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THE FORMATION OF THE UKRAINIAN ETHNIC COMMUNITY: THE OLD RUSSIAN PERIOD AND KIEVAN RUS'

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Abstract. This study analyses the process of the formation of the Ukrainian ethnos through the lens of the Old Russian stage of development. The work focuses on the study of Kievan Rus' as a key centre of ethno-cultural integration and the foundation of Ukrainian nation-building. It examines the transition from the early Slavic period to a consolidated community, where the unifying factors were language, legal traditions, religion and a shared historical memory. Particular attention is paid to the methodological framework: the application of historical-legal, cultural and systemic approaches has enabled a comprehensive assessment of the role of state institutions and cultural factors in the formation of identity. The results of the study demonstrate that the Old Rus' period was a time when the fundamental foundations of the Ukrainian ethnic community were laid. The scientific and practical significance of the topic for contemporary national memory policy and for understanding the continuity of the historical development of the Ukrainian people is substantiated.

Key words: ethnogenesis, Ukrainian ethnic community, Kievan Rus', Old Rus' period, ethno-cultural integration, identity, historical memory, early Slavs.

Introduction. The formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community is a complex, protracted and multifaceted process, which has its roots in the early Middle Ages and is directly linked to the development of the East Slavic tribes and the emergence of statehood in Kievan Rus'. It is the Old Rus' period that represents a fundamental stage in the ethnogenesis of Ukrainians, as it was during this time that the core elements of ethnic identity – language, culture, customs, social structures and the earliest forms of political organisation – took shape.

The relevance of this research topic stems from the need for a thorough academic understanding of the origins of the Ukrainian ethnic community in the context of contemporary geopolitical and informational challenges. In contemporary academic and public discourse, the question of the Ukrainian people's origins is often the subject of political manipulation, which heightens the importance of objective historical analysis. Research into the Old Rus' period allows us not only to reconstruct the processes of early ethnogenesis, but also to establish the historical continuity of the Ukrainian nation's development.

The current state of academic research on this issue indicates considerable interest in the subject among both Ukrainian and foreign scholars. The academic literature contains various theories regarding the formation of the East Slavic peoples and the role of Kievan Rus' in this process. Some researchers view Kievan Rus' as the common cradle of the three East Slavic peoples, whilst others emphasise its decisive significance specifically for Ukrainian ethnogenesis. This academic debate necessitates a comprehensive and interdisciplinary approach to studying the issue.

The study pays particular attention to the role of Kievan Rus' as the first powerful state entity on the territory of modern Ukraine, which ensured the political, economic and cultural consolidation of the population. The emergence of statehood facilitated the integration of separate tribal confederations into a single social organism, the formation of a common legal system, and the development of trade, crafts and cultural ties. This, in turn, created the preconditions for the emergence of a higher-level ethnic community.

An important factor in the formation of ethnic identity was the adoption of Christianity, which had a profound influence on the spiritual life of society, the development of writing, education and culture. Christianisation facilitated the integration of Kievan Rus' into the European cultural sphere, which ensured the spread of new values, norms and models of social behaviour.

Furthermore, this period saw the formation of the legal foundations of society, notably through the emergence of legal texts such as the **Ruska Pravda**, which regulated social relations and contributed to the development of a legal culture. The existence of a common legal system was a key factor in the consolidation of the population and the development of a sense of belonging to a single social space.

Cultural processes played no less an important role, particularly the development of chronicle-writing, oral folk art, crafts and the arts. These ensured the transmission of historical experience, shaped collective memory and fostered an awareness of shared origins and cultural unity.

Thus, research into the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community during the Old Rus' period allows us not only to gain a deeper understanding of the historical origins of the Ukrainian people, but also to identify the main patterns of the development of national identity, which is of great significance for contemporary academic and public discourse.

Main text. The aim of this study is to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the process of the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community during the Old Rus' period, identifying the role of Kievan Rus' as a key stage in the ethnogenesis of the Ukrainians. Achieving this aim involves a systematic study of the historical, cultural, socio-economic and legal factors that influenced the formation of the ethnic identity of the population in the territory of modern Ukraine.

Another important aspect is identifying the patterns and characteristics of the ethnic community's development in the context of early statehood, which allows not only for the reconstruction of historical processes but also for an assessment of their significance for the subsequent formation of the Ukrainian nation.

