Walking through the plains beyond the outskirts of Rome, one is unable to imagine that it was just in those now empty places that Caesar's capital was unfolding itself, giving gorgeous shelter to some ten million inhabitants. It is equally unbelievable to imagine the gorgeousness of Kiev (The Mother of Russian Towns)—where Prince Yaroslav the Wise entertained foreign guests from East and West. The remnants of the wall paintings in Kiev's cathedrals, all those large-eyed, serene figures of world-wise men, interpreted by the brush of real artists, give us a glimpse of what art actually meant to the Russians of those times (about 1000-1200).

A few years ago there were excavated in Kiev some remnants of ancient walls, frescoes, tiles and ornaments; these are believed to be fragments of the Princes' court-yards. I have seen some of the exquisite frescoes, and I found them bearing the features of art of Asia Minor. The structure of the stone walls in itself indicates a special quaint manner of technique, which usually marks the periods of great love for architecture. I think that the Rogere Palace in Palermo gives an idea of the palaces of Kiev.

It was really a combination of North and South: the metal sheen of the Scandinavian style, beaded with the pearls of Byzantium, made the ancient city that place of beauty which led brothers to fight for it. The astounding tones of enamel, the refinement of miniatures, the vastness and dignity of the temples, the wonders of metal work, the mass of hand-woven textures, the admixture of the finest laws of the Roman style—all these melted into one in giving Kiev its noble elegance. Men of Yaroslav's and Vladimir's times must have
had a highly developed sense of beauty, or the things left by them would not have been so wonderful.

Note those paragraphs from the heroic epos where the people's mind dwells on the details of ordinary life, leaving for a while the achievements of heroism. Here is a description of a private house—a (terem):

- Around the terem—an iron fence;
- Its spikes—topped with carving;
- Each of them crowned with a pearl.
- The gate-way—floored with whale tooth.
- Over the gate-way—about seventy ikons.
- In the middle of the court—the terems do rise;
- The terems with their gilt domes;
- The first door-way—in wrought iron work.
- The middle door-way—in glass;
- The third door-way—latticed.

One can trace in this description a likeness to the images on the Aegian structures and Trojan columns.

And, here is a description of horsemen:

- Their clothes are of scarlet cloth.
- Their leather belts are pierced with wrought metal clasps.
- Their caps are black and pointed,
- In black fur, with golden crowns.
- Their feet are shod with precious leather,
- Tipped at the toes like awls;
- The heels are pointed too;
- There's room enough for an egg to roll around the toes,
- There's room enough for a sparrow to fly around the heels.

This is an exact, although poetic, description of the kind of garments that can be seen in the Byzantine wall-paintings.

And, here again is the picture of the hero himself:

- The helmet on his cap shines like fire.
- His plated shoes are in seven shades of silk.
- Each has a golden tack in it;
- On his shoulders—a coat of black ermine.
Yaroslav's was the exultation of a man who sensed in his creation a monument of art that would live for ages. One can envy and admire the modes of life where such art was in demand.

A question may arise: How could Kiev have become a centre of culture at the very start of Russian history?

But, do we possess any knowledge about the foundation of Kiev?

That city tempted Prince Oleg the Varengian—a man of the world, a man of experience. Before him, the Princes Askold and Dir coveted Kiev; so did many other Normans.

(And many Varengians foregathered and came into possession of the Slavonic Land.)

It should be noted that there are no indications anywhere in the lines of the annals about Askold and Dir being uncultured. Thus the facts about the foundation of Kiev are really pushed back into the depths of the legendary times. Let us not despise tradition, either; it says that the Apostle Andrew has visited Kiev: why should an Apostle come to virgin forests?—But his appearance in Kiev becomes quite comprehensible if one thinks of the secret cults of Astarte which have been recently traced near Kiev. These cults take us back to XVI-XVII centuries B.C. A large centre of mental interest ought to have existed already in order to shelter such cults.

