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BYZANTIUM
AND THE
VIKING WORLD

Edited by
FEDIR ANDROSHCHUK     JONATHAN SHEPARD
MONICA WHITE

UPPSALA
UNIVERSITET
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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following people and institutions, and to acknowledge their help in seeing this volume into print. First and foremost, thanks go to Ingela Nilsson, without whose consistent support and guidance we would never have got things off the ground; to Ragnar Hedlund, who played an invaluable role in organising the Uppsala workshop in May 2013; to the Nordic Byzantine Network for their support of that workshop; to Eric Cullhed and all at Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia, including our anonymous reviewers whose insights and comments have helped shape the volume; to David Cox for his excellent maps; to Nicola Sigsworth for her unstinting work on the copy editing; to Elena Stepanova for her assistance with illustrations of material in the Hermitage; to those colleagues who participated in the 2011 Sofia International Byzantine Congress table-ronde or in the Uppsala workshop, but whose papers are published elsewhere, for the intellectual stimulus they provided; but above all, to our authors for their enthusiastic participation in the project and for their patience and good-humour in dealing with a raft of queries great and small.

We also gratefully acknowledge the support of the Stiftelsen Riksbankens Jubileumsfond; the Stiftelsen Enboms Donationsfond; the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Studies (SCAS); and the Swedish Research Institute in Istanbul (SRII). Publication of this volume would not have been possible without the generous support of the Berit Wallenberg Stiftelse; the Kungliga Patriotiska Sällskapet; the Stiftelsen Konung Gustaf VI Adolfs fond för svensk kultur; and the Åke Wibergs Stiftelse.
Preface

The title of this book encompasses two quite different academic worlds—those of Byzantine and Scandinavian studies. Each has its own academic tradition rooted in distinctive source materials. The world of Byzantine studies, which owes its origins largely to the study of the classics, has been accused—rightly or wrongly—of being elitist; while that of Scandinavian studies has long been overshadowed by the romance of the Old Norse sagas. Within these two academic worlds there are a number of smaller professional spaces that seldom overlap, and those of historians and archaeologists offer a prime example. Each approaches the other’s source materials hesitantly. Not all historians are at ease with the relevant archaeological sources, and the same is true for the way in which some archaeologists deal with the written sources. However, there are subjects where close collaboration between these disciplines is difficult to avoid. One such is the Scandinavians’ activities in eastern Europe and Byzantium during the Viking Age and beyond. One might assume that Scandinavians—variously referred to as Rhōs, Rūs or Varangians—played only a marginal role in the history of the Byzantine empire. However, as is well known, the empire had need of foreigners as much as the Scandinavians had need of Byzantium in the construction of a social identity for themselves. It would probably be no exaggeration to say that Byzantium is also needed by modern Scandinavianists as well as by Slavists. Slavonic and, in particular, Scandinavian written sources only materialised at a very late date and, for research into the history of the Viking Age, our information comes solely from the Muslim and Byzantine texts and from archaeology.

When “Byzantium without Borders” was announced as the theme for the twenty-second International Congress of Byzantine Studies, it opened up an opportunity to bring a Scandinavian perspective to this subject. A round table was organised during the Congress in Sofia by Fedir Androshchuk, with input from Jonathan Shepard, on “Byzantium and the Viking World”. There were twelve participants—from Bulgaria, Denmark, England, Iceland, Russia and Sweden. It had been a while since the last conference proceedings on this topic were published, and the time seemed ripe to take stock of work done in the intervening years. Accordingly, we decided to publish the papers from the round table, but to supplement them with some important new contributions. A Prepublication Conference was held on 3–5 May 2013 in Uppsala. It convened under the aegis of the Nordic Byzantine Network, with support from the Swedish Stiftelsen Riksbankens Jubileumsfond. This time, twenty scholars took part in the proceedings.
Byzantium and the Viking World

Departing from earlier scholarly conventions, which tended to focus wholly on evidence from the territory of Scandinavia itself, our conception of the Viking world encompasses the Scandinavian cultural diaspora in the round, while paying special attention to England and Rus, and we also present some new interpretative models of cultural transfer.

Mastery of the Byzantine and Slavonic sources is of obvious importance to the task of editing and for this and many other reasons, we are delighted to have Monica White on the editorial board. Although the editors of this book represent different generations and academic schools, they share more or less the same approach and experience in dealing with the various categories of sources.

This volume contains nineteen papers, which form four thematic sections. In the general introduction the reader may learn something of the reasons for and background to the contacts between Byzantium and the Viking world. One section contains papers devoted to runestones and to all forms of material evidence. Another section raises the question of the image of Byzantium in the Old Norse sagas and Rus chronicles. The final section deals with the role of Christianisation in the contacts between Byzantines and Northerners, in so far as they can be deduced from the written and the archaeological sources.

This collection of studies is, then, a kind of snapshot of recent findings, with observations about the problems posed by the many strands of relations between Byzantium and the Viking world.

Working across such a broad range of sources and cultures creates a virtual and volatile minefield of issues as to how best to style names; whether to quote in the original language, and if so, how; whether or not to transliterate; and if so, how to do this. Striking a balance is never easy, and often leads to charges of inconsistency or worse. We have aimed to make this volume clear and accessible to an English-speaking and -reading audience and especially to those who are new to the sometimes arcane fields of the history and archaeology of early Norse, Rus, Slavonic and Byzantine history and culture. For this we can but apologise—particularly to colleagues from those fields whose sensibilities may, quite understandably, be offended by such an approach.

We have attempted to make proper names and technical terms which appear frequently in the volume comprehensible to non-specialists. In respect of the Old Norse world, we have tried to use an Anglicised equivalent where one exists—Thorvold instead of Thorvold and Sigurd the Greek instead of Sigurðr grikkr, for example; but we have generally left place names untouched unless there is a well-known version—such as Hedeby instead of Heiðabýr. In the Byzantine sphere, Greek forms of proper names have generally been adopted—Komnenos instead of Comnenus; but again, place names have generally been left untouched, unless a familiar English form exists—Ath-
ens not Athenai. Some names in Asia Minor appear in their Turkish form, when the author is orienting the reader by citing present-day locations. And we have generally preferred the Russian spelling for place names in what were the lands of Rus, rather than a Ukrainian version—Chernigov not Chernihiv, for example—on the grounds that the former are still more familiar to the English-speaking world. Future generations may well think—and spell—differently.

With a few exceptions, Greek and Russian have been transliterated, using a modified version of the Library of Congress system for Cyrillic. Long quotations in the original language have been avoided and an English translation offered, unless a given source is being subjected to detailed textual analysis; these translations are by our authors, unless otherwise specified in the footnote. Given the scarcity of sources for the early history of Rus-Byzantine relations, some of them are discussed by several authors and the reader will therefore occasionally find varying translations and interpretations within the volume.

A short Glossary is provided at the end, although this is by no means exhaustive and wherever possible technical terms and foreign words are explained in their context. The maps at the start of the book aim to orient the non-specialist and to locate some of the key places and areas mentioned by our authors. Unless stated otherwise, all maps, images, photographs and tables are by the author(s) of a given chapter; for acknowledgements, please see below, 447–51.

Fedir Androshchuk Jonathan Shepard

Monica White
Notes on contributors

LESLEY ABRAMS did her graduate work at the Centre for Medieval Studies, University of Toronto, and is Fellow and Tutor in History at Balliol College and Professor of Early Medieval History, University of Oxford. A specialist on the early medieval Scandinavian world, Lesley is particularly interested in an interdisciplinary approach to Scandinavian integration and interaction in the west, what far-flung Viking-Age populations had in common, and religious conversion across all periods and faiths. Recent published work includes “Diaspora and Identity in the Viking Age” Early Medieval Europe 20 (2012) and “Early Normandy” Anglo-Norman Studies 35 (2013).

FEDIR ANDROSHCHUK obtained his doctorate from the University of Kiev, where he was a lecturer in the Department of Archaeology. He has lived and worked in Sweden since 2000, and is currently an Associate Researcher on the Images of Power: Byzantium and Nordic Coinage c. 995–1035 project at the Swedish History Museum. Fedir’s research focuses on contacts between Byzantium, Rus and Scandinavia in the Viking Age and recent publications include Scandinavian Antiquities of Southern Rus (Paris 2012); Vikings in the East—Contacts along the Road to Byzantium 900–1100 (Uppsala 2013); and Viking Swords (Stockholm 2014).

SCOTT ASHLEY is Lecturer in Medieval History at Newcastle University, having undertaken his doctoral work at the University of Oxford. His main research interests lie in early medieval Europe, especially the Carolingian empire, Anglo-Saxon England and Viking-Age Scandinavia. He has recently published on Icelandic experiences of Byzantium and on the Carolingian and Chinese accounts of Halley’s Comet from 857. Scott is currently writing up his research on the environmental consequences of the Viking diaspora in the North Atlantic, as well as looking at the relations between the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ in Bede’s Northumbria.

FLORENT AUDY has studied history, archaeology and languages at Poitiers, Paris and Uppsala and is currently a doctoral candidate in Stockholm University’s Department of Archaeology, where he is looking at the ornamental and symbolic functions of coin-pendants in Viking-Age Scandinavia. His research focuses on the interface between archaeology and numismatics, with a particular interest in early medieval coins, their re-use and deposition; as well as in ornaments, funerary practices and religion.
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Inga Hägg is a scholar of textile finds from Viking-Age Birka, Hedeby and medieval Schleswig. Now Professor Emerita at the University of Stockholm, she undertook her doctoral study at Uppsala University, published as Kvinnodräkten i Birka (Women’s Dress at Birka) (Uppsala 1974). In Germany she was part of a research project on Hedeby (Haithabu); directed the Archaeological Research Laboratory at the Archäologisches Landesmuseum Schloss Gottorf; and taught in Kiel and Hamburg. Her latest book Textil und Tracht in Haithabu was published in the series Die Ausgrabungen in Haithabu (Schleswig 2015).

Sverrir Jakobsson is Professor of Medieval History at the University of Iceland, where he obtained his doctorate after studying for an MA at the University of Leeds. Sverrir’s research interests include the Icelanders’ and west Scandinavians’ view of the world in the middle ages, and medieval thought systems in general. He has published widely in the fields of medieval Scandinavian history, Icelandic history and sagas, Old Norse literature, medieval world geography and national identity. Recently, with Þorleifur Hauksson, he prepared a critical edition of Hákonar saga Hákonarsaga I. Böglunga saga and II. Magnúss saga lagabætis, ÍF 31–32 (Reykjavik 2013).

Marek Jankowiak is Research Associate at the Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford. He works on Byzantium in the sixth to tenth centuries, especially on church history, historiography, and Byzantium’s external trade. He is also Co-Investigator on the AHRC-funded Dirhams for Slaves project, and is preparing a study of the slave trade between Scandinavia, Byzantium and the Islamic world in the ninth and tenth centuries. His recent publications include “The first Arab siege of Constantinople” Travaux et Memoires 17 (2013).
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Gülgün Köroğlu is Professor of Art History and Archaeology at Turkey’s Mimar Sinan University of Fine Arts in Istanbul, where she undertook her doctoral work on Byzantine art in the iconoclast period. She is director of excavations at Yumuktepe and Sinop in Turkey. Gülgün has published extensively on medieval pottery, glass and jewellery, including Anadolu Uygarlıklarında Taki (Anatolian Civilization in Jewellery) (Istanbul 2004). Recent publications in English include “Medieval Small Finds from the Yumuktepe Excavations 1993–2008” BYZAS: Veröffentlichungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Istanbul 15 (2012).

John H. Lind, an historian and slavist, received his PhD from the University of Copenhagen in 1993. He has been associated with the Centre for Medieval Studies of the University of Southern Denmark since 1980. His publications include Nöteborgsfreden och Finlands medeltida östgräns 2–3 (Helsinki 1991). He recently co-authored Jerusalem in the North: Denmark and the Baltic Crusades, 1100–1522 (Turnhout 2012) and co-edited and contributed to From Goths to Varangians (Aarhus 2013). His research interests include the flow of influences between east and west in Rus and Scandinavia from the eighth century onwards, Christianity, Varangians, crusades and the historiography of the Viking Age.

Anna Litvina is a philologist and Senior Research Fellow in the Laboratory of Linguo-Semiotic Research at the Higher School of Economics National Research University (Moscow). She has published several books in Russian, co-authored with Fjodor Uspenskij: The Choice of Names Among the Princes of Rus, 10th–16th Centuries: Dynastic History Through the Prism of Anthroponymics (Moscow 2006); The Trajectories of Tradition: Chapters From the History of the Dynasty and Church in Rus, Late 11th to Early 13th Centuries (Moscow 2010); and The Russian Names of Cuman Princes. Inter-Dynastic Contacts Through the Prism of Anthroponymics (Moscow 2013). In addi-
tion, she has published over seventy articles on the history, language and culture of pre-Mongol Rus.

Elena Mel’nikova is a graduate of the Philological Faculty of Moscow State University and is Professor of Philology and History, based at the Institute of World History of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Elena’s main interests include Scandinavia and the East Slavs in the Viking Age, Icelandic sagas, runology, early history writing and oral traditions. She is the author of *Old Scandinavian Geographical Treaties* (Moscow 1986); *The Eastern World of the Vikings* (Gothenburg 1996); *The Image of the World: the Evolution of Geographical Thought in Europe, 5th to 14th Centuries* (Moscow 1998); *Scandinavian Runic Inscriptions. New Finds and Interpretations* (Moscow 2001) and *Scandinavia and Rus: Selected Papers* (Moscow 2011).

Roland Scheel is Assistant Professor for Medieval Scandinavian Studies at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen. He studied history and Scandinavian Studies in Frankfurt am Main and Copenhagen. His doctorate focused on the cultural relationship between Scandinavia and Byzantium. His research focuses on the various effects of cultural interaction between Scandinavia and other European regions throughout the middle ages. He is the author of *Lateineuropa und der Norden. Die Geschichtsschreibung des 12. Jahrhunderts in Dänemark, Island und Norwegen* (Berlin 2012) and *Skandinavien und Byzanz. Bedingungen und Konsequenzen mittelalterlicher Kulturbeziehungen* (Göttingen 2015).

Valentina S. Shandrovskaia was for many years Keeper of the collection of Byzantine seals at the State Hermitage Museum, St Petersburg and is a leading scholar at the Hermitage’s Oriental Department. Author of over one hundred papers, she recently co-authored *Byzantinische Bleisiegel der Staatlichen Ermitage mit Familienname Sammlung Lichachev. Namen von A bis I* (Vienna 2005) with Werner Seibt.

Jonathan Shepard was University Lecturer in Russian History at the University of Cambridge and is currently Co-Investigator on the AHRC-funded *Dirhams for Slaves* project at the Khalili Research Centre, University of Oxford. Co-author with Simon Franklin of *The Emergence of Rus* (Harlow 1996), with whom he also edited *Byzantine Diplomacy* (London 1992), his other edited volumes include *The Expansion of Orthodox Europe* (Farnham 2007) and *The Cambridge History of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge 2008). Some of his many articles and book chapters appear in a collection of his studies *Emergent Elites and Byzantium in the Balkans and East-Central Europe* (Farnham 2011).
Thorgunn Snædal studied Old Norse, German and comparative linguistics at the universities of Stockholm and Uppsala. Her dissertation, defended in 2002, investigates the language and chronology of the runic inscriptions of Gotland. From 1978 until 2014 she was employed as an expert in runology and Old Norse languages and culture at the National Heritage Board in Stockholm. She has written many articles on topics related to runology and in recent years, in addition to her work on Swedish runic monuments, has conducted research on Icelandic runic inscriptions and runelore.

Fjodor Uspenskij is Professor of Philology at the Higher School of Economics National Research University (Moscow). He is a director of the Centre for Slavonic-Germanic Research at the Russian Academy of Sciences and a senior scholar at the Laboratory of Medieval Research at the Higher School of Economics. His research interests encompass the history of Russian literature, onomastics, Old Norse and Icelandic literature, medieval Scandinavia and early Rus, historical poetics, and genealogy and dynastic ties in the early and high middle ages. In addition to his books co-authored with Anna Litvina (see above), he has published: Name and Power: the Choice of Names as an Instrument of Dynastic Struggle in Medieval Scandinavia (in Russian, Moscow 2001; in German, Frankfurt am Main 2004); and Scandinavians—Varangians—Rus (Moscow 2002).

Monica White holds a PhD in Slavonic Studies from the University of Cambridge. An interest in the cults of saints in the medieval Orthodox world has inspired much of her scholarly work, including her book Military Saints in Byzantium and Rus, 900–1200 (Cambridge 2013) and articles about relics, enamels, dragon-slaying saints and the cult of Constantine the Great in Rus. Following post-doctoral positions at Cambridge and Stanford, she is now a lecturer at the University of Nottingham and is pursuing a new project on Byzantine-Rus relations.

Valeri Yotov, PhD, is a docent and research fellow at the Varna Museum of Archaeology in Bulgaria. He has published extensively on the material culture of early medieval Bulgaria. His particular interest is in weaponry from that period. He is the author of Weaponry and Riding Gear in Medieval Bulgaria (in Bulgarian, Varna 2004).
### Abbreviations

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<td>ANS</td>
<td>Anglo-Norman Studies</td>
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<td>BSI</td>
<td>Byzantinoslavica</td>
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DG Drevneishie gosudarstva na territorii SSSR/Vostochnoi Evropy

DOP Dumbarton Oaks Papers

DOS Dumbarton Oaks Studies

DRVM Drevniaia Rus’. Voprosy medievistiki


EME *Early Medieval Europe*


HUS *Harvard Ukrainian Studies*

ÍF Íslenzk fornrit

JÖB *Jahrbuch der österreichischen Byzantinistik*


MA *Medieval Archaeology*

Abbreviations


NAR Norwegian Archaeological Review


PSRL Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisei


RAÄ Riksantikvarieämbetet (Central Board of National Antiquities), Sweden


REB Revue des études byzantines

RN Revue numismatique


GENERAL MAPS
MAP 1.1: The range of the Viking world

Areas of Viking settlement

Viking-Centric Map

1st Proof 29 August 2015
2nd Proof 01 September 2015
3rd Proof 03 September 2015
4th Proof 19 November 2015
5th Proof 04 January 2015

JONATHAN SHEPARD
Byz and the Viking World
Font: Myriad Pro

Left-hand frame size: 110mm x 165mm
MAP 1.3: Rus and Byzantium
PART I

CONTACTS AND CULTURAL TRANSFER BETWEEN BYZANTIUM AND THE VIKING WORLD
Before embarking on some principal themes, one must consider a couple of objections that may be raised against the very title of our volume, besides taking note of the difficulties posed by our source materials. One might object to using the term ‘Viking’ as if it were synonymous with ‘Scandinavian’, and to the consequent neglect or misrepresentation of the large proportion of Scandinavian-born men (and women) whose main occupations were herding, planting, fishing and weaving, not passages of arms. One might further object that if ‘Viking’ denotes an era of long-haul traders and war bands, fortune seekers all, beginning in the later eighth century and ending in the second half of the eleventh, our volume’s protraction into the thirteenth century far outruns the ‘Viking Age’ and therefore lacks consistency in its contents. Still more fundamentally, one might point to the diversity of societies and polities scattered across the expanses of the Viking world. Many were, after all, volatile and dynamic, changing over time, and their cultural horizons were capable of contracting abruptly rather than maintaining long-range antennae; furthermore, settlers could ‘go native’, merging with the host populations and losing key cultural signifiers such as their Nordic language.

And if terms like ‘Viking world’ give a false sense of coherence to a sprawling, ever permutating, series of potentially self-contained ‘small worlds’, objections may also be raised against the possible implication of our volume’s title that Byzantium was static, with politico-military characteristics and cultural norms much the same in the thirteenth century as they had been in the ninth. Modern scholarship has highlighted the variety of streams running through its political, religious and artistic culture.¹ The elastic, somewhat amorphous, quality of the Byzantine empire’s borders has also come under scrutiny, and I have myself advocated the merits of regarding the Byzantine phenomenon as a set of overlapping circles rather than treating its history in terms of

¹ See e.g. Kazhdan & Epstein 1985; Evans & Wixom 1997; Louth & Casiday 2006; Parani 2007; Walker 2012; Nilsson & Stephenson 2014.
a unitary state. The term ‘Byzantine world’ has featured in several recent publications and projects. So might it not be more accurate to re-label our volume ‘The Byzantine and the Viking worlds’?

The objections about nomenclature may receive shortish shift. ‘Byzantium’ has the advantage of being ambivalent, denoting both Constantinople itself and a much broader entity. And, in so far as it highlights ‘the City’ (Polis), as the Byzantines habitually termed their capital, it accurately reflects their priorities. In a sense, the Byzantine empire was Constantinople long before its territorial compass dwindled to the City and a few far-flung dominions. It was far richer than any other town under imperial rule, and the municipal authorities were apt to lump provincials and foreigners together as ‘outsiders’. Their usage is perhaps comparable to that of Northerners, who focused on the ‘Great City’ (Miklagardr) when not referring more generally to ‘the Greeks’ as a collective. So far as ‘Viking’ is concerned, its use as a term of convenience is not utterly misleading. Even in the second half of the eleventh century, not a few Scandinavian property holders and potentates were ready enough to seize or plunder, when opportunities arose. Important areas of Scandinavian settlement saw raiding and free-for-alls for dominance still rampant in the twelfth century, notably the coastal areas and isles around Scotland and abutting on the Irish Sea. Further south, in the Scandinavian homeland, Cnut (like his father Sven) sponsored piratical operations before eventually installing himself as England’s ‘Viking king’, while the gelds extracted from the English by the Swedish Ulf in the service of successive lords were deemed worth commemorating on an Uppland runestone. A propensity for predatory enterprises is clearly discernible among power-holders of Nordic origin through the eleventh century, and a certain sense of mutual emulation and common origins persisted over distance and time, entering into the repertoire of saga composers. Thus, if we follow Snorri Sturleson, ‘Duke’ Roger of Sicily symbolically waited upon the Norwegian King Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer at table during the latter’s stay there en route to the Holy Land. Allegedly, Sigurd confirmed Roger in his dominion over Sicily, even raising him to kingly status.

By the time of Sigurd’s visit in 1108, Roger and fellow members of the de Hauteville family had long since abandoned their ancestral language and unchristian beliefs.

2 Shepard 2006.
3 See e.g. Cheynet, Morrisson & Laiou 2004–2010; Stephenson 2010 (especially introduction: xxi–xxv); Jeffreys et al. 2011.
4 See Magdalino 2000.
7 Magnúss saga 247; tr. Laing & Foote 281.
and in subjugating southern Italy and Sicily they looked to the Roman pope for legitimisation of their rule. Yet some sense of affinity with royal figures in the Scandinavian homeland persisted. Below the level of political elites and predators, there is ample evidence of cultural norms, aesthetic tastes and religious beliefs shared by communities of Scandinavian origin scattered across a vast area, from Greenland and Iceland to Rus. Local and hybrid forms emerged, new decorative styles circulated and became modish across the entire area, and these variations on common themes have aptly received the appellation of ‘Viking diaspora’ from Lesley Abrams. One of her thesis’ implications is that self-awareness and a certain sense of commonality transcended the many variations in social structures, and one of the components was interest in exotica and the flaunting of items or styles that were, or looked to be, of distant origin. Paradoxically, the display of assortments of alien luxury goods and styles could serve as a mark of status recognisable throughout the Viking diaspora.

In line with this, particular prestige accrued to those who showed themselves at home with or, better still, esteemed in several different parts of this trans-regional society and beyond. To be well-travelled, and especially to have visited places like Constantinople, was in itself strong qualification for claiming membership of this society’s uppermost echelons. This is implicit in the Rus Primary Chronicle’s tale of the visit paid by Kiy, a (mythical) precursor of the Rus lords of the Middle Dnieper region, to the emperor’s court in the ‘Imperial City’ (Tsarigrad); and it lies behind Kekauomenos’ passing reference to Harald Hardrada’s journey to Constantinople: Harald’s purpose was to pay his respects to the emperor. These statements made by, respectively, Rus bookmen around the end of the eleventh century and a Byzantine commander of the same era, are in key with the commemoration by some twenty-seven Swedish runestones of individuals’ journeys to ‘the Greeks’. They also accord with the motifs of journeying by heroes and villains to Byzantium and of goings-on there which feature in a fair number of Icelandic sagas, whether purportedly historical or avowedly fabulous. The recurrence of these themes in source materials emanating from a broad geographical compass points to the existence—and persistence—of a certain cultural commonality, at least among the socially or politically prominent and those who sought to record or fantasise about their deeds and aspirations. This serves to vindicate

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8 AbrDIV, especially 28–33, 38.
9 AbrDIV, 28–29, 33–34.
10 The Primary Chronicle’s authors argued that Kiy must already have been of exalted status to visit Tsarigrad and receive high honours from the emperor: PVL 9–10; RPC 54–55.
11 Str, ed. and Russian tr. Litavrin, 298–99; ed. and tr. Roueché, 97–06.
12 Mel’nikova 2005, 161–64. See also Ruprecht 1958, 52–54, 77, 91, 186 (index); RoU, 114–17, 125–27 and below, 169–86.
13 See VB and below, 363–87 and 345–62.
our volume’s treatment of the ‘Viking world’ as one cultural entity, for all its volatility. Indeed, in so far as return trips down ‘the East Way’ and, specifically, to Miklagardr were status symbols, opening doors to enhanced prestige and wealth back home, Byzantium was itself a constituent part of the Viking world, acting as a stimulus of sorts long after regular journeying there abated.

This is not to claim coherence or linear development for the history of the Viking world’s relationship with Byzantium. On the contrary, the frequency and intensity of human contacts and the passage of goods, and probably of imaginings about Byzantium, too, varied over time. Without attempting a comprehensive conceptual framework for them all here, I would suggest that the strands in the relationship between, roughly, the mid-tenth and the later eleventh centuries deserve special attention for their multiplicity, vitality and lasting repercussions, and that comparison with the immediately subsequent epoch of the Komnenan emperors (1081–1185) is fruitful. The earlier period saw potentates across eastern and northern Europe receiving baptism; some sought to impose Christianity on their subjects, taking steps to ‘territorialise’ their respective regimes with the aid of bishoprics and monasteries.14 Their attempts at tightening control over regional elites drove malcontents and losers into exile as far afield as Byzantium, while they themselves put a premium on authority symbols and exotica which might command trans-regional respect.

Around the time when these changes were under way in the north, with potentates seeking permanent hegemony for themselves and their offspring, the Byzantine empire itself underwent oscillations in power and territorial extent, against a background of steady economic expansion. Its strategic stance became bolder, sustained by wealth that was partly due to an upswing in commercial dealings with outsiders in general.15 The size of the empire’s armed forces rose from the mid-tenth century onwards, and although many full-time soldiers were Byzantine-born, the government looked to foreigners for military manpower suitable for the sustained offensive warfare that campaigning to reconquer eastern Asia Minor, northern Syria and much of the Balkans required. To enlist sizable contingents already equipped and trained for such operations, emperors often sought a foreign potentate’s cooperation, offering him gifts and other favours and trying to ensure adequate remuneration for the ‘allies’ he provided. Since the military build-up offered ample opportunities for generals to launch a bid for the imperial throne, emperors had good reason to see in ‘barbarian’ troops a useful coun-

14 See e.g. contributions to CRCM; Roesdahl 2011.
terforce to rebel commanders, and to employ some as guardsmen. In 1057 axe-bearers from the north were, along with Italian Normans, deemed characteristic enough of imperial receptions for a rebel general to parade them as guards.\(^\text{16}\) In the event, it was mutual suspicion between the central government and its generals, rivalries among the latter and the sheer cost of a large army that rendered Byzantium vulnerable and led eventually to massive territorial losses. The new order that Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118) instituted was of a rather different stamp to that of his recent predecessors, with religious correctness and piety under the emperor’s supervision being imprinted heavily, together with soldierly virtues and, at least in Alexios’ case, a degree of personal austerity.\(^\text{17}\) The Byzantine economy seems to have been buoyant, and provinces together with the capital prospered from a medley of exchanges, trafficking with markets far to the north of the Black Sea.\(^\text{18}\) The empire was now hemmed in by several formidable powers, and Alexios Komnenos looked above all to western—‘Frankish’—military manpower and horsemanship to help him regain key strategic points, precipitating the First Crusade in the process.\(^\text{19}\) This did, however, leave scope for the recruitment of men from other foreign quarters to serve on campaigns generally less flamboyant than those of Nikephoros II Phokas or Basil II, and to perform guard duties in Constantinople and key strongholds.\(^\text{20}\)

These changes in conditions in Byzantium correspond with shifting patterns in our sources’ allusions to Northerners and military matters. Warriors termed \textit{Rhōs} or \textit{Rūs}—and thus of Scandinavian descent\(^\text{21}\)—appear quite often in, respectively, Byzantine Greek and Arabic writings from the mid-tenth century onwards. Although slightly earlier mentions are known, they are sporadic and, for the most part, involve only limited numbers of warriors.\(^\text{22}\) It is the large and sustained offensives against the Mus-


\(^{17}\) See e.g. Kazhdan & Epstein 1985, 104–19; EMIK, 180–82, 185–89, 271–75; Cheynet & Flusin forthcoming.

\(^{18}\) Clear indications of the volume of exports of wine and oil come from the finds of amphorae surveyed by Noonan & Kovalev 2007.

\(^{19}\) See Shepard 1993, 276, 303–04; Shepard forthcoming.

\(^{20}\) This is not to deny the vigorousness of Manuel I’s campaigning, which could amount to recklessness, as at Myriokephalon in 1176: Birkenmeier 2002, 129–33. See also VB, 128–29, 147–62.

\(^{21}\) This need not mean that the birthplace of all of them was the Scandinavian homeland, given that several generations had passed since the first installations of Svear and others in the region of Lake Ladoga. But that the name \textit{Rhōs}/\textit{Rūs} or (in its Slavonic form) \textit{Rus} still in the tenth century denoted persons primarily of Scandinavian stock seems a safe assumption. See Schramm 2007, especially 76–77.

\(^{22}\) An exception is provided by the 700 warriors whom \textit{DeCer} (II.44, ed. Reiske, vol. 1, 651–52, 654) mentions as participants in the 911 expedition to the eastern Mediterranean. See Haldon 2000,
lims from the 950s onwards that seem to prompt mentions of hosts of Rūs in Arabic sources, and around the same time Byzantine military manuals presuppose the availability of Rus spearmen on expeditions.\textsuperscript{23} The army of Northerners, reportedly 6,000 strong, that came to the rescue of Basil II in 988 against his rebel commanders neatly illustrates the dilemmas posed by expansion of the Byzantine army.\textsuperscript{24} When, a century or so later, Alexios Komnenos found it difficult to fund large armies yet needed full-time warriors to help repulse marauders, the arrival of young Anglo-Saxon thegns eager for action and without a homeland was almost as providential. These Anglo-Saxons, alongside the Scandinavians already in imperial employ, provided a steady enough core of trustworthy warriors for Anna Komnena to describe their service to the emperors as being like “an inheritance”. By the time she wrote in the 1140s they formed some sort of guards unit associated with the Blachernai Palace.\textsuperscript{25}

Thus, for more than two centuries the reserves of military manpower available from the Anglo-Scandinavian world responded to the emperors’ sundry demands and strategies. This alone would make the subject of ‘Byzantium and the Viking world’ worth studying. It represents a phase in their unremitting quest for ‘barbarian’ military manpower. The prospect of rewards in the form of gold and de luxe goods was an incentive for Northerners to serve with the imperial armed forces, especially since protracted plundering was not an option, in light of Sviatoslav’s heroic failure in 971.\textsuperscript{26} Commercial exchanges were an alternative means whereby Northerners could acquire exotic goods from the Greeks. It was, after all, silver from the Islamic world that had first drawn Scandinavians far to the east of the Baltic and that led to the establishment of trading posts at Staraja Ladoga and beyond. One cannot hope to calibrate their relationship with the Byzantine world without taking account of the antiquity of these other contacts with a sophisticated civilisation. Judging by finds at Staraja Lado-

\textsuperscript{23} That the Rus’ numbers were substantial is suggested by the contemporary poet Mutanabbi’s account of efforts of the Rūm (i.e. Byzantines) and the Rūs to destroy the key fortress of Hadat, as if conducting joint operations: Vasiliev 1950, 333. A further indication of the Rus’ prominence and, probably, numbers is their third place in an Arabic list of enemy forces on this campaign, following the Byzantines and the Armenians: ibid., 331. For the occurrence of Rhōs in a manual of Nikephoros II Phokas’ era, see Praecepta militaria 14–15. See also below, 91–116.

\textsuperscript{24} The figure of 6,000 for the footsoldiers whom “the king of the Rus” sent to Basil’s assistance is provided by Stephen of Taron, Histoire universelle vol. 2, 164–65. See also Seibt 1992, 295–99; Shepard 1992, 68–70, 85–93; \textit{ER}, 161–63. For Basil’s allocation to the Rus of one-third of the prisoners and booty taken in Bulgaria in 1017, see John Skylitzes, Synopsis historiarum 355.

\textsuperscript{25} See Anna Komnena, Alexiad vol. 1, 79; \textit{VB}, 140–47; see also below, 53–87, 187–214, 215–40 and 345–62 on the various components of what is now known as the ‘Varangian Guard’, their weaponry and the seals of the ‘Grand Varangian Interpreter’.

\textsuperscript{26} For the weaponry left in the Danube region by Rus and other Northerners, see below, 241–53.
ga, some sort of commercial nexus linked Scandinavian entrepreneurs with Khazaria, if not the central lands of the Abbasid caliphate, already in the 750s. The streams of Islamic silver were fitful and small-scale at first, and the routes whereby they reached the north fluctuated drastically. But if, as seems likely, much of the silver whose profusion Anskar and his followers observed at Birka in the mid-ninth century came from the Orient, one may suppose gathering items marketable in the east to have provided motivation for the predatory activities—not least, taking slaves—discernible elsewhere in the Viking world.

So Scandinavian engagement with distant eastern markets dates from the formative phases of the Viking Age. The simple facts that Islamic products, not Byzantine ones, were long the big attraction, and that the all-important silver was obtainable most reliably by way of trading should always be borne in mind. Byzantium’s stocks of silver were quite meagre in comparison with what was circulating in the central lands of the Abbasid caliphate in its heyday, or what the Samanids issued as coinage during the first half of the tenth century. The Byzantine world is, literally, on the periphery of our earliest extant account of journeying by the Rus to trade in Khazar and Muslim markets, first composed by Ibn Khurradadhbih in the mid-ninth century. According to this well-informed Abbasid official, some of the Rus would bring furs and swords down to “the sea of the Rūm (i.e. Byzantines)” and there pay a tithe to “the emperor of the Rūm” before travelling on to the Straits of Kerch. The location of the Byzantine customs office was, almost certainly, Cherson. This bastion of the imperial presence on the Crimea was of commercial significance, judging by finds of seals of customs officials (kommerkiarioi). Yet Cherson was, ultimately, merely an outpost of empire, not the megalopolis that would eventually inspire skalds and writers of stories to tell of Miklagårdr’s splendour. The zone north of the Black Sea occupied by, among others, Greek-speaking and -writing communities stretched to the Sea of Azov and beyond, and it was perhaps someone hailing from one of these who scratched “Zacharias” (presumably his own name) in Greek letters on a dirham that ended up in the hoard deposited near modern St Petersburg early in the ninth century. In any case, the main routes of Scandinavians venturing into the interior from the Baltic ran to the south-east and the east, not across the Black Sea to Constantinople. And, if one may draw any infer-

31 On the abundance of finds of seals of *kommerkiarioi* from the mid-ninth to the late tenth centuries, see Alekseyenko 2007, 129–32; Alekseyenko 2012, 51–59.
32 Dobrovol’skii et al. 1982; Mel’nikova et al. 1984, especially 26–27, 40–41, 42 (fig. 1), 47.
ences from the sparse source materials, these enterprises involved groups and individuals who made no particular claim to high social status. Their objective seems primarily to have been self-enrichment from loads of silver, rather than the honorific gifts and glory vaunted of farers to Miklagardr in the sagas.\textsuperscript{33} The earliest encounters between Scandinavians and the advanced cultures in the east were of a different tenor from those which men-at-arms, princes and aspiring heroes had with the imperial court, if one follows these literary sources. The very fact that Byzantium provides a recognisable historical setting for such tales in a way the Islamic and Khazar worlds do not is noteworthy in itself. As I have argued elsewhere, Byzantium appears the embodiment of the thesis of the ‘Superordinate Centre’ formulated by Mary Helms.\textsuperscript{34} The goods crafted in its workshops were enshrouded quite deliberately with celestial associations, and Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (945–959) lists Rus among the peoples eager to get their hands on them.\textsuperscript{35} The Byzantines’ talent for fine craftsmanship will have resonated particularly with a culture predisposed to trace crafting skills back to the gods.\textsuperscript{36}

At any rate, Scandinavian contacts with the Islamic and Khazar worlds were—for all their vagaries—of longstanding by the time the Rus began regularly to trade at Constantinople itself, rather than merely putting in at Cherson. Early in the tenth century, accords followed by a treaty granting access to Constantinople’s markets and providing legal means for averting or resolving disputes were ratified between the Byzantine government and representatives of the Rus leadership. I see no reason to doubt a close connection between these agreements and the installation some years earlier of Northerners on the Middle Dnieper, most notably on the riverside in Kiev’s Podol.\textsuperscript{37} Thanks to the treaty, use of the waterway between the Middle Dnieper and the

\textsuperscript{33} This is not to deny that individuals may have headed for Constantinople from the late eighth century onwards, as the occurrence of the name ‘Ingeros’, probably deriving from Inger, suggests: Mango 1973, 17–18, 20, 27. The questioning of Scandinavian origins for bearers of this name posed by Shchavelev 2012 does not seem to me convincing. For archaeological evidence of Rus contacts with Byzantium in the ninth century see below, 91–116; and, for an apparent difference in attitudes towards the Islamic and the Byzantine worlds see below, 117–39.

\textsuperscript{34} Helms 1993; Shepard 2010b, 174–76.

\textsuperscript{35} DAI 66–69.

\textsuperscript{36} For the Aesir gods who “smithed”, see The Poetic Edda, “The Seeress’ Prophecy”, verse 7; DuBois 1999, 56, 158–59, 161–62; Barndon 2006; Andersson 2013, 52. The imperial government’s propagation of a link between its crafted goods and heavenly powers whetted Northerners’ appetites for silks from Byzantium and may also, perhaps, have something to do with their predisposition to use Byzantine coins for pendants. See below, 141–68 and 281–304. One may note that magic (seiðr) was taught to the gods by Freyja, “but its master was Odin”, lord of the gods: Price 2014, 175.

\textsuperscript{37} PV L 17, 18–20; RPC 65–68. On the archaeological evidence from Kiev, particularly the Podol, see ER, 98–103; Sahajdak 2007, 118. See also below, 91–116.
imperial capital for commercial purposes became feasible. However, the literary and archaeological data for trade between Byzantium and the regions north of the Black Sea steppes only begins to mount up from the mid-tenth century onwards. Twenty-six “traders” (kupets) are named, alongside emissaries of princes and other notables, as parties to the 944 Rus-Byzantine treaty, and some years later considerably more “traders” (pragmateutai) attended two receptions held in the Great Palace in Constantinople, forty-three and forty-four, respectively. The receptions were in honour of Princess Olga, and to infer that trade featured amongst the issues raised during her visit receives support from the Rus Primary Chronicle. This depicts the emperor as asking her, just after her return, to send produce—“slaves, wax and furs”—together with warriors, in fulfilment of undertakings she had made during her discussions with him. Such statements seem to be borne out by the finds of artefacts and produce from the Byzantine world that are coming to light in sites north of the steppes, and notably at Gnezdovo, near modern Smolensk. On this subject we shall just make two observations. Firstly, it may be no coincidence that finds of artefacts from the Byzantine world start to multiply from around the time that literary sources begin to attest the military service of Northerners—Rus—at Byzantium in sizable numbers (see above, 7–8). Those who eventually returned to the north may well have brought back the fruits of their years of service with the imperial forces. Secondly, the nature and functions of the settlements at Gnezdovo are open to various interpretations, the number of permanent residents being still modest in the mid-tenth century. Nonetheless, it is difficult to see the assortment of goods unearthed there as divorced from clear literary attestations of the close attention to commerce being paid by the Rus leadership at that time. These two rationales for the finds are not, in fact, mutually exclusive. If hundreds, maybe thousands, of Northerners returned from imperial service laden with showy ‘consumer goods’, they would have served, in effect, as travelling advertisements for the exotica on offer in Byzantium. The sight of these could well have stimulated fresh enterprises to gain them through commercial exchanges.

The mid-tenth century also provides the first indubitable evidence of Northerners—Rus—in receipt of baptism from the Byzantines, Princess Olga being only the most prominent neophyte. Here too, one finds precedents of a sort, albeit loose and nuanced. They serve to warn against taking at face value the apparent upsurge in northern Christians’ numbers that extant sources attest for Olga’s era. Since the mid-ninth

38 PVL 23; RPC 73.
40 PVL 30; RPC 83.
41 For the kudos attached by saga writers to weaponry reportedly of ‘Greek’ workmanship, see below, 363–87 and 345–62.
century and probably long before, Rus traders had been encountering Christian rites and observances while going about their business in places like Cherson. According to Ibn Khurradadhbih, they even claimed Christian status for themselves, so as to lower their customs dues. For them to convince the Muslim authorities, they would presumably have needed to offer evidence of belief and for this, visual symbols of the Christian faith would have had a part to play. Professing devotion to the Cross or, better still, bearing a miniature cross on one’s own person would have served this purpose well. One may fairly suspect a certain connection between the Rus’ desire to show Christian symbols to—sometimes sceptical—Muslim officials and the finds of pendant crosses along the riverways of Rus and around the Baltic. There were, of course, other reasons for individuals wearing such crosses. They could act as lucky charms alongside other talismans invoking alternative protectors, or as tokens of personal commitment to Christ and affirmations of belief, their presence known only to the wearer beneath clothing. Pendant crosses occur across a vast area, questions of their dating and origins are thorny, and western Europe and the Baltic region have been proposed as possible manufacture locations of the earliest known types. Nonetheless, there is clearly a connection between the wearing of crosses, encolpia and suchlike marks of devotion and the periphery of the Byzantine world. Cherson was one place where pendant crosses were made, as witnesses the find there of a stone mould for casting sacred items, including crosses comparable to a type found in the Middle Dnieper region, at Gnezdovo and also at Birka. Tatjana Jašaeva has dated the mould to the ninth or tenth century, and there is evidence that Cherson was replete with monasteries and churches at this time, seemingly a vibrant centre of Christian life.

This scenario of casual encounters between itinerant Northerners—mostly traders—and Christian practices on the northern fringes of the Byzantine world over a lengthy period is the background against which to view an apparent upsurge in numbers of Rus Christians between the early years and the middle of the tenth century. As is well known, there is a contrast between the terminology of the Rus-Byzantine

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42 Ibn Khurradadhbih, Kitab al-masalik 116.
43 Survey of find spots of early types of pendant crosses by Jansson 2005, 66–75. See also Lind 2013, 351–52; Shepard 2014.
46 Jašaeva 2010, 479, 481 (Abb. 2a); Shepard 2014, 238. See also, for the mould of a different type of cross at Cherson, Pitarakis 2006, 166–67, fig. 110.
47 Jašaeva 2010, 479, 483–89. See also Tolochko 2011, 62–64; and for, respectively, literary and material evidence of Christian Cherson, Albrecht 2012 and Jašaeva et al. 2011.
treaty of 911 and that made in 944. The former, drafted by imperial clerks, uses the term “Christians” as synonymous with the Byzantines, treating the Rus as all pagans. By 944, however, they could no longer make this assumption. Instead, they mostly used a proper name for themselves, given in the Slavonic version of the Rus Primary Chronicle as “Greeks.” Without doubting that some Rus were whole-heartedly committed to Christian monotheism and attempted devotions as best they could, one may doubt the practicality or consistency of their Christian observances back home. The evidence for the regular practice of Christianity under priestly direction in the Middle Dnieper region or points further to Staraja Ladoga and, indeed, Birka before the late tenth century is very scant. Some prominent pious individuals may have maintained clergymen, as Olga clearly did up to the time of her death in 969. But no trace of a church building has been convincingly identified, any more than there is evidence of a prelate resident in Rus or among the Svear. And even allowing for Constantine VII’s aversion to the Rus and his De administrando’s preoccupation with strategic issues, this work’s eyewitness report on the rites performed by Rus traders upon navigating the Dnieper rapids leaves little room for Christian leanings.

The discrepancy between the 944 treaty’s mention of Rus professions of Christianity on the one hand and, on the other, a dearth of firm indications of Christian institutions north of the Black Sea is striking. It calls to mind the reaction of the German Adalbert, whom Otto the Great sent in 961 in response to Olga’s request for “a bishop and priests,” in other words a full-blown Christian mission. To Adalbert the request appeared in retrospect to have been false and futile. He recorded that he had “barely” escaped the fate of some of his companions, who were killed on the homewards journey. Adalbert imputes fraudulent intentions to Olga, but the truth is probably more banal. Despite the commitment to Christ of Olga and, probably, her entourage, the majority of the Rus politico-commercial elite were not disposed to follow her example. They practised a medley of religious rites, incorporating only elements of Christian symbolism and ritual, at most. This is not to deny that many may have revered the God of ‘the Greeks’, or that leading households could be managed by God-fearing women.

49 A priest—not necessarily identifiable with the Gregory who accompanied her to the receptions in Constantinople—officiated at Olga’s funeral in Kiev: PVL 32; RPC 86.
50 The dearth of firm evidence for Christian worship or institutions in Rus in the mid-tenth century was emphasised by Toločko 2011, 65–68. For a more positive assessment, see below, 409–40.
51 DAI 60–61. For Constantine’s personal suspicions of the Rus, see Shepard 1999, 269–70, 272. See below, 315–36.
who sought Christian-style burial for their infants and themselves. But very few seem to have had the inclination or apparatus regularly to maintain Christian observance and worship. One suspects that much of the Rus’ promptness to make a show of Christian devotion in Constantinople, and to swear oaths and attest other statements by the Christian God, was fired by their desire for credibility and respect. At any rate, that practitioners of some Christian rites coexisted readily enough with persons maintaining pagan rites and beliefs is suggested by the distribution pattern of graves in the burial ground on the Starokievskaia Hill at Kiev. A child’s coffin in a Christian-style pit burial lay only a few metres from a warrior’s chamber grave, and the same part of the burial ground accommodated what seems to have been a sanctuary where sacrifices were made.

The state of affairs on the Starokievskaia Hill is comparable with that in Birka and other urban centres of the Svear in the tenth century and beyond. There, too, firm evidence for wholly Christian separate burial grounds is lacking. Those attempting forms of Christian observance in life apparently coexisted with outright pagans and underwent, in effect, co-burial with them. As among the Rus, so among the Svear, imposition of one cult to the exclusion of all others was beyond a leader’s power, being contrary to what most members of socio-political elites deemed the proper function of their paramount prince. There was no uniformity of outlook or ritual observance even within families. The famous tale of Sviatoslav’s rebuff to Olga’s injunction to adopt her faith signals this. So, on a different scale, does the occasion around 1007 when a bishop baptised King Olof Skötkonung together with people from seven ‘folk’, only for an assembly at Uppsala to reject any notion of mass baptism. The bishop had been despatched by the German missionary, Bruno of Querfurt. Bruno himself was then attempting to convert to Christianity the Pechenegs in the Black Sea steppes, only to die a martyr’s death in 1009, at the hands of people whom our earliest source terms Rus.

These episodes highlight the elite-level intermingling and heightened cultural aspirations across northern and eastern Europe in the later tenth and earlier eleventh centuries. But they also point to the diverse ways in which societies and political structures

54 PVL 24–26; RPC 75–77. I discuss this issue further in Shepard 2014, 236, 239.
55 Borovs’ky & Kaliuk 1993, 8–9, 11–12. See also Shepard 2009, 205–06.
57 PVL 30–31; RPC 83–84.
58 Bruno of Querfurt, Letter to Henry II 105.
59 Baronas 2008, especially 18–22.
evolved. Communities among the Götar and the Svear proceeded towards Christian observance at their own pace and without enthusiasm for complete conformity. Anglo-Saxon churchmen played some part in this, particularly among the Svear, while German churchmen provided pastoral care among the Götar. Västergötland was, in the early eleventh century, the sole bishopric. Yet in this same region in the tenth or eleventh century a tiny portable altar of green porphyry accompanied a priest or perhaps a bishop to his grave; presumably he had, like the altar, come from the Byzantine world. This is just one of several indications of the Swedes’ acquaintance with eastern church usages and, probably, of direct encounters with clergymen or holy men hailing from the eastern Christian world. Phrases occurring on runestones such as “God help his/her soul...” are reminiscent of the standard Byzantine formula, “God help thy servant...” Some were carved in Uppland by an English-born bishop, Osmund. They epitomise the interplay between east and west there, the ability of communities and propertied families to pick and mix religious rites and usages, even if fresh supplies of silver now flowed in only from the German lands.

Such freedom of choice owed something to the settlement patterns and relatively secluded location of the Swedes, and things worked out differently in other parts of the Viking world in the second half of the tenth century. But multi-cult practices might have lingered on indefinitely in Rus, as among the Svear, perhaps with Islamic decorative motifs, if not customs, being adopted piecemeal alongside Christian ones. I see no reason to doubt the essence of the Rus Primary Chronicle’s report of the ‘Investigation of the Faiths’ conducted by Prince Vladimir in the mid-980s. The very fact that all the objects of the Investigation were monotheistic religions constitutes a partial answer to the question of why multi-cultism did not persist in Rus. Vladimir was among the potentates mentioned above (6) who were aspiring to more consummate dominion as well as acquiring more subjects, attaching a common cult and belief in a God of Power to their personal regimes. Uniformity of worship would engender tighter political order, and a ‘winning formula’ of correct types of public ritual and avowed belief should bring rewards, in the form of victories and material success. Yet realisation of such aspirations involved experimentation and the risk of hostility from other

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60 Blomkvist et al. 2007, 181–82.
61 Vretemark & Axelsson 2008, 216, 217 (fig. 5). The authors note that the ten other exemplars of such portable altars from Scandinavia usually lack archaeological contextualisation. See also Musin 2012, 80; Garipzanov 2012, 3–5, 11–13, 17.
63 Staecker 2009, 362–66; Blomkvist et al. 2007, 183. The rune master Osmund’s Anglo-Scandinavian origins are open to question and a case for assigning him to Hälsingland, Medelpad or elsewhere in the northern lands of the Svear is presented by Källstrom 2007, 285–89, 291.
members of a dynasty or ruling elites, and drastic policy changes and negative reactions from younger generations, Sviatoslav’s rebuff to Olga being an instance of the latter. Such oscillations are unsurprising, given that these potentates faced a dilemma. They wished to appropriate the religious faith and apparatus that were earning wealth, victories and éclat for their preeminent practitioners, the Byzantines and the Germans. Besides the Byzantine campaigning in which Scandinavians themselves played a part (above, 6–7), the reputation of German military might ran high after Otto I’s decimation of the Hungarians at Lechfeld in 955. Substantial wealth accrued to him from the tribute levied from Slavs beyond the Elbe, and from his Saxon silver mines. These powers’ recent ‘success stories’ commended their respective forms of cult to outsiders, and made access to their priests’ rites and prayers desirable. Yet it was these self-same powers which posed challenges to the status, if not the security of regimes on their periphery, and whose culturo-religious tentacles were already extending into their territories by the mid-tenth century. Foremost among the political structures that developed in very different directions from the Swedes’ are those of the Danes and the Rus.

The regime under direct challenge was that of the Danes in the face of German military resources and culturo-religious organisation. Three sees were staffed by German prelates, one being the vital emporium of Hedeby. King Harald Bluetooth had himself baptised around 966 and, probably buoyed up by trust in the Christian God’s backing, he launched a raid soon after Otto’s death. Retaliation came swift and devastating, and Hedeby was lost. Harald only regained control of the town thanks to Otto II’s preoccupation with campaigning in southern Italy and sudden death in 983, followed by a prolonged minority. But Harald still ruled under the shadow of the mighty neighbour that supplied much of his priesthood and, perhaps not surprisingly, his son Sven Forkbeard showed himself out of sympathy with current arrangements for Christian worship while striving for mastery of the Danes after Harald’s death c. 987. German-born bishops had to seek refuge in their homeland. The Rus political leadership was not exposed to Byzantine power in quite the manner of the Danes to German troops. But the care with which Constantine VII’s De administrando describes points of Rus vulnerability to the steppe nomads shows the damage they could inflict through proxies. They retained this capacity well into the eleventh century, judging by the show of bravado the Polish ruler Boleslaw Chrobry mounted towards “nearby Greece” upon taking over Kiev in 1018. And the impairment that the Byzantines’ attractive

67 Gelting 2007, 83.
69 Thietmar of Merseburg, Chronicon 474–75.
cult could pose to a Rus prince’s authority is illustrated by the resistance Vladimir’s institution of pagan rites aroused from a Scandinavian-born man of substance who had returned “from the Greeks”, having (almost certainly) been baptised while serving with the imperial forces.  

The dilemmas faced by Danish and Rus potentates vis-à-vis their respective mighty neighbours and trading partners bear comparison, although they were not identical. Both wished to appropriate, in effect, their winning formulae for legitimate and successful rulership, but to do so on their own terms, involving enhancement rather than demeaning of status. Indeed, a prime aim of Harald and Vladimir alike in receiving baptism was to parry these neighbours’ material strength and unearthly powers, deflecting the culturo-religious attractions they exercised on individuals in their respective polities. And their regimes illustrate quite well the vigour with which the Viking and Byzantine worlds interacted in this period, a time when ambitious rulers were trying to forge legitimately separate identities for their regimes, even while embracing Christianity. Without attempting full substantiation, one may note how Harald and Vladimir sought to root their rulership with the aid of monuments that proclaimed their piety, but also their victories and, even, their cultural uniqueness. Thus the runes of Harald’s famous Jelling inscription characterise him as “that Harald who won for himself all Denmark and Norway, and made the Danes Christian”. Christ is depicted, but this and other images are executed in a new (Mammen) style that inspired many later runestones.

The Jelling monuments have been described by Else Roesdahl as “a grand Danish counterpart” to the works then under construction in Magdeburg and other Ottonian centres, which themselves invoked Rome. Harald’s efforts to monumentalise his commitment to the new religion are comparable with Vladimir’s fore-mentioned bid to institute public rites of worship in Kiev. Seemingly these had no exact precedent among the Rus, at least in being so manifestly linked up with the place of residence of the ruler.

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70 *PVL* 38–9; *RPC* 95–6. The probable ultimate derivation from the Slavonic *Life of the First Cherson Martyrs* of the words put into the mouth of the “Varangian” by the Rus *Primary Chronicle* (Tochko 2011, 62–64) does not altogether invalidate the historicity of this episode, probably datable to the early 980s. The *Life* was available to the composers of the so-called *Life of the Varangian Martyrs* (the direct source of the Rus *Primary Chronicle*’s account) in, presumably, the first half of the eleventh century. This, together with the Varangian’s Nordic name, Tury, and his son’s name of Ivan, suggestive of the name of Emperor John Tzimiskes, a lord much admired by the northern warriors, weighs in favour of a factual basis for the episode: see *ER*, 158. See also below, 429–433.


72 Roesdahl 2011, 357. Harald Bluetooth may have alluded directly to imperial Byzantine designs and appearances through the construction of his Trelleborg ring fortresses: see 91–116.
Six idols were erected outside Vladimir’s hall, while his uncle did much the same in Novgorod. The centrepiece was a richly ornamented figure of Perun, god of lightning and power. Vladimir’s innovation seems to mark a systematic version of his father’s emphatic yet fairly personal rejection of Byzantine Christianity. Through siting the idols and sacrifices outside his hall, Vladimir made a visible link between his actions elsewhere as warleader, personal authority and supernal powers. Was not this a form of riposte to the imperial rites of victory which, in the third quarter of the tenth century, were celebrated quite often in the streets of Constantinople? If so, Vladimir’s initiative has something in common with Jelling, the “grand Danish counterpart” to German monuments and also, perhaps, to the royal burials and pomp and circumstance displayed at places like Quedlinburg.

Vladimir’s attempt at an organised ‘counter-cult’ to Byzantium’s did not last long. Upon receiving baptism from Byzantine prelates and marrying Anna Porphyrogenneta in Cherson, he ostentatiously aligned his regime with the God of the Greeks, accommodating Byzantine metropolitans in Kiev to organise and preside over regular rites of worship across his dominions, and getting “masters from the Greeks” to build a magnificent church which evoked the design of the Pharos palace church in Constantinople and had the same dedicatee, the Mother of God. But this ‘Tithe Church’, which stood in Vladimir’s Kievan palace complex, served to commemorate Vladimir’s capture of Cherson and victory over the Greeks besides implying parity of status with the basileus. Trophies seized from the city were paraded outside the church. Inside, the relics of St Clement enjoyed such prominence that this “martyr of Christ and pope” was taken for the church’s dedicatee, at least by outsiders.

For all Vladimir’s diligence in introducing correct forms of worship as practised by the Greeks, the winning formulae, he

73 PVL 37; RPC 93–94; ER, 155–56. If one accepts the basic historicity of Tury’s martyrdom for objecting to rites involving the sacrifice of his son (above, note 70), one may as well admit that of Vladimir’s institution of sacrifices to an assortment of idols. His bid to concoct a coherent ‘pantheon’ of gods from the traditions of various peoples under his sway is in key with the successive attempts of his grandmother and his father to solemnise their role through association with supreme heavenly and earthly powers, or through manifesting symbols of authority and comradeship that resonated with different groups of their subjects: ER, 120–21, 134–37, 143, 146, 149–50, 177; Kovalev 2012, 470–73, 483–87, 491–97, 515–17. A comparable series of experiments is discernible at Jelling: Roesdahl 2008, 658–60. On the Rus Primary Chronicle’s own testimony, the ‘pantheon’ of idols erected outside Vladimir’s hall was novel and short-lived. The absence of any firm archaeological attestation for them is, accordingly, unsurprising.

74 See Petersen 2006, 304.


76 Thietmar of Merseburg, Chronicon 436–37; Shepard 2005, 261. See also below, 391–408.
also sought to commemorate the distinctiveness of his polity, and the fact that he had acquired the cult from the Greeks on his own terms. In this Christian guise, the Tithe Church and the Sunday feasts now held in the nearby palace halls, had something in common with Vladimir’s ‘counter-cult’ of the recent past, and also with the “grand Danish counterpart” to German monuments at Jelling. One should not disregard the possibility of motifs and concepts circulating between Rus and Danish courts, as well as fundamental similarities in their geopolitical stances vis-à-vis mighty neighbours. Harald Bluetooth’s court could have given sanctuary to the young Vladimir, after he fled “beyond the sea” in the 970s. And there is reason to believe that Vladimir’s triumphant installation of St Clement’s relics in the Tithe Church so stimulated this saint’s cult among Northerners that Clement gained venerators among the Danish political elite: it may have been Sven Forkbeard’s son, Cnut, who disseminated the cult further still, among the Norwegians and the English.

The Byzantine and Viking worlds were, then, engaged in lively contacts over a period starting around the mid-tenth century and running well into the second half of the eleventh. As already noted, potentates across eastern and northern Europe were trying to consolidate dominion over extensive areas, and they were looking to established powers, the English and the German leaderships as well as the Byzantines, to provide religious cults and other building blocks for their regimes. At the same time, and moving to a different beat, the Viking diaspora was emerging as a phenomenon, of shared tastes together with a certain sense of commonality that transcended distances and political structures. Among these tastes was an appetite for exotica (above, 5), which the Byzantines were, for their own purposes, only too happy to whet. The processes of ‘polity building’, mass baptisms of adults, and, indeed, of frantic acquisitiveness of luxuries and techniques from afar, were inherently of finite duration. Rulers were essentially trying to create their own powerbases and political cultures, without incessant reference to a Superordinate Centre; local craftsmen and entrepreneurs sought to appropriate the methods of distant manufacturing centres; and there is a tendency for sectionalising to develop in long-distance trade routes of the preindustrial age, with a series of regional carriers and local distribution hubs rendering long-haul journeying redundant. So it is unsurprising that the period of most productive intercourse between Byzantium and the Viking world seems to have spanned little more than four generations, for all the subsequent spurts of cultural borrowing and of literary activities by saga composers.

77 PVL 55–56; RPC 120–22; ER, 165–67.
79 Shepard 2011b, 133–34.
This periodisation is ‘broad-brush’, resting partly on arguments *ex silentio*, and it is one that the contributions to this volume will illustrate, refine or modify. Less open to contradiction is our emphasis on the significance of Constantinople’s sea link with the Rus on the Middle Dnieper. This link became used more frequently and intensively in the era of Olga. But it was Vladimir’s baptism and creation of an ecclesiastical structure across Rus that transformed communications with Byzantium and regularised them. Thenceforth, the requirements of Christian worship generated a standing demand for huge quantities of wine and oil, which only the Byzantine world could supply. And, by the 1040s, Rus pilgrims were making their way to the Holy Land. Moreover, Vladimir’s organisation of a steppe frontier reaching far to the south of Kiev made travel along the Dnieper less hazardous, albeit never wholly secure. This made journeys to Byzantium more feasible and, probably, more affordable. In the 1070s Adam of Bremen remarked on the fact that Swedes preferred to use waterways to visit “Greece”, as being safer than the land route.

Opportunities for personal contact between persons from the Viking and the Byzantine worlds were probably greater than ever before. This raises the question of how far Rus remained part of the Viking world after c. 1000. Obvious cultural changes soon set in as a consequence of Vladimir’s imposition of Christian worship on his subjects and territorialisation of his rule—notably the virtual cessation of Rus princes’ long-range predatory expeditions, and the rapid spread of Slavonic as the language of worship and of authority. From soon after his baptism, Vladimir used Slavonic inscriptions on his coins, and efforts were soon being made to instruct persons—especially priests—in written Slavonic. Wax tablets found at Novgorod in a stratum from the early eleventh century seem to attest this. Runes went out of use in everyday life, at least among native-born Rus. Yet there is a fair amount of evidence of contacts and connections between the Rus princely house and members of the Scandinavian—and Anglo-Scandinavian—elite throughout the eleventh century. And at a deeper level Rus conceptions of rulership as a family affair, a property divisible between a prince’s sons rather than vested in a single monarch, are reminiscent of Scandinavian notions of

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80 For Feodosii’s encounter with “wanderers” near Kursk, see Nestor, *Zhitie Feodosiia* 356–59; tr. Heppell 28. On the repeated journeys of Anthony to Athos in the earlier eleventh century, see below, 409–40, and on Christian life and cults in Rus, see also below, 391–408.
81 *ER*, 170–74, 178.
82 Adam of Bremen, *Gesta* 452–53.
83 *ER*, 167–68.
85 Significantly, in light of one of this volume’s themes, runes were being written in places like Smolensk well into the twelfth century. They are probably the work of visitors or unassimilated settlers from the Nordic homeland: Franklin 2002, 111–15.
inheritance. So, too, is the starkness of Rus inauguration ritual, focused on an ancestral throne and apparently comprising a prince taking his seat upon it, without recourse to religious services, coronation or, indeed, a church. Underlying assumptions about authority and political culture in Christian Rus and in the Scandinavian—especially Swedish—homeland have traits in common, and persisted after the conventional end date of the Viking Age.\(^{86}\) This may provide some justification for our volume's own protraction into the thirteenth century.

Finally, any survey of Byzantium and the Viking world should take into account the British Isles, whose northernmost parts housed Norse-speaking populations long after the thirteenth century and whose southerly regions had rather more to do with Byzantium than is generally realised. Three reasons for paying attention present themselves. Firstly, evidence for the presence in these Isles of material objects and persons from the Byzantine world becomes firm from around the time when finds of its artefacts were accumulating at Gnezdovo and literary sources begin attesting the military service of Northerners at Byzantium in sizable numbers (above, 6–7). In itself, this suggests a fair degree of circulation of persons and things between the Rus-Byzantine trading network and the wider world of the North Atlantic. A couple of genres of evidence seem to corroborate this impression. One is an item of luxury goods, silk, which receives expert attention from Inga Hägg.\(^ {87}\) Here I shall highlight a number of finds of silks in the British Isles, in places that have more or less direct connections with Scandinavians. The fragments of silk fabrics excavated in mid- and later-tenth century strata at York and Lincoln and found in London are very likely to be Byzantine manufactures, especially those dyed with the rich red kermes of the eastern Mediterranean. All these find spots were prosperous emporia within or near the Danelaw, York and Lincoln having sizable populations of Nordic stock while Normans, and probably other members of the Viking diaspora, were certainly doing business in London in the later tenth century.\(^ {88}\) That these textiles came via Rus and the Baltic seems overwhelmingly likely, given their resemblance to examples found there. And the amount of silks available in England increased, so that they ceased to be attributes of kings and the topmost nobility: by the mid-eleventh century silks were, judging from literary sources, being flaunted by lesser nobles and well-to-do townsfolk, too.\(^ {89}\) One may reasonably suppose


\(^{87}\) See below, 281–304. See also Hägg 2007, especially 124–34, 138–40.


that this increase registers the rise in traffic along the Dnieper and other Rus riverways after Vladimir’s conversion and construction of a steppe frontier.

To postulate Byzantine manufacture for the silks reaching England together with routing via Rus gains support from the fact that silks of probable Byzantine origin have been found in another important emporium with a strong Scandinavian presence. Thus, twenty-seven small pieces of silk have been excavated in sites dating from the mid-tenth to the late eleventh century in Dublin. The location was a row of shops near the riverside, a commercial context, and silk seems to have become quite a routine feature of well-to-do women’s head coverings in the town during this period. Caps with a common pattern made from very similar textiles have been found in Lincoln and York.90 This distribution of finds suggests that things of Byzantine make could arrive in western parts of the British Isles by way of commerce, but they could well have changed hands in several transactions before reaching Dublin’s markets.

A different type of evidence points to persons making journeys to and from Byzantium, and bringing back with them tales that were later incorporated into the Rus *Primary Chronicle*, Norse sagas and Danish, Anglo-Latin, Norman French and Irish-related texts. Some have general themes of fate and vengeance, but many of the best-travelled involved stratagems and warfare. Adolf Stender-Petersen traced a number of narrative structures and motifs back to the classical and the Byzantine worlds and suggested that the likeliest transmitters to the north were warriors who had served with the imperial forces in the tenth and eleventh centuries. Given the stratagems’ military context, this is very likely.91 Stender-Petersen himself pointed to parallels with the “Counsels and Tales” of the eleventh-century commander, Kekaumenos, and more recent investigations have emphasised the resonance of Middle Byzantine military culture in some of the stories, alongside the fact that one or two tales are not so far removed from Byzantine methods of siege warfare.92 The transmission is likely to have been mainly by word of mouth, rather than through the written word. Therefore the diffusion of the motifs and narrative structures in our extant texts serves as a rough ‘tracer’ of returnees, suggesting that some travelled west beyond the Scandinavian homeland. In other words, persons as well as things like silk travelled from the Bosporus to the British Isles besides Iceland.93

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91 Stender-Petersen 1934, 243–48.
93 Stender-Petersen’s pinpointing of Harald Hardrada and his entourage as key *Kulturträger* has its merits (1934, 85–87, 97–101, 142, 153–55). However, Harald’s expedition against England in 1066 was not the only—or the most opportune—occasion for dissemination of “Varangian tales”. 
This implication, of the movement of persons as well as things, introduces a second aspect of the relevance of the British Isles to our topic. Literary and sigillographic evidence for individuals making the journey from the Byzantine world to England is fuller than has generally been appreciated. I shall cite a few instances of this, by way of complementing the evidence from silks and sagas. Firstly, there is reason to suppose that Byzantine embassies were reaching England in the tenth century, though not before around that century’s middling decades. Envoys from “the eastern kingdom” encountered the young Dunstan in the earlier 940s. Being in political disgrace, he begged them “to take him home with them, though he would be going into exile”. The East Frankish realm is the obvious candidate for this “eastern kingdom” but, as the editors of Dunstan’s Life note, Byzantium makes a serious alternative candidate.94 This is all the more so in light of the “paten fashioned by Greek work” and the “Greek vestments” which Athelstan and Edmund presented to St Cuthbert’s shrine.95 These luxury goods could well have arrived at the royal court among the gifts of an earlier Byzantine embassy or embassies. And that messages were arriving from imperial officials, if not from the emperor himself, is shown by the lead seal of a top treasury official. The seal belonged to Leo, who was genikos logothetēs at the end of the tenth century, holding the titles of anthypatos and patrikios. It was found near the Thames waterfront, the first in a series of seals of treasury officials found in London that reaches into the late eleventh century.96 The seals came to light more or less by chance, in an area of great commercial and administrative significance to the medieval city. Soil conditions elsewhere in central London are far less favourable to the survival of lead discs and, as an authority on the city’s archaeology observes, “it would be unwise to take the currently attested distribution [of finds of Byzantine seals] as even beginning to define the full extent of the capital’s buried links with Byzantium.”97

The location of the finds of Leo’s and the later seals by the riverside does not prove that they were brought by imperial emissaries in person or, indeed, that they had travelled by waterways across the Viking world from Rus. But this is a very serious possibility, not least because the chronological distribution pattern fits so closely with our postulated opening up of the sea link between Rus and Constantinople. Moreover, the overwhelming predominance of seals of treasury officials at Thameside Exchange indi-

94 Vita S. Dunstani 46–47 and n. 137.
95 Symeon the Monk, Historia de sancto Cuthberto 211, 212.
96 Egan 2007, 113–14; Cheynet 2008, 146–47, 157. On Leo, see now PmbZ # 24537. Leo only held the title of patrikios at the time of signing a decree (hypomnēma) in favour of the Great Lavra of Mount Athos in May 994. So his London seal, styling him with the higher title of anthypatos, was struck after that date. Since Leo was already genikos logothetēs in 988/989, he is unlikely to have still been en poste after c. 1000.
cates a certain consistency, and the seals’ editors have suggested recruitment of military manpower as the underlying purpose of the messages which the seals authenticated.\textsuperscript{98}

This seems all the more probable in view of a second feature of late tenth-century England, the apparent familiarity of cultured members of the ruling elite with Byzantine Greek military and naval terms. In composing his Latin version of the \textit{Anglo-Saxon Chronicle}, Ealdorman Aethelweard rendered the Anglo-Saxon words for ship with Latinised forms of contemporary Byzantine ones, \textit{dromon} and \textit{moneris}.\textsuperscript{99} While this reflects Aethelweard’s desire to flaunt his erudition and general savoir faire, it presupposes acquaintance with these Latinised Byzantine words on the part of his readership, which was not confined to the work’s dedicatee, his German cousin, Matilda. Such an acquaintance among members of the English political ‘establishment’ might well have come through mingling with the Scandinavian notables in their circle: terms of Byzantine Greek origin such as \textit{dromundr} had most probably already entered Old Norse usage.\textsuperscript{100} But Aethelweard’s opting for contemporary Greek terms for ships would be all the more understandable if Anglo-Saxons were themselves doing service with the Byzantine forces by the late tenth century, the time both of his Latin rendering of the \textit{Chronicle} and of Leo the genikos logothetēs. Their most convenient route to the Bosporus would surely have been the one already taken by Scandinavians heading in the same direction, along ‘the East Way’ through Rus. This was, after all, the route along which de luxe wares such as silks are most likely to have reached emporia such as London, Lincoln, York and Dublin (above, 5–6).

So far, we have merely drawn inferences about the passage of persons to or from the Bosporus and the British Isles, so it is worth glancing at a couple of fairly incontrovertible examples of individuals who claimed—convincingly enough for their Saxon hosts—to be of ‘Greek’ origin. One, “a certain monk…named Constantine” shows how motifs and skills from Byzantium could elicit wonder and then, in effect, be subsumed within the ‘small worlds’ of which early medieval polities were configured. Constantine arrived at Malmesbury abbey sometime in the earlier eleventh century and his ascetic piety impressed the monks. So did his talent for viticulture. Although not himself a drinker, he was the first to plant a vineyard beside the monastery and, while duly spending feast days in prayer, he would pass “every hour of other days toiling in his vineyard.”\textsuperscript{101} While lying down and at death’s door, he produced a \textit{pallium} from the bag he always kept at his side, and tried to put it on. The monks took this to be a mark

\textsuperscript{98} Egan 2007, 114; Cheynet 2008, 157.
\textsuperscript{100} Shepard 2010a, 28.
\textsuperscript{101} William of Malmesbury, \textit{Gesta pontificum Anglorum} 620–21; \textit{PmbZ} # 21347.
of his archiepiscopal status, in itself a sign of their readiness to put a premium on skills brought by persons from Byzantium.

