

Mapping Marriage: Kyivan Rus' in Europe
A component of the Harvard Ukrainian Institute's Mapa Project
by Christian Raffensperger

When Rabbi Petachiah of Regensburg wrote a travelogue of his journey from the German Empire to the Middle East in the second half of the twelfth century, he dismissed the European portion of his journey in the course of just one sentence. He traveled

from Prague, which is in Bohemia, to Poland, and from Poland to Kiev [Kyiv], which is in Russia [Rus'], then he journeyed six days on the Dnieper and on the other side of the Dnieper he cut across the lands of Kedar [the nomads].

It was only after crossing the Dnieper and the lands of the nomads, most likely Cumans (also known as Polovtsy and Qipchaks), that his journey really began, as shown by the immediate expansion of his narrative. For Rabbi Petachiah, the journey from the German Empire to Bohemia, Poland, and Rus' was part of his known world and thus required only brief description. The same was certainly true of the many medieval chroniclers whose stories about their particular purview all seemed to include some portion of the Slavic world. However, when modern historians have written the history of eastern Europe, they have separated it from the rest of medieval Europe, anachronistically adding boundaries that did not exist at the time. This has created a "medieval Europe" which stretches from the Atlantic to the Rhine, which is the commonplace, often unstated definition of that term. In reaction to this, some scholars have worked to create a narrative of a medieval Central Europe, in an attempt to integrate Poland, Hungary, and Bohemia into this normative picture of "medieval Europe." This definition, however, still leaves out Rus', the lone inhabitant of a medieval eastern Europe, ostracized by modern medieval historians, and given a special place of "exceptionalism" in regard to Eastern

European scholars.¹ This digital humanities project is part of a larger attempt to shift the perceptions of modern scholars to include Rus' in the wider narrative of medieval Europe, and to create a picture of the medieval European world that fits the evidence from the primary sources — one that stretches from the Atlantic in the west to the Dnieper River in the East and beyond.

One of the chief ways to counter these anachronistic impressions of the place of Rus' in medieval Europe is by looking at the connectivity between Rus' and the rest of Europe — and one of the richest sources of data is in the arena of dynastic marriage. The ruling family of Rus', the Volodimerovichi (also known as the Riurikids), had marital connections with the ruling families of most of medieval Europe. These connections have been known for some time, but have often been dismissed due to a lack of emphasis on women and their importance in medieval history.² It was those Russian women who married out to places as diverse as the the German Empire, France, Hungary, and Denmark; including them in the data expands the modern picture of Russian connections with the rest of Europe and gives us a more complete way to look at Russian influence and impact on medieval Europe.³ The initial analysis of the data presented here was based upon a traditional, textual, discussion of family ties. That portion appears in print as *Ties of Kinship: Russian Genealogy and Dynastic Marriage*,⁴ but there is also a digital humanities component available online at genealogy.obdurodon.org. Despite the twenty-two charts found in *Ties of Kinship*, the vast interconnectedness of the Volodimerovichi with the rest of Europe is not immediately discernible. In *Reimagining Europe* I state that “of fifty-two known dynastic marriages that took place over the course of nearly two hundred years, 77 percent of them [were]

¹ More on this divide in scholarship can be found in my “The Place of Rus' in Medieval Europe” *History Compass* 12, no. 11 (November 2014): 853–65.

² For a discussion of this issue, see Christian Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe: Kievan Rus' in the Medieval World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), ch. 2.

³ For instance, in my *Ties of Kinship: Russian Genealogy and Dynastic Marriage* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, forthcoming), of the fifty-seven total marriages examined in detail, twenty-one of them are focused on a Russian woman.

⁴ See note 3.

with countries to the west of Rus’.”⁵ Such a phrase might impress upon the reader that the vast majority of marriages were not within Rus’ or with Byzantium, one of the points of the argument, but it does not have the same impact as the opening image of all of those marriages projected on a map of Europe, as is done by the Mapa project (see figure 1).



Figure 1: All marriages included in the Mapa: Rus’ Genealogy Project

Thanks to this image, one can immediately see the plethora of marriages the Volodimerovichi made throughout Europe. It also shows that there are a great many marriages within Rus’, but the

⁵ Raffensperger, *Reimagining Europe*, 47.

breadth of the marriages is also displayed. At a glance, a new picture of Rusian interconnectivity with medieval Europe is created.

