' brought themselves to the attention of Byzantine historians by launching a raid on Constantinople.[12] The chroniclers counted back from that date to the Creation, and forward to the time of writing, in a sequence that was at once continuous and punctuated with expectations of the ultimate rupture: the coming apocalypse. The chronicle texts were layered up over time, so entries of a given year periodically show heightened expectation of that rupture that are then reincorporated into a continuous sequence when the world does not, in fact, end. At the same time, these prefigured the rupture to come.[13]

The displacement of such a conception of time was a precondition, in Benedict Anderson's view, for the emergence of the limited and sovereign imagined community of the nation in the early nineteenth century. In place of the "simultaneity-along-time" of the chronicles, modern historical narratives are structured by a conception of time that disconnected cosmology from history.[14] The magnificent historical ambition of Hrushevsky, who began his panoramic *History of Ukraine-Rus'* with the literal shifting of tectonic plates, operated within this secularized time. He traced the origins of the Ukrainian nation to the deepest antiquity, but he conceived the nation as limited as well as sovereign: its claims against Russian imperialism were claims that other nations could and should also make, as separate communities, with their own histories.[15] Similarly, his Russian contemporary Kliuchevsky began his course on Russian history with the observation that universal history is built from the history of

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[9] Geraldine Heng, *The Global Middle Ages: An Introduction* (Cambridge, England, 2021), 9–12.

[10] Ilya Gerasimov and Marina Mogilner, "Deconstructing Integration: Ukraine's Postcolonial Subjectivity," *Slavic Review* 74 (Winter 2015): 715–22.

[11] Marina Mogilner, *Homo imperii: A History of Physical Anthropology in Russia* (Lincoln, NE, 2013).

[12] *The Povest' Vremennykh Let': An Interlinear Collation and Paradosis*, ed. Donald Ostrowski (Cambridge, MA, 2003), 17,25–18,24.

[13] Igor' Danilevskii, *Povest' vremennykh let. Germenevitcheskii osnovy izucheniia letopisnykh tekstov* (Moscow, 2004), 184–234; Mikhail Gromov, "Vremia i ego vospriiatie v drevnei Rusi," *Drevniaia Rus'* 34:2 (2009): 7–17; Simon Franklin, "Russia in Time," in *National Identity in Russian Culture. An Introduction*, ed. Simon Franklin and Emma Widdis (Cambridge, England, 2004), 11–29; Simon Franklin, "Borrowed Time: Perceptions of the Past in Twelfth Century Rus'," in *The Perception of the Past in Twelfth Century Europe*, ed. Paul Magdalino (London, 1992), 157–77.

[14] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, rev. ed. (London, 2016), 22–36.

[15] Mykhailo Hrushevsky, *Istoriia Ukraïny-Rusy*, vol. 1, *Do pochatku IX vyka* [1913] (Kyïv, 1991); idem, *History of Ukraine-Rus'*, vol. 1, *From Prehistory to the Eleventh Century*, trans. Marta Skorupsky, ed. Andrzej Poppe and Frank E. Sysyn (Edmonton, 1997).

individual nations.[16] Still, both historians turned to the chronicle accounts of rupture, even as they proposed new periodizations of Ukrainian and Russian history. Chronicle accounts of rupture, originally written to advance specific ecclesiastical claims understood within one conception of universal time, came to be read as moments in the unfolding of a secular, but still predetermined, story.[17] Historical contingency was thus obscured twice over.

RUPTURE AND COLONIZATION

For a decolonized history of the region, the specific imperial context in which those periodizations were first developed is crucial. For all their other differences, both Hrushevsky and Kliuchevsky carved non-Slavic populations out of authentically "Ukrainian" and "Russian" histories. Hrushevsky's historical project aimed to correct the ruptures that Russian imperial historiography imposed on the understanding of the Ukrainian past. In his introductory remarks to the 1913 edition of *History of Ukraine-Rus'* he celebrated the growing acceptance of "Ukrainian history as single continuous and uninterrupted whole." This was a view that had appeared "strange and heretical," especially outside Ukraine, when the first edition appeared in 1898.[18] The continuous view of Ukrainian history confronted dominant historiographical paradigms, which traced the "history of political organizations." Consequently, most historians simply "tacked on parts of the history of the Ukrainian people to that of the Polish or the Russian state, so that this history disintegrated into a series of disjointed episodes."[19]

