

# Rurik Biography

## Rurik

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# Biography

The legendary Norman warrior Rurik (died ca. 873) was the founder of the first Russian state and of the dynasty that ruled in Russia until the death of Feodor I in 1598.

According to the first Russian annals, the *Primary Chronicle*, Rurik was a Scandinavian "from the tribe of the Rus" whom the people of Novgorod invited in 862 to assume rule over them, as they had been unable to govern themselves. Accompanied by his family and retinue, Rurik settled in Novgorod, and his brothers took control of adjacent regions. The area under their authority came to be called "the land of the Rus" and eventually Rus'. The descendants of Rurik continued to rule over this region following his death about 873.

Although this account of the origins of the first Russian state and dynasty enjoyed considerable credibility among older historians, modern scholars no longer accept it in its entirety and even question the actual existence of Rurik. The story of Rurik contains inconsistencies and information that cannot be confirmed from other sources. The origin of the name Rus' has never been satisfactorily explained. Scholars are certain only that the Scandinavians frequently invaded and migrated into Russia in the 9th century and that the origin of the names of early Russian princes, including the name Rurik, derives from the Normans. Though possibly reflecting earlier records or legends that have not been preserved, the *Primary Chronicle* has obviously used the story of Rurik to explain, justify, and antedate the rule of the Rurik dynasty, during which the chronicle was written and compiled (early 12th century).

The notion of Rurik's having been invited to rule in Russia seems in particular to be a product of such efforts. The original Rurik, if one existed at all, might have been one of the Norman chieftains who went to Russia from Scandinavia either as conquerors or as hirelings of local communities in which they often subsequently usurped power. At best, Rurik might have been invited to Novgorod as an auxiliary to one of several local parties competing for power. The establishment of his own power there under these circumstances was probably achieved through usurpation.