It is a comfort to know that all of the Great Kiev is still resting within the ground of peace, un-excavated. There are glorious discoveries to come yet. They will open almost the only gate into the depths of the past of our land. Even the Scandinavian period and the Bronze period will have a light thrown on them through those gates.

There is no doubt that the joy of art has grown in Kiev, side by side with the neighbouring Scandinavian culture, without being engendered by the latter altogether. Why should the birth of the Russian Scandinavia be attributed entirely to the legendary Prince Rurik?—The ancient annals mention a fact which is of great significance, yet it has never been picked up as a key:

(The Russians pushed the Varengians beyond the sea and would not pay duty to them.)—Now, if the expulsion of the Varengians took place before Rurik's name came in at all, when did their first appearance in the Russian land take place? It is quite possible that the Russo-Scandinavian era may have been rooted in the depths of the ages.

We have a startling illustration of carelessness in the (historical) text-books on the subject:

The famous phrase attributed to the old Russians, which is meant in the text-books as a wholesale invitation from the Russian land to the Varengians (from over the seas) runs thus:

(Our land is large and prolific, but there is no order in it. Come and rule over us.) What is usually given as a sequence to this invitation are the following lines: (There came the Varengian Rurik with his brothers Sineus and Truver (862).

Now, in the Scandinavian annals, the words (sin huus) and (truver) mean, (his household) and (his true guard). Therefore, I would suggest a different explanation of the famous phrase: very probably, it has found its utterance, not on the part of the ancient Russians themselves, but among the Scandinavian colonists who inhabited the banks of the northern river Volhov. It is they that must have asked Rurik from behind the Ladoga lake (which is very much like a sea—where he, most likely, used to come from Scandinavia for hunting)—to come and organise a military force for them. And that man—with his Household and his Guards, with his means and his probable love of adventure—came to the asking of his compatriots. By and by, his kind of (princes) the warriors hired in the North of Russia, were attracted by the Kiev principality where the role of a (Prince) was more than that of a warrior and included the position of a statesman.
Going further into the depths of the ages, we find the last frontier of realistic entities. Apparently, only dust seems to be left beyond those frontiers, and an amateur is put hard to believe that it is not merely a theory of dull archaeology that we are asked to adopt. But in reality, there survived some atoms of fascinating gorgeousness that did live in the past. Now it is time for everyone to realize that art has existed not only where this is obvious to all; but that much, much is hidden from us by the veils of time. And what seems dull now will appear one day lit up by the joys of penetration. The onlooker will become a creator. Herein lies the fascination, both of the Past and of the Future.

The phantastic bas-reliefs on the northern rocks, the tall hillocks among the trade-routes, the long daggers and the attire, so rich in design, make one love northern life; they awaken respect for the primitive forms of beauty beyond which our imagination sinks in the depths of the bronze patines.

A great deal of art can be sensed even in the mysterious and dusky periods which stand back furthest from us. Can the animal Finnish phantasmagoria be strange to art? Do the bewitched forms of the Far East escape artistic penetration? Are the first adaptations from the antique world hideous in the hands of the Scythians? Are the ornaments of the Siberian nomads merely coarse?

No: these finds are kindred to art, and one can envy the clarity of conception of the ancients. They incarnated symbols that meant to them so much, and created well-defined, distinct, manifold artistic forms.

It is in the mysterious cobweb of the Bronze period that we have to look round. Every day brings with it new conclusions. We can discern a whole pageant of people. Beyond the shining, gold-clad Byzantines we see the motley crowds of Finno-Turks pass by. Deeper still in time, majestically come the gorgeous Arians. Still deeper—there are only the extinguished bonfires of unknown wanderers: these are numberless.

It is the gifts which all of these have left for us that are now-a-days building up the neo-nationalism. The younger generations will heed it and will become strong and sane through it. If the blunted modern nationalism of art is to be turned into a neo-nationalism—the foundation stone of the latter will be the great ancient world in its genuine conceptions of truth and beauty. This truth and beauty will find one day its equal in the great future.