

THE NORTHERN WORLD    BRILL

# Viking Rus

*Studies on the Presence of  
Scandinavians in Eastern Europe*



Wladyslaw Duczko



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VIKING RUS

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North Europe and the Baltic c. 400-1700 AD  
Peoples, Economies and Cultures

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*Studies on the Presence  
of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe*

BY

WLADYSŁAW DUCZKO



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## PREFACE

The debates on the subjects concerning Russia—the country of the Rurikids princes, the Moscovite tsars, the socialist Soviets, and post-communist Russian Federation—are never tepid. One of such topics, the beginnings of the first state of East Slavs, the Kievan State, has for a long time been among those which has been debated in the most heated fashion. The main reason is a dispute about one issue: how extensive was the participation of Scandinavians in the creation of this state? It is not the sole purpose of the present book to offer an answer to this question; this will be attempted but as a side effect of the main purpose: to make a presentation of Norse settlements in Eastern Europe between the mid eighth to the late tenth century.

When in 1985 I attended the 5th Congress of Slav Archaeology in Kiev it was my first visit to the land of the Rus. To see Kiev and Chernigov was a great experience, just as was, ten years later, my visit in Gnëzdovo. It was in Kiev that I met for the first time the Russian scholars researching early history of Rus: Danil A. Avdusin, Elena A. Melnikova, Vladimir J. Petrukhin, Tamara A. Pushkina; later I encountered the Leningrad/St Petersburg archaeologists Evgenii N. Nosov, Evgenii A. Rjabinin, and many others: All of them have had their place in making of this book.

Writing a book is a job that needs a suitable place with computers, e-mail, xerox machines, library, coffee maker and pleasant company. I was privileged to have such a place in one of historical houses of Uppsala, in the Dekanhus: for making this possible I would like to thank professor Ola Kyhlberg.

The unrewarding task of transforming my English into publishable text was undertaken by Paul Barford.

This book is intended to be the first volume of two concerning Central East Europe during the first millennium A.D. The Berit Wallenberg Foundation in Stockholm has my grateful thanks for its long, patient and generous financing of the project and this book.

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## INTRODUCTION

The representation of Eastern Europe in the literature of the medieval Norse is a mixture of geographical realities and fantasies. Following the traditional denominations taken from the writers of Antiquity, this part of continent was usually called Scythia. In the early medieval period the content of this name was extended and started to include Scandinavia. During the twelfth century some Norse writers made a new linguistic construction by equating Scythia with the name of Svealand, *Svitjod* and provided vast territories north of the Black Sea with the name *Svitjod hinn mikla*—Sweden the Great.<sup>1</sup> But the fact that the territory of medieval Russia was given the ancient name of Sweden was not only a scholarly play on words; it was also based on knowledge about the long and extensive presence of Swedes in the East.

The state of the Eastern Slavs—Russia, or *Rhosia* according to the Byzantines of mid-tenth century—was called in the medieval Norse literature *Gardariki*, or in the earlier, Viking-age sources just *Gardar*, a term originally restricted to the non-Slav territory of Ladoga-Ilmen. The Norse written sources are entirely silent about the very beginning of the Scandinavian presence in the East; nothing is recorded of the early history of the Rus, the people that eventually gave its name to the state and territory. The main written source for studies of the history of early Russia—*The Primary Chronicle*—has very little to say about situation before mid-ninth century. Its relation is restricted to the story in which groups of Varangians, Scandinavian robbers, troubled different tribes by forcing them to pay tributes till the victims revolted, made the oppressors leave and started to rule themselves; after a while this self-rule turned into the internal strife and soon, in their desperation, they asked some other Varangians, called Rus, to come and rule them. This vision of the very beginnings of Russia conditioned all history writing on the subject and left examination of the earliest period more or less outside the scope of research.

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<sup>1</sup> Gahrn 2002.



Eastern Europe—between the Bug river in the West and Ural in the East—was populated by Slavs, Balts, Finns and Turks, people organised in tribal communities living in the vast territories of different zones: steppes, steppe-forest and forest. Until the middle of the tenth century there was only one polity here strong enough to exercise domination over the mosaic of all these peoples—the Empire of the Khazars. It existed since the seventh century A.D. between the Volga and Don rivers and northern Caucasus, being a federation of various people ruled by the Turk nomads, the heirs of the western kaganate, part of the huge Asiatic Empire of the steppes. Amongst this diversity of folks of East Europe, in the middle of the eighth century A.D., appeared Scandinavians—Svear from Central Sweden. In the beginning they were traders operating from Staraja Ladoga along the Oka-Volga route, the territories of Finnish people. The Norsemen were given by these people a special name—the Rus, and it was by this name that the Greeks and Arabs knew them. In the early ninth century some groups among these Svear-Rus became united by one ruler called *chakanus* = *khaqan* and as such were recognised by Byzantium and Franks in the West. In the late ninth century the Rus started their expansion to the Slavonic middle Dnieper, where during next century they created the principality of Kiev, the first state of the East Slavs, a polity which eventually changed the history of whole region.

The appearance of the Svear in the northeast regions of Eastern Europe was not a sudden and new phenomenon. In fact it was preceded by a very long period of contacts in which groups of Svear from Central Sweden and the Åland islands were engaged in various operations in the forest zone east of the Gulf of Finland. The main reason for this penetration was the exploitation of the attractive natural resource of the region—the furred animals like marten, beaver, fox and squirrel. The great demand for the winter furs of high quality was, since the Roman period, constant and during the early Viking Age rose significantly becoming (together with slaves) one of the most important commodities traded by the Svear.

The beginning of the Viking period is manifested by an increase in the martial and mercantile activities of the Scandinavians. The establishment in the North of a network of trading and craft places called in the contemporary Latin sources *portus* or *vicus*, in modern German literature *Seehandelsplätze*, the emporia with harbour, is one of those important changes which took place in the Baltic during

the eighth century.<sup>2</sup> This network of points of contacts covering the North Sea and the Baltic was a powerful unifying force, which was soon engaging the European North in activities promoting contacts with, and later incorporation in, Christian Europe. Far from being of the same strength and dynamism as the late medieval Hansa, the early Viking-age chains of ports of trade introduced a new factor in the exchange operations of the region. The ports were links of similarly organised places, meeting-points serving traders that were moving around. Alongside the trade, various crafts were established and an extensive production of combs, glass beads and metal jewellery was conducted, thus making the material culture of the Germanic Baltic increasingly homogenous.

One of the earliest Norse places of *portus* type was Ribe on the west side of the Jutland peninsula. Founded around 700 it functioned as a focus for Frisian trade. Its importance and adjustment to the conditions of this trade was shown by the use, and probably local production of scaettas, silver coins employed in the North Sea trade.

These early trade sites are treated by research only in their Baltic-North Sea context. The side branches from the continental “*austurvegr*”, the “East Way”, the main highway by which the commodities were transported, have been acknowledged but yet not examined in any real detail, with the important exception of numismatics. A third site should be considered alongside the main northern ports at Hedeby in Denmark and Birka in Sweden, Staraja (Old) Ladoga in north-east Russia. Although it is not recorded in written sources, the archaeological finds leave no doubt that the Scandinavians were the founders of the site and for a long time the most significant of its users.

The study of the circumstances of creation of the first state of the Eastern Slavs in Russia is an old and important topic in European historiography. It has never been a neutral topic; on the contrary, seldom has a problem of seemingly purely scholarly interest been so hotly debated as this one. The heat of the debate depended not only on the usual problems with the evidence, which would be quite natural, but most of all because of strong nationalistic feelings it used to raise. This is an underlying thread of the discussion, from the first angry protest of the great scientist Mikhail Lomonosov (arguing against the opinions of German historians working in Russia and

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<sup>2</sup> Dulnicz 1999.

maintaining the creation of the Russian state by the superior Scandinavians), to the 19th century scholars attacking Vilhelm Thomsen's soberly presentation of the evidence, and finally the Stalinist Great-Russian chauvinism and post-communistic nationalism. This so-called Anti-Normanism casts a black shadow over eastern-European historiography. It should however be noted that nationalism and ethnic fantasies never ruled totally, there were always scholars able to keep their heads cool and cultivate their patriotism separate from their research. Among them was Leo Klein, one of the Soviet scholars who in the mid-1960s tried to study the issue as objectively as possible, and who, together with his seminar in Leningrad has recognised seven steps in official concept of Norman question:<sup>3</sup>

1. The coming of Normans to the Ancient East-Slavic area;
2. Foundation of Kiev's dynasty of Normans;
3. Norman origin of the name Rus';
4. Influence of Normans on the East-Slavic state;
5. Normans as creators of the First East-Slavic state;
6. Racial preference of Normans as the cause of their successes;
7. Political influences for the contemporary situation: Scandinavian geniuses are the proper bosses, Slaves must be subordinates.

Many Slav scholars regarded the idea of participation of non-Slav people in the foundation of the Rus state as something unacceptable, others only unwillingly maintained "Anti-Normanistic" positions, disgusted by some western historians' uncritical acceptance of the extreme "Normanistic" attitude. This attitude was held by many even in much extreme variant, like that formulated by Adolf Hitler: "Unless other peoples, beginning with the Vikings, had imported some rudiments of organisation into Russian humanity, the Russians would still be living like rabbits"<sup>4</sup> While there were few scholars that would have expressed an opinion as extremely as Hitler, there were many others that fell more than easily into the trap of an exaggerated confidence by over-interpreting the sources, almost always the written ones, and reaching unreliable conclusions.

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<sup>3</sup> Klein 1999:91; my translation.

<sup>4</sup> Quoted in Härke 1998:22.

One can understand the despair of Slav scholars forced to deal with the dilemma of making the choice between the testimony of the written sources and their own patriotic feelings. The historian F. Uspenski from late 19th century was one of many that were struggling with the issue.<sup>5</sup>

If you adhere to the Normanist school, you must attribute all the events of the 9th and 10th centuries to Varangian princes from beyond the seas, and you can draw from those events hardly any inferences relating to the Russian national history. The expeditions against Constantinople, the treaties with the Greeks, and *Pravda Russkaya*, all concern a Norse fellowship, and tell us nothing about the Slavs. If you are an Anti-Normanist, you regard all these things as creations of the Russian, i.e. the Slavonic spirit, and you deduce from them conclusions which are of interest to Russian national history. In any case, no one can refuse to give plain answers to the questions: is Rus a Slavonic nation—is its name a Slavonic or Scandinavian word—or, does it, in general, designate only (foreign) conquerors? You may agree that the answers affect one very essential question: namely, whether or not we have created our own history.

After all the Great Russian chauvinistic attitude expressed in the past, and its echoes in present, it is refreshing to read what a young Ukrainian historian, Oleksy Tolochko is writing about Kiev: “The Kievan state was a family owned company, equipped with its own administration, military forces, laws, and its own aborigines to exploit. The parallel that immediately comes to mind is that of European colonial companies of modern times”<sup>6</sup>

The history of the early Rus is a history of migration and adaptability of the Norse people to the various ethnic and cultural environments of the Eastern Europe. The written and archaeological sources gives clear testimony of continuous migration of people from Scandinavia during Viking Age. While the fact of migrations, not only of small groups of warriors and traders but whole segments of populations to the West was never denied, there was always difficulty in accepting this for the east of Europe.<sup>7</sup> At the present stage of research, it is not possible to give even an approximate number of Norsemen dwelling in the East during a period of more than two

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Paszkiewicz 1954:110f.

<sup>6</sup> Tolochko 2001:131.

<sup>7</sup> See discussions about migrations in Chapman & Hamerow 1997, Härke 1998.

hundreds years but it should be stressed that it was not a small number. Beside the princely Rus of the Rurikid dynasty, the warrior-trader grouping that founded the base on which Kievan Russia was established, were also many of Norse colonists that settled in various places in the East—they were, as Ingmar Jansson appropriately called them, “the rural Vikings”.<sup>8</sup>

The adaptability of the Norsemen was a prominent feature of all Viking enterprises. It would not exist if the lands they went to were not attractive for them, even if they were sometimes very different from their homes. It was worth them moving out there for either a short time, or for good, because in the new places it was profitable to conduct trade, to impose tributes on the native people, to rule some of them, or settle and live as farmers. For many Norsemen, the opportunity to operate in the East was a way of securing their social position at home, while for many others it was an excellent opportunity to leave troubles in Scandinavia behind and start a new life.

Concepts concerning ethnicity play a significant role in studies of the Norse presence in East Europe. It cannot be otherwise: the story of Scandinavians moving into non-Germanic, multiethnic regions is an ethnic story. The issue of ethnicity is as complex as any other that involve problems of identity.<sup>9</sup> In this case the creation of the Rus’ ethnicity presents itself as a long process in which various specific stages have to be recognised. There is very little place here for generalisations. It is necessary to maintain all the time in mind the historical context, to proceed step by step, from the earliest fur-traders moving in and out, through the first established settlements as centres of trade, crafts and service, to political organisations without territories and, finally, to the foundation of principalities with boundaries, administration and a hereditary-based power structure. This process involved relations with many ethnic groupings and relations between the Rus already long-established in the East and groups of new Norse arrivals. The main theme of the story is how the identity of the Rus was negotiated, by which means Norse ethnicity was preserved and how it was utilised in each new phase.

By defining their peculiarity, the Rus could make clear to the people with which they were interacting—trade companions, tributary

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<sup>8</sup> Jansson 1997.

<sup>9</sup> Jones 1997; Pohl 1998.

people—who they were. The ideological culture of Norsemen was transferred from their homelands to the Eastern Europe, where it was functioning as long as the process of integration with other cultures turned their original identity to something less important and eventually terminated it. In this process, the use of symbols was a necessity. Material culture was a bearer of identity, and its political aspect—the use of symbolic signs and symbolic items—a source of its vitality. As long the Norse groups in the East entertained contacts with Scandinavia, and received new arrivals, their identity retained its vitality and was perpetuated in a natural way. Once the broader contact ceased, it did not take very much time for the forms and motifs to disappear from the mainstream of the culture. The fact that some of the forms continued to be used for a long time is another story.

The main weakness that has perverted the research dealing with the Rus, especially in the West, was a relatively poor knowledge of the archaeological material, a source without which it would be not possible to effectively explore the early medieval history of this part of Europe. This weakness is still serious and until more, and better, excavation reports and finds are published and thus made available for international research, the topic will remain difficult to handle satisfactory.

The functional treating of the archaeological material has tended to simplify the issues and turn the history of the Norse presence in Eastern Europe to a narrative which has hardly any relation to reality. The area of Kiev has always received much attention, although it was the Ladoga-Ilmen region and the territories between the Upper Volga and Oka which were those parts of East Europe where the largest Scandinavian population lived.

When we approach the society of the early Rus, it is essential to get to know their material culture as it appears in archaeological remains. The usual manner of research is to make a differentiation of the finds between those which are Scandinavian, and those which are not, and then to summarise this with simple statistics. The second step, the recognition of the cultural, social and specific historical context of these Nordic objects is almost never revealed.

This leaves us with an unused source of evidence of great importance. The range of available Nordic objects is large enough to allow an analysis of the functioning of the society of the Rus in alien surroundings. At this moment we should ask a question: how alien in

fact was this culture? While it is a fact that what we have got here is a culture transferred from outside together with people who were not here originally, at the same time these people had behind them a history of a long presence in Eastern Europe, and because of this they should be treated as indigenous as many other groups. The permanent engagement of the Rus in the area stretching over several hundred years implicates them as an element of the cultural mosaic of the region. At the same time, if their identity was dependent on contacts with Scandinavia, their society should not be seen as typical for the indigenous ones. The identity of the Rus must have been well established if also the later newcomers from the North were treated as Rus. The mechanism that was maintaining their identity consisted of several elements that allowed perpetuating the Nordic self-identification. The interaction with various ethnic groups was a permanent variable in this process, a variable that was working in different directions. Contacts with culturally and linguistically alien people were reinforcing the Nordic identity of the Rus, and at the same time were introducing in it new elements, thus widening their self-consciousness.

The other aspect of the problems with the recognition of the realities behind the archaeological material in Russia is the interaction between different groupings of the Scandinavians. It is naive to expect that the Norsemen operating here were not competing with each other, that the differences that existed at home were not reflected in conflicts abroad. This aspect has never been given enough attention. The neglecting of the variability of the Scandinavians, their attempts to create separate power concentrations with their own politics, has considerably simplified our picture of the Norse presence. This complicates the understanding of the development of the engagement of the Scandinavians in time. It is difficult to follow the connections between the earliest settlement in Staraja Ladoga with the polity of Rus, the kaganate of which is known from the 830s, and with the testimony of the later sources that a shift of power occurred just after the mid-ninth century, which according to the *Russian Primary Chronicle*, is usually connected with the arriving of Prince Rurik. Was Rurik a completely new factor not related to the previous polity? How we should relate the expansion of the Rurikids southwards to the many Scandinavian groupings dwelling in the southern part Ladoga and the Volga-Oka region? Was Gnëzdovo, the largest Norse

site in Russia, ruled by the Rurikids or by some other Scandinavian dynasty? Who was ruling in Chernigov?

Finds from two main points in the Volkhov-area—Staraja Ladoga and Gorodishche—mainly manifest the presence of the higher social groups of the Norsemen. This is hardly surprisingly. The remains of the culture of the social elite are always most visible in archaeological finds. The elite was the only part of society that had the possibility to create a complex culture by co-operating with elites in other regions, by obtaining craftsmen and artisans that created material culture, which was a vehicle of their identity. The objects taken from Scandinavia, or the ones produced on spot, served the ideology of Nordic people living in Eastern Europe. As long as this ideology was important for the group, it was natural for them to utilise the objects. They provided people with material signs of their identity, giving coherence to the community. Besides these objects, burial customs were the most important way of keeping the identity alive.

Studies of Norse material culture in Russia have been negatively influenced by insufficient knowledge of the original Scandinavian culture. Many times they were restricted to simple identifications that a particular object was Scandinavian, and nothing more. The unspecified recognition of Norse items made the whole idea of uncovering the people behind the material remains completely out of scope of scholars. The problem itself (which is the possibility of connecting particular objects, or their groups, with particular people: Svear, Danes, Norwegians or Gotlanders) was never established as a goal of research. In this book it will be attempted to recognise who were people that lived and died in Ladoga, Gnëzdovo, Kiev, Shestovitsa and other sites.

The most visible Norse archaeological finds from Eastern Europe are female personal ornaments. This fact is of importance because warriors and traders occupy a primary position in the universal picture of Viking Russia and if women are mentioned they are often regarded as slaves transported to Islamic markets for sale. The presence of Norse women should be given more space in an examination of Rus society. Women were a part, a decisive one, of families, a part that to great extent was responsible for their Norse identity. In this book the material culture of women, because it is so salient, so tangibly present in archaeological sources, will be given prominent place, thus making the world of Rus more understandable.



## CHAPTER ONE

### THE RUS AND SCANDINAVIA: THE CASE OF THE RHOS IN INGELHEIM A.D. 839

#### 1. *Background*

In the entry sub anno (s.a.) 6367 (859) in the Russian *Primary Chronicle* we are told “The Varangians from beyond the sea imposed tribute upon the Chud, the Slovene, the Meria, the Ves, and the Krivichi . . .” Three years later, 6370 (856), these Varangians were driven back and the mentioned people “set out to govern themselves” but they failed to do so. As a result, they invited from the oversea “the Varangian Rus: these particular Varangians were known as Rus, just as some are called Swedes, and others, Normans, Angles, Gotlanders . . . They thus selected three brothers, with their kinsfolk, who took with them all the Rus and migrated. The oldest, Rurik, located himself in Novgorod . . .”<sup>1</sup> For the compiler of the *Primary Chronicle* the Rus was a name of a group of the Norsemen which was translocated from Scandinavia to Eastern Europe where they first settled in the north region and after some time moved south and created the Kievan state. This vision was one of the historical constructions of the writer, an invention of the origins of the ruling dynasty of Rurikids (see chapter VI). The chronicler had no clear idea about the early Rus and thus could not know that people called Rus were present in this part of the continent far earlier than the mid-ninth century.

We learn about these early Rus from another entry in another chronicle. In the research examining the history of the early Viking Age in the Eastern Europe, and particularly the circumstances of the origin of the Russian state, an exceptional position is occupied by the entry under the year 839 in the continuation of Royal Frankish Annales, the Flandrian “Annals of St Bertin”. By using official documents from imperial archives, Prudentius (the writer of this entry)

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<sup>1</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:59.

recorded an encounter with people named Rhos, which were identified by the Frankish authorities as Swedes. These Rhos were a part of a Byzantine embassy, which in 839 had arrived at the court of the Emperor Louis the Pious at Ingelheim near Mainz. This was the first time the Rus appeared in the written sources (at least in those which have survived). The content of the entry has attracted scholarly interest for a long time, long enough to turn the described event into a symbolic notion. The primary reason for the sending of the embassy very soon disappeared into the background and it was the marginal Rhos upon which attention was focussed. Almost everything in the entry became a subject of controversy: who these Rhos actually were, where they had been living, why their ruler had the title *chakanus*, why they came to Constantinople and what was the purpose of their presence in the Byzantine embassy? The main points in the exploration of this case were the ethnicity of the Rhos and the meaning of the title *chakanus*, but the most important issue was the old topic: the creation of the Russian state and the role played in it by the Norsemen and the Khazars. The issue was from the very beginning a very sensitive one and soon became a political one, to a such degree that during a part of the Soviet period it was not entirely safe to be involved in a research that could show that the alien impact (Scandinavian, i.e. Germanic, and Khazar, i.e. Turk-Jewish) on the innocent Slavs was not totally destructive.<sup>2</sup> Nor should we omit in this context the problem of Finnish and Balt populations of Northern Russia, the demographic environment in which most of the early activities of the arriving Scandinavians took place. This ethnic environment was often left aside and the Slavic one highlighted.

National pride and strong chauvinistic feelings, combined with politicisation of research for some time steered much of the exploration of the issues of the case of the Rhos. The entry in the *Annales Bertiniani* was used as one of the most important pieces of evidence for those scholars who claimed Swedish roots for the first Russian state. At the same time its contents did not much disturb those who were convinced of the unimportance of the Norse people in the process of political organization in Eastern Europe. Since the Danish linguist Vilhelm Thomsen, and his book about the creation of the Russian state by Scandinavians, many efforts were made to interpret

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<sup>2</sup> Avdusin 1988; Pletneva 1990.

the case of the Rhos at Ingelheim to suit various, sometimes contradicting, historical narratives. The fall of the communism in the early 1990s has promoted a more open approach among eastern European scholars to the “Normanist” and Khazarian problem without making the issue less controversial. Though perpetually discussed, the case of the Rhos was no more studied than the other celebrated case—the invitation of the Varangians with Prince Rurik. The significance of the latter event, despite its historicity or not, was always understood by scholars as a kind of a starting point of the Russian state, while the “kaganate” of Rus in the early ninth century was usually presented as an obscure beginning, interrupted by the arrival of Rurik and his two brothers in the late 850s. The *Primary Chronicle*, where the legend of “the calling-in of the Varangian princes” was formulated, tells us nothing about the early Rus, it only mentions some undefined “Variagi”—Varangians, extorting tributes from the various tribes, groups of Norsemen which, when they became too much of a nuisance, were simply expelled beyond the sea. Even if the existence of the political structure created by Scandinavians before the mid-ninth century is absent in the *Primary Chronicle* it is well attested by the contemporary written sources. Besides the embassy of 839 being mentioned in the *Annales Bertiniani*, the Rus and their organization are mentioned in several Oriental books of various date, sometimes as simply repetitive parts of much earlier narratives, sometimes as short notices preserved in original shape. They are seldom very extensive, which is why the origins of the polity of Rus remains rather obscure, but the fact itself—its reality—is not possible to deny. The lack of more detailed sources and the difficulties with the interpretations of the available ones is often adduced as the reasons for the insufficient state of research on the subject. As we perfectly know however, historians seldom feel that they have ‘enough’ sources. In our case this lack is serious but hardly devastating. What we have got should be enough to make a coherent and plausible historic reconstruction. If this reconstruction will hold good in each instance is another matter. It would be strange if it did as our story is an exceedingly complex one and it would be unreasonable to expect that it would be possible to link all its elements in total harmony.

As long as the scholars were upholding the idea that the involvement of Scandinavians in the affairs of eastern Europe was minimal and without significant importance for the developments in the region,

it was not easy to reach conclusions which would be in accord with all available sources. By repudiating the explanation of the word *Rus* as originally a Scandinavian-Finnish term and keeping up with the theory of the Slav origin of the name, by restricting this term to the territorial denotation (suggesting that the name concerned Slav tribes in the Middle Dnieper) and not accepting the *Rus* as at first an ethnic (Scandinavian) and later a social group, research involved itself in a maze of contradictions and unsolved propositions continually leading into cul-de-sacs. Attempts to determine the beginning of the Russian state, with Kiev as its centre, long before the Viking age, sometimes already in the sixth, sometimes in the eighth century led to the same sort of problems. By regarding the Ilmen-Volkhov area with its Finnish population to be a less important area, secondary to the Slav area of the Middle Dnieper, the picture of the beginning of the process of the creation of a state organization in the Slav Russia became too distorted to be of real value.

During the late twentieth century, new data were emerging from eastern European archaeology; we now have a more reliable chronology, and we have also started to learn more about the finds of Scandinavian character. To a large extent it has also proved possible to move away from some of the old misconceptions in scientific discourse. These processes have advanced enough to allow discussion of the case of the Rhos to proceed in a different, and more productive manner. In this discussion we realise that we should pay more attention than before to events and developments in Scandinavia. This facet of the examination of the issue has hitherto been unsatisfactory and has had a negative influence on the progress of research. Even if the Rhos were living in Eastern Europe, they were most of the time and in a variety of ways connected with the Scandinavian North. Well-developed trade links functioned as co-operative enterprises involving groups in the North with those in Russia. The involvement of the Norse elites gave these activities a special dimension. The acquisition of wealth, mostly in the form of Islamic silver, was closely connected with the upholding of social status at home. Behind the operations of the Scandinavians in the East was always the need of possessing mobile wealth necessary for distribution and keeping positions in the society. From the moment that groups of Norsemen started staying longer, or decided to settle permanently in the East, the process began of the building of a new kind of Norse society.

This process was ongoing at an accelerated pace since the late eighth century when the contacts with the trading centres in Khazaria were established to the extent allowing large quantities of Islamic silver coins, dirhams, to be purchased and transported to centres in Russia and Scandinavia. Once the volume of the trade, and other possibilities in the East was realised at home, the enterprises became increasingly attractive for Norse chieftains. It was enough that one leader among them had strong charisma and sense of purpose to give the activities quite a new character—the creation of a political structure, a hierarchic military organization. An organization of this kind came into being in the early ninth century and is known in historiography as the “kaganate of Rus”.

The Rhos who appeared in Ingelheim were representatives of this organization. Their incorporation in an important embassy—at imperial level—from Byzantium was not accidental. They were not there in the capacity of official envoys to the Franks and their presence was explained by the Byzantine emperor in such a way that it gave the impression that they had nothing to do with the main purpose of the embassy. But this was not quite true. In fact it will be argued below that the Rhos were dispatched as messengers of the Greek Empire to the Danes. The Rhos became part of a diplomatic plan of Constantinople, an attempt to involve Danish military forces—the most effective Vikings—in the struggle against the offensives of Islam in the Mediterranean, where Byzantine armies were losing battles, and the Empire its territories. The Greeks engaged the Rhos as mediators in this attempt. Nothing about such an operation is preserved in written sources, at least explicitly, but appears as quite likely when we add the testimony of archaeological finds to the information known from Frankish, Islamic and Greek sources.

The temptation to use archaeological material to fill in lacking parts of written documents, to illustrate particular events known from written sources, has always been regarded in an ambiguous manner, even by historians, who otherwise have had a critical attitude towards archaeology as an independent historical science. It is, however, known that in some cases the use of archaeology is possible, even more, it is the only way to acquire knowledge otherwise absent in written records. Our case belongs to this category. It depends on a peculiarity of the available material. In a way, the most important finds—lead seals and coins—are written sources, and it should be added are sources of prime quality. In particular seals—“the ghosts

of vanished archives<sup>3</sup> are of such informative value that we could build a whole story only on them: they were issued by a known person of known social position, a person whose activities and movements in time are fairly well documented. Even the coins represent a very useful source: they can be easily identified as belonging to a well-known emperor and the exact time of their emission can also be deduced. Thanks to these favourable circumstances, the prolongation of the exploration of the story of the Rhos after the year 839 is rather promising.

The case of the Rhos at Ingelheim is rich in issues, each of which deserves separate discussion. In order to understand the background of the story we have to present all of them in more or less extensive form. There is plenty of scope for detailed explorations, and there are many questions which have to be asked and, where possible, answered. The examination of the case of the Rhos gives an excellent opportunity for a better understanding of the first four decades of the ninth century in Eastern Europe, a time when the involvement of people from the Scandinavian North started to be a decisive factor strongly influencing shape of this part of the continent.

## 2. Sub anno 839 in Annales Bertiniani

Ingelheim, an imperial residence site with a palace, and a renowned *aula regia* lies close to Mainz am Rhein, one of the important Frankish archdioceses.<sup>4</sup> The palace was often used not only as private living quarters for the Carolingian rulers but also as a place for official state meetings, and a place where foreign embassies were received. The *palatio* served in this capacity when a Greek embassy arrived on 18 May 839. Apart from splendid gifts, the envoys had a letter from Byzantine emperor Theophilos directed to the German emperor Louis the Pious. In the letter was explained the reason for their journey—to renew and confirm a peace treaty. This Greek embassy was one of several sent to Louis during his reign: two were despatched 816 and 817 by Emperor Leo V, and one 833 by Theophilos.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Whittow 1996:2.

<sup>4</sup> Sage 1976; Grewe 1999.

<sup>5</sup> Treadgold 1988:219; Wickham 1998:246; Nelson 1990:157.

An account of the Byzantine embassy of year 839 is to be found in the Annals of St Bertin recording events in the Carolingian Empire between 830–882, written by several authors.<sup>6</sup> The part which interests us was written by Prudentius, bishop of Troyes from 846 to 861. It is assumed that Prudentius was present at Ingelheim during the Greek visit,<sup>7</sup> and while writing the entry had been using documents from imperial archives, especially two letters, one from Emperor Theophilos and a copy of the letter of Louis the Pious despatched to Constantinople. His part of the chronicle is highly regarded by scholars, who treat it as very reliable.<sup>8</sup> It should be remembered however that Prudentius was not writing a detailed report of the event, only a short story in which he mentioned some facts he found significant for understanding the case. Though we would appreciate a more exhaustive treatment, the elements that Prudentius recorded are of great value indeed, without some of them we would not be able to understand the details of a process of change that was taking place in Eastern Europe in the early ninth century A.D.

The entry has been the subject of many scholarly explorations. The first who paid attention to its content was Gottlieb Bayer, a German historian active in Russia in the first part of the eighteenth century, while the most exhaustive scrutiny of the entry was made by Ernst Kunik.<sup>9</sup> Since then the number of studies of different scope increased following the engagement of research in the problems of the early Russian state.<sup>10</sup>

The entry reads as follows in Latin and in English translation:<sup>11</sup>

*Venerunt legati Graecorum a Theophilo imperatore directi, Theodosius videlicet, Calcedonensis metropolitanus episcopus, et Theophanius spatharius, ferentes cum donis imperatore dignis epistolam; quos imperator quintodecimo Kalendas Iuni in Ingulenheim honorifice sescepit... Misit etiam cum eos quosdam, id est gentem suam, Rhos vocari dicebant, quos rex illorum chakanus vocabulo, ad se amicitiae, sicut asserebant, causa direxerat, petens per memoratam epistolam, quatenus benignitate imperatoris redeundi facultatem atque auxilium per imperium suum totum habere possent, quoniam itinera per quae ad illum Constantinopolim venerant, inter barbaras et nimiae feritatis gentes immanissimas habuerant, quibus eos, ne forte*

<sup>6</sup> Nelson 1991:6–13.

<sup>7</sup> Lowmianski 1973:130f; Boba 1967:23.

<sup>8</sup> Kunik 1845:197; Nelson 1991:7.

<sup>9</sup> 1845:195–284.

<sup>10</sup> See Riasanovsky 1962.

<sup>11</sup> Kunik 1845:198; Nelson 1991:42–43.

*periculum inciderent, redire noluit. Quorum adventus causam imperator diligentius investigans, comperit eos gentis esse Sueonum, exploratores potius regni illius nostrique quam amicitiae petitores ratus, penes se eo usque retinendos iudicavit, quoad veraciter invenire posset, utrum fideliter eo necne pervenerint; idque Theophilo per memoratos legatos suos atque epistolam intimare non distulit, et quod eos ilius amore libenter suscepit; ac si fideles invenirentur, et facultas absque illorum periculo in patriam remeandi daretur, cum auxilio remittendos; sin alias, una cum missis nostris ad eius preasentiamdirigendos, ut quid de talibus fieri deberet, ipse decerendo efficeret.*

There also came envoys from the Greeks sent by the Emperor Theophilos. There were Theodosius, metropolitan bishop of Chalcedon, and Theophanus the Spatharius and they brought gifts worthy for an emperor, and a letter. The Emperor received them with due ceremony on 18 of May at Ingelheim. The purpose of their mission was to confirm the treaty of peace and perpetual friendship and love between the two emperors and their subjects. They also brought congratulations and exultation in the Lord on the victories that our Emperor had gained with Heaven's help in his wars against foreign people. Theophilos in friendly fashion urged the Emperor and his subjects to offer up thanks to God for all these victories. He also sent with the envoys some men who said they—meaning their whole people—were called *Rhos* and had been sent to him by their king whose name was *chacanus*, for the sake of friendship, so they claimed. Theophilos requested in his letter that the Emperor in his goodness might grant them safe conducts to travel through his empire and any help of practical assistance they needed to return home, for the route by which they reached Constantinople had taken them through barbarous tribes that were very fierce and savage and Theophilos did not wish them to return that way, in case some disaster befell them. When the Emperor investigated more closely the reason for their coming here, he discovered that they belonged to the people of Swedes. He suspected that they had really been sent as spies to this kingdom of ours rather than as seekers of our friendship, so he decided to keep them with him until he could find out for certain whether or not they had come in good faith. He lost no time in sending a letter to Theophilos through the same envoys to tell him all this, and to add that he had received them willingly for the sake of his friendship for Theophilos and that if they were found to be genuine, he would supply them with means to return to their own fatherland without any risk of danger and send them home with every assistance, but if not, he would send them with envoys of ours back to Theophilos for him to deal with as he might think fit.

In the entry there are the following facts concerning the Rhos:

- the men—nothing is said about their number—who called themselves Rhos were Swedes;



- their ruler had the title *chakanus*;
- they were officially dispatched to Constantinople by the *chakanus*;
- the Rhos were attached to the Greek embassy because of severe perils waiting on them on way back home;
- the given reason for their arriving to Ingelheim was not accepted by the emperor, who accused the Rhos of being spies and put them in detention;
- the farther fate of the Rhos is not stated.

These are the basic elements of the case of the Rhos that we will examine one after other in the present study. It will include such topics like the ethnicity of the Rhos, the nature of their organization, their territory, the kind of activities they were engaged in, the reason for inaugurating official contacts with Byzantium and the circumstances which led the envoys of the Rhos to Ingelheim; finally an attempt will be made to find out what happened to the Rhos party after May 839. To these elements will be added some others, organically belonging to the main topic, and which it will be necessary to discuss in order to better understand the case. One of such additional elements is the seemingly unimportant question of who was leading the Greek embassy. According to the *Annales* it was led by two persons, bishop Theodosios, metropolitan of Chalcedon and the *spatharios* Theophanes. There were, however, raised doubts about the correctness of this generally accepted information. Some Byzantine sources state that Theodosios was a patrician, not metropolitan, and a relation to the emperor Theophilos through his wife Theodora, i.e. a different person but with the same name as the metropolitan. This other person was recognised as a brother of Constantine Babut-zicos, a military commander in Asia Minor, captured by the Arabs 838 after the Amorium catastrophe. The brother's name was Theodosios, he was a *patrikios*, a patrician and a high military official responsible for the Imperial fleet. It was claimed that it was this *patrikios* Theodosios who headed the diplomatic mission to Ingelheim.<sup>12</sup>

For our discussion, the identity of Theodosios is of great importance, for if he was not the metropolitan of Chalcedon but the *patrikios* Theodosios, this would provide us with stronger arguments for the explanation of the presence of three seals issued by the latter

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<sup>12</sup> Treadgold 1988:309, note 425.

and found in Denmark. These finds are crucial for our attempt to shed light on an otherwise unknown Byzantine initiative to directly contact Danish Vikings and persuade them to join forces against Islamic expansion.

## 2.1 *The name of the people*

For Louis the Pious the name Rhos said nothing, evidently he had never heard of such a people. This was also the reason why he was so anxious to interrogate the strangers and find out who they were. The investigation revealed that they were Svear-Swedes, which was a very different thing. With this kind of people the emperor had been familiar since the early 820s, when he started to actively promote conversion of the Norsemen by cooperating with archbishop Ebo of Reims and later by supporting the monk Ansgar and his missions to the Danes and Svear.<sup>13</sup> Louis naturally had received reports about the land of Svear, so when the Rhos told him that despite their alien name they were part of *gens Sueonum* the emperor could at once place them. These strange Swedes must have also explained to him why they called themselves Rhos, where they lived and in what kind of society. Unfortunately for us none of those explanations, with the exception of the title of their ruler, was recorded.

Prudentius used the term *gens* to describe the kind of ethnic unit of the people called Svear. The term was employed according to the praxis among scholars in early medieval Western Europe.<sup>14</sup> They were relying here on the Antique authors, like the Late Romans, which wrote of *gentes*, or *nationes*, when they referred to barbarian peoples, contrasting it to the *populus*, people living in the state organization. Early Christian writers altered this division according to their ideology: *gentes* were pagans, *populus* was no longer a political unit but a society of Christians. For the Medieval Latin world *gens* and *natio* became a term denoting each ethnic community consisting of members sharing common origin, language, customs and way of life; now the term *populus* lost its sharp denotation and was utilised alongside the two others. This is demonstrated in Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii* (chapters 14–17) from the late ninth century, where the

<sup>13</sup> Wood 1987.

<sup>14</sup> Zientara 1985:20ff.

population of the Swedish *regnum* is sometimes called *gens*, sometimes *populus Sueonum*.<sup>15</sup>

The recognition of the Rhos as Svear, likewise the testimony of the later sources equating them with Norsemen—*Normannorum gentes* in Ioannis Diaconi *Chronicon Venetum* talking about the Rus attacking Constantinople in 860—leave no doubt that at least the leading portion of the Rus, constituting their identity, was of Norse origin. The Norsemen could act with brutal force as an instrument of domination among the tribal communities of the Eastern Europe, but it was not the only way they were capable of acting, they were certainly cooperating with the autochthonous people, mixing with them, though still preserving their Norse identity.

The letter of Theophilos to Louis the Pious does not specify where the Rhos were living but from the context it clearly appears that they came from Eastern Europe. When, during interrogation in Ingelheim, the Rhos explained that they were *gens Sueonum* they were informing him that though they were not living in the territory of Svear, and though they were called different name, their identity was connected with a specific ethnic unit of people in Scandinavia (see below). It is hardly possible to give the connection Rhos-Svear any other interpretation than this one.

Generally scholars accepted the information that the Rhos were Swedes as a very clear statement. For many others it was possible to deny the truth of this information when they decided once and for all to see the Rus as a people of Slav origin. During three hundred years many (predominantly Russian) scholars, have tried to convince themselves and others that the idea that the Rus were originally Northmen was a fantasy, and a very bad one, as it was not possible to accept Germanic strangers as the creators of a Russian state: a Slav state, by definition, could be created only by Slavs. Once the thesis about the Norse origin of the word Rus was repudiated, there was no end of the attempts to find an alternative explanation. One of the earliest expressions of this attitude was the idea that Varangians were western Slavs from the Baltic coast.<sup>16</sup> In 1749 the great scientist Mikhail V. Lomonosov became an enthusiastic adherent of this thesis, being deeply offended by Gerhard Müller, the German historian from the Imperial Russian Academy, who claimed Scandinavian,

<sup>15</sup> Trillmich 1978:46, 48, 52.

<sup>16</sup> See Viliñbakhov 1970.

especially Swedish superiority over Slav primitivism.<sup>17</sup> He was followed by many others; at the end of the nineteenth century the most influential was S. Gedeonov, who claimed that the invited Varangian princes were Slavs.<sup>18</sup> There were also some attempts to identify the island of Rügen in the Western Baltic as the place of origin of these Rus—only because of some similarity of the name. In later time, in accordance with all those ideas which tried to find Rus' roots outside Eastern Europe, was a hypothesis formulated by Omeljan Pritsak who claimed that the Rus originated from merchants living in the town of Rodez in south France, and that the ethnonym itself was derived from, otherwise not recorded, Celto-Roman *Ruteni*.<sup>19</sup> Like some other bold hypotheses of this scholar, this one too has been refuted.<sup>20</sup>

Scholars disliking the idea of a western Slavic origins of the Rus, but still refusing to accept their Scandinavian pedigree, turned their attention to the south of Russia, to the forest-steppe zone, where one of the numerous Slav tribes—*Poliane*—was found more suitable than some foreign Slavs for the role of the creator of the Rus state (see below chapter VI). Toponyms and the names of tribes and people from different times, all with the root Rus/Ros, were offered as evidence for the ancient and autochthonous ancestry of the name Rus. The thesis of the autochthonous origins was built on disparate sources, practically none of real value. In the search of etymologically suitable name were involved names of the rivers, such as the Ros, tributary of the Dnieper, Rusa, tributary of the Seim, the Rsha in the Chernigov area, or even Rha—the ancient name of the Volga.<sup>21</sup> Among the names of various ancient peoples were an Iranian tribe of Roxolani from the beginnings of first millennium A.D., the Rosomoni, a Germanic unit from the third century A.D. in Pontia, or the Hros living north of the Caucasus and mentioned in a Syrian source from sixth century A.D.<sup>22</sup> In this desperate search, attention was given to Etruscans in Italy and even “prince” Rosh from the Biblical prophet Ezekiel.<sup>23</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Davies 1996:656.

<sup>18</sup> Gedeonov 1862.

<sup>19</sup> Pritsak 1981.

<sup>20</sup> Schramm 1982; Thulin 1985.

<sup>21</sup> Paszkiewicz 1954:129; Melnikova & Petrukhin 1989:33.

<sup>22</sup> Thulin 1981; 2000:77f.

<sup>23</sup> Paszkiewicz 1954:129; Lowmianski 1957:145.

The majority of the written sources pertaining to the Rus clearly distinguish them from the Slavs. No oriental source ever equates the Rus and the Slavs, on the contrary, they are very careful to keep them apart as two different kinds of people. The only exception is a source, originating one generation after the mission of the Rhos, the work of Ubaidallah ibn Khurdadbeh, director of Posts and Intelligence in the Baghdad Caliphate.<sup>24</sup> In his *Kītab al Masalik Wa ‘L-Mamalik*—The Book of Roads and Kingdoms, probably written in the late 840s, he mentioned the *ar-Rus* as:

... a tribe from among the *as-Saqaliba*. They bring furs of beavers and of black foxes and swords from the most distant parts of the *Saqaliba* [land] to the sea of Rum, [where] the ruler of *ar-Rum* levies tithes on them. If they want, they travel on the Itil, the river of the *as-Saqaliba* and pass through Khamlij, town of the Khazars, [where] the ruler of it levies tithes on them. Then they arrive at the sea of Gurjan and they land on the shore of it which they choose. On occasion they bring their merchandise on camels from Gurjan to Baghdad [where] *as-Saqaliba* eunuchs serve them as interpreters. They claim to be Christians and pay [only] head tax<sup>25</sup>

This account has always been used by many scholars as an excellent source testifying in the most clear way the Slav origin of the Rus. Matters are, as has been emphasized many times, not so simple. The attribution to the Slavs may be explained that the author was employing a term without sharp ethnic connotation, in the same manner the word *al-Saqaliba* was generally utilised by Islamic authors when depicting not only Slavs but all people of fair complexion and hair, or sometimes just all inhabitants of Eastern Europe.<sup>26</sup> About eighty years later, an Arab diplomat ibn Fadlan calls the Volga Bulgars *as Saqaliba*, though these people were certainly not Slavs. The information given by ibn Khurrdadbeh that the Rus when trading in Baghdad could use Slav eunuchs as interpreters is also of dubious value, it is well-known that the majority of slaves traded by the Rus were Slavs, and the Rus being in constant contact with their living merchandise could have learnt their language.

The account has been recognised by some scholars as a later interpolation, which does not necessary need to be the case, the book of

<sup>24</sup> Lewicki 1956:43ff.

<sup>25</sup> Boba 1967:27f.

<sup>26</sup> Lewicki 1956:50ff.

ibn Khurdabeh has not survived as the original work but in late, carelessly made copies.<sup>27</sup>

The search for the original Rus' was generally a purely linguistic activity. In this special position was occupied by Danish linguist Vilhelm Thomsen. His book, "The Relation between Ancient Russia and Scandinavia and the Origin of the Russian state", published 1877, contained little original thinking of the author but was instead a very efficient presentation of all the known sources—Latin, Oriental, runic inscriptions—as evidence of the Norse origin of the Rus.<sup>28</sup> In this most influential book, Thomsen offered a detailed analysis of a theory based on older assumptions, first forwarded in 1744 by J. Thunmann, that the name of Russia was not Slavic but originated from a Finnish denomination of Sweden—*Ruotsi*. By stressing the general use of this word in all West-Finnish languages: Estonian—*Roots*, Vodish—*Rotsi*, Livish—*Ruot's*, Karelian—*Rotsi*, Thomsen could secure the base of the thesis in the linguistic environment of the region.<sup>29</sup> After his work, the detailed analysis of this issue was conducted almost continually.

The name of the Swedes received in Ingelheim—*Rhos*—is understood as a Latin form of Greek word Ros. The chronicler Prudentius was using official documents, among them the letter from the emperor Theophilos, where he found the strange name of the Svear and wrote it as it was in his Latin text.<sup>30</sup> The word Rhos-Ros is equal to the term *ar-Rus* of the Arab sources, and the name of the first state of the eastern Slavs, the Kievan State.

In the beginning, before the Viking Age, certainly in the early eighth-century, the term was employed as a self-denomination by the Scandinavians, mainly Svear, arriving in those parts of Eastern Europe which were populated by Finish tribes. The original word, in Old Norse, was the verb *róa*, to row, and later its derivatives like *roðR*, meaning both the action of rowing and the sea expedition and its members which derived Old Finnish *rotsi* from compounds in Old Scandinavian—*roþ(r)smenn*.<sup>31</sup> By simplification the Finnish -ts- became -s- thus eventually creating the universally used word *rus*.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>27</sup> Konovalova 1999:206; Paszkiewicz 1954:118.

<sup>28</sup> Thomsen 1877; 1882.

<sup>29</sup> Thomsen 1882:83.

<sup>30</sup> Schramm 1981:2.

<sup>31</sup> Ekbo 1981; 2000.

<sup>32</sup> Schramm 1982:19.

So the self-name of the migrant Scandinavians, the rowers, the crew of a boat, oarsmen—*roðsmenn*—became accepted sometime during the eighth century as an ethnicon by the Finnish people, and which eventually, through their mediation, reached Slavs and Turks of Eastern Europe, the world of eastern Islam and the Greeks of Byzantium. The original word describing the profession of the groups of the Northmen turned eventually—as a result of a long process of socialisation and politicisation—to the name of a state and people of the eastern Slavs. After many heated disputes, the etymology of the word *Rus* seems to have been settled. The favourite hypothesis about word's western or southern origin cherished by generations of Slav scholars is now mostly abandoned. There is a general consensus among scholars accepting deriving name *Rus* from a term of Norse-Finnish origin. Thus, we could obtain from the account of Prudentius the information that people of Swedish origin were part of an organization members of which were calling themselves *Rus* (*Rhos*). This leads us to the next piece of information, that about their ruler.

## 2.2 *The title of the ruler*

Apart from the name of the people, the title—*chakanus*—of the *Rhos*' leader has been the most debated element of the account in the Bertinian Annals.<sup>33</sup> From whom this title was adopted was one of the questions to which the answer was often dependent on a preconception: some scholars assumed a Khazar origin as the only possibility,<sup>34</sup> while others, especially those who tried to diminish the importance of the Khazarian Empire, used to claim that the *Rus*, who of course were Slavs, were imitating the title of the Avar *khaqan*.<sup>35</sup> For some nineteenth-century Normanists like A. Schlözer and N.M. Karamzin the word *chakanus* was not a title at all but a Scandinavian name, the Old Norse *Hákun*.<sup>36</sup> The latter interpretation did not gain much acceptance and was abandoned (though its supporters still appear from time to time). The same eventually happened with the Avar proposition. At present there is almost total unity of opinion

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<sup>33</sup> Arrignon 1984.

<sup>34</sup> Kunik 1845:235; Artamonov 1962:366.

<sup>35</sup> Rybakov 1953:135.

<sup>36</sup> Kunik 1845:217; Blöndal 1978:33, note 1.

that the title of the ruler of Rus is of Khazarian origin and that the word *chakanus* is a Latin form of the Turk word *khaqan*, a title of a prime ruler in the nomadic societies in Eurasia.

The written sources deliver several pieces of information about the title of the Rus king. After the one which is present in *Annales Bertiniani*, already in 871, in the *Chronicon Salernitanum* there is a note of the comments of the Emperor Louis the German on the title—*caganum*—of the Avars, Khazars and Norsemen: *caganum vero non praelatum Avarum, non Gazanorum aut Nortmannorum nuncupari reperimus . . .*<sup>37</sup> The Norsemen here are the Scandinavians living in Eastern Europe, i.e. the Rus. It is most significant that the title *kagan* was officially accepted by Byzantine authorities as rightly belonging to the rulers of Rus. This title is even recorded in Islamic sources. A Persian writing in Arabic, ibn Rosteh, in a book from 903–913, calls the ruler of Rus *khaqan Rus*, the same is noted by an anonymous Persian geographer from the end of the tenth century.<sup>38</sup> What is rather surprising is that this title of the Rus ruler is absent from the above mentioned book written by ibn Khurdadbeh. One would have expected that in the chapter “Titles of the rulers of the Earth” the title of *khaqan* would not be restricted to Turks, Tibetans and Khazars, but also included the Rus, described in the same book as important traders. But this is not the case. It is difficult to decide whether this can be explained by some parts of the book being late interpolations, but it is rather peculiar that this source is so different from all the others.

For a while the term “*kagan*” was the only official title of the Rus’ rulers, later, after the creation of the Kievan Rus’, it seems that it was utilised only as an archaic and prestigious denomination. As such it was employed in the mid-eleventh century by Metropolitan Hilarion of Kiev in his “*Slovo o zakone i blagodati*”, where Prince Vladimir was mentioned: “. . . *velikago kagana nashea zemlja, Vladimera . . .*, the great *kagan* of our land, Vladimir”, and where, in the same words, even his son Jaroslav was mentioned.<sup>39</sup> On the inside wall of the Sophia Church in Kiev somebody wrote “*spasi gospodi kagana nashego*”—Lord, save our kagan”, an inscription referring, as it is assumed, to

<sup>37</sup> Kunik 1845:236f; Lowmianski 1957:152; 1973: 133; Golden 1982b:82.

<sup>38</sup> Lewicki 1950:350; Golden 1982b:82; Minorski 1937:159.

<sup>39</sup> Kunik 1845: 271f; Lowmianski 1957:151, note 554.



the death of one of the sons of the prince Jaroslav.<sup>40</sup> Are those cases of using of the title of *kagan* evidence of the preservation of ancient tradition or there is something different behind it?

The title *khaqan* belonged among the highest and most respected titles of the rulers in the complex societies of Euroasia. It was used in the great Mongolian–Turk federation, the kaganate of the West and East, existing in the late sixth and first third of the seventh centuries, as a vast empire stretching from the Altai to the Sea of Azov and Amu-Darya, in the south reaching the Indus valley. The term was also reserved for the rulers of the Avar empire, stretching from the Pontic steppes to Pannonia (late 6th–late 8th A.D.) and in the Khazarian state (7th–late 10th A.D.) on the lower Volga, northern Caucasus and eastern Crimea. By the early ninth century the only one of these powers left was that of the Khazars, ruling most of Eastern Europe and with which the Rus were dealing in their capacity of traders and pirates, and a builders of a new polity. The Khazars were the heirs of the Turk kaganate, from which they inherited the structure of power—dual kingship—, the charismatic royal dynasty of Ashina (the clan from which all original khaqans were derived), and the system of administration.<sup>41</sup>

In the structure of the Khazar state the function of the supreme ruler was a very special one. A detailed account of it is a part of larger description of Eastern Europe and Khazaria, in a book written by al-Istakhri.<sup>42</sup> The book is from the early 930s and the part concerning the khaqan runs as follows:<sup>43</sup>

As to their politics and system of government, their chief man is called Khaqan of the Khazar. He is greater than the king of the Khazars, except that it is the king of the Khazars who appoints him. When they wish to appoint this Khaqan, they bring him and throttle him with at piece of silk till he is nearly strangled. Then they say to him, How long do you wish to reign? He says, So and so many years. If he dies before, then well and good, if not, he is killed when he reaches the year in question. The Khaqanate is only valid among them in a family of notables. He enjoys neither the right of command nor of veto, but people do him honour and prostrate themselves when they

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<sup>40</sup> Vysotskii 1966:49.

<sup>41</sup> Golden 1980:39.

<sup>42</sup> Macartney 1930:220f; Dunlop 1954:91–100.

<sup>43</sup> After the translation in Dunlop 1954:97f.

enter his presence. No one except a few, such as king and those of his class approaches him. When the king enters his presence, which happens only on a special occasion, he wallows in the dust, prostrating himself, and stands at a distance till he allows him to come near. When any serious eventuality befalls them, the Khaqan is brought out. None of the Turks and the other unbelievers, who are their neighbours, sees him but retires and does not fight with him, out of reverence for him. When he dies and is buried, no one passes his tomb without dismounting and prostrating himself, nor does he remount till he is at a distance from the tomb. Their obedience to their king (i.e. Khaqan) goes so far that when one of them is perhaps condemned to death and, being one of their great man, the king does not care to kill him openly, he commands him to kill himself, and he withdraws to his house and kills himself. The Khaqanate is in a group of notables who possess neither sovereignty nor riches. When the chief place comes to one of them, they appoint him without regard to what his condition is. . . . the Khaqanate is never given to any but a Jew. The throne and canopy of gold which they have are never set up for any but the Khaqan. His tents when they go forth are above the tents of the king. His house in the town is higher than the house of the king.

Ibn Fadlan, an Arab diplomat who was sent to Volga Bulgars A.D. 922, wrote about the Khazars and mentioned some more details about their *qagan*:<sup>44</sup>

As concerns the king of the Khazars, who is called Qagan, he does not show himself except [once] every four months, appearing at a great distance. They call him Great Qagan and his deputy is called Qagan Beh. It is the latter who leads his armies and governs them and takes charge of the affairs of the state and cares for the state and appears before the people and the neighbouring kings show submission to him. And he [the Beh p.g.] goes in to the Great Qagan every day, humbly, showing his lowliness and seriousness and he comes in to him only bare-foot and holding a piece of firewood in his hand and when he greets him he lights the firewood, when he finishes with the wood he sits down with the king. His place is taken by a man called K.nd.r Qagan and his in turn by one called *Jawshigr*. The custom of the king of the Khazars is that he has twenty-five wives. Each of them is the daughter of one of the kings who confront him, taken freely or by force . . . The length of their rule is forty years. If the king exceeds it by a single day, the subjects and his courtiers kill him, saying his reason has failed and his understanding is become disordered . . .

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<sup>44</sup> Golden 1980:98f.

To make the presentation of the sources about the supreme ruler of Khazars even more complete we should also mention the description left by al-Masudi (c. 940s) in his book *Muruj adh-Dhahab*:<sup>45</sup>

... in the country of the Khazars, there is a Khaqan. His official function is that he be in the hands of another king and in his palace. The Khaqan lives inside a castle and does not ride forth and does not appear before the courtiers and the people. He does not leave his residence where he lives with his harem. He issue neither commands nor prohibitions and takes no part in the affairs of state. Nonetheless, their king would be unable to maintain proper governance of the country of Khazar without the presence of the Khaqan beside him, in the capital with him in his castle...

In all these accounts the Khazar khaqan appear as a sacral sovereign representing the highest concept of rulership. The divine properties of this office was used to provide the security of the Empire and to give the Khazars prestige and legitimacy among people of various origin living under their overlordship. Only members of the Ashina clan could be the khaqans and their exceptional position as holy persons was guarded by elaborate religious ceremonial, numerous taboos and ritual seclusion, all these kept the heavenly khaqan out of the reach of the normal mortals. This isolation made the khaqan's deputy, the beq, into an important person, to the real ruler.

The status of the khaqan in the Empire itself, and in whole region, was the highest possible and to become a khaqan was not in the reach of even the most powerful leaders and kings. Considering this, it is difficult to accept the claims of scholars, like Novoseltsev,<sup>46</sup> that the employment of the title by the Rus rulers was a demonstration of independence from the Khazars and a manifestation of their own position of power. The simplicity of this explanation meant that it became generally accepted as the only possible one. This attitude was strongly objected by P.B. Golden:<sup>47</sup> "Borrowing or adopting the Qaganal title without having met the commonly recognized criteria that gave legitimacy to the bearer of this title, would have been considered usurpation (which could be legitimatised only by the thorough destruction of the previous Qaganal line/charismatic clan) and as such would have encountered only derision. The Rus', as a rising

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<sup>45</sup> Golden 1982a:59.

<sup>46</sup> 1982.

<sup>47</sup> 1982b:87.

commercial and political force, would hardly have wished to be objects of ridicule". It is an important remark which few scholars noted and those who did it decided to refute the reality of the Rus khaqan and revived an old opinion that the Rhos came to Ingelheim as the messengers of the khaqan of the Khazars.<sup>48</sup> The testimony of the account of Prudentius and of the majority of the other sources, make such a conclusion impossible.

The objection presented by P.B. Golden was valid in the nomad world within which the Rus were operating without being an organic part of it. Golden doubted this outside position of the Rus and maintained that the ruler of the Rus could obtain the title khaqan only if he became a vassal of the Khazar khaqan, if only for a short time. But was it really necessary to acknowledge the authority of the Turk to become a khaqan? It could have happened if the Khazars needed the Rus as allies. The fact that the Rus' ruler was using a title of such status means only one thing: the circumstances under which the Rus could take over the title were such that it was possible. This should be connected with the events occurring in Khazaria, where the *beq* Obadiah, managed to reach supreme power by removing the khaqan, which is dated to the early ninth century.<sup>49</sup> This, and the *beq's* conversion to Judaism in a state consisting of many different religions, caused internal problems and resulted in social disturbances. The leader of the Rus was able to take advantage of such an unstable situation and called himself khaqan, thus manifesting the extent of his ambitions.

### 2.3 *The kaganate of the Rus*

The use of the title chakanus by the ruler of the Rus has led scholars to call the organization he headed the "kaganate of Rus". The correctness of such a designation may be disputed. The term kaganate is organically connected with the political organizations of Asiatic people, the nomads, and to give the same name to an organization of immigrant Germanic people from the North seems hardly suitable. On other hand the fact that their ruler was called kagan means that the Rus were thinking about themselves as a kaganate. If they

<sup>48</sup> Whittow 1996:250ff.

<sup>49</sup> Artamonov 1962:275ff.

did so they must have been also aware that they were not the “real” kaganate, the continuation of the great Turk kaganate of the West, because the only heir of that was the Khazar Empire. According to P.B. Golden, the Rus became a part of the Khazarian federation, and their ruler was officially accepted as a vassal kagan of the Khazar Khaqan of Itil. If we can accept this hypothesis we may apprehend the polity of Rus as a kind of a kaganate. The main problem is how powerful were the Rus at this time that the Khazars would bother to include them into their federation? It is hardly possible to answer this question.

Exactly how and when an ambitious political organization came to being among the Scandinavians in Eastern Europe is a problem of prime importance. Was it an evolutionary process, long and slow, or was it rather a rapid development, started at a suitable moment by a charismatic leader capable of collecting a group of followers and able to exercise power over other groups of the Norsemen and some indigenous peoples? The second alternative, being in accord with similar cases known from this time in Europe, appears to me to be the most probable.

The reality of a polity with a chakanus as its head is confirmed by several written sources. For a long time there was no consensus on the problem of where it existed: somewhere in Scandinavia, on the Azov Sea coast, in Crimea at Tmutorokan, on the Middle-Dnieper, between Upper Volga and Oka, or in North Western Russia. The Scandinavian alternative was never considered seriously, neither was the southern one, though it was entertained by many scholars.<sup>50</sup> Kiev was considered as the only possible place of residence of the Rus’ *chakanus*. M. Artamonov claimed in the 1940s: “. . . in the first half of the ninth century, in Kiev, Scandinavian Varangians already formed part of the Rus (Slavonic) Kagan’s (Khaqan’s) retinue”, and expressed the same unchanged opinion half a century later.<sup>51</sup> Even Riasanovski,<sup>52</sup> who accepted the Rhos in Ingelheim as Swedes, explained them as envoys of the Slav rulers of Kiev. The Kiev kaganate is seen as a proto-state of Slavs, formed during the eighth and ninth century A.D., and archaeologically represented by the

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<sup>50</sup> Vernadsky 1941:72f.

<sup>51</sup> Quoted in Paszkiewicz 1954:414; Artamonov 1990:286.

<sup>52</sup> 1962:5ff.

Volyntsevo culture.<sup>53</sup> For many Russian scholars the kaganat of Rus was the “*russkaja zemla*”—the Russian Land as it is referred in the Primary Chronicle, a territory embracing the Kiev state between 882–1054, and with the Scandinavian ruler Dir as the kagan.<sup>54</sup> The Rhos in Ingelheim were thus the envoys of the Slav kagan ruling the earliest state of the eastern Slavs.<sup>55</sup>

The most fanciful idea about the origin of the kaganate of Rus and its territory was offered by Omeljan Pritsak.<sup>56</sup> During the civil war in Khazaria the khaqan rebelled against his all-mighty major domo (*beq*) and after losing the struggle fled to Rostov, where he joined the Rus living there. The son of this fugitive married a woman belonging to the Ynglingar, the Svear royal family from Uppsala and thanks to this the Rus of Rostov were raised to an extraordinary prominence and could establish their own kaganate. Everything here is built on assumptions. Nothing is known about the escape of any Khazar kagan, especially to Rostov, a place which did not exist in the early ninth century, nor that the Rus were present there at this time, not to mention that there is no record about involvement of members of royalty from Uppsala in the eastern enterprises.

Apart from some information pointing to the south, many scholars searched for the kaganate in the northern parts of Eastern Europe. The reason for this was the information recorded by Prudentius that some wild people hindered the Rhos envoys from returning to their *patria*. It was understood that these dangerous people were living in the steppe zone thus preventing the party of Rhos from getting to the river along which they could reach their territory in the forests of the North. A similar argument may be extracted from the case of the Rus attack on Constantinople in 860—it is absolutely impossible to place the Rus in the south, because everything in this story points to the north.<sup>57</sup>

In parallel with these hypotheses opinions were being formed, claiming the Ladoga-Ilmen area as the core territory of the kaganate of Rus. Already C.A. Macartney<sup>58</sup> was emphasizing that according

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<sup>53</sup> Sedov 1998:231.

<sup>54</sup> Kirpichnikov et al. 1986:189, 285; Tolochko 2001:131.

<sup>55</sup> Lebediev 1985:190.

<sup>56</sup> 1981:28.

<sup>57</sup> Paszkiewicz 1954:423f.

<sup>58</sup> 1930:66.

to the *Primary Chronicle* the Rus were first established in the north in the Novgorod area, an idea which led him to the conclusion that Rurik was the Kagan of the Rus. Some British historians have located the kaganate of Rus in North Western Russia and recognise Gorodishche (Rurikovo) near Novgorod as its centre.<sup>59</sup> C. Zuckerman, in a paper read at a conference held in Paris 1997, claimed that the kaganate existed between 830–871 in the north where Staraja Ladoga was its main point.<sup>60</sup> This is an opinion which is becoming increasingly attractive for Russian scholars.<sup>61</sup>

Several Arab writers, like ibn Rosteh, active in the early tenth century (903–913), and Gardezi (1050–52), give detailed accounts, based on sources from the mid-ninth century which are not now accessible, about the kagan of Rus' and the territory he controlled.<sup>62</sup> Ibn Rosteh, like many other compilers, based his encyclopaedic work on different sources among which the most important was the so-called The Anonymous Account, a book about countries and peoples of Asia and Europe from the second part of the ninth century.<sup>63</sup> The original is lost but fragments of it are preserved in later works, the fragments used by ibn-Rosteh are considered to be the best.

According to ibn Rosteh the Rus centre

is an island around which is a lake, and the island in which they dwell is a three days journey through forest and swamp cover with trees and it is a damp morass such that when a man puts his foot on the ground it quakes owing to the moisture. . . . They have a king who is called khaqan Rus. . . . they make raids against Saqalaba, sailing in ships in order to go out to them, and they take them prisoner and carry them off to Khazar and Bulgar and trade with them there. . . . They have no cultivated lands; they eat only what they carry off from the land of the Saqalaba. . . . their only occupation is trading in sables and grey squirrel and other furs, and in these they trade and they take as price gold and silver and secure it in their belts (or saddle-bags). They are clean in regard to their clothing, and the men wear bracelets of gold; they are kind to their slaves and cloth them well for they engage in

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<sup>59</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996: 33f.

<sup>60</sup> Kulakov 1998:239.

<sup>61</sup> Machinski 1998b:136.

<sup>62</sup> Macartney 1930:213f.

