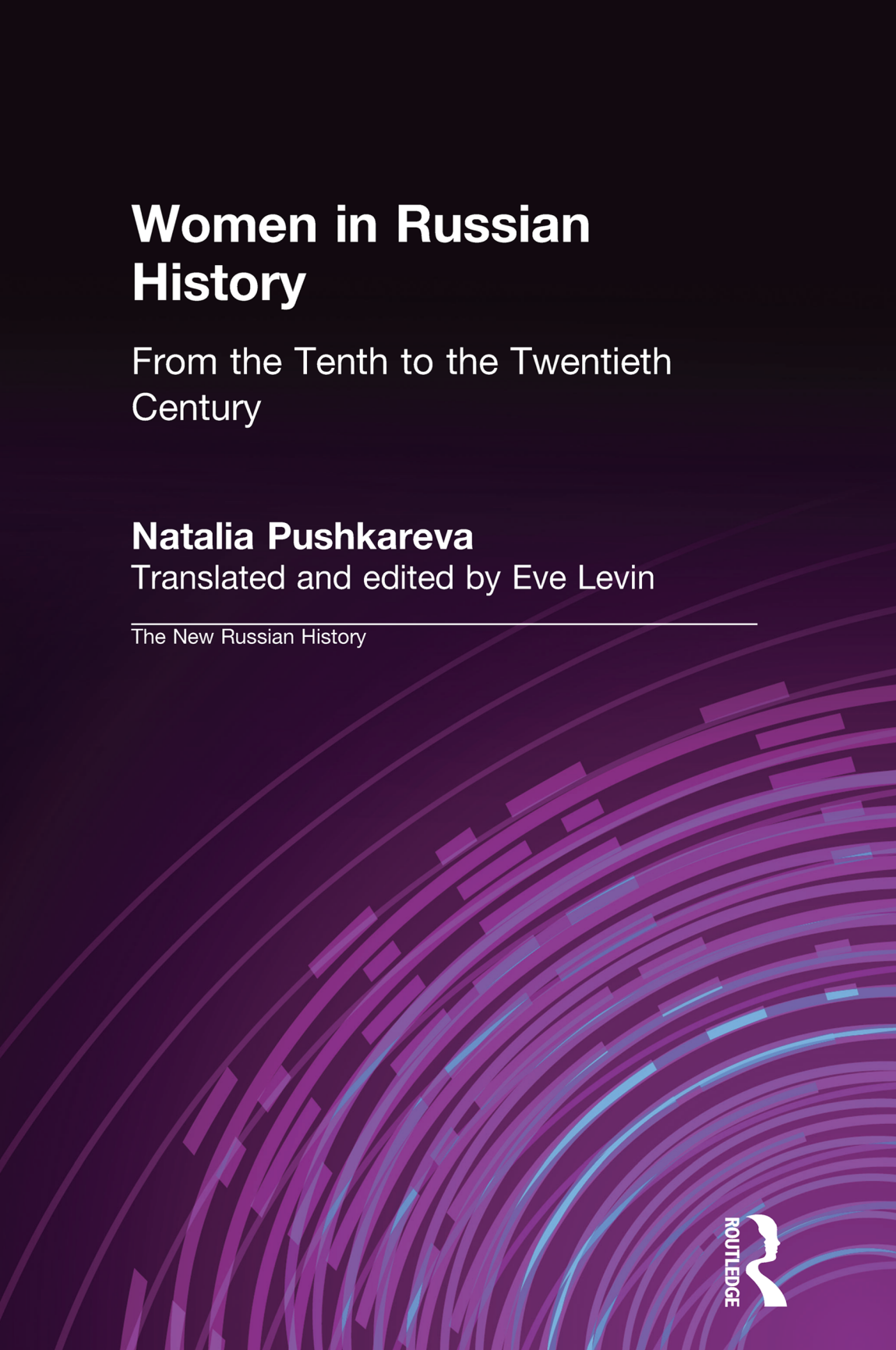
Women in Russian History

From the Tenth to the Twentieth Century

Natalia Pushkareva
Translated and edited by Eve Levin

The New Russian History



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The New Russian History

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For Tjoma, my son,
with the hope of the happiest of futures

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Contents

List of Illustrations

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Author's and Translator's Preface

This survey of the history of women in Russia, the first of its type since the past century, reflects the development of the field of Russian women's studies. In the last twenty years, many books and articles have appeared, and these have covered a huge range of topics in Russian women's history, vastly increasing our knowledge of this once-ignored subject. Until now, however, there has been no survey of Russian women's history to serve as an introduction to the topic and as a framework for these more specific works. We hope that this book will serve both these purposes.

The momentous changes that Russia has experienced in the past decade make a historical perspective on the status of women that much more timely. With the collapse of communism, Russians have begun to look, even more than before, to their own roots in order to understand their society and find direction for the future. But the myths about Russian women in the past are manifold and too often invoked for immediate political gain. A work such as this one that strives to be true to the sources and impartial in its examination of the topic, can provide a needed corrective. In this unstable and changing political climate, it is important that private citizens of all countries have knowledge of the Russian past.