Another individual, “Bishop Sigewold, a Greek by origin”, moved in still higher socio-political circles. He is described by a work of the late tenth century as being one of “the king’s magnates” during the reign of Edgar. He fell out with another such magnate, “Thorsteinn, a Dane”, over who should be granted control of the church and monastic community of Ely.\textsuperscript{102} Michael Lapidge, who first drew attention to this text, suggested that the name of ‘Sigewold’ is an exact English calque on the Greek name ‘Nikephoros’: the components mean, in English and Greek, ‘victory’ and ‘bearing’.\textsuperscript{103} It seems highly unlikely that this individual could really have held episcopal office in Byzantium, and one may doubt whether he had even been ordained. Yet he presumably possessed some sort of priestly apparatus and, indeed, education, to pass himself off as in holy orders and gain the status of “magnate”. Ely, for control of which he sought royal approval, was an important town, and it lay in the Danelaw, which was presumably where his rival, Thorsteinn, resided. Thus Nikephoros-Sigewold was highly ambitious, and his success in entering royal circles suggests that he had influential supporters, perhaps also attestations of his spiritual credentials. One may surmise that Nikephoros-Sigewold’s supporters, like his rival and indeed their objective, Ely, were based in eastern England, and that this was where he had first made landfall. Like the Byzantine silks noted above, Nikephoros-Sigewold had probably arrived via the Baltic and the North Sea. Such an itinerary would be unsurprising, given the continuing vitality of links between the Danelaw and Scandinavia that recent excavations in Norwich and studies on the brooches unearthed by metal detectors have shown.\textsuperscript{104}

A third reason why the British Isles deserve attention in this volume is as illustration of the uses to which an established Christian power could put authority symbols and practices from the eastern empire. When conditions in a receiving culture and polity were ripe, adaptations from Byzantium could involve concepts of authority and law, rather than mere imitation of material objects or adaptation of techniques of ornament. The state of affairs in England around the time of the opening up of the sea link between Rus and Constantinople differed quite markedly from anywhere else in the Viking world. But certain English developments gain in clarification, when viewed

\textsuperscript{102} \textit{Liber Eliensis} 73–74; tr. Fairweather 96–97; PmbZ # 27069.

\textsuperscript{103} Lapidge 2002, 386–88.

\textsuperscript{104} Ayers 2011, especially 78–83, 85–87; Kershaw 2013, 137–41, 173–78, 207–14, 246–49. The vitality of exports of wool from the Danelaw and other Scandinavian-settled parts of Britain to the Low Countries and Germany emerges from Sawyer 2013, 96–108; Faith 2012, 682–83, 690–96. The interlinking of this axis with commerce and other forms of contact across the North Sea deserves further study. See, for a clear indication of the role of Anglo-Danes at Byzantium, the seal of Sven, “patrikios and interpreter of the English”, below, 305–12.
from the perspective of that world’s relations with Byzantium, and especially so, if one accepts that the eastern things and persons mentioned above had reached the British Isles mostly via ‘the East Way’. Perhaps one of the reasons for Byzantium’s appeal to Anglo-Saxon rulers was the familiarity of its outlines to members of the Scandinavian-born elites and war bands frequenting their shores. In donning attributes and adopting practices redolent of the eastern empire, they could reinforce the message that their regime was incomparably superior to those of common-or-garden konungs. In other words, the apparently ‘Byzantinising’ attributes of these rulers may have been designed for leading members of a Viking world well acquainted with eastern ways, as well as for their own Anglo-Saxon ‘constituency’.

An obvious instance is the use of the term *basileus* to denote their status. First appearing in charters of King Athelstan, the term came into fairly common use during the reign of Edgar (959–975), and it began to be written quite often in the king’s own subscription, rather than just in the main text. The term was by no means the only signifier of his status, and the loose-knit manner in which documents were prepared for royal authentication—often, it seems, by persons not directly employed by the king—precluded consistency of usage. But as I have remarked elsewhere, the very fact that the accolade of *basileus* was wished upon the king by supplicants suggests widespread notions of the term’s connotations of monarchical rulership. This was not just a conceit affected by the king himself, or by a handful of clerks bedecking their master with grandiloquent Greek titles. Moreover, the term’s sense of ‘emperor’, whose rule transcends regional or ethnic borders, was very apt for a royal house whose heads aspired to dominion over ‘all Britannia’. Edgar showed particular interest in ceremonies and gestures likely to solemnise his pre-eminence, as with his coronation in 973 at Bath (well-stocked with Roman monuments) and the event staged just afterwards near Chester, an equally Roman-looking town: several other potentates of the British Isles, at least one Norse sea king among them, rowed him up and down the River Dee.

The grandiose yet intangible dominion expressed by these acts bespoke a *basileus*.

Around the time of these quasi-imperial ceremonies, in 973 or 974, occurred “one of the great currency reforms of English history”. On the face of the new coins was the king’s head in profile, while the reverse named the mint and the moneyer. Previous English coin types, including Edgar’s own, had not shown the king in so standardised a form. The resultant silver pennies proved to be of stable weight and silver content.

106 Shepard 2010a, 23.
The only other Christian ruler capable of maintaining a currency to this standard resided at the far end of Europe, on the Bosporus. Edgar did not copy any visual motifs of Byzantine coins, let alone sport the title basileus on his new issues, but one of the measures envisaged by him and pursued under his successors had parallels in an eastern imperial practice of long standing. From time to time, the design of the coins was changed, requiring persons to swap their old coins for new, paying fees to the authorities for the privilege. These officials, and the ruler’s treasury, profited from the process, especially if the new coins were slightly lighter than the old. But so long as their governance ensured order and conditions conducive to commerce, this arrangement worked. The successful functioning of such a system in England reflected well on the king’s administration, and this owed nothing to Byzantium. But the resemblance between the regular new issues and obligatory surrender of old coins in the two polities caught the eye of the eminent numismatist Michael Dolley, who was expert in Byzantine history. He allowed for the possibility of inspiration from the eastern empire.

Scholarly enthusiasm for such a contingency was, with one noteworthy exception, scarcely more fulsome than it had been for an earlier suggestion, floated by Robert Lopez. Lopez suggested a connection between the frequent designation of Edgar as basileus in his charters and the fact that during his reign the king’s image came to monopolise coins to the exclusion of all others. While underlining the importance of Edgar, he noted that Edgar’s uncle, Aethelstan, was first to decree the confinement of minting to “ports” and to stipulate amputation of a hand as punishment for counterfeaters: earlier laws had prescribed such amputation only for theft. Lopez recognised that amputation for counterfeiting, supposedly formally introduced by Heraclius, was ordained by western barbarian regimes such as the Lombards, the Visigoths and, eventually, the Carolingians: Charles the Bald decreed this penalty for money forgers. But, as he argued, the transmission of the text of Charles’ or earlier Germanic kings’ decrees to England seems unlikely, while conditions in tenth-century France were

110 For signs of a certain tightening in royal administration between the mid-tenth and the mid-eleventh century, see Molyneaux 2011.
114 Aethelstan, Laws 2, 14, 158–59; Lopez 1946–1948, 157 and n. 2; Lopez 1942–1943, 453–54. The clauses in Aethelstan 2 concerning coinage and commerce may have been incorporated from a text composed in the reign of his father, Edward the Elder: Foot 2011, 152–53.
scarcely such as to inspire thoughts of a royal monopoly of minting.\textsuperscript{116} The inspiration of Romano-Byzantine law, recently revised in the \textit{Basilics} and manifestly practised in tenth-century Constantinople, therefore appeared to Lopez a plausible explanation for the punitive measures of Aethelstan and his successors.\textsuperscript{117}

The cautiousness of subsequent scholars regarding the hypotheses of Lopez and Dolley is understandable,\textsuperscript{118} given the dearth at the time of their publication of evidence of direct contacts between Byzantium and the British Isles. Now, however, a fair amount of such evidence is available, attesting not only the movement of things but of people. Our star witness is Nikephoros-Sigewold. Whatever his true status in Byzantium, he was indubitably close to Edgar.\textsuperscript{119} And, as an educated man, his knowledge of administrative practices at home should have been sufficient to outline their essence to the king and fellow counsellors. Besides conversing with Nikephoros-Sigewold, Edgar could have learnt something from embassies comparable to the one Dunstan apparently encountered; or bearers of a message akin to that from Leo the \textit{genikos logothetēs} at the century’s end might have briefed him. One cannot exclude the possibility that returnees from the imperial forces, themselves of Scandinavian stock but having or seeking links with England, made their way to Edgar’s court. Any warrior who had spent years in the emperor’s pay would probably have grasped the general concept of reissues of coins, much as they picked up current Greek names of warships and, it seems, conveyed them to members of the elite like Aethelweard (above, 24). Such oral informants would have provided Edgar with more useful, first-hand, impressions and experience.

\textsuperscript{116} Lopez 1946–1948, 158. See, however, arguments for a possible channel, the capitulary collection of Ansegisus: Wormald 1999, 306.

\textsuperscript{117} Basilicorum libri LX 41, 8; 60, 1, 310; 60, 1, 311; Lopez 1946–1948, 157–59. As Lopez himself acknowledged (1942–1943, 455–56) and subsequent scholarship underlined (Hendy 1985, 328), punishment by amputation for the counterfeiting of coins does not feature in extant laws of Heraclius or any other sixth- or seventh-century emperor. It seems rather to have originated in customary administrative and judicial procedures in the Romano-Byzantine world. What is certain is that Leo III’s \textit{Ecloga} of 741 prescribes amputation for counterfeiters of coins (\textit{Ecloga} 17.18), and this particular penalty is laid down not only in the \textit{Basilics}, but also in what seems to have become a handbook for actual regulation of affairs in the capital, Leo VI’s \textit{Book of the Eparch} (\textit{Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen} III.1, 88–89; Lopez 1942–1943, 454–55). So the penalty would have been well enough known to those doing business in tenth-century Constantinople, including the Rus.

\textsuperscript{118} Expressed by, for example, Whitting 1961, 25. The evidence for direct contact before the mid-seventh century has received more positive scholarly treatment: Harris 2003.

\textsuperscript{119} See above, 25. Nightingale (1984, 239 n. 39) surmised a possible connection between Edgar’s reform, a fiscal rationale for frequent reissuing, and the presence of “a Greek bishop” among Edgar’s magnates.
than coins could do by themselves. Individual Byzantine coins may, though, have been to hand, judging by stray finds of base metal examples in London and elsewhere. This is a motley array of data. No single item clinches the case for direct—if not lively—contacts between Byzantium and England along ‘the East Way’. Yet a clear pattern seems to emerge. It supports our contention that Anglo-Saxon rulers, and especially Edgar, may have adopted ‘Byzantinising’ attributes that ‘spoke to’ Viking notables well aware of eastern ways, besides impressing their native Anglo-Saxon ‘constituency’. Individual envoys and artefacts may have reached the English court via the German-speaking lands, and relations between these lands’ kings and emperors and their West Saxon counterparts were lively in the tenth century. But from the mid-tenth century on, a pulse was beating between Wessex’s ambitious rulers and the eastern imperial court—irregularly, perhaps, yet sustained by a steadier flow of goods and of individuals of many kinds. One might follow developments into the eleventh century and consider the uses of Byzantine motifs, measures and imagery to a Scandinavian potentate seeking to join the English realm and his mainland territories together in a true sea empire, Cnut. This, however, is best left to a separate study. Here I shall merely reiterate that England’s political culture offered soil for active reception and systematic adaptation rather more fertile than anything contemporary Scandinavian polities could manage. But if, as proposed above, the greater part of the things, persons and, indeed, tales of likely Byzantine provenance recorded for the British Isles in the tenth and earlier eleventh century had come via ‘the East Way’, a sort of on-going parade of eastern Christian—sometimes, perhaps, unchristian—goods and persons was travelling past or through the Scandinavian home territories. And, of course, Scandinavian-born persons were themselves returning from Byzantium in significant numbers, as witness the Swedish runestones, while the Byzantinising tendencies of Anglo-Saxon kings could well have prompted emulation on the part of Scandinavian rivals.

120 The authenticity of some examples is dubious, and few have archaeological contextualisation. This is where the find of three bronze examples (dating from the mid-eleventh century to Alexios I’s reign between 1092 and 1118) at the same site as the seals, Thameside Exchange, tips the balance in favour of early arrival dates for them, as also for other examples found in London, including a coin of Romanos I: Egan 2007, 111–12, 114–17; Cheynet 2008, 156–57. Anthea Harris has shown the readiness of some members of the Anglo-Saxon elite to ‘buy into’ the Romano-Byzantine world at a time when its coins and other artefacts were still available via Rhineland trading networks and via direct links between Celtic-ruled Britain and the Mediterranean: Harris 2003, 163–64, 175–87.

121 Leyser 1994.

122 See Lawson 2004, 193–96. I hope to pursue the subject myself.

All this serves to underline the catalytic role Byzantium played in the development of the Viking world. One may suppose *a priori* that it continued to do so after the traditional end of the Viking Age, once Christian households, communities and polities in Scandinavia were better placed to adapt to their own needs the options for expressing devotion and political aspirations on offer from Byzantium. This constitutes further justification for the chronological span of our volume, reaching into the twelfth century and beyond. It is worth taking account of ‘small worlds’ among Scandinavian societies that still looked to Byzantium for other-worldly experiences, socio-political status or supposedly boundless wealth. They could never match the discipline, liturgical systematisation or ideological coherence that the ruling elites closely aligned with the Latinate institutions of the papacy and western religious orders eventually attained. But their sheer variety and perseverance amounts to a mark of Scandinavian identity.

\[^{124}\text{See below 53–87, 345–62 and 363–87 (where the author makes a persuasive case for his use of ‘local worlds’).}\]
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SECONDARY LITERATURE


Scandinavia in the early medieval period has often, whether explicitly or implicitly, been conceived of as set apart. Two strands of development—the creation of centralised kingdoms and the formal acceptance of Christianity, followed by the development of institutional churches—have been seen as the means of its integration into Europe, itself a cultural region defined by precisely the strength of those phenomena. In addition to being separate, Scandinavia has also been seen as marginal, since the lines of inclusion/exclusion have been drawn by those who left the most written sources, namely the Franks and the English (and their historians). This separateness has survived as a conceptual template for interpreting the region’s early history despite the ready recognition that its people were also extremely active outside its borders—so much so that in Britain and western Europe the period from the 790s to c. 1050 has been called the Viking Age. Scandinavian raiders in the west were well known to those who read the annals of monastic houses of the British Isles and Europe; as archaeology continued to unearth more and more material, especially in urban contexts, Scandinavian traders and settlers took their place alongside them. Eastern connections, especially as pursued by men from Scandinavia’s Baltic zone, have not been excluded from the picture: the explorer/entrepreneur has always had some purchase on the imagination, and travels to the east have commanded a particular romantic capital. But despite a recognition that eastern activities could have had enormous impact in the Scandinavian homelands and beyond, the general trajectory of Scandinavia’s own history has commonly been conceived in relation to the west. The different directions of Scandinavian interests and activities in the Viking Age have rarely been integrated: maps tend to isolate them, and so, inevitably, do scholars. This has in part been a logistical issue: most of us are specialists in one discipline and, furthermore, are unlikely to have expertise in more than one
Recent thinking in terms of networks and connections has transformed the picture and allowed us to see Scandinavia from a new perspective. One way of bringing the extremities of the map together has been to think of Scandinavians in the Viking Age as a diaspora. The recent extension of the term to this time and place has helped us to conceptualise how political elites, military men, settlers and trading communities from the homelands and overseas settlements could interact across large distances, communication being maintained through shared language and a common culture, not to mention expert skills in waterborne travel. The concept of ‘diaspora’ depends on the idea of an identity shared across space. Its application to the ‘Viking world’ stresses the impact of the many different lines of contact—among them migration, predation, diplomacy and trade—which kept people connected and which linked together groups or individuals categorised as ‘Scandinavian’ by birth or by cultural affiliation. There has been justifiable criticism of past conceptions of a monolithic ‘pan-Scandinavian’ culture, resting as they did on undesirable and unsustainable evolutionary and nationalist assumptions; furthermore, the vastness and obvious diversity of the Scandinavian homelands weighed against seeing them as a single unit. Diaspora studies, however, stress that communities can exist on more than one plane, having synchronic regional and supra-national identities; they can simultaneously affiliate with ‘here’ and ‘there’. The very real evidence of significant Scandinavian diversity at home—especially in the most visible form of burial rites—can therefore sit comfortably alongside the equally compelling evidence of cultural transnationalism: the consistent, widespread sharing of a common culture along the routes of Scandinavian activity overseas.

Elite and commercial contacts between the Scandinavian homelands and the lands of Rus and Byzantium through trade, exile, marriage and military recruitment are well known and are explored further in this volume. The long-distance cultural

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1 I would like to thank the organisers for inviting me to participate in this volume, despite my lack of specialist expertise in the fields of Rus and Byzantine studies, especially as I was not fortunate enough to attend either the original round table or the conference in Uppsala in 2013. Particular thanks are due to Jonathan Shepard for his extremely generous help with Russian material and his comments on a draft of this paper. I would also like to thank Fedir Androshchuk, Leslie Brubaker, Simon Franklin, Kari Ellen Gade, James Graham-Campbell, Stephen Harrison, Marek Jankowiak, Judith Jesch, Judy Quinn, Charlotte Roueché, Joanna Story, Leslie Webster, Gareth Williams and Alex Woolf for help with specific queries.

2 For example, Sindbæk 2007.

3 AbrDIV; Jesch 2015, 55–86.

4 As many have noted, there is a real problem when it comes to finding a single suitable word for those who belonged to this cultural group. My preference, for convenience, is ‘Scandinavian’.

network that linked its members rested on shared elements such as the Norse language and the runic alphabet, which were used as far afield as Greenland and Greece. Traditional art styles and iconography representing a common universe of myth and legend also helped to disseminate a cultural repertoire and (both before and after conversion to Christianity) shared religious traditions. For example, the Thor’s hammers and miniature female figures with characteristic plaited hair and upswept skirts discovered in Scandinavia are matched by similar finds in the west and along the rivers in Rus. Evidence of production shows that their presence overseas was not simply a matter of export: Thor’s hammer moulds have been recovered from tenth-century levels in Dublin and Staraia Ladoga, for example.7

The organisers of the exhibition ‘Vikings’, which opened in Copenhagen in June 2013 before travelling to London and Berlin, were keen to transmit a message that stressed the global reach of Scandinavian activity. “One of the most remarkable things about the Viking Age is the scale of the world the Vikings inhabited and the diversity of peoples with whom they came into contact”, begins Chapter One of the accompanying publication.8 ‘Contacts and Exchange’ was one of the chosen themes of the exhibit, and the message was articulated not only in the volume of essays but in the lay-out of the display. In particular, groups of objects, such as women’s dress sets, were arranged together in the same case: their find spots—Ireland, Denmark, northern Norway, Finland, Russia, Ukraine—made the point through physical juxtaposition that a similar style of dress, with local adaptations, could be found across this extraordinarily widespread region. Who exactly the women were who wore the jewellery is not known, although scientific advances may soon allow us to suggest where they came from. Recent isotope analysis of a female burial in northern England, accompanied by mismatched P37 oval brooches, identified Norway as a potential place of origin, while the isotope signature of over fifty men decapitated and buried in a pit in Dorset near the southern English coast in the late tenth or early eleventh century “suggests they may have lived in places as far afield as Scandinavia, the Baltic States, Belarus and Russia”.9 Brooches seem to support other suggestive evidence that women, not just men, were on the move at the time,10 although it is not necessarily the case that everyone wearing Scandinavian dress or carrying objects of Scandinavian form or style was born in the homelands or even to Scandinavian parents. If the living regularly wore the clothes they were buried

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6 Williams et al. 2014, 20, 54, 80–81, 172, 187–88, 166–67; for finds in Ukraine, see SASR.
7 Ó Riordáin 1971, 73 (illustrated on 79); Kirpichnikov 2014, 219; see Plochov 2007, 61 (fig. 1) for a mould for the production of the female figures.
8 Williams et al. 2014, 30.
10 McLeod 2011; Kershaw 2013.
in, the women whose accessories have been preserved appear to have been dressed in a similar style, whether they lived and died in Ireland, southern Denmark or on the Dnieper. Cultural conventions could (and did) accommodate a degree of local variation, but this was clearly a culture that travelled, and those who identified with it took it on the road. Their common cultural repertoire would have played a role in maintaining group consciousness. However, what it meant to associate with ‘Scandinavianness’ and to define oneself accordingly must have varied significantly from place to place, depending on local circumstances. Affiliation with a Scandinavian identity would have resonated quite differently in Norwich and in Kiev, for example.

There was clearly also significant local variation within Scandinavia itself. While the homelands and overseas communities maintained links with one another and channelled objects and ideas back and forth, ‘Scandinavian culture’ was neither monolithic nor static. At home, some of this diversity was produced by external contacts: clay models of beaver paws, for example, have so far been found in Scandinavia only in the Åland islands and the southern Mälär basin in Uppland; Władysław Duczko has pointed out that similar finds near Jaroslavl suggest a direct connection between the Upper Volga and these Swedish regions, which could relate to fur-trapping activity. Zanette Glørstad’s work on penannular brooches in Norway suggests that from c. 850–950 a certain style of male dress was imported from Ireland and served to demonstrate local links with the Irish Sea zone.

Connections with Byzantium may have been displayed in the same way through the wearing of silk. Evidence of movement abounds: in the eastern context, outward traffic is attested especially in the form of Scandinavian dress accessories in sites along the Russian rivers, while a variety of objects and, above all, coins from the Arab world travelled in quantity in the other direction. Inward flow from the Khazar khaganate is also attested, by the bronze mounts made in the tradition of the Volga Bulgars found at Gnezdovo, for example, and from Byzantium, as discussed throughout this volume. This interaction between Scandinavian and other cultures produced adaptations which drew on elements of both ‘home’ and ‘away’. Within Scandinavia, the influence of forces encountered outside the homelands is reflected, for example, by local adaptations of penannular brooches. Copying the form developed in the Irish Sea zone, native versions were made in Norway, Denmark and

11 VR, 193.
12 Glørstad 2012; for Byzantine influence, see Glørstad 2013.
13 For more on silk, see below 281–304.
14 VE gives a useful summary.
15 WOIS; Jonsson 2009.
16 Pushkina 2007, 185–86.
Sweden with Borre-style ornament. Abroad (in Rus, for example), different strands likewise combined to form hybrid objects and local cultures that synthesised a variety of ‘foreign’ influences, among them Hungarian, Volga Bulgar, Khazar and Byzantine.

A small axe-head exemplifies the dynamic quality of these cultural encounters (Fig. 2.1).\textsuperscript{18} Embellished with gold, silver and niello inlay, its Ringerike-style decoration associates it with the Scandinavian cultural world of the first half of the eleventh century, and the triquetra on one edge is a long-lived motif in Scandinavian art. The form of the axe-head, however, belongs to an eastern nomad tradition, while other aspects of its ornament have been seen to reflect Byzantine influences.\textsuperscript{19} Despite its small size, it is an ostentatious piece, and the precious metals of the decoration would have distinguished its bearer, whether on the battlefield or ‘on parade’. The axe-head, a nineteenth-century find, unfortunately has no archaeological context, and its exact provenance is unknown. There is conflicting evidence relating to its discovery, as described by the archaeologist Vladimir Sizov soon after its appearance on the scene.\textsuperscript{20} According to Sizov, a reputable dealer in antiquities acquired the axe-head in the city of Nizhni Novgorod from a Tatar who claimed that it had been found in Biliarsk, “together with other things”. The axe-head then passed into the hands of another dealer, who may have been trying to raise the game by claiming instead that it was part of a hoard of objects found in Vladimir in the previous year.\textsuperscript{21} Noting the capital letter ‘A’ on the part of the axe through which the handle would have passed, this second dealer claimed that the axe “must have belonged to Andrei Bogoliubskii, the celebrated twelfth-century prince”, an association which would have considerably increased its value, as Sizov wryly remarked.\textsuperscript{22} The region of Vladimir-Suzdal, at the north-eastern margin of Rus, is a credible location for an object with Scandinavian associations: the Kievan dynasty maintained a presence there in the early eleventh century, and it continued to have connections with Novgorod.\textsuperscript{23} However, several other decorated axe-heads without figural scenes but with filigree-like ornament potentially influenced by Scandinavian models have been found in Biliarsk, a major Bulgar centre on the Middle Volga;\textsuperscript{24} and other objects from Biliarsk were circulating at the time the axe-head came on the market. Some scholars have been keen to claim it as a Russian artefact and have therefore insisted on a Vladimir-Suzdal provenance;\textsuperscript{25} more recently, however, an as-

\textsuperscript{18} Williams et al. 2014, 88 (fig. 20), 268; Graham-Campbell 2013, 128–29 (fig. 142); Holmquist Olausson & Petrovski 2007, 233 (fig. 6), 234; Roesdahl & Wilson 1992, 80 (fig. 7), 306; Kirpichnikov 1966, 35, 110 (pl. 19); Paulsen 1956, 123 (fig. 56, illustrating both sides and edges).


\textsuperscript{20} Sizov 1897, 144–46.

\textsuperscript{21} This second claim presumably accounts for the name ‘Vladimir axe’ given to the object in English-language scholarship (i.e. Bailey 1980, 119).

\textsuperscript{22} Sizov 1897, 146.

\textsuperscript{23} ER, 267–68.

\textsuperscript{24} Paulsen 1956, 118–21 (fig. 52, 54).

\textsuperscript{25} Sizov 1897, 153; Kirpichnikov 1966, 35.
association with Biliarsk seems to be preferred. In the early tenth century Ibn Fadlan visited the Middle Volga region and observed a now notorious group of Rus traders there. In the eleventh century, Volga Bulgaria continued to act as an intermediary in trade between Rus and the east, and traffic, at least in fur, may have continued into the twelfth century.

The Ringerike-style ornament on one side of the axe-head (Face B) would be enough to associate it with Scandinavian elite culture: even more striking, however, is the iconography. A snake-like beast is pierced by a sword, the hilt of which, although obscured by damage to the metal, extends to the edge of the blade. There is no human figure, but none is needed to associate this image with the killing of the serpent-dragon Fáfnir by the legendary hero Sigurd. Later literary sources describe how Sigurd’s feat was achieved through a combination of courage and strategy: he dug a pit and hid in it, and when Fáfnir slid overhead, Sigurd pierced him from below. The presence of this iconic image links the owner of the axe not just with the designers, makers and consumers of Scandinavian material culture, but with a world of story that came to be written down only much later, and very far away. As with most mythological and legendary material of the Old Norse world, our earliest written evidence comes from Icelanders of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries who played a special role in its preservation and transmission. There is therefore no written version of Sigurd’s adventures contemporary with the axe, and the story was instead widely disseminated at this time through a variety of other media. The figure of a man with a sword piercing a snake-like creature from below was depicted on stone monuments in northern England and the Isle of Man in the tenth century, on Swedish runestones in the eleventh and on the wooden doors of Norwegian churches in the twelfth, often in connection with other recognisable episodes of the Sigurd story; occasionally, as here, the human figure appears to be missing. TheLegendary Saga of St Olaf tells us that some of this narrative was depicted on a wall hanging in the hall of King Olaf Haraldsson, who ruled Norway in the early eleventh century: the king asked his poet Thormod to compose verses about the scene on the hanging where Sigurd was shown cutting off the dragon’s head and roasting its heart; Thormod’s lines are quoted in the saga, which


29 Recounted in the preface to the eddic poem Fáfnismál, for example: The Poetic Edda, 157.


was probably compiled from various sources (including orally-transmitted verse) in the thirteenth century. Surviving fragments of textile confirm that figural scenes were indeed represented in portable form. The image on the axe could have been contemporary with Thormod’s verses, both of them made long before the stories they told were written down.

The materiality of weapons looms large in Old Norse poetry, where they played a major role in literary representation of Scandinavian elite life. Axes were portrayed in skaldic verse in a series of flamboyant metaphors called kennings, some of which associated them with an animate being personified as a giantess or troll-woman. A decorated axe epitomises elite gift-giving in Øxarflokkr (‘Axe-Poem’), a series of verses by the twelfth-century Icelander Einarr Skúlason. The silver and gold decoration of the axe swirls throughout the poem, as Einarr stresses how the richness of the axe’s ornament linked giver to recipient and gave honour to both:

*The fair cheeks of my axe, attached to the maple [shaft], bear gold...
Both silver and gold lie on the two sides of the axe. I must praise the warrior.*

This poetic axe, conceived in Iceland, and the axe from the Volga share one other feature: dragons. “Seafarers can see”, observes Einarr, “how dragons, beautifully engraved, lie near the axe-blade”. Interpretation of Face A of the blade, which is decorated with a tree flanked by two facing birds, leads us in a different direction. While the scene could easily accommodate a further allusion to the Sigurd story, it also has a long-standing eastern pedigree and many recognisable Christian parallels in images of the Tree of Life or the Fountain of Life in Paradise, flanked by peacocks. In the west, such motifs were popular in Carolingian Francia and Alfredian England, but by the tenth and eleventh centuries they were less common there; it may therefore be that a Byzantine origin for this aspect of the decoration is more likely. In particular, the acanthus-style ornament of the tree and the decorative details of the birds led Sizov to suggest Byzantine and other eastern influence. Models would have been available in a number of media, including

34 “Fógr hlýr øxar mínar, feldrar við hlyn, bera {þann meldr Fenju}... Bæði {snær sjóðs} ok {eldr geima} liggr tveim megin bjargs {blöðeisu}; ák at mæra {stríði sokkva}.” I would like to thank Kari Ellen Gade for sending me her draft edition and translation of these verses, forthcoming in the collaborative international project to edit the corpus of medieval Norse-Icelandic skaldic poetry (see The Skaldic Project). There is also a translation of Øxarflokkr in Krell 2013, 28–30.
35 “Megu sjá rétt, hvé drekar, fagrt of skornir, liggja við {bró {Gridar fjørnis}}, {{{Raefils fold} viggs} ríðendr}.”
36 Webster 2003, 91–93.
37 Sizov 1897, 159–61.
textiles. In the light of this connection, it may not be too fanciful to wonder whether the image on Face B could be multivalent, evoking, along with Sigurd, dragon-killing of a kind more familiar in an eastern Christian context. Like the Byzantines, the Rus régime was particularly fond of the dragon-killer saints Michael, George and Theodore. They were usually represented as on horseback and spearing (or trampling) the beast from above, however, a convention developed from late antique pagan iconography, whereas Fáfnir, in Scandinavian tradition a crawling dragon and more like a snake, was killed by a sword-thrust from below.

Unravelling the cultural context of the axe is not a simple matter. The Sigurd scene might connect the axe to a consumer of traditional Scandinavian legend; but the killing of the serpent/dragon could have served (as it did elsewhere) to express a Christian message, whether or not associated with a saint. The eastern form of the axe might suggest manufacture outside the areas of Scandinavian settlement; but eastern influences are very evident within the Rus kingdom, while archaeological finds indicate that its traders and others in contact with the homelands continued to travel along the Middle Volga throughout the eleventh century. Experimentation and adaptation are attested there (at least in an earlier period) by local imitations of dirhams, produced in the ninth and tenth centuries. Meanwhile, the potentially Byzantine aspects of the decoration of the axe remind us of the importance of Byzantium’s influence on Rus ecclesiastical culture; parallels between Face A and a number of motifs found in eleventh-century and later manuscripts from Novgorod have been identified by Sizov and A. A. Medyntseva.

The letters above the blade on the spherical knob of the axe-head are a significant element of its decoration. One side (Face B) is badly damaged and the details of the letter there are difficult to make out. The form of the letters does not help with dating, as an ‘A’ with a dropped bar (Face A) was already standard in the Roman period in the eastern empire and, after the sixth century, the same letter forms were used and

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38 White 2013. For the suggestion that one dragon-killing scene in Kálfaðlákjarbók, an Icelandic manuscript of c. 1300, represents a combination of iconographical traditions relating to Sigurd and Michael, see Hamer 2008, 257–63.
39 Walter 2003, especially 127–28; the speared-from-above image was also adopted by the Carolingians (293, fig. 70). See White 2008 for the popularity of dragon-killing in the middle Byzantine world.
40 See, for example, Begovatov et al. 2013, for coins of Sven Estridsen, king of Denmark (1047–1074), in modern Tatarstan.
42 Sizov 1897, 149–53; Medyntseva 2000, 95–98. I owe this latter reference to Simon Franklin.
reused in Byzantine inscriptions. A Rus connection has been proposed, however. Medyntseva has suggested that the ‘A’ with the spearhead-shaped top, which is unusual, is the iotated (or iotified) form of the letter in the Cyrillic alphabet. She also observed that the image on Face B, the sinuous beast pierced by a sword, itself forms a kind of decorative ‘A’. Like earlier commentators Medyntseva interpreted the letters as making reference to the name of an owner or a patron. In addition to the identification with Andrei Bogoliubskii, proposed by the axe’s hopeful vendor in the nineteenth century, celebrity candidates have included Prince Vsevolod Iaroslavich of Kiev, whose baptismal name was Andrei; but as Medyntseva herself has pointed out, this would move the time frame for the production of the axe away from the early eleventh century, the date preferred on stylistic grounds. Alternatively, if the ‘A’ is iotated, Iaroslav himself might be preferred; if not, a Scandinavian name such as Aralt (Harald) could be imagined. In Scandinavian tradition, swords and axes themselves often had names, but I have been unable to find evidence that these were ever displayed on the weapons. Some weapons decorated with personal names survive (two Viking-Age swords from Ireland, with ‘HARTOLFR’ and ‘HILTIPREHT’ inlaid on the underside of their hilts, for example), but not, as far as I know, with inlaid initials. In any event, it might be anachronistic to see a single letter as an initial referring to a name, and other interpretations should be considered. Charlotte Roueché has pointed out that in this period a personal name might be more likely to have been represented by a monogram, and she has suggested that the ‘A’ on the axe might have acted instead as an indication of primacy. Some Viking-Age sword-blades are inlaid with religious inscriptions, and a few are even decorated with crosses and symbols that bear a passing resemblance, it

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44 Medyntseva 2000, 95–98 (presumably the spearhead-top represents the ‘i’ of the iotated form); Sizov 1897, 152, 149.
45 Ibid.; Vsevolod Iaroslavich ruled from 1078 to 1093, a time when, for anyone in touch with Scandinavia, Ringerike would have been old fashioned: Graham-Campbell 2013, 116.
46 I am indebted to Charlotte Roueché for this suggestion.
47 For example, according to a verse attributed to the eleventh-century poet Arnórr jarlaskáld, the axe of King Olaf Haraldsson was called Hel: Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla vol. 2, 308–09. See Pierce 2002, 1–2, for sword names. See also below, 365–87 and 345–62.
48 From Kilmainham (close to Dublin) and Ballinderry Crannog, respectively: Harrison & Ó Floinn 2014, 87–88. The names found on many sword-blades are usually associated with their manufacturers, not their owners. See Pierce 2002, 7–9.
49 For another possible example from Rus (perhaps a decorative ‘M’), see Kolchin 1985, 340 (tab. 128, no. 2). I owe this reference to Simon Franklin.
50 Charlotte Roueché, personal communication.
is said, to omegas. As far as I know, most of the evidence of inlaid words or letters is on sword-blades, but decoration on other parts of the weapons (and on axes) often survives less well. An alpha-omega pairing would perhaps be the most likely explanation for single letters incorporated in the decorative scheme of an object, but if both letters on the axe are ‘A’s, this cannot be the case. Medyntseva’s identification of the snake-like beast as a possible (third) letter ‘A’ adds to the difficulty of interpretation.

There may be further reason besides potential anachronism to think that understanding the letters as initials and interpreting them as indicators of ownership or patronage may be a red herring. Despite the damage, it is possible to detect significant differences between the forms of the letters on the axe which have not been remarked upon in discussions I have seen. The sides of the damaged letter on Face B converge in a plain point at the top, and they appear to be double-banded, whereas the top of the ‘A’ on Face A terminates in the spearhead shape, and its sides are single lines. It seems, therefore, that the axe was decorated with two different types of ‘A’, perhaps a standard and an iotated form. If iotated ‘A’ was the last letter of the alphabet, could this suggest a possible rendering of alpha and omega after all? I am unable to say whether alpha and omega were ever translated into Slavonic in this way, but the possibility remains intriguing. A further hint may be the frames around the letters, which could be interpreted as mandorla-shaped. If so, they would certainly suit a religious meaning better than a secular one.

While the meaning of the lettering on the axe remains uncertain, there is no doubt that weapons belonged to the world of diplomatic intercourse and political symbolism, where giving and receiving cemented political affiliations. Their role in elite social relations was also considerable, not least in the theatre of display alluded to in contemporary skaldic verse. Sizov’s observation that axes served as an explicit mark of authority in Rus is supported by the accounts of several eleventh-century incidents in the Rus Primary Chronicle, where axes were carried, it should be noted, not just by princes but by their representatives. Axes may have embodied a particular cultural association: scholars have argued that Scandinavians were responsible for their introduction to the aristocratic weapon-set in England and Ireland in the late Viking Age. That was certainly the view of Gerald of Wales, writing in the twelfth century about Irish military practice.

51 Pierce 2002, 95, 110.
52 My knowledge is far from complete, however, especially of Russian-language scholarship.
53 See for example PVL 77, 78; RPC 151, 154.
54 See Williams in Loe et al. 2014, 217, for example.
55 Giraldus Cambrensis Opera 187; The History and Topography of Ireland 122.
The axe from the Volga, therefore, is a complicated object; even in its own time it may never have carried a simple, single, message. Uncertainty about its provenance has muddied the waters. For scholars who favoured the Vladimir-Suздal location, the axe was the work of foreign craftsmen recruited by Rus rulers; its hybridity therefore reflected the cultural character of the easternmost polity established through Scandinavian initiative. The situation is more complicated if the association with Biliarsk is accepted. If the axe was found in Volga Bulgaria, it could have been made there (by native or foreign metal workers), or it could have been made in Rus and lost by a traveller. If manufactured in Rus, it would support our understanding of the way its elite culture absorbed influences from numerous directions and confirm that Scandinavia’s contribution was still significant in the early eleventh century. Whether made in Rus or Volga Bulgaria, the axe apparently reflects the presence of a population which was familiar with the visual culture and the world of story that linked Scandinavian craftsmen and consumers and story-tellers and their audiences from Brattahlíð to Byzantium. Alternatively (especially if a local product of the Volga region), it could represent the kind of connectedness found at the end of a line of transmission, where the Sigurd scene, admired and copied from a visual model, had lost its narrative content (and, in the process, perhaps acquired a different meaning). Its Rus credentials may be the most compelling, however. While the designer of the axe-head was obviously eclectic in his choice of decorative models, the letters might be thought to be more purposeful and to offer a better indication of location. If so, they might help to fix its production there. Further study by appropriate specialists of all aspects of its form and decoration, including comparison with the corpus of extant axes across the Scandinavian world, would help to resolve some of these uncertainties. Even without such clarification, the axe-head serves to exemplify the processes of cultural encounter and cultural exchange and is a compelling witness to their operation at the eastern reaches of the Scandinavian diaspora. Its combination of elements indicates that local manufacture, wherever it might have been, drew on models from both ends of the Baltic-Byzantine continuum.

Artefacts are naturally the most visible evidence of the links in the cultural chain, while oral and other non-material channels of transmission may be neglected because they have disappeared (almost) without trace. Language, however, has always played a major role in charting contacts. In the context of the ‘Viking world’, evidence for the doubtless complex interactions between speakers has been limited by the scarcity of contemporary writings and the attendant complications of interpreting linguistic evidence attested only in later sources. Yet occasionally we can almost overhear snippets of contemporary speech and can glimpse language interaction at work: Elisabeth

Sizov 1897, 161–62.
Ridel has argued for a connection between Old Norse vágrek and French varech, for example, vágrek being adopted first into local Norman speech and then more widely as a standard French term for a type of seaweed. More recently, Tatjana Jackson and Alexander Podossinov have drawn attention to an Old English word, taperæx, defined as a “small axe”, which is mentioned in a charter dated 1023 in the name of Cnut, king of England (1016–1035), concerning the port of Sandwich in Kent: the king granted dues to Christ Church, Canterbury, “from both sides of the river...so that when it is high tide and a ship is afloat, the officers...shall receive the dues from as far as can be reached by a small axe which the English call tapereax thrown inland from the ship”. Tapar-öx is also found in Old Norse, where it has been interpreted as borrowed from Old English. The first element of taperæx/tapar-öx has been identified as Old Russian topór (“axe”), however, and it therefore seems more likely that the word was formed in a mixed Norse-Slavonic language environment, where it served to describe a particular kind of axe, and that the English usage came from Norse. It is unlikely to be a coincidence that the word is first attested in England in the early eleventh century and is found in association with Cnut (who was also king of Denmark from c. 1018), not to mention Sandwich, which was “the most famous of all the ports of the English”, according to the historian who described Cnut’s arrival there with a massive fleet from Denmark. Cnut’s entourage included a Wrytsleof dux, whose name, not obviously Norse or English, might have been Vratislav. Might taperæx/tapar-öx, like the new equestrian equipment which made its way into England, reflect the influence of a particularly military—and heterogeneous—Scandinavian elite in the early eleventh century? Cnut had both personal and economic connections in the eastern Baltic (his

58 Jackson & Podossinov 2015. I am indebted to Tatjana Jackson for allowing me to see a copy of this article before its publication, and to Jonathan Shepard for drawing it to my attention.
59 “Ab utraque parte fluminis...ita ut natante naue in flammeum cum plenum fuerit quam longius de nau potest securis paruula quam Angli vocant tapereax super terram proici” (taperex in the Old English text) (both versions being single-sheet copies from the second half of the eleventh century): *Charters of Christ Church Canterbury* vol. 2, 1080, 1094. The charter was also copied into the entry for 1031 in MS A of the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* and s.a. 1029 in MS F, both manuscripts of the later eleventh century.
60 Cleasby & Guðbrandur Vigfusson 1962, 625. This is presumably because the English text is the earliest; but there are almost no Norse texts before the thirteenth century to offer contemporary evidence.
61 Björkman 1900–1902, vol. 2, 256; VB, 84.
63 He attested a charter dated 1026, preserved in the twelfth-century cartulary of Old Minster, Winchester; Keynes 1994, 64–65.
mother may have belonged to the Piast dynasty), and his conquest of England in 1016 gave a new stimulus to all kinds of activity along existing channels of contact between England, Denmark and points beyond, including, of course, Byzantium: his queen, Emma, gave a *grecysscan scrine* (“Greek shrine”) to the New Minster, Winchester.

While Cnut’s West Slavonic connections may provide a less distant context than a borrowing from Old East Slavonic, it is tempting to imagine that *tapar-ôx* is what Norse-speaking contemporaries would have called the axe from the Volga. While the word serves as a forceful reminder of Cnut’s ties with the wider ‘Viking’ world, it also gives us a glimpse of the multilingual and multicultural interactions that must have characterised everyday life at the time. Like the axe itself, with its mixture of influences, the hybrid coining reveals cultural exchange in action. Both word and object help to bring to life the channels of connection that linked east and west in the period and highlight the dynamic nature of contact across the Scandinavian diaspora.

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66 *The Liber Vitae of the New Minster* 105–06; see also Crawford 2008 for arguments about Cnut’s role in developing the cult of St Clement. Some skeletons in the Dorset mass grave which showed such diverse origins were carbon dated to 970–1025, leaving open a dating in Cnut’s reign: Loe et al. 2014, 43.
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CONCEPTS OF CULTURAL TRANSFER BETWEEN BYZANTIUM AND THE NORTH

ROLAND SCHEEL

When Byzantine texts refer to Scandinavians and medieval texts from the north refer to Byzantium, they almost never talk about the same events. There are only two exceptions: Kekaumenos, a Byzantine nobleman who wrote around 1078, refers to a certain Haralēdēs from Varangia,¹ that is, Harald Hardrada, king of Norway from 1045 to 1066. Harald's Byzantine adventures were first treated extensively in a northern work in Morkinskinna, the oldest compendium of the Kings' Sagas (Konungsgasögur).² Although both texts share the basic information that Harald served in Byzantium’s partial re-conquest of Sicily together with the general George Maniakes, the impressions they create differ radically. Kekaumenos uses Harald as an ideal example to illustrate his advice that barbarians should not be promoted to the highest court dignities.³ Consequently, he portrays Harald as a useful and noble mercenary who was nevertheless modest enough to be content with the mediocre court rank of spatharokandidakatos. Morkinskinna, written about 130 years later, characterises Harald as the only able military commander the Byzantines could rely on, depicting him as constantly having to save Gyrgir, the general George Maniakes, from wrong decisions and despair. Thus, his Byzantine superior is ridiculed as a weakling and a coward, while Harald comes across as a warlike hero who seduces the empress’ niece, slays a dragon, and takes revenge on the emperor, who had him cast in prison on false accusations: he is blinded by Harald in return.⁴ Such a tendency towards romance may already be observable in the skaldic stanzas which are integrated into Morkinskinna’s prose narrative and which were composed during Harald’s lifetime.⁵

¹ Str, ed. and Russian tr. Litavrin, 298–301; ed. and tr. Roueché, 97.01–27.
² Mork. vol. 1, 82–117.
³ Str, ed. and Russian tr. Litavrin, 294–97; ed. and tr. Roueché, 95.04–24.
⁵ This applies especially to Illugi bryndöeiskáld’s Haraldsdrápa, which combines praise of Harald’s deeds with content from the myth of Sigurd Fáfnisbani. While the allusion to his father’s name is obvious, the association between Harald, who kills a lion in William of Malmesbury’s
The second event to be treated synchronously by both Nordic and Byzantine sources is the battle of Beroia between the Pechenegs and the Byzantines, which took place in 1122. Although all witnesses agree that the Varangians, *Varangiar* or John II Komnenos’ “axe-bearers” (*pelekyphoroi*), played a crucial role in breaking the Pechenegs’ wagon circle, all our Scandinavian sources attribute their victory to the miraculous help of St Olaf⁶ whereas the Byzantine historians refer to the intercession of the Mother of God.⁷

Even these two rare instances, when information from Byzantium and the north overlaps, reveal different points of view towards the other culture. From the Byzantine perspective, the *Varangoi* or axe-bearing barbarians, Anglophone and Scandinavian alike, were useful and brave infantry soldiers on the battlefield and an impressive, exotic part of court ceremonial, although they do not seem to have formed a special guard unit before c. 1100.⁸ Sometimes they are described as especially loyal, although this remains a late exception,⁹ and they are usually not the centre of attention. From the Nordic perspective around 1200 and later, however, as witnessed in both Latin and vernacular texts, Byzantium and the Byzantine court were the places where Scandinavians served the *basileus*, committed heroic deeds as both warriors and lovers, gained honour (*sæmd*) and gold and even continued feuds among themselves in exile.¹⁰ Splendid receptions of Scandinavian crusaders took place at the Blachernai Palace, where the kings did not fail to impress Alexios I Komnenos: Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer of Norway proved himself to be a master of the Byzantine diplomatic game and a connoisseur of precious gifts around 1110; and in 1103 King Eric of Denmark impressed Alexios so

chronicle and a dragon in the *Gesta Danorum*, and the mythological dragonslayer in both Íllugi’s poem and medieval historiography, is more than sheer coincidence.

⁶ Einarr Skúlason, *Geisli* 48–53 (stanzas 51–56); *Passio et Miracula Beati Olaui* 76–78; *Gamal norsk homiliebok* no. iii, 114; Snorri Sturluson, *Heimskringla* vol. 3, 371–72. While *Geisli* does not mention the erection of a church after the battle, the other texts state that the church was dedicated to either Mary or both saints; Snorri finally turns it into St Olaf’s.


⁸ Cf. for now Kühn 1991, 258–59. Blöndal’s reconstruction of the ‘Varangian Guard’ in the Viking Age in SB, better known in the influential English version *VB* (see note 18 and below, 345–62), takes information from high medieval sagas as a premise when analysing the Byzantine sources, which never mention a Scandinavian guard unit before the twelfth century. The Byzantine picture of Scandinavians and its change over time are treated in detail in my PhD dissertation (Scheel 2015).

⁹ See below, 56.

¹⁰ Cf. Sverrir Jakobsson 2008, 178–82. Damico 1996, 51–66 notes the narrative patterns but does not doubt the historicity of the reports even about the tenth century in *Íslendingasögur*. Since Byzantine authors before Michael Psellus never mention Varangians or ‘axe-bearers’ at the palace, the anachronistic character of information from the sagas about Viking-Age events should be stressed.
much with his piety and confirmation of Danish loyalty (fides Danorum) towards the Byzantines that the latter spontaneously questioned the alleged superior wisdom of the Greeks. It was not only kings who gained honour, relics and gold: exploits in the emperor’s service could provide the returning Varangian and his relatives with both material treasures and prestige, although this was true of the romanticised ‘good old days’ in the Sagas of the Icelanders (Íslendingasögur) rather than in the saga authors’ present. Nevertheless, thirty-two commemorative runic inscriptions, predominantly from eastern Sweden, mention journeys to Grikkland and Langbardal (i.e. the Byzantine Longobardia), thus underlining the idea that travelling to Byzantium could be lucrative and that it was a well-established practice already in the early eleventh century. On top of that, two Scandinavian saints, Olaf and Thorlak, performed miracles in Byzantium and were honoured by churches built by emperors, according to their respective sagas and miracle catalogues.

Whereas Varangians constituted a not overly exciting part of Byzantine everyday life, Byzantium appears in Scandinavian literature from the high middle ages as both an exotic and a distant place: an important, if not the most important, centre of the Christian world, offering Scandinavians a good social network and the possibility of making their fortune. No crusader or pilgrim would have visited Jerusalem without travelling via Byzantium, where his fellow Norsemen were to be found.

This marked difference in perception and attention is not only a matter of different perspectives, but mirrors an asymmetric cultural relationship, which also holds

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11 Mork. vol. 2, 95–98; Saxo, Gesta Danorum 12.7.1–3.
13 See RoU, 114–17, 121–24; Larsson includes runestones from Uppland (U) and Södermanland (Sö). For further references to the runestones, their datings and the thirty-four individuals mentioned in the inscriptions, see the entries (#) by Daniel Föller in PmbZ, vol. 2: Ög 81 (Assurr #20553), Ög 94 (Oddlaugr #26174), Sm 46 † (Svæinn #27434), Sö 82 (Frøystæinn #22009), Sö 85 (Anonymous #32042), Sö 163 (Ólæifr #26181), Sö 165 (Heðinn #22590), Sö 170 (Baulfr #21136), Sö 345 (Gæir #22046), U 73 (Æmmundr #20137, Ingimundr #22761, names retrieved from U 72), U 104 (Svæinn #27436, Þórir #28340), U 112 (Ragnvaldr #26803), U 136 (Öystaðinn #26176), U 140 (Anonymous #32061), U 201 (Töki #28361), U 270 (Kattil Grískfari #23595), U 358 (Folkbiðn #22000), U 374 (Anonymous #32056), U 431 (Gunnarr #22521), U 446 (Anonymous #32051), U 518 (Ormgeirr #26203, Ormulfr #26205), U 540 (Anonymous #32057), U 792 (Haursi #22566), U 890 (Anonymous #32064), U 922 (Ingifastr #22760), U 956 (Viðbiðn Grískfara #28424), U 1016 (Áki #20208), U 1087 † (Ótryggir #26210), Vg 178 (either Æsbiorn #20138 or Kolbæinn #24210). Travellers to Langbardal are commemorated in Sö 65 (Ólæifr #26180), U 133 (Holmi #22628), U 141 † (also Holmi #22628). One could add the runestone found on the island of Berezan (St Aitherios) in the mouth of the Dnieper (Grani #22320, Karl #23677).
14 For Olaf, see above note 6; for Thorlak, see Jarfeinabók Þorláks byskups gnunnar (Biskupa sögur II 236–37).
true for the material culture from the Viking Age until the thirteenth century. In the north, we find, for instance, Byzantine ivories, silks, glass, pottery, coins, pectoral crosses and—much more significantly—local adaptations of the latter two in the eleventh century. Later on, murals in Danish churches, especially in Zealand and Scania, show the astonishing influence of Byzantine style and iconography, and cannot be connected directly to any surviving Rus or western European intermediaries.

The Scandinavian imprint on Byzantine culture is much more limited. Aside from some runic inscriptions, which in themselves only prove the presence of Scandinavians, the main Scandinavian contribution to Byzantine culture which is still visible today seems to have been the battle-axe. On the one hand, the axe (pelekys), which the Byzantines did not normally use as an infantry weapon, came to be the most important ethnic attribute of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian warriors from the late eleventh century, when they were finally differentiated from the Rus (Rhōs). For stylistic reasons, nearly all historians from the Komnenian era prefer the word ‘axe-bearers’ (pelekyphoroi) as a synonym for the vernacular Varangoi, which had been borrowed from East Slavonic. Axe-bearing barbarians already appear in the first part of Michael Psellos’ Chronographia, written around 1060, when he describes the ceremonial during the reign of the sisters Zoe and Theodora in 1042. From the time of John Skylitzes’ chronicle onwards, they became a part of everyday life at court. Anna Komnena, writing the biography of her father Alexios after 1137, makes a famous reference to the loyalty of the Varangians to the old emperor Nikephoros III Botaneiates in 1081, when Alexios besieged Constantinople. The Varangians are compared with the best of the indigenous Byzantine regiments (tagmata). Although the passage’s historical accuracy in this detail is highly doubtful, the picture is valid, at least from Anna’s point of view. The story of Alexios’ accession could not have been written this way without Anna’s personal experience of the importance of this group of foreigners, and without her po-

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15 Cf. Duczko 1996; Roslund 1998, 338–68, 381–85. For pectoral crosses, see RRDD; for coins, see below note 47.
16 On Rus-Gotland transfers, see Vasilyeva 2009.
17 See Koli 1988, 162–72.
18 In VB, Blöndal usually identifies Rhōs as Scandinavians, which is perfectly plausible in, for instance, their description in De cerimonis from around 950. However, the cavalry described in the Taktikon Vári from c. 1000 shows that the term Rhōs must have included people from the multicultural society around Kiev (Three Byzantine Military Treatises 280). Scandinavians did not fight on horseback until the later part of the twelfth century (Heebøll-Holm 2009, 34–40, 50–55, 69). For the amalgamation of Scandinavians and Rus, see Schorkowitz 2012, 87; ER, 21–22, 36–37, 72, 173–77.
19 Psell. vol. 1, 118.
20 Sources written before 1081 do not mention a Varangian unit.
21 Anna Komnena, Alexiad vol. 1, 79.
itical intention to exculpate them from the looting of Constantinople which followed the taking of the City. This growing attention to axe-bearers during the twelfth century is highlighted by a short autobiographical eyewitness account of a palace revolt in 1201, written by the keeper of the relics (σκευοφύλακας) of the Pharos palace church, whose life was saved by Varangians he knew personally.²² The battle-axe and its bearers also influenced a visual representation of the Byzantine court. In the illuminated Madrid manuscript of Skylitzes’ chronicle, which was produced in Sicily in the late twelfth century,²³ a Byzantine illuminator depicted a scene in which fifteen guards surround the imperial palace; some are holding spears, but the majority are holding long-shafted battle-axes of a high medieval northern European type.²⁴ Again, the depiction is anachronistic with regard to the time it is meant to represent,²⁵ but the Byzantine notion of what palace guards should look like in the twelfth century is clear (Fig. 3.1). Limited as they may be, the constant presence of Scandinavians nevertheless left traces in Byzantine culture, although they come to the fore surprisingly late.

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²⁴ See Fig. 3.1 and Tsamakda 2002, 75–76, 373–74. Contrary to Kolias 1988, 166–70, the illumination probably does not depict an oriental type of axe, but the long, curved blades coincide with a high medieval Scandinavian type (cf. Liestøl 1976, 653–55).
²⁵ The illumination corresponds to the description of the murder of Leo V in 820.
Indicators of cultural contact are, of course, much earlier than the first witnesses of cultural transfer. Archaeological finds in the north and Byzantine written sources indicate that there had been a constant to and fro between the two regions since around 800, first along the eastern European rivers and the Black Sea, and after the First Crusade predominantly through central Europe and via Rome or along the Atlantic coast and through the Straits of Gibraltar. The flow of material goods along 'the East Way' to the Baltic region and the trade treaties preserved in the Rus Primary Chronicle are indicators of cultural contact and the accessibility of certain resources in Byzantium. It is plausible that regular encounters between Rus from Scandinavia and Byzantines triggered consequences of some sort in the north, but imported goods do not allow us to define the character and consequences of the cultural relationship more precisely, especially since one will never know whether they were acquired in Byzantium and transported directly all the way or passed through the hands of middlemen.

The impact of cultural encounters beyond economics can be analysed more specifically when material goods turn into cultural goods; when things and ideas behind them are understood, adapted and reproduced in the home context; or when non-material ideas, concepts or knowledge from the other culture reappear. In other words, when travellers or migrants from one culture observe an object or a non-material concept, or gain specific knowledge of another area of culture which attracts their interest and which comes to influence their local language, aesthetics, handicraft, dress, warfare, religious belief or other cultural fields, one can talk about cultural transfer.

The term transfert culturel was first established in francophone German studies in an analysis of the cultural relations between French and German scholarly milieus in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The theoretical model has been refined in various ways.

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28 The following concepts and ideas about cultural transfer are based on collaborative work with Stamatios Gerogiorgakis and Dittmar Schorkowitz and rest upon our theoretical considerations published in Gerogiorgakis et al. 2011. Cultural goods are not understood as wares in an economic sense, but as ideas, concepts or artefacts which are ascribed a ‘cultural use’ value by individuals or groups in the ‘receiving’ culture in a certain situation (ibid., 419–20) and are therefore adopted.
29 See ibid., 419–22 regarding the underlying anthropological concept of culture. The following model focuses on the interest and cognitive effort of the receiving party, as cultural appropriation in the end always depends on the efforts of the recipients.
30 Espagne & Werner 1985; Espagne 1999.
ious ways by historians to encompass pre-modern phenomena, such as by removing the modern nation as a frame of analysis and including material culture. Since oral or semi-oral cultures cannot communicate primarily through the circulation of written media, the role of migrants as cultural brokers has to be stressed with reference to medieval problems. The underlying idea is that encounters between members of different social groups, which due to their phenomenology can be defined as different cultures, do not necessarily or automatically entail mutual exchange of cultural goods, but rather a series of selective and unilateral processes of perception, appropriation and transmission, often simultaneously in both directions. It implies that transferred cultural goods are never precise reconstructions of what migrants saw and brought back with them as ideas or artefacts. The model of perception and appropriation, borrowed from reader-response criticism (Rezeptionsästhetik) and cognitive science, means that an individual only recognises things or concepts which can be decoded with the help of her or his semantic knowledge. Migrants should be able to fit what they see into their cognitive horizons, and this process of cognition is a creative act. If there is no intersection between one’s own knowledge and an object or a concept, it will not draw the attention of the individual in question, and no perception and appropriation will occur. If, however, this cognitive threshold is passed, the cognitive horizon of a stranger or a person confronted with a strange item will be changed in turn by the input of new information.

From this it follows that the perception of, for instance, a Byzantine pectoral cross by a Scandinavian in the eleventh century was necessarily different from its perception by a Byzantine. This is clearly demonstrated by pectoral crosses cast in the north which virtually always transform the Orthodox Christus mortuus found in Byzantium and Rus into an early medieval, western Christus vivus. The Deesis often found on the back of Byzantine crosses is different from the composition on a silver encolpion found on Öland, the so-called Gåtebo Cross dating to the end of the eleventh century (Fig. 3.2): instead of the Theotokos on the right and John the Baptist on the left of Christ Pantokrator, we see a haloed man with a long moustache on the right and an unidentifiable saint of indeterminate sex with a raised right hand in St John’s place. Certain aspects—the meaning of the Deesis and its theological implications—are lost, whereas a

32 Borgolte & Schneidmüller 2012, 260–64.
33 See Jauß 1975, 131–51.
34 Tulving & Clark 2000, 627–33; the implications for the historian are treated by Fried 2004, especially 100–07, 140–43, 385–93.
35 RRDD, 283–84.
36 This analysis is based on ibid., 180–84, 452–54.
saint with a Nordic moustache has been added. In the cases of three other crosses from
the eleventh century or around 1100, the Maria orans composition, which can be found
on the back of about half of surviving Byzantine crosses, has been turned into a cruci-
fied figure. Obviously, the notion of the praying Theotokos and its implications were
absent and her raised hands identified as an indicator of crucifixion, leading to a more
or less altered repetition of the iconography found on the front. These examples show
how a cultural good was separated from its Orthodox context and re-contextualised

37 Silver crucifix from Hurva Äspinge (Scania, c. 1000–1050: RRDD, 150–52, 439–40 [see below,
Fig. 3.3]); silver encolpion from Gullunge (Uppland, c. 1100: ibid., 164–72, 511–13 [see below,
Fig. 3.4]); silver encolpion from Kjøpsvik (Tysfjorden/northern Norway, c. 1100: ibid., 164–72).
These items undermine the notion of the wider impact of Byzantine devotion to Mary in the
Viking north. Traces of this might be found in two of the ‘Grikkland runestones’ in Uppland,
U 540 und U 956, from the second part of the eleventh century. They contain the formula Guð
hialpi hans salu ok Guds modir (“May God and his Mother help his soul”). See above note 13.
The processes of appropriation entailed a creative and different understanding on the basis of local religious knowledge and belief. Although the Nordic interpretation of Byzantine iconography is—from a Byzantine point of view—a fundamental misunderstanding and reveals remarkable blind spots in Viking Christianity, it nevertheless illustrates that there was enough shared knowledge for Byzantine iconography to be understood, albeit in a different way.

On the other hand, this also shows that such processes of transfer do not necessarily occur as soon as contact is established. The smaller the cultural compatibility, the greater the cognitive gap which has to be crossed and the smaller the chance for transfer between two cultures. We may therefore be sure that Scandinavians who

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38 The concept of de-contextualisation and re-contextualisation, which necessarily entail changes of the cultural goods in question, is taken from Burke 2009 and corresponds to Jauß 1975 (see above note 33). For an example of transfer of knowledge in the eleventh century, cf. the probable migration of Menia, a figure from local Sicilian hagiography, into the Eddic Grottaspngr (Brandes 2005).
Roland Scheel reached Constantinople in the ninth century witnessed a great deal, but, in the words of Sherlock Holmes, to what extent they merely saw or really observed their surroundings remains questionable as long as no witnesses of cultural transfer emerged. For the purposes of the present study, however, cultures are not thought of holistically as static units in space and time, but rather as a sum of social processes and products of social self-attribution, which consequently change over time. Thus, cultural difference

FIGURE 3.4: Encolpion from Gullunge, with reinterpreted Maria orans on the reverse (right)
(drawing after RRDD, 512–13, not to scale)

reached Constantinople in the ninth century witnessed a great deal, but, in the words of Sherlock Holmes, to what extent they merely saw or really observed their surroundings remains questionable as long as no witnesses of cultural transfer emerged. For the purposes of the present study, however, cultures are not thought of holistically as static units in space and time, but rather as a sum of social processes and products of social self-attribution, which consequently change over time. Thus, cultural difference

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may be reduced, facilitating communication and the appropriation of foreign goods. Processes of transfer are likely to play an energising role in the evolution of a cultural relationship, when one successful transfer process triggers the next. As a consequence, developments, ranging from cultural contact to a clash of cultures, a cultural relationship or even cultural entanglement, may be volatile; they are not expected to develop linearly and simultaneously in all cultural areas.

This can be demonstrated by comparing traces of transfer between Byzantium and England and Byzantium and eastern Scandinavia in the tenth century. By that time, the local, acephalic Scandinavian societies, marked by syncretising religious practices and looting economies, and Byzantium, which was closer to being a ‘state’ than any other culture in the Christian middle ages, were the very embodiment of the “simultaneity of the non-simultaneous.” The difference is not to be understood as a cultural gradient or ‘underdevelopment’, but as a marked gap which reduces overlapping in different cultural fields. Although England was farther away from Byzantium and participated in the flow of Byzantine wares to a similar extent as Scandinavian regions, more traces of cultural transfer can be observed. The Anglo-Saxon notion of kingship made the Byzantine title of basileus attractive to the kings of Wessex already in 935, and in a Christian context, Byzantine relics and liturgical equipment possessed a special value. Similarly, Archbishop Adalbert of Hamburg-Bremen, according to his biographer Adam, probably planned to introduce the Byzantine liturgy because of its greater splendour. Cultural synchrony, as in these cases, is likely to create situations in which the actors easily benefit from the appropriation of ideas, concepts or objects from the other culture. It is curious in this context that re-contextualisations of Byz-

40 Bitterli 1976, 81–83 differentiates between these four stages of cultural interaction in rising order of impact (occasional contact, clash, relationship, entanglement).
41 Cultural areas are not thought of as ‘containers’ but as spaces which are loosely associated with certain cultural formations and are liable to constant change (see below note 49).
45 Adam of Bremen (Hamburgische Kirchengeschichte 174) mentions that Adalbert claimed to be a descendant of Theophano and imitated Byzantine habitus and mores.
antine coinage and pectoral crosses in eleventh-century Denmark tend to be closer to the Byzantine archetypes than in other Scandinavian regions: Mary is twice depicted according to Byzantine iconography in Danish pieces, and Byzantine-influenced coins from Denmark from the early years of Sven Estridsen’s reign are much closer to Byzantine originals than Swedish imitations of earlier miliareia. From the point of view of cultural synchrony, it is hardly surprising that these examples occur in a region whose local elites had close ties to both England and Saxony. As a preliminary and partly unexpected result, the presumption that eastern influence on Viking-Age Scandinavia was replaced by western influence in the Nordic middle ages may lose some of its plausibility. It seems paradoxical only at first glance that cultural transfer from the Latin west to the north could boost transfer from the east.

The complex network of transfer processes from different directions at the same time, however, underlines the fact that the benefits of the concept are limited. While it is easy to describe and analyse single, unidirectional processes behind texts and artefacts in detail, this type of analysis is not especially helpful in delineating a global picture of complex cross-cultural interactions which consist of an endless series of transfers in many directions. This is especially true in situations of cultural amalgamation; that is, when processes of transfer run in both directions at a high rate and create exchange or even make cultural borders disappear. Although the idea of a relationship between cultural phenomena and geography is problematic and cultural areas may be “just nice to think…but quite hazardous or even impossible to draw on a map,” in our case the charting of a spatial regime of sense (Sinnordnung) concerning ‘Scandinavia’—the

46 See the fragment of the bronze encolpion from Råga Hörstad (Scania, eleventh century, probably produced in the region: RRDD, 180–84, 438–39; see Fig. 3.5) and the gold encolpion from Orø (Isefjord/Zealand, c. 1100 or later, depicting a Christus mortuus on the front and the Theotokos holding the Holy Scripture on the back: ibid., 164–74, 431–33).

47 For Sweden, see Malmer 1992; Malmer 1981b. For a general view, see Morrisson 1981; for Denmark, Grierson 1979, 124–27; Steen Jensen & Kromann 1995. They all interpret the production of the Danish coins as the result of competition between Sven Estridsen and the returned Harald Hardrada. It should be stressed that these exact reproductions did not occur in Norway or Sweden, although the devaluation of the Norwegian coinage under Harald has been compared to contemporary developments in Byzantium he could have witnessed (Malmer 1981a, 128). For the use of the comparatively few imported Byzantine coins, especially as pendants, see below, 141–68.

48 Sometimes the terms ‘transfer’ and ‘exchange’ are used synonymously (cf. Burke 2000, 9, 13; Lüsebrink 2005, 138). However, it seems meaningful to distinguish between a complex overall situation and single ongoing processes which are only small parts of a complex system of interaction.

49 Schippers 2006, 11.

Nordrlond where the ‘Danish tongue’ (dønsk tunga) was spoken and ‘Byzantium’ is quite easy. Furthermore, since Scandinavia and Byzantium did not share a border and their cultural relationship was asymmetric, the concept of cultural transfer helps to adjust one’s view to the volatile processes of interaction. It allows us to observe what happened to appropriated cultural goods during re-contextualisation, be they coins, pectoral crosses or information about the Byzantine court; to compare the diachronic development of such processes in different regions; and to seek out the prosopographical and social background of cultural transfer. It is necessary to ask who was or might have been responsible for such importation, which social groups or strata reacted to and benefitted from it and what the consequences were, in both the short and long terms. Effects within the borrowing culture and potential interferences with other transfers from different directions and diachronic developments are of special interest.

It is therefore imperative to take into account the different layers of time which material goods or texts represent. Whereas in the case of archaeological finds a terminus ante quem can be defined, at least if the horizon is undisturbed, texts hardly ever give clearly identifiable strata of historical information. On the one hand, it is quite obvious that Morkinskinna’s story of Harald Hardrada’s exploits in Byzantium contains information which was transmitted orally to the anonymous author in skaldic stanzas and perhaps also in communicative memory; this is corroborated by Kekaumenos. Already in the skaldic stanzas from Harald’s lifetime—if we choose to accept their authenticity—we see how information was transformed and re-contextualised in order to fit into local patterns of thinking. A Norwegian king may not simply fall into disgrace and flee the country, as Kekaumenos suggests; he must also avenge his loss of face by assailing and blinding the emperor, an event which, according to Byzantine texts, cannot have taken place. The transferred information about Harald as we have it in Morkinskinna may well be old, but it is, on the other hand, inextricably interwoven with the concept of crusade, motifs from French romance, information from hagiographical texts about St Olaf, William of Jumièges’ story of Duke Robert I in Constantinople and—most importantly in our context—information from King Sigurd’s crusade in the same text and eyewitness knowledge of Byzantium available to the author. It is self-evident that Harald perceived his Byzantine surroundings differently from, for in-

51 Already to be found in the early eleventh-century Vikingarvísur of Sigvat Thordarson, 555–56 (stanza 15). Cf. Ælnoth’s Chronicle (Vitae sanctorum Danorum 82); Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla vol. 1, 3.

52 Harald is portrayed as a crusader avant la lettre (Mork. vol. 1, 106–08; for a detailed analysis, see Föller 2011, 58–67; Föller 2012, 293–98). For traits of romance, see Mork. vol. 1, xxxv–vi. Morkinskinna includes a miracle of Olaf defeating the Pechenegs which was transferred from 1122 to Harald’s time (Mork. vol. 1, 95–96). For the Gesta Normannorum ducum and other western sources, see White 2005, 99–109; Hill 2011.
stance, the crusader Alexander Pedersen, the nephew of Archbishop Absalon of Lund, who visited Constantinople in 1193. Not only had Byzantine culture and the status of the Varangians themselves changed in the period between these visits, but now cultural synchrony entailed closer attention to the famous icon of the Theotokos Hodegetria, which receives extensive treatment from a chronicler of the Danish crusade and which features in a mural in a church built by the Skjalm family collective (see below, 76 and 79). Such migrations and processes of transfer between Viking-Age events and high medieval texts necessarily came to influence the latter. Morkinskinna’s story about Harald could never have taken the form it did without the processes of cultural transfer which took place between Harald’s return to the north and the early thirteenth century, not to mention the import of written culture and linear historical thinking as preconditions. The same applies to the astonishing and exact knowledge shown in the Gesta Danorum and Morkinskinna about the implications of Byzantine diplomacy, and the way the Byzantines both flattered and belittled barbarians with an abundance of gifts,53 in their descriptions of the receptions of Eric of Denmark and Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer in 1103 and around 1110, respectively. If one takes into account Byzantine sources about the Varangians’ status and integration into court life around 1200, it is much more likely that Saxo Grammaticus and the author of Morkinskinna gained their precise knowledge from living eyewitnesses rather than from oral tradition about events one hundred years earlier.

Based on these observations, sagas and Latin chronicles are seen in this study not primarily as containers of oral tradition, but as products of specific synchronous conditions and contemporaneous interests. The question why a remarkable predilection for Byzantium is discernible between the late twelfth century and c. 1220 in both Icelandic and Danish texts cannot be answered sufficiently by the sheer fact that information about ancient times was available. Consequently, the analysis of Viking-Age cultural transfer between Byzantium and the north is, in our case, left to the expertise of archaeologists and runologists, while the analysis of texts and murals focuses on developments of cultural transfer during the twelfth century and their consequences.

DENMARK, BYZANTIUM AND THE SKJALM COLLECTIVE

King Eric of Denmark’s crusade left remarkably few traces in early Danish historical writing. He left Denmark in 1101 and travelled, in all likelihood, via the Romano-German empire and Rome itself to Byzantium and on to Cyprus, where he died on his way to Jerusalem in 1103.54 Ælnoth of Canterbury, the first person to write a chron-

54 Eric was in Rome for the first time in 1098 (Annales Danici medii aevi 70; Saxo, Gesta Danorum 12,5,1–2). The Gesta Danorum indicates that in 1101 Eric sent an embassy to Rome instead of
icle about Danish history around 1111–1112, focused his attention on St Cnut, who was murdered in Odense and buried in the monastery and cathedral where the author himself lived. Although King Eric, in contrast to the saint’s other brothers, played a positive role, his travels to Rome and Byzantium were of no consequence to Ælnoth’s story. Likewise, the Roskilde Chronicle from 1138 only devotes a few lines of laconic information to Eric’s travels and death.

The first text to deal more extensively with a Danish journey to Byzantium is the Office of St Cnut Lavard, Eric’s son who was murdered in 1131. The Office seeks to establish King Eric as a holy predecessor to his equally holy son. It describes the miracles Eric performed on Cyprus and was written around the time of Cnut’s canonisation, as late as 1170. This is remarkable, since Eric’s journey at the beginning of the century had left visible traces: a silk cloth, the so-called Ørnetæppet (Eagle Cloth), in which St Cnut the King’s bones were wrapped and which is displayed today in Odense Cathedral, was very likely a gift from Alexios I to the Danish king, as a reconstruction of the Greek inscription on the cloth and a skaldic stanza indicate. One of the most sophisticated Byzantine encolpia, which was found in 1683 in the grave of Queen Dagmar (d. 1212) or Princess Richiza (d. 1220) of Denmark in St Bendt’s Church, Ringsted, may also be seen in this context. Due to its superb quality, Dagmar’s Cross clearly belongs to the sphere of imperial gifts, and it most probably contained a relic of the True Cross. Intriguingly, the container was obviously emptied long before it was buried; the two halves were soldered together and the hinge-joint hammered flat. Signs of wear indicate that it must have been worn in this state for many years. Both the context of the find and the fact that the relic was removed correspond perfectly to the stories later texts tell about Eric in Byzantium. Saxo’s Gesta Danorum states that Eric acquired a piece of the True Cross and had it sent to the church in Slangerup in Zealand where he was born.