This dramatic image of a Rus' that is deeply interconnected with medieval Europe is the most important contribution of the Mapa: Rus' Genealogy Project. It counteracts the traditional pictures of Rus' to show in a highly transparent and data-driven model (more on both topics below) that the Volodimerovichi were one among many medieval European royal families who were deeply involved in making dynastic marriages with one another to advance the interests of themselves, their families, and their kingdoms. Such an image of Rus' is important not just for medieval historians who are striving to present as accurate an image of the past as possible, but for modern peoples in general. History has a tendency to be used by modern people as a tool to express ideas about the present.⁶ For Eastern Europe, especially for the nations that have gained their independence after the fall of the Soviet Union, there has been a blossoming of study of their histories as a way to reinforce their independent statehood. The picture of Rus' offered here as part and parcel of medieval Europe helps to create a new image of the medieval histories of the same areas occupied by some of these newly independent states. The work is not done with a nationalist bias, but is based on in-depth research of the primary sources. The picture created is an accurate one and will help historians demonstrate that the medieval European world did not stop east of the Rhine River, and will also help those who simply want to demonstrate that Europe once stretched to the Dnieper River and beyond, and thus there is no reason it cannot do so again.

⁶ Many authors have written on this topic. The most well-known is Patrick J. Geary, whose *The Myth of Nations: The Medieval Origins of Europe* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002) is highly accessible. For the Slavic world, Serhii Plokhy addresses some of these questions in his *The Origins of the Slavic Nations: Premodern Identities in Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006) as well as elsewhere.

Questions and Answers about the Mapa: Rus' Genealogy Project

The Mapa: Rus' Genealogy Project, in addition to the base map shown in figure 1, offers a variety of tools to manipulate the image and search the database for more information on a variety of subjects. These searches can inform a variety of particular research questions that are related to the relations of medieval European polities and royal families. In the remainder of this article, some examples of searches, research questions, and data-driven examples will be examined as a way to highlight the possibilities involved in this project for both the specialist and the general user.

The focus in the project is on marriages and all that goes along with them in the medieval world. And while all of the marriages of the Volodimerovichi are depicted on the main map (figure 1), that group can be delineated in a variety of ways for specific searches. For instance, if one wanted to examine just marriages which involve the German Empire, you can do so (see figure 2).