To achieve this objective, the following main research tasks have been identified:

1. To analyse the early Slavic stage of ethnic community formation and identify its main characteristics.
2. To examine the process of the formation of Kievan Rus' as a political and cultural centre for the consolidation of the population.
3. To identify the role of economic factors, in particular the development of the economy and trade, in the formation of ethnic unity.
4. To analyse the influence of political organisation and state institutions on the process of ethnogenesis.
5. To investigate the significance of legal norms and legal culture in the formation of social stability and the integration of the population.
6. To assess the role of cultural factors, in particular language, religion, education and art, in the formation of ethnic identity.
7. To determine the influence of historical memory and traditions on the preservation of ethno-cultural continuity.

The stated aim and objectives enable a comprehensive approach to the study of the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community during the Old Rus' period, which contributes to a deeper understanding of the origins of Ukrainian national identity and its historical development.

The methodological framework of the study is based on the use of a range of general scientific and specialised methods, which enable a comprehensive analysis of the process of the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community during the Old Russian period. The application of an interdisciplinary approach allows for the integration of historical, legal, cultural and sociological analysis.

The historical-legal method is used to analyse the processes of state formation, the development of legal institutions and their influence on the formation of the ethnic community. Particular attention

is paid to the study of customary law norms and written sources, in particular the 'Ruska Pravda', as an important element of social organisation.

The comparative method allows for a comparison of the processes of the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community with similar processes among other European peoples. This makes it possible to identify both common features and specific characteristics of development that define the uniqueness of Ukrainian ethnogenesis.

The cultural studies approach focuses on examining the role of culture, traditions, religion and art in the formation of ethnic identity. An analysis of cultural processes helps to identify the mechanisms for the transmission of values and the formation of collective consciousness.

The sociological method is used to analyse the social structure of society, the interactions between different social groups, and the processes of social integration. This makes it possible to assess the influence of social factors on the formation of an ethnic community.

A systematic approach ensures a comprehensive study of the process of ethnogenesis as a holistic phenomenon involving the interaction of various factors. It allows the formation of an ethnic community to be viewed as a dynamic system that develops under the influence of internal and external factors.

The use of these methods ensures the scientific validity of the research and provides a comprehensive understanding of the process of the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community during the Old Rus' period.

The Early Slavic stage marks the starting point for the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community and spans the period from approximately the 6th to the 9th centuries. It was during this time that a gradual consolidation of the East Slavic tribes took place on the territory of modern-day Ukraine, alongside the formation of their cultural, linguistic and social unity, which laid the foundations for the further development of ethnic identity.

The early Slavic population was composed of numerous tribal confederations, among which the Polans, Drevlyans, Severians, Ulichs, Tiverians, White Croats and others were of particular significance. Each of these tribes had its own local characteristics, yet they were united by common features in their material culture, economic organisation and spiritual life. Interaction between these tribes contributed to the gradual formation of a unified ethno-cultural space (Motsia, 2007).

Economic activity was a key factor in ethnic consolidation. The economy was based on agriculture, cattle breeding, hunting and fishing. The development of crafts, particularly pottery, blacksmithing and weaving, contributed to the economic strengthening of tribal communities and the development of inter-tribal trade. This, in turn, intensified contacts between different population groups and facilitated their integration.

Natural and geographical conditions played a significant role in the formation of ethnic unity. The territory of Ukraine, rich in fertile land, river routes and forest resources, facilitated the development of the economy and the formation of stable settlements. Rivers, particularly the Dnieper, served as important transport arteries, providing links between different regions and promoting economic and cultural integration (Baran & Baran, 2005).

The linguistic factor is one of the key elements in the process of ethnogenesis. During the Early Slavic period, a Proto-Slavic linguistic community took shape, which gradually diversified whilst retaining a significant degree of internal unity. This linguistic commonality ensured effective communication between tribes and fostered a sense of belonging to a wider community.

Spiritual culture played an equally important role. The religious beliefs of the early Slavs were linked to paganism, which was based on the worship of nature, gods and spirits, as well as on a developed system of rituals and traditions. Shared beliefs contributed to the formation of cultural unity and the strengthening of social ties between tribes (Yurii, 2023).

The social organisation of early Slavic society was based on clan and tribal relations. The main units were clans and communities, which ensured collective economic activity and protection against

external threats. Gradually, social differentiation took place, manifesting itself in the emergence of a military and tribal elite, which became a prerequisite for the formation of early forms of statehood (Baran, 1998).