It is easy to imagine that Eric obtained the encolpion together with the silk cloth, and meeting the pope himself and travelled to Byzantium via Rus (13,6,6; 13,7,1). This contradicts the information from 1169–1170 in The Offices and Masses (190), the Annales Ryenses (Annales Danici medii aevi 70) and the Knýtlinga saga (Danakonunga sọgur 235–38), including Markús Skeggjason’s Eiríksdrápa, composed soon after 1103. Cf. below, 70.

55 Cf. Scheel 2012b, 8–16.
56 Riis & Riis 2004, especially 262–65, decipher the inscription as “ἐπ’ Ἀλεξίου φιλοχρίστου δισπότου” (“in the time of Emperor Alexios, friend of Christ”). Markús Skeggjason’s Eiríksdrápa (457–58) mentions a cloth given to Eric by the basileus.
57 Lindahl 1980; Liebgott 1986, 14; RRDD, 176–80, 433–34. According to the most recent publications, a late eleventh century date seems most probable. Bangert 2010, 269–71 takes a date around 1200 for granted and searches for possible explanations for its migration to the north around this time, neglecting the clear signs of wear and the transformation from an encolpion into a crucifix, which clearly undermine this hypothesis.
58 Saxo, Gesta Danorum 12,7,4.
that they were brought back to Denmark after his death. Although a virtually infinite number of other possibilities can, of course, never be ruled out, the quality of the piece and the place where it was found suggest direct contact at the highest social level. In the new cultural context, the precious cross underlined the wearer’s high social status, but the relic’s value meant that no king, queen or bishop would have worn it around his or her neck. Such relics were extremely difficult to obtain in the north, hence its value was increased by the transfer. During re-contextualisation, one would expect precisely what obviously happened: the relic was removed and transferred to an altar, while the crucifix remained in use. We may therefore presume that special attention was paid to objects of Byzantine origin. Actually, Eric’s crusade is the only instance when the reception of a Scandinavian lord by a basileus is mentioned in a nearly contemporary skaldic stanza. One may infer from this stanza’s reference to the emperor’s gifts—a “half load” (hálfa lest) of gold, a cloth, probably the Ørnetæppet, and fourteen ships—that these were considered extraordinary and worth mentioning. Nothing on this level of detail was known about King Sigurd’s crusade, a fact which later caused considerable overlap between the stories of these two kings, once historical writers became interested in Byzantium.

This interest, however, did not develop before the reign of King Valdemar the Great (1157–1182) and his allied magnates, the Skjalm Collective, consisting of the descendants of Skjalm Hvide from Zealand and associated oligarchs. The first historical work from the Valdemarian era is a little known, short Latin history of the mythological Danish kings who had their seat in Lejre, not far from Roskilde. The Chronicon Lethrense, which is in fact the oldest Scandinavian text about mythological prehistory, was conceived as a typological mirror to the earlier Roskilde Chronicle and was most probably written under Bishop Absalon in Roskilde in the late 1160s. Two themes in the text set the political agenda for a typical Danish-Roman-Byzantine triangle which would inspire cultural transfer in the next decades. The first pillar of the historical argument is that no Roman emperor, including Augustus, had ever been able to conquer and control Denmark. This is obviously a reaction to the fact that, during the dynastic

59 Cf. the dramatic story of the Wends who in 1135 plundered Konghelle and tried to steal the splinter of the True Cross obtained by Sigurd (Snorri Sturluson, Heimskringla vol. 3, 291–95).
60 A “half load” equals six skippund, each consisting of 125–150 kg.
61 Cf. Morkinskinna (above note 11). Not only is Sigurd explicitly compared to Eric, but he is also offered exactly the same amount of gold.
62 The term ‘Skjalmkollektivet’ is from Hermanson 2000, 4–7.
63 The Historia Norwegie, which contains a mythological genealogy of the Norwegian kings, is probably younger than the Chronicon Lethrense (see ‘Introduction’, Historia Norwegie, 21–24).
64 Scheel 2012a, 73–80.
65 Chronicon Lethrense (SMHD vol. 1, 44–45).
struggles of the 1130s to 1150s between members of Sven Estridsen’s family, and also in the early years of Valdemar’s reign, Denmark had become an imperial fief: Lothar III and Frederick Barbarossa, in particular, had exercised some influence over Danish affairs. Valdemar was eventually forced to accept Frederick’s pope, Victor IV, and only the latter’s death lessened the harmful influence of the Hohenstaufen emperor, of which the Valdemarians and the Skjalm Collective tried to rid themselves. The second pillar of the argument is an historical circumvention of Rome and its ‘German’ heirs. Mythological prehistory ends with King Harald Wartooth, who is said to have created a Danish dominium maximum which reached to the Mediterranean. This idea, based on knowledge about the old eastern routes, posed a challenge to contemporary perceptions that Denmark was on the periphery of the Christian world and historically dependent on papal-imperial mission work. It is developed further in the works of Sven Aggesen, a canon from Lund. Writing in the 1180s, he treats Cnut the Great as the founder of the law of the Danish royal household in both his Lex Castrensis and his Brevis historia regum Daciae, and in both texts he ascribes to Cnut a dominion which reached from ultima Thule to Graecorum imperium. This made Denmark the third imperium of the Christian world, and the fact that Cnut installed his son-in-law Henry III on the throne in Rome, and thus imposed his imperial will on the Romans, proved the supremacy of the Danes over the ‘Romano-German’ empire just as powerfully as the encounters in the mythological past.

This close association between messages from the distant past and political constellations in Sven’s own time would seem a little vague, and hence the interpretation a little bold, were it not for Saxo Grammaticus, who wrote between the 1180s and 1216. In his Gesta Danorum, the same concept of old connections with Byzantium is more developed and forms an integral part of Danish history, especially Saxo’s claim that Odin himself came from Byzantium. As a consequence, a direct connection is shown to have existed between the east and the north from the very beginning of history, and the northern universe developed its own culture in parallel to the Roman world, not in dependence on it. This subtle construction, which becomes more and more prominent, creates an old and self-evident tradition for a strong bond in the Valdemarian era, when

67 Chronicon Lethrense (SMHD vol. 1, 53).
68 Lex Castrensis (SMHD vol. 1, ch. 1, 66); Brevis historia regum Dacie (SMHD vol. 1, ch. 9, 120).
69 SMHD vol. 1, ch. 9, 122.
70 Cf. the story of the duel between King Uffe and the emperor (SMHD vol. 1, ch. 3, 100–04) and the story of Queen Thyra and Otto the Great (SMHD vol. 1, ch. 5, 108–14); Scheel 2012a, 96–103.
71 Saxo, Gesta Danorum 1,7,11; 3,4,9. For the consequences of this construction, see Skovgaard-Petersen 1981, 121–23, 131–32.
the idea of Byzantine connections and Byzantine cultural goods were put to use.\textsuperscript{72} It is mirrored in two of Valdemar’s charters for Esrom Monastery from 1176 and 1177, in which the arengae borrow formulae which are atypical for western documents but characteristic of prooimia in Byzantine chrysobulls.\textsuperscript{73} In the same period, the chronicle of Niketas Choniates shows the highest frequency of references to axe-bearers in all of Byzantine literature.

The flourishing Byzantino-Danish relationship during the later decades of the twelfth century coincides with an evolving and at times problematic cultural entanglement between the Scandinavian regions and Latin Europe. ‘Negative’ cultural transfer from the Hohenstaufen empire and ‘positive’ transfer from Byzantium are interlocking in Sven Aggesen’s and Saxo’s works. The concept of a Danish honor regni in the Brevis historia is clearly an appropriation of the Hohenstaufen concept of honor imperii, while at the same time being directed against the latter.\textsuperscript{74} On the other hand, the closeness between Denmark and Byzantium in former times, the personal acquaintance between King Eric and Alexios I, as well as Danish loyalty towards the ‘Greeks’ in Saxo, demonstrate which empire was relevant to the Danes: the Komnenian rather than the Hohenstaufen. Suddenly, Eric of Denmark’s crusade and the display of insider knowledge about Byzantium became particularly noteworthy. Saxo—against all probability and the evidence of both the skaldic stanzas and a well-informed early text\textsuperscript{75}—has King Eric travelling to Rome, back to Denmark, and more or less immediately afterwards to Byzantium via ‘the East Way’ instead of Rome. The alteration only becomes logical if it is interpreted as a way of illustrating a direct, separate Danish-Byzantine link, a postfiguration of what mythological history had already shown:\textsuperscript{76} that the Byzantine empire was no more remote than Rome, in fact quite the opposite. Seen from this perspective of functionality, it is hardly surprising that Niketas Choniates on the southern fringe shares his negative view of Henry VI’s policy of imperial restoration and its arrogant agents with Sven Aggesen and Saxo, who, on the northern periphery, underline Ger-

\textsuperscript{72} The following ideas were originally inspired by the reconstruction of Ciggaar 2000, 129–41, although some datings of the artefacts and paintings have been revised.

\textsuperscript{73} Riis 1977, 75, 77.

\textsuperscript{74} See the story of Uffe (above note 70); cf. Foerster 2009, 146–50; Scheel 2012a, 91.

\textsuperscript{75} See above, 66 and note 54.

\textsuperscript{76} Another reason for Saxo to keep the journeys to Rome and Constantinople apart might be that The Offices and Masses (190) ascribes three pilgrimages to Eric, but only describes two. Now, however, it seems more reasonable to suppose that Eric and Bodil made a ‘third’ pilgrimage to Durham: they are mentioned in the Liber vitae, and similarities between the antiphons of St Cuthbert, St Edmund and St Cnut Lavard might also be explained through such a connection (ibid., XXXVI).
man arrogance, turgidity and the emperors’ policy of intimidation.\textsuperscript{77} Shared enemies and political alliances proved to be stronger than a ‘schism’ which the Danes, Latins though they were, simply chose to ignore.\textsuperscript{78}

**DANISH ART AND THE DESCENDANTS OF SKJALM HVIDE**

The political effectiveness of the relationship between Denmark and Byzantium was not, however, limited to the constellations in this transcultural triangle. Certain groups among the magnates in Denmark seem to have profited from its visual display, too. In eastern Denmark, there are a number of murals in small churches which show a remarkable degree of Byzantine influence in both style and iconography. While style, in the light of the overall Byzantine influence on western art, is not considered to be a reliable indicator of direct contacts,\textsuperscript{79} iconographic elements which can be found nowhere else in the west hint strongly at direct transfer and conscious use of Byzantine models. Obvious differences between these murals and others on Gotland, which were influenced by Rus art, help to rule out identical transfer mechanisms in spite of the vital trade routes and social networks across the Baltic.\textsuperscript{80} Most of these murals, in a total of thirty-three churches, can be ascribed to three workshops active in the twelfth century, known as Vä, Finja and Jörlunde after the locations of the most important churches decorated by each group.\textsuperscript{81}

\textsuperscript{77} Compare Niketas Choniates *Historia*, vol. 1, 476, 479–80 with *Brevis historia* (SMHD vol. 1, 100–02, 112–14).

\textsuperscript{78} Cf. Sverrir Jakobsson 2008 for an analysis of Icelandic literature.

\textsuperscript{79} Cutler 2000, 490–92.

\textsuperscript{80} Cf. Vasilyeva 2009 and Roslund 1998, 332–68, who demonstrates in a comparison between archaeological finds from Lund and Sigtuna that wares from the eastern trading route did not reach Denmark in amounts comparable to those which reached Sweden. Anglert (1995, 48–51) underlines the idea of a ‘split Scania’, whereby the material culture of eastern Scania is similar to that of Blekinge, Gotland and Öland.

\textsuperscript{81} Murals in Vä (Scania) and Gundsømagle, Sæby ved Tissø, Kirke-Hyllinge, Tybjerg, Sønder Jernløse and Skibby (Zealand) are ascribed to the Vä workshop or are stylistically closely related (Kaspersen 2003) and currently dated to the period between c. 1100 and 1130–1150. The murals in Tybjerg, Sønder Jernløse and Skibby are stylistically similar (ibid.). The Finja workshop, currently dated to c. 1125–1150, comprises murals in Finja, Asmundtorp (lost), Lyngsjö, Vallkärra, Flädje (lost) and probably Stävie (lost) in Scania, and Fjenneslev, Slaglille and Soderup in Zealand. Murals ascribed to the Jörlunde workshop (dated to c. 1150–1175) are to be found in Jörlunde, Målv, Kirkereup, Hagedest, Kildebrønde, Tveje Merløse, Roskilde and St Ib in Zealand, and Vrigstad (lost) in Småland. Other murals not painted by these workshops are to be found at Östra Sallerup (1125–1150), Vinslöv (1125–1150), Hörby and Lackalänga (1175–1200) and Stehag (c. 1200, all in Scania), Førslev (1150–1200, Zealand), Mårslet (1175–1200, Eastern Jutland) and Ståby (1200–1225, Western Jutland). For references, see Haastrup, 1986a; Haastrup & Egevang 1987; Kaspersen 1982; Ahlsted Yrlid 1976 and the articles in the comprehensive series *Danmarks*
Figure 3.6: The three Magi and two Hvide donors, Fjenneslev Church: detail from the east wall of the nave.
not be discussed in detail here, some common prominent elements should be pointed out. Donors are often depicted the same size as the other figures, presenting their donations directly to God without *intercessores*, as is the case in Byzantine programmes in church narthexes.\(^8^2\) The location of the donors, either on the eastern wall of the nave on the side of the triumphal arch or in the arch itself, is uncommon in the Latin west but functionally not dissimilar to the narthex in Orthodox churches, where the *memoria* of the deceased was honoured.\(^8^3\) The Last Judgement, commonly depicted on the western wall of Latin churches, but in the narthex of Orthodox ones, is usually situated on the eastern wall of the nave in our eastern Danish churches, again showing

*kirker.* Pictures can be found in the database <www.kalkmalerier.dk> [accessed 19 October 2015].

\(^8^2\) Such donors are to be found on the eastern wall in Vä, Fjenneslev (Fig. 3.6), Slaglille and Hagested, in the triumphal arch in Roskilde/St Ib, Vallkärra, Førsløv and Ståby, on the northern wall of the nave in Måløv, and in the apse on the side of the *Maiestas Domini* in Lackalänga. Cf. Haastrup 1986a, 58–60. Norlund & Lind (1944, 100) stress that full-scale donors are atypical outside the Byzantine commonwealth; neither Kirschbaum et al. (1972) nor Lipsmeyer (1981) mentions this Danish type in murals elsewhere in the west. Cf. the imperial donor portraits of Hagia Sophia, for instance above the entrance to the narthex (Fig. 3.7).

\(^8^3\) Theis 2005, 878–79.
a fairly similar location and iconography to Byzantine models.\footnote{This is found in the churches in Roskilde/St Ib, Finja, Hagedest, Skibby, Asmundtorp (lost), Vrigstad, Valkäära, Sønder Jernløse, Lyngsjö and Stävie. The arrangement in vertical zones is western, the iconography Byzantine, like in Torcello. The location in the east, however, is special. Cf. Ahlsted Yrlid 1976, 30; Hjort 1986b; Kirschbaum et al. 1972, 513–22.} Representations of the Virtues, depicted as Byzantine princesses in medallions in the triumphal arch, are also remarkable in comparison to western murals.\footnote{Located in Sæby ved Tissø, cf. also Kirke-Hyllinge, Kirkerup and Gundsømagle (Haastrup 1986b).} Setting aside the many other Byzantineisms which can be found in individual churches, one may point out that the most outstanding examples are to be found in the churches painted by the Jørlunde workshop. This is considered to be the latest of the three, since it shows the influence of the so-called ‘dynamic style’.\footnote{Haastrup 1986a, 39–41; for the ‘dynamic style’, see Kitzinger 1976.} Three examples, two from the chancel of Jørlunde Church in northern Zealand and one from Måløv Church, located only a few kilometres away from Jørlunde, highlight the transfer of iconography. At Jørlunde, Christ on his entry
into Jerusalem rides the donkey in the Byzantine manner, with both feet on one side, and the Last Supper is depicted with Christ and the disciples reclining at table in the antique manner. In Måløv, we find a depiction of the Theotokos Hodegetria, a pre-

FIGURE 3.9: The Last Supper, Jørlunde Church: detail from the north wall of the chancel (east corner)

See Fig. 3.8 and 3.9.
cise reproduction of the Byzantine iconographic type in a Byzantinising Romanesque style.\textsuperscript{88}

\textsuperscript{88} See Fig. 3.10, cf. Hjort 1986a.
These puzzling Byzantine elements in small but very richly endowed Danish churches scattered across Zealand and Scania have been explained by lost intermediaries in Germany, Italy or other gateways for Byzantine influence. The conventional paradigm behind these reconstructions is that Byzantine influence reached the north via a sort of cultural osmosis, and not through the will and influence of powerful individuals, i.e. donors. However, if none of the aforementioned elements appears together in western paintings, even taking into account the limited number preserved, the argument ex silentio for indirect transfer is quite weak, especially if we consider the direct personal links that existed between Byzantium and the north during the twelfth century and the possible migration of icons, enamels, model books and similar small objects, not to mention travellers’ impressions.

In the case of the Danish murals, we are in the fortunate and rare situation that the transfer of iconography, the transfer of ideas and the social group responsible for these processes can all be connected. The murals, previously considered to be from the Valdemarian era, are now thought to have been painted immediately after the churches were built. According to dendrochronological analysis, these stone churches replaced their wooden predecessors in the early decades after 1100. While the validity of the arguments used to correlate the relative stylistic chronology with an historical time scale can be debated, the association of the churches in question with two social groups is quite obvious. If we look at the ownership structure of the estates surrounding the church buildings in the twelfth century, it becomes very clear that descendants of Skjalm Hvide and their allies were responsible for most of the Byzantinising murals, which number twenty-two of the total thirty-three. Seven other churches were most probably built on royal possessions; only four churches cannot be ascribed to one of these powerful social groups. Although our knowledge about land ownership in
these early times is often far from certain, we can spot a characteristic coincidence between the occurrence of Byzantine iconography or murals in general and those regions where the Hvide clan, led by King Valdemar’s foster-brothers, Archbishop Absalon and Esbern Snare, had very extensive possessions: central Zealand, western Zealand between Kalundborg and Isefjord, and north of Roskilde. In Scania, where the Hvide first gained substantial influence during King Valdemar’s reign, a certain concentration around Lund can be observed, whereas royal possessions dominate in the thinly populated north-east. The same relationship between landownership of the leading group and transfer of art applies to six central church buildings, representing the Holy Sepulchre and displaying a crusader identity.

The validity of this association between the Skjalm Collective and Byzantine influence is underpinned first of all by a comparison with murals from Jutland, which constitute an older group and show no particular signs of Byzantine influence. Secondly, the written sources which describe relations with Byzantium were written under the auspices of Skjalm Hvide’s descendants. The last books of the *Gesta Danorum* are an account of the clan’s success stories, including those of Absalon and his brothers, and King Valdemar and his son. This link becomes even clearer if we consider the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, a short crusader chronicle about a Danish-Norwegian venture during the Third Crusade, written shortly after the return of the protagonists in 1193. Actually, the text tries to present an almost ludicrous chain of bad luck and failure as a success. The preparations took too long, the Danish part of the fleet was shipwrecked in the North Sea and the Danes travelling overland via Germany and Italy arrived after the armistice between Richard and Saladin in 1193, and thus too late to fight. Some incidents, however, are striking with regard to relations with Byzantium. At the beginning of the narration, when the news of Jerusalem’s fall reaches the Danish court, Esbern Snare, Absalon’s brother, exhorts the Danes to prepare a crusade; one of his arguments is that the Danes are the “defenders of Greece”.

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95 See Ulsig 1968 and Kræmmer 2011 (above note 93). In our only example from Jutland, the owner of the estate in the high middle ages is unknown, but Mårslet is very close to Aarhus, where Peder Sunesen (Hvide) was bishop at the end of the twelfth century.

96 Cf. Hermanson 2000, 238–45.

97 Such central buildings from the later twelfth century are to be found in Bjernede, Kalundborg, Store Hedinge and Pedersborg in Zealand, Thorso in Jutland (all associated with the Skjalm Collective) and Horne (Funen), adjacent to the kings’ estate. For a crusader consciousness among the Danish elites, see Villads Jensen 2011, 186–98, 437–47.

98 Haastrup 1986a, 25–27 (murals in Jelling, Ørreslev, Raasted and Horslev).


101 *SMHD* vol. 2, 466.
In Acre, English crusaders robbed the Danes and wanted to kill them because they thought the Danes were “Greeks”.\textsuperscript{102} Obviously, Scandinavians in Outremer were automatically regarded as agents of Byzantine interests by other crusaders. In the end, the Danes travelled home via Constantinople, where Isaac II Angelos hired some of them to join his Varangians.

More important, however, is the long description of the Theotokos Hodegetria, the icon of the Mother of God which, according to legend, was painted by St Luke himself. It plays a central role in the narrative, in terms of both the attention paid to it and the message expressed through it.\textsuperscript{103} The Danish crusaders did not reconquer Outremer, but they did pray in front of the most important icon of Mary, which is presented as a figuration of the Holy Land, the land where milk and honey flow. Milk and honey are also an allegory for the Mother of God; thus the Danish crusaders encounter Jerusalem in an allegorical way. The Byzantine icon of the Hodegetria fits perfectly into the chronicle’s concept, which was adapted from French schools,\textsuperscript{104} because it adds a military connotation.\textsuperscript{105} This very icon was treated extensively in our Danish crusader chronicle and reproduced in a church endowed by a member of the Skjalm Collective. In the chronicle, which was most probably written in Børglum in northern Jutland, three of the Hvide feature prominently among the five Danish protagonists.\textsuperscript{106} It is difficult to say whether or not the Theotokos Hodegetria in Måløv Church and other Byzantinisms from the Jørlunde workshop may be seen in the context of the Third Crusade; current stylistic dating indicates that the paintings are at least four decades older than the chronicle. Nevertheless, the connection between cultural transfer from Byzantium and the Hvide clan and its allies, both in art and in literature, is beyond doubt. The display of Byzantine connections obviously held social prestige, as wall paintings in churches were not very common, and churches with murals usually also

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 489–90.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 490–91.
\textsuperscript{104} Skovgaard-Petersen 2001, 49–56 names Alain de Lille and Richard of St Victor as sources.
\textsuperscript{105} Pentcheva 2006, 90–97.
\textsuperscript{106} The idea of a Børglum origin of the chronicle is formulated in Skovgaard-Petersen 2001, 7–8, on the grounds that the chronicle was written by a Norwegian from Tønsberg Monastery, a daughter house of Børglum, and that a nephew of the former bishop was among the crusade’s leaders. For an older attempt to identify this ‘frater X’, as he calls himself, see Vandvik 1955, 24–25, 33–34, who supposes that the chronicle was dedicated to Abbot Vilhelm of Æbelholt and proves that the author was familiar with contemporary Latin texts written in Denmark. The idea that the chronicle was written in Norway (cf. Johnsen 1976) is not accepted here; Danish-Norwegian relations are important, but the text focuses exclusively on the Danes in the second part. The three influential Hvide individuals are Åge Stigsen Hvide, Peder Pallesen Hvide and Alexander Pedersen. While the latter is a nephew of Archbishop Absalon, the first two are not descendants of Skjalm Hvide, but connected to the clan in other ways (Kræmmer 2011, 527–28).
possessed towers, which were otherwise rare. These magnate churches, including some central buildings, are evenly spread over the Skjalm Collective’s properties like landmarks. They document imperial Byzantine connections just like the histories written on the Hvide’s behalf, thus distinguishing the group from other Danish magnates in both iconography and materials.

The murals are usually painted with a dark blue background using plenty of lapis lazuli, an extremely expensive semi-precious stone from Persia which was imported to the Christian world via Outremer or Byzantium. In the west, where the technique of purifying the pigment had not yet been learned, lapis lazuli blue is usually found only in especially rich churches and not across the whole region. The Skjalm Collective was rich, but the notion that its members bought these large quantities of pigment through middlemen is not very likely. This material may therefore also be considered a good indicator of direct contacts. Since Archbishop Absalon’s testament also mentions prestigious Byzantine artefacts, the idea that the Skjalm Collective was responsible for the supply of Danish soldiers to Byzantium suggests itself. With regard to the dating of the murals, it should be noted that the descendants of Skjalm Hvide only reached foremost social status after Valdemar’s victory over the other Danish king, Sven III, in 1157. Not only were the magnates under intense financial pressure during the kings’ feuds between 1131 and 1157, but other Zealandian clans were more powerful than the Hvide. Since this situation is reflected neither in the distribution of the murals nor in the fact that the donors obviously had the necessary material and money at hand to display their superiority, a later dating of the murals should be reconsidered. The iconography of the relevant workshops shows a conscious orientation towards antique pictorial tradition.

The murals’ archaic style and iconography should probably be seen in the context of a general traditionalism in different branches of Danish Roman-

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107 This applies first of all to Zealand, where about 10% of the churches were originally built with western towers in the Romanesque period. In Scania, about 25% of the churches from the Romanesque period must have possessed primary towers, which usually covered the whole width of the building. It should be noted that Scanian churches with Byzantinising murals often possess either small, square towers or twin towers, a form which was not dominant in Scania, but typical for the Zealandian ‘Hvide’ churches (Jacobsen 1993, 21–29; Stiesdahl 1983, 30–32; Anglert 1995, 78–85).


111 See the depiction of the three Magi in Fjenneslev (Fig. 3.6), which clearly follows the iconography of the mosaic in Sant’ Appollinare Nuovo in Ravenna from the seventh century, and not contemporary Byzantine or western models.
esque art, as should the language of Saxo’s *Gesta Danorum*, in which antique models are consciously preferred to the latest developments. Byzantium was, in this context, the vessel of antiquity that the Hvide preferred. The emergence in the same murals of the *Maiestas Domini*, usually associated with the transfer of concepts of God’s grace which first consistently occurred in Valdemar the Great’s charters, and its absence in the older murals from Jutland, also indicates that they should be dated to the second half of the twelfth century.

For the present purposes, it does not matter whether the Hodegetria in Måløv Church or the description in the *Historia de profectio Danorum in Hierosolymam* was created first. They both belong to a certain milieu whose members used their Byzantine connections in order to sharpen their concept of a ‘Danish’ identity against ‘Romano-German’ imperial influence and distinguish themselves from other influential groups within Denmark. As a consequence, longstanding connections between Denmark and Byzantium quite suddenly came into the collective consciousness and triggered several processes of cultural transfer, including appropriations of both art and the concepts behind it. Seen from a global perspective, they helped the winners of internal struggles in Denmark to cement their position in a network of multidirectional cultural entanglements on the eve of the Danish expansion beyond the Baltic.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Similar patterns, both chronological and political, apply to Iceland in the decades between c. 1190 and 1220: *Orkneyinga saga* and *Morkinskinna*, two texts especially friendly to the Baglar faction in the Norwegian kings’ feud and possibly written in the Munkaþverá Monastery in the Eyjafjörður, create a picture of Byzantino-Norwegian relations which is similar to that of the *Gesta Danorum* for Denmark. In addition, the *víðfjörla* narratives, created around the same time in the Pingeyrar Monastery in the north-west, develop a second model of early Viking travels along ‘the East Way’; both narratives find their way into later fictional sagas.

As a result, the decades around 1200 appear to have been a key period in cultural transfer between Byzantium and Scandinavia, an impression which is supported by the close attention paid to axe-bearers by Niketas Choniates and Nicholas Mesarites, both eyewitnesses to events just before 1204. Although the asymmetric cultural relationship

113 Friis-Jensen 1992, especially 79.
114 Hermanson 2000, 252. For the association between God’s grace and the *Maiestas Domini*, see Kaspersen 1981.
116 Cf. Oddr Snorrason’s *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar*; *Yngvars saga víðfjörla*. 
had existed for centuries, it did not automatically entail processes of cultural transfer. Volatile booms of Byzantino-Scandinavian transfer depended on highly specific situations, both in the north and in Byzantium, and on the development of a certain cultural synchrony which allowed the re-contextualisation of cultural goods in the local context. This holds true for the establishment of the battle-axe as a weapon and symbol of the palace guards in Byzantium; the transfer of pectoral crosses, coins and their iconography in eleventh-century Scandinavia; the appearance of Byzantine iconography in Romanesque murals; and the creation of an image of Byzantium in Nordic historiography.

It might seem curious that Byzantine influence was not replaced by western dominance in the twelfth century, but rather was fuelled by the cultural entanglement between the Scandinavian and western European cultural regions. In fact, it was the situation around 1200, with its multidirectional cultural interactions, which favoured cultural transfer from Byzantium: it was precisely then that mobile Scandinavian elites were searching for proto-national group identities in a Christian context and were negotiating the social stratification in their societies through history and self-display. Old connections with Constantinople, which distinguished Scandinavians from other Latins and certain elites from other groups, were the precondition for this sudden interest and its numerous consequences. Seen from this perspective, the earlier history of cultural contacts between Byzantium and the north seems like a long incubation period for the sudden outbreak of different forms of Scandinavian Byzantinophilia. Without oral tradition and the collective consciousness that these connections were ancient, the phenomenon would have been impossible. However, the many stories about Viking-Age activity on ‘the East Way’, about crusaders and Varangians, are the result of high medieval cultural transfer. They present us with a concept of Byzantium and an interest shared by Scandinavians, whether in monasteries or in kings’ and magnates’ courts, during decades of rapid social change. They anchored Byzantium firmly in the cultural memory of the north.
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PART II
CONTACTS REFLECTED IN THE MATERIAL CULTURE
WHAT DOES MATERIAL EVIDENCE TELL US ABOUT CONTACTS BETWEEN BYZANTIUM AND THE VIKING WORLD C. 800–1000?¹

FEDIR ANDROSHCHUK

BEFORE DISCUSSING THE scale and importance of contacts between the Viking world and Byzantium, we must first outline the political, economic and cultural space in which these contacts emerged. In doing this, an understanding of the place of the north in relation to the problem of ‘centre and periphery’ is important.² This issue can be explored by investigating the political, economic and cultural dimensions of the spatial relationship between them. We are aware that the core area or ‘centre’ did not necessarily dominate in all of these respects. It might be considered the ‘centre’ simply because of its pre-eminence in one of these areas, or because it was a source of economic, social and cultural capital.³

We know about the prominent role of the Carolingian empire for Scandinavia in the ninth century through both written accounts and archaeology. However, the role of eastern connections should not be underestimated. Recent studies show that a large number of objects dated to the sixth to eighth centuries found in Sweden (among other areas) are of eastern or Byzantine origin. These include gold coins, amethyst beads, silk and jewellery discovered mostly in two areas: central Sweden and Gotland.⁴ Many objects come from richly furnished graves of individuals who must have had a high ranking social position. The most illustrative case is the five Byzantine cameos discovered in the late sixth- or early seventh-century grave of the western mound in Old Uppsala.⁵ The finds of these items in the centre of royal power of the Svear people underline the importance of Constantinople as both a core centre of power and a place of accumula-

¹ This paper is based largely on three previously published works: VE; Androshchuk 2013; Androshchuk 2014b.
³ Ibid., 112, 114.
⁴ Ljungkvist 2010.
⁵ Ibid., fig. 10.
MAP 4.1: Key sites where material evidence has been found of Rus-Byzantine contacts in the ninth and tenth centuries
tion of social and economic capital. In this respect, Byzantium has been viewed as an exemplary aristocratic centre and object of imitation by local Scandinavian ‘elites’. The relationship between centre and periphery was established with the help of intermediaries or ‘translators’ of Byzantine culture, who helped explain the social world of the centre to the ‘periphery’ in a comprehensible language of symbols. Such ‘translators’ included the Carolingian aristocracy, which was influenced by Byzantine court culture and adopted some of its ceremonial elements, as well as individuals of Scandinavian origin in the Byzantine court. The latter can sometimes be identified by name, as in the case of Eudokia, the mistress of the emperor Michael III, whose father was named Inger.

The empire always maintained an ambivalent position regarding outsiders, but the Byzantines were also of the opinion that “some others are more other than others”. During the period in question, the world as viewed from Constantinople was centred on the peoples and lands around the Mediterranean, the Black Sea, and the Caucasus and steppe regions. The northernmost region that was known to Byzantine diplomacy in the mid-tenth century was the upper reaches of the River Dnieper. This was the land of the Rus, located on the edge of the Byzantine oikumene and representing something completely different: the Viking world shaped by Scandinavian cultural presence and activity (Map 4.1).

Our modern concept, or rather expectation, of what is ‘Byzantine’ has developed thanks to the work of art historians who have tried to single out iconographic and stylistic criteria for Byzantine art. However, the material they focus on is dominated by luxury objects, which lack find circumstances and a proper cultural context. There can be no doubt that many so-called ‘oriental’ objects were manufactured in various parts of the Mediterranean and Asia Minor and then imported and sold in Constantinople. The Book of the Eparch (also known as the Book of the Prefect) tells of saddlers, soap

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6 McCormick 1990, 364–65. It is ironic that, owing to the Vikings who were defeated by King Louis III at Saucourt on 5 August 882, the traditional Byzantine prayer “Kyrie eleison” was included by the Franks in their preparation service (Ibid., 354).
7 Bj. 886, 1151 after Hägg 2002, tab. 6; Hägg 2006, fig. 1. See also below, 281–304.
8 The Old Norse male name Ingigæir is attested in one Swedish runic inscription (Sö 35). On Eudokia Ingerina see Mango 1973.
9 Smythe 2000; Herrin and Saint-Guillain 2011.
10 Rephrased after Appadurai 1986, 357.
11 DAI 184–85.
12 The only exception is a recently published volume devoted to small Byzantine objects (Böhndorf-Arslan & Ricci 2012).
13 WOIS.
FIGURE 4.1: Material evidence of ninth-century contacts between Scandinavians and Byzantium: (1) Arabic coin minted in 776/7 inscribed with the Greek name of its owner Zacharias found in Peterhof; (2) mount from Liubytino; lead seals from (3) Hedeby, (4) Novgorod, (5) Ribe and (6) Tisso; (7) gold coin of Theophilus refashioned into a female brooch from Hedeby; (8) gold chain link with Greek inscription from Hoen (after VE, 93–96, 99)
What does material evidence tell us?

That is why it is important to apply a contextual approach when singling out ‘Byzantine’ items. It is also necessary to investigate possible patterns in and reasons for acquiring Byzantine objects, as well as the social and cultural backgrounds of their owners. Finally, it is meaningful to explore the nature of these objects in a new cultural context. In doing so, we will exploit all available sources, especially sigillography and written evidence.

EaRly cOnTACtS

There are some remarkable finds indicating early contacts between Scandinavia and the Byzantine authorities, in the first instance Byzantine coins. Only six coins of the emperor Theophilos (829–842) are recorded in Sweden, of which four come from the trading centre of Birka. One was found in chamber grave 632 in the Birka cemetery, in association with two silver pendants of eastern origin. T. J. Arne connected them, and the coin, with the Swedes mentioned in the Annals of Saint Bertin, as arriving at the court of Emperor Louis the Pious in 839. Although this interpretation may be possible, we cannot rule out other reasons for the presence of Theophilos’ coins in Scandinavia.

Among Byzantine finds in Scandinavia, the most remarkable are those of lead seals (Fig. 4.1). Three seals have been discovered on Danish territory. One of them comes from the trading centre of Hedeby and bears the name Theodosios, who held the titles of patrikios, chartoularios and protospatharios. Two other seals found on Danish territory also bear the name of Theodosios. These come from Ribe and Tisso. Another find of Byzantine origin from Hedeby should be mentioned: a gold coin of Theophilos with his sons Michael and Constantine, minted between 825 and 835, which was re-fashioned into a female brooch.

These three seals were discovered in the presumed royal manor of Tisso and the trading sites of Ribe and Hedeby, which were under royal protection. A fourth seal has come to light in Novgorod, in the vicinity of Riurikovo Gorodishche, which has also

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17 Arne 1946.
18 For further discussion of these coins see below, 141–68.
19 Laurent 1978.
21 Jankuhn 1943, 114 (pl. 2: m); Graham-Campbell 1980, 101–02.
been interpreted as both a princely site and a trading centre. All of these seals should be seen as indirect evidence of early military contacts between the Viking authorities and Byzantium in the ninth century and should be connected with Byzantium’s wars.

MAP 4.2: The area of Khazar cultural influence (adapted from Callmer 2000)

What does material evidence tell us?

We know that Theophilos sought military help in Venice, Ingelheim and Spain, and the Vikings may also have been seen as good candidates for solving his problems. As shown above, the titles on the seals are apparently connected to the military activities of their owners, which implies that a need for mercenaries was the main reason for Byzantine contacts with the Northmen at this early time.

It was probably because of the military activities of Scandinavians that the Khazars asked for Byzantium's help. In 837 Theophilos sent his official, the *spatharokandidatos* Petronas Kamateros, to supervise the construction of the fortified city of Sarkel on the left bank of the lower River Don (Map 4.2). At the same time, he began to reinforce the sea walls of Constantinople, in particular those facing the Bosporus. These actions were presumably appreciated during the Vikings' assault on Constantinople in 860.

In that year, 200 ships of the people referred to in Greek sources as Rhōs (Slavonic: Rus') entered the Bosporus, and over several months laid siege to the City, killed people and plundered the surrounding areas. The origin of the Rus is still a mystery. The chronicler of the twelfth century asserted that Askold and Dir, legendary princes in Kiev, organised the raid. However, archaeological sources indicate that Scandinavians established themselves in Kiev only in the second quarter of the tenth century, and there is no indication that they knew how to pass the barrages of the Lower Dnieper in the ninth century. Moreover, they could not use the River Don because of the fort at Sarkel.

How, then, did the Rus reach the Black Sea? There are some pieces of evidence indicating their possible movement along the River Donets (see below, Fig. 4.2). One of them is a stray find: a fragmentary sword of type E found at Tatianovka. The second object is an upper guard of a type H sword, also a stray find discovered on the Maiatskii hill fort of the Saltovo-Maiatskii culture on the same river. The third find is a boat rivet which came to light in the ninth-century cultural layer of the Maiatskii hill fort and is associated with the Khazar period.

Passing along the rivers Desna, Seim, Donets and Don and via the Straits of Kerch, it was possible to reach the Black Sea and then the city of Tamatarkha (Tmutarakan), where a possible Scandinavian military presence at the end of the tenth century is att-

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26 DAI 182–83.
29 Afanas'ev 2011.
30 Kravchenko, Petrenko & Shamrai 2009, 5, 14, 36 (fig. 11:3, 27:10, photo 40:7); SASR, no. 246–47.
31 Shepard 2006; Shepard 2009; Chkhaidze 2008.
FIGURE 4.2: Objects of Scandinavian origin discovered along the Donets river: fragmentary type E sword, Tatianovka (top left); boat rivet, Maiatskii (top and centre right); type R sword pommel, Taman Peninsula (bottom)
What does material evidence tell us?

What does material evidence tell us? Via the River Desna, it was easily possible to reach the Smolensk area, the location of the Gnezdovo trading centre in the late ninth and tenth centuries, where a number of finds of both Scandinavian and Byzantine origin have come to light.

From Byzantine sources we learn that, shortly after the retreat of the Rus, they came again requesting to be converted to Christianity. In his circular letter to the oriental patriarchs dated to around 867, Photios describes the Rus as a Christian people under the protection of the empire. At this early date, references to Christian Rus cannot be taken seriously. We know that generous presents were distributed during conversions of barbarians, and it seems that these gifts were the target for most of the people seeking conversion. Nevertheless, certain items from the famous Hoen hoard from south-eastern Norway, deposited in the second half of the ninth century, may constitute material evidence of the first contacts with Byzantine Christianity. These are two gold solidi of Constantine V (741–775) and Michael III and Theodora (843–856). The hoard also contained an elaborate gold chain link with a Greek inscription (Fig. 4.1.8), which may have served as a reliquary.

The Big Turn to the South

Judging from the archaeological material, the exploration of the Dnieper waterway by Scandinavians can hardly be dated to before the beginning of the tenth century. The emergence of an agglomeration of farms, a hill fort, a huge cemetery and a harbour at Gnezdovo, in the upper part of the Dnieper, may be ascribed to this period (see below, Fig. 4.3). The appearance of Gnezdovo can be explained by a re-orientation of commercial routes and the role of the Dnieper as the main channel of communications with Byzantium. I suggest that this re-orientation of commercial routes took place in combination with colonisation by new groups of Scandinavians, who settled there as both farmers and traders. Compared to Staraia Ladoga and Riurikovo Gorodishche, Gnezdovo represents a new centre of the ‘Dnieper type’. These sites feature at least one hill fort which dominates the surrounding settlement area, a harbour, an agglomeration of satellite settlements and large cemeteries. There is good reason to believe that Gnezdovo represents the earliest residence of Scandinavians who established themselves in the Dnieper area, and its role in the development of contacts with the south and east has been attested by a number of finds of Byzantine origin. Furthermore, the flourishing

32 I am grateful to Sergei Kainov for information about this find.
33 Vasil’ev 1946, 229.
34 HH, 17–21 (no. 56–57, 39).
35 Heyerdahl-Larsen 1982; VBM, 128 (fig. 6); Piltz 1998, 28; Buckton 2006.
36 Eniosova & Pushkina 2013.
of Shostovitsa, Chernigov and Kiev fits perfectly with the idea of the re-orientation of commercial routes toward Byzantium.

Despite the legendary character of the tale of Oleg’s raid on Byzantium in 907, it includes the important detail of his request for silk and linen sails for the Rus and the Slavs, respectively, which indicates that silk was considered a prestigious good and that the Rus needed it. It is also noteworthy that the Rus were among those barbarians who claimed some of the imperial vestments, diadems or state robes in return for fulfilling some service or office, indicating that there were some Byzantine influences on the shaping of ideas about status and social prestige.

Until 941, the relationship between Byzantium and the Rus was relatively good. In 911, Prince Oleg concluded a peace treaty with the emperors Leo VI and Alexander.

\[37\] DAI 66–67.
This treaty regulated relations between the Rus and the Greeks in the spheres of criminal responsibility, property and prisoners of war. The text of the agreement deals little with trade questions, and mostly concerns military cooperation between the Rus and Byzantium. In 910–911, 700 Rus took part in Byzantium’s naval expedition to Crete. Indications of military collaboration may include three Byzantine seals dated to the first half of the tenth century from Kiev and Shestovitsa (see below, Fig. 4.6.1–2). The owners of these seals held the rank of protospatharios, equivalent to senior general.

Thus, the main reason for the installation of the Rus on the Middle Dnieper was their efforts to collect tribute from the surrounding tribes, as well as make profits through exchange with Byzantium. It coincided with Byzantine demand for wax, honey, grain and rare fur. At the same time, some aspects of this trade needed special regulation, specifically from the Byzantine side.

Unresolved trade issues were probably the main reason for Igor’s raid on Byzantium in 941. The 944 treaty was an important step toward the successful negotiation of Rus-Byzantine trade. Judging from the large number of merchants among Olga’s delegation to Byzantium in 946 or 957, the real purpose of her visit, in addition to baptism, was to improve trade connections. It is not a coincidence that, from the mid-tenth century, objects of Byzantine origin, including coins and silk, began to be introduced into the material culture of the elite of Rus as well as Scandinavia.

Remnants of silk have been found in richly furnished Viking-Age graves in both Rus and Scandinavia. Silk has been detected in the graves of Gnezdovo, Shestovitsa, Pskov and Staraia Ladoga. A collection of narrow strips of silk was recorded in the Oseberg ship burial in Norway, and similar items have been found in royal Danish graves such as Jelling, Mammen and Ladby. According to data collected by Inga Hägg, a total of fifty-three graves at Birka contained remnants of silk. Scholars generally believe that garments of silk with tablet-woven bands in silk, gold and silver belonged to the local aristocracy. Hägg has suggested that the variety of textiles in graves indicates a differentiated social hierarchy and a clear Byzantine fashion in Scandinavian high-status clothing.

Only fifteen finds of Byzantine silver and copper coins from the reign of Theophilos until the mid-tenth century have been registered in Sweden, and it was not until the joint reign of Constantine VII and Romanos II (945–959) and during the reigns of

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40 Østergård 1991; Mikhailov 2010, 275.
41 Hägg 1974, fig. 53.
42 Hägg 2002; Hägg 2006. See also below, 281–304.
FIGURE 4.4: Material evidence of tenth-century contacts between the Rus and Byzantium: finger rings from (1) Shestovitsa and (2) Vladimir; buckles from (3) Staraia Ladoga and (4) Kiev; small, copper-alloy reliquary crosses from (5) Staraia Ladoga, (6) Gnezdovo and (7) Uglich; beads of Byzantine origin found in Scandinavian graves (8–12); bracelet fragments from Kiev (13); glass weight (14) and cone-seal (15) both from Shestovitsa (after VE, 96–105)
Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969), John I Tzimiskes (969–976) and Basil II and Constantine VIII (976–1028) that most Byzantine coins reached Sweden. There are 410 coins dated to the period between 945–989, of which 229 belong to the reign of Basil II (976–1025). A considerable number of imitations of coins (mainly those of Basil II) have been interpreted as an early Sigtuna coinage of c. 995–1005. The earliest Rus hoard containing a Byzantine coin (c. 880) was found at Khitrovka and contained a silver coin of Michael III (842–867) along with about 1,000 oriental coins from the eighth and ninth centuries. The hoard was buried in the region of the River Oka and probably arrived there via the Don or Volga waterways. There was a lull in the deposition of Byzantine coins in the first half of the tenth century, and it is only from 950 that they were again included in Rus hoards. A characteristic feature of the distribution of Byzantine coins in Rus is that all the hoards containing gold coins are concentrated in its southern part (the territory of modern Ukraine).

An important aspect of the chronological distribution of Byzantine coins in Sweden is that there are no hoards containing only Byzantine coins. Single coins from around the mid-ninth to the mid-tenth centuries are almost exclusively associated with the trading centre of Birka. Coins of Basil II have been found predominantly on Gotland, in mixed hoards of Arabic or western European coins. Hoards containing oriental and western European coins generally have very few Byzantine silver coins, and occur mainly in northern Rus. This feature is also characteristic of Swedish hoards. The presence of western European coins in northern Rus hoards may indicate that Byzantine coins came to northern Rus from the west, most probably via Sweden. Byzantine coins might have reached Sweden via Greater Poland, where twenty-four hoards containing Byzantine coins are dated to 955–1084. The composition of hoards from southern Rus is unlike both late Swedish hoards and those in northern Rus, which can be explained by the particular social and political position of Kiev’s historical territory, with its key role on ‘the way from the Varangians to the Greeks’ and its particular relations with Byzantium.

The Rus took part in several Byzantine military campaigns during the course of the tenth century. In the naval expedition to Crete in 949, some 629 Rus warriors took part. In 954–955, Rus troops took part in Bardas Phokas’ campaign in Syria.
FIGURE 4.5: Weaponry of possible Byzantine origin found at Viking-Age sites: lamellar armour fragments from Sweden (A–F and 10) and Bulgaria (1–9); long scabbard chapes from Kiev (11), Latvia (12–14) and Ockarve, Sweden (15) (after VE, 108–110)
964–965, Rus troops were part of the army which Nikephoros II sent to Sicily. Finally, in 967 Nikephoros recruited Rus troops to attack Bulgaria. Did any of these raids leave traces in the material culture of the Scandinavians?

It is noteworthy that very few objects in Scandinavia or eastern Europe can be associated with weapons of Byzantine origin. The most plausible explanation for this might be that during their military service in Byzantium, Scandinavians normally used their own weapons. However, remains of lamellar armour have been discovered in the garrison site at Birka. Judging from iconographic parallels, a definite Byzantine origin can be ascribed to a group of long scabbard chapes made of silver or bronze and decorated with plant motifs or the figure of a bird (Fig. 4.5.11–14), dated to the end of the tenth or the beginning of the eleventh century. The most characteristic examples are scabbard chapes from Turaida in Latvia (Fig. 4.5.12) and Kiev (Fig. 4.5.11). Only two similar scabbard chapes were previously known on Gotland. Recently, however, another large chape has been discovered at Ockscarve, Hemse parish (Fig. 4.5.15) in one of the largest silver hoards from Sweden, containing English, Danish, German, Italian, Byzantine and Arabic coins (c. 999).

Byzantine lead seals indicate contacts with the area which provided mercenaries (see below, Fig. 4.6). One, from c. 991–1025, found in southern Rus, bears the name of the emperor Basil II, and another seal from 975–1025 discovered in Novgorod bears the names of the emperors Basil II and Constantine VIII. Two seals of Theophylact, protospatharios and strategos (late tenth to early eleventh centuries) have been discovered in Riurikovo Gorodishche and Novgorod (the latter is from the layer of the Nerevskii trench, dated 1055–1096).

I would argue that the Byzantine impact on Scandinavian military technique can be seen in the appearance of the Danish ring forts such as Aggersborg, Fyrkat and Trelleborg (see below, Fig. 4.7). Their origin is much discussed. Roman camps and

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51 Ibid., 39.
52 LDH 111.
55 Paulsen 1953, 74–75 (figs. 93–95).
56 Ibid., figs. 103–04; Zotsenko 1999.
58 Bulgakova 2004, 43–44.
59 Ibid., 74–75.
60 I do not include similarly shaped hill forts at Borgeby and Trelleborg in Scania, the inner parts of which reveal no regular planning. Although they belong to the same cultural region, they seem to represent a distinctive group of old Danish hill forts. See Svanberg & Söderberg 1998, 40–47; Jacobsson 2000, 144–49.
FIGURE 4.6: Byzantine lead seals of the tenth and eleventh centuries found in Rus: from Kiev (1 and 5); Shestovitsa (2); and Novgorod (3 and 4) (after VE, 110–13)
Slavonic hill forts have been suggested as possible models for their construction.\(^6^1\) The possibility of a Byzantine model was suggested once, but rejected because of the existence of other, similar structures. Nevertheless, my arguments for the Byzantine origin of Danish hill forts are set out below.

Byzantine military technology was conservative, and classical devices were still in use in the tenth century.\(^6^2\) An anonymous book on tactics dated to 991–995 is particularly revealing.\(^6^3\) The source gives a general idea of how Byzantine camps looked (see below, Fig. 4.8). They could be constructed of earth and/or perishable materials, and

\(^{62}\) Heron of Byzantium, Siegecraft 18, 20.
\(^{63}\) Three Byzantine Military Treatises 246–63.
FIGURE 4.8: Plan of a Byzantine camp (Vatican, Vat.gr. 1164, fol. 236v, reproduced with permission from the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, all rights reserved, © 2015 Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana)
enforced by a wide trench which tapered toward the bottom. Although square and/or rectangular camps were preferred, circular camps might also be acceptable if the landscape demanded it. Two thousand metres was the acceptable width of the camps. A characteristic trait of Byzantine camps was the roads built inside them which divided the inner area into several sections. The infantry was placed within these sections, and behind them, toward the centre, were stationed the javelin throwers and archers. Each section housed a separately placed camp of troops belonging to one thematic or tagmatic army.

This description fits and perfectly explains the Danish ring hill forts. The layout of the hill forts reveals a clear acquaintance with Byzantine military tactics. There are similar roads dividing the inner space into several sections, shaped by symmetrically-positioned long houses. Apparently, single houses and clusters represent a hierarchy of military units. The Danish ring hill forts are dated to around 980, which is close to the date of the anonymous source on tactics. Furthermore, the source mentions the Rus in the imperial army, who formed a tagma of 300–500 troops. They constituted the infantry who accompanied the emperor.

Written sources reinforce the possible connection between the appearance of hill forts in Denmark and Scandinavian mercenaries in Byzantium. In 987, Basil II faced a serious military threat from the rebel Bardas Phokas. In search of help, he appealed to Vladimir of Kiev, who sent Varangian troops to Byzantium. The Varangians contributed to the victorious battle against Bardas on 8 March 989. In 999, they took part in Basil’s Syrian campaign and the siege of Tripoli. Interestingly, during the siege of Tripoli the Byzantine army constructed a large camp surrounded by a ditch.

There is reason to believe that after their successful mission, these Varangians left for Denmark, where they were stationed in specially constructed ring shaped hill forts for some time. Traces of their journey home are reflected in Byzantine coins in mixed hoards found in Greater Poland and Scandinavia. A richly decorated axe from Trelleborg reveals parallels between the weaponry of Bulgaria and that of Poland. A recent strontium isotope analysis of forty-eight graves in Trelleborg cemetery showed that some young individuals buried there may have been of Slavonic origin, and that the

64 Ibid., 241–42, 246–47, 250–53.
65 Ibid., 262–63.
67 Roesdahl 1994, 110.
68 Three Byzantine Military Treatises 280–81, 294–95.
69 Yahya of Antioch, Continuation 24–25, 40–41.
70 VE, 166.
71 Kotowicz 2011, fig. 7.1.
army stationed in these fortresses had been recruited outside Denmark.\textsuperscript{72} The relatively short life span of the ring hill forts reveals interesting examples of the application of Byzantine military technology on a local level in late tenth-century Denmark.

\section*{MEDIATORS AND WAYS OF DISSEMINATION OF BYZANTINE CULTURE}

The subject of the evidence for Byzantine culture in the Viking world is inextricably linked with that of dissemination and the mediators of that culture. Without excluding robbery and trade as possible origins of some Byzantine objects, it seems obvious that most of them were brought into the Scandinavian cultural environment by individuals who might be considered representatives or transferors of Byzantine culture. In some cases we can identify the social profile of such people with a high degree of certainty. For instance, there is good reason to believe that the aforementioned seals of the \textit{patrikios} Theodosios discovered in Ribe, Hedeby and Tissø were attached to letters sent to Denmark by Theodosios Baboutzikos. He was a senior treasury official with military duties, including the supervision of Constantinople’s naval arsenal and the equipping of fleets. In 840–841 he visited Venice in order to recruit military aid against an Arab invasion.\textsuperscript{73} Theodosios’ naval competence seems to explain his interest in the Vikings, as experienced sea warriors. The deliverers of these letters to Danish warlords were doubtless supplied with precious gifts, including gold coins. As indicated by the gold coin of Theophilos with Michael and Constantine, which was refashioned into a female brooch (see above, 95), such gifts had an impact on representatives of the Scandinavian population and were highly valued by them.

With the spread of Christianity in the mid-tenth century, Greek priests became active mediators and transferors of Byzantine culture. Judging by the mention of Gregorios the priest and translators among Olga’s retinue attending banquets at the Great Palace, most priests did not speak the local languages. However, finds from Gnezdovo of amphorae, reliquary crosses and a unique copper-alloy peg for fastening a manuscript binding indicate the presence of Byzantine Christian culture in a tenth-century urban centre located along ‘the way from the Varangians to the Greeks’.\textsuperscript{74}

Translators were important mediators of Byzantine culture to foreigners.\textsuperscript{75} Such an official undoubtedly took part in the compilation of the ninth chapter of the \textit{De administrando imperio}. He could speak Old Norse and Slavonic, and was very familiar with the local political and general economic situations. Judging from the references to

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{72} Price et al. 2011.
\item \textsuperscript{73} \textit{VR}, 53, 57; Shepard 2012, 359 n. 17.
\item \textsuperscript{74} Eniosova & Pushkina 2013, figs. 4.1–4.4, 9.1–9.3, 16.
\item \textsuperscript{75} See below, 305–12.
\end{itemize}
the polo ground (*tsikanisterion*) and the Hippodrome, he knew Constantinople and Great Palace.  

Receptions had a huge impact on visitors to Constantinople. Three receptions in the Great Palace were given for the Rus Princess Olga in 946 or 957. They were extraordinary events for both sides: for the Byzantines because of the unusual fact that the visiting sovereign was a woman, accompanied by a large female retinue; and for the whole delegation of the Rus, consisting of around 100 members. During the second reception, hosted by the empress Helena and her daughter-in-law in the hall (*triklinos*) of Justinian II, girdled patrician women and the wives of male court dignitaries were presented to Olga and her female relatives of *archontissa* rank. Another banquet was held in the presence of Emperor Constantine VII and co-Emperor Romanos II for male representatives of the Rus embassy. In this distinctive way, the social status of the representatives of both female and male roles in imperial ceremonial was demonstrated for the guests. The impact of Olga’s visit to Constantinople on the Rus aristocracy is difficult to underestimate. All of the 100 members of the Rus delegation who brought valuable presents home with them might be considered effective mediators of Byzantine culture in the world of the Vikings.

The *patrikios* Kalokyros is the most important figure among famous Byzantines who visited Rus. The reason for his visit was the advent of considerable complications in Byzantine-Bulgarian relations. In 965, a Bulgarian embassy came to Constantinople demanding tribute. To recruit military aid, Nikephoros II provided Kalokyros with an enormous sum of money and sent him to Rus in 966–967. There is good reason to believe that this “particularly impulsive and hot-headed man” was responsible for subsequent events, which affected political and economic life in Byzantium, Bulgaria, Rus and to some extent even Sweden. Apparently, Nikephoros’ decision to send Kalokyros to Rus was not accidental. Kalokyros was *strategos* and *proteuon* of Cherson, meaning that he had a certain amount of experience as a military and administrative governor of the city. There can be no doubt that he had had some personal encounters with the Rus. In any case, finds of Scandinavian weaponry in Cherson belong to this period. It seems that Kalokyros’ personal qualifications may have been taken into consideration by Nikephoros in his decision to send an embassy to Rus.

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76 *DAI* 58–61; *DAI Com.* 19, 44. See below, 315–36.
77 *DeCer* II.15, ed. Reiske, vol. 1, 566–98.
78 Toynbee 1973, 504.
79 Fifteen kentenaria corresponds to 1,500 pounds of gold or 108,000 nomismata. *LDH* 112 n. 46; Alekseyenko 2012, 66.
80 *LDH* 111.
82 *SASR*. 
After arriving in Rus, Kalokyros managed to convince Prince Sviatoslav to deploy his army against the Bulgarians. In August 968 the Rus "laid waste many of Bulgar’s cities and lands, collected a large amount of booty and then returned to their lands". The Byzantines were not counting on a long stay by the Rus in their northern borderland. For this reason, I suggest, they organised a military assault by the Pecheneges against Kiev. The Rus quickly retreated to their lands. However, at the end of 969 Nikephoros was murdered and Kalokyros decided to challenge the new emperor, John I Tzimiskes. It should be noted that before his encounter with Kalokyros, Sviatoslav’s political ambitions were directed exclusively at establishing control over the river system which supported the Volga trade route. This explains his raids on the Oka and Volga, his imposition of tribute on the Viatichians, and his conquest of the Khazars, Alans and Kasogians. The widening of his political vision became clear after his encounter and agreement with Kalokyros, who should be seen as the source of Sviatoslav’s new political ideas. The proclamation of Preslavets-on-Danube as the centre of his realm, “where all riches are concentrated” correlates with Kalokyros’ promise to consider Bulgaria Sviatoslav’s territory in exchange for his help attacking Byzantium and installing Kalokyros as emperor, thus securing a stable source of income from the imperial treasury. The large-scale plan to relocate the main base of the Rus to Preslavets-on-Danube needed considerable manpower. Leo the Deacon says that Sviatoslav’s 60,000-strong army consisted of “all the Taurians, from youth upwards”, but he almost certainly got additional help from the north. This can be seen in Birka’s decline around 970, as well as in the increasing number of Scandinavians in Gnezdovo, Shestovitsa, Chernigov and Kiev in the last quarter of the tenth century. Judging from the objects of Byzantine, oriental and Scandinavian origin, the individuals buried in the chamber graves of these sites certainly visited and encountered Byzantines, Khazars and Magyars. In Rus, some of them were in contact with high Byzantine officials dealing with the army and administration.

84 *PVL* 85–86; *RPC* 86.
85 Novgorodskaja pervaia letopis’ 117; *PVL* 84; *RPC* 84.
86 Compare the words which Leo the Deacon put into Sviatoslav’s mouth: “they [the Romans] should quickly withdraw from Europe, which [does] not belong to them, and move to Asia”: *LDH* 155.
88 *LDH* 128.
89 On possible material evidence of Sviatoslav’s activity in Bulgaria see below, 241–53.
CONCLUSION

As we have seen above, objects of Byzantine origin found in Old Norse cultural settings included lead seals, reliquary crosses, finger rings, buckles, pottery, glass, silk and coins. Apart from individual finds of seals, most objects belong to the late tenth century and later. Different forms of contact, as well as certain trade regulations which were applied to foreigners by the Byzantine authorities, explain this chronological peculiarity.

It is possible to conclude that around the middle of the tenth century, the role of the southern Rus became prominent in these contacts. The largest concentrations of Scandinavians were in Gnezdovo, Shostovitsa, Chernigov and Kiev. From the very beginning, these were considered as ‘Rus’ because they were under the jurisdiction of the ruler of Kiev. Gradually, a redistribution of some of the functions of these centres took place. The decline of Birka in the second half of the tenth century was a direct consequence of the emergence of the flourishing centres of southern Rus. Their main attractions became the silk trade and exchange with Byzantium. The authorities in both Constantinople and Kiev controlled these businesses. The population of Birka consisted largely of people on the move who may not have received an inheritance from their parents and were forced to make a living by trading and raiding. The east could offer them much better prospects: riches and fantastic opportunities. It is not a coincidence that Birka’s decline is dated to around 970. In the summers of 968 and 969, Sviatoslav invaded Bulgaria and was about to transfer his capital to Preslavets-on-Danube. From Byzantine sources we know that there were Scandinavians and Magyars among Sviatoslav’s warriors. After he lost his position in Bulgaria he retreated, and on his way back to Kiev in 971 was killed by the Pechenegs. The remains of his army may be traced in Kiev, Chernigov, Shostovitsa, Gnezdovo and even in individual late graves at Birka containing belt fittings and weaponry of Magyar origin.

Carefully recorded stratigraphic information and analysis of the nature of the Byzantine objects (coins converted to jewellery, primary and secondary use of items, etc.), reveals their exclusive character in the Old Norse cultural settings of the period. These examples prove that the possession of Byzantine objects manifested the owner’s high social position and disclosed his authority, prestige and social networks.
FEDIR ANDROSHCHUK

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76–99.
Compared to some 400,000 Islamic dirhams from ninth- and tenth-century finds in northern Europe, the 1,250 Byzantine silver miliaresia from the area appear to be a mere admixture. Does this proportion, roughly 1:300, reflect the relative intensity of the contacts of the Scandinavians and Slavs with the two superpowers of the early medieval world, Byzantium and the Abbasid caliphate? Abundant written sources, archaeological finds, and cultural and religious influences testify to the appeal of Byzantium in the north and suggest that simple mathematics does not allow us to make sense of the situation. Why, then, are there so few Byzantine coins in hoards from Scandinavia and the Slavonic lands?

This question will loom in the background of this paper. Its primary goal, however, is to provide an overview of the finds of Byzantine coins—mostly silver, but also gold and copper—from Scandinavia and the Slavonic lands. The area under consideration corresponds to the zone of intense silver hoarding in the early middle ages, which includes the whole of Scandinavia, the entire Baltic coast, the West Slavonic lands and Rus. Although the period of hoarding extended over three and a half centuries, from c. 800 to the mid-twelfth century, very few miliaresia found in the north were struck before the reign of the emperor Theophilos (829–842) or after that of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055). These reigns define the chronological limits of this investigation.

Despite the relatively small number of finds, the inflow of Byzantine coins to the north in the ninth and tenth centuries has not yet been comprehensively studied. The

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1 This paper was presented at various stages of completion at the ‘Byzantium and the Viking World’ conference in Uppsala and at the Late Antique and Byzantine Archaeology and Art Seminar in Oxford. I would like to thank Jonathan Shepard, Marlia Mango and Philipp Niewöhner for their invitations, and the participants for their comments. I also benefited from the comments of Cécile Morrisson and Luke Treadwell. All mistakes are mine. I was able to conduct this research thanks to a Newton International Fellowship and the AHRC-funded project *Dirhams for Slaves*.

2 Kovalev & Kaelin 2007, 563.
national focus of much recent scholarship has resulted in excellent catalogues and overviews of finds of Byzantine coins from individual countries, in particular the outstanding catalogue of Swedish finds. But a broader, regional study integrating Scandinavia, the West Slavonic lands and Rus is still lacking. This study aims to aggregate this dispersed evidence and use it to reflect on the reasons for the presence of miliareia in the north and their small quantity. It will thus be guided by questions related to the flow of Byzantine coins northwards, while problems related to their circulation within this area will be of secondary importance.

The figures below are based on published sources specified in the footnotes. Although I have attempted to be comprehensive, many single finds have no doubt escaped my attention. The figures below are therefore not definitive, but they nonetheless provide an idea of the number and distribution of miliareia in the north.

OVERVIEW OF THE MATERIAL

I am currently aware of 1,493 provenanced Byzantine coins struck between the reigns of Theophilos and Constantine IX Monomachos and found in Scandinavia, the Baltic states and the Slavonic lands (see below, Tab. 5.1 and Map 5.1). The numbers below include single finds, but not imitations of Byzantine coins, which will be discussed briefly towards the end of this paper.

GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

The largest number of Byzantine coins, nearly 500, unsurprisingly comes from the Baltic island of Gotland, home to around 800 early medieval silver hoards. One of them, found in Ockscarve (Hemse parish, Gotland, terminus post quem [henceforth tpq] 1120), is the second biggest known find of Byzantine coins in the north: aside from several hundred deniers and dirhams, it contained 123 miliareia, mostly struck under Constantine IX Monomachos. Mainland Sweden yielded fewer than 100 coins, found mainly in Scania, Uppland and Södermanland. Finds from other Scandinavian countries are rare: only thirty-four miliareia are known from Denmark—almost half of which (fifteen coins from eight finds) come from the island of Bornholm—whereas

3 BCFS. See also BCCE, and below for other national catalogues or lists of finds.
4 Unprovenanced coins from systematic collections and coins made of unknown metal have been excluded.
5 For Gotland and mainland Sweden, see BCFS, from which I have excluded unprovenanced coins from systematic collections and coins minted outside the chronological scope of this paper. I have added several recent finds, for information about which I thank Gert Rispling. See also Malmer 1993 and Piltz 1998.
6 BCFS, no. 88.
7 von Heijne 2004.
Table 5.1: Byzantine coins found in Scandinavia, the Baltic states and the Slavonic lands (C VII = Constantine VII and co-emperors; N II = Nikephoros II Phokas; J I = John I Tzimiskes; B II = Basil II; Other = Other emperors or not identified)

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<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belarus</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech Rep.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moldova</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand total</td>
<td>269</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>512</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ a \text{ Including finds from the Lower Volga and Lower Don, corresponding to the core of the Khazar khaganate.} \\
\[ b \text{ These figures do not include Crimea, parts of which were integrated into the Byzantine monetary system.} \\

nineteen Byzantine coins come from Norway.\footnote{Skaare 1976, 53–54.} Norwegian finds are, unusually, dominated by gold coins that come almost exclusively from the single hoard from Nedre Strømshaug (tpq 945, fourteen nomismata). Otherwise, a nomisma of Michael III
from the spectacular hoard of Hoen (tpq 852) and four miliareia from various finds are known.

The second largest number of Byzantine coins has been found in Poland. Almost all of these 257 Byzantine coins come from hoards, and almost all of them are miliareia, with the exception of five stray folles and a stray nomisma from central Poland. The finds are concentrated in the central areas of the Piast state in Greater Poland.

9 See the four-volume catalogue of early medieval monetary finds from Poland: Slaski & Tabaczyński 1959; Kiersnowski & Kiersnowski 1959; Gupieniec et al. 1965; Haisig et al. 1966. A new edition is in preparation, the first volume of which has been published: Bogucki et al. 2013. Overviews of finds of Byzantine coins can be found in Gliksman 2003, 2009 (an abbreviated translation of Gliksman 2003), with corrections by Bogucki 2010, 570, 577–78. See also Gupieniec 1958 (several single finds); Kiersnowski 1960, 137–49; Warnke 1964; Gąssowska 1979 and Noonan unpublished.

10 I exclude the puzzling hoard from Wilków (Cracow district, Lesser Poland), said to have contained around twenty Byzantine gold coins, of which the only investigated coin was “so worn out that it was impossible to read it, but it was a typical saucer-shaped Byzantine coin” (Wiadomości Numizmatyczno-Archeologiczne 2/1910, 31). This implies a date after the 1040s (Grierson 1973, part 1, 5–6).
Most of the 176 miliareia from this region come from three major hoards: Dzierznica (tpq 985), the biggest silver hoard found in Poland, in which eighty-two miliareia, mostly fragmentary, have been identified;\(^\text{11}\) Obrzycko (tpq 969), recorded by Julius Friedlaender in 1844 as having a significant number of Byzantine coins,\(^\text{12}\) but which has since gone missing; and Zalesie (tpq 976), with twenty-one Byzantine coins, twenty of which were issued by John I Tzimiskes (969–976) and were remarkably well preserved and recent in relation to the tpq of the hoard.\(^\text{13}\) Surprisingly few Byzantine coins have been discovered in Pomerania, otherwise a major hoarding area. Several specimens are known from southern Poland, including two noteworthy coins from Cracow: a copper coin struck with miliareia dies, and a gilded silver miliareion with a loop.\(^\text{14}\)

Other West Slavonic lands have yielded few miliareia: if nineteen fragments of miliareia are known from eleven hoards buried in eastern Germany in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries,\(^\text{15}\) only four specimens come from a single hoard from the Czech Republic (Kelč, tpq 1010),\(^\text{16}\) and one from a grave find in Slovakia.\(^\text{17}\) Several gold and copper Byzantine coins come from stray or grave finds in the latter two countries. These finds, untypical for the Baltic area, probably arrived via Hungary.\(^\text{18}\)

Two hundred and fifteen Byzantine coins—one follis and 214 miliareia—have been found in Estonia.\(^\text{19}\) This high number is due to the Võlla hoard (Are parish, Pärnumaa, tpq 1002), which among its 522 identified coins contained 142 miliareia and one imitation.\(^\text{20}\) Most other finds are also located along the Estonian coastline.

\(^{11}\) Fifty-four coins were published by Skowronek 1973; a further twenty-eight coins are mentioned and partly illustrated in Gliksman 2009, 610–11 (figs. 4–5). Kmietowicz 1994, 163 n. 11, mentions 201 fragments of Byzantine and western European coins in the main part of the hoard, but it is unclear how this number relates to the above figures.

\(^{12}\) Friedlaender 1844, 21–23, mentions one coin and four coin fragments of Romanos I, Constantine VII and Stephen and Constantine (931–944). He notes coins of Constantine VII and Romanos II “in sehr vielen Exemplaren, von denen die meisten zerbrochen sind”, as well as “mehrere Exemplare und Bruchstücke” of coins of Nikephoros II and “einige Exemplare und Fragmente” of coins of John Tzimiskes. For the convenience of my calculations, I assume conservatively that there were fifteen, ten and five coins, respectively, of the rulers mentioned by Friedlaender.

\(^{13}\) Dekówna et al. 1974, 9–10; see also the comments of Gliksman 2009, 616.

\(^{14}\) Salamon 2009.

\(^{15}\) Kiersnowski 1964; Warnke 1964; Friedland & Hollstein 2008 (hoard of Cortnitz).

\(^{16}\) See Polansky & Vacinova 2009 on the Kelč hoard, and Profantová 2009 on other finds in the Czech Republic.

\(^{17}\) Found in Nitra, in a possibly Hungarian grave: Fusek 2003. See also Ondrouch 1964 and Fiala 1989 on finds in Slovakia.


\(^{19}\) Leimus 2009. See also Leimus 2007 and Molvogin 1994.

ty-two miliaresia each come from Finland and Latvia.\textsuperscript{21} For the most part, these coins are from grave finds and were pierced to serve as pendants. No finds have been reported from Lithuania.\textsuperscript{22}

One in five known finds, c. 300 coins, comes from Rus.\textsuperscript{23} They are scattered across vast expanses of European Russia, Ukraine and Belarus, with the most notable concentrations in urban centres such as Kiev, Gnezdovo, Novgorod, Pskov and Sarkel in Khazaria.\textsuperscript{24} These finds, half of which are copper coins, have a different profile from that of the rest of the region, where miliaresia clearly predominate. A bronze jar found around 1813 in the area of the Dnieper rapids and reportedly filled with coins of Nikephoros Phokas and John Tzimiskes, now dispersed and therefore not included in the above statistics, shows, however, that their importation was more substantial than it would appear from the number of finds.\textsuperscript{25} Finally, three miliaresia of John Tzimiskes found in a small hoard in Alcedar in Moldova\textsuperscript{26} suggest that Byzantine coins were flowing northwards not only by the main communication channel of the Dnieper, but also by smaller rivers such as the Dniester.

But this distribution map of finds of Byzantine coins should be interpreted with considerable caution. It illustrates not only where silver was hoarded in the tenth and eleventh centuries, but also where it has not been recovered until modern times. The reasons for the non-recovery of silver deposits were no doubt manifold, as the two biggest clusters of the early medieval hoards, situated on the Baltic island of Gotland and in Greater Poland, indicate. We know what happened in Greater Poland: the collapse of the Piast state in the 1030s resulted in the disappearance of central power and the dispersal of much of the population, including the silver-owning elites who were unable to recover the wealth hoarded during earlier decades. The case of Gotland, with its remarkable stability of settlement,\textsuperscript{27} is more complicated. It seems, however, that the gap between the period when silver was thesaurised and the shift to a monetary economy starting only in the mid-twelfth century—when silver could at last be used for economic purposes—was long enough for the hoarded wealth to be forgotten. The

\textsuperscript{22} Noonan 1992.
\textsuperscript{24} Kiev: Noonan 1987; Gnezdovo: Eniosova & Pushkina 2013.
\textsuperscript{25} Kropotkin 1962, no. 154. The jar is extant, see Korzukhina 1954, 37 (fig. 6). The inscription should probably be read “φωνὴ κυρίου ἐπὶ τῶν ὤδητων” (Ps. 29[28],3), as on an analogous vessel from the Ashmolean Museum (AN 1980,22). I am grateful to Marlia Mango for this suggestion.
\textsuperscript{26} Boldureanu 2010. On the finds from the coastal area of the Black Sea between the Danube and the Crimea, see Stoljarik 1993, 91–107.
\textsuperscript{27} Note, however, that Svedjemo 2014 has added nuance to the picture of settlement stability.
scarcity of hoards in areas where silver was siphoned off by early state structures in the first half of the eleventh century, such as Uppland or the regions of Kiev and Novgorod, is therefore no indication of less intensive contacts with Byzantium. The 1,493 Byzantine coins inventoried in this paper are not only a small fraction of the original flow, but also not a fully representative one.