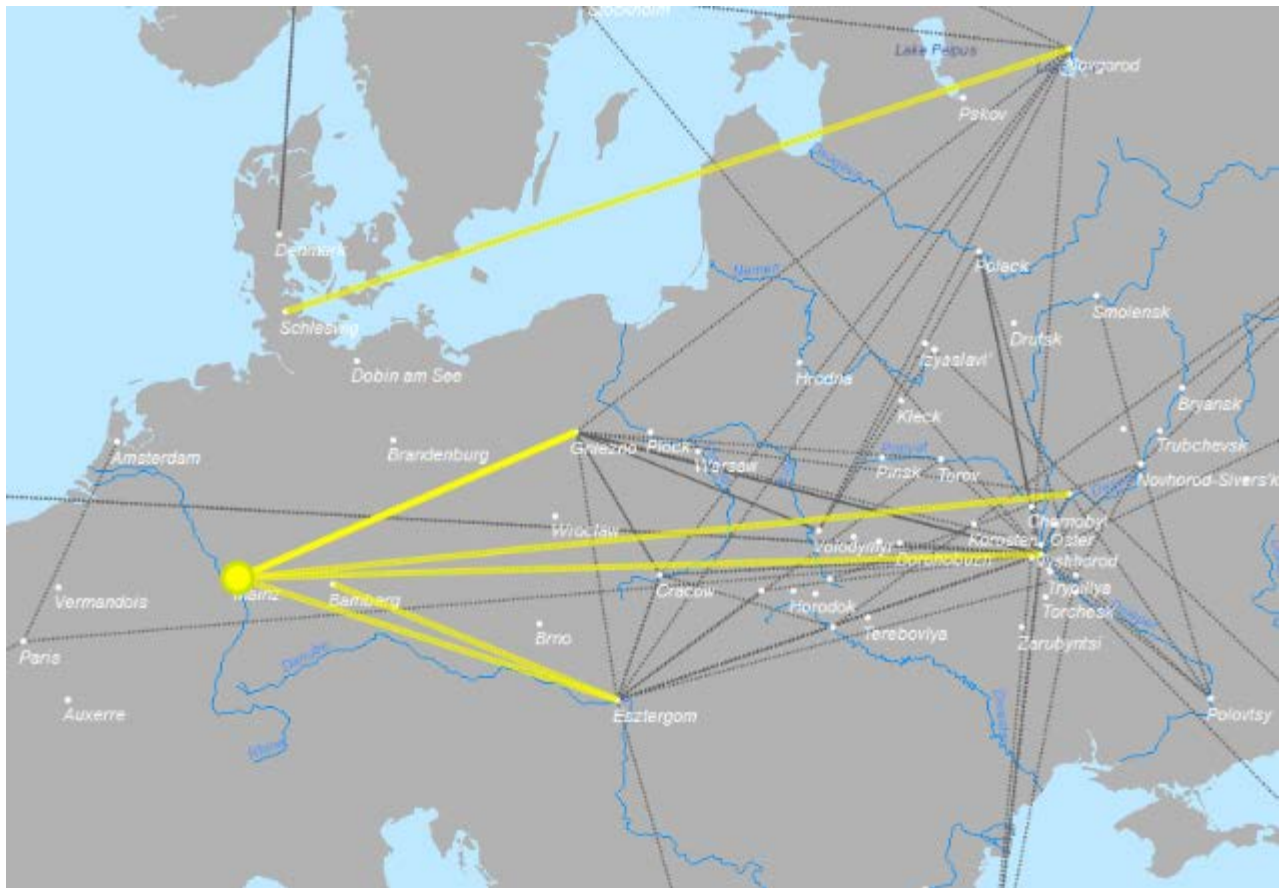


Figure 2: Marriages with the German Empire in the Mapa: Rus' Genealogy Project

From such a search, one can quite easily see that such marriages, for the Volodimerovichi of Rus', originated in Novgorod, Kyiv and Chernihiv, major centers of Rus'. One can also gain additional information about these marriages by clicking on the lines themselves. Doing so shows that the two lines originating from Kyiv and Chernihiv and going to Mainz are both depicting marriages which took place roughly a decade apart from the 1070s and early 1080s. These marriages, and the lack of earlier or later marriages, raises the interesting question of why Rusians were marrying into the German Empire at this time and not at other times. Such questions have, of course, always existed, but the visual display of this information brings to the fore these issues in a new way, while the transparency of the data behind the Mapa Rus'

Genealogy Project allows researchers a fast, easy way to access possible data to find answers to such questions.

Similarly, the Mapa: Rus' Genealogy Project has a chronological component to it that allows the user to isolate different periods for study. One of the most interesting comparisons to do is to examine the map of marriages made in the eleventh century and those made in the twelfth century (see figures 3 and 4).



Figure 3: Eleventh-century marriages in the Mapa: Rus' Genealogy Project



Figure 4: Twelfth-century marriages in the Mapa: Rus' Genealogy Project

A simple, superficial analysis of these two images opens up a host of possible observations and research topics. To name just a few, the images show several changes in the twelfth century (figure 4), such as a change in marital orientation with an increased focus on marriages within Rus'; an increased inclusion of northeastern Rus', which had almost no activity in the eleventh century; and a decrease in the marriages with the rest of Europe, especially outside of eastern, or central, Europe. Just these three observations encompass a number of possible research projects and are possible to make because of the data-driven visual depiction of the Russian dynastic marriages as part of the Mapa: Rus' Genealogy Project.

This is not to mention the host of much more focused questions that arise, often from questions of curiosity, such as “What is that line going to Abkhazia? Are there more marriages, or ties at all, with the Caucasus?” These kinds of questions are intuitively easier to get at, and to ask in the first place, due to the visual depiction of this information. All of the questions which are raised by the map can then be answered with additional data underlying the map and which can be accessed simply by clicking on one of the marriage lines on the map and following the link for more information. For instance, to continue the example of the marriage with Abkhazia noted in figure 4, there is information on the Mapa screen that provides basic details (see figure 5).

