To the accession of Vladimir I, the Northmen had played a noteworthy role in northern Rus’ in the consolidation of Eastern Slavic tribes into a loosely organized state, but the solitary rule of the Riurikids was regionally limited and subject to clashes with rival Varangian clans. Their fortunes to the time of Vladimir’s baptism were gauged by their military exploits and mercantile accomplishments. While the Scandinavian tradition remained a strong force in some Kievan regional areas, the Varangians lost little of their luster for martial exploits or trading acumen. On the other hand, Nordic political and religious thought and practices, and their very culture were more primitive in their structure and development than the Byzantine. And the ingredients and ideals associated with the Scandinavian heritage were not uniform; hence we encounter inconsistencies in their definition of rulership and its image. The early Rus’ scribes, though moved by their Christian ideals, do not attempt with deliberateness to efface completely this pagan political tradition; rather, they seek to disguise the sources of princely power without clear attributions to their Scandinavian roots while preserving an essential Varangian image of rulership.

A crucial issue arising in Kievan historiographic thought is the question of the source of princely sovereign authority. Did it emanate from the Rus’ scribes readings of the Old and New Testaments and hence enter the principality upon its Christianization; or did this aspectual quality of rulership enter the Kievan land by way of Byzantium through the inculcation of Greek laws and religious teachings; or was there present in pre-Kievan Rus’ an expression of commonality of political ideals, rooted in the Varangian pagan past, but also traditionally acknowledged by most Indo-European peoples? We have addressed the first two parts of this question in the previous chapters. It is the third portion that merits scrutiny and critical attention at this juncture. ПВА speaks of Vladimir having established his unitary rule in 980\(^1\) over the lands then comprising the Kievan principality. This source implies

\(^1\) ПСРЦ I: 79; and 2: 56. Cf. supra, pp. 13ff. and accompanying notes.
the presence of sovereign authority as a result of the fact that Vladimir had assumed rule by the right of conquest and some years after his conversion to Christianity, the same annalists are prompted to demonstrate that he was “the elect of God” and his sovereignty was derived and directed from above.\(^2\) Again, with the onset of Jaroslav’s sole rule in 1036, the scribes of \(P\!B\!D\!I\) relate to us that the prince “aspired for all his powers” and was the “autocrat” of the Rus’ land.\(^3\)

The notion of sovereignty is common to Scandinavian political thought. The earliest major Scandinavian sources speak of this aspect of rulership and the \textit{Ynglinga Saga},\(^4\) a semi-legendary account compiled by Icelandic scribes very early in the second Christian millennium or at the close of the previous thousand-year cycle, is representative of this genre. The \textit{Saga}, though written in a turgid literary style with its consequent aberrations, elaborates upon the evolution of the Northmen’s political and social organization and of their rulers’ powers. These early Nordic tribes did not require sovereign authority as an essential characteristic of rulership. At this primitive, but pagan, stage that appears to coincide with the inculcation of rudimentary Christian thought, Norse chieftains achieved tribal leadership through distinguished acts of bravery, were noted for their skill in safeguarding the domain from foreign conquests, and were recognized for their ability to make worthy sacrifices to the gods, thus bringing divine favors upon the ruler and the ruled.\(^5\)

Scandinavian society advanced in stages from a clan/tribal structure to higher forms of civilized society through a maturate process—a growth noticeable among many of the leading Indo-European peoples at this stage in their history. In the progression of Norse political society the \textit{Ynglinga Saga} relates that the high chieftain became known as a \textit{drott} (sovereign) and simultaneously his people accepted the notion that the kin of the gods had begot him.\(^6\) The idea of sovereignty developed from the political expectations of the people—their need for solitary leadership generally in time of military conflicts that were frequent and the knowledge that the gods through the agency of a semi-divine being would protect the community

\(^2\) Ibid., 1: 127; and 2: 111. Cf. \textit{supra}, pp. 45–46, and esp. n. 111, for variants on this phrase.

\(^3\) Ibid., 1: 150. For variants and \textit{lacunae} in the Rus’ annals subsequent to this source, cf. \textit{supra}, pp. 59–60, esp. n. 156.

\(^4\) Snorri Sturluson (Monsen edition), pp. 1–35; and the Hollander translation, pp. 6–50.

\(^5\) Ibid. (Monsen edition, unless otherwise noted), p. 6.

\(^6\) Ibid.