

Prince Vladimir Monomakh, the Jews and the Anti-Usury Uprising of 1113 in Kiev

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In Old Kiev, prince Sviatopolk II Izyaslavich ruled the city through his dependence on Jewish usury. It was proof of illegitimacy in that this was his major prop of financial support. The Chronicles state that the invasion of the Polovtsy from the south were God's punishment on this excoriable policy.

Upon the death of Yaroslav the Wise in 1054, his successor was Izyaslav. The prince of the powerful and increasingly independent Turov, Vyslav, challenged him and drove him from the city. Kiev was pillaged while the population demanded the return of Izyaslav. In the meantime, the city had disintegrated. Izyaslav was then challenged by Sviatoslav, who in the meantime had gone to the Germans. In response, Izyaslav went to Rome in 1076.

Once Sviatoslav died, four princes vied for power: Vsevolod, Sviatopolk II, Vladimir Monomakh and Izyaslav. The coalition of Vsevolod and Sviatopolk II defeated the endlessly embattled Izyaslav, who died soon afterwards. Vsevolod and Sviatopolk II then ruled the state.

The context then was an era of constant violence from local princes and several foreign powers, including the steppe nomads (the Polovtsy), Germans and Poles. The formerly strong, law-bound economy was gone and the rule of the strongest was the norm. Society was demoralized. This gave rise to the dominance of money lending.

Given that this prince gave the usurers free rein, a powerful oligarchy developed on the backs of rural communes. Slavery resurfaced as debt-bondage was the only recourse for many. As more and more land became forfeit due to debt, this oligarchy grew fangs. One manifestation of this was salty speculation during the embargo created by Galicia, the major salt exporter of Central Europe. The Caves Monastery released its stores, thereby reducing the price to manageable levels. The result was that Sviatopolk ordered the confiscation of all salt held by monastic institutions. The population had other plans, and a mob quickly reversed that policy. The mob was not stupid – they marched straight to the Jewish quarter where the salt was found.

Both the Caves Paterikon and the Chronicles state clearly that the oligarchy was aware of its illegitimacy and that it ruled solely by deceit and usury. It also stated baldly that they were very nervous. The death of the prince unleashed a revolt of the population explicitly and clearly dedicated to ending usury and debt bondage in 1113. It was an agrarian revolt against rentier income: income that is unearned, based on one's commanding position economically or politically. It was not directed against the “feudal elite” as most history books in both English and Russian will state. It was aimed at oligarchy. Soviet era historian MN Tikhomirov writes:

It was directed against exploitation in all its forms, and clearly usury and the resultant bankruptcy and forfeiture of its victims. The collection of compounding interest became a tool for the enrichment of the boyars, merchants and upper clergy. Although religious canons always insisted that “rezoimanie” (usury) is a sinful thing, all church decisions in this regard were of a purely declaratory nature.

During the second half of the 12th century, Ilya, the bishop of Novgorod bishop threatened severe punishment for clergy engaging in this practice. Monastic usury was widespread and carried out under various pretexts. . .(Tikhomirov, 2013)

This historical analysis is deeply flawed. There is little evidence of systematic usury among clergy and monasteries in an economy largely non-monetized. Jews controlled banking in the country and hence, made themselves easy targets of the riots they engendered. Church prohibitions against usury are well known, but since no such concept as “centralized, bureaucratic power” existed at the time (nor could it have), there is no organized way to haul sinners into court. All canons are “declaratory” in this sense.

In Novgorod, the boyar class was deeply usurious and so were all who functioned within her walls. Her “republican” government was like all others of its ilk, a shoddy cover for oligarchy that would (and was) ditched at the moment it ceased to assist them. The entire economy was based on usury, the merchant class and exploitation. When a power threatened her elite no value was too sacred to be thrown overboard. The elite maintained regular ties with Poland, the Grand Duchy and elsewhere so their political allegiances could be altered at a moment's notice. This is why Moscow needed to act so quickly against them. It was from Novgorod that the Strigolniki and Judaizer heresies spread, both of which justified and ritualized usury.

Further, the problem with Tikhomirov's view is that these were never systematic. Only the Jewish banking regime was a system of relations that had global connections. The later network spanning the great capitals of Europe was far into the future, but its outlines could clearly be seen. While the system's text-books speak of the “rebellion against feudalism,” the fact remains that Jews had monopolized usury by the 12th century. Tikhomirov is simply incorrect.

Sviatopolk tolerated the Jewish trade in Russian slaves. The governor of Crimea was a Jew at the time of severe weakness in the Byzantine empire. While formally a Christian, this man immediately permitted Jewish trade in slaves. While the Khazar state had been smashed a century prior, the domination of Jewish traders in the area had not abated. In this case, Sviatopolk brought them into Kiev as a means to ensure an income against his relatives.