Hrushevsky regarded the problem as the product of imperialist paradigms, and of how the chronicle tradition had been used. He described the history of the origins of the state of Kyivan Rus' as "one of the most difficult questions in world history–not so much because of a lack of information, as because of the existing tradition."[20] One of Hrushevsky's objections to the chronicle tradition on the early history of Kyivan Rus' was its account of foreign, Varangian (Scandinavian) origins. Hrushevsky admitted at most a Varangian origin for the tenth-century princely dynasty, but argued that they would have simply supplanted a preexisting local dynasty.[21] Hrushevsky added his voice to a controversy that had provoked earlier set-piece debates, for instance between the Russian proponent of the "Normanist" thesis, Mikhail Pogodin, and the Ukrainian historian Mykola Kostomarov.[22] Hrushevsky's contribution drew on critical engagement with the philological scholarship of Aleksei Shakhmatov, from which Hrushevsky drew a methodological principle about textual ruptures. Nikolai Karamzin, who above all others was responsible for molding the dominant Russian imperial historiographical paradigm from the chronicle texts, had regarded the early chronicle material as a unitary source, from which variant readings could be disregarded. Hrushevsky took from Shakhmatov's demonstration of the layered and composite nature of the chronicle texts an appreciation for divergent readings.[23]

Hrushevsky proposed to look past the ruptures of imperial historiography or textual scholarship to present a continuous national story. Nonetheless, ruptures in state form also played a key role in structuring that national story. While Hrushevsky challenged other state-centered narratives, he argued that the "foundations laid by the Kyivan state remain at the core of life in eastern Europe to this day." Hrushevsky argued that it was the subsequent social and cultural processes that should interest us, but he also traced the latter "to the impulse that it [Kyivan statehood] had once provided." The

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[16] Vasilii Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia v 9-kh tomakh*, vol. 1, *Kurs russkoi istorii*, pt. 1 [1904] (Moscow, 1987), 37.

[17] Pelenski, "Origins," 62–4.

[18] Hrushevsky, *Istoriia* 1:3 (trans.1:3).

[19] Ibid. 1:17 (trans. 1:13).

[20] Ibid. 1:379 (trans. 1:289).

[21] Ibid. 1:379–90 (trans. 1:289–97).

[22] V. Mordvinov, ed., *Publichnyi disput 19 marta 1860 goda o nachale Rusi mezhdu gg. Pogodinym i Kostomarovym* (St. Petersburg, 1860).

[23] Hrushevsky, *Istoriia* 1:598 (trans. 1:466); compare Ostrowski's comments on Soviet textology (*Povest'*, xlv–liv).

ruptures often came from the steppe. Hrushevsky regarded the middle Dnipro region as the "ancestral homeland of the Ukrainian people," but also traced waves of steppe migration and colonization. He described a push and pull of Ukrainian colonization of the steppe, followed by incursions by nomads into Ukrainian heartlands: from the Pechenegs in the tenth century, the Cumans in the late eleventh century, the Mongols in the thirteenth, and the Crimean khanate in the late fifteenth. He emphasized the "terrible destruction" caused by the nomads, while describing waves of Ukrainian colonization in more neutral terms as "reverse movements," but both "leaving a deep imprint on the physiognomy of the Ukrainian people."[24]

Hrushevsky's Russian contemporary, Kliuchevsky, also sought to replace existing paradigms of Russian imperial historiography. He too was critical of periodization based upon dynastic ruptures and took a skeptical approach to key parts of the chronicle narratives. Kliuchevsky's analysis of Russian history caught the attention of the imperial government: to his irritation, Sergei Witte, who was the finance minister at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, began publishing transcripts of Kliuchevsky's lectures without his permission in order to train civil servants.[25] In place of the old dynastic history, Kliuchevsky offered a periodization based upon colonization as the "fundamental fact" of Russian history. While Hrushevsky presented the middle Dnipro region as the "ancestral homeland of the Ukrainian people," Kliuchevsky treated the colonization of the middle and upper Dnipro (Dnepr') region as the first phase of Russian history. The "Dnepr' period" of Russian history (eighth to thirteen centuries) was characterized for Kliuchevsky by its urban and commercial character and its political fragmentation. Kliuchevsky rejected the traditional idea of the thirteenth century Mongol invasions as a moment of rupture (*razdel'noe sobytie*). Instead, he saw the transition from the first, "Dnepr' period," to the second, "Upper Volga' period" (thirteenth to fifteenth centuries) as a product of a social and economic shift toward agrarian colonization by free peasantries under the power of a fragmented (*udel'nyi*) princely class. In the third, "Great Russian" period (fifteenth to seventeenth centuries), colonization by an increasingly subject peasantry expanded beyond the Upper Volga under a boyar aristocracy led by the tsars in Muscovy. This was followed by a fourth, "All-Russian" imperial phase.[26]