**Metals**

Silver miliaresia are by far the largest group in the northern lands (1,244 coins, or 83%), but almost 200 copper folles and several dozen gold nomismata are also known. Most folles come from Kiev, Gnezdovo and Sarkel, and appear to date from the reigns of emperors from Basil I (867–886) to Romanos Lekapenos (920–944). The gold coins which do not come from the fringes of the silver hoarding zone (e.g. Slovakia, coastal areas of southern Ukraine) have been found in relatively late hoards (Wilków, mentioned above, note 10; Kiev, Ekaterinskaia Street, tpq 1057; Pinsk, tpq 1068). It is noteworthy that none of these periods coincides, as we shall see, with the period of the inflow of miliaresia (945–990s). This suggests that copper and gold were perceived by the Scandinavians and Slavs as ‘second best’, and were obtained mainly during periods of limited availability of silver.

The predominance of silver over gold and copper is the opposite of the situation within the Byzantine empire, where silver was the least popular metal. Stricter imperial control over the movement of gold than over that of silver can perhaps be postulated to explain this anomaly, but the determining factor was no doubt the Scandinavian appetite for minted silver. Their demand for silver coins and relative lack of interest in other metals, including gold, have similarly resulted in the virtual absence of Islamic dinars from the northern hoards.

**Hoards and single finds**

The vast majority of Byzantine coins have been found in hoards (1,224 coins, or 82%, from 281 hoards), but over 150 other finds are also known. These are mostly from burials, especially in Latvia, Finland and the area to the south-east of Lake Ladoga, as well as settlements such as Gnezdovo and Kiev. In the hoards, Byzantine coins are always an admixture to coins of other origins, except for a handful of finds from southern Ukraine and Kiev. Their distribution in late tenth- and early eleventh-century hoards is remarkable, as most hoards of this period contain a Byzantine coin or two, but rarely

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28 Two finds from the territory of the Derevlians (a hoard from Gladkovichi, tpq 976, and a solidus of Basil I and Constantine from Korosten) are exceptional in this respect, see Kropotkin 1962, no. 150 and Petrauskas 2009.
more. There are also relatively few hoards with no Byzantine coins at all.\(^{29}\) This pattern, along with the fact that they are proportionally more frequently looped or pierced than other coin types,\(^{30}\) suggests that Byzantine coins received special consideration from the owners of silver deposits and may have been consciously collected by them, no doubt because of their distinctive iconography, Christian character and relative scarcity.

**Fragmentation**

The condition of the Byzantine coins is analogous to that of the dirhams: they are well preserved in the finds from Rus and Sweden, but become increasingly fragmented the further one goes toward the West Slavonic lands. Of the 558 provenanced miliaresia catalogued by Hammarberg, Malmer and Zachrisson, 448 were whole coins, while “small fragments, 1/6 or less, are very rare [in Sweden]”.\(^{31}\) By contrast, most miliaresia in Polish finds are extant in small fragments. In the hoard of Dzierznica, for instance, only two whole miliaresia were found, along with eighty fragments, most of which were smaller than one-quarter. Detailed data from several hoards suggest, however, that Byzantine coins are on average less fragmented than dirhams.\(^{32}\) This is unlikely to be the result of particular consideration for their Christian iconography, as the fragments are too small for the Cross to be recognisable. Rather, their lower rate of fragmentation indicates that on their way from their place of origin they changed hands fewer times than dirhams.\(^{33}\)

**Chronology of the Miliaresia**

The overwhelming majority of the miliaresia found in northern hoards were struck between 945 and the 990s. Coins issued in the ninth and first half of the tenth centuries are very rare, including the issues of the joint reign of Romanos I, Constantine

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\(^{29}\) On Gotland, for instance, among the fifty-two hoards with tpqs between 970 and 1000, fifteen contained one Byzantine coin, six contained two, seven contained between three and ten and three contained more than ten. There were no Byzantine coins in twenty-one hoards.

\(^{30}\) See below, 141–68.

\(^{31}\) BCFS, 12. I count unfragmented coins which are damaged on the edges as whole coins.

\(^{32}\) In Ciechanów II (tpq 973), 1,122 dirhams weighed on average 0.62 g and eleven miliaresia 0.83 g; in Zalesie (tpq 976) 866 dirhams weighed on average 0.99 g and twenty-one miliaresia 2.17 g; in Kapiel (tpq 983) 1,511 dirhams weighed on average 0.31 g and six miliaresia 0.51 g. The difference is bigger in relative terms, taking into account that a whole dirham weighed on average c. 3.00 g, but a miliareson only 2.64 g (observed average weight of undamaged miliaresia catalogued in BCFS).

\(^{33}\) For fragmentation as a function of the distance from the source of the silver, see my paper forthcoming in the proceedings of the ‘Silver and Other Economies in the Viking Age’ conference (London, 23–24 April 2014).
VII, Stephen and Constantine (931–944), known from only a dozen specimens. The picture changes dramatically with coins issued by Constantine VII and Romanos II, the production of which may have continued into the reign of Romanos II. The pace of their inflow can best be followed using the average number of miliaria known from the northern lands divided by the number of years of their production (Tab. 5.2). It appears that the inflow of miliaria to the north slowed down under Nikephoros II Phokas, but accelerated again to reach its maximum under John I Tzimiskes and Basil II. It ceased around the time of the transition between Grierson’s Class II of Basil’s miliaria, 229 specimens of which are recorded in the Swedish catalogue, and Class IV, known in Sweden from only six coins. The date of this transition is uncertain: the connection with the victory of Basil II over Bardas Phokas in 989 proposed by Grierson is purely conjectural, and a date in the last decade of the tenth century is perhaps more likely. Very few miliaria of the successors of Basil II are known from northern Europe, with the exception of the coins of Constantine IX Monomachos, but these mostly come from the exceptional Ocksarve hoard.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emperor</th>
<th>Number of miliaria</th>
<th>Number of years</th>
<th>Miliaria per year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constantine VII and Romanos II (945–959), Romanos II (959–963)</td>
<td>248</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nikephoros II Phokas (963–969)</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>John I Tzimiskes (969–976)</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basil II (976–c. 995)</td>
<td>512</td>
<td>c. 20</td>
<td>25.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basil II (c. 995–1025)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>c. 30</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantine VIII to Michael V (1025–1042)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055)</td>
<td>126</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 5.2: Number of miliaria found in the northern lands per emperor, normalised for the lengths of their reigns

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34 Similarly with the nomismata of Constantine VII and Romanos II: Füeg 2007, 40–41. No miliaria of Romanos II alone are known.

35 BCFS, 9, 34–40. Similarly, only two specimens of Class IV are known from Estonia: Leimus 2009, 642.

36 Grierson 1973, part 2, 610–11, proposed 1) to intercalate between Class II and Class IV the anonymous miliaria with the Virgin Nikopoios and 2) to date the latter to 989. Neither of these propositions is likely, see Leimus 2009, 642 and below, note 51.
The dates of the hoards confirm this chronology. Byzantine coins are a great rarity in ninth-century hoards: single coins come from the Russian hoards of Moiseevka (tpq 866) and Khitrovka (tpq 876), and even in the massive Spillings hoard (tpq 870) only one miliareon has been identified among over 14,000 coins.\(^{37}\) Several coins of Leo VI (886–912) are known from Kiev, Shestovitsa and Gnezdovo, but Byzantine coins appear in larger numbers only in hoards with tpqs after 945, first mainly in Gotland, Uppland and Estonia, and then, in hoards buried after 960, in an area extending from Greater Poland in the west to Kiev and beyond in the east. By 1000, Byzantine coins turn up in hoards throughout the Baltic area and Rus. Even though their inflow all but stopped at the end of the tenth century, they are included in hoards sealed as late as the first half of the twelfth century, either as part of hoards that were accumulated over several generations, or perhaps as actively circulating coins.

**TWO WAVES OF INFLOW?**

An interesting phenomenon is the difference in the distribution of the miliareia of Constantine VII, Nikephoros II Phokas and John I Tzimiskes on the one hand, and Basil II on the other.\(^{38}\) The first group predominates on the southern shore of the Baltic, i.e. in Poland, Germany and Denmark, while coins of Basil II are more common in Sweden, Finland, Estonia and Latvia; Rus occupies an intermediary position (Map 5.2). The virtual absence of miliareia of Basil II is particularly striking in Greater Poland, where even the rare coins that found their way there are known exclusively from hoards buried after c. 1010. It appears, therefore, that the pattern of the inflow of miliareia to the north changed around 976. Coins issued before that date tended to travel to the southern shore of the Baltic, mainly to Greater Poland, while the miliareia of Basil II flowed almost exclusively to the northern part of the Baltic area, home to 90% of known specimens. I will speculate below about the reasons for this change.

**SUPPLY OF MILIARESIA**

The narrow chronology of miliareia in the north is surprising in the light of the abundant textual evidence for commercial and military contacts between Scandinavians and the Byzantine empire both before 945 and after the 990s. After a period of confusion following the collapse of the Rus khaganate in the 870s,\(^{39}\) contacts were re-established by 911, which saw not only the conclusion of the first Rus-Byzantine treaty, but also the participation of 700 Rus warriors in an unsuccessful Byzantine campaign against

\(^{37}\) Östergren 2009, 28 and personal communication from Gert Rispling.

\(^{38}\) Noticed already by BCFS, 17–18 and Gliksman 2003, 112, and now confirmed by a larger number of coins.

\(^{39}\) On which see Zuckerman 2000.
Crete. In 934, seven Rus ships manned by 415 warriors joined an expedition against Longobardia, and in 941 the Rus attacked Constantinople, having been forced to do so, according to the Schechter Letter, by the Khazars. But even if the increasing importance of the Dnieper route is attested by the growth of Kiev and Gnezdovo between 911 and 944, the massive inflow of Samanid dirhams to the northern lands in this period indicates where the real money was. The exacting journey to Constantinople, obstructed by the Dnieper rapids and roaming Pechenegs and Khazars, was less alluring as long as Scandinavia and Rus were flooded with Central Asian silver.

In this context, the treaty of 911 may not have resulted in significant commercial activity, which would explain why it left no identifiable trace in the northern hoards. By contrast, the treaty of 944 was followed by an increased movement of coins and people: Princess Olga of Kiev visited Constantinople in 946 or 957, the Rus participated in the Byzantine expeditions against Crete in 949 and 961 and against the Hamdanids in

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41 Khazarian Hebrew Documents 116–19, to be read with Zuckerman 1995, 256–68.
955, and by around 950, Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos described the annual Rus expeditions to Constantinople as if they had always been part of the landscape. This increased interest of the Rus in Byzantium, which went hand in hand with the shift of their centre of gravity from northern Rus to Kiev, may have been stimulated by the progressive drying up of the Samanid silver supply around the mid-tenth century.

But the rhythm of the inflow of Byzantine coins to the north was also determined by the production of miliaresia in Constantinople. In the absence of a die study of the middle Byzantine silver coinage the exact correlation cannot be established, but a general idea of the evolution of Byzantine monetary production can be obtained from the corpus of dies of gold coins compiled by Franz Füeg. It demonstrates the variability of the output of nomismata: periods of high production, e.g. between 945 and 976 (when Füeg’s study ends), alternated with long periods of inactivity, such as the reign of Leo VI (886–912) or the years 931–944. The sharp increase in minting activity after the fall of Romanos Lekapenos and his sons is particularly noteworthy: according to Füeg’s calculations, the average annual number of observed obverse dies was four times higher in the period 945–976 than for 867–944.

There is no reason to think that the production of silver coinage followed a significantly different trajectory. The impression of an increased availability of coined silver after 945 also comes from the more frequent mentions of miliaresia in the written sources after that date. Most references to miliaresia in De cerimoniiis, for instance, belong to the period after the fall of Romanos Lekapenos: the largesse distributed during state banquets to the rulers of Tarsus and Kiev, the distributions during the feast of broumalia instituted by Constantine VII and various payments to soldiers and senators mentioned in the treatise When the Emperor is About to Go on Campaign. Miliaresia do not appear in the pay lists of the Cretan campaign in 911, but they do in 949, when the imperial fleet was paid 121,805 nomismata in gold and 5,318 \( \frac{3}{4} \) “in miliaresia”. The small proportion of the pay in silver (4% of the total amount) indicates that it had some special purpose: it is tempting to interpret it as the payment to the 629 Rus enrolled on the expedition, at the approximate rate of 100 miliaresia per person (5,318 nomismata correspond to 63,820 miliaresia).

\[ Füeg \text{ 2007, in particular 164–71.} \]
\[ See \text{ Morrisson 2008, 514, for possible similarities in the patterns of production of nomismata and folles.} \]
\[ DeCer II.15, 18, ed. Reiske, vol. 1, 585, 592, 597, 598, 602, 607; Constantine Porphyrogennetos, Three Treatises 94–151 (see the index [330] for specific references to miliaresia). \]
\[ DeCer II.45, ed. Reiske, vol. 1, 667: “ῥόγα χάραγμα λίτραι \( \alpha \)χθ\( \varphi \)’: γγ’ . και δι\( \delta \) μιλιαρησίων λίτραι \( \gamma\)′ : ξζ’ ιδι. I owe my interpretation of this passage to Constantine Zuckerman. \]
The inflow of miliareia to the northern lands after 945 appears, therefore, to be related to the expansion in their production. This increase in output was no doubt driven by the general economic growth of the tenth century. But the secondary role played by silver in the Byzantine monetary system (its finds are scarce within the boundaries of the empire and it appears only sporadically, for instance, in the documents of Athos), and the frequency of references to it in the context of diplomatic largesse, pay to foreigners and ceremonial distributions, suggest that one of the purposes of miliareia was to facilitate relations with the outside world, in particular the Abbasid caliphate, Rus and Scandinavia, where silver was preferred to gold. It is thus not unlikely that the Scandinavian appetite for silver was one of the factors behind the apparent increase in the availability of miliareia.

If there are hints about the increased production of miliareia in Byzantium after 945, it is not certain when it was discontinued. Philip Grierson thought that Basil II ceased to mint the silver coin already c. 990, but a hoard found in Oescus on the Danube, next to the village of Gigen (Pleven province, Bulgaria), undermined this hypothesis. It contained 113 miliareia of Basil II, all of them of the Virgin Nikopoios type (Grierson's Class III), 596 miliareia of Constantine IX, and only one coin of Romanos III (1028–1034). This called for the redating of the Virgin Nikopoios miliareia from 989, the date proposed by Grierson, to the later years of Basil II's reign. By implication, their absence from northern hoards indicates that miliareia ceased to flow northwards before their production stopped under the successors of Basil II at the latest, even though contacts between Byzantium and the Rus continued. Perhaps Byzantium returned to its earlier policy of banning the export of precious metals. This

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46 On which see Harvey 1989.
47 On the scarcity of finds in the Byzantine empire see Metcalf 1979, 54–55; Athanassopoulou-Pen nas 1991. For some rare mentions of miliareia in the documents of Mount Athos, see Actes d'Ivi ron no. 9, line 42 (a fine is set at one miliarion); no. 29, line 96 (part of the land tax to be paid in miliareia in 1047). See also Grierson 1973, part 1, 63–65, who acknowledges that miliareia “must have fulfilled a real economic role”, but emphasises their ceremonial character.
48 This is perhaps also hinted at by the high number of die links among the Class II coins of Basil II, the most common in the Swedish finds. There are, however, few die links for other types: BCFS, 10, 16.
49 Grierson 1973, part 2, 611, attributed the break in the production of miliareia to the “silver famine”, a concept that is in need of further research.
51 See above, note 36; Morrisson & Pitarakis 2001.
52 See, for instance, VB, 46–52, on Rus troops in Basil II’s army during the last twenty-five years of his reign.
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was frequently reiterated by emperors, for instance in the early tenth-century *Book of the Eparch*.53

MILIARESIA FOR SLAVES?

From the perspective of the northern hoards, the distribution of miliare sia follows similar patterns to that of the considerably more numerous Islamic dirhams. It is thus not unreasonable to expect that similar mechanisms were responsible for their inflow. Even though many questions remain unanswered, the accounts of Arabic geographers and travellers such as Ibn Fadlan, who visited the market city of Bulgar on the Middle Volga in 922, make it clear that dirhams were imported to the north from the Islamic world, in particular from Central Asia, in exchange for slaves and furs brought by the Rus. Other accounts confirm that the slave trade provided the impetus for the commercial exchanges between the Scandinavians and the Islamic world in the ninth and tenth centuries.54

Did a similar mechanism account for the inflow of miliare sia to the northern lands? Even if Byzantine slavery remains understudied,55 the Byzantine demand for slaves is well attested. It seems to have expanded, along with the rest of the economy, in the tenth and eleventh centuries, when the slave trade and captive taking are frequently mentioned in the sources. Slaves appear to have been active in all sectors of the Byzantine economy and society, from domestic contexts to the workshops of Constantinople to agriculture. Their origin is only exceptionally specified, but the importation of slaves by the Rus to Constantinople is mentioned by Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos in his description of their annual expeditions to Byzantium in *De administrando imperio*. Constantine, impressed by the difficult crossing of the Dnieper rapids by the Rus flotilla, describes how at the fourth cataract, called Aeifor in Scandinavian and Neasit in Slavonic, some Rus were posted to guard their fleet against the roaming Pechengs, while “the remainder, taking up the goods which they have on board the *monoxyla*, conduct the slaves in their chains past by land, six miles, until they are through the barrage.”56

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53 Leo VI, *Book of the Eparch*, II.2, 86–87 (it is not clear to me why the editor obelises the relevant part of the sentence). See also *Codex Iustinianus* 4.63.2 (probably issued in 374) and, in general, Hendy 1985, 257–59.


55 Rotman 2004 is a rare exception.

56 *DAI* ch. 9.50–53, 60–61: “οἱ δὲ λοιποὶ τὰ πράγματα, ἀπερ ἐχουσιν εἰς τὰ μονόξυλα, ἀναλαμβανόμενοι, τὰ ψυχάρια μετὰ τῶν ἁλύσεων διὰ τοῦ ἕρου αὐτὰ διαβιβάζουσι μίλια ἕξ, ἐως ἃν διελθωσι τὸν φραγμὸν".
The prominence of slaves in Rus-Byzantine trade is confirmed by the treaties concluded by both parties in 911 and 944 and preserved in the Rus Primary Chronicle. Remarkably, slaves are the only commodity brought by the Rus to Constantinople which are explicitly mentioned. While the first treaty establishes a legal framework for relations between the Byzantines and the Rus and lays down provisions for stranded ships, Rus mercenaries in Byzantine service and fugitive slaves of Rus merchants, the second treaty focuses on the technicalities of the trade, which appears to have consisted mainly of the exchange of the slaves brought by the Rus for Byzantine silk. This is shown by the sequence of the clauses of the treaty of 944, which first establishes the framework for the exchanges—the Rus are entitled to enter Constantinople in groups of fifty men and stay as long as necessary to dispose of their merchandise—and then deals with the silk acquired by the Rus and the runaway slaves belonging to them. The treaty gives an indication of the value of the slaves: the Rus were to receive two pavoloki (no doubt rolls of silk) as compensation for a lost slave, and Christian captives were to be redeemed for five to ten gold coins (zlatniki), depending on their age. These amounts are lower than the equivalent ransoms defined in the previous treaty with the Rus (twenty gold pieces) and in the treaty concluded by the Byzantines with the Hamdanids in 969 (ten to thirty nomismata), suggesting that slaves brought by the Rus were relatively cheap, perhaps due to their plentiful supply. The fact that these values are denominated in gold does not imply that they were actually paid in this metal rather than in silver.

The slave trade continued into the eleventh century, when the existence of a market in Constantinople where “Rus merchants come in order to sell slaves” is attested in a miracle story of St Nicholas. Furthermore, a legal case submitted to Rabbi Yehuda ha-Kohen ben Meir of Mainz early in the same century offers a rare insight into the slave trade between the Slavonic lands and Byzantium from the perspective of a captive. It deals with the remarriage of a widowed woman to the brother of her deceased husband, in compliance with a practice prescribed by the Torah (yibbum). In the case submitted to Rabbi Yehuda, the difficulty was that the only brother of the deceased man had gone missing in circumstances described by one of his relatives:

They were [my] relatives and they were two brothers. During a disorder in Poland [pluni] we were taken captive from the city of Primut [probably Przemyśl in south-eastern Poland]. They were still small children. They were taken, and when they were brought from the city to a field,
they were abandoned in the field. And when I was taken out with tied hands, I saw them abandoned on the field, crying and groaning. In the meantime we saw a Canaanite [i.e. a Slav] whom I recognized. I asked him to accept us and the boys to his house. [I told him that] if Heaven had mercy on us and brought us out of slavery, I would honour him fittingly....The miracle happened, I was liberated, and I came to the house of this Canaanite to enquire about the boys. He told me: “one of them died, the other is in front of you”....After some time, I heard that the 

goyim [non-Jews] brought a boy to Prague to sell him. He said that he was abducted from the city of Przemyśl. He was sold to a Greek Jew. And someone else, who had been liberated and came from Greece [i.e. a Jewish convert] said: "I saw him in Constantinople".61

The story breaks off here, but enough is preserved to illustrate the direct connection between the kidnapping of slaves in the Slavonic lands and their sale in Constantinople. The Byzantines were as interested in Slavonic slaves as were the Muslims; consequently, it is likely that at least some of the miliareia that ended up in northern hoards left Byzantium as payments for slaves.

DIPLOMATS AND MERCENARIES

The ‘miliareia for slaves’ perspective is, however, only part of a broader picture. As opposed to the Scandinavian trade with Central Asia, which ended as soon as dirhams ceased to flow northwards in the 950s, the northern trade with Byzantium outlived the flow of miliareia; it did not, therefore, depend exclusively on them. Silver was only one among the commodities offered by Byzantium in exchange for slaves and other goods exported by the Rus, such as furs and wax.62 The treaty of 944 mentions payments in silk, finds of which are frequent in the entire zone of Scandinavian trade, from Dublin to Rus. Other imports from Byzantium included glass vessels and bracelets, ceramics, copper alloy buckles and rings, and amphorae containing wine.63 It is noteworthy, however, that even in well-investigated sites such as Gnezdovo or Kiev, little of this material predates the mid-tenth century.64

Nor was trade solely responsible for the inflow of miliareia to Scandinavia and the Slavonic lands. Another source of silver was imperial gifts, such as those bestowed

61 Eliezer ben Yoel ha-Levi, Sefer Ra’avyah § 900, 36–37:

62 Mentioned alongside slaves in the Primary Chronicle among the gifts presented in 944 by Prince Igor to Byzantine envoys: PVL 26; RPC 77.


64 See VE, 172; Eniosova & Pushkina 2013.
Byzantine coins in Viking-Age northern lands

By Constantine VII on Olga and her entourage on her state visit to Constantinople in 946 or 957. Largesse was then distributed on at least three occasions: during a banquet in the Chrysotriklinos on 9 September, during dessert on the same day and at another banquet on 18 October in the Pentakouboukleion of St Paul, where:

the empress sat with her children born in the purple and her daughter-in-law and the princess. And to the princess were given two hundred miliaresia; to her nephew, twenty miliaresia; to the priest Gregorios, eight miliaresia; to the sixteen [female] relations of the princess, twelve miliaresia each; to her eighteen handmaidens, six miliaresia each; to the twenty-two emissaries (apokrisiarios), twelve miliaresia each; to the forty-four merchants, six miliaresia each; to the two interpreters, twelve miliaresia each.\(^{65}\)

Gifts to the Rus delegation amounted in total to 2,905 miliaresia, of which the princess received 700, while most of her attendants and the accompanying merchants had to content themselves with relatively modest payments of three to twenty miliaresia. These not very impressive figures are dwarfed by the subsidies paid to the Rus in exchange for their military assistance to the empire. In 966, for instance, fifteen kentenaria—108,000 nomismata, or c. 1.3 million miliaresia—were reportedly paid to Prince Sviatoslav of Kiev in order to induce him to attack Bulgaria.\(^{66}\)

Miliaresia were also brought to the north by Scandinavian mercenaries in Byzantine service.\(^{67}\) First mentioned in the treaty of 911, they participated in each of the three Byzantine campaigns of which we have detailed accounts in De cerimoniis: \(^{68}\) 700 Rus are listed in 911, 415 in 934 and 629 in 949. Their presence in imperial armies is also frequently attested in the second half of the tenth century.\(^{69}\) The accounts give an idea of their pay: the 700 Rus who assisted the Byzantines in their invasion of Crete in 911 were paid in total one kentenarion, which is 7,200 nomismata, or on average ten gold coins per person. This is equivalent to 120 miliaresia, a wage close to the conjectured pay of 100 miliaresia per Rus in 949 (see above, 128).

If these payments reached the north, little remains of them in the hoards. But there is one special case. As we have seen, two distinct geographical zones emerge from the data aggregated above: miliaresia found on the southern shore of the Baltic were mostly issued in the names of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos, Nikephoros II Pho-

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\(^{66}\) Leo the Deacon, Leonis Diaconi 63.

\(^{67}\) Their role is emphasised by Morrisson 1981 and overemphasised by Gliksman 2003, 113–14; 2009, 618.

\(^{68}\) DeCer II.44–45, ed. Reiske, vol. 1, 651–78.

\(^{69}\) VB, 37–47.
kas and John I Tzimiskes, whereas coins issued by Basil II predominate in Sweden, Finland and Estonia, but are rare elsewhere, including Rus (see Map 5.2). This distribution, remarkable at a time when the princes of Kiev controlled the flows along the Dnieper, suggests that a substantial group of Scandinavians came into direct contact with Byzantium some time after 976. It is tempting to identify it as the Varangian contingent hired by Vladimir to oust his brother Iaropolk from Kiev, an episode described in the Primary Chronicle under the year 980. When, after his conquest of Kiev, Vladimir found himself unable to reward his allies, he allowed them to seek their fortune in “Greece”, where they disappear from the written record. Whether this identification is correct or not, the numismatic evidence indicates that, at a time when contacts between Scandinavia and Byzantium were increasingly mediated by Kiev, only exceptional events enabled Byzantine coins to flow directly to Scandinavia.

IMITATIONS

Even if Byzantine coins ceased to flow northwards at the end of the tenth century, an indication of their enduring influence in Scandinavia and the Slavonic lands in the eleventh century is provided by local imitations, the diversity of which is astonishing. In Germany, a die chain combining imitations of gold coins of Theophilos and of dirhams with an official die of the emperor Henry II has been identified. In Sweden, some of the imitations of miliareia are die-linked to imitations of Anglo-Saxon coins and the local official coinage. In Finland, they seem to respond to local demand for ornaments, and in Tamatarkha (Tmutarakan), miliareia of John I Tzimiskes and Basil II were imitated in copper by local Rus princes. Byzantine coins also embodied the ideal of Christian kingship and were thus an attractive model for early national coinages: the earliest type of Polish coinage, produced in the 990s, the Rus and some Czech coins, as well as most of the coinage of the Danish king Sven Estridsen (1047–1074), were modelled on Byzantine coins. Interestingly, some of these coins imitated eleventh-century Byzantine coins—those of Romanos III or Constantine IX in Finland, and those of all of the

70 Pace Blöndal and Benedikz (VB, 42–45), the Varangians who left Kiev for Constantinople in or around 980 are unlikely to be those who assisted Basil II in his struggle with Bardas Phokas in 988–989, almost a decade later.

71 The exceptionally low fragmentation of the miliareia of Basil II found in Sweden (observed by BCFS, 12) also speaks in favour of their direct transfer from Byzantium to Sweden.

72 Morrisson 1981.


emperors between Basil II and Constantine IX in Denmark—which must therefore have been more common in the north than their rare finds would indicate. One should beware, however, of attributing too much influence to them, as in most of these areas other coins were also imitated or reinterpreted in the early national coinages.

CONCLUSION: MILIARESIA AND DIRHAMS

The inflow of miliaresia to the north reflects the complexity of relations between the Scandinavians and the Slavs on the one hand, and Byzantium on the other. Even if the initial impulse came from trade, no doubt the slave trade, the eagerness of the Byzantines to employ Rus mercenaries and the prestige that the princes of Kiev derived from the legitimising package of Christianity and political ideology offered by Byzantium to its neighbours added new dimensions to the picture. By contrast, Scandinavian contacts with the Samanid emirate never went beyond a relatively simple exchange of silver for slaves and furs. Its scale may have been larger, but its flexibility was limited: once the Samanids ran out of silver, the trade system collapsed almost overnight. Contacts with Byzantium relied to a much more limited extent on silver, which accounts both for their resilience and for the limited quantity of miliaresia in northern hoards.

The second difference concerns the circulation of silver coins in the north. Whereas the importation of dirhams remained a private affair of Scandinavian merchants, traffic to and from Constantinople over the course of the tenth century was increasingly controlled by the rulers of Kiev, who no doubt filtered out at least part of the silver flowing northwards. Furthermore, miliaresia were coming into increasingly organised areas, where early state structures were able to recycle the local stocks of silver into their coinages. Only major discontinuities, such as the one in Greater Poland, could result in the preservation of hoards.

The presence of fewer miliaresia than dirhams does not mean, therefore, less vigorous contacts, just like the absence of Carolingian coins from Scandinavia or of German coins from tenth-century Bohemia should not be mistaken for evidence of the low intensity of commercial and other contacts. We are reminded once again that numismatic material is a powerful indicator of intercultural relations, but a very unsuitable basis for reasoning ex silentio.

75 Morrisson 1981, 137–39; Grierson 1966, 137.
76 Carolingian coins: Kilger 2010, 165; Bohemia: Jankowiak 2013.
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WHEN STUDYING THE contacts between Byzantium and the Viking world, the numismatic evidence is of particular importance. Coins form, in comparison with other remains of Byzantine material culture in the north, a very large group of artefacts, consisting of more than 700 specimens, plus several dozen imitations. They offer the possibility of undertaking both geographical and chronological analyses, while their interpretation may echo the Byzantine and Rus written sources, in which commercial and mercenary activities are described. This is probably the reason why coins are almost always included in studies of the relations between Byzantium and Scandinavia, even though the numismatic evidence is often used without paying much attention to the coins themselves. In general, what matters to those using the evidence is the importation and circulation of money, not the treatment and handling of objects.

The strong interest in Byzantine finds from northern Europe has resulted in the publication of several catalogues focusing exclusively on Byzantine coinage. Among them, the most important is the corpus written by Inger Hammarberg, Brita Malmer and Torun Zachrisson, which presents all the Byzantine coins found in Sweden prior to 1989, but several other works are also worth mentioning: the article by Brita Malmer on the imitations of Byzantine coins in Sweden, the article by Pekka Sarvas on the Byzantine coins in Finland and the article by Tuukka Talvio on the imitations of Byzantine coins in Finland. Although these publications constitute the basis for any study, it would not have been possible to make a satisfactory inventory of Byzantine coins without the help of general catalogues of Viking-Age coin finds, specific catalogues dealing with settlement finds and various references mentioning Byzantine coins in Scandinavia. Finally, additional information was obtained through research in the coin cabinets

1 See e.g. Duczko 1997; Müller-Wille 1997; Piltz 1998.
5 Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006; Skaare 2006.
of Copenhagen and Stockholm and thanks to the generosity of Scandinavian numismatists.⁶

Albeit not fully complete, as some of the latest finds are still undocumented, the resulting list provides a good starting point for analysing the contacts between Byzantium and the Viking world through the numismatic evidence. In total, 739 Byzantine coins have been recorded in four countries:⁷ Denmark, Norway, Sweden and Finland.⁸ Northern Germany was also included in the present study, since the province of Schleswig-Holstein was part of the early Danish kingdom. When referring to the geographical origins of the finds in the following pages, I will make use of the borders of present-day countries, each country having an independent tradition of collection and publication. Only at a later stage will I try, based on the results of the analysis, to delimit different areas for the uses of Byzantine coins in the Viking Age.

The aim of this paper is to determine the use of Byzantine coins in Scandinavia in order better to understand the meaning of this coinage for the Vikings. This cannot be achieved if use is considered in isolation, separated from other monetary contexts. In a recent article dealing with theory and method in numismatics, Fleur Kemmers and Nanouschka Myrberg proposed dividing the life cycle of a coin into four main contextual phases:⁹

as the primary context we might identify the production phase of the coin; as a secondary context, its use; the tertiary context might be seen as the deposition or loss of the object and its integration into the archaeological record; while the subsequent retrieval of the coin (by excavation or otherwise) and its subjugation to antiquarian or scholarly investigation could be seen as the quaternary context.

The division into four contexts provides an excellent tool for analysis of the Byzantine coins found in Scandinavia, particularly within the framework of a comprehensive approach. In this paper, the four contexts will be developed extensively, the quaternary

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⁶ I am particularly indebted to Helle Horsnaes, Håkon Ingvaldsen and Kenneth Jonsson for sharing with me their lists of Byzantine coins, and to Lena Holmquist Olausson, Catherine Jolivet-Lévy, Cécile Morrisson, Nanouschka Myrberg Burström and Gert Rispling for sharing with me their knowledge. My thanks are also due to the curators and staffs of the Royal Coin Cabinet in Stockholm and the Royal Coin Cabinet in Copenhagen for granting me access to their collections. Finally, I am grateful to Shane McLeod for taking the time to check the language of this paper.

⁷ The figures are slightly different from those presented by Marek Jankowiak in this volume (see above, 117–39). The focus on Scandinavian countries enabled me to include more finds, some uncertain and some unpublished.

⁸ The inclusion of Finland, which remained on the margins of the Viking world, is questionable. Yet the Finnish material is regarded as relevant to this discussion because it shares many similarities with the Byzantine numismatic material found in the rest of Scandinavia.

⁹ Kemmers & Myrberg 2011, 89–90.
context serving mostly as a background for the critical interpretation of the three others.

The production of Byzantine coins is generally little studied in publications dealing with their presence in the Viking world. The diversity of the metals and of the types struck in the Constantinopolitan mint has not attracted much attention from numismatists. Instead, their emphasis is on the dominant denomination in Scandinavia, i.e. miliaresia or silver coins. This is best illustrated by the publication of Brita Malmer on the importation of Byzantine coins to the north, in which the non-silver specimens are not even mentioned.\(^\text{10}\) Although it is true that miliaresia represent the largest group in the sample, it does not follow that copper and gold coins should be overlooked.

In Viking-Age Scandinavia, the uses of coins could leave a wide range of traces, whether deliberate or not. Wear, test marks, fragmentation, means of suspension, graffiti or even bending are evidence for circulation, alteration and transformation of the numismatic material.\(^\text{11}\) The absence of traces is also significant, especially when the coin was deposited long after minting, since it may have been intentionally preserved from ordinary damage. In the case of Byzantine coins, there are very few specimens recorded in mint condition among the Scandinavian finds, most of the coins having been materially affected by use. Thus, traces on the metal provide a good basis for understanding how the coins were handled and perceived by the Vikings, even though it is sometimes hard to tell where the damage was inflicted.

The context of deposition has become more prominent in numismatic research over the last few decades, as is shown by the development of new archaeological strategies, like the systematic excavation of find spots.\(^\text{12}\) In general, some interest has already been expressed in the context in which Byzantine coins were deposited in Scandinavia, as indicated by the detailed presentation of the find circumstances included by Inger Hammarberg, Brita Malmer and Torun Zachrisson in their catalogue.\(^\text{13}\) Nevertheless, no study has gone beyond informative description of the contexts by trying to interpret them as a coherent whole.

The purpose of this paper is to show that a thorough analysis of the coins may produce a new picture of the Byzantine presence in Scandinavia. Written sources and non-monetary objects, though essential to understanding contacts on a general level, are not needed to demonstrate the exceptional use of Byzantine coins in the Viking world. Rather, the Byzantine coins must be studied exhaustively, by taking into account several aspects which are frequently neglected. Instead of focusing solely on circulation

\(^{10}\) Malmer 2001.
\(^{11}\) See e.g. Rispling 2004b.
\(^{12}\) See e.g. Östergren 1989.
\(^{13}\) BCFS.
and importation, special attention must be paid to use and context, implying a more archaeological approach.

Discussing in detail the use of coins is the best way to reveal Viking attitudes towards Byzantine material culture, attitudes ultimately reflecting the relations between the two areas. The idea is to determine whether Byzantine coins were treated with care, respect, indifference or disdain. It is to determine whether they were associated with specific places, objects or individuals. From this perspective, it is essential to understand the functions ascribed to Byzantine coins, since the meaning of an object used as an ornament is very different from the meaning of an object used as a means of payment.

Finally, it will be argued that Byzantine coins were not perceived as neutral pieces of metal, only circulating in the north for their silver or gold content; rather, they were perceived as significant artefacts, valued highly by their owners. In the Viking world, Byzantine coins were imbued with symbolic meaning, which most likely varied from situation to situation. This symbolic meaning may have been related to the origin of the coins, to their biographies and/or to their designs.

SILVER AND NON-SILVER COINS IN SCANDINAVIA

Based on the sources mentioned above, it has been possible to identify 739 Byzantine coins in the Scandinavian countries. They consist of twenty-three gold coins, 661 silver coins, thirty-two copper coins and twenty-three coins made of unknown metal. The earliest coin included in this study was minted under Constantine V (741–775). It is a gold nomisma struck in Syracuse between 751 and 775. The latest coin included in this study was minted under Nikephoros III. It is a copper follis struck in Constantinople between 1078 and 1081. Most of the Byzantine coins known in Scandinavia belong to the period from 945 to 989. In total, 110 specimens are recorded in the names of Constantine VII and Romanos II (945–959), twenty-three in the name of Nikephoros II (963–969), eighty-seven in the name of John I Tzimiskes (969–976) and 299 in the names of Basil II and Constantine VIII (977–989) (Fig. 6.1). Another important group is formed by the coins of Constantine IX Monomachos (1042–1055), 114 miliaresia of this emperor being known in the north. They all originate, with the exception of two coins, from the hoard of Ockسارve, discovered in the 1920s on the island of Gotland. The rest of the Byzantine coins represent a small proportion of the to-

**Figure 6.1:** Miliaresion of Basil II and Constantine VIII found in Holsegård (Copenhagen, Royal Coin Cabinet)
How were Byzantine coins used?

Total number, since they consist of only sixty specimens. They are struck in the names of thirteen different emperors, plus a series of anonymous folles.

Byzantine coins are not distributed evenly among the Scandinavian countries; in fact, quite the opposite (see Tab. 6.1). Gotland occupies the leading position, following the usual pattern of the Viking Age. It has yielded 115 finds with Byzantine coins, totalling 523 coins. Mainland Sweden and Öland also account for a significant part of the material, with sixty finds and ninety-three coins. Outside Gotland and Sweden, Byzantine coins are rare. In Denmark, including Bornholm and northern Germany, thirty-two finds and forty-one coins are recorded. Finland is the region where the number of Byzantine coins is lowest, with thirteen finds and twenty-two coins. In Norway, the figure is roughly equivalent, with twelve finds and twenty-eight coins.

The monetary system of Byzantium was characterised by the use of three metals: gold, silver and copper. The gold solidus, weighing 4.55 g, was the basic unit of the coinage, meaning that silver and copper coins were valued in relation to it. Three main denominations were minted during the Viking Age: gold nomismata, silver miliaresia and copper folles. The system was quite stable between the eighth and the middle of the eleventh century, when gold coins began to be debased and fractions of miliaresia began to be struck. Thus, it is not surprising that Byzantine coins made of all three metals circulated in Viking-Age Scandinavia, even though the proportion in which they have been found is “not representative of the Byzantine mint output in respect of either denominations or types”. The Byzantine miliaresion is very important in our material, with 661 specimens representing almost all variants and types of the period 949–1025. On the other hand, nomismata and folles only appear occasionally in Scandinavia, the fifty-one specimens scarcely reflecting the rich variety of the gold and copper coinage (see Tab. 6.1 and Fig. 6.2).

From the Viking point of view, the presence of Byzantine coins made of all three metals is surprising. Generally speaking, non-silver coins are extremely rare in the north. At most a few dozen gold specimens have been recorded, including thirteen

\[ \text{Figure 6.2: Anonymous follis found in Gråbrødre Kloster (Copenhagen, Royal Coin Cabinet)} \]

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14 Grierson 1999, 3.
15 Ibid., 10.
16 Ibid., 15.
17 BCFS, 9.
Islamic dinars and a couple of Frankish solidi.\(^{18}\) The majority come from the famous Hoen hoard, which contained sixteen gold coins.\(^{19}\) Copper coins are slightly more common, several dozen specimens having been recorded. They consist, in addition to Byzantine folles, of Roman, English and Islamic specimens.\(^{20}\) The composition of this group remains ambiguous, as is shown by the Islamic component. In total, eighteen Islamic coins made of base metal have been found from Viking-Age Scandinavia, but they are all counterfeits, i.e. coins struck in copper or bronze instead of silver or gold.\(^{21}\) In his database, comprising more than 60,000 Viking-Age Islamic coins, Gert Rispling does not record a single genuine copper coin.\(^{22}\)

If non-silver coinage was virtually unknown in the western world from c. 700 to 1200,\(^{23}\) this was not the case for two economic partners of the Nordic countries: Byzantium and the Islamic world. In both areas, the system was based on trime-tallism, with copper, silver and gold coins being in simultaneous circulation and use. This trime-tallistic system was far from uniform, with great chronological and geographical variations. However, even in regions where silver was the dominant metal, it was never the sole coinage. In Transoxania, for instance, where a significant portion of the Islamic dirhams found in the north originated, a considerable place was occupied by copper coins, while gold was also issued sporadically.\(^{24}\)

This similarity between the two systems is not reflected in the composition of the Scandinavian material. A comparison between Islamic and Byzantine non-silver coins in the north is illustrative: copper and gold specimens represent around 8% of the Byzantine material but less than 0.1% of the Islamic material, even if one accepts the most optimistic estimations. As noted by Elisabeth Piltz, “Byzantine gold and bronze coins reached Rus and Scandinavia in greater number than their Islamic counterparts.”\(^{25}\) Of course, these variations could be explained by differences in monetary policies and export models in the two regions of origin,\(^{26}\) but they could also indicate, firstly, a differ-

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\(^{19}\) Ibid.

\(^{20}\) Birka is the only place where all four types of bronze coins are found: one *aes* of Constantius II from the Black Earth (the main settlement), two *stycas* of Aethelred II from graves 29 and 176, six Islamic counterfeits from the Black Earth and twelve folles from various spots.

\(^{21}\) Rispling 2004a, 38–39.

\(^{22}\) Rispling, personal communication.

\(^{23}\) Blackburn & Grierson 1986, 54.

\(^{24}\) Dani & Davidovich 1998.

\(^{25}\) Piltz 1998, 98.

\(^{26}\) For instance, massive minting of silver coins by the Samanids to stimulate trade. See Kovalev & Noonan 2002.
enence in the nature of the contacts, and, secondly, a difference in the function of the two coinages in the Viking world.

Interestingly, Byzantine silver and non-silver coins in Scandinavia show divergent patterns of geographical and chronological distribution. Nomismata and folles are found in areas where miliareas are very few. On Gotland, the area with the largest concentration of Byzantine coins, only two nomismata have been registered, and folles are absolutely unknown on the island. In mainland Sweden, where the group of miliarea is relatively small, copper coins form a significant part of the Byzantine material, making up 25% of the total. In Norway and mainland Denmark, where miliarea only appear occasionally, nomismata and folles represent a high proportion of Byzantine coins, even the majority in the case of Norway. In the light of these observations, one may conclude that the number of gold and copper coins in an area was inversely proportional to the number of silver coins in the same area. The same is true of Islamic gold coins, which are absent on Gotland, the dominant region for Arabic silver.\(^{27}\) It is also worth noting that no Byzantine non-silver coins have been found in Finland, where miliarea and imitations of miliarea played a relatively significant role.

Furthermore, there is a chronological gap between the Byzantine gold and copper coins found in Scandinavia and the Byzantine silver coins. On the one hand, most of the miliarea of the sample were minted between 945, the year of the first coinage depicting Constantine VII and his son Romanos II, and 989, the year of the battle of Abydos. The one notable exception is the hoard of Ocksarve, containing 116 coins of Romanos III (1028–1034) and Constantine IX (1042–1055). On the other hand, most of the nomismata and folles of the sample were minted before 950 or after 1030, with the number of copper coins minted in the ninth century being particularly high.

\(^{27}\) Carlsson & Jonsson 2012, 37.
Although some of the anonymous folles are hard to date precisely, they seem to belong mostly to the late types of this coinage, from after 1030/35 according to the chronology of Philip Grierson.\footnote{Grierson 1973.}

The general impression given by the material is that Byzantine gold and copper coins fill the chronological and geographical gaps left by the miliareia. They are found in regions where miliareia are few, and they were imported during periods when miliareia are missing in the north. Though presumably unintentional, this clear separation between the two groups seems to reflect the coexistence of two separate networks. For that reason, it is tempting to explain the import of nomismata and folles and the import of miliareia as the result of independent activities.

In Scandinavia, the import of Byzantine coins, and especially the import of miliareia, has often been related to traders and mercenaries.\footnote{See e.g. Morrisson 1981; Piltz 1998.} However, some groups of coins, mainly consisting of nomismata and folles, seem to have had a different history, one connected with politics and diplomacy. This is the case with the coins of Theophilos. According to the theory of Ture J. Arne,\footnote{The theory was put forward by Ture J. Arne (1946), but further developed by Jonathan Shepard (1995) and Władysław Duczko (VR).} the coins of this emperor may have been brought back to the north by the Rhōs envoys mentioned in the Annales Bertiniani. In the entry for the year 839, it is said that a group of Rhōs, identified as Swedes, was sent by Theophilos with an embassy to the court of Louis the Pious at Ingelheim. The Byzantine emperor asked Louis to help the Rhōs go back home, since they could not return by the same route as their outward journey. In Scandinavia, eight coins of Theophilos have been registered, an unusually high number given the few Byzantine specimens of the ninth century known in the region. They consist of one nomisma and one follis from Hedeby (Fig. 6.3),\footnote{It is extraordinary that the nomisma, although turned into a brooch, has never been included in the publications dealing with the Rhōs embassy. In the Viking Age, it was very unusual to turn a coin into a brooch, so the fact that this coin of Theophilos was worn as such must be significant. The practice has parallels in the Carolingian world, where the few solidi of the time were often transformed into ornaments of this type. They were probably used as symbols of power, perhaps} one miliareion and three folles from Birka as well as one follis and one half-follis from Styrnäs. The coins of Theophilos have been connected with politics and diplomacy in the region, and their presence in Scandinavia has been related to the Rhōs embassy mentioned in the Annales Bertiniani.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.8\textwidth]{figure6_3.png}
\caption{Nomisma of Theophilos found in a grave at Hedeby (after Hilberg 2006)}
\end{figure}
How were Byzantine coins used?

Los, taken together with several other significant finds, provide material evidence for direct contacts between Byzantium and the Viking world at that time, shedding new light on the account of the Annales Bertiniani.

That nomismata and folles were obtained in special circumstances does not necessarily mean that all of them were the product of a single activity or single event. This is best illustrated by the finds of Byzantine coins in Hedeby. If one interprets the two coins of Theophilos as signs of diplomatic activity in the light of the Annales Bertiniani, then how to interpret the two other folles, one of Leo VI and Alexander and one of the anonymous type? Were they the product of Byzantine embassies not recorded in the written sources? Without the possibility of using literary evidence, it is necessary to focus on the archaeological patterns.

Using Byzantine coins in Viking-Age Scandinavia

As mentioned above, there are a wide variety of traces indicating how a coin was used during the Viking Age, such as wear, test marks, fragmentation, means of suspension, graffiti or bending. Studying all of them comprehensively in the present paper is not possible, especially since the various publications dealing with Byzantine coins do not provide the same level of detail regarding secondary treatment. Whereas the catalogue of the Swedish finds pays attention to every detail, little more than the general appearance is described in the other publications. To avoid asymmetry between the Scandinavian regions, it seems best to focus more narrowly on two important practices: suspension and fragmentation. Suspension involves the transformation of a coin by adding a loop or a hole. Fragmentation involves the mutilation of a coin by cutting it up into several pieces. The former practice has to do with symbolism and aesthetics, the coin being henceforth worn as an ornament. The latter even as imitatio imperii, the nummular brooch mirroring the fibula worn by the emperor on the coin. See Hilberg 2006; Schulze-Dörflamm 1999.

Two coins of the same emperor found in northern Russia and three Byzantine seals of the mid-ninth century found in Denmark. It is worth noting that the majority of the coins of Theophilos from Scandinavia and northern Russia show signs of secondary treatment, five of them having been turned into ornaments, including two bronze coins and two gold coins.

BCFS.
practice has to do with economics, the coin being exchanged by weight in commercial transactions. Suspension and fragmentation will not, however, be the only secondary treatments under discussion. Other evidence will occasionally be introduced in order to strengthen our arguments.

Generally speaking, traces of use are very rare on Byzantine coins made of copper or gold. Of fifty-one folles and nomismata known in the north, only six have been affected by secondary treatment. This figure is very low compared to the one for miliaresia, whose proportion of manipulation is close to 90% if all types of secondary treatment are taken into account. When encountered, traces of use on copper and gold coins are very particular. None of the specimens shows the usual signs related to monetary circulation in the Viking world. They are not intentionally cut into pieces, affected by test marks or bent. If fragments of possible folles have been registered in Birka, it is due to bad conditions of preservation, as indicated by their very advanced corrosion. On the other hand, a small number of Byzantine non-silver coins were provided with a hole, loop or other type of mounting. This is the case with two folles found in a grave at Styrnäs, two nomismata found in the hoard of Hoen and one nomisma found in a grave at Hedeby (Fig. 6.3 above). In addition, one nomisma of Romanos III bears traces of soldering with tin on the reverse, but it is not clear whether the remains are ancient or modern.\textsuperscript{34} From this evidence, it can be assumed that folles and nomismata were not used for economic purposes, or at least not used in the same way as silver coins. They were, however, used for symbolic purposes, even though the proportion of pendants is lower for copper and gold coins than for miliaresia.

In Scandinavia, the number of Byzantine silver coins used as ornaments is significant. Of the 661 miliaresia in our sample, 157 specimens were looped or holed, 24% of the total material (see Tab. 6.2). This represents a relatively high proportion compared to the transformation rate of other types of silver coins in the Viking world. In a recent article, Gert Rispling estimated the percentage of pendants to be around 2% for German coins, around 4% for English coins and between 4% and 8% for Arabic coins.\textsuperscript{35} The proportion of Byzantine coins used as ornaments is even higher if the hoard of Ock Sarve, whose composition is very unusual, is excluded from the calculation. Without the 123 uncirculated miliaresia of this find, the transformation rate rises to 28%.

In parallel with suspension, fragmentation is an important phenomenon among the miliaresia of Scandinavia. Of the 661 miliaresia in our corpus, 106 specimens have been intentionally cut into pieces, which equals 16% of the material. This practice is best illustrated by the hoard of Kattlunds, discovered in 1866 on Gotland, where seven

\textsuperscript{34} Malmer 1985, 28.

\textsuperscript{35} Rispling 2004b, 8.
out of eight Byzantine coins had been fragmented, some into small pieces. The seven fragmented miliaria are different from each other, since they were minted by three separate emperors: two by Nikephoros II, one by John I Tzimiskes and four by Basil II. The smallest fragment is a coin of Basil II, of which less than a quarter of the specimen is preserved. Such an occurrence is very unusual in the northern countries. In most cases, the incomplete miliaria that have been preserved are cut into fragments of more than half of the original coin.36

Despite small chronological variations, it is difficult to observe an evolution in the use of the different Byzantine silver coins in Scandinavia. This is due to the predominance of miliaria struck between 945 and 989, a very short period of time. If the hoard of Ocksarve is excluded, 95% of the miliaria belong to the latter part of the tenth century, no more than sixty years. The only important remark to be made is that the fragmentation rate decreases during the period, from 31% for the miliaria of Constantine VII to 11% for the miliaria of Basil II.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Fragmentation</th>
<th>Suspension</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bornholm, Denmark and northern Germany</td>
<td>19 (56%)</td>
<td>8 (24%)</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>18 (82%)</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gotland</td>
<td>72 (14%)</td>
<td>88 (17%)</td>
<td>503</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainland Sweden, Öland and Norway</td>
<td>13 (19%)</td>
<td>34 (49%)</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown origin (Sweden?)</td>
<td>2 (6%)</td>
<td>9 (28%)</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>106 (16%)</td>
<td>157 (24%)</td>
<td>661</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.2: Miliaria found in Scandinavia, suspension and fragmentation by region

By contrast, geographical variations in the use of Byzantine silver coins are clearly evident. Scandinavia can even be divided into four main regions corresponding to the suspension/fragmentation ratio (see Tab. 6.2): Gotland, where the fragmentation and suspension rates of miliaria are more or less equivalent (around 15% if Ocksarve is included, around 20% if Ocksarve is excluded); Norway and mainland Sweden, where fragments of miliaria represent a small part of the material, while coin-pendants represent a significant part of it, close to 50%; Bornholm, mainland Denmark and northern Germany, where fragmented miliaria form a large group compared with looped and holed miliaria; and Finland, where fragmentation of Byzantine coins is virtually absent, but where suspension is a widespread phenomenon.

36 BCFS, 12.
Of course, these variations depend on the general patterns of coin usage in the different regions of Scandinavia. It is clear that the presence of cut or pierced miliaresia cannot be separated from the secondary treatments observed on other types of coins. However, the influence of these general patterns of usage is not sufficient to explain many features of the Byzantine group, like the high suspension rate in mainland Sweden, Finland and Norway. This means that the differences are also inherent to the function ascribed to Byzantine coins in each region.

Although suspension and fragmentation can both contribute to understanding the function of Byzantine coins, the former deserves special attention, since this practice is much more complex. Using a coin as an ornament is not only using the coin itself, but using the pictures on it as well. As with the coins, the treatment of the pictures can reveal attitudes towards the material. It is thus essential to consider the relationships between coins, pictures and means of suspension.

Already in the 1990s, Brita Malmer pointed out that about two-thirds of the means of suspension on miliaresia were placed in the axis of the vertical arm of the cross. From this, she deduced that the cross was regarded as an important feature by the wearers of Byzantine coins, who often tried to rotate it so that it appeared the right way up.37 This observation is of great importance, but it does not explain the reason for the rotation. Was the suspension placed for aesthetic reasons, just to create symmetry? Was it placed for religious reasons, in order to highlight the symbol of the cross? How do we explain the remaining third of our sample, coins on which holes and loops are placed randomly? Does this mean that the wearers were not able to understand the symbols?

Although most Byzantine coins are decorated with a cross, this is not the case for all of them. After 1025, the cross of the miliaresia was replaced by religious and imperial figures, usually depicted standing. The figures are realistic, presenting no problem of interpretation for the Vikings. Nevertheless, the means of suspension are rarely placed above the pictures, so as to rotate them correctly. This is best illustrated by a pierced

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Constantine VII</th>
<th>0°</th>
<th>180°</th>
<th>90/270°</th>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nikephoros II and John I</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basil II</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainland Sweden, Öland and Norway</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>121</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 6.3: Suspended Byzantine coins with cross found in mainland Sweden, Öland and Norway, showing degree of rotation between the suspension point and the cross, by emperor

37 Malmer 1996, 93.
coin of Romanos III from the hoard of Ocksarve, in which the hole is located at right angles to the figure’s axis, and by a pierced coin of Constantine X probably found in Sweden, in which the hole is located near the feet of the Virgin. The random position of the means of suspension indicates that the religious and imperial figures were not decisive when turning the coins into ornaments.\textsuperscript{38} The same interpretation applies to the picture of the cross, whose rotation varies with the coin type (see Tab. 6.3). This variation had little to do with religious beliefs, since the meaning of the cross does not change from one coin to another. Instead, it had to do with aesthetic sensibilities or possibilities. An explanation for the rotation of the miliareia of Constantine VII may be, for instance, the presence of a small globe under the cross, a good point of reference for piercing the coin.

That the cross was not at the core of the practice is confirmed by studying the degree of wear of the pierced and looped miliareia. In several cases, it is possible to determine which side of the coin-pendant was displayed, because of the much poorer state of preservation of the hidden side, which was worn away by constant rubbing on the clothes. Even though this information, which depends on the shifting intensity of use, cannot be systematically analysed, it reveals an interesting pattern: very often, it is the cross that seems to be most affected by wear, meaning that the side with the cross was worn against the clothing. A good example comes from the hoard of Lilla Våststäde on Gotland, in which a miliareion of Basil II was provided with a loop. On this coin, the picture of the cross is nearly erased while the letters of the reverse are perfectly legible. A few counterexamples are known, without changing the general picture.

These observations are essential for understanding the use of Byzantine coin-pendants, but they do not solve the problem. How do we interpret the hidden side of the coin? Although it could indicate indifference or disdain for the picture of the cross, other interpretations are possible, with completely contradictory implications. Hiding the cross could be a way of wearing the religious symbol against the chest, in very close contact, to improve its protective qualities.\textsuperscript{39} It could be a way of keeping the Christian

\textsuperscript{38} It is worth noting that the rotation of gold coins is always centred on one of the figures, which may indicate greater care in the transformation.

\textsuperscript{39} Morrisson 2014.
faith secret, in a period when the new religion was still in a weak position.\textsuperscript{40} The same type of ambivalence occurs in interpretations of the rotation of the coin. If wearing a cross upside down could suggest that the symbol was treated with indifference or was misunderstood, it could also be a way to rotate the picture so as to appear the correct way up to the wearer.\textsuperscript{41}

The rotation of the coin seems to be essentially an individual matter. Several patterns are visible, but they cannot be generalised. Rotation depended on many factors, like the degree of familiarity with the designs and the intentions of the owner. Consequently, this feature cannot provide definitive answers about the function of the coin, as is shown by the miliareion of Nikephoros II from the churchyard of Stånga on Gotland. Riveted at right angles to the axis of the cross, the loop occupies an incoherent position. Had the coin not been found in a Christian cemetery, it would have been concluded that its owner did not care about the Christian symbol. This example demonstrates the importance of context for understanding the use of Byzantine coins.

THE USE OF BYZANTINE COINS IN CONTEXT

Byzantine coins from Scandinavia have mostly been discovered in hoards, where they are mixed with other coins and valuables. A typical hoard of this type is the hoard of Baldringe, Scania.\textsuperscript{42} Deposited around 1000 in a bronze vessel, it contained two miliareia, 313 coins of various origins, an armlet, two beads and 142 pieces of hack-silver. The total weight of the find was 712.85 g, divided between miliareia weighing 2.26 g, other coins weighing 159.84 g and other objects weighing 555.75 g.

Generally speaking, there is nothing to indicate that Byzantine coins were ascribed a specific value in this context, even when they were originally worn as ornaments. On the contrary, coin-pendants were usually assimilated into the mass of monetary objects. In order to do so, loops were often detached from the coins before deposition, so as to remove a piece of base metal or mark the loss of the symbolic function.\textsuperscript{43} The removal of the loop is sometimes visible by looking directly at the coin: in a hoard from Birka, a coin of Constantine VII includes the negative image of the former means of suspension. This is mainly noticeable when comparing the proportion of loops in

\textsuperscript{40} The idea is that some Christians had to remain private Christians. For a short discussion of this phenomenon, see Gräslund 1987, 82.

\textsuperscript{41} As an example, the Wilton cross from the British Museum may be mentioned. This Christian pendant, in the shape of an equal-armed cross, displays the reverse of a solidus of Heraclius, which was mounted upside down.

\textsuperscript{42} Malmer 1985, 11.

\textsuperscript{43} Although Tuukka Talvio (1978) only mentions the first explanation, detaching the loop is also a means of identifying the change of status of the object, its recontextualisation.
different find contexts. When coin-pendants are found in graves or individually, the proportion of loops is very high, ranging between 60% and 70%; when they are found in hoards, the proportion of loops is very low, around 20%. These observations seem to suggest that Byzantine coins were, in most cases, considered as bullion when they were deposited in hoards, regardless of the symbolic role they had formerly played.

Exceptions to this rule occur occasionally, with Byzantine coins found in hoards with a strong ornamental dimension. First of all, coin-pendants may still be physically attached to their original sets. Seven Byzantine coins are recorded in this context: three from Finland, two from Gotland and two from mainland Sweden. In Finland, the sets consist of a type of necklace made of braided silverware with small rings as joints. They include a selection of looped coins combined with several other pendants. Such necklaces were probably produced in Finland (Fig. 6.6), as shown by their concentration in the provinces of Tavastia and Finland proper. In mainland Sweden and Gotland, the sets consist of silver chains formed by a series of double-looped coins and intermediate rings (see below, Fig. 6.7). It is difficult to imagine how they were

FIGURE 6.6: Finnish-type necklace found in Paunküla, Estonia (after Jonsson 2009)
worn, but the hypothesis of a necklace is unlikely, given that one of the sets ends with a single-looped coin. Of unknown origin, the chains may have been produced in the south of Sweden, where most of the specimens have been discovered. It is interesting to note that both types of sets show a marked monetary character: coins are the main component of the pieces of jewellery, as well as the main component of the finds. In such circumstances, it may be assumed that the symbolic aspect was only secondary, an idea corroborated by the presence of fragmentary chains and necklaces.

Secondly, Byzantine coins may appear in hoards comprising ‘fixed sets’ of jewellery, comparable to grave goods or tool sets. They are characterised by recurrent inventories, consisting of certain types of brooches, rings, pendants, beads and coins.47 Despite some degree of variation from hoard to hoard, it is possible to identify objects that stand out. According to Christoph Kilger, complementary brooches are one of them, perhaps even the most central element.48 Three Byzantine coins are recorded in this context: two from Norway and one from mainland Sweden.49 The two coins from Norway originate from the same find, the famous Hoen hoard. This hoard, found in

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47 Myrberg 2009a, 161.
49 Three imitations of Byzantine coins could be added to the list, but it would be beyond the scope of the present study to include them. It is worth noting, though, that imitations of Byzantine
How were Byzantine coins used?

1834 in Buskerud, was buried in the second half of the ninth century. It contained 207 items, of which fifty-four are gold or silver-gilt objects, twenty are gold or silver-gilt coins and 132 are glass or semi-precious beads. Apart from a brooch and several rings, all the items of the hoard were fitted for suspension, with beads and pendants initially forming a single necklace. The two nomismata were thus combined with a wide range of ornaments, most of them made outside Scandinavia. The presence of a coiled snake, the transformation of imported objects and the selection of various beads are particularly significant, for they have a parallel with grave 632 in Birka, where a Byzantine coin was also adapted as pendant.

In Sweden, the Byzantine coin from a ’fixed set’ hoard was deposited in the hoard of Valbo. This hoard, found in 1836 in Gästrikland, was buried in the last decades of the eleventh century. It contained fifty-one items, of which eighteen are Scandinavian and imported ornaments, twenty are filigree beads and thirteen are silver coins. Among the ornaments, pendants are not the dominant element: rings, brooches and chains form the majority of the material. Unlike the Hoen hoard, most of the objects of the Valbo hoard were produced to serve as ornaments, the notable exception being the coins, which were all transformed into pendants by the addition of a loop. The composition of the hoard resembles that of a Christian grave, as reflected by the deposition of a crucifix and a reliquary pendant. Nanouschka Myrberg Burström has argued that the ’fixed set’ hoards, including those of Hoen and Valbo, may be interpreted as graves without bodies. Although this interpretation is still hypothetical, it is crucial to acknowledge the importance of the relationship between Byzantine coins and Viking funerary practices. Outside the context of hoards, the discovery of Byzantine coins was also associated with dead bodies.

Byzantine coins have been found in sixteen graves from Viking-Age Scandinavia: six from mainland Sweden, five from Finland, four from Gotland and one from Denmark. Most of the specimens were holed or looped so as to be worn as ornaments, and only two coins without means of suspension break this rule. At Staby, in Uppland, a Byzantine copper coin was discovered in a funerary urn, together with ashes, bones and charcoal. At Sunnersta, in Uppland, a fragment of a miliaresion of Constantine VII was discovered in a cremation grave, together with a pair of spikes, a comb, charcoal coins rarely played a symbolic role outside Finland, with the exception of these three finds: Harndrup Skov in Denmark, Badeboda in mainland Sweden and Hajslunds on Gotland.

51 Duczko 1987.
52 Myrberg 2009b, 139–40.
53 BCFS; Hilberg 2006; Talvio 2002.
54 BCFS, 69.
and burnt bones. Although the find circumstances are unclear for these two finds, they show that Byzantine coins could play a symbolic role even beyond their use as pendants.

The fact that Byzantine coins mainly appear in graves in the form of ornaments is unexpected in the Viking world. It does not conform to the normal structure of the monetary material, which is dominated by coins without means of suspension. On Gotland, for instance, of the 220 coins recorded in funerary contexts, only thirty-one specimens were transformed into pendants. The same is true for most of Scandinavia, where the deposition of coin-pendants with the dead is a rare phenomenon. Based on a preliminary list compiled by the author for his doctoral dissertation, it is possible to identify about 230 coin-pendants in Scandinavian graves, Finland excluded. This is a limited number in comparison with the total number of holed or looped coins found in the north, estimated to be more than 10,000. Finland is the only region showing a very different pattern, with a large proportion of the holed and looped coins being deposited in graves. This difference is best illustrated by the structure of the Byzantine material: in Finland, more than 20% of the miliaresia have been discovered in funerary contexts, but they constituted less than 2% in the rest of Scandinavia.

In addition to many ritual variations, the Finnish practice also differs in one fundamental respect: the sex of the owner of the Byzantine coin-pendant. In Sweden, none of the documented graves seems to have belonged to a male. Five of them are associated with females and three of the bodies are of unknown sex. Although the sample is too small to allow firm conclusions to be drawn, the hypothesis is supported by analysis of other graves with coin-pendants. Without exception, all of them contain feminine attributes, as in the case of Birka. In Finland, on the other hand, graves with Byzantine coin-pendants seem to belong to both sexes. Of the four burials available for study, three are associated with females and one with a male. However, the two Finnish practices are not identical, with strings of beads with several coins reserved for females.

Outside Finland, where most of the miliaresia were buried in the eleventh century, it is possible to distinguish between different chronological phases among the graves with Byzantine coin-pendants. Apart from a gap at the beginning of the period, the finds cover the entire Viking Age, from the late ninth century to the late twelfth century. The oldest graves with Byzantine coin-pendants were excavated in Birka. Bj. 632, which contained a miliareson of Theophilos, can be dated to the late ninth cen-

55 Ibid., 65.
56 For a list of the coins recovered in a funerary context on Gotland, see WG, vol. 4.
57 Audy 2012, 416.
58 Talvio 2002, 71.
How were Byzantine coins used?

Bj. 557, which contained a miliareion of Michael III, can be dated to the early tenth century. Both graves consist of chambers, with a female buried in each. Next to the females were deposited various artefacts, including vessels, brooches and pendants. Grave Bj. 632 is especially interesting with regard to the present subject, since a complete necklace was found close to the body (Fig. 6.8). The Byzantine coin, both pierced

60 Ambrosiani 2006, 46.
and looped, is associated with a series of beads and pendants, most of them imported from abroad. They originate from England, Khazaria, Byzantium and the Carolingian empire, thus representing a microcosm of the Viking sphere of contacts. Although their origin is significant, the symbolic value of the pendants derives from their meaning, too. Some of them, like the snake, have been interpreted as amulets. Others, like the miniature chair, have been interpreted as symbols of prestige.

The grave from Styrnäs, Ångermanland, which contained two folles of Theophilos, can also be dated to the tenth century. The two oval brooches of type P51C suggest that the grave dates to after 950. In this chamber the remains of a female and a horse were excavated, as well as various artefacts, such as a knife, two oval brooches and an equal-armed brooch. The two Byzantine coins were worn in combination with beads and pendants, including a cowry shell with loop. According to Audrey L. Meaney, shells were used for amuletic purposes, in particular for fertility and preservation against the ‘evil eye’, which may indicate a similar function for the two coin-pendants. It is worth noting that the folles were not decorated with a cross, but with a portrait of the emperor. The grave from Styrnäs is very similar to the two graves from Birka, with a pronounced pagan and aristocratic character. The main difference is the presence of a horse.

Around the year 1000, a Byzantine coin was placed in grave 341 in Såntorp, Västergötland. The aristocratic nature of the burial is strong, with a few gold artefacts, but the body was buried in a simple inhumation with dress accessories, not in a chamber with grave goods. According to Inga Lundström and Claes Theliander, who published extensively on the results of the excavations in Såntorp, grave 341 belonged to the Christian part of the cemetery, which was situated apart from the pre-Christian area. This Christian dimension is enhanced by the features of the miliareion: it was worn alone, without being associated with other pendants, while the cross was displayed the right way up. This coin-pendant may be considered a pious medallion used by a Christian, in spite of the absence of a church.

With the development of Christianity in Scandinavia, the context in which Byzantine coin-pendants were deposited changed in many respects. This evolution, already visible in Såntorp, is even clearer in the churchyard at Stånga, Gotland, from

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61 See e.g. Koktvedgaard Zeiten 1997, 13.
62 See e.g. Arrhenius 1961, 156.
63 Jansson 1985; Selinge 1977, 293–96.
64 Meaney 1981, 127.
65 The excavation of the cemetery is published by Lundström & Theliander 2004.
66 Ibid., 93.
the late eleventh century. In 1902, several graves were discovered in connection with the church during the installation of a lightning rod. A wide range of artefacts were unearthed, including brooches, pendants, beads and a looped miliaresion of Nikephoros II. Although it is impossible to piece together all the inconsistent information on the find, there is one fact of great importance for the interpretation of the Byzantine coin: it was found in a churchyard, not in a pre-Christian cemetery. Without any doubt, the context is now Christian, even though a lot of artefacts worn in combination with the miliaresion still belong to the traditional Gotlandic dress.

The last step of this evolution toward a Christian context is illustrated in the churchyard of Silte, established around 1200. About forty graves were excavated in the 1970s, mostly located along the western wall of the church. None of them was provided with grave goods, except for grave 3, which contained a miliaresion of Basil II with a loop. This coin-pendant was discovered under the chin of the skeleton, thus suggesting that it functioned as a pious medallion: in this Christian context, the Byzantine coin was used to show the faith of its wearer, especially since it is the only object accompanying the deceased in the grave. It is worth noting that the cross was worn upside-down, supporting the hypothesis of a special meaning for this position.

In recent decades, several finds of Byzantine coins have been made in a new context, altering dramatically the general picture of the material. Excavations in trading centres, although limited in scale, have yielded a significant number of folles. Once the few older finds are added, it turns out that the majority of Byzantine copper coins in Scandinavia are concentrated in trading centres: seventeen specimens, of which twelve come from Birka, three from Hedeby and two from Kaupang. Although the precise context is generally difficult to define in these settlement areas, it appears that the folles found in trading centres were assigned a specific function. As emphasised by Mark Blackburn in the case of Kaupang, they are unlikely to have played any monetary role, the value of small copper coins being very low. It has been suggested that they served as raw material for working in copper alloy, but this hypothesis is not supported by the evidence. In Birka, the two folles of Theophilos were more than 100 years old when they ended up in the garrison fort, while the follis of Basil I was more than fifty years old when it ended up in the Black Earth. How would it be possible for coins meant to be melted down to have circulated for such a long time in the north? Alternatively,

69 The Byzantine origin of four of the twelve coins is uncertain.
70 Blackburn 2008, 62.
71 Hedenstierna-Jonson 2006, 84.
72 Blackburn 2008, 60.
it has been suggested that copper coins could serve as weights, based on Anglo-Saxon parallels.⁷³ Although this interpretation is quite convincing, the transformation of two folles in Styrnäs and the specific deposition of the Byzantine copper coins in Birka’s garrison fort point to a more symbolic function, difficult to determine without further detail about the precise contexts.

Birka’s garrison fort has been the object of extensive excavations for the past fifteen years. These excavations have revealed a fortified complex, including stone-set terraces, a wooden rampart and a great building with the character of a hall.⁷⁴ Three Byzantine coins are known from the complex. Two of them are made of copper, while the third one is of unknown metal.⁷⁵ The three coins are associated with three different contexts, all of them very well documented.⁷⁶ One copper coin was found in the hall, at the likely location of the ‘high seat’. One copper coin was found under the palisade, in a layer of burnt remains. The last coin was found on the lower terrace, in a stone structure identified as a well or a posthole.⁷⁷ Two characteristics of the garrison are interesting to note: firstly, no other copper coins have been discovered in the area; secondly, weights are virtually absent from the fortified complex. Therefore, the material from the garrison contrasts with the material from the Black Earth, where the number of weights is high and non-Byzantine copper coins appear occasionally. In the garrison fort, the commercial character discerned in the Black Earth is not observable, or at least not in the same way. In all likelihood, the Byzantine coins found in the fortified complex were used neither as weights, nor as currency, nor as scrap metal. They were rather used as symbolic objects, even deposited as offerings in the cases of the palisade and the well/posthole.