<sup>63</sup> Lewicki 1977:11f.

trade. They have doctors (priests) who act as judges, whose judgement is esteemed above that of the king, who are like lords (or gods) to them. These men order them to come forward with what they desire to their Creator, of women and men and horses, and when the doctors have decreed a thing there is no escape from fulfilling their behest, and the doctor takes the man and the beast from them and cast a rope about his neck and hangs him from a beam, until his soul has departed, and the doctor says that this is an offering to God. These people are vigorous and courageous and when they descend on open ground, none can escape from them without being destroyed and their women taken possession of, and themselves taken into slavery. The Rus are strong and observant, and their raids are not made riding, but their raids and fights are only in ships. None of them goes to satisfy a natural need alone, but he is accompanied by three of his companions who guard him between them, and each one of them has his sword because of lack of security and the treachery among them, for if a man has even a little wealth, his own brother and his friend who is with him covet it and seek to kill and despoil him.

When a great man among them dies, they erect for him a tomb like a spacious house, they place him in it and with him his clothes and the gold bracelets which he used to wear, and abundance of food and jars of wine and money also, and they place with him in the tomb his wife whom he loved, while she is still alive, and the door of the tomb is sealed upon her and she dies there<sup>64</sup>

Though at some points this account leaves doubts about the realities behind it, or at least raise suspicions of later contamination, it is the most detailed information about the society of early Rus we have. The polity described by ibn Rosteh was the kaganate of Rus. Where was the territory over which this organization was ruling? The geographical reality of the island—*al-gazira*—mentioned was either refuted or, much more frequently seen as the Ladoga-Ilmen area with its characteristic richness in water and marshes. There is in fact no other region that would fit better the description of ibn Rosteh, not to mention the archaeology which demonstrate the presence of Norse culture only in Staraja Ladoga in the first decades of the ninth century.

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<sup>64</sup> Macartney 1930.



## 2.4 *The Rhos and Sweden*

While being interrogated at Ingelheim, the Rhos identified themselves as Swedes. This denomination belonged to the people from Middle Sweden, the Lake Mälär Valley, especially the population concentrated in its northern parts, the mediaeval provinces of Uppland and Västmanland. There is enough evidence to claim that some people living here since at least the Early Roman Period, the very beginning of the Christian era, were using this name.<sup>65</sup> For the first time this name is mentioned by Tacitus in chapter 44 of his *Germania* from A.D. 98, where he is talking about “. . . *Suionum hinc civitates . . .*”, their strong fleets, and a leader controlling access to weapons. In the mid-500 A.D. in *Getica* of Jordanes the name of these people is mentioned in two variants: *suehans*, from the Gothic *sweans*, and *sue-tidi*, from ON *sviþiud*—people of Svear. In the latter form this denomination is well established during the Viking Age and since medieval times will be used as Latin *Suedia* and *Suecia* in the whole of Europe.<sup>66</sup>

In the sixth century A.D. the Svear built a political structure with the kings belonging to one family, that of the Scylfings-Ynglings, exercising their power with help of a cult centre in Uppsala, which was their main residence and where they could, by controlling public cult and by cooperating with local rulers on the basis of common interest, legitimise their kingdom.<sup>67</sup> Although the royal family managed to reach a high status its rule was restricted by the power of numerous chieftains and the strength of the most important social institution of the Scandinavians, the *ting*, an assembly of free, male members of society.

Our knowledge of the events in Sweden in the early ninth century is far from exhaustive but not as bad as it sometimes appears. It is in fact the first early historical period which is illuminated by contemporary written sources, of which the main one is *Vita Anskarii* (VA) written in the mid-870s by archbishop Rimbert.<sup>68</sup> Some more information about this period is included in the *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesie pontificum* by Adam of Bremen from the 1070s.<sup>69</sup> These sources

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<sup>65</sup> Gahrn 1988:40f.

<sup>66</sup> Wessén 1969:31.

<sup>67</sup> Duczko 1997c.

<sup>68</sup> Trillmich 1978.

<sup>69</sup> Tschan 1959.

can be supplemented with accounts from late medieval Icelandic sagas, and last but not least, by archaeological material.

The all-dominant place in research of this period is the trade town of Birka. The description of the town in the *Vita Anskarii*, and the richness of the archaeological finds, have made this site the focus of Swedish Viking-age archaeology. It does not mean that the site is well explored, on the contrary, besides good knowledge of burials and some parts of the settlement, we still know very little about the town itself. The port was established sometime after the mid-eighth century and everything indicates that the royal family of Svear was involved in its foundation. It was during this time span that the power in Svealand was divided between two branches of this family. One branch produced the main kings, the Uppsala-kings; the other had its residence on the island of Adelsö on the Mälars Lake,<sup>70</sup> from which the kings could control neighbouring island of Björkö with the Birka-emporium. In the 830s the king at Uppsala was Anund, while at Hovgården on Adelsö was residing King Björn, the one to which Ansgar arrived with his mission.

Two years before the Rhos came to Ingelheim a violent rebellion shook the Svealand. After an, obviously illegal, attempt to enlarge his power, King Anund became involved in 837 in controversy with the people who refused his claims. The rebellion turned against Christians and reached Birka where one of the priests was killed, and the bishop Gautbert, and eventually even the king, were expelled from the country.<sup>71</sup> King Anund found haven in Denmark, where he stayed for seven years. That he escaped to Denmark was not accidental. In the early 810s members of the Danish royal family, the sons of King Godfred, after losing the fight for succession, found security in Sweden (see below). It may indicate that there existed dynastic bonds between the Danish and Swedish royal families, most probably through marriages. This enabled members of both families in times of trouble to seek asylum in the respective countries. The early existence of such a connection explains what happened at the end of the ninth century, when after the Danish royal power crumbled, the Swedish prince Olof could establish himself as a king in Denmark.

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<sup>70</sup> Brunstedt 1996.

<sup>71</sup> Duczko 2000a:34.

### 3. *Early Viking-age Denmark*

Did the Rhos follow the Greek embassy to Ingelheim as Byzantine messengers to the Danes? Three seals originally belonging to letters issued by *patrikios* Theodosios Babutzikos, the ambassador of the Emperor Theophilos, found at three Danish sites—Hedeby, Ribe and Tissø—places of political and economical importance—are very strong indications that there may be substance in this hypothesis. But what in this far-away, little kingdom could have attracted the mighty Greek Empire? It would hardly have been any natural resources; to talk about Danish iron as a strategic and important commodity, would be an exaggeration. The only resource of value would be its manpower, in this case not the otherwise always needed slaves but men with proved extraordinary martial ability (see below).

Though relatively slight in terms of territory, the Danish kingdom of the Early Viking Age was strong enough to play a distinctive and significant role in European politics. From the moment Charlemagne conquered the Saxons and put the Slavonic tribes of the Obodrites into political submission the Frank-Danish relations, which came into being in the 780s during the rule of King Sigfred, became very tense and soon reached a high level of complication.

Danish rulers came from a dynasty which regarded the territories of the Obodrites, Saxons and Frisians as their sphere of influence.<sup>72</sup> This made Frankish politics the concern of the Danes and turned their rulers into respected and feared partners capable of realising their own goals and successfully fulfilling their own policies. Under powerful rulers the Danish kingdom developed military and economic strength which allowed it to successfully obstruct Frankish penetration towards the North. Despite all the internal quarrels between the members of various branches of the dynasty the capacity of the Danes to fight Franks was very high during most of the ninth century. So was their ability to withstand other forms of involvement, like manipulation of royal claimants. Under the pressure of recurrent attacks of Danish Viking fleets on the coast of Francia, the Empire was forced to employ various methods in an attempt to control the situation. One of those methods was absorbing military leaders of

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<sup>72</sup> Kroman 1976:57.

royal origin in the system of dependency by taking oaths from them and, when possible, converting them to Christianity.

An all-dominating factor in the politics of the region was the existence of two branches of the royal family engaged in never-ending combat over the ultimate power. In the repeating configurations two brothers could reign jointly, sometimes adopting one more co-ruler, at another time one of the claimants was strong enough to rule alone, while brothers, cousins and nephews in exile were trying to find sponsors and collect resources which could secure their return to Denmark.

The most powerful Danish ruler until he was murdered in 810 was Godfred. His purposeful and aggressive policies had to a great extent complicated Charlemagne's expansionism.<sup>73</sup> The fights for succession after Godfred involved several competing claimants, the names of whom are preserved in Frankish chronicles: Sigfred, Hemning, Anulo, Harald Klak, his brother Reginfred, and at least three of Godfred's sons. The latter lost and in the company of their followers escaped to Sweden, where they stayed for three years. They returned in 813 and after a while managed, at least some of them, to establish themselves as Danish rulers. They continued the policy of their father and were in constant conflict with Louis the Pious, who was giving his support to the loser of the Danish kingdom, Harald Klak, a member of another branch of the royal family. Due to the internal quarrels between Godfred's sons, Harald could return and share the royal power until early 821, when he was expelled again. In 826 he, his wife and son, and four hundred other Danes, were baptised in Mainz, made their way back to Denmark, from which they were finally and permanently expelled one year later. Louis granted Harald Rüstringen a district in north-west Germany as a fief, where he stayed until his death in the early 840s.<sup>74</sup> His nephew Harald, together with his brother Rörik, was raiding the Empire until 841, when they received Dorestad as a benefice from Lothar. Rörik was given a prominent place in the early history of Rus, being identified by some scholars as Rurik, the prince invited to rule the tribal federation in north Russia, and founder of Rurikid dynasty.

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<sup>73</sup> Kroman 1976:57ff.

<sup>74</sup> Coupland 1998:92.

Under the year 827 the chronicles mention for the first time the name of a Danish king (*regis Danorum*) who until the mid-ninth century was going to be a dominating factor in Frank-Danish relations. It was Horik the elder, one of the sons of Godfred, a most talented ruler capable of staying in power for thirty years (to 854 when he was murdered).

Between 833 and 835, when Louis the Pious was deposed from the throne, the Danes took advantage of the disturbances and launched a series of attacks on the Frisian coast; they continued raiding even after the return of Louis to power. King Horik was claiming non-involvement in those events and even managed to receive from the emperor money for alleged expenses while out of loyalty to the emperor he killed the Vikings, and according to the custom paid wergeld for them.<sup>75</sup> Though Horik claimed innocence it seems that at least some of the periodic Danish attacks on Frisia were inspired by him and his proclamations of loyalty delivered to the emperor were a cynical political lie. After each attack he used to send an embassy with gifts to the Franks to strengthen peace between the countries. In 838 he informed the emperor that he had neutralised some Vikings who had attacked Franks and for this he was expecting Louis to be grateful and give him overlordship over Frisia and the Obodrites. Louis could only give a negative answer to such an impudent request, especially considering that he was aware that the Obodrites were approaching Horik in order to get rid of the burden of Frankish oppression, and that even the Frisians, tired of Frankish overlordship, were already establishing closer relations with the Danes. Horik continued his game with Louis and in 839, after a new Danish raid on Frisia, he sent an embassy to Louis offering him gifts and peace; after some more complains from the Danes, both rulers reached settlement and under an oath promised each other an eternal friendship.<sup>76</sup> When Louis died in June 840, and his sons started a war of succession, Horik stayed neutral during five years until the new emperor Louis the German attacked the Obodrites, now the allies of the Danes. Horik's reaction was immediate: with a fleet of 600 ships he went up the Elbe, conquered Hamburg and destroyed it.

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<sup>75</sup> Nelson 1990:158, note 70.

<sup>76</sup> Kroman 1976:72.

Jutland, a natural part of the continent, was the region where the earliest Danish proto-town emporia for trade and crafts were founded. The very first one was Ribe on the west coast. The next was Hedeby (Haithabu), at the southern end of the peninsula. Hedeby was founded in the second part of the eighth century but its high status as an important trading and craft port was established during the reign of the powerful King Godfred, and for more than two hundred years this town was the most cosmopolitan place in the Danish kingdom, with various ethnic components.<sup>77</sup> Both Ribe and Hedeby were under royal control.<sup>78</sup>

But the centre of Danish royal power was the island of Zealand, where two sites—Lejre and Tissø—played the main role. Lejre was a prominent cultic and royal site from the seventh to the tenth century, a function which was continued even afterwards in a nearby place.<sup>79</sup> Lejre is known from the *Chronicon* of Thietmar of Merseburg and many later sources, in which the appellations like “Lejre throne” and “King of Lejre” indicate that the concept of royal power was connected with this place. Here was one of Denmark’s largest manors consisting of a residential part with several halls—one was 50 m in length—and a workshop area producing bronze and exclusive jewellery. Even many items from Carolingian Western Europe and from the Anglo-Saxon world found here are evidence of Lejre’s exceptional status.

About 70 km west of Lejre, on the western shore of the Lake Tissø, is another site with a great manor.<sup>80</sup> It was established in the early seventh century and existed to the early eleventh century. Within the fenced area, expanding in time from 10,000 to 18,000 m<sup>2</sup>, was a hall—36 m × 10 m—(during the ninth century), and a small building with forge. The site is identified as a *hov*, a place for cultic activities.<sup>81</sup> Similar activities were conducted by the lake, where weapons—swords and axes—were put into the water. The name of the lake tells that those sacrifices went to the god Tyr, one of the most ancient, and most important of Nordic gods.

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<sup>77</sup> Steuer 1984.

<sup>78</sup> Helle 1994.

<sup>79</sup> Christensen 1991.

<sup>80</sup> Jørgensen & Østergaard Sørensen 1995; Jørgensen & Pedersen 1996.

<sup>81</sup> Jørgensen 2002.

North and south of the fenced area were production places with hundreds of pit-houses, where iron forging and bronze casting were performed. Finds of weights and fragments of silver coins discovered all over those areas are testimony of trading during periodical markets. It was in the southern workshop that the lead seal of Theodosios was found.

Who owned the Tissø complex? All factors point to members of the Danish royalties, having their main residence at Lejre. There is in fact the possibility of identifying this family. This is due to the find of a rune-stone near the church at Gørlev, just a few kilometres from the settlement of Tissø. The stone (Dk 239) was erected by a woman called Tjodvi in memory of her husband Odinkar.<sup>82</sup> The stone is dated to about the year 900. In the same place is another stone, raised one hundred years later, about 1000, by Thorgot (man), or Thorgund (woman) for Halvdan.<sup>83</sup> From Skern, in northern Jutland, is a runestone (Dk 81), from the same time as the previous one, raised by a woman, Sasgerd, in memory of Odinkar.<sup>84</sup> The man's name is well known from the early history of Denmark. Adam of Bremen tells about two missionary bishops, uncle and his nephew, Odinkar the older and the younger, belonging to the Danish royal family.<sup>85</sup> They were descendents of a mighty tenth-century clan from which came Asfrid, the daughter of Odinkar who married Gnupa, the king of Denmark, son of Prince Olof, a Swede who in the late ninth century founded his own dynasty.<sup>86</sup>

King Horik's Denmark was the strongest kingdom of the Scandinavian North. The engagement of the members of the royal family in the attacks on the Frankish coast made Denmark an important actor on the European power scene. It was thus only natural that when Byzantium was looking for allies they found out that the Danes with their gallant warriors and big fleets could be of great value in the prolonged and difficult fights against the expanding Saracens.

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<sup>82</sup> Moltke 1976:125, 140f.

<sup>83</sup> Moltke 1976:191f.

<sup>84</sup> Moltke 1976:190f.

<sup>85</sup> AB, II:26,36.

<sup>86</sup> Andersen 1985:16.

4. *Byzantium, Islamic threat and Greek diplomacy*

In our attempt to understand the presence of the Rhos in the Byzantine embassy we have to learn about the situation in the Byzantine Empire in the early ninth century. The period we are dealing with was a time when Theophilos, the last of the iconoclastic emperors ruled Byzantium. When in 829 this well-educated and ambitious sixteen-year-old son of the Michael the Amorian became the new ruler of the eastern Roman Empire, he took over a state in good shape. This does not mean that Byzantium was without problems. Since the beginning of the century the empire was tormented by wars, military defeats, even by major natural catastrophes like a violent earthquake. Almost none of these spared Theophilos' eleven-year reign (he died 842): the wars with some of old enemies were still going on and leading to new, sometimes quite devastating, defeats, and the nasty persecutions of iconophiles conducted by the fanatical emperor were not good at all for the internal harmony of the state. Despite this misery the historians are willing to treat Theophilos' reign as a successful one: as a politician he was resourceful and able, had a good understanding of economy, his reform of the army gave it new strength and his activities as a builder and supporter of the arts and science created an image of a powerful kingdom, a positive image which was beneficial for the self-esteem of Byzantines and which made a strong impression on the outside world.<sup>87</sup> Criticised by his contemporaries, especially churchmen, because of his fierce iconoclasm—he was called rather bad names: “fit tool of the devil”, “harsh in mind”, “demented in opinion”—but soon after his death he became the subject of radical rehabilitation.<sup>88</sup>

Despite the abilities of Theophilos, his Empire during the third decade of the ninth century saw many military defeats—Byzantium was losing not only battles but also territories. The enemies, besides the ambitious and sometimes lethal Danubian Bulgars, were various groups of Arabs expanding in different parts of the Mediterranean. In the 830s the Arabs were ravaging Asia Minor and though the Greeks managed to be victorious in some battles, the threat was not

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<sup>87</sup> Treadgold 1988:327ff.

<sup>88</sup> Makropoulos 1998:41.



removed and soon became even more substantial.<sup>89</sup> The first great loss was the strategic island of Crete conquered by marauding forces from Spain, then, in August 838, the great naval base in Amorium—also the town of origin of the Byzantine dynasty—on the Phrygian coast of Asia Minor, was sacked by an army from the Abbasid caliphate.

A far more dangerous development was going on in the west, where a *jihad*, the “holy war”, was heralded against the Greeks by the Aghlabids rulers in North Africa. Some parts of Sicily were seized by them and the coast of Calabria and Apulia was subjected to constant attack.

In 835 Theophilos made an attempt to re-conquer the occupied parts of Sicily but failed. The situation was hardly acceptable and for a while Theophilos was forced to leave the hated iconophiles alone and focus on real dangers. Unable to fight alone on all fronts, the Emperor decided to negotiate with those who were not openly hostile and could give assistance to the hard-pressed Empire. In order to do so Constantinople launched a series of diplomatic actions. Embassies were dispatched, one to the Franks in the spring 839, another in the autumn of the same year to the court of Ummayyad caliph in Spain, then, in early 840, to Venice; and finally in 842 once more to Germany.

The embassy to Spain was only a partial success. The Greeks, by playing on the Ummajad’s aspirations to represent the entire Islamic world, had at least managed to make them interested. The caliph in Cordova arranged his own embassy, put the celebrated poet al-Ghazal at the head of it and despatched the envoys to Constantinople.<sup>90</sup> There are, however, no traces of any positive results of this mission.

The embassy to Venice was of a different sort. Here the Byzantines were negotiating with (in theory) their own subjects and because of this could expect real engagement from their side. They were not disappointed. The Doge, Pietro Tradonico, after being honoured by the Greeks with the title of *spatharios*, ordered that the fleet should be strengthened by building new ships, some of them of the Byzantine type, *chelandia*, and an expedition was sent to Taranto in southern Italy to fight occupant Islamic forces. This ambitious Venetian-

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<sup>89</sup> Whitrow 1996:152.

<sup>90</sup> Moreno Manzano 1998:220ff.

Byzantine undertaking ended in a catastrophe: the fleet was destroyed.<sup>91</sup> Soon after this disaster the Byzantine fleet arrived and was equally badly defeated in a battle near Calabria.<sup>92</sup>

The case of the embassy to Venice would have only marginal interest in our context if it were not for the presence at its head of a person which plays a most significant role in the Ingelheim story—Theodosios Babutzicos, courtier of Emperor Theophilos, a high military official and also the issuer of the three documents with the three seals that reached Denmark. Theodosios Babutzicos was once more employed to seek help from the Franks in early 842 when a new embassy was formed in Venice and dispatched to Trier, to the residence of the Emperor Lothar. It was well received but though the Franks accepted a real Byzantine princess offered to Lothar's son, they gave nothing in return. While the embassy was in Trier the emperor Theophilos died. On his way back home *patrikios* Theodosios Babutzicos also died. The attempt of the Greeks to resolve the Sicilian problem had failed.

##### 5. *Why did the Rhos go to Byzantium and later join the Greek embassy?*

Now, when the background to the Greek embassy to the Germans is known, we should focus on the reasons for the Rhos to have come to Constantinople and then later join the Byzantine embassy to the West. In Theophilos' letter to Louis these reasons are given and it is these explanations we are going to scrutinise.

It is said that the Rhos came to the Greeks for "friendship" (*amicitiae*). In the Byzantine praxis this could mean an attempt to establish an agreement formed as a treaty, which would regulate various aspects of the future relations.<sup>93</sup> Was then the Rhos' diplomatic mission a kind of first presentation to the Empire of a new political organization that appeared in the vast and always turbulent Eastern Europe?<sup>94</sup> Even if this was the case, there must have been a more particular reason for sending envoys to the capital of the Greeks.

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<sup>91</sup> Vasiliev 1935:182.

<sup>92</sup> Treadgold 1988:320.

<sup>93</sup> Lowmianski 1973:136.

<sup>94</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996:35.

For many scholars such a reason was the attacks of the Rus on Byzantine territories on the coasts of the Black Sea, and the Rhos embassy was dispatched to make peace. The reality of these raids was frequently disputed because the sources which mentioned two such events—the pillaging of Surozh in Crimea, and Amastris on the Asia Minor coast—were late and regarded as not dependable.<sup>95</sup> In the case of one of these sources, the Greek “Life of St. George of Amastris”, the opposite opinion has also been claimed, that this *vita* was preserved in its original shape from a time before 842.<sup>96</sup> Even if both these sources are rejected we cannot exclude plundering raids of Rus as one of the reasons of their mission to Byzantium: the Rus were robbers and pirates, not only peaceful traders (if people extorting tributes and kidnapping women for sale can be called peaceful). Nevertheless, in the contemporary sources the Rus are depicted as a part of an effective, and very important mercantile organization conducting busy trade with southeast Europe and the Orient. Trading was one of the main activities of the Rus and they were certainly interested to develop it even more by establishing direct contacts with the metropolis, the Greek capital. For this they needed a legal agreement, which had first to be negotiated in talks with Byzantine authorities. Did therefore the urge for expansion of the trade lie behind the Rhos embassy to Constantinople? As usual when two alternatives are possible it is easiest to accept both of them. But when we evaluate all facets of the case of the Rhos at Ingelheim it is still simpler to accept the primacy of the martial encounters, which preceded the diplomatic mission. This does not mean that the trade factor should be excluded. The Rus-Byzantine treaties show that trade and military actions were connected with each other in the tenth century, when every treaty was negotiated after plundering raids. This may therefore have also been the case in the year 838.

The Rhos arrived in Constantinople at a time when the Greeks, because of the Moslem aggression, were in great difficulties. Pressed by several serious defeats, threatened by forces it could not master, the Empire was in need of any competent ally. The virtues of the Rus which had been revealed at some occasion were carefully noted by the Byzantine authorities, as also was the successful raiding of the

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<sup>95</sup> Vasiliev 1946:70ff; Makropoulos 1979.

<sup>96</sup> Lowmianski 1957:152; Shevchenko 1977:120ff.

north of continental Europe by naval forces of the Danish Vikings, about which Constantinople was well informed through diplomatic embassies. It seems then that it was not only the Rhos but also the Byzantines who were interested in the establishing of contact. Theophilos received the Rhos envoys to talk peace and trade but even regarding possibilities for arranging military aid from the Norsemen, possibly even recruitment to the Imperial Guard, to the security forces known in the future as the Varangian Guard.<sup>97</sup> It is rather much too early to think about this kind of recruitment, but this was perhaps the first occasion when the idea to engage Norse warriors into the internal forces came to the Greeks' mind. What became very clear for emperor Theophilos was the opportunity to engage the fleets of the gallant Vikings. The Rhos envoys were asked to perform the role of messengers to the Danes, to deliver a proposition to go into the Mediterranean as allies of the Greeks and help them to fight the Saracens.

That is the answer to the question why the Rhos joined Byzantine embassy to the Germans. The answer is not in accord with emperor Theophilos' own explanation given in the letter to Louis the Pious, which was that they were unable to return to their *patria* because of dangerous people blocking the direct route. Now it is time to look closer at this issue. As with many other elements of the case of the Rhos, even this one is difficult to handle because none of the discussed people could be identified unequivocally. The explanation offered by Theophilos was accepted because it corroborated information from one written source, *De administrando Imperio*, a book of information on various subjects collected by Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in the mid tenth century.<sup>98</sup> In chapter 42 there is a note about the trouble of the Khazars caused them by some enemies. The menaced Khazars asked the Byzantine emperor Theophilos for assistance with building a fortress at a strategic point at the Lower Don. The Greeks responded positively and provided the Khazars with architects which helped to construct a brick fortress on the left bank of Don, the stronghold of Sarkel.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Benedikz 1969:21.

<sup>98</sup> Moravcsik 1949.

<sup>99</sup> Artamonov 1962:298–302.

For a long time this information was taken by researchers at face value: it was accepted that this event took place in 833 and the contribution of the Byzantine expertise was seen as most important. The correctness of both assumptions has been put in doubt. First of all, the narrative as it is related by Constantine Porphyrogenitus was understood as an after-construction referring in fact to a martial event which went wrong for the Greeks and was later, when the relations between the Khazars and Byzantines improved, described as something different than it was in reality.<sup>100</sup> Another mistake, which complicated the issue, was the year when the Sarkel episode happened. The year 833 was maintained until research placed it in 838. According to P.B. Golden the embassy of the Rhos to Constantinople was “an aid-seeking mission”, dispatched in cooperation with the Khazars searching for help from the Greeks against the threat from the invasions of other peoples.<sup>101</sup>

The sources make it clear that the Rhos were living in the northern part of Eastern Europe, which means that if they wanted to go back home they would have needed to cross the Black Sea and then travel through the Pontic steppes. This appears as a quite reasonable view, but still it is difficult to imagine that even the most lethal enemies could have hindered a party which had access to the forces of friendly Khazars. If the emissaries of the *chacanus* had managed arrive in Constantinople safe and sound, why was it suddenly so different when it was time to return? Did those wild people appear while the Rhos were visiting the Greek capital?

As already mentioned, the enemies were not specified. Many suggestions have been advanced identifying possible aggressors as nomads like Pechenegs or Magyars but also as the Rus of Kiev.<sup>102</sup> The Pechenegs are easily excluded, as it has been established that they crossed the lower Volga and first appeared in the Pontic steppes in the late 890s. That the dangerous people were the Rus from Kiev was a widespread opinion among historians. In this view, Kiev was seen as an important political centre of the first Slav state already in the early ninth century and it was this state's raising power that represented the threat against the Khazars.<sup>103</sup> This view cannot be

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<sup>100</sup> Golden 1982a.

<sup>101</sup> Golden 1982b:96.

<sup>102</sup> Lewicki 1956:33f; Macartney 1930:72f; Vasiliev 1946:68.

<sup>103</sup> Artamonov 1955:116.

correct, as at this time the Slavonic Kiev state did not exist and thus could not be a military threat to the Khazars and Byzantines. If the Rus had originated from the middle Dnieper region then there would be no problem to reach it on the way back from Byzantium because the steppe along the lower Dnieper was still free from the Pechenegs, or any other dangerous nomads. There is always a possibility that those wild people were just other groups of the Rus which were not under the authority of the *chakanus* and which could operate independently. Even if this was the case it is difficult to imagine that such groups could be of any serious threat for the Khazars who were still very strong. Neither there are any records of hostility between the Rus and the Khazars in the 830s. The Khazars accepted the Rus as any other trading people of the region, taxed them and, when it was suitable, let them pass to the Caspian for piracy. As we will see later there were even more reasons for the mutual cooperation.

The remaining alternative is proto-Magyar tribes, the future Hungarians, movements of which are recorded at this time.<sup>104</sup> Even this identification is not simple either. Sources containing information about these people showing that there was a close co-operation between Magyars and Khazars at this time; severe problems complicating these friendly relations surfaced in the later ninth century when the Magyars, together with the Kabars, a warrior tribe belonging to the Khazarian confederacy, left for the steppes further in the west, and eventually settled in Pannonia.

What is suspicious in the story of sending the Rhos with the Greek embassy is the great care for the envoys showed by the emperor Theophilus. Why was he so anxious to secure the lives of the Rhos? Was it only moral obligation of a host to look after the guests' well being? This is doubtful, the pragmatism of Byzantines and their ruthlessness in political matters is known, so the moral aspect of the special treatment of the Rus' envoys seems unlikely. The explanation given to Louis looks too simple to be true, it looks like an excuse offered in order to hide the real reason. The interrogation arranged by Louis shows that the explanations he received from the Greek envoys were not satisfactory, and when even the Rhos could not provide him with any better information, he went so far as to demand

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<sup>104</sup> Boba 1967:73f.

information directly from Constantinople. The inability of the official members of the embassy to calm the emperor's suspicions with straight answers was obviously alarming him. One may wonder what the reason for this might have been, why it was so important for the emperor to clarify this case? We know that Louis the Pious had all reasons to suspect, not only strangers, but also almost all of those around him. During his reign he was tormented by conspiring sons, constantly rebelling aristocracy and violent attacks of Danish Vikings.<sup>105</sup> No wonder that he developed extreme sensitivity for situations he understood as not quite clear. And apparently for him the case of the Rhos was not at all clear. It is worth noting that his suspicion first became extreme when it was revealed that the Rhos were of Swedish origin. There were some reasons for this. Louis encountered the Svear for the first time in 829 when their envoys came to him asking for priests. The Emperor agreed and a mission, arranged by Ebo, the archbishop of Reims, was dispatched to Birka, the main port of the Swedish realm, where a church was built in 832. This establishment was a success, but not for long. In 837 an anti-Christian riot exploded in Central Sweden and caused a violent end of the Christian institutions in Birka (see above). All this was very bad indeed, but such brutal behaviour was only expected from the barbarian people, so this could not be the only reason for Louis' aversion towards the Rhos-Svear. Was it therefore some event connected with the ongoing devastating attacks of the Danes on the North Sea coast that made the emperor treat his Swedish guests with greatest suspicion? As far as we know the Swedes were not among the attackers, so it would be far-fetched to accuse them of spying in order to prepare future raids. There is, however, a catch in this reasoning: our assumption that the Svear had nothing to do with the Viking expeditions against Franks. Researchers, following the testimony of written sources, never considered Swedes as part of these raids, which were apprehended as an exclusively Danish affair. In general this is correct, but there is one particular case which may be of importance in this context. In Rimbert's *Vita Anskarii*, chapters 14, 17, there is a story of Swedish king Anund who was exiled by his rebellious subjects in 837, during the above mentioned raiding, and then

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<sup>105</sup> Reuter 1991:48ff.

lived in Denmark until 844.<sup>106</sup> What he was doing during the years in exile is not recorded, but one can imagine that like many other persons of his status he was a “sea-king”, that is a pirate. It cannot be excluded that he took part in Danish attacks on Frisia and that his involvement became known to Louis the Pious, who for obvious reasons deeply resented it. The fact that Anund returned to Sweden and attacked Birka with a fleet of Danish Vikings makes our assumption even more plausible.

So was it after all the engagement of some Svear in the hostile activities against the Franks that raised the emperor’s suspicions against the Rhos? Louis made the connection between Rhos-Svear and Swedish Vikings plundering Frisia and accused the Rhos of spying. The emperor was obviously convinced that the Rhos, as other Norsemen, were collecting military intelligence wherever they went, each time fooling their hosts with talk about peace and friendship, sometime even asking to be baptised. He thought that they even spied on Byzantium and explicitly warned Theophilos of his suspicions, thus showing his friendly attitude towards the Greeks.<sup>107</sup>

Was then Louis’ deep repugnance towards the Rhos just the well-grounded reaction of a greatly troubled ruler? There is some possibility that apart from the quite natural causes for suspicion, Louis sensed that something was wrong with those Rhos, and he was obviously bothered that he could not shed light on it. Perhaps what made him so cautious was an uneasy feeling that the Rhos, and even the Greek envoys, were hiding something from him. But what could it be? Was it the information about the real purpose of the Rhos’ mission? If Theophilos was concerned to get help from Franks was it necessary to hide the true reason for sending the Rhos with his embassy? The Byzantines were well informed about the numerous and disastrous Danish raids on the Frisian coast, and how much trouble they had caused the Franks, so it would be, as they probably thought, not very diplomatic on the one hand to negotiate with Louis while on the other preparing a similar meeting with his enemies. The Greeks did not dare to be open, obviously afraid to jeopardise talks with the Franks, especially because the attacks of the Danish Vikings two years before on Frisia had been more devastating than

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<sup>106</sup> Duczko 2000a:34.

<sup>107</sup> Wickham 1998:252.



usual.<sup>108</sup> At the end of 838 the Danish king Horik sent envoys to Louis “to report that because of his loyalty to the Emperor he had captured and ordered to kill the majority of those pirates who had lately attacked our territory” Horik also requested that the Frisians and Obodrites be given over to him. The request seemed to the Emperor so thoroughly inappropriate that he utterly scorned and ignored it.<sup>109</sup> The killing of the Danish pirates was certainly pleasing to the Emperor but the other steps of the king Horik made him hardly favourably disposed towards the Norsemen. In the autumn of 839 the Frankish relations with Horik improved.<sup>110</sup> But in the meantime they were still rather bad and it was necessary for the Greeks to keep to themselves the real reason of the Rhos’ presence, as it was not only King Horik they were planning to contact but also the Vikings which were operating independently of the king.

### 6. *The return voyage of the Rhos*

The account of the visit of the Rhos to Ingelheim ends without clearing up the problem of what happened after Louis the Pious dispatched his angry letter to Constantinople. Bishop Prudentius must have known how the problem with the Rhos was resolved—if he was not in person at the *palatio* during the visit, he had access to the documents concerning the case and if he needed could even have talked to eyewitnesses. The silence of the chronicler cannot be taken as a testimony that he was not informed, rather that the issue was of no importance for him.

Prudentius reports that that the letter to the emperor Theophilos was dispatched with the returning Greek envoys. The entry s.a. 839 also tells us that Louis left Ingelheim for Worms on the 30th of May, which means that the embassy must have also started return travel at about the same time. The Rhos had most probably stayed. Their wait could have been short if the assuring letter from Byzantium came quickly enough, or they may have waited quite long if the letter was late. Their detention could take from weeks to several months.

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<sup>108</sup> Nelson 1991:37.

<sup>109</sup> Nelson 1991:40.

<sup>110</sup> Nelson 1991:47f.

The latter situation cannot be excluded, because a long stay of the diplomatic envoys was far from unusual. It was experienced in 817 by the embassy from Cordova to the Franks which had to wait three months because Louis the Pious first received the envoys from the Greek emperor Leo V, or by the bishop Liudprand in 968 on a diplomatic mission to Constantinople where he was forced to stay for about four months.<sup>111</sup>

As we are told, Louis left Ingelheim and went to Worms to meet his son Lothar, king of Italy to make new arrangements for his share of the kingdom,<sup>112</sup> then he stayed the whole summer in Gaul. That he would bother to drag the suspected Rhos with him is improbable.<sup>113</sup> Louis the Pious died during the civil war with his rebellious son Louis the German, on an island near Ingelheim on the 20th of June 840.<sup>114</sup>

Some months before the emperor's death an embassy was dispatched from Constantinople to Venice for negotiations with the Doge about help against the Islamic nuisance. The main negotiator was *patrikios* Theodosios Babutzicos. His leadership is well documented and has never been contested, which cannot be said about the head of the embassy to Ingelheim. As was already mentioned above there are some doubts among scholars about the identity of the main ambassador of the Greeks: was it Theodosios the metropolitan, or was it Theodosios Babutzicos the patrician? Prudentius, who recorded the presence of the former, was a contemporary witness and thus his testimony is stronger than the later writings of Genesios, the other source with information about Greek embassies. Do we have to assume that Prudentius got it wrong when he was collecting data for the year 839, or was it Genesios that was mistaken? It appears strange that Prudentius tells us only about the metropolitan but not about Babutzicos, a much more important person. If the *patrikios* was the leader he could not have been omitted in the documents the annalist had been utilising for writing the entry. On the other hand it cannot be excluded that Prudentius made a mistake while interpreting the documents, but the probability of this is rather

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<sup>111</sup> Wickham 1998:246; Scott 1993:52, 59.

<sup>112</sup> Nelson 1991:45.

<sup>113</sup> Kunik 1845:206.

<sup>114</sup> McKitterick 1983:171.

slight. Genesios, Joseph or Kanikleios remains uncertain, was writing *On the Reigns* at various times during the first part of the tenth century and covers most of the ninth century, the years 813–886.<sup>115</sup> In book 3:16 Genesios tells how the emperor Theophilos “. . . sent the *Patrikios* Theodosios of the Baboutzicoi, a near relative, to the King of the Franks to seek his help in forming a large army which, with some of his officers, would plunder some Saracen lands and cities that lay between Libya and Asia”, and is adds later in chapter 18: “The Emperor’s plans for a joint campaign with the Franks against the Ishmaelittes came to nothing, as his ambassador Theodosios had died in the meantime”.<sup>116</sup> The scholars who bothered to take an interest in this issue preferred the testimony of the *Annales Bertiniani* and accepted metropolitan Theodosios as the head of the embassy.<sup>117</sup> Among the few who preferred the *patrikios* was Warren Treadgold.<sup>118</sup> It is worth mentioning that those studying the book “On the Reigns” observed that the author had rather vague knowledge about the events from the time of the emperor Theophilos.<sup>119</sup> This uncertainty is also mirrored in the information about the embassy with *patrikios* Theodosios. The note in chapter 16, combined with the one in chapter 18, shows that Genesios knew only about one embassy to Franks, the one that went 842 to Trier, and was not aware about the previous one to Ingelheim. The reason for the sending of the second embassy—to acquire military help from the Franks—corroborate well with the content of a letter, surviving as the so-called “Papyrus of St Denis”, where the Byzantine Emperor proposes an expedition against common enemies.<sup>120</sup>

This explanation of the discrepancy between Prudentius and Genesios leads to the conclusion that *patrikios* Theodosios was not present at Ingelheim. How then did documents with his seals reach Denmark? With the Rhos, or rather later with someone else? Let us first look at the archaeological material, coins and seals.

Since researchers did not show much interest in the case of the Rhos in Ingelheim, they did not much care to try to follow-up the

<sup>115</sup> Kaldellis 1998:IX–XX.

<sup>116</sup> Kaldellis 1998:66f.

<sup>117</sup> Vasiliev 1935:178 note 2; Shepard 1995:56.

<sup>118</sup> 1988:446, note 425.

<sup>119</sup> Kaldellis 1998:XXV.

<sup>120</sup> Shepard 1995:45.

end of the story. Absence of the literary records, difficulties in apprehending the existence of direct contacts between the Byzantines and the Scandinavian North, left the case unclosed. The renowned Swedish archaeologist T.J. Arne was the first who made an attempt to find out what the Rhos did after Ingelheim. By referring to the find of a silver coin of Theophilos and some Khazarian objects in one of the rich graves in Birka, he assumed that the Rhos party eventually got permission from the Franks and went home to the East through Scandinavia.<sup>121</sup> This idea was left unscrutinised, until it was further elaborated by the British historian Jonathan Shepard, who has identified a group of objects—a seal of Babutzikos in Hedeby, coins of Theophilos—as indicators of the route of the Rhos leading through Denmark and Sweden back to their *chacanus* in Northern Russia.<sup>122</sup>

After more inquiries, and due to the increase of the number of relevant finds, our possibilities to reinforce the Arne-Shepard's hypothesis are at the moment much more plausible than they were previously. The material at our disposal consists of three lead seals and a handful of coins. To employ "usual" archaeological finds would be hardly satisfying, but in our case the most important objects belong more to the category of written sources than to the "silent" one. As it was already mentioned above, the seals were issued by the *patrikios* Theodosios Babutzikos, and the significance of the presence of his seals in Denmark, at three different and very special places, cannot be underestimated. They are certainly not "imports", i.e. traded objects, and neither can they be labelled as interesting oddities acquired abroad. The circumstances—find-places and the same issuer—strongly suggest that the seals came to Denmark hanging from three letters written by Babutzikos. The seals are then crucial evidence for the possibility to reconstruct the course of events after 839, and to shed some light on the otherwise unknown direct connection between Byzantium and the Viking Denmark. We recall the role Babutzikos played in the efforts of the Greek Empire to mobilise European powers against the Islamic threat and it is in this context the return of Rhos should be investigated and the seals and coins of Theophilos should be utilised as our prime source. The seals are, of course, especially relevant: they are of the same type and were issued at the

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<sup>121</sup> Arne 1946:224.

<sup>122</sup> Shepard 1995.

same time between 839 and 842, the year of death of *patrikios* Babutzicos.

While the presence of the seals appears as obvious proof of the existence of direct contact, the finds of coins may be seen as more dubious. There are nine coins: one *nomisma*, a gold coin, one *miliaresion*, a silver coin, and seven bronze coins: six folles and one half-follis. All of these coins are emissions of one and the same emperor—Theophilos. Their distribution is as follow: 1 – Denmark (Hedeby), 6 – Sweden (4 in Birka, 2 in Ångermanland), 2 – north Russia (1 on Rurikovo Gorodishche, 1 in Gnězdovo).

The Hedeby-follis is a loose find<sup>123</sup> (Fig. 2 a) There are three folles in Birka: one was found 1873 in the settlement area, the so-called Black Earth, two others appeared during excavations close to the Borgen, at the place called *Garnisonen*—one (found 1998) on the lower terrace, the second (found 2000) on the upper terrace inside a long house (Fig. 2 b).<sup>124</sup>

The only silver coin of Theophilos, dated to 938–840, is from Birka. It was a part of a necklace consisting of rock crystal and cornelian beads and some pendants of Danish and Khazarian type.<sup>125</sup> The grave (Bj 632) at Birka, which contained this necklace, is an exclusive burial, though not rich—except the necklace there are only a few simple items like an iron knife. Among the pendants are several that expose the connections between Hedeby and east Europe. A coiled snake and two bowl-shaped ornaments are of the type of which the oldest examples are known from the ninth century grave No. 42 at Hedeby.<sup>126</sup> The eastern connection is represented by two small mounts from a belt belonging to the so-called Saltovo-Majaki (Khazarian) culture.<sup>127</sup> T.J. Arne was inclined to date the Birka burial to the ninth century but the presence of some other well-datable items show that the grave belonged to the transition to the next century, the very early tenth century.<sup>128</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Shepard 1995:48; Jankuhn 1938.

<sup>124</sup> Hammarberg et al 1989:26, No 9, Pl. 2:6; Hedenstierna-Jonson et al. 1999:68, nr 558; Jonsson 2001:30.

<sup>125</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 119.

<sup>126</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 119k, n, o; Duczko 1985:47.

<sup>127</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 119b, c.

<sup>128</sup> Jansson 1985:172.

Two copper coins of Theophilos—one follis and one half-follis—were found about 400 km north of Birka, in the burial of a woman at Djuped, Styrnäs parish in the province of Ångermanland.<sup>129</sup> Finds of folles in the far North are witness of direct contacts between the settlements there and Birka, most possibly in connection with the fur trade. The next bronze coin appeared in north Russia on the *Gorodische*—Rurikovo Gorodische site, a settlement near Lake Ilmen, at the outflow of the river Volkhov.<sup>130</sup> Gorodishche was founded in the mid-ninth century as a new focal point for the Rus in this region (see chapter III). According to Franklin and Shepard<sup>131</sup> it was here that the chakanus of Rus had his residence. Among the archaeological finds there are two items originating from the period before the middle of the ninth century that make such a claim possible (see details in chapter II).

A more exclusive example of Theophilos' coinage, a *monisma* of gold, was found in a grave at Gnëzdovo, the most important site of the tenth-century Rus in the Upper Dnieper. This coin is of a type issued from ca 835 to 840, showing on the reverse Theophilos' father Michael II and son Constantine.<sup>132</sup> The grave, kurgan No 47, which produced several interesting Norse objects was dated to the first half of the ninth century and its inventory associated with the Rhos.<sup>133</sup> Even if the coin itself could eventually be treated as an additional trace left by the Rhos envoys, the early chronology of the kurgan 47 is impossible to maintain, as some items are of certain tenth-century origin (see chapter IV).

Finds of copper coins are of great interest, in fact more than the finds of gold and silver currency. One of Theophilos' reforms was to introduce more copper coins into the Byzantine economy. Between 835 and the early 840s the number of *folles* and half-folles produced and put into the circulation reached about a hundred million pieces.<sup>134</sup> This huge amount allows one to assume that these coins were spread not only across the Greek world but also easily reached more distant countries. This is, however, not the case. Among finds of Byzantine

<sup>129</sup> Malmer & Wiséhn 1983:38, no 65, find no 159.

<sup>130</sup> Nosov 1992:33.

<sup>131</sup> 1996.

<sup>132</sup> Avdusin 1952:101, fig. 28:1; Treagold 1988:284, fig. 44.

<sup>133</sup> Shirinskij 1997.

<sup>134</sup> Treadgold 1988:288.

copper coins the emissions of Theophilos belong among the most rare. This rarity turns the copper coins from Denmark, Sweden and North Russia into items of special source value. Their presence at the mentioned places can be explained not in the usual way, that is by seeking causes for their dispersion in trade activities, but in special circumstances, more specifically as items that followed the Rhos envoys on their way home.

We may now return to the seals, the most interesting elements of our archaeological material. As it was already mentioned they were issued by one person, the *patrikios* Babutzikos, and thus represent an excellent source on which we can build our attempt to connect the Rhos with the Byzantine diplomatic activities of the late 830s. Before we proceed it is worth looking closer at seals: how they were made and for what purpose. It is easiest to follow the presentation of Mark Whittow:<sup>135</sup>

...the lead seals...the Byzantines used to close confidential communications and to authenticate documents. A piece of string was inserted through a hole in the document, and the two ends were then passed through the channel in a lead blank. The lead blanks used in this process vary in size but they can be imagined as roughly equivalent to that of a coin. The blanks were cast in a mould and so made that they had a hollow channel from top to bottom. The string was passed through this channel and then knotted. The lead blank was then placed between the jaws of a *boulloterion*, a device that resembled a pair of iron pincers with disc-shaped jaws, a little smaller than the blank itself. The face of the jaws was engraved with an inscription, or an image, or a combination of the two. The *boulloterion* had a projection above the jaws so that when it was struck with a hammer the lead blank would be compressed, sealing shut the channel and locking in the two ends of the string attached to the document. At the same time the design engraved on the *boulloterion* was stamped on the lead blank

Three such Byzantine lead seals have been found in three places which during the early Viking Age were places of power, trade and crafts. Two of them are on the Jutland peninsula—Hedeby/Haithabu and Ribe—both prime trading and crafts towns; the third find-place is on the island of Zealand, on the west side of the lake Tissø, where a great settlement belonging to a mighty chieftain of royal family has been excavated since the mid-1990s (see above).

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<sup>135</sup> 1996:1.

The seal from Hedeby, found in the lower layer of the settlement site, is the one that has been the most closely investigated.<sup>136</sup> It is a lead disc 2.7 cm in diameter, with impressions on both sides. On the obverse is a cross monogram and inscription in Greek: “Mother of God, help your servant”, the reverse bears only an inscription “*patrikios* Theodosios, imperial *protospatharios* and *chartularios* of the *vestiarion*” (Fig. 3 a) The title *patrikios*, a patrician, was an honorary one, the highest that could be granted to persons not belonging to the close circle of the imperial family.<sup>137</sup> *Protospatharios*, was a title next in status after *patrikios*, *chartularios* was an official leading the *vestiarion*, which originally was the state treasury for non-monetary objects, even robes, but which during the ninth century turned to the office responsible for the equipment of the fleet, like weapons, uniforms, food.<sup>138</sup>

The seal from Ribe was found within the remains of the marketplace which was functioning from c. 700 to the mid-ninth century when it ended. The seal belong to the youngest level, the phase C-I<sup>139</sup> (Fig. 3 b) The third seal, from Tissø was found 1999 during excavations within the manor estate in the area of the southern workshop.<sup>140</sup>

The distribution of the seal finds cannot be accidental; it shows that the persons to whom these letters were directed must have been in control of the places where the seals were found. In two cases they were found in trading places, in the third in the residence of a powerful chieftain belonging to the royal family.

When were the letters written and when were they delivered to the Danish addressees? The very short stay of the Byzantine embassy may indicate that the returning Greeks reached Constantinople before the end of summer, which made it possible for Theophilos, if he really cared, to dispatch to Louis a reassuring letter. However, it is possible that Theophilos allowed the Rhos to wait many months in Frankia and gave his attention to them first when an embassy with Babutzicos was sent to Venice in the early spring of 840. It was probably then that the *patrikios* was instructed to deliver a letter from Theophilos to Louis through a special envoy, which at the same time, gave the Rhos letters for Danish royalty. After receiving an

<sup>136</sup> Laurent 1978.

<sup>137</sup> Treadgold 1988:463.

<sup>138</sup> Laurent 1978:37.

<sup>139</sup> Feveile & Jensen 1993:35, 37; fig. 6; 2000:14, fig. 7 e.

<sup>140</sup> Jørgensen 2002:241, fig. 15.



assuring answer from Constantinople, Louis gave the Rhos permission to go to their *patria* through his realm. The Rhos carrying the letters of Babutzicos left Ingelheim and started their return voyage, most probably by boat, along the Rhine. After they reached the emporium at Dorestad, they changed to a ship and continued along the Frisian coast heading for the Jutland of the Danes. It is difficult to tell which place they went to first: they had two options, either Hedeby or Ribe. The shortest way, and more easily accessible was Ribe. The decision where to go depended on whom they wished to encounter first. That it should be King Horik is quite certain. He was the leading ruler and as such he was the obvious target of the envoys.

There is a question why two seals were found in the trading centres, and one at the workshop at the aristocratic residential area? The publisher of the seal from Hedeby suspected, because of the *patrikios* Theodosios' position as an official responsible for fleet that the Greeks were looking in Denmark for supplies; his opinion was accepted by the excavator of the Tissø.<sup>141</sup> It is not easy to see what kind of material the Danes could deliver to Byzantium; it would have to have been something of strategic importance to make it worth the bother. We should rather consider manpower as the most interesting asset of Danes, or to be more specific, their sea-going warriors and their highly efficient fleets. The find-places of the seals reveal the lack of care for the important documents: the letters were not stored in archives because there were obviously none in existence.

By examining the reasons for the Rhos joining the embassy, we have assumed that they were messengers of the emperor Theophilos to the Danish kingdom. Being Swedes by origin, the Rhos were well acquainted with Norse politics, especially with the dynamic developments in the realm of the Danes. As was mentioned above, there existed close connections between the royal houses of the Svear and the Danes. The fugitive King Anund of Sweden who arrived in Denmark in 837 was still there in 840, when the Rhos arrived from Ingelheim. It seems plausible that a meeting was arranged and the issue of the help for Byzantium discussed. The Rhos left Denmark and went by ship to Svealand, to Birka. They certainly had an encounter with the king on Adelsö who was informed about their

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<sup>141</sup> Laurent 1965; Jørgensen 2002:241.

mission. After this meeting, and meetings with relatives and other associates, they went to Staraja Ladoga, back to the Rus.

There is no direct evidence in the sources that the talks with Horik and other Danish parties gave results that would satisfy the Greeks. No Viking fleet appeared at once in Mediterranean. In 844 the Vikings located close to the Spanish border started a long journey to this sea, but their behaviour shows rather that they were there not as allies of the Byzantine Empire.

## CHAPTER TWO

### PEOPLE, PLACES AND THINGS IN THE FIRST “LAND OF RUS” IN THE EAST

#### 1. *The early period: trade and political organisation*

In European historiography two towns used to symbolise the early history of Russia: Kiev and Novgorod. In the first part of the eleventh century the former was already a Slav metropolis, rich and powerful, a fast growing centre of civilisation adopted from Byzantium. The latter town, Novgorod (in medieval times called Novgorod the Great), was another centre of the same culture but founded in different surroundings, where some old local traditions moulded this commercial city into a mighty oligarchic republic of a kind otherwise unknown in this part of Europe. These towns have tended to overshadow other places of a significance that they had acquired long before Kiev and Novgorod started their way to historic glory. These two original centres of Rus were Staraja Ladoga and Rurikovo Gorodishche, two points on the ends of an axis, the Volkhov, a river running for 200 km between two lakes, from the Ilmen in the south to the Ladoga in the north. This was the territory that most probably was originally called by the Norsemen *Gardar*, a name that long after Viking Age was given much wider content and become *Gardariki*, a denomination for whole Old Russian State.<sup>1</sup> The area between the lakes was the original Rus, and it was from here its name was transferred to the Slav territories on the middle Dnieper, which eventually became “*Ruskaja zemlja*”—the land of Rus.

It was from here the Rus moved eastward, to the Finno-Ugrian lands of the Volga-Oka region, and southward, to the Dnieper among the Slavs. The two above mentioned places were the original focal points of the Rus. Ladoga, or as it was then called *Aldeigja*, was the earliest and the most important place, while Gorodishche, probably with the Norse name *Holmr*, was founded more than a century later,

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<sup>1</sup> Melnikova 1986a:45ff; Krause 1998.

when new groups arrived from the North and initiated the next step in the development of the polity of Rus.

The Ladoga area was the core of the kaganate of Rus: it was from here the Rhos' envoys went to Constantinople in 838; this area was their *patria* to which they were hindered from returning. This kaganate cannot be envisaged as a state-like organisation with a territory enclosed inside clearly drawn boundaries and run by a controlling administration. Nothing of this kind could exist at this time in this area of Eastern Europe (it was equally not possible in Scandinavia where kingdoms comprised loosely connected lands kept together by configurations of different power-groups among which one group, the royal clan, supplied rulers with particularly high status).

The pre-history of the first polity of Rus—the kaganate—has to be sought in the developments around the mid eighth century, when Staraja Ladoga was founded as a trading place, serving the operations of Scandinavian hunters and dealers in furs obtained in the north-eastern forest zone of Eastern Europe. It was at this time that these dealers, or at least most of them, became a part of an organisation constituting a network of coastal sites spread across the Baltic region.<sup>2</sup> Some of those sites were functioning on a supra-regional level co-ordinating exchange of goods delivered from the outside. Behind this process was an increasing interest of Western Europe in trade with southern Scandinavia, where the creation of more consolidated political organisation made long-distance exchange into an important activity. The earliest emporium in Scandinavia was at Ribe on Jutland's western coast.<sup>3</sup> Founded as a seasonal market at the beginning of the eighth century, it became an important centre in the exchange between the North Sea, mainly Frisia, and the Baltic region. A large market and craft place at Åhus near the river Helgeå in Scania had close contacts with this emporium.<sup>4</sup> The Danes were involved in the creation of the trade/crafts places on the southern coast of the western Baltic among Slavic tribes, where emporia were established in the 730s, like the one in Gross Strömkendorf in Meklemburg (probably the Reric mentioned in the Frankish chronicles), or some decades later in Rostock-Dierkow and Menzlin-Görke.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Callmer 1994b:53–59.

<sup>3</sup> Feveile 1994:91f; Feveile & Jensen 2000.

<sup>4</sup> Callmer 1994b:56.

<sup>5</sup> Losinski 1995.

These developments did not stop in the south but were soon moving northward. An emporium was founded on Gotland, at Paviken in the middle of the eighth century—at about the same time as a port of trade known as Birka was being created on the island of Björkö in Lake Mälär in Middle Sweden.<sup>6</sup>

After the mid eighth century, the qualitative and quantitative speeding up of the development of trading sites of emporium type was occurring in the Baltic region. The prime reasons for this were the transformations taking place in the southeast of the continent, in the Caucasus region. After a long period of constant struggles for domination between the Damascus Caliphate and the Khazars, the situation started to alter. Around the mid eighth century the Arab warrior Umayyad dynasty collapsed and was replaced by the Abbasids.<sup>7</sup> During the rest of the century they were engaged in several internal wars and a long conflict with Byzantium, but at the same time their caliphate was changing from an expansionist society of warriors to an economically and culturally strong state with its magnificent centre at Baghdad.<sup>8</sup> After the successful military expeditions of the Khazars in the early 760s into the southern Caucasus, their relations with the Arabs began to improve. Though the hostilities never completely ceased, the former state of constant warfare belonged to the past. The most important factor promoting contacts between former enemies was the rapid growth of the economy of the Caliphate. Successful political integration created a united market, effectively stimulated by the availability of gold and silver, influencing the productivity of industry. This in turn led to the growth of towns and, last but not least, building wealthy groups with great spending capacity and luxury needs, the satisfying of which significantly contributed to commercial expansion.<sup>9</sup> This transformation of the society of the Caliphate influenced conditions in the northern Caucasus in a dramatic way. It opened the way for intensive mercantile activities, which also became of decisive importance for the Khazarian economy and caused the evolution of the Khazarian state into a mighty regional power.

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<sup>6</sup> Lundström 1981; Ambrosiani 1998.

<sup>7</sup> Hodges & Whitehouse 1983:123ff.

<sup>8</sup> Noonan 1984.

<sup>9</sup> Noonan 1984:262f.

Changes in the southeast triggered off new developments in the Baltic Sea region. The growing Islamic and Khazarian markets were now demanding substantial quantities of the goods, among them high quality furs, the main asset of the Scandinavians, but also other products, not to mention an unceasing demand for the greatest of all commodities—slaves. The earliest traces of the initial commerce are finds of Islamic silver in north-western Russia, Sweden and in Pomerania and Mecklenburg dated to the last two decades of the eighth century; the establishment of exchange, as yet still on a modest scale is testified by finds in the sites mentioned above dated to the first decade of the ninth century.<sup>10</sup> There are some peculiarities in distribution of finds of earliest dirhams within the Baltic Sea region: more Oriental silver has been found on the Slavic coast than in Sweden.<sup>11</sup> To explain this as a trace of the activities of West Slav merchants is probably wrong. It was Norsemen that were established in the emporia and at tribal centres that were maintaining contacts with the East (the situation changed after the beginning of the tenth century). On the dirhams contained in the earliest hoards in northern Russia are runes telling us about Scandinavian, mostly Swedish operations. On one dirham from a hoard buried in the first quarter of ninth century in Peterhof near St Petersburg is inscribed word *kiltr-gildr* meaning "of full quality, measure, weight".<sup>12</sup> A dirham with runes was found in Świelubie, in Polish Pomerania where a group of Svear had lived since late eighth century.<sup>13</sup>

The stream of Islamic dirhams, large and heavy coins of good quality silver, coming to Eastern Europe caught the attention of the Rus' fur-traders quite early on. It did not go unnoticed among the people in Scandinavia either, where a kind of "silver fever" soon spread. It became very profitable to go east; the mercantile possibilities caused the number of Norsemen searching for wealth to multiply and the range of operations accelerated dramatically. The widening of operations and profits made new groups of Norsemen arrive in the East where they introduced a competitive factor into the trade activities and complicated contacts between the Rus and

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<sup>10</sup> Noonan 1984:155; Losinski 1988:128, 154f.

<sup>11</sup> Noonan 1994:226.

<sup>12</sup> Melnikova 1987:170f, fig. 7.

<sup>13</sup> Duczko 2000.

the indigenous populations. As long as the exchange was conducted on a relatively small scale, it was possible to obtain commodities either by peaceful means or by threat of violence, without making such an operation impossible to repeat after a while. Now competition over resources became fierce and started to disturb the former equilibrium. The instability of conditions affected the efficiency of the exchange and forced some groups to co-operate. It is possible that Staraja Ladoga was a place where the competing parties could meet and reach consensus. Contacts with the South, especially with the Khazars, increased and gave the Rus the opportunity to learn different forms of social organisation, which eventually lead to the creation of the first polity of Rus, the kaganate.

Developing trade with rising profits made it difficult to maintain consensus for longer periods of time. The archaeologically demonstrated burning of Staraja Ladoga in the 860s can be seen as material testimony of events connected with the competitive strife between the various Norse groups and the locals. Those events also belong to the process of establishing of the Rurikid clan (see below VI:1).

### 1.1 Aldeigja—the focal place of the early Rus

There is no other place that can match Staraja Ladoga (until 1703 only Ladoga) for its ability to best illustrate the earliest history of Rus. It is here, thanks to archaeological investigations, that we can observe the dynamism of the settlement since its foundation in the mid eighth century and follow it down to medieval times.

It was long before the Viking Age that people from central Sweden and the Åland islands came through the Ladoga area to northeastern Europe and reached as far to the east as to Perm beyond the river Volga. These contacts were already in existence in the Late Bronze Age and Early Iron Age, but we may put these aside here and concentrate on the seventh century A.D. At this time, the Ladoga-Ilmen region was thinly populated predominantly by Finnish people. Thus the Germanic-speaking Scandinavians, when they entered the forested north of the Eastern Europe, were interacting mainly with Finnish speakers, to some extent with Balts, even with Saamis, but hardly with Slavs, which had not yet started their northward expansion here from the steppe-forest zone.

The early contacts between the Svear and the Perm region are demonstrated by finds of elements of belts. South of Staraja Ladoga

on the Pobedishche site, one mound burial (a so-called *sopka*) contained the metal strap mounts of a so-called Novelino belt.<sup>14</sup> These items were produced in the Finno-Ugrian area on the River Kama during the seventh and early eighth century, and became fashionable in Finland and reached the Svear, as one grave-find from their centre at Old Uppsala shows.<sup>15</sup> This find, X-shaped belt-mounts of bronze and a strap-end of gold—appeared in the cremation layer under a large mound—*Gullhögen*—next to the monumental *Västhögen* ("Western royal mound") of the late sixth century A.D.<sup>16</sup> The fact that this Permian item—the only one of its kind in Sweden—was used by a man that had the privilege to be buried in the most prestigious place, demonstrates the social level of the long-distance contacts with the East.

After several centuries of contacts between the people of the Lake Mälär area in Central Sweden and the Finno-Ugrian territories east of the Volga, the users of the route started to extend their engagement in Eastern Europe. The most obvious manifestation of this was the creation of a settlement at Staraja Ladoga. The area around Ladoga, on both sides of the River Volkhov, was populated since at least the Iron Age. During the seventh and eighth centuries the area was inhabited by Finns who left cemeteries consisting of *sopkas*, high barrows. There are concentrations of these mounds around Staraja Ladoga and even on the opposite side of River Volkhov. On this latter riverbank, at Maloe Chernavino, are also remains of a fortified settlement with ramparts more than 2 m high built of wooden construction covered with earth and faced with stones on one side.<sup>17</sup> Excavations conducted in 2001 by E.A. Rjabinin uncovered here a settlement existing before Staraja Ladoga with no traces of Scandinavians.<sup>18</sup> Such an early site, with a unique type of fortification shows that the foundation of the emporium on the west side of the Volkhov happened in more complex circumstances than it has been previously assumed.

The site of Ladoga was chosen with care. After crossing the Gulf of Finland, the boats of Norsemen went up the Neva River, reached

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<sup>14</sup> Jansson 1997:30.

<sup>15</sup> Mäki 1989; Lindqvist 1936:78.

<sup>16</sup> Lindqvist 1936:78, fig. 56.

<sup>17</sup> Lebedev & Sebykh 1985:23, No 38.

<sup>18</sup> Personal communication, Jurij Lesman, St Petersburg.



the Lake of Nevo, now Ladoga, and thence to the mouth of the Volkhov River. From here they started their journey southward: after a while they had to pass through some difficult rapids and after about twelve kilometres, on the west side of the river, at the confluence of one large tributary (the Ladozhka, which was joined from the south the smaller Zakliuka), they found a raised spot suitable for settlement (Fig. 4). The Icelandic sagas report that the Norsemen called the site *Aldeigjuborg*, a denomination that originally was *Aldeigja*, coming from Finnish toponim *Alode-joki*—"lower river", meaning the River Ladozhka; it was from this Norse version the Slavic name Ladoga originated.<sup>19</sup> The choice of name shows that the Norsemen were not the sole founders of the settlement here but utilised a place that already had a name given by the locals. As far as we know (unlike *Hólmgarðr* on the upper Volkhov—see below) Ladoga never had a Norse name.

Comfortably situated upon its hill, the settlement became eventually a focal place in the network of other settlements that were later founded along the Volkhov. The Volkhov became an important route leading to Lake Ilmen where several rivers could be used for travelling eastward to the Volga or southward to the Dnieper.

From the very beginning, around the middle of the eighth century, the Scandinavians were in Ladoga, acting in cooperation with locals, the Finns but not with the Slavs. Some scholars<sup>20</sup> suggest that migrant Slavic groups from the south had reached the lower Volkhov area already in the second part of the eighth century, while according to others, now the majority, there are no traces of Slavs in Ladoga before the tenth century.<sup>21</sup>

Despite extensive excavations, only about 5% of the settlement of Staraja Ladoga has been explored and its plan remains unknown, and consequently, our picture of the early developments here is fragmentary. The original settlement was up to 0.5 ha in area, its space occupied by long and small square timber houses and huts for craftsmen on plots along the river bank at the place called *Zemljanoe gorodishche*—"the Earthen fort" (*gorodishche* means the remains of an abandoned fortified settlement).<sup>22</sup> Its existence is divided into three

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<sup>19</sup> Rozhdestvenskaja 1997:92; Dzhakson 1994; Machinski 1998b:133.

<sup>20</sup> Kirpichnikov 1985:24.

<sup>21</sup> Petrenko 1984:87f.