Where Hrushevsky critiqued imperial historiography for neglecting Ukrainian history after the political decline of Kyivan Rus', Kliuchevsky justified his own cursory treatment of the southwest: "We must follow only the dominant trends in our history." Kliuchevsky's approach was explicitly teleological. The Kyivan Rus' period provided the context in which "national unity" (*edinstvo natsional'noe*) first emerged. Meanwhile, the agrarian colonization in the northeast under conditions of political fragmentation in the subsequent period laid the foundations for the emergence of political unity under the Muscovite tsars.[27] Kliuchevsky downplayed the significance of the Mongol invasions, but the thirteenth century nonetheless formed a break in his narrative, as he turned away from the Dnipro region. Moreover, his emphasis on agrarian colonization gave the longer-term history of antagonism with steppe nomads a crucial role. He described the "struggle" with Polovtsians and "vicious Tatars" between the eighth and seventeenth centuries as searing itself into the "historical memory of the Russian people." It explained "more than one European deficit in Russian historical life."[28]

Like Hrushevsky, Kliuchevsky was aware of the composite nature of the chronicle texts. He dedicated the fifth lecture in his *Course* to the textual history of the earliest chronicle narratives and distinguished different layers in the surviving chronicle compilations. However, Kliuchevsky also saw the chronicles as the key to uniting scraps of information from other, Byzantine, saga and Arabic sources into a coherent account of Russian history. Although the surviving forms of the chronicles did

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[24] Hrushevsky, *Istoriia* 1:11–17 (trans. 1:9–13).

[25] Valentin Ianin, "Predislovie," in Kliuchevsky, *Sochineniia* 1:13–14.

[26] Kliuchevskii, *Sochineniia* 1:48–53, 116.

[27] Ibid. 1:350–1, 366.

[28] Ibid. 1:84–5.

not allow direct access to the original texts, they provided for him a narrative "distinguished by a single spirit and direction, with the same devices and a single view on historical events," over the course of eight centuries. His reading of the material collected in the *Complete Collection of Russian Chronicles*, published by the imperial Archaeographical Commission from 1841, thus provided material for his unitary account of the transformation of Russian nationality into Russian statehood.[29]

The paradigms established by Hrushevsky and Kliuchevsky experienced different fates in the Soviet period, as a focus on ruptures in state form was first critiqued and then reemerged. Hrushevsky's challenge to the imperial narrative initially gained some acceptance as an advanced example of "bourgeois-national" historiography. This changed in 1929, which the Communist party described as the year of the "Great Break." Serhii Plokhy has shown how debates over Hrushevsky's work in 1929 served as a vehicle for wider attacks on a national paradigm of Ukrainian history. Historians who had drawn significantly on his work, such as Matvii Iavorsky, now sought to demonstrate their Marxist credentials by asserting their distance from his arguments.[30] Mikhail Pokrovsky played a key role in these debates. In the same prerevolutionary years that Hrushevsky and Kliuchevsky had been publishing their major historical surveys, Pokrovksy had been publishing his own, Marxist account of "Russian" history. Pokrovsky had reviewed Kliuchevsky's *Course* in *Pravda* in 1904, in which he acknowledged the powerful impression the original lectures had had on him, while criticizing the "eclecticism" of the published version.[31] In his own survey, Pokrovsky critiqued the "nationalist historiography" that denied the existence of feudalism, and he challenged the narrative of rupture between prior unity and the *udel'nyi* period of the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries: there was no prior unity to disintegrate.[32] If Pokrovksy's earlier target had been Russian imperial-nationalist historiography, in 1929 he lent his authority to attacks on Hrushevsky's national paradigm for Ukrainian history. Despite Pokrovksy's own anti-imperial and anti-nationalist stance, he still took "Russia" as his framework of analysis.[33] The further irony was that an increasingly Russian nationalist and state-centered official historiography would lead Pokrovsky's own work to fall from favor shortly after.[34]