THE SYMBOLIC NATURE OF BYZANTINE COINS IN SCANDINAVIA
A thorough study of Byzantine coins found in Viking-Age Scandinavia shows that this specific group differed from the other groups of coins encountered in the same area. Differences appear in terms of: composition, with an appreciable portion of non-silver specimens among the Byzantine coins; use, with a high number of miliareas worn as

⁷³ Ibid., 62.
⁷⁵ This third coin is mentioned, without further information, in an unpublished report by Holger Arbman. It cannot be traced in Swedish collections. See BCFS, 62.
⁷⁷ The stone structure was interpreted as a well by Holger Arbman (BIG), who excavated in the garrison in 1934. Lena Holmquist Olausson, who has excavated in the garrison during the past decade, thinks that this hypothesis is not plausible, given the location of the structure. She argues that it was a posthole: Holmquist Olausson, personal communication.
ornaments and a high number of non-silver coins functioning outside the monetary sphere; and context, with a slight over-representation of Byzantine coins outside of the typical hoards from the Viking Age.

Of course, a significant proportion of Byzantine coins were part of the currency in circulation in the Viking world. They were cut into pieces, tested and deposited in silver hoards. However, the symbolic dimension of this coinage is surprisingly well developed. Apart from Gotland, where they were mostly used as a means of exchange just like other silver coins, it is evident that Byzantine coins were ascribed a specific meaning. If Finland, mainland Sweden and Norway are taken together, the picture is crystal-clear: non-silver coins represent more than 30% of the material, while almost 60% of the miliareia are holed or looped.

One may suggest various explanations for the high status of Byzantine coins in Scandinavia. The high quality of the coinage compared to English and German coins, already imported during the last decades of the tenth century, is a possible factor in their attractiveness. Byzantine coins are characterised by their heavy weight and large size,

Two other coinages seem to have had a similar status in the north: Carolingian and early Scandinavian. See Audy 2012.
a sufficient reason to single them out. The distinctive style of the coins may also be a factor, especially when the purpose was to transform them into pendants. Byzantine coins were ornamented with large crosses and majestic busts, patterns that were greatly appreciated by the Vikings, as shown by the regular rotation of the coins used as ornaments.

If it is true that the physical and aesthetic quality of Byzantine coins influenced their distinctive usage and ascribed meaning, I would argue that this consideration was only secondary. A clear Byzantine origin, on the other hand, seems to have been a key factor in the function of the coin. This is indicated by a particular feature of the material: genuine Byzantine coins and imitations of Byzantine coins were not used in the same way. Except for Finland, where almost 90% of imitations included a hole or a loop, imitations of miliareia were not especially valued in Scandinavia. Rarely worn as ornaments, they were preferred as a means of exchange, as shown by their deposition in silver hoards and the high number of pecks on their surfaces. The only exceptions occur in the late Viking Age, from which time imitations of miliareia are found in Christian contexts. This is the case in the hoard of Harndrup Skov, in which an imitation of a miliareion of Basil II was combined with two pendants decorated with an orant. This is also the case in the hoard of Badeboda, in which an imitation of a miliareion of Basil II was combined with brooches, pendants and a crown.

The fact that a Byzantine origin was so meaningful may have been the result of direct contacts with the Byzantine empire. It is easy to imagine a journey to the Black Sea, during which Byzantine coins were obtained in exchange for goods or services. Brought back to Scandinavia, these coins would remind their owner of specific persons, times or places. They would embody the experience of the traveller in the Byzantine empire, where a whole new world had been discovered. The idea of direct contacts is reinforced by the presence of folles in several trading centres of the north. While silver and gold coins imply the circulation of commodities, copper coins imply the circulation of persons, their low value being of no use in long-distance trade.

Acknowledging the existence of direct contacts between the two worlds has interesting consequences for the understanding of Byzantine coins in Scandinavia. It sheds

79 Talvio 2002, 71.
80 The proportion of transformation is very low outside Finland, less than 10%. Moreover, two of the five looped imitations found in Sweden and Denmark are of Finnish origin, which implies that transformation may have taken place in that area.
81 von Heijne 2004, 343–44. The orant is a figure at prayer, usually with arms raised.
82 BCFS, 61.
83 This theory, proposed by Louis Robert in 1966, remains the basis for many numismatic interpretations. For example, it adds credibility to the hypothesis of Jonathan Shepard (1995), according to which the folles of Theophilos found in the north have a diplomatic explanation.
new light on the geographical and chronological distribution of the finds, since they are related to activities in which both parties were engaged. The presence of two folles in Ångermanland might, for instance, reflect the Byzantine demand for furs, as has been suggested in papers dealing with earlier periods. It also sheds new light on the practice of using coin-pendants, since a similar practice is attested in the Byzantine world. In Constantinople, gold and silver coins were worn for apotropaic purposes, their designs being associated with the cult of the Cross. A letter from the Byzantine writer Michael Italikos explains how a konstantinaton, a gold coin turned into pendant, can protect its bearer from evil. Without implying that the Scandinavian practice was borrowed from Byzantium, it would be interesting to consider how encounters with Greeks wearing coin-pendants may have influenced Scandinavian travellers.

Our analysis of how Byzantine coins were used does not provide much information on the nature of the contacts between Scandinavia and the empire. Nor does it provide much information about the intensity of the contacts. However, analysing the use of Byzantine coins makes it possible better to understand the meaning of these contacts for the Vikings. From the monetary evidence, it can be concluded that relations with Byzantium were highly significant: in the north, Byzantine coins were popular and treated with great respect. Thus, the prestige attached to Byzantium was expressed not only in written sources, for instance runestones and sagas, but also in Byzantine material culture through its reinterpretation.

84 See e.g. Zachrisson 2010.
85 See e.g. Bendall & Morrissorn 2012.
86 In Scandinavia, late Roman and early Byzantine coins were already worn as ornaments during the Migration Period, a tradition with long-lasting effects, especially through the production of bracteates.
Arthenius, B. 1961. “Vikingatida miniatyrer” Tor 7, 139–64.
—. 2012. “Pour une étude méthodique des pendentifs monétaires: le cas des sépultures de Birka (Suède)” RN 169, 403–25.


When a road was repaired in 1940 in the central part of the island of Gotland, near a farmstead called Timans in Roma parish, a remarkable runic inscription was discovered (G 216). It is incised on a whetstone of grey sandstone, which measures about 10 cm in length. The inscription is arranged in three horizontal lines and consists of two personal names, probably Ormika and Ulfhvatr, followed by four geographical names: Grikkia, Iōrsali, Island and Serkland. Why the carver should have chosen to cut these four names on the whetstone is unclear, but possibly they represented the most remote places that he knew of. They can be translated as Greece (Byzantium), Jerusalem, Iceland and “the land of the Saracens”, roughly the Muslim countries in the Middle East and north Africa.

We know that many Scandinavians visited these places in the Viking Age and, to judge from the Scandinavian runic inscriptions, Byzantium was the most popular destination of the four. It is mentioned in about thirty of these inscriptions covering a time span of more than a hundred years. It is hardly a coincidence that all these stones are situated in eastern Scandinavia, or more accurately in Sweden. There are also about twenty-five runestones commemorating men who followed their famous chieftain Ingvar the Far-Travelled to Serkland, although the final destination is only mentioned on four or five of the stones. Since all these inscriptions refer to one particular occasion, I have chosen not to include them in this survey.

When the Viking-Age rune carvers referred to Byzantium they normally used an ethnic designation in the plural: Grikkia, literally meaning “Greeks”. In the runic inscriptions this word commonly occurs in the dative case (Grikkium) preceded by the preposition i (in), for example: Æir dō i Grikkium (“they died in Greece”) (U 73). But sometimes the preposition til (to) is adopted: Æir vāru út til Grikkia (“they went out to the Greeks”) (U 104). Only in a few inscriptions do we find the compound Grikk-
MAP 7.1: Distribution of runestones referring to Byzantium
land, meaning “the land of the Greeks” (U 112, U 374, U 540). There are also some instances of the by-name or personal designation Grikkfari; these must be construed as a contraction of the longer *Grikklandsfari (“Greece-traveller”) (U 270, U 956).

A recurring word in the biographical phrases on these runestones is the adverb ût (out). It is recorded in no fewer than seven of the inscriptions in my material and it is obviously a way of identifying Byzantium as a very distant place. In some inscriptions, the adverb ût also occurs in connection with Iōrsala (“Jerusalem”) (U 605) and possibly Langbardaland (“Italy”), but never or very seldom to describe places such as England.

WHO TRAVELLED TO BYZANTIUM?

The runic inscriptions mentioning Byzantium are chiefly found in central Sweden in the provinces around Lake Mälaren, Uppland and Södermanland, together with a handful in the southern part of the country (Map 7.1). It is, however, difficult to draw any conclusions from this distribution pattern since the Viking-Age custom of erecting runestones reached its peak in central Sweden, and about two-thirds of all known runestones from this period are found in this area.

The inscriptions of the runestones from this period are generally very short. In most cases we are only told that someone set up the stone in memory of someone else and how they were related to each other (the ‘memorial formula’), although occasionally there is some additional information. The runestone from Angarn church in Uppland offers a typical example (U 201) (see below, Fig. 7.1). The inscription reads as follows:

þiagn ok Gautdjarfr(?) ok Sunnhvatr(?) ok Þorulfr þæi rēisa stæin þenna æfti Tōka, faður sinn. Hann fors ut ī Grikkium. Guð hialpi and hans, and ok sālu.

Þegn and Gautdjarfr(?) and Sunnhvatr(?) and Þórulfr they had this stone set up in memory of Tóki, their father. He died abroad in Greece. God help his spirit, spirit and soul.

Besides the memorial formula, which dominates the inscription, this text includes a single sentence about how the person commemorated lost his life and a prayer for his soul. In some inscriptions there might also be a note on the rune carver at the end of the text (e.g. “Fōtr cut the runes” (Fōtr rīsti rūna)), but generally this is all.

The family relationships expressed in the inscriptions make it possible to estimate the age of the people who went abroad, and it seems that Byzantium attracted both younger men and those who must have reached middle age. Due to the fragmentary state of many runestones it is only possible to determine the relationships in sixteen cases: nine of these stones commemorate fathers or the like, while seven were set up

by parents in memory of their sons. In one case a father and a son seem to have made a joint journey (U 104). Apart from the family relationships, the inscriptions seldom tell us anything about the social background of the travellers to Byzantium, although there are a few examples. Of the person commemorated on the Harstad stone in Östergötland (Ög 94) it is said that “he was a good bóndi” (Hann var bóndi gōðr). Here the designation bóndi shows that he was not only a free man, but also a farm owner and the head of the household. More puzzling is the phrase þrōttar þegn, which is used about the deceased Baulfr on the Nälberga stone in Södermanland (Sö 170). Literally it means “a man of strength”, but since the expression is only recorded on a couple of runestones in the same province it is difficult to determine the precise meaning. Another interesting term is found on the Fjuckby stone in Uppland (U 1016). The

\[4\] See Bianchi 2010, 159 with references.
stone was set up by a man who calls himself “Ljótr the steersman” (Liūtr stȳrimaðr) in memory of his two sons. Of one of them, called Áki, it is said that he “steered the ship” (stȳrði knærri) to the Greeks, which shows that the son inherited the profession from his father (see Fig. 8.19, 212 below).

Only a few of the men commemorated in the inscriptions seem to have returned home from their voyages to Byzantium. These inscriptions are of special interest, since they often comprise a short description of the travellers’ activities abroad. The best examples are probably two carvings cut onto a great boulder in the woods at Ed in East Uppland (see Fig. 8.18a, 211 below). Both carvings were commissioned by the same man, Ragnvald. In the first one he commemorates his mother Fastvé, who “died in Ed”, while in the second he talks about himself: “Ragnvald let the runes be cut. He was in Greece, he was the leader of the host”. Ragnvald calls himself a liðs forungi, which in this case probably means that he was in command of a troop belonging to the bodyguard of the Byzantine emperor in Constantinople. Exactly the same phrase occurs on another runestone in the Mälar region, namely the stone at Turinge church in Södermanland (Sö 338). This commemorates a man who “fell in war east in Garðar [i.e. Rus]” as liðs forungi.

A further example of someone who must have returned from Byzantium is found on a runestone at Ullunda in west Uppland (U 792). The stone was set up by a son to commemorate his deceased father, who was probably called Myrsi (written in the accusative, mursa), a nickname formed from the Old Swedish word for an ant (myr [female]). In a short verse which ends the inscription we are given the following information about the deceased:

\begin{verbatim}
Fōr hæfila
fēar aflaði
ūt ī Grikkium
arfa sinum
\end{verbatim}

He went boldly,
wealth he won,
out in Greece
for his heir.\(^6\)

To describe the activities of the father, the rune carver chose the expression afla fēar. In Old Norse there is a similar phrase, afla sér fjár ok frama (“to earn wealth and fame”). One may note that the verb afla occurs in a similar context in an inscription on the bedrock at the farmstead of Veda at Angarn in East Uppland (U 209). The inscrip-

\(^5\) Larsson 2001, 85 n. 7.
\(^6\) Translation by Peter Foote in Jansson 1987, 44.
tion states that a man named Thorsteinn (Þórsteinn) kópti þennsa bý ok aflaði austr í Gardum (“bought this farm, and earned [wealth] east in Garðaríki”). From this we learn that money made in Rus was used to purchase a farm in the homeland. In none of these inscriptions are we told exactly how the men in question earned their wealth, and they might have done so as traders rather than exclusively as mercenary soldiers.

An example of the latter is probably found on a runestone at Grinda in Södermanland (Sö 165), where we read the following about the deceased, Hedin:

\[
\text{Vak hann í Grikkium,}\\
gulli skifti.
\]

He was in Greece, 
took his share of gold.

In this case the phrase “took his share of gold” (gulli skifti) obviously alludes to war booty. This is shown by another runestone at the same location (Sö 166). It commemorates a man who “was west in England” (var vestr á Ænglandi), where he “took his share of [the Dane-] geld” (gialdi skifti). The runestones at Grinda were probably cut by the same rune carver and set up at the same time.

Interestingly, the expression gulli skifti is also found on a second runestone in the province. This stone (Sö 163) is situated at the now abandoned farmstead of Rycksta, in Råby-Rönö parish, about ten kilometres south-east of Grinda, and was commissioned
by a father in memory of his two sons (Fig. 7.2 and 7.3). For some reason, only one of the sons is mentioned by name: “Oleifr went to Greece, took his share of gold”. The Rycksta stone was obviously inspired by the two runestones at Grinda. The rune carver not only copied the expression *gulli skifti* from the stone that makes mention of Byzantium, but also imitated the distinctive type of cross used on the second stone. This shows that the Rycksta stone must be of a later date than the two Grinda stones, a fact which is supported by other features in the inscription. It looks as if the runestones at Grinda may have acted as a sort of advertisement, and that they encouraged young men in the vicinity to attempt the same kind of feats as are described on them.

Other runestones have messages that make more demands on the reader. On the Nålberga stone in Södermanland (Sö 170), which was set up by two brothers in memory of their father Báulfir, the section which mentions his voyage to Byzantium is written entirely in secret runes. This system is known from other runestones in the vicinity and the text is not so complicated as to be impossible to figure out: “he came to the Greeks,

7 *För Ôleifê i Grikkiem, gulli skifti.*
died in...” (Hann med Grikká varð, dó á...). The final runes (pumpa or pumpi) have not yet been explained satisfactorily, but the text does not seem to contain any secrets worth hiding. Probably the use of secret runes in this context was first and foremost a way of displaying status.

SOME CHRONOLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

In 1990 the Swedish archaeologist Mats G. Larsson published his dissertation *Runste- nar och utlandsfärder*, concerning runestones and voyages abroad in the Viking Age. In his study he commented at some length on the inscriptions mentioning journeys to Byzantium. Larsson identified an older and a more recent group of runestones in his material and he also made an attempt to link these groups to events in Byzantine history in which Varangians are said to have been involved. As one might expect, Larsson was aware of the difficulties of this procedure, but he pointed to two different periods in the eleventh century which he thought could match the two groups of runestones. One stretches from the beginning of the 1020s to the middle of the 1040s, and the other from the middle of the 1060s to the beginning of the 1080s.

Thanks to the work on the ornamentation of runestones undertaken by the ar-
gy of runestones in the late Viking Age (Fig. 7.4).\textsuperscript{11} Gräslund divides the material into different groups based primarily on the design of the rune animal’s head; she has also suggested absolute dates for these groups, based on more accurately dated archaeological material. Although there are probably overlaps between the style groups and in some cases also variations at the local level,\textsuperscript{12} it is possible to use Gräslund’s methods to identify changes in the runic material over time (see below, Tab. 7.1 and 7.2).

If the material is considered as a whole, it looks as if most of the runestones commemorating travellers to Byzantium belong to the first half of the eleventh century, with a clear emphasis on the decades just before the middle of the century. About 70% of the runestones in question belong to the period before c. 1050. This distribution is,

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<th>Unornamented</th>
<th>Pr 1</th>
<th>Pr 2 + Fp + KB</th>
<th>Pr 3</th>
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<th>Pr 5</th>
<th>Undefined</th>
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<tr>
<td>South of Lake Mälaren</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North of Lake Mälaren</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Table 7.1: Chronological distribution of all Swedish runestones commemorating travellers to Byzantium following Gräslund’s typology (see Fig. 7.4 opposite)

\textsuperscript{11} E.g. Gräslund 2006.
\textsuperscript{12} See Källström 2007, 64–75.
however, dependent on the custom of putting up runestones, which ceased earlier in the provinces south of Lake Mälaren than it did in Uppland. If we confine ourselves to the runic inscriptions in the province of Uppland the picture changes a little, but there still seems to be something distinctive about the period just before c. 1050. It is therefore worthwhile making a more detailed investigation of this material.

In Uppland the custom of erecting runestones did not start to flourish until after 1000. Of the runestones mentioning Byzantium, there are three which can be dated to the first two decades of the eleventh century (U 201, U 358, U 518). It is worth noting that one of these inscriptions says of the deceased that “he died also among the Greeks” (Sār ændæðis ok með Grikkium), which shows that there may once have been an additional stone—now lost—at the same site, commemorating another traveller to Byzantium.

Since two of the runestones (U 201 at Angarn and U 358 at Skepptuna) were used to build church walls, we know nothing of their original context, but they were probably connected to settlements adjacent to the site of the later church building. Only runestone U 518 at Västra Ledinge in Skederid parish is still in the position where it was first erected. The stone stands in a large burial ground with about eighty graves still visible, half of them burial mounds and the other half consisting of circular stone

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<th>Unornamented</th>
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<th>Pr 5</th>
<th>Undefined</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Uppland</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7.2: Chronological distribution of the runestones in Uppland commemorating travellers to Byzantium following Gräslund’s typology (see Fig. 7.4 above)
settings. This combination of grave forms is typical for the late Iron Age, and in 1991–1992 the remains of a settlement were excavated close to this burial ground. The results from the excavation show that the settlement was established around the beginning of the first millennium AD and that it still existed in the eleventh century when the runestone was raised.13

From the distribution pattern of these inscriptions one may infer that the earliest travellers to Byzantium from this area came from the south-eastern part of the province (Map 7.2). It is also worth noting that all three of the runestones in question are connected to settlements, which at the time were probably linked to the Baltic Sea directly through deep inlets from the east.

MAP 7.2: Distribution of the earliest group of runestones in Uppland referring to Byzantium (first two decades of the eleventh century)

In the next chronological group, probably covering the period between c. 1020 and c. 1050, the travellers bound for Byzantium were from the same area, but there are also a few individual runestones to be found in the western and central parts of the province (Map 7.3). These inscriptions are from roughly the time when the most renowned of the Scandinavian visitors to Byzantium was active along ‘the East Way’, namely Harald Hardrada, the half-brother of the Norwegian king (and later saint) Olaf Haraldsson. Harald was wounded in the battle of Stiklestad in Norway in 1030, where his brother fell, and he subsequently fled to Sweden. The following spring he travelled east to Rus (Garðaríki) and a couple of years later he went on to Constantinople, where he became one of the emperor’s men. Harald’s stay in Byzantium lasted about ten years.14

14 VB, 54–102.
FIGURE 7.5: Runestone from Åshusby, Norrsunda parish (U 431), cut by the famous rune carver Åsmund Kåresson; the inscription commemorates a man named Gunnarr, who died "among the Greeks"
It is not unlikely that some of the stones from this period were set up in memory of Swedes who followed Harald to Greece, and one may note that several were cut by the same carver, a man called Åsmund Kåresson. Åsmund was a very productive rune carver and produced more than eighty runestones, covering large parts of the provinces of Uppland and Gästrikland. Some researchers have even tried to identify him with the missionary bishop Osmund mentioned by Adam of Bremen, but this assumption is unlikely for several reasons.\(^\text{15}\)

As an example of a carving by Åsmund we can cite U 431 (see above, Fig. 7.5). The stone was originally discovered at Åshusby in Norrsunda parish, but it is now kept in the porch of Norrsunda’s church. According to the inscription, the stone was set up by Töfa and Hemingr in memory of their son Gunnarr, who had died “among the Greeks”. Åshusby was probably a very important place in the Viking Age. The place name Åshusby contains the word husby, which is a designation for a royal manor. The settlement is not very far from the town of Sigtuna, which was founded in the 980s, probably by the Swedish king. The ornamentation of the Åshusby stone is quite simple and indicates that it was one of Åsmund’s earliest carvings, probably cut in the period 1030–1050. If we search the runic material for a Swede who might have accompanied Harald Hardrada to Constantinople, I believe that Gunnarr from Norrsunda is a very strong candidate.

Not all travellers to Byzantium had Constantinople as their final destination. Some intended to travel even farther. On a pair of runestones at a place called Broby in Täby parish (U 135, U 136) outside Stockholm, we read about Eysteinn, of whom it is said that he “went to Jerusalem and ended his days up in Greece” (sōtti Iōrsaliīr ok ēndadis upp ī Grikeium). The verb sökia means ‘to seek’, but also, among other things, ‘to visit, come to’. The formulation of the inscription gives the impression that Eysteinn reached his goal and visited Jerusalem, but that he lost his life on the way back to his home country.

The last group comprises runestones that belong to the second half of the eleventh century and the beginning of the twelfth (Map 7.4). In this case it looks almost as if the stones form a line stretching from Uppsala in the central part of the region all the way down to Lake Mälaren in the south. In this group, too, we find some runestones produced by the rune carver Åsmund Kåresson. The most interesting of all is probably U 540 from the church of Husby-Sjuhundra (formerly Husby-Lyhundra) in the eastern part of Uppland, since it seems to refer to a very specific social setting. The stone was being used as a tile in the church floor when it was first spotted in the early seventeenth century. The inscription reads as follows:

\(^{15}\) Thompson 1975, 161–67.
Æiríkr ok Hákon ok Ingvarr ok Ragnhildr þau... Hann varð dauðr á Grikklandi. Guð hialpi hans sálu ok Guðs móðir.

Eiríkr and Hákon and Ingvarr and Ragnhildr they... He died in Greece. God and God’s mother help his soul.

The name of the deceased on the Husby-Sjuhundra stone is lost. But since the same family is known from another runestone in Rimbo church (U 513), around eight kilometres to the west, scholars have concluded that the stone probably commemorated a man named Anundr. Anundr’s name is found at the beginning of the inscription on the Rimbo stone, which he put up together with Eiríkr, Hákon and Ingvarr in memory of their brother Ragnarr.
What catches the eye is the lengthy list of personal names, which indicate some kind of special status. This was first noticed by the Russian scholar Fedor Braun at the beginning of the twentieth century. Anundr, Eiríkr, Hákon and Ingvarr are names chiefly found within the Swedish royal family of the time, and some researchers have even identified the Ingvarr of these inscriptions with Ingvar the Far-Travelled. The family relationships expressed on the Husby-Sjuhundra and Rimbo stones make it clear that this cannot be the royal family itself, but it was probably a family closely related to them. It should also be noted that the stone at Husby-Sjuhundra, like the Åshusby stone discussed above, is situated at a place called Husby.

The ornamentation of the Rimbo stone—which can be attributed to a rune carver named Thorbjorn the Poet—has some features in common with Åsmund’s earlier stones. The runestone in Husby-Sjuhundra, on the other hand, has ornamentation of a later type. According to Gräslund’s typology, it belongs to the period c. 1070–1100, but I think in this case her dating is a bit late. A dating to the middle of the eleventh century seems more likely.

There are, however, several inscriptions in this group which are clearly later than c. 1080. The rune carvings on the large boulder at Ed mentioned above can safely be attributed to a fairly late rune carver, Thorgaut, who must have been active at the end of the eleventh century. His orthography and language show many similarities with another late rune carver, Øpir, who signed two of the runestones on which Greece is mentioned. One of these stones comes from the church at Ed and can with confidence be dated to the beginning of the twelfth century. It clearly belongs to the last of Gräslund’s style groups (Pr 5). This is the latest attestation of travellers to Byzantium on a runestone in Sweden. But one must remember that as late as the beginning of the thirteenth century it is stated in a Swedish provincial law codex (of Västergötland) that “he takes no man’s heritage as long as he stays in Greece” (Ingsinss manss arv takær hæn men i girkandi siter).

To sum up some of the observations made above, it seems that the earliest travellers to Byzantium from the province of Uppland came from its south-eastern part. In the period c. 1030–1050 we also find them in the central part of Uppland, in the vicinity of Sigtuna, and it is not impossible that this has something to do with Harald Hardrada’s stay in Sweden after the battle of Stiklestad in 1030. In the second half of the eleventh century the runestones commemorating travellers to Byzantium cover more extensive tracts of the province, and judging by the runic evidence these voyages continued well

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16 Braun 1910.
17 See von Friesen 1910.
18 Crocker 1982, 301–04.
Byzantium reflected in the runic inscriptions into the twelfth century. Some of the people mentioned on these runestones came from very prominent families, for example Anundr from Husby-Sjuhundra, but others were probably somewhat poorer and earned their wealth in the south, for example Myrsi (?) from Ullunda.

**RUNES IN BYZANTIUM**

When discussing runestones and travellers to Byzantium one must remember that the Scandinavians also left some runic inscriptions in Byzantium itself. The runic graffiti in Hagia Sophia in Istanbul are famous. The first inscription, mentioning a man named Halfdan, was discovered in the 1960s, and since then additional inscriptions have been revealed, such as one with the name of Arni. The names tell us nothing about the exact provenance of these men, since both Halfdan and Arni were fairly common throughout Scandinavia in the late Viking Age.

The most renowned rune carvings from Byzantium are, of course, the inscriptions on the great marble lion from the Piraeus in Athens. The lion was taken as war booty in 1697 and moved to Venice, but the runic inscriptions were not discovered and reported until the beginning of the nineteenth century. The runes are heavily weathered, and when Sven B. F. Jansson examined the inscriptions in 1948 he could not read more than a few words, such as hafn þessi (“this harbour”) and drængiar, which means “(young) men” or in some cases probably “warriors”. The more imaginative researchers of the nineteenth century believed that they could read significantly more. One of them believed he had found the name of Harald Hardrada, another that he had detected the signature of the Upplandic rune carver Åsmund Kåresson, discussed above. The latter supposition is definitely wrong, since neither the runes nor the spellings in the inscription correspond with the characteristics of this carver.

We still do not know the details of what was originally inscribed on the lion. But when it was restored and cleaned a couple of years ago, my colleague at the Swedish National Heritage Board, Thorgunn Snædal, was engaged to undertake a fresh investigation of the runes. She presents her results in a contribution to this volume, and this will certainly revitalize discussion of a problematic (but thus all the more interesting) inscription.

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20 Svärdström 1970.
21 Knirk 1999.
22 Jansson 1984, 32.
23 Rafn 1856.
24 Sander 1896.
Bibliography

———. 1984. ”Pireuslejonets runor” Nordisk tidskrift 60, 20–32.
The rune-inscribed lion from Piraeus has been standing outside the Arsenale in Venice since 1692. It was taken there in 1688 as a war trophy, together with another three marble lions from Athens or its vicinity, by the captain-general of the Venetian forces, Francesco Morosini. In September 1687 he had briefly succeeded in capturing Athens and the Peloponnese from the Turks. The lion is a classical sculpture from the fourth century BC,¹ and had thus been a feature of the harbour of Piraeus for almost twenty centuries when it made its move to Venice. The harbour was even renamed Porto Leone by the Venetians, and the Franks termed it Porto Dracos.²

The Piraeus lion had been standing in its new home for over 100 years when the runes were discovered by the Swedish diplomat and linguist Johan David Åkerblad in 1797 or 1798. In 1800 he reported his discovery, but without trying to interpret the runes.³ Soon runologists started to visit the lion to read the runes, with varying degrees of success. The first philologist to make a complete reading and interpretation of the inscriptions was Carl Christian Rafn, who investigated the inscriptions in 1852 and published his results four years later in both Danish and French. His interpretations have now mostly been superseded, but his careful investigation of references to the lion in older secondary literature, and his detailed narrative of the capture of Athens and the Peloponnese by the Venetian

¹ Capelle & Gustavson 2003, 197–98.
² Rafn 1856, 71–76.
³ Thomasson 2013, 194–96.

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Figure 8.1: The author interpreting the runes (April 2011)
The Swedish runologist Erik Brate investigated the inscriptions in July 1913. He spent three days examining them and also made drawings and took photographs, which show how heavily the runes have been weathered since his day. Nonetheless, in many respects I have been able to confirm his results, even if I have also read many of the runes differently.

Reading the runes presents plenty of difficulties. Firstly, the lion has been peppered by shot on both flanks. Judging by the diameter of the bullet holes, the lion seems to have been used as a target for musketeers at some point. They may have been Turks or members of the Venetian navy, using their spare time at the harbour to prac-

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4 Brate 1919, 7–8. He also studied the copy of the lion made in 1895, now in the Historical Museum in Stockholm.
tise their shooting. Secondly, the ropes or other devices used to drag the lion aboard the ship and off again to the Arsenale seem to have erased some parts of the inscriptions. Thirdly, the natural weathering of the surface of the lion over the centuries has left its mark on the inscriptions. Fourthly, the uppermost parts of the inscriptions are some two and a half metres above the ground level of the Campo Arsenale; to reach these badly damaged runes you have to stand on a ladder, and then the base makes it difficult to get close enough to view them properly. Of course, it would have been ideal to examine the runes in total darkness, using strong spotlights, but unfortunately this proved impossible, since the Campo Arsenale is permanently lit.

However, the situation with the Piraeus lion is not so different from normal field working conditions: inspecting badly damaged runic inscriptions in inaccessible places, where rough terrain makes night visits impossible, is not out of the ordinary. By returning repeatedly to the inscription, with the sun in the right position, the runes can painstakingly be read. Over the course of four visits to Venice, spending fifteen days in total and working between four and seven hours a day depending on the weather, I believe I have now seen everything there is to be seen of the inscriptions. Obtaining photographs of sufficient quality to illustrate my results was a challenge. Especially difficult, in terms of both viewing and capturing a good image, are the runes highest up on the lion’s left side and some of the runes on the left foreleg. Even the runes highest up on the lion’s right flank are very difficult to view properly, and the greater part of the inscription on the right side has either been almost effaced by the lifting gear or greatly damaged by bullet holes.

**THE INSCRIPTIONS**

There are three different inscriptions on the Piraeus lion, all presumed to be from the eleventh century. The oldest are probably the runes on the left side: the long inscription running up the foreleg and flank, and the short inscription on the left hind leg, although the latter is very difficult to date. The most recent is probably the carving on the right side: this must date from the last decades of the eleventh century, or possibly from around 1100.

All three inscriptions are assumed to have been carved by members of some Varangian troop. Clearly, these inscriptions are evidence of the activities of Varangians serving with the imperial armed forces in the region of the Aegean. Whether the men who left their mark on the Piraeus lion were members of the Varangian Guard cannot be determined, and the exact nature of this guard is open to debate (see above, 54; 5

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5 I would like to thank Sigurd Rahmquist for suggesting that the shots must have come from muskets and not larger ballistic weapons.
FIGURE 8.3: Piraeus lion: right side (April 2013)
Figure 8.4: Piraeus lion: left side (April 2013)
below, 345). Even so, one should note that one famous warrior who was closely associated with the imperial court, Harald Hardrada, did see service among the Aegean islands and also further west in Sicily in between the 1030s and the early 1040s. Harald and his company were not the only Varangians who took part in operations in the central Mediterranean in the first two-thirds of the eleventh century. And the Piraeus was probably a frequent port of call for imperial fleets after battle, to tend the wounded, replenish their forces and supplies, and possibly also undertake ship repairs. Some Varangian troops no doubt stayed long enough in the Piraeus during the eleventh century literally to make their mark on one of the harbour’s landmarks.

**PRESENTATION OF A RUNIC INSCRIPTION**

When presenting an interpretation of a runic inscription, runologists usually begin by transliterating each rune into its equivalent in the Latin or Old Norse alphabet, with special signs for different features of the inscription. Thus, a dot under a rune (aż) means that the rune is damaged in some way, a bow over two runes (ье) means that they are joined, so-called ‘bindrunes’, a short dash (−) means that the value of the rune cannot be decided and three dots (…) means that this part of the inscription is totally obliterated. As the Viking-Age futhark only had sixteen signs, when transliterated the text is ‘normalised’ into eleventh-century Old Swedish and then translated. During the eleventh century, the runic alphabet was supplemented with dotted runes which made it possible to express the sounds of the language more clearly.

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**Figure 8.5:** The runic alphabet in Scandinavia in the eleventh century

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**THE INSCRIPTION ON THE LION’S LEFT FORELEG AND FLANK**

As noted, some of the runes in this inscription have been damaged or obliterated, but many can still be read when the sun is in the right position. However, damage is not the only problem: the very position of the inscription, running up the lion’s foreleg and onto his flank, seems to have challenged our carver or carvers, who apparently lacked technical skills. The first twenty to twenty-five runes are reversed, making them somewhat more difficult to read, and four or five of the runes are almost illegible. The carving then bends and continues upwards on the other side of the leg; these runes are not reversed and are more distinct. Apart from one or two runes just above the bend, the whole inscription is legible up to the breast. A large crater has then damaged the
Figure 8.6: Left foreleg and flank (July 1913) (photograph by Erik Brate, courtesy of ATA)

Figure 8.7: Left foreleg and flank (April 2013)
next three or four runes, after which three runes and the remains of a fourth can be seen. This part of the inscription seems to end with two points (\(\ddagger\)).

The inscription then continues high up on the lion’s left flank. The first two or three runes have been damaged by another deep crater and the sequence of runes that follows is in a poor condition, taking me several hours to decipher. The last part of the inscription runs down the lion’s flank. The runes here are fairly well preserved, but they are so tightly packed that it is difficult to decide where one rune ends and the next begins. Unconvinced by Brate’s reading of this part of the inscription, I eventually arrived at an interpretation quite different from his, which is as follows:

\[
\text{: } \text{hiágu(?) } \text{þeik } \text{helfnings/helmingr } \text{mænn(?)}\ldots\text{en i hafn } \text{þessi } \text{þeik } \text{mænn(?)}
\]
\[
\text{at } \text{hau}-\text{sa } \text{buta } \ldots\text{þu}-\ldots
\]
\[
\ldots\text{þu } \text{þiuar } \text{þeita } \text{leiniu}
\]
\[
f\ldots\text{-þyrgaiftuankearu-}
\]

\text{Hiágu(?) } \text{þeik } \text{helfnings/helmingr } \text{mænn(?)...en i hafn } \text{þessi } \text{þeik } \text{mænn(?)}
\text{biágu(?) } \text{þiínar } \text{at } \text{Hau[r]sa } \text{þónda...}
\text{(Rê)þu(?) } \text{svéar } \text{þetta } \text{á } \text{leiniu/leis(?)nu (alt: } \text{réðu } \text{svéar } \text{þetta } \text{leionu).}
\text{F[iall]/f[órs](?) } \text{þórgaild } \text{vann } \text{gæva.}
\]

They cut (the runes), the men of the host...but in this harbour those men cut runes after Haursi, the farmer...
Swedish men applied this on the lion.
(He) fell/perished before he could receive ‘geld’.

The inscription would seem to have been carved by members of a Varangian group who had spent some time at the harbour of Piraeus. They were all members of the same \text{helfningr}/\text{helmingr}. This word means ‘half of something’, but in this context it could have been used as a term for a subdivision of a larger force or army. It is found on two stones erected in memory of two of Ingvar the Far-Travelled’s followers, who perished on their way to Arabia (\text{Serkland}).\(^6\) It is also used in one of the sagas of Harald Hardrada to describe just such a band of Varangians in action at Constantinople.\(^7\) It may have been the usual term among Varangians for smaller groups sent out on some kind of expedition.

While at the Piraeus, Haursi’s comrades found in the old lion’s smooth, marble leg and flank an excellent substitute for the rock or raised stone they were accustomed to back home in Sweden, and they used this to carve a runic inscription to commemorate their dead comrade. The name is known from a few other runic inscriptions, and he is

\(^6\) Brate 1919, 44–46; Óg 136–37, 146–48; RoU.
\(^7\) Brate 1919, 44–46; \text{Fagrskinna 229–30; SB, 159–60; VB, 94–95.}
nicknamed bóndi (yeoman or farmer), as doubtless he had been in Sweden. After the nickname, traces of another rune can be seen. Unfortunately, it has been damaged by a shot that destroyed two or three other runes. Moving beyond this damage, three runes can be read and traces of a fourth may be seen: ...hua-. These runes might convey words of praise for Haursi: bónda hinn hvata, bónda allhvatan or miq hvatan (very able, very brave, or some such description).

The inscription does not mention the names of the carvers; they only identify themselves as Swedish men (svēar) or men from Sweden (Svēþiūð). It is understandable that they wanted other Varangians who visited the harbour at Piraeus to know where they came from. Indeed, this text may have inspired the carvers of the inscription on the right flank several decades later.

A bullet hole has damaged the beginning of the word before svēar, but the remains of three rune bases in the crater’s lower edge may represent ᶠ ra, and the first word was probably the verb rāða (to decide, interpret, read, etc.). Among its many meanings, in runic inscriptions rāða may also mean ‘to apply’, i.e. to decide how runes and ornaments were to be shaped and laid out, and this would appear to be the case here. The carver or carvers seem to have had certain difficulties in spelling the unusual word ‘lion’. They probably meant to write leiun (lion), but instead reversed the last letters, a common mistake in runic inscriptions. One finds this later in this part of the inscription, in the word giald (geld), which they spell gailt, instead of gialt.

The inscription’s authors then return to Haursi, telling us that ‘[he] fell/perished’ before he could receive ‘geld’ (fall) or (f)urs (?) giald vann gærva). The ᶠ-rune is probably the first rune of the word fell/fiall, past singular of the verb falla (to be killed in battle), or past singular of the reflexive verb faras (to drown, die in an accident or catastrophe of some kind). Both words occur a few times in the runic inscriptions, and they are still in common use in modern Icelandic.

The last sentence tells us in rhythmic prose that the unfortunate Haursi died in battle or perished in some kind of accident before he could get his share of the plunder. To get rich by taking booty would have been the main goal of virtually every Varangian. Verbal constructions like vann gerva or vann ganga (to proceed to do something) are quite common in Old Norse poetry, and also in traditional Icelandic poetry. The verb

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8 We know of another yeoman who fell in Greece at about the same time: Oddlög (?) the “good yeoman” from Haddestad (Ög 93–95).
9 At this time, the name Svēþiūð was used only for middle Sweden, the area around Mälaren and its vicinity. The term Svēaríki/Svīaríki (Sverige) was used for the whole country.
10 There is a possibility that the word is to be interpreted as leiona (feminine singular nominative, accusative leiounu), as this form is noted in an Icelandic manuscript.
11 For example, the construction vinna gjöld (to (re)pay geld) is found in the thirteenth stanza of the Lay of Arinbjörn by the famous poet and Viking, Egill Skallagrímsson, as quoted in Egils saga
vinna (to labour, win, do) is used here to make the construction more expressive and extended. This is the first known instance of its use in a Swedish runic inscription.

This sentence shows that the word giald (geld) was used to describe the Varangians’ taking of war trophies in Byzantium, and was not found only in the well-known ‘Danegeld’, paid by the English in an attempt to buy off Viking attacks in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. One may compare its usage here with a verse by an eleventh-century Icelandic skald, Ottarr the Black. When King Olaf Haraldsson of Norway descended on Gotland in 1007, threatening to ravage the land, the Gotlanders chose to pay him geld instead. Ottarr described this episode in a stanza:

Gildir, komt at gjaldi/gotneskum her, flotna; þorðut þér at varða/ þjóðlönd firar röndu.

Chieftain, you took geld from the Gotlandic army.
The people did not dare to defend themselves.\(^\text{12}\)

The word ‘geld’ is also used on runestone U 613 from Torsätra parish in Uppland. The stone was raised in memory of a man who died on Gotland “when they took ‘geld’ on Gotland” (…þā þæi r giald tōku ā Gutlandi). According to Guta Saga, the Gotlanders agreed to pay tribute to the Swedish king so as to get protection from further Viking raids on the island.\(^\text{13}\) The same practice was doubtless applied by the Varangians (and other Byzantine troops) after they had conquered some unlucky area, obliging the inhabitants to hand over their goods on pain of death. Likewise, the crews of captured pirate vessels would have had to hand over their stolen goods if they wanted to escape with their lives.

We know from the runic inscriptions about the taking of ‘geld’ in England that the leader of the war band took its share and then divided it up among his men.\(^\text{14}\) Presumably similar procedures were used by the Varangians in Byzantium. Haursi may have been the leader of a unit who died before he could receive its due share and apportion it, or he may have been just an ordinary member of the helmingr who lost his share when he died. After his successful campaign in Bulgaria in 1016, Basil II is said to have divided the enormous booty into three parts: one-third for himself, one-third for the Varangians and the final third for the Byzantine soldiers. This is reminiscent of the division of ‘geld’,\(^\text{15}\) since the standard division of imperial booty was “one-sixth to the emperor, and the rest divided into two parts; one for the commanders-in-chief, the

\(^{272.}\)

\(^{12}\) von Friesen 1909, 68.

\(^{13}\) Guta Saga 6–7.

\(^{14}\) von Friesen 1909, 68; Hasloch Kirby 1977, 121–25.

\(^{15}\) SB, 96; VB, 48; D’Amato 2010, 9.
other for the soldiers." Of course, many Varangians lost their lives in the battles that were a matter of course in the empire. Clearly, Haursi perished in one such battle, or perhaps an accident, and therefore missed out on his due reward. It is understandable that his comrades wanted to commemorate his fate in a runic inscription, as was the tradition in their home country.

Three runestones in Sweden, all erected before the middle of the eleventh century, commemorate men who did manage to take booty in Byzantium. They are described as either dividing gold or winning wealth in Greece:

Sö 163: ...Olov went to Greece / divided gold. (För Ölœif i Grikkium/gulli skifti.)

Sö 165: ...Hedin...was in Greece/ divided gold. (Hēdin...var hann i Grikkium/gulli skifti.)

U 792:...Myrse?...went boldly, wealth he won out in Greece for his heir. (För hæfila/fear aflaði/ át i Grikkium/arfa sinum.)

All three inscriptions are in verse or rhythmic prose, and describe men who apparently survived to return home.

**DATING THE INSCRIPTION ON THE LION’S LEFT FORELEG AND FLANK**

The simple shape of the inscription points to the first half of the eleventh century, between around 1020 and 1040. Analogies are quite common in Swedish runic inscriptions from this period. When the Bulgarian war was finally over in 1018, the emperor Basil II travelled to Athens to celebrate his victory. Our first inscription on the Piraeus lion has been linked to this event, on the grounds that the emperor left Athens from the harbour at the Piraeus, and that many Varangians would have accompanied him to the celebrations and could then have stayed on long enough at Piraeus to cut the runes. Although it is not entirely impossible that the inscription dates from 1018, it is much more likely to have been cut a decade or two later. The lack of marks between the words could perhaps point toward the early eleventh century, although the quite frequent use of dotted runes indicates a somewhat later date of the late 1020s or 1030s. As noted above, mercenaries in Byzantium frequently saw service in the Aegean navy, and an influx of Scandinavian mercenaries in the 1020s and 1030s is well attested. Haursi may well have lost his life in battle against pirates, or in one of the sea-borne Arab raids and counter-attacks of the period.

Some features of the inscription seem to point toward a mixed group of Swedish and Norwegian warriors. One example is the absence of the palatal r-rune (ᚪ) that is

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16 SB, 64; VB, 25.
17 Sö 163 and Sö 165, which stand not far from one other, and U 792. For Sö 163, see above Fig. 7.3, 175; for Sö 165, see above Fig. 7.2, 174.
18 Gregorovius 1889, 171; Bugge 1907, 103; SB, 96; VB, 45–50.
Figure 8.8: Left foreleg (detail): the inscription starts at the colon high up in the middle, but the beginning (above the large dent) has almost been obliterated.
FIGURE 8.9: Left foreleg (detail): this part of the inscription: ---ku suiar þêta leinu is decipherable to the naked eye when the sun is in the right position, but the runes are difficult to photograph; the f-rune which continues the text can be seen, bottom right

FIGURE 8.10: Left flank (detail) showing the end of the inscription: all the runes are decipherable, apart from the final one (f...aþr gailtuankearu-)
Figure 8.11a: Runestone from Örkensta, north-east of Stockholm (U 341); the text band on the Piraeus lion’s left foreleg and flank has a similar form to the text band on this stone.
to be expected in words like þæiðr (they), which is written þir in the inscription, and rūnaðr, which is written runar. In Old Norse this r-sound had already merged with the ‘ordinary’ r-sound and the rune ᚦ was used instead for ᚨ. The Norwegians would therefore not have accepted ᚦ as an r-sound. The carvers’ need to identify themselves as Swedish might also suggest such a mixed group. Since it was not as common in Norway as it was in Sweden to erect runic monuments in this period, it is likely that only Swedish warriors would think of making such a carving.

Many runologists and historians have tried to connect this carving with Harald Hardrada’s exploits in Byzantium. Tempting though it is to link Haursi’s fate to Harald’s exploits in the Aegean between 1034 and 1038, or to his battles in Bulgaria in
the early 1040s, the carving’s simple design seemingly points to an earlier date. Our
inscription is, as we have seen, more likely to date from the late 1020s or early 1030s,
thus predating Harald’s time in the Byzantine armed forces.

Simple text bands, such as those on the Piraeus lion, are mainly found in the Swedish
provinces on runestones from before the mid-1030s. Even by the mid-1020s, the
rune master Åsmund had introduced a more elaborate ornamental style in his carvings,
and from then on, the sophisticated Urnes-style from Uppland began to take shape.\(^{19}\)
So if our carving were from the period of Harald’s operations in imperial service, we
might expect a more elaborate design. On the other hand, it is clear that the carvers
were no masters of this art form and had problems with both the technique and the
organisation of the characters. This might be the reason why they chose such a simple
form. Thus, there is still a faint possibility that Haursi really was one of Harald’s Var-
rangians.

**THE SHORT INSCRIPTION ON THE LEFT HIND LEG**

A short inscription runs along the lion’s left hind leg:

\[
\text{trikir \( \cdot \) rist runir} \ldots
\]

\[
drangir/drengir \ rist(u) \ r\text{\(\bar{n}\)ir}/\text{\(\bar{r}\)\text{\(\bar{n}\)}ir}
\]

Young men/warriors cut the runes.

This inscription does not appear to have been cut into the marble, but merely scratched
on to the surface, using a knife or some other sharp tool. It does not originally seem
to have been any longer,\(^{20}\) nor is it connected to the other inscriptions in any way. It is

\(^{19}\) Jansson 1987, 54.

\(^{20}\) Brate 1919, 23, 43 reads another five or six runes but I could not see any definite traces of them.
also very difficult to date: the runic forms do not give any definite clues as to its age. The only s-rune is a short twig s (“) and the r-runes are open (Ř), not closed (Ř). This points toward the eleventh century, as later they were mostly closed. The lack of palatal r-runes could, of course, indicate the twelfth century, but since none of the other inscriptions uses the palatal r-rune, this cannot be used as a dating criterion. The warriors who scratched this inscription may not have been Swedish. If they were from Norway or Iceland, they would not have used the palatal r-rune even in the eleventh century and they would almost certainly have used a short twig s. Thus the text represented by these runes can be ‘normalised’ either as:

\[\text{drængiar (sg. drengr) rist(u) rūnar/ rūnir (Old Swedish)}\]

or as:

\[\text{drengir (sg. drengr) rist(u) rūnar/ rūnir (Old Norse)}\]

The word drengr was used both for boys/young men and for (young) warriors, although in this case we may assume that it refers to warriors and that they were Varangians.

**THE INSCRIPTION ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE LION**

It is a strange sensation to see the beautiful runic carving on the lion’s right flank and all the sadder to see how damaged it is. It is also odd that such a competent carver seems to have left no other traces of his skills in other Swedish runic inscriptions. The carving’s form and type of ornamentation places it in the closing decades of the eleventh century, perhaps as late as around the turn of the century.

Unfortunately this carving is far more damaged than the plain one on the other side of the lion. Not only has its surface been peppered with even more shot, but the lifting gear seems to have almost totally destroyed many of the runes. Only a small area of the surface is well preserved, and there we can see how deeply and skilfully cut the runes are. The inscription forms the shape of a finely drawn dragon. The dragon’s head is positioned on the breast of the Piraeus lion, directly under his mane, and the body stretches over his right shoulder and flank in elaborate coils. The part nearest the dragon’s head is divided into two small bands which seem to be entwined with the dragon’s long head crest. As no rune traces are visible in those sections of the small bands which have been preserved, the inscription would not appear to start from here, but rather to the left in a text band beginning with a small knot:

\[\text{[×] aspuntr x rištî [×] ... [ŋ]ar ōðar x þair x isk-...}
\[\text{...þurilfi ---- auk x (- x) u/ř ... o-........ɪ -...}
\[\text{...-ufruk ...f...Þ ----...uantarñ x} \]
Figure 8.13: Piraeus lion: right side (July 1913) (photograph by Erik Brate, courtesy of ATA)

Figure 8.14: Piraeus lion: right side (April 2013)
The runes of the first word, **asmuntr**, are weathered but can be read in good light. In the next word, **rištî**, the last three runes are difficult to follow, as they are carved in the deep dent that goes straight through the middle of the whole carving. This text band seems to end at the broad, main text band.

The inscription continues under the area where the dragon’s head crest and other ornamental coils entwine with the main text band. As the surface is damaged, no sure traces of this line ornament can now be seen, and the first two or three runes in the word have been effaced, although worn remnants of the **n**-rune can just be traced. The last two runes, **...ar**, are well preserved and show that the word must have been **runar**.

The next words, **pisar × pair ×isk-**..., are also relatively easy to read. Thereafter, the runes have been almost completely obliterated for some 30 cm, up to the spot where the text band curves to the left. There then follow the barely readable runes: **...purlifr**, i.e. the name **Börleifr** (’Torlev). After this, the inscription is crossed by the small text band which contains the end of the inscription. There then comes a 12 cm long passage in which traces of probably four runes can be seen, followed by the best preserved part of the inscription, where the runes **auk a × u/r-**... are deeply cut and the surface is polished and shining. The whole carving must have been like this originally, perhaps right up to 1687. Finally, a long section of the inscription has been almost totally destroyed. Only a few runes can be read, although traces of many others can be seen:

21 Brate assumed that the obscured runes must have been **litu**, although he did not succeed in reading any of them.
The inscription probably continued along the leg of the dragon, whose hind claws can be seen when the sun is in the right place. It carries on in a small text band that seems to have been carved in the deep dent or rift in the middle of the carving. It is probably divided by the text band containing the beginning of the inscription and then continues upwards and ends in a thin bow. I could see no sure sign of any runes on the badly damaged surface in the rift. However, in the upper part of the text band, seven fairly well preserved runes can be seen. Of the inscription in this band, from the dragon’s claws to the end of the small text band, the following can be read:

...þ[ufru]k...r...s...u[ñfār]n ×

Only vague traces of the first rune are discernible, but it is possible that it was originally a þ-rune (as Brate sees it). If the first two runes represent the end of a word, the runes fruk could possibly be interpreted as the end of the word frøkn (bold, brave). On the other hand, if the r-rune that follows is part of the same word, it may have been a plural form: frøknir (fāðu frøknir, rēðu frøknir (?), ‘Brave men cut or applied this’ (?)). After the s-rune and the remains of two more runes, no further runes can be seen below the text band with the beginning of the inscription. Since the area above the text band is damaged, it is uncertain whether the inscription continues right up to the clearly readable, although small, runes of the text band that passes over the main text band, just to the left of the last rune in the name þurlifr. The last seven runes are sufficiently numerous to give meaningful words, but to my disappointment I have so far not been able to interpret this part of the inscription.22

While the names Åsmund and Eskil are fairly well known in Swedish runic inscriptions, the name T orlev occurs only on a lost runestone in Västergötland and on a grave slab with runestone ornamentation found in 1981 in the ruined church of St Hans in Visby. According to the inscription, Torlev was one of the carvers, the other apparently being a woman. In Norway the name Torlev is common, and the man named on the Piraeus lion could of course have been from Gotland or Norway. As in the inscription on the lion’s left side, the palatal r-rune (å) is not used in words where one would expect it: (rūn)ar þessar þair is spelled ...[n]ar þisar × þair. This late in the eleventh century, however, the palatal r-sound was beginning to merge with the ‘normal’ r-sound, and this could explain its absence in the inscription. One must bear in mind that, like other such troops, this group of Varangians very probably included

22 I have of course considered the possibility of interpreting the last runes as vann fara (proceeded to go, travel), but it is unlikely that this construction is found in both inscriptions.
men from both Sweden and Norway, and possibly even Danes. The absence of palatal r-runes could therefore be a result of Danish and Norwegian influence on the inscription, since this rune, as stated above (197, 201), was used to express the y-sound in their runic alphabets.

As already noted, the carving’s arrangement and rune forms place it in the second half of the eleventh century and possibly as late as the turn of the century. Certain features of the ornamentation—for example the elaborate head crest—and certain rune forms—for example the s-rune, 1—suggest Gotlandic influence. A number of runestones were erected there at the turn of the eleventh century with the same outer shape as the famous picture stones, but with locally developed and highly elaborate variations on the Uerns runestone style.23

The nature of our carving has parallels in others from the area of Mälaren from the second half of the eleventh century, for example U 112B in Ed parish north of Stockholm. It is worth recalling that the majority of runestones mentioning Greece are found in Uppland. The carving U 112B was made on a large boulder some two kilometres south of the church at Ed. A man named Ragnvald made two carvings, one in memory of his mother Fastvé and the other in memory of himself, in which he tells us that he had been in Greece and had been “in command of soldiers” (see also above, 173). Although there are similarities between this carving and the one on our lion, the latter is far more elaborate and skillful, making it unlikely that Ragnvald’s carving was by Åsmund of Piraeus.

Throughout the eleventh century, Northerners seem to have continued to come to Constantinople to enter the emperor’s service. Since military operations were always under way in some district or other, it is impossible to know in which of the many battles waged at the end of the century the three men mentioned in our text could have fought, if indeed they did. In 1071 the Byzantines lost Bari, their last bridgehead in Italy, and no doubt many Varangians lost their lives defending the city, even while others were spared for battles ahead.24 It is not unlikely that the emperor’s ships and troops put in at the harbour at Piraeus both on their way to the long siege at Bari and on their way back to Constantinople.

In 1081, Robert Guiscard, the leader of the Normans in southern Italy, attacked Dyrrachium (modern Durrës in Albania). With help from the Venetians, the emperor and his forces managed to defend the city for a while, but in the final battle in October 1081 the imperial army was routed, many Varangians fell and the emperor had to flee.25 In this battle, a leading but fateful role was played by a Varangian called in Greek

24 SB, 174; VB, 104–12.
Figure 8.16: Right foreleg (detail): the runes in the dragon’s foot (photograph from 1948 by Gösta Lundquist, courtesy of ATA)
FIGURE 8.17: Right foreleg (detail): the runes in the dragon’s foot (photograph from April 2013)
Nampites, which could be the Norse nickname Nábitr (one who stabs near the heart). He apparently survived, because in 1087 he was fighting with the emperor once more, this time against the Pechenegs in the great battle at Dristra (Drastrar/modern Silistra in north-eastern Bulgaria).\(^\text{26}\) The imperial army was defeated and again the emperor had to flee. After Dristra, Varangians are not mentioned in Anna Komnena’s Alexiad, and it is possible that the “regiment was so decimated that it needed to be reconstituted completely over the years that followed”\(^\text{27}\). Åsmund, Eskil and Torlev may have been survivors of Bari, Dyrrachium or Dristra and have made the inscription to commemorate one or more of their less fortunate comrades, much as the comrades of Haursi did for him. Unfortunately, the inscription is so damaged that we will never know for sure. Swedes very probably continued to travel to Byzantium in the twelfth century to become mercenaries, just as Norwegians and Danes did. But we have no evidence of their fate, for no runestones were erected after the first decades of the twelfth century.\(^\text{28}\)

**SUMMARY**

To date I have not had the opportunity to investigate the carvings in darkness with adequate lighting equipment or to have professional photographs taken, let alone RTI photos or 3D scans. I am fairly sure that with this equipment it would be possible to follow the intricacies of the ornamental bands of the inscription on the right side better, and that would of course be useful. Some of the three or four runes after the name þurlifr might even be read, but I am also convinced that no amount of further investigation or technical equipment could enable a full interpretation of the most obscured parts, even though traces of more runes could be seen. This conclusion also applies to the long carving on the left side. I consider it possible that in the right lighting conditions the uppermost runes at the beginning of the carving highest up on the left side of the lion’s breast ọ̀tụ́ & (?) could easily be read, and perhaps some of the almost obliterated runes on the leg and breast could be seen more clearly. However, I very much doubt that they will ever be possible to interpret.

Despite the failure to interpret the runes in the text band beginning on the dragon’s foot, I am satisfied with the results achieved so far. I have been able to read the greater part of the long inscription on the left side and have obtained a new interpretation of the last sentence. It may not seem to be a great achievement to read the begin-

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\(^\text{26}\) Anna Komnena, *Anna Komnenas värld* 130, 211.

\(^\text{27}\) D’Amato 2010, 9.

\(^\text{28}\) At the beginning of the twelfth century, both the Danish king Eric the Good (1102–1103) and the Norwegian king Sigurd I (c. 1110) visited Constantinople and are said to have left behind many of their retinue who wished to enroll as mercenaries in the Byzantine army. SB, 207–09, 213–17; VB, 136–38. See above, 54; below, 348.
FIGURE 8.18a: Runestone from Ed, north of Stockholm (U 112B): probably dating from the 1060s or 1070s and made by Ragnvald, who “was in Greece, was leader of the host”, the carving has a similar pattern to that on the right side of the Piraeus lion.

FIGURE 8.18b: Drawing by Erik Brate of the carving on the Piraeus lion’s right side (original drawing, courtesy of ATA)
Figure 8.19: Fjuckby runestone from Ärentuna parish, north of Uppsala (U 1016); erected in memory of Áki, who “steered the ship, visited Greek harbours” and died abroad.
ning of the inscription on the right side as *asmuntr risti* instead of *asmutr hiu*, as previous interpreters have done. But this proved that with enough time it was possible to read this part of the carving correctly. I have also seen the first two runes in the name *Þōrlæifr*, which were assumed to exist by Carl Christian Rafn but not detected by Erik Brate. There were additional grounds for undertaking a new investigation of the runes after the lion was restored in 2007–2008. One needed to see if the method used to clean and secure the surface had harmed the carvings in any way. This seems not to be the case; instead, the clean surface has probably made it easier to read the runes.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES


SECONDARY LITERATURE


UNTIL RECENTLY, OUR knowledge about the presence of Varangians in the Byzantine empire was based largely on written sources.¹ The role of archaeology has not been considerable because of the general neglect of the study of the material culture of the Middle Byzantine period. Now things are taking a turn for the better, and there have been several important excavations which have contributed significantly to our understanding of the Byzantine material culture of this time. These include, first of all, the excavations at Amorion, Hierapolis, Thessalonica, Cherson and other sites in the Crimea² which have contributed new knowledge and made it possible for scholars to identify items of Byzantine origin in Scandinavian cultural settings. We can now trace Byzantine objects in the Viking-Age graves and towns of Scandinavia and eastern Europe.³

However, within the territory of the Byzantine empire material traces of Scandinavian presence are still meagre,⁴ and in order to understand them better we need to discuss them within the context of Byzantine history. As one example of this, we took a recent find in Yumuktepe, in the city of Mersin in southern Turkey.⁵ This presentation is a preliminary interpretation of the find.

First of all, a few words should be said about the site itself. Yumuktepe is a well-known archaeological site situated two and a half kilometres north of the Mediterranean, on the bank of the River Müftü in the south coast region of Asia Minor (see below, Map 9.1). It is a 25 metre high mound with a flat top and covers an area of about five

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¹ Two works are still essential: Vasil’evskii 1908; VB.
³ VBM; Roslund 1997; Androshchuk 2013.
⁴ SASR, no. 86–92; see also above 187–214; below 241–53.
hectares. The site reveals several chronological phases: Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze Age, Hittite, Greek, Roman and Byzantine settlements (see below, Fig. 9.2). This can be partly confirmed by numismatic evidence. Between 1993 and 1997, thirty-seven coins were discovered during excavations. Two were Hellenistic, one Roman, one late Roman, twenty Byzantine and four Cilician Armenian. Of the Byzantine coins, only one can be dated to the sixth century, while the others were from the late tenth or eleventh century.

During the late Roman and early Byzantine periods, the site was part of the province of Cilicia, with the regional capital at Tarsus. From an unknown location in Mersin comes a rich gold hoard consisting of three necklaces with pendants, earrings and belt fittings dated to the sixth or seventh century. To this period also belongs a

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6 Caneva & Köroğlu 2010b.
7 Tekin 1998.
8 Grabar 1951, fig. 3; Bank 1960, 125 (pl. 64–68).
single T-shaped brooch discovered in Yumuktepe. It has been noted that such brooches are common in the Roman borderlands and/or in places where military garrisons were located.⁹ The late Roman finds discovered here belonged to a stratum which was removed during reinforcement works on the site carried out at the end of the tenth century.¹⁰ Both the stratigraphic situation and the character of the ceramic finds show that the medieval settlement was established here only at the end of the tenth century, and not earlier, as had been suggested previously.¹¹ The Byzantine settlement is represented by a small fortified site at the top of a hill overlooking the surrounding plains (Fig. 9.1). Judging from its dominating position, this walled settlement played an important strategic role in the region.

Most of the structures which have been discovered belong to the eleventh to thirteenth centuries and allow the character and occupation of the settlement to be reconstructed. At the beginning of the eleventh century it was a small settlement encircled by a wall with a church and a burial chapel in the centre (see below, Fig. 9.3). A number

⁹ Kostromichev 2012, fig. 7.
¹⁰ Caneva & Köroğlu 2010b, 81.
¹¹ Garstang 1953, 2–3.
of inhumation graves have been discovered in the nave and narthex. Many of them contained grave goods, including cross-shaped pendants of bronze, green and red serpentine and steatite, which provide a relative dating of the cemetery. The earliest grave was uncovered in a terracotta sarcophagus, in which a bronze coin of Basil II and Constantine VIII (976–1025), as well as a glass perfume bottle, were discovered. Inside the church and in its vicinity, bronze ceremonial crosses were discovered (see below, Fig. 9.4 and 9.11).

12 Caneva & Köroğlu 2010b, 84–85.
FIGURE 9.3: Yumuktepe church (after Caneva & Keroğlu 2010b)

FIGURE 9.4: Grave in the burial chapel, Yumuktepe (after Caneva & Keroğlu 2010b)
Some dwelling boxes (sections inside the wall in which people lived) built with a simple masonry technique using spolia from the Roman and early Byzantine periods were situated along the southern side of the mound, and were exposed at the edge of the mound closest to the Mediterranean (Fig. 9.5). The entrances to the boxes faced the pebble-paved road running east-west. In one such building, pieces of ceramic, an ampulla with a depiction of St Menas, a gilded bronze item (possibly a belt fitting) and a fragmentary bracelet of glass and animal bones were found. A hoard of twenty-one silver coins hidden among stones was also discovered there (Fig. 9.6a–b). Fourteen of these are from the reign of Michael IV Doukas (1071–1078), two are from the reign of Nikephoros III Botaneiates (1078–1081), two are from the Fatimids and the Great Seljuks and three are from the crusaders. The northern part of the mound has not been investigated yet, but judging from some indications (fragmentary amphorae and pithoi), a storehouse area may have been situated there.\(^\text{13}\)

Excavations of rooms which were used for living, storage and work have revealed various types of ceramic imported from Constantinople, the Aegean, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq and Egypt, indicating the high social status of the residents of Yumuktepe (see below, Fig. 9.7).\(^\text{14}\) The existence of fortifications in the early Byzantine period is still under discussion. However, there is no indication of activities here until the end of

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 92–93.

\(^{14}\) Köroğlu 2007b.
the tenth century. At that point the Byzantines recaptured the region, and some new fortification works were undertaken on the top of the mound. The dominating and commanding position of the settlement, as well as the discovery of a seal of Michael the
Figure 9.6b: Yumuktepe hoard (after Caneva & Köroğlu 2010b)
protospatharios in combination with other finds, indicate that we are dealing here with a small Christian society settled in the borderland (see also below, 234 and Fig. 9.16).

The hoard of silver coins deposited during the reign of Nikephoros III Botaniates, as well as two simple leaf-shaped arrowheads (see Fig. 9.8A–B below), help to date one crucial point in the life of this Byzantine settlement. The arrowheads are of the same type as those unearthed in Hierapolis, where they have been connected with “the arrival of the nomadic Seljuks, not long after the battle of Mantzikert in 1071.” Since few

15 Caneva & Köröglu 2012.
16 Arthur 2006, 95 (fig. 38).
coins of the hoard are of Fatimid, Great Seljuk or crusader origin, it is possible to date the deposition of the hoard to shortly after the First Crusade (c. 1095).

It seems that some considerable changes in the layout of the inner part of the settlement happened around the middle of the eleventh century. By that time, only the chapel adjoining the church from the south remained. Until the fourteenth century, this was the main place for burials of the local population. In the twelfth century, the church was converted into a storehouse that then was damaged by a great fire in the
middle of the century. In the thirteenth century, in the building and to its south and west, a small cemetery was established.  

A fabulous find was made in a room adjoining the fortification wall (Fig. 9.9 and 9.10). Here, an iron sword came to light. The room where the sword was discovered was built with creek stones, bound with lime-sand mortar and re-used architectural details, and strengthened with half-columns in the corners. This room, which adjoined the fortification from the inner side, was excavated in grid squares P-Q-R12. On the basis of finds of storage jars and glazed and unglazed ceramic, it has been suggested that there were storerooms here in the middle of the eleventh century. The find circumstances indicate that below the sword, a copper coin of Constantine X Doukas and Eudokia (1059–1067) was discovered. 

17 Köroğlu 2007b.  
18 Köroğlu 2010, fig. 126.  
19 Caneva & Köroğlu 2012, 223.  
20 Köroğlu 2010, 113.
There can be no doubt that the sword belongs to the Viking Age. Apart from the aforementioned coin of Basil and Constantine found in the earliest grave, another object from the tenth century, namely a bronze belt buckle, should be mentioned (Fig. 9.11). A similar buckle was found in a tenth-century grave in Corinth. In Viking-Age graves of eastern Europe, buckles of this type can be dated to the mid- to second half of the tenth century. For example, in a recently excavated grave in Kiev, a similar buckle was discovered in association with a belt attached to a sword. Importantly, these small objects are quite often found in Rus in so-called graves of retainers, which clearly indicates their military character.

21 Köroğlu 2002, 18; Caneva & Köroğlu 2010b, 92–93 (fig. 155).
22 Davidson 1952, 272 (pl. 115:2216).
Fig 9.11: Miscellaneous finds from the middle Byzantine period from Yumuktepe, including a bronze belt buckle (after Caneva & Köroğlu 2010b)
FIGURE 9.12: Hilt of the Yumuktepe sword
The sword corresponds to Petersen’s type H (opposite, Fig. 9.12). The total weight of such swords ranged from 604 to 1,652 g. Some of them could be quite heavy. For instance, the total weight of one fragmentary Swedish specimen is 1,799 g, while the pommel’s weight is 675 g (Fig. 9.13). The thickness of the tang of the blade is 8 mm. As far as we know, this is the heaviest sword recorded in Sweden. The average length of Scandinavian swords of this type is about 90 cm. The shortest specimen is 720 mm, while the longest is 964 mm. There are about 240 whole and fragmentary swords of type H/I recorded in Sweden. The average length of the grip is around 95 mm, but there are also specimens with very short grips (67 mm, 71 mm, 78 mm), and very long grips (100–105 mm). We believe that the diversity in the weight and length

25 Petersen 1919.
26 Androshchuk 2014, 339.
FIGURE 9.14: X-ray image of a type H/I sword hilt from Uppland (after Androshchuk 2014)
of these swords testifies to an individual approach to the manufacturing of this weaponry. The pommels of swords of this type were attached to the upper guards by a loop or two rivets (opposite, Fig. 9.14). Pommels and both guards were usually decorated with silver and/or copper incrustation. Additional decorative elements of this type include copper or brass sheets, which have been found on both surfaces of the guards. Usually swords of this type have double-edged blades, but there are also single-edged specimens recorded mainly in Norway (four such swords have been found in Sweden and one in Denmark). Wooden grips and sheaths are sometimes well preserved. On individual swords, they may be covered with fabric. Individual finds of pommels and guards, as well as traces of repairs show that, for some reason, pommels were a problem area for this type of sword. Apart from isolated specimens, most of the H/I swords belong to the tenth century.27

Swords of type H/I were among the most popular swords of the Viking Age. Their Scandinavian or possible Carolingian origin has been a subject of discussion. But although swords of type H/I have been found in present-day Germany, most of them have been discovered at Hedeby and in other areas influenced by Denmark during the Viking Age. On the whole, H/I swords appear only occasionally in the Frankish/German empire. The lengths of the grips are variable, which indicates that sword hilts were tailored to individuals.

It is almost certain that the ‘Frankish swords’ which were sold in the Muslim world by the Rus were pattern-welded blades without hilts. Generally, Muslim authors paid attention only to the quality of blades and never mentioned hilts.28 One explanation for this might be that the variety of shapes of hilts had certain tactical and aesthetic meanings in Scandinavia but not in the Muslim east, where the blades were only considered curiosities. The sword from Yumuktepe bears obvious Scandinavian traits and has to be interpreted in the context of the history of contacts between the Scandinavians and Byzantium. In Scandinavia, H/I swords often appear in graves in association with objects of Byzantine or Hungarian origin, a good example being the double chamber grave 644 in Birka, dated to the second half of the tenth century (see below, Fig. 9.15).29 How can the sword from Yumuktepe, which is unique among archaeological finds from Turkey, be interpreted?

One idea might be that the sword is evidence of a military assault by the Vikings on the Cilician coast. Written sources provide us with three possibilities. It is known that after the disastrous Rus attack on Constantinople in 941, many Rus ships were burnt but some small boats survived and managed to escape and reach the Cilician

27 Androshchuk 2010, 81.
28 Ibn Khurrađadhbih, Kniga putei i stran 124; Al-Biruni, Sobranie svedenii 234.
29 BIG, fig. 183.
Figure 9.15: Grave goods, including a type H/I sword, from chamber grave 644 at Birka (after BIG)
However, this theory is undermined both by the lack of written evidence of any military activity in this area, and by the chronology of the finds at Yumuktepe, which points toward the end rather than the middle of the tenth century. Another possibility might be to connect the find with the raids of the Byzantines and their capture of Mopsuestia, Adana and Tarsus in 963–965. However, written sources mention only Iberian and Armenian allies during Nikephoros II’s raid on Cilicia. The Rus are mentioned as Nikephoros’ allies only after his raid on Syria in 966. The third and most credible possibility is the Syrian campaign of Basil II in 999, in which the Rus are known to have taken part as allies. On his way back, Basil spent six months in the area of Tarsus. This fits perfectly with the dating of the sword and the establishment of the Byzantine settlement at Yumuktepe.

In order to interpret the find at Yumuktepe, we need to know what kind of settlement we are dealing with. This can only be done by discussing other finds from this site. Osteological investigations have shown that local meat consumption was supported by balanced breeding of cattle, pigs, sheep and goats, as well as hunting deer, wild boar, gazelle, bear and hare. Furthermore, experts have noted the existence of wheat-based agriculture supplementing a diet which included broad beans and fruits (almonds and...
The high social status of some residents of the settlement is shown by the aforementioned imported ceramics, as well as coins and lead seals. Three lead seals of the eleventh century have been discovered at Yumuktepe. Two of them are still waiting to be cleaned, while one has been attributed to Michael the protospatharios. The title protospatharios is usually associated with a high military rank.

Given the small size of the settlement, as well as the artefacts indicating the high social status of the residents, the following interpretation can be suggested. To be sure, we still know very little about the types of, and social and cultural differences among, the early medieval settlements of Cilicia. Kilise Tepe in the Göksu valley in western Cilicia may be similar to the Yumuktepe site. It is located on the important route from the Mediterranean coast through the Taurus mountains to the Konya plain. It includes the remains of a church and buildings dated to the Byzantine period. The excavation of the site is still going on, and an interpretation of its Byzantine settlement has not yet appeared.

One explanation might be that Yumuktepe was a residence of a local landowner—a so-called oikos or household, including related men, women and servants of both sexes. Some of these residences may have been used as bases for hunting. The description of the Byzantine Baris estate in Bithynia indicates that oikoi could have a church, bathhouse, kitchen, stables and storehouses. The characteristic layout of the oikos featured “a complex of buildings grouped around a central courtyard with a church in the middle.”

Until recently, we had no archaeological evidence for the oikos. However, excavations on the Vrina Plain, in the city of Butrint in Albania, have revealed the remains of early medieval structures which have been interpreted as an aristocratic oikos. The oikos on the Vrina Plain was built on the ruins of an old established urban community and consisted of a hall, workshop, church, cemetery and some storage rooms, and had no traces of fortifications. The material culture of the site is represented by finds of seals, coins, imported amphorae and a few pieces of high-status metalwork. The area has been interpreted as an aristocratic and administrative centre and the residence of the regional ruler or archon.