<sup>22</sup> Kirpichnikov 1985; Callmer 2000:31.

periods dated by dendrochronology: the oldest (horizon E<sub>3</sub>)— c. 750—c. 760, middle— c. 770—c. 790, and late— c. 800—c. 830; the next phase (E<sub>2</sub>) is a short period between c. 840 and c. 865; the third phase (E<sub>1</sub>) ended in the 920s; the upper border of the next phase (D) is not clear, but it seems that it should embrace the rest of the tenth century.<sup>23</sup> The site was expanding from the first decade of the ninth century, and at the same time an open settlement was founded on the left side of the Ladozhka showing the same kinds of buildings as those on the Earthen settlement.<sup>24</sup>

Our main sources of knowledge about Norse life in Ladoga are the buildings, products of handicrafts and various objects, even hoards of Islamic coins. This knowledge is tempered by the fact that no burial grounds of Scandinavians belonging to this period have yet been discovered near this site.

As has been said above, the Norsemen were in Ladoga from the very beginning. It is not possible to tell how large their groups were in the second part of the eighth century. They dwelt in large houses (*bolshie doma*) consisting of an anteroom and main-room with fireplace in the middle, a type that lasted here to the late tenth century (see below).<sup>25</sup> Almost simultaneously, beside the large houses, another type of buildings appears: small, square, 4—4 m timber houses with fireplace in the corner.<sup>26</sup> The latter type belongs to the building tradition in northern forest zone, i.e. to the Finns.

Trade and handicrafts were the main focus of the people running Staraja Ladoga. The trade with the Orient left the earliest finds of silver coins in Ladoga, and its neighbourhood. On the *Zemljanoe gorodishche* site, in a house, were found three half-drachmas: one (783), two (765–770); a little hoard consisting of 5+18 dirhams had a terminus post quem 846/7; close to Ladoga was found one of the earliest known hoards of Oriental coins: 28+3, dated to 749–786.<sup>27</sup> To those finds should be added an object used in exchange transactions, a cylindrical weight of lead, from 750–830.<sup>28</sup> Other items obtained through trade were glass beads. They are found in large quantities

<sup>23</sup> Rjabinin & Chernykh 1988:98.

<sup>24</sup> Petrenko 1985:113ff.

<sup>25</sup> Kuzmin & Petrov 1990:62.

<sup>26</sup> Uino 1989:213.

<sup>27</sup> Kirpichnikov 1989:322, 324f.

<sup>28</sup> Davidan 1987:119.

in Ladoga where they mix with some beads of North European origin and remains of raw material indicating local production.<sup>29</sup>

The most visible features of the early phase of Ladoga are the traces of many handicrafts like metal-, horn-, bone-, amber-working, glass bead making and weaving.<sup>30</sup> The working of metals was here the earliest, as the remains of a smithy from the 750–60s testify (see below II:1.1.1). The production of combs (a craft of singular importance in all parts of trade in the Baltic Sea region), had a slow start in Ladoga, where the majority of early specimen found were of Frisian origin, probably imported by Scandinavians; only a few were made locally.<sup>31</sup>

Exceptionally good conditions for preservation have meant that many fragments of textiles have survived in Ladoga. They are already present in the layers of horizon E<sub>3</sub> and are made of wool, linen and silk.<sup>32</sup> Some of them may be of Scandinavian origin, for example those made of linen. Mass production of linen textiles in Early Viking-age Denmark, from the eighth century, in Nøes on Zealand, suggests the existence of similar manufacturing sites even elsewhere in Scandinavia.<sup>33</sup>

The Norse costume included leather footwear like that—23 shoes—found in all layers of horizon E, in E<sub>3</sub> were 11 specimens.<sup>34</sup> They are of a type well known in Scandinavia, for example the ones from the ship-burial in Oseberg, Norway.<sup>35</sup>

Ornaments are a category of artefacts that are generally missing in the archaeological material from early Ladoga. In eighth and early ninth century Scandinavia there are very characteristic sets of female jewellery consisting of a pair of oval brooches, a brooch, and pendants, often of pelta-type.<sup>36</sup> In Ladoga there is only one item—an undecorated oval brooch uncovered in the house identified as one of the oldest in Ladoga.<sup>37</sup> The pelta pendants of characteristic type were manufactured here in the mid ninth century—a mould is among

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<sup>29</sup> Rjabinin 1985:68ff; Callmer 2000:32.

<sup>30</sup> Davidan 1970, 1982.

<sup>31</sup> Davidan 1982:171; 1999.

<sup>32</sup> Davidan 1982:177f.

<sup>33</sup> Møller Hansen & Høer 2000.

<sup>34</sup> Davidan 1970:86, fig. 5:7; Roesdahl 1993:299.

<sup>35</sup> Roesdahl 1993:268.

<sup>36</sup> Jørgensen 1987.

<sup>37</sup> Davidan 1970:86, fig. 5:6.

the finds—but none of them has been discovered here (see below). We have to take into consideration the burial conditions determining the differential survival of artefacts but the scarcity of female ornaments seems to be a reality that may indicate that until the mid ninth century there was only a small number of Norse women living in Ladoga.

An unmistakable kind of Scandinavian find is represented by four gaming-pieces of hemispherical type with a hole underneath.<sup>38</sup> Gaming belonged among the favourite pastimes of the Norsemen, especially males of warrior status, who were often provided with a board in their graves.<sup>39</sup>

Otherwise there are very few traces of the warriors in the excavated material from early Ladoga where only three spearheads testify to the martial side of Norse life.<sup>40</sup> Though no sword has yet been uncovered, there is a series—seven in the layers of horizon E<sub>3</sub>—of swords made of wood, most probably as toys for children (Fig. 5 a).<sup>41</sup> The makers of these toys tried to be faithful to the originals giving us an opportunity to recognise the most common types in use, like Petersen B- and H-types.

In building No 7, in layer E<sub>2</sub> (between c. 840–865), together with 30 glass beads, a piece of wooden stick was found. It is 12 cm long, and bears a runic inscription consisting of 52 signs (Fig. 5 b).<sup>42</sup> The inscription is written in the younger, 16-rune *futhark*, and belong to the so called short-twigg or Swedish-Norwegian runes that appear at the very beginning of the ninth century. There is consensus about the magical purpose of the inscription but its linguistic meaning is disputed and varies between an invocation of an elf in the Underworld, praise of a dead warrior, a poem about a shield and a description of an arrow.<sup>43</sup>

The rune-stick should be seen as the strongest evidence for the existence of a real Norse society in Staraja Ladoga. It cannot be seriously maintained, as it has done repeatedly, that this stick was a

<sup>38</sup> Davidan 1970:85, fig. 5:39; 1982:172, fig. 1:13.

<sup>39</sup> Ringstedt 1997:76; Lindquist 1984:216f.

<sup>40</sup> Davidan 1970:82, fig. 4.

<sup>41</sup> Davidan 1970:88; Raudonikas 1950:35f; Roesdahl 1993:301.

<sup>42</sup> Raudonikas & Laushkin 1959:25f; Melnikova 1977:158f, fig. 87, 88.

<sup>43</sup> Admoni & Silman 1957; Krause 1960; Kiil 1964; Melnikova 1977:160f; Melnikova 2001:202ff.

kind of souvenir taken by a Slav during his visit in Scandinavia, or, as others liked to have it, property left by a distracted Norseman just passing through, or, not to forget another favourite explanation, an item prevailing in trade exchange. It seems that for some writers almost everything was better than the possibility that this stick was made by a Rus living in Ladoga. The Norse character of the culture of at least the major part of the dwellers of Ladoga makes it easy to accept our rune-stick as a natural part of the material culture of the town. Runic script could not be used by anybody, it was intimately connected with the literate segment of Scandinavian society, an elite, and when objects with runes are found outside the North they should always be considered as the strongest testimony of the existence in the area of a Norse milieu.<sup>44</sup>

### 1.1.1 The smithy and the man with horns

The most particular remains in the earliest settlement of Staraja Ladoga are those of the workshop of a blacksmith and jeweller. The smithy belongs to a complex consisting of a square space, 4.0–4.8 m, surrounded by a ditch, dated to the early 750s, and a house constructed in the early 760s.<sup>45</sup> In the house were one hearth and a stone anvil, and in the other part a hearth for metal melting with slag and crucibles, and devices for cold processing of metal. Among half-finished and completed items were knives, an arrowhead, rivets for boats and spikes. After a short period of time, in the early 770s, the smithy was destroyed and the site was not utilised for a decade, after which a wooden log-house was built here, where two oriental coins from 783 and 786 were found.<sup>46</sup> According to Gubanov<sup>47</sup> the new house was built by people that came from the south, apparently meaning Slavs, staying there until 840, when new groups of Scandinavians took over the settlement, which existed thirty years, to the 860s when it was burnt down.<sup>48</sup> There is no evidence that could support Gubanov's opinion about the Slav presence and it is difficult to discern evidence of the absence of Norsemen for about seventy years in the material. The destruction of the smithy has to be seen as a specific

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<sup>44</sup> Duczko 2000b:30.

<sup>45</sup> Rjabinin 1985:55.

<sup>46</sup> Rjabinin 1985:51.

<sup>47</sup> 1998:33.

<sup>48</sup> Rjabinin 1985:27–75.

event of unknown character, perhaps a trace of one of the earliest conflicts in the complex society of the new emporium.

The implements belonging to the smithy were found collected in one place. They represent the tools for many different purposes: drills for wood-working, hammering devices, a spike maker, shears for cutting sheet metal, chisels, anvil, tongs and a draw-plate (Fig. 6).<sup>49</sup>

Since its discovery the smith's hoard has been recognised as Scandinavian, though this has sometimes doubted,<sup>50</sup> because similar tools sets—at Telje, Jutland and Mästermyr, Gotland—appear in Scandinavia in later finds, dated up to the tenth century there is hardly any reason for not accepting the Norse origin of the Ladoga tools.<sup>51</sup> Analysis of the implements, mostly knives, shows that the technology employed in Ladoga was of Scandinavian origin; the knives produced here in the eighth century were already made by the sandwich method; there are in Ladoga, already in level E, knives made by this method.<sup>52</sup>

The presence of a draw plate shows that wires between 1.5 and 3 mm diameter were manufactured with this flat piece of iron with 14 holes. The coarseness of the wires indicates that they were used for the embellishment of big objects, like swords, rather than small ornaments. We may compare this plate with another one, also found in Staraja Ladoga but dated to the early tenth century. This plate has 78 holes with diameter between 2 mm and 0.2 mm and was utilised for making fine filigree.<sup>53</sup>

While some categories of the objects produced by the craftsmen in Ladoga were made for indigenous societies, there were items aimed entirely for Scandinavians. Among such items is a figure, about 5 cm long, of a man's head with two horns (Fig. 7 a).

The image of a man with pair of horns on his head had been part of Germanic symbolism since at least the sixth century A.D. and survived until the Early Viking Age when it gained popularity for the last time.

The animal ends of the horns on the piece from Ladoga are executed in an art style current during the Vendel period, or more

<sup>49</sup> Rjabinin 1985:55ff, fig. 20–22.

<sup>50</sup> Vierck 1983; Jansson 1987:780.

<sup>51</sup> Munkegaard 1984; Roesdahl 1993:251; Arwidsson & Berg 1983.

<sup>52</sup> Khomutova 1984:208; Roesdahl 1993:298f, no 269.

<sup>53</sup> Duczko 1985:17, fig. 1.

exactly to the seventh century A.D.<sup>54</sup> The animal is a bird of prey, either a falcon or eagle.<sup>55</sup> Such birds were used as mounts on shields, like the ones from boat-grave 7 from Valsgärde, Uppland, as brooches, or even only the heads as parts of brooches of disc-on-bow type and S-shaped brooches from Gotland and Denmark.<sup>56</sup>

The dramatic and, as it appears for us, very Nordic figure with horns is often published as a suitable illustration of the Scandinavian milieu in Ladoga, and is always seen as strong evidence for a Swedish presence. The latter opinion cannot be easily sustained, as the history of the motif will show. The earliest examples of the motif belong among the art of sixth and early seventh century warrior elites in Scandinavia, England and Germanic continent. The motif is on the bronze plates from the helmets found in boat-graves No 7 and 8 Valsgärde, Uppland, Sweden and from Sutton Hoo, East Anglia, in the cremation-grave in the East Mound in Gamla Uppsala; it is also present on one of the dies from Torslunda, Öland, on a buckle from Finglesham and on a foil from Caenby, both in England.<sup>57</sup>

Few examples of this motif are dated with confidence to the eighth century. Two artefacts originate from different parts of this period, one piece similar to the Ladoga example from Gåtebo on Öland (Fig. 7 b), and one with a small head and a large, simplified helmet from Hjulsta, Uppland.<sup>58</sup> Both items were found in cremation graves, the former in a grave with several burials from various periods, the latter was in female grave with beads indicating the transition period to the Viking Age.

From the very beginning of the ninth century there are many more specimens with this motif. The old motif of a horned man holding a sword and two spears, or an X-shaped item, appears again. Its strong symbolic content is proven by the fact that such a man is present in the cultic procession depicted on the tapestry found in the famous boat-grave of the 830s at Oseberg, Norway.<sup>59</sup> From about the same time, the motif is present as the main iconographic element

<sup>54</sup> Jansson 1987:780.

<sup>55</sup> Åkerström-Hougen 1981.

<sup>56</sup> Atterman 1934; Nerman 1969.

<sup>57</sup> Böhner 1995:712ff; Gaimster 1998:65ff.

<sup>58</sup> Holgersson 1978; Thorberg 1975.

<sup>59</sup> Hougen 1940.

on coins struck in Denmark and is also produced as small figures in Uppland of Svear.<sup>60</sup>

Three figures similar to the Ladoga piece are known from Denmark, from Zealand (Tisso and Sigerslevøster), and Uppåkra in Scania (Fig. 7 c).<sup>61</sup> They are recognised as artefacts from the Viking Age though their chronology is not certain.

The specimen from Ladoga has been described as part of unfinished tweezers of Gotlandic type, a product of the metalworker from the smithy.<sup>62</sup> The horns on the Gotlandic items are turned down in the fashion of the bird-heads on disc-on-bow brooches, no other design is known from Gotland and this excludes the island as the place of origin of the Ladoga piece.<sup>63</sup> Other interpretations are more elaborate with ideas ranging between large brooch pins or keys.<sup>64</sup> Pieces from Denmark are fragmentary, neither the upper nor the lower parts are preserved, which makes it impossible to recognise the function of specimens, with the exception of a fragment from Sigerslevøster that was part of a pin of a ring brooch.

It has become almost customary to see our motif as a representation of the god Odin.<sup>65</sup> This identification rests on a misunderstanding. There is no doubt that we are dealing here with one of themes in Wotanic/Odinic ideology manifested in the art originally produced for the Norse elite in the sixth and seventh century. In the iconography of this art the warrior with horned helmet is presented as a representative of divine person not the person itself. In some contexts he is obviously playing the role of a helper, a middleman acting on behalf of a higher power. In Early Viking Age art he stands for high status, and when presented in form of small figures it is a magic amulet.

Now we should consider the problem of the age of the specimen from Ladoga. Its style points to the seventh but its find-context to the mid eighth century. Was it then merely scrap-metal serving as raw material for new castings? It is difficult to be sure about this.

<sup>60</sup> Pedersen 2000:26, 27; Ringquist 1969; Arbman 1943, Taf. 92:9.

<sup>61</sup> Kramer 1998:104f; Bergqvist 1999:119f.

<sup>62</sup> Davidan 1980:66.

<sup>63</sup> Nerman 1969, Taf. 121:1099–1101.

<sup>64</sup> Bergqvist 1999:121.

<sup>65</sup> Meinander 1985; Bergqvist 1999:120f.



It is far from certain that the item itself is as old as it may appear. It could have been manufactured during the first part of the eighth century in traditional way by an artisan consciously employing an older style. If that was the case our piece is much closer to its context and should be treated as more or less contemporary.

Finally the question of origin: does our horned man belong to Swedish or Danish sphere? Both alternatives are possible but the Danish milieu seems to be more probable.

### 1.1.2 Ladoga and the middle Danube

While ports of trade like Birka and Hedeby were noticed and documented in contemporary Western written sources, Staraja Ladoga's early existence was completely ignored. The reason for that was Ladoga's obscure location, not to mention the lack of interest of the Christian church—there was no mission and thus no written record. However, there can be no doubt that Ladoga was a well-known place among Baltic Norsemen.

One artefact from Ladoga tells a story of wide contacts not only with Scandinavia but also Central Europe. This special artefact is a casting mould found in a layer of horizon E<sub>2</sub>.<sup>66</sup> Thanks to the latest dendrochronological dating of this layer, its chronology can be determined to a short period of a few decades between the 840s and the second part of the 860s.<sup>67</sup> The mould was made of chalkstone and provided with concavities on each side showing design of two different pendants: of pelta type and triangle with cross-like ends (Fig. 8 a). Although the mould was found in a well-dated layer it has always been treated as a much older object because in the triangular cavity could be cast ornaments identified as Balt and belonging to the sixth or seventh century.<sup>68</sup> This identification meant that the mould was regarded as the oldest object from Ladoga and consequently was used in argumentation for an early beginning for the whole settlement. G.F. Korzukhina, who connected the triangular design with Baltic pendants with enamel of the first part of the sixth century, regarded the mould as an alien artefact out of context in the layer in which it was found.<sup>69</sup> This opinion became accepted

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<sup>66</sup> Raudonikas 1950:36, fig. 33.

<sup>67</sup> Rjabinin & Chernykh 1988:98.

<sup>68</sup> Raudonikas 1950:38, fig. 33–34.

<sup>69</sup> Korzukhina 1971:124.

and is still maintained.<sup>70</sup> The general shape of the triangular cavity does indeed show close affinity with the Baltic pendants of the earlier period, but there the similarity ends. No pendant of this type cast in bronze is known from sixth century and it seems to me that this kind of ornament is not as old as it is claimed. The Baltic cultures were extremely conservative and some ancient designs were preserved for a very long time. This is the case with dress pins with triangular heads popular among Balts, with heads that are similar to the cavity on the Ladoga mould.<sup>71</sup> It cannot then be excluded that this mould was produced in the ninth century, as the date of the layer indicates, as does—which is equally important—the typology of the other casting cavity, which until now has been neglected by research.

The pendant cast in the second cavity was a half-moon with two horns and a projection between them; each end had clusters of three points; the surface was covered by a chequered pattern. The pendant is a pelta, an Amazon shield—an ornament of great age and wide popularity through the time—and a favourite motif in the Classic art of the Greeks and Romans.<sup>72</sup> This noble motif was integrated with other old designs into the jewellery art of the early medieval period, and was utilised by Norse craftsmen during the early Viking Age.

None of the pendants cast in the Ladoga mould are known but there are some examples of ornaments of similar type found in different places, like the one from a settlement at Gnězdovo on the upper Dnieper, at Kniazhaja Gora, south of Kiev, or in Galich in the Ukrainian Podkarpattija.<sup>73</sup> In southwest Ukraine, at Dobrynovskoe gorodishche, near Chernovtsy, in a settlement of the ninth century, was found a mould for casting pelta pendants with slightly different surface decoration.<sup>74</sup>

Pelta pendants are absent from the archaeological material of the main ports of trade in Scandinavia, but they were manufactured, at least in Birka and Hedeby, because moulds for their production were found there (Fig. 8 b, c). The mould from Birka was uncovered in

<sup>70</sup> Davidan 1980:59.

<sup>71</sup> Bliujienė 1999:136ff.

<sup>72</sup> Florescu 1986, fig. 67, 88.

<sup>73</sup> Egorov 1996:61, fig. 385; Khanenko 1902, fig. 387; Ratych 1976, fig. 57:6.

<sup>74</sup> Timoshchuk 1976:39.

the Black Earth, a settlement area of the town. The form of the casting cavity closely matches the one of the Ladoga mould, while the cavity on the mould from Hedeby is somewhat different: instead of the chequered pattern the surface is covered by lines.<sup>75</sup>

As is the case at Ladoga, none of the pelta pendants cast in the Birka and Hedeby moulds has been discovered. Pendants of the discussed type belong instead among the ornaments used by women far away, down in the south, in Moravia, Slovakia and Bulgaria. These southern pendants are identical with the cavities on the moulds from the North and there is every reason to see them as the models for the northern pieces.

Finds from Moravia and Slovakia are part of the very rich material culture of the powerful Slav state known as Great Moravia, a state which emerged in the early ninth century and which existed to the beginning of the next century.<sup>76</sup> This state expanded into Pannonia and Bohemia, became Christian and with the help of two bishops, Cyril and Methodius, obtained a Slavic liturgy and writing. After the collapse of the state, theologians of this church went to Bulgaria and from here influenced Byzantine Christianity of the Rus church of Vladimir the Great in Kiev. The highly original aristocratic culture of Moravia played some role in delivering to the Rus singular elements of the jewellery art, best manifested in the lunula-pendants decorated with granulation, one of the most characteristic ornaments of tenth century Rus culture (see chapter IV: 1.4.).

It was from the Moravian state that the pelta pendants came to the north. The most similar specimens have been found in graves in Staré Mesto (Fig. 8 d) and Cífer-Páci.<sup>77</sup> But this was not the only place that these pendants appeared. Three examples, practically identical with pieces from Staré Mesto, were uncovered further to the south, in Bulgaria, in three inhumation graves, belonging to a large burial ground near the village of Gradešnica (Fig. 8 e).<sup>78</sup> The very close similarity between the items suggests the activities of one craftsman, or at last the same workshop. It would seem that there are more grounds for regarding Moravia as the place where ornaments

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<sup>75</sup> Arbman 1939:125.

<sup>76</sup> Hošek 1965.

<sup>77</sup> Hrubý 1955, Tab. 75:1; Hanuliak 1992, Taf. VI:10.

<sup>78</sup> Mašov 1979, fig. 13:1–3.

of pelta type were produced. It was here that the characteristic decoration, the chequered pattern, was employed on other items.<sup>79</sup>

The presence of moulds for production of such pendants in Scandinavia and North Russia, and concentration of the pelta pendants in the territory of Great Moravia, indicate a direct connection between those two regions. There is in fact a place on the middle Danube which more than clearly shows the kind of connection. This place, called Ruzaramarcha, was in the eastern part of the Bavarian March—between Vienna and Linz—in today's Austria. It is mentioned in the charter from 863 issued for a monastery in Altaich.<sup>80</sup> Ruzaramarcha was not far from the trading station at Raffelstetten. A unique document issued by king Louis the Child between 904–906, the so called Raffelstatt Statutes ("Inquisitio de teloneis Raffelstettensis"), with regulations of custom dues on the territory of the Eastern March, mentioned in chapter 6 the goods delivered by *Rugis*, people recognised by research to be Rus traders.<sup>81</sup> The earliest record of the place name Ruzaramarcha in 863 cannot be used as the date for the establishment of this place. It is not possible to pin-point the exact time when the Rus started to frequent the middle Danube, but there is nothing which can prevent us assuming that they appeared here some time before the middle of the ninth century, and did it often enough to give their name to the market place itself.

How could the Rus reach Ruzaramarcha? Probably across southern Poland, through the Moravian Gate, an opening in the mountains through which already during the Roman times the famous Amber Route went. This led from the Danube and along the Morava River to the Vistula and along it to the Baltic coast. But why were the Rus engaged in trade in this region? Was it really worthwhile to take wax and slaves and come here on a regular basis? There must have been something very important that made them do this. It seems that this important item was salt, a mineral as valuable as gold and silver. Salt was not mined in Moravia but farther to the south, in Bulgaria. Extensive trade with this necessary commodity on the middle Danube is well documented.<sup>82</sup> So it was the constant

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<sup>79</sup> Poulik 1948, fig. 44; Merinski 1985, fig. 4.

<sup>80</sup> Nazarenko 1999:299.

<sup>81</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996:89; Nazarenko 1999:296.

<sup>82</sup> Lewicki 1967:20f.

need for salt that made the Rus of Ladoga undertake long journeys to the south. The pelta pendants followed as a new element worthy of enriching the ornaments of Norse women.

## 2. *After 850: more Rus and continued expansion*

According to dendrochronological dates, the buildings in the settlement of Ladoga recorded as horizon E<sub>2</sub> were destroyed some time after 863 but no later than 870.<sup>83</sup> This devastation has more than willingly been linked by many scholars to the unruly situation which occurred here soon after the mid 850s. According to the *Primary Chronicle* in the years 859–862 a revolutionary event took place in the north of Russia. The people called Varangians that had preyed on the ingenuous people by extorting tributes were eventually expelled beyond the sea, but soon, because of internal strife among the tribes, were asked to come back and restore the peace. The chronicle reports that envoys

... went to Varangian Rus: these particular Varangians were known as Rus, just as some are called Swedes, and others Normans, English, and Gotlanders, for they were thus named. . . . They thus selected three brothers, with their kinsfolk, who took with them all the Rus and migrated.<sup>84</sup>

The invited Rus consisted of a clan headed by a chief named Rurik and his two brothers, Sineus and Truvor; each of them came with their own people and settled in Novgorod (Rurik), Belozero (Sineus) and Izborsk (Truvor).

Apart from the issue of the name Rus, “The calling-in of the Varangians” (as the story of Rurik’s invitation is known), is the most controversial one in Russian historiography and was both accepted and rejected in the traditional views.<sup>85</sup> Most often the legendary nature of the calling-in was stressed as a part of “anti-normanistic” attitude of scholars, but also as a part of examination of medieval method of constructing dynastic origin legends. For equally many scholars the arriving of Rurik’s clan was an historical event, mostly

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<sup>83</sup> Rjabinin & Chernykh 1988:91.

<sup>84</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:59.

<sup>85</sup> Rydzevskaja 1978; Froianov 1991; Kirpichnikov 1997.

because of the identification of the prince himself with a person recorded in western chronicles (see below).

The compiler of the Chronicle was creating a train of events out of very thin stuff consisting only of names of the leaders of the Rurik clan. He equalized Rus with other distinct and well-known Norse peoples, which cannot be correct because to the best of our knowledge no people with this denomination ever existed in Viking-age Scandinavia. Maintaining that "all the Rus" came together with Rurik-clan shows that the writer was not familiar with the origin of the name and from his position distant in time was mixing up two notions, one ethnic and one social. In his narrative, the pre-Rurik Norsemen were not appreciated as Rus but as anonymous robbers about which nothing particular could be said, they were just a bunch of Scandinavian plunderers "from beyond the sea". The chronicler either knew nothing about the Rus and their kagan from the first part of the ninth century (alternatively if he had some idea about the khaganate, he decided not to mention it in order to present the Rurikids as the only legitimate rulers). He knew about the arrival of Rurik but the actions of the prince was placed in the later, medieval realities. The term Varangians used was anachronistic, as it was introduced in the East at the end of the tenth century, none of the towns mentioned in this part of the chronicle had existed in the mid ninth century, and maintaining that the invitation was regularized by an agreement (*riad*) between Rurik and local authorities was an attempt to give the arrival of Rurik the air of lawfulness. Such an agreement presupposed the existence of one authority—for Russian scholars always Slavic—which in the ninth century could not have existed. There is the assumption among scholars that the autochthonous population consisting of a variety of ethnic groups started to cooperate and created a union against the robbers.<sup>86</sup> But this assumed federation of Finnish and Slavic tribes is only an invention of the historians. They were looking for local powers that could deal with Varangians who by this perception of events became a passive element, not the party which took the initiative.

For the chronicler, the history of Rus begins with Rurik's clan: "On account of these Varangians, the district of Novgorod became known as the land of Rus". Thus, in the account of the chronicle,

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<sup>86</sup> Noonan 1974:14.

the Lake Ilmen region, and especially the area at the mouth of the River Volkhov was the original territory of the Rus, the first “*rusškaja zemlja*”. As we have already noted, there is no trace of the *chacanus* of Rhos in the *Primary Chronicle*. Once more we have to ask the question: was this so because the compiler of the chronicle had no knowledge about the *chacanus* or did he refrain from writing down the information he possessed? The first alternative seems to be the right one, as, we can be sure, no written source recording the early Rhos had existed, at least in the milieu of the chronicler. We should remember that without the note s.a. 839 in the *Annales Bertiniani* there would be no contemporary record of the Rhos and their *chacanus* at all. As we will see below, even in Constantinople around year 860, information about the early Rhos was scarce.

We meet similar problems with access to sources when we deal with Rurik himself. The search for the identity of Rurik has occupied generations of scholars.<sup>87</sup> One of the most cherished ideas, since the early 19th century, was the identification of Rurik with Rörik, a member of the Danish royal family, nephew, or brother, of King Harald Klak.<sup>88</sup> Rörik was a real person recorded in the Frankish annals, such as the *Annales* of St Bertin, where he appears as very efficient Viking, leader of a fleet attacking the northern coast of Francia. In 850 he received southern Frisia, including the important trade town of Dorestad, as a grant from King Lothar.<sup>89</sup> Rörik was expelled from Frisia in 855, returned to Denmark to fight for his royal position, failed and came back to his former fief, got into trouble in 867 but in 870 made a new deal with the Franks becoming a vassal of Charles the Bald, to whom he stayed loyal, at least until 972; when and where he died is unknown.<sup>90</sup> According to some scholars, the years which Rörik was away from Frisia were spent in North Russia where it is suggested that he, as Rurik, founded a new polity. The available sources make it difficult to accept this story.<sup>91</sup> The Frankish chronicles have quite good information about Rörik's movements in time and space and even if some years are not covered, there is nothing here that allows assumption about his engagements in the East.

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<sup>87</sup> Schramm 1980:322.

<sup>88</sup> Vasiliev 1946:235; Lebedev 1985:214.

<sup>89</sup> Sawyer 1982:88.

<sup>90</sup> Nelson 1991:69, 81, 139, 165, 176, 180.

<sup>91</sup> Lowmianski 1963.

Even if it is impossible to identify Rurik with this royal Danish Viking, it is not necessary to see him as a product of the chronicler's fantasy. He could have been real, but the time when the chronicle was written—the early twelfth century—was so distant from the mid ninth century that nothing specific, with the exception of his name, managed to survive. When exactly and why he arrived, if the account of the chronicle is left aside, is not clear. If we accept the arrival of Rurik as a historical fact, it means that we should even accept that when this new ruling group of Norsemen established itself, an older one (represented by the kagan of Rus) was eliminated. On the other hand, as it was said above, we have to see the story of Rurik as an extreme simplification, in which many elements were invented and others heavily distorted. It cannot be excluded that Rurik had some family connections with the leaders of the kaganate of Rus and his appearance in the East was a result of internal power play among the Rus. With this explanation we don't have to assume the removal of an older elite of the Rus. The devastation of Staraja Ladoga in the 60s of the ninth century, so often connected with Rurik, may have happened as a deliberate action of one group of Rus, or even as a result of an attack of Vikings coming from the Baltic region; in both cases the destruction of settlement at Ladoga would have had nothing to do with the arrival of Rurik.

The latter event has to be placed in the mid 850s, not in the early years of the next decade, as it is done in the Primary Chronicle. The chronicler was employing a chronology created on the basis of the Byzantine time reckoning he found in his main source, the work of Georgius Hamartolos.<sup>92</sup> While computing various dates he made some mistakes, reaching wrong conclusions about the time of the events he was writing about, he was even careless in presenting them. In the case of the calling-in of the Rus he gathered the expulsion of the tribute-taking Varangians, the strife between the tribes and the invitation of Rurik under one entry s.a. 6370, i.e. 862. Here he also tells that Truvor and Sineus died after two years and that Rurik assumed sole power, and at the same time he left the entries for next three years empty. We can see how the chronicler is manipulating his scant knowledge and inventing a course of events. This becomes even clearer when we consider the content of entry for

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<sup>92</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:31.



6374, i.e. 866, where he talks about the assault of the Rus on the capital of Byzantium. This large military expedition had occurred, according to a good source, in June 860 and was, as it will be argued below (2.1.), organised by the Rus living in the Ladoga-Ilmen area, not in Kiev, as the Chronicle maintains.

The expedition was an enterprise of great dimension that needed long preparation and extensive logistic effort, but most of all, it needed a motivation of the people that had initiated it. That is why we have to see it as a reflection of changes inside the community of Rus. They were most probably evoked by the arrival of new groups from Scandinavia, Viking-like groups more disposed to use swords rather than sell them. The shifting of priorities occurred during some years before 860 and led eventually to structural alterations. The time of hitherto dominating peaceful commerce was over and martial actions with plunder of lands in the south became of increasing importance: from 864 to 884 the Rus launched several raids on the coasts of the Caspian Sea, a region they attacked on some later occasions.<sup>93</sup> Even the assault on Constantinople was not an isolated enterprise; it became almost a ritual to attack the Byzantine capital by each new generation of Rus princes.

From which part of Scandinavia did the above-mentioned new Norsemen come? As we will see below, the Norse material culture of Ladoga and Rurikovo Gorodishche from the second part of the ninth, and, especially, the tenth century, shows close affinities with Middle Sweden. A strong indication of the involvement of the Svear in the East is a sharp increase of number of dirhams in Swedish hoards from the mid ninth century onwards. For the first time it was mainland Sweden that received a large portion of oriental silver, reaching almost the same level as that from Gotland.<sup>94</sup>

Expansion to the south was paired with territorial expansion of the Rus within the east. If our chronology of various settlements along River Volkhov is correct, we can observe the appearance after the mid ninth century of new sites where Scandinavians were present in significant numbers if not being in the majority. These sites were founded at the mouth of the Volkhov near Lake Ilmen, where a new centre of the Rus elite, probably called *Holm* (now *Rurikovo*

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<sup>93</sup> Minorski 1958:111ff.

<sup>94</sup> Noonan 1994:226.

*gorodische*) was created (see below). Even in the east, in the Upper Volga region, several sites have produced traces of Norse culture, the bearers of which, both men and women, settled permanently after the middle of the ninth century.

## 2.1 *The attack on Constantinople in 860*

Changes among the Rus in the mid ninth century are documented not only by the story about the arrival of prince Rurik but also by the fact that the Rus decided to organise a major raid on Constantinople. Our only sources contemporary with this event are in the writings of Photios, Patriarch of Constantinople. The attack on the Greek capital started 18th June 860, and was described as sudden and very brutal: the outskirts of town were plundered and burned, people slaughtered, and the city itself was saved only due to divine help.<sup>95</sup> Photios repeatedly underlines that the invaders' homeland was very distant: they came from "the farthest north", "crept down from the north . . .", they "were sundered off from us by so many lands and kingdoms, by navigable rivers and harbourless seas".<sup>96</sup> The Patriarch called them a "fierce and barbarous Scythian tribe", and described them as "An obscure nation, a nation of no account, a nation ranked among slaves, unknown, but which has won a name from the expedition against us, insignificant, but now became famous, humble and destitute, but now risen to a splendid height and immense wealth, a nation dwelling somewhere far from our country, barbarous, nomadic, armed with arrogance, unwatched, unchallenged, leaderless . . .".<sup>97</sup>

Later, in 867, in an encyclical letter Photios said about the attackers: "... these people surpassing all others with cruelty and blood-thirst,—I am talking about Rhos—conquered neighbouring people . . ., raised their weapons against the Roman state"; but on this occasion the Patriarch also reported that these Rhos had been converted to Christianity and had become subjects and friends of the Greek Empire.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Boor de 1895:459; Vasiliev 1946.

<sup>96</sup> Mango 1958:82, 84, 88, 89.

<sup>97</sup> Mango 1958:98.

<sup>98</sup> Vasiliev 1946:232; Boba 1967:31.

The raid of the Rus and their conversion are issues which have been concerning researchers almost as long as the case of the Rhos in Ingelheim. Even here scholars were troubled by a number of questions they had already asked before: who were the Rus, where they had come from, what exactly happened after the encounter with the Greeks. According to many investigators of this subject, the Rus were Slavs living in Tmutorokan at the Straits of Kerch in the Black Sea. This popular and long entertained hypothesis was finally refuted as incorrect because of lack of any proof that the Rus had settlements there at this period.<sup>99</sup> For many other scholars it was likewise obvious that the only place from which the Rus could organise their raid was Kiev, and that their leaders were two Norsemen, Askold and Dir.<sup>100</sup>

It is written in the *Primary Chronicle* that these two Norsemen came to Russia with prince Rurik, decided to go to Byzantium and on their way along the Dnieper arrived in Kiev, stayed there as the rulers of the Poliane and from here organised a great expedition against the Greek capital (see more in chapter VI). This identification was very attractive for many scholars but its credibility was far from certain. The story is an invention of the compiler, a mixture of information about the raid taken from the Chronicle of Georgios Harnartolos with the names of two Norsemen, not mentioned by the Greeks, which he had found in another source unknown to us.<sup>101</sup> Kiev in the mid ninth century was just an insignificant settlement, and it would be difficult to recognise it as the starting point of such a grand military expedition. All the evidence points to the area further north, that of Ladoga-Ilmen, where the Rus were beginning the next phase of their activities in the east.

Photios repeatedly states that the Rus came from far away, from the North. This statement most definitely excludes the Black Sea region, which to great extent was a Byzantine sea, and also makes the middle Dnieper less probable: there is in fact nothing, even in archaeological material, that could indicate Kiev in the mid ninth century as the base for Rus expansion to the south. The dominant note of the reaction of the Greeks to the Rus' attack is an expression

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<sup>99</sup> Paszkiewicz 1954:422, 431.

<sup>100</sup> Vasiliev 1946:173ff; Boba 1967:32; Obolensky 1970:150.

<sup>101</sup> Lowmianski 1973:142.

of surprise. They were obviously not expecting the possibility of an assault on such a scale, which shows that the Rus could not have had their base close to the steppe zone, not far from the Black Sea.

By excluding Kiev we are left with territory of the Rus in the Ladoga region, the core of the kaganate of the Rhos from the 830s. But should we equate the Rhos of the 860 with the Rhos of 839? The name of the people is the same, some of their characteristics mentioned by Photios can be accepted as real, but most of his description is just puzzling, and looks more like a part of his exorbitant rhetoric, an artificial construction built up just to make a point. Photios' talk about the Rus as an unknown people sounds strange only twenty years after the dealings of the emperor Theophilos and *patrikios* Theodosios with the same people. Is it possible that the Rhos' envoys of 839 had so completely vanished from the memory, and archives, of the Byzantine authorities, or is it the case that the Rhos of 860 were different from the previous ones? Rather not, because in 871 the Greeks were telling the German emperor that they used to give the title of *caganum* to the ruler of the Norsemen, meaning the ones living in Eastern Europe.<sup>102</sup> Even if the particular name of these Norsemen is not mentioned, the title employed reveals the connection with the Rhos.

Photios' referring to the Rus as an obscure nation could eventually be understandable if for the majority of the citizens of Constantinople the Rus were not known (which was certainly true) and that for the preaching Patriarch it was suitable to use a picture of a completely alien people as a strong rhetorical figure. What is more difficult to understand is his other claim that they "ranked among the slaves". To whom was Photios actually referring, to the Norse Rus, traders and warriors? It cannot be so because it contradicts all we know about the Rus from reliable sources, so to describe them as people of subordinate status is absolutely excluded. The possible answer may be found in the encyclical letter of Photios where he writes that some time before the raid on Constantinople the Rus had subdued their neighbours.<sup>103</sup> By becoming subjects of the Rus these neighbours had, politically speaking, also become part of the Rus, and consequentially were apprehended by the Greeks as such. As it has

<sup>102</sup> Golden 1982b:82.

<sup>103</sup> Vasiliev 1946:174; Lowmianski 1973:143.

already been stated, the only people that can be identified as these subdued neighbours were the people of the North—the Finns and Balts in the Ilmen-Ladoga area.

The attack on Constantinople turned the attention of the Empire to the invaders, who from now were considered as a new element in the power structure of Eastern Europe. The necessity to cope with the Rus was strengthened by another attempt they made to attack the city soon after the invasion of 860. In this situation Byzantium had taken steps that were in accordance to its usual policy: in order to control a foreign people one had first to convert them. Some time between 864 and 867 the Rus had accepted Christianity, and the Greeks sent an archbishop to them who completed the conversion; the Rus were placed under the protection of Byzantium, became incorporated into its ecclesiastical system and were treated as political friends of the empire.<sup>104</sup> This was a remarkable event, especially when seen in the light of the total silence about it in the Primary Chronicle, strongly contrasting with the accounts of contemporary Greek sources.

The raid on Constantinople was the first event in a series of transformations occurring in and around the Ladoga-Ilmen area. To arrange such a large military expedition, to collect a considerable force able to move down to the south and then terrorise a metropolis, was a great feat showing more than anything else that the Rus were entering a new phase in their development. This major assault on the mighty capital was also a demonstration by the leading group of Rus of how it was going to act. From now on the Empire of the Greeks became a target of the mercantile-military activities of the Rus. Time after time, during the tenth century and even later on, the raids on Byzantium were repeated in a way that give the impression that each generation of Rus' rulers felt that launching such an expedition was a necessity without which they could not be taken seriously.

## 2.2 *Staraja Ladoga from the mid ninth to the end of the tenth century*

In the late 860s, as far as it can be seen, a fire totally destroyed Staraja Ladoga. What caused this catastrophe—a hostile attack or just simple carelessness with fire—cannot be established. Without the

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<sup>104</sup> Vasiliev 1946:229ff.

Primary Chronicle's account of the strife between the Varangians and locals, and between locals and locals, it would not be possible to connect the burning of the town with a specific historic event. According to some variants of the Chronicle it was in Ladoga not Novgorod that Rurik stayed when he arrived in the East. If this occurred in the 850s, the responsibility of burning of the site one decade later could not be placed on him but on somebody else. There is no need to speculate further about this, it will suffice if we look what happened at the settlement after the great fire.

Until the late ninth century nothing especially new can be seen in the rebuilt site of Ladoga. Traditions of house building were maintained, including the characteristic big houses ("bolshie doma") of Ladoga-type that existed to the very end of the tenth century.<sup>105</sup> There is therefore no evidence of a break with the past, rather traits of clear continuity and maintenance of status quo. The people that were living here before the fire were still here after it.

The most significant change that occurred here belong to the last decades of the ninth century when a stone-built fortress was erected on the hill beside which the Ladozhka flows into the Volkhov; the walls had a height and width of about 3 m.<sup>106</sup> From the same time dates a settlement built on the banks of the Ladozhka and divided into plots, in one of them was a two-room house with an iron-furnace close to it.<sup>107</sup> Staraja Ladoga was successively expanding, in the tenth century reaching an area of about 10 ha, at the same time being replanned with streets.

In 894 on the *Zemljanoe gorodishche* site was constructed a large house (*bolshoi dom*)—16.6–17.3 × 10.0 m—covering an area of 170 m<sup>2</sup>, of corner-jointed log-built walls, consisting of a dwelling room with hearth in the centre and with a gallery around it, and an ante-room with entrance; for its construction parts of a boat were used (Fig. 9).<sup>108</sup> The occupants of this building belonged to a Norse group, most probably well-to-do traders. Among the finds from their house were weights, a gold finger-ring, fragments of oriental cups of glass, gaming-pieces, combs and a Thor-hammer amulet of iron.<sup>109</sup>

<sup>105</sup> Kuzmin & Petrov 1990:62; Petrenko 1985:103.

<sup>106</sup> Orlov 1973; Kirpichnikov 1984:29ff; 1993:103f; 1995:13.

<sup>107</sup> Kirpichnikov 1993:13f.

<sup>108</sup> Rjabinin & Chernykh 1988:91f.

<sup>109</sup> Rjabinin & Chernykh 1988:98.

There are many different objects illuminating a Norse presence in the Ladoga of this later phase: jewellery, amulets including pendants with runes, wooden sculptures, footwear of a type known already in the previous period, dresses, combs, and even wooden swords for children. The late ninth century Norse items are still rare but they show the presence of the most characteristic items—women's ornaments, such like an equal-armed brooch of Valsta-type and one oval brooch—JP 44-type.<sup>110</sup>

The majority of the objects come from the next century and were found in horizon D, dated by dendrochronology between 930–960. Among those objects are ornaments from various parts of Scandinavia. There is one equal-armed brooch in bronze from the rich group of the so-called Öbbestorp-series, characteristic for eastern Sweden (Fig. 10 a);<sup>111</sup> to the Danish area should be referred a find of a model for the production of small equal-armed brooches with an analogy known only from Denmark (Fig. 10 b, c); an animal head-shaped object of a type used in pairs by women on Gotland and only on this island (Fig 10 d).<sup>112</sup>

Besides those few brooches there are likewise in the material from Ladoga a few pendants, in all cases typical of middle Sweden: two of bronze of fire-steel shape and two circular examples of silver: one with animal and one with spiral decoration.<sup>113</sup> The pendant with the animal (Fig. 10 e), representing the so-called Borre-animal, has one analogy in Birka and four others in a hoard found in 1867 at Gnëzdovo, on the upper Dnieper; all these specimens are practically identical, most probably made by the same craftsman.<sup>114</sup> The second pendant has a four-volute motif inside a circle, a cast version of the filigree-decorated ornaments produced in Danish jewellery art of the mid tenth century (Fig. 10 f).<sup>115</sup> The cast specimens are quite numerous in east Scandinavia, mainly in the Lake Mälär region, and in Russia.<sup>116</sup>

<sup>110</sup> Gubanov 1998:34; Davidan 1970:89.

<sup>111</sup> Callmer 1999:217, fig. 31.

<sup>112</sup> Petersen 1999:255; Raudonikas & Laushkin 1959:29, fig. 7; Carlsson 1983: 47f, 77.

<sup>113</sup> Davidan 1980:65, Tab. 2:8; *ee below*; Raudonikas & Laushkin 1959:27, fig. 4, 30, fig. 11.

<sup>114</sup> Callmer 1989:25, fig. 3:25.

<sup>115</sup> Duczko 1985:38, Eilbracht 1999:56ff.

<sup>116</sup> Callmer 1989:22, fig. 3:1, 3:27.

In horizon D was also found the only item related to real weapons, this time not a toy like the wooden swords; it was a sword chape with bird decoration parallel to examples from Birka.<sup>117</sup> One chape of similar type was found on the northern site of Staraja Ladoga on the Varjazhska street in a context dated to the mid-tenth century.<sup>118</sup> Another find from Ladoga, a well-preserved needle-box has analogies at Birka.<sup>119</sup>

To the above-described group of Norse objects we should add some special artefacts—wooden and antler sculptures from the *Zemljanoe gorodishche* site. One of them may be called a classical type, namely the head of a beast (Fig. 11 a).<sup>120</sup> This piece, now 7.7 cm high may have been a complete object or part of some larger object. Of equally unknown function is another head of a beast, made of antler of 10 cm height, with decoration of the body that seems to be an imitation of metalwork (Fig. 11 b).<sup>121</sup> While these two sculptures show very close affinity with Norse animal art, it may be difficult to assume similar certainty towards two wooden sculptures of humans. One of them, 27.5 cm in height, depicts an elongated man with bearded face and a head gear, with no arms marked, only a long tunic with a belt (Fig. 12 a).<sup>122</sup> This strange piece is identified as a pagan deity, but it rather more looks like it is executed in the manner in which figures of Norse warriors were depicted in Scandinavian art of the tenth century.<sup>123</sup> The second anthropomorphic figure is again that of a bearded man, this time with a long, curved body ending with two short "legs" (Fig. 12 b).<sup>124</sup> This figure is almost always described as cultic piece of the Slavs of Ladoga. Though without very clear Norse characteristics I would add this sculpture to the others, made by Scandinavians and for Scandinavians.

Such wooden figures are mentioned by ibn Fadlan who observed at Bulghar a place of worship, where the Rus merchants used to sacrifice to the group of standing wooden idols:<sup>125</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Davidan 1970:89; Arbman 1940, Taf. 4:5, 5:67.

<sup>118</sup> Mikhailov & Nosov 2002:136f.

<sup>119</sup> Mälarstedt 1984:192, fig. 21.

<sup>120</sup> Kirpichnikov et al 1986, fig. 25 left; Mongajt 1955:359.

<sup>121</sup> Kirpichnikov et al. 1986, Tab. 9; Davidan 1982:172, fig. 1:1.

<sup>122</sup> Roesdahl 1993:301, fig. 277.

<sup>123</sup> Ekelund 1956, fig. 9; Nylén & Lamm 1987:63.

<sup>124</sup> Kirpichnikov et al 1986, fig. 25 centre.

<sup>125</sup> Smyser 1965:97.



§ 85. When the ships come to this mooring place, everybody goes ashore with bread, meat, onions, milk and *nabid* and betakes himself to a long upright piece of wood that has a face like a man's and is surrounded by little figures, behind which are long stakes in the ground. The Rus prostrate himself before the big carvings and says, "O my Lord, I have come from a far land and have with me such and such a number of girls and such and such number of sables", and he proceeds to enumerate all his other wares. Then he says, "I have brought you these gifts", and lays down what he has brought with him, and continues, "I wish that you would send me a merchant with many dinars and dirhams, who will buy from me whatever I wish and will not dispute anything I say". Then he goes away.

If he has difficulty selling his wares and his stay is prolonged, he will return with a gift a second or third time. If he still has further difficulty, he will bring a gift to all of the little idols and ask their intercession, saying, "These are the wives of our Lord and his daughters and sons." And he addresses each idol in turn, asking intercession and praying humbly. Often the selling goes more easily and after selling out he says, "My Lord has satisfied my desires; I must repay him," and he takes a certain number of sheep or cattle and slaughters them, gives part of the meat as alms, brings the rest and deposits it before the great idol and the little idols around it, and suspends the heads of the cattle or sheep on the stakes.

The described place was an outdoor sanctuary in which wooden pillars with carved faces were worshipped. Such pillars, in Old Norse called *trémadr* and *skurgoð*, stood in places with a name consisting of the word *stav*, staff.<sup>126</sup>

There were more Norsemen living in Ladoga but this time on the left side of the Ladozhka, outside the Earthen *gorodische*. In the northern part of *Varjajzhska* (Varangian) Street was uncovered a "large building"—"*bolshoia postrojka*", consisting of log-built walls—about 11 m length, with an inner area of 120 m<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 13). This unique construction, of a form otherwise unknown in Ladoga, existed from the 960s until its destruction between 986–91, after which the place was left for a long time in ruin.<sup>127</sup> Inside the building were found wooden utensils, anthropomorphic planks, animal bones, mainly whole and fragmentary skulls, and two Samanid dirhams (914–943, 944/45).

Because of the building's non-residential character, it has been interpreted as a pagan cult site, analogous to the so-called temples

<sup>126</sup> Sundqvist 2001:124ff; Vikstrand 2001:294ff.

<sup>127</sup> Petrenko 1985:113, 91.

of Slavs in Mecklenburg. Some features, like the anthropomorphic planks, are very close indeed to the elements from mentioned temples but there are doubts that it was a Slavic population of Ladoga that was using the *postrjka*. If the artefacts found inside the building can be taken as an evidence of the ethnicity of the users it will appear that they were Norsemen. One of the items is a runic amulet, made of sheet metal, with an inscription consisting of 48 runes in two rows on both sides; the inscriptions are apparently meaningless (Fig. 14 a).<sup>128</sup> The closest analogy to this pendant is one found in Sigtuna in Sweden. Another Norse artefact from the "*bolshoia postrjka*" is an iron neck-ring with three pendants in the form of hammers, a cultic item mostly employed in central Sweden (Fig. 14 b).<sup>129</sup>

This symbol of the most popular of the Norse Viking Age gods is marked on an artefact from another place on Varjazhska Street. It is a knife handle made of the jaw of an animal, on which are two signs of hammer and other graffiti, like two drinking horns, a swastika, and an interlace-pattern (Fig. 14 c).<sup>130</sup> These signs, with the exception of the interlace, have good parallels in graffiti executed on coins.<sup>131</sup>

The material remains of the Norse culture of the first period in Ladoga were all uncovered on the settlement site, but as we have noted above, the mortal remains of the bearers of this culture are still unknown. The situation is different for the second period. The graves of Rus have been found on the eastern bank of the Volkhov, opposite to Staraja Ladoga, at the place called Plakun (Fig. 15).<sup>132</sup> Here eighteen graves have been recognised. They form a single burial ground which could originally have been much larger, possibly stretching at least 300 m to the south.<sup>133</sup> The earliest graves in the Plakun cemetery date to the mid ninth century, but if the cemetery had originally been larger, there is always the possibility that among the destroyed, or still undiscovered, graves were earlier burials. The assumption that the cemetery was used for about one hundred years, until the middle of the tenth century, rests only on a few datable objects obtained from some of the eighteen examined burials, a dating

<sup>128</sup> Petrenko & Kuzmenko 1978:78f, fig. 1; 3:1; Melnikova 1977:162, fig. 87, 88.

<sup>129</sup> Petrenko & Nazarenko 1978, fig. 4:4.

<sup>130</sup> Petrenko & Nazarenko 1978, fig. 3, 4:3.

<sup>131</sup> Dobrovolskij et al. 1981:221.

<sup>132</sup> See picture in Nosov 2001:52, fig. 31.

<sup>133</sup> Nazarenko 1985:157.

which though applies to those burials but not necessarily for the whole burial ground.

All but one of the graves were cremation burials covered by mounds of various sizes with contents showing that both males and females were buried here. It has also been claimed that couples were buried in some of the graves, the latter suggestion is based however not on osteological analysis but on the fact that in some graves (Nos 1, 3) single glass beads appeared together with inventories of male character. This is however not a good argument. Single beads are often found in male burials in Scandinavia and this makes the theory of the burials of couples at Plakun less plausible.

The bones in the graves were placed either in an urn or in a pit, the rest were spread across the site of the funeral pyres, which were sometimes covered with stones. In four graves (No 1, 3, 5, 7) a number of rivets varying from ten to two hundred are evidence for the utilisation of parts of boats in the pyre (Fig. 16 a).<sup>134</sup> The burials of women are recognizable thanks to the presence of assemblages of various kinds of beads, as is the case with the one in grave No 7 provided with 14 glass beads and 4 made of silver wire.<sup>135</sup> The woman in this grave had several things made of metal—chains, rings, an ice-spike and many fragments of pieces of unknown function—one hundred rivets and spikes show that on her pyre a part of a boat was burnt. Her high status is shown by two pottery jugs of the Tating type originating from Westphalia; similar jugs were put into the ninth-century graves in Birka, where also ornaments like the beads of silver mentioned above were produced.<sup>136</sup> Rivets and spikes are also found in cremation graves in central Sweden, for example in Antuna, Uppland, where under a mound covering the remains of a woman were 74+64 rivets and 49+46 spikes.<sup>137</sup>

Somewhat puzzling is the burial in grave No 6, the biggest one in the Plakun cemetery. Under the mound, in the centre there was a hearth with a pit containing a small empty wooden box; in different places were single cremated bones and two artefacts, an arrow-head of lancet type, a characteristic Norse item, and a lunula pendant of silver, typical for Rus jewellery of the tenth century; the mound was

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<sup>134</sup> Nazarenko 1985:161.

<sup>135</sup> Nazarenko 1985:166, fig. 6.

<sup>136</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 219–221, 114.

<sup>137</sup> Andersson 1993:26f, fig. 20; 1994.

surrounded by a ditch with plenty of animal bones on its bottom.<sup>138</sup>

The only exception among the cremation graves of Plakun was burial No 11, which was a chamber-grave with the skeleton of man of age between 60–70, placed with head to the northwest, in a large coffin. The chamber was covered with four planks on which were put stones; upon the stones were found 40 rivets and remains of burnt wood, which is interpreted as remains of a part of a boat that was burnt here.<sup>139</sup> Beside the skeleton were many badly preserved and unrecognisable fragments of bronze and iron artefacts. There is nothing here that can help with chronology, but the tenth century seems to be the most probable date.

About 250–300 m to the south of Plakun there is a huge (25 37 m) oval mound made of clay, 6.2 m in height.<sup>140</sup> It contained four burials—three cremations in its base and one inhumation in the upper part of the mound. In one of the cremation graves (No 1) were the remains of the pyre—human, a male and animal bones (of dog?) and a comb of eighth century type—collected in a container made of wicker. Two other graves were in different places and consisted of a cremation layer with some human bones and with single fragmentary pieces of bronze and iron. Somewhat above these three graves, but to one side of them, were found seven biers of wood (some were made of planks from boats), parts of wooden spades, oars and the bones of various animals: horse, cattle, pig, sheep, and horns of two goats. All these things are explained as the remains of the funerary rituals; the wooden biers have never been found in any other burial but with the help of ethnography it is claimed that the custom of leaving the biers which had been used for the transportation of the bodies of the deceased was typical of Finnish people.<sup>141</sup>

The fourth grave had nothing to do with the previous ones, which probably all belonged to the ninth century; this one was younger, of the tenth century, and situated on the top of the mound. It was an inhumation of a man with two horses placed alongside the burial.<sup>142</sup> The man, who was laid on a platform made of the planks from a boat, had with him 14 arrows, a belt with metal mounts, a yellow

<sup>138</sup> Nazarenko 1985:168.

<sup>139</sup> Nazarenko 1985:162, 168, fig. 4.

<sup>140</sup> Nosov 1985:147ff; Lebedev & Sebykh 1985, fig. 1:41.

<sup>141</sup> Nosov 1985:150f.

<sup>142</sup> Nosov 1985:152, fig. 6.

double glass bead, a piece of bone with carved animal head on the end (Fig. 17 b) and fragments of iron items of unknown function. As the grave was partly destroyed before excavation we cannot be sure about the completeness of the inventory.

Who were the three people in the great mound and who was the man buried in the top of it? The absence of objects with unequivocal cultural traits, mainly metal ornaments, leaves no possibility to answer this question. The only item with good chronology and provenance from the mound is a comb of a type that in Staraja Ladoga belong to the earliest horizon E<sub>3</sub>, i.e. the second part of the eighth century.<sup>143</sup> This comb is Frisian-Scandinavian and, it may be tentatively surmised was used at Ladoga only by Norsemen. The presence of remains of many animals used in cultic rituals may also indicate a connection with Norse religious customs.

The man buried in the top of the mound is equally difficult to identify. Judging by the arrows, belt and horses, he was a warrior, but was he of Scandinavian origin? The arrows are not Norse, the way horses are placed points towards an east European (nomadic) tradition, the only indicators that the burial may be considered Norse are the sculpture of an animal head and the burnt parts of a boat. The use of boats in the burial used to be accepted by scholars as definitive evidence of the Scandinavian pedigree of the deceased. This, as far as we can see, seems to be a correct opinion.

In that case, this will also apply to the graves in the Plakun cemetery. Without the boats it would be difficult to ascribe those burials to Scandinavians. Again, the absence of typical metal ornaments, like the oval, equal-armed, or round brooches of women, or the ringed pins of men, makes one wonder if the generally accepted ethnic attribution to Scandinavians is correct. There is, however, a weak point in our reasoning: we are trying to find practically identical funeral rites, objects and grave forms as those we know in Scandinavia, and we assume that when burials in Ladoga do not fit this pattern then they are not Norse. This cannot be the right way to go. The graves we are examining cannot be absolutely identical with Scandinavian burials because they belong to a mixed culture existing outside the Scandinavian North, they are the burials of the Rus. How far this

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<sup>143</sup> Nosov 1985:150: fig. 4; Davidan 1982, fig. 1:16.

mixing could go will be presented with examples taken from the area close to Ladoga (see below).

While we are occupied with the mortuary problems in Ladoga we should direct attention to the fact that no elite burials have ever been discovered here which are comparable to the chamber-graves of the type known in Birka or Hedeby, or at Gnezdovo and in Kiev. We cannot rule out the possibility that they have been either destroyed, or not yet discovered, as we cannot neglect the possibility that this absence may be a sign of some peculiarity of the Norse society living in Ladoga.

In the late tenth century, Staraja Ladoga was subjected to the interest of hostile powers, if the repeated burning of the settlements may be taken as an indication.<sup>144</sup> One fire, especially devastating, was caused in 997, when the Norwegian jarl Erik, treated the town in classic Viking manner; the event is described in Snorre's *Heimskringla*.<sup>145</sup>

In the autumn Earl Eirik sailed back to Sweden and spent another winter there and in the spring the earl made his ships ready and sailed to the east. As soon as he arrived in Valdimar's kingdom, he started slaughtering the inhabitants and burning everything wherever he came, laying the land waste. He came to Ladoga Town, and laid siege to it until he captured the town, killing a good many people, demolishing the town and burning it to the ground. Afterwards he plundered Russia far and wide.

Erik's attack demolished many of the site's buildings, even the stone fort, which around the year 1000 was replaced by a new one, this time, made of earth—the "*Zemljanoe gorodishche*".<sup>146</sup>

Ladoga's importance was maintained during first part of the eleventh century. In 1019 the town was given to the Swedish *jarl* Ragnvald to rule, as a part of a marriage contract between Ingegerd, daughter of King Olof Skötkonung of Sweden, and Jaroslav, at this time prince of Novgorod. Behind the willingness of Jaroslav to accept such an arrangement was his uncertain position in the ongoing violent strife with his brothers: after the death of his father Vladimir in 1015 he was forced to fight with Sviatopolk and Mstislav, and the only way to gain an upper hand was buying help from Scandinavia by engaging troops of mercenaries. In 1016/17 Jaroslav became the prince of

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<sup>144</sup> Petrenko 1985:115.

<sup>145</sup> Palsson & Edwards 1989:32f.

<sup>146</sup> Kirpichnikov 1985:25.

Kiev but in 1018 was beaten by an ally of Sviatopolk the Polish duke Boleslav Chrobry (the Brave), escaped to Novgorod and only in 1021 was able to return to Kiev. So it was because of political necessity that Jaroslav was entertaining his Norse connections. Alliance with King Olof in 1019 was an attempt to secure military help from Sweden in the ongoing civil war. In such a situation it was certainly smart to give Ladoga to Ragnvald, an able leader with many useful contacts in Scandinavia.

### 2.3 *Scandinavian culture in Priladozhe*

Southeast of Lake Ladoga, in the territory called *Priladozhe*,—"the area near Ladoga" there are a significant number of burials of Scandinavians that were living among the indigenous Finnish population. The area has several large rivers and the majority of Viking-age settlements are concentrated along them and their tributaries (Fig. 17).<sup>147</sup> Scandinavians, as we will see mostly Svear, were moving into this area already in the late eighth century—there is one sword of Petersen V-type from the Sijas *gorodishche*,—and later on started to settle down on the banks of the rivers Pasha and Svir, introducing a new kind of graves: mounds over cremated bones.<sup>148</sup> Finds of Norse objects from the early period (of the ninth century) are rare, but some time between c. 920–c. 950, in a period of rapid development of settlements across the Priladozhe, the number of Scandinavian artefacts found in graves increases considerably. These later graves are mounds with cremation and inhumation burials of females and males. According to the available statistics in the Priladozhe region there were thirty-three burial grounds with 170 mounds, of which 76 have been examined, and in sixteen of these cemeteries (especially in those concentrated around River Pasha) were 25 mounds with Scandinavian items.<sup>149</sup> Another report states that from 23 sites came 80 Scandinavian objects.<sup>150</sup>

Mortuary remains, and thus traces of ritual behaviour, are our only source of knowledge about the ethnic situation in Priladozhe. The majority of the burials provide clear evidence for the phenomenon

<sup>147</sup> Raudonikas 1930, map; Stalsberg 1992:275, fig. 2.

<sup>148</sup> Boguslavskii 1993:135.

<sup>149</sup> Stalsberg 1992:279.

<sup>150</sup> Pushkina 1997:88; Kochurkina 1970, 1973.

of mingling of Norse and local Finno-Ugrian cultures. There are a few graves that look like typical burials in Scandinavia; the others are more unusual, some even demonstrating traits completely unknown outside Priladozhe.

There is a clear domination of the custom of building mounds with several burials under and in it. Although multiple burials are also known in Scandinavia, they are not very numerous. One of them is the mound in Norsborg, Botkyrka parish, Södermanland, which consisted of three burials; another one, with seven burials from different phases of the Viking Age, is in the same land, in Brunnby, Bränkyrka parish.<sup>151</sup>

The Norse items, both for males and females, from Priladozhe represent a good selection of objects typical for tenth century culture in Scandinavia, particularly in Svealand. There, the artefacts belonging to men, such as weapons, drinking horns with silver mounts, bronze pans, iron buckets and cauldrons, may be connected with the warrior's style of life, as it can be seen in burials in Birka, where similar items were put into the chamber graves (Fig. 18, 19).<sup>152</sup> But unlike the burials of the military elite in Birka, the men buried with their weapons in Priladozhe were more similar to the other men in Swedish Uppland, those that were not members of the retinue of some mighty chieftain or king but instead belonged to the well-to-do families living in rural communities.<sup>153</sup>

Grave Nr 14 from Gorka near River Pasha in Priladozhe resembles a quite common type of Norse male burial. Under a low mound in a cremation layer were placed upon each other a spear, an axe, a knife, a ring from a pin richly-decorated with Borre-motifs, and arrowheads (Fig. 20).<sup>154</sup> The ringed-pin is a fine specimen of male ornaments mainly in use during tenth century in East Sweden, Finland and Russia.<sup>155</sup>

Other burials typical of the weapon-graves of the Priladozhe region were found in mound Nr 6 at Zaozerje village near the River Pasha, which contained seven burials, cremations and inhumations, placed at different levels (Fig. 21). In two of them were swords (one made

<sup>151</sup> Einerstam 1940; Hansson 1938.

<sup>152</sup> Brandenburg 1895, Tab. IX–XI; Arbman 1940, Taf. 196, 201, 202, 207.

<sup>153</sup> About burials with weapons in Central Sweden, see Bodin 1987.

<sup>154</sup> Raudonikas 1930:52, fig. 53:C, 54, 55.

<sup>155</sup> Thunmark-Nylén 1984:9ff; Lehttosalo-Hilander 1982:109ff, fig. 32.



in Western Europe with a signature CEROLT), axes, spears, arrows and a shield; the men had also with them ring-brooches, belts with metal mounts and combs.<sup>156</sup> At the base of mound No 6 was the original burial (Nr VIII), an inhumation of a woman near a hearth by which were iron objects: cauldron with chain, a pan and two spades; on the skeleton were two oval brooches of bronze (P 52), a necklace with 55 small glass beads and a Samanid dirham from 922/3, two bronze pendants with double horse heads and small chains of a type characteristic for the Perm region.<sup>157</sup>

Otherwise the female burials in Priladozhe are predominantly cremations. In many of them are oval and equal-armed, trefoil, big and small circular brooches and pendants with zoomorphic decoration, and arm-rings of bronze with wave ornamentation (Fig. 22).<sup>158</sup> These female ornaments are of type found in Sweden, especially in the Mälär Lake valley.