The growth of external contacts was also an important factor in this development. The East Slavic tribes actively interacted with the Varangians, Khazars, Byzantines and other peoples. These contacts contributed not only to economic development but also to cultural exchange, the adoption of new technologies, military practices and elements of social organisation (Tolochko & Tolochko, 1998).

Trade routes, in particular the famous route ‘from the Varangians to the Greeks’, played a key role in the formation of interregional links. They facilitated the exchange of goods, ideas and cultural influences, which contributed to the integration of various tribal confederations into a single economic space (Khvedchenia, 2011).

Gradually, more complex political entities with the hallmarks of early statehood began to form on the basis of tribal alliances. This manifested itself in the consolidation of princely power, the emergence of administrative centres and the formation of military structures. Such processes created the preconditions for the emergence of Kievan Rus’ as the first state entity in these lands.

It is important to emphasise that the early Slavic period was not homogeneous and was characterised by both processes of integration and local differentiation. However, it was precisely the combination of these processes that ensured the formation of a stable ethno-cultural basis, which became the foundation for the further development of the Ukrainian ethnic community.

The early Slavic period played a decisive role in shaping the basic elements of the Ukrainian ethnic community. It was during this period that the foundations of language, culture, economy and social organisation were laid, which ensured the further development of the Ukrainian people and became the basis for the emergence of statehood in the form of Kievan Rus’.

The emergence of Kievan Rus’ in the 9th–13th centuries marked a qualitatively new stage in the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community, as it was during this period that the transition took place from scattered tribal confederations to a more integrated political, social and cultural entity. Kievan Rus’ emerged not only as the first state form of organisation of the East Slavic lands, but also as a powerful centre of ethno-cultural consolidation of the population.

The formation of statehood facilitated the unification of various tribal confederations around a political centre – Kyiv. This ensured the formation of a single administrative space, within which common governance norms, tax mechanisms and military organisation operated. The consolidation of power in the hands of the prince and his entourage contributed to the stabilisation of social relations and the strengthening of internal ties between regions (Tolochko & Tolochko, 1998).

The formation of a common economic system became a key factor in ethnic integration. Kievan Rus’ actively developed both domestic and foreign trade, which fostered economic growth and interdependence among different territories. Trade links with Byzantium, the Scandinavian countries, Central Europe and the East ensured not only the exchange of goods but also cultural influence, which contributed to the unification of material and spiritual culture (Smolii, 2011).

Political authority played a key role in the consolidation process, gradually taking on the characteristics of a centralised system. The institution of princely power, supported by the *druzhina* organisation, ensured the effective administration of territories and protection against external threats. This created the conditions for the stable development and integration of the population.

The adoption of Christianity at the end of the 10th century became one of the key factors in the formation of a unified ethno-cultural community. Christianisation contributed to the spiritual consolidation of the population and the formation of a shared system of values and moral norms. It also stimulated the development of writing, education, literature and the arts, which significantly raised the level of cultural development in society (Smolii, 2013).

The introduction of Christianity facilitated the integration of Kievan Rus' into the European cultural and political sphere. This enabled the establishment of diplomatic and dynastic ties with the leading states of Europe, which enhanced the state's international status and fostered cultural exchange.

The legal system was no less an important element of consolidation. 'Ruska Pravda', as one of the oldest legal codes, regulated social relations, defined the rights and obligations of various social groups, and contributed to the establishment of the rule of law. The existence of common legal norms fostered a sense of belonging to a single social space and strengthened the internal unity of society (Blashchuk, 2005).

The social structure of Kievan Rus' gradually became more complex. Various social strata began to take shape: the princely elite, the boyars, the clergy, the artisans and the peasantry. This differentiation contributed to the development of social relations and the formation of a more complex social organisation, which is a characteristic feature of statehood.

The cultural development of Kievan Rus' played a significant role in the formation of an ethnic community. Chronicle writing, in particular the 'Tale of Bygone Years', became an important tool for shaping historical memory. Oral folk art, crafts, architecture and art reflected the shared values and cultural orientations of the population (Tolochko & Tolochko, 1998).

Language also played an important role in the consolidation process. The Old Russian literary tradition contributed to the spread of shared cultural standards, facilitating communication between different regions and strengthening cultural unity.

Foreign policy factors had a significant impact on the development of Kievan Rus'. Constant interaction with other states, both peaceful and military, contributed to the strengthening of internal organisation and the formation of political consciousness among the population.