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36 Köroğlu 2002, 16; Caneva & Köroğlu 2010b, fig. 152.
39 Bezobrazov 1900, 74–75; Byzantine Documents no. 7–35, 50; Magdalino 1984, 95–96; Whittow 1995, 64–66.
40 Greenslade & Hodges 2013.
41 Ibid., 12.
A close analogy may be a middle Byzantine settlement at Beycesultan by the River Meander, near Çivril in the former region of Phrygia. On a mound, remains of a walled settlement and traces of a cemetery have been identified. The wall, built of stone, enclosed a settlement area of about two hectares and has been dated to the tenth and eleventh centuries. Unfortunately, three levels from the Byzantine period were sacrificed for the sake of remains from the Bronze Age, which were a higher priority for the excavators. Nevertheless, the chronology of the site and its position in the frontier area between Byzantium and the Turks were established on the basis of characteristic ceramics and a group of deposited metal objects, as well as some architectural details.42

Another possibility is that Yumuktepe was a *kastron*—one of many Byzantine fortified settlements in the borderlands. Although we still know very little about the chronological and typological diversity of these Byzantine strongholds and especially about the social, ethnic and gender composition of their residents, certain clues indicate that at least some of them were privately owned or were part of extensive magnate holdings, as in the case of Neokastron, which belonged to the *sebastokrator* Isaac Komnenos.43

There are still many unanswered questions about the relationship between the magnate estates and military service in the frontier areas of empire.44 There is a suggestion that rural *oikoi*, which could have a courtyard wall and gates, were hardly considered fortresses.45 The aforementioned Beycesultan and Baris estates were situated along the River Meander and Baris encompassed seven other estates where peasants (*parikoi*) resided. Judging from such personal names as Hasan, Nicholas, son of Samona and Nikephoros, son of the Saracen,46 some of them were of Arab descent, while others, with titles such as *strategos presbuteros* and the *strategos*’ widow, were military veterans or their close relatives.47 The Baris estate bordered on “the field of the *protospatharios*’ widow (?)”,48 which means that at one time some of the residents were responsible for performing military service in this frontier area.

In order to gain a better understanding of the social background of the owners of the fortified residence at Yumuktepe, it is useful to consult the will of Eustathios Boilas, *protospatharios epi tou christotriklinou* and *hypatos*, dated to 1059.49 Eustathios belonged to a prominent Byzantine family, possibly with Bulgarian roots and a family

42 Wright 1997; Wright 2000.
43 Ostrogorsky 1971, 15–16.
46 Byzantine Documents 11, 17 (no. 50).
47 Ibid., 11, 12.
48 “τὸ χωράφιον τῆς Πρωτοσπαθαρίας”, Ibid., 12.
49 Eustathios Boilas, “Zaveshchanie”.
estate in Cappadocia. From the will we learn that he left Cappadocia for a new home somewhere in the eastern borderland of Asia Minor, where he established his new estate. There, “among alien nations with strange religion and tongue”, he had Armenians as neighbours and served under the *doux* Michael Apokapes. It states that Eustathios received deserted and poor land, where he built his house, two churches, “meadows, parks, vineyards, gardens, aqueducts, and small farms, water mills” and brought animals. The household of Eustathios consisted of his wife, three children, twenty-five slaves and the clergy of his private church and associated burial chapel. The main house of the estate was situated “in the eyes of Theotokos”, i.e. close to or opposite the church.


To the main estate belonged ten villages. His wealth can be estimated at 837 gold nomismata. In addition to precious church objects, about 80 books are mentioned. Apparently Eustathios was a member of the Byzantine military aristocracy, since at least one patrikios, one strategos and katepan and one officer of the grand hetaireia are known among his ancestors.\[52\]

Despite the fact that there is no written evidence regarding the residents of Yumuktepe, it is highly probably that its owner had a background similar to that of Eustathios Boilas. The character and context of the finds discovered at Yumuktepe are very similar to the descriptions of the oikos at Baris and Boilas’ estate. The owner of Yumuktepe in the eleventh century is likely to have been a representative of the military aristocracy residing with his household in the area where he was doing some service for the empire.

With regard to cultural diversity in Byzantium,\[53\] the role of foreigners in establishing and running castles or fortified villages is important to study. Normally, this type of land should have passed to successors or close relatives.\[54\] We believe that this custom may explain the appearance of a tenth-century sword in the eleventh-century social and cultural environment of Yumuktepe. The fact that remnants of wood have been found on the blade means that the sword was deposited with its scabbard. Finds of swords with scabbards are recorded only in Viking-Age graves, especially chamber graves, where they were placed deliberately. Intact swords without scabbards have only been found as sacrificed depositions in rivers, lakes and bogs in Scandinavia and other parts of Europe. The discovery of a sword with its wooden scabbard means that it was not lost, but was probably an object with its own ‘biography’ which goes back to one of the tenth-century residents of Yumuktepe. It is clear that the sword belongs to the Byzantine phase of the settlement, and most probably to the time of the establishment of the Byzantine rural fort or oikos in this borderland at the very end of the tenth century. The participation of Varangians in the Byzantine army is attested in written sources, but this is the first material evidence of their presence in Asia Minor. This undoubtedly makes the find of a single sword in Turkey worth hundreds of finds in other parts of Europe.

\[52\] “ἐν τῷ οίκῳ μου ἐνώπιον τῆς Θεοτόκου”, Ibid., 225; Vryonis 1957, 273.
\[53\] Charanis 1975, 17–18.
\[54\] Skabalonovich 2010, 446; Górecki 2009, 153.
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A VIKING SWORD-BEARING RESIDENT?


TRACES OF THE PRESENCE OF SCANDINAVIAN WARRIORS IN THE BALKANS

Valeri Yotov

The presence of Scandinavian Rus and Varangians in the Balkans has been studied mainly by historians.¹ Until recently, there was little material evidence of their activity in the region south of the River Danube. The only indications came from some bronze sword scabbard chapes and the pommel of just one sword.² However, over the last fifteen years, fresh data have appeared which can shed light on this issue. Both the provenance and the dating of some of the artefacts that have surfaced are still under discussion by archaeologists. In this paper, I will examine only those objects which have clear parallels in the Scandinavian material. A number of other objects of possible Scandinavian origin will receive attention in a work due to be published elsewhere.³

To begin our brief survey, Scandinavian artefacts have come to light at various sites in Bulgaria and Romania (Map 10.1). Some of them have already been published.⁴ I shall list the main categories of finds below, as well as some find spots which may contribute to a better understanding of the nature of the Scandinavian presence in this region. I am aware that there is some risk in

¹ VB; Ciggaar 1974; Ciggaar 1981; EB; Gjuzelev 2001, 30–33 n. 13–29.
² Paulsen 1953, 59, 63 (no. 1, 5); Popa 1984.
³ Yotov 2016 forthcoming.
calling all these objects 'Scandinavian', because some of them may have been used over a long period of time and by people of varying ethnic origins. However, they are all of military character and belong to the same limited period—from the second half of the tenth and beginning of the eleventh century. Thus, there is good reason to believe that they reflect a relatively short episode in the history of the Balkans.

The Scandinavian artefacts found in the Balkans are of an exclusively military character, although they vary in type and also sometimes in decoration. Swords, their pommels and scabbard chapes represent the largest group of finds.

**SWORDS**

An important specimen came to light in the area of a medieval fortress near the village of Opaka in the Popovo region of north-central Bulgaria (Fig. 10.1.1). Judging from the hilt type and its decoration, the sword could be likened to Jan Petersen’s type K. Petersen dated such swords to the ninth century, but this dating does not fit our Bulgarian specimen, which appears to be of a later period. It is known that type K swords were also used in the tenth century, for instance in Birka, where one fragmentary specimen has been discovered in a settlement deposit datable to c. 900–930/940.

A sword of type Z was discovered in a settlement near the village of Gradeshnitsa in the Vratsa region of south-eastern Bulgaria (Fig. 10.1.2). According to Petersen, such swords date from between the second half of the tenth and the mid-eleventh century.

The origin of this sword type remains unclear and is a matter of debate, since similar finds have been discovered across Europe. However, because they are found in Scandinavian graves, we have included them in our discussion.

Three more swords of Scandinavian origin are now in the collection of the Archeological Museum in Constanţa, Romania. One of them was found near the village of Albeşti, west of Mangalia; the other two come from the inland area of North Dobrudja. The blade of the Albeşti sword (Fig. 10.1.3) has a mark on one of its surfaces, and on the reverse there is an inscription reading "Ulfberht". The three swords belong to Petersen’s types E, X and V and date to between the second half of the tenth and the early eleventh century (Fig. 10.1.3–5).

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5 First published by Parushev 1999.
6 Petersen 1919, 176.
7 Ambrosiani & Androshchuk 2006, fig. 3.
8 Petersen 1919, 175–77.
9 Yotov 2011, 39–40 (figs. 5–7).
One sword (Fig. 10.1.6) came to light somewhere inland in the Sliven region of northern Thrace (south-eastern Bulgaria). According to Petersen’s classification, it is of type H and dates to the tenth century.\footnote{Ibid., 175–77.}
Several sword pommels have been discovered in the region of, or close to, the Lower Danube. One is decorated in the Mammen style and was found in a fortress on the Danubian island of Păcuiul lui Soare (Fig. 10.2.1). A second pommel is ornamented with engravings inlaid with silver, forming motifs of spirals and interlacing lines on the iron surfaces (Fig. 10.2.2); it was discovered by chance somewhere in north-eastern Bulgaria. Both of these pommels are of Petersen type R/S and so date to the tenth or early eleventh century.

**SCABBARD CHAPES**

Sword scabbard chapes of possible Scandinavian origin or imitation have also been found in the Balkans. They are either open-work or solid cases fixed to the lower end of wooden scabbards. Each has a round asymmetric rhomboid, triangular or more sophisticated form with convex or concave shoulders. They are elliptic in cross-section, and are cast of bronze. The decoration of four of these scabbard chapes has parallels in pieces which, according to Peter Paulsen, bear the so-called ‘germanisches Vogelmotiv’ (Fig. 10.3), while the other three can be assigned to the so-called ‘germanisches Vierfüßler-motiv’ style (Fig. 10.4). It has been suggested that the chapes of both groups were manufactured in Sweden. What is worth noting, however, is their distribution across a vast area of Europe. There have been finds in Iceland, Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Ukraine.

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13 Petersen 1919, 142–49.
14 Paulsen 1953, 17–57.
FIGURE 10.3: Scabbard chapes (Paulsen’s ‘germanisches Vogelmotiv’ style)

FIGURE 10.4: Scabbard chapes (Paulsen’s ‘germanisches Vierfüßlermotiv’ style)

FIGURE 10.5: Scabbard chapes (Paulsen’s ‘orientalische Palmette’ style)
Figure 10.6: Spearhead from north-eastern Bulgaria

Figure 10.7: Spearhead from south of Dristra

Figure 10.8: Copper alloy shield boss found south of Dristra
Another, more interesting group of chapes belongs to the ‘orientalische Palmette’ style, according to Paulsen’s classification (Fig. 10.5).\(^\text{16}\) It is now clear that there have only been two finds of such chapes in Scandinavia: most of them have been discovered in the region south of Kiev, in Hungary, Romania and south of the Danube. As far as I am aware, finds of these scabbard chapes are most numerous in Bulgaria.

**SPEARHEADS**

To date there has only been a single find of a spearhead of Scandinavian origin in Bulgaria (Fig. 10.6). It was discovered by chance and is now kept in a Bulgarian private collection. Its blade is ‘oblong egg-shaped’, according to Anatolii Kirpichnikov’s classification, but more importantly, it has narrow silver bands applied to the surface of its socket. This enables us to compare the spear to similar examples of Scandinavian origin which have been found in Ukraine.\(^\text{18}\)

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\(^{16}\) Paulsen 1953, 59–67.

\(^{17}\) Both pieces come from hoards discovered in Gotland: Paulsen 1953, Abb. 91; WG, vol. 3–4, 707 (Abb. III:62 B:1).

\(^{18}\) Kirpichnikov 1966, 13 (pl. VI.1–2); SASR, no. 235, 238.
Figure 10.10: Axes from north-eastern Bulgaria

Figure 10.11: Axes of possible Scandinavian style from Bulgaria

Figure 10.12: Heavy axes of possible Scandinavian style from Bulgaria
One further spearhead has been found south of Dristra (Drastrar/modern Silistra in north-eastern Bulgaria) (Fig. 10.7). It has a long, slender blade, a long socket and four-armed rosette decoration at the transitional part. It corresponds to the ‘Baltic Sea group’ of M-spearheads and is dated to the second half of the tenth or the eleventh century.19

SHEilds
We have only one find of a Scandinavian shield in Bulgaria (Fig. 10.8). It is represented by a shield boss of type R 562 and it, too, was found south of Dristra. On the basis of Scandinavian parallels, it can be dated to the tenth century.

AXES
Axes found in the Balkans belong to a very confused group of artefacts. For instance, a battle-axe from the Shumen region of north-eastern Bulgaria (Fig. 10.9) has only one Scandinavian analogy—a similar axe from Trelleborg in Denmark, which is unique and definitely of eastern provenance.20 Other types of Bulgarian axes have local or broadly ‘eastern’ origins (Fig. 10.10–12).21

POSSIBLE ROUTES BY WHICH SCANDINAVIAN OBJECTS ENTERED THE BALKANS
There are two main routes by which artefacts of Scandinavian origin might have made their way to the mouth of the Danube: Rus military raids or trading convoys to Constantinople between the ninth and mid-eleventh century; or, seemingly, the recruitment of Varangians by the Byzantine empire in the late tenth or early eleventh century.22

20 Paulsen 1939, 168 (Abb. 87a, b); Nørlund 1948, pl. XXXVI–XXXVII; Drozd & Janowski 2007, 126 (ryc. 8); Kotowicz 2011, fig. 73.
21 For parallels see Paulsen 1939, 37 (Abb. 12); Kirpichnikov 1966, 33–35 (ris. 6; pl. XII, 6; XIII, 1, 4).
22 Vasil’evskii 1908.
Figure 10.14: Two bronze medallions with engraved eagles or falcons from the fortress at Păcuiul lui Soare
Unfortunately, very few of the artefacts discussed above have come to light as a result of archaeological excavations. Nevertheless, it is worth looking at some of the sites where Scandinavian objects have been unearthed, or which may have connections with their activity in the Danube region. One such is the afore-mentioned fortress of Păcuiul lui Soare (Fig. 10.13). The fortress is near Dristra and was built on an island in what is now the Romanian part of the Danube. It underwent extensive investigation by the Romanian archaeologist Petre Diaconu. Although still subject to controversy, there is general agreement that it was constructed by the Byzantines. Since the medieval Bulgarian polity lacked a fleet, it is most likely that the fortress’ wharf was built for imperial vessels after the Byzantine victory in 971. The fortress’ main purpose was to serve as a military counterpoint to Dristra, the largest town in the region. What is most important for us, however, is that one of our sword pommels (Fig. 10.2.1) was found there:  

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23 Diaconu & Vicleanu 1972; Diaconu & Baraschi 1977.
the pommel decorated in Mammen style and corresponding to Petersen’s type R/S. Five unfinished pieces of this type of pommel have recently been discovered in Sweden, in a metalworking hoard at Alvena in Mästerby parish on Gotland. Single finds of this pommel type have been recorded in Denmark, Gotland, Norway and Russia. The fortress has yielded some other remarkable finds, including two medallions with images of eagles or falcons (Fig. 10.14).

Another site which must be mentioned is the village of Nufăru, which lies on the right bank of the southernmost arm of the Danube delta, in what is now Romania. Nufăru may well be the Preslavets-on-Danube mentioned in the Rus Primary Chronicle’s account of Sviatoslav’s plan to subjugate the Balkans. During excavations, the remains of some wooden structures of note were uncovered. Their building technique has parallels with early medieval architecture in northern Europe and it is similar to tenth- and eleventh-century structures excavated at Novgorod and Staraja Ladoga in present-day Russia. According to the archaeologist Oana Damian, a wood-paved ‘Varangian street’ was built in Nufăru (see above, Fig. 10.15 and 10.16), and it formed “an eventual temporary establishment inside the Nufăru fortification of some mercenaries from Byzantine armies”.

However, most of our Scandinavian material comes from stray finds, with very little information available about the circumstances of the find or its provenance. One such find area is located south of Dristra, which played an important role in the history of the Lower Danube region during the middle ages. The type K sword (Fig. 10.11), the spearheads (Figs. 10.6–7), the shield boss (Fig. 10.8) and a number of the axes of ‘eastern’ types (Figs. 10.10–12) discussed above all came from this area.

Scandinavian weaponry from this region can be dated to the second half of the tenth and the beginning of the eleventh century. The dating of some of the Balkan materials discussed in this paper is based on that of their Scandinavian parallels. They could represent material evidence of Sviatoslav’s raids of 968 and 969–971, which resulted in the conquest of most of the important centres of the First Bulgarian Empire by the Rus. However, in my opinion, most of these objects are more likely to be connected with the Scandinavian mercenaries who were employed in the eleventh century by the Byzantine army. But that is another story.

25 Gustavsson 2011.
26 Diaconu & Baraschi 1977, 116 (fig. 93.3, 9).
27 Damian & Vasile 2011.
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THE MATERIAL CULTURE in the urban settlement of Birka indicates a wider range of contacts with what was then the known world than any other urban centre in north-western Europe enjoyed. On the basis of the extant finds, we can discern a range of contacts stretching from the British Isles in the west to Tajikistan and China in the far east. The question is: what was the nature of these transcontinental contacts? We can assume that Northmen did not visit China on a regular basis—if at all—and that the communication therefore took other forms, with contacts being indirect rather than face-to-face.

This paper takes as its starting point some intriguing results from the 2005 and 2007 excavations in the present day village of Björkö in Lake Mälaren, in the eastern part of Scandinavia. Thanks to the finds from this part of the island, it is now possible to draw a revised picture of the settlement’s structure. For the first time, we can confirm the existence of buildings not located in immediate proximity to the urban settlement. This simple fact raises questions about the range and function of structures on the south-eastern part of the island—questions which have only featured to a limited extent in the general discussion about internal structuring and functional displacement within the Birka complex during the earlier and later phases of the Viking Age.

The material of concern to us here is pottery from the Middle East, the Far East and south-eastern Europe. So much pottery from these areas was recovered in the excavations at the village of Björkö that the total amount of this material now surpasses any other extant material of this type found in the town of Birka itself. Comparative material from excavations in the town of Birka and from the garrison, south of the settled area, will also be analysed. Further, other imported material from the same geo-

* The term ‘remotion’ here indicates the way certain foreign objects were received and interpreted in the Viking Age. It refers both to their physical remoteness (from Byzantium) and to Scandinavians’ psychological distance from the objects in relation to their interpretation and use.
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graphical area, such as textiles, clothing, beads, jewellery, military equipment and coins will be touched upon briefly by way of comparison with the pottery finds. Variations in the regional distribution pattern of these materials indicate differences in the island's strands of communication with the outside world.

BIRKA

Birka is situated on the island of Björkö in the eastern part of Lake Mälaren, in a quasi-archipelago (Map 11.1). During the Viking Age the lake was part of the Baltic Sea and the Baltic cultural sphere. Birka flourished between c. 770 and the 970s. The town
was located in what is now known as the Black Earth zone. The basic set-up of the people living on this tiny island is of importance for understanding the site. One thing is perfectly clear: the island’s natural resources could not have supported its presumed population of between 500 and 1,000, figures estimated from the c. 2,500 discernible graves. Birka’s population was always dependent on outside people for its supply of food, timber, fuel, raw materials for production and perhaps also protection. Consequently, a wide range of alliances and contacts are traceable in the material culture of the town and the burial ground. As can be seen in the aerial photograph, the area of habitation leaves little land for subsistence production.

The insular scene is dominated by the town area and rampart, the burial ground and the hill fort or garrison (Fig. 11.1). Most of the activity in the Viking Age is generally supposed to have taken place in this northern part of the island, but this assumption can now be questioned. The newly discovered signs of Viking-Age occupation on the south side of the island of Björkö (near the medieval village of Björkö and separate from the town of Birka) have revealed a possible combination of a typical town house and a sunken floor building. The building is dated to the ninth century. This is what I call the ‘fourth element’ of Birka: a non-military occupation outside the town, the other three elements being the town, burial ground and garrison. There are also strong indications that there may have been a harbour in the medieval village of Björkö on the south side—at the other end of the island from the town of Birka. In this context one should recall the suggestion that there might also have been a harbour site near Char-

**Figure 11.1:** The elements constituting the Birka complex (photograph by Björn Ambrosiani)
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lottenlund on the south side of the island.\(^1\) Even though the archaeological evidence is ambiguous, one cannot rule out the possibility of yet another anchorage. And as noted above, the amount of long-distance pottery imports found in Björkö village now exceeds such finds in the town of Birka itself.

**THE POTTERY PROFILE OF BIRKA**

A well-known method of characterising a historical site is to summarise the relative frequency of all the pottery types found there in order to capture a local ‘fingerprint’ of social interaction. The pottery, mostly reflecting patterns of everyday life, is normally present as a mass material on urban sites and it is also well preserved in comparison with organic matter. I shall start by presenting the pottery profile of Birka that emerged from the major excavation campaign in 1990–1995 (Tab. 11.1). Not surprisingly, local pottery amounts to more than three-quarters of the total assemblage found there.

This might seem like quite a large figure, but in comparison with the norm for rural sites in eastern Scandinavia, the proportion of imports is very high. In the countryside there are only occasional examples of pottery imports originating in ‘contact areas’ in the central Baltic region. More than 20% of the total pottery assemblage derives from various parts of the Baltic, and surprisingly enough only half of this comes

\(^1\) Wåhlander 2000.
from neighbouring areas: Finland, Estonia and north-western Russia. The other half originates in West Slavonic areas in the southern Baltic, mainly Pomerania and Mecklenburg. Western European imports are rare: only 1.5% of the total amount of pottery from Birka emanates from north-western Europe. These items mainly originate from the Lower Rhineland and the Frisian coast. Even less well represented are the pottery groups discussed in this paper. No more than 0.5% of the total assemblage originates from south-eastern Europe or the Middle East. In order to understand what lies behind these statistics, a thorough analysis of the reasons for the presence of different pottery types in Birka needs to be carried out. The north-western Russian and Fenno-Baltic pottery types can serve as examples here. These types have a find pattern that is very different from that of the western European or Black Sea wares. The former have a relatively wide distribution in the countryside, especially in the county of Uppland, while the pottery from western Europe and the Black Sea region is concentrated in Birka’s close hinterland (Map 11.2). The wares discussed in this paper, pottery from south-eastern Europe and the Middle East, are only found on the island of Björkö and occur

Map 11.2: Distribution of imported pottery on settlement sites in the Lake Mälaren basin (750–980)
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nowhere else in eastern Scandinavia in the Viking Age (Map 11.3). I will come back to the distribution of these wares in the latter part of the Viking Age and the transition to the early middle ages as defined in Scandinavia.

However, we need first briefly to comment on the quantitative distribution of the imported wares in Birka. Table 11.1 shows the relative proportions of the main categories of imported wares from the Birka excavation in 1990–1995. As already noted, West Slavonic wares predominate and they constitute more than 50% of the imported pottery. The upper Baltic wares (Fenno-Baltic and north-western Russian) add up to almost 40% of the imports, whilst western European wares represent 8.5%. The pottery discussed in this paper represents no more than 1.5% of the total bulk of imports. These figures are, of course, not surprising in the light of the vast geographical areas we are dealing with. Finally, it should be mentioned that only a single find of insular pottery from the period has been recovered in the central part of eastern Scandinavia.
First identified as Thetford ware and now re-evaluated as Lincoln ware, it is the only example of English pottery in this part of Scandinavia before the eleventh or even the twelfth century.

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LOCAL AND IMPORTED POTTERY IN A NORTHERN EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE**

Before taking a closer look at the pottery originating in the Middle East, the Far East and south-eastern Europe, I will very briefly sketch the pottery profile of some other sites in northern Europe. Table 11.2 above shows the relationship between imported and locally manufactured pottery from eleven sites in northern Europe, including Birka. One should note the high percentage of imports found in Dorestad (in the Netherlands) and in Kaupang (in Norway). Around 90% of the pottery found in Kaupang is imported. Also worth highlighting is the relatively limited amount of imports at the Slavonic sites compared to the western European ones. Here it is important to stress

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2 Selling 1955, 60.
that this survey is based on materials that were published before 1995. Most probably, there are more imports at sites like Staraia Ladoga (not submitted), but the figures give a reasonably adequate picture of the relative proportions of imported pottery at the different sites.

The pottery profiles of these sites are rather dissimilar, but a full comparative analysis lies outside the scope of this paper. Here, I will only comment on some aspects of the patterns which emerge from the statistics. Firstly, we have already observed the very high proportion of imports in Kaupang and Dorestad. In the case of Kaupang there is an endemic reason: there was almost no local production of pottery in Norway in the Viking Age, and hence the unusual dominance of imports. Dorestad is situated on the Lower Rhine and forms a transit point on the trade routes using this central communication channel. With the exception of these two sites, Birka has more imports than all the others, closely followed by Hamwic in southern England and Ribe in the south-western corner of Denmark. The very low rate of imports at the Baltic sites, including Staraia Ladoga (which is not reviewed here due to lack of information from that site) is noticeable. Within the Baltic context Birka stands out clearly, and, seen from this perspective, 25% imports does not seem like such a small proportion. Obviously, the site must have had a role as a transit point in interregional interactions in northern Europe. The primary characterisation of Birka is that it had contacts with the east, even though, from the very earliest phases, western European material is also present. This is a situation not found at Kaupang or Åhus, and, remarkably, it is also not the case in places like Staraia Ladoga and Riurikovo Gorodishche in north-western Russia (judging by the published pottery evidence). Thus, we cannot discuss the degree of interregional interaction at one particular site just by quantifying its pottery imports. Birka is, in my opinion, firmly rooted in the local community but at the same time it constitutes an anomaly. External influences on everyday life are discernible in the burial customs, consumption of material culture and hybridisation within certain craft traditions, for example pottery production. Trace element analyses have shown how Slavonic influence affected the design and decoration of locally made cooking vessels. On the other hand, the pottery traditions discussed below had no influence on local traditions, but are rather an example of what makes Birka an ‘exotic flower’.

**POTTERY FROM SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST IN CENTRAL EASTERN SCANDINAVIA**

There are considerable difficulties in identifying pottery from such a vast geographical area, with a very long and comprehensive history of production. Without trace element analysis it is almost impossible to pinpoint the exact provenance of individual vessels. However, we can confirm that the pottery in question derives from the
Byzantine empire, other parts of the Black Sea region, the Khazar cultural sphere and Islamic areas. As we have seen, the total number of vessels is small, but sufficient to allow discussion of possible contact regions. Numerous works on the contacts between Scandinavia and the regions in question have been published over the last forty years. Some subjects have been discussed in more detail than others, in particular numismatics.³ Other categories of material culture that have received attention are jewellery, beads, cloth, weights and weight systems.⁴ On the whole, there are very few Byzantine and oriental objects in Scandinavia, with the exception of Islamic coins and some bead types. However, it is important to stress that these finds are much more common in eastern Scandinavia than they are in the rest of western Europe.⁵

³ See e.g. BCFS; Rispeling 1990, 2004. See also above, 141–68 and 117–39.
⁵ For surveys of Far Eastern finds in Scandinavia see e.g. Jansson 1989; Müller-Wille 1997.
From the distribution map above (Map 11.3) it is obvious that the pottery dealt with here is associated entirely with Birka. Before excavations took place in the medieval village on Björkö in 2005–2007⁶ there were thirty-four to thirty-seven known pottery vessels from the regions under discussion; in the Birka project’s pottery registration system, these groups comprise Bi I 20 A–D and Bi I 21 A–D. They come primarily from the town plots and harbour area in Birka, but one sherd was found in the garrison.⁷ The excavations at Björkö village have produced vague remains of buildings and other structures, but in cultural layers dateable to the Viking Age twelve sherds, representing seven or eight vessels of Black Sea and Middle Eastern origin, were found. This is remarkable, since the pottery deriving from these regions now amounts to about 20% of all known vessels of these types in eastern Scandinavia from this period. Hence-

⁶ Bäck 2009; Bäck 2010a; Bäck 2010b; Bäck et al. 2010.
forth, we can no longer discuss the Birka complex without reference to what I call the ‘fourth element’, which comprises the structures of everyday life outside the town wall of Birka. The combination of newly discovered signs of habitation at Grindsbacka (between the town of Birka and the medieval village of Björkö) and the find contexts in Björkö village indicates that we must start paying attention to the shallow bay called Kassviken on the south side of the island. In the light of these long-distance pottery finds, we need to reconsider the role of Kassviken as a possible landing place or harbour. The general dating of the pottery under discussion is confined to the tenth century, judging by the stratigraphically dated material from Birka. This hypothetical harbour may, then, represent a relatively late feature of the Birka complex which was not in use during the earlier phases of the town. As for vessel types, the pottery consists mainly of large storage and transport vessels like amphorae and massive jars. Two amphorae of the same type were recovered in the town of Birka. This is of interest, since

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8 Bäck 2009.
9 Bäck 2010a, 184; Bäck et. al. 2010, 26–27.
this type represents the earliest finds of amphorae generally attributable to the Black Sea region. Finds of this kind of amphora from Bulgaria, Romania and Russia give us a chronological framework of 800–1100. Other amphora types represent new forms on the island. Significantly, the relative frequency of finds of transport vessels is greater on the south shore site than it is in the assemblage from the town of Birka. Before examining the pottery from the settlements on Björkö, it is worth mentioning the total and significant lack of Black Sea and Middle Eastern pottery in burial contexts on the island.

If we look more closely at the provenance of the unglazed wares we can establish that there are a total of between fourteen and seventeen vessels (seventy-five sherds)

10 See e.g. Zelenko 2001, figs. 2, 10; Parshina 2001, figs. 1, 3, 4; Majko 2001, fig. 1.
11 Günserin 1989, 270.
originating from the Khazar cultural sphere (Fig. 11.4). Contextual dating for these wares in Birka is 950–980 which, at the latest, is about fifteen years later than the finds from, for example, the Khazar town and fortress of Sarkel in southern Russia. So-called ‘Khazar’ pottery has been recorded in cultural layers dated to before the destruction of the town around 965.\(^\text{12}\) Noteworthy is the fact that one of the sherds is an amphora stopper remodelled from a Khazar vessel. A total of four sherds from so-called costrels or spheroid-conical vessels have been recovered in Birka. They come from three vessels, all found in the town area. These vessels have a wide chronological span, from the ninth to the thirteenth century, but the vessels in Birka belong to the tenth century. A further four fragments, representing four separate, large storage amphorae, have been found in Birka. One of these comes from the town harbour area, one from within the town and another two from the recently excavated site on the southern shore of Björkö. The

\(^{12}\) Pletneva 1996, 99, 103–04, 129, 140; Pletneva 2006, figs. 69 (local ceramic), 73 (amphorae).
Figure 11.7: Green glazed red ware from the excavations of Birka (1990–1995) and Björkö village (2005–2006); the origins of these sherds are at present unknown

Figure 11.8: White ware from Birka and Björkö village
pottery from the town area is stratigraphically dated to the tenth century. Other large storage containers amount to some four or five vessels. These are red or cream coloured wares. The majority of these vessels were unearthed during excavations in the village of Björkö in 2005–2007. There are also a variety of smaller red fired wares (between fifteen and twenty vessels) which have not yet been identified (see above, Fig. 11.6). Their classification is based on elimination, since they cannot belong to any other main pottery group found in Birka. Identification of these more or less anonymous wares is a task for the future and one that will involve substantial work.

A small quantity of glazed ware belongs to the pottery groups dealt with here. A small group (seven sherds) of green glazed monochrome red wares represents five or six vessels (Fig. 11.7). They are found in both the northern and the southern parts of Björkö. It has not, so far, been possible to identify the provenance of the pottery. Five sherds of glazed white ware, representing three or four vessels, were recovered from the town area and the southern shore of Björkö. None of these sherds has been identified.
The sherds are very small and it is not even possible to determine whether they are of Byzantine or Islamic origin.

Let us turn back to the excavations in the village of Björkö in 2005–2007. Following these investigations, it is obvious that our focus must shift from the northern part of the island to include the southern part when discussing the settlement complex of Birka. The finds from the southern side of the island come from a site close to the shore of Kassviken Bay, facing south onto the waterway that leads out to the Baltic Sea. The results of the excavations show that we need to reconsider this part of the island as well.

I have shown the very limited distribution of finds of pottery from the regions under discussion beyond Birka in the period from 850–980 (see above, Map 11.3). From the second half of the ninth century, material from the East Slavonic and Islamic regions makes up the bulk of long-distance imports (for example, coins, jewellery, belt ornaments, beads, cowrie shells and cloth). In contrast, Byzantine material is not prom-
Birka and the archaeology of remotion

Inent until after the town of Birka had ceased to exist at the end of the tenth century, with the possible exception of the garrison, which may still have been in use. In the post-Birka period, a different type of source material reflects a more dispersed picture of transcontinental contacts. Map 11.4 illustrates the runestones that describe journeys in various directions. This probably indicates long-distance networks among the landholders around Lake Mälaren, and possibly also a change in the political structure of the area relative to the earlier Viking Age.

One of the main characteristics of Birka is, as we have seen, the wide range of finds from different parts of the known world. There is almost no other contemporary town in northern Europe that can boast the same geographical span in its material culture. The provenance of the finds covers an area stretching from Ireland in the west to Tajikistan and China in the east. It has been suggested that the main production areas

MAP 11.6: Plot map showing runestones which mention journeys to the east in relation to finds of Baltic ware/Slavonic-influenced pottery for the period c. 980–1150

in ent until after the town of Birka had ceased to exist at the end of the tenth century, with the possible exception of the garrison, which may still have been in use. In the post-Birka period, a different type of source material reflects a more dispersed picture of transcontinental contacts. Map 11.4 illustrates the runestones that describe journeys in various directions. This probably indicates long-distance networks among the landholders around Lake Mälaren, and possibly also a change in the political structure of the area relative to the earlier Viking Age.

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for the eastern pottery found in Birka are the Lower Don and Donets estuaries, the Crimea and the Caucasus.

Although the eastern material predominates, there is no real sign of trade in pottery. Rather, the pottery reveals contacts and contracts of types other than trade. Even though analysis of one Khazar vessel confirms that wine had been transported to Birka in that container, the very limited quantities suggest that these wares reached Scandinavia as personal belongings, gifts or supplies for long journeys.

It is significant that all the long-distance pottery imports from south-eastern Europe, the Black Sea region and the Caucasus have been found in the settlement areas, and not as grave goods. It is also noteworthy that de luxe table wares occur within the town of Birka, whereas the new excavations in the possible southern harbour area of Björkö have mainly uncovered storage and transport vessels. I believe that we should not view these ‘exotic’ wares as exclusively status symbols or ethnic indicators. On the contrary, this pottery might well be more indicative of status in the production area than at the consumption sites. Other materials, like silk clothing, beads and cowrie shells are more indicative of social position, but they do not necessarily signify ethnic affiliation.

PRE- AND POST-BIRKA CONNECTIONS WITH SOUTH-EASTERN EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST

This paper focuses on Viking-Age long-distance contacts, as seen through the ceramic evidence. However, these contacts can be traced long before the Viking Age. In the Roman era and the Migration Period (which corresponds to the early Byzantine period), glass and bronze finds in particular occur in quite a few places in the Mälaren basin, even though there seem to be concentrations surrounding the royal centre of Uppsala and the eastern reaches of Lake Mälaren. The total amount of foreign goods does not reach the scale of the Viking Age, due above all to the vast number of Islamic coins found mainly in eastern Scandinavian contexts in the latter period. The reasons for the presence of these finds probably differ in some respects from the situation in the later Viking Age. Amethysts, ivory rings, cowrie shells and silk and gold strips are found in grave contexts that have mostly been interpreted as belonging to high ranking individuals. Concerning the means by which Byzantine goods reached Scandinavia, regular direct contacts must be ruled out for this early period. The presence of Byzantine and Middle Eastern goods in the Baltic and Scandinavian spheres can only be explained through the use of intermediaries. These intermediaries are among the more

13 Ljungkvist 2010, fig. 3.
14 Ibid., fig. 17.
important actors if we want to discuss the social structures which enabled interaction to take place, since exchange is, on the whole, a matter of trust. There is an ongoing discussion about which routes were in use over time. Theories shift from western rivers through the Merovingian kingdom and on to Scandinavia, to routes via central

15 Bäck 1997; Gustin 2004b.
European and Russian rivers. From the later eighth century and more clearly from the second half of the ninth century onwards, the Russian waterways seem to have been the main communication arteries.

Let us briefly discuss the situation immediately following the Birka period, when the ‘Varangian Guard’ allowed closer and more frequent contact. The guard probably came into being under Emperor Basil II (976–1025), and this roughly coincides with the date of Sigtuna’s foundation. Notably, the bulk of the extant Byzantine goods reached eastern Scandinavia when Birka was already fading away as the central commercial and administrative hub in the Lake Mälaren basin. A thorough analysis of political events in the Byzantine sphere is crucial in order fully to understand the dynamics of communications between northern Europe and the Byzantine world. One question which has not yet been investigated concerns the significance of western routes in comparison with the eastern routes, via the Russian river systems. A major urban excavation in the centre of Sigtuna (Trädgårdsmästaren block) in the late 1980s yielded, among other things, the most substantial assemblage of south-eastern European and Far Eastern pottery in eastern Scandinavia, with the possible exception of Lund in Denmark. The contact areas traceable through the ceramics include Rus, the Islamic lands, Syria, the Black Sea region, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and perhaps even Persia and China. The total number of vessels is not great in comparison with, for example, the Baltic wares found in Sigtuna, but they still mark out the town as a centre with deep roots in the personal alliances that had already been forged in the ninth century, at the latest, at Birka. Before the extensive excavations between 2010 and 2011 in the town of Nyköping on the shore of the Baltic Sea, around one hundred kilometres south of Stockholm, there were only sporadic finds from Strängnäs, Västerås, Enköping and Södertälje to indicate Baltic and other long-distance connections in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The Nyköping material (above, Fig. 11.9) has revealed a regulated urban structure already in existence at the end of the eleventh century—the only one known in this region that is comparable with Sigtuna. Within the pottery assemblage we find what are, in the eastern Scandinavian context, extremely rare types, such as ‘splashed ware’ or ‘London coarse ware’, Islamic raqqa ware and an amphora from the Black Sea region. These finds indicate a lively network, though not as strikingly as in the case of Sigtuna. Of course, the limited amount of material makes it difficult to draw far-reaching conclusions about intercontinental relations. However, the presence of this pottery may well be a result of personal relationships between burghers in Sigtuna and Nyköping. We need more material from several other urban sites in the area.

17 Bäck 2014; Bäck et. al forthcoming.
in order to amplify this discussion. However, the material culture of Nyköping could be a more ‘normal’ representation of an urban network in eastern Scandinavia in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. At any rate, the pottery assemblage in Nyköping clearly points to extensive relationships for long-distance exchanges, sufficient to have been influential on urban life there. Future large-scale excavations in these towns will be of great importance for our understanding of the character of the networks linking the various urban sites in eastern Scandinavia with each other and more distant regions in the early middle ages.

THE PROBLEM OF REMOTION

Far Eastern pottery has not been recovered from graves in Birka or anywhere else in the Mälar valley. Based on what we know today, there is nothing to indicate that ceramics were used to express either status or ethnicity in burial contexts. Furthermore, references to pottery are almost non-existent in contemporaneous written sources. The transporting of ceramics and silks across huge geographical areas shows that there was a vast network in operation, stretching from the British Isles in the west to China in the east. Sphero-conical vessels originating in the area historically known as Transoxania (modern Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan) indicate that the Rus interacted with Arab traders. These encounters might have taken the form described by Ibn Fadlan: “No Muslim is able to trade in their country [Ghuzzija, inhabited by Ghuzz Turks in modern Kazakhstan] without initially acquiring a guest friend, who accommodates him”.18 This suggests that locals (Muslims?) could have acted as middlemen at trading places in the Khazar realm. On the other hand, there are reliable written accounts of Rus traders operating in Itil, so we cannot rule out the possibility of direct trading without middlemen. Furthermore, there is no written evidence about Khazar traders apart from Khazar Jews. Even in the capital, Itil, the Khazars resided in an area of the city separate from the quarters of traders and Muslims. It is assumed that Khazar trade was essentially transit trade.19

Pottery analysis shows that the routes between Scandinavia and the Byzantine empire went primarily via the Khazar polity and the Caucasus, and thus often through regions where only intermediary transactions took place. Here, substantial amounts of Byzantine and Islamic goods were in regular circulation and readily accessible. Material evidence of Volga Bulgarian origin is seen in a group of ninth- and tenth-century ob-

18 Ibn Fadlan, Puteshestvie 61; Wikander 1978, 40.
jects discovered in graves at Birka. This evidence is reinforced through pottery analysis, whereby the interrelationship between Middle Eastern/Islamic, Khazar and Volga Bulgarian pottery is contextualised and highlighted.

Explanations for the modest quantity of Byzantine material found at Birka primarily involve issues of chronology, along with the types of ware identified. There are quite a few examples of finds of pottery from the early Byzantine period in western Europe, but from the eighth century onward, archaeological reports mentioning Byzantine wares are scarce. They normally concern ‘coarse ware’, that is, amphorae and other types of vessels for transport and storage made from red fired clay. During the eighth to tenth centuries, fine wares (white clay wares) were distributed widely within the Byzantine empire, but there is little evidence that they circulated in western European markets. This means that the Byzantine pottery recovered in Birka constitutes some of the earliest known examples of such wares in western Europe. This find pattern changed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, when trade was internationalised again. Does the presence of Byzantine pottery in Birka reflect changes in international trade patterns, or did other factors account for the distribution pattern of pottery from the Mediterranean and Black Sea regions? As this analysis has shown, there seem to have been vast contact areas as early as the seventh and eighth centuries.

According to numismatists, the bulk of the Byzantine coins in Scandinavia arrived between c. 975–1070, after Birka ceased to function as an urban centre. What about the ‘garrison’? The question is whether a guard was still maintained on the island, possibly connected to the royal manor on the adjacent island of Adelsö. Moreover, after the mid-tenth century the stream of Islamic coins flowing into Scandinavia also dried up. Evidently, something happened to the contacts between Scandinavia and the Middle East in the late tenth century. The reasons for this are probably manifold, but the changes in the archaeological data are too substantial to ignore. Political changes in Rus, as well as developments in the Lake Mälaren basin itself, must be taken into account. Michael McCormick has presented some new interpretations, arguing that the slave trade in Europe until the tenth century was responsible for major social and structural changes in early medieval Europe. There is no room to discuss his comprehensive work here, beyond noting that he used a vast corpus of material showing the mobility of slaves in Europe. An example of the complexity of these problems is the fall

\[\text{References}\]

\[\text{Jansson 1978, 397–98; Jansson 1989, 610–13 (figs. 23:8, 14, 15); Müller-Wille 1997, 416 (fig. 7a); Ambrosiani & Androshchuk 2006, 6 (fig. 7); VE, fig. 81.}\]

\[\text{Dark 2001, 92.}\]

\[\text{Dark 2001, 92; Roslund 1997, 288–93; Roslund 1998, 49–50; Roslund 2010, 48.}\]

\[\text{See above, 141–68 and 117–39.}\]

\[\text{McCormick 2001; McCormick 2002.}\]
of the Khazar polity in the 960s and the repercussions of its collapse. These events are contemporaneous with the abandonment of Birka. The upheavals in the Khazar cultural sphere may well have affected the direction of trade routes, in that journeys across the region were now considered too dangerous to undertake.

Political turmoil in Byzantium and the Black Sea region in the seventh and eighth centuries must also have left its mark even as far north as Scandinavia. The political tendency which started in the ninth century with Charlemagne was continued by the Ottonians in the later tenth century, and western Europe became an imperial construct, posing a challenge to Byzantium. This is the very time of the influx of Byzantine goods into eastern Scandinavia. Does the material discussed here reflect direct contacts with the east, or should western alliances be considered, too? In the late Birka period (late tenth century) this may not have been the case, but what about the Middle Eastern pottery from Nyköping, discovered in a seemingly western context? We have to remember that the earliest phases at Nyköping have southern Baltic and Slavonic associations, reflecting political alliances. The archaeological challenge is to find out the extent to which these are discernible in the material culture of everyday life. Even though pottery often carries ethnic, cultural and ritual connotations, it is also a commodity, which, in a context far from its place of production, first and foremost signifies the various alliances in play. We must concentrate our future work on the character of these alliances and on the prerequisites for communications in the Viking Age. Only then will we be able fully to understand the different Scandinavian sites and their occupants’ commercial, cultural and political alignments.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


Birka and the Archaeology of Remotion


As contemporary and later historical sources show, Europe underwent extensive structural changes after the collapse of the Roman empire and the subsequent Migration Period. The steady advance of Christianity was making it the dominant religion, larger state units were forming and widespread trading networks were being established—developments which were all somehow interconnected. At the same time, mass movements of Slavonic groupings continued across the continent, including across central and northern Europe. Viking-Age Scandinavia was to a greater or lesser degree involved in all of this, with Birka as one of its key locations. This was Sweden’s political and commercial centre, the king’s place of residence and a base for mission work, particularly that undertaken from Hamburg-Bremen. There are written as well as archaeological sources for this period, but they are unevenly distributed, often difficult to interpret and also to a certain extent misleading. Textiles can allow us to reach more nuanced conclusions, especially when they are found in settlements linked to a particular group of people or to an individual. All the textiles found at Birka so far come from burials. This study uses these textile finds—and particularly the deluxe silk textiles found there—to bring into focus Birka’s position between east and west in the Viking Age.

Silk in woven cloth or other textile elements has been discovered in an unusually large number of graves at Birka, all dating from the ninth and tenth centuries. Such

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1 The questions of the date when, and the locations where, Slavs came to form a distinctive entity are highly controversial, and traditional assumptions have come under challenge from Florin Curta (2001); this challenge has itself gained both endorsement and spirited counter-challenge (see e.g. contributions to Studia Slavica et Balcanica Petropolitana 2 (St Petersburg, 2008) and Archeologické Rozhledy 61 (Prague, 2009)).

2 See the papers from a conference held in Gothenburg in 2002, with critical surveys of different historical interpretations of the original sources, published in FBN.

3 This subject receives more detailed treatment in Hägg 1984, Hägg 2002 and Hägg 2007a. The main points developed there are summarised on the following pages. With the kind invitation to contribute to the present publication I now have the opportunity to add some arguments based on my research into textile materials from Hedeby (Hägg 1985; Hägg 1991).

4 The number of burials with samite and different kinds of silk tabby are summarised here, and also appear in Hägg 1986, fig. 8.1. Unfortunately, in the latter only silk tabby (Tafseide) is listed.
high value material is found frequently in male and female graves when it forms part of their clothing or dress trimmings, but only rarely amongst other parts of their belongings. The relative proportion of male and female graves in which remnants of silk have been found differs significantly. One reason for this is that the total number of women’s graves is greater than that of men.\(^5\) Another is the particularly favourable conditions for textile preservation offered by the corrosion found above and beneath the large oval brooches in many female graves. But looked at over time, these differences do

\(^5\) 58\%: Gräslund 1980, 82.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Grave type</th>
<th>Samite</th>
<th>Other types of silk fabrics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First half of the ninth century</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>464, 557, 602, 619, 854</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ninth century</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>577, 597, 620, 825, 849, 950</td>
<td>950</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>624, 942, 1151</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>c. 900</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>466, 594, 946</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>832</td>
<td>832</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beginning/first half of the tenth century</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>507</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>581</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Double*</td>
<td>703</td>
<td>—</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle of the tenth century</td>
<td>Female</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>495, 524</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Double*</td>
<td>735, 750, 834</td>
<td>735</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tenth century</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>465, 480, 511, 512, 523, 543, 660, 739, 791, 823, 824, 835, 837, 838, 839, 844, 845, 854, 943, 953, 963, 964, 965, 967, 968, 983</td>
<td>660, 824, 963</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>944, 958</td>
<td>944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Double*</td>
<td>731</td>
<td>—</td>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>535</td>
<td>535</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>842, 855, 886, 957</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^*\) i.e. Male and female grave

Table 12.1: Birka: remains of silk fabrics found in female, male and double graves
Silks at Birka seem to reflect a real contrast between the sexes. When aggregated, silk remains have been found in three male and twelve female burials from the ninth century (see Table 12.1). This uneven ratio changes only slightly in the tenth century, when silk appears in ten male and thirty-two female burials (excluding graves from c. 900 and those with uncertain dating). That the number of graves with silk finds is unusually high at Birka is clear in comparison with the situation at Hedeby, its counterpart in south-western Scandinavia. Some 1,200 burials have been uncovered there, yet silk remains appear only four or five times. Considering Hedeby’s prominent position as a trading centre, the rarity of silk even in its richly furnished chamber graves is striking. At Birka, on the other hand, silk not only occurs frequently: in many of the graves it seems to make up a regular part of the dress.

Certain garments with elements of silk can be identified as exclusively male, and these include caftans with silk applications, passement-trimmings and embroidery; tunics with similar silk applications, decorated with tablet-woven bands and embroidery; and two types of headgear with trimmings and other ornaments. In female burials, the silk elements consist mostly of applied strips, with or without tablet-woven bands, and they appear on the front openings of tunics worn on top of the skirt, and on shifts with closed fronts worn underneath the skirt. Textile ornaments from headgear have also been found in some of the women’s graves. However, in neither male nor female dress is there any indication of an entire garment made of silk.\(^6\)

\(^6\) Hägg 1986.
Since Agnes Geijer’s publication in 1938 of the textiles found at Birka, different explanations have been offered for the vast quantity of silk found in the graves. Most focus on the transit trade from the east, with goods travelling along the waterways of Rus to Birka, for distribution in western Europe. Trade was certainly an important factor, but it explains neither the sheer quantity of silk in the graves nor its relationship to the find context in general. We know that silk formed a substantial part of the court dress found at various princely seats in Europe, which took the imperial court of Constantinople as their model. In Byzantium the concept of a hierarchically-organised society took visual form, with vestments and other insignia representing the

emperor as head of state and church, as well as denoting the respective ranks of his subordinates. By the tenth century Scandinavians were already serving in the imperial forces and many were later to be found in the emperor’s guard in Constantinople, where they would have come into direct contact with the Byzantine hierarchy. It would therefore not be surprising if the silks and other deluxe dress elements found in the graves at Birka were the remnants of Byzantine-style court dress.

We should look first at the male burials to shed light on this possibility, where there is evidence to support this suggestion. But it is not individual dress elements which would point convincingly to a Byzantine influence. After all, Byzantium had been a meeting point between east and west since antiquity, receiving and sending out stimuli in all directions. The distinguishing characteristic is rather the hierarchical system, strictly regulated from above and applied to a political structure, with different precious materials symbolising different levels of obligation and authority. This is especially important for our present problem. Among other things, it implies that a person’s de luxe outfit reflected quite precisely his—or her—position in the political structure, and not their wealth and power in general. The ques-

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For the ideology, its historical importance and visual expression see Schramm 1954–1956; Ostrogorsky 1956; Piltz 1997; Trilling 1997; Weyl Carr 1997. See also Maguire 1997.

Davidson 1976, 177.
Figure 12.3: Silver trimming and remains of silk fabric from an A-type headpiece (Birka, grave Bj. 710) (photograph by Gabriel Hildebrand)

Figure 12.4: Silver trimming from a B-type headpiece (Birka, grave Bj. 886) (photograph by Gabriel Hildebrand)
tion is whether the extraordinarily large number of graves with remains of silk at Birka might fit into a system of this kind.

If one takes into account the basic hierarchical criteria of the Byzantine model, the remnants of clothing allow us to make a rough subdivision of the male burials at Birka. At the top of the hierarchy we find a type of conical headgear, made entirely or partly of silk, with a vertical trimming of gold wire (Tab 12.3, type A1; Figs. 12.1A and 12.2). At a level below this are headpieces of similar shape but with silver trimmings (type A2, Fig. 12.3). Corresponding forms of ornamentation often appear on other dress items in the same graves. These conical headpieces are also found with other types of vertical trimmings, for example gold or silver braid (type A3), instead of the passamenterie trimmings made of precious-metal wire. The men buried in some graves probably had semi-spherical caps with horizontal borders of silver and silk (type B, Figs. 12.1B and 12.4). Here, too, there is an obvious correspondence between a headpiece’s fabric and decoration and the other parts of the men’s dress. In some cases, the remnants of a woollen caftan and wool from the cap have been preserved. Some gold braids were probably worn as brow-bands (type C). The gold thread in the weft of these bands is flat, a type that was not normally used at Birka. Perhaps the men in these particular graves were envoys or other dignitaries from distant countries. The largest group of male burials to contain de luxe garments with elements of silk and silver in them are those in which no remains of headgear have been found (type D). As in the graves with silken headgear, the woollen fabrics used for the garments in these burials were of high quality. The standard type of twill—Geijer’s group IV—does not appear in any of the male burials containing de luxe dress.

The impression of a hierarchical subdivision of the most sumptuous male burials at Birka seems to gain support from other finds and find contexts there. One remarkable feature is the distribution of battle-axes. Altogether ten graves contain axes, and textiles are preserved in six of them. In five cases we find remains of headgear, all of conical type A, and these can be identified as typical for the highest social stratum. This sort of headpiece is probably of the same type as is depicted on the sword scabbard in grave 7 at Valsgärde to the north of Uppsala (c. 675 AD) and also on some Gotlandic picture stones, such as the one from Stenkyrka, Smiss I (eighth to ninth century). Such headpieces crown the heads of Scandinavian kings on late Viking-Age coins too, for example those struck under Olaf Haraldsson (995–1030) or Anund Jakob (1010–

12 Hallinder 1986.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grave number</th>
<th>Headgear</th>
<th>Other costly dress elements</th>
<th>Mantle fastner</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Type A1</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>524</td>
<td>Gold border P7</td>
<td>Silk S4; gold braid B23; gold crosses P16; silver edgings and pendants P12, 14, 21, 22; St25, 30, 31</td>
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<td>Battle-axe</td>
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<td>Gold border P5</td>
<td>Silver ornament</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>644</td>
<td>Gold border P4; silk S4; conical silver mounting</td>
<td>Gold braid B23; gold sheet framed by silver wire St27</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>Battle-axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>736</td>
<td>Gold border P8</td>
<td>Silver braid</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>Battle-axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type A2</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>496</td>
<td>Silver braid; silk S4; pendants St29; pieces of mica; silver wire</td>
<td></td>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>Horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>581</td>
<td>Conical silver mounting; pendants of silver St22, 23 and gilded leather; silk S4</td>
<td>Silver braid; ornament and small case; silver St12</td>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>Battle-axe, two horses, belt clasp T86:11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>710</td>
<td>Silver border P6; silk S4?</td>
<td>Silver braid</td>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>Horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type A3</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>495</td>
<td>Silver braid; silk S4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>Battle-axe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>643</td>
<td>Silver braid</td>
<td>Gold braid B23; silver passelements P9</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>731</td>
<td>Gold braid B22; silver</td>
<td>Gold ornaments St1, 19</td>
<td>Silverb</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>735</td>
<td>Silver braid?</td>
<td>Silver braids B17,18, 20; silver embroideries St3, 8; Silver deer St17; silk S4</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>Horse, belt clasps T29:2, T86:8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>750</td>
<td>Gold braid with hammer-and cross-pendants of silver</td>
<td>Gold braids B23a, B41, B42 with flat thread; silk S4?</td>
<td>Silver</td>
<td>Horse, belt clasp T86:1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1125B</td>
<td>Silver passement P19</td>
<td>Silver braid</td>
<td></td>
<td>Horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1151</td>
<td>Silver braid</td>
<td>Silver pendants of silk S4 with silver embroidery St10; silver spiral; silver braid</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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* A man and woman were buried together in this grave, the woman obviously sitting on the man’s lap. Remains of clothing were found between the femurs of the two bodies and are therefore difficult to attribute.

* Next to a spearhead at the foot end of the grave chamber; according to Arbman (BIG, 254), the brooch pin (Ringnadel 206:9) on the grave plan is missing. See also Androshchuk 1999, 202.

Table 12.3: Birka: male burials with silk fabric, gold or silver dress elements (only burials where precious elements can be attributed with a fair degree of certainty to a particular part of the dress are included, and all are chamber graves, with the exception of Bj. 58A, 478, 716, 903 and 976)
Table 12.3 cont.

Silks at Birka

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grave number</th>
<th>Headgear</th>
<th>Other costly dress elements</th>
<th>Mantle fastner</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>798</td>
<td>Silver border P₁, P₂</td>
<td>Silver border P₁₀; silver braid</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>832</td>
<td>Silver border P₁₀, P₁₂</td>
<td>Silver border P₁₀, silk S₄; silver band endings P₁₈; silver deer St₁₆, St₁₈, silk S₁ with silver border, P₁₂ and St₂₆</td>
<td>Silver and bronze</td>
<td>Horse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>886</td>
<td>Silver border P₃</td>
<td>Silver border St₆; silk; silver border P₈, P₉</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>944</td>
<td>Silver border P₁₁; gilded silk S₃; silk S₅</td>
<td>Silver border P₁₃; silk S₄; silver border P₁₁; linen with silk S₄ and St₂; silver braid B₆, B₇; band endings P₁₅</td>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>Horse, belt piece?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>957</td>
<td>Silver border P₁₀</td>
<td>Silver braids B₆, B₇; silk S₄</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>976</td>
<td>Silver braid B₇; silver border P₁₀; pearls of bronze; silk S₄; silver knot P₂₄</td>
<td></td>
<td>Iron</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Type C**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grave number</th>
<th>Headgear</th>
<th>Other costly dress elements</th>
<th>Mantle fastner</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>561</td>
<td>Gold braid B₂₃, flat thread, brow-band?</td>
<td>Gold ornaments P₁₇, 2₃; silver border and knots P₂₂</td>
<td>Silver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>628</td>
<td>Gold braid with flat thread, brow-band?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>716</td>
<td>Gold braid with flat thread, brow-band?</td>
<td>Silver braid B₂; silk S₄</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>Belt pieces T₈₉</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Type D**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grave number</th>
<th>Headgear</th>
<th>Other costly dress elements</th>
<th>Mantle fastner</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>58A</td>
<td>Silver border P₉; silver braid</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>478</td>
<td>Gold braid</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>Belt tip T₈₇:9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>514</td>
<td>Band endings with silver embroidery St₉</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>520</td>
<td>Silver border P₁₀; band endings silver P₂₀</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

c The grave plan (see BIG, Abb. 133) does not show the individual find places of the many precious textiles in this grave. A broken line surrounds their distribution area over the chest and hips. Another broken line crosses over the skull. With its flat metal thread, the gold braid differs technically from the other ones. It is not impossible that the broken line at the skull marks out the find position of this braid.
d In the Historiska museet samlingarna (SHM) collection, a notice with the fragment reads: “Gold thread, located inside the shield boss no. 628 surrounded by soil.” In this position, and assuming the shield boss in Arbman (BIG, Abb. 166:5) is accurate, the gold thread might have been touching the skull before the latter came to rest on the right shoulder joint.
e Stored in the SHM collections in a small case together with teeth, bone from the skull and woollen cloth.
Semi-spherical type B caps can also be seen on the Gotlandic picture stones. Both the conical and the semi-spherical headpieces, worn alternately by every other member of the ship’s crew, can be seen on the Stenkyrka stone. Effigies of battle-axes appear on medieval Norwegian royal seals. Seeing that the axe became emblematic of the Byzantine emperors’ Varangian Guard, a connection between the hierarchy of the male graves at Birka and the imperial bodyguard in Constantinople is quite possible.

Of the fourteen highest-ranking male graves (i.e. those containing type A headgear), six also contain traces of a horse burial. In the graves where men are wearing other types of headgear, horses are found less frequently (see Tab. 12.3). It is striking that in those graves which do contain horses, the mantle fastenings which have been unearthed—whether pins or fibulae—are mostly made of iron, and only exceptionally of silver or bronze. This could mean that precious-metal fastenings had been replaced by ones made of iron, and that precious-metal fastenings were, in fact, insignia which

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grave number</th>
<th>Headgear</th>
<th>Other costly dress elements</th>
<th>Mantle fastner</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>624</td>
<td>Silver border St5; silk S4</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>703</td>
<td>Silver braid B3, 4; silk S4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>725B</td>
<td>Silver border P; bronze buttons</td>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>Horse, belt piece?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>842</td>
<td>Silver braid; silk S4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Horse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>855</td>
<td>Silver braid B9</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>903</td>
<td>Silver braid B3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>956</td>
<td>Silver braid</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>Belt clasp T87:8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>958</td>
<td>Silver braid; silk S4; silver ornament (P22)?</td>
<td></td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>977</td>
<td>Silver braids B5, 8</td>
<td>Iron</td>
<td>Horse</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1076</td>
<td>Silver braid B10</td>
<td>Bronze</td>
<td>Battle-axe, belt pieces T87:1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

f Stored in the SHM collections and marked as grave Bj. 985 are the remains of the passement border of type P22 and of the silver braid.

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15 Trätteberg 1969, 281 and figs. 7–9; Hägg 2007a, fig. 6.
did not follow men to their graves; they may instead have been taken over by their successors in office.\textsuperscript{16}

This possibility that silver and bronze insignia were replaced by ones of iron, together with the sheer costliness of the silk and the precious-metal thread, along with a tendency for configurations of high-ranking attributes to recur in certain graves, all suggest that the dead were buried wearing court dress, in evocation of the Byzantine model. That the dress in a fair number of graves does not fit this pattern admitted complications the picture, but it does not invalidate our conclusion. After all, men in court service were not the only people to wear elite dress at Birka.

It is not possible without further research to reconstruct a reliable hierarchical order of textile elements for the women’s dress or to establish what their ranking significance might have been. However, it is clear that, as with male burials, no textiles with precious-metal threads appear in those female burials which contain the standard woollen fabrics of Geijer’s group IV type.\textsuperscript{17} Silver is the only precious metal to be used in the main female dress found at Birka. Gold occurs very rarely and then only in headgear.\textsuperscript{18} And there is no evidence that tablet-woven braids with wefts of pure gold were used in the main items of women’s dress at the site. At Hedeby, tablet-woven bands of silk and silver have not been found in any of the graves investigated so far, although two of the women’s chamber graves do contain tablet-woven bands of silk and gold, most probably from garment edgings. This would imply that dress traditions at Hedeby were affected by customs from Merovingian and West Slavonic princely courts.

The dissimilar use of passement work in male and female dress also seems significant,\textsuperscript{19} although in part this reflects general differences between the male and female

\textsuperscript{16} For the practice of replacing insignia in burials, see Schramm 1954–1956, vol. 1, 2–4.
\textsuperscript{17} See Hägg 2002, 207 (tab. 7–12).
\textsuperscript{18} Tablet-woven braids of pure gold (gB) or gold and silver alternating (sgB) were found in five single female burials. In Bj. 551 (gB 23), 943 (gB type?) and 824 (sgB 22), the find position is not known. In Bj. 791 and 844 (both type gB 23), the braids were found by the head. Four burials with men and women together contained gold braids. In Bj. 644, the band (gB 23) lay between the femurs of the dead and it is not clear to whom it belonged. In Bj. 731, braids with gold and silver alternating in the weft (sgB 22b) seem to have been used for the headpieces of both the man and the woman. From Bj. 735 comes a gold braid (gB 23d), the find position of which is also unknown. The gold braid (gB22) in Bj. 750 comes from the man’s headpiece, while a silver braid probably belonged to the woman’s headpiece.

\textsuperscript{19} Passement work occurs in about thirty graves at Birka. Among these were the following single female burials, or the burial of a man and woman together (one only: Bj. 750): Bj. 557 P27 (pendant); Bj. 619 P22 (end-knots of a silk band); Bj. 739 P22 (end-knots by the left shoulder); Bj. 750 P16 (knot of silver wire together with silver braid from the woman’s headpiece); Bj. 757 P (single cross of silver wire c. 60 cm below a right oval brooch); Bj. 838 P21 (knot together with sB from headpiece); Bj. 840 P12 (trimming from headpiece); Bj. 966 P (purse ornament); and Bj. 983 P (silk bands with knots).
clothing. The caftan was an exclusively male garment, and was often decorated with several passement borders, especially when found with type B headpieces. In women’s graves, passements tend to be in the form of single ornaments; for example, the cross on a purse (Bj. 966), or the end-knots from various silken cords. On the whole, passement works at Birka are found most often in rich, male burials and only seldom in women’s graves. Passement was clearly not a regular form of ornamentation for women’s dress, even for those of high social status. In contrast, Birka-style passement work is extremely rare in Hedeby and south-western Scandinavia as a whole, and de luxe textile ornamentation there consists mainly of bands and embroideries. The only passement work found at Hedeby is one or possibly two knots made of silver wire, probably from a purse found in a female grave.\textsuperscript{20} In this case, both the use of silver wire and the passement technique employed hint at a provenance from the Birka region, a possibility which seems confirmed by the silver throne-amulet found in the same grave. The amulet was attached to the end of a piece of golden braid, an arrangement which brings to mind the cross- and Thor’s hammer-amulets similarly attached to the end of the gold braids found on a headpiece in a rich male grave at Birka (Bj. 750). The fact that passement work is primarily found on male caftans and appears so very rarely in south-western Scandinavia points to its affinity with eastern cultures.

The tunics with silk applications found in many female burials at Birka also indicate a general connection with the east, and with the Black Sea region in particular. Such garments were worn more generally in Sweden, and not just in Birka, as can be seen from references in Old Swedish law to a tunic with silk applications which use the East Slavonic term \textit{stäniza}.\textsuperscript{21} Similar tunics were worn by well-to-do women living in regions along the route through the north-western Caucasus that Anna Jerusalimskaja has dubbed “the northern silk road”.\textsuperscript{22} Tunics of this kind were produced in Sogdia and exported via Byzantium to Rus. Thus, although at present we cannot identify any specific features of female dress which shed light on whether the Byzantine model for women’s court dress was in use at Birka, a comparison between male and female garments is illuminating.

One remarkable difference between the silk finds at Birka and Hedeby—the leading trade centres in north-eastern and south-western Scandinavia—emerges from the distribution patterns of the two main types of woven silk fabric: samite and silk tabby. As can be seen above,\textsuperscript{23} eastern Mediterranean samite (S4) was the dominant type at Birka. At Hedeby, samite appears in just one find: a male grave dating from the second

\textsuperscript{21} Ruthström 1993; Hägg 2013, 84.
\textsuperscript{22} Jerusalimskaja 1996, 297.
\textsuperscript{23} See above, Tab. 12.1 and 12.2.
half of the tenth century, where it was preserved by the corrosion of a sword whose
inscription ends with the sign of a cross. In general, silk appears in south-western
Scandinavian finds only rarely. Some of the few examples include the piece of samite
with untwisted yarns found in the grave of a woman at Fløjstrup, Hørning in Randers
(c. 800). The richly furnished tenth-century burials at Bjerringhøj, Jelling, Hvidehøj
and under the church at Hørning are few in number, but they also contain a quantity
of silk. Here, samite seems to occur almost as often as silk tabby, and the two even al-
ternate within the same part of a garment. This combination can be seen clearly in the
textile remnants from the Bjerringhøj chamber grave at Mammen.

One may, incidentally, draw attention to several unmistakably eastern elements
found in the grave at Bjerringhøj. The armlets of padded silk fabric correspond to the
epimanikia of the eastern Orthodox church. And, as Bodil Leth-Larsen observes, the
large candle from the grave has parallels in “a few richly furnished Viking-Age buri-
als in Denmark, Norway, Russia and Ukraine.” The man buried at Bjerringhøj was
obviously a Christian, and he was probably an adherent of the Orthodox church. It is
therefore very possible that his costume is not altogether representative of high-rank-
ing male dress in south-western Scandinavia at this time.

However, to judge from elite Scandinavian finds, silk tabby was far more com-
mon in the dress of high-ranking people from south-western Scandinavia than among
those from Birka, where the situation was quite the reverse. There also seems to be a
significant difference between the few silk tabbies found at Birka and those from
the south-western parts of Scandinavia. At Birka they are made of non-twisted yarn,
in both warp and weft. Boiled silk cocoons were used for the yarn; their filaments
were held together by sericin and therefore did not need to be spun. This type is also
found in some richly furnished boat graves at Valsgärde, where Z-twist yarns are only
very occasionally found in the silk. Most of the Valsgärde fabrics—tabby as well as
twill—are made of non-spun silk threads in warp and weft. In contrast, silk fabrics with
non-twisted threads are rare in south-western Scandinavian graves. The plain silk tabby
found in three of the graves at Hedeby has a Z-twisted warp and a non-twisted weft. It

25 See Hedeager Krag 2010 and several other of her studies.
26 Bender Jørgensen 1986, 221 (no. 51.4).
27 See Østergård 1991, 138–40 (no. C); Fuglesang 1991. This is where the ornamented battle-axe was
found, which gave its name to the Scandinavian ‘Mammen style’.
29 For an attempt to reconstruct the dress in this grave, see Bender Jørgensen 1992. On the recon-
struction see Hedeager Krag 2012.
30 See above, Tab. 12.1.
31 Good 1995.
Inga Hägg belongs to a type which appears in surprisingly large quantities at Anglo-Saxon York and probably came from the eastern Mediterranean, reaching north-western Europe via the markets of Italy. It was predominant in western Europe: “the combination here of warp yarn with Z-twist and weft yarn without twist does seem to have been standard for early medieval European plain silks.”\textsuperscript{32}

But the most remarkable regional difference to be found at Birka lies in the shape and manufacturing technique of its precious-metal thread. In western Europe, including south-western Scandinavia, and above all in Byzantium, such thread took the form of thin, flat strips, made from metal sheets that had been finely hammered and cut into narrow ribbons. At Birka, the thread usually consisted of extremely thin, solid wire.

\textsuperscript{32} Granger-Taylor 1989, 310.
with a round cross-section. Both types were often to be found twisted in a fine spiral around a thread of silk, as in many passement works. As Geijer notes, the technique employing flat metal strips was already used in antiquity in western Europe: "The type of gold thread which I venture to designate as ‘western’ corresponds to the technique described by Theophilus as aurum battutum." In contrast, the technique using precious-metal wire was characteristic of the east.

This survey makes it clear that the silks and other remnants of de luxe dress found in the graves at Birka show fundamental differences to corresponding elements at Hedeby and other key sites in Viking-Age Europe. The dress at the royal court of Birka was unique in Scandinavia. At the same time, dress elements of similar type appear in Byzantine finds. A basic component of the high-ranking dress ornaments found at Birka is plaited silver or gold wire. The same type of ornament appears on a Byzantine silk caftan from one of the barrows (kurgans) at Chingul in Ukraine (Fig. 12.5). Here, the borders frame various motifs, for example the face of an angel, but also non-figurative elements, such as geometrically arranged metal plaques. Similar pieces have been found in some richly furnished graves at Birka, including insets made of mica or stone.

Is it possible that some of the men buried at Birka may have served in the emperor’s guard, and were eventually buried in their official dress? The answer is, surely, no. For one thing, the metal thread ornamenting the silks at Birka is made of gold and silver wire, a type not used in Byzantine imperial textile manufacture. So it is highly unlikely that the Birka caftans could have been produced there. Instead, the most plausible explanation is that these garments came from one of the textile and insignia workshops operating for courts at Kiev or other princely seats in Rus. In fact, draw-plates—tools for making the thin wire-thread—are known from several places in Rus, and one has even been found at Birka. And comparisons between oriental silver coins, metal dress elements and other Viking-Age finds from Rus and Sweden lead us to a similar conclusion.

For men serving in the Constantinopolitan palace guard, silk cloth was readily available, and lengths of less valuable silk could also be bought. In a study dealing

33 For the techniques of the different types of metal thread under discussion, see Duczko 1985, 16.
34 Geijer 1979, 215.
36 Arrhenius 1968; Duczko 1985.
38 On feast days, valuable gifts and money were distributed to the members of the emperor’s guard: “Bags of money and cloaks, presumably the coveted lengths of silk, were waiting for them” (Daavidson 1976, 200; the author refers here to Liudprand of Cremona, Antapodosis VI.10, 149).
with elite dress in Bulgaria, Liliana Simeonova draws attention to the market outside Constantinople, where low-quality silk was for sale.\textsuperscript{39}

But regardless of where the garments found at Birka were made, the town’s workshops were certainly capable of producing court dress to a Byzantine pattern, as were workshops in Rus. To judge from the type of precious-metal thread used, most of the elite garments at Birka did not arrive ‘ready-made’ from the imperial workshops of Constantinople. The majority were probably manufactured somewhere in the vicinity of Birka or Kiev, to a Byzantine pattern, with or without Byzantine silk trim.\textsuperscript{40} The women’s tunics with applied silk and braid seem to have been crafted in a similar way, although the design model they followed was the highly-regarded Sogdian tunic. Because their ornamentation is technically identical to what is found on our male garments, it is clear that the female tunics were produced in the same region, probably even at the same workshops.