Under mound Nr 4 at Jarovshchina on the River Ojat were the remains of a woman with many Norse ornaments, such as a pair of oval brooches (P 51), two arm-rings with wave decoration, a massive bronze ring-brooch, a bronze neck-ring, but also with several ornaments of typical Finnish kind.<sup>159</sup>

At Hittola near the River Olonka in a mound with several burials of the late tenth century was a female cremation (grave Nr XIV) with ornaments consisting of one pair of oval brooches (P48), part of a neck-ring of silver, a pendant made of a dirham and chains and pendants of Finno-Ugrian type.<sup>160</sup>

In the cemetery near the village of Nikolskoje on the bank of the River Ojat was a cemetery consisting of 33 mounds of which 15 have been excavated; only in one, No 7, were Norse artefacts belonging to a woman.<sup>161</sup> In the cremation layer were numerous ornaments, among them a pair of oval brooches (P55), another pair of similar but smaller brooches, one circular brooch (P116), four arm-rings of bronze, an iron neck-ring, beads, pendants of dirhams, mounts for a knife and several bird ornaments. Besides classical Norse ornaments

<sup>156</sup> Raudonikas 1930:44, 46; Roesdahl 1993:305, nr 294.

<sup>157</sup> Raudonikas 1930:44f.

<sup>158</sup> Brandenburg 1895, Tab. I, IV.

<sup>159</sup> Raudonikas 1930:60f, fig. 66, 68, 70–80.

<sup>160</sup> Raudonikas 1930:61ff, fig. 87–93.

<sup>161</sup> Raudonikas 1931:352ff.

there are here equally typical Finnish items. The burial is of the late tenth century.

For a long time it has been argued, mainly by Swedish scholars like Ture J. Arne and Holger Arbman, that Priladozhe was subject to Swedish agrarian colonization, and for an equally long time it has been counter-argued that nothing of the kind ever happened here.<sup>162</sup> The archaeological material, practically only from burials, confirms the presence of Norse groups, mainly during the tenth century, a time when this area became more densely populated by Finno-Ugrians. Scandinavian material culture in Finnish territory may indicate that either Norsemen settled among locals or the natives had received part of their culture from outside and were treating it as their own. In the latter case there must have been reasons for accepting alien items that were not only designed to serve a distinctive kind of dress but also act as signs of identity. This could only have happened due to intimate contacts with foreign peoples. On the other hand, it would be wrong to deny the possibility of physical influx of such people, especially that it in fact this happened in the neighbouring Staraja Ladoga and, as we will see, in many different places in Russia. The cultural mixing, which is so apparent in funeral practices in Priladozhe, clearly emphasizes the close co-existence of groups of Svear and Finno-Ugrian population at least during one century.

### 3. *The Upper Volkhov—Holmgård*

The most significant phenomenon that characterised the developments taking place in the Volkhov area from the mid ninth century was the establishment of the Rus in the northern area of the Lake Ilmen region (Fig. 23). During the Middle Ages it was the centre of *Novgorodskaja zemlja*, the Land of Novgorod, a mighty trading republic, the *Holmgård* of medieval Scandinavians. This Norse name had its root in the early Viking Age when Norsemen after sailing from Ladoga up the Volkhov reached its mouth and on the riverbanks could see a little archipelago of hills that were from time to time turned by the rising water to *holmar*—islands or peninsulas. It has

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<sup>162</sup> Jansson 1987:775.

been argued that the name *Holmgårdr* was originally applied to the whole area of Ilmen.<sup>163</sup> The single denomination *Holm* was possibly used for the Lake Ilmen, if in such a way we interpret the inscription on a Swedish rune stone (U 214), standing at Vallentuna near Stockholm, raised in memory of a man that lost his life in the waters of “*Holms hav*”.<sup>164</sup> This singular name might be a transfer from a place of special importance, a place on the hill standing at the mouth of the Volkhov, where in the mid ninth century Norsemen established their main settlement point known in modern times as *Rurikovo gorodische* but which in the beginning could have been named *Holm* (see below).

For a very long time the territory of northern Ilmen was densely populated, predominantly by Finno-Ugrians, to which belonged the archaeological *Sopka* Culture, named after the *sopkas*, their conical burial mounds. In the ninth century, various Slav groups arrived in the area. With time there was an increase in their numbers and in the tenth and eleventh centuries they became an important component of the inhabitants of the region. They labelled themselves *Slovene*, the Slavs, an obvious ethnonym in alien surrounding; these people came to play a leading role in the activities of the republic of Novgorod and were also called *novgorodskije slovene*.

The mouth of the Volkhov has two distinctive parts, the western and eastern. The western part, so-called *Poozerie*, “land along the lake”, was divided by the river Verjazha and it was here that most of the settlements of the area were situated.<sup>165</sup> Some of them had an early, eighth-century pedigree, and belonged to the local farming societies of the *Sopka* culture. It should be pointed out that extremely few Norse objects have been found on these settlements. In sharp contrast to this stands one site in the eastern part of Volkhov delta, a place called *Gorodishche*, which was ennobled in the first half of the nineteenth century (at the earliest) by the association with the name of Prince Rurik. After each new excavation, this place appears increasingly to be one of the most interesting of all early sites in the Ilmen area. It may be suggested that the site may have been originally called *Holmr* and, judging by the number and quality of Norse artefacts, it was a focal site of the Rus (see below).

<sup>163</sup> Melnikova 1986a:47.

<sup>164</sup> Wessén & Jansson 1943:325ff.

<sup>165</sup> Nosov 2001:27f.

Some time in the mid tenth century, about two kilometres north of *Rurikovo Gorodishche*, on the western bank of Volkhov was established the nucleus of the future town with the name Novgorod. Intensive archaeological research to find a settlement originating before the tenth century has been in vain. It is clear that the beginnings of the later Novgorod the Great were humble and relative late. The information of the Primary Chronicle about Rurik arriving to Novgorod was thus an anachronism, as the town did not even exist in the ninth century (the only place Rurik could have arrived, or even establish as his main power-point was Gorodishche). There are very few objects found in the town of Novgorod that are of Norse origin, among them characteristic amulets: the hammerlets of Thor.<sup>166</sup>

### 3.1 Hólmr—*place of a new beginning*

For about one hundred fifty years of the Viking Age (between the second half of the ninth to the end of the tenth century) *Rurikovo Gorodishche* was a central point held by the Rus in the Upper Volkhov area. It is the only place in this area where remains of Norse material culture appear in concentration, in relatively large numbers and in a variety of forms. It is now generally accepted that this site was the original *Holmgardr* of the Scandinavians, before the name was transferred to the later foundation of Novgorod. The scholars entertain an idea that Gorodishche even had another name, the one mentioned by Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his *De administrando imperio* (9:4) where he tells us that in the early 940s Prince Igor had sent his son Sviatoslav, still a child, to live in a place called Nemo-gardas.<sup>167</sup> This name bothered historians who decided to emendate it to *Nevogardas* and thus make it more similar to the famous Novgorod. What they did not realise was that at the time of recording of this name, Novgorod was not yet in existence, and that the only place of prominence that could have been a princely residence was the hill-site at Gorodishche. Judging by the nature of archaeological finds, this was the dwelling place of a Norse elite throughout the whole tenth century. In the early eleventh century Gorodishche lost its central function: archaeology demonstrates an occupational hiatus,

<sup>166</sup> Jansson 1997:35; Nosov et al. 1993:70.

<sup>167</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996:38, 130.

historians talk about the transferring of power to Novgorod, where Prince Jaroslav the Wise established his residence.<sup>168</sup> The princely status of Gorodishche was re-gained in the late eleventh century when the Rurikid rulers were forced by the boyars and *weche* to leave Novgorod.

Recently it has been suggested that the fortified hilltop of Gorodishche was the residence of a much earlier Norse ruler, that of the *kagan* of Rus, and that was from here the envoys of Rhos started their long travel to Byzantium and Ingelheim.<sup>169</sup> Keeping in mind the aristocratic nature of the site it would be easy to accept such hypothesis if there were enough archaeological finds confirming that a settlement was founded here already in the first part of the ninth century. There are very few such remains and this may mirror a real historical situation or the shortcomings of investigation. Erosion, extensive utilisation of the site during its history and severe destruction in modern time may have either entirely removed or seriously disrupted structures on the *Holmr*, leaving the question of its earliest date of settlement open. Also the absence of a cemetery where people of Gorodishche were buried complicates the issue. However, there are two finds that make an early date look realistic. One of the finds is a copper coin of Emperor Theophilos; as we have learnt from our study of the coins of this emperor in Denmark, Sweden and north Russia it might be possible to apprehend them as one collection originated from the supply of the Rhos envoys. Nevertheless, to make Gorodishche to the site of the *chacanus* of Rhos only on the basis of one coin would be to go too far. But there is also another find: a Byzantine seal dated to the first part of the ninth century and belonging to the domesticos Leon who, according to the inscription was commander of the first, second and forth unit of the emperor's regiments of guard.<sup>170</sup>

Gorodishche was founded at a strategic place, at the most convenient point at the mouth of the Volkhov from which it was easy to control north- and southbound water traffic. It was situated on the east bank, on a promontory of about 10 hectares with sandy top and clayey lower parts. It was situated between two tributaries,

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<sup>168</sup> Nosov 1992:91ff.

<sup>169</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996:32f.

<sup>170</sup> Bulgakova 2003:15.

the Volkhovets in the south and the Zhilotug in the north, turning this place into a real *holm*. The hill was specially prepared by making the slope to the river more steep, on its north and east side it was separated by a 4.5 m deep ditch, probably provided with a bank from the dug up earth; the excavations during the year 2000 uncovered here remains of wooden rampart.<sup>171</sup> The fortified elevation of the hill, measuring about 4 ha in area, was a residence of the social elite, the Rus. The rest of the space was occupied by a settlement of craftsmen, people servicing and repairing boats, and enclosures for livestock.

The archaeological finds from Gorodishche leave no doubts about the importance of this place. The number, variety and even quality of artefacts give a clear picture of the complex Norse culture of the Rus society that consisted of whole families, not only of one particular group like those of warriors or traders. The majority of artefacts have analogies in Birka thus giving a strong indication about the origin of the people, or at least the major part of them, dwelling in Gorodishche. Their culture was that of the Svear. It is so close to the Swedish material culture that in my opinion Gorodishche should be treated as a site of the Svear.

Finds from the surface and structures on the hill fairly well indicate the high status of the people living here. They had access to coins, both Oriental and Byzantine: the former were discovered as hoards (two deposits of dirhams from after the 860s) or single finds; the latter were only two, one copper coin, the already mentioned follis of Theophilos (829–842) and a millaresion of Basil I (867–886). The archaeological material obtained from the site is rich enough to shed light on the society of the Rus living here. We have here female and male ornaments—jewellery and metal parts of garments—combs, gaming set, cultic items, parts of horse bridle, weapons and last but not least items with runes. Some of these artefacts—a dragon-head, a small figure of woman, a mount from bridle and two amulets with runic inscriptions—are of special informative value and will be discussed separately.

The Norse objects date to a period from the second half of the ninth to the very end of the tenth centuries. As is also the case with Staraja Ladoga, the objects from the earliest period of occupation

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<sup>171</sup> Nosov 1992:40f; personal communication Ingmar Jansson.

are few, but there is an increase in number after the end of the ninth century and then it is constantly high throughout the tenth century. The earliest items are female ornaments, brooches: equal-armed type (P 58) and oval (P 37) (Fig. 24 a).<sup>172</sup> In silt taken from the River Volkhov close to the Gorodishche was recovered a brooch, a variant belonging to the Valsta group comprising about 16 specimens from Scandinavia, Baltic areas and Finland and one from Staraja Ladoga (Fig. 24 b).<sup>173</sup> This early brooch was developed from West European forms and its production concentrated in important emporia, like the Swedish Birka, where moulds for their casting were found.<sup>174</sup>

To the same period, and to the next, belong four iron neck-rings, some with pendants in the form of Thor's hammer and rings with small rings, both types were used as amulets or for sacrifice (Fig. 24 c).<sup>175</sup> Artefacts of this kind are spread throughout all of Scandinavia, but it was in Middle Sweden where they appear in greatest concentration (see more about these items in Russia below in chapter IV). To the same category, equally often used in Scandinavia, and present in Gorodishche, belong miniature strike-a-light pendants of iron and bronze.<sup>176</sup>

The tenth century artefacts comprise typical oval brooches but also more unusual ones, such as two pieces showing a curled animal; the only analogy is to be found in female grave Bj 857 in Birka (Fig. 25 a).<sup>177</sup> More rare types of ornament are two circular pendants made of tinned lead with ring decoration imitating filigree and with a carnelian inlay in the middle of one, and green glass inset in the other; the only similar pendant was found on the island of Öland (Fig. 25 b).<sup>178</sup> Another pendant is flat and octagonal in form, its front is decorated with a pattern consisting of four volutes, similar to the ones on a pendant from Staraja Ladoga and belonging to a large group of pendants and brooches with such a motif (Fig. 25 c).<sup>179</sup>

<sup>172</sup> Nosov 1990, fig. 44:5,6; 45:1.

<sup>173</sup> Callmer 199:203f; Ambrosiani et al. 1994.

<sup>174</sup> Ambrosiani & Erikson 1996:28.

<sup>175</sup> Nosov 1992:52, fig. II.2.0, II.2.7.

<sup>176</sup> Nosov 1990:158, fig. 30:4; 35:2.

<sup>177</sup> Nosov 1992:47, fig. II.24:2, 3; Arbman 1840, Taf. 85:2.

<sup>178</sup> Nosov 1990:77, fig. 32:5, 6; Nosov 1992:49, fig. II.26:2, 3; Inv. No 120, in Göteborg Arkeologiska Museum.

<sup>179</sup> Nosov 1990:125, fig. 48:14; Duczko 1985:38f, 42f, 82ff.

The item has direct analogy in three specimens which all seems to be made in one workshop: two are from Sweden—Birka grave Bj. 861, the hoard from Smedby in Östergötland, and one from the island of Schouwen, Holland.<sup>180</sup>

Accessories used for fastening clothing, probably for garters, are also present on Gorodishche: two animal heads seen *en face* and provided with a hook have good analogies at Birka where two pieces, placed near the knees, were found in grave Bj 905, an inhumation burial of a man (Fig. 25 d).<sup>181</sup> Similar items are also found in material from the settlement site at Gnëzdovo.<sup>182</sup> A small ring with four protuberances, probably an element of dress, has analogies in cremation graves of females in Birka, some of them belonging to the late ninth century.<sup>183</sup> Another type of dress fastener, with identical analogies in material from Birka, are bronze pins, among them one with a terminal in the form of a man's head wearing a helmet, and penannular brooches (Fig. 25 e).<sup>184</sup> The male ornaments are represented by ringed pins (Fig. 25 f) and ring brooch with animal heads, very rare in the East, of the Gotlandic type.<sup>185</sup>

Other artefacts very similar to specimens from burials of male and females in Birka are whetstone pendants, symbolic rather than practical objects.<sup>186</sup> To the objects of more practical use belongs an elegant pair of shears with the bow decorated with small faces, in a way analogous to the piece from grave Bj 880 in Birka.<sup>187</sup>

There is no lack of items coming from gaming sets, once more giving testimony to the custom of playing board games so characteristic for the Norse elite culture of the Viking Age.<sup>188</sup>

The martial side of the elite dwelling on the Holm is illustrated only by finds of chapes; three pieces of types with the bird and plait ornaments (Fig. 26).<sup>189</sup>

<sup>180</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 96:13; Duczko 1995a:655; Capelle 1978, Taf. 18, 25:100.

<sup>181</sup> Nosov 1990:160ff, fig. 63:1; 64:2; Arbman 1940, Taf. 91:6.

<sup>182</sup> Egorov 1996:64, fig. 418, 420.

<sup>183</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 112:10–13.

<sup>184</sup> Nosov 1992:53, fig. II.22:3; Arbman 1940, Taf. 170:4; 174.

<sup>185</sup> Nosov 2001:64, fig. 44:3,4; Thunmark-Nylén 1998, Taf. 114:2.

<sup>186</sup> Nosov 1990:70, fig. 33:3, 4; 93, fig. 37:13; Arbman 1940, Taf. 186, 188.

<sup>187</sup> Nosov 1990:76, fig. 31:3; Arbman 1940, Taf. 174, 175:4b.

<sup>188</sup> Nosov 1984:147; Nosov 1990:80, fig. 37; Nosov 1992:51, fig. II.28:3.

<sup>189</sup> Mikhailov & Nosov 2002.



### 3.1.1 Dragon's head

Among the artefacts found outside a stratigraphic context in Gorodishche is a figure of a small flat, two-sided animal head made of lead: the animal has an open mouth with bared teeth and curled tongue, the eyes are round and protruding, on the top is a kind of crest (Fig. 27 a).<sup>190</sup> This is a unique piece, the only one of its kind in the whole of Eastern Europe. This contrasts with the situation in Scandinavia, or to be more specific, in Middle Sweden and on Gotland, where numerous examples of such specimens have been found. From Birka in Lake Mälaren are known two pieces, one fragmentary from a jetty, and one from inside a hall standing near the fort, Borgen, at place called *Garnisonen* (Fig. 27 b).<sup>191</sup> Another find from Birka testifies to the popularity of this motif, a stone mould with a cavity in the form of dragon head of somewhat different design than that discussed here.<sup>192</sup>

In the collection of the Statens Historiska Museum in Stockholm is one dragon head, probably originating from Södermanland and four other pieces from Gotland (Fig. 27 c), all specimens are of the same design as the piece from Gorodishche.<sup>193</sup> Another similar piece was found at the Slinkbacken cemetery, near Söderby, not far from Uppsala. It was uncovered near a stone ring enclosing the earthen mound covering two separate cremation burials of males; in both burials were swords, one stuck into the soil (Fig. 27 d).<sup>194</sup> The piece has a socket in which are remains of wood showing that the head was set on a pin. It is this socket that is analogous to the specimen from Gorodishche.

The origin of these heads is to be found in Insular art, in which the earliest examples appear in the eighth-century Pictish metal-work on the well-known silver scabbard chapes from the St. Ninian's Isle hoard.<sup>195</sup>

In the late ninth century this design was transferred to Norway where the ends of rings on some types of penannular brooches (an Insular item in itself) received the form of a dragon with charac-

<sup>190</sup> Nosov 1992:48, fig. II.25:4; Roesdahl 1993:302, fig. 284.

<sup>191</sup> Kyhlberg 1972:172f, fig. 56j; Holmquist Olausson 2001:14.

<sup>192</sup> Oldeberg 1943:259, fig. 497.

<sup>193</sup> Oldeberg 1943:259, fig. 496, 498.

<sup>194</sup> Wexell 1997:232, fig. 3.

<sup>195</sup> Youngs 1989, fig. 102–103. 1993:305, nr 294.

teristic open jaws and tongue.<sup>196</sup> A fine example of such a head can be seen on the top of a bronze pin found in Danish Hedeby.<sup>197</sup>

The miniature dragon head is an artefact, which is familiar to Nordic archaeologists, not because it appears in a large numbers but because of its cultural connotation: a dragon is for the Viking Age as symbolic as the ship. The latter were often called dragons, and it was almost a custom to have a head of a dragon put on the battle-ships' prow, some of them not permanent but removable when the ship approached the land.<sup>198</sup> It is therefore more than probably that our heads of dragons were miniatures of prows, or rather their upper parts provided with magical powers. They were used either separately or as an element of some bigger object, perhaps even a model of a ship.

### 3.1.2 Lady in long dress

There is yet another artefact as unique as the previous one found on the surface in Gorodishche: a small silver pendant showing in profile a walking woman in a full-length dress (Fig. 28 a).<sup>199</sup> While unique—the only one—in Russia, it is by no means rare in Scandinavia, especially in Sweden. This kind of pendant showing females wearing rich garments and jewellery, in some cases holding in one hand a goblet or drinking horn, was put into the graves of wealthy women.<sup>200</sup>

The specimen from Gorodishche is very close to the piece found in a inhumation grave, Bj 968 in Birka, and somewhat less to another piece from grave Bj 825.<sup>201</sup> The evidence that such ornaments were manufactured in this town was found during the excavations conducted here in the 1990s. Among a great number of moulds for casting of many typical Norse Viking-age ornaments were clay moulds for making small figures of walking women.<sup>202</sup>

All known figures of this kind are depicted in one and the same way. Behind this homogeneity must lay an original design that started this standardisation of representation. This had happened after the

<sup>196</sup> Graham-Campbell 1987:237.

<sup>197</sup> Elsner 1985:9.

<sup>198</sup> Nylén & Lamm 1987:115, 117, 121.

<sup>199</sup> Nosov 1992:48, fig. II25:3; Roesdahl 1993:302, fig. 281.

<sup>200</sup> Nordahl 2001:52f.

<sup>201</sup> Arbman 1940, Tab. 92:8,10.

<sup>202</sup> Ambrosiani & Erikson 1996:26, 27.

middle of the first millennium of our era in South Scandinavia among artists producing so-called *guldgubbar*, small, thin gold foils with pictures of striding women; these foils were used in a cultic context as sacrificial items.<sup>203</sup> The foils were still employed in the early Viking Age when the characteristic design of the female figures was spread to other art forms, like textiles, for example the tapestry from the Norwegian boat-grave from Oseberg, or relief on stones, like the ones on the Gotlandic *bildstenar*—the picture-stones.<sup>204</sup>

The type of pendants discussed here used to be called Valkyrie-pendants, because, as it was thought, they were representations of mythological female beings which were agents of the war god Odin and would collect killed heroes from battle-fields and deliver them to the paradise of the fallen warriors—the Valhalla. This is hardly a correct identification as there is nothing that could indicate that these female figures had anything to do with the demonic warrior women. They obviously show women from the upper layer of Norse society, while wearing their best dresses during important events—religious ceremonies or feasts in the halls—acting as creators of social cohesion and playing an important role in manifestations of hierarchical order.<sup>205</sup> Small figures of such women were badges of social identity. Loaded with symbolic-magic contents they gave the bearer—always female—a sense of belonging to a special group. The woman who owned the figure from Gorodishche belonged to the Rus elite in which the Norse symbolism was much alive, or she more probably came to Russia directly from Svealand having jewellery made in Birka with her.

### 3.1.3 Mount from a bridle

An intact bronze mount with a *jour entrelac* decoration and an animal head on the top was part of snaffle bit of a bridle set (Fig. 28 b).<sup>206</sup> It was not however a standard bridle for everyday use. The mount from Gorodishche belonged to a group of exclusive bridles with straps covered by rectangular mounts with curled animals produced for Norse elites in the first part of the tenth century. The most famous

<sup>203</sup> Watt 1991.

<sup>204</sup> Hougen 1940; Nylén & Lamm 1987:90–92.

<sup>205</sup> Enright 1996:34ff.

<sup>206</sup> Nosov 1990:125, fig. 48:2.

example of such a bridle came from a ship-burial in Vestfold at the royal cemetery of Borre in Norway (see Fig. 40).<sup>207</sup> Although this find used to dominate discussions around the items decorated in the so-called Borre style and thus creating the impression that bridles with bronze mounts were typical for Norway, it should be emphasised that bridles of our type are very rare there—only one other set was found in another ship-burial, that at Gokstad—otherwise they are more common in Middle Sweden and on Gotland. From Swedish sites are several finds of this type of bridle: Birka, Valsgärde and Antuna, all in Uppland, on Gotland they appear at various places such as graves in the Ihre burial-ground and in the smith's deposit in Smiss.<sup>208</sup> Outside Sweden they are also found in Russia, not only on Gorodishche but also in Gnëzdovo, on the Upper Dnieper and at Supruty, Upper Oka.<sup>209</sup>

One of the finds of this type of bridle clearly shows this item's place among the equipment of high-status social groups. It comes from the mound named Skopintull on the island of Adelsö near Birka.<sup>210</sup> The cremation layer under the mound contained a large amount of artefacts, mostly of female character but also some male, like two belts with mounts, a fragment of a spear, metal clamps from a shield and a board-game set; they were provided with exclusive accessories, like clothes with gold-wire braids. Besides rectangular mounts from the straps there was here one fragment of a mount from a snaffle bit similar to the one from Gorodishche.<sup>211</sup> The persons in the grave were cremated in a boat, or at least in parts of a boat. A copper cauldron of east European origin was utilised as the container for the bones, it was of a type well recorded in finds from Supruty mentioned above.<sup>212</sup> The Skopintull grave is a place of burial of people belonging to the royal milieu at Hovgården and the bridle used here was a part of its exclusive culture, which was also transferred to Holm-Gorodishche.

<sup>207</sup> Brøgger 1916:9ff; Müller-Wille 1986:159, fig. 3:1,7.

<sup>208</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 88:2; 1943:223; Sundkvist 1992, fig. 31; Andersson 1993:16ff; Thunmark-Nylén 1995, fig. 198; 1998, fig. 264:4–6; Zachrisson 1962, fig. 1e.

<sup>209</sup> Egorov 1996:67, 74.

<sup>210</sup> Rydh 1936:104ff.

<sup>211</sup> Rydh 1936, fig. 305a.

<sup>212</sup> Egorov 1996:75, fig. 625.

### 3.1.4 Amulets with runic inscriptions

To all these discussed objects should be added two items that will give the final touch to our presentation of Norse life at Gorodishche—artefacts with runes. They are two elongated pendants of bronze sheet found in two different places.<sup>213</sup> On the surface of the pendants is scratched an identical inscription consisting of twelve signs; sheet 1 has also an inscription on the other side (Fig. 28 c). In the latter, which is badly preserved, there are four signs written in older futhark, one in cryptic form and some other written with signs typical of the beginning of the ninth century; the inscription has something to do with god Tyr and his protective power.<sup>214</sup>

The main inscription on both pendants is written in younger futhark but the branches of the runes are duplicated, thus clearly indicating the magic purpose of the formula, which according to Melnikova was an invocation that could be read as follows: *Þarnisk Þér eigi úrr*—May you not lack man's power.<sup>215</sup> Sheet 1 seems to have been in extensive use for long period of time, and, probably, was made in Scandinavia, while the second one, in unworn state, may be a copy of the first one and of local production.<sup>216</sup> The closest analogies to the sheet-pendants from Gorodishche are to be found in Roskilde, Denmark and two in Uppland—Hovgården on Adelsö and in Sigtuna.<sup>217</sup>

## 4. *The Rus west of the Volkhov: the case of Izborsk-Pskov*

The *Primary Chronicle* tells us that Truvor, one of three brothers that were called in from Scandinavia to rule over the feuding tribes received the town of Izborsk as his seat. This place is situated on the west side of the lower Velikaja River, which runs to Lake Pskov. Because of the noble pedigree provided by the chronicle, Izborsk has been considered to be one of the earliest Russian towns. It has,

<sup>213</sup> Nosov 1990:106.

<sup>214</sup> Melnikova 1994; Melnikova 2001:180ff; Nosov 2001:66.

<sup>215</sup> Melnikova 1987:166; Melnikova 1994; see critic of Melnikova's method in MacLeod 2002:171ff.

<sup>216</sup> Melnikova 1987:166.

<sup>217</sup> Jacobsen & Moltke 1942:235, 263, 305, 487; Lindquist 1936; Nordén 1937:188, fig. 18; Brunstedt 1996:38.

however, been archaeologically demonstrated that this town was not in existence in the ninth century; the compiler of the chronicle, in his striving to place the first Rurikids in a familiar context, as happened to him many times, created an anachronism. Why he made Izborsk the main seat of Truvor is not quite clear, especially in the light of archaeological investigations which have not produced Scandinavian objects of an early period. Scholars have often discussed Izborsk, attempting to find a reason for its literary importance. The etymology of the name was a subject of controversy in which its Finnish, Slav or Scandinavian origin were maintained.<sup>218</sup> S.V. Beletskij<sup>219</sup> has offered a solution to this problem. He is convinced that Izborsk was originally founded at another place, further to the north, on a peninsula between River Velikaja and its tributary Pskova. One of the decisive pieces of evidence in support of this view is the fact that it was here that the presence of Scandinavians has been well proven by archaeology. After a while some groups in this first Izborsk decided to leave. They moved to the west side of the river, settled at the called in modern times *Truvorovo gorodishche*, then expanded outside and gave their new place of dwelling the old name of Izborsk; their former site on the east side was renamed Pskov. The movements of people and the mobility of names of their settlements is a well-known phenomenon, so the main idea of Beletskij's interpretation does not have to be entirely wrong. But as Izborsk has no evidence for Scandinavians, we need not dwell any longer on this place and instead look closer at Pskov.

The site for Pskov was chosen with care, exactly as in the case of Staraja Ladoga, and Rurikovo Gorodishche. It was founded close to the waterways leading first to Pskov Lake, then to the much larger Pejpus Lake, from which the River Narva flows to the Gulf of Finland. It was a good way to communicate with the Baltic and Scandinavia. Close to the mouth of the Pskova, the northern end of a peninsula called Krom, was settled by Finno-Ugrians in the first half of the first millennium A.D. and then continuously occupied to the late ninth century.<sup>220</sup> This Finnish dominance was broken at the very end of the ninth century when alien people, Scandinavians and West

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<sup>218</sup> Rozhdestvenskaja 1997:95f.

<sup>219</sup> 1996.

<sup>220</sup> Beletskij 1980:15.

Slavs moved into the site, built a rampart at Krom, and established open settlements and a barrow cemetery. The Slav elements are clear: high quality wheel-made pottery with characteristic wavy decoration, and the manner of construction of the rampart.<sup>221</sup> The Norse elements are equally clear, both from settlements and from burials. In the material from the settlements is a selection of Norse items of types we already know very well from the Volkhov (Fig. 29 a). We have here bone combs, bronze jewellery—for women: brooches of equal-armed and small circular types, pendants with animal decoration, for men: ringed-pins; amulets: a little ring with 14 various hanging items and a large iron ring with one miniature hammer pendant (Fig. 29 b). There are many other artefacts of Norse origin: instruments of trade like a balance and weights, weapons represented by arrow-heads—10 lancet shaped specimens; a gaming dice for pastime, a clay weight from an upright loom, and last but not least a wooden sword of Petersens's type X a toy for children.<sup>222</sup> An unusual object is a comb of Finnish type on which two Norse graffiti are scratched: a picture of a tree and a ship with a mast and quadratic sail, very similar to the one carved on a Gotlandic *bildsten* or on graffiti made on a piece of clay found in France (Fig. 30 a).<sup>223</sup>

Together with the Norse items appeared another category of finds usually associated with the Scandinavians: Islamic coins, dirhams from 914–34 and 940–55, and even such a unique piece as a Byzantine gold coin struck between 914 and 944.<sup>224</sup>

The barrow cemetery at Pskov consisted of inhumations and cremations with assemblages that contained Norse items, in some cases complementary to the material from the settlement. In one cremation grave of a woman (Nr 4) was a pair of oval brooches of Petersen 55 type, in a man's grave (Nr 9) were arrowheads, a knife, a strike-a-light implement, a whetstone, and a ring brooch.<sup>225</sup> From a destroyed cremation grave (Nr 57) come two parts of a bridle: an intact strap-end and fragmentary buckle, both with interlacing decoration in Borre-style.<sup>226</sup> Once more we meet traces of the exclusive type of

<sup>221</sup> Beltskij 1980:7, fig. 4, 14, fig. 7:4.

<sup>222</sup> Sedov 1992.

<sup>223</sup> Kondrateva 1981:107, fig. 2:6; Nylén & Lamm 1987:65; Roesdahl 1993:317, nr 349.

<sup>224</sup> Beletskij 1980:11.

<sup>225</sup> Labutina et al. 1981:71ff, fig. 3.

<sup>226</sup> Sedov 1992:152, fig. 3:3, fig. 4:1.

horse headgear of the type that was found in Rurikovo Gorodishche (see above 3.1.3). This item, more than the others, is a strong evidence for the presence in Pskov of high-status Norsemen. The same story is told also by the inhumation burials, both males in chamber graves. In one of them (Nr 15) was an iron brooch of a type well represented in Swedish Birka.<sup>227</sup>

Another indications of the presence of an elite group in Pskov are the hoards of silver and gold items. They were not found in the town itself but appear southeast of Pskov in the area of the upper River Velikaja. These hoards were deposited during the eleventh century but contained several tenth-century items. In a hoard from Vaskovo were many Scandinavian items—neck-rings, brooches and one circular pendant, a miniature shield, all artefacts of well-known style, often found in hoards in Scandinavia.<sup>228</sup> In a hoard found in Demshina, together with 6000 Islamic and West European coins, was a penannular brooch of type that developed in Norway and Denmark with insular brooches as the model (Fig. 30 b).<sup>229</sup>

Who were the Norsemen in Pskov and neighbouring areas? Their culture was universal Scandinavian, well represented by both male and female elements; it was a living culture of Norse society with families, warriors and traders. But from which part of Scandinavia had they come? If we take into account the fact that there was a strong West Slav component among the inhabitants of Pskov we could assume that the Norsemen were of Danish origin. The cooperation between Danes and Slavs had long tradition that included Slav colonisation in Denmark and Danish involvement in West Slav trade-towns.<sup>230</sup> Since the ninth century the Danes had become increasingly interested in the eastern parts of the Baltic Sea, and started to establish themselves in Prussian Truso and later, during the tenth century, in Kaup, Samland.<sup>231</sup> However strong may be the indications of Danish involvement in Pskov, it cannot be excluded that Svear from Mälar Valley were also established here.

There is no information about Norse princes living in Pskov in the same way as in the case of Polotsk where Rogvolod's family

<sup>227</sup> Labutina et al. 1981:70, 75, fig. 1, Arbman 1940, Taf. 57.

<sup>228</sup> Korzukhina 1954:98f, Tab. XXIII–XXIV.

<sup>229</sup> Korzukhina 1954:99, Tab. XXV:1.

<sup>230</sup> Duczko 2000.

<sup>231</sup> Duczko 1997a:204ff.



ruled. What we are told of is a connection between the Norsemen of Polotsk with the Rurikids. According to the *Primary Chronicle*, Pskov was the hometown of Olga (ON *Helga*) wife of Prince Igor who married her in 903 and had with her Sviatoslav, the warrior-prince. In contrast however, some later sources tell us that Olga was not of noble origin.<sup>232</sup>

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<sup>232</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:64, note 32.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE RUS AND THEIR CULTURE

#### 1. *The Rus of the tenth century*

In the early period—the second part of the eighth and first part of the ninth century—the Norse presence is only visible with special clarity at Staraja Ladoga, and to a much lesser degree at a few other sites in the northern parts of Eastern Europe. The objects that represent Norse material culture of this period are rare outside Ladoga and mostly known as single finds. This rarity continues through the ninth century until the whole situation changes radically during the next century, when we meet, at many places and in relatively large quantities, the material remains of a thriving Scandinavian culture. For a short period of time, some areas of Eastern Europe became as much part of the Norse world as were Danish and Norwegian territories in the West. The only difference between the West and East is that in the latter the Norse material culture is much more manifest: what is found here is exactly the same as in Scandinavia and the number of items is incomparably higher than in the Norse territories in the West.

During the tenth century the number of groups of people with Norse culture multiply in the East to an extent which was previously unknown. From Pskov at the south end of the Lake Pejpus, through Staraja Ladoga and along the eastern side of Ladoga Lake, on the Upper Dnieper at Gnëzdovo and in the neighbouring area, as well as on the Upper Volga and close to the rivers Kljazma and Oka, appear larger and lesser concentrations of settlements occupied by groups of people sharing Scandinavian culture. Though they are small clusters in a sea of autochthonous populations—Balt, Finno-Ugrian, Slav, Turkic Bulgars—they are not isolated aliens but an immanent part of this ethnic mosaic. What made them special was their permanent connections with Scandinavia, from which they used to fetch new members, and with them more Norse culture that strengthened their identity.

The testimony of written and archaeological sources shows the complexity and dynamism of the development of the society of the Rus. The northwest region, Ilmen-Ladoga area, after receiving new groups of Norsemen, established its focal position for a long time. It was from here that very profitable trade with Volga Bulgars and the Orient was organized, and it was from here that some groups of the Rus started their expansion towards the south to Slav territories and which, at the same time, made Byzantium the target of their military expeditions and trading operations. The migration to the West of the strong Magyar confederation at the end of the ninth century gave the Rus opportunity for moving down the Dnieper, where they made Kiev their main base and started to establish their rule over Slav communities.

The attraction of the Black Sea region played an important part in this expansion. Already at the very beginning of the tenth century fleets of ships appear there, if we understand as Rus “the Scythians from the north” attacking Greek coasts, mentioned by Emperor Leo VI in his *Tactica* written probably after 907.<sup>1</sup> Soon, the Rus would go even farther and repeatedly attack imperial Constantinople, then make peace with Greeks and become involved in trade exchange regulated in detail by treaties. These activities are connected with the Rurikids establishment in the Middle Dnieper and their expansion (see chapter VI).

Yet another region became a target of the military expeditions of the Rus—the Caspian. Several plundering raids went to the Muslim coasts of this sea, some of them organised on large scale. The first recorded expedition from the period between the early 860s and early 880s, ended in total catastrophe, which did not hinder the Rus from new attempts during the first part of the tenth century.<sup>2</sup> Al-Masudi in his book *Muruj al-Dhahab*, “The Golden Meadows”, written in the early 940s<sup>3</sup> tells us about one such expedition:

Some time after AH 300 (= A.D. 912/13) there came about 500 ships, each manned by 100 persons [...]. The ships of the Rus spread throughout the sea. [...] The Rus shed blood, destroyed the women and children, took booty, and raided and burnt in all directions. [...]

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<sup>1</sup> Lowmianski 1973:194.

<sup>2</sup> Minorsky 1958:111.

<sup>3</sup> Dunlop 1954:209f.

The Rus continued many months in this sea [...] and none of the natives who border it were able to reach them. [...]. When they had gained enough booty and were tired of what they were about, they started for the mouth of the Khazar river, informing the king of the Khazars, and conveying to him rich booty, according to the conditions which he had fixed with them [...]. The Arsiya and other Muslims who were in Khazaria learned of the situation of the Rus, and said to the king of the Khazars, Leave us to deal with these people [...]. He could not gainsay them. So he went to the Rus, informing them of the determination of the Muslim to fight them. The Muslims assembled and went forth to find them, proceeding downstream. When the two armies came within sight of each other, the Rus disembarked and drew up in order of battle against the Muslim, with whom were a number of the Christians living in Atil, so they were about 15,000 men, with horses and equipment. The fighting continued for three days. [...]. The Rus were put to the sword. Some were killed and others were drowned. About 5,000 of them escaped, and re-embarking on their ships, reached the other bank in the neighbourhood of the Burtas. Here they left their ships and kept to the land. Some of them were killed by the Burtas. Others who had reached the Bulgars (who were Muslims) were killed by them. Of those slain by the Muslims on the banks of the Khazar river there were counted about 30,000.

A generation later, in 943, a large fleet appeared once more in the Caspian. The Rus landed, went inland, and managed to capture a whole town, an important trading centre Bardhaah, and occupied it for a year. The behaviour of the aggressors indicated that they were making preparations to stay if not for good so at least for a long time. They informed the citizens of the city: "There is no dispute between us on the matter of religion, we only desire sovereignty; it is our duty to treat you well, and yours to be loyal to us"<sup>4</sup> As had been the case with the former raids, even the Bardhaah expedition ended in catastrophe: affected by an epidemic sickness, the Rus fell easy prey for local rulers who managed to kill as many Rus as it was possible and drove the survivors back to their boats.<sup>5</sup>

The information about the sizes of the Rus armies attacking Caspian area is most certainly exaggerated. It is notoriously difficult to estimate the size of Viking bands. Western sources give numbers of ships and sometimes even numbers of attackers: they were small bands varying between a few to several hundreds persons, an army

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<sup>4</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996:147f.

<sup>5</sup> Dunlop 1954:240.

may consist of several thousands.<sup>6</sup> To make a raid with 50,000 men would be not possible, among other things for logistic reasons.

The problem with the size of fleets is of less importance than the issue of who was organising those expeditions. It has been almost always assumed that it were the Rurikid rulers of Kiev. It is too easy to accept this opinion if we see the Rurikids of the first part of the tenth century as the only force capable of arranging raids which needed discipline and strong leaders. That the early Kievan princes were involved in at least some of raids to the Caspian shores is certain but there must have also been expeditions that came directly from Scandinavia. The most famous one is known from early 1040, the so called Ingvar-expedition which was organised by a person belonging to the royal family of the Svear who gathered a large number of people from the Mälär Lake area; this expedition, like many of those from tenth century, finished in total disaster. Perhaps it is about early attempts of this kind which Joseph, the king of Khazars, mentions in his correspondence with the Spanish Jew Hasday ibn Shaprut in the 950s:<sup>7</sup> “By the help of Almighty I guard the mouth of the river and do not allow the Rus who come in ships to come by sea to go against the Arabs.”

If the written sources record all of the expeditions to the Caspian which the Rus ever accomplished, then all those enterprises were failures. Even when the Rus were successful in robbing they obviously never manage to return to their homes with great booty. In the light of this it is difficult to see as reasonable claims of some scholars that the majority of dirhams in Scandinavia, especially in Gotland, were obtained through plunder.<sup>8</sup> Neither it is reasonable to see the origin of the wealth of Islamic silver in the North as part of the tributes taken by Scandinavians from the Slav and Finnish inhabitants of Russia.<sup>9</sup> It is easy to forget that tributes in this part of Europe consisted of goods, not of Islamic silver.

So, in the end, as a great contrast to the sorry picture of unlucky Viking raiders losing their booty and lives, the trading activities of the Rus appears as economically most significant. The expeditions to the Caspian were caused by knowledge about the riches of Islamic

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<sup>6</sup> Nelson 1997:39.

<sup>7</sup> Dunlop 1954:240.

<sup>8</sup> Sawyer 1982:125f.

<sup>9</sup> Lieber 1990:209.

countries. A prerequisite for this was the economic development of Transoxania (the Khorasan of Arab writers), where at the very end of ninth century a new dynasty came to power—the Persian Samanids. Thanks to the access to new sources of silver and well-developed trade, the economy of their state and the whole region was booming. It has been established that practically all the silver coins produced by the Samanids were for export—they were used as a payment in the foreign trade exchange.<sup>10</sup>

From the early tenth century coins made of this new silver are present in large quantities in the trading system of the Bulgars who created on the Volga one of the most important centres in the Eastern Europe. The Bulgar became a goal of trading parties of Rus and it was here, not in the Caliphate itself, that the transactions were concluded. The dirhams were disseminated everywhere the Rus were living and went also outside Russia to the Baltic. Analysis of silver hoards deposited in Bulgar, Northern Rus and Scandinavia gives some indications about the movement of oriental coins during the tenth century. The contents of hoard deposits from Bulgar show that the stream of Islamic coins to the Volga was unbroken throughout whole century and that the circulation was all the time dominated by emissions current in the lands where they were produced. The situation was different in the area we are dealing with in this chapter. Here, coins were arriving irregularly, the emissions, with some exceptions, were mixed, the pace of circulation varying, with periods of growing numbers of coins but also periods of poor access to them; the same may be observed in Scandinavia.<sup>11</sup>

Judging by the number of finds of dirhams in the tenth century Baltic region it was people from Gotland that were the predominant element in the eastern exchange, the second most active area was West Slav Pomerania, and after it Sweden and Öland; even Denmark, and to a little extent Norway, were participating in the stream of Samanid coins.<sup>12</sup> It is worth remembering that the Norsemen were also involved in Pomeranian trade through their engagement in the town of Wolin.<sup>13</sup> During the first three decades of the tenth century

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<sup>10</sup> Noonan & Kovalev 2002:173.

<sup>11</sup> Losinski 1993.

<sup>12</sup> Noonan 1994:225f; Losinski 1993:21.

<sup>13</sup> Duczko 2000:24ff.

mainland Sweden is still receiving quite a large number of coins but at the same time is losing its favourable position to Gotland, where 80% of known coins are found.<sup>14</sup> The finds make it clear that the trade started to decline in Sweden already in the 950s when only a small portion of coins from the new stream of dirhams arriving to Russia was carried to the North.<sup>15</sup> This weakening of connections continues into the 970s, when the transfer of Islamic silver not only to Sweden but also to the whole Baltic basin ceases almost entirely; this happens at a time when Russia is reached by massif influx of coins struck after 959.<sup>16</sup> After two decades of absence the dirhams begun flowing again to Scandinavia, but their quantities were very low compared with the level from mid-950s; in Sweden they were circulating to the 1040s, on Gotland to the 1060s.<sup>17</sup>

As the oriental silver from the beginning had played an important role in Norse engagement in European Russia, we have to try to understand what caused the end of its usage. The disruption of the 970s is usually explained by relating it to the raising power of the Kiev State. This explanation does not provide an answer: why should Rurikid princes hinder the traditional subject of Norse trade—Islamic silver—from reaching Scandinavia? And still another question: were they really able to do this? This could only have been the case if they had total monopoly of operations with oriental silver, which it seems clear that they did not have, or if they could control the whole of Eastern Europe, which they definitely did not. According to Sawyer,<sup>18</sup> who asserts that dirhams in the North originated not from trade but from plunder, it was the growing power of local rulers that made it impossible for the Viking warbands to come and loot. In this context it should be underlined that it was during the decades when the stream of Samanid coins to the Baltic had dried up that the Norse presence in Russia was at its peak. This would imply that the growing number of Norsemen was a decisive factor in hindering the looting and transfer of silver to the North. The Polish scholar Wladyslaw Losinski<sup>19</sup> approaches this kind of rea-

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<sup>14</sup> Noonan 1994:227.

<sup>15</sup> Noonan 1993:230.

<sup>16</sup> Noonan 1994:233.

<sup>17</sup> Losinski 1993:22.

<sup>18</sup> 1982:125.

<sup>19</sup> 1993:15.

soning by assuming that, while the number of Norsemen in the East multiplied, their presence underwent a characteristic change: traders, who previously were very mobile, begun to settle permanently in places like Gnëzdovo and by connecting their lives with local rulers were cutting their bonds with Scandinavia. The same, Losinski continues, happened with Norse warriors who also settled down and were attached to the *druzhina* of Kievan princes.

Let's consider yet other explanations. Should we perhaps look for the cause of disruption in the known expedition of Prince Sviatoslav to the Volga Bulgars in the late 960s? In fact, he had robbed the town of Bulgar but was not able to destroy it in the same way he managed to do with the Khazars. Even his son Vladimir in the 980s was powerless against the might of the Bulgars who continued to successfully run trading business until the end of the tenth century.

It is also sometimes pointed out that cutting off the stream of Islamic coins was not caused by events in the East but rather by developments in the West. The important factor was, as the argument goes, the entering into circulation of the silver from German mines, which became productive towards the mid-950. These coins, together with English pennies, were from the end of the tenth century effectively taking place of oriental ones, which, as being transported a much greater distance, became too expensive.

While considering the internal Scandinavian causes we should take a look at the problem of Birka. This main port of trade and crafts in Svealand ceases to exist in the 970s, or soon after. This important event used to be explained in two ways: because of the shortest way to the port was closed by the rising of the land, and because of cutting off the trade with the East. It would take too much space to discuss these two explanations here. I find them to be not sufficiently based in research—our knowledge about the settlement in Birka is still limited—and definitely not anchored in studies of political situation in Svealand during the second part of the tenth century. Elsewhere I tried to see the internal, political considerations to be responsible for the termination of Birka: it was the action of King Erik the Victorious who by withdrawing the royal protection caused the fall of the town; after this Erik was able to build his own town Sigtuna, over which he had total control.<sup>20</sup> Archaeological findings

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<sup>20</sup> Duczko 2001.



from Sigtuna show that the town had close western connections in the early phases of its existence; it was during the eleventh century that the eastern bonds were first activated.<sup>21</sup>

It seems that at the present stage of research it is not possible to reach a clear conclusion about the causes of disruption of connections between Scandinavia and Russia in the 970s. All of the explanations presented above may contain some kernel of truth, but in which proportions and in which combination it is too early to tell.

### 1.1. *Who were the Rus?*

Who was called a Rus during the tenth century? This seemingly unnecessary question is in fact highly relevant. Were all people of Norse origin living in Eastern Europe the Rus? What about those who came from Svealand, made some business, stayed for a while and went back home? Were they the Rus for the Volga Bulgars? Or was this denomination restricted only to people permanently dwelling in the East for some generations? The testimony of written sources allows a rather broad interpretation.

The Norse background of the Rus was universally recognised. Liudprand, Bishop of Cremona in Italy, a visitor to Constantinople in the mid tenth century, in his *Antapodosis* refers to: "... Rusios quos alio nos nomine Nordmannos appellamus . . . , . . . *Rusios, nos vero a positione loci nominamus Nordmannos . . .*"<sup>22</sup> For Liudprand the Rus were the Norsemen, he was not trying to differentiate the ones living in Scandinavia from the ones living in the East, for him they were the same.

In the above-mentioned work of Masudi is stated: "The Rus form several nations of different kinds, among them a sort called Ludhaniyah, who are the most numerous. They pass with merchandise to the countries of Spain, Rome, Constantinople and Khazaria"<sup>23</sup> The strange name Ludhanyah was decoded by scholars as a distorted word meaning Norsemen.

The Oriental authors knew that the Rus were people living far from the places of their trade and martial activities. Ibn Miskawaih

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<sup>21</sup> Duczko 1997b.

<sup>22</sup> Paszkiewicz 1954:124; Scott 1993:76.

<sup>23</sup> Dunlop 1954:21.

(late tenth and first decades of the eleventh century) while writing the dramatic story of the assault of the Rus on Bardhaah in the early tenth century tells us that they came from a cold land that lacked “. . . fruits [. . .] brought to them only in small quantities from distant parts”<sup>24</sup> At the same time the Arabs had some knowledge about the Rus in Eastern Europe. Al Istakhri, wrote in 930 in his “The Roads of the Kingdom”:<sup>25</sup>

The Rus are made up of three tribes: one near Bulgar; their king dwells in a town called *Kuyaba*. This is larger than Bulgar. Farthest away is another tribe. It is called *Salawiya*. The third tribe is called *Arthaniya*. Their king resides in a place called *Artha*. The people there go for purposes of trade to Kuyaba. As regards Arthania it is said that no stranger ever entered their town, because they put to death any stranger who comes to their country. They go down the rivers for trading purposes only. But they tell nothing of their business and goods. They do not allow anyone to come into contact with them or to enter their country. They export from *Artha* black sables and lead.

Many later Arab and Persian compilers of geographical works used information on the three kinds of Rus. It became one of clichés repeated by authors who knew nothing about the subject they were writing about. In modern research *Kuyaba* has for long been identified as Kiev, *Salawiya* as Novgorod, and *Arthania* the most elusive site, was located at a variety of places: on the Upper Volga, in Scandinavia, at Staraja Ladoga, in Volynia, the Carpathians, even on the isle of Rügen in the western Baltic Sea.<sup>26</sup> The unclear nature of the information created a great confusion among scholars who failed, though making many attempts, to bring clarity to the issue.<sup>27</sup> The degree of difficulties with identifying those three groups of Rus make further dwelling on the issue hardly fruitful and it will be left aside in this study.

In literary sources the Rus are merchants and warriors, taking advantage of the agrarian Slavs by robbing them of foodstuff, and catching them for sale as slaves to customers in the Caliphate. The parts from the *Anonymous Account* from 870—or early 880s, quoted by Ibn Rosteh, a Persian writing between the end of the ninth century

<sup>24</sup> Paszkiewicz 1954:127.

<sup>25</sup> Thulin 1973:101.

<sup>26</sup> Thulin 1973:105ff.

<sup>27</sup> Petrukhin 1982; Kononova 1995.

and early tenth century, tells us about the Rus:<sup>28</sup> "... they make raids against Saqalaba, sailing in ships in order to go out to them, and they take them prisoner and carry them off to Khazar and Bulgar and trade with them there [...]. They have no cultivated lands; they eat only what they carry off from the land of the Saqalaba". In the travel report of a visitor to central Europe in 966, Ibrahim ibn Jacob, a Jew from Spain, is a short notice about the Rus:<sup>29</sup> "... and the northern tribes seized some of them (of the Slavs) and up till now lived among them (among the Slavs), ..." and the chief of the northern tribes speak Slavonic because they mixed themselves with them (with the Slavs) ...".

The *Hudud al-Alam*, (The Regions of the World), written by an anonymous Persian geographer at the very end of the tenth century (A.D. 982), has in chapter 44 under title "Discourse on the Rus Country and its Towns" a depiction of the earlier situation:<sup>30</sup>

East of this country (*Saqalab*) are the mountains of the Pechenegs; south of it, the river Ruta; west of it, the *Saqalabs*; north of it, the Uninhabited Lands of the North. This is a vast country, and the inhabitants are evil-tempered, intractable, arrogant-looking, quarrelsome and warlike. They war with all the infidels who live round them, and come out victorious. The king is called *Rus-khagan*. It is a country extremely favoured by nature with regard to all the necessities (of life). One group of them practise chivalry. They hold the physicians in respect. They annually pay tithe on their booty and commercial profits to the government. Among them lives a group of Slavs who serve them.

Ibn Fadlan, an envoy from the Caliphate to the Volga Bulgars in 921–2 encountered there the Rus, became interested in their exotic customs, and collected information about them. Beside the celebrated account of the funeral of a prominent Rus leader (discussed here in more detail below) he left a depiction of their appearance and about their ruler:<sup>31</sup>

§ 80: I have seen the Rus (*ar-Rusija*) as they came on their merchant journeys and encamped by the Atil. I have never seen more perfect physical specimens, tall as date palms. Blond and ruddy; they wear neither qurtas nor caftans, but the men wear a garment which covers one side of the body and leaves a hand free.

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<sup>28</sup> Macartney 1930:213.

<sup>29</sup> Paszkiewicz 1954:121.

<sup>30</sup> Minorsky 1937:15.

<sup>31</sup> Smyser 1965:95f, 101.

§ 81: Each man has an axe, a sword, and a knife and keeps each by him all the times. The swords are broad and grooved, of Frankish sort. Each man is tattooed from finger nails to neck with dark green (or green or blue-black) trees, figures, etc.

§ 93: It is a custom of the king of the Rus to have with him in his palace four hundred men, the bravest of his companions and those on whom he can rely. These are the men who die with him and let themselves be killed for him. Each has a female slave who serves him, wash his head, and prepares all that he eats and drinks, and he also has another female slave with whom he sleeps. These four hundred men sit about the king's throne, which is immense and encrusted with fine precious stones. With him on the throne sit forty female slaves destined for his bed. Occasionally he has intercourse with one of them in the presence of the companions of whom we have spoken, without coming down from the throne. When he needs to answer the call of nature he uses a basin. When he wants to ride out, his horse is brought up to the throne and he mounts. If he wishes to dismount, he rides up so that he can dismount on to the throne. He has a lieutenant who commands his troops, makes war upon his enemies, and plays his role vis-à-vis his subjects.

The information about the Rus that ibn Fadlan managed to obtain during his stay at Bulghar consisted of his own observation and the knowledge circulating among people there. The story about the throne is one of those imaginary motifs often used by Oriental writers to give exotic flavour to their otherwise very restricted knowledge about the place where the Rus were living. The king was a sacral person dwelling together with his concubines set aside in an extraterritorial place—"the throne"; he could move out only on the horseback, obviously, to avoid unclean surroundings. He seem to be a figurehead that was not ruling directly but through a deputy who was representing him in contacts with outside world and, at the same time, was a leader of the military forces. We can sense here a trait of the Khazarian system of highest rule, divided between the *qagan*, the sacral, symbolic ruler having only ceremonial function, and the *beq*, the deputy with the real power.<sup>32</sup> We are back to the discussion around the *chacanus* of the Rhos (chapter I). Ibn Fadlan does not mention this title but his depiction indicates the strong influence of the Khazarian power structure on the Rus. As ibn Fadlan obtained information at Bulghar the manner of functioning of the ruler of the

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<sup>32</sup> Golden 1980:98f.

Rus must have been common knowledge there. Even if we may doubt that the huge throne ever existed we cannot doubt the veracity of the rest of account. The commander-in-chief, *voevoda*, was the second of importance after the prince of Rus. The *Primary Chronicle* recorded the most powerful one, from the time of Sviatoslav, with the Norse name Svenald.<sup>33</sup> The four hundred warriors serving the king, provided with food and a place to live, were in total dependency on their leader, and were forced, after swearing an oath, to fight for him to death. They were members of the retinue, the *družhina* in Russian, an organisation that provided the main part of the framework for the original structure of the Rurikid state (see chapter VI).

Besides the clan of Rurikids there were some other powerful Norse families that established themselves in the western fringes of Eastern Europe. This happened sometime in the mid tenth century in at least two places, in Polotsk and Turov.

The *Primary Chronicle* states under year 980:<sup>34</sup> “Now Rogovold had come from overseas, and exercised the authority in Polotsk just like Tury, from whom the Turovians get their name, had done in Turov”. Nothing else is known about Tury (ON *Þórir*) but it seems he was of enough high standing and importance to give his name to the site on the middle Pripiat River, the centre of the territory of the Dregovich, a Slav people living between the Pripiat and Western Dvina. Sviatopolk, one of Vladimir’s sons was placed in Turov by his father to be a local prince. Norse rule at Polotsk was seen in the *Primary Chronicle* as old: the town had been given to one of the followers of Rurik. Since we know that Polotsk was not yet in existence in the ninth century, this cannot have been a recorded tradition but an invention of the compiler. Rogvolod (ON *Ragnvaldr*) was, most probably, the first Scandinavian ruler who came here around the middle of the tenth century. It would be of importance to know from which part of Scandinavia this Polotsk dynasty originated but the absence of sources leaves us only with speculations. The name of the ruler was most popular among South Scandinavian elites. It also appears in Sweden where the best-known bearer of such name was jarl Ragnvald Ulfsson, born in the 980s, who around year 999 married Ingeborg, daughter of Norwegian king Olav Tryg-

<sup>33</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:89; Artamonov 1966; Poppe 1971.

<sup>34</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:9.

gvasson. It is not impossible to see Rogvolod in Polotsk as a member of a mighty family of earls. Another jarl of this name, as we already know (see above in chapter II), became ruler of Staraja Ladoga around 1019.

## 2. *The Norse culture of the Rus*

The places where Norsemen were living were spread over large territories of eastern Europe where they were part of societies of various people with their own cultures: there was not a single place in eastern Europe that was occupied totally by the Rus and only by them. The Rus permanent dwellers were always a minority among indigenous populations, but a minority that through its contact with Scandinavia was able from time to time rise in number and revitalise itself. This was especially important for the elite of the Rus who by using its connections, mainly through family bonds, was able to obtain from the North new members for their warbands. It was these possibilities that made the Rus such a dynamic people and allowed them to survive as a distinctive folk. As long as they were conscious about their peculiarity they could preserve their Norse identity. How was this identity maintained? As it was mentioned above the uninterrupted connections with Scandinavia were of prime significance in this matter, but there were of course other factors, like the way of living—trading and military expeditions—and not to forget the political organisation, which acted as a consolidating force. Now, it should be noted that it is rather unthinkable that all Norsemen living in the East were collected together in one organisation and accepted one person as their ruler. The *chakanus* of Rus could only rule over people that were either dependent on him or forced to recognise him as superior. It was hardly possible for the Rus kaganate to control all Norsemen moving around the vast space of eastern Europe.

The culture of the Rus contained Norse elements used as a manifestation of their Scandinavian background. These elements, which were current in tenth century Scandinavia, appear at various places in form of collections of many types of metal ornaments, mainly female but even male, such as weapons, decorated parts of horse bridle, and diverse objects embellished in current Norse art styles. Even the mortuary rites played a considerable role in demonstrating differences.

The emerging picture of the culture of the Rus is that of a living culture constituted in a milieu where objects and customs were as real as they were in the North. The majority of the objects are identical with pieces found in Scandinavia; some specimens show deviations from the standard types, while others have all the features of Norse products but lack exact analogies in the North. Some researchers had tried to separate “pure” Scandinavian objects from “hybrids” and decide which of them should be counted as belonging to Norsemen, and which, though exposing Norse traits, should be seen as only influenced by alien art but actually manufactured by locals, most certainly by Slav workers. This alleged hybridisation of material culture was presented as a testimony of the ongoing process of assimilation of the Norsemen that managed to keep their identity only for a short fraction of time. Such opinions, forwarded mainly by Russian researchers, were not based on detailed studies of the Scandinavian archaeological material, and this renders them quite worthless.

The Norsemen in the East were in many ways actively interacting with cultures of other people but this did not influence the production of their own material culture. This culture was Norse in the same meaning as it was in Scandinavia. Some elements of alien cultures, for instance belts with metal mounts, were transferred to the Norse society but had never been turned (by adding animal decoration), to real Norse items, in other words, they were not made Norse in a deeper meaning.

The search for very close analogies to various Norse objects found in the East should not be too meticulous, taken *ad absurdum*. The archaeological culture of Rus—it should be noted that we are talking only about this culture—shows a practically pure breed of Norse culture: its bearers were Norsemen from Scandinavia. Before we proceed, we must dwell on the term “pure”. Our picture of the purity of Norse objects in Russia depends on the definition employed for objects in Scandinavia. If we take the types designed in the main workshops at the royal sites as models for minor workshops where copies were produced for less noble customers, then we could have a measure of “purity”. Consequently, what kind of objects were used, and produced on the spot in Russia, depended on with which centre in Scandinavia actual contacts were entertained.

The majority of Norse items in Russia are of one category: female ornaments. As was the case in Scandinavia, even here the males

used very few ornaments (they were practically restricted to brooches with needles for holding a cloak, and to arm-rings). Although archaeologists have always employed female ornaments to build up chronological systems, thus showing their appreciation for this source material, they have at the same time treated this material with caution, if not with some kind of disregard. Even they, professionals, were (and still are) conditioned by decades of underestimating the position of women in Norse societies and thus even the things that belonged to them. Their approach to ornaments was simple: they were seen as embellishments, certainly worth examining as examples of art styles but nothing more. That those small things could represent a system of coded messages—religious, and social—was hardly considered. This attitude derives not only from the underestimation of the social position of Viking-age women but also on a lack of detailed studies of workshops. The enormous increase of finds, both ornaments and remains of workshops, especially in Denmark—the most important and innovative part of Scandinavia—has not yet been followed by deep enough research. Already we can now see that there existed workshops at the royal sites, like Lejre or Tissø, not to mention such places like the proto-urban sites of Ribe and Hedeby, and before those workshops have been the subject of detailed examination, we will not be able to use them in any analysis of Norse societies.

There is one category of female brooches that is of great importance when the Norse culture in Russia is discussed, the oval brooches made of bronze, often gilt and decorated in Viking Animal styles.<sup>35</sup> They were used in pairs for fastening the shoulder straps of a long dress. Their function is connected with a special garment and their Norse decoration and their pan-Scandinavian employment make them the most typical, almost archetypical ethnic artefact of Norse Viking culture. They disappear from this culture at the very beginning of the eleventh century when strong Christian influences start transformation of the traditional customs and the material culture connected with them. Sweden is the part of Scandinavia where the greatest number (about 1500 examples) of oval brooches has been discovered. The next largest number of such brooches, more than 200 specimens, has been found in Russia; this is seen as a strong indication for assuming the presence of a large number of Scandinavian

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<sup>35</sup> Jansson 1985.



women in the East.<sup>36</sup> This picture appears as even more clear when other characteristic and functionally specific artefacts are added to these oval brooches, amulets and talismans.

## 2.1 *The magic miniatures*

One of the ways to approach Norse society in Russia is to study the artefacts used for magical purpose. In Viking-age Scandinavian society the usage of miniatures representing military items (swords, spears, daggers, shields), implements (sickles or hammers), and various other objects was a widespread phenomenon.<sup>37</sup> It had long tradition in the Germanic world and the types, most of them, which were popular in the Viking Age are more or less identical with pendants current among continental and insular Germans and Scandinavians in late Roman times and the Migration period.<sup>38</sup>

The presence of a variety of symbolic/magical miniatures in the Norse environment in Russia gives clear testimony to the identity of social tradition and mentality of Scandinavians and Rus. In some cases one category of items known to be characteristic for a specific Norse territory, enables us to recognise with certainty the origin of people using it. This is especially apparent in the case of iron neck-rings with pendants (see below)

Among the amulet miniatures, strike-a-light pieces are very numerous, exactly as is the case in Scandinavia (Fig. 31 a).<sup>39</sup> In the shape of simple pieces made of iron, they were employed as sacrificial objects put in a sacral place. A good example, one of many in Sweden, is represented by a place close to a rock near a Viking-age house at Borg, Östergötland, Sweden, where a collection of 98 pieces of such specimens, together with many animal bones, was found.<sup>40</sup> Many strike-a-light specimens appeared among the rich assemblage of Norse artefacts in Gnëzdovo (see below) and the fact that a representation of such an item was scratched on the backside of a fine filigree pendant in a hoard found on the same site in 1867 shows the importance of the ideas connected with fire making in Norse

<sup>36</sup> Jansson 1987:786.

<sup>37</sup> Arrhenius 1961.

<sup>38</sup> Capelle 1994; Meaney 1981:154–160; Näsman 1973.

<sup>39</sup> Skovmand 1942:96, fig. 20.

<sup>40</sup> Nielson 1996:99.

magical thinking (Fig. 31 b).<sup>41</sup> In the early ninth century these amulets were given elaborate form and were manufactured in Svealand as castings in bronze.<sup>42</sup> The latter type is known in Russia only in one example uncovered on the settlement site of Timerëvo, Jaroslavl area (see chapter V).<sup>43</sup> The over-all design of this item is similar to the early ninth century pieces but details are somewhat different, which may indicate a later date of this specimen.