The political, social, economic, and cultural changes in Russia that have made this book so necessary have also made it possible. Under the Communist government, a Soviet author could not write a book specifically for publication in the West, under the auspices of an American publisher. Yet this monograph was specifically commis-

sioned by M.E. Sharpe, Inc., for distribution not only in the United States but worldwide. Furthermore, the type of close collaboration between the author and the translator that went into the production of this volume would have been almost impossible to arrange under the strictures of the pre-glasnost era. For in this case the "translation" consists not so much of rendering the author's words into English as conveying her ideas in a way that makes them readily accessible to an American audience. Frequently, that goal required a substantial rewording of sentences and reordering of paragraphs, as well as the addition of explanatory material and an English-language bibliography. These alterations in the manuscript were made in full consultation with the author during many hours of productive, and enjoyable, collaboration.

But this book is collaborative in another sense as well. It reflects more than fifteen years of scholarly association. We first met in the hostile years of Leonid Brezhnev and Ronald Reagan, when we were both graduate students: Natasha at Moscow University and Eve at Indiana University. Both of us had selected dissertation topics relating to women; Natasha's concerned women in medieval Russia from the tenth to the fifteenth centuries; Eve's focused on the women of Novgorod in the same period. At that time, the suspicions generated by the cold war inhibited contacts between Soviet citizens and foreigners, especially those from "capitalist" countries. But because we shared the same academic advisor, Academician Valentin Lavrentevich Ianin, we could become acquainted without concern about adverse political ramifications.

From our first meeting in Eve's dormitory room at Moscow University, we both realized that we had somehow reached the same conclusions concerning the status of women in medieval Russia. At Ianin's suggestion, we co-authored an article on the status of women in medieval Novgorod, which was published first in Russian in *Vestnik Moskovskogo universiteta* (1983) and later in English in *Soviet Studies in History* (1985). Such collaboration, which has since become so common, was practically unheard of then; our two scholarly communities expected us to embrace different, and incompatible, interpretations.

Despite the complications created by distance, we remained in close touch and advised each other about research and career choices. In due course, we both defended our dissertations and found employment: Natasha at the Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology of the Academy of Sciences, where she now holds the position of senior research fellow; and Eve at Ohio State University,

where she is currently an associate professor. Both of us also eventually assumed editorial duties: Natasha on the journal *Rodina*, and Eve on the journal *Russian Review*. By mutual agreement, Natasha's first monograph, *Zhenshchiny drevnei Rusi* (Women of Medieval Russia) (1989) focused on women's legal, family, and social status; Eve's monograph, *Sex and Society in the World of the Orthodox Slavs, 900–1700* (1989), focused on a topic then forbidden in the Soviet Union. The changes in the intellectual climate in the late 1980s permitted us to publish a second collaborative article in 1990 on sex in medieval Russia. Over the years we have translated each other's work many times; even more important, we have contributed to each other's thinking in formative ways. Thus it would be difficult to delineate exactly what in this book came from which of us, although the basic text is Natasha's work.

Of course, both of us have benefited immensely from the knowledge and the intellectual support of our colleagues. We would first like to acknowledge in particular Donald J. Raleigh, the editor of the M.E. Sharpe series on the New Russian History, who had the perception to recognize how valuable a survey of Russian women's history would be to the profession. Of our intellectual forebears, first place must go to Valentin Lavrentevich Ianin, who recognized the validity of our topic and our collaborative work at a time when few senior scholars did. In addition, the late Vladimir Terentevich Pashuto provided special inspiration. Irina Mikhailovna Pushkareva and Lev Nikitich Pushkarev, both noted historians in their own right, gave us, their Russian and American daughters, immeasurable help of every sort. Saul and Ruth Levin similarly provided for us both. Of the many, many colleagues and friends who have guided us, we would like to recognize particularly Jean-Pierre Arrignon, Iurii Bessmertnyi, Michael Berndt, Robin Bisha, Nada Boshkovska, Angela Brintlinger, Carsten Goehrke, Mikhail Dmitriev, Semeon Ekshtut, Clemens Heller, Manfred Hildermeier, David Hoffmann, Christiane Klapisch-Zuber, Igor Kon, Alexandra Korros, Sandra Levy, Predrag Matejić, Carolyn Pouncy, Ninel Polishchuk, Ernst Schubert, Jutte Scherrer, Grigorii Tishkin, Valerii Tishkov, Isolde Thyret, Irina Vlasova, Wladimir Vodoff, and Allan Wildman. At M.E. Sharpe, Patricia Kolb, Ana Erlić, and Elizabeth Granda helped us with the many essentials of preparing the manuscript for publication.