Kliuchevsky's star, meanwhile, began to rise again. The 1922 Soviet edition of his *Course* was reissued in 1937, and in the 1950s Mikhail Tikhomirov oversaw the publication of his collected works.[35] Kliuchevsky's conception of a unitary Russian national identity in Kyivan Rus', which later found expression as political unity under Moscow, found increasing favor, even if his "*russkaia natsional'nost'*" (Russian nationality) was now repackaged as "*drevnerusskaia narodnost'*" (Old Rus' nationality/people).[36] However, Kliuchevsky's emphasis on the limitations of the political unity of Kyivan Rus' was now reversed by Soviet historians such as Boris Grekov, who criticized him for not making enough of the rupture between Kyivan statehood and subsequent "feudal disintegration."[37] Grekov described the Slavs as the largest people in Europe, and the Kyivan state as the most powerful "of all Slavic and non-Slavic states of its time."[38] Grekov used the Marxist terminology of internal contradictions in his analysis of the ultimate disintegration of the Kyivan state. However, the effect of his account of the rupture of Kyivan statehood, followed by the eventual emergence of Muscovy as the "most powerful state in Eastern Europe," was to claim for the latter the cultural and political

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[29] Ibid. 1:90–2.

[30] Serhii Plokhy, *Unmaking Imperial Russia: Mykhailo Hrushevsky and the Writing of Ukrainian History* (Toronto, 2005), 346–413.

[31] Mikhail Pokrovskskii, "Retsenziia na kn. V. O. Kliuchevskii, *Kurs russkoi istorii*, chast' I (Moskva, Sinodal'naia tipografiia, 1904)," *Pravda* (March 1904): 211–15.

[32] Mikhail Pokrovskii, *Russkaia istoriia s drevneishikh vremen*, vol. 1, 6th ed. (Leningrad, 1924), 28, 135.

[33] Plokhy, *Unmaking*, 347–53.

[34] For a recent Marxist reengagement with Pokrovsky see Jairus Banaji, *A Brief History of Commercial Capitalism* (Chicago, 2020), 3–8.

[35] Vasilii Kliuchevskii, *Kurs russkoi istorii: Pereizdanie s sovetskogo izdaniia 1922 g.* (Moscow, 1937); idem, *Sochineniia: V 8 tomakh* (Moscow, 1956).

[36] Plokhy, *Origins*, 17.

[37] Boris Grekov, *Kievskaia Rus'* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1944), 6.

[38] Grekov, *Kievskaia Rus'*, 20.

inheritance of the former.[39] Once again, the rupture in Kyivan statehood sustained the linear narrative, leading toward Moscow.

PARADIGMS FOR MEDIEVAL NORTHERN EURASIAN HISTORY

The paradigms proposed by Hrushevsky and Kliuchevsky and their Soviet critics converged on their relegation of non-Slavic groups to a marginal or external role. Interactions with other cultural and linguistic groups, in particular from the steppe, thus featured as eruptions into the central story of Ukrainian or Russian history. Following the lead of chronicle texts, these eruptions could explain moments of rupture that in turn justified the shift in focus of the central historical narrative. A different conception emerged among the Eurasianist school of émigré intellectuals following the October Revolution. Michael Rostovtzeff was a major influence on the Eurasian account of Russian history offered by George Vernadsky. The final chapter of Rostovtzeff's *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (1922), "The Origin of the Russian State on the Dnieper," differentiated Russian history from the framework provided by the chronicle tradition, which leads historians "to confound the history of Russia with the history of the Slavonic race." Rostovtzeff instead presented Russian history as the product of the interaction between (Iranian) steppe culture and Hellenistic civilization. It was an account that Caspar Meyer has connected to Rostovtzeff's own experience of the rupture of revolution and emigration. Rostovtzeff applied innovative archaeological scholarship to present an older cosmopolitan conception of dynastic empire that contrasted with the nationalized and racialized conceptions that had become hegemonic in the preceding decades.[40]