Other amulets, likewise very numerous, were miniature shields, circular pendants made of metal sheet, most often decorated with curved lines, sometimes with straight lines, circles and triangles (Fig 31 c). The shield-pendants were already popular during the Migration period both in Scandinavia and England.<sup>44</sup> Between the end of the ninth and mid tenth century, they first appeared in Denmark and from here were introduced to Middle Sweden, where they are known in large number in burials and hoards.<sup>45</sup> Russia is the place with the second largest number of shield-pendants—34 from hoards, 33 from graves and 2 from settlements; they are concentrated in two areas, one on the upper Dnieper at Gnëzdovo, and a concentration of several sites, in the territory between the upper Volga and Oka.<sup>46</sup>

Sometimes the amulets of various types were collected on one little ring. They were made of silver, bronze, iron and widely dispersed on settlement sites, in graves and in hoards. The usual items hanging on such ring are hammers, axes, sickles, weapons, small rings and staves (Fig. 31).<sup>47</sup> A special place among such amulets from Russia is occupied by a specimen with thirteen items on a ring found in Pskov (see Fig. 29 b). The hanging elements consists of a strike-a-light pendant, an arm with a hand, a sword, an axe and some other not easily recognisable implements, and finally, two pieces unique in Russia—perforated bowl-shaped pendants, and one other pendant of a type not even known in Scandinavia but represented as graffiti; it is square with four holes, probably a representation of a tablet, a weaving implement, or a one side of a die.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>41</sup> Novikova 1991:184, fig. 3.

<sup>42</sup> Almgren 1955.

<sup>43</sup> Dubov 1982, fig. 29:8.

<sup>44</sup> Meaney 1981: 159f.

<sup>45</sup> Duczko 1989.

<sup>46</sup> Novikova 1998.

<sup>47</sup> Hallström 1913:57; Skovmand 1942:131, fig. 29; Novikova 1991:5.

<sup>48</sup> Sedov 1992:149, fig. 4; Hammarberg & Rispling 1985:71, fig. 21.

The most popular of all amulets were miniature hammers, identified as pictures of Mjölnir, the magic weapon of the god Thor (Fig. 31). According to written sources it was this god that was the most frequently worshipped of the Asa-gods among Norsemen.<sup>49</sup> Dudo of Saint-Quentin in his *History of the Dukes of the Normans*, written around 1000, gives an account how it was done:<sup>50</sup>

... they used to offer sacrifices in worship of their god Thor. They did not make him an offering of sheep, nor cattle, nor wine, nor grain, but honoured him with human blood, considering it the most precious of all sacrifices: For this, a prophetic priest chose victims beforehand. They cruelly stuck on the head with one strike from an ox-yoke and then one of the battered heads was singled out by lot for one extreme and final blow. That man was then dashed to the ground and they would search for “the tube of the heart” on the left-hand side, that is the aorta. Once the blood had been drained from it, as was the custom, they smeared their own heads and the heads of their men and quickly set the sails of their ships according to the direction of the winds.

Pendants in the form of a hammer made in silver are frequently found everywhere in tenth century Scandinavia, almost exclusively in hoards, only in a few cases in burials, predominantly in female ones.<sup>51</sup> There is, however, a special category of amuletic items where the miniature hammers are used as a main element—iron neck-rings (Fig. 31 g; see even Fig. 29). Besides the hammers, which may be single or multiple, other kinds of pendants were added: small rings or spirals.

Neck-rings with pendants are very numerous and confined to two territories, the eastern part of Mälär Lake valley and Russia. Their main area was that of the Svear of Uppland and Södermanland where more than 95% of the total known number (more than 400 specimens) has been found. The central and eastern part of Uppland—the home territory of the Svear—is the area where rings are most frequent—80% of all items. The first examples appeared in the eighth century and they were in use to the end of the tenth century.<sup>52</sup> The majority of these neck-rings have been recovered from burials: 60%

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<sup>49</sup> Holtsmark 1970:76f.

<sup>50</sup> van Houts 2000:27f.

<sup>51</sup> Ström 1973.

<sup>52</sup> Ström 1984.

female and 40% male.<sup>53</sup> In Birka, among the graves (under 1000 excavated burials) these iron rings occurred in 45 cremation and 10 inhumation graves; in another Upplandic cemetery with 118 graves 23 burials were provided with these rings.<sup>54</sup>

It is not entirely clear if the neck-rings were for personal use, to be put on a neck. In cremation graves, where the urn was employed as container for bones, the ring was often on the top of the urn, but in inhumation burials the rings are in most cases not placed close to the head of skeleton. The material from which the rings were made may indicate that what we have got here is an amulet type connected with iron items employed in offerings on sacred places.

As has already been stated, the only other region where iron neck-rings appear in large numbers is Eastern Europe. There are about 36 rings with pendants of the same types as in Svealand, but at the same time there are also many, about 100, without any hanging items; they are distributed from Pskov in the west to the Volga in the east, from Ladoga down to the middle Dnieper, with two concentrations: at Ladoga and Volkhov, and on the upper Volga.<sup>55</sup> As it is the case with rings in Svealand the rings are found in burials, but in contrast to Sweden they are quite often discovered on settlements: 25 pieces from nine sites.<sup>56</sup>

Iron rings are artefacts that can be recognised as characteristic items of Viking-age culture in Svealand. Their rich appearance in Russia should be taken as a good testimony of the Swedish origin of the people living in Pskov, Rurikovo Gorodishche and on the sites around Jaroslavl.

## 2.2 *The message of graffiti*

Many of the miniature objects discussed above are depicted as graffiti on coins and in some cases on other objects. There is a variety of scratched lines, signs, single letters and inscriptions in Arabic, Armenian, Georgian, Greek and in Norse runes that may be counted as graffiti.

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<sup>53</sup> Nilsén 1992:1.

<sup>54</sup> Nilsén 1992:25f.

<sup>55</sup> Novikova 1992:75.

<sup>56</sup> Novikova 1992:75.

Scratching on coins was not a widespread custom; published surveys shows that among 34,000 coins in one Swedish collection, graffiti were present on 1,173 pieces, and of 55,000 coins from various Russian collections only 605 pieces were marked.<sup>57</sup> We will restrict our discussion to the pictographs and runic letters and inscriptions because they form a coherent group of graffiti apparently executed by Norsemen. The majority of coins with graffiti were found in Sweden, or more correctly in Gotlandic hoards; from continental Sweden are known only single coins, one or two, very seldom four. Even if the majority of examples of graffiti on coins have been found in Gotland and Sweden there is no reason to consider them and the graffiti from Russia as a separate phenomenon: it is obvious that this specific graffiti belong to a common culture shared by one group of Norsemen-Rus.

The runes start to be scratched on coins in the early ninth century, from the end of that century their number rises, and at the same time beside them appear pictographs like hammer of Thor, crosses, swastika and pictures showing weapons, banners and ships (Fig. 39 a). This custom of making graffiti continues through the first part of the tenth century and ebbs away around the middle of century.

Coins with runes are quite numerous: in the Swedish collection mentioned above they comprised 820 pieces, in Russia about 100.<sup>58</sup> Among the runic inscriptions are a large number of words connected with magic and religion. Single runes like t, a, f, s, u, m, d, g, belong to the most usual being apparently made for magical purposes. Among the inscriptions the word 'god' is especially frequent, scratched either in older futhark as *guð*, or in younger futhark as *kup* (Fig. 32 a); sometimes, there is a name of a specific god, that of Thor—*þur*, by itself or together with the runic words 'god' in both forms.<sup>59</sup>

Another group of graffiti with religious connotations consists of hammers of Thor and crosses, which appears either separately or together on the same coin surface (Fig. 32 b). Chronologically they belong to the mid tenth century. Placing the pagan sign of the hammer with the Christian cross may be seen as something strange but as we will see later there is a reasonable explanation for this. A good example of this combination of signs may be seen on a comb found

<sup>57</sup> Hammarberg & Rispling 1985:64; Melnikova 1996a:74.

<sup>58</sup> Hammarberg & Rispling 1985:65; Melnikova 1996a:81.

<sup>59</sup> Hammarberg & Rispling 1985:66, 70, nr 16,32.

at Gnezdilovo near Suzdal: on the one side there are simple signs of hammer of Thor and a cross, and on the other a triquetra (Fig. 32 c).<sup>60</sup> The latter sign is of particular significance. It was used as a motif on Merovingian silver coins, then on Anglo-Saxon sceattas, was transferred to earliest Danish coins struck in Hedeby and later, in the early 940s was put as main symbol on coins produced in York by Norse kings, and continue to be employed in England, Germany and Norway during the eleventh century.<sup>61</sup> Triquetra belong also among the frequent motifs in Insular and Scandinavian art.<sup>62</sup> The triquetra is quite rare on Norse artefacts found in Russia, besides its presence on the comb from Gnezdilovo, it is on one of circular pendants of Gotlandic provenance in a hoard from Gnezdovo (see below) and on the middle element of the big equal-armed brooch from Eletz (see below). There is no doubt that the triquetra was one of the important signs in the Christian world of symbols, the question is whether it had the same religious content in the Viking world. We may see that this was the case on the coins struck by Christian Norse kings of York, but what about triquetras put on brooches with beasts of rather heathen character?

The same doubts may be raised when we look at the graffiti of crosses, especially when they are placed side by side with hammers of Thor. To understand this mixing of symbols we have to take a look at the signs that symbolise power, military power: weapons and banners (Fig. 32 d).<sup>63</sup> The similarities between those signs and the real things used by Norse warriors are striking. By depicting weapons and other emblematic items, the executors were manifesting their belonging to particular organisation, the retinue. How important these kinds of pictures were for maintaining of group identity may be found in another part of Viking Europe, in England. On the coins struck by the Norse kings of York (Yorvik) and Lincoln, during the first decades of the tenth century, are the same pictures as on the coins with scratched graffiti of Rus. Even here we meet the combination of sword and hammer. The coins in north England were emitted by Danish kings, who were already Christians. Their

<sup>60</sup> Lapshin 1989:2,1.

<sup>61</sup> Skaare 1976:68f; Lindberger 1991.

<sup>62</sup> O'Meadhra 1979.

<sup>63</sup> Duczko 1995b 2000c; Dobrovolski et al., 1981.

successors, the Hiberno-Norse dynasty, which started with King Regnald 919–921, did not break with the Danish tradition, and consciously and consequently demonstrated its continuity by placing images of a sword and hammer on their own coins.<sup>64</sup> The most conspicuous feature of these coins is use of the renowned pagan symbol, which may appear as rather a surprising choice for Christian rulers. But this paradoxical feature has a natural explanation. These symbols, besides functioning as badges of identity expressing the Scandinavian background of the rulers, were not pagan any longer, they had become (as had those Danish and Norwegian kings) Christian too. If the people could lose by baptism their heathen, unclean content, the same could happen with the old pagan symbols. Especially when such symbols belonged to the sphere of power and contained values, of which it was not easy to get rid during the tricky transition between ideologies.

The conversion of pagan motifs of Scandinavian mythology was an accepted feature among the Christian Norsemen living in the Insular world. To make their new religion more close to their mentality and tradition, they let the artists working for them use some particularly popular motifs, especially the ones connected with the deeds of Thor, to illustrate the New Testament stories, as can be seen on the crosses raised in northern England and on the Isle of Man.<sup>65</sup>

The great popularity of Thor provides also the explanation for the popularity of his magic weapon, the hammer, as a converted symbol. Thor was obviously associated with Christ and through the *interpretatio Christiana* even his hammer was turned into cross. There are many items showing it in a very straightforward way: the hammer pendant with open cross in the middle from Foss on Iceland, the silver hammer pendant with small crosses on it found at Hedeby, and the casting form in which both hammer and cross pendants could be made from Trendgården in Denmark.<sup>66</sup>

The cross signs on the graffiti of the Rus provides clear evidence for the strength of the influence of Christianity on the members of Rus elite prior to the official conversion in late 980s and even before the baptism of Princess Olga in the 950s. Constantine Porphyrogenetos in his book *De ceremoniis* (579:2) recorded that in the imperial guard

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<sup>64</sup> Graham-Campbell 1980, 365–372.

<sup>65</sup> Bailey 1980.

<sup>66</sup> Wamers 1997:98, Taf. 1.

were “Christian Rhos”. The ongoing changing of religion can be observed archaeologically. In some chamber-graves in Gnëzdovo are found cross-pendants of the same type as in contemporary burials in Birka (see below).

### 2.3 *The funeral of a Rus chieftain in the Risala of ibn Fadlan*

One of the most amazing of surviving accounts concerning the Rus is to be found in the *Risala*, a travel report from a diplomatic mission in the years 921–22 from the Baghdad caliph al-Muktadir to the ruler of the Volga Bulgars. The author, the secretary of the embassy, was Ahmad ibn Fadlan ibn al-Abbas ibn Rashid ibn Hammad, commonly called ibn Fadlan. He is known only from what he wrote in his report, which has been enough for scholars to see him as a specialist in Islamic law, and not an Arab by origin but a freed Greek slave converted to Islam.<sup>67</sup>

The *Risala* has not been preserved in the original. Before 1923, when an almost complete copy was found in Meshed in Iran, it was known in fragments quoted in encyclopaedic works of later Persian and Arab writers. According to one of them, Yakut, a compiler from 13th century, the *Risala* enjoyed widespread fame and was circulating in many versions. Those versions are very similar to each other, with one exception, the one in a book written by the Persian writer Amin Razi in 1593–94. This writer apparently had access to a copy closer to the original.<sup>68</sup>

The reason for the popularity of the *Risala* was its excellent quality, without analogy in contemporary Arab travel literature. It is not a straight and dry report written for the chancellery of the caliph but a detailed account about places, people and events offered by an intelligent and engaged observer.<sup>69</sup> Ibn Fadlan’s description of the funeral of the Rus leader is of extreme interest for historians of religion and students of societies of Eastern Europe. Exceptionally, we have received not just a short note about some abstract funeral as contained in some other sources, but a regular report delivered by participant observer of a particular event.

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<sup>67</sup> Kmietowicz et al. 1985:7.

<sup>68</sup> Kmietowicz et al. 1985:14.

<sup>69</sup> Kowalska 1973.



The report written by ibn Fadlan has become an important source of knowledge about people living on the eastern edge of the European continent: Bulgars, Khazars, Finno-Ugrians, and last but not least the Rus. It is obvious that Ibn Fadlan perceived the Rus as an exotic people worth closer attention. He noted their physical appearance, how they were dressed, behaved, conducted trade and the way their ruler lived. These strange people apparently attracted him, and when he received news about the death of one of their leaders, he went to the place the Rus were making preparations for the burial. He stayed there watching the whole process, the details of which were made understandable for him through an interpreter. He paid attention to each step of the preparation: the use of a ship, choice of sacrificial animals, the costume of the dead man, his provisional grave, the person of the officiate women responsible for the execution of all the rituals, the ceremonies connected with killing of a servant-girl, and the final cremation. It is indeed a unique source and it is understandable that it has attracted the attention of researchers. For a long time Slav scholars used to recognise this burial as a Slav one, while, at the same time, for Western researchers it was clearly a typical Norse one; nowadays the latter opinion is commonly accepted. For the students of Scandinavian culture many elements of the described burial ceremony are familiar, some are not. However, the latter should not be too readily identified as features characteristic for Slavs or other ethnic groups of the East Europe. Our knowledge of Norse culture is far from complete. The Norse literature is lacking descriptions of the funerals with such richness of detail as we meet in the *Risala*, and archaeological finds cannot provide us with all knowledge about the performed rituals. Even if some features of the described rituals may be alien to Scandinavian culture, and were obtained in the East, the whole funeral has to be seen as Norse and nothing else.

### *Translation*

There are several English translations of the chapters from *Risala* concerning the Rus.<sup>70</sup> I used all of them when working with the translation for this study employing as a basis the translation and

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<sup>70</sup> Anderson 1872; Cook 1923; Major 1924; Lorimer & Waddy 1934; Smyser 1965; T. Saas in Lund Warmind 1995.

comments of the Polish edition of *Risala*, which was made from the Meshed manuscript.<sup>71</sup>

§ 87: I was told that at the deaths of their chieftains they did many things, of which the last was the burning. I wished to learn more and at last I heard of the death of one of their prominent men. They placed him in a grave and put a roof over it for ten days, until they had finished cutting and sewing garments for him. If it happens that a poor man among them dies, they make a little boat, put him inside and burn it. In the case of a rich man, they collect all his property and divide it into three equal parts; one for his family, one cut his garments and one to make liquor for them to drink on a day his maid-servant will be burnt together with her master. They are much addicted to liquor, which they drink night and day; sometimes one of them dies with a cup in hand. When one of their chieftains dies, his family says to his menservants and maidservants, "Which of you will die with him?" One of them replies, "I will". When anyone has said this, it is obligatory and it cannot be taken back, and no one who wishes to withdraw is allowed to do so. It is usually maidservants who do this.

§ 88: When the man I mentioned died, they said to his maidservants, "Who will die with him?" One of them replied, "I will". Two girls were entrusted to guard her, and be with her wherever she went; even occasionally washing her feet with their own hands. Then they began seeing to the concerns of the deceased, cut his cloths and making the necessary preparations. The slave-girl meanwhile spent every day drinking and singing, cheerful as if she was waiting for something happy.

§ 89: When the day arrived on which he and the slave-girl were to be burnt, I came to the river on which was his ship. It was already drawn onto the shore and four supports of birch wood and other wood had been erected, and there was also made around it something like great platforms of wood; they pulled the ship up until it rested on this wood. Then they began to come and go and speak words that I didn't understand, while he was still in his grave and they had not taken him out. They next brought a couch, placed it on the ship, and covered it with quilts and pillows of Byzantine brocade (*dibag*). Then came an old woman that they called the Angel of Death, and she spread the above-mentioned furnishings upon the couch. She was in charge of sewing the cloths for him and all the preparations, and it was she who killed the slave-girl. I noticed that she was a strapping old witch, fat and louring. When they came to his grave, they removed the earth from the wood, and they removed the wood and pulled him out, dressed in the covering in which he had died. I saw that he had gone black from the cold in that country. They had put with him in the grave

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<sup>71</sup> Kmietowicz et al. 1985.

liquor, fruits and a stringed instrument, and now they took it all out. He did not smell and nothing about him had altered except his colour. They dressed him in trousers, leggings, boots, a tunic, a caftan of satin, with gold buttons, and they put on his head a cap of satin and sable fur. They then carried him along and brought him into the tent, which was on the ship, sat him on the quilt, and propped him up with the cushions. They now brought liquor, fruit, and herbs and put them by him, then they brought bread, meat, and onions, and threw them down in front of him. They brought a dog, cut it in two, and threw it into the ship, then brought all his weapons, and put them by his side. After that they took two horses, ran them along until they sweated, then cut them to pieces with a sword and threw their flesh into the ship; then they brought two cows, cut them up also, and threw them into the ship. Next they produced a rooster and a hen, killed them, and threw them into the ship. The slave-girl who was to be killed, meanwhile, was going up and down, entering one tent after another, and one man after another had intercourse with her. Each one said to her, "Tell your master that I have done it for love of him".

§ 90: When Friday afternoon arrived, they brought the slave-girl to something they had made, which resembled a doorframe. She placed her feet on the palms of the men and they raised her over this frame, she spoke some words and they lowered her again. A second time they raised her up and she did again what she had done; then they lowered her. They lifted her a third time and she did as she had done the two times before. After it they brought her a hen; she cut off the head, which she threw away, and then they took the hen and threw it into the ship. I asked the interpreter what she had done. He answered, "The first time they raised her she said, "Behold, I see my father and mother". The second time she said, "Behold, I see all my dead relations seated". The third time she said, "Behold, I see my master seated in Paradise, and Paradise is green and fair, and with him are men and servants. He is calling me, take me to him". They passed along with her to the boat and she took off two bracelets which she had on and gave them to the old woman who was called the Angel of Death, and who was to kill her; then she took off two anklets she was wearing, and gave them to the girls who were in attendance on her, and who were daughters of the Angel of Death. Then they led her onto the ship, but did not take her into the tent. Some men now came along, bringing shields and pieces of wood. She was given a cup of liquor, and sang over it and drank it. The interpreter said to me "In this fashion she bade farewell to her companions". Another cup was given her, and she took it and sang for a long time, while the old woman urged her to drink it and to enter the tent in which was her master. I saw that she was already bewildered and wished to enter the tent; she put her head between the tent and the ship, and the old woman took hold of her head and made her enter the tent, and went

in with her. Thereupon the men began beating the shields with the sticks, so that the sound of her screams should not be heard, and the other slave girls would not be frightened and not wish to die with their masters. Then six men entered the tent, and all of them had intercourse with her. They then laid her at the side of her master, and two took hold of her feet and two her hands; the old woman known as the Angel of Death put a rope done into noose around her neck, and gave it to two men to pull. She approached her with a large broad-bladed knife, and began thrusting it in and out between the girl's ribs, and the two men strangled her until she died.

§ 91: Then the closest relative of the dead man came, took a piece of wood which he lighted at a fire, and walked backwards with the back of his head toward the ship and his face turned (toward the people), with one hand holding the kindled stick and the other covering his anus, being completely naked, until he set on fire the wood beneath the ship. Then the people came up with logs and other fire wood, each had a piece of wood of which he had set fire to an end and which he put into the pile of wood beneath the ship. Thereupon the flames engulfed the wood, then the ship, the tent, the man and the girl and everything in the ship; a powerful, fearful wind began to blow so the flames of the fire grew stronger and its blaze fiercer.

§ 92: At my side was one of the Rus and I heard him speak to the interpreter, who was with me. I asked the interpreter what he said. He answered: "He said, 'You Arabs are fools', 'Why?'" I asked him. "He said: 'You take the people who are most dear to you and whom you honour most and you put them in the ground where the earth, insects and worms devour them. We burn him in a moment, so that he enters Paradise at once'". When I asked him about it he said: "His lord, for love of him, has sent the wind to bring him away in an hour." And actually an hour had not passed before the boat, the wood, the girl, and her master were nothing but cinders and ashes.

Then the Rus constructed in the place where had been the ship which they had drawn up out of the river something like a small round hill, in the middle of which they erected a great post birch wood, on which they wrote the name of the man and the name of the Rus king and they departed.

### *Commentary*

The funeral ibn Fadlan attended was not a simple disposal of the dead body but a complex event consisting of series of ritual ceremonies. He has documented most of the ceremonies that eventually led to the moment of cremation, and by this given us a unique opportunity to become acquainted with the funeral practices of the Viking-age Norsemen belonging to the social elite of the Rus.

The funeral was an event which consisted of various steps belonging to a process of transferring the dead from the community of living to the community of the deceased. The circumstances around this transfer had as much to do with the dead man's social position in life as with the new situation his departure created in the community: An important link in the network of relationships had disappeared and left an empty place in a current hierarchy, therefore it was necessary to make all needed arrangements that could secure succession. Before the dead man was finally transferred to the world of the ancestors, the position he had hitherto occupied was presented for the last time through a display of weapons, cloths and other manifestations of his lifestyle. The burial was also an occasion for the employment of rituals that activated relationships between the community and the supernatural world.<sup>72</sup>

Who were the ar-Rûsiya, the Rus, ibn Fadlan had met by the Volga River? For the Arab diplomat they were a party of those merchants who came to Volga Bulghar for trading slaves, furs and weapons. They were obviously a collective having a leader—a head (*rais*)—who had with him not only his kinsmen but also several persons dependant on him, such as members of the retinue, the traders *sensu stricto*, and even a group of servant people, free and slaves. This collective probably represented the “people of the house”—*akhl al-bait*, a term used by ibn Fadlan when referring to similar groups of various size he encountered at Volga.<sup>73</sup>

The dead Rus was a leader of such a collective and the funeral arranged for him shows that he was a man of very high standing. Apart from the quality of the funeral, it is possible to understand this by the fact that beside the name of the deceased, the name of the Rus ruler was inscribed on the wooden pole placed on the top of the grave-mound. The purpose of the inscription was to inform the Rus frequenting the Volga route where an important, perhaps even widely known person, was buried. By inscribing the king's name the family of the dead man was making a statement about his position. It cannot be excluded that in some way he was connected with the king, either as a high member of his retinue, or even as a kinsman (see below).

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<sup>72</sup> Theuws & Alkemade 2000:413ff.

<sup>73</sup> Kalinina 1993.

The party of Rus came on boats and anchored by the shore. If they built here long houses of the type described by ibn Fadlan elsewhere (§ 83), this is not mentioned. It seems that they originally were planning to stay for short time and were forced to prolong the visit only because of the death of their chief. The place for the funeral was close to the river and it was there that the ceremonies were performed. In the text of Amin Razi we are told that "each of his kinsmen . . . built a tent . . ." close to the chamber-grave.<sup>74</sup> The grave, which for nine days was a centre of activities, was dug in the earth and covered with a wooden roof. Only the roof is mentioned but it is obvious that the grave was not just a pit in the ground but a chamber wholly made of wood. The man was put into the grave in his clothes and provided with food, drink and a musical instrument, indicating that the deceased was not covered by the earth but was housed in a tomb-like room. In an earlier source, the so-called Anonymous Account of the late ninth century, is the information that the Rus employed constructions "resembling a large house" as graves.<sup>75</sup> Another source, *Hudud al-Alam*, from the late tenth century, noted that the Rus: "... bury the dead with all their belongings, clothes and ornaments; they (also) place in the grave, with the dead, food and drink."<sup>76</sup> In our case the chamber was not intended to be a final place of rest, it was a place of seclusion where the Rus leader was dwelling before his body was taken out and burnt. He stayed there for nine days during which he could eat, drink and make music, taking an active part of the festivities, to which his companions were devoting themselves.

In his temporary grave-house the Rus stayed nine days while all preparation for the terminal destruction of his mortal remains was going on. The length of time the man was kept in the tomb was not random because the numeral nine had very special significance in Scandinavian mythology. The understanding of nine as a magic number was of old age in the North. On a rune stone (Dk 357) from the seventh century A.D. is an inscription recalling a man that sacrificed nine bucks and nine stallions for the sake of a good year.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Kmietowicz et al. 1985:207.

<sup>75</sup> Kmietowicz et al. 1985:203.

<sup>76</sup> Minorsky 1937:159.

<sup>77</sup> Santesson 1989; Näsström 1997:89.

This numeral had particular function in a cosmic context, as it can be seen in stanza 2 in *Völuspá*, an Edda poem, where a *völva* tells about climbing nine steps—nine worlds—on the world-tree; on the same tree, tells another poem, *Havamál*, Odin was hanging for nine nights, he was also sitting nine days on the chair of *norna*, where he learned nine magic songs.<sup>78</sup> Odin's gold ring *Draupnir* was dripping a new ring every ninth night; it is also the same period of time that the god Freyr had to wait to get his beloved Gerdr.<sup>79</sup> There is more: the god Heimdal was born of nine mothers,<sup>80</sup> Aun, the legendary king of Uppsala, sacrificed nine of his sons,<sup>81</sup> and Adam of Bremen in his *Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum* from 1070s<sup>82</sup> informs us that the main sacrificial festival at Uppsala was held every ninth year, and that at this occasion nine animals and nine men were hanged on trees in the sacred grove; similar festivals at Lejre, the cult centre of the Danes on the island of Zealand, were held every ninth year.<sup>83</sup>

During nine days the deceased existed in a state between life and death. The poem *Sólarljóð* describes this situation: *Á norna stóli satk niú daga, þaðan vas á hest hafinn*—"on the chair of norna I was sitting nine days, from there I was raised up on the horse"<sup>84</sup> Hermod rode on Sleipnir nine nights to the Underworld to fetch god Balder who after his death was put into the boat. It is then clear that the time dead Rus was spending in his grave was a ritual time of waiting to be ready for final transition, on the tenth day, when he was taken out for cremation.

But what was actually going on during the days of preparations for the final fire? There were certainly several issues that had to be solved at once. Most important was to determinate the new status of the family members, the choice of the next head of the family, and division of the possessions of the dead man among those who had the right of inheritance. When these basic problems were settled it was time for the *veizla*, a feast, held to the honour of the

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<sup>78</sup> Bucholz 1971:14f.

<sup>79</sup> Dronke 1962:252, 267.

<sup>80</sup> *Hyndluljóð* 35–35.

<sup>81</sup> *Ynglingasaga* 25.

<sup>82</sup> III:27, schollion 141.

<sup>83</sup> Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon* I:17.

<sup>84</sup> Ström 1954:84.

deceased, the main part having the form of drinking, which included drinking *efiol*, inheritance beer.

Drinking of intoxicating beverages at special occasions belonged among the old traditions in Celtic and Germanic Europe.<sup>85</sup> The extensive use of mead and ale was a part of social and religious custom not only among pagan but also among Norsemen that already were Christians.<sup>86</sup> Drinking was apparently one of the most important moments of the mortuary ceremony, as it appear from the fact that one third of the dead man's property went for producing of liquor, *nabib*. What kind of alcoholic beverage it was is difficult to say. If it was made on the spot it could not have been a beer or mead, as these drinks need time to be prepared, so it is rather possible that the Rus just paid for liquor locally available, such as wine or nomadic *kimiz*, made of fermented mare's milk. The Rus drank *uslettuliga*, "without restrain"<sup>87</sup> and ibn Fadlan (§ 87) had noticed the custom among Rus to drink heavily, sometimes with the death of some of participants as a result of alcohol poisoning.

In the case of the funeral of the Rus it was something more than only customary drinking. It is most possible that the relatives and companions of the dead man were *drekka brullaup*, "drinking the wedding". Al-Masudi writing in the tenth century about Rus living in the Khazarian capital Itil had noticed that when a man dies his wife is burnt with him, but if he had no wife, the marriage was arranged after his death.<sup>88</sup> In Amin Razi's version of *Risala* it is plainly stated that the slave-girl was a wife of the dead Rus: "She goes into the pavilion (a tent) in which her husband has been put, and six of the relatives of her husband go into the pavilion and unite sexually with his wife in the presence of the dead man."<sup>89</sup> The slave-girl who voluntarily agreed to follow her dead master was by this decision turned to his bride and while waiting for the end was acting as such.<sup>90</sup>

Turning the slave-girl to the bride of the chieftain moved her from the low social position of a personal servant of the dead Rus to his official wife. There are many signs of it. She was embellished with

<sup>85</sup> Arnold 1999; Tacitus, *Germania* 23.

<sup>86</sup> Jochens 1995:105ff; Drobin 1991.

<sup>87</sup> Jochens 1995:109.

<sup>88</sup> Kmietowicz et al. 1985:205.

<sup>89</sup> Smyser 1965:100; Kmietowicz et al. 1985:209.

<sup>90</sup> Ellis 1943:50ff; Lewicki 1953:138ff.



ornaments and fine cloths, was drinking liquor—a sign of a free person and of higher status—moved around with a train consisting of the daughters of the Angel of Death, now her ladies-in-waiting taking care of her, even washing her feet. By giving away her arm- and ankle-rings the girl was acting like members of the leading groups in which the distribution of rings was an important manifestation of status.

There is one ritual where the girl was involved as main actor, the moment when she was raised over some kind a gate (§ 90). The ritual is performed just before the entrance of the girl into the ship and it looks like a ritual of passage, if the gate is understood as a part of symbolic wall between the worlds of living and dead. The visions of her parents and deceased relatives, and even of her master surrounded by retinue and family, were hardly simply pictures from the Otherworld. They were there for one special reason—for confirmation of the girl's new status as a bride. The presence of the members of family for the fulfilment of the act of marriage was necessary in the real ritual of marriage when a woman was transferred from one family to other. By heralding the presence of her parents and ancestors she could affirm her status as a wife of her master. Even the third vision was a part of this confirmation. Her husband could not be in "the Paradise" before he was cremated, the picture of him sitting there and calling her, was a symbolic presentation of the acceptance of her as a wife.

An important part of the marriage rite was the copulation of the kinsmen of the dead chief with the girl. The intercourse was, as they expressed it, their duty, and they were anxious that she would tell it to her master. The custom of making love to the wife-to-be of a dead man, who could not perform his marital duty, also apparently consisted of giving explanation of the situation to the deceased. The kinsmen felt that it was needed as they were breaking the sexual rules of their society, in which a free woman could have sex with whom she liked but married woman's sexual life was restricted to her husband.

While the copulation in the tents had the character of nuptial intercourse the one performed by six men on the boat in presence of the dead men looks like a ritual concerning reproduction and continuation of family. It can be seen as a kind of sacrifice, or an attempt to contact the divine forces responsible for fertility in order to secure the welfare of the community. The enormous significance

of cults of fertility in the pre-Christian Scandinavian societies is well attested. In this context it is strange to notice that explicit sexual acts are very seldom depicted in Nordic art. The only picture of a couple engaged in love-making preserved from the Viking Age is, curiously enough, on a Christian rune-stone (U 1043), dated to the mid-eleventh century, raised in Swedish Uppland (Fig. 33).<sup>91</sup>

Ibn Fadlan was paying special attention to the person that seemed to be responsible for the execution of funeral ceremonies. It was an old woman he called *maḷ'ak al-maut*, the Angel of Death who, together with her two daughters serving as her helpers, was engaged in almost each step of the funeral process. What was her official function in the travelling party of the Rus? Her function can hardly have been restricted to being the leader of rituals exercised at burials. She probably belonged to a special group, probably a family of the "magicians-priests" responsible for religious services, a group having considerable power in the community, as is stated by ibn Rosteh. The wording used by ibn Fadlan when describing the woman's physical characteristics is not entirely clear but there is an interpretation that the employed term *qawan birah* is an Arabic version of Persian *qawan pīreh*, meaning either "an older person", or "a high priest of the magi."<sup>92</sup> The latter denomination is especially interesting as it describes the status of the Angel of Death. The name given to the woman by ibn Fadlan is not known in Norse literature and seems to be of Arab origin, possibly taken from the Koran, and should be understood as an attempt of a foreign observer to describe one of her functions, the most apparent one in the circumstances.

One of the duties of the Angel of Death was to prepare a new costume for the deceased. The fact that one third of the dead man's assets were spent on his burial cloths, shows how they were important for emphasising of the status of the chieftain. The Rus was put into his provisional chamber-grave in something, which is called *izar*, a word meaning a cloak, a piece of fabric, or, sometimes, a shroud. When it was time to place him into the boat for cremation, he was dressed in special garments consisting of trousers (*sarawīl*), leggings, a tunic (*qurtaq*), caftan and a cap on the head. The anonymous Persian author of *Hudud al-Alam* tells about some of the clothes characteristic

<sup>91</sup> Wessén & Jansson 1943–46: Pl. 69.

<sup>92</sup> Kmietowicz et al. 1985:206.

for the Rus: "Out of 100 cubits of cotton fabric, more or less, they sew trousers which they put on, tucking them up above the knee. They wear woollen bonnets with tails let down behind their necks."<sup>93</sup> Large breeches gathered at the knees, where they were kept tight giving onion-like form, are well documented on the picture-stones on the Gotland.<sup>94</sup> Trousers, called in Scandinavia *drambhosor hrokknar*, are mentioned in *Fagrskinna*.<sup>95</sup> The tunic, a long shirt with long sleeves, was called in Old Norse *skyrta* or *kyrtill*, a garment that was worn not directly on the body.<sup>96</sup> The caftan with gold buttons was made of special material, called *dibadj*, which is sometimes translated as brocade, but which was rather a satin, a fabric with silk as its main component.<sup>97</sup> From the same fabric was made the head gear, a cap, which was embellished with sable fur. Remains of caps with traces of silk were found in burials in the Birka cemeteries.<sup>98</sup>

The musical instrument that the dead Rus could enjoy in his first grave was probably a harp, or rather a lyre of the kind found in the ship burial in Sutton Hoo.<sup>99</sup> Here should be recollected a popular motif in Norse poetry and art, of Gunnar in the snake-pen, where the hero plays on the harp.

Several animals—dog, cows, hens and horses—were used in sacrificial ceremonies during the funeral. All those animals were employed in Scandinavian death rituals; they are the most often discovered animal remains in the graves from the first millennium A.D.<sup>100</sup> Graves of the nobility of the Svear from the seventh and eighth century A.D. reveal the custom of providing the deceased with plenty of animals, among them horses, dogs and birds.<sup>101</sup> Since the sixth century A.D., the ritual burials of the warrior elite of the Norsemen were provided with several horses, and in the Viking Age the custom developed in some cases to regular mass killings, as can be seen by the numbers of horses in boat-burials in Norway: Oseberg—15, Gokstad—13, and Denmark: Ladby—11.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Minorsky 1937:159.

<sup>94</sup> Nylén & Lamm 1987:57, 65, 66, 91.

<sup>95</sup> Hougen 1940:107.

<sup>96</sup> Fentz 1987.

<sup>97</sup> See *dibadj* in *Enzyklopaedie des Islam*, Band 1, Leiden, Leipzig, 1918.

<sup>98</sup> Geijer 1938:146f.

<sup>99</sup> Panum 1904; Care Evans 1989:69–7.

<sup>100</sup> Bennett 1987:21.

<sup>101</sup> Sjösvärd et al. 1983.

<sup>102</sup> Gjessing 1943; Müller-Wille 1972a.

The hen and rooster are animals with clear connotations concerning life and death in European and Asian cultures.<sup>103</sup> The fecundity notion was combined here with ideas about the continuity of life, even for the dead in the Otherworld. The girl uplifted at the doorframe killed a hen by decapitation; the hen's body was placed on the funeral ship, thus showing connection with this obvious sacrificial act and the dead man. The custom of putting hens and rooster into the remains of cremated pyre is recorded from many Swedish burials.<sup>104</sup> Such a custom may be observed in the Norse cemeteries between the Upper Volga and Kljazma (see below). One example is to be found in grave No 282 in Timerëvo: a whole hen was buried in a shallow pit dug in the pyre layer and on it was placed a clay vessel surrounded on two sides by stones.<sup>105</sup>

The bird described by ibn Fadlan might have been a rooster rather than a hen. The rooster is another bird of significance in the Norse mythological imaginary world. In the saga of *Hadding* is a story about the hero's travel to the Underworld together with a woman, who, when they reached a high wall, takes a rooster, wrings his neck and throws it to the other side, from which they hear the rooster's crow.<sup>106</sup> That roosters were provided with strong symbolic notion is testified by the fact that these birds were depicted on Danish coins struck in Hedeby in the early ninth century.<sup>107</sup>

The dog was one of those animals that were often put on the pyre when the Rus were cremated. In sixty-six graves in the cemeteries of the Upper Volga (see below) dogs were there together with other animals, such as horses, birds and cattle.<sup>108</sup> The dog is here in a double, at least, role: as an animal showing the deceased Rus' life style, in which hunting was very significant part, and as a guide to the Otherworld.<sup>109</sup>

Before the girl goes to the boat for the final rituals she receives from the Angel of Death two cups of drink. After the second drink girl was acting like someone intoxicated: she was confused and could not find her way into the interior of the tent. It is apparent that in

<sup>103</sup> Lewicki 1953:139.

<sup>104</sup> Einerstam 1940:149.

<sup>105</sup> Smirnov 1963:116.

<sup>106</sup> Holtsmark 1993:128.

<sup>107</sup> Malmer 1966, pl. 34:10.

<sup>108</sup> Andreeva 1963:93.

<sup>109</sup> Davidson 1998:49ff.

the drink was some kind of narcotic substance. What was the purpose of this deprivation of her senses? Hardly compassion, that for sure, and neither because she should enter the death having some hallucinogen visions; what is left is the simplest explanation: she was drugged to make her quiet.

The intoxicated servant girl, now a wife of the death man, is going to be killed. The execution happens in two ways, by strangling and stabbing, in both cases because each way has particular significance. Strangling was a sacrificial act, already in use by early Germanic Scandinavians. The ropes still on the necks of the Tollund or Borre Fen men belonging to the Danish Iron Age shows that they were victims of a sacral strangling.<sup>110</sup> Sacrificial hanging is described by Adam of Bremen in his account of Old Uppsala rituals, where bodies, or their parts, of various animals and humans, all males, were given to some female deity, most probably to Freya. Strangling by hanging was thus a most efficient method to be transported to the sacral world of the gods. Even the gods could use this way to reach some benefits. It is presented in the well-known verse 138 in *Hávamál*, where Odin tells: "I know that I hung on a windswept tree, nine whole nights, wounded with a spear and given to Odin, myself to myself. . . ." Death by strangling is a motif that appears very seldom in Nordic art. There are some representations, in obvious sacrificial contexts, on Gotlandic picture-stones of the early Viking Age.<sup>111</sup> A strangling situation is shown on the big silver brooch of Swedish origin, now in the British Museum.<sup>112</sup> On the edge of the circular plate are two small figures of a sitting man who is strangling himself with a rope by putting his arms under his legs and holding in his hands the ends of a rope that is choking him. This looks like self-immolation through a complicated method of strangling. I could not find any description of such performance in the literary sources but there is a similar depiction on a gold bracteate dated to sixth century found near Uppsala, Sweden: instead of a rope the sitting man is holding two snakes.<sup>113</sup>

The other way of killing of the slave-girl was stabbing. Ibn Fadlan reports that the executioner used a large and broad knife. If this

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<sup>110</sup> Glob 1969.

<sup>111</sup> Nylén & Lamm 1987:62–63.

<sup>112</sup> Graham-Campbell 1980:36, No 139.

<sup>113</sup> Lamm et al. 1999.

was a special instrument used only for the purpose of ritual killing, is not easy to tell, but it is not impossible. In fact there is one find from Russia, from Gnëzdovo, of a spatha-like implement that may be interpreted as an instrument used for sacrificial killings. It is of iron, 44 cm in length, 5 cm in width, with a man's face of silver beneath the handle (Fig. 34). It was found in a richly furnished cremation-grave lying on the iron cauldron in which there were remains of a goat. The edges of the point were not sharpened, so if this object was really used for killing in the sacrificial ritual, it could be employed only as a cutting instrument.

One of the moments at the later part of the funeral ceremonies was the noise made by the men, beating the shields with piece of wood. Ibn Fadlan understood it as a way to prevent the shouts of the slave-girl being heard. It is not necessary a wholly correct explanation. The Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his *De ceremonis aulæ Byzantine* (I:83) gives an account of the so-called "Gothic Dances" that were performed at the imperial court at Constantinople. The dancers, the bodyguards, were beating on their shields while forming concentric circles around the Emperor's table. It is often maintained that the dancers belonged to the Varangian guard and that the dance itself was of Norse origin.<sup>114</sup> As it was convincingly proved by Bolognesi Recchi Franceschini<sup>115</sup> this dance was originally Gothic from the fourth century A.D., and there is nothing that allows the assumption that it had anything to do with Scandinavia of the Viking Age. However, there was a Scandinavian custom, termed *vapnatak*, of producing noise through brandishing of weapons performed during *ting* meetings: when the assemble was to arrive at important decisions the noise was made as an instrument for clearing evil powers from the place.<sup>116</sup>

The duty of setting fire on the pyre was reserved for the closest relative of the deceased. The way it was done testifies that even this step had a magical importance, and that it was necessary to perform it right. The man stripped naked, kept the torch in one hand, the other was held behind his back covering his anus, and he was approaching the ship backwards. All these elements were part of

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<sup>114</sup> Ramskou 1975:152f.

<sup>115</sup> 1995.

<sup>116</sup> Loyn 1994:90.

preparations to secure him against evil, to confuse their forces: he was moving backward to avoid eye contact with the place with dead persons, he was nude, thus not recognisable, and was covering his anus through which the evil spirits could enter. The nudity of people engaged in dangerous activities is of ancient ancestry.<sup>117</sup> There is no record of such a ritual in the Norse literature from the Viking Age but the nudity of warriors depicted on gold bracteates and other objects indicates that the use of nudity as a medium in contacts with sacrum was known in Scandinavia in early periods.<sup>118</sup>

The most obvious feature of Norse character of the funeral is the employment of a ship for the act of cremation. This is an ancient Scandinavian custom well known both in the literature and archaeology.<sup>119</sup> The earliest boat burials—inhumations—are known from the Danish island of Bornholm where about 40 graves were excavated at the large cemetery at Slusegaard dated to the Roman Iron Age.<sup>120</sup> From the late sixth century to the late Viking Age, burial in real boats/ships was well-established praxis among the elite in Norway and Sweden. Some leading groups of Svear accepted burials in boats to such an extent that it became their specific manifestation of identity, as is demonstrated at the burial places at Vendel and Valsgårde, both in central Uppland.<sup>121</sup> Beside inhumations in boats, cremation—burning the dead in a boat, or their part—was a widespread mortuary custom of the Norsemen of the Viking Age, particularly of the tenth century. Male boat burials are dominant (72.5%), female burials are less common (22.9%), while there are a few (4.5%) burials of couples.<sup>122</sup> The custom was practised in Russia: at Plakun cemetery near Staraja Ladoga, parts of boats were cremated on the pyre at the cemeteries at Gnëzdovo about 11 burials with boats were recorded, burials from the Vladimir-kurgans and in Shestovitsa contained iron rivets.

We are able to see how the Norse artists pictured the boat burial during Viking Age. From a rich chamber-grave under a mound in Rolvsøy, Østvold in Norway was found a fragmentary tapestry show-

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<sup>117</sup> Pfister 1935; Banaszkiewicz 2000.

<sup>118</sup> Duczko 2003.

<sup>119</sup> Müller-Wille 1969, 1995; Schjødtt 1995.

<sup>120</sup> Crumlin-Pedersen & Munch Thye 1995.

<sup>121</sup> Schönback 1994:122–131.

<sup>122</sup> Andrén 1992:43.

ing a boat standing on the land and a group of people in front of it; the grave is from early tenth century (Fig. 35).<sup>123</sup>

After the burning of the ship with the Rus leader and his wife, ibn Fadlan reports that a barrow was erected on the spot. This form of marking of a grave is the most ancient in all of Europe, occasionally still in use during the Viking Age. In Scandinavia the custom of making low barrows, and on special occasions big mounds, over burials is most characteristic in the Viking period.<sup>124</sup> Ibn Fadlan describes the mound as a small hill, which may mean that it could have been quite big, if it was necessary to call it a hill.

The barrow was provided with the mark of identity of the deceased: on a large pillar of wood placed on the top was written the name of the dead man and the name of the king of the Rus. These kinds of pillars were known in Scandinavia as memorial staves. Staves made of wood have never been uncovered, neither in Russia nor in Scandinavia, the only surviving staves are rune-stones, like the one 105 cm in height, that still stands on the top of a large mound in Fuglie, Scania in Sweden,<sup>125</sup> or that in Södermanland in middle Sweden (Fig. 36). An inscription on another Scanian rune-stone of the late tenth century in Hällestad I (Dr 295) inform us about such staves "... *drengs* erected the stone on the mound after their brother, solidly with runes."<sup>126</sup>

The fact that the king of the Rus was mentioned in the memorial inscription on the post put on the top of the mound is of interest. To record a name of a ruler is not usual on the rune-stones in Scandinavia. The only exception is to be found in tenth-century Denmark where members of royal dynasties of Olof, Swedish prince of Hedeby, and the next one, that of Gorm the Old raised memorial stones with inscriptions containing the name of a king.<sup>127</sup> It was already stressed above that writing of the name of a ruler on the memorial post on the mound on the Volga shore would indicate the existence of a special relationship between the deceased and the king, that the former could have himself been a member of the royal family. So who was the king of Rus? The answer is a difficult one. It might have

<sup>123</sup> Brøgger 1929:28.

<sup>124</sup> Müller-Wille 1993:58f.

<sup>125</sup> Moltke 1976:196.

<sup>126</sup> Lund 1991:130.

<sup>127</sup> Andersen 1985:16, fig. 1; Moltke 1976:162ff.



been Prince Igor who according to the *Primary Chronicle* was ruling between 913 and 945. But, as we will see later, this does not have to be the only alternative, because there were many princely members of the clan of Rurikids with which the chieftain buried at Volga could have been associated, either by bonds of dependency or through family connections (see below in chapter VI). Even if it seems to be certain that the dead man belonged to the elite of Norsemen living in the East, we cannot exclude the possibility that he was a Scandinavian only periodically travelling with his people on business matters; in that case his king was one of the rulers in Scandinavia.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THE UPPER DNEIPER

#### 1. *The centre at Gnëzdovo*

On the right bank of the Dnieper, c. 13 km from the city of Smolensk, are the remains of one of the biggest settlement complexes of Viking-age Russia. This whole site is called Gnëzdovo, named after one of the villages in the area. The original name could have been, as most of scholars will have it, Smolensk, a name noted in Icelandic sagas as *Smaleskia*. The site of Smolensk itself lacks layers and finds originating from the period before the later eleventh century, confirming the priority of Gnëzdovo and its special position in the area.<sup>1</sup> The Icelandic name, incorporating the Nordic word *smá*, meaning small, was in use at least in the tenth century, if we accept that the name *Milíniska* recorded in *De Administrando imperio* from 950s, is the same as Smaleskia. There is yet another possibility to find out the name of this site. In the *Haukbók*, an Icelandic compilation of the 14th century is a list of towns in Eastern Europe, where Holmgard is followed not by *Pallteskia*-Polotsk, as is the case in similar lists from other sagas, but an otherwise unknown name Syrnes.<sup>2</sup> This is interpreted by Tatjana Dzhakson<sup>3</sup> as a toponym consisting of two Nordic words, *syr* = sow, and *näs* = naze; she connects the first word with the name of the brook, Svinetz—"the brook of swine", which runs by the main fortified settlement of Gnëzdovo—*Centralnoe gorodishche*, while the second name relates to the topography of the place. The interpretation is attractive, and could even be right (although the more proper name of the site should be *Svinnäs*), the only obstacle is that there are no names similar to Syrnes in Scandinavia.

The territory of the Upper Dnieper where Gnëzdovo is situated was originally Balt, the Slavs had begun to arrive here in small numbers

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<sup>1</sup> Avdusin 1991:8.

<sup>2</sup> Melnikova 1986a:36f.

<sup>3</sup> 2001:69ff.

during the ninth century, and only gradually became a dominating party, eventually acquiring their own identity and name—the *Krivichi*.<sup>4</sup> Russian researchers had for a long time recognised the traces left here by Scandinavians but the extent of their presence was perceived at the lowest possible level. Norse items were usually identified as imports, the objects showing mixing of Norse and non-Norse features were identified as local Slav products, or, at the best, as the things that were manufactured by rapidly assimilated arrivals from the North.<sup>5</sup> This attitude is now abandoned, it is generally accepted that Scandinavians were here in a significant number and that they played an important, most probably leading role.

It appears fairly clearly that Norse establishment in Gnëzdovo was connected with operations which utilised rivers as a means of communication with different parts of Eastern Europe. The reason for the appearance of the Gnëzdovo settlements is usually ascribed to geography: from here it was possible to control routes along the Western Dvina and Volkhov-Lovat, the traffic going south by the Dnieper and east towards the Volga. The route through Ilmen Lake and Lovat River was certainly employed all the time but it is for tenth century the Norse presence is well documented. In the Upper Lovat, close to Velikie Luki, is a settlement site, called *Gorodok*. On this site were operating metal workers, both smiths and jewellers, producing metal elements for boats (rivets and nails) and bronze and silver ornaments, like typical Norse brooches (equal-armed) and circular pendants with granulation.<sup>6</sup>

It was not possible to navigate the rivers all the way; at some places the boats were transported across the land, which involved great trouble and need of organisation.<sup>7</sup> It was always assumed that Gnëzdovo was founded on the route of such a portage between the Dnieper and Dvina, and that this would explain the importance of the site. In reality, the only effective portages where the boats could be transported across the stretch between these large rivers were quite a long way (up to 30 km) from Gnëzdovo.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the

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<sup>4</sup> Sedov 1982:158ff.

<sup>5</sup> See articles of Avdusin 1969; 1977.

<sup>6</sup> Gorjunova 1978, fig. 2.

<sup>7</sup> About the portages and condition of navigation in Russia see Edberg 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Jansson 1997:49.

connection between the Dnieper and Dvina was functioning and the usefulness this route has to be seen as one of the main factors behind creation of Gnëzdovo.

The exact time when Scandinavian had started to frequent those parts is not known but it must have happened during the ninth century. There is some concentration of finds dating to this time in the region of the Kasplia River. One of the earliest is a Danish Hedeby-coin (KG 4, according to Malmer) from c. 825 found at Kislaja, not far from Gnëzdovo in a hoard consisting of several hundred dirhams, the youngest from the first third of the ninth century.<sup>9</sup> In the village of Novosielki, 5 km from Gnëzdovo, some ninth century graves were discovered in the cemetery; they consisted of cremation burials under mounds with sword, spear, fragments of silver coins and weights.<sup>10</sup>

The remains of Scandinavian culture are the most visible elements in the archaeology of Gnëzdovo creating a strong impression that the site was of predominantly Norse nature. It has always been maintained however that the Norsemen were here just one part among other ethnic groups, mainly Slavs, then Balts. The analysis of archaeological finds is not conclusive in this matter. There are very few typical, easy recognisable Baltic ornaments, and their classic long barrows, which are present in the region, are completely absent from all the cemeteries of Gnëzdovo.<sup>11</sup> The Slavs are also elusive because of their mortuary customs that until eleventh century were of a kind that left no material traces. The most explicitly Slavic artefact is the pottery, and Gnëzdovo has yielded many examples of it. In the beginning it was simple hand-made pottery, from the 920–30s a new kind of vessels appears, wheel-turned and with wavy-line decoration, alien to the East Slav tradition but characteristic for Western and South-west Slavs.<sup>12</sup> Of other emblematic indicators of Slavs there is only one category, but most typical, temple-rings, also of West Slav type.

The complex of Gnëzdovo stretches for about two kilometres between two tributaries of the Dnieper, the small brook Svinetz and the slightly bigger river Olsha (Fig. 37). At the mouths of those rivers

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<sup>9</sup> Suchodolski 1989:425f.

<sup>10</sup> Lebedev et al. 1975.

<sup>11</sup> Kirpichnikov et al. 1986:224.

<sup>12</sup> Kamenetskaja 1998:133.

are hill-forts—*Centralnoe* and *Olshanskoe* gorodishche—at the former is also an open settlement of 16 ha, at the latter was also a settlement, which is now destroyed.<sup>13</sup> Close to these centres, and in the area between the rivers, along the Dnieper, there are eight groups of burial-grounds. Due to destruction and uncertain information about the result of early excavations, it is not possible to obtain reliable estimates of the original number of graves: the figures offered vary from between 3000–5000 to even 6000.<sup>14</sup> The data presented below are according to Avdusin<sup>15</sup> and Mühle.<sup>16</sup>

In the eastern part of the complex, on the lower Svinetz, around the hill-fort and settlement area is a concentration of large cemeteries divided by archaeologists into several groups. On the left side of the stream are the *Lesnaja* (1340–1643 barrows) and the *Glushchenkovskaja* groups (320–356 graves); on the right side, where the village of Gnëzdovo is situated, are the *Centralnaja* (769–1101 barrows) and the *Pridnieprovskaja* group. South of the centre on Svinetz, on the other, left side of Dnieper is the *Levoberezhnaja* group (109 barrows).

About ½ km southwest of the Svinetz, along the Dnieper there is the *Dnieprovskaja* group (184 barrows), divided into eastern, central and western part. Russian archaeologists are certain that those parts were in fact one cemetery serving people living in one of the centres, while the Swedish scholar Ingmar Jansson<sup>17</sup> is sure that they belonged to undiscovered small settlements outside the big ones.

Near the centre on the Olsha River, on its left bank, is the *Olshanskaja* group (143–160 barrows); on the right bank, about 800 m to the west, is the *Žaolshanskaja* (*Pravoberezhnaja*) group (105 barrows).

The majority of burials in the cemeteries of Gnëzdovo were cremations performed either on the spot or somewhere else; many barrows were apparently raised as cenotaphs—they did not cover a burial. In some cemeteries were concentrations of big mounds over cremations and chamber-graves with inhumations, two special categories of burials belonging to the Rus elite. Almost all graves at Gnëzdovo date from the time around the mid tenth century, which

<sup>13</sup> Kamenetskaja 1991:158.

<sup>14</sup> Kirpichnikov et al. 1986:223.

<sup>15</sup> 1977:265f.

<sup>16</sup> 1989:363.

<sup>17</sup> 1997:49.

was the period of the most intensive development of the settlement sites. The main settlement, that on Svinetz brook, expanded in size from the original c. 4 hectares to about sixteen. This process of expansion had already started in the 930s when on the scarp of the high bank of the river was constructed a rampart and ditch. It is from this time the Norse presence in Gnězdovo became most manifest, making itself visible in crafts, burial rites, dress, ornaments, weapons and deposits of gold and silver artefacts. During a few decades of the tenth century, new arrivals from Scandinavia, or to be more specific, mostly from Middle Sweden, turned an originally modest site to a large centre of trade, art and power. This was a place where for about three generations a community of Rus existed which had taken part in the great enterprise of the Norsemen in the Eastern Europe. The size of cemeteries with thousands of burials shows that the settlements at Gnězdovo were well populated. The workshops of many crafts were manufacturing all things needed: the smiths produced implements, like high quality knives and iron elements for boats, the jewellers made ornaments of Norse types.<sup>18</sup> The latter developed their own brand of Scandinavian styles creating exclusive jewellery in precious metals for the female component of the Rus elite.

Up till now about 250 artefacts have been identified as Scandinavian.<sup>19</sup> In this total however have not been included many other items such as combs, various objects made of metals and wood, and even weapons, for instance arrowheads, which, according to latest research are very numerous, about 152 specimens of lancet-type only.<sup>20</sup> The most characteristic, “ethnic” ornaments of Scandinavian women—oval brooches—are known in relatively high number (53 examples), comparable to the quantity from sites like Hedeby, the biggest Scandinavian Viking-age town, and Norwegian Kaupang (where 50 specimens were discovered in each); it cannot, however, be compared with the extraordinarily high number (316) of those brooches in Swedish Birka.<sup>21</sup>

In the burial rite, especially in the big mounds, the use of boats

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<sup>18</sup> Eniosova 1998.

<sup>19</sup> Pushkina 1997:89.

<sup>20</sup> Kainov 1999:49ff.

<sup>21</sup> Jansson 1985:9.

in cremation is also worthy of note. Analysis of the rivets, from burials and settlements, has showed that they belonged to both east-Swedish and south-Scandinavian types, which should indicate that either boats from the North came to the Upper Dnieper area, or the rivets were produced in Gnëzdovo's ship-yards.<sup>22</sup>

The furnishings of the dead and the traces of rituals connected with the cremation, as they appears in the graves under mounds in Gnëzdovo, illustrates many of the elements of the burial of the prominent Rus described by ibn Fadlan in his *Risala*. The items found in the graves are analogous to those found in the mounds in Norway, Denmark and, most of all Middle Sweden.

The artefacts and elements of burial rites are the only traits left by Scandinavians. In contrast to the situation at Staraja Ladoga, nothing has remained here (or rather has been identified), of the buildings of Norsemen in the settlements. The variety of finds is the best testimony of the totality of Norse life at Gnëzdovo. It was not just a site that the Norsemen simply passed through on their way to the Volga, Middle Dnieper and Constantinople, it was a place of permanent residence for Norse groups who had left Scandinavia and who in their new surroundings became Rus.

More than 1000 burials have been examined in the cemeteries of Gnëzdovo. According to Pushkina<sup>23</sup> only sixty were graves of Norsemen. This number comprises burials with inventories consisting of certain Norse objects. To restrict the identification of buried Scandinavians to those graves while satisfying basic source-critical needs, does not take to consideration the fact that many typical Norse objects disappeared when cremated, and that many of the so-called cenotaphs, empty graves in the cemetery were probably erected for Norsemen. The chronology of the majority of the graves is difficult to fix with precision because of the lack of suitable artefacts or, even more often, because of bad documentation. In such a situation the number of graves which can unequivocally be characterised as Norse therefore may not represent the true scale of the Scandinavian settlement in Gnëzdovo.

Below, we are going to acquaint ourselves with only a small number of all the burials of the Gnëzdovo complex. It will be a sample of

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<sup>22</sup> Personal communication Gunilla Larsson.

<sup>23</sup> 1997:87.

the graves with the most clear Norse features, and, as it is the case, the most special graves, those which are under the biggest mounds, and those which are made as chambers under mounds. The burial customs, the equipment that accompanied the deceased, the precious metal items in hoards, the art of smiths working in bronze, gold and silver, all these will be presented in detail in order to deliver as much information as possible about this exceptional site.

### 1.1 *Big mounds*

Among the thousands of low barrows in the cemeteries in the Gnëzdovo complex there were several so-called “*bolshie kurgany*”—big mounds. Such mounds are defined as structures of a height over 2 m and more than 20 m in diameter.<sup>24</sup>

In Sweden there is a scholarly tradition to make distinction between big mounds—*storhögar*, and royal mounds—*kungshögar*. This distinction was concretised by the determination of the differences between them by their diameters: for the former 20–29 m, for the latter from 30 m.<sup>25</sup> Mounds with diameters much less than 20 m are the dominant size in Swedish Viking-age cemeteries. Analysis of the diameters of the sample of 544 mounds from Birka has shown that 93.8% were less than 10 m in diameter, only few had diameters bigger than 10 m, and none was larger than 20 m.<sup>26</sup>

In the cemeteries at Gnëzdovo, small barrows over cremation graves are the dominant grave form, and the big mounds are usually either gathered in clusters, or stand as single monuments among lesser ones. The biggest mounds were concentrated in the *Centralnaja* (Central), *Olshanskaja* (Olshany) and western part of the *Dnieprovskaja* (Dnieper) group; all of them are by now excavated.<sup>27</sup>

The most interesting burials are the four biggest mounds, all cremations, in the *Centralnaja* group in the western part of this cemetery, on the high bank of the river and consisted of several exceptional graves, amongst them three kurgans, No 41, 16 and C-2.<sup>28</sup> Their elevated position, the monumental size and surrounding ditches, not

<sup>24</sup> Petrukhin 1998:361; Bulkin 1975.

<sup>25</sup> Hyenstrand 1974:104.

<sup>26</sup> Svensson 1983:5.

<sup>27</sup> Avdusin 1952:93; 1977:268.

<sup>28</sup> Egorov 1999:103.



to mention the rich grave goods and the use of a boat for cremation, all emphasise the outstanding status of the buried people, making it clear who they were: the members of the Norse elite that had its dwellings on the fortified site of *Centralnoe gorodishche*.

Kurgan No 41 had a conical form and was surrounded by a ditch 6–7 m in width and about 2 m deep. The mound was, according to Sizov, more than 9 m in height and 32.8 m in diameter, while Shirinskij maintains that its real size was 7–7.4 25–26 m.<sup>29</sup> The mound covered two separate but obviously contemporary complexes: the main one consisting of an extensive cremation layer, and the second one made of stones, apparently after cremation finished. The chronology of this mound may be defined as the early decades after the mid tenth century. The majority of the objects have parallels in Scandinavian finds that can be dated to this time.

The cremation layer was saturated with ashes, charcoal and burnt bones, many artefacts were also found here (Fig. 38 a). Among the latter were bronze elements of a horse bridle, one lozenge-shaped brooch, beads of carnelian and of glass, a fragment of a comb, a knife, whetstones, dice of bone, a fragment of a silver mount from a drinking horn, a casing of iron from a wooden bucket, 19 iron rivets and 7 nails<sup>30</sup> and a piece of a dirham struck for Ismail ibn Akhmed in A.D. 905/6.

The second complex consisted of a low terrace surrounded by stones of about 1 m in diameter; inside were placed objects taken from the pyre and items used in the rituals that had taken place here (Fig. 38 b).<sup>31</sup> On the terrace was laid a sword and spear, both burnt, on them was placed a gilt helmet with chain mail: inside the helmet was a burnt piece of human skull indicating that the helmet was on the head of the dead man during the cremation; all those objects were covered by two unburnt shields;<sup>32</sup> alongside the weapons was laid the skeleton of a lamb; under and beside it were fragments of a glazed dish of Byzantine origin,<sup>33</sup> another vessel was an inverted clay pot. Inside the stone circle were a lot of ashes with burnt gold

<sup>29</sup> Shirinskii 1999:105ff; 107.

<sup>30</sup> Sizov 1902:68.

<sup>31</sup> Sizov 1902:3, fig. 1.

<sup>32</sup> Sizov 1902:63, 65ff.

<sup>33</sup> Sizov 1902:61; Mühle 1989:398.

and silver drops, probably from elements of the costume, to which also belonged fragments of silver braid.

Mound No 41 was built upon a place where two persons, a man and a woman, had been burnt on a pyre that included part of a boat. That in this burial the man was the main subject is clearly indicated by the fact that after the pyre had burnt out the weapons were gathered in a specially created place. Most of the artefacts in the cremation layer were the belongings of the woman burnt here. The strap-ends are elements of a bridle typical for women from the Norse elite of mid tenth century. The same may be said about the drinking horn: the presence of a horn is a symbolic manifestation of the function of the woman as a wife of a man at whose feasts she was distributing drinks according to a particular hierarchical order. Mounts similar to those from this grave are known from one more female grave from Gnëzdovo (see below p. 171) and even from other Russian sites.<sup>34</sup> The closest analogies to the mount from kurgan No 41 are in Birka, grave Bj 523, in a burial of a woman.<sup>35</sup> The beads and the lozenge-shaped brooch were elements of the woman's ornaments; the brooch was a creation of late ninth century south Scandinavian artists, an ornament that became especially popular during the next century. Identical pieces were found in a cremation grave in Birka, on the settlement site on Fyn, and in Boeslunde on Zeeland, both in Denmark.<sup>36</sup>

A fragment of iron casing comes from wooden buckets of a type known in male burials from Danish and Swedish finds from Birka and Adelsö.<sup>37</sup>

Some other objects like dice could belong to the mortuary equipment of the man burnt together with the woman, but sometimes, very seldom, elements of a gaming set are found in female burials. The intact die from kurgan No 41 is of the elongated type, known from, for example the above-mentioned warrior burial in Gjermundbo and other graves in Norway.<sup>38</sup>

The weapons from the pyre were a helmet with a mail neckguard

<sup>34</sup> Rozenfeld 1997:40, Tab. 29:1,3,4.