No less important to us in the preparation of this book was the support received from institutions. Grant moneys from the Interna-

tional Research and Exchanges Board (IREX), the Fulbright-Hays program of the Department of Education, the Center for Slavic and East European Studies at Ohio State University, and the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at Ohio State provided Eve with the financial means to travel to Russia. Natasha received research grants from the French government under the "Programme Diderot" to work at La Maison des Sciences de l'Homme in Paris, as well as Volkswagen and Humboldt grants to study in Germany at the Institut für Historische Landesforschung in Göttingen. The Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology in Moscow has been an institutional home for both of us, as have been the Resource Center for Medieval Slavic Studies/Hilandar Research Library and the Department of History at Ohio State University. Natasha gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the staff members at the Bibliothèque Nationale and the Bibliothèque d'Institute des Études Slaves in Paris, as well as the Staatsbibliothek in Göttingen. Eve made frequent and productive use of the facilities of the Summer Research Laboratory for Slavicists at the University of Illinois. We both benefited from the resources of several Russian archives: the Russian State Archive of Ancient Acts (RGADA) and the Manuscript Division of the Russian State Library (RGB) in Moscow; and the Manuscript Divisions of the Russian National Library (RO RNB) and the Russian Ethnographical Museum in St. Petersburg. We are grateful to Vladimir Dolmatov, editor-in-chief of *Rodina*, and to the editorial staffs of the publishing houses Izobrazitelnoe iskusstvo, Mysl, and Ladomir for permission to reproduce illustrations in this book.

Throughout the book, the Library of Congress system is used to transliterate Russian. For ease in reading, diacritical marks are omitted in the text. Russian personal names and common nouns that have become familiar in English with a spelling from a different transliteration system (e.g., Yeltsin) retain their familiar spelling. Dates in the text, except in the "Afterword," reflect the usage of the Old Calendar (Julian Calendar) that was used in Russia until 1917.

Moscow, January 1996

E.L.
N.P.

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Introduction

This book is about Russian women: how their intricate, multifaceted, dynamic history developed throughout a millennium. It concerns prominent Russian women, who are as renowned as male scholars and warriors for their role in public life; but also the hundreds of thousands of ordinary Russian women, wives and mothers, who made their own lives and their own history and who were the bearers and preservers of everyday customary life.

In thinking about the urgent issues concerning Russian women of today, many people seek answers in the events of the past. The topic of women has certainly occupied a place in the research of historians, jurists, ethnologists, sociologists, and economists. Nonetheless, even a quarter-century ago, women's studies as an independent scholarly discipline was unthinkable. Researchers were absorbed in building global models of society and conceptualizations of political history, and they were occupied with the study of class struggles and economic cataclysms. To them, it seemed that all events in world history were universal, part of a past that was common to everyone. They simply did not notice women.

But in the late 1960s and early 1970s, a revolution took place in the humanities—one that was not predicted, but was inescapable. It became clear that women had their own history and that the study of this history required special methods and understanding, and especially a broadening of historical vision. This impetus to examine the human past in a new way inspired dozens of researchers (and especially women researchers!) in the United States, England, France, Germany, Italy, and Scandinavia. Inquisitive readers soon had at their disposal a considerable number of interesting works that explored the history of women in Western Europe, America, Asia, and Africa

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throughout diverse periods, from classical antiquity to the present.[1] A number of scholars of women's history joined in a collaborative effort, founding an International Federation and compiling a six-volume work, which has been translated into a number of languages.[2]

But Russian women found hardly any place in the pages of this prestigious multivolume publication. At the same time that specialists on Western European women were founding their own association, Russianists had barely begun their investigation of the history of Russian women. For a long time, the ideological hostility between the Soviet Union and the West kept scholars isolated. They were cut off from essential sources, archives, and libraries on the specious grounds that they were "bourgeois falsifiers." Thus the first attempts by Western European and American scholars to reconstruct a history of Russian women were far from impartial. When they compared the history of women in Russia with that of their sisters in Western Europe, they often could not manage to break with ideological stereotypes. Contrary to all logic, they strove to present only the negative side, contrasting the downtrodden, ignorant, and passive Russian woman with her contemporaries in England, France, Italy, and Germany.[3]

Meanwhile, the Russian colleagues of Western scholars tried to avoid the topic of women entirely. They were reluctant to take up subjects that the official ideology did not endorse. Women, who did not constitute a "class," were automatically deemed marginal to any scholarly problem. Those Soviet scholars who decided nonetheless to investigate the history of women were obliged to subscribe to Friedrich Engels's conception of the topic and make their conclusions conform accordingly. Engels had propounded a "universal historical subjugation of the female sex," coinciding with the appearance of private property, with the result that "all women were spiritually oppressed and disfigured."[4] The more difficult it became to provide for the daily needs of contemporary Russian women, the more important it became, apparently, to prove that in the past things were even worse.