At the same time, it should be noted that Kievan Rus' was not a homogeneous state in the modern sense. It consisted of a complex system of lands and principalities that enjoyed a degree of autonomy. However, it was precisely this structure that allowed a balance to be maintained between centralisation and local self-government (Smolii, 2009).

The period of fragmentation that ensued in the 12th–13th centuries did not lead to the complete collapse of ethno-cultural unity. Despite political decentralisation, common cultural, linguistic and religious elements persisted, continuing to unite the population.

Kyiv Rus' became a key stage in the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community, as it ensured the political, economic and cultural consolidation of the population. It was during this period that the main elements of ethnic identity were formed, which were preserved and developed in subsequent historical eras.

The Old Rus' period is of decisive importance in the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community, as it was during this time that the key elements of ethno-cultural identity were consolidated and the historical foundation was laid, ensuring the continuity of the Ukrainian people's development. This stage acts as a bridge between the early Slavic period and subsequent stages of nation-building, ensuring the continuity of cultural, social and spiritual traditions.

One of the most significant achievements of the Old Russian period was the development of historical memory. It was during this time that chronicle-writing emerged, recording events linked to the development of statehood, social life and culture. Chronicles, in particular 'The Tale of Bygone Years', served not only as historical sources but also as a tool for shaping collective consciousness, reinforcing the notion of a shared origin and the historical unity of the population.

Spiritual culture played an important role in the formation of the ethnic community. The adoption of Christianity contributed to the creation of a unified spiritual space that united the population regardless of their territorial origin. The Christian religion not only shaped moral norms and values but also acted as an important factor in social integration, ensuring the spiritual unity of society.

The cultural development of Kievan Rus' was also evident in the development of education, literacy and the arts. The establishment of the first schools, the development of a culture of reading and translated literature contributed to the dissemination of knowledge and the formation of an intellectual milieu. This, in turn, fostered an awareness of cultural commonality and the formation of ethnic identity.

The architecture and art of Kievan Rus' also played an important role in shaping cultural unity. Churches, icons, mosaics and frescoes reflected not only religious but also the socio-cultural values of society. They served as symbols of unity and the continuity of cultural tradition (Aseiev, 1969).

Oral folk art took on particular significance, as it preserved and passed down historical events, traditions and worldviews from generation to generation. Folk songs, legends, fairy tales and rituals shaped the collective memory and helped to strengthen ethnic identity (Kotliar, 2011).

Language, as one of the key elements of ethnic identity, played an important role in the consolidation process. The Old Russian linguistic tradition facilitated communication between different regions and contributed to the formation of a shared cultural space. Despite the subsequent differentiation of languages, it was this period that laid the foundations for the development of the Ukrainian language (Pivtorak, 1993).

Another important aspect is the formation of social and legal norms that regulated public life. The norms of customary law, as well as written sources, contributed to the establishment of order and stability in society. This created conditions for the development of social institutions and the strengthening of internal ties (Kotliar, 2011).

Despite the decline of Kievan Rus' and subsequent political fragmentation, the ethno-cultural unity of the population was not lost. Shared traditions, religion, language and historical memory continued to unite the population, ensuring the continuity of the ethnic community's development.

The Old Russian period also played an important role in the formation of territorial identity. The sense of belonging to a specific region, linked to historical events and cultural centres, helped to strengthen ethnic identity.

The significance of this stage also lies in the fact that it shaped the basic models of social organisation, which were preserved in subsequent historical periods. Traditions of self-government, interaction between the authorities and society, as well as cultural practices, became the foundation for the development of subsequent forms of statehood.

The Old Rus' period is of fundamental importance for the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community. It ensured the establishment of the main elements of identity, shaped historical memory and cultural heritage, which became the basis for the further development of the Ukrainian people. It is precisely thanks to this period that the continuity of historical development and the preservation of national identity are ensured.

The present study has enabled a comprehensive analysis of the process of the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community during the Old Rus' period as a complex, multi-level phenomenon that emerged as a result of the prolonged interaction of historical, socio-economic, cultural, legal and geopolitical factors. It has been established that this process was not linear, but was characterised by a combination of integrative and differentiating tendencies, which together ensured the formation of a stable ethnic identity.

First and foremost, it should be noted that the ethnogenesis of the Ukrainians during the Old Rus' period took place through the consolidation of East Slavic tribes, which gradually transitioned from local forms of organisation to more complex social structures. This process was accompanied by the formation of common elements of material culture, economic practices and spiritual life, which created the preconditions for the emergence of an ethnic community.