Where Rostovtzeff looked back, the Eurasianists looked forward to mold a historical conception that could accommodate the Soviet Union as the latest phase in the imperial unification of the Eurasian landmass. Vernadsky challenged the traditional idea of the "Tatar yoke." He regarded the Mongol invasions of 1237–41 as a "national catastrophe," but he emphasized the longer-term contribution of Mongol rule to the unification of Eurasia, and the development of Russian state institutions.[41] Eurasianist ideas also developed as an influential heterodox strand within Soviet historical and archaeological scholarship, in particular in the work of Lev Gumilev. Gumilev similarly rejected the concept of a "Tatar yoke" on the grounds of his positive assessment of the contribution of nomadic imperial formations to the development of Eurasian unity. Gumilev combined his environmentally determinist appreciation of steppe imperialism with an anti-Semitic account of the parasitic or "chimeric" role played by Jews in Eurasian history. Instead of the "Tatar yoke," Gumilev and his followers offered the "Khazar yoke," according to which the early medieval nomadic empire of the Turkic Khazars became an oppressive force when its elite converted to Judaism and the state became economically dependent on international commerce. Gumilev's work has enjoyed significant popularity in post-Soviet Russia, and official accolades in post-Soviet Central Asia.[42]

These are not the only possible paradigms for medieval Northern Eurasian history. Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard's *Emergence of Rus'* (1996) has given Anglophone readers an account of early Rus' history that emphasizes the cultural and linguistic diversity of Northern Eurasia between the eighth and twelfth centuries. They explicitly abandoned a "centralist schema" and emphasized political

[39] Ibid., 300–301.

[40] Michael Rostovtzeff, *Iranians and Greeks in South Russia* (Oxford, 1922), 211; Meyer, "Rostovtzeff," 187–89, 198; Caspar Meyer, *Greco-Scythian Art and the Birth of Eurasia: from Classical Antiquity to Russian Modernity* (Oxford, 2013), 39–94.

[41] George Vernadsky, *A History of Russia*, 5th ed. (New Haven, 1961), 16–19, 57–84; Charles J. Halperin, "George Vernadsky, Eurasianism, the Mongols, and Russia," *Slavic Review* 41 (Autumn 1982): 477–93.

[42] Lev Gumiler, *Etnogenez i biosfera Zemli* (Leningrad, 1989), 302, 455; idem, *Drevniaia Rus' i Velikaia Step'* (Moscow, 1989), 7–8, 18, 254–55; Victor A. Shnirelman, "The Story of a Euphemism: the Khazars in Russian Nationalist Literature," in *The World of the Khazars. New Perspectives from the Jerusalem 1999 International Khazar Colloquium*, ed. Peter B. Golden et al. (Leiden, 2007), 353–72; Mark Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia* (Ithaca, 2016).

flexibility rather than fragmentation.[43] Oleksiy Tolochko has challenged the uses of the "ethnography" of the chronicles to construct the traditional narratives of ethnic, followed by political and then territorial consolidation.[44] For a later period, Donald Ostrowski has challenged the Eurasianist association between Mongol rule and Muscovite despotism.[45] More broadly, there exists a large body of scholarship, in particular archaeological, on the many cultural groups that inhabited the forest-zone, steppes, and mountains of the territories now within the modern state borders of Ukraine, Belarus, and the Russian Federation.[46] However, when it comes to overall framings, it is notable that even Valerie Kivelson and Ronald Suny's *Russia's Empires* (2017), which critiques state-centered narratives, apologetically adopts the same sequence of "Russian history," beginning in Kyivan Rus', and then moving to Moscow and St. Petersburg, punctuated by the ruptures of Mongol invasion and Petrine reforms.[47] Is it time to experiment with new frameworks?

WAYS FORWARD

So will Russia's invasion of Ukraine bring about a rupture in how we write about and teach the history of medieval Northern Eurasia? State-centered narratives of the region's history draw on accounts of rupture originally deriving from chronicle accounts. In the early twentieth century, these narratives were reframed, placing colonization at the center of the story. Although Hrushevsky wrote a history from the perspective of Ukrainians subject to Russian imperialism, neither he nor Kliuchevsky saw the perspectives of the non-Slavic groups affected by the processes of colonization they described as part of their historical remit. A decolonized approach to Northern Eurasian history would pay closer attention to the epistemological basis of the exclusion of non-Slavic populations from such accounts. Meanwhile, Eurasianist accounts that reject or qualify the idea of the "Tatar yoke" as a key moment of rupture, treat imperial unification as the natural (and environmentally determined) end of Eurasian history. A more productive approach would recognize the *absence* of geographical, climatic, or cultural predeterminants of Northern Eurasian integration, imperial or otherwise, and trace the varied and contingent ways such integration occurred historically.[48] If the "Global Middle Ages" have been characterized as "a period of options and experiments," a growing body of scholarship suggests that this was particularly true of Northern Eurasia.[49] It is time to make this explicit.