But despite the obstacles, each year the number of scholars of Russian women's history, both Soviet and foreign, increased. Each newly discovered source; every new attempt at comparative analysis of the family, custom, and daily life; and every attempt to provide a human dimension to the panoramic political and economic interpretation of the Russian past brought Soviet and foreign scholars into contact. Gradually scholars of women's history freed themselves from

the ideological bonds that impaired the development of an impartial picture of the history of Eastern Europe. In this new intellectual context, it was evident that women frequently played decisive roles in Russian history.[5]

This book is the result of many years of reflection about the status of women in Russia, and the first attempt to describe the full millennium of their history. In keeping with the traditional chronological categories, each of the four chapters of the book focuses on one era, describing the typical characteristics of women's place in that period. Each period reveals some continuation from the past, and also some departure from it.

The goal of this book is to present a comprehensive and multifaceted picture of the life of women in Kievan Rus, Muscovy, and Imperial Russia. But because Russia has always been an immense country, it is not possible, in the context of a survey, to provide equal treatment of all the regional variations. Thus the primary focus of the narrative is on the central core of Russia, with occasional attention to the variations found in the peripheries. Russia was also, from its inception, a multinational state, and each of these peoples had unique traditions concerning women's place in society. But coverage of these other peoples, so deserving of their own women's history, will have to await a different book. It is sufficient here to focus on Russian women and to counter the notorious assertion of the eternal subjugation of women in Russia that still afflicts much of the historiography.

This study rests upon a great variety of sources. Some of them have been published and are widely known, but they have not previously been examined from the point of view of women's history. Others, preserved in Russian archives, have been discovered only recently and are being discussed for the first time here. Among the most important historical sources are chronicles, travelers' accounts, hagiography, memoirs, and literary texts. Without them, it would be impossible to reconstruct the biographies of the prominent women who played roles in political and cultural life. Other sources must be used to reconstruct familial and quotidian life for women of different social strata: historical ethnography, archeological finds, descriptions of weddings, oral poetry, and normative and didactic literature produced by the church, in particular penitential manuals and prayer books. The legal status of women may be elucidated from the period of the formation of the first Russian state to the twentieth century through such law codes as *Russkaia Pravda* (of the eleventh century) and the complete codifications of the laws of the Russian Empire in

the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Numerous private legal documents dealing with property and lawsuits testify to women's empowerment in the judicial process. All these sources help to establish both the ideal and the reality, the norms and the actuality of life. Finally, iconography and portraiture yield information on how the shadowy women from the past looked and what image they conveyed through their choices of costume.

The history of women is a rewarding topic, one that provides new insights into the past. It combines the narrative history of politics and diplomacy with the history of economics and law, culture, religion, demography, and social psychology. It allows an infinitely more profound understanding of the literary, artistic, and cultural heritage that has come down to us from past generations.

Chapter 1

Warriors, Regents, and Scholars: The Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries

Princesses in Their Own Right

Ten centuries ago, an enormous Slavic state, called Rus, arose in Eastern Europe. It stretched from the Black Sea to the Arctic Ocean, and from the Danube to the Volga and the Ural Mountains. Scholars debate the ethnic origin of these Rus or Ros; some believe they were Scandinavian, while others are convinced that they were Slavic. These Rus dwelt among an ethnically mixed population of Slavs, Balts, Finns, steppe nomads, Greeks, and Jews. Yet when the first Russian state emerged in the tenth century, it was unambiguously Slavic and quite distinct from the other nascent Slavic states emerging in Poland, Bulgaria, and Moravia.

The history of this Russian state, recorded in chronicles and folklore, in Scandinavian sagas and Polovtsian songs, in the writings of Byzantine annalists and Arab travelers, contains the names of many prominent figures, including a number of women.[1] But unlike the history of early medieval Western Europe, which is rich in detailed accounts of the lives of great queens and sage women rulers, medieval Russian history does not abound in analogous figures. Russian literary and folkloric sources usually refer to women as insignificant, secondary figures.

But were women in reality so insignificant, or were they simply ignored by the men who controlled the writing of history in that period, who stressed events in accordance with their own understanding of the world? However truthful and judicious the chroniclers were

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in their treatment of their women contemporaries, they invariably relegated women, if not to oblivion, at least to last place. Did they secretly wish to consign them to the role of silent, barely visible nonentities?

Only by compiling testimony from a variety of narrative sources, both secular and ecclesiastical, contemporary and retrospective, is it possible to reconstruct an accurate picture of women's participation in the historical dramas of the Kievan period. Some women have left only a few traces in the record, while of others, primarily rich and aristocratic women, a much fuller portrait can be drawn. The latter include women rulers of the principalities of Rus, as well as the foreign brides of Russian princes and Russian princesses who contracted marriages abroad. The noted Russian historian N.M. Karamzin (1766–1826) assembled his original "Gallery of Famous Russian Women" from among them, "depicting each face with the lively coloration of love for the female sex and for the Fatherland."[2]

The most impressive figure in the history of early medieval Russia is Grand Princess Olga, who ruled the Russian state from 945 to 964. Because of her sagacity in uniting the Russian lands and her introduction of Christianity to Rus, her descendants called her a "wise woman," and she is numbered among the saints of the Russian Orthodox Church.