The Jews used the Polovtsian raiders to obtain slaves. The Turkic hordes now had Jewish patronage. By 1092 or so, these raids increased markedly. They were then sold to the Jews on Crimea. By all accounts, Jewish slave dealers had a special hatred for Slavic slaves. St. Eustratii the Faster of the Kiev Caves, according to the Paterik of the Kiev Caves, was taken in a Polovtsy raid along with 20 or 30 others and sold to a “ferocious Jew” on Korsun. Trying to force him to renounce Orthodoxy, he was tortured to death by the Jewish slave traders. All told, 50 Russians died this way from this same raid.

St. Vladimir had five sons. Upon his death, Sviatoslav attempted to form his own state with Turov. Yaroslav fought against this and the former was killed in the fighting. In Novgorod, Yaroslav then had to fight Sviatopolk, seeking to take Kiev. Soon, outmatched at home, he went to Poland. The rape of Kiev with Polish soldiers made their paymaster very unpopular. With broad support, Yaroslav defeated Sviatopolk, but the resulting power was too much for Mstislav, a grandson of Vladimir.

The next generation saw Izyaslav, son of Yaroslav the Wise, defeated for Kiev by Vesvolod of Polotsk. Izyaslav went to Rome and converted to the Roman church in Poland. At Sviatoslav's death, Vsevolod and Izyaslav made peace, but this was not to last: a coalition of Vsevolod and Monomakh defeated him, and he died in 1078, Vsevolod died in 1093. The

Liubech Code was partly the result of this chaos.

The first Kievan synagogue was built under Sviatopolk. His father Izyaslav, during one of the many civil wars that plagued old Kiev, fled to Poland for assistance. While living there, he became quite the Judeophile. Later, he ran to the Germans, promising to make Kiev a tributary of the German state if an army were given him. He was even willing to accept papal rule over Kiev as well. It is from the Jewish influx under Izyaslav that Jews first penetrated Russia.

Both rulers knew the Jews had been given permission to enslave the Russians in exchange for a regular subsidy. They quickly became unpopular, but Svyatopolk's police protected them diligently. As always, the synagogue, contrary to popular belief, was never meant as a prayer house. It was a fortress for protection and a center for military and ideological mobilization. While protected, the Jews never quite needed it. They had a martial tradition of their own. Very soon, Jewish usury had much of the country in debt, and, especially when facing unrest among princes, foreign occupation and defeats from the Polovtsy, the population had enough.

The mob looted the Jewish quarter in that same year of unrest. Since it was an urban movement, it could not have been a rebellion against “feudal exploitation” but, since no such conceptual objection existed at the time, it was directed against those that did: merchants, Jews and those profiting from them. These were foreigners, those who had no connection to the soil and hence, used human material as the “soil” to grow their profit.

The power of the boyar class at the time was as obnoxious as ever. Its faction fighting destroyed the property of Galicia as nobles, caring only for property and profit, used Turks, Cumans, Poles, Hungarians or Tartars to invade the territory of their rivals. The surplus of the promising Galician economy was decimated. The Jews were singled out, again, because of the systematic and deceitful means used that set them apart.¹ Importantly, it was under the rule of Sviatopolk where the Jews, invited and encouraged, first made their agenda obnoxiously known. Thus, it was a fairly new phenomenon.

The riot in 1113 was very popular, aimed at Jews and the gentiles that had business relationships with them. These were well known and were anything but arbitrary. It was the nobility, fearing for their money, that sent for Monomakh to restore “law and order.” They stated that, if left unchecked, they might even “rape your daughter and family.” This was a lie, since the targets of the mob were very clear. They wrote to Vladimir saying: “Come, prince, to Kiev so as to stop the violence; the Jews will attack the nobles, the monasteries and even the royal family itself. They will plunder if you do not come.” A meeting of princes concluded that Jews needed to be expelled from Kiev. He did so, and anti-usury legislation was immediately drawn up.

First, interest could not be compounded. He did make a distinction between the charge for the use of money and usury. The interest charged could not be more than the principle. If the lender tried to charge more than the principle over time, the debtor was freed from the obligation of paying the principle at all. The maximum rate of interest could not exceed 20% a year. The Bankrutsky Statute protected the property of smallholders and artisans from confiscation.