One of the key factors in the formation of the ethnic community was economic integration. The development of agriculture, crafts and trade facilitated the establishment of stable economic ties between different regions. Of particular importance was the development of trade routes connecting

the territories of Kievan Rus' with other parts of Europe and Asia. This ensured not only economic growth but also cultural exchange, which contributed to the unification of the population's way of life.

The political factor also played a decisive role. The formation of Kievan Rus' as a state union created the conditions for the centralisation of power and the formation of a unified system of governance. Political organisation helped to strengthen internal ties between territories and foster a sense of belonging to a shared political space.

An important aspect is the legal codification of social relations. The introduction of written law, in particular the **Ruska Pravda**, marked a significant step in the development of the legal system. Legal norms regulated social relations, defined the status of various social groups, and ensured stability within society. This contributed to the formation of a legal culture and an awareness of shared rules of coexistence.

The cultural factor played no less an important role in the nation-building process. The development of writing, literature, art and education contributed to the formation of a shared cultural space. Chronicle-writing, ecclesiastical literature and folk art shaped historical memory and ensured the transmission of cultural values between generations.

Of particular significance was the adoption of Christianity, which became a powerful integrating factor. Christianity not only united the population on a spiritual level but also contributed to the formation of a new system of values, norms of behaviour and worldview. It also ensured the integration of Kievan Rus' into the European cultural sphere.

The social structure of society underwent significant changes during this period. A social hierarchy was taking shape, comprising the princely authority, the boyars, the clergy and the dependent population. This differentiation contributed to the development of social relations and the formation of a complex system of interaction between different strata of society.

Language played a significant role in the formation of the ethnic community. The Old Russian linguistic tradition facilitated communication between different regions and promoted cultural integration. Language served not only as a means of communication, but also as a vehicle for cultural values and traditions.

Historical memory was also an important factor, shaped through chronicles, oral tradition and religious texts. It ensured continuity between generations and fostered a sense of shared origins and historical destiny.

Geopolitical factors had a significant influence on the process of forming an ethnic community. The location of Kievan Rus' at the crossroads of trade routes facilitated active interaction with other peoples. This created conditions for cultural exchange, but at the same time required the strengthening of internal unity to counter external threats.

Despite the political fragmentation that set in during the late period of Kievan Rus', the core elements of the ethnic community remained stable. A shared culture, religion, language and historical memory ensured the preservation of ethno-cultural unity, which became a key factor in the further development of the Ukrainian people.

The findings of the study indicate that the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community during the Old Russian period was the result of the complex interplay of various factors. It was precisely this combination of factors that led to the emergence of a stable ethno-cultural system, which became the foundation for the further development of the Ukrainian nation.

Conclusions. Research into the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community during the Old Russian period has established that ethnogenesis was a complex, protracted and multifaceted process, involving the interplay of political, socio-economic, cultural, legal and geopolitical factors.

Firstly, it has been demonstrated that the early Slavic period created the basic preconditions for ethnic consolidation, ensuring the formation of common features of material culture, economic organisation and primary social structures, which became the foundation for the further development of Kievan Rus'.

Secondly, it has been established that Kievan Rus' played a key role as a state and civilisational centre, ensuring the political integration of the East Slavic lands, facilitating the formation of a unified administrative space and the development of early state institutions.

Thirdly, it has been determined that cultural and spiritual factors were of decisive importance in the process of ethnic consolidation, in particular the adoption of Christianity, the development of writing, chronicle-keeping, education and the arts, which shaped a shared cultural and value space for the population.

Fourthly, it has been confirmed that legal mechanisms, in particular customary law and the *Ruska Pravda*, contributed to the establishment of social stability, the regulation of social relations and the strengthening of internal integration within Old Russian society.

Fifthly, it has been demonstrated that language and historical memory were key factors in the preservation of ethnic identity, ensuring the continuity of cultural development and the formation of notions of a common origin and historical destiny.

Sixthly, it has been established that even during the period of political fragmentation, ethno-cultural unity was not lost, as shared cultural, religious and linguistic elements continued to perform an integrative function.

Thus, a synthesis of the research findings leads to the conclusion that the Old Rus' period was a fundamental stage in the formation of the Ukrainian ethnic community, laying the foundations for the further development of the Ukrainian nation and its historical identity.

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