While a significant body of scholarship presents more decentered accounts, media commentary and most undergraduate curricula do not adequately reflect these possibilities. In undergraduate teaching, "Medieval Russia" is often still used as the title of courses, regardless of what is taught to students once they enter the classroom.[50] Often this is the product of the programs in which the courses are taught, but this raises the importance of cross-curricula discussion between colleagues and students in different Faculties. A decolonized curriculum will need to address provision of non-Slavonic

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[43] Simon Franklin and Jonathan Shepard, *The Emergence of Rus, 750–1200* (London, 1996), xix.

[44] Oleksiy Tolochko, "The *Primary Chronicle*'s 'Ethnography' Revisited: Slavs and Varangians in the Middle Dnieper Region and the Origin of the Rus' State," in *Franks, Northmen, and Slavs: Identities and State Formation in Early Medieval Europe*, ed. Ildar H. Garipzanov et al. (Turnhout, 2008), 169–88; Oleksiy Tolochko, "Voobrazheniia narodnost'," *Ruthenica* 1 (2002): 112–17.

[45] Drawing on David Sneath's concept of the "headless state." See Donald Ostrowski, "Systems of Succession in Rus' and Steppe Societies," *Ruthenica* 11 (2012): 29–58; idem, *Muscovy and the Mongols: Cross-Cultural Influences on the Steppe Frontier, 1304–1589* (Cambridge, England, 2002); David Sneath, *The Headless State: Aristocratic Orders, Kinship Society, and Misrepresentations of Nomadic Inner Asia* (New York, 2007); and Valerie A. Kivelson and Ronald Grigor Suny, *Russia's Empires* (Oxford, 2017), 27–43.

[46] See, for example, with important contributions from both Russian and Ukrainian scholars, and presenting a very different view of "Khazar studies," the articles collected in V. Petrukhin et al., eds., *Khazary = Evrei i Slaviane* 16 (Jerusalem, 2005).

[47] Kivelson and Suny, *Russia's Empires*, 7, 17–43, 75–88; as remarked upon by Marina Mogilner, "There Can Be No 'Vne,'" *Ab imperio* 4 (2021): 25.

[48] Gerasimov, *Novaia imperskaia istoriia* 1:10.

[49] Catherine Holmes and Naomi Standen, "Introduction: Towards a Global Middle Ages," *Past and Present*, Supplement 13 (2018): 44.

[50] Christian Raffensperger, *The Kingdom of Rus'* (Kalamazoo, 2017), 3.

languages, and will need to be based upon cross-period and cross-disciplinary discussion.[51] Archaeology has been key to our growing sense of the diversity of Northern Eurasian history: students need to be given methodologically informed exposure to this material. Critical approaches to race are a key part of that discussion.[52] This essay began with Putin's misuse of chronicle narratives: the "global turn" encourages us to contextualize our teaching of the chronicles within contingent "cultures of recording" that shaped their production and survival.[53] Meanwhile, in communication to broader publics, we should draw attention to the cultural diversity of modern Ukraine and Russia as one feature they have in common with the region's medieval past. Where "rupture" has held together teleological and state-centered narratives, diversity offers one very important element of continuity.

ORCID
Nick Evans 🅳 https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8725-0042

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Nick Evans is a Visiting Research Fellow in the School of History at the University of Leeds. He is a contributor to *Muslims on the Volga in the Viking Age*, ed. Jonathan Shepard and Luke Treadwell (2023) and his forthcoming monograph is entitled *Mountains, Steppes and Empires: Highlanders and the Outside World in the Early Medieval North Caucasus*. He is currently working on a project on medieval economic anthropology.

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[51] Gerald Graff, *Clueless in Academe: How Schooling Obscures the Life of the Mind* (New Haven, 2008), 62–80.

[52] See the planned volume on *Ethnicity and Race in Medieval Europe, Africa, and the Middle East* for Bloomsbury Press.

[53] Mark Whittow, "Sources of Knowledge; Cultures of Recording," *Past and Present* Supplement 13 (2018): 45–87.