Even if they differ in many respects from elite dress elsewhere in the Viking-Age north, several elements of the Birka garments have close parallels with sacral textiles from eastern as well as western Europe, often dating from the later middle ages. One may note, for instance, the gold and silver bands found in many of the burials,\textsuperscript{41} or the decorative cord- and girdle-ends in male graves Bj. 520, 832 and 1125.\textsuperscript{42} These may be compared with similar pieces, mainly of much later date, for example the endings of a cingulum (monastic cord belt) in the diocesan collection of Halberstadt, or a tasselled cord from a reliquary at Quedlinburg.\textsuperscript{43} Furthermore, there are resemblances not only in form but also in motifs, with some of the gold or silver thread-work found at Birka symbolising Christian ideas. One example is the deer looking backwards, which is embroidered on two small silk pockets, probably reliquaries.\textsuperscript{44} In other graves small pomegranate pendants have been uncovered, symbolising the Virgin Mary, God’s goodness and the church.

\textsuperscript{39} See Simeonova 2011, 135. My kindest thanks to Anne Hedeager Krag, who drew my attention to and furnished me with a copy of this article.

\textsuperscript{40} Obvious parallels with the type of male dress at Birka are found in east and west, for instance the “Avar costume,” i.e. a caftan with a studded belt and a “conical hat”, worn in the ninth and tenth centuries by men of the Bulgarian elite (see Simeonova 2011). However, the divergences in shape, material and ornamentation—as well as the few belt pieces in graves with exclusive textiles (see above, Tab. 12.1)—mean that a direct relationship is unlikely.

\textsuperscript{41} Geijer 1938, 91 mentions an imperial manufacturer in Byzantium for the production of tablet-woven bands and their parallels: “In dem zugänglichen Vergleichsmaterial sind merkwürdiger Weise die grössten Ähnlichkeiten mit kontinentalen Bändern späteren Datums zu finden.”

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid., Taf. 28:1, 2, 14.

\textsuperscript{43} See von Wilkens 1991, 335 (Abb. 375).

\textsuperscript{44} One of these comes from grave Bj. 735 (S4, St17), the other from Bj. 832 (S-tabby, St16).
These and a number of other Christian forms and symbols customary in sacral textiles appear with comparative frequency in the graves at Birka, thus probably confirming that dress here was influenced by the general European—above all Byzantine—pattern for robes of state and for church vestments; and that at least some of Birka’s inhabitants were Christian. A more widespread commitment to Christianity at the site is generally thought to be contradicted by the finds of Thor’s hammer pendants in some graves. However, many well documented examples from the period of mission work in Scandinavia attest to extensive use of interpretatio Christiana, a way of recasting pagan elements so as to be in harmony with Christian iconography. As Egon Wamers has conclusively shown, Thor’s hammer was seen as an alternative to the cross. Of special interest here is the cult of the Archangel Michael, whose attributes were weights and balances. These are found in many graves at Birka, and could merely indicate that the graves belonged to prosperous traders. But clearly there was a change of meaning once Christian observances became widespread: the weights and balances now came to symbolise the Archangel Michael, who weighed men’s souls on the Day of Judgement. It may be of some significance that Michael was also venerated as a patron saint of merchants. The presence of his cult at Birka receives indirect confirmation from runestone inscriptions throughout central Sweden.

Corresponding evidence for a cult of the Archangel Michael is missing from south-western Scandinavia. Neither balances nor even weights have been found in the graves at Hedeby. In this region, saving souls from the pain of purgatory was the responsibility of St Lawrence, whose cult can be recognised in such archaeological finds as charcoal in the graves or gridirons placed under the dead, symbolising the method of Lawrence’s martyrdom. It seems, therefore, that basic eschatological ideas may have taken different forms of symbolic expression in north-eastern and south-western Scandinavia. That western (‘Latin’) Christianity of the sort practised in the archbishopric of Hamburg-Bremen was preached at Birka is well known, above all thanks to Adam of Bremen’s Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum. It is therefore noteworthy, although hardly surprising, that some of the religious symbols which occur in elite dress at Birka seem to belong to eastern Orthodox iconography. This tendency toward an eastern orientation receives positive confirmation from the cult of the Archangel

46 Wamers 1997.
47 Hägg 2007c.
48 Hägg 2006.
49 See below, 300–01.
Michael, who has a very central place in the Orthodox church.\textsuperscript{50}

The many parallels between elements in elite dress found at Birka and in sacral textiles from both east and west point to their interconnection, which makes it all the more remarkable that the types of precious-metal thread used when ornamenting these textiles with silk should differ. The techniques for producing both types of precious-metal thread are fairly uncomplicated, and could probably have been adopted in outlying regions as and when desired, along with the design of the ornaments. This difference in technique must, therefore, be deliberate and of some significance. Firstly, as noted above, the garments found at Birka would seem to be the product of craftsmen working there or for various princely courts in Rus. These craftsmen would, naturally, have used their own traditional techniques when weaving and ornamenting fabrics, as also when making precious-metal thread. That many sacral textiles correspond so closely to Byzantine types does not indicate any lack of native traditions. On the contrary, their resemblances result from the craftsmen and designers making deliberate adjustments to the Byzantine pattern. For people heavily engaged in long-distance trade and therefore more or less within the political, religious and economic orbit of Byzantium, the legitimising function of the insignia was probably an important argument in favour of this kind of adaptation.

The development of some sort of Rus-Byzantine official dress at Birka seems to have taken place mainly from the second half of the ninth century onwards (see above, \textsuperscript{50}

\textsuperscript{50} There is no doubt that the Archangel Michael was also venerated in the west. Of special interest here, besides his central position in the Orthodox church, is the fact that his attributes seem to have differed in south-western and in north-eastern Scandinavia during the period of Christianisation.
Tab. 12.3). This is around the time when we learn of the formation of a Rus polity in the *Primary Chronicle*. According to the *Chronicle*, this was the handiwork of Varangians, men from the central regions of Sweden. In the second half of the ninth century their prince, Riurik, reportedly unified the Slavonic and Finnish tribes in the Novgorod region and his kinsman, Prince Oleg, later brought the region of Kiev under control, ousting a couple of Rus rulers who had themselves already taken the city from the Khazars. The affinity in both shape and technique between the decorations on the conical type A headpieces found at Birka (see above, Figs. 12.1 and 12.3) and the ornament made of gold wire from a grave in the burial ground at Belgorod (see Fig. 12.6) offers a hint of the political interactions between these regions.

Finally, several of our written sources contain information about dynastic as well as diplomatic relations, and tell of both military and peaceful interactions between Scandinavians and the inhabitants of the land to the east. It is clear from the Rus-Byzantine peace treaty of 944 that a very considerable number of the Rus envoys and their masters were of Scandinavian stock, and that many of them were Christians. The Scandinavian presence is also attested by abundant archaeological material: this is obvious at Gnezdovo, some of whose inhabitants hailed from the Nordic world from the 930s onwards, and where we find the same types of burial rite, elite dress and costume ornament as at Birka. These in fact increase over the subsequent decades, and it is likely that towards the end of the tenth century quite a large number of Gnezdovo’s inhabitants were emigrés from central Sweden.

Since robes of office and other insignia were important components in the symbolism of church and state in medieval Europe, attire of this kind featured in the competition between eastern and western European ideas of imperial hegemony. Forms of ceremony and ceremonial attire, developed at the Byzantine court under Justinian (527–565) and his wife Theodora, soon came to influence other courts such as that of the Merovingians. However, in rejecting the symbolic representation of the *basileus* as the head of Christendom, the Carolingians kept to their own ceremonial dress and tended to ignore Byzantine developments. It was not until the 970s, when Otto II (972–983) was married to the Byzantine princess Theophano, that western court dress

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51 *PVL* 13, 14; *RPC* 62, 63.
52 Mezentseva & Prilipko 1976; for this reference my warmest thanks to Ingmar Jansson.
53 See Davidson 1976, 57.
54 *PVL* 23–26; *RPC* 73–77; Jansson 2005, 73–77.
55 *VR*, 159.
and ceremonial were adapted to contemporary Byzantine styles.\textsuperscript{57} Certain contrasts between finds in Birka and the Frankish west may be explicable in the light of developments in Byzantium that were followed by the Swedes but not by westerners. Additions made to his imperial robes by Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos (945–959) may serve as an example: miniature pendants depicting cymbals (\textit{tintinnabula}) and pomegranates (\textit{mala punica}). In early Byzantium, such pendants had originally been found on the robe of the pontifex, but for Constantine VII they symbolised his role as \textit{rex et sacerdos}, that is, not only emperor, but also head of the church.\textsuperscript{58} Similar pendants have been found in some of the highest-ranking graves at Birka, datable to the first two-thirds of the tenth century.\textsuperscript{59} Yet it is not until the last quarter of the century that such symbols appear on Ottonian imperial robes—on a girdle belonging to Otto II—when he also adopted the designation of \textit{rex et sacerdos}.\textsuperscript{60} The appearance of these pendants at Birka is therefore most likely to register Byzantine designs and concepts arriving directly from the east, before such elements had made their mark in the Christian west. On such chronological grounds, but also from what can be seen in the details of the textiles and metalwork, this probably holds true for most of those costume ornaments at Birka which have parallels in contemporary sacral textiles and robes denoting rank. The predisposition towards eastern elements in Christian symbolism mentioned above seems to corroborate this impression.

Birka’s heyday was also a time when the eastern and western churches sponsored mission work. Through the initiatives of the church of Hamburg-Bremen, starting with Ansgar’s first stay at Birka around 830, Sweden came within the western missionaries’ ambit and one would hardly expect to find remains of Byzantino-Rus court dress in wealthy burials in this period. Soon after his return to Hamburg, Ansgar was made papal legate for Sweden, Denmark and the Slavonic lands, and this was confirmed in 864.\textsuperscript{61} Our written sources give very little information about conditions in Birka after Ansgar’s death in 865. But it is well known that Archbishop Unni visited the town in


\textsuperscript{59} See the pendants St29 in grave Bj. 496 and St22–23 in Bj 581, both dated to the first half of the tenth century, or St30 in Bj 524, from the middle of the tenth century.

\textsuperscript{60} See Hägg 2007a, figs. 16–17.

\textsuperscript{61} Radtke 1999, 10; Janson 2005, 166–70. As Radtke notes, the Christianisation of the Danes advanced gradually after the establishment of bishoprics at Hedeby, Ribe and Aarhus in 948, with several severe setbacks. The situation in the second half of the tenth century was greatly affected by the conversion of King Harald Bluetooth around 965.
936 and observed that people had returned to “paganism.” It may not be a complete coincidence that during the poorly-documented sixty or so years between Ansgar’s and Unni’s visits, traces of samite and other elements of Byzantino-Rus costume become increasingly numerous at Birka. These finds come from elite graves, and such elements soon became predominant and remained so until the end of the site’s functioning as a politico-commercial centre (see Tab. 12.1 and 12.3). The development of dress denoting high rank after the Byzantine pattern seems to have taken place at the same time at Birka as it did in Rus, in a period when Rus’ political structure was developing and its contacts with the eastern church were intensifying. So the situation in Rus seems to correspond with that at Birka, where formal attire and other symbols of authority attest aspirations for a political hierarchy along the lines of the Byzantine model, displaying and consolidating the ruler’s ascendancy. This development was not well attuned to German churchmen’s missionary ambitions in Scandinavia, and it also had implications for the balance of power between Scandinavian ruling houses. One might even suggest that Birka’s orientation towards Byzantium and Rus at a time when the Christianisation of the north at the hands of western missionaries was proceeding apace may have eroded its political position and ultimately contributed to its decline.

63 See Duczko 2004, 134: “The establishment of a mighty royal Danish dynasty in the mid-tenth century eventually had repercussions in Svealand.”
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vom dritten bis zum sechzehnten Jahrhundert, 3 vols. Stuttgart.


Diplomacy played a prominent role in the political, ideological and cultural life of Byzantium. The empire paid considerable attention to its exchanges of ambassadors with foreign courts. A motley crowd from the furthest corners of Europe, Asia and Africa featured regularly at receptions and other proceedings in the imperial palace, where the sounds of many different languages filled the air. A dedicated Bureau of the Barbarians (skrinion tôn barbarôn) handled the empire’s dealings with barbarian regimes. At its head, from the eighth century onwards, was an official called the Logothete of the Drome (logothêtēs tou dromou). We first learn of the Bureau of the Barbarians in 441, in the constitution addressed to the Master of Offices (magister officiorum) by Emperor Theodosius II. The De cerimoniis offers further information about the empire’s dealings with barbarians, including the procedures for receiving them and the officials who dealt with them, such as the keepers of documents (chartularioi), translators and interpreters (hermēneus, hermēneutēs or diermēneutēs). There were normally several chartularioi in the Bureau of the Barbarians; and the Logothete of the Drome had to maintain a sizable staff of translators and interpreters, proficient in a multitude of languages, to deal with the foreigners who were settled inside the empire, as well as those based beyond its borders.

Interpreters took part in embassies, as well as translating incoming documents from foreign languages into Greek, and texts issued by the imperial chancery from Greek into other languages. They were participants in the highly complex court receptions for foreign embassies, and they were also engaged in the negotiation and rati-
FIGURE 13.1A: Seal of Michael, Grand Interpreter of the Varangians (obverse) (M-11908, courtesy of the State Hermitage, St Petersburg)
Figure 13.18: Seal of Michael, Grand Interpreter of the Varangians (reverse)
fication of all types of treaties. The Byzantines would frequently call upon interpreters of exotic origin—including Latins, Armenians and Arabs—for their diplomatic negotiations. Depending upon the rank of the officials they were accompanying, such interpreters might hold a senior military or civilian title, and these titles would be imprinted on their seals.

Seals made for heads of the Bureau of the Barbarians, as well as seals belonging to individual interpreters, have survived from various periods. Some of their inscriptions contain only the single word: “Interpreter”; but others name the people whose language the interpreter was being employed to translate, such as the Bulgarians, ‘Romans’ or English.6

Two seals of “Interpreters of the English” come from the Zacos Collection.7 One of them belonged to Constantine Kourtikios, “sebastos and diermeneutēs of the most faithful English”, and is perhaps datable to the second half of the twelfth century.8 The Kourtikioi were a family of Armenian origin who are first known from the reign of the emperor Basil I (867–886). They played a prominent part in the life of the empire, and Constantine served as a translator liaising between the Byzantines and the Anglo-Saxon warriors of the imperial army.9 A second seal bears the inscription: “Lord, help Spheni, patrikios and translator of the English [tōn Enklínōn],” and is perhaps datable to the twelfth century.10

Another twelfth-century seal is that of of Theophylact Exoubitos. Theophylact features in John Kinnamos’ history as “a man of Italian origin” (anēr Italos).11 He was a member of the embassy sent to the Holy Land to find a bride for the emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180) from among the Frankish ruling houses there. This matchmaking is recorded in William of Tyre’s Chronicon, which mentions a “maximus pa-latinorum interpretum” among Manuel’s envoys.12 In the early Byzantine period, this

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7 On the English in Byzantium, see EB.
9 Shandrovskaia 2004.
10 Zacos et al., Byzantine Lead Seals, vol. 2, no. 706; see Jeffreys et al. 2011, Boulloterion 1466. Oikonomides (1986, 266; 1999, 17) takes Spheni (Σφένι, “Swain/Sven”) for an Anglo-Saxon name and regards him as the “interpreter of the English” (τῶν Ἐνκλίνω). See now Shchavelev 2015, who takes the name to be “an undeclined Greek transcription of the name Sveini...a soft form of Sveinn”; dates the seal to post-1066 and most probably post-1081; and highlights the importance of northern European ‘barbarian’ translators for the history of Rus.
12 William of Tyre, Chronicon vol. 2, 855; tr. Babcock & Krey, vol. 2, 287–88; EMIK, 72. See also Guilland 1968. Guilland has listed all the translators recorded in our written sources. It seems that megas diermeneutēs first appeared as a title during the era of the Komnenoi.
The seal of Michael, Grand Interpreter of the Varangians official had been head of the Latin section of the imperial chancellery and in charge of the corps of translators who specialised in rendering Greek into Latin and vice versa.¹³ A seal of particular relevance to links between Byzantium and the Viking world is now kept in the State Hermitage in St Petersburg (see above, Fig. 13.1A–B).¹⁴ On the obverse there is a full-length representation of the Archangel Michael, wearing an imperial di-vitision and loros, richly decorated with large and small pearls. He stands front-facing, holding a sceptre tipped by a trefoil ornament in his right hand and an orb in his left. On either side of him runs the inscription in Greek: “Michael Archangel”. On the reverse is a six-line inscription which translates as follows: “Seal of Michael, pansebastos, sebastos and Grand Interpreter of the Varangians”. The seal was first published by Andreas Mordtmann as part of his collection¹⁵ and was then reproduced in Gustave Schlumberger’s monumental Sigillographie. Schlumberger underlined its importance in the following terms:

Ce sceau précieux entre tous, le premier sur lequel on a retrouvé inscrit cet illustre nom des Varangiens, ΤΩΝ ΒΑΡΑΓΓΩΝ, est celui d’un grand interprète de ce corps, et se distingue encore par une particularité infiniment curieuse, la présence à l’exergue du revers de la fameuse hache, cette arme spéciale aux Varègues, si fréquemment mentionnée par les chroniqueurs.¹⁶

The Russian numismatist I. I. Tolstoi explained how this particular seal had found its way into the Hermitage collection: “Several Chersonite seals of special interest were brought by my brother Dmitrii from Constantinople, where A[nndreas] Mordtmann had kindly given them to him”.¹⁷ Among these was our seal of Michael, Grand Interpreter of the Varangians, listed as no. 16. It then entered the Hermitage as part of I. I. Tolstoi’s collection, and was kept in the Numismatics Department until 1965, when it was transferred to the Oriental Department, where it remains today.

The seal’s inscription attests its owner’s high status in the Byzantine hierarchy: he held the titles of pansebastos and sebastos, as well as the office of Grand Interpreter. Ordinary interpreters were used for routine dealings with foreign mercenaries, whereas the Grand Interpreter was an official state representative, who would have engaged in negotiations of various kinds with the Varangians’ leaders, not least issues to do with

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¹⁴ M-11908. Diameter 31–35 mm. The seal is dented and has lost metal in three places, and there are vertical splits on both sides.
¹⁵ Mordtmann 1881, 697.
¹⁶ Schlumberger, Sigillographie 349–50.
¹⁷ Tolstoi 1887, 38. Count Dmitrii Ivanovich Tolstoi (1860–1941) was a Grand Master of Ceremonies and Councillor of State (statskii sovetnik) at the Russian court. From 1909–1918 he was Director of the Hermitage. He was also the owner of a private collection of sculpture, drawings, furniture, engravings and prints, among other items.
payments. He was also responsible for inspections, taking key decisions and resolving disputes.\textsuperscript{18}

According to Rodolphe Guillard, the title of Grand Interpreter first appeared during the Komnenian era and fourteenth- and fifteenth-centuries sources mention several more Grand Interpreters.\textsuperscript{19} Mordtmann concluded that our seal should be dated to the Palaiologan era, judging by the seal type, shape of the letters and use of many ligatures.\textsuperscript{20} However, Vitalien Laurent has suggested a mid-thirteenth century date, during the period of the Nicean empire,\textsuperscript{21} which seems to me convincing.

The seal of Michael, \textit{sebastos}, \textit{pansebastos} and Grand Interpreter of the Varangians is unique among our surviving Byzantine seals and is another manifestation of the vitality of links between Byzantium and the Viking world.\textsuperscript{22}

\textsuperscript{18} Schlumberger, \textit{Sigillographie} 350.
\textsuperscript{19} Guilland 1968.
\textsuperscript{20} Schlumberger, \textit{Sigillographie} 351.
\textsuperscript{21} \textit{Corpus des sceaux}, no. 471.
\textsuperscript{22} On this topic see Filipchuk 2012. See also above, 169–86 and 187–214, and below, 363–87 and 345–62.
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PART III

CONTACTS REFLECTED IN
THE WRITTEN SOURCES
The fundamental importance of the information about the Rus (Rhōs) in Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos’ *De administrando imperio* for the study of the origins of the Old Rus polity has been acknowledged since the eighteenth century.\(^1\) It provides the earliest glimpse of a region otherwise shrouded in mystery. Barring the occasional exception, it is the chapter of the *DAI* devoted to the Rus—chapter 9—that is used to illuminate various aspects of tenth-century Rus, from the inhabitants’ possible bilingualism to characterisation of their social and political structure. However, information on the Rus is by no means limited to this chapter;\(^2\) it is scattered throughout the first three sections of the *DAI*. Mentions of Rhosia and the Rus can be found in the early ‘didactic’ section;\(^3\) in the ‘diplomatic’ instructions on how to fob off importuning “Northerners and Scythians” (13.25); and in the *Peri ethnōn* section (32.42–47), which includes a description of the Black Sea steppes (42.4–5, 60–62, 75–78).\(^4\) The *DAI* is thought to have undergone two editorial stages. It was compiled by Constantine—or a team under his supervision—between 948 and 952, while the *Peri ethnōn* section was composed either by him in the 940s as a companion volume to his *De thematibus*;\(^5\) or by Leo VI (886–912) in the first two decades of the tenth century.\(^6\) Most scholars agree that the information presented in the *DAI* derives from a wide variety of sources: official documents and intelligence reports; accounts from both Byzantine emissaries

\(^1\) Henceforth *DAI*; I quote the translation of Romilly Jenkins and refer to it in the text in brackets.
\(^2\) More accurately 9.1–113.
\(^3\) Chapters 2, 4, 6, 8.
\(^4\) On the division of the *DAI* into four major sections and their characteristics see Jenkins 1967, 11–12 and Jenkins 1962, 2–7. The only major change to Jenkins’ scheme was suggested by James Howard-Johnston, who included the so-called ‘Caucasian dossier’ (chapters 43–46) into the third section (Howard-Johnston 2000, 326–27).
\(^5\) Jenkins 1967, 12.
\(^6\) Howard-Johnston 2000.
MAP 14.1: Rus and the north in the age of Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos
and foreign ambassadors to the Byzantine court; eye-witness descriptions and oral tales from neighbouring nations.\(^7\)

The origins of the passages describing the Rus have varied sources and date from different times, which makes it necessary to look closely at the contexts these passages refer to in order to have firmer grounds for discussing what positive information about the Rus they provide.

THE RUS IN THE ‘DIDACTIC’ SECTION OF THE DAI

The first section of the *DAI* comprises chapters 1 to 13.11 and, in Constantine’s own words, aims to elucidate “in what each nation has power to advantage the Romans, and in what to hurt, and how and by what other nation each severally may be encountered in arms and subdued”.\(^8\) In reality, the section describes the political situation in only one region—south-eastern Europe. Most of the information collected here derives from materials preserved in the imperial chancellery, above all from the reports of Byzantine emissaries to the Pechenegs and similar intelligence data.\(^9\) From a geographical as well as political point of view the section consists of two parts: chapters 1–9 tell us about the nations based on the Black Sea steppes and stretching to the area of the Middle Dnieper; while chapters 10–12 deal with the Crimea and further east. The main topic permeating the first eight chapters is the Pechenegs’ role in serving Byzantine interests in the region. In the second part, the same function is attributed to the Alans and to a certain extent to the Khazars. The opening lines of chapter 13 (1–11) define the boundaries of the land occupied by the Hungarians—termed ‘Turks’ by Constantine—after their migration to Pannonia, in a similar way to the later enumeration of those nations neighbouring the Pechenegs (37.39–45) and Serbia (30.117–19), among others.

In the first part Constantine summarises the advantages of maintaining peace with the Pechenegs (chapter 1) and then details their potential to affect their neighbours. Among the peoples most vulnerable to Pecheneg attack are first and foremost the Rus (chapter 2), followed by the Hungarians (chapter 3), the Bulgars (chapter 5) and the Chersonites (chapter 6). The next two chapters deal with Byzantine emissaries to the Pechenegs before closing with a description of the Rus. Constantine’s acute concern with the Rus can be clearly seen from his discussion of them at the very beginning of the section; from the detailed examination of their relations with the Pechenegs; from the repetition of the same information in chapter 4; and from passing mentions of the Rus in chapters 6.5 and 8.20.

\(^7\) Jenkins 1962, 3–5; *DAI Com* passim; *ObUpImp* passim; Sode 1994; Howard-Johnston 2000; Wozniak 1991.

\(^8\) *Proem*, lines 14–17: *DAI* 44–45.

\(^9\) On the collecting of intelligence, see Wozniak 1991.
Special attention to the Rus was only natural after the expedition of Prince Igor in 941—possibly repeated in 944—when he ravaged the suburbs of Constantinople for almost three months.\textsuperscript{10} Because of either this or earlier raids, the Rus are treated in chapters 1–8 as potential enemies.\textsuperscript{11} Constantine repeats three times that the Rus are “unable to set out for wars beyond their borders unless they are at peace with the Pechenegs” (2.8–11), and he further notes the military nature of their activities: they are able to “come upon the Roman dominion by force of arms” (4.3–5) or to appear “at this imperial city of the Romans, either for war or for trade” (2.16–18). The latter phrase might have been inspired by Igor’s recent expedition, which took place before Constantine’s own eyes;\textsuperscript{12} but it could equally well have been a summary of the experience of several generations.

The treaty of 944 settled the ongoing conflict, while it also aimed to prevent future possible attacks on Byzantine possessions in the Crimea and Constantinople itself: the Rus were prohibited from over-wintering in the mouth of the Dnieper, either at Beloberezhe or on the island of St Aitherios (Berezan).\textsuperscript{13} However, the Byzantine authorities, or possibly Constantine himself, do not seem to have been entirely sure about the efficacy of these measures. Constantine’s main message in the first section of the \textit{DAI} is that the best way to deter the Rus, as well as the Hungarians and other nomads, is to employ the Pechenegs, who had proved highly efficient in repulsing the rest.

Byzantine strategy in the Black Sea steppes thus seems to have been highly centred on the Rus, aptly characterised by Jonathan Shepard as a policy of “containment of the Rhos”.\textsuperscript{14} The Pechenegs themselves do not interest Constantine in the first section—their history and geography are discussed in the third section’s ‘nomadic dossier’ (chapter 37). He treats them here simply as a tool for keeping control over the situation in the region, first and foremost for restraining the Rus from attacks on Byzantine territories. In this context chapter 9, entirely devoted to the Rus,\textsuperscript{15} does not appear to be such an alien inclusion in the first section as it has been held to be since John Bury’s study of the \textit{DAI}.\textsuperscript{16} Bury stressed that chapter 9 did not fit with the section’s aims and that it

\textsuperscript{10} Theophanes Continuatus, \textit{Chronographia} 423–24; \textit{PVL} 22–23; \textit{RPC} 71–73.
\textsuperscript{11} Shepard 1974, 11–15.
\textsuperscript{12} \textit{ObUpImp} 312–14 n. 9–15 (M. V. Bibikov).
\textsuperscript{13} \textit{PVL} 25; \textit{RPC} 76.
\textsuperscript{14} Shepard 1999; \textit{ER}, 113, 138.
\textsuperscript{15} Apart from 9.114 (“The Uzes can attack the Pechenegs”), which is commonly viewed as the beginning of the following chapter placed erroneously before its title: Bury 1906, 520–21.
\textsuperscript{16} Bury 1906, 543, 574.
differed strikingly from the other chapters in its contents.\textsuperscript{17} Jenkins defined chapter 9 as spadework on which the information in chapter 2.16–23 (on crossing the Dnieper rapids) and chapter 8.20–22 (on the Pechenegs' attacks against the Rus) was based. He thought that it was only by accident or by oversight that chapter 9 happened to be included in the final text,\textsuperscript{18} and his conclusions were accepted by later scholars.\textsuperscript{19} Chapter 9 has come to be regarded as devoted to a subject—the Rus—of little significance to the Byzantine empire. Simon Franklin has summarised the commonly-held view thus:

for Constantine, of course, these extracts are merely small fragments of a vastly larger mosaic: the relevant chapters of the \textit{De administrando imperio} constitute only about 6\% of the whole work...Constantine’s interest in the Rus is subsidiary to his concern about the Pechenegs and about the means to maintain a trouble-free zone north of the Black Sea.\textsuperscript{20}

Indeed, chapter 9 is descriptive and is not prescriptive, in contrast to the brevity and business-like manner of chapters 1–8 and 9.113–13.11, which are full of instructions on how to use the Pechenegs to Byzantium’s advantage. It is obvious that the narrative strategy of chapter 9 differs from that of the other chapters in the section. But its contents, if viewed in a wider perspective, seem to have the same aims as the section as a whole. Scholarly attention has been paid almost exclusively to the object of the description, and not to the essence of the information provided by Constantine. Dimitri Obolensky viewed the chapter as:

\begin{quote}
...a topographic account of the trade route from Kiev to Constantinople, with special reference to the rapids, or ‘barrages’ on the Lower Dnieper; a list of towns situated on or near the Novgorod-Kiev section of the Baltic-Black Sea waterway; a description of the Russian trading expeditions to Byzantium; a reference to the economic relations between the Russians and their Slav tributaries.\textsuperscript{21}
\end{quote}

Following Obolensky, I have singled out two main topics from chapter 9: the description of the waterway from Kiev to Constantinople (9.3–104); and the characterisation of the ethno-political situation in the Middle Dnieper region.\textsuperscript{22}

However, chapter 9 is not simply a “topographical account” or “list of towns”, and the “description of the waterway from Kiev to Constantinople” is no mere travel writing. Accounts of the Rus assembling and equipping \textit{monoxyla}, navigating along the Dnieper and Black Sea coast, and visiting their Slavonic tributary cities are politically

\begin{thebibliography}{9}
\bibitem{17} Macartney 1930, 143; Jenkins 1967, 12; Obolensky 1962, 18; Jenkins 1962, 2; Howard-Johnston 2000, 307; Zuckerman 1995.
\bibitem{18} Jenkins 1967, 12; Jenkins 1962, 2.
\bibitem{19} \textit{DAI Com} 18; Howard-Johnston 2000, 302.
\bibitem{20} Franklin 1989, 62; and for a similar point of view: Howard-Johnston 2000, 307; Zuckerman 1995.
\bibitem{21} Obolensky 1962, 18.
\bibitem{22} \textit{ObUpImp}’ 291–93 (E. A. Mel’nikova).
\end{thebibliography}
vital topics: they throw light on how and where the Rus obtained ships for their voyages to Byzantium (9.3–16); how and where these ships were equipped (9.16–24); the obstacles they had to overcome on their road to Byzantium, including the rapids and Pecheneg attacks (9.24–104); how the Rus sustained themselves and where they obtained the commodities they brought to the markets of Constantinople (9.104–113). This kind of information was by no means of marginal interest. It was strategic information of crucial importance to Byzantium in view of the permanent threat from the north. In fact, it reported on the Rus’ capacity to menace Byzantine possessions, and on the economic potential of a prospective enemy and trade partner. This intelligence was collected from Rus emissaries and merchants, from Byzantine ambassadors, and probably also from Pecheneg chiefs.23 Having such information at their disposal, the Byzantine authorities were aware of the Rus’ weak spots and could take preventive measures to frustrate preparations for larger campaigns. Shepard doubts if this information was accurately registered and frequently renewed,24 but it was of value and of immediate practical use: it is supposed, not without reason, that the Pechenegs’ attack on Prince Sviatoslav on his return from Bulgaria in the spring of 972 was instigated by the Byzantines. The information in chapter 9 would have become especially relevant after Prince Igor’s assault on Constantinople, and the inclusion of this information in the DAI cannot have been accidental.

The composition of chapter 9.1–113 seems to support this conclusion. That it is heterogeneous in both content and sources was noted long ago.25 Most obvious is its division into two parts: the voyage of the Rus to Constantinople (9.3–104); and a short description of their “severe manner of life” (9.104–13). The two parts differ in both content and narrative style, using different transliterations of ethnic and place names: for example, Κριβηταινοί (9.9–10) and Κριβιτζοί (9.108) for Krivichians; or τὸ Κιοάβα (9.8), τὸν Κιοβα (9.15) and τὸν Κιοβον (9.106, 111) for Kiev. The second part of the chapter includes Old East Slavonic technical terms such as πολύδια for tribute collected or tribute rounds (9.107); and such possible calques as: πάντων τῶν Ρώς “together with all the Russians” (9.106), and διατρεφόμενοι—literally ‘feeding’—an Old East Slavonic term meaning ‘to be maintained’ or better ‘to live on, subsist’ (9.110).26 The informant

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23 One possible indication of a Pecheneg informant on the Rus can be seen in the use of the word ζάκανον (8.17), a loan word from Old East Slavonic zakonъ meaning “custom, norms of customary law” (Mel’nikova 2010).


26 Obolensky 1962, 59–60, 61.
for the second part not only knew the Old East Slavonic language and realities, but also used Slavonic terminology in everyday practice.  

If the second part of chapter 9 (lines 104–13) seems homogeneous, by contrast the first part (lines 3–104) consists of at least three passages of different origin. The first comprises information on the assembly and preparation of ships for the voyage to Byzantium (9.3–24). The person who advised the Byzantines on this matter was obviously a Rus thoroughly familiar with the routes used to float monoxyla down the Dnieper. One of the towns he names when enumerating the sites from which the monoxyla travelled down to Kiev—Νεμογαρδάς—preserves its Scandinavian form (garðr). He also knows his ship-building. The author of the passage uses quite a few *termini technici* and, probably while trying to render unfamiliar terms, introduces rare words such as πέλλα (literally ‘a pail, a basin’). This was translated by Jenkins as ‘oar’ (πελλα < Lat. pala ‘a spade’), but in the context of ship-building πέλλα is much more likely to mean ‘gunwale’ or ‘cap rail’ (Ital. pelle) or ‘bulwark’ (falque).

The second passage is an eyewitness account of the route from Vitichev to the mouth of the Dnieper, with the famous description of the Dnieper rapids (9.24–79). Comparisons with everyday realities in Constantinople (9.26 and 9.68) together with a relatively accurate rendering of the cataract names in both Old East Slavonic and Old Scandinavian, with Old Swedish phonetic features, suggest that our eyewitness was a Rus well acquainted with the imperial capital, rather than a Greek who had travelled the Dnieper route as a member of a Byzantine embassy to Kiev, as suggested by Obolensky. The description of sacrifices on the island of St George also suggests a detailed knowledge of the ritual more typical of a participant rather than of a casual observer.

The third passage (9.80–104) is devoted to the route from the island of St Atharios (Berezan) down to Mesembria and differs radically from the previous passage. Its structure and description of moorages, transit times and navigational conditions make it more like a *periplous*, the antique or medieval description of the route along a sea coast.

Creating a compilation from different sources was a normal way of working for medieval writers, and Constantine was no exception. Much more important are the traces of an effort to make a coherent whole out of different narratives. The author be-

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27 Franklin 1989.
28 I am indebted to Sergei Tokhtasiev for bringing my attention to this word and suggesting its interpretation.
29 DAI 59; DAI Com 326.
30 Hesseling 1903, 37.
31 ObUpImp 319–26 n. 28–43 (E. A. Mel’nikova).
32 Obolensky 1962, 19. See also Sorlin 2000, 337.
gins the third passage by referring back to the mention of the mouth of the Dnieper in the previous passage (“as has been said”: 9.87). When starting the second part of the chapter, he links it back to the start: “the severe manner of life of these same Russians...” (9.104). But the author’s desire to integrate the chapter probably expresses itself most clearly in his final words, where he ends the narration on the Rus with a direct reference to its beginning:

but then once more, starting from the month of April, when the ice of the Dnieper river melts, they come back to Kiev. They then pick their ‘monoxyla’, as has been said above, and fit them out, and come down to Romania (9.110–14).

The circularity of the construction points to a deliberate attempt to unite heterogeneous narratives into a whole and, consequently, to a well-considered editing of the text. Such deliberate revision of the chapter strongly suggests it was not of a preparatory nature, and that its inclusion in the DAI was not accidental.

With these arguments in mind, chapter 9 would seem to be a logical, if not organic, part of the first section of the DAI. Perceiving the Rus to be one of the main threats to the empire, the author had to provide as much information about them as he possessed. But despite long contact with the Rus, information about them remained rather poor. There was nothing like the detail available in the Peri ethnōn section about the Magyars or the Pechenegs, let alone the Balkan Slavs. This was primarily because those groups of Rus who came to Byzantium before the mid-tenth century were mostly isolated bands from different parts of Scandinavia, only loosely connected with the newly-established rulers in Kiev. They had no common history, no single generally recognised dynasty of rulers, their contacts with Byzantium were sporadic and they remained pagan. There was not enough information about the Rus to mention them in their own right in the third section, and it was therefore only natural to include such scrappy pieces of information about them as the Byzantines possessed in the section devoted to an overview of the political landscape in the region to which they belonged and which they shaped to a large extent. Chapters 1–9 thus seem to form a single bloc united by a common theme: the usefulness of the Pechenegs to the Byzantines in pursuing their interests in the Black Sea steppes, and first and foremost their role in the containment of the Rus.

33 Obolensky 1962, 20.
RUS PRETENDERS TO IMPERIAL INSIGNIA: CHAPTER 13.25

Chapter 13.12–200 is devoted to diplomatic means of fending off the “importunate demands and brazenly submitted claims” of the peoples of the Black Sea steppes, including the Rus (13.19–20). The passage is unanimously attributed to Constantine himself and dated to when the DAI was being compiled, i.e. 952 or shortly before. However, the examples given of requests made by the Khazars, the Hungarians and the Rus are taken from different times, the earliest being for the marriage of a Byzantine emperor to a Khazar princess. Constantine VII wrongly ascribes this to Leo IV (775–780), when it was in fact Leo’s father, Constantine V (741–775) who married her. The Rus are mentioned as demanding imperial insignia and robes, and they are also mentioned indirectly when discussing undesirable marriage alliances (13.106–109). The text offers no hint as to exactly when the Rus requested state regalia or marriage alliances, but it is fairly safe to assume that if such claims really were put forward, this must have occurred during the first half of the tenth century: possibly in connection with the treaties of 911 or 944; or, as has often been suggested, during Princess Olga’s visit to Constantinople.

RUS AND PECHENEGS AS NEIGHBOURS: CHAPTER 37.42–47

Chapter 37 belongs to the third section of the DAI, which comprises chapters 14–42; or, according to Howard-Johnston, chapters 14–46. Jenkins suggested that the section incorporated a treatise composed earlier—the putative Peri ethnōn—which was converted “into a practical diplomatic hand-book” in 951–952; however, he did not suggest when the Peri ethnōn might have been composed. The main reason for dating this section to before the composition of the rest of the DAI was the fact that most of the information it contains dates to the ninth and even the eighth century. The lack of information on some of the neighbouring polities of importance for Byzantine foreign policy in Constantine’s time, such as Bulgaria and Khazaria, has been explained by the unfinished state of our extant text. The few up-to-date remarks have been ascribed to Constantine himself, such as those on events in the Arabic world around 930 and 945 (25.56–85); or those relating to imperial diplomatic relations with Serbian rulers (32.80–145). Having scrutinised the four ‘dossiers’ which constitute the third section of the DAI, Howard-Johnston concludes that this section was originally drafted in the first two decades of the tenth century, having been commissioned by Leo VI.

36 Litavrin 1986; ObUpImp 340 n. 18 (G. G. Litavrin); Nazarenko 2001, 302.
38 Jenkins 1967, 11.
39 The Arab dossier; the Balkan dossier (drafted before 922–925); the Caucasian dossier (composed before June 913); and the Northern dossier: Howard-Johnston 2000, 323–28.
The Northern dossier (chapters 37–42) deals with the Pechenegs and the Hungarians. It contains varied materials of differing provenance, including oral traditions about the origins and early history of the nomads, and documentary sources and intelligence reports on the Pechenegs’ political organisation and the location of their ‘themes’ or provinces.\(^{40}\) Howard-Johnston admits that there is no firm evidence for when the Northern dossier was compiled, but stresses the “almost unbroken silence about tenth-century events” and the attention to relations with the Pechenegs and Hungarians from around 850 to the mid-890s. He concludes that the author’s “prime concern is to describe the new geopolitical configuration of the Pontic steppes” after the movement of the Hungarians to the Carpathians in 896–897, making it probable that the Northern dossier was compiled in its original form sometime around 900.\(^{41}\) Howard-Johnston supposes that, having received a more-or-less coherent text, Constantine made attempts to update it by inserting various pieces of contemporary information or ‘glosses’: these dealt mainly with issues of chronology, geography and etymology.\(^{42}\)

*Rhosia* and the Slavonic tributaries of the Rus are mentioned in chapter 37 when describing the northern borders of the Pecheneg provinces. Four are said to “lie beyond the Dnieper river towards the eastern and northern parts that face Uzia and Chazaria and Alania and Cherson and the rest of the Regions”, while the other four “lie on this side of the Dnieper river, towards the western and northern parts” (chapter 37.34–40). The migration of the Pechenegs into territories previously occupied by the Hungarians to the west of the Dnieper, which is commonly considered to have taken place in the late 890s, is also mentioned in chapter 8.5–7.\(^{43}\)

The location of the provinces lying to the west of the Dnieper is further defined by describing Bulgaria and *Tourkia* (Hungary) as adjoining two of them—Giazichopon and Kato Gyla; and Rus and several Slavonic peoples as adjoining the other two:

> the province of Charaboi is neighbour to Russia, and the province of Iabdiertim is neighbour to the tributary territories of the country of Russia, to the Oultines and Dervlenines and Lenzines and the rest of the Slavs (37.42–45).

It is only from the *DAI* that we know of the existence of the Pecheneg provinces and their names; and its information about their location and when they came into being cannot be independently corroborated.\(^{44}\)

\(^{40}\) Huxley 1984, 88–89.
\(^{41}\) Howard-Johnston 2000, 324–27.
\(^{42}\) Howard-Johnston 2000, 328–30.
\(^{44}\) Pletneva 2008.
Constantine uses the term *Rhosia* to designate the territory settled by the Rus (χώρα τῆς Ῥοσίας) rather than the polity of the Rus, as is sometimes believed. This territory seems to have been confined to Kiev and its vicinity, since the “town” (κάστρον) of Vitichev, which is only sixty kilometres down the Dnieper from Kiev, is defined as a tributary town of the Rus (chapter 9.20–21) and not a Rus city *per se*. According to chapter 9, the Rus were based in Kiev for most of the year, buying *monoxyla* from the Slavs there and only leaving it to tour their Slavonic tributaries in the autumn and head for Byzantium in the spring. *Rhosia* is differentiated from the lands of the Rus’ Slavonic tributaries: called *Slaviniat*; these are probably collectively described as “Outer Russia” (ἡ ἔξω Ῥωσία) in chapter 9.3. But whatever the interpretation of ἡ ἔξω Ῥωσία, the Slavonic tributary lands are not included in the notion of *Rhosia* in chapter 9; nor in chapter 37.42–45, where *Rhosia* is said to neighbour one of the Pecheneg provinces, whereas the Slavonic lands adjoin another one.

The list of Slavonic tributaries adjoining the Pechenegs consists of three names. The first two peoples—the “Oultines” and the “Dervenines”—can safely be identified with the “tribes” of the Ulichi and the Derevlians, who feature in the early twelfth-century *Primary Chronicle* and whose existence is traceable from archaeological remains. The identification of the third grouping—the “Lenzenines” (Lendzanins)—raises difficulties because the name is otherwise unknown in our written sources and it cannot be linked to any archaeological finds. Neither their traditional identification with the Tiverty or Volynjane, based on an incorrect assumption that the Slavonic peoples were enumerated strictly from west to east, nor their recent identification with the Poliane, based on a semantic propinquity of the two names, can be accepted without reservation.

The Derevlians’ territory seems to have remained unchanged since the mid-fifth century Slavonic migrations in eastern Europe and, according to our archaeological data, it covered the right bank of the Dnieper, to the south of the River Pripet. It is in the southern part of their territory, in the area between the Dnieper, Teterev and Goryn rivers, that the Derevlians might have bordered the Pechenegs. However, the *Primary Chronicle* offers no information on any contact between the two groupings.

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45 Mel’nikova 2014b.

46 The interpretation of the phrase ἡ ἔξω Ῥωσία (9.3) is a matter of lively debate. For a summary, see *ObUpImp* 1 308–10; Nazarenko 2010; *ObUpImp* forthcoming.

47 For a survey of the problem by B. N. Floriia, see *ObUpImp* 1 316–317. See also *ObUpImp* forthcoming.

48 Shchavelev 2014a.

49 Sedov 1982, 101–06.
The Ulichi are known to have lived on the Dnieper to the south of Kiev. Under the year 885, the *Primary Chronicle* tells us that Prince Oleg “waged war with the Ulichi,” seemingly without success. Their later subjugation by Prince Igor is recounted in the *Novgorod First Chronicle*, but is missing from the *Primary Chronicle*. It is thought that this information comes from the so-called *Primary Compilation* (*Nachal’nyi svod*) of the 1090s, a forerunner of the *Primary Chronicle*. Warfare against the Ulichi is said to have taken great time and effort, and to have resulted in their migration westward:

Igor, though, stayed in Kiev, ruling and waging war against the Derevlians and the Ulichi. And he had a commander-in-chief named Sveneld, and he subjugated the Ulichi and he laid them under tribute and delegated and handed it over to Sveneld. And one town (*grad*) did not surrender, named Peresechen; and they besieged it for three years and hardly seized it. And the Ulichi had been settled along the Dnieper but afterwards they moved to between the Bug and the Dniester and settled there.

This text is found under the year 922, but it is included in a cumulative entry covering several years. In shortened form, the information is repeated for the year 940:

This same year the Ulichi started to pay tribute to Igor and Peresechen was taken. This same year he gave the tribute from them to Sveneld.

The partial repetition of the information could be because the writer wished to stress Sveneld’s special role, before going on to recount how Igor’s death was indirectly provoked by his men’s envy of Sveneld’s wealth.

The date of the Ulichi’s movement to the west provides a *terminus post quem* for the information in chapter 37.42–45. Before they migrated from the Dnieper they cut the Rus off from the Pechenegs, occupying lands in between the two. However, the proximity of the Rus to the Pechenegs, as mentioned in chapter 37.42–45, and the fact that it was only “one day’s journey” from *Rhosia* to the Pechenegs’ territory (*Patzinacia* 37.47) presupposes no intermediaries between them. This would hold especially true if the intermediaries were a grouping hostile and strong enough to repulse Oleg for several decades, only surrendering after a long and determined resistance.

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50 Berezovets 1963. It is supposed that their ‘tribal’ centre of Peresechen was only several kilometres south of Kiev and it was identified (without much justification) with Kitaevo, now lying within the territory of modern Kiev (Kuza 1996, 171, 245, 249). It is more probable that Peresechen was located further south, on the River Stugna (Petreshenko 2014).

51 *PVL* 14; *RPC* 61.

52 Gippius 2012, 46–49.

53 In other chronicles Sveneld (< Old Icelandic Sveinaldr).

54 *Novgorodskaya pervyiia letopis’* 109.

55 *Novgorodskaya pervyiia letopis’* 110.
However, a precise date cannot be established with certainty. Dates in both the Novgorod First Chronicle and the Primary Chronicle for the ninth and most of the tenth century are very arbitrary and unreliable. This is because they were only introduced in the late eleventh century into a text which lacked any chronology, possibly at the time of the Primary Compilation. Moreover, the dates given by the two chronicles often do not match. For example, the Primary Chronicle dates Oleg’s death to 911, but the Novgorod First Chronicle dates it to 922, and the death of Igor is given as 944 and 945, respectively. But both chronicles attribute the subjugation of the Ulichi to Igor’s reign, which makes it most likely that it took place no earlier than the 920s and before 945 at the latest. Slavonic artefacts have been found in both the Dnieper region to the south of Kiev, and in the area between the Bug and Dniester rivers, and these can cautiously be attributed to the Ulichi. However, their dating is too uncertain for us to be able to pinpoint exactly when the Ulichi migrated from the Dnieper. In order to date that event, we have to rely on the Rus chronicles, which provide us with an interval between the 920s and 944/45.

The information on Rhosia in chapter 37.42–47 thus reflects the situation in the second quarter of the tenth century and it also agrees with the descriptions of the relative location of the Pechenegs and the Rus found in chapter 2.2–3 (“The Pechenegs are neighbours to and march with the Russians also…”) and in chapter 42.62 (“Patzinacia possesses all the land as far as Russia and Bosporus…”). The passage could have been written by Constantine himself, or in his time; but it could equally well have been written at any time after the 920s, i.e. substantially later than the main part of the third section of the DAI, if we accept Howard-Johnston’s dating of this to the 900s–910s and of the ‘Northern dossier’ which he dates to around 900. In view of its concurrence with 2.2–3, in the section undoubtedly belonging to Constantine, it seems more likely that this text is one of Constantine’s geographical ‘glosses’, and similar to those in the Balkan dossier which also deal with events of the 920s.

THE RUS ON THE UPPER REACHES OF THE DNIEPER:
CHAPTER 42.4–5, 60–62, 75–78

Rhosia and the Rus are mentioned three times in chapter 42: firstly, in the ‘title’ of the chapter (42.4–5). Secondly, the Rus are said to live in the upper reaches of the Dnieper, down which they journey through the neighbouring lands of the Pechenegs (42.62)

56 Sedov 1982, 132.
57 Howard-Johnston 2000, 326.
and on to Byzantium (42.60–62). The third mention of the Rus in chapter 42 involves their journeys to Volga Bulgaria, Khazaria and Syria (42.75–78).  

Chapter 42 ends the Northern dossier of the third section. It offers a description of the routes from Thessalonica through the Balkans and along the northern coast of the Black Sea, from the Danube as far as Sotiriopolis on its eastern coast, giving the distances between river mouths. Irina Konovalova has described it as “sailing directions in the Northern Pontic”, and likened it to many Greek, Roman and medieval periploi. Gyula Moravcsik divided chapter 42 into two parts: an itinerary of the northern border of the empire from Belgrade to the Caucasus (42.15–23, 55–110); and two historical narratives—on the construction of Sarkel and the incorporation of Cherson (42.23–55).

According to Moravcsik, chapter 42.18–22 makes it clear that the itinerary was composed after 906. But the use of the Thessalonica to Belgrade route as a post-road could hardly have been viable before the death of Symeon of Bulgaria in 927, when endemic warfare between Byzantium and the Bulgars ceased. Thus, chapter 42 is likely to have been composed after 927. Howard-Johnston does not discuss chapter 42 in detail, but attributes it to Leo VI, as forming part of the Northern dossier included in the third section. However, he ascribes to Constantine the two ‘historical’ insertions on Sarkel and Cherson mentioned above (42.23–55) and several geographical ‘glosses’, two of which contain the information of interest to us. Alexei Shchavelev agrees with Howard-Johnston in dating chapter 42 to Leo’s VI time, but he argues that the passages mentioning Rhosia and the Rus belong to the earliest layer of the DAI and form an organic part of the chapter.

The itinerary in chapter 42 is quite coherent, describing the route from west to east without deviations, except for the historical narrative (42.23–55) on Sarkel and Cherson. The route is divided into several sections, which correspond to the distances between major rivers or other important points, for example between Thessalonica, Belgrade and the Danube; between the Danube and the Dnieper; and between the Dnieper and Cherson. Each section pays detailed attention to the minor rivers which cross it and which discharge into the Black Sea, and to the distances between the rivers that form its borders. Short remarks are sometimes added on specific features; for example, when naming the River Charakoul, the author adds “in which they fish for

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59 I accept the reading of “Syria” in the Paris manuscript Codex Paris. gr. 2009; see also below, n. 72.
60 Konovalova 2010, 217.
61 DAI Com 153–54.
62 DAI Com 154 with reference to Jiriček 1877, 76–77; Marquart 1903, 241; Manojlović 1910, 9–10.
63 Howard-Johnston 2000, 328.
64 Shchavelev 2014b, 370.
sturgeon" (42.88–89). Apart from the section on Thessalonica, Belgrade and the Danube, the route follows the northern coast of the Black Sea, mentioning the peoples or territories located on its shores, and all the additional remarks concern maritime matters. Even the two major digressions, on Sarkel and Cherson, do not break this pattern: Sarkel is introduced in connection with the easternmost border of the Pechenegs’ lands; while Cherson is first mentioned as a staging post in the construction of Sarkel. For the interpolator, both narratives cohere around a single issue, and he finishes the digression by noting the distance from the Danube to Sarkel.

The passages on Rhosia and the Rus are the only ones in the chapter where the author’s gaze shifts from the Black Sea coast far to the north. They seem to break an integrated narrative, and are not logically connected with the surrounding text.

The first passage (42.60–62) disrupts the itinerary and squeezes itself in between an enumeration of rivers in the section on the Danube to the Dnieper, and a statement of distances between the river mouths:

From the Danube river to the aforesaid city of Sarkel is a journey of sixty days. In this land between are many rivers: the two biggest of them are the Dniester and the Dnieper. But there are other rivers, that which is called the Syngoul and the Hybyl and the Almatai and the Kouphis and the Bogou and many others. On the higher reaches of the Dnieper river live the Russians, and down this river they sail and arrive at the Romans. Patzinacia possesses all the land as far as Russia and Bosporus and as far as Cherson and up to Sarat, Bourat and the thirty places. The distance along the sea-coast from the Danube river to the Dniester river is 120 miles. From the Dniester river to the river Dnieper is eighty miles, the so-called ‘gold-coast’ (42. 55–67, author’s italics).

The itinerary describes the territory between the Danube and the Dnieper by first listing a number of smaller (and partially unidentified) rivers, and then reporting the distances between the largest of them—the Danube, Dniester and Dnieper. The text is well-constructed and internally consistent. There is no obvious reason for mentioning the Rus lands and their voyages down the Dnieper at this point, and the sentence stands out from the other information in the chapter. In a sense it offers a brief summary of chapter 9. But the sentence that follows, dealing with the boundaries of Patzinacia, reverts to the chapter’s characteristic mode of describing things. The Pechenegs are said to “possess all the land” from the Danube to the Dnieper; and Patzinacia’s boundaries are, in a way, the boundaries of this section of the road. As noted above, the proximity of Patzinacia to Rhosia is also dealt with at greater length in chapter 37.42–47, as well as being mentioned several times in chapters 2–6.

It is a different matter when it comes to describing the Rus lands on the higher reaches of the Dnieper, and implies that the author of the passage was acquainted with another important Scandinavian site in eastern Europe, Gnezdovo, which lies several
kilometres from modern Smolensk.65 Located where the Lovat, Western Dvina and Dnieper rivers meet, and linked through a series of rivulets and lakes, Gnezdovo controlled the beginning of the straight water route to southern Rus and the Black Sea.66 It was one of the largest Scandinavian settlements in eastern Europe to emerge at the turn of the ninth and tenth centuries and it flourished in the middle and second half of the tenth century, after the formation of the route from the Baltic down the Dnieper, called in the Rus chronicles ‘the way from the Varangians to the Greeks’.67 It was not only an important trade centre, similar to Birka,68 but also the administrative centre of a polity that may have been independent of Kiev in the first decades of the tenth century.69

The Upper Dnieper region was, in fact, known to Constantine: in chapter 9 he mentions the Krivichians as paying tribute to the Rus and supplying *monoxyla* to them.70 He also names *Μιλινισκα* (9.6) as one of the cities which sent *monoxyla* to Kiev. The name has traditionally been identified as Smolensk. But according to archaeological finds, Smolensk only came into being a hundred years later at the earliest,71 and the name *Μιλινισκα* most probably refers to the settlement located at the present-day village of Gnezdovo. What was not known to Constantine, though, was that the Rus had themselves settled there: not the slightest hint about this can be found in chapter 9. The region populated by the Krivichians is seen by Constantine as one of the Rus’ *Slaviniai*, and not as their permanent place of habitation.

The second passage to mention the Rus in chapter 42 (lines 75–78) interrupts a description of the Sea of Azov (the Maeotis):

After Bosporus comes the mouth of the Maeotic lake, which for its size everybody calls a sea. Into this same Maeotic sea run rivers many and great; on its northern side runs the Dnieper river, from which the Russians come through to Black Bulgaria and Chazaria and Syria. This same gulf of Maeotis comes opposite to, and within about four miles of, the Nekropyla that are near the Dnieper river... (42.73–79, author’s italics).

This remark about the Rus and their travels is not connected in any way with the otherwise consistent text about the Sea of Azov, where the mention of a river flowing in from the north is relevant and corresponds to 42.86–87:

65 This identification was first suggested by Mel’nikova (2009, 202) and later developed by Alexei Shchavelev (2014b, 370–71). Howard-Johnston (2000, 329) takes this locating of the Rus to show “considerable ignorance on Constantine’s part”.
66 Murasheva 2012; Pushkina et al. 2012.
67 See, for example, *PVL* 8–9; *RPC* 53.
69 Eniosova & Pushkina 2012, 77.
70 Κριβιτζανοι (*DAI* 9.9–10); Κριβιτζεζι (*DAI* 9.108).
Into the eastern side of the Maeotic lake debouch many rivers, the Tanaïs river that comes down from the city of Sarkel, and the Charakoul, in which they fish for sturgeon, and there are other rivers... (42. 86–89).

In 42.79, and contradicting 42.86–87, the river running into the Sea of Azov is said to be the Dnieper. It is commonly agreed that the Dnieper is wrongly named here instead of the Don (the Tanaïs). However, the mention of Volga (‘Black’) Bulgaria, Khazaria and Syria\textsuperscript{72} as destinations for the Rus would imply that the river being referred to is not the Don, but rather the Volga. Irina Konovalova ingeniously suggested that this mistake is rooted in geographical preconceptions about eastern Europe. A belief had existed since late antiquity that a channel, or a river, connected the Black Sea with the Outer Ocean to the north. Arabic scholars borrowed and developed this notion, together with many others, and in Arabic geographical literature this channel was called the ‘Slavonic’ or ‘Rus’ river. But this could describe several rivers which flowed from north to south, including the Dnieper, the Don and the Volga. The ‘Rus’ river was liable to move eastwards and to encompass the Volga or and the Don if the Volga route to the Arabic world was under discussion; or to move westwards, turning into the Dnieper, when the way to Byzantium was being described. Conflating the Volga and the Don into a single river, with outlets into both the Caspian and the Black Sea, was a common mistake; a confusion caused by the ease of portage between the two rivers, where the isthmus between them narrows to around 100 kilometres. Konovalova thus explains Constantine’s mistake by his close association of the Rus with the Dnieper, in accordance with the Byzantine world view of the time; and by his firm belief that the only route taken southwards by the Rus led along the Dnieper.\textsuperscript{73}

The Dnieper route was not the only one in use, however. Although Gnezdovo was located on ‘the way from the Varangians to the Greeks’, it was also connected to another major transcontinental route running from the Baltic down the Volga, which started to function in the mid-eighth century and reached its zenith in the ninth and first half of the tenth century.\textsuperscript{74} The inhabitants of Gnezdovo had access to the River Oka via its tributaries, the Ugra and Zhizdra; and also to the Volga, since the Oka flowed into it north of the territories occupied by the Volga Bulgars on the opposite side of the river. The region of the Upper Dnieper thus had good communications not only with the area along the River Volkhov and Lake Ilmen, but also with the Middle Volga. And so the Rus from Gnezdovo could travel to the lands of the Volga Bulgars, Khazaria and on to ‘Syria’ far more easily via the Oka and Volga than by any roundabout route.

\textsuperscript{72} In Constantine’s usage, ‘Syria’ could designate the whole Arabic world: see, for example, \textit{DAI} 21.73, 102; 25.56–74; 46.43 (Konovalova 2010, 223 n. 27).

\textsuperscript{73} Konovalova 2010.

\textsuperscript{74} Dubov 1989; Mel’nikova 2014a.
down the Dnieper, across the Sea of Azov and then either northwards up to the Volga Bulgars or southwards towards the Muslim world. The route referred in 42.75–78 is therefore not via the Dnieper, but rather a latitudinal river route that led into the Volga and downstream.

The confusion of the Don with the Dnieper in 42.79 might thus have resulted from a clumsy attempt to insert information about the Volga route, which the Rus used intensively in the first half of the tenth century. The widespread notion that the Volga flowed into both the Caspian and the Sea of Azov offered a suitable opening for this insertion, where the author describes the latter. It is worth noting that in 42.75–78, the river called the Dnieper runs into the Sea of Azov from the north; whereas in 42.86–87, the Don flows into the eastern side of the Sea of Azov, which is geographically correct. And one should also note that the imaginary outlet of the Volga—erroneously called the Dnieper—into the Sea of Azov seems to be distinguished from the Don proper. This makes it all the more probable that we have here not a simple mistake caused by the author’s ignorance of the region’s geography, but rather a feeble attempt to incorporate additional and unfamiliar information, during which he made a mistake in naming the river.

The two passages seem interconnected: the first tells us that the Rus live on “the higher reaches of the Dnieper river” (42.60); and the second that, from the Dnieper, they “come through to Black Bulgaria and Chazaria and Syria” (42.77–78). These pieces of information supplement one another to form a united whole. They might derive from a common source, but that source was different from those which Constantine had at his disposal for the rest of his information about the Rus. It seems justified to assume that the passages concerning Rhosia and the Rus in chapter 42 were introduced into the text of an existing itinerary at a later date.

The information about the Rus based on the Upper Dnieper cannot be dated with any certainty. It reflects a time when the settlement of Gnezdovo was already in existence as a major—possibly the largest—Rus centre to the south of the region around Lakes Ladoga and Ilmen, and when the Dnieper route was being regularly travelled. Gnezdovo emerged at the turn of the ninth and tenth century, which gives us a terminus post quem for the information. By looking at the chronology of Byzantine imports found at Gnezdovo, which reflects the settlement’s connections with Byzantium, we can estimate roughly when information about Gnezdovo was likely to have been available in Constantinople. Finds from the first half of the tenth century are scarce;

75 Filipchuk 2013.
76 The interpretation of the route of the Rus from Black Bulgaria southwards as the Volga route was first suggested by Alexei Shchavelev (2013, 147–49; 2014b, 370–71).
77 Pushkina et al. 2012.
their numbers increase by the middle of the century; and they become plentiful and variegated in the second half of the tenth century.\textsuperscript{78} Information about this Rus centre could thus have been available to the Byzantines from the early decades of the century, but Gnezdovo is more likely to have become known about by the mid-tenth century. A later date is also suggested by the amount of information received and adopted in Byzantium: not only the settlement’s very existence, as attested by Constantine’s main source in the naming of *Μιλινίσκα; but also its connection with the Volga route. Thus, knowledge about Gnezdovo seems to have spread towards the end of the first half of the tenth century, rather than earlier, and this knowledge does not seem to have been particularly widespread.

All of this makes it doubtful that the passages about the Rus in chapter 42 belong to the original text of the itinerary, if indeed this dates to the time of Leo VI. I feel inclined to agree with Howard-Johnston, who qualified them as ‘glosses’ by the emperor,\textsuperscript{79} and to regard them as interpolations made most probably by Constantine, but borrowed from a source unconnected to those he relied upon when giving his main account of the Rus in other parts of the \textit{DAI}. The attribution of these ‘glosses’ to Constantine himself is substantiated by their emphasis on and reiteration of information that he gives elsewhere: clearly, these were facts about the Rus he considered to be central—their coming to Byzantium via the Dnieper and their neighbouring the Pechenegs.

CONCLUSIONS

Constantine’s knowledge about the Rus was extensive and varied. He saw them as an important force in eastern Europe, at times hostile, at times friendly; and he returned to them repeatedly, including different pieces of information about them throughout his treatise. As a contextual analysis of those passages which mention the Rus shows, they all belong to Constantine or were written in or around his time. The largest bloc of information is presented in the first section of the \textit{DAI}, in chapter 9. It constitutes a consistent report on the military potential of the Rus, as well as on their capabilities as trading partners. The chapter forms an integral part of the first section, and provides a background for the information presented in chapters 2, 4 and 6, where methods for ‘containing’ the Rus and other peoples of the Black Sea steppes are discussed. The role of the Pechenegs in solving this problem determines their central position in the section.

\textsuperscript{78} Eniosova & Pushkina 2012, 76–77.
\textsuperscript{79} Howard-Johnston 2000, 329–30, 335.
Chapter 37, together with the whole *Peri ethnōn* section, is dated by Howard-Johnston to the first decades of the tenth century—more precisely to the time of Leo VI. However, the information given about the Rus seems later than the rest of the text, and must date to sometime after the 920s, when the migration of the Ulichi took place. In chapter 42, interpolations about the Rus date to approximately the same period, when information about Gnezdovo was starting to appear in Byzantium. The passages in chapter 42 can be ascribed to Constantine, if we assume there was no refreshment of the *Peri ethnōn* after the 920s (when some of the information in the Balkan dossier was also updated).

In his description of *Rhosia* and the Rus, Constantine uses a wide variety of sources, including eye-witness observations, reports by Byzantine officials visiting Cherson and the Pechenegs, and also probably reports from emissaries who took part in ratification of the treaty of 944. Information focuses on those Rus who had settled in Kiev some fifty years earlier, and who had since become an important part of Byzantine foreign policy. In essence, this information amounts to their permanent habitation in Kiev; their voyages down the Dnieper to raid or trade; and their proximity to the Pechenegs, which gave the latter a better chance of restraining the Rus. It is these issues that are repeated time and again throughout the treatise. Occasional information about other groups of Rus, which came from a different source or sources, was correlated with the main section, but it was poorly understood and its incorporation into chapter 42 became complicated and resulted in mistakes.
RHOSIA AND THE RUS IN THE DE ADMINISTRANDO IMPERIO

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CONTEMPT FOR BYZANTINE GOLD: COMMON PLOT ELEMENTS IN RUS CHRONICLES AND SCANDINAVIAN SAGAS*

ANNA LITVINA & FJODOR USPENSKIJ

It is hard to find a passage of the Rus *Primary Chronicle* that has been more extensively studied than the story of the campaign of Prince Sviatoslav, son of Igor, against Byzantium and how this was received in Constantinople. According to the text of the *Primary Chronicle*, when Sviatoslav and his troops approached the walls of Constantinople in 971, the Byzantine emperor, on the advice of his counsellors, sent ambassadors to meet him with lavish gifts:

The emperor summoned his boyars to the palace, and inquired what they should do, for they could not withstand Sviatoslav's onslaught. The boyars advised that he should be tempted with gifts, to discover whether Sviatoslav liked gold and silks. So they sent to Sviatoslav gold and silks, carried by a clever envoy....The envoy took the gifts, and went out to Sviatoslav. It was reported to the prince that Greeks had come bringing greetings, and he ordered that they should be introduced. They came near and greeted him, laying before him the gold and the silks.¹

The Rus prince spurned these gifts, and either had them returned to the emperor (according to the version in the *Laurentian* and *Hypatian* redactions of the *Primary Chronicle*),² or commanded that they should be distributed to his warriors (according

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¹ *Lavrent’evskaia letopis’* 70–71; *Ipat’evskaia letopis’* 58: “и созва цръ боларе своя в полату . и реч имъ что створимъ яко не можемъ противу ему стати . и ръша ему боларе . послі к нему дары . искусимъ и любьзвивъ ли есть злато . ли паво[ло]камъ . и послаП нему злато и паволоки . и мужа мдра...шнь жъ вземъ дары приде къ Стославу . и повдаша Стославу . яко придоша Гръцы с поклономъ и реч введёте я съмо . придоша и поклониша ёму . [и] положиша пред нимъ злато и паволоки.”

² *Lavrent’evskaia letopis’* 71; *Ipat’evskaia letopis’* 58–59; RPC 88.
to the version in the *Novgorod First Chronicle*). The next time, the emperor sent him arms (“a sword and other accoutrements”), and Sviatoslav “accepted these gifts, which he praised and admired, and returned his greetings to the emperor. The envoys went back to the emperor and reported what had occurred. Then the boyars remarked, ‘This man must be fierce, since he pays no heed to riches, but accepts arms.’”

This is not an isolated story. It was included in the set of the laudatory characteristics of the Rus princes especially of the tenth and eleventh centuries (although there are also later examples), in which a ruler’s low esteem of property, gold, silver and precious clothes, in contrast to his love of and generosity towards his troops and entourage, was highly regarded. In recent papers we have tried to show that these characteristics are based on Scandinavian panegyric formulas that were couched in poetic language. Without discussing this question in detail, we may cite a basic example in a line of the poem by the tenth-century skald Eyvind the Spoiler of Poets, in which the king is described as “loyal to men, not to gold.”

Antithetical sayings of this kind were a regular, almost mass phenomenon in Scandinavian culture of the tenth and eleventh centuries. They were applied not only to kings, but also to nobles who had mustered an armed force, or to leaders of land and sea forces. Undoubtedly, the Riurikids inherited from their Scandinavian motherland formulas such as “merciful, and a great lover of his retainers, begrudging them neither treasure nor food nor drink” (referring to Mstislov, son of Vladimir Sviatoslavich); and “with silver and gold I could not secure a retinue, but with a retinue I am in a position to win these treasures, even as my grandfather and my father sought riches with their followers, for Vladimir [Sviatoslavich] was fond of his followers.” In Sviatoslav’s case, however, we are not dealing with a formula but with a developed narrative based on this formula.

Generally speaking, these panegyrical antitheses could develop into complete stories within the Scandinavian tradition. Apparently, microtexts of this genre already had

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3 *Novgorod’skaia pervaia letopis’* 122–23.
4 *Laurent’euskaia letopis’* 71; *Ipat’euskaia letopis’* 59: “и послала ему мечь . и ино щржьє”; “шмъ же принь нача любити и хвалити и цѣловати цѣра. и придоша шлать къ цѣро . и повѣдаша вся бывшая . и ркоша бояре лють сѣи мужь хочетъ быти . яко имѣния не брежет. а щржьє ѣмлаетъ.”
7 *Laurent’euskaia letopis’* 150; *Ipat’euskaia letopis’* 138; *RPC* 136: “любаше дружину по велики а имѣния не шадаше ни питьяни ядения не бранаше”.
8 *Laurent’euskaia letopis’* 126; *RPC* 122: “яко сребром и златом не имам налѣсти дружинны а дружиною налѣзу сребро и злато якоше дѣлъ мои и ѣць мои доискас дружиною злата и сребра бѣ бо Володимерь люба дружину”.
the potential to do this. The question thus arises: how and where was the plot about Prince Sviatoslav formed? Did it stem from a ready-made Varangian formula circulating in Rus, or was the whole plot, in its surviving form, brought from Scandinavia?

In the saga of the kings of Norway, *Morkinskinna*, there is a story that is very similar indeed to the tale of Prince Sviatoslav. The Norwegian king Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer, having come to the walls of Constantinople, underwent the same sort of trial by gifts. Twice the Byzantine emperor sent envoys to him with sacks of gold and precious stones, and each time Sigurd, without even looking at these treasures, ordered them to be distributed among his people. The third time, the emperor, sending even more gifts, put two gold rings on the sacks. Sigurd met the ambassadors carrying the gifts, took the gold rings and put them on his fingers. Then, he made a speech in Greek thanking the emperor for his generosity. He accepted the treasures and courteously distributed them among his warriors, thus earning great respect from the emperor.9

These narratives, although not identical, show striking coincidences in both structure and a number of descriptive details. It is quite obvious that we have here two variants not merely of the same formula, but of one and the same narrative cliché, a ‘legend plot-type’ in later folklore terms, although we do not know whether this particular plot-type actually occurs in later folklore. It is very typical, for example, that emphatic contempt for Byzantine gold is described in both cases. In the saga, it is underlined that Sigurd did not even look at the treasure (“leit eigi til fiarins”), while according to the *Novgorod First Chronicle*, Sviatoslav ordered the gold to be distributed “looking aside” (“кромѣ зрѧ” or “прочь зрѧ”), i.e. without glancing at the gold. Thus, the main goal of the canon of etiquette reflected here was to refrain even from curiosity regarding the gifts.

In a certain sense, the conclusion of the story about Sigurd may even shed light on the *Chronicle’s* account of Sviatoslav’s final meeting with the emperor’s ambassadors. Indeed, when Sviatoslav finally agrees to accept the weapons, the way in which his subsequent behaviour is described by the *Chronicle* is not entirely clear to the modern reader: the prince accepts the arms, which he praises and admires, and returns the emperor’s greetings (“ънъ же приемъ нача хвалити и любити. и целова цѣѧ”). Grammatically, the verbs *liubiti* (‘to admire’, literally ‘to love’) and *khvaliti* (‘to praise’) in this passage could refer either to the emperor or to the arms, and the expression *tselova tsesaria* (‘to greet’, literally ‘to kiss the emperor’) is far from transparent in its significance. Seemingly due to the obscurity of this passage, an insertion was made in the various redactions of the *Novgorod First Chronicle*: “нача любити и хвалити и целовати,

“[яко самого] цесаря” (“he praised and admired [them] as though they were the emperor himself”). Nevertheless, this insertion does not fully clarify the situation.

The Chronicle’s text can be compared with Morkinskina’s account of the way in which Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer reacted: from all the gifts proffered, he took only the two gold rings that had been put on the sacks by the emperor himself, and “then made a speech in Greek and thanked the emperor in beautiful words for his generosity”. It thus becomes clear that in the episode involving Sviatoslav, the Rus prince expresses his appreciation to the Byzantine emperor upon receiving the weapons as a personalised gift. Apparently this gratitude, and its contrast in both cases with the disdain originally shown to the riches offered, was also part of a certain ritual of correct behaviour. The emperor specifically asks the ambassadors to observe how Sigurd responds. This detail is used to underline the fact that the imperial ambassadors are dealing not with a barbarian, unable to value the emperor’s gifts, but rather with a powerful and sharp-sighted ruler, who can foresee the actions of the other side by several steps. Generally speaking, he knows the kind of riddles he will be asked and how he should answer.

Bearing in mind this story of Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer, one might jump to the conclusion that the story of Prince Sviatoslav was borrowed by the Rus tradition from the Varangians in the same way that it had earlier inherited the formula of a ruler’s love for his retinue and for arms, and his lack of interest in gold. However, this simple solution is at odds with an otherwise basic fact: Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer lived in the twelfth century and was the son-in-law of the Rus prince Mstislav the Great, the great-great-grandson of Sviatoslav himself. The story about Sviatoslav is recounted in all three of the oldest Rus chronicles and obviously took shape no later than the end of the eleventh or beginning of the twelfth century (and indeed probably much earlier). This was before Sigurd was born—or at least before he could possibly have visited Constantinople!