It is difficult to establish the circumstances of Olga's birth and childhood, even through a meticulous reading of the sources. One of the legends composed many centuries later describes her as a peasant maiden, whose beauty and sharp mind prompted Igor, the ruling prince of Kiev, to propose marriage. The chronicle account of Olga's origins and her accession to the throne has little in common with this artless folktale. It is much more likely that Olga came from an aristocratic family of Pskov and that she married Igor sometime between 903 and 927.

As a woman of the upper aristocracy, Olga possessed the political experience to take the reins of power after the death of her husband in 945. Olga ruled the country for twenty years as regent for her underage son Sviatoslav, her single, closely guarded child. She earned fame throughout the known world for her efforts to build and enrich the Russian land.

Olga undertook the first reform of financial administration in Russian history. She was motivated to do so because of a personal tragedy: in 945 her husband, Igor, was killed during an attempt to collect tribute a second time from the Drevlians, a tribe subject to

Kiev. Having wreaked vengeance on those guilty of Igor's murder, Olga was able to overcome her personal grief. Unlike previous Russian rulers, who collected revenues from subject peoples through seizure and pillage, Olga ordered the establishment of a fixed tribute. She arranged for an orderly collection of taxes at specified intervals. The author of the Grand Princess's vita, which was composed many years after her death, was astonished and delighted by the talent of the "builder of the Russian land" and her striving to grasp thoroughly every aspect of governmental affairs. In his words, "she herself traveled throughout the Russian land, establishing the amount of tribute; like the mistress of a great household, she answered for everyone and everything."[3]

By strengthening the financial bases for her princely power early in her reign—that is, in the 940s—Olga was able to fortify the administrative apparatus and broaden the areas under princely rule, defining their boundaries. And in founding her powerful state, Olga relied not upon force but rather upon her intelligence.

However, this new system of governance required a new ideology. Princess Olga understood that the transformation of her country could be achieved only through the conversion of Rus to Christianity. Having weighed her powers and evaluated the possibilities, the princess decided to accept baptism from Russia's neighbor, the Byzantine Empire. Her baptism in the Byzantine capital of Constantinople strengthened the princess's personal power and enhanced Russia's international prestige.

Olga's journey to Constantinople (which the early Russians called "Tsargrad," the "Emperor-City") in the 950s has been embellished by legend, like so many other events of her life. The Byzantine emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus personally received the "hegemona and archonissa of the Rus," as Byzantine chronicles titled Olga.

The compiler of the Russian Primary Chronicle, parts of which date from the eleventh century, propagated a legend about the circumstances of Olga's baptism. Supposedly, the emperor hoped to wed the Russian princess, although she was "much past thirty" and he was already married. But Olga was proud and independent, and single-minded in her pursuit of her goals. She asked the emperor to stand as her godfather at her baptism, and then responded to his marriage proposal, "How can you desire to marry me, when you have just baptized me and called me your daughter?"—for Orthodox canons forbid marriages among spiritual relatives.

Thus the legend presents Olga's baptism as a clever device to es-

cape from the emperor's proposition. In actuality, everything was much more straightforward. Olga undertook the journey to Constantinople for reasons of state. After receiving baptism, she hoped to arrange a marriage for her son to one of the princesses of the Byzantine imperial family, but did not succeed.

Even so, the journey to Byzantium was fruitful. After the administrative reform, this was Olga's second success as ruler of the Russian state. The princess discussed diplomatic and commercial issues in the Byzantine Empire and received generous gifts. She was elevated to the honorary rank of "daughter" to the Byzantine emperor, to whom she promised military aid in case of need. The sixteenth-century Radziwill Chronicle contains a miniature of the signing of the treaties, depicting Olga and Constantine Porphyrogenitus sitting together on the same level, emphasizing their equality.

Having blazed a trail for Russia's entry into the ranks of Christian states, Olga sent an embassy to Holy Roman Emperor Otto I in 959. She also gave her consent for German missionaries to preach among the Rus. Although these missionaries did not enjoy much success, Olga's initiative opened Russia's first "window on the West."

During the last years of her life, Olga once again assumed the functions of head of state while her son Sviatoslav went off to war. In 968 it fell to her to organize the defense of Kiev from a sudden attack by steppe nomads. The chronicle notes that Sviatoslav showed his mother exceptional respect and returned from his campaign in order to be with her in her final hours.[4]

Olga's fame and accomplishments survived her. No later chroniclers and historians doubted the significance of her reforms. At a time when war was the primary means of resolving international disputes, the first Russian princess demonstrated that prestige could and should be earned peacefully, through diplomatic means. However, while granting Olga her due, these same historians regarded her as atypical of Russia, where otherwise heroes were exclusively male.