<sup>35</sup> Arbman 1940, Tab. 196.

<sup>36</sup> Arbman 1943:117, Abb. 63; Henriksen & Klitgaard 1999:154, fig. 187; Nielsen 1992:129, fig. 47.

<sup>37</sup> Brøndsted 1937:158–9; Arbman 1940, Taf. 207; Rydh 1936:121, fig. 315b.

<sup>38</sup> Grieg 1947, pl. VIII.

and a spear; the latter was badly burnt and it was not possible to identify its type. The helmet is of sub-conical shape with a cylindrical top; it is of the so-called "Spangen"-type, i.e. it consists of four iron plates.<sup>39</sup> The Viking-age helmets are unique finds, although there is yet another one in Gnëzdovo and a fragment in Kiev (see below) but from the whole of Scandinavia there is only one piece, that from tenth-century burial at Gjermundbo, Ringerike, Norway.<sup>40</sup> Otherwise there is iconographical evidence for the use of helmets in Scandinavia and here as usual it is Gotland and its picture stones that are the most important source. The majority of helmets depicted on many stones are conical, only a few are bowl-like.<sup>41</sup> Outside Scandinavia, a fragment of conical Spangen-helmet consisting of plates with rivets was found at Menzlin, Vorpommern, Germany, but this too was a place where the Norsemen were dwelling and operating.<sup>42</sup> The helmet from kurgan 41 was not of Norse origin, the details, like the cylindrical element on its top and the mail of neck-guard, rather suggest an Oriental direction.

The two round shields were not on the pyre, only later were they laid upon the objects that were placed inside the stone circle. The shields were about 1 m in diameter, made of wooden planks painted red, with an iron boss in the centre; on the shields rims were metal clamps.<sup>43</sup> Circular shields of above-mentioned type were characteristic for the Scandinavian military equipment; even the red paint seems to be preferred, if we take descriptions of them in the Norse literature at face value.<sup>44</sup> To provide the deceased with a pair of shields was a custom, as can be observed in some inhumation graves in Birka.<sup>45</sup>

Close to mound No 41 stood a mound under which a skeleton of a horse was found without any trace of other burial. Near the head of the horse was uncovered a fragment of bronze chain and a dirham in mint condition struck in A.D. 913; by the back legs of the horse was placed an inverted pottery vessel.<sup>46</sup> It is not impossi-

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<sup>39</sup> Sizov 1902:66.

<sup>40</sup> Grieg 1947, pl. V-VI.

<sup>41</sup> Nylén & Lamm 1987:57, 65, 98, 114-116, 132-133.

<sup>42</sup> Schoknekt 1978, Abb. 10.

<sup>43</sup> Sizov 1902:67; Avdusin 1977:276.

<sup>44</sup> Griffith 1995:169.

<sup>45</sup> Arbman 1943:160, 206, 260.

<sup>46</sup> Sizov 1902:11.

ble that, as Sizov thinks, that this horse burial was connected with the burial of the pair under mound No 41.

In the same western part of the *Centralnaja* group was another big mound, No 16.<sup>47</sup> It had quite a different shape from other kurgans: it consisted of a mound with flat top 32 m in diameter, and 38 m at the bottom; its height was 2.9 m; the mound was surrounded by a ditch 7.5 m wide and c. 2 m deep, with an opening on one side.<sup>48</sup> In the cremation layer were found 234 iron rivets making it clear that a boat of about 7–10 m in length had been used in the burial. Alongside the cremation layer were unburnt bones of horse, cow, pig and sheep. The burnt bones—human and animal (horse, bird, sheep)—were collected in four pottery vessels standing close to an iron cauldron with flat bottom: inside the cauldron were the remains of a ram—head with horns and wool; an iron spatha with small silver human faces on both sides beneath the handle was placed on top (see Fig. 34). Near the cauldron stood a wooden bucket with iron fittings. In the layer itself were found a number of various artefacts: a pair of oval brooches (JP 55-type), a circular, gilt circular fibula of bronze, one fragment of a silver brooch, a silver Thor hammer pendant, beads, a decorated bone handle (Fig. 39 a), a strap slide with the figure of an animal (Fig. 39 b), a weight, a large quantity of gold and silver threads from textiles, and elements of a horse bridle: strap-mounts, four buckles, 2 strap slides with interlacing, and cramps (Fig. 39 c).

None of the artefacts from mound No 16 was of a kind that could be clearly identified as belonging to a man, it is apparent that a woman was buried here. Her main ornaments—oval and circular brooches—are of typical Norse style. The circular brooch has decoration consisting of interlace with animal heads, and similar examples are known from Scandinavia.<sup>49</sup> A find from Lejre on Zealand in Denmark is of importance because it comes from a workshop at the royal residence and a cult site.<sup>50</sup> Another similar piece was found in boat-grave X on the cemetery at Tuna in Alsike, Uppland, Sweden.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Sizov 1902:82ff, Tab. XL; No 74 in Spitzyn 1905b: 46ff; Bulkin 1978; Egorov 1996:50ff.

<sup>48</sup> Bulkin 1978:164f.

<sup>49</sup> Jansson 1984:62f, Abb. 8:2.

<sup>50</sup> Christensen 1991, fig. 22:n.

<sup>51</sup> Arne 1934, Taf. XV:3.

Among the artefacts from the discussed grave a prominent group was formed by several items representing the parts and decoration of a bridle, harness and saddle. As has been mentioned before (chapter II:3.1.3) the equipment for horses covered with artful bronze mounts are characteristic items belonging to the Norse elite of the mid tenth century. The preserved elements in mound No 16 show that the bridle was originally a splendid piece comparable to the sets from Scandinavia, like the ones from Borre, Norway and Ihre, Hellevi parish, Gotland.<sup>52</sup> The long strap-ends are very close to the pieces from the latter find, and to the one from a big mound at Skopintull, on the island of Adelsö, near Birka.<sup>53</sup> Two mounts—one quadratic with an animal holding its head back, and one triangular with an interlaced animal motif—only have analogies in the Borre-grave (Fig. 40 a).<sup>54</sup> Some details on those pieces and the design of other mounts belonging to the bridle are of kind that is not usual on the specimens from Scandinavia, for example small square mounts with four protruding birds beaks or the animal on the triangular piece. I would recognise in them products of a Norse master working in Gnëzdovo (see below for more on local production of art pieces).

Judging by the presence of several single bridle pieces in various graves in Gnëzdovo, bridles of Borre-type were popular among the local Rus elite. Besides all those finds there is an almost complete bridle from an unknown mound with cremation burial; the bridle was found outside the cremation layer: it has preserved straps on which are fastened 38 square and 5 convex mounts, two elongated strap-ends and an animal head (Fig. 40 b,c).<sup>55</sup> The square mounts do not have Borre-animal decoration, as in the case of all Scandinavian pieces, but an interlaced knot. Nordic bridle sets do not have an animal head between the strap-ends.

The strap slides with flat interlace decoration from mound No 16 have a parallel in a female inhumation burial in Vrads, Jutland, Denmark.<sup>56</sup> The strap slide with the figure of a four-legged animal with head turned back is quite unique in the context of the decoration of the slides, but quite typical of some brooches, such as those found in one of the hoards from Gnëzdovo (see below).

<sup>52</sup> Müller-Wille 1986; Thunmark-Nylén 1995, Abb. 198.

<sup>53</sup> Rydh 1936:116, fig. 300a.

<sup>54</sup> Müller-Wille 1986:159, Abb. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Sizov 1906, Tab. XII:1; Egorov 1996:67, no 465.

<sup>56</sup> Brønsted 1937:118, fig. 26:1.

Yet another object from the same kurgan should be given a prominent place in this presentation. It is a fragment of a bone item (a handle?) with half of the surface covered by carvings—intertwined bands with dots—in Mammen style.<sup>57</sup> The carving is a good work by a competent artist, well acquainted with contemporary decorative style in south Scandinavian art of the early second part of tenth century.<sup>58</sup> It is difficult to decide whether this piece would have been made in Denmark (for example), or in Gnëzdovo, but both alternatives are possible.

The most unusual (practically unique) object in this assemblage is the iron spatha with silver decorative faces. The spatha (44.5 × 5.0 cm), has a point which, in contrast to the blade, is not sharp.<sup>59</sup> No analogy to this object is known; only the silver male faces resemble many of the faces, often in form of pendants that appear in Scandinavian Viking-age finds.<sup>60</sup> Sizov identified this object as a sacrificial implement, while the authors of the catalogue of an exhibition in Moscow in 1996 were not sure if this was sacral knife or a weaving-sword. The context in which this spatha was found rather supports the idea that it was connected with cultic activities. The spatha was put on the top of a cauldron in which were the remains of a ram. The arrangement of the objects does not look like the remains of a normal meal but like remains of a cultic ritual. We are reminded of the story told by Snorre Sturlasson about the god Thor who killed his rams for the evening meal, collected their bones, and covered them with their hide, in the morning, after he spoke a magic formula that made them alive again.<sup>61</sup> The divine magic even works in Valhalla where each evening the warriors of Odin eat the pork of the pig *Särimmer* boiled in the cauldron *Eldrimmer*.<sup>62</sup> The cauldron itself, being a vessel for preparing a meal of an animal belonging to a god, has also obtained sacral character and as such has become an organic part of the mortuary ritual.<sup>63</sup>

Another mound within the *Centralnaja* group is the “*Bolshoj centralnyi*

<sup>57</sup> Sizov 1902, Tab. XI:1; Fuglesang 1991:91.

<sup>58</sup> Karlsson 1983:50ff; 123ff.

<sup>59</sup> Sizov 1902:91; Egorov 1996:51.

<sup>60</sup> Duczko 1985:68f.

<sup>61</sup> Holtsmark 1992:86f.

<sup>62</sup> Holtsmark 1992:62.

<sup>63</sup> Petrukhin 1976.

*kurgan*", C-2, which was 5 m in height and 36 m in diameter. Under the mound were two separate cremation layers with burnt bones, golden threads and also a gold object with plait-work made of spiral wires and a fragment of an equal-armed brooch in silver; in both layers were pairs of small pottery urns.<sup>64</sup> The brooch has an analogy in a bronze specimen from grave C-252, which can be compared with similar equal-armed brooches in burials at Birka.<sup>65</sup>

Underneath one of the layers was a pit in which a sword was placed.<sup>66</sup> This sword, of Petersen D-type, is a well-known item because of the unique decoration of its hilt (Fig. 41). The decoration is constructed of elements of Norse style employing a "gripping beast" motif; on the hilt are seen only gripping paws without the animal bodies. The elements of this decoration are characteristic of oval brooches of type JP 42 and 51 and some other types of brooches.<sup>67</sup>

This strange artefact has been the subject of scholarly debate. The opinion of Holger Arbman that the hilt was made by a second-generation Norse artisan was rejected by Russian scholars maintaining that it was the product of a Slav smith who was influenced by objects imported from Scandinavia.<sup>68</sup> Both explanations are hardly tenable. The freakish appearance of the decoration of the hilt allowed Arbman to think that such a piece could be produced by a craftsman that was a descendant of local Scandinavians living on the Dnieper for at least one generation and thus not in touch with "real" Norse art. This explanation contains the assumption that the art at Gnëzdovo was developing in a linear way from the older phase (late ninth century) to the younger (of the next century). This was apparently not the case. The Norse art here is restricted to the mid tenth century, which means that objects in Scandinavian style were either brought from the North or made on the spot by immigrant specialists. The hilt from kurgan C-2 was possibly made by an experimenting Norse artist, possibly a Gotlander, who did not care to be only a producer of standardised things. It is suggested that he might have been a Gotlander because the workers in metal on this Baltic island were not only excellent artists, they were also experts in transformation

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<sup>64</sup> Avdusin 1952:94, 101.

<sup>65</sup> Egorov 1996:59, No 362; Arbman 1940, Tab. 81.

<sup>66</sup> Avdusin 1952:94, fig. 26:1.

<sup>67</sup> Jansson 1985:195, fig. 48, 54, 59; Petersen 1928, fig. 67, 75, 108.

<sup>68</sup> Avdusin 1969:57.

of alien designs to their own, very peculiar brand of Norse art. Instead of oval and equal-armed brooches they produced box-shaped and animal-head brooches, which they sometimes embellished with decoration in animal styles. There are several box brooches with decoration very similar to that on the Gnëzdovo-hilt.<sup>69</sup>

The case of the decoration on the sword-hilt has close analogy in early Swedish art from the second part of the fifth century A.D. In the native burial ground in Proosa in northern Estonia were found graves containing artefacts recognised as the products of workshops on Helgö, an island in the Mälär Lake. Beside the “pure” objects, there were some “hybrid” items, among which was a monstrous symbolic buckle cast in bronze.<sup>70</sup> The buckle consisted of decorative elements well known in the repertoire of the art on Helgö but the item itself was unique. It seems that the artisan who left his home milieu felt free to experiment with unusual forms. The same thing happened five hundreds years later in Gnëzdovo and we will meet this phenomenon several times while discussing items from Russia.

To make our review of the local Norse art more complete, I would like to draw attention to some additional objects. One is an oval pendant (?) of bronze with an elongated animal inside a beaded frame (Fig. 42 a).<sup>71</sup> Such items are very rare in Scandinavia; they can be compared with two specimens found in Närke in Sweden, an oval grip of a silver ear-scoop in the hoard from Eketorp, to a pendant from a cremation grave in Höjen, Kräklinge parish, and a single find of an elaborate pendant consisting of two such ovals found on the settlement site at Kirke Hyllinge-Steensgaard, Denmark.<sup>72</sup> All those pieces are decorated with animals of clear Norse fashion, the animal on the pendant from Gnëzdovo is certainly not of such origin: it seems to be a fantasy animal, a gryphon, of the kind depicted on the triangle part of a bronze object that is interpreted as a hanging-hook from a shield (Fig. 42 b). The difference in execution of the animal on those two objects is striking: the former has all the features of the Norse style of the tenth century, the latter is more naturalistic, only circles on the body recall similar Norse elements. The end part of the hook object has the form of an animal head, even if its

<sup>69</sup> Thunmark-Nylén 1983:42, fig. 34.

<sup>70</sup> Selirand & Deemant 1986.

<sup>71</sup> Spitzyn 1905a:56, fig. 36; Arbman 1960:130, fig. 16.

<sup>72</sup> Ekelund 1956:171, fig. 23; Örebro läns museum dnr 2153/60; Petersen 1999:257.



design is not immediately recognised as Scandinavian, there is in fact no reason not to see it as a representation of the most popular motif in Norse Viking-age art, that of a dragon. A similar case of two different stylistic manners of execution of one motif will be discussed below.

Two kilometres to the west of the cemeteries around the *Centralnoe gorodoshche* is the *Olshanskaja* group of graves. In the latter was the big *Olshanskii* kurgan, No 24, 6.7–37 m, according to Avdusin<sup>73</sup> or 6.4–34 m according to Shirinskii.<sup>74</sup> Under the mound, on a terrace of about 1 m height was an extensive cremation layer, a place of cremation. A boat was used as part of the pyre, represented by 70 intact and about 1000 fragments of iron rivets, and 50 whole and fragmented nails. After cremation some of the bones, part of a mail shirt, and a fish were put into the bronze cauldron, which was placed in the centre of the layer. South of the vessel were put three pottery urns filled with bones, to the east was a mail shirt tied in a knot and covered by cremated bones; to the west lay the head of a sheep and the skeleton of a bird, and not far from it, more to the north, were the bones of an aurochs (*Bos primigenius*). All those animals were apparently the remains of a feast held here after the completion of the cremation. Many of the objects which had been on the pyre were left in the ash-layer: fragments of bronze mounts and buckle from a bridle, parts of a horseshoe-shaped brooch, fragments of carnelian and glass beads, an element of a luxurious costume made of gold threads, spherical buttons of bronze, a ring pendant, 9 fragments of gaming pieces, parts of a comb, iron key, whetstone and knife.<sup>75</sup>

## 1.2 *Norse items from smaller barrows and settlements*

Many other members of this Norse elite, perhaps less prominent but still of significance, were buried under the smaller mounds. One example of such a burial is mound No 47 from the *Lesnaja* group.<sup>76</sup> In the cremation layer from a pyre with a boat, of which 276 iron rivets and 95 nails remained, were preserved several special items:

<sup>73</sup> 1952:94.

<sup>74</sup> 1999:123.

<sup>75</sup> Shirinskii 1999:124.

<sup>76</sup> Avdusin 1952:98; Avdusin 1977:278.

a pendant made of a Byzantine gold coin of Emperor Theophilos (829–842; the emission with his son Constantine and his father Michael on the obverse); an iron ring with a hammer of Thor pendant, two mounts, and a miniature (3 cm in length), of an iron sword with a silver ring.

Knowing the riches of Gnëzdovo it is hardly surprising to find in a grave a gold coin of the Emperor Theophilos who was one of the main heroes of our introductory study of the case of the Rhos in Ingelheim (see chapter I). Other items from the grave are not as exclusive as the coin but of clear informational value. The mount in the shape of a step pyramid was the decoration of the mouth of a drinking horn (see above). The second mount was also a decorative element attached to some large but for us unknown object. The motif engraved on its centre—three inter-crossing triangles—belongs to one of those very special and apparently important signs used in the Norse Viking Age: it is placed on the Danish Hedeby-coins from early ninth century, is present on the animal head of a bedstead found on the ship from Oseberg, and depicted on a number of Gotlandic picture stones, for example on the one from Stora Hammars I, where the sign is seen over a sacrificial altar.<sup>77</sup>

The miniature of a sword is one of the Norse amulets which we have already discussed above, it will be enough to mention a similar sword of iron which was found in a tenth century female burial in Kumla, Södermanland, Sweden.<sup>78</sup> Even in our case the burial is that of a woman.

In grave No 47 was an iron ring with Thor hammer pendants, an item that was already mentioned above (III:2.1). A similar ring was in another grave (coincidentally also numbered grave 47, but in the *Zaolshanskaja* cemetery). That grave was a cremation burial of a woman and man and consisted of two urns with bones, upon one of them was placed a ring with hammer pendants; in the cremation layer were many pendants of bronze (one with Borre-animal decoration), fragments of a comb, four beads of glass, a weight, and part of a penannular brooch.<sup>79</sup>

While the man in the grave above was buried without any military

<sup>77</sup> Grieg 1928:92, fig. 44; Nylén & Lamm 1987:62–66.

<sup>78</sup> Drotz & Thorsberg 1995:42, fig. 38.

<sup>79</sup> Kamenetskaja 1991:131, fig. 12:5.

equipment there were several graves under the small mounds in Gnëzdovo where men were buried with their weapons. One such grave was mound No 4 (excavated by M.F. Kushinskij in 1874) in which were an Ulfberth sword of Petersen E-type and a spear-head; but also an iron ring with two Thor hammers and two rings; tweezers, dress pin, shears, knife, two iron crampons for a men and a horse (Fig. 43 a).<sup>80</sup> The weapons are probably of Frankish origin and belong to the ninth century, while the tweezers and pin are specific Swedish well represented in Birka burials of the tenth century.<sup>81</sup>

Another cremation burial with weapons was found under barrow No 18, in the cemetery of the *Centralnaja* group. Upon the cremation layer was gathered such items as a helmet standing on a piece of mail, a sword pressed deep into the earth close to a long battle knife; other objects were: an arrowhead, a buckle of gilt bronze with interlace decoration, mounts from a belt, fragments (pans and beams) of a balance, a glazed dish, crampons, and 17 boat rivets.<sup>82</sup> The helmet, conical in shape, 18 cm in height, was made of two iron parts covered by an iron band, the presence of strong iron wires indicate that mail was hung on its back. As has been said above only a single Viking-age helmet has been preserved in Scandinavia. Iconographic evidence however, such as the picture stones on Gotland, shows that helmets like the one from mound No 18 could have been in use by Norsemen. The sword, of Petersen type V, and battle knife, a scramasax, were found in combination in some of the elite burials in Swedish Uppland, like the ones in the necropolis at Vendel, where the tenth-century boat-grave No IX may be taken as the best example, or the chamber-graves Bj 834, 944, 955 in Birka.<sup>83</sup> The chain mail shirts are not, as we already know, standard finds in Gnëzdovo but appear here more often than in Scandinavia, where they are extremely rare (see the above-mentioned find from Gjermundbo).<sup>84</sup>

The presence of the balance is of interest. They are in fact a well represented category in Gnëzdovo, no less than 14 pieces, among them are two complete examples; there are 77 weights of different types from 50 graves.<sup>85</sup>

<sup>80</sup> Kirpichnikov 1970:56f, fig. 1a, b; Egorov 1996:53.

<sup>81</sup> Arbman 1940, Tab. 170–171.

<sup>82</sup> Sizov 1902:97ff, fig. 68–69; Egorov 1996:52f.

<sup>83</sup> Stolpe & Arne 1912:Pl. XXIII–IV; Arbman 1943:306, 370, 379.

<sup>84</sup> Grieg 1947.

<sup>85</sup> Pushkina 1991:227ff.

In the above-presented male graves, and in many others, the dominant ornament type is a penannular brooch used for fastening the mantle, one of the most usual male ornaments. But this type was not the only one, the other one (well represented in graves) were ringed pins of bronze, richly decorated with interlace motifs and animal heads in Borre style (Fig. 43 b).<sup>86</sup> Pieces of moulds for casting elements for such pins in bronze are found in the remains of the workshop on the settlement site.<sup>87</sup>

There are some odd Norse objects from burials in Gnëzdovo that in a direct way endorse the impression about the real character of the Scandinavian culture of the people buried here. A very special item of this kind was found in a female burial under mound No Lb-1 in the *Lesnaja* cemetery. The grave contained an equal-armed brooch, which was enough to secure the Norse pedigree of the woman, but there was yet another object that confirmed her origin even more, an iron rod (42.5 cm long) of square section, with three polyhedral knobs of bronze and square plate on the top (Fig. 44 a).<sup>88</sup> This rod belongs to a whole group of similar objects, about 28 pieces, found in Scandinavia and on Iceland. In Birka (3 specimens) they were placed in the richly furnished chamber graves of women; on Öland one was found in the cremation grave of a couple.<sup>89</sup> Women buried with rods have recently been identified as *völur*, sorcerers performing magical *seidr*, provided with the attribute of their skill, the staff.<sup>90</sup> The iron rod-staff has been given many explanations—from roasting spits to implements for measurement—and there is no doubt that this object was a multifunctional item, but it is doubtful that it was a symbolic wand with its content restricted only to the *seidr*. This object indicates the special status of the owner, a social status, identifying the woman as a ruler of a household.

While it is doubtful that the iron wands had anything to do with magic it is quite certain that the object made of clay found in mound X had lot to do with cultic activity. The object was anthropomorphic in two fragments: one piece is the upper part of a female body

<sup>86</sup> Sizov 1902:87, Tab. I:5, 11–16; Shirinskii 1999; fig. 20:I.73; 24:III.61; 30:I–III.1895.

<sup>87</sup> Eniosova 1998:77, fig. 18.

<sup>88</sup> Egorov 1996:59, 64.

<sup>89</sup> Arbman 1943:222, 231, 306; Price 2002:128ff; 143ff.

<sup>90</sup> Price 2002:175ff.

with breasts and face without any features; the second fragment is a trunk with legs down to the knees (Fig. 44 b).<sup>91</sup> The early medieval Norwegian law mentions such figures as a heathen feature where it is written that the *lerblót*—offering of clay, is forbidden: this is explained as use of clay figures in a sacrificial context.<sup>92</sup>

### 1.3 *Chamber-burials*

Around the mid tenth century, a new type of burial—pits with an inhumation under a mound appears in cemeteries at Gnëzdovo. Among these graves was a special category, chamber-graves. They were constructed in pits measuring 190–90 cm, 230–85 cm, 280–120 cm (in exceptional cases as much as 225–275 cm or 320–150 cm), the walls were built of wood, and they were sealed with a wooden roof (sometimes a wooden floor was even added). The deceased were buried in various positions: extended or twisted on their backs, on the side and sitting.<sup>93</sup> Among 126 inhumation burials excavated up to 1989, 29 were chamber burials: 9 single male + 3 with horses, 12 single female + 1 double with horse; in one case two men were buried in a chamber, in another four persons (two males and two females) with two horses; in two cases it was not possible to identify to which category the burials belonged.<sup>94</sup> The chamber graves have been discovered in the middle and outskirts of cemeteries of the *Centralnaja*, and *Dnieprovskaja* groups, in one case in the *Olshanskaja* cemetery and eight on the *Žaolshanskaja* site.<sup>95</sup>

The inhumation burials are contemporary with the dominating cremation burials and are without predecessor in Russia. They are always compared with similar graves from Scandinavia, especially with the numerous examples from Birka in Sweden, where they constitute c. 10% of 1100 examined graves. They started to appear during the late ninth century, but the majority belong to the period around the middle of the next century. Chamber-graves concentrate in two places, in the cemetery on the northern side of the Borg

<sup>91</sup> Sizov 1906:93; Egorov 1996:57f.

<sup>92</sup> Holtmark 1996:33f.

<sup>93</sup> Avdusin & Pushkina 1988:21.

<sup>94</sup> Zharnov 1991:207f.

<sup>95</sup> Avdusin & Pushkina 1988:21f; Kamenetskaja 1991:135.

(stronghold), and next to or close to the wall at the end of the largest cemetery of Hemlanden.<sup>96</sup> In the former were 76 chambers (of which 21 were male burials, 15 female and 2 double graves—men and woman), while at latter were 76 chambers (32 male graves, 28 female, 2 children's, 8 double—in one two women).<sup>97</sup> Chamber-graves are west-east oriented and 91% of the examined graves contained bodies buried in seated position.<sup>98</sup> The deceased buried in chamber-graves were men with weapons, and sometimes with horses, and women often with good quality dress and sets of ornaments. The men appear to have been warriors, among which were some of special position, those who were provided with horses placed on a platform at the end of the grave.<sup>99</sup> The inventories of these graves are fairly homogenous: a set of weapons—a sword, a spear, a battle-knife, one or two shields, a bundle of arrows, stirrups, spurs, a bucket or a iron cauldron, sometimes a gaming board. Often, the men had exclusive dress with elements of silk and buttons, of the type found even in Gnëzdovo.

From time to time it is suggested that foreign merchants dominated among the people buried in Birka's chamber graves. Such claims are baseless. The fact that some of the objects in these graves are foreign is not enough to imply that the people in these graves were wealthy German or Rus traders. It must be emphasized that the men in the chambers are provided with the sets of weapons according to local tradition, the women have with them Norse ornaments and other items of obvious Scandinavian pedigree—there is nothing here that allow us to infer that they were aliens who had died while visiting Birka. These people, both men and women, ought to be seen as members of an elite that controlled the town. The representatives of this elite had their houses on the terraces built close to the wall, high over the town. Near the wall of the fort—Borg—was a place, now called *Garnison*, where a unit of military force was kept and where a long hall which had stored plenty of weaponry was uncovered.<sup>100</sup> Some of the prominent warriors belonging

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<sup>96</sup> Gräslund 1980.

<sup>97</sup> Ringstedt 1997:41.

<sup>98</sup> Gräslund 1980:37.

<sup>99</sup> See for example in Arbman 1943:247, Abb. 194; 257, Abb. 208; 306, Abb. 252.

<sup>100</sup> Holmqvist Olausson 2001.

to this force were certainly buried in the cemetery north of Borg. The centre of power that kept its warriors in the town was not situated in Birka itself but on the neighbouring island of Adelsö, where was a royal site at Hovgårdén, dominated by four big mounds. Except those graves—only one, from c. 960s, has been examined—no other burials of exclusive character have ever been discovered here. It is obvious that members of this ruling elite were buried in the chamber-graves in cemeteries around Birka.

What can be said about the chamber-graves in Gnëzdovo? Let's take a look at some of them. The chamber under mound C-198 was a female grave with a pair of oval brooches (JP 51), one circular silver brooch, a necklace with 26 beads, seven pendants of gilt silver (a lunula with granulation, a cross, a circular one with the picture of a cock, and three of eastern origin); a small penannular brooch of silver; a balance; a comb, a knife, a silk band from the headgear, and a wax candle.<sup>101</sup> The oval brooches give this female burial an immediate Norse character. Yet another ornament is here of interest. It is a circular brooch, a variant of the so-called Terslev-type, brooches made in Denmark during the reign of King Harald Gormsen).<sup>102</sup> With an amethyst in the centre, a three-volute motif, and granulation filling all the space between filigree threads, it differs from all known brooches from Scandinavia (Fig. 44 c). A similar piece was discovered in a burial (?) in the *Centralnoe gorodishche* (Fig. 44 d),<sup>103</sup> indicating that we have here two examples of local Rus products based on prestigious Danish jewellery. To those two brooches we should add another one with a motif of a curled animal (Fig. 44 e).<sup>104</sup> The motif of animal recalls those on small brooches produced in Denmark,<sup>105</sup> but details of execution tell us that our piece was made in the workshop in Gnëzdovo.

The cross pendant and candle are items showing that the woman buried under the mound C-198 was a Christian. Another woman who had embraced the new faith was put in a chamber under mound C-301 in the same *Centralnoe* cemetery. She had with her 50 glass

<sup>101</sup> Egorov 1996:53f.

<sup>102</sup> Duczko 1985:82f; Eilbracht 1999, Taf. 13–18.

<sup>103</sup> Mühle 1989:388, Abb. 11:4.

<sup>104</sup> Eniosova & Pushkina 1997:70, fig. 20.

<sup>105</sup> Eilbracht 1999, Taf. 27:317.

beads, a cross pendant, fragments of an equal-armed brooch of bronze, a wooden bucket, a pottery vessel and a box made of birch bark containing various textiles of flax, wool, silk, and with one circular brooch; to one side on the floor were standing two candles, another nine similar ones were placed on the chamber's roof.<sup>106</sup> After this second grave, a pattern starts to appear showing how female burials in chambers were arranged. We will complete it with one more grave, under mound C-306, where fragments of a pair of oval brooches were found with remains of a shirt with silk elements laying beside a pottery vessel and wooden cup with silver mounts; on the floor were standing three large and nine thin candles.<sup>107</sup> This grave produced a dendrochronological date of A.D. 979.

Among the more unusual female burials should be counted the chamber grave under mound No 25 in the *Žaolshanskaja* cemetery.<sup>108</sup> In the chamber were found: a pair of oval gilt brooches (JP51), pendants: (two made of silver coins—one of Byzantine Emperor Leo VI (886–911), one Samanid dirham (A.D. 905/6) of Ismail ibn Akhmed), one lunula with granulation, and two beads of glass. What made this grave special was not the chamber but what was on the roof of it: a cremation layer in which was standing an urn filled with the burnt bones of a child and of an unidentified animal, together with many heavily burnt items of bronze. According to the excavator these two very different burials were contemporary. There is no information about the age of the child: if it was a baby, and the woman in the chamber was a Christian, we could assume that child died before baptism and was burnt as pagan, while its mother was buried in a Christian manner. This is only a speculation because we cannot know how a community not yet entirely converted would have dealt with such a situation.

It remains to characterise the male burials in chamber graves. In the *Dnieprovskaja* group, grave Dn-4 under a mound was excavated. The pit contained a chamber of post construction in which were found, along the wall, elements from a bridle, a horse skull, a whetstone, two weights, crampon, crushed pottery vessel, a fragment of thin silver disc, part of a wooden bucket, five arrowheads, fragments

<sup>106</sup> Avdusin & Pushkina 1988:22, fig. 1.

<sup>107</sup> Avdusin & Pushkina 1988:22ff, fig. 2, 4.

<sup>108</sup> Kamenetskaja 1991:137f, 167.



of a costume with bronze buttons; in the middle were a pair of stirrups and weapons: sword (Petersen E-type), spear, and axe, penannular brooch, a cast silver cross pendant, upper part of a caftan with two silk ribbons and 24 bronze buttons, at the level of the belt was lying a whetstone and iron strike-a-light with piece of flint and two iron rings, remains of belt purse with bronze mounts and piece of cloth and hazel nuts.<sup>109</sup> With the exception of the sword and spear, the stirrups, arrowheads and axe were of non-Scandinavian origin (Fig. 45). The grave was dated by dendrochronology to A.D. 975.

Another male burial with weapons is worthy of mention: the grave under mound No 11, in the centre of the *Žaolshanskaja* cemetery.<sup>110</sup> Once more we meet a costume with bronze buttons, 12 of them, a little penannular brooch, a knife, a whetstone, an iron strike-a-light and piece of flint, and weapons; a spearhead and a scramasax with scabbard. The sax was broken into three parts that had been left in different parts of the chamber. The scabbard was of hide and provided with mounts of bronze sheet of a kind typical for specimens from tenth-century Swedish Uppland.<sup>111</sup>

The chamber-graves of Gnězdovo are burials of a special character, not only because of their particular form but also because of the presence of Christian elements, cross-pendants and wax candles. For the first time we meet the symbols of a new faith in the mortuary practice of Rus. The fact that the cross is also in the male burial, Dn-4, shows that manifestation of belonging to the new religion was not restricted to women. This contrasts with the situation in Birka where similar crosses were found only on the bodies of women in six inhumation graves.<sup>112</sup> The absence of crosses in graves of men can be explained by the chronological difference: the burials in Birka are about a decade earlier than the chamber graves in Gnězdovo. It seems to me a very possible explanation that those chamber graves were burials of members of the elite that had left Birka when town begun to lose its importance.

The usage of numerous candles is seen as traces of a Christian ceremony that was carried out just before the grave was sealed. In

<sup>109</sup> Avdusin & Pushkina 1988:24ff.

<sup>110</sup> Kamenetskaja 1991:137, fig. 5.

<sup>111</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 6.

<sup>112</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 102; Staecker 1999:95, 100.

Scandinavia are several graves with candles but always only with single or two pieces; the most celebrated cases of the finds of candles is one in the chamber of the royal burial in the Northern mound in Jelling and second one in an exclusive burial in the chamber grave dating to about 970, in Bjerringhøj, Mammen, Denmark.<sup>113</sup>

The chamber-graves are not the only burials in which the deceased had crosses. In the cemetery of the *Žaolshanskaja* group were three graves, all females, where the symbols of Christian faith were discovered. All the burials (Nos 5, 27, 38) were inhumations in pits, either with nail-less coffins, or without coffins. In the graves together with crosses were: in grave No 5 (where the woman was buried sitting) were two vessels—one of wood, one of clay, a knife and 19 beads; in grave No 27 was a pottery vessel, a knife and iron scissors; and in the third, No 38 pottery vessels and a knife.<sup>114</sup>

The phenomenon of the construction of chamber-graves was restricted in Gnězdovo to a few decades after the middle of the tenth century. There cannot be any doubt that all those graves belonged to the Norse elite. The custom of burying some members of the leading groups in such graves was practised at a few other places: in Kiev, at Shestovitsa and Timerëvo, at the places where the Rus had their centres (see below). The employment of similar styles of costume, ornaments, and weapons, together with other items, like balances with weights, tells us about the style of life of the Rus which was manifested in the same way wherever their central places were established.

#### 1.4 *Exclusive jewellery*

The exceptional position of Gnězdovo among the Rus sites in Eastern Europe is emphasised by numerous finds of exclusive Norse jewellery. High-quality products of this art are found in hoards, graves and in the settlements indicating the presence of a wealthy and powerful elite manifesting its status by using original Scandinavian-made ornaments, and employing expert jewellery makers who were operating on the spot. The filigree and granulated jewellery appears (as

<sup>113</sup> Iversen & Näsman 1991:57f.

<sup>114</sup> Kamenetskaja 1991:164, 167–8, fig. 12:1–3.

in Scandinavia) to have been the most prized ornaments of the second part of tenth century.<sup>115</sup> Besides them were various ornaments (pendants and large brooches) cast in silver representing specimens of well-known Norse design.

The most varied collection of quality ornaments was contained in a hoard found in 1867 on the *Centralnoe gorodishche* (Fig. 46).<sup>116</sup> It consisted of 105 silver objects and about 12, or more, coins, of which the latest was struck 953/4.<sup>117</sup> The Norse ornaments consisted of a number of filigree pieces: 10 pendants, an anthropomorphic figure, and 6 beads with spiral decoration. The items which were cast comprised: 17 pendants with animal motif and 1 human face, 2 round brooches with sculptural elements, and 6 neck-rings; besides those apparent Norse ornaments there was a group of granulation jewellery with lunulae, half-spherical pendants, large box pendant and 40 sheet beads, all products of the so-called Volhynian jewellery school, a peculiar and still unexplained art phenomenon of the second part of the tenth century.<sup>118</sup>

Among the circular pendants are five with volute-motifs, one with stylised plant and one with four roundels with step-motifs; two pendants have three-volute motif and are identical, apparently made by one jeweller, in fact the same workman who made the pendant from grave Bj 758 in Birka.<sup>119</sup> To the workshop of this jeweller may be related some other pendants from Gnëzdovo, this time from the *Centralnoe gorodishche* where, it is suspected, they had been part of a destroyed burial. In this find were, beside a Byzantine gold coin of Alexander I (912–913) and a silver circular brooch of locally-made, Terslev type (see above), three circular gold pendants with three-volute motifs in filigree (Fig. 47 a).<sup>120</sup> A comparison of form and the ways the filigree was made leave no doubt that those pendants were manufactured by one and the same master, who was also the producer of the three circular and lozenge-shaped pendants of silver from Birka burials: Bj 758, 901, 1161.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>115</sup> Duczko 1985; Eilbracht 1999.

<sup>116</sup> Pushkina 1998.

<sup>117</sup> Gushchin 1936:53–57; Tab. I–IV; Roesdahl 1993:307.

<sup>118</sup> Duczko 1983.

<sup>119</sup> Duczko 1985:36, fig. 22.

<sup>120</sup> Egorov 1996:57, No 334–336.

<sup>121</sup> Duczko 1985:36f, 55, fig. 22, 24, 60.

In the above-mentioned burial (?) was also found a unique gold pendant of square form with a pyramid-shaped centre on the sides of which were omega-shaped signs (Fig. 47 b). No such pendant is known from Scandinavia, but the elements of decoration are typical of Norse filigree art. The omega sign is used on two circular pendants from another hoard from Gnëzdovo, the one discovered in 1993: the motif consists here of one omega with its top inside a volute; another omega is on the front of the suspension loop (Fig. 47 c).<sup>122</sup> A similar pendant, also of silver but with the motif made in granulation, was found in the chamber-grave No 50 in the *Žaolshanskaja* cemetery.<sup>123</sup> The square pendant and the three circular pieces with omega motif should be seen as the products of a Rus jeweller in Gnëzdovo.

In the burial under mound C-292 was uncovered a pendant with granulation filling the space around the three volutes.<sup>124</sup> Pendants like this are found in hoards and graves in Middle Sweden, it is no doubt from this region the piece found at Gnëzdovo had come.<sup>125</sup>

The large circular pendant with four-volute motif and triquetra in the middle from the 1867 hoard is of different origin (Fig. 48 a). This piece was produced by the same jeweller who made yet another circular pendant from the Gnëzdovo hoard: its decoration consists of four roundels, inside which is four-step motif; in the external area is a triquetra design (Fig. 48 b). The overall design of this specimen is Danish-Swedish but the style of decoration is that of Gotlandic tenth-century jewellery art, similar to the very original decoration on the gold circular pendants.<sup>126</sup>

The pendant with filigree plant decoration has several analogies, both in Scandinavia and even various sites in Russia and Estonia.<sup>127</sup> In Gnëzdovo there were also specimens made of gilt bronze, like the one in grave No 105 or in No C-212.<sup>128</sup> Similar pendants (but executed by casting) are quite numerous in Middle Sweden—there are four pieces from Birka.<sup>129</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Eniosova & Pushkina 1997:69, fig. 13:11.

<sup>123</sup> Kamenetskaja 1991:170, fig. 12:6.

<sup>124</sup> Egorov 1996:61, No 387.

<sup>125</sup> Eilbracht 1999, Taf. 2–3.

<sup>126</sup> Stenberger 1947, Abb. 58:1, 3; 59:62.

<sup>127</sup> Duczko 1985:42, fig. 32, 33.

<sup>128</sup> Shirinskii 1999:111, fig. 21:I.105; 1996:63, No 410.

<sup>129</sup> Callmer 1989:22.

Two of the circular pendants from the 1867 hoard differ from the others: they have suspension loops on the back and their decoration consists of a whorl motif—they are symbolic shields, popular in Denmark, Sweden, and as was stated above (III:2.1) even in Russia.<sup>130</sup>

There is yet another pendant of rather peculiar form, a circular specimen with the figure of a large bird (Fig. 48 c). The construction of this pendant is completely different from the others: it was made of silver sheet that was cut in two circular parts connected with a small band; the sheet was folded turning the band into a suspension loop. This construction recalls the way some lunula pendants are made. There is yet another detail that connects our pendant with lunulae: the ornamentation of the loop consisting of granulation triangles. The bird has broad wings, its neck is interlaced and it has a double head. A variant of such a pendant, cast in bronze, and with the bird with one head, is known from a find near Kiev.<sup>131</sup> This kind of bird, most probably a falcon, is depicted, with the exception of the multiple head, on one of the most popular types of scabbard chape, showing a single bird with spread wings (Fig. 48 e).<sup>132</sup> A more sophisticated interlaced design involving a falcon is on another type of chape (Fig. 48 f). Both chapes were in use in Scandinavia and Eastern Europe; examples of these types were amongst the finds in Gnëzdovo.<sup>133</sup> A falcon designed as on the chapes was also produced as a separate ornament by casting, probably in Birka; one copy of such a bird has been found in Gnëzdovo.<sup>134</sup>

The creator of the pendant with the double-headed falcon was an experimenting Norse jeweller who received some inspiration from Volhynian jewellery. We should ask if these impulses were transmitted by Volhynian products or through cooperation with the Volhynian jewellers working in Gnëzdovo? There are more specimens here that can help resolve this problem. Three silver pendants from chamber-grave No C-61 are of interest for discussion of this stylistic cross-fertilisation. Two circular pendants look like typical Norse

<sup>130</sup> Duczko 1985:48f.

<sup>131</sup> Paulsen 1953:167, fig. 238.

<sup>132</sup> Paulsen 1953:23ff.

<sup>133</sup> Ambrosiani 2001:14ff; Paulsen 1953:23, fig. 12; Egorov 1996:64f, No 429, 431.

<sup>134</sup> Ambrosiani 2001:10; Sizov 1906, Tab. I:10.

pendants, especially their suspension-loops, what is alien is the decoration that consists of elements characteristic of lunulae: repousee and granulation; another piece, a circular shield with a boss in the centre and whorl decoration, is also provided with granulation in a way that never occur in Scandinavia.<sup>135</sup> It seems to me quite apparent that those pieces were made by Volhynian jewellers producing Norse items to which they added their own elements. The ornaments made by Volhynian and Norse jewellers are also present in another hoard found in 1993 in Gnëzdovo.<sup>136</sup>

In the 1867 hoard under discussion there are many items of unusual kind. On of them is a little figure of a sitting man in rich, all covering dress and headgear of consisting of two large hemispheres (Fig. 48 f). The only analogy to this piece is an equally small figure found in Denmark.<sup>137</sup> Both specimens were most probably pieces in an exclusive gaming set.

The cast ornaments in this hoard represents a variety of the pendants and brooches decorated with gripping-beasts characteristic of Norse art of the second part of tenth century. Among the pendants are two pieces, larger than the other pendants that have a motif of two antithetic elongated S-shaped animals with turned down heads (Fig. 49 a) very similar to the one from a hoard found at Vårby in Sweden.<sup>138</sup> The hoard from Vårby is good proof of the existence of personal contacts between the Mälars Lake area and Rus: the deposit includes exclusive Oriental belt mounts, Volga Bulghar coins, many Norse cast pendants and sheet silver beads like those present in the 1867 hoard.

A variant of the motif with two antithetical animals, this time with their heads held up, is also known from Gnëzdovo, from the grave under mound No 54, where a copper coin of Leo VI Wise (882–912) was found and a silver pendant with Jelling-style animal.<sup>139</sup> We have practically identical analogies to this piece in three specimens made of gilt bronze from graves on the island of Bornholm, Denmark.<sup>140</sup>

The other pendants are of two types, one with gripping animal

<sup>135</sup> Avdusin 1977:276, 281, fig. 5.

<sup>136</sup> Egorov 1996:48.

<sup>137</sup> Duczko 1989.

<sup>138</sup> Hildebrand 1873, Pl. 2; Karlsson 1983:46; Fuglesang 1991:100.

<sup>139</sup> Shirinskii 1999:108, fig. 29.

<sup>140</sup> Brønsted 1937:212, fig. 118.

inside a ring and the head forming a suspension loop outside it (Fig. 49 b); one is with an animal that is gripping four long animals circling around it (Fig. 49 c). Both types belong among ornaments produced in Denmark—there are finds of casting moulds in Hedeby—and from here spread throughout Scandinavia.<sup>141</sup> The pendants from Gnëzdovo seem to have been made in two moulds, probably in the workshop on *Centralnoe gorodishche*.

Among the cast pendants in the 1867 hoard is one showing the face of a man with moustache and beard wearing on the head a fantastic helmet (Fig. 49 d). Face-shaped pendants belonged to the tenth century when they were executed both by casting and of silver sheet and filigree, as can be seen in graves at Birka and in hoards from Gotland.<sup>142</sup> The only parallel to the face-pendant can be seen on another object from Gnëzdovo, showing a male face with large protruding eyes, moustache and high interlaced headgear; the face is connected with a snake (?) (Fig. 49 e).<sup>143</sup> A design of a similar kind—flat eyes and interlaced head—but with an animal face is met on a garter-tag from a settlement. This piece can be compared with another garter-tag the head of which has naturalistic features.<sup>144</sup> The second tag is good proof of the unorthodox approach of the Norse artisans in Gnëzdovo to their work. They were familiar with the art of Danish masters making face-pendants in bronze, for example in the workshops at the centre in Tissø.<sup>145</sup> These pendants belong to the style of the Danish jewellers working for King Harald Gormsen and his powerful chieftains, producing ringed brooches with terminals in the form of faces showing clear affinities to the pendant from Gnëzdovo, and masterpieces like the horse-collar from Mammen.<sup>146</sup> More will be said about jewellery art in Gnëzdovo below.

The 1867 hoard includes other cast ornaments, much bigger than all the previously mentioned pendants: two brooches, large and heavy—200.4 and 101 grams—built of circular cast elements with animal decoration upon which are fastened three-dimensional figures

<sup>141</sup> Callmer 1989:24; Petersen 1928:139.

<sup>142</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 92:3–6; Callmer 1989:25f; Duczko 1985:68f; Stenberger 1947, Abb. 170.

<sup>143</sup> Sizov 1906, Tab. V:17; Shirinskii 1999:111, fig. 20:I.91.

<sup>144</sup> Egorov 1996:63f, No 418, 420.

<sup>145</sup> Jørgensen & Pedersen 1996:30, Fig. 14.

<sup>146</sup> Näsman 1991:224ff; Arbman 1960:129, fig. 15, 13. fig. 6–7, 16.

of four-legged animals standing around a central element. Eight specimens of such brooches are known from Sweden, the islands of Öland and Gotland; two of them are in foreign museums, one in London, one in Hamburg, both are probably originally Swedish finds.<sup>147</sup>

One of the brooches from Gnëzdovo has a central conical element with four triquetra signs; in a cross-like arrangement around this element stand four animals with their backs to it (Fig. 50 a). Animals in this position and a triquetra sign on the central element are on the brooch from Finkarby, Södermanland; similar animals are also on the brooch from Väsby, Uppland. Around the outer border of the disc base is a very special decoration consisting of bow-shaped elements connected with rectangles.<sup>148</sup> This decoration was used in Norwegian art of early Ringerike style, for example on the famous rune stone from Alstad but it was designed already in the mid-eighth century on Gotland.<sup>149</sup> A ring is fastened to the brooch it has three chains on which hang lozenge-shaped pendants with two-volute motifs in filigree; these pendants have analogies in Birka.<sup>150</sup>

The second brooch has a different central element, which consists of a cylindrical, openwork structure with four snake-like creatures; around it are placed three goats with long horns, and three smaller four-legged animals. The central element is present on almost all known brooches of this type; the goats with their oversized horns are found only on the equal-armed brooches from Birka.<sup>151</sup>

From mound No C-5 comes a single figure of a goat (?), which could have been a part of sculptural group on a brooch, either circular or equal-armed (Fig. 50 b).<sup>152</sup> The somewhat unusual form of this figure may indicate that it might have belonged to a brooch produced locally by a Rus master, as was apparently a case with the monstrous brooch from Eletz.

The latter cannot be omitted while discussing these large, sculptural brooches. This is an exceptional brooch, this time of equal-armed type, found far away from Gnëzdovo in Eletz, Voronezh gov., on the upper Don, at the border between Slav territories and the nomadic

<sup>147</sup> Capelle 1962.

<sup>148</sup> Duczko 1987:12f.

<sup>149</sup> Karlsson 1983:62, fig. 90; Nerman 1969, Taf. 216:1769.

<sup>150</sup> Duczko 1985:54f.

<sup>151</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 82:7–9.

<sup>152</sup> Arbman 1960:116.



East. Only about half of this object—8.9 cm—is preserved but as the missing part was exactly like the existing one, it is enough to understand that when intact it was about 13 cm long, and heavy too, as it was manufactured of silver, gilt in some places, partially embellished with niello, and provided with many cast sculptural elements (Fig. 51 a).<sup>153</sup> The piece creates a monumental, and overloaded impression because of the large central element consisting of a conical part with eight protruding animal heads with big ears, and a bow construction on the top of it which is the backward-looking figure of an elongated animal; on the end of the arm is a half figure of a strange creature holding its paws in its mouth; between this beast and the central element is a group of animals. The central, conical piece is decorated with four triquetra signs, as is the case on one of the above-mentioned circular brooches. Some decorative elements of this brooch are recognisable as foreign to Norse art and the brooch itself is treated as a product of a jeweller working in Russia and influenced by Byzantine and Oriental styles.<sup>154</sup> This judgement seems to be correct. We have here once more an example of an artwork created for a Norse-Rus woman by an artist who allowed himself to go outside the standards that were ruling in Scandinavia.

After this excursion to the workshops of the creative artisans of Gnëzdovo, we have to go back to the 1867 hoard to examine the last of the items in it, the six neck-rings. Four of them are plaited and, with the exception of one, permanently locked by a knot.<sup>155</sup> Neck-rings plaited of various number of rods were, together with sometimes similarly made arm-rings, important items of great ideological significance.<sup>156</sup> Almost all Scandinavian neck-rings are provided with hooked ends, while permanently locked specimens are very rare. Those pieces we know are all large, like two gold rings in the magnificent Norwegian hoard from Hon, Buskerud.<sup>157</sup>

The two remaining rings are of a different kind. One is made of one piece, partly forged, and with two large faceted knobs as end-pieces. A fragment of such a ring with a knob, is in one Gotlandic hoard.<sup>158</sup> The knobs recall the very similar parts of some types of

<sup>153</sup> Stenberger 1959; Arbman 1960.

<sup>154</sup> Arbman 1960:129.

<sup>155</sup> Roesdahl 1993:78, fig. 5.

<sup>156</sup> Stenberger 1958:83f, 272ff.

<sup>157</sup> Grieg 1929:183, fig. 1, 2; Roesdahl 1993:91, fig. 3.

<sup>158</sup> Stenberger 1947, Abb. 55:3.

Gotlandic ring brooches and one type of the so-called Permian rings.<sup>159</sup> The other ring is made of silver tubes, is 33.3 cm in diameter, the full length of the tube is 1.30 m; and is provided with six nodes and two terminals in which are inserted roundels with a four-volute motif in gold filigree; the weight of the ring is 736 grams (Fig. 51 b). No such rings are known in Scandinavia but identical nodes, separated from the rings, are preserved in Danish hoards from Scania.<sup>160</sup> Similar nodes are found on a 26 cm in diameter large neck-ring of gold from a late-ninth-century hoard found at Hon, Norway. Here we recall yet another Norse ring, that of gold, more than 2 kg in weight, found as an offering in water at Tissö, Denmark.<sup>161</sup>

### 1.5 *The Rus of Gnëzdovo*

The archaeological remains from Gnëzdovo attest in a very direct way that on the high bank of the River Dnieper a large Scandinavian community existed during the Viking Age. The very origins of this community should be connected with the attempts of Norsemen to find another route from the Baltic into the interior of Eastern Europe. The attempts were successful and in the late ninth century the first settlement was founded by the Svinetz brook. The site was fairly modest until the 930s when it started to expand, eventually reaching a size three times bigger than the original settlement; at the same time one part of it was fortified, apparently in order to provide a secure space for an elite group controlling the site. The expansion was not restricted to the area around the brook, but extended for more than five kilometres along the Dnieper until it reached the river Olsha in the west, where a second large settlement was established.

The rise to significance of Gnëzdovo coincided with the increase of the range of operations of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe. The growth of their trading and military activities was paralleled by their colonisation and the foundation of the power structures of different groups of Rus that occurred at various places. The complex of Gnëzdovo at this time functioned as one of the most important centres. Towards the mid tenth century an elite of people connected

<sup>159</sup> Carlsson 1988:19, 70f; Stenberger 1958:125f.

<sup>160</sup> Hårdh 1976:132, Taf. 54:I:8.

<sup>161</sup> Jørgensen & Pedersen 1996:23.

with the leading groups in Svealand was established here. The genetic bonds are visible in the grave forms, mortuary customs and series of objects that have close affinities to the elite culture of Birka-Adelsö. Some members of the Rus elite were buried under monumental mounds, others in chambers also covered by barrows. The grave inventories show that these Norsemen were manifesting their status through the use of special costume, ornaments and funeral rituals. The latter are not known in Scandinavia, or, at least, are not usual. This fact cannot prove that the deceased buried here were not Norsemen. Once more it should be emphasized that we cannot expect to find in Russia a Norse culture identical in its minute detail with that in Scandinavia. The Norsemen staying, living and dying here were preserving their identity at the same time adding to it new features by accepting different elements from various East European cultures. The elite had well-defined needs concerning material culture and could satisfy it on the spot by employing artisans, among which were Danes, Swedes and Gotlanders, producing high quality ornaments of the type current in Scandinavian workshops. The masters went even further by creating a new brand of Norse art, one of the most advanced among the Rus.

What kind of place was the Gnëzdovo complex? A common opinion among Russian scholars is that it was a *pogost*, a centre for collecting tributes and a military outpost of the Kievan princes that kept here their retainers, who were buried in the rich graves, mainly in chambers. The size and complexity of settlements in Gnëzdovo indicate something much bigger than a simple outpost of the princely power from the Middle Dnieper. It was rather a centre of power itself with fortified site for the elite, advanced crafts, and established infrastructure service for long-distance trade, as well as a developed agrarian background. What we have got here is a mixture of Birka and Rurikovo Gorodishche, with a culture that is exposing its origin in Svealand. It is possible that the Rus-Rurikids from the Middle Dnieper were in some way involved with this site, but if so this may have happened fairly late.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE VOLGA-OKA REGION

One of the largest concentrations of sites that has yielded remains of Viking-age Norse culture indicating the existence of several communities of people of Scandinavian origin is the eastern part of the forest zone, the territory stretching from the Upper Volga in the north to the Kljazma, a tributary of the river Oka in the south. This region was populated by Finno-Ugrians, the people that in later written sources were called Merja. The colonisation of these territories by Slavs began after the mid tenth century, much later than the influx of Norsemen, which had started about one century earlier. To judge by the wide dispersion of Norse finds throughout this region Scandinavians were living in the majority of places that were settled at this time.

The sole provider of information about the Norse period in the history of this part of the European continent is archaeology. It is a problem, however, that—with few exceptions—the excavated material is incomplete and badly documented, especially the information originating from the excavation of several thousand graves on almost an industrial scale at great speed by count A.S. Uvarov in the 19th century.

In spite of the faults of these sources we are able to recognise the Norse colonisation in the vicinity of the towns of Jaroslavl, Pereslav, Jurev, Suzdal and Vladimir (Fig. 52). It is impossible to say with any accuracy how many sites the Scandinavians settled. The number about ten that is sometimes offered can be only an approximation arrived at only by using the criterion of cultural purity. If all places that delivered less typical Norse objects, or features of funerary customs, were included in the statistics, the number of sites would increase significantly.<sup>1</sup> The same would occur with the number of Scandinavian objects because the presented figures are definitely much too low, and thus completely misleading. But before the work

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<sup>1</sup> Jansson 1997:37.

of identification of all Norse items is done we will make here a presentation of the most characteristic traits of the Norse material culture from these parts.

The earliest traces of a Norse presence in the Upper Volga area were found on the Sarskoe Gorodishche at Lake Nero, southwest of Rostov, near the River Sara. The Merjan settlement here existed already in the eighth century but it rose to importance, and partly became fortified (the only fortified site in the region), in the early ninth century. It was subsequently a centre for long-distance exchange, a site for craft production and a place at which warriors were situated. Among the items of foreign origin were Norse objects, such as iron neck-rings, female ornaments, circular pendants, lancet-shaped arrowheads, chapes with falcon, a tongue-shaped strike-a-light piece of Birka-type;<sup>2</sup> even a hoard of dirhams deposited in the 830s which should be connected with the activities of the Norsemen.<sup>3</sup> Beside the iron neck-rings, an ideological category of objects characteristic for the Svear in middle Sweden, even circular pendants with whorl decoration, an important amulet, are present here showing that people wearing them were bearers of actual Scandinavian culture (see above IV:2.1).<sup>4</sup>

In the late ninth century the number of Norsemen frequenting the route to the east increases and new sites became settled. The *Jaroslavl'skoe Povolzhe*, i.e. the area around the town of Jaroslavl, was one of the central territories, where three sites were established at a distance of about 10 km from the Volga: Timerëvo and Petrovskoe in the southwest, and Mikhajilovskoe in the north.

The best preserved, and examined, was Bolshoe Timerëvo, a settlement and cemetery on the bank of the Sechka brook at its confluence with the river Kotorosl running to the Volga. In the settlement, that during its greatest extension extended almost 10 hectares, were explored about 50 dwellings with roof-bearing posts and ancillary structures and pits, gathered in clusters, sometimes fenced.<sup>5</sup> Norsemen were living here from the beginning, which is attested by a hoard

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<sup>2</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 145.

<sup>3</sup> Leontev 1981:141ff; Kirpichnikov et al. 1986:206f; Hedenstierna-Jonson 2001, fig. 4; Arbman 1940, Taf. 4, 5, 145.

<sup>4</sup> Novikova 1998:169, fig. 2.

<sup>5</sup> Dubov 1982:227f.

from the settlement, a deposit consisting of 2685 dirhams, the latest from A.D. 864/5: on four coins were scratched single runes and one inscription; another hoard—1500 dirhams—belonging to the same period, was found outside by the bank of the brook.<sup>6</sup> One of the earliest Norse objects from the settlement is a pendant cast in bronze, of a type known as strike-a-light-shaped ornament that were popular, mostly in middle Sweden during the oldest Viking Age (Fig. 53 a).<sup>7</sup> Our specimen, with its rich interlace decoration, is quite unique, the only piece with which it can be stylistically compared is dated to the very beginning of the ninth century and is from Gotland.<sup>8</sup>

The importance of Timerëvo increased from the 930s, when after the arrival of new Norse groups the settlement started to expand. The growth of the population is mirrored in the local cemetery that originally consisted of almost 1000 barrows: only about a half of them survived and have been archaeologically examined. Among 218 well-dated graves were 7 from the late ninth or early tenth century, 17 from the first and 79 from the second half of the tenth century—almost all of those burials contained typical Norse objects; 77 burials belonged to the very end of the tenth century and the early part of the next.<sup>9</sup> The big mounds of the type known from Gnëzdovo are lacking but there are several (more than ten), inhumation burials of chamber-grave type, all from the late tenth century. No boats burnt on pyres are recognised here; the single iron rivets found in some graves may indicate that small parts of boats were merely used in a more symbolic manner.

For a long it was assumed on the basis of the analysis of the burials that the population of Timerëvo consisted of people belonging to three different ethnic groups, Finno-Ugrians, Scandinavians and Slavs, living there together at the same time. This view was altered when a closer evaluation of the chronology showed that the cemetery expanded from the parts where the Norse graves were concentrated, towards the north, into the area where people of Finno-Ugric culture were buried—the latter graves were later than those of the Scandinavians.<sup>10</sup> At the very end of the tenth century, and somewhat

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<sup>6</sup> Dubov 1982:144ff.

<sup>7</sup> Almgren 1955, Pl. 38–41.

<sup>8</sup> Nerman 1969, Taf. 279:2236.

<sup>9</sup> Fekhner & Nedoshivina 1987:86.

<sup>10</sup> Jansson 1997:42.

further away inhumation burials emerged in the southern part of the cemetery, which was a mortuary custom that the immigrant Slavs were using.

If the examined graves were representative then we could have an indication that the Norsemen were in fact the people that founded the site. The earliest burials were four female cremation graves of which three had oval brooches of type JP 37 belonging to the late ninth century; the fourth grave, No 95, had, besides three coins—two Omayyad, one Abbasid, all from the late eighth century—silver beads made of beaded wire, a type known from three burials in Birka, one with oval brooches of JP 37 type.<sup>11</sup>

Sixty-four burials in fifty-three graves were identified as certainly Norse; the recognition was made with help of ornaments, both male and female, iron neck-rings, weapons and stone constructions under the mounds.<sup>12</sup> Again, it is only an approximate number that would rise dramatically if we added all burials with more ambiguous ethnic indicators. One should remember that many of the Viking-age burials in Scandinavia lack any such objects.

In twenty-seven graves at Timerövo were preserved thirty-four specimens of the most characteristic Norse objects, the oval brooches. It is a remarkably high number. Ingmar Jansson could demonstrate this by comparing the number with the situation in Birka—where among 570 cremation graves only twenty-six contained oval brooches.<sup>13</sup> While the oval brooches were so well represented, other types of Norse ornaments were either lacking or appeared as single pieces. More frequent were items like iron rings with or without Thor hammers (from six burials) and several circular pendants with whorl motif, all objects with special meaning among the peoples of middle Sweden. The bridle of the type discussed previously also came to the Jaroslavl area from the same region of Scandinavia, several elements were found here which shows that the members of the Norse elite even in these parts owned this prestigious riding equipment.

Military equipment is present but seldom as sets, in most cases the weapons were buried as single pieces. Swords, whole and frag-

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<sup>11</sup> Kirpichnikov et al. 1986:209; Fekhner & Nedoshivina 1987:77, 79; Jansson 1985:51; Arbman 1940, Taf. 114.

<sup>12</sup> Fekhner & Nedoshivina 1987:86f.

<sup>13</sup> Jansson 1987:789f.

ments (of types E, U, one with Ulfberth inscription), were found in four burials; there are also two chapes, one in a grave without any arms, the second a single find; only one spear in one grave, together with a sword and arrows; the thirty-seven arrows found in the cemetery were distributed between twenty-four barrows, fragments of bows and quivers appeared in five burials; one battle-knife; axes were in twelve graves; small parts of mail-shirts were in four graves.<sup>14</sup>

The items that appear neither on the Upper Dnieper or Volkhov but which are regularly found in the graves in Timerëvo, and almost everywhere in the Jaroslavl area, are clay paws and rings (Fig. 53 b). The paws, probably representing the paws of beaver, have for some time been recognised as ritual artefacts used on the Åland islands, an archipelago between middle Sweden and Finland, and to some extent in the southern part of the Mälars Lake basin, since the early seventh century A.D.<sup>15</sup> The spread of the clay paw rite only in the *Jaroslavskoe povolzhe* shows that at least some part of the Norse population here had its roots in different areas from the Norse people in other regions of Eastern Europe.

The funeral rites employed by Norsemen living in Timerëvo left enough material remains to give a rich picture of their religious beliefs. At the same time this material provides information about their subsistence and economic activities. That commerce was of importance is proved by the presence of whole and fragmentary balances and weights in thirty-two burials.<sup>16</sup> Many cremation graves contained the remains of horses, cattle, sheep, pigs and poultry, showing that even here, as was the case in Scandinavia, the breeding of animals was a major activity.<sup>17</sup> That—since furs were one of their most important trading goods—hunting of animals with valuable furs was an activity of high economic significance for the Norsemen is also shown by the finds of bones of such animals as marten, beaver or fox.

The Norse burials in Timerëvo mirrored the features of mortuary customs originating from Scandinavia and their further development in Eastern Europe. This will be demonstrated with help of a selection of the best-documented graves.

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<sup>14</sup> Fekhner & Nedoshivina 1987:70f; Dubov 1982:203, fig. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Callmer 1994a.

<sup>16</sup> Fekhner & Nedovshina 1987:72f.

<sup>17</sup> Andreeva 1963:93f.



