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IVÁN QUESADA MAYO, *Los varegos y la Rus de Kiev en el siglo X* [*The Varagians and the Kievan Rus' in the 10th Century*], Ediciones de La Ergástula, Madrid 2018 [= *Sine qua non. Monografías de Historia Medieval*, 3], pp. 150.

A small monograph by Iván Quesada Mayo, a representative of the youngest generation of researchers (born in 1992) and a graduate of historical studies from the Complutense University of Madrid (Universidad Complutense de Madrid, UCM) is an example of the interest displayed by Spanish historians and medievalists in the history and culture of the Byzantine Empire and South-East Europe in the Middle Ages. The book was published last year as part of the *Sine qua non. Monografías de Historia Medieval* series, which was initiated and supervised by Carlos de Ayala Martínez, a researcher in the Department of Medieval History at the Autonomous University of Madrid (Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, UAM).

Iván Quesada Mayo's research interests include the formation of the Old Rus' state in the 10th century and the role of the Scandinavians (Varangians) in that process. Simultaneously, he tries to lay out the history of Rus' in the period of his interest against the relatively wide background of the history of South-East Europe, illustrating the relationships between the young Rurik dynasty and states such as Byzantium, Bulgaria, and Khazar Khaganate. His reflections, however, typically take the shape of a synthetic recapitulation of the views that have been previously discussed in historiography rather than a fully original take of the historical processes based on a new reading of the sources.

The monograph is comprised of four chapters that present the material in chronological order. In the first chapter, entitled *Vikings in Rus' (Los vikingos en Rusia)*, the author overviews the genesis of the presence of Scandinavians

in the territory of East Europe, frequently going beyond the timeframe assumed in the work and making references to the events from the 7th–9th centuries. This chapter is rather non-homogenous in regard to the topics it covers. It explores consecutively: the results of archeological research conducted in Staraya Ladoga and Gnezdovo, among other places (surprisingly, not much attention is paid to Rurik Gorodishche located near Volkhov and the Lake Ilmen, south of Veliky Novgorod, which Władysław Duczko is prepared to view as none other than a Swedish settlement)¹. The chapter also analyzes the dispute between the supporters and opponents of the so-called "Norman theory" that has been conducted since the 18th century, attempts to explain the etymology of the term *Rus'*, and demonstrates the course of one of the first sieges of the Rus' on Constantinople in 860, confirmed in Byzantine sources.

Chapter two lays out the consolidation process of the young Rus' state (*La consolidación de la Rus de Kiev*). Iván Quesada Mayo discusses the rule of Prince Oleg (882–912), the first fully-historical ruler of Rus'. The author particularly elaborates on the war with Byzantium, which was concluded with a treaty in 911 (while omitting the previous strifes and settlements between Byzantium and Rus' from the first decade of the 10th century). For the Spanish medievalist, the contacts with the empire are also one of the most crucial aspects of Prince Igor's rule (912–945). However, the regency

¹ W. DUCZKO, *Ruś Wikingów. Historia obecności Skandynawów we wczesnośredniowiecznej Europie Wschodniej*, Warszawa 2007, p. 86–94.

rule of his widow, Olga, dated traditionally by the author to 945–964, was discussed in a rather brief manner. Naturally, Quesada Mayo considers her reign's peak moment to be the Princess' quest to the Bosphorous and her acceptance of Orthodox Christianity. When recapitulating the previous discussion on the subject, the author presents the source material in a relatively selective manner. He omits, for instance, the text by John Skylitzes (to whom he frequently makes references in the subsequent sections of his work)². Among the hagiographical texts, he only relates to the Comprehensive Life of St. Olga, which was included in *The Book of Degrees of the Royal Genealogy* from around 1560. *The Book of Degrees* concluded a centuries-long written tradition covering a number of previous, and, as such, much more reliable works from the point of view of historical research – e.g. Yacob the Monch's *Praise of Olga* from the 11th century³, the prologue lives from the 12–13th century⁴, and the accounts from Pskov⁵.

The extensive chapter three is devoted to the rule of Olga and Igor's son, Sviatoslav (964–972). It touches on the social changes that occurred in Rus' in the mid-10th century, but primarily it focuses on the territorial expansion of the Rurik dynasty at that time and the related wars waged by Sviatoslav, e.g. the quest against the Khazars between 965–968 that shattered their statehood. The author devotes undoubtedly the most attention to the wars waged by the Rus' prince in the Balkans between 968–971, which directly resulted in the liquidation of

the First Bulgarian State and the incorporation of its lands into the empire. This section, however, lacks an in-depth analysis of the Bulgarian-Byzantine relations in the second half of the 10th century and an overview of the root causes of the conflict. Iván Quesada Mayo repeats stereotypical claims established in old historiography about the rule of Tsar Peter I (927–969) that recognize the moment of his marriage to Maria-Irene Lekapene, the granddaughter of the Byzantine emperor Roman I, as the end of the autonomy of the Bulgarian state (p. 81). Today, this view tends to be rejected by researchers⁶.