Debt slavery was outlawed. Repayment could be done on an installment plan of up to five years if the debtor had a regular income. Interest could not be collected for longer than two years. After that, the loan was no longer interest bearing. When a debtor had to work off a loan, he had the rights of any Russian and was not a slave. The only time slavery was permitted is if the

¹ Famed historian Sergei Solovyev states that the Jewish banking class, very ethnically conscious, “had immense power, which is why many merchants and artisans were ruined.”

debtor tried to defraud the creditor.

The Testament of the metropolitan of Kiev Nikifor states that “if you take the wealth of your brother through usury, it will do you no good and provide no security or virtue. If you eat meat, you are not eating the meat of sheep or other animals, but the flesh of your brothers, cutting into his flesh through the evil methods of extortion, bribery and unjust debt collections.” This shows that the practices of the Khazars were well known and that many were aware that the mind of that empire has not gone away.

Ancient Khazaria is essential to understanding the Jewish mind. By the early 8th century, it reached from the west Caucasus to the Sea of Azov and took most of the Crimean steppe. To show its commercial nature, its capital lay at the mouth of the Volga. In the work of Lev Gumilev and Tatiana Gradev, the Khazar civil war of 810-820 led to the total Judaization of the elites. The war was between Islam and Judaism, two social views very similar, but ultimately, it concerned the orientation of this commercial parasite.

The empire was a “chimera” in Gumilev's view defined as any x having two distinct rhythms or functions, creating a cacophony understood only subconsciously. This consists of a state without any real ethnic or racial basis, merely a gaggle of people held together by force. The ethnic mix was chaotic, maintaining the Jewish ruling class secure.

From this time forward, “Gog and Magog” were exclusively used in reference to Khazaria. Only during the Crimean war did the English propaganda machine equate “Ros” or “Rosh” with “Rus.” In reality, it refers to the chief prince rather than a people. In a letter from Hisday ibn Sharput in 9th century Spain, the Khazar king is referred to as “Prince of Rosh, Meshech and Tubal.” The testimony of the church fathers of both east and west was that Antichrist is Khazaria.

The Pecheneg and Polovtsy forces that harassed Kiev through much of its existence were popularly associated with the Jewish control over the slave trade. The profit for the nomads was to sell the Slavs to the Jews. Klyuchevskii argues that short-term loans were extremely expensive and not regulated by law at all. He further suggests that the real agenda of Jewish moneylenders at the time was not so much the quick payoff, but the destruction of Russian capital. Default meant that the property went to the Jews and its debtors became slaves.

Once the Khazar Khanate was destroyed, the Jews moved to Tmutarakan, from which they orchestrated the nomadic attacks on Russia. From there, they moved north to Kiev. Since the Jews had great experience in banking, they were easily able to dominate their gentile competitors. This served as a convenient midpoint between Byzantium and Kiev and was at one time the capital of St. Vladimir himself.

Rather than making war on the nomads, rulers such as Izyaslav would much rather hire them out than fight them. For the first time – specifically in 1068, the veche became a powerful voice in Russia. If the ruling class and pagan aristocracy were planning on working with the Poles, Jews and nomads, then the most patriotic of the elite organized into the veche. Izyaslav took his revenge on the urban poor the veche were advocating for.

Similarly for 1113, Sviatopolk II, rather than go to the nomads, made an alliance with the Jews. Each ruler and faction was trying to discover which alien group would give them the best advantage over the others. At the end of the 11th century, there were three factions in Kiev: the old nobility, the pro-western associates of Sviatopolk II and the veche. Sviatopolk threw in his lot with the Jews. The result was that Jews were able to rule at will.

The westernized nobles along with the prince and Jews eased out both the church and the old nobles, permitting the Jews to absorb the capital of the area in exchange for financial support. Lev Gumilev writes:

The control mechanism was extremely simple: the Jewish moneylenders received protection from Kiev and shared their cash with the prince. In turn, he would use this to maintain the army and keep all anti-Jewish forces at bay (Gumilev, 2014).

It was the death of this prince that permitted the old nobles and the people to fight back. The collapse of the older tribal system and the rise of the state separated the people from the traditional sources of morals. The church was not as yet firmly in control, so chaos demoralized most people. As the factions fought it out for control of the state, money and finance became very important. Hence, the Jews were as well.

The destruction of Jewish usury and their removal from power by Vladimir Monomakh was significant largely because it restored the power of the church and assisted greatly in the Christianization of the country. The importance of this cannot be overstated: The Russian empire was to be the very opposite of the Khazar mind and this was made explicit in document after document.

Vladimir Monomakh was the first “gatherer of the Russian lands.” The Jews were forwarding money to separatist princes in an effort to permanently divide Russia. The warfare among princes had debased the population. Jewish usury was a revolutionary development that required the rapid intervention of a legitimate prince.

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