

*East Central & Eastern Europe
in the Early Middle Ages*

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IN THE
Early Middle Ages

FLORIN CURTA
Editor

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In memory of Lucian Roșu

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Preface

This book developed out of three sessions organized for the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo in 2000 and 2001. Several articles published here (Henning, Urbańczyk, Buko, Shepard, and Font) are expanded versions of the papers presented in Kalamazoo. Others (Kovalev, Barford, Petrov, Madgearu, and Stepanov) were later solicited by the editor for this publication.

The volume examines specific aspects of the early medieval history of Eastern Europe—with particular reference to society, state, and conversion to Christianity—and the diverse ways in which these aspects have been approached in the historiography of the region. Many previous studies have described developments in Eastern Europe as replicas of those known from Western Europe or as reactions to military and political encroachments from that same direction. This volume reconsiders such views and attempts to demonstrate that the processes of social integration, state formation, and conversion to Christianity were gradual and complex, displaying many specific variations at the regional and local level. A considerable amount of data is now available, and old questions can now be rephrased in the light of the new evidence. What forms of social organization existed in different regions of Eastern Europe in the early Middle Ages, and how different in that respect was Eastern from Western Europe? What were the implications of the contacts established with the world of the steppes or with early states founded by nomads in present-day Hungary (Avars) or Bulgaria (Bulgars)? How is the process of state formation reflected in the surviving material and documentary evidence? Above all, this volume's aim is to open up an interdisciplinary and comparative dialogue in the study of early medieval Europe, and the included chapters examine the documentary and archaeological evidence in an attempt to assess the relative importance of each in understanding the construction of cultural identity and the process of political mobilization responsible for the rise of states.

This collection of essays should also be viewed as an effort to provide a more theoretically sophisticated account of the early medieval history of Eastern Europe and to bring its study up to date in terms of developments in the regional schools of archaeology and history. The approach taken in this volume is both broader and more rigorously contextual than has been the case with previous English-language studies of the medieval history of this area.

Various authors seek to throw a new light on internal processes of economic and social differentiation, while at the same time moving on from the rigid model of Marxist inspiration, which has prevailed in the historiography of the region for the last five or six decades. A number of chapters demonstrate that the role of individuals, particularly in cases of early state formation, needs drastic reconsideration, while political goals of individual rulers, which have been the object of much discussion in earlier studies of conversion to Christianity, should be approached comparatively at a macroregional scale. The volume also emphasizes the building and rebuilding of local and regional identities and affinities, many of which point to both eastern and western regions of the European continent. What were the reasons for these cultural and political affinities? Are such connections just a construct of historiography, or do they reflect real differences in political choices? How do such developments differ from similar and contemporary developments in the West?

Although each contributor to this volume was allowed some freedom to develop his or her essay in a unique manner, each was asked to address at least some of the previously mentioned questions. Much greater efforts were made to bring uniformity to the spelling in proper names and transliteration of cited references. The preferred form of transliteration is a modified version of the Library of Congress system, but place-names, especially in the case of archaeological sites, generally follow the language in use today in a given area. The only exceptions are commonly accepted English equivalents, such as *Kiev* instead of *Kyïv*, *Cracow* instead of *Krakow*, or *Prague* instead of *Praha*. This is also true for such general terms as *qagan* (instead of *qağan*, *khagan*, *kagan*, and the like) and for such names as *Boleslav the Brave* (instead of *Boleslaw Chrobry*, although the Polish epithet is sometimes used separately), *Cyril* (instead of *Kiril*), *Vladimir* (instead of *Volodymyr* or *Włodzimierz*), and *Stephen* (instead of *István*).

I am grateful to the Medieval Institute at the University of Notre Dame for a Mellon Fellowship in 2003/4 that allowed me to concentrate my efforts on finalizing this work and to the Medieval Institute at Western Michigan University, the organizer of the International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, for its continuous support of congress sessions dedicated to medieval Eastern Europe. I would like to express special appreciation to Maria Todorova, János Bak, Piotr Górecki, and the anonymous readers, for their comments, suggestions, and corrections. My thanks are also due to the staff of the University of Michigan Press for their support and cooperation.

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