A typical female grave was mound No 60.<sup>18</sup> The body was burnt on the spot and the bones were gathered into a pile in the centre; among the surviving artefacts were an oval brooch, an iron rod neck-ring, a bronze chain, a bead, a comb, a clay paw, and two pottery vessels, which were there from the beginning, probably as containers for food. Mound No. 53 exhibits a different arrangement of the remains of pyre. Here the bones and accompanying objects were put into a small pit then covered with flat stones, around which was made a circle of stones with two intersecting lines of stones crossing the centre. The artefacts consisted of a pair of oval brooches, four carnelian beads and a triangular pendant of bronze.<sup>19</sup> Another variant is represented by grave No 368: in the centre of the cremation layer was laid a line of stones by which was placed an urn with the bones of a woman and a dog; the artefacts were an oval brooch (JP 52), an equal-armed brooch (JP 70–73), a glass bead, a comb, a bronze button, and a knife.<sup>20</sup> One of the frequently recurrent features of the cremation graves was the placing of part of the burnt pyre inside the structure of the barrow erected above the main grave. It could be seen in grave No 305 in which a woman with oval brooches was cremated; some of her bones were put in the mound and covered with two burnt logs from the pyre placed in the shape of a cross.<sup>21</sup>

The custom of an extra burial inside the barrow was also employed in the male graves, which otherwise had no special features that distinguished them from the female ones. They may be fairly simple, like grave No 46 with a pile of bones mixed with artefacts: an arrow-head, a weight and a buckle of bronze; inside the barrow was another collection of burnt bones with a knife, several mounts from a belt and a comb.<sup>22</sup> In one of the cremation burials, grave No 383, together with a man were burnt such animals like horse, cattle and fish; the personal objects were two garter-tags (Fig. 53 c), good copies of the specimen from Gnëzdovo, combs, a weight, and a lancet-shaped arrowhead, two small bells; a single iron rivet may be the only trace of part of a boat used on the pyre.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Smirnov 1963:100.

<sup>19</sup> Smirnov 1963:100.

<sup>20</sup> Smirnov 1963:121f.

<sup>21</sup> Smirnov 1963:117.

<sup>22</sup> Smirnov 1963:99.

<sup>23</sup> Fekhnner 1963a:17; Smirnov 1963:123.

The children were also given burials of their own. In grave No 273 was an urn with the bones of a little child with two glass beads put in a pit covered with stones, above it was a little pottery vessel beside which was laid a late ninth century dirham made into a pendant.<sup>24</sup>

Many of the cremation burials contained the remains of more than one person. An exceptionally rich burial of this kind was grave No 83.<sup>25</sup> In the southern part of a pyre layer was a pile of human and animal bones (horse, dog, marten, and a bird); the artefacts were fragments of an oval brooch, nine carnelian beads, two combs, bronze buttons, two iron crampons, a whetstone, a clay paw and ring, and two pottery vessels. On the west side was made another pile of burnt bones of a man and a child; their bones were clean, without any elements of the pyre; in the pile were bones of cattle, and artefacts: a penannular brooch of a type known in Birka,<sup>26</sup> a whetstone and mounts from a quiver. Inside the barrow over these graves was another collection of burnt bones of a woman together with bones of a horse, a dog and a marten, and an oval brooch, silver bead and bone needle. The extra burial inside the barrow was, this time, of another person, not already buried in the pyre layer.

A double cremation burial, No 134, shows how the remains could be treated according to ideas about the differences between sexes. After a man and a teenage girl were burnt on the spot, the bones of the latter were collected in the southern part of the layer, while the man's bones were gathered in the northern; the girl had with her a strap-end with two triquetra signs, strap mounts of bronze, a circular brooch JP 116 (a similar brooch is also in grave 391), and two pottery vessels; the man had 29 mounts from a belt, an arrow-head, two iron crampons, and one weight.<sup>27</sup>

Among the burials with several persons in one grave, mound No 265 presents a special case. After the cremation of a mature woman and a child, their bones were gathered in the centre of the layer together with the bones of a horse, cattle, pig, fox and birds; in this pile were found three weights, an iron crampon, an iron needle and

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<sup>24</sup> Smirnov 1963:115.

<sup>25</sup> Smirnov 1963:102.

<sup>26</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 42:2; 43:1,3,4.

<sup>27</sup> Smirnov 1963:105; Malm 1963b:66, fig. 38; Fekhnér 1963c:78, fig. 13.

awl, a strap cramp with interlace decoration of a type usual in Gnězdovo and even in Old Uppsala in Sweden, and combs. The pile was covered with two large stones; in the layer was dug a pit into which were put bones of a human and of horse, dog and burnt and unburnt bones of birds; inside the barrow was a third burial: the burnt but cleaned bones of a woman mixed with a fragment of oval brooch, a carnelian finger-ring bezel, an iron needle, glass-bead, comb, and pieces of pottery vessel.<sup>28</sup>

In the late second half of the tenth century a new type of burial, chamber-graves with inhumations, was introduced to Timerëvo. As an example of a very Norse female inhumation may be taken grave No 348 (Fig. 54). In a pit 2.9 × 1.9 m large and 0.6 m deep, a woman buried in a sitting position was provided with a pair of oval brooches (JP 51 type), a little circular brooch with interlaced three-volute motif, a comb with a bronze mount, a necklace with 18 beads of glass and stone, two pendants made of coins—one from Baghdad (803/4) and one English penny of Edmund of c. 900; a finger-ring with stone bezel with an Arabic inscription, a part of a head-gear made of silver wire, and a knife with handle decorated with silver wire.<sup>29</sup> In many ways this burial was reminiscent of a number of female burials at Birka: the sitting position of the deceased, the Norse ornaments, the comb, and last but not least, the presence of eastern items, especially the finger-rings, which were found in three graves.<sup>30</sup>

The burial No 459, a female inhumation in chamber produced one neck-ring with 2 circular silver pendants with filigree decoration: one with three-volute motif, and the other with vegetal ornamentation (Fig. 55 a), and two dirhams, of which one, cut to the shape of a cross, was a Samanid issue from A.D. 369/70, there was also a weight and a bronze dish with a graffiti depicting a sword (Fig. 55 b).<sup>31</sup> The pendants, with good analogies in Birka, are the only examples of Norse filigree art in Timerëvo. The scarcity of high-status art may indicate a difference in the functioning of the leading group on this site and at the great centre at Gnězdovo. But, as we will see

<sup>28</sup> Smirnov 1963:114; Malm 1963a:34, fig. 20; Stolt 1999:52, fig. 20.

<sup>29</sup> Fekhnér & Nedoshivina 1987:85, fig. 9; Murasheva 1998:69; Roesdahl 1993:305.

<sup>30</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 111:1–3; Duczko 1998, fig. 7, 8.

<sup>31</sup> Fekhnér & Nedoshivina 1987:77, 78, 80, fig. 6, 7; Duczko 1985:41, fig. 33.

below, the presence of fairly frequent finds of filigree ornaments on various sites between the Volga and Kljazma show that this art was of importance even here.

A female inhumation burial in grave No 394 is dated to the second part of the tenth century. It included one oval brooch of JP51 type, a gilt trefoil brooch of bronze, fragments of a dress made of silk, a bronze chain, comb, eleven glass beads; at the feet of the skeleton were many iron objects, among them a key and awl (Fig. 56).<sup>32</sup> The interlace decoration on the trefoil brooch is a badly executed version of the motif on pieces from Norway; the central knob is taken from the type with animal decoration.<sup>33</sup> This brooch is the only specimen that has survived in the whole Jaroslavl area. This must mean that ornaments of this type were not fashionable among Norse women living not only here but even at other places in Eastern Europe. This contrasting strongly with the situation in Scandinavia, where they were an almost compulsory part of a set of brooches; for example 23 trefoil brooches were found in Birka, of which twenty were in burials.<sup>34</sup>

One of the later burials in Timerëvo was chamber-grave No 100 containing the inhumation of a couple: the man was provided with weapons—a sword (Petersen type W), spear, arrowheads, stirrups and bridles; the woman had temple-rings, a finger-ring of gold, a lock of Scandinavian type, a game piece of glass, a leather bag with 7 Samanid dirhams, the youngest one from 976; upon the wooden roof was standing a wax candle.<sup>35</sup> Among the weapons, all Norse, one arrowhead is very peculiar: it is of type known only in Norway and in the Swedish province of Dalarna.<sup>36</sup>

Not far (only five km) from Timerëvo, in Petrovskoe, was another Viking-age Norse community. It consisted of two settlements, one on the left side of the river Shakhterka, the other on its right side.<sup>37</sup> The cemetery by the left-bank settlement, had originally a large number of barrows, probably comparable with Timerëvo, but only less than 200 of them have been preserved: 60 cremations, 43 inhumations,

<sup>32</sup> Smirnov 1963:123; Fekhnner 1963c:80, fig. 47.

<sup>33</sup> Petersen 1928, fig. 112, 113; 105, 106.

<sup>34</sup> Hårdh 1984:85ff.

<sup>35</sup> Fekhnner & Nedoshivina 1987, fig. 1, 2; 76, fig. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Personal communication Peter Lindbom, Uppsala.

<sup>37</sup> Fekhnner 1963b:20; Kirpichnikov et al. 1986:212.

12 empty.<sup>38</sup> This remaining fraction of the cemetery cannot be a satisfactory basis for an analysis of the buried population. What can be said is that the mortuary customs here were analogous to the customs of the Norsemen in Timerëvo. The difference is the lack of chamber-graves and the small number of graves with rich inventories. Only six burials produced Scandinavian brooches: five oval and one circular.<sup>39</sup> Even weapons are very rare—one sword, and one axe, the only more frequently found armaments are arrows and bows. The sole burial of a warrior was in grave No 38, the largest in the cemetery: a man who was cremated together with a lamb, bird and fish, had with him a sword (only the pommel was preserved), bow and quiver, a belt with bronze mounts, a balance with two weights and combs.<sup>40</sup>

About twenty kilometres from Timerëvo and Petrovskoe to the north, four kilometres from the shore of the Volga, at the village Mikhailovskoe, was yet another fairly large site where Norsemen had lived. The settlement, of about 6 hectares, has not been excavated and all we know about this site comes from the cemetery. In the 1930s it had about 400 barrows, of which 219 had survived and 171 were examined, showing that 63% were cremations, 34% inhumations, the rest were either empty or of uncertain status.<sup>41</sup> The inhumations were late, from the eleventh century, while the cremations belonged to the tenth century and Scandinavians were buried in at least most of them. These burials, concentrated in the northwestern part of the cemetery, were characterised by the richest inventories, both in female and male graves. Female brooches were in eleven burials—oval ones in nine, circular examples in two; male ornaments were represented by two penannular brooches decorated with Borre-animal and interlace.<sup>42</sup> In one female cremation grave, No 2/1902, were elements of a special bridle decorated with animal style: one strap-end and strap-mounts to which the best analogies are to be found on Gotland.<sup>43</sup> As we will soon see, this Gotlandic connection was not accidental but must have been based on direct contacts.

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<sup>38</sup> Fekhnner 1963b:20.

<sup>39</sup> Pushkina 1997:89.

<sup>40</sup> Smirnov 1963:127.

<sup>41</sup> Niedoshivina 1963a:26f.

<sup>42</sup> Fekhnner 1963c:82–83; Arne 1918.

<sup>43</sup> Malm 1963b:67, fig. 39:2; Thunmark-Nylén 1995, fig. 130.

Weapons were more numerous here than in Petrovskoe: six swords, seven spears, three axes, and fifteen arrowheads in thirteen graves. The graves with weapons had the largest mounds—of height 1 and 1.6 m, diameter 10 and 17 m.<sup>44</sup>

The sites studied in this chapter were all located at some distance from the Volga, but there are finds indicating that Norsemen were not reluctant to settle near the banks of that river. One such site was situated westward of Timerëvo, on the high bank of the Volga, inside the fortified *kremlin* of the medieval town of Uglich. The small-scale excavations uncovered iron rivets, lancet-shaped arrowheads, fragment of battle-knife, and three sword chapes of various types: one with a bird, one with Jelling animal, and one with an interlaced Borre animal.<sup>45</sup> At another place were the remains of a destroyed burial of a cremated woman provided with a small circular gilt brooch of bronze with three animal heads, and a pendant made of a dirham of Nasr ibn Akhmed—942/3 A.D.; this burial was associated with a stone floor with the skulls of a horse and a dog; not far from this grave was found a piece of cattle horn with runic signs.<sup>46</sup> Outside the site were found deposited a hoard consisting of dirhams of the ninth century, a find which suggests that the Norsemen had been here since this time. Their presence was terminated when the site was destroyed by a violent fire at the end of the tenth or early eleventh century.<sup>47</sup>

The sites close to the Volga bank were only a small fraction of the settlements with Norse population in the Merjan territory. The majority was concentrated in two groups: one to the west on the river Nerl and Lake Pleshcheevo, and the other to the south-east, along the Nerl at its lower part before it joins the Kljazma. Among the finds from about 8000 graves excavated at great speed and badly documented in the mid-19th century, are Norse items. These Vladimir *kurgans*, as the barrows from this region are called, will remain a secondary source, which we can use but only with great caution. For our purpose it will be enough to present groups and single items that can give, at least, an insight into the material culture of some parts of Norse population.

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<sup>44</sup> Nedoshivina 1963b:55.

<sup>45</sup> Tomsinski 1999:171, 174, fig. 2; Paulsen 1953, fig. 11–21, 38–40, 52–54.

<sup>46</sup> Tomsinskii 1999:173.

<sup>47</sup> Tomsinskii 1999:174.

What is most striking about the finds is the presence of high quality ornaments, many of a kind already familiar: silver pendants with three and four volutes, with whorl and bird motifs, and even pendants decorated with granulation (Fig. 57 a).<sup>48</sup> Judging by their forms and details, these specimens are products of either workshops in Scandinavia or in Gnëzdovo. The contacts with Scandinavia are well illuminated by finds from Vasilkovo near Suzdal. We have here two filigree pendants with volutes, a circular bronze brooch with interlaced animal, a pendant with Borre-animal, and a pendant of probably Islamic origin showing a man embracing two big birds; a similar ornament is found in Birka and some other sites around the Mälär Lake.<sup>49</sup>

The workshops in Gnëzdovo were responsible for manufacturing many other ornaments, such as circular brooches of Terslev type with silver filigree, bridle mounts that were designed by the Norse artisans using volute-motifs, and also their own forms with animal decoration (Fig. 57 b, c). Besides these exclusive ornaments there are many oval and circular brooches of standard Norse types. The classic oval brooches are known from fifteen graves in eight cemeteries.<sup>50</sup> The impression that we are dealing with a real Norse culture of the same sort as in Gnëzdovo is confirmed by the presence of many amulets in the form of Thor hammers (Fig. 57 d). To complete this picture we should recall the above-mentioned find from Gnezdilovo near Suzdal: a comb with a Norse graffiti—a triquetra and a cross, paired with a hammer of Thor.<sup>51</sup>

The concentration of Norse settlements along the waterways from the upper Volga to the Kljazma and Oka illustrates how the Oriental trade of the Scandinavians resulted in the colonisation of the territories close to the most important centres of the Volga Bulgars and the Khazars. Contacts with the latter were maintained along the Oka, the main route leading to the Don.<sup>52</sup> Even in the Oka area there are some Norse finds of significance, for example those from a fort at Supruty, near the river Upa, a tributary of the Oka, where a hoard of various items contained a snaffle-bit with rich animal

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<sup>48</sup> Spitsyn 1905b.

<sup>49</sup> Lapshin & Mukhina 1988; Arbman 1940, Taf. 95:5.

<sup>50</sup> Lapshin 1981:46.

<sup>51</sup> Lapshin 1989:68, fig. 2:1.

<sup>52</sup> Petrukhin 1993:119.

decoration made on Gotland (Fig. 58).<sup>53</sup> The hoard was in a container, a copper vessel identical with the one that was used as an urn in the Skopintull mound, a big barrow at the royal site of Adelsö near Birka.<sup>54</sup>

Although our knowledge of the Viking Age Norse settlements between the upper Volga and Oka is defective, the number of the sites and the variety of material culture is such that we can establish fairly certainly that in this territory had lived a large Scandinavian population, perhaps the largest in Eastern Europe.

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<sup>53</sup> Egorov 1996:74, No 599.

<sup>54</sup> Rydh 1936, fig. 297.



## CHAPTER SIX

### TOWARDS THE RUS STATE

#### 1. *The Rus in the South*

The German chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg wrote in his *Chronicon* (chapter 32) about the Kiev of year 1018 as the capital of the Rus kingdom, a great town with 400 churches and 8 markets. Only a half-century earlier this illustrious town had merely been a focal point for the political group of Norsemen that was extending their power from the Finno-Ugric north to the Slav south. During the tenth century Kiev developed step by step to become the main town on the Middle Dnieper, neighbouring the dangerous nomad world of the steppes. It was now a centre of the new, powerful state, known in historiography as Kievan Rus.

The *Primary Chronicle* gives the story of the emergence of this state. This text demonstrates all the traits of compilation where various elements are put together in order to create a coherent narrative and to reach concrete goals: to give an explanation how the Rurikids came to power in the lands of the Slavs, why the dynasty was the only legitimate one and why all the princes should terminate their internal fights and rule in peace and brotherly love. The chronicler was manipulating his sources in the usual way: information that was not compatible was left aside, while the elements that should be there but did not exist, were invented. The writer had access to the stories about the past of the ruling dynasty, even to copies of some old official documents, such as treaties with the Greeks, but apparently not to any earlier local chronicles. That one such chronicle was written until the late 980s at the church of St Elias in Kiev<sup>1</sup> has to remain an unproved speculation. If any early local annals existed, and the compiler had access to them, his coverage of the tenth century would have been much more detailed than the account he offers. How much of the narrative material used in the *Primary*

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<sup>1</sup> Lowmianski 1973:124.

*Chronicle* belonged to the category of “oral tradition”, i.e. non-written but preserved knowledge about the past, is very difficult to tell. When information is not found in other written sources we often used to try to explain its uniqueness by referring to oral tradition that had survived in the milieu about which the chronicler was writing. What kind of historical memory survived among the Rurikids of the late eleventh century? Many attempts to isolate pieces of such memory by evaluating the text of the Primary Chronicle have been made but their ambiguity and arbitrary character is evident.

It is apparent that the author of the Chronicle knew very little about the period he was writing about. He presents only a few concrete facts about the early rulers of the Rus operating in the Dnieper valley. For the first four decades of the tenth century, to 941, the year when Prince Igor with a huge army went against Constantinople, there is not a single piece of information about events concerning the Rus; most of the years were left empty—glaring proof of the chronicler’s lack of knowledge. Also what he offers for later times is impaired by many inconsistencies showing clearly that the stories, if not totally invented, were artificially gathered in order to create a coherent entity.<sup>2</sup>

In an effort to give a firm place for the Rurikids on the Middle Dnieper it was necessary for the compiler to make Kiev into their most important and exceptional site equipped with a suitable early history. The chronicler did this by inventing the *origo regni* of the people living here, known as the Poliane. He employed a legend that belonged to traditional European mythological explanations of the beginnings of communities.<sup>3</sup> Kiev was depicted as a place where the first native, i.e. Slav dynasty of the local tribe of Poliane founded its centre.<sup>4</sup> We hear about three brothers, Kii, Shchek, Khoriv, and their sister Lybed, a family that built a fort-town on the hills of Kiev. In the beginning they consolidated separate large groups of families—*svoi rody*—living isolated *sine rege et lege*, and created a new community with a centre that received its name after Kii, the oldest of brothers. The chronicler was acquainted with another story about a ferryman Kii that presented him without brothers and sister. The story was refuted as not compatible with Kii’s status as a hero that

<sup>2</sup> Likhachev 1970.

<sup>3</sup> Reynolds 1983:375ff; Banaszkiewicz 1998:7ff, 45ff.

<sup>4</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:54f.

was able to pay a visit to imperial Byzantium. By providing Kii with siblings the main narrative could be anchored in the local topographical context. The three brothers, it was explained, lived on the hills close to the Dnieper where they built a city. The names of two brothers were taken by the chronicler from the names of the hills: Shchek from *Shchekavitsa* and Khoriv from *Khorivitsa*—the latter was in fact the name of a Biblical mountain Khoreb in the Sinai, one of the toponyms in Kiev that perhaps was recollecting a Khazarian presence; the sister's name was that of a tributary of the Dnieper.<sup>5</sup>

The narrative concerning the further stages that followed after the dynasty of Kii moves next to the case of the two Scandinavians, Askold and Dir, and to the arrival of Oleg. As was previously said (chapter II:2.1) the case of these two Norse rulers is an odd episode. It is not known where the chronicler found their names, and who those men, if they ever existed, really were. The story in the Chronicle—their arrival together with Rurik, the expedition to the south and establishing of their rule at Kiev, their military activities and finally dramatic death—has all the traits of literary fiction. The chronicler has tried to present a logical narrative of Oleg's taking over of Kiev by turning Askold and Dir into chieftains subordinate to Rurik. By stressing their non-princely pedigree their legitimacy as rulers was removed, leaving them only with the status of members of a retinue. That the chronicler was striving to show their dependent position is clearly seen in his claim that they had to ask Rurik for permission to go to Byzantium. It is apparent that the annalist was trying to create an impression that these rulers of Kiev had belonged to Rurik's structure of power. By this trick he could legitimise the brutality of Oleg's actions—he killed them—and was, in a way, also giving sense of continuity of power for the Rurikids of the eleventh and twelfth centuries.

It has always been difficult to find the historical realities behind the story of Askold and Dir because they were mentioned only in the *Primary Chronicle*. Information about the realm of Dir in al Masudi's "The Golden Meadows" from the late 940s is far from clear. The author lists three powerful kingdoms of the *saqaliba*: ad-Dir, al-Firag and Turk, the second is probably that of Prague, i.e. the Czech

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<sup>5</sup> Melnikova 1996a:101; Petrukhin 1998:108.

realm, while the third is Hungarian.<sup>6</sup> It is usually taken for granted that the realm of ar-Dir was that of Kiev, and that the name (which it should be said was recorded in differing variants), referred to the Dir of the *Primary Chronicle*. He would be, it was thought, the one that was ruling after Askold at the end of the ninth century but there are some attempts to see him as far earlier ruler, in fact the chakanus of the Rhos from *Annales Bertiniani* himself.<sup>7</sup>

Despite all doubts, it is possible that these two Scandinavians might have been historic persons. If their names had not been preserved in some way it would not have been necessary for the chronicler to invent them. There must have been in existence a story that gave the names of Askold and Dir to graves at two different places in Kiev that forced the annalist working two hundred years later to include these two men in his historical construction.

The story of the beginnings of the Kievan state given in the *Primary Chronicle*, which has always been the core of historiography, runs as follows: when Oleg became heir of the Rus realm after Rurik he started a period of expansion: the town of Smolensk was taken, then, after moving southward along the Dnieper Oleg, together with the child Igor, son of Rurik, reached Kiev, a centre of the Poliane, where he killed their rulers Askold and Dir, and established the main site of the Rurikid dynasty; in the next years Oleg attacked various Slav tribes and put a tribute on them; all this happened in the 880s.

The life of Oleg as a leader of the Rus now operating in the Middle Dnieper continued for about one decade of the tenth century. In 907 he organised a great assault on Constantinople, forced the Greeks to pay tribute and accept the Rus as partners in official contacts making it easy for Rus merchants to conduct trade in the capital. Five years later a treaty was concluded regulating all aspects of co-operation between the Greeks and Rus (the *Primary Chronicle*, s.a. 912; see also below). In late 912 Oleg dies in circumstances described in the chronicle in a way clearly demonstrating that the annalist knew nothing about the end of this ruler and was forced to employ a literary theme (concerning the poisonous bite of a viper that was concealed inside the skull of Oleg's dead horse).

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<sup>6</sup> Lowmianski 1973:182.

<sup>7</sup> Lebedev 1994:151.

Research has shown many times that the story of Oleg, his deeds and legendary death, was an artificial narrative made up by the compiler in order to give a coherent picture of the beginnings of the dynasty of the Rurikids in Kiev. Oleg was given the role of the creator of the Kievan state, and, eventually became also one of the most popular heroes of folk tales. Even some modern researchers have regarded his political actions as most significant: “Oleg’s establishment in Kiev was an important step on the road to building the state. The Russian north was united with the Russian south, and Kiev was declared the capital of the rising, already Old Russian State”.<sup>8</sup> The statement is characteristic of Russian-Ukrainian historiography, and directly misleading. The south was not Russian (meaning Rus) but Slav, only the north was “Russian”, and what was going on in the south was a process of the building by the non-Slav Rus of a new power structure among the Slavs.

Because of the artificial nature of the sources, the role of Oleg in this process is not known with any reliability.<sup>9</sup> What we can understand is only that the “Russification” of the Slav South was in the hands of the warrior-mercantile community of the Norse Rus, which by military means forced tributary obligations on different tribal units. These tributaries, the *pactios* of the Constantine Porphyrogenitus, were also feeding the Rus and by delivering goods, provided them with merchandise for trade with Byzantium. Constantine calls the chiefs of the Rus *archontai*, mentioning names of princes like Igor and Sviatoslav without naming their clan—they were Rus, and nothing else. It has been pointed out by some scholars that in other works apart from the *Primary Chronicle*, Rurik does not figure at all as the ancestor of the Rus princes.<sup>10</sup>

The choice of Oleg as the builder of the Old Russian State was closely connected with the prominent role historiography gave Kiev as a site of prime importance not only for the early Rus but also long before arriving of Oleg. It was thought that the region was the territory of the Slav tribe of Poliane, and Kiev had been their centre (see above). After giving explanation to their name: “because they lived in the fields” (*pole* means an open field in Slavonic languages),

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<sup>8</sup> Kotliar 1995:43.

<sup>9</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996:107.

<sup>10</sup> Likhachev 1970:174.

the compiler of the *Primary Chronicle*, s.a. 898, presents the Poliane as more civilised than any of the other East Slav tribes, which were people of lower culture, little more than beasts. Due to their high standing the Poliane were predisposed to host the rulers of the Rus. More than this: because of this they could become the Rus. Even with such excellent qualities, these Poliane were not destined to give their name to the territory, instead this honour was granted to the Rus, the Norse foreigners from the region of Ladoga-Ilmen.

The search for these important Poliane has almost been as intense as the search for the Rus and, as was the case with the latter, there has been a lot of speculation around the identification of this particular tribe. The Poliane were supposed to be settled in the territory around Kiev and down to the Kaniv, and in the north around the lower Desna River—the Chernigovshchina. Their presence there was secured by the archaeological culture of the eighth/ninth century characterised by common pottery.<sup>11</sup> This identification is hardly tenable. It is in fact far from clear how the archaeological remains from this region should be interpreted, as the material culture around Kiev is not distinctively different from the ones on the both sides of the Dnieper.<sup>12</sup>

Taken with the suspicions that the chronicler was inventing the characteristics of the tribes he mentions in his usual way, this fact has meant that the very existence of Poliane has sometimes been called in doubt. The name of this tribe is not recorded in the book of Constantine Porphyrogenitus, where some other, less important Slavonic tribes are reported. The emperor only knew of *Rhosia*, consisting of Rus who were closer to Byzantium, i.e. that of Kiev, and the Outer Rus, meaning the ones living further to the north along the Volkhov River. If the Poliane had existed and were of political significance, it has been argued, the Greeks would be the first to receive information about them. This statement, however, cannot be entirely correct. If the Poliane were a political community before the tenth century the chance that the Byzantines knew about it was minimal. What was going on in the woodlands north of the steppes was out of the Greeks' reach; they had a very diffuse idea about the Rus and where they were living in the 860s after their violent attack on

<sup>11</sup> Petrashenko 1994.

<sup>12</sup> Callmer 1981:35, 41.

Constantinople. The change occurred during the first decades of the tenth century when the Greeks became more closely involved in co-operation with the Rus. Now they knew where their partners were dwelling and how they made arrangements with Slav tribes with their own names: the Poliane were not among them. The only possibility to explain this strange situation is to assume that a political grouping of people with name Poliane existed until the end of the ninth century when the Rus arrived and after establishing their domination they dissolved the political order of the Poliane and by this erased its name. In the 940s, when the Greeks obtained current information about Rhosia, the Poliane as a political notion were already gone and in their place came the name of new political rulers, the Rus. Perhaps the statement s.a. 898 of the *Primary Chronicle*, that Poliane were now called Rus is a reflection of the past conditions. On other hand it can be one more artificial attempt of the compiler to find an explanation for the introduction of the name of Rus to the territories at Middle Dnieper.

In this context it may be of interest to refer to the situation in tenth century Poland where the dynasty of the Piasts founded a state, which first got the name Polonia around the year 1000. Before this date, such a denomination was not known, neither in the source listing tribes of the region in the middle ninth century—the so-called *Bavarian Geographer*—nor in any other document or chronicle. The name is not mentioned in *Dagome iudex*, an excerpt of an official document of 992 sent by Duke Mieszko I to Rome, in which the state of the Piasts was called “the realm of Gniezno”—*civitas schinesghe*.<sup>13</sup> The denominations Palani, Polanis and Polonia, appear for the first time in hagiographic writings from the last years of the tenth century.<sup>14</sup> That this name had belonged to one of the tribes living here from which the Piasts had originated, was an assumption generally accepted by scholars although it had no support in the sources. The name of the Polans was explained in the same way as the Russian chronicler had done for the Poliane at Dnieper—because they were living in the midst of fields. In the case of the *Primary Chronicle* there is obvious conflict between this statement and the repeated description of the places where Poliane were dwelling: “... among the

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<sup>13</sup> Kürbis 1962.

<sup>14</sup> Kurnatowska 2000:109.

hills . . . , as they lived in the hills and forests".<sup>15</sup> Once more we find traces of artificial constructions hiding a lack of information about the realities of the distant past. The similarity of names between the Polish Polans and the Kievan Poliane looks very suspicious: do we have here an attempt of the Russian chronicler to use the name of a state of western Slavs to make a point in his historical construction? He needed a name for the people among which the Rus settled and built their state, and there was also a need to make these people important by giving them not only superior qualities but also a well-established name.

How did the Rus establish themselves among the Slavs? First of all it should be stressed that the Rus had been organised as an effective political body since at least the early ninth century. The structure of this polity was hierarchical with the *chakanus* on the top, his closest companions were responsible for military and trading operations, the members of retinues belonged to the main ruler and others of lesser status. The ability of the Rus to handle power games was based on long experience. They were part of an intercontinental trading network, and operations in this network had taught them how to negotiate both with diplomacy and raw force. Being highly able warriors the members of the Rus represented a considerable force allowing them to keep local agrarian societies under control. So even if deals were a necessary precondition for the expansion the Rus, violence would always have been employed when needed.

One of the aspects of the establishment of the Rus among some of the Slav tribes was, according to the *Primary Chronicle*, the abolishing of the tributary duties of the latter to the Khazars. Putting tribute on the Slavs was an encroachment into the Khazarian sphere of interest and was, most probably the reason of halting the stream of Islamic silver to the west at the end of the ninth century.<sup>16</sup> The stream of dirhams started again in the early tenth century but this time from the Samanid territories and not through Khazaria but by the intermediary of the Volga Bulgars.

It has been a source of constant debate to what extent the Khazars had control over the Slavs and Kiev.<sup>17</sup> The main source used in the

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<sup>15</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:53, 58.

<sup>16</sup> Noonan 1985.

<sup>17</sup> Petrukhin 1995a.



disputes has been a Hebrew letter discovered in the 1890s in the *geniza*, a store of letters, documents and other manuscripts at the Ben Ezra synagogue in Cairo containing information about the community of Jewish Khazars in Kiev.<sup>18</sup> Golb and Pritsak have asserted that Kiev was under Khazars rule until the 930s, which contradicts the statement of the *Primary Chronicle* that Oleg took over this town in 882. The early dating of the letter has been contested but not the presence of the community.<sup>19</sup> Nothing in the letter says that the Khazar community was martial, a garrison put there to control the population. As we'll see below, another name for Kiev, Sambatas, had a clear affinity to the Khazars, confirming their presence in town.

Oleg, Igor and Olga are listed as the first rulers of the Rurikid dynasty on the Middle Dnieper, and it is on their persons that the *Chronicle* focuses its attention. If it were not for the excerpts from the treaties with the Greeks preserved, in blurred and contaminated state, in the *Primary Chronicle*, we would be completely ignorant of the extent of the ruling clan and would have the impression that those three persons were the sole actors. The treaties are however good evidence of the intensity of the enterprising spirit of the Rus, and also decisive evidence of the Norse pedigree of princes and members of the princely clan and their representatives who were despatched as envoys to Constantinople. In the treaty of 911 the list of names consists of fourteen envoys:<sup>20</sup>

We of the Rus nation: Karl, Ingjald, Farulf, Vermund, Hrollaf, Harold, Karni, Frithleif, Hroarr, Angantyr, Throand, Leithulf, Fast, and Steinvith, are sent by Oleg, Great Prince of Rus, and all the serene and great princes and the great boyars under his sway.

All the envoys mentioned had been chosen to represent the leader, Prince Oleg, and other princes and chieftains, whose names are not stated. The term "nation" employed by the translators is misleading, giving the impression that the envoys represented the whole population of *Rhosia*. The original word is *rod*, which refers to an extended family consisting of all kinsfolk.<sup>21</sup>

In 941 it was time again for a new expedition against Constantinople.

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<sup>18</sup> Golb & Pritsak 1982:60ff.

<sup>19</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996:96.

<sup>20</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:65f.

<sup>21</sup> Grekov 1955:84.

The attack surprised *Miklagard* without giving the Rus victory: they were unable to storm the walls and after the destruction of the suburbs and murdering a great amount of people, they ran away from the horrible flames of the Greek fire—the ultimate weapon of the Byzantines. According to Liudprand of Cremona, the fleet of the Rus consisted of about 1000 ships and was headed by a leader named Inger.<sup>22</sup> This expedition, and the name of its leader are intensely disputed because the testimony of another written source giving the background to the expedition of 941 offers a different name of the prince of Rus. The source is a Khazar letter from the Cairo *geniza*, written in the 960s and sent to Cordova in Spain, now known as the Cambridge document.<sup>23</sup> In this letter is told the story how emperor Romanos Lekapenos (920–944) requested the Rus prince HLGW (Helge?) to occupy the Khazarian city of *Smkrts* on the coast of the Black Sea; the Rus obeyed but were defeated by the Khazars who then forced them to make an assault on the Byzantine capital; the Rus once more obeyed and were repulsed with Greek fire; Helge did not return home but went to Persia where he died.<sup>24</sup> The similarity of names, Helge-Oleg and the Oleg of the *Primary Chronicle* confused scholars who for long could not decide what was wrong: was the letter a fake or was Oleg still alive in the 940s? Nowadays the letter is considered to be genuine and the *melek* is thought to be Helge, a Rurikid ruler not from Kiev but from another site, for example from Chernigov.<sup>25</sup>

After the catastrophic assault of 941 it took several years of diplomatic contacts until a new treaty was negotiated in 944. This time it was a much larger group of envoys that was dispatched to the Greeks, and even this time, almost all of them were of Norse origin:<sup>26</sup>

... Ivar, envoy of Igor, Great Prince of Rus, and the general envoys as follows: Vefast representing Sviatoslav, son of Igor; Isgaut for the Princess Olga; Slothi for Igor, nephew of Igor; Oleif for Vladislav; Kanitzar for Predslava; Sigbjorn for Svanhild, wife of Oleif; Freystein for Thorth; Leif for Arfast; Grim for Sverki; Freystein for Haakon, nephew of Igor; Hegri for Efling; Voist for Voik; Eistr for Amund;

<sup>22</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996:114.

<sup>23</sup> Dunlop 1954:162.

<sup>24</sup> Golb & Pritsak 1982:118f.

<sup>25</sup> Zuckerman 1995; Petrukhin 1997:68; Platonova 1998.

<sup>26</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:73.

Freystein for Bjorn; Yatving for Gunnar; Sigfrid for Halfdan; Kill for Klakki; Steggi for Jotun; Sverki; Hallvarth for Guthi; Frothi for Throand; Munthor for Ut; the merchants Authun, Authulf, Ingivald, Oleif, Frutan, Gamal, Kussi, Heming, Thorfrid, Thorstein, Bruni, Hroald, Gunnfast, Freystein, Ingjald, Thorbjorn, Manni, Hroald, Svein, Halfdan, Tirr, Askbrand, Visleif, Sveinki, Borich: sent by Igor, Great Prince of Rus, and from each prince and all the people of the land of Rus . . .

Through the treaty of 944 we gain much more information about the members of the Rurikid clan than from previous ones. Twenty-two persons belonged to the princely family; each of them sent one representative and one merchant. As it is rather improbable that some of the important members were not represented we may have here the complete list of people belonging to the clan. Together with less important members and other dependants the kernel of the Rus polity was not larger than two hundred people.<sup>27</sup>

More information about the clan of Rurikids is contained in Constantine Porphyrogenitus' second work *De ceremonis aulae byzantine*, where the Emperor made a record of people that followed Olga to Constantinople in 957. They were relatives of Olga, male and female, and representatives of other rulers of Rus. Constantine gives a scrupulous account how much money each person received as a gift: thirty gold coins for one closest relative to Olga, twenty gold coins each of six female *archontiss*, Olga's relatives and her eight male relatives, and finally twelve gold coins each of the twenty envoys representing other rulers.<sup>28</sup>

The names in the treaty of 944 were not exclusively of Norse origin but these names were in a majority. That the leading members of the clan were still using their Norse names is recorded by written sources: Olga appears at the imperial court as *Helga*, Igor when attacking Constantinople is recognised as *Inger*, and Oleg, one of the princes, is known as *Helgi*. Prince Igor had, as it is mentioned in the treaty, several nephews, two of them are mentioned—Igor and Haakan—all of them had Norse names. A change of the traditional ways of employing Scandinavian names was already there. For the first time we can see that the Slavicization of the names of high members of the clan was ongoing: the son of Prince Igor, born ca.

<sup>27</sup> Tolochko 2001:130.

<sup>28</sup> Platonova 1999:166.

940, received the name Sviatoslav, another prince was called Vladislav, and one of the female Rurikids was called Predslava. These names are most significant when seen in the context of an ancient custom within noble families to keep using names which had been traditional for a long time. The adoption of the local names must be a reflection of marriages between the Rus and Slavs. Even the use of the Slavonic language among the Rus became apparent at the very same time, a phenomenon that was observed by Arab writers.

The establishment of Rus power over the Slav populations included close co-operation. By collecting tributes, according to previously negotiated quotas, and storing them in *pogosts*, the Rus obtained goods for trade and a means for living, especially during the winter. There is a description of this system in chapter 9 of *De administrando imperio* edited by Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus.<sup>29</sup> The account refers to situation before 944, i.e. the year of the death of prince Igor:<sup>30</sup>

When the month of November begins, their chiefs together with all the Rhos at once leave Kiev and go off on the *poliudie*, which means "rounds", that is, to the Slavonic regions of the Vervians and Dregovichians and Krivichians and Severians and the rest of the Slavs who are tributaries of the Rhos. There they are maintained throughout the winter, but then once more, starting from the month of April, when the ice of the Dnieper melts, they come back to Kiev. They then pick up their single-strakers, as has been said above, and fit them out, and come down to Romania.

The account contains several important points. First of all it reveals that the Rus were understood as a social group consisting of leaders and "all the Rhos", certainly meaning nearest kinsfolk, dependants and retainers. The Greeks had become well informed about who were tributaries of the Rus, even the names of Slav peoples are produced. It is also interesting to see that Kiev was a place used as a focal point only during the spring and summer. It was there that preparations concerning trade, exchange, but originally even the organization of crafts and planning of raids were carried out. If at this period there were permanent settlements, like the estates of the princess and workshops, these were most probably maintained for

<sup>29</sup> Moravcsik 1949:57ff.

<sup>30</sup> Obolensky 1970:155.

half a year by small numbers of people. The resources within Kiev were not large enough to allow a large group of people (especially those who were accustomed to high consumption), to dwell there for a long time during the winter period. The Rus were forced to move from one place to another within territories that were under their domination and live on the food collected for them. The term *poliudie*, was a Slavic word that became a technical term for an institution that was most characteristic for the early Rus. The institution of rounds of the rulers and their retainers is known in Slav countries, for example Poland, as *stan*, in Scandinavia as *veizla*, or Swedish *gästning*.<sup>31</sup> The writer of the *Primary Chronicle* reports that Princess Olga created a system of *pogosts*, places that collected tributes, and most possible even food for the *poljudie*, were stored.<sup>32</sup> According to E.A. Melnikova the system of tributes was taken over from the Khazars already during Oleg's time in the late ninth century, what Olga had done was introducing of changes in this system.<sup>33</sup>

The rounds were also a way of controlling of tributary people and reinforcing their subjugated status. At the same time they permitted an acculturation that was of decisive importance for future political structures of the region. The perpetual contacts through the rounds created a network of personal bonds with the upper level of Slav societies and made it possible for the Rus to establish their rule on a solid basis. Through this acculturation the Rus, and even the Slavs, acquired a new identity manifested in the creation of the Rus state.

The manner of operation of the Rurikids in the middle Dnieper after 945 (the year of the killing of Prince Igor) is demonstrated by the activities of his widow Princess Olga. She put an end to an uprising among the Derevlans, built the *pogost* structure that normalised the taking of tribute and in the mid 950s was ready to take a step that could raise the status of the Rus in their contacts with Byzantium. A grand embassy was sent to Constantinople to talk trade and, above all, to make Olga Christian. Her baptism was arranged by the imperial hosts, she received the name of Helena, was given rich gifts from her godfather emperor, but that was all. The more concrete benefits she had expected failed to be realised. For the Greeks,

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<sup>31</sup> Lowmianski 1970:144f; Odén et al. 1961.

<sup>32</sup> Petrukhin 1993:75.

<sup>33</sup> Melnikova 1996a:66.

the Rus had been Christians since the mission of 867, and even if they were happy to baptise the exotic Helga they saw the act itself to be of secondary importance not even worthy of recording—it is not mentioned by Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his *De ceremoniis*, where her visit is otherwise well accounted for. The Rus were of some importance, not only as merchants supplying slaves, wax and honey, and as gallant warriors but most of all as a latent threat, a military force that from time to time could make things difficult for Constantinople with their raids. Still, the Rus and their Rhosia were too distant, too underdeveloped to force Byzantium to show a more keen interest in them. Olga understood that her baptism was hardly a success and in an attempt to exercise pressure on Constantinople she asked for a mission from Ottonian Germany. In 959 Bishop Adalbert was sent to Kiev but it was clear from the beginning that the whole enterprise was a mistake and that Olga had something else on her mind than the spreading of Christianity, and the Germans went back home.<sup>34</sup>

Sviatoslav, the son of Olga and Igor, was the man to demonstrate that even if the Rus were still unsophisticated they were already powerful enough to be worthy of note. It was he who had launched campaigns against the Volga Bulgars (964), the Khazars (965), and sent large expeditions to the Danube region (between 968–971), where he was fighting the Danubian Bulgars and Byzantines.<sup>35</sup> The Balkan wars had opened for him a new world of riches and political might, and he decided that the Rus should leave the provincial Middle Dnieper and migrate to the delta of the Danube, where they would have their centre. If he had not been killed in 972 it is possible that the history of Eastern Europe would have been somewhat different. Sviatoslav was the first Rus ruler that mentally and culturally was shaped by the way of life of a nomad warrior. Born an expansionist, a conqueror, he acted like a smaller version of Attila the Hun. Leo Diaconus saw him 971 on the Danube.<sup>36</sup>

Sviatoslav crossed the river in a kind of Scythian boat; he handled the oar in the same way as his men. His appearance was as follows: he was of medium height—neither tall, nor too short. He had bushy

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<sup>34</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996:137.

<sup>35</sup> Petrukhin 1993:77f.

<sup>36</sup> Jones 1984:261f.

brows, blue eyes, and was snub-nosed; he shaved his beard but wore a long and bushy moustache. His head was shaven except for a lock of hair on one side as a sign of the nobility of his clan. His neck was thick, his shoulders broad, and his whole stature pretty fine. He seemed gloomy and savage. On one of his ears hung a golden earring adorned with two pearls and a ruby set between them. His white garments were not distinguishable from those of his men except for cleanness.

Sviatoslav had intended that the middle Dnieper would cease to be the centre of the Rus state, but the death of this nomadic Rurikid gave the opportunity for another princely Rus to build here a state. The man responsible for this was Vladimir, one of Sviatoslav's sons. According to the *Primary Chronicle*, his mother Malusha was a housekeeper of Olga, her brother Dobrynia was a man of some standing who had taken care of the young Vladimir. In the mid 970s, Vladimir was sent by his half-brother Jaropolk the ruler of Kiev to be a prince in Novgorod. The years spent in northern Rus opened for Vladimir contacts with Scandinavia and when Jaropolk had killed his other brothers and became dangerous even for Vladimir, he escaped "beyond the sea", to Scandinavia, where he stayed for three years. Where he stayed and what he was doing is unknown. If he visited Svear, which is more than likely, he could have seen how King Erik, the king of Uppsala, after the death of his brother Olof, the king of Adelsö was taking over the trading town of Birka and by withdrawing his protection caused its collapse.<sup>37</sup> When in Scandinavia Vladimir must have been to Birka, the place that for more than a century had played a focal role in the trading activities with the East, and where since the mid tenth century among the military men who were stationed there were Norse warriors from Russia. Vladimir's long sojourn in the North was in one respect of importance to him as a future leader of the Rus: he came in touch with the mighty chieftains that were interested in well-paid work as mercenaries. A deal was made and in 980 Vladimir came back to Novgorod with troops of Norse warriors, and with their help eventually established himself in Kiev. That is how the Varangian period in Rus history began. Since the late tenth century the military units of Scandinavian warriors who were called *Varangians* in the east, were hired by Rus princes; they could carry out their duties and leave, or stay perma-

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<sup>37</sup> Duczko 2000a:30.

nently in retinues. This, and later on the dynastic marriages with royal Norse women, were the basis of contacts between the “Russian” east and Scandinavia. But that is a different story and is not the subject of these studies.

Vladimir ruled for 34 years and when he died 1015 he left the foundations of the Russian State, with Orthodox Christianity as its religion, culture and mentality, and with the city of Kiev as its centre, around which there were several independent principalities ruled by already Slavic Rurikids.

## 1.2 *Kiev—the centre of the new Rus*

The *Primary Chronicle* reports s.a. 882, that Oleg after killing Askold and Dir, “set himself up as prince in Kiev, and declared that it should be the mother of Russian cities”.<sup>38</sup> That’s how the chronicler from the early twelfth century saw the dawn of the glory of Kiev, the metropolis of the Eastern Slavs, the *kænugardr* of the Icelanders.<sup>39</sup> What the Norsemen meant by *kænu-* remains unclear: was it just their own version of word *Kii*?<sup>40</sup> The linguistic analysis tells us only that Kiev “. . . is a composite noun, in which the underlying etymon is ‘Kii’, followed by a possessive or genitive -ev/ov; . . . it is a short form for ‘Kiev gorod’, i.e. city of Kii, that is, a settlement populated, owned, or founded by a man or people of that name; [. . .] Kiev is grammatically a genitive form originally modifying the noun ‘gorod’, which has been dropped in the course of time”.<sup>41</sup>

If the Kii was a personal name what was the meaning of name Sambatas, the parallel name of Kiev mentioned by Emperor Constantine in *De administrando*?<sup>42</sup> Vilhelm Thomsen and Nils Höjer were certain that this word was of Norse origin: *Sandbakka-ás*—sand-hills, or *Sambátar*—a harbour for boats.<sup>43</sup> Since the time of these explanations, the name has been the subject of long dispute that has revolved around the idea that behind it were Jewish Khazars and that it was connected with either the Sabbath or the Sambation, a

<sup>38</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:61.

<sup>39</sup> Melnikova 1986a:210f.

<sup>40</sup> Melnikova 1986a:210.

<sup>41</sup> Boba 1967:52.

<sup>42</sup> Moravcsik 1949:57.

<sup>43</sup> Höjer 1883:337.



river from Jewish legends.<sup>44</sup> The role of the Khazars in this case was also stressed by another explanation that distanced itself from Hebrew words and instead referred to the Turkish words *sam* and *bat*, meaning high and strong; these words constituted the name Sambats that was left by Khazar community that evidently existed in tenth-century Kiev and is well attested by the Hebrew letter from the Cairo *geniza*.<sup>45</sup> The correctness of those two Khazar-based explanations will certainly be disputed even in the future, not only by expert linguists but also by historians for whom the Khazars and their impact on the Rus is still a current problem. I would add to this issue another facet by pointing to the fact that in Old High German, the seventh day of the week, Sunday, was called *sambatstag*.<sup>46</sup> If this fact is of significance or not it is not easy to say, but it is certainly worth remembering in future discussions.

We can leave the names aside and ask if Sambatas was the name of the whole town of Kiev or only part of it? It is sometimes maintained that the name was attached only to the *Lysaja gora*, a hill in the north part of the city, where a fort and several cemeteries with some Norse graves of the tenth century were situated.<sup>47</sup>

We have already mentioned Kii, and we also know why the city was founded in this place. The reason was the extraordinary natural conditions of the site (Fig. 59). On the right bank of the Dnieper there is a plateau 15 km long and 3–4 km wide divided into several hills, up to 90 m high, separated from each other by ravines with brooks and streams running through them.<sup>48</sup> This attractive area, with fertile soil, woods and easily defended places, was situated in the border area between steppe and forest zone. It was also a suitable place to cross the Dnieper: the story of Kii as a ferryman was not on this point a fantasy.

During the first millennium A.D. people of various cultures stayed here for a shorter or longer sojourn. Intense Slav settlement in the area in the early Viking age gave the settlement a more permanent character. The archaeological evidence is fairly rich but very fragmentary, which gives only a general picture of the early phases of

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<sup>44</sup> Zotsenko 1994:126f; Petrukhin 2001:117.

<sup>45</sup> Franklin & Shepard 1996:95.

<sup>46</sup> Green 2000:252.

<sup>47</sup> Lebedev 1985:239f.

<sup>48</sup> Callmer 1981:30.

inhabitation of Kiev. The process of development of settlements and, most of all their expansion, may be observed in finds starting from around 900. At about this time at least three of the hills were fortified, houses were built on their tops and slopes; the low plain by the shore of Dnieper, called Podol, was settled by craftsmen and people engaged in various ways with water traffic.

Amongst the hills it was the *Starokievskaiia gora* (Old Kiev hill) that was chosen for the location of the most important site during the later part of the Viking Age. To the northwest of the hill, on the *Andreievskaiia gora*, was an area of about 2 hectares enclosed by a semi-circular ditch (moat and rampart?). The fortification indicated a space with special purpose. It was here that remains of what was interpreted as pagan sanctuary with a stone platform for sacrifices was discovered.<sup>49</sup> The dating of the ditch and the “sanctuary” are far from secure and used to vary between the eighth and tenth century. It was often assumed that during the tenth century the elite of the Rus had here its central place with houses and burial grounds. Archaeologically, only the latter were attested by numerous finds.

The *Starokievskaiia* hill gained an exceptional status after the 980s when Prince Vladimir had raised here the magnificent Tithe Church surrounded by stone palaces, the centre of his town, the “town of Vladimir”. Several cemeteries with cremation and inhumation graves covered by barrows occupied various portions of the hill until the mid-19th century but since then hundreds of graves have been destroyed leaving very incomplete accounts about their contents and their contexts.<sup>50</sup> The most characteristic burials of Kiev were high status graves (inhumations in chambers) found under and around the Tithe Church. The burials investigated here were only a fraction of the original number: many vanished during the building activities of the 980s and subsequent periods. Another concentration of high status graves was outside of the “town of Vladimir”, on the site where prince Jaroslav would later build the glory of Kievan churches—St. Sophia; even here the number of surviving burials is very restricted. Some of those barrows here were large mounds but all of them were destroyed.

Keeping these facts in mind, we will understand that our picture

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<sup>49</sup> Borovskii 1992:49ff.

<sup>50</sup> Karger 1958:134ff; Zotsenko 2002:27f.

of the Norse culture of tenth-century Kiev cannot be complete. The objects of Norse provenience that have surfaced in Kiev came from high status burials of the Rus elite and from hoards; they are not present, as far as we can see, in the cremation-graves, and only to some extent in the graves of lower layers of society. Chronologically the graves with Norse items belonged to the short period between c. 950 and c. 990. Earlier objects, neither from a time which would be contemporary with the Chronicler's Askold and Dir (the second part of the ninth century), nor from the period of the reigns of Oleg and Igor (end of ninth and beginning of tenth centuries), have not been recognised in the archaeological material with certainty.

When compared with the wealth and variety of forms represented by finds from Gnëzdovo, the number of Norse items from Kiev is hardly overwhelming. In fact their number is so low that if our picture of the presence of the Rus in Kiev were based only on the finds from preserved burials there would be no reason to maintain that people of Norse origin had played a decisive political role in the history of this place.

Inhumations, either in coffins or in chamber-graves show the same variation as at Gnëzdovo and in the Jaroslavlic kurgans: a single man, a man with horse, man with woman, and single woman. The inventories of the Kievan graves are reminiscent in many cases of those from the mentioned sites but at the same time show some different features: a few standard Norse ornaments and the lack of many others, the more pronounced presence of influences from nomadic culture and even some Slav elements, mostly ceramics and temple-rings.

One particular Kievan feature characteristic of the warrior graves was the custom of putting into the chamber quivers containing many arrows, sometimes between 20–50 pieces. One example is grave No 105 in which a man was buried with a Norse sword and spear, a bow and a quiver with 50 arrows, some with Norse-type heads.<sup>51</sup> The placing of such large numbers of arrows into the grave is a unique custom both for contemporary nomads and in Scandinavia, where it appears only in chamber-graves in Birka and boat-graves at the cemeteries at Valsgårde and Vendel.<sup>52</sup> If a quiver with many arrows is found in a grave outside Uppland it must be seen as evi-

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<sup>51</sup> Karger 1958:167.

<sup>52</sup> Lindbom 1997.

dence of presence of a Svea warrior, as is the case with a quiver with 45 arrows in a boat-grave at Ladby on island of Fyn in Denmark.<sup>53</sup>

Even burials containing horses connect Kiev with Birka, with one significant difference: the horses in chamber-graves at Birka were always placed on a platform at the foot-end of a grave, never, as in Kiev, alongside the deceased, i.e. in traditional nomad manner. One such grave with a horse is No 108, in which is a mixture of nomad and Norse objects.<sup>54</sup> The dead man was covered by a hide with silver-sheet ornaments; he had with him a sword with silver-sheet handle decorated in Hungarian style, an eastern axe, a large knife with bone handle decorated with flowers (does not survive), a silver ringed pin with the ring embellished with unique decoration,<sup>55</sup> ten gaming-pieces of glass (some blue-green with black threads) and dice of bone, 40 Islamic coins (only 6 known, 4 are Nasr ibn Akhmed from the first part of the tenth century); by the horse were found a pair of stirrups and a bridle (do not survive).

The most apparent Norse element of the inventory is a set of glass gaming pieces of a type frequent in the chamber graves of Birka. As a good example may serve Bj 644, where they were found together with several item of typical Kievan mix: a nomadic axe, a Hungarian bag, a silver cone-mount covered by granulation, and a Finno-Ugrian fire steel.<sup>56</sup>

The long pin from grave No 108 is of Norse type and has a ring with Scandinavian decoration—three heads of a bird (?) among the interlace and small animal heads (Fig. 60). The most unusual part is the ring that has nothing to do with the rings on regular Norse pins. The only analogy is a ring-brooch of bronze with three large heads turned inside the ring found in a grave No 54, in Skukovshina in the region of St. Petersburg.<sup>57</sup> Once more we are faced with a product of a Norse artisan, probably active in Kiev, and manufacturing ornaments for the Rus.

The other products of these artisans will be presented below.

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<sup>53</sup> Thordvilsen 1957:82.

<sup>54</sup> Karger 1958:169.

<sup>55</sup> Karger 1958, Tab. XV.

<sup>56</sup> Arbman 1943:221, Abb. 188.

<sup>57</sup> Egorov 1996:41, No 42.

Among them is yet another pin for a man's cloak found in a chamber-grave No 112 near the Tithe Church.<sup>58</sup> This grave, which contained a couple and the head of a horse, was partly plundered: the weapons of the man were removed and the only object belonged to him remaining in the grave was a pin. The inventory given to the woman remained intact: she still had her necklace with beads and eight dirham-pendants (seven Samanids, the youngest 922/23); three silver earrings of Moravian type; a little key of bronze, and a finger-ring of silver sheet with wave-like decoration. The latter item is the only female ornament with Norse affinities: it is a copy of Scandinavian arm-rings, probably those used on Gotland.<sup>59</sup> A similar specimen was found in a grave of the later Jaroslav town near to the Golden Gate.<sup>60</sup> As the finger-rings in Scandinavia did not have this kind of decoration we should see the rings from Kiev as local forms.

The fact that the women in this grave had only one Norse object is a characteristic feature for all female graves that are known from the *Starokievskaja gora*. Another example is grave No 122, also near the Tithe Church.<sup>61</sup> The woman was buried in a coffin and had with her a necklace of beads, a pendant made of a gilt silver imitation of a gold coin of Basil I & Constantine (869–879), and a gilt silver brooch with filigree animal decoration (see below 1.2.1).

Besides these few specimens of Norse metal art in the graves there have also survived a few examples of items made of bone and horn of Scandinavian form and decoration. Two pieces of bone objects looking like a large animal fang with a terminal in the form of an animal head were found in two graves, No 24, 25; the analogies to these artefacts of unknown function are in burial material from Birka (Fig. 61 a).<sup>62</sup>

A very special burial from the area under the Tithe Church was an inhumation grave, No 110, of a child in a chamber.<sup>63</sup> The inventory the boy was given was rich: two dirham pendants (911/12), on one was a graffito of a cross, on his breast was placed a silver mount in the form of a cross, at his foot stood two small wooden buckets

<sup>58</sup> Karger 1958:178ff, Tab. XXII.

<sup>59</sup> Stenberger 1947, Abb. 126–128, 142.

<sup>60</sup> Borovskii & Arkhinova 1993:207.

<sup>61</sup> Karger 1958:205f, Tab. XXVI:2.

<sup>62</sup> Karger 1958:144, Tab. VI:3; VII:5; Arbman 1940, Taf. 154:1.

<sup>63</sup> Karger 1958:174ff, Tab. XVI; XVII.

and three pottery vessels, near them was a spoon of bone with interlace decoration on the handle (Fig. 61 b), a fragment of comb, a whistle, miniature axe, two small whetstones, two silver buttons, part of small balance; three animal fangs, a lot of shells and 175 astragali. Some of the objects, even if they are not decorated with typical Norse decoration, reflect Scandinavian elements of the mortuary custom; the only object manifestly Norse is the spoon with an interlace motif. The variety of inventory, and the numerous parts of animals, would indicate that the boy was still a pagan, but the cross-mount and the equal-armed cross with rounded ends scratched on a coin, are enough strong indicators of his Christianity.

The same can be said about a woman in the coffin in grave No 14 under the Tithe Church.<sup>64</sup> She had a necklace with plenty of beads, one dirham of Ismail ibn Akhmed (892–907), and three silver crosses. These crosses are of the same type as the ones found in the female graves in another cemetery, outside the *Starokievskaja* centre, in the northern part of the complex.

This other part of the Kievan complex was situated on and around the *Lysaja gora* (the Bald hill), where during the tenth century the Rurikids had one of their important sites in the area. The hill, provided with a natural defence by its steep slopes, needed artificial fortification only in one place; on the hill-top was a building made of bricks and stones, probably a princely palace; on the site was found a hoard with silver coins deposited after the 930s among which were some specimens with runes.<sup>65</sup> The settlement and several cemeteries followed the slopes down to the Pochaina creek where, according to the *Primary Chronicle* s.a. 955, Princess Olga had her residence. Most probably, it was here that the earliest of Kievan churches, St. Elias, was located.<sup>66</sup>

In the fairly large burial grounds consisting of hundreds of barrows were found some rich graves with Norse items. It was only in this cemetery that oval brooches appear in Kievan graves; they were found in two assemblages: Nos 124 and 125. In the former was also a round silver brooch with filigree decoration, a necklace with nineteen beads, one of silver with crosses of granulation, a little gold ring of

<sup>64</sup> Karger 1958:142f, Tab. V:2.

<sup>65</sup> Karger 1958:120f; Melnikova 2001:136f; Zotsenko 2002:48.

<sup>66</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:238.

filigree wire with twisted ends, and one cross of bronze, a pair of earrings and two Byzantine silver coins (931–944); in the latter grave were earrings of silver and gold wire with beads, a necklace with beads and one Abbasid dirham (759–760), two silver cross-pendants and a whetstone pendant of Birka type (Fig. 62).<sup>67</sup>

Among the burials around the *Lysaja gora* were many graves of men with weapons. One of them was No 116,<sup>68</sup> which contained a Norse sword and a gilt ringed brooch of a type known in middle Sweden and Gotland, from where came the closest Norse analogies (Fig. 63 a).<sup>69</sup> A practically identical parallel to this ring-pin was found on the banks of the Volga, at Krasnaja Reka (Fig. 63 b).<sup>70</sup> The ring-chain ornament on the ring is unknown on Scandinavian pins, which may indicate that these two Russian examples were local products.

As was case with men buried with weapons on the *Starokievskaja gora*, even here the majority of weapons were of nomad type; only some of the armour, usually sword and spear, originated from Scandinavia. An example illustrating this is grave No 117.<sup>71</sup> In the chamber a man was buried with ring-mail, sword, helmet, pair of stirrups, eight arrows, a buckle of bronze with silver decoration, a spear, an axe; next to the body of the man was placed his horse.

There are even graves of men buried with woman, like the one in chamber No 114<sup>72</sup> where the man was provided with the sword and quiver with 20 arrows and a woman who had nothing with her. Once more we can observe the characteristic feature of warrior burials in Kiev—the presence of large number of arrows (a feature which, as we have already pointed out, was typical only for warrior burials in chamber-graves in Birka in Scandinavia). It is difficult to tell whether we have here traces of the direct contact of the Rus of Kiev with the warrior elite of Svear, or whether this was just an independently developed part of the mortuary custom.

Many mounds in Kiev had large dimensions but most of them have been destroyed leaving only memory of their existence. Big mounds were also raised in the cemeteries close to the *Lysaja gora*.

<sup>67</sup> Karger 1958:208ff; Tab. XXVIII; 210f, Tab. XXIX.

<sup>68</sup> Karger 1958:189f.

<sup>69</sup> Lehtosalo-Hilander 1982:109f; Thunmark-Nylén 1998, Taf. 116:2,3.

<sup>70</sup> Stalsberg 2002.

<sup>71</sup> Karger 1958:190.

<sup>72</sup> Karger 1958:185ff.

One of them, No 118 at Verkhna Jurkovitsa, was examined and documented.<sup>73</sup> This mound was 2 m in height and 40 m in diameter, and covered a chamber with a wooden roof, sealing a grave that possible was of at least three persons; the burial was partly plundered. The surviving remains tell us that at least one man was a warrior with iron spurs of Norse type;<sup>74</sup> he had a Finno-Ugrian fire-steel from the Kama river area; a vessel of glass; and two Norse artefacts—a plate made of elk antler decorated with an animal head, and a wooden bowl with silver mount and a handle. The plate can be compared with Norwegian and Swedish plates for ironing that were usually decorated with two animal heads.<sup>75</sup>

The presence of cross-pendants—equal-armed with rounded ends—in Kievan burials is one of the features connecting them with the graves in Gnëzdovo, Timerëvo and finds in Scandinavia; the design of these pendants was inspired by the crosses produced in Insular, mainly English, art.<sup>76</sup> It should be stressed that these crosses, to which should be also added a group of crosses of Latin type, were the only crosses in graves from Russian sites of the middle and second part of the tenth century. This domination is rather surprising in light of the close contacts of the Rus with the Orthodox Christianity of Byzantium. The employment of Western crosses by the Rus shows once more that before the conversion of Vladimir it was important for some people attached to the Rurikids to be part of the trends of current Norse culture. The bonds with Scandinavia were entertained through direct contacts with people, like those buried in Birka with crosses identical with the specimens from Kiev; these people belonged to families the members of which were spread throughout Eastern Europe.

As was observed on other sites, even in Kiev we can see that the Rus were buried with a selection of items, among which only a portion belonged to Norse culture. If we keep only to the most obvious Norse artefacts as a criterion for identity, it would be easy to restrict the Norse element among the Rus on the Kievan hills to few persons. This would be definitely the wrong way to go.

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<sup>73</sup> Karger 1958:191ff.

<sup>74</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 38:3–5.

<sup>75</sup> Arbman 1940, Taf. 152.

<sup>76</sup> Staecker 1999:91ff.



### 1.2.1 Exclusive Norse jewellery art in Kiev

The number of Norse metal ornaments in Kievan burials is very low. The standard types of oval brooches appeared only in two graves in the cemetery near the Lysaja Gora, while three pieces have been found (unstratified) in the central part of Kiev, on Starokievskaja Gora.<sup>77</sup> No circular and equal-armed brooches, or any pendants cast in bronze were uncovered in Kiev, which makes this site unique among the Russian sites with Norse populations. Even male ornaments are here extremely few: two specimens of two types of ringed pins.

One of these pins, from grave No 112, is of penannular type, made of silver, with three knobs embellished with interlace and circular gold sheets with filigree decoration (Fig. 64). Pins of this type were produced in Denmark and Norway as Norse copies of Insular brooches.<sup>78</sup> Some of these copies were real masterpieces of jewellery art, for example the specimen from Möllerlöken, Odense, Fyn, or knobs in a hoard from Eketorp, Närke, Sweden.<sup>79</sup> Less masterly executed pieces are also known, such as pins from Norway.<sup>80</sup> Three pieces from eastern Europe belong to this Norwegian group: one from a hoard found in Demshina, region of Pskov, one from a cremation-grave of a warrior at Gorodilov near River Berezina in Belarus, and finally our specimen from Kiev.<sup>81</sup> The latter exhibits some differences—the knobs are more elongated, the circular sheets are much larger, the decoration is a variant of the four-volute motif that does not appear on original Scandinavian pieces—allowing the assumption that this piece was produced locally in Kiev. In the remains of the jewellery workshops in Kiev, no traces of manufacturing ornaments with filigree were uncovered. There is, however, one item found not far from the town at the gorodishche at *Knjazha gora*, showing that Kievan jewellers were involved in such production. The item is a bronze die with a four-volutes motif; this is an instrument for producing the sheet part of circular brooches of Terslev-type (Fig. 65 a).<sup>82</sup> Dies of this kind are known from Denmark, but all of them have a cross in the middle, not a half-spherical pro-

<sup>77</sup> Karger 1958, Tab. XXX.