But in fact Olga was not unique, as careful scrutiny of the sources attests. The chronicle account of the legendary founding of the Russian state in the eighth century names not only Kii, Shchek, and Khoriv as the first Russian princes, but also their sister, Lybed. A reference to her is preserved in the name of a small river near Kiev, and she also appears as a character in Russian and Armenian epic poetry. However, early Russian chroniclers suppressed accounts of Lybed's activities, considering them paltry in comparison with Olga's achievements.

Grand Princess Olga visits with the Byzantine Emperor in Constantinople. Miniature from the Radziwill Chronicle, fifteenth century.

Two decades after Olga's death—that is, in the late tenth century, another prominent woman appeared on the Russian throne. This was Princess Anna, the wife of Grand Prince Vladimir (980–1015), who baptized Russia. Anna was the granddaughter of the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII, and Vladimir was Olga's grandson; thus the marital alliance of the Byzantine and Kievan monarchies, for which Olga had striven in the 950s, was accomplished a quarter-century later. Not even Vladimir's great reputation—he is called the "Red Sun" in folk epics—could eclipse Anna's participation in governmental affairs.

As a Byzantine *porphyrogenita*—a princess "born to the purple," the daughter of a reigning emperor—Anna received an excellent education. Scholars of classical learning—historians, hagiographers, linguists, and jurists—filled the court of her father and grandfather. As the wife of the grand prince of Russia, she was competent to receive foreign embassies, for example, ambassadors from Germany who came to Kiev in 989–90. Acting at the behest of Byzantine clergy, Anna contributed to the promulgation of the "Charter of Prince Vladimir," which granted immunities to the Russian Orthodox Church.

It was common in the eleventh to fourteenth centuries for princesses to be involved in legislation and governance alongside their husbands. For example, the "Charter of Prince Vsevolod of Novgorod Concerning Church Courts" lists "Vsevolod's princess" among other influential city administrators in the preamble.[5] The number of women lawmakers, akin to Anna and Vsevolod's wife, grew substantially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, when the Russian state dissolved into numerous autonomous principalities.

But earlier, in the first half of the eleventh century, the Russian state was united and at the height of its power under the rule of Olga's great-grandson, Iaroslav, called "the Wise." During his reign, Kiev became a major cultural center. The rulers of many Western European countries sought to ally themselves with Russia through marriage with one or another of Iaroslav's daughters: Anastasia, Anna, Elizabeth, and a fourth, whose name is not preserved in the sources. Iaroslav and his wife Ingegerd (baptismal name: Irina), the daughter of King Olav of Norway, raised their daughters in an atmosphere of learning, surrounded by books. They were educated at home, but very rigorously, learning writing, mathematics, astronomy, and Latin, then the lingua franca of Europe.

Three daughters of Iaroslav and Ingegerd married into the ruling houses of powerful European states, where they could put their knowledge to good use. Anastasia, the eldest daughter, became the bride of King Andrew I of Hungary, where she became a fervent advocate of Hungarian unity. In widowhood, she ruled Hungary as regent, founding a number of Orthodox monasteries. Her sister Elizabeth (Elisava) married the Norwegian prince Harald Hardrada. Scandinavian sagas report Harald's countless expeditions in Sicily, Africa, Asia Minor, and Salonika. Having gained much fame and fortune, Harald convinced Elizabeth to marry him, or as the Scandinavian chronicle *Hauksbók* put it, "the Russian maiden with the golden necklace stopped holding him in disdain." Neither Russian

nor Western chronicles report anything about the princess's life in Norway. It is known only that she did not return to Russia after Harald's death in 1066 but instead agreed to marry the ruler of Denmark.

The third daughter of Iaroslav the Wise left the greatest mark on European history. Anna became the wife of King Henry I of France, who, according to the chronicler, "was enchanted by tales of her accomplishments." In May 1051 the bridal cortège arrived in Paris. Anna was unimpressed with Paris, then a tiny city with muddy streets; it could not compare with Kiev, which styled itself the rival of Constantinople. "What sort of barbaric country have you sent me to!" Anna complained in a letter to her father. "The dwellings here are dark, the churches misshapen, and the customs appalling!" Anna's dark mood worsened when, despite the birth of her son Philip, her husband became more and more distant; he preferred the company of comely troubadours.

The more Henry withdrew from governmental affairs, the more Anna threw herself into them, aided by her intelligence, energy, and undisputed administrative ability. The most important state documents of the 1050s often bear her signature, "Anna Regina," written in neat Cyrillic letters. Underneath are crosses inscribed by illiterate French courtiers. Anna could express herself easily in Latin—a skill, according to contemporaries, that disquieted some French aristocrats. It was in Latin that Pope Nicholas II wrote to Anna, praising her for "fulfilling royal duties with enviable fervor and remarkable intelligence."