The fourth and final chapter of the monograph reflects on – as the author puts it – “the final Christianization” of Rus' (*La definitiva cristianización*), which coincided with the rule of Prince Vladimir the Great. Interestingly, Iván Quesada Mayo concludes his narration with the events from 988–989, and not the death of the ruler (1015), thus, presenting the occurrences of the last decades of the 10th century in a succinct manner. As a result, he does not engage with one of the most vital – from the perspective of the title of the book – motifs of the Old Rus' culture of that period, that is, the Slavinization of the Varangian element in the state of Rurikids.

Finally, let us consider the source documents. The author uses native Old Rus' accounts, primarily *The Tale of Bygone Years* according to its oldest extant version *The Laurentian Chronicle* from 1377, consistently referring to it as *Texto Laurenciano*. He also makes references to the sources of Byzantine, West-European, and, which is noteworthy, even Arabic origin. The “great absentee” in Iván Quesada Mayo's analysis is *The Novgorod First Chronicle* – a text whose earliest part was most likely created around 1115 and can, therefore, be considered as one of the most ancient Old Rus' historiographical compilations. Contrary to the author's claim (p. 24), this source has been

² *Ioannes Scylitzae Synopsis historiarum*, 11, 6, ed. I. THURN, Berolini 1973 [= *CFHB*, 5], p. 240.

³ *Память и похвала князю Владимиру и его Житие по сп. 1494 г.*, ed. В.И. СРЕЗНЕВСКИЙ, ЗИАН.ИФО 1, 6, 1897, p. 4–5.

⁴ Б.С. АНГЕЛОВ, *Из старата българска, руска и сръбска литература*, vol. I, София 1958, p. 196–197.

⁵ Н.И. СЕРЕБРЯНСКИЙ, *Древнерусские княжеские жития. Обзор редакций и тексты*, vol. II, *Тексты*, Москва 1915, p. 8–12; *Псковская редакция Жития княгини Ольги*, [in:] А.Ю. КАРПОВ, *Княгиня Ольга*, Москва 2012, p. 357–361. The full text of all the aforementioned sources along with the subject literature have been included in the work: Z.A. BRZOZOWSKA, *Święta księżna kijowska Olga. Wybór tekstów źródełowych*, Łódź 2014, p. 44–60, 82–100.

⁶ Z.A. BRZOZOWSKA, M.J. LESZKA, *Maria Lekapene, Empress of the Bulgarians. Neither a Saint nor a Malefactress*, Łódź–Kraków 2017 [= BL, 36]; *The Bulgarian State in 927–969. The Epoch of Tsar Peter I*, ed. M.J. LESZKA, K. MARINOW, Łódź–Kraków 2018 [= BL, 34].

in print for a while now⁷. Not only has it been translated to English⁸, but it also contains a great deal of interesting information from the point of view of Iván Quesada Mayo's research area – for instance, the notion that the Novogrodian people come from the “Varangians” (суть новгородстни люде до днешняго дни от рода варяжска)⁹.

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⁷ A variant of the source that includes the description of the events from the 9th–10th centuries, so-called *The Novgorod First Chronicle* in an earlier redaction was published in: *Новгородская летопись по Синодальному харатейному списку*, ed. П.И. САВВАИТОВ, Санкт-Петербург 1888; *Новгородская первая летопись старшего и младшего изводов*, ed. А.Н. НАСОНОВ, М.Н. ТИХОМИРОВ, Москва–Ленинград 1950, p. 103–427. Moreover, it appears that on p. 24, Iván Quesada Mayo mistakenly applies the term *Crónica de Nóvgorod* to another text, *The Ioachim Chronicle*, referenced by Vasily N. Tatishchev in his synthesis of Russia's history but viewed as counterfeited by many contemporary researchers.

⁸ *The Chronicle of Novgorod 1016–1471*, trans. R. MICHELL, N. FORBES, ed. C. RAYMOND BEAZLEY, A.A. ШАХНМАТОВ, London 1914 (= New York 1970). The translation includes the older variant of the chronicle, starting with the description of the events from the year 1015/1016.

⁹ *Новгородская первая летопись...*, p. 106. Cf. А.Е. МУСИН, „Род русский”, „род варяжский”, „род прусский”: миграции и историческая память как факторы политогенеза, [in:] *Восточная Европа в древности и средневековье. Миграции, расселения, война как факторы политогенеза*, ed. Е.А. Мельникова, Москва 2012, p. 192–197.

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