<sup>78</sup> Graham-Campbell 1987; Holmqvist 1960.

<sup>79</sup> Skovmand 1942:85f; Ekelund 1956, fig. 5, 10.

<sup>80</sup> Holmqvist 1960, fig. 1–4.

<sup>81</sup> Korzukhina 1954:99, Tab. 25:1; Stenberger 1959:196f.

<sup>82</sup> Khanenko 1902, Pl. XIV.

trusion as on the specimen from Kiev.<sup>83</sup> The die from *Knjazha gora* attests Rus production of exclusive jewellery of the type created by Danish goldsmiths working for king Harald Gormsen Bluetooth, c. 956–986.<sup>84</sup> This jewellery had high social value and was used as a status symbol by elites around the Baltic Sea. Local imitations of this art appeared on various sites from England (York) to Sweden (Sigtuna) and, as we can see now, even in Kiev.

But the members of the Rus elite even had access to original Danish jewellery. This is demonstrated by a find at the Mikhailovski monastery, of a set of seven identical silver cross-pendants with their surface covered with fine granulation which were part of a big hoard consisting of various Kievan jewellery pieces from the twelfth and thirteenth century (Fig. 65 b).<sup>85</sup> The set of cross-pendants was probably in the possession of a Kievan family for several centuries before it was deposited together with later jewellery. This set is very special because it is the only unit of Danish jewellery in existence, beside the well-known gold set from the island of Hiddensee, close to Rügen. In the Hiddensee hoard are two cross-pendants similar to the pieces from Kiev, but they have different loops and details of execution.<sup>86</sup> The closest analogies to the crosses from Kiev are in a Danish hoard deposited at the end of the tenth century at Siem on Jutland, while various variants—with differently decorated suspension-loops and central field—were deposited in hoards in Denmark, Gotland, southern Scandinavia and Poland.<sup>87</sup>

Another two examples of filigree ornaments from Kiev are two small circular brooches of silver. One of them, from grave No 122, has as decoration an animal—a horse (?) lashed with an elongated snake (?) and with a head turned back. The animal on this brooch is designed in a way which recalls the animal on the mounts from bridles of Borre-type. No brooch with such a filigree motif is known from Scandinavia. The second brooch, from grave No 124, is now damaged but originally consisted of a slightly conical central part with four squares in which was an animal head. This type is fairly rare, its design was created by the Danish jewellers that made the

<sup>83</sup> Duczko 1993:187; 1985:82, fig. 104.

<sup>84</sup> Duczko 1995a.

<sup>85</sup> Korzukhina 1954:120ff, No 103, Tab. XLI–II.

<sup>86</sup> Eilbracht 1999, Taf. 11:137–8.

<sup>87</sup> Skovmand 1942:58f; Eilbracht 1999:56f, Taf. 8:122–124.

unique golden spur-set found near Vaern kloster, Östfold in Norway.<sup>88</sup> In this set there is a piece with a motif with four heads similar to the much more schematic motif on the brooch from Kiev; another such brooch, made of gold, came from Öland, Sweden.<sup>89</sup>

Although the filigree decorated ornaments are most noticeable, there is yet another find of exclusively Norse jewellery from tenth-century Kiev which will decisively complete our picture of the elite culture of the Rus. The find, a hoard discovered near the Pustynno-Nikolski monastery, was a copper vessel sealed with wax; inside were 2930 dirhams, the earliest 709/10 and the latest 905/6, and six arm-rings of gold (Fig. 66).<sup>90</sup> The rings were characteristic items of the elite culture of Viking-age Scandinavia, provided with a whole ideology that concerned both social hierarchy as well as religious manifestations. Gold arm-rings were objects of double value, an economic one because of high price of this metal, and an even greater symbolic value. Norse rulers were called in skaldic poetry “the dividers of rings”, the gold ring was a gift not only for a skald but for a retainer or other person worthy of it; the rings were connected with the gods and it was customary to sacrifice rings, either by depositing them in the soil, or by throwing them into the rivers or lakes.<sup>91</sup> Gold rings are a fairly rich group of finds, for instance more than 20 pieces were found on Gotland alone.<sup>92</sup> A good parallel to the hoard from Kiev is represented by the collection of seven gold rings from Pennemünde, Vorpommern.<sup>93</sup>

The set of Danish pendants and the hoard of gold rings are testimony enough to the living Norse culture in Kiev. By contacts with the north the elite of Rus could obtain, and use, the main elements of the ideological and religious culture that was current in tenth century Scandinavia.

### 1.2.2 The “Sign of Rurik”—the dynastic badge of identity

All political power must depend, if it wants to be fully efficient, not only on economical and military force, but also on ideology. The

<sup>88</sup> Brøgger 1921:36, fig. 18; Duczko 1995:657, fig. 15.

<sup>89</sup> *Månadsblad* 1890:5.

<sup>90</sup> Korzukhina 1954:83, Tab. V; Karger 1958, Tab. IV.

<sup>91</sup> Steinsland 1991:148ff.

<sup>92</sup> Stenberger 1958:96ff; Stenberger 1947, Taf. 70–76, 103.

<sup>93</sup> Paulsen 1936, Taf. VII.

claims of some groups of their right to rule and the way they reached for legitimisation of these claims have always contained symbolic language consisting of signs that gave identity not only to the rulers but also to the ruled. It was recognised early on that symbols were a necessary element of the instruments of executive power. This was possible because the strength of symbols combined religious beliefs and magic thinking with deep needs, or rather the necessity, of belonging to a well-defined group. Symbols were not selected at random; their choice was careful and deliberate. The basic goal was to create a visual image that was simple enough to be understood at one glance. A symbolic image was made out of an image with all the details, and then by removing everything unnecessary—the remaining image consisting only of basic characteristics.<sup>94</sup>

The strength of such a sign lay in its visuality, its non-verbal nature. At the same time it was important that it could be associated with something familiar and respected, and thus belonged to an already existing context. The specific context that gave meaning to a symbol was seldom an obstacle to it being removed for use in another context, as long as the general notation was preserved. The strong appeal of a symbol is especially attractive for groups engaged in building a new political organisation. This was the main reason why symbols of power were seldom completely new creations. An old symbol was always preferred because it was already known how it worked and what social effect it would cause. In the history of states it is easy to follow how symbols of ideological and political supremacy were continuously transferred from one state to another. The classical examples are symbols from the Roman and Byzantine Empires that became employed by the new Germanic states.<sup>95</sup> By choosing their own symbols, the elite engaged in a fight for power was showing its ability to make an apt analysis of the contemporary situation: the choice of a suitable symbol was nothing less than a choice of a tool of power. Such a symbol would focus all the required information to invoke an intended recognition. The moment a symbol was chosen was the moment of the maturing of the goals of an elite, a pronouncement of its new political identity.

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<sup>94</sup> Jensen 1970:40ff.

<sup>95</sup> Schramm 1954–1956.

The ruling members of the dynasty of Rus, the Rurikids, used an emblematic sign known in historiography as the “Rurik’s sign”. This sign was, and still is, a subject of dispute considering its origin and meaning, a dispute that has produced an extensive scholarly literature.<sup>96</sup> The opinions presented in this literature show very clearly to what extent misunderstandings of the sources, simplistic view of the process of the creation of the Rus state, and, again, national prejudice can confuse the issue.

The Rurik’s sign appears in two types with several variants: the main types are the bident (*dvuzubets*) and trident (*trezubets*), the variants have elements added to the various parts of the main signs.

The best source allowing us to observe the use of the Rurik’s sign are graffiti on coins. The bident sign is marked either by simple lines or by a more solid drawing, the former is certainly a simplification of the latter. There are about twelve coins with bident from Russian, Estonian and Swedish finds (Fig. 67 a).<sup>97</sup> One of the earliest examples of the *dvuzubets* is scratched on a dirham struck 877/78 in Basra and found in a hoard deposited after 880–885 in Kinner, Lummelunda parish on the island of Gotland (Fig. 67 a:1).<sup>98</sup> Closer in time to this find is a hoard from Belarus, from Pogorelshchina, deposited after 902/903: it contained half a dirham, dated to the beginning of the tenth century, on one side is a *dvuzubets*, while on the reverse is scratched another symbol—a standard (Fig. 67 a:3).<sup>99</sup> Most of the other coins with bident belong to the first part of the tenth century, only some are from the 980s.

The bident very seldom appears on other objects than coins. In fact there are only two items with this sign, one is a seal found in Kiev, the other is a round-shaped, flat piece of horn discovered at the Khazarian fortress Sarkel standing on the left bank of the Don; both objects are attributed to the time of Prince Sviatoslav (965–972). The seal from Kiev, considered to be the oldest Russian seal, was found 1912 during the excavation of the remains of the Tithe Church built by Vladimir the Great in 989–996.<sup>100</sup> The seal has on each

<sup>96</sup> Molchanov 1999.

<sup>97</sup> Melnikova 1996a, figs. 1–9, 11, 12, 15.

<sup>98</sup> Stenberger 1947, No 346; Hammarberg & Rispling 1985:71, fig. 25; Melnikova 1996a:47, fig. 1.

<sup>99</sup> Melnikova 1996a, fig. 3.

<sup>100</sup> Janin 1970:166, Tab. 1:1, Tab. 33:1; Tolochko 1996:163, no 1.

side one large *dvuzubets* and a quasi inscription, there is also a little cross sign at the top (Fig. 67 b). The cross—of Latin type—seems to be a real symbol with significance for the user. As is stated s.a. 955 in the *Primary Chronicle*, Prince Sviatoslav refused baptism: “How shall I alone accept another faith? My followers will laugh at that”, and remained pagan to his death.<sup>101</sup> If we must attempt to attribute this seal to a concrete person it seems more plausible that it belonged to Sviatoslav’s Christian mother Olga who received baptism in Constantinople in the mid 950s. The question how her seal could appear on the site of the Tithe church is puzzling and difficult to answer, partly because of the unknown archaeological context of the find (which by the way, is now lost). Perhaps we should attribute this seal to the builder of the church, Prince Vladimir? Nobody has suggested this because of the commonly accepted opinion that says that the sole sign of this ruler was a trident (see below).

The second object depicting the bident has one large sign on one side and a geometrical ornament on the other (Fig. 67 c).<sup>102</sup> The attribution of this object to the time of Sviatoslav was prompted by the fact that it was found in a layer belonging to the Rus settlement founded on the site of the fortress at Sarkel conquered in 965 during Sviatoslav’s war against the Khazars. The object is unique in its archaeological context but the similarity with the bident on the coins makes attribution to the Rus the only one acceptable.

The scratched representation of the *dvuzubets* on the coins indicates that it began to be employed at the earliest in the last decade of the ninth century, or rather, which seems more acceptable, at the very beginning of the tenth century. The way the bident was placed on the coins and other objects—as a large, single, dominating sign (Fig. 67 d)—shows that it was important to present it as a kind of emblem possessing particular significance. The fact that the bident was also put on one of the earliest (?) seals also emphasises the symbolic value of the sign. The sign was made for a special purpose, at a time of change, to meet new ideological needs among the Rus. The context of the other graffiti on the coins showing military signs—swords, spears, bows and standards—indicates that the *dvuzubets* was one of the symbols used by warriors.

<sup>101</sup> Cross & Sherbowitz-Wetzor 1953:84.

<sup>102</sup> Artamonov 1958:76, fig. 52.

In the late tenth century alongside the bident appears a variant form, a trident—*trezubets*. One of the earliest known example of the trident is to be found on a little rectangular bone-pendant, with the sign on both sides, found in Novgorod in layer 26 in the Troitskij trench, dated to the 970s (Fig. 68 a). As the dendrochronology of the Novgorod is under revaluation, making the dates younger, it means that the actual chronology of the layer should be placed in the 980s.<sup>103</sup> Another find from Novgorod, found in the Nevskij trench is a stone measuring 10.5 × 9 cm, with a large *trezubets* on one side and a cross on the other, (Fig. 68 b).<sup>104</sup> The cross should point to the situation after 988, i.e. after the conversion of Prince Vladimir.

The turning of the *dvuzubets* to a *trezubets* needs close attention, as this change of design must have been caused by special circumstances—one does not change an already established emblem for insignificant reasons. If this change occurred during the time of Vladimir, as the finds indicate, we have to ascribe it to his political strategy. Was it done after establishment of Vladimir in Kiev? The answer depends on how the little square pendant from the Troitski trench in Novgorod already above mentioned is dated. Can we date it to the early 970s, soon after 973, when young Vladimir, son of Prince Sviatoslav, arrived to Novgorod, or after the 980 when he became the ruler of Kiev?

There are only two coins with the *trezubets* as graffiti: one, probably from the Chernigov region, is a dirham struck 979/80, the second is also a dirham, but much older, of 810/11; the latter came from Svirstroj, near the east shore of Ladoga Lake; it was in a hoard deposited after 1015, the year of Vladimir's death (Fig. 67 a:14).<sup>105</sup> Nothing indicates that the graffiti trident could have appeared already during the ninth century; it is probable that sometime at the end of the tenth century an already very old coin was taken from a collection of dirhams and used for graffiti. The scarcity of scratched bidents depends not on the lack of popularity of the sign but on the diminishing intensity of execution of graffiti that can be observed from the mid tenth century.

That the *trezubets* was an emblem of Prince Vladimir is testified by its use on the bricks of his first monumental Christian building—

<sup>103</sup> Jansson 1997:56, note 4.

<sup>104</sup> Rybina 1998:22, fig. 4:6.

<sup>105</sup> Melnikova 1996a:87.

the Tithe Church on the *Starokievskaia* hill in Kiev (Fig. 68 c).<sup>106</sup> It has to be noted that the trident on the bricks has the same form as the one on the pendant from Novgorod, i.e. with a short central element. It seems that this form was the original one and that it took some years, to the very end of the tenth century, before the central element became taller and more protruding. It is in this form that it appears on the gold and silver coins that Vladimir started to strike at this time. The most peculiar trait in this coinage, beside the explanatory inscription in Slavic “Vladimir on the throne”, is the presence of a trident placed to the left of Vladimir, and, on other types of coins, large and alone on the reverse (Fig. 68 d). The employment in the iconographic programme on a coin of the emblematic sign of the ruler is a phenomenon absolutely unique in the whole of the European coinage of the Viking Age. Knowing well the expansive nature of Vladimir, his deep need of legitimisation of his power, it is not surprising that he decided to include his own variant of the emblem on his coins, the first ones produced by the ruler of Rus.<sup>107</sup> Very few objects other than coins carry a picture of a trident, among them is a box of antler found in Ukraine (Fig. 69 a).<sup>108</sup>

The limited employment of the sign indicates that there must have been some kind of restriction regulating its use. It seems that the sign was not employed outside the princely milieu, that only the most important rulers, and people close to them could mark their belongings with it.

From the very beginning, when he was prince of Novgorod, Vladimir understood the great benefit of symbols. Here we should recall the little pendant found in Novgorod, depicting the earliest trident sign (Fig. 68 a). This object was also one of the first of the emblematic pendants that were introduced by Vladimir. The idea of such a marking must have been attractive because the pendant with the trident survived not only Vladimir’s reign but also that of his son Jaroslav, and was used even much later. There are a group of pendants of distinct form apparently representing a kind of identity badge. From the early eleventh century there is one pendant found in the Nerevskij trench, in the 25th layer dated by dendrochronology

<sup>106</sup> Tolochko 1996:113, fig. 44.

<sup>107</sup> Sotnikova & Spasskii 1981.

<sup>108</sup> Kilievich 1965:193, fig. 4.



to 1002–1025 (Fig. 69 b).<sup>109</sup> This time it is not just a simple piece made of bone but an item extremely well executed by casting. There is one Nordic trait here: the top part is a schematic head of an animal. There is another pendant of the same type that shows a more obvious Scandinavian feature—a sword as a Thor hammer (Fig. 69 c). We have already encountered this unique image before. The item was found in a male inhumation grave in the Perm area near the Ural mountains, which gave the author of the publication occasion for speculations about the use of such pendants by traders working for the prince of Rus.<sup>110</sup> That it was a kind of badge of identity is quite evident because even Jaroslav, installed in 1010 by Vladimir as a ruler in Novgorod, was issuing this kind of pendants. On one of them, found in a mound near Ladoga, there are two signs, one with the trezubets of Vladimir and one with a more ornamentally developed form, furnished with a circle on the top of the central element, a variant belonged to Jaroslav, see below (Fig. 69 d). The high status of such badges is ascertained by the fact that they were in use as pendants until the 14th century by women of rich families in Latvia at lower Dvina-Daugava.<sup>111</sup>

Though the trident became the dominant emblem of the dynasty the bident was not forgotten. After Vladimir's death his son Sviatopolk (1015–16 and 1018–1019) returned to the *dvuzubets* and at the same time—his first reign—introduced a novelty by exchanging one of the points for a cross. With various modifications the bident was preserved as an emblem in the side branches of the Rurikid dynasty, but it was the trident of Vladimir that retained the main position.<sup>112</sup> Vladimir's other son, Jaroslav the Wise took it as his sign already during his father's life when he was appointed prince of Novgorod in 1010. It was here between 1014–1016 and 1018–19 he produced his own coins with a picture of a trident modified by addition of a circle on the top of the central prong, which become much bigger than it was on the trident of Vladimir (Fig. 69 e).<sup>113</sup>

Where was the sign of Rurik actually designed and employed: in the “Russian land”, i.e. Kiev and Chernigovshchina? There is no

<sup>109</sup> Kuzmienko 1982.

<sup>110</sup> Krylasova 1995:196.

<sup>111</sup> Beletskii 1996.

<sup>112</sup> Beletskii & Beletskii 1998:171.

<sup>113</sup> Suchodolski 1971:142; Sotnikova 1990.

evidence for such an assumption. There is not a single item marked with the Rurik sign from the rich furnished chamber-graves at Shestovitsa, near Chernigov, burials that are usually attributed to the retinue of the princes of Kiev (see below). The only exceptions are two coins with a *dvuzubets* and one with *trezubets* in a hoard of Islamic coins from an unknown place of discovery, now preserved in the museum at Chernigov.<sup>114</sup> Even among the rich finds in Gnëzdovo on the upper Dnieper, the sign of Rurik does not appear, which is very significant in light of the opinion that many of the rich Norse burials from this site were of the princely *druzhina*, the retinue. All the known archaeological finds indicate that the sign, both as bident and trident, was introduced in the north, in the Ladoga and Novgorod area, the territory of the original Rus.

What kind of signs are they? Are they pictographs or ideograms? Contrary to the pictures of weapons and hammers of Thor, which are very realistic depictions known from graffiti, the sign of Rurik is difficult to recognise as a schematic representation of a concrete object. Attempts have been made to find such an object. The earliest one, from the second part of the nineteenth century, was the explanation of the sign as a picture of a bird of prey, the falcon. This explanation not only took into account the form of sign—wings and beak—but also was referring to the Slav name of this falcon, *rarog*, which was thought to be a personal name *Hrōrikr*, the name of the invited prince Rurik.<sup>115</sup> This identification became a widely accepted and uncritically repeated cliché.<sup>116</sup> It has to be stressed that the scholars forwarding this identification were not taking into consideration the original sign, the bident, but the trident in the version presented on the eleventh century coins of Jaroslaw the Wise.

There was another attempt to explain the Rurik sign as originally Norse, an attempt, which since it was published, has remained unnoticed, although it is much more plausible than the previous one. It was formulated by the Russian numismatist M.P. Sotnikova,<sup>117</sup> who referred to the transverse-section of a Scandinavian ship with bows and a keel as the model for the *dvuzubets*. It is an attractive

<sup>114</sup> Melnikova 1998:176, note 2.

<sup>115</sup> Melnikova 198:178, note 3.

<sup>116</sup> Paulsen 1953:166f; Rapov 1968; Kulakov 1988; Kiersnowski 1990; Ambrosiani 2001; Lindberger 2001; Edberg 2001.

<sup>117</sup> 1990:306.

interpretation. A drawing of a ship-section could actually resemble a bident, and if we put a mast in the middle it will show a *trezubets*. This hypothesis would be correct, both visually and ideologically—a ship as a symbol of Vikings—but, still, simple as it is, this explanation is too good to be true. Not to forget that among all known pictures of Norse boats from the period we cannot find any that is similar to the sign of Rurik.

If we cannot find tenable proof for the opinion that the sign had a Norse pedigree, in which direction we should turn our search? It has long been suspected, but hardly ever studied in detail, that the sign was of nomadic origin, that it was a *tamga*. Tamga signs were used in the Bosphoran Kingdom just before and during the first three centuries of our era and eventually became accepted among the Sarmatians.<sup>118</sup> The main design, a combination of two bidents, or bident and trident, belonged to the royal families. Very similar tamgas were employed in the Saltovo-Majaki culture of the Khazarian Khaganate.<sup>119</sup> Most often they were put on the bottoms of pottery but otherwise were not utilised on special items, like pendants, or on ornamental metalwork. It is thus not possible to find evidence that such tamgas were symbolic signs employed by the Khazar nobility. This makes the assumption that the Rurik sign was originally a Khazarian tamga difficult to sustain. In the available material we cannot find traces of a direct Khazarian connection with the Rurik sign. And, if the bident was a tamga, why was it not in use already in the first part of the ninth century within the kaganate of Rus? It would be only natural if the Rus took over a symbol of the dominating regional power some institutions of which they were imitating.

Despite its formal similarity with tamga signs, the original model for the sign—the bident—could have been something else. There is in fact one model that should be examined, a model that has never been considered in the discussion—an arrowhead in a shape of a fork (Fig. 69 f). Arrowheads of such form were used during the ninth and tenth century in whole of Eastern Europe.<sup>120</sup> A catalogue compiled in 1966 shows that 83 examples were known, compared

<sup>118</sup> Sulimirski 1979:132ff.

<sup>119</sup> Pletneva 1967:126.

<sup>120</sup> Medvedev 1966:72f; Tab. 14:27; 16:35–37; 30B:56, 57.

with some 700 finds of the classic Norse arrow-head of lancet-shaped type.<sup>121</sup> What the function of the forked head was is not entirely clear. It has been explained as a special construction for hunting purposes, but it is known that it was even used in battles. The peculiar shape of this head make the arrow fly less efficiently than is case with more common usual types, and it is hardly suitable for piercing the body.<sup>122</sup> Samurai in medieval Japan used forked arrowheads, and when they were shot into the air they were called *karimata* “after their resemblance to a flock of geese in flight”; they were sometimes provided with a whistle to make a sound for signalling.<sup>123</sup> It seems that arrows of this type were employed in massive attacks to do harm by their number.

Nothing is known about the function of such arrowheads among the Rus but there is at least one find indicating that such arrows had a symbolic value. The find is a dirham struck 866, from a hoard deposited in the first half of the tenth century at an unknown place in Russia. On the worn surface of the coin there is a large, clearly drawn forked head of an arrow; on its lower part is another graffiti—the prow of a ship (Fig. 69 g).<sup>124</sup> By being included among the other objects executed as graffiti on the coins—swords, standards, hammers of Thor, spears, battle knives, and sign of Rurik—we have to assume that even the forked arrowhead had, like the previously mentioned items, symbolic content. If this type of arrowhead was the model for the bident, the original sign of Rurik, it must have been because of its specific purpose. If its original function was for hunting, we may seek the explanation in the very special role hunting played among the social elite during the early mediaeval period. Hunting was an important part of aristocratic life, almost a social obligation paired with passion, not to mention a source of food. At the same time hunting parties were occasions for a highly ritualised demonstration of the current social status of the participants.<sup>125</sup>

How the original sign, the *dvuzubets*, was created is still an enigma. Although it would be more in accord with what we know about the

<sup>121</sup> Medvedev 1966:64.

<sup>122</sup> Personal communication Peter Lindbom who also directed my attention to this arrowhead.

<sup>123</sup> Arms . . . 1988:29.

<sup>124</sup> Dobrovolskij et al 1981: 228f, Tab 1:21; Kirpichnikov et al. 1986:268, fig. 93.

<sup>125</sup> Theuws & Alkemade 2000:460.

mechanisms ruling the choice of important symbols to see a Viking ship, a bird of prey or a nomadic tamga to be the model for the “sign of Rurik”, we cannot, however, exclude that in the end it was an object so strange as a forked arrow that was used to create a sign that has preserved its symbolic value to our days.

## 2. *The Rus at Chernigov and Shestovitsa*

The richest remains of Scandinavian culture in the whole middle Dnieper region were discovered within an area about one hundred kilometres north of Kiev, on the River Desna. In the city of Chernigov and the village of Shestovitsa are big mounds, cemeteries with numerous barrows and large and fortified settlement sites which are the remains of Rus groups living here during the tenth century. The Rus came to this territory because of its strategic position. Here was a meeting-point of the routes going along the Desna, Seim, and the Northern Donets to the Don-Volga territories of the Khazars; the fort on the hill near Shestovitsa was a place from which it was possible to control the water and land routes leading to Kiev and the upper Dnieper.<sup>126</sup>

The city of Chernigov is situated on a hill on the right bank of the river Strizhen at the place where it joins the River Desna. Within the city are various monuments showing that powerful group of Rus managed to establish a place of significance and maintain it for some time; in the eleventh century it became the capital of the medieval principality of Chernigov. The establishment of the town occurred at the end of the ninth century when a fort surrounded by walls of timber construction was raised at the place called *Detinec*; during the tenth century three, partly fortified settlements were founded near the fort.<sup>127</sup>

The most characteristic monuments are not only large cemeteries with hundreds of barrows but also, or most of all, big mounds (at least four), of which two are of a size that lack analogy elsewhere in Viking-age Eastern Europe. These extraordinary mounds were raised, probably at the same time, over cremations. Their construc-

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<sup>126</sup> Kovalenko 2002:245.

<sup>127</sup> Kovalenko 2002:239.

tion was of the same kind as the big mounds in Gnëzdovo. They were built in following manner: after the accomplishment of the cremation on a platform of sand the remains were covered by a mound of earth; upon this mound was placed an iron cauldron containing the bones of a ram; when this cult ceremony was over a further mound of clay completed the construction; the top of it was left flat; around the base was a deep and broad ditch with one or more small bridges.<sup>128</sup>

The largest of the big mounds was *Chernaja Mogila* (Black Grave), this was 11 metres high and with a diameter at the base of 125 m.<sup>129</sup> The second largest was *Gulbishche* (8.5–100 m), and the third was the *Bezimenny* (Nameless) mound of size 7–21 m. There had been other big mounds in Chernigov, for example the mound of “Princess Cherna”, but since the 19th century they have disappeared.<sup>130</sup> The big mounds did not stand alone, there was around the *Chernaja Mogila* at least a fairly large cemetery with small barrows, which has long since been destroyed.

The Black Grave was exceptional among the big mounds not only because of its dimensions but also because of contents of the burial. In his reconstruction of the pyre of *Chernaja Mogila* Boris Rybakov had assumed that the bodies of three persons—a man, woman and a boy—were burnt in a wooden house (Fig. 70 a).<sup>131</sup> It is not possible to confirm if the boy was there—the double set of weapons does not have to indicate the presence of another male—the beads and a spindle-whorl do however attest the presence of a woman.<sup>132</sup> There were the remains of animals—two horses and cattle, and a great amount of objects two helmets, two swords (type Z and T-2), one sabre, ten spears, a battle-axe, arrow-heads, five knives, fragments of a coat of mail, elements of shields, two pairs of stirrups, two large drinking horns with gilt silver mounts with plant and mythological scenes, a belt-set with mounts, a weight, many gaming-pieces made of bone and glass, 31 beaver astragali; a bronze figure of a sitting man with broad waist-belt and with right hand holding his beard, a gold coin of Basil I and Constantine (869–879)

<sup>128</sup> Androshchuk 1999a:80f.

<sup>129</sup> According to Sedov 1982:253, the diameter was only 40 m.

<sup>130</sup> Androshchuk 1999:80; Kovalenko 2002:239.

<sup>131</sup> Rybakov 1949.

<sup>132</sup> Egorov 1996:79.

and half of a gold coin of Constantine VII and Roman II (945–954); a whetstone pendant, eight iron rivets from a boat, ten iron sickles, the remains of a casket with keys, locks and implements such as axes and chisels.<sup>133</sup> In the State Historical Museum in Moscow is preserved a large part of the cremation layer from Chernaja Mogila containing numerous metal items.<sup>134</sup>

The feature that the Black Grave shared with the other big mounds were the traces of a ritual performed on the original, earthen mound where a heap of items taken from the pyre—armour, two large drinking horns and little bronze figure—were placed (Fig. 70 b,c,d). Near this heap stood an iron cauldron, which contained the cremated bones of a ram and a bird, covered with ram's wool, on which was placed the skull of the ram; close to the cauldron were found two knives.

The Chernaja Mogila was the grave of a man buried in a form in which were mixed nomadic and Norse traditions. To the latter belonged the most important element—the employment of a boat, or its parts. The majority of the weapons were nomadic, except for the pair of swords and knives; the presence of the small (4.7 × 2.7 cm) bronze figure makes the burial even more Norse. Figures of this kind are found, but not in graves, all over Viking world, from Sweden—the ithyphallic god from Rällinge, Södermanland, through Danish Lund and Roholte—a piece made in amber, Mecklenburg-Vorpommern—the sitting man from Gatschow, and finally from Iceland.<sup>135</sup> Apparently the gesture of holding the beard had religious connotations and at least some of the figures could be recognised as Norse gods, Freyr and Thor.<sup>136</sup>

The nomadic traditions are much more distinctive in the Chernaja Mogila. These are very reminiscent of the form taken in the Saltovo (i.e. the Khazarian) cultural circle such as the placing of the weapons and horse harness (and some other objects) separately, but in particular the mountings of the big drinking horns showing scenes from the royal Khazarian myths.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>133</sup> Sedov 1982:253f; Egorov 1996:77ff; Androshchuk 1999:82.

<sup>134</sup> Seen by the author on exhibition in Moscow 1996.

<sup>135</sup> Pushkina 1984; Schoknecht 1994.

<sup>136</sup> Gjaerder 1964.

<sup>137</sup> Petrukhin 1995b:171ff; 1995c.

The Chernaja Mogila has always tempted scholars to guess who was buried here. As Chernigov was situated within the territory populated by the Sievierian tribe, it was only natural to see the monumental kurgan as the grave of a Slav ruler. This opinion is no longer uncritically accepted. It is more often maintained that in the tenth century Chernigov had nothing to do with local people but was created by the Kievan Rus and was under the suzerainty of Rurikid princes. But it is often assumed that these princes did not live there and that the region was governed by their *voevoda*, commander-in-chief.<sup>138</sup> The *Primary Chronicle* informs us *s.a.* 945 about such a *voevoda*, a Norseman named Svenald (ON *Sveinaldr*), a mighty military leader and equally mighty magnate, able to collect around him an efficient retinue, which, thanks to his successfully conducted wars, became rich, much to the envy of the members of the *druzhina* of Prince Igor. Another *voevoda* was Pretich, who saved Kiev from attacking Pechenegs mentioned in the chronicle *s.a.* 968. It was he who, according to some scholars, was buried in the Chernaja Mogila.<sup>139</sup> Even if it can be accepted that Chernigov was the site of the residence of a *voevoda*, the sheer size of this place, the large settlement and many of the big barrows, all these point rather towards a princely status for the site.

It is less easy to speculate who might have been buried under the Golubishche barrow, another of the big mounds of Chernigov. The mound was contemporary to the previous one, had a similar construction but the majority with the objects found near the cremated couple, with the exception of a sword of Norse E-type, were nomadic.<sup>140</sup> Little is known about the third big mound, the Bezimenny; no certain Scandinavian artefacts are recorded.<sup>141</sup>

The other cemeteries were in different parts of the city; one of them was on the left side of the river Strizhten, at a place called Berizki. There were more than forty barrows, both cremations and inhumations, among them were five large mounds measuring 3.5 in height and 11 to 20 meters in diameter; all fourteen graves examined were of the tenth century.<sup>142</sup> There were very few Norse objects and

<sup>138</sup> Petrukhin 195b:193.

<sup>139</sup> Lebedev 1985:243.

<sup>140</sup> Sedov 1982:254, Tab. LXIX; Egorov 1996:79f.

<sup>141</sup> Androshchuk 1999:80.

<sup>142</sup> Blifeld 1965.



none of the graves have produced typical female or male ornaments of bronze. In the cremation grave No 7 was a necklace with various beads, two small gold rings and a silver pendant, circular with stylised vegetal ornament of a type known from central Sweden, and the Gnëzdovo, and Vladimir barrows.<sup>143</sup> Under one of the larger mounds, No 15, was cremated a horse, a ram and a bird together with a man and his bow, a bag with bronze mounts, a whetstone and iron crampon. In the cremation layer were also fragments of two objects made of bone embellished with decoration of Norse type with elongated elements and some kind of a chain motif, to which the closest parallel is at Birka.<sup>144</sup>

The man buried in grave No 15 had only one weapon with him, a bow. With the exception of an axe the same situation was in the large chamber with inhumation under mound No 17. This time this lack of weapons was due to the fact that the grave had been plundered already in the past. The only weapon left was a little battle-axe but the finds of two horses placed between the wooden construction and the wall of the pit shows that originally it was a very special burial. One of the horses had full harness, the other was without but under it laid the skeleton of a man.<sup>145</sup> Burials with a pair of horses are unknown in the mortuary customs of the Rus, but are documented in Scandinavia, for example in Birka, grave Bj 581.<sup>146</sup> The presence of a man under one of the horses should be seen as a sacrifice: no find of this nature is recorded from Russia or Scandinavia, but in the latter there are graves of men with sacrificed humans, such as one at Birka.<sup>147</sup>

The barrow cemetery at Berizki has been identified as the burial place of a *druzhina* belonging to some *bojar* living on an estate near Chernihov.<sup>148</sup> To restrict this cemetery to a retinue cannot be right, nothing indicates that here was a burial-ground only for members of a military group. It was a cemetery for the elite of a wealthy family, among which were also prominent warriors.

About fifteen kilometres southwest of Chernigov, on the right side of the river Desna, south of the village Shestovitsa are the remains

<sup>143</sup> Blifeld 1965:114, fig. Duczko 1985:41f.

<sup>144</sup> Blifeld 1965, Tab. III; Arbman 1940, Taf. 154:6.

<sup>145</sup> Blifeld 1965:127ff, fig. 17.

<sup>146</sup> Arbman 1943:188f.

<sup>147</sup> Holmquist-Olausson 1990.

<sup>148</sup> Blifeld 1965:137.

of a complex with settlements and cemeteries (Fig. 71). The complex was located on and around an elongated hill about a kilometre in length. At one end of the hilltop was a *gorodishche* covering about a hectare on top of an area that originally had been a Slav settlement that was destroyed in the late ninth century by fire.<sup>149</sup> After this violent end, chronologically compatible with similar events that occurred elsewhere in Russia, the area on the hilltop was fortified with a rampart and ditch. In the occupation layer of the tenth century were found items attesting the presence of Norsemen: fragments of weapons, among them lance-shaped arrowheads, fragmentary iron vessels, a fragment of an oval brooch, a whorl with runic inscription (Fig. 72 a), needle-box of ivory with four human faces (Fig. 72 b), a small figure of stone with a man's head (Fig. 72 c), metal mounts from belts, elements of harness, penannular brooches for men, weights for balances, and finally iron spikes and rivets for boats.<sup>150</sup> The Norse building tradition was also revealed in the remains of a long house with a large hearth in the middle.<sup>151</sup> North of the hill-fort was an unfortified settlement for economical activities and for craftsmen, among which were metalworkers, who, partly, had their workshop on a large terrace, where was found an arm-ring in intricate wirework with zoomorphic terminals (Fig. 72 d).<sup>152</sup>

The name of the hill-fort and its close surroundings is Korovel, which according to Elena A. Melnikova is a Norse toponym consisting of two parts in which the first one *koro* is a form originating from ON *kjarr*, meaning brushwood, and the second one *vel*, from ON *vellir*, meaning plain.<sup>153</sup>

Contemporary with the Korovel settlements was a large cemetery with cremation and inhumation burials. About twenty graves, out of 147 examined, were considered as Norse.<sup>154</sup> The most apparent were those with typical female ornaments, in most cases in cremation graves: No 53—on top of the bones in an urn was laid a pair of JP 51 oval brooches, a little circular bronze brooch with three animal heads, glass beads, and weights; in No 69, where a similar group

<sup>149</sup> Kovalenko 2002:242f.

<sup>150</sup> Kovalenko 1999:45; 2002:244.

<sup>151</sup> Kovalenko 2002:243.

<sup>152</sup> Kovalenko 1999:47; 2002:243, Abb. 7.

<sup>153</sup> Kovalenko 2002:245.

<sup>154</sup> Arne 1931; Blifeld 1977:108.

of items was left in the cremation layer; in No 59 where besides oval brooches there was also a trefoil brooch (Fig. 73 a), a rare ornament of Norse women in Russia; in No 92 the cremated woman had with her about 30 beads, oval brooches and textile with golden threads.<sup>155</sup>

One special female burial was an inhumation in the chamber grave No 78, where the deceased was buried sitting—as in many graves in Birka—and provided with a pair of JP 51 oval brooches, a little penannular silver brooch, a necklace of beads and four pendants of silver (one circular of shield type, one cross, one open-work with animal motif (JP 159), one with four-volute motif), two dirhams (Akhmed ibn Ismail 909/10 and Akhmed ibn Ismail Anderab 913/14), three fragments of clothing with silver passementerie-work (Fig. 73 b).<sup>156</sup>

The burials of males, the majority with weapons, included both cremations and inhumations. The former could be like No 58, a barrow 0.80 m high and 11 m diameter, covering a cremation layer with a sword and chape of bronze with bird decoration, a spear, a ring-pin of plain type, and an iron crampon; the sword was bent around the urn (Fig. 74 a).<sup>157</sup> A warrior in grave No 83 was provided for in a much richer manner, it contained a sword and chape with bird decoration, a scramasax, a spear; a shield with umbo, two stirrups, each of different type, a little spur; two copper coins of Leo VI (868–912) and the bones of horse and dog (Fig. 74 b).<sup>158</sup> To those two cremations may be added a third grave, No 93, with the remains of a man with a scramasax, and a belt covered with one hundred mounts of bronze with silver decoration.<sup>159</sup>

The inventories of the inhumations were not very different from those of cremations; the only difference concerning the graves of armed warriors was the fact that they were buried together with women. One of the chamber-graves, No 36, contained the rich burial of a man holding his left arm over a woman stretched out alongside him; at some distance from their feet was the skeleton of a horse (Fig. 75 a).<sup>160</sup> The man, dressed in a caftan with golden threads,

<sup>155</sup> Blifeld 1977: 144f, Taf. XIV; 158f, Tab. XIX, 2; 148; Tab. XVI; 167f, Tab. XXIV.

<sup>156</sup> Blifeld 1977:22, 160ff, Tab. XXI-II; Androshchuk 1999, fig. 45, 46.

<sup>157</sup> Blifeld 1977:146ff, Tab. XV.

<sup>158</sup> Blifeld 1977:164f, fig. 38.

<sup>159</sup> Blifeld 1977:168f, Tab. XXV.

<sup>160</sup> Blifeld 1977:128ff.

had with him weapons—a sword of H-type, a scramasax, a knife, and thirteen arrowheads, including five lancet-shaped ones; a silver mount from a drinking-horn, a wooden bucket, a comb, a strike-a-light and flint; the woman had a necklace consisting of six silver lunula-pendants decorated with granulation and 74 glass beads, a half of a dirham, a silver finger-ring with granulation, scissors; close to the skeletons were the bones of a bird, and parts of a ram, a bull and a pig; at the feet was a collection of items: a long whetstone, three weights, tweezers, little hammer, an anvil, and some implements for working wood.<sup>161</sup>

There is another grave, No 110, which is a close parallel to the previous grave: here a couple was laid in similar position, had a horse and weapons—sword and chape with bird motif, a lancet-shaped arrowhead—and a silver mount from a drinking horn (Fig. 75 b). There are also at least three other chamber-graves with burials of couples, weapons and horse.<sup>162</sup> From the latter we should lay particular emphasis on grave No 42 in which were two bone pieces from a saddle with animal decoration executed in the Mammen style; the pieces are, together with the bone handle from Gnëzdovo the only examples from Russia of the last great Norse art style of the tenth century (Fig. 76).<sup>163</sup>

Alongside the above-mentioned burials with apparent Norse finds there are several others in which iron rivets from a boat cremated on the pyre were found, for example in graves No 9 and 33 (in the latter together with a gaming set), or one grave, No 14, where a beaver paw and ring made of clay appeared, the only specimens of these items typical of Norse burial customs of the upper Volga area, and finally, in No 138, an iron ring with Thor hammer pendants.<sup>164</sup>

The burials in the cemeteries at Shestovitsa demonstrate a very pronounced presence of Scandinavian objects and mortuary customs implying the existence of a community of Rus with the well-developed identity of a fundamentally Norse elite. This is manifested with all clarity in the burials of men, women and horses in the chamber-graves. Who were the people buried here? A common opinion among Russian scholars is that these warrior burials were the graves of

<sup>161</sup> Androshchuk 1999:60.

<sup>162</sup> Blifeld 1977:175ff, 138ff, 188ff, 150ff; Androshchuk 1999:106.

<sup>163</sup> Blifeld 1977:138ff; Androshchuk 1999:52; Fuglesang 1991:91.

<sup>164</sup> Blifeld 1977:117f; Tab. II:3, 4; 127; 55; 187f, Tab. XXXV:6.

retainers of Kievan princes.<sup>165</sup> Once more status high graves are recognised as burials of members of an outside power. To my mind the ruling group was rather a part of the power centre in Chernigov, a centre that was independent from Kievan Rus.

### 3. *The Druzhina—the retinue among the Rus*

When in the *Primary Chronicle* the prince of Rus, or his commander-in-chief, are on the move, either to collect tribute or to make a war, they had with them a military unit called the *druzhina*. In this word is the IE stem *\*drug-*, which in OSI mean friend, and in ON, as *draugr*, warrior.<sup>166</sup> The *druzhina* was a retinue, an association of men serving a man of high standing, to whose household they belonged and to whom they were loyal and, most of all, owned military obligations. In the *Primary Chronicle*, and other sources from the eleventh and twelfth centuries, the term *druzhina* is used in a wide range of situations. It was not only applied to the warriors in the service of a prince but also to a variety of people of different parts of society, the adherents of one person, male members of a territorial unit, or even a trading or craft organisation.<sup>167</sup> This extended meaning was typical for an already established principality with new hierarchies and social groups, a situation that differed from conditions at an early period, when the concept of *druzhina* was more restricted. In order always to have access to military force these units were created around the persons of leaders of various standing. There were as many retinues as there were powerful men in the society. Some of the *druzhinas* had an occasional character, created for a special purpose, while others had an almost institutionalised form. Those retinues were of two main types, one called *starsha*—the older, and the *mladsha*, the younger. The former comprised higher groups of the social elite, the *boljare-bojars*, the group mentioned in the treaties with the Greeks just after the members of the Rurikid clan. The younger *druzhina* consisted of people from lower strata such as free owners of estates and merchants.<sup>168</sup> The latter *druzhina* had a sep-

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<sup>165</sup> Lebedev 1985:243.

<sup>166</sup> Green 2000:111.

<sup>167</sup> Wasilewski 1958:303.

<sup>168</sup> Wasilewski 1958:304.

arate part (called *mala*—the small one), grouping young men—called *otroki*—without their own family and home, wholly dependable on the leader in whose household they were living in a separate building and who lived on the maintenance of the leader.<sup>169</sup> This *mala* retinue had its own name, of Norse origin—*grid*. In Russian, and even Norse research this name was often understood, wrongly, as a distortion of word *hird*.<sup>170</sup> The generally entertained thought that *hird* was a Viking-age Norse term for retinue is incorrect; in fact it is of later, twelfth-century origin.<sup>171</sup> Neither was the word *grid* used in Scandinavia as the term for a retinue. It had two meanings, the first referred to the state of security one person was provided for a period of time or during his stay in one place, the second referred to a person of free status without their own home staying at someone else's place.<sup>172</sup> It must have been the latter meaning that gave rise to the employment of this word in Russia.

Not many certain details about the internal structure of either the grid or the other kind of *druzhina* has survived in written sources. We know that the members of the grid—*gridini*—lived together in a special building called a *gridnica*, when out on expedition they acted as bodyguards for the leader and as the main military unit; their number could vary from ten to several hundred men—the latter size, four hundred is presented by ibn Fadlan in his depiction of the residence of the Rus ruler.<sup>173</sup>

Attempts to find eventual common features between the Rus *druzhina* and the Scandinavian retinue are rarely successful because our knowledge of the latter is rather bad. It is restricted to inscriptions on some early, mostly Danish rune-stones, that tell about men belonging to some sort of military organisations. The term used for this organisation was *lið*, meaning a band of warriors following its leader on an expedition; such warriors were called *himþigi*, men belonging to the household.<sup>174</sup> Men with such a title are mentioned on the stone from Hällestad in Scania, dated to the late tenth century, where

<sup>169</sup> Lowmianski 1970:173f.

<sup>170</sup> Thörnqvist 1948:46.

<sup>171</sup> Hamre et al. 1961.

<sup>172</sup> Boe 1960:463f.

<sup>173</sup> Lowmianski 1970:172.

<sup>174</sup> Jacobsen & Moltke 1942:7ff.

they identified themselves both as *himpigi*, *felle*—fellows and even brothers, obviously in social meaning, to one Toke Gormsson, who was entitled *trutinþ*, a lord and a leader of a war-band.<sup>175</sup>

Where should we look for material remains of the *druzhinas* of Rus? Russian archaeologists have almost always treated burials of men with weapons as the graves of members of a retinue. The chamber-graves in the cemeteries in Gnëzdovo, Kiev, Timerëvo and Shestovitsa in particular have been seen as the burials of the retainers belonging to the princes of Kiev, or, as was a case with the latter site, of their commander-in-chief. Identifications of this kind were never based on detailed analyses of burials only on an assumption that the weapons and mortuary customs attested the existence of one power behind them. There can be no doubt that among the burials with such features were retinue graves, but were all of them of members of the Kievan retinue? The answer could be positive in the case if the prince of Kiev was the only prince in *Rhosia* whose territory was kept together by means of military control. As we remember there was not only a single prince of Kiev, but also there were other Rurikid princes. Kiev was a place where they could gather when joint expeditions were prepared but it was not the residence of all of them. The Middle Dnieper with Kiev together with Chernigovshchina on the Desna comprised *Rhosia*, the land of Rus, the “*Russkaja zemlja*”, the domain of the Rurikids. They continued to rule in the north along the Volkhov but in the tenth century the Upper Dnieper, with the great centre at Gnëzdovo and the Upper Volga-Oka region, with large number of Norse settlements, were outside their territory.

#### 4. *On the way to Byzantium through the Lower Dnieper*

The forest-steppe zone south of Kiev continued for a while before the traveller came to the wide plains of the steppe. It was the hostile world of the warrior nomads, Pechenegs during the tenth century, who preyed on the people that entered their territory. For the Rus sailing down the Dnieper it was always a dangerous, sometimes lethal, journey.

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<sup>175</sup> Jacobsen & Moltke 1942:347ff.

In chapter nine of the *De Administrando* . . . Constantine Porphyrogenitus gives an account of the sailing of the Rus down the Dnieper to the Black sea and then farther to Byzantium:<sup>176</sup>

And first they come to the first rapid called *Essoupi*, which in Rus and Slavonic means “Don’t fall asleep”. This barrier is just as narrow as the width of the imperial polo-ground. In the middle of this rapid are rooted tall rocks, looking like islands. The water comes against them and, flooding up, dashes down to the depths below with a great and terrifying noise. So the Rus do not dare to go through the midst of them but put ashore nearby and set the men on dry land leaving everything else in the ships.

Then they strip off, feeling their way with their feet to avoid bumping against the rock. This is how they do it; some at the stem, some amidships, others again, at stern, push along with poles. And by this caution they get through this first barrier, round the bend of the river-bank. When they have got past this rapid, they take the others from the dry land on board again and set off, and come down to the second rapid, called in Rus *Oulvors*i and in Slavonic *Ostrovouniprach*, which means “The islet of the barrier”. This one is like the first, tough and awkward to get through. Again they put the men ashore and take the ships past, just as at the first one. They go through the third rapid in the same way; this is called *Gelandri*, which in Slavonic means “Noise of the rapid”. And then the fourth rapid, the huge one, called in Rus *Aeifor* and in Slavonic *Neasit* [. . .]. At this rapid all put ashore, stem foremost, and out get all those who are appointed to keep watch. Ashore they go, and unsleeping keep sentry-go against the Pechenegs.

The rest of them, picking up the things they have on board the ships, conduct the wretched slaves in chains six miles by dry land until they are past the barrier. In this way, some dragging their ships, others carrying the on their shoulders, they get them through to the far side of the rapid. So, launching the ships back on the river and loading their cargo, they get in and again move off. When they come to the fifth rapid, called in Rus *Varoufors*, and in Slavonic *Voulniprach* because it forms a great lake, they edge their ships again round the bank of the river, just as at the first and second rapids, and so they reach the sixth rapid, called in Rus *Leanti*, and in Slavonic *Veroutzi*, that is “the boiling of the water”. This too they pass in the same way. From there they sail off to the seventh rapid, called in Russian *Stroukoun*, and in Slavonic *Naprezi*, which is translated as “little rapid”. This they pass at the ford named *Krarios* [. . .]. The crossing is the width of the hippodrome, and its height from the bottom up to where the rocks

<sup>176</sup> Page 1995:95f; the translators use name Russian, I change them to Rus.



project is the distance an arrow can be shot from a bow. It is at this point, therefore, that the Pechenegs come down and attack the Rus.

After crossing this place, they reach the island of St. Gregorios; on that island they conduct their sacrifices because a huge oak that stands there. They sacrifice live birds. Also they stick arrows in a circle in the ground, and others of them provide bread and meat, bits of anything anyone has, as their practice demands. Also they cast lots about the birds—to sacrifice, or to eat them as well, or to let them live. From this island on, the Rus have no fear of the Pechenegs until they reach the river Selinas. So they set out from there and travel for four days until they reach the lake forming the mouth of the river, on which there is the island of St. Aitherios. Reaching this island they take a rest there for two or three days. Then they fit out their ships with whatever they need—sails, masts and steering-oars—which they have brought on board.

This account in an imperial book shows that it was of political interest to know in detail the Dnieper route of the Rus. It seems that for this account Constantine used a report delivered by the Byzantine envoys that went to Kiev 944 to conclude a treaty with Prince Igor.<sup>177</sup> Of the nine rapids once existing (Fig. 77)<sup>178</sup> seven are described and presented with their Rus and Slavic name. Like many other issues of the “Normanist problem” even the names of rapids have been extensively discussed.<sup>179</sup> The Rus names were identified already by Vilhelm Thomsen, and confirmed by other scholars, as words belonging to the Old Swedish language. There are still many as yet unsolved linguistic problems with those names, like the one who were first to name the rapids—the Norsemen or the Slavs—but there cannot be any doubt that the Rus names are of Norse origin.<sup>180</sup> In Scandinavian sources only one of the names of the rapids is mentioned; the Aeifor; it appears as *Aifor* on a rune-stone at Pilgårds, Gotland in an inscription that commemorates men that reached this rapid.<sup>181</sup>

While travelling on this dangerous river the Rus were in great need of divine protection. The sources do not record how they tried to assure it before they started their journey. What has, however, been recorded in the archaeological finds and by Constantine Porphyrogenitus, were their ceremonies after they arrived at the end

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<sup>177</sup> Obolensky 1970:156.

<sup>178</sup> Rolle 1989:484.

<sup>179</sup> Kalgren 1947; Falk 1951.

<sup>180</sup> Obolensky 1970:160f.

<sup>181</sup> Krause 1953.

of the river. At the ford Krarion, later known as Kichkas, close to the island of Khortitza/St. Gregorios, where in the 1920s a power station was built, four complete swords and a blade without hilt were found during deepening of the river.<sup>182</sup> Two of the swords were of Petersen S-type (Fig. 78 a).<sup>183</sup> They belong to an exclusive group of swords with hilts covered with various noble metals, like gold and silver, and decorated with Jelling-style animal geometrical patterns.<sup>184</sup> Most of them are found in Norway but there are several examples from the rest of Scandinavia and continental Europe. Two other swords are of Petersen type T, and the closest analogies come from Norway.<sup>185</sup> Three of the swords had blades with Ulfberth inscription; all the swords belong to the tenth century.

Even if it is easy to explain those swords at the bottom of the Dnieper as testimony of an accident, or as remains after a battle, it is more likely that they represent objects that were put into the water with a specific purpose. The custom of throwing weapons into the water is a part of cultic tradition among Germanic people throughout the whole first millennium A.D.<sup>186</sup> The Gotlandic Viking-age finds from Gudingsåkrarna and Lillmyr are the best-known but some appear in Uppland of the Svear, like the sword of a similar type as one from the Dnieper that was found in Sigrisholm Lake,<sup>187</sup> or the large sacrificial spot near the Islandsbro, at the Fyris river in Uppsala, where swords, spears and axes were put into the water during the tenth century A.D.<sup>188</sup>

According to Constantine Porphyrogenitus, the Rus had their sacrificial places on the island of St Gregorios. One place was around a large oak where birds,<sup>189</sup> were offered to the gods, likewise other food-stuff—meat and bread—but also many other unspecified things. The Rus were recorded as also casting lots, probably not only to decide whether or not to eat the sacrificial bird but also to ascertain information about the future, an ancient custom among Scandinavians.<sup>190</sup>

<sup>182</sup> Chernyshev 1963; Rolle 1989:504; Androshchuk 2002.

<sup>183</sup> Petersen 1919:142ff.

<sup>184</sup> Müller-Wille 1972, Abb. 28:3, 4.

<sup>185</sup> Petersen 1919:150f, fig. 119, 121.

<sup>186</sup> Müller-Wille 1984:199f.

<sup>187</sup> Müller-Wille 1972, Abb. 30:4.

<sup>188</sup> Unpublished, in collection of the Dep. of archaeology, Uppsala.

<sup>189</sup> Cocks in Jenkins' translation: Moravcsik 1949:61.

<sup>190</sup> Slupecki 1998:103ff.

Before the Rus continued their journey to Byzantium they stayed on another island, that of Aitherios, now Berezan, at the mouth of Dnieper. Here they could rest, sometimes forever, as a very special find testifies. It is a rune stone—the only one in Eastern Europe—with a simple band in which the inscription tells us “Grane made this sarcophagus for Karl, his partner” (Fig. 78 b).<sup>191</sup> Karl was *fēlagi* of Grane, which may mean that they either were operating in a mercantile partnership, or were members of a retinue. The stone was found in secondary context but the word *hvalv* indicating that it was a part of a sarcophagus. The Berezan stone is dated to the eleventh century.<sup>192</sup> The raising of a burial monument as that made by Grane for Karl is a good evidence for existence of social needs for this kind of memorial, and even for the intensity of traffic of Norse speakers in this region.

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<sup>191</sup> Melnikova 1977:154, fig. 84.

<sup>192</sup> Arne 1914.

## SUMMING UP AND CONCLUDING

That Scandinavians were present in Eastern Europe during the Viking Age has been obvious to research for a very long time. The conviction came from the evidence of the written sources, which contained bald statements about the Norse identity of people called Rus. Since the 19th century yet another kind of evidence was made use of in the scientific debate about the Rus—the archaeological material. While the number of written sources remained the same, the archaeological evidence was accumulating in ever-larger quantities, but its utilisation was always limited by relatively poor knowledge of Scandinavian Viking-age culture among the majority of researchers, also by a general acceptance of artefacts discovered as simple trade commodities rather than socially conditioned elements of Norse culture.

In this book the narrative written sources were employed as a background for the archaeological material, which was employed as the main source of the studies presented here. Although the majority of the material had already been published and discussed by Swedish, Russian and Ukrainian scholars it has never been studied systematically and in such detail as was done here. The results of the studies unveiled the existence of regular Norse societies with culture of the same kind as the contemporary one in Scandinavia, thriving in many places that consisted not only of proto-urban, fortified sites but also of villages with rural populations. It even became clear that the traditional approach to the subject—to see Scandinavians in the East as a people acting towards one goal, the creation of the Kievan state—was not only simplified but entirely wrong. The rise of the principality ruling the middle Dnieper region appears now as a result of activities of one group of Rus: their movement southward to the Slav territories was not an enterprise engaging all existing Rus societies.

The story of Scandinavians in the East had its beginnings in Middle Sweden from where traders went into the forest zone of the Finno-Ugrians in order to purchase high-quality furs. The Finnish inhabitants of the area gave these visitors a special name, Rus. This term was coined by adapting to their own language the originally Norse word *roþsmen*, people rowing boats. Among people of Eastern Europe

and in the Islamic Orient this name became an accepted term for the Norsemen, and finally became the name of the first state among the East Slavic, that of Kievan Rus.

In the mid eighth century a number of the traders reached a level at which it was necessary for them to have a common place for meetings, a place where parties of Scandinavians could stay and make preparations for their travels. It was because of those needs that the settlement Staraja Ladoga on the River Volkhov came into being. The site was originally quite small, but after a while, from the end of the eighth century, it expanded considerably. This was a reaction to the changed circumstances set in train by political and economical changes that occurred in Mesopotamia, where in the middle of the eighth century the Abbasid rulers created a new caliphate with a centre in Baghdad. Its booming economy activated even the region north of the Caucasus turning it to the one of the most important places of exchange in this part of the continent. The news about these great economical possibilities soon became known to Scandinavians, who immediately adjusted to the situation by offering a range of commodities including furs, swords, wax and, most of all, slaves. The boom in trade caused the number of people from Middle Sweden engaged in the eastern developments to rise dramatically. Amongst Norsemen coming to the East were now even groups of warriors ruled by leaders who established organisation for the taking of tributes. We learn about one such military organization, probably the biggest one, from the information in Frankish chronicle *Annales Bertiniani*, where under year 839 a group of Swedes called Rhos is mentioned. The title of their leader, *chacanus*, indicates intimate contacts with the Khazars, whose empire at the lower Don and Volga rivers was the main power-factor in the region.

The constantly increasing attractiveness of Eastern Europe culminated in the 850s in the waves of new arrivals from Scandinavia. Apart from traders, there also came to the area more warriors, either joining the organization of the *chacanus* of the Rhos, or forming part of perhaps similar arrangements at different places. The growing importance of military activities became obvious when a great army of Rus attacked Constantinople in June 860. Although failure, the size and the ferocity of the assault forced the Greeks to take a serious interest in those dangerous warriors and through diplomatic effort, which included conversion, make them allies. Despite this, the attack

was the first of many similar enterprises the Rus directed against the capital of the East Roman Empire during the next two hundred years.

Some time in the 860s the old centre of Rus at Staraja Ladoga was destroyed only to be rebuilt again in the same fashion as it was before; the only difference was a stone fortress erected here at the end of the century. Although Ladoga remained an important Norse site, it was no longer the sole one because further to the south, at the mouth of the Volkhov, another centre was established. This place, probably named Holm, now Rurikovo Gorodischche, was a large residence within a fortified settlement on the top of a hill. It was a site of the elites of the Rus, who, judging by their material culture, originated from Middle Sweden.

The dramatic changes that occurred within the Volkhov area have been connected by scholars with the most famous event known from The Primary Chronicle—"the calling-in of the Varangians". The writer of the Chronicle tells the story about the arrival of Prince Rurik with his Rus as a result of an official deal made with the local populations, a deal that gave Rurik the rulership over the tribal communities. In one or another way this story has been accepted in research as a reflection of real events. Although the historicity of Rurik has been disputed, and the whole story is explained away as a legend, it has become customary to take it as a starting point of the history of the Norse presence in Eastern Europe.

What cannot be disputed, at least generally, is the story of this period as told by archaeology. The material sources give a picture of upheaval, represented by the traces left by obviously newly-arrived Norsemen who settled on the Volkhov. However, what is most important, there came new groups of Scandinavians that did not stay on this river. They were spreading within the forest zone and from the end of ninth century were living not only on the shores of the many rivers in the area east of the Volkhov (*Priladozhe*), but even on the Upper Dnieper and the territory further in the east, in the region between the upper Volga and Oka rivers. At the same time yet another expansion occurred, towards the south, down to the Middle Dnieper into the Slav territories. In the tenth century in all these places there were permanent settlements of people from Scandinavia. They kept their identity alive, as can be seen in their material culture, for several generations until it became relatively rapidly transformed into an autochthonous identity—Finno-Ugrian and Slav.

While the two main Rus sites at the Volkhov, Staraja Ladoga and Rurikovo Gorodishche, played their special and quite unique role as proto-urban and power centres, there was one place that due to its size and complexity appears as exceptional one—the agglomeration at Gnëzdovo. It was situated on the high bank of the Dnieper and consisted of two large fortified settlements, several rural ones, and many cemeteries, among which were groups of big mounds and chamber graves of the Norse elite. The archaeological finds leave no doubt that Norsemen were living here in families in a real Scandinavian society with its own culture. The leading group of this complex originated (as it was a case with Rurikovo Gorodishche) from Middle Sweden. It consisted of people apparently close to the royal family, the one that was controlling the town of Birka. Many of them arrived in the 930s and were to inhabit Gnëzdovo until the late tenth century, at the same time maintaining contact with their former land. The scale of the agglomeration and the very high quality of the Norse material culture are strong indicators that this place had its own ruler, maybe of princely status. It seems relatively certain that the rulers of Gnëzdovo did not belong to the clan of Rurikids because the site itself was not treated as a part of the tenth century Rurikid dominion (the opinion that Kievan princes controlled the site by keeping here their *družina*—the retinue, is without foundation).

Another centre of the Rus was situated on the middle Dnieper at Chernigov on the Desna. Even here, at the strategic crossroad of interregional routes, was a fortified residence and settlements with craftsmen; the burial grounds contained graves of warriors and, above all, the elites were buried under big mounds. The characteristic trait in the culture of this elite was the strong impact of Khazarian ideology. Only here this trait appears with such clarity showing that the local Rus had more direct relations with the Khazars than other Norsemen in the East. Scholars used to identify the rulers of Chernigov as commanders-in-chiefs (*voevodas*) of the Kievan princes. The validity of such an assumption is difficult to accept because Chernigov appears to be a site ruled by a group of Rus independent of Kiev. They may have entertained relations with the Rurikids but were not an organic part of their sphere of power.

In this context one should enquire into the status of the neighbouring site, that at Shestovitsa. With its stronghold and unfortified settlement of craftsmen and large cemeteries with graves of men (obviously warriors) and women provided with classic items of

Scandinavian origin, it should be treated as a settlement complex belonging to another Norse society. The closeness to Chernigov indicates strongly that it belonged to the dominion of the rulers of this centre.

A different picture is provided by the archaeology of the territory between the upper Volga and Oka River. Across this large area were spread numerous settlements—more than 25—established by Norsemen at the end of ninth century and in existence until the early eleventh century. The most characteristic elements in their material culture reveals that the Rus of this area were Svear from Middle Sweden and the Åland Islands and that their number was probably the largest in the East.

Finally we come to Kiev, the only centre which was the creation of the Rus that has survived the Middle Ages. In the middle of the tenth century we learn from Byzantine records of the existence of the Norsemen called Rhos ruling over a region called *Rhossia*—a territory that consisted of an inner part, which should be identified as the middle Dnieper region, and an outer zone, most possibly the Volkhov region in the north. The leaders of these Rus' were members of a clan, known in later sources as the Rurikids, who made some Slav tribes pay them tributes that were collected in the form of various commodities they later traded with Greeks, with whom they established official contacts confirmed by treaties. The treaties inform us about the number of the members of the clan and of their names. From these documents we learn that the nucleus of the clan—the persons with princely status and their closes relatives—consisted of about twenty persons, all with Norse names. The Scandinavian identity of the clan members began to dissolve during the 940s when for the first time the princely Rus were provided with Slav names: the Slavicisation of the clan was going on in the second part of the century; princes Vladimir and his son Jaroslav were already Slavs.

The main site of the Rurikids in the south was Kiev. It gained importance during the tenth century when on some of its hills existed settlements and burial places of the Rus elite.

The surviving material, when compared with burials from Gnëzdovo and Shestovitsa, contains few typically Norse items. If the archaeological material which is accessible is representative (which there seems no reason to doubt) it would mean that the Norse identity of the Kievan Rus either was much weaker than that of the other Rus', or it did not manifest itself in the same way.



The period of the activity of the Rus in the East was a relatively short episode but definitely not an unimportant one. We can see clearly that the Norse presence here was considerable, and it was not restrained by any means to a few traders and mercenaries, not even to the clan of Rurikids, the creators of the Principality of Kiev. Remembering the glory of Kiev, we should not forget the Rus', the Norsemen that made this part of Europe their home and lived here for quite a long time. The East was, as was England, Ireland, the Atlantic islands and Normandy, part of the Scandinavian world of the Viking Age. This world was alive for more than two centuries and ceased to exist in most of these places either just before the end of the tenth or at the beginning of the eleventh century. The basis for the existence of a real Norse society was gone when new groups of Scandinavians stopped coming. The troops of mercenaries, the Varangians who came to the Kievan rulers represented a completely different kind of Norsemen; they were partaking in conflicts as hired hands and not as consolidated groups of families with women which had previously arrived to settle down and live here. In the long run the Norse culture could not compete with the overwhelming power of the Byzantine civilization that already during the eleventh century was creating thriving traditions of architecture, literature and church, the lasting structure on which Medieval Russia was built.

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