After the death of Henry I in 1060, Anna settled at Senlis, a small castle north of Paris. From that point her life took on the character of a courtly romance. While walking in the forest, a pastime, a French chronicler observed, "for which she had great liking," she met Count Raoul de Crépy de Valois, a descendant of Charlemagne. The count fell head over heels in love with Anna, and in 1062 he abducted her from the fortress of Senlis. The local priest of the church on the count's estate wed them, but under duress, because Raoul was still married to someone else at the time. Raoul's wife Alionor sent a complaint to Pope Alexander II, and incensed at Raoul's bigamy, he invalidated the marriage to Anna. But the lovers defied the pope's command and continued to live together happily.

Anna's son Philip, who in the meantime had inherited the throne, did not find anything scandalous in his mother's actions. His relationship with her remained friendly, and he harbored no resentment

against his "stepfather." Anna and Raoul accompanied Philip on his travels around the country, and Anna provided him with intelligent and farseeing advice on governmental matters. French documents of the second half of the eleventh century, such as charters to monasteries, land deals, and juridical acts, testify to Anna's continuing administrative role.

Raoul de Crépy died in 1074, and Anna immersed herself in governmental affairs. She returned to court and even, according to Western chroniclers, traveled to Kiev. But Russian sources make no mention of such a visit; doubtless she stayed only for a short time and then returned to France, where she had spent most of her tumultuous life.[6]

Anna's successful career in France is not exceptional against the background of the many politically active women of the Russian royal house in the eleventh to thirteenth centuries. Shortly before the marriage of Anna to the king of France, her aunt, Maria-Dobronega, became the wife of King Casimir of Poland. She ruled with her sons in the 1030s and 1040s. Two of Anna's nieces became rulers and successful diplomats: Evpraksia and another Anna—often called by her family nickname, Ianka—the daughters of Iaroslav's son Vsevolod.

Evpraksia married the Holy Roman emperor Henry IV in the 1090s, taking the German name Adelheid. Later German historians did not mince words in their insinuations about Evpraksia; they denounced her as "immoral" and "dissolute" (*"proprio marita prostituta est"*), because she refused to play the part of political puppet. At the crucial moment in the ongoing political battle between Henry IV and Pope Urban II over the appointment of German bishops, Evpraksia decided to side with her husband's opponents. In doing so, she served the interests of her native Russia, which had broken off relations with Henry at the behest of the Byzantine Empire. At the same time, Evpraksia filed a complaint against her husband with the church synod of Piancenza. Her revelations about their family life, in particular her husband's immoral conduct and secret orgies, were very damaging to him politically. She achieved her ends: Henry was condemned by an imperial court and was removed from the throne to die in ignominy. But Evpraksia committed political suicide through her revelations, because of her insubordination to her husband. Rumors of Evpraksia's performance at the synod reached Russia, where she not only received no support for her audacity but was also condemned by Orthodox clergy. Forced to flee Germany,

Evpraksia hurried to her aunt Anastasia in Hungary and from there to Kiev. There she tried to remain inconspicuous; she took vows as a nun and lived out her days in a convent under the religious name of Anna.

In 1089, when Evpraksia was being crowned empress in Germany, Anna-Ianka was leading an embassy to Byzantium, much like her ancestress Olga. The purpose of the trip was to arrange the selection of a new metropolitan of Russia. After her return from Constantinople, a center of culture and education, Ianka was inspired to found a monastery for women (named Ianchinii—"Ianka's" in her honor) and the first school for girls in medieval Russia. At the school, she decided the requirements, the preceptresses, and the teachers. Students studied "writing, needlework, and other useful crafts," including rhetoric and singing.[7]

The traditions of female education in Byzantium, which Russia adopted through its close contacts, bore fruit in the spread of literacy among Russian women. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, monastic schools for girls became common. Their founders were, as a rule, women from the Kievan aristocracy or abbesses. Hagiographical sources indicate that women of the clerical order, in particular, enjoyed a comparatively high level of literacy. Many princesses, having taken monastic vows, recopied ecclesiastical manuscripts and compiled texts for the *Prolog*, a collection of didactic readings for each day of the year. The daughter of Prince Sviatoslav of Polotsk, Predslava (d. 1173 and canonized as St. Evfrosinia of Polotsk), not only "wrote books with her own hands," she also taught her sisters Gorodislava and Zvenislava to do so at her monastery.

At home, the daughters of princes were educated the same way as their brothers, in grammar, mathematics, philosophy, the healing arts, astronomy, rhetoric, and foreign languages (particularly Greek and Latin). Instruction began at an early age and continued through the study of the classics in Greek. According to the vita of St. Evfrosinia of Suzdal, she studied the philosophical works of Aristotle and Plato, the medical manuals of Galen and Aesculapius, and the poetry of Vergil and Homer. Many wealthy women, and not only the very educated, possessed their own home libraries, consisting of several volumes. Before the introduction of printing into Russia in 1564, books were rare and represented a substantial investment.