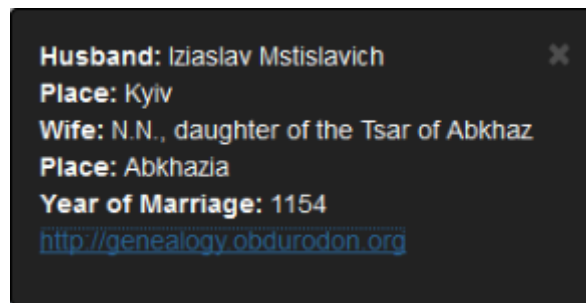


Figure 5: Marital information for Iziaslav Mstislavich from the Mapa: Rus’ Genealogy Project

One can then click on the genealogy.obdurodon.org link for additional information, including citations to the primary sources behind those names and dates. This transparency was designed into the project to allow the Mapa: Rus’ Genealogy Project to be a resource for scholars investigating the many questions that arise from this set of information.

The goal of the Mapa: Rus’ Genealogy Project is to display an accurate presentation of the dynastic marriages of the Volodimerovichi. When examined on the map (figure 1), it becomes quite clear that Rus’ existed as part and parcel of the larger medieval European world. The

Volodimerovichi intermarried and interacted with the other royal families of Europe, and Kyivan Rus' was clearly viewed as one among many of the kingdoms of Europe. This fundamental, and necessary, correction to the still present idea of Rus' as an eastern "other" or part of a "Byzantine Commonwealth" changes the perception of how scholars conceive of medieval Europe.

Project Background

The roots of this project reside in my dissertation at the University of Chicago, completed in 2006. When I began researching Kyivan Rus' and the various interconnectivities between it and the rest of Europe, I noted the prevalence of dynastic marriage connections. These connections had been noted before, but were often dismissed because of an antiquated picture of the role of women (noted above), or because they did not fit a certain ideological framework of Rus' or the medieval European world. The last person to thoroughly analyze those marriages and present a reference work on them was an exiled Russian working in western Europe following the Bolshevik Revolution named Nicholas de Baumgarten. His work on the marriages of the Riurikides (as he called them) has been the dominant resource for investigating Russian dynastic marriage for the last one hundred years.⁷ However, in that time, the interpretation of sources has changed, early modern sources have been reevaluated and found to be unreliable sources for medieval history, and the perception of women's roles in history has changed. Thus I envisioned a new study of the marriages of the family that I call the Volodimerovichi.⁸ To do this, I returned to the roots — the primary sources — written in the German Empire, Scandinavia, Poland, Hungary, Byzantium, and Rus' itself, to find out what they wrote about these marriages and then

⁷ N. de Baumgarten, "Généalogies et mariages Occidentaux des Rurikides Russes du X-e au XIII-e siècle," *Orientalia Christiana* 9, no. 25 (1927).

⁸ For a fuller critique of Baumgarten and a review of other scholarship on the genealogy of the Volodimerovichi, see Raffensperger, *Ties of Kinship*, introduction.

layered modern scholarship and interpretation on top of those findings. The result is a new interpretation of medieval Russian dynastic marriage which will be as useful for future generations as Baumgarten has been to those before.

After the completion of a draft of a monograph on this project, it was brought to my attention how much more useful this could be if it were also constructed as a digital humanities project. In collaboration with David J. Birnbaum (Professor, University of Pittsburgh) we developed a technological infrastructure to display the information online and make it highly searchable and minutely interlinked.⁹ The result of this project can be seen in an ever-evolving form at genealogy.obdurodon.org.

In the fall of 2013, during my stay as a Eugene and Daymel Shklar Research Fellow at the Harvard Ukrainian Research Institute, conversations with Serhii Plochy led to the idea to integrate the Mapping Marriages project as part of HURI's ongoing Mapa initiative. With generous funding from HURI and technical support from Kostyantyn Bondarenko, IT Director for the MAPA Digital Atlas of Ukraine program, the Harvard Center for Geographical Analysis was commissioned to complete this project. Data from my research on dynastic marriage are projected onto a map of Europe, utilizing highlighted lines to demarcate marriages. These lines then are themselves links to more information on each marriage, including year and participants, as well as links to a genealogical database file on the marriage and the individuals. Tools were also built into the map to allow for searches, chronological scalability, and geographic scalability. These tools allow users to explore visually how Rus' was an integral part of medieval Europe.

⁹ More on this can be found in "Mapping History: Using Technology to Showcase Medieval Familial Interconnectivity" (with David J. Birnbaum), *Festschrift in Honor of Orysia Karapinka*, special issue, *Russian History/Histoire Russe* 37, no. 4 (2010): 305–21.