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Florent MOUCHARD, *la Maison de Smolensk : une dynastie princière du Moyen Âge russe (1125-1404)*

Paris, Institut d'études slaves, 2015, 308 pages

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- 1 This monograph offers the first dedicated history of the Smolensk princely dynasty since P V. Golubovskij's *Istorija Smolenskoj zemli do načala XV st.* (1895). F. Mouchard's book does not replace Golubovskij's magisterial narrative, which remains indispensable for any scholarly treatment of Smolensk. Rather, it narrows and sharpens the focus, makes important corrections and adopts a theoretical approach better reflecting the realities of the period.
- 2 The political history of the "Smolensk" princes is here conceptualized, not as sovereignty over a particular territory eventually absorbed by its powerful neighbors, Lithuania and Moscow, but in terms of a clan (*rod*), whose genealogical, family identity transcended territorial limits. The book builds on revisionist historical theory and research. A. V. Nazarenko (1995) hypothesized that the basic political principle of Kievan Rus' was *rodovoj sjuverenitet*. The idea of re-examining the influence of a clan misrepresented as marginal in the received tradition was suggested by M. Dimnik's prosopographical studies of the Chernigov princely house (1981, 1994, 2004).
- 3 V. A. Kučkin's encyclopedic *Formirovanie gosudarstvennoj territorii Severo-vostočnoj Rusi v X-XIV vv.* (1984) also challenged traditional assumptions about pre-Mongol Smolensk. A. A. Gorskij's *Russkie zemli v XIII-XIV vekax: puti političeskogo razvitija* (1996) singled out

Smolensk as one of nine lands ruled by branches of Riurikide families to convincingly argue that the Smolensk princes were among the most powerful rulers in the pre-Mongol period (pp. 10-11, 23). Gorskij's seminal article "Političeskaja bor'ba na Rusi v konce XIII veka i otnošenija s Ordoj" (*Otečestvennaja istorija*, № 3, 1996) and his highly praised *Moskva i Orda* (2000) reassessed the politics of Fedor Rostislavič, a Smolensk prince who acquired the throne of Jaroslavl' through marriage, allied himself with the Saraj Horde and was a leader in the dynastic struggles of the 1290s.

- 4 Mouchard's book is organized in five dense chapters with excurses on sources, genealogy, and selected ancillary themes. Chapter I focuses on the family connections and career of Rostislav Mstislavič (1090-1167), who, after years of indecisive conflicts with the family's longtime rivals, the descendants of Svjatoslav Jaroslavič ("Ol'goviči"), the princes of Polock and the Novgorodians, achieved recognition through astute diplomacy and manipulation of the seniority principle as the Grand Prince of Kiev (c. 1157-1169). Chapter II, which covers the period between 1157-ca. 1230, shows how Rostislav's successful political choices served as models for his sons, nephews and grandsons: to accept the seniority principle among the Riurikides, and to expand into areas critical for insuring their dominance (Kiev, Novgorod, Galič). It ends with the crisis of the 1230s, when dynastic conflicts, exacerbated by plague and famine, led to the loss of both the Kievan and Smolensk thrones. Chapter III surveys Smolensk's role in the Baltic areas (1100-1230). Chapter IV examines a series of political crises faced by the Smolensk royal house between 1237 and 1350. Spared from the devastation of the Mongol invasions, Smolensk was challenged by Lithuania, whose rulers progressively advanced into territories held or controlled by the Smolensk princes. Smolensk recovered during the successive reigns of the brothers Gleb, Mixail and Fedor Rostislaviči. Prince Fedor's obligations forced him to leave his patrimonial throne for long periods of time to fight for the khan and his allies, the princes of Northeast Rus'. In his absence, his late brother's son, Aleksandr Glebovič, seized the Smolensk throne with help from Lithuania. The remainder of the chapter chronicles the progressive fragmentation of Smolensk and the subordination of its princes to Lithuania. Chapter V offers as detailed an account as the sources permit of the period from 1356 to 1404, when the Lithuanian Grand Duke Vytautas reconquered Smolensk from Jurij Svjatoslavič.
- 5 The complexity of the politics, which are intertwined with economics, and the sparsity of the sources, compelled some hard decisions about what to cover and how to organize the history. Golubovskij wrote separate chapters, respectively, on the geography and resources; genealogy; trade; and political history of Smolensk. Hypothetical dates and names were filled into his genealogical tables. Mouchard chose to analyze the Smolensk princes in chronological order, but included subchapters with excurses, which fragment and sometimes break the narrative thread. Conflicts in the Baltic space after 1237 are integrated into the chapters IV and V, but pre-Mongol Baltic conflicts and trade are shunted to a separate chapter III, which toggles confusingly between periods covered in the chapters I and II. No dates or names were added to the genealogical tables (pp. 284-286) in cases where the sources diverge, leaving many question marks. In a few instances, however, the question marks are unjustified because the body of the text reports reliable information on a prince's spouse (at the time women were often identified by their fathers rather than by name), children or death date.

- 6 Mouchard is to be commended for going beyond the chronicles to consult a wide range of primary sources, including archeological evidence, seals and treaties, but also hagiography, ecclesiastical writings, and iconography. The expansive bibliography attests to an impressive command of ancient and modern languages, an awareness of the diverse scholarly disciplines necessary for assessing Kievan and Mongol themes, and a knowledge of the latest scholarship. Four excellent color maps are included. The index provides brief but essential identification of the historical figures, who can be easily confused even by the specialist.
 - 7 In the last year, while the book was in press, a number of collaborative projects on Smolensk have been launched. French, Latvian and Russian medieval historians are collaborating on the first volume of a *Series Rossica*, within the collection *Monumenta Paleographica Medii Aevi*, which will publish digital images of many original Smolensk charters discussed by Mouchard. A team of Russian, German and Estonian scholars are preparing annotated translations of German, Latin and Russian sources that provide context on conflicts, treaties and trade in the transnational space of the medieval Baltic. Russian and American scholars are preparing a new biography of Fedor Rostislavič, clarifying his role in the resurgence of Smolensk commerce, and a history of his veneration as a saint, with scholarly editions of hagiographical and the earliest liturgical texts. *La Maison de Smolensk* will contribute to ongoing and future research into this enigmatic clan.
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