The chronicles record the names of the most educated princesses, who impressed their contemporaries with their knowledge. These included Princess Olga Romanovna of Volynia, who "devoured book

learning to the limit"; the wife of Prince Roman Rostislavich of Smolensk (whose given name is not provided); Evfrosinia (Predslava) of Polotsk; and Evfrosinia of Suzdal, among others.[8]

One of these erudite princesses, Dobrodeia-Evpraksia (baptismal name: Zoia), was born in Kiev at the beginning of the twelfth century. She was the daughter of Grand Prince Mstislav Vladimirovich and Christine of Sweden and the granddaughter of the powerful Grand Prince Vladimir Monomakh. "She was not born in Athens, but she learned all the wisdom of the Greeks," contemporaries said of Dobrodeia.

In 1122, Dobrodeia married the nephew of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus. Immediately after the wedding feast, the young bride set out for Constantinople, where a whole circle of intellectual women awaited her: Princess Anna Comnena, the famous historian, and the noblewoman Irina, the patroness of scholars and astrologers. Anna Comnena and Irina encouraged Dobrodeia to develop her talents. Her particular area of interest became medicine, especially herbal treatments. The Byzantine writer Balsamon noted that the Russian princess "displayed a fascination with healing methods" from her first arrival in Constantinople, and that she formulated medicinal salves and described their efficacy. She knew the works of the ancient physician Galen well, and she subsequently translated some of his works into Russian. Dobrodeia summarized her knowledge and practical experience in a long treatise entitled "Ointments" (*Alimma*). This work of medicine, the first of its sort by a woman author, survives in fragments in the Medici Library in Florence.[9]

Dobrodeia's sisters—Malfrid, the wife of the king of Norway, Ingeborg, the wife of the king of Denmark, and Evfrosinia, the wife of the king of Hungary—also gained renown for their intellects. The first two are mentioned in the "History of the Kings of Denmark" (the *Knutlingasaga* of the thirteenth century) as active rulers who spoke fluent Latin and a variety of other European languages and who advised their husbands on political and cultural affairs. Evfrosinia, the ambitious wife of King Geza II of Hungary, devoted all her energies and talents to strengthening the ties between Hungary and her native Russia. In complicated internal and external conflicts, Evfrosinia often showed herself to be more sagacious and farsighted than her husband, who valued and respected her opinion. After the death of Geza, Evfrosinia became regent, resolving all matters of state independently. Defending her rights to the Hungarian throne, Evfrosinia emerged as an advocate of political unity in her adopted country.

But the adherents of Evfrosinia and her son, the young King Istvan III, proved weaker than their opponents, the pro-Byzantine faction, backed by the armies of Emperor Manuel. Recognizing that they could not defend their throne, Evfrosinia and her son fled to Austria. In the meantime, a revolt took place in Hungary, bringing Evfrosinia's second son, Bela III, to the throne. Bela recognized that his mother's ambitions could be extinguished only through confinement in a convent; he ordered her arrest. Evfrosinia was kept under close guard for a short time in the fortress of Branichev and was then shipped off to Byzantium, where she was forcibly shorn as a nun.[10]

While Evfrosinia was devoting all her efforts toward the preservation of Hungarian unity, her native Russia was being torn apart by internecine war. By the mid-twelfth century, the once-united medieval Russian state had dissolved into a multitude of petty principalities. Princesses and noblewomen participated in the political life of each of these states, and even to all intents and purposes ruled them.

The conditions in western Rus in the early twelfth century were particularly fortuitous for the development of women's rule. In 1129, all the men of the princely house of Polotsk were taken captive by the rival prince of Kiev, Mstislav, the father of Dobrodeia, Malfrid, Ingeborg, and Evfrosinia. Mstislav not only deprived the princes of Polotsk of their throne but also exiled them to Byzantium. The princesses of Polotsk filled the power vacuum left by their absent menfolk, and for almost twenty years the city was ruled by a "matriarchy." Archeological digs in Polotsk and the nearby vassal town of Kukeinos have yielded three seals belonging to women: Princess Sofia, the wife of Prince Sviatoslav-Georgii; her daughter Predslava; and a third, unidentified woman.[11] Predslava had taken monastic vows (under the name Evfrosinia, as discussed above) before the political crisis arose, but her status as a nun did not prevent her participation in governmental affairs.

The existence of seals, which represented administrative power in Russia, are the most irrefutable evidence of women's participation in governance. The seals, cast in lead or cut in stone, were usually inscribed only with the name of the owner, but sometimes also a pictorial design. They were used, like signatures, to validate official documents. Only prominent and respected individuals, high officials in city or princely administration, had the right to seals. It was not only princesses of Polotsk who possessed seals and their concomitant administrative functions, but many other Russian princesses as well.

Medieval Russian princesses and noblewomen not only served as