

MIKHAIL PETROVICH POGODIN

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Pogodin, Mikhail Petrovich (1800–1875) was a prominent Russian historian, journalist, and publisher of the nineteenth-century. His conservative journal The Muscovite (1841–56) defended the policies of Tsar Nicholas I. A Slavophile and professor of Russian history at Moscow State University (1835–44), Pogodin wrote a seven-volume history of Russia (1846–57) and a three-volume study entitled, *The Early History of Russia* (1871).

He began life in humble circumstances, as the son of a serf, but his ultranationalist views helped to boost him to prominence. His association with the secret society “Lovers of Wisdom” (*Lyubomudry*) at Moscow State University also helped his career. Founded in 1823 toward the end of the reign of Alexander I by Prince Vladimir Odoevsky (1803-1869) and others, this society was, to some extent, a continuation of the Masonic Astrea Lodge. The circle - consisting of a dozen members who met in secret - tended to disregard politics and propound the philosophic ideas of Schiller and other Romantic thinkers. The society published the journal *Mnemosyne* until it was dissolved soon after the Decembrist uprising in 1825.

Pogodin believed that the natal gentry-style aristocracy had compromised and outlived itself. He wrote that Nicholas I, who died in 1855, had imposed upon Russia

“the quiet of a graveyard, rotting and stinking, both physically and morally.” As a Pan-Slavist, he often suggested that God’s hand was at work in Russian history, preparing the nation for a great mission of peace and order. He compared the conquest of Siberia by Yermak in 1581 with that of South America by Cortéz. “We have discovered one third of Asia,” he wrote in 1837. “Is that not worth for celebration like America’s discovery by Christopher Columbus?”

In the 1850s, Pogodin got into a debate with Ukrainian historian Mykhailo Maksymovych (1804-1873) over the legacy of Kievan Rus’. Pogodin developed the untenable thesis that the Great Russians originally inhabited the Kiev region and that only after the Mongols forced them to flee to the northeast in the eleventh and twelfth centuries did the Ukrainians ('Little Russians') migrate into the area. According to Pogodin, the Ukrainians arrived much later from somewhere in the Carpathian Mountains. Pogodin's views were expanded on by the philologist Aleksei Sobolevsky.

The oldest school of thought about the legacy of Kievan Rus’ claims that the first leaders and organizers of the state were the Varangians, a group of Scandinavians who raided the eastern shores of the Baltic Sea in the ninth century and penetrated into Eastern Europe toward Byzantium along the Dnepr River. This Norman (Normanist) theory rests mainly on a literal interpretation of the Primary Chronicle (“Tale of Bygone Years,” or *Povest Vremennyk Let*), a document written by monks of the Kievan Monastery and covers the period up to 1118.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Ukrainian historians challenged the Normanist theory, downplaying the Varangian influence on the formation of Rus’.

They argued that Ukrainians were autochthonous (indigenous) in their territories, and that the principality of Galicia-Volhynia was the successor to the Kievan state.

However, the tsarist autocracy constantly censored these revisionists, which, besides Maksymovych, included Mykola Kostomarov, Volodymyr Antonovych, Mykhailo Hrushevsky, Dmytro Bahalii, Dmytro Doroshenko, and Mykola Chubaty. However, the Normanist theory remains, with certain modifications, the basis of Western historiography of Russia and Ukraine.

Despite Pogodin's humble beginnings, his portrait was painted by the famous artist Vasily Perov (1834-1882) and he was buried with other luminaries in the Novodevichy Cemetery.

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