These historical circumstances give us reason to believe that this is a peculiar case of circular borrowing. The Rus princes initially inherited the Scandinavian panegyrical formula, which in the Rus environment developed into an independent narrative. It was this narrative that the Scandinavians borrowed from the Rus tradition. Such a borrowing process was comparatively easy because, in addition to being transferred to Sigurd within the princely kin network, the notions and categories involved in the story were habitual and familiar to Scandinavian cultural tradition.

In addition, there is, as it were, a concrete mediator in the borrowing process: the Rus princess Malmfred, daughter of Mstislav the Great and wife of Sigurd, who was in

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10 Novgorodskaya pervaya letopis’ 123.

11 Mork. vol. 2, 97: “talaði hann ørendi á grícscu ok þaccadí keisara með þögrom orðom sína stór-lyndi”.
Norway in the 1120s and most probably did not go there unaccompanied. One should bear in mind that the saga was recorded at the beginning of the thirteenth century (around 1220), when Sigurd’s Byzantine voyages could already have been described in terms of what was originally Rus narrative material.

Although there is no reason to reject the possibility of a Rus model behind Sigurd’s story, as outlined above, it does not necessarily follow that this was the main or only model involved. Sigurd’s story belongs to a whole class or subgenre of narrations about how a Scandinavian king should behave when tested with precious gifts by the Byzantine emperor or another ruler. This suggests that a developed etiquette existed and was maintained for precisely such cases through narratives of this type, as a Scandinavian tradition.

A quite different source—The Legendary Saga of St Olaf—contains the story of Anund Jakob, an early eleventh-century Swedish king. Although not strikingly similar to the story of Sviatoslav, it evidently belongs to the same plot-type. According to The Legendary Saga, Cnut, king of Denmark and England, sent envoys to Anund Jakob with an array of gifts in order to convince him to betray the Norwegian king (and later saint) Olaf and break their alliance. The envoys tested the Swedish king with their gifts on three occasions: they offered him gold chandeliers, a precious cup and finally rings. Anund Jakob rejected all these gifts, although he could not conceal his admiration for them. In rejecting the last gift—the gold rings—the king exclaimed: “Shrewd is King Cnut! For he knows well that I am greedy for wealth and little familiar with chivalry!” However, the gifts were rejected, and Anund Jakob’s alliance with Olaf preserved, despite Cnut’s blandishments.

No doubt elements of the Scandinavian formula that we are interested in are exaggerated here and clichés are used, such as fegiærn, ‘covetous, avaricious, greedy for wealth’. The plot, involving demonstrable contempt for gifts, is adapted: the king allows himself to exhibit general interest in, and weakness for, valuable and beautiful things, before rejecting them. However, this unexpected mode is, in fact, quite standard in Old Norse poetry and prose. In skaldic poetry, the expression “a king abandons his stinginess” may be used as a poetic paraphrase for exhibiting generosity. In the sagas, it may be said that, while sharing out the spoils, the ruler once took several gold rings, and this was the only case when his people could see that he had an appetite for riches. The story of Anund Jakob does not simply comment on his quality as a king, in contrast to the ideal seen in the cases of Sigurd and Sviatoslav; rather, it belongs to a related pattern in which the king, lord or leader is at home instead of abroad.

12 Ólafs saga hins helga 60: “hýgginn er Knutr konongr oc væit hann at ec em fe giærn oc kann litla kurteist”.
13 Mork. vol. 1, p. 64: “ok þat eitt sinn să menn fégirni hans”.
Great generosity and utter contempt for precious gifts is an absolute virtue that
the ruler must show first and foremost when he is far from home. In his own country,
human weakness does not injure him in the eyes of the people, but rather adds interest
to the story, so long as his actions agree overall with the standard prevailing etiquette.
Variations on this standard can be found in the stories of the arrival at Constantinople
of Eric the Good, king of Denmark, and of Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer's journey to
Jerusalem.

In other words, an abundance of variants devised according to this plot design
can be identified as the Scandinavian background to the examples discussed above.
In Rus, we only encounter a particular variant in the story of Prince Sviatoslav and its
interpretation in the story of his descendant and namesake—Prince Sviatoslav, son of
Jaroslav the Wise.¹⁴ Thus, the assumption that the plot in the Rus chronicle, so rare
in Rus, became popular in Scandinavia, remains tenable. Much more likely, however,
is the possibility that in Scandinavia the description of the correct form of behaviour
for the ruler during trials by foreign gift-giving had a long history in the form of oral
stories. One of the variants of such a story, evidently, served as the basis for the story of
Prince Sviatoslav’s meeting with the envoys of the Byzantine emperor.

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THE VARANGIAN LEGEND: TESTIMONY FROM THE OLD NORSE SOURCES

SVERRIR JAKOBSSON

In the eleventh century there existed, within the great army of the Byzantine empire, a regiment composed mainly of soldiers from Scandinavia and the Nordic countries. This regiment was known as the Varangian Guard (tagma tôn Varangôn). The purpose of this paper is to assess the impact the existence of this regiment had on prevailing attitudes towards the Byzantine empire within the Old Norse linguistic and cultural community.

The Varangian Guard is well known from Byzantine sources of the period. John Skylitzes’ chronicle Synopsis historiarum contains one of the earliest references to the term ‘Varangian’, connected with the events of the year 1034. From then on, Varangians appear in various sources. According to Michael Psellos’ Chronographia, the founding of the Varangian Guard took place during the reign of Basil II (976–1025), although Psellos calls these soldiers “Tautothians” rather than Varangians. This has often been connected with the evidence of Arabic and Armenian sources, according to which the nucleus of this regiment was formed by 6,000 mercenaries despatched by Prince Vladimir of Kiev in 989 to help the emperor Basil II quash a rebellion. From then on, Scandinavians formed the bulk of the guard, until expatriate Anglo-Saxons began to join in large numbers as a result of the Norman invasion of England in 1066. From the 1070s onwards, the Varangian Guard became predominantly English. Among notable Varangians serving the empire during the initial stage, when the force

1 John Skylitzes, Synopsis historiarum 394–95. The chronicle itself was written several decades later. See also above, 53–87.
3 Psell. vol. 1, 9.
4 See Obolensky 1971, 255–56; Poppe 1976. The main source is the Arab Christian writer, Yahya of Antioch (Histoire vol. 2, 423–26). The number 6,000 is from Stephen of Taron, Histoire Universelle vol. 2, 164–65. However, Stephen uses the same number on other occasions to denote a large army: ibid., 156. See also Seibt 1992, 297–98.
was predominantly Scandinavian (i.e. from 989 to the 1070s), was a certain Araltes, “son of the king of the Varangians [basileōs men Varangias en uios],” who is mentioned in the Strategikon of Kekaumenos. This Araltes has commonly been identified with King Harald Hardrada of Norway (1046–1066). From sources such as these, it is possible to gain some insight into contemporary Byzantine attitudes about the Norsemen, i.e. the view from the centre to the periphery.

The view from the other side is more murky. Almost all our reliable knowledge about the Varangians stems from contemporary Greek sources. There is a distinct lack of Latin or Old Norse sources with the same validity. And our Slavonic sources, which have mostly been the focus of research into the history of the Varangians before 989, pose their own problems of interpretation. Yet there is no dearth of material relating to the Varangians in Old Norse sources from a later period. In this paper I shall focus on Old Norse sources from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and on how they should be interpreted as representations of the contemporary Byzantine empire. These sources can be divided into two groups. The first consists of the Kings’ Sagas (Konungasögur), narratives dealing with the history of Scandinavian kings, in which there are sections about their relations with the Byzantine empire during the period between the First and the Fourth Crusades (1096–1204). The second consists of the Kings’ Sagas dealing with an earlier period (the tenth and eleventh centuries), as well as Sagas of the Icelanders (Íslendingasögur). The second group of narratives are set in the heyday of the Varangian Guard; but their problem as sources is that they were composed no sooner, and very often much later, than the Kings’ Sagas of the first group.

The purpose of this paper is to delve into the Old Norse narratives containing information about the relationship of the Nordic peoples with the Byzantine empire during these two periods, and to extract from them such facts as are of use for the exploration of the image of the Byzantine empire in the north. The problems under discussion here are connected with periodisation, medieval ideas of sovereignty and the relationship between periphery and centre in an age before the advent of world systems.

CRUSADER KINGS IN CONSTANTINOPLE

For a brief period in the early twentieth century, the Sagas of the Icelanders seemed to offer an exciting alternative view of the history of the Byzantine empire from the viewpoint of the Varangians themselves. The last manifestation of this optimism was Væringja saga by the Icelandic scholar Sigfús Blöndal, published posthumously in 1954.

6 Str, ed. and Russian tr. Litavrin, 298–99; ed. and tr. Roueché, 97.06.
7 See the overviews by Stender-Petersen 1953, 5–20 and Rahbeck Schmidt 1970.
8 On the Kings’ Saga genre see Ármann Jakobsson 2005.
However, by that time, serious doubts had been raised within saga studies in general about the value of these particular narratives, which mainly deal with events in Iceland from c. 930–1030, and in which events occurring abroad are mostly extraneous to the main plot. In his heavily edited English translation of Væringja saga, The Varangians of Byzantium, Benedikt Benediktz offered Blöndal’s scholarship in a thoroughly revised form, with much more scepticism about the factual accuracy of the accounts.9

In Væringja saga, Blöndal described the relationship between the Scandinavians and the Byzantines chronologically according to the occurrence of the events recounted, rather than following the age of the sources. This view of the sources has been echoed by subsequent scholars, often due to their unfamiliarity with the particular problems relating to Old Norse sources.10 This view gives central importance to events and other historical titbits, with the sources of information becoming secondary to the discussion. In order to shift our understanding of this relationship and the development of the Old Norse discourse about the Byzantine empire, the emperor and the imperial city of Constantinople, this order will be reversed, beginning with the oldest sources which deal with more recent periods.

The earliest alphabetical texts in the Old Norse literary language are from the twelfth century. Before then, runic inscriptions were the dominant literary medium in Scandinavia, and Scandinavians even left traces of their presence in runic inscriptions in Constantinople and Athens.11 On the runestones of Norway, Sweden and Gotland, the names of ‘Greekland’ [Grikkland] and the Greeks appear more often than those of any other land or people.12 Similarly, the terms Grikkland and Grikkir/Girkkir occur in skaldic poetry, which is generally thought to have originated in the eleventh century, for instance at the court of King Harald Hardrada.13 The terminology is interesting in itself, as ‘Graecia’ and ‘Græcus’ were Latin terms which the Byzantines did not use themselves, and could even in some contexts be seen as pejorative.14 These terms were, however, generally used in Old Norse sources from that time onwards.

However, neither skaldic poetry nor runic inscriptions contain longer narratives. These were introduced with the advent of an Old Norse adaptation of the Latin script on parchment. The earliest literary recordings of dealings between Scandinavians and Byzantines are thus necessarily no older than the twelfth century. Yet already at that time there are references to contemporary Byzantine events. The death of Alexios I
Komnenos in 1118 is recorded in the Íslendingabók of Ari Thorgilsson, which was composed sometime between 1122 and 1133. In the twelfth century universal history Veraldar saga there are records of Byzantine emperors up to the Carolingian period; from then onwards, the western emperors are listed instead.

The expeditions of Scandinavian kings to Constantinople do not receive much prominence in our twelfth-century narratives. The oldest surviving account of the crusade of King Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer, the Historia de antiquitate regum Norwegiensium by Theodoricus Monachus (composed c. 1180), does not mention his sojourn in Constantinople at all. The oldest surviving account in Old Norse, Ágrip af Nóregskonunga sögum (c. 1190) is relatively succinct:

He went to Miklagarðr and received great honour from the reception of the emperor and great presents, and he left his ships there to commemorate his stay, and he took a great and valuable figurehead from one of his ships and placed it at the Church of St Peter.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on the honour and gifts received from the emperor initiates a theme echoed in later accounts of this very crusade, the bulkier Kings’ Sagas composed in the first half of the thirteenth century, for example Morkinskinna and Heimskringla. It seems that honour and gifts were the emperor’s to bestow and the Norwegian king’s to receive, which prompts some reflection about their relationship. King Harald had received honorary titles from successive emperors in the 1030s and 1040s and, according to the Kings’ Sagas, some decades later his great-grandson received dignity and presents from Alexios Komnenos.

A similar description is given of the journey of the Danish king Eric (d. 1103) to the Holy Land some years earlier in the thirteenth-century Knýtlinga saga. This version draws upon the poem Eiríksdrápa, composed by the contemporary Icelandic lawspeaker Markus Skeggjason (d. 1107), in which the various dignities bestowed upon Eric by foreign kings are enumerated at some length. Although Eric seems to have benefitted from being associated with the monarchs of France and Germany, the greatest dignity which he received was—according to the poem—from “the lord himself” (harra sjölfum) in Miklagarðr. Gold, clothes and fourteen warships are listed among the gifts granted to Eric. In the narrative in Knýtlinga saga, the dignities that Eric and Sigurd
received from the emperor become the subject of direct comparison, the gold offered to Eric being contrasted with the games the emperor held for the Norwegian king in the Hippodrome in Constantinople, "and opinion is divided upon which choice was considered more noble".\(^{21}\)

The same attitude toward the emperor and his court is noticeable in *Orkneyinga saga*, an early thirteenth-century account of the pilgrimage of Earl Ragnvald in 1153–1155. A man named Eindridi the Young (*ungi*), who had served for a long time as a mercenary in Constantinople, encourages the earl to travel to the Holy Land and not to be content simply to listen to stories from there. He argues that the earl will be "most respected, when you arrive there into the company of noblemen".\(^{22}\) The pursuit of honour is thus made into the principal purpose of this pilgrimage. Following an adventurous journey, Ragnvald arrives in Constantinople to acclaim from "the emperor and the Varangians". The emperor Manuel I Komnenos (1143–1180) gives Ragnvald and his companions "a great amount of money and offered them mercenaries' payment, if they wished to remain there. They stayed a long time through the winter in altogether splendid revelry".\(^{23}\) However, Ragnvald and his men choose to return, and in the end it is noted that they were considered to be much worthier men after this pilgrimage than they had been before. The account of the reception of the earl by the emperor is much briefer in *Orkneyinga saga* than in *Morkinskinna*, *Heimskringla* and *Knýtlinga saga*, and the gifts given by the emperor are referred to in the context of mercenary pay. Mention is also made of the Varangian Guard, perhaps as a suitable regiment for the service of any Scandinavian mercenaries.

When seen in this light, the chrysobull sent by Alexios III Angelos (1195–1203) to the monarchs of Norway, Denmark and Sweden in 1196 seeking their military assistance is not very surprising.\(^{24}\) The Byzantine emperor could confidently expect these kings to be well disposed towards the empire, and at the very least putative allies in wars against its enemies.\(^{25}\) Is it possible to read more into this chrysobull and regard the relationship between the emperor and the Scandinavian kings as that between a liege lord and his vassals? It is certainly the case that this was a unilateral relationship, for the emphasis in the Old Norse is on dignities and gifts granted by the emperor, never on an exchange of gifts, as between monarchs of more equal stature. However, there is no

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\(^{21}\) *Danakonunga sögur* 237. See also the version in Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum* vol. 2, 74–83.

\(^{22}\) *Orkneyinga saga* 194.

\(^{23}\) *Orkneyinga saga* 236.

\(^{24}\) *Sverris saga* 192–94.

\(^{25}\) In the *Historia de profectione Danorum in Hierosolymam*, which describes the participation of a group of Danes and Norwegians in the Third Crusade, the emperor Isaac II Angelos is said to have hired some of these crusaders as mercenaries on their way home. See *SMHD* vol. 2, 490. This event occurred a few years before 1196.
conclusive proof that the Byzantine emperor did regard the Nordic kings as anything more than junior partners within a larger community of sovereigns, in which the emperor of Rome was bound to be pre-eminent. It is also evident that the Scandinavian kings accepted the emperor’s pre-eminence and considered it an honour to visit him and pay their respects. Some of the sources for the travels of these Scandinavian crusaders give a clear indication that the emperor was regarded as the foremost monarch in Christendom. This is implied by the turn of phrase in the Eiríksdrápa of Markus Skeggjason (noted above, 348), and more indirectly by the relative importance placed on the visit to Constantinople in all of the aforementioned accounts.

The overwhelmingly positive relationship between the Byzantine emperor and various Scandinavian monarchs during the twelfth century is interesting in itself.26 But what is also noteworthy is that the image of the Byzantine empire in Old Norse sources was not subject to radical shifts after this period. The state of the empire following the debacle of the Fourth Crusade receives scant attention in Scandinavian sources. Very little attention was paid to the religious schism between the empire and Latin Christianity. In fact, the existence of such a schism seems to have been news to the Icelanders when they learnt of its putative resolution at the Council of Lyon in 1274.27 In Old Norse sources, little effort was made to make sense of the new political realities in the Balkans and Asia Minor in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Instead, their historiographers’ attention turned towards a past more distant than the twelfth century, the period of the Varangian Guard.

EMPERORS AND KINGS

Olaf Tryggvason (995–1000), the king of Norway associated with the Christianisation of Norway, Iceland and Greenland, was a character of great importance within Old Norse historiography and his reign is usually seen as marking a watershed between the pagan and Christian periods. In the late twelfth-century Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar, Olaf is also cast as the person who introduced Christianity to Rus. Even if hardly a reliable source for events two hundred years earlier, this account is nevertheless an early example of how the Christianisation of Scandinavia was connected with events in the east.28 In the narrative, Olaf is made out to be the chief missionary to Rus, actually travelling

26 The common scholarly opinion has been that the ‘special relationship’ between Scandinavians and the Byzantine empire ceased during the crusading period: Bagge 1990, 172.
27 See Sverrir Jakobsson 2008a, 175.
28 Jan Ragnar Hagland regards four Norwegian kings as having “strong, personal contacts” with the east, beginning with Olaf Tryggvason in 995: see Hagland 2005, 154.
to the Byzantine empire in order to bring missionaries from there.\textsuperscript{29} But although \textit{Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar} links Olaf with the Byzantine empire through his mission work and depicts him as the noble servant of two great eastern monarchs, Prince Vladimir of Kiev and King Boleslaw of Poland, no attempt is made to connect him with the Varangian Guard. The main reason for this is probably that another Norwegian king, Harald Hardrada, was already renowned for his Varangian connections.

As noted above (346), King Harald's exploits in the Byzantine empire are mentioned by contemporary authors such as Kekaumenos. Harald is also the subject of some discussion in the \textit{Gesta Hammaburgensis ecclesiae pontificum} by Adam of Bremen, written sometime in the 1070s. Concerning Harald's youth, Adam is quite laconic, simply stating: "He was a powerful and triumphant man, who had formerly participated in several wars against barbarians in Greece and the regions of Scythia."\textsuperscript{30} The oldest surviving history of the Norwegian kings, the \textit{Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium} of Theodoricus Monachus, also mentions that Harald came to Norway from 'Grecia' and carried home with him great treasure. His exploits abroad are summarised thus:

\begin{quote}
This Harald had performed many bold deeds in his youth, overthrowing many heathen cities and carrying off great riches in Rus and in Ethiopia (which we call \textit{Bláland} in our mother tongue). From there he travelled to Jerusalem and was everywhere greatly renowned and victorious. After he had travelled through Sicily and taken much wealth by force there, he came to Constantinople. And there he was arraigned before the emperor; but he inflicted enough shameful humiliation upon that same emperor and, making an unexpected escape, he slipped away.\textsuperscript{31}
\end{quote}

As noted by scholars, this narrative seems to be based partly on skaldic poems which were later used in more voluminous works in Old Norse, such as \textit{Morkinskinna} and \textit{Heimskringla}. The anecdote about a quarrel with the emperor corresponds to a degree with the tale told by Kekaumenos:

\begin{quote}
Harald wished in the time of the emperor Monomachos to get royal permission to return to his own land, but it was not forthcoming. Indeed, the road out was obstructed. Yet he slipped away and took the throne in his own country in place of his brother Olaf.\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}

However, the details of the quarrel are different, as in the \textit{Historia de antiquitate regum Norwagiensium} Harald seems to have been the subject of some accusation and appears to have somehow disgraced the emperor in making his getaway. Apart from Kekaumenos:

\begin{quote}
\textit{Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar} 40–42. On the historical value of this account see Jackson 2011, 121–24. 
\textsuperscript{29}

\textit{Adam of Bremen, Gesta} 346. On the concept of Scythia see Janson 2011, 46–49. 
\textsuperscript{30}

\textit{Monumenta Historica Norvegicae} 57. 
\textsuperscript{31}

\textsuperscript{32}
\end{quote}
menos, the only source earlier than Theodoricus to mention this incident is the *Gesta regum Anglorum* by William of Malmesbury, who suggests that Harald had defiled a noble lady (which might explain the words “probrosa ignominia”). Harald’s Sicilian expedition is also mentioned by Kekaumenos and his wars in Rus might correspond to what Adam of Bremen calls the region of the Scythians, but neither eleventh-century source mentions Harald warring in Ethiopia. Nor was this exciting detail taken up by the more extensive narratives composed about Harald in the thirteenth century.

Legends connected with Harald Hardrada were elaborated in the thirteenth-century Kings’ Sagas such as *Morkinskinna* and *Heimskringla*. They use the skaldic poems more extensively and provide greater detail on central events such as the invasion of Sicily, in which Harald is portrayed as a rival of the Byzantine general George Maniakes. An interesting variation is provided by Saxo Grammaticus, who describes Harald fighting a dragon in a Byzantine dungeon. Nevertheless, the main outline of the plot is the one provided by Theodoricus, and it focuses on certain details. The first is the immense wealth gathered by Harald during his service with the Byzantine emperor. The second concerns the intrigues which made him leave Constantinople in a clandestine manner.

By contrast, the narrative concerning Olaf Tryggvason focuses on religious matters. By making this apostle to the north also responsible for bringing Christianity to Rus, Icelandic historiographers forged a clear link between eastern and western Christianity, an idea which kept its appeal throughout the middle ages and figures prominently in works from the last quarter of the fourteenth century.

These two kings were both active in the period when Nordic warriors were predominant in the Varangian Guard. Their stories served as prototypes for accounts of less prominent persons who were said to have served the Byzantine emperor. These were mainly Icelanders, and the accounts of them were written down slightly later than the tales about King Olaf and Harald, mainly in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The development of this ‘Varangian legend’ will be examined further in the following section.

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34 *Mork.* vol. 1, 84–118; *Heimskringla* 69–91.
36 The view of Harald and his relationship with the empire could, however, vary from source to source; see for example Bagge 1990, 179–90.
The body of literature commonly known as the Sagas of the Icelanders (Íslendingasögur) had its heyday in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The earliest known examples were composed in the second quarter of the thirteenth century, in the wake of the large compilations of Kings’ Sagas such as Morkinskinna and Heimskringla. It has even been suggested that the Sagas of the Icelanders were originally elaborations of shorter episodes dealing with Icelanders at the Norwegian court. This conjecture is supported by the fact that some of the earliest known sagas feature the exploits of Icelanders who were, at least at some point in their careers, retainers of the Norwegian king. By the second half of the thirteenth century the evolution of the sagas was well under way, with notable examples such as Laxdœla saga, Heiðarvíga saga and Brennu-Njáls saga being composed in this period.

Most Sagas of the Icelanders are set in the decades before and after the introduction of Christianity in Iceland, an event which has traditionally been dated to the year 999. The Christianisation then serves as a chronological and structural turning point in the sagas, creating a divide between the old pagan times and the new and improved customs introduced by the Christian faith. It is evident that as a history of particular events, the sagas are of limited value since the action takes place two or three hundred years before the time of their composition.

There are, however, reasons for those studying Old Norse views of the Byzantine empire to be interested in this genre. It so happens that this chronological structure places the action of the sagas within the period when the Varangian Guard was at its peak, at least from the point of view of Scandinavians. It thus became a common narrative device to locate characters, who for some reason had to be removed from the thrust of the action in Iceland, at the court of the most glorious monarch in Christendom, the Byzantine emperor. There, the exploits of these characters were usually not listed in much detail, as it could be taken for granted that they had been exalted by serving such a noble master.

If of little value as factual sources about the fate of particular individuals, what is the historical value of the Varangian episodes in the Sagas of the Icelanders? Are they nothing more than literary topoi? This is surely not the case, seeing that literary stereotypes can shed light on a society’s thought processes. The reason why the Varangian motif was so popular in this particular genre is linked to the Byzantine empire’s position within the prevalent worldview of medieval Icelanders, and to a large degree of other Scandinavians as well.

37 See Bjarni Einarsson 1961.
38 For an overview of the genre see Vésteinn Ólason 2005.
Since Iceland is central to the saga genre, Varangians usually appear in two contexts: either as men who have served in the guard but have returned to Iceland; or as protagonists who have to leave Iceland and seek their fortune elsewhere, in this case in Constantinople. Different motifs are used according to the different contexts.

One of the earliest instances of the first motif is in Hallfreðar saga, an early thirteenth-century text which became part of a saga cycle connected with Olaf Tryggvason. In this case, the eponymous hero is courting a woman who is betrothed to a wealthy and popular farmer called Gris Sæmingsson: “he had travelled abroad all the way to Miklagarðr and received much honour there”.\(^3\)

Gris’ past is only referred to on one occasion, when Hallfred is about to duel with him, but is discouraged by the death of King Olaf. Gris proves surprisingly sympathetic to his plight and refuses to consider this an act of cowardice: “It is not so, I had less honour from the emperor and yet I considered it a great event when I lost my lord; the love towards a liege lord is fiery”.\(^4\)

In their different ways, both Hallfred and Gris exemplify the ideal of service to a noble lord.

It is not evident from the saga whether the wealth and social position of Gris are related to his former service with the emperor, but this is stated more clearly in two other thirteenth-century texts, Laxdœla saga and Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða. In the former, young Bolli Bollason travels abroad and visits the courts of Norway and Denmark. He then continues until he reaches Constantinople:

He spent a brief time there until he acquired for himself a place in the Varangian Guard; we have not heard any tales of a Northman joining the service of the emperor before Bolli Bollason did. He spent very many winters in Miklagarðr and was considered the stoutest fellow in all hardship and always closest to the front ranks. Varangians had a high opinion of Bolli, while he was at Miklagarðr.\(^5\)

All this is just a prelude to his return to Iceland, when great emphasis is placed on the glitz and glamour accompanying the return of a Varangian to his northern homeland:

Bolli brought out with him much wealth, and many gems that dignitaries had given him. Bolli was such a richly-adorned fellow when he came back from this journey that he would wear no clothes but of scarlet or silk, and all his weapons were gilded: he was called Bolli the courteous. He made it known to his shipmates that he was going west to his own region, and he left his ship and goods in the hands of his crew. Bolli rode from the ship with eleven men, and all his followers were dressed in scarlet, and with gilded saddles, even though Bolli was peerless among them. He had on the silken clothes which the emperor had given him, he had around him a scarlet cape; and he had the sword Æskíðir [Foot- or Leg-Biter] girt on him, the hilt of which was ornamented with gold, and the grip woven with gold. He had a gilded helmet on his head, and a red shield on his flank, with a knight painted on it in gold. He had a lance in his hand, as is the

\(^3\) Vatnsdœla saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks Saga 144.
\(^4\) Vatnsdœla saga, Hallfreðar saga, Kormáks Saga 192.
\(^5\) Laxdœla saga 214–15.
custom in foreign lands; and wherever they took quarters the women paid heed to nothing but
gazing at Bolli and his ornaments, and those of his followers.  

This kind of conspicuous wealth is reminiscent of reports of the great treasure of Har-
ald Haradrada in the Kings’ Sagas; the wealth of Byzantium seems even greater in the
context of medieval Iceland. But the value of his jewellery was more than just that of
precious stones and metals in general. There was also symbolic value in the fact that
most of these precious things were presents from a noble master. In that sense, Bolli is
no different from Gris Sæmingsson, although his conspicuous showmanship is a far cry
from the quiet dignity of the latter. Both gained in honour and wealth by associating
with the noble lord in Constantinople.

In Hrafnkels saga Freysgoða, a text from the last quarter of the thirteenth centu-
ry, two secondary characters are returned Varangians. One is the brother of the main
character’s chief antagonist, a person by the name of Eyvind Bjarnason. He was a sailor
who went “abroad and ended in Miklagarðr, where he was much honoured by the king
of the Greeks, and he stayed there for a while”.  

When he returns after seven years
he wears coloured clothes and has a fine shield, and he had “educated himself a great
deal and had become the bravest of men”. Another character in the saga, Thorkell
Thjostarsson, had also been abroad for seven years “and gone to Miklagarðr, but I am
now a retainer of the emperor”. Neither of them displays any conspicuous wealth and,
although they evidently gained some social prestige from their stay in Constantinople,
neither of them is elevated to the lofty heights of Bolli Bollason.  

Do the fates of these characters, portrayed in historical narratives composed much
later than the time in which the events took place, bear any relationship with those
of actual Varangians? In the thirteenth century, memories of people returning from
Miklagarðr were perhaps not so faint. In 1217 Sturla Sighvatsson, the eighteen-year-old
son of a chieftain, gained some notoriety when he tried to take a sword from a local
farmer and managed to wound him seriously in the process. In this, he was quietly en-
couraged by his father. But why were this father and son prepared to disturb the peace
in the region for the sake of a sword? The artefact in question was called Brynjubítr,
‘Mail-Biter’, and had been brought from Constantinople by a person known as Sigurd

42 Laxdala saga 224–25. For a comparison, see below, 363–87.
43 Austfirdinga sögur 100.
44 Austfirdinga sögur 125.
45 Austfirdinga sögur 111.
46 According to Sigfús Blöndal, the evidence for the existence of these two men is of no historical
value: SB, 310–11. He was, however, much more inclined to accept the existence of Gris Sæmings-
son. But, as argued above, the main value of these narratives about individual Varangians is as
evidence of the prevailing view of the Byzantine empire in thirteenth-century Iceland.
47 Sturlunga saga vol. 1, 261.
the Greek (grikkir). This man had participated in dramatic events in the region some twenty years earlier, by which time he had already acquired his nickname. Sigurd’s most notable achievement in these battles had been to save a wealthy farmer by herding him into a church “and then he stood before the church and proclaimed that he would defend it, as long as he was able to stand”. While not of the highest rank in Iceland, Sigurd was evidently remembered as a valiant man and a defender of Christian values. Although the Varangian Guard is not mentioned in connection with Sigurd, he had clearly served in Constantinople in some way and had brought home a sword as proof, an artefact coveted by noble lords after his death.

There are also several examples in the sagas of characters who end their careers in the Varangian Guard, having left their troubles behind in Iceland. The narratives concerning them are usually quite laconic, as events abroad seldom form the main plot in the sagas. In the early thirteenth-century Heiðarvíga saga, two men seek their fortune in Constantinople at different times following troubles in Iceland. One of them, Gestr, has slain a noble chieftain and is pursued by the chieftain’s son, Thorstein. Their journey ends in Miklagardr, where Gestr joins the Varangian Guard. Thorstein finds him there and wounds him during a wrestling match. The Varangians want to kill Thorstein for violating the rules of the contest, but Gestr intercedes and even pays for Thorstein’s journey home. In return, Thorstein promises to stop his pursuit, provided that Gestr will not return to the Nordic countries (Nordrlönd).

Later in the saga, Bardi Gudmundarson is exiled following a series of killings. He visits the kings of Norway and Denmark, returns to Iceland and is married there, but then returns to Norway, where he divorces his wife. Finally, he travels to Rus (Garðaríki) and eventually joins the Varangian Guard:

and all the Northmen thought highly of him, and held him in great affection. Every time the kingdom needed to be defended, he took part in the expedition and became known for his hardiness and had a large regiment of men around him. Bardi spent three winters there and received great honour from the king and all the Varangians.

He is eventually killed against overwhelming odds, in an unspecified battle.

Another important saga character connected with the Varangian Guard was Kolsskegg, brother of the famous Gunnar from Hlíðarenda, who is one of the central char-

48 For a comparison, see below, 363–87.
49 Sturlunga saga vol. 1, 208. The notion of church sanctity was heavily contested in Iceland in the 1190s, see Sverrir Jakobsson 2008b.
50 Borgfirðinga sögur 243–44. A similar pursuit occurs in the Grettis saga, in a form heavily influenced by Romance literature. See Guðmundur Andri Thorsson 1990. As this text may be of very late date (early fifteenth century) it will not be discussed here.
51 Borgfirðinga sögur 325.
acters in the *Brennu-Njáls saga*. Gunnar dies a heroic death after tragically refusing a settlement to go into exile for three years. Kolskegg, who has loyally supported his brother throughout his adventures, decides to honour the settlement and leaves Iceland, eventually joining the court of the Danish king Sven Forkbeard:

One night Kolskegg dreamed that a man approached him; a radiant man, who woke him up, saying: “Arise and come with me.” “What do you want of me?” asked Kolskegg, to which the man replied “I will give you a bride, and you shall be my knight.” Kolskegg believed he had agreed to this, whereupon he awoke. Kolskegg consulted a wise man about the dream, who interpreted it as meaning he would travel to southern lands and become the knight of God. Kolskegg was baptised in Denmark, but did not like it there, so travelled east to Rus, where he wintered. He then voyaged to *Miklagårdr*, where he entered service. The last that was heard of Kolskegg was that he had taken a wife in *Miklagårdr*, becoming the leader of a Varangian band and remaining there until his dying day. He is now out of this story.52

The story of Kolskegg has markedly Christian overtones. By serving in the Varangian Guard, Kolskegg has become a knight of the Lord.

It is possible to identify a certain dichotomy based on these examples. Those who return from the empire gain great wealth and even greater glory from serving the noble emperor (most notably Bolli Bollason). They mirror Harald Hardrada, the prototype for examples of immense wealth from the east. Those who end their lives as Varangians achieve an advantage, either in reputation (such as Bardi Gudmundarson) or in becoming a knight of God (such as Kolskegg). Here, the parallel is closer to Olaf Tryggvason, who reportedly ended his life as a hermit “in Greece, the Holy Land and Syria”.53

**A VIEW FROM THE PERIPHERY**

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, those episodes in the sagas that mention the Byzantine empire received much scholarly attention. The main focus of scholars such as Gustav Storm and Sigrún Blöndal was to establish whether the Old Norse sources contained reliable information about the history of the Byzantine empire and to ascertain the facts relating to the Varangian Guard in the tenth and eleventh centuries.54 As the sagas’ credibility as sources about the distant past began to diminish, so did interest in these episodes. It can, however, be argued that the main value of the sagas’ evidence is as a source for the Old Norse world itself, especially its prevailing attitudes and mentalities.

First, there is the question of the relationship of Nordic monarchs to the Byzantine emperor. It has often been noted that early medieval ideas of sovereignty revolved to a degree around “the legal axiom embodied in the *Corpus Juris Civilis*, namely that

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52 *Brennu-Njáls saga* 197.
53 *Ólafs saga Tryggvasonar* 242.
54 See Storm 1884 and SB.
theoretically, the emperor was lawful overlord and supreme monarch of Europe: every king and prince was inferior to him. According to the testimony of the Kings’ Sagas, this was the prevailing view in the Old Norse world of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. Nevertheless, neither the Byzantine empire nor the Nordic states can be characterised as ‘feudal’ at this time. The bond between the emperor and the Scandinavian monarchs was not that of a lord and his vassals; it was more a symptom of the fragmented sovereignty characterising society in general. In the middle ages, ultimate sovereignty had an ultimate source—God himself—and the Byzantine emperor could be seen as one of his most distinguished representatives. Thus, service to the emperor was also service to a higher Lord, as exemplified by Kolskegg’s dream.

From a Byzantine viewpoint, the relationship between the empire and other countries was not, and could not be, a relationship between equals. It was axiomatic to Byzantine political thinking that their emperor was the kosmokrator—the lord of the world; and, as seen in the De cerimoniis, by the tenth century they had developed the concept of a hierarchy of subordinate states, revolving in obedient harmony around the throne of the universal autocrat in Constantinople. Within his own lands a prince could be a fully sovereign ruler, but in relation to the empire he occupied a subordinate position in the hierarchical structure of the Commonwealth.

The relationship between Nordic Varangians and the Byzantine empire also raises the issue of periphery and centre. Questions concerning peripheries and centres have been key to the study of development theory in the past few decades. Usually, however, the focus has been on economic relations between areas. In his seminal study on world-systems, Immanuel Wallerstein defines a world-system as “an economic but not a political entity”, in contrast to political empire, which he regards as a “primitive means of economic domination.” According to Wallerstein, an economic system depends on a system of government which directs the flow of economic goods from the periphery to the centre.

The medieval period, in Wallerstein’s view, was characterised by the absence of such a system. In the twelfth century there existed “a series of empires and small worlds.” Since then, Janet Abu-Lughod’s study of medieval world-systems has modi-

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55 Ullmann 1949, 3. See also André Grabar’s theory about the ‘Family of Princes’: “for the pious Emperor of Byzantium, God is simultaneously Father and Brother, head of the army and comrade in arms, He Who in time of war ensures victories and in time of peace just government. Above all, for the Emperor God is a friend; the basileus has the Master of the universe as a friend, and as a result—are not the goods of friends common?—the basileus who is loved by God becomes a universal sovereign himself” (Grabar 2007, 5).

56 See Obolesky 1970.

57 Wallerstein 1974, 15.

58 Wallerstein 1974, 17.
fied this simplistic picture of the medieval economy. In the view of Abu-Lughod, there were a number of such world-systems in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, but no single system exercised hegemonic power over the others.\textsuperscript{59} While the Scandinavian countries were on the periphery of the European economy during most of the middle ages, the same cannot be said of the Byzantine empire. Firstly, gold coins struck in the empire were long the preferred specie for international transactions. Until the second half of the thirteenth century, Venetian and Genoese merchants used gold coins from Constantinople or Egypt rather than striking their own.\textsuperscript{60} And secondly, Constantinople was Christendom’s largest and most prosperous city and the gateway to Central Asia. It is thus no wonder that Venetian merchants coveted and benefitted from controlling trade with Constantinople, extracted trading concessions from the emperor in the eleventh century, and then conquered the City in the Fourth Crusade.\textsuperscript{61}

This revision of history leaves north-western Europe as a very marginal area in economic terms for much of the time. Even from Wallerstein’s Eurocentric perspective, Europe as a whole cannot be regarded as a hegemonic power during the middle ages. As already conceded by Wallerstein, north-western Europe did not simply have a subsistence economy, and its social relations grew out of the disintegration of the Roman empire. In Wallerstein’s words, “The myth of the Roman empire still provided a certain cultural and even legal coherence to the area. Christianity served as a set of parameters within which social action took place. Feudal Europe was a ‘civilisation’, but not a world-system.”\textsuperscript{62}

This murky entity—‘civilisation’—amounts to the cultural and legal coherence provided by the myth of empire, and to the parameters set by the church that defined Christendom. There can be no doubt that both the Roman empire and the Christian church were of enormous importance for defining the identities of those who saw themselves as belonging to this world. And yet it seems facile to think of this entity as something other than a world-system. How can the expansion of Europe in the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth centuries be explained, if not in economic terms? What was different, however, was the relative importance of culture and the economy within this system.

If Scandinavia was on the periphery, the nature of that peripheral status is open to debate. Was it mainly political, cultural or economic? The most important studies on centres and peripheries concentrate on their economic aspects, but that leaves the relationship between centres and peripheries within medieval Christianity largely un-

\textsuperscript{59} Abu-Lughod 1989, 32–38.
\textsuperscript{60} Abu-Lughod 1989, 15, 67.
\textsuperscript{61} Abu-Lughod 1989, 105, 119.
\textsuperscript{62} Wallerstein 1974, 17–18.
accounted for. Even if it did not constitute an economic world-system, there existed a unity within the Catholic world of the middle ages, provided by the church and the legacy of the Roman empire. Rome, Jerusalem and Constantinople were the cultural and political centres of this entity.

The distance of the north from the political, cultural and economic centres had to be compensated for. A journey to the centres of power could increase the cultural capital of the participants. It is a *topos* in narratives describing such journeys that the prestige of those who went on them increased. This was reflected in several ways. For instance, a person who had spent time with foreign dignitaries was supposed to have adopted good manners. He had adapted himself to the manners of noble men. It was also an advantage to be able to show tokens of the respect one had gained at the hands of foreign potentates, and gifts from a noble lord usually served as such tokens. The gilded exuberance of Bolli Bollason becomes very understandable from such a perspective.

**CONCLUSION**

A ‘history of the Varangian Guard’, based mostly or entirely on Old Norse sources, will necessarily be the story of a legend. The legend of the Varangians which has been preserved in texts from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries was to some degree a reflection of the past. However, that past was probably not the heyday of the Varangian Guard, but rather the experiences of crusaders in the twelfth century. Significantly, the thirteenth-century fragmentation of the Byzantine empire never became solidly anchored in the Old Norse works that form the textual basis of the present analysis.

The Varangian legend revolved around a few major themes. One was the wealth and prestige to be had through service to the emperor. The prototypical Varangian in this sense was Harald Hardrada, with his vast treasure; but less exalted travellers, such as the relatively obscure Sigurd the Greek, who lived in the north of Iceland around 1200, also had the capacity to bring home tokens of their service, encapsulated in a sword that local magnates considered worth fighting for. However, the road from Constantinople to the north went both ways, and the fates of those destined to end their lives in the Byzantine empire also became part of the Varangian legend. Here the emphasis was much less on material wealth and the tokens of honourable service, and far more on the glory that came posthumously from having served a true Christian lord and, ultimately, the Lord himself. For these travellers, being a Varangian was not just means to an end, but an end in itself.
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GLOBAL WORLDS, LOCAL WORLDS: CONNECTIONS AND TRANSFORMATIONS IN THE VIKING AGE

Scott Ashley

This paper is an attempt to conceptualise a large-scale history for the Vikings, to find a way to explore the spaces in which they were entangled as a whole, from Byzantium and the Islamic world to North America. Any attempt to do this faces multiple challenges, not least in the sheer mass of information now available on all aspects and regions touched by Scandinavians and their descendants, a body of data that continues to swell in an unabated stream every year. But there are also methodological and theoretical issues. How can we find a way to describe and analyse the spaces in which Vikings operated without organising them around anachronistic and/or imperial–state units (for example, Byzantium, the Abbasid caliphate, the British Isles, even ‘Scandinavia’) when Vikings (itself a problematic term) often existed either in the interstices between such units or transcended them entirely? Equally, what exactly are the scales and levels on which we want such a history to work? Can the macro-scale histories necessary to try and find larger patterns and to make broad comparisons between different parts of the Viking world be meshed with the regional and local narratives in which Viking-Age archaeology and history is so rich? World history can on occasion appear as a kind of zero-sum game in which gains in broader understanding must inevitably lead to the sacrifice of the details of lived experience and particular contexts. While these are all very real and ongoing questions, capable of multiple answers, one way to tie together the global and the local in Viking-Age Scandinavia and Iceland is by exploring the different meanings of the term ‘world’.

When historians use the term ‘world’, as in ‘world history’, the primary sense is usually conceived as being on the largest scales, encompassing extensive parts of the planet and exploring either the connections between those parts or making comparisons between them. Using this most basic conception, there was a Viking world that stretched (very roughly) from L’Anse aux Meadows and the Canadian coastline in the west to the River Volga and the Caspian Sea in the east. In this space diasporic-mari-
time Scandinavian-descended peoples (let us call them ‘Vikings’ after all) settled, raided, traded and worked out new rhythms of living.¹ Spread over three continents, with open and empty ocean between two of them, the Vikings came closest of any humans on earth to having a truly global presence before 1492.² Surrounding this area there was also an even more extensive hinterland, where no Scandinavian ever set foot, but which touched upon their concerns through chains of movement, exchange and trade and via political, social and economic events and processes. These might begin far beyond the knowledge of Scandinavians, but the effects could still ripple through their world. As an example of the former, there is the material evidence of South and East Asian origins found in Sweden, perhaps most famously the Helgö Buddha, buried most likely during the eighth or early ninth century, in or near to the central hall(s) of Building Group 2, having been made in the Swat valley on the border between modern Pakistan and Afghanistan in the sixth or seventh centuries.³ Birka has been rich in such global connections, with silks found in burials having Byzantine, Abbasid and even Chinese origins.⁴ Shell beads and pendants made from cowries originating in the Red Sea and Indian Ocean have also been discovered there, as well as on Gotland and occasionally elsewhere in Scandinavia.⁵ Such global objects then flowed on through the networks of the Scandinavian diaspora into the North Sea and western Europe. Byzantine silks and a cowrie shell (along with a forged Samanid dirham), deposited c. 930–970, have been discovered in excavations at York.⁶ As for the events and processes, examples would include in the east the periodic silver ‘booms’ and ‘crises’ of the Islamic caliphate and the ultimate demise of centralised Abbasid power, that despite being external to and independent of the Viking world still fundamentally reshaped Rus and Scandinavian social relations between the late eighth and late tenth centuries.⁷

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¹ For an excellent sketch of this diaspora see AbrDIV. For the utility of ‘Viking’ as a descriptive term, see above, 3–35.

² Given this position, it is surprising how little this has been explicitly recognised either in Viking, Atlantic or world history. Abu-Lughod (1989) has nothing to say about the Scandinavian contribution, despite the fact that her model of interlocking regional world-systems is enormously useful for thinking about both the Viking world and medieval world history generally. For some Old World global perspectives on the Vikings, see Sindbæk & Trakadas 2014.

³ Gyllensvärd 2004.


⁶ Hall 1994, 85–87. There are also finds of Byzantine silks from the British Isles at Lincoln, London and Dublin: see above, 3–35. Silks and other exotic objects had been entering northern Europe via the western Mediterranean since late antiquity: McCormick 2001, 719–28.

⁷ There is an extensive and developing literature on this theme; for some starting points, see Noo-nan 1998; Kilger 2008. Bolin (1953) and the neo-Bolinesque Hodges & Whitehouse (1983) are still worth reading for breadth of vision.
At the other end of the Viking world, in the far west, Robert McGhee has recently suggested that the expansion of the ancestral Inuit peoples from their Alaskan homelands eastwards to Arctic Canada in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries was provoked by the discovery that there were blue-eyed strangers living in Greenland who had access to iron and smelted metals in general. If McGhee is right, then here—and in the probably much shorter-lived contacts between Norse and skraelings in Vinland—we see the two diverging paths of *Homo sapiens* after leaving Africa, between those who turned left and kept on going and those who turned right and kept on going, meet-up again after travelling a full circle around the earth.

Fascinating and important as these global encounters are, it is well to remember that there are other meanings of ‘world’ than those with macro-scale, even global, resonance. For one thing, the Viking world contained within it most of the ecological zones known to human history. As an alternative to looking at the links between political zones (Sweden-Byzantium, for example), it would be good to explore the connections and adaptations made necessary through the fact that the Viking world was a patchwork of landscape ecologies, including Arctic ice and sub-Arctic tundra, boreal forest, mountainous uplands, temperate lowland agricultural areas and grassy steppe. Among the great ecological divisions on the planet, only the hot, dry desert and the rain forests were not represented in some shape or form within the Viking world. Each of these landscapes contained within it a variety of social and economic types, but with some clear patterning: hunter-gatherer and semi-itinerant pastoralist communities in the far north; arable and pastoral agriculture further south; all entangled with mercantile and urban connections cutting across these older patterns. These ‘worlds’ were themselves surrounded and penetrated by a similarly varied aquascape, from cold oceans, such as the North Atlantic, to warmer inland seas, such as the Black Sea, cobwebbed together by a network of rivers, a category that incorporated everything from the glacial torrents of Iceland, to the shallow tidal rivers that fed into the North Sea, to the majestic highways and challenging portages of Rus. These in turn generated their own human maritime ecologies: fishing; coastal trading and beach-markets; long-distance mercantile networks; classic Viking raiding.

That men and women from the Viking world regularly had to cope with crossing the boundaries between these ‘local worlds’ is well attested in literary sources. There are famous accounts of such journeys throughout the period. From the very beginning of the Viking Age there are the Swedish Rhōs, who came from their northern homelands

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10 For the portages of the Dnieper rapids, see the famous account of Constantine Porphyrogenetos (*DAI* ch. 9, 57–63). Winroth 2012, 92–98, has valuable comments.
in Rus to the Constantinople of Emperor Theophilos (829–842), before being sent by him westwards to the court of Louis the Pious at Ingelheim on the Rhine in 839. The handful of coins of Theophilos left scattered across Denmark, Sweden and north-western Russia may well trace the arc of their homeward voyage, a journey covering several thousand miles and as wide an array of environments as might be imagined in early medieval Eurasia. Four hundred years later Icelanders were remembering (with what level of accuracy it is hard to be certain) Bolli Bollason, a young man of the early eleventh century, who had left his farm in the far west of their island to travel to Constantinople to serve in the emperor’s Varangian Guard, only to return years later rich in honour, material wealth and experience. Not the least of those experiences, although his saga does not record Bolli’s thoughts on it, would have been the transition from a North Atlantic life of long winters, turf buildings, near-subsistence agriculture and scrubby, shrinking woodlands to a Mediterranean world of sun, stone cities and relative abundance.

One of these travellers, although he did not sail as far as Byzantium, has left behind his story in something approximating his own words. This man was known in Old English as Ohthere and he came to the court of King Alfred of Wessex in the later ninth century, where his tale was recorded and eventually incorporated in the Old English Orosius (c. 890). Self-identified as living furthest to the north of all the Norwegians, with only the Finnas beyond him, Ohthere appears as a man living with some of the trappings of southern agricultural life, including horses, cattle, sheep and pigs. Nevertheless, his major sources of wealth were resolutely northern and Arctic: six hundred reindeer and the tributes he took from the Sami of marten, bear, and otter furs, reindeer hides, feathers, whale-bone, and ropes made from the skins of whale and seal. He was also a whale and walrus hunter, who brought Alfred ivory tusks from the walrus as a prudent and well-received gift. But Ohthere was not a man only of the forest and the cold seas; he straddled local worlds. The distance from his home in Hålogaland to the southern borders of Denmark was as far as it was from the Danewirke to southern Italy. And yet he made that voyage too. The last section of Ohthere’s account gives a brief description of his sailing route to the trading-stations of Kaupang and Hedeby. From his home he sailed along the west coast of Norway, camping every night, in a journey that would take over a month, before heading into the mouth of the Baltic and a five day voyage to Hedeby. Farmer, hunter and herder, tribute-taker and merchant, Arctic-dweller and frequenter of urban places, Ohthere symbolises how the

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11 Shepard 1995; to be supplemented with VR, 53–59.
12 Laxdœla saga 72–73, 77.
Viking ‘global world’ can be broken down into a set of distinct but interlocking local worlds.

The point to stress is that the Viking world was more than just a neutral space through which the traditional subjects of history and archaeology, humans and objects, moved and came to rest. It was a complex set of environments, ecologies and land/seascapes, each of which was its own ‘world’, with its own character, possibilities and problems, defined by small-scale activities and cosmological and cultural individualism. One compelling story we can tell of the Vikings that moves decisively beyond the established ones of raiding, trading and heroic migration, centres around comparative analysis of the methods by which they modified themselves, their institutions, rituals and their very conception of ‘home’ to each local world into which they found their way. We might, for example, look at some of the characteristic homes of the Viking world, the large hall that fulfilled certain central place functions and compare how such sites operated and adapted to different ecological zones. A hall like the one found by excavators at Borg on the island of Vestvågøy in the Lofoten Islands in the Norwegian Arctic, while superficially similar to a southern Scandinavian central place, such as Lejre or Uppåkra, had to provide a focus to a different economic landscape, one based less on pastoral and arable farming and more on tribute-taking from the local Sami. Despite being a wealthy man, Ohthere had no more than twenty head of cattle, sheep and pigs and “the little that he ploughed, he ploughed with horses”, much to the astonishment of his West Saxon audience.

Here we can see how an Arctic landscape was domesticated through the creation of a traditional-looking home far from the older centres in the Baltic islands and Scania where those traditions were first created.

Although there is a rapidly growing body of scholarly literature on Viking environmental history, particularly focused on the North Atlantic, there has been less work

14 ‘Local worlds’ is the term used here to refer to the micro-scale unit of analysis in preference to ‘small world’ used by Søren Sindbæk and taken from the work of Immanuel Wallerstein: Sindbæk 2007. The latter is concerned with fluid networks through which things move, whereas here it is the story of how things come to rest and are transformed that is central.
15 AbrDIV has laid out some of the outlines of this story.
16 Munch et al. 2003.
17 Bately 2007, 46.
on conceptualising how these ecological local worlds interacted with each other as a whole. For the early modern period, we have from Anglo-American scholarship works like Alfred W. Crosby’s *The Columbian Exchange* (1972) and *Ecological Imperialism* (1986), that provided models for thinking about how the post-1492 world became enmeshed together environmentally, with fundamental consequences for world history.\(^{19}\)

Would it be worthwhile postulating an ‘Eiríkssonian Exchange’ for the pre-1492 Atlantic, given what we now know about the extent to which the Norse settlers in the Faroes, Iceland and Greenland remodelled the landscapes of those islands after settlement? The work of the ‘Landscapes circum *Landnám*’ project and NABO (the North Atlantic Biocultural Organisation)\(^{20}\) among others have clearly demonstrated the huge potential that exists here, although as yet the results lie scattered among a myriad of specialist journals and there is a critical need for some stock-taking and synthesis. Despite this, it has become clear that the first settlers unwittingly caused significant and sometimes fundamental environmental damage to the local worlds into which they moved from the mid-ninth century as they attempted to recreate the (agri)cultural landscapes they were familiar with from their mainland Scandinavian and British Insular homelands.\(^{21}\)

Yet work around Lake Mývatn and Þórsmörk has shown how over time Icelanders learned how to live in their new homes, how to adapt their inherited assumptions to their new surroundings by modifying the constituency of their farmyards (fewer pigs and goats, more sheep), abandoning some frontier farms to conserve woodland and generally developing more sustainable patterns of land and resource use.\(^{22}\) Again, we see global and local processes at work, entangled with each other in a kind of ecological dialectic: the attempt to impose ‘home’ on an exotic and unknown new world; the slow recognition that the fit between old and new does not and cannot work; the evolution of a modified Icelandic ‘Scandinavian’ landscape, that is neither a copy of the homelands nor yet a decisive break from them.\(^{23}\)

To turn from the North Atlantic eastwards, to Viking-Age Scandinavia, Rus and Byzantium, any study of an analogous ‘Riurikid Exchange’ (to coin yet another process named after a semi-legendary founder-figure, on the lines of Crosby’s ‘Columbian Exchange’), is as yet in relative infancy. Nevertheless, while the ecological situations are self-evidently different between the two large-scale zones of the Viking world—the

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\(^{19}\) Crosby 1972; Crosby 1986.

\(^{20}\) See, for example, Edwards et al. 2004; Dugmore et al. 2005; <http://www.nabohome.org/> [accessed 26 August 2015].

\(^{21}\) For a point of entry into this growing body of work, see Dugmore et al. 2005.

\(^{22}\) McGovern et al. 2007; Dugmore et al. 2006.

\(^{23}\) The famous account of Skallagrím’s settlement around Borgarfjörður in western Iceland in *Egil’s Saga* appears to preserve some memories of these processes: *Egils saga* 29.
western ‘Eiríkssonian’ and the eastern ‘Riurikid’—it seems to me that the questions and issues raised by the one can provide some useful starting-points for research in the other. Some parallel processes to those observed in the North Atlantic were occurring around the Baltic. There has been some research on anthropogenic environmental change at Birka and Staraia Ladoga, showing that water pollution increased, tree-cover declined and that agricultural crops and ‘weedy’ plants rapidly took over the land after the founding of the trading-towns. Further afield, ongoing work at Novgorod and Beloozero in northern Russia has demonstrated how fur-trapping was putting excessive pressure on local animal populations by the twelfth century. But in contrast with Iceland and Greenland, while pockets of agricultural production were being created in the river valleys of Rus from the later-tenth century, the surrounding forests remained almost untouched throughout the Viking Age. The landscapes of the eastern Viking diaspora were both more familiar and more resilient than those of the North Atlantic and it may be that the problems of adaptation and domestication were less ones of nature than of culture.

Some of the most severe challenges faced by Viking men and women moving between these local worlds were mental and imaginative. Later medieval sagas suggest that Icelanders found great difficulty in conceptualising the Byzantine empire and in particular the man-made ecological zone of Miklagarðr, the ‘Great City’ of Constantinople. The solution in many of the tales of Varangians and Scandinavian crusaders was to imagine Byzantium as if it were Iceland. The places, customs and institutions of one local world were translated into the terms of another. In the sagas of Greek-farers, such as Thorstein Ásmundarsson (drómundr ‘the Galleon’) in Grettis saga, or in those of Norwegian kings, such as Harald Hardrada or Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer (Jórsalafari), the urban, Mediterranean world of Byzantium, with its roots in Roman late antiquity, was subtly transformed into a huge, but identifiably Icelandic, farmstead, truly a Miklagarðr. In Grettis saga, for example, Thorstein the Galleon’s legal defence after he kills a fellow Varangian at the climax of a blood feud in Constantinople is conducted as if it was at the Althing, based on Icelandic principles of oath-swearing, networks of kindred, negotiation and compensation. The sagas of Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer’s visit to Constantinople in 1108 were acutely attuned to the techniques of translation between home and abroad. The anonymous early thirteenth-century history of the Norwegian kings known as Morkinskinna (‘Rotten Parchment’) offered an example

25 Makarov 2004; Makarov 2006; Brisbane et al. 2012.
26 Ashley 2013.
27 Grettis saga 86–89.
of the process in its description of the Hippodrome (Old Norse \textit{pádreimr}) of the New Rome:

Those who have been in \textit{Miklagårdr} say that the \textit{pádreimr} is constructed in such a way that there is a high wall enclosing a field that might be compared with a huge circular homefield (\textit{túns kringlótts}). There are tiers along the wall for people to sit on while the games are played on the field. The walls are decorated with all sorts of ancient events. You can find the \textit{Æsir}, the \textit{Volsungs}, and the \textit{Gjukings} fashioned in copper and iron with such great skill that they seem alive.\textsuperscript{28}

Here we see perhaps the ultimate transformation of the exotic into the terms of the domestic. The great stadium of Constantine mutates into an Icelandic farm, with its homefield and wall, the kind of wall Icelanders lounge on in the sagas to watch their own horse fights and ball games. Even the Hippodrome’s statuary, a link back to the ancient world, becomes the images of the gods and heroes of the \textit{Edda}.\textsuperscript{29} Eleven hundred years earlier Tacitus saw in the pantheon of Germania avatars of Mercury, Hercules and Mars.\textsuperscript{30} Now the process was reversed and the Icelanders discovered in the revered dead of Byzantium shadows of the old north.

TRANSFORMATIONS

This discussion has taken us from a relatively flat macro-scale Viking world, to a bumpy set of contrasting yet interlocking ecological worlds, into a third meaning of ‘world’, a micro-scale idea of home, of a bounded space made familiar by shared and inherited memories and practices, but which is also of necessity open to change and modification. These three types of ‘world’ clearly have some fundamental discontinuities between them, areas where they are working on different conceptual and practical levels, while also being embedded within each other. World historians work on a big scale to transcend the specialist, unique narratives that so often seem deliberately to resist the possibilities of comparison and generalisation. But equally the materials for such macro-scale histories, textual and material, only exist as part of local circumstance. This otherwise perhaps obvious point is important to stress, as it can be overlooked that the ‘global’ is only ever experienced by human beings, let alone animals, plants and bugs—also part of globalisation, Viking and otherwise—within the ‘local’.

To take one classic example, coin hoards are evidence for long-distance chains of contact between Scandinavia and the wider world. But they are inevitably experienced by the men and women who created, curated and buried them and by modern-day researchers within the parameters set by local knowledge, conditions and contexts. The

\textsuperscript{28} Mork. vol. 2, 69; tr. \textit{Morkinskinna: Earliest Icelandic Chronicle}, 324.

\textsuperscript{29} For an interpretation of the statuary of the real Hippodrome, see Bassett 1991.

\textsuperscript{30} Tacitus, \textit{Germania} 9.
silver miliareia that can be used as evidence for connections, trade and exchange between Viking-Age Scandinavia and the Byzantine empire have been in different ways and situations variously cut, drilled, looped and strung onto necklaces with beads, pendants and other coins.31 Others were probably melted down and reworked as rings, ingots or wire. Some of these transformed coins were then mixed with hack-silver, mounts and other odds and ends, some of which may be imports, some local, some of local manufacture from imports.32 The hoard (itself a rather crude term for a plurality of different types) has then been placed in a specific piece of ground, sometimes as treasure intended to be recovered, sometimes as a ritual or votive offering. If it is sometimes hard to tell the two kinds of burial apart (perhaps one could fade into the other? It is increasingly clear that human burials were reopened at regular intervals for inspection, retrieval and reworking), what is clear is that the act of burial itself affected the locality in which it occurred.33 At the most basic level, this might mean that a certain arrangement of trees or the curve of a riverbank might transform into signposts pointing the way back to the spot where the treasure lay. Unfortunately, after a thousand years and more these are now wholly invisible to the archaeologist, but they must have been there. At a more complex and often more visible level, coins might be placed at a numinous spot, either reflecting a pre-existing significance or creating it through the act of burial. The most obvious location for this is by being placed with a human body in a grave, the last resting place of whole and manipulated miliareia as well as Islamic dirhams and other foreign coins in Viking-Age Scandinavia, and a very clear case of exotic objects being domesticated into local systems of value and meaning.34 But the way that several hoards or a series of individual finds can congregate within either a single field or in close proximity to each other over several centuries could also be evidence of this. One example comes from the two Ockscarve hoards found in neighbouring farms on Gotland in 1920 (terminus post quem 1120) and 1997 (terminus post quem 999), the former being the largest hoard of Byzantine miliareia found in Scandinavia.35

Even more interesting is the way special deposits of coins and other precious objects can be found as a kind of protective layer within and around buildings or guarding boundaries in the landscape. Rooted in widespread and ancient practices, this way of

31 For a detailed analysis see above, 141–68.
32 For a variety of approaches to silver in the Viking Age, see Hårðh 1996; Graham-Campbell & Williams 2007; Graham-Campbell et al. 2011.
33 For the reopening of burials, see Bill & Daly 2012; Lund 2013. For a broader discussions on the possible practices and meanings embedded in burial, see Price 2010; Moen 2011.
34 Myrberg 2009 argues that hoards could be a metaphor for a dead person, with the coins as a symbolic ‘body’.
35 Lamm 2007. Östergren 2011, 332–33, notes some 90 silver coins recovered from the immediate proximity of the hoards discovered in 1997, plus another hoard found on the same farm in 1843.
marking out a domestic space was common across northern Europe in the early middle ages. In Viking-Age Sweden deposits of silver and the erection of runestones seem to have been used to negotiate boundaries between wet and dry land, the settled areas of a farm and the wild outside, the living and the dead, perhaps even between pagan and Christian. Depositions in and around halls often appear to mark out entrances, posts (as with the gold-foils at Borg in Lofoten), lines of walls and foundations, hearths and liminal places generally. This seems to be the case within older central place sites, such as Uppåkra and Helgö in Sweden and Gudme on Fyn in Denmark, that had their origins in the Migration Period or even earlier and that survived in modified form into the Viking Age.

This pattern is exemplified by the famous cache of exotic objects on the Foundation I terrace of Building Group 2 at Helgö, including the Buddha (itself drilled, modified and hung on a leather thong at some point before burial), the Irish-Insular ‘crozier’ and glass stud, a Carolingian sword pommel, and the Coptic ladle and Mediterranean silver dish, all found in close proximity to one another. Figural gold-foils were also found in the immediate vicinity, clearly congregated around a post-hole. Rather than being part of a single deposition, this assemblage more likely represents ongoing foundational and/or ritual deposits from the sixth to the ninth century and maybe slightly later, the objects drawing power from their status as imported and prestigious items to operate as markers of significant spaces. While there is some uncertainty as to the exact character, function and even number of the buildings on the terrace, these objects do seem to have often been buried close to walls or partitions, roof-posts and pathways. The statue of the Buddha is now seen as originally buried in a central open space, like some kind of tutelary deity around which the buildings huddled.

At Uppåkra the unusual pre-Viking Age structure now characterised as a cult-house or ritual building has a similar pattern of deposition. A bronze and silver beaker of local make and a glass bowl, probably imported from the Black Sea area, were deliberately buried to the south of the central hearth most likely in the sixth century, with scatters of gold foils concentrated along walls, by posts and at the north doorway. It is now clear that this building continued in use well into the Viking period, only falling

36 Zachrisson 1998, especially chs 5, 7–8; Hamerow 2006, with comparative material from south Scandinavia and the eastern North Sea at 22–26; see also Morris & Jervis 2011.
38 See the articles on individual objects in Clarke & Lamm 2004; Androshchuk 2007.
39 The specific location of the Buddha’s burial has shifted over time; in the earliest reports it was stated to have been found in a hall-like building, Foundation IB: Lundström 1970, 135. In the latest report Foundation IB has been replaced by an “open place”: Arrhenius 2011, 19–20, 30–31, although IB still continues to appear on maps elsewhere in the same volume.
out of use even as late as the tenth century.\textsuperscript{40} Elsewhere in south Scandinavia, on Fyn, for example, in the hinterland of Gudme, there is some evidence that Migration Period depositions of bracteates and gold hoards have a rough tendency to congregate at transitional zones in a landscape, between coastal, plain and forest-zones. Their burials also appear to trace natural roads in both Fyn and Scania.\textsuperscript{41} These patterns were ancient, with objects and bodies patrolling the boundary between wet and dry land traceable in the archaeological record back into the Neolithic period. Despite the cessation of some of these ancestral ways of life in the fifth and sixth centuries, right up until the end of the Viking Age lakes, bridges, fords, watersheds and tracks were still being selected as places to bury special objects, including human bodies.\textsuperscript{42}

This interpretation does not hold good for all the exotic objects on the site, as at least some were treated more pragmatically. For example, many of the fragments of imported glass vessels found in Building Group 2 at Helgö appear to have been simply swept out of the door once broken and left, with no discernible extra significance to their location at entrances or along external walls.\textsuperscript{43} But the fact that so many precious, rare and exotic objects were placed into the ground and then simply left over many centuries, does suggest that they had particular meanings and significances that had more to do with local, Scandinavian cosmologies and traditions than with the intentions of their original makers.

There is a lot more to be said about all this, but we would only move further away from this central point: the ‘global’ is primarily experienced in and through the ‘local’. Material culture in particular—coins, Buddhas, glass, pottery, all the familiar paraphernalia of Viking-Age archaeology—but also ideas, beliefs, even human beings, are often examined as evidence for exchange, trade and connections. In many of the histories of the Vikings and of the Viking Age they are imagined in motion.\textsuperscript{44} But historians and archaeologists can only ever know them when they stop moving and are incorporated in the ground, at the bottom of a stream, in a text, inside a church. These assorted things come to a halt as they become weighted down with a web of local knowledge and meanings. This process transforms the object, idea or story from its original character, from how it was understood inside the local world that produced

\textsuperscript{40} For the objects, see Hårdh 2004; Stjernquist 2004. For the locations and contexts of burial, see Larsson 2011.

\textsuperscript{41} Fabech 1994, 171–74.

\textsuperscript{42} Zachrisson 1998; Lund 2004; Thäte 2009.

\textsuperscript{43} Lund Hansen 2011, 126–27, 137–38, although the possible ritual function of the intact glass vessels is still accepted.

\textsuperscript{44} For a wonderful evocation of the rhythms and movements of the early medieval west, see McCormick 2001.
it, into something different that only makes sense inside the belief-systems of the local worlds through which it moves and that eventually capture it.⁴⁵

Once this self-evident point is recognised then it becomes possible to see how an effective world history of the Vikings might be able to bring together both the macro-scale, connective and comparative narratives of world history, with the micro-scale, unique and richly detailed existing historiography. I have already made a claim for global home-making as a theme to explore in the Viking diaspora outside the homelands. Inversely, that story would also show how the global and exotic was domesticated and transformed into something ‘Scandinavian’ (in all its own local heterogeneity) in turn.

These transformations could be limited to a change in the function of the thing. For example, we have already noted how shell-beads made from cowries were imported into Viking-Age Scandinavia from the Indian Ocean and Red Sea, where they were primarily understood as forms of wealth and as currency. But the very specific patterns of their deposition in Gotland, predominantly in the graves of young girls and women between the ages of five and fifteen, along with their unusual white colour, suggests that these beads were understood in northern Europe primarily in gendered terms, as amulets protecting or marking virginity and female purity.⁴⁶ Something similar happened to eighth- and ninth-century Celtic penannular brooches when, after being transferred to Norway through plunder or less violent exchanges, they turned into grave goods or votive offerings, while also changing gender from female to male ornaments.⁴⁷

But often the change in function was also accompanied by a change in the very fabric of the thing itself. Byzantine coins, for example, were regularly worn as pendants in Scandinavia, both individually and as part of larger sets. To take one well-known case, a ninth-century Byzantine miliareion of the emperor Theophilos was looped and fitted onto a necklace of glass, rock-crystal and cornelian beads and fourteen other silver pendants, made from a variety of fragmented objects, including a Carolingian book-mount, belt fittings from the Khazars and Volga Bulgars, and what seems to be part of an Islamic vessel. The whole assemblage was then buried in a female grave at Birka (grave 632), most likely as an heirloom, in the early tenth century. With the cornelian and at least some of the rock-crystal beads imported to Scandinavia from the Black Sea or Caucasus, the Abbasid caliphate and perhaps even India, the necklace with its Byzantine silver coin and exotic pendants might have functioned as a kind of travel narrative, drawing together the identity and experiences of either the wearer herself or her wider kindred within the networks of the Viking diaspora. Here, a ‘global’ object

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⁴⁵ I have been influenced here by Turgeon 1997. For some associated ideas, see above, 53–87.
⁴⁶ Thedéen 2010.
⁴⁷ Tsigaridas Glørstad 2012.
was turned into a distinctively local one, yet with the purpose of expressing large-scale connections from the Atlantic to the eastern Mediterranean and the Islamic world. Terms such as ‘imports’ and ‘prestige goods’, regularly used by historians and archaeologists to describe objects such as cowrie beads, penannular brooches and Byzantine coins, clearly only capture one part of their story. Instead, they should also be examined as part of an ongoing process of domestication, that is the modification or appropriation of an exotic object to make it fit the needs and values of the society into which it is transported. But there was a stage of transformation even beyond this, that we might term indigenisation. This was the full-scale reworking of the exotic into a new thing, entirely native in character. This could occur through the complete reimagining of the original concept and style, such as the way penannular brooches were, by the tenth century, being copied by Norwegian craftsmen and made into local versions, covered in Borre-style animal art and transmitting wholly new signals, perhaps to do with ideologies of male, royal power. The ultimate form of indigenisation however was undoubtedly the actual destruction and remodelling of the raw materials of the original exotic object, before being reconstituted as something else. The classic examples of such radical indigenisation from the pre-Viking period are the gold bracteates, a local transformation of the concept of late-Roman and Byzantine solidi into things that have some relation to their ancestral past while also being uniquely Scandinavian in form and content. To write a history of these twin processes would have the effect of raising Scandinavian craftsmen into major heroes of the period, alongside the more familiar ones of warriors, mariners and merchants.

We need to find symbols and metaphors to undertake any world history. To attempt any form of complete coverage is to be swamped immediately by the sheer mass of data and the task in hand. But to trace the journey of, for example, an (imaginary and ideal) Byzantine miliaresion from its first minting as a coin in Constantinople, to its exchange for northern slaves, furs or wax or its granting as payment to a Varangian mercenary at the Great City, to its passage along and through the rivers and forests of Rus, to the lanes of Birka, the beaches of Gotland and on into the western Baltic would be such a metaphor. We could then layer onto this the physical changes the miliar-
sion experienced, from metal ore to minted coin, to a currency-like token of exchange to be fragmented, bent, pecked and weighed as bullion, on to the reimagining of its meanings as it was domesticated through drilling or looping to become a pendant, graffitied over or given as a gift. Finally it came to rest in the ground. Or alternatively it was melted down and reconstituted as something entirely indigenous, at which point its journey would begin all over again. These tracings of what Stephanie Wynne-Jones has called for East Africa the ‘lines of desire’, that link the Viking world with its peripheries (for no matter how powerful our neighbours, be they Byzantium, the Abbasids or the Carolingians, our ‘world’ is always central), are one way to entangle together histories of long-distance, large-scale connections with culturally specific activities and local meanings.

This model might provide a way through the ‘connections versus comparisons’ battles of world history: should our unit of study be the links between different parts of the world or a comparative analysis of specific elements in societies that need have no direct contact between each other? These ‘histories of transformation’ would naturally have to include both the story of the routes, methods and potential reasons an object reached its final destination. But at least some of these histories would also contain comparative questions: how were things that travel received and domesticated in different ways inside the Viking world? Are there patterns as to where and why exotic material finally came to a halt? Why do some things get filtered out along the way? What role did the differing ecological zones play in negotiating relationships between the exotic and the indigenous? How did the domestication of objects happen differently, if at all, from that of ideas, like Christianity?

THE TALE OF A SWORD

Finally, let us turn to a story from the very end of the Viking Age, perhaps a true story, perhaps not, but a good one nevertheless. In 1217 there was a man called Thorvard Örnólfsson, living in the north of Iceland at a farm called Miklagarðr. He owned a sword, an important and potent sword because it had a name, Brynjubítr, ‘Mail-Biter’. It even had a history of its own. It had been brought to Iceland from Constantinople by a man called Sigurd the Greek (grikkr). It had been used by a man called Sveinn

53 For the full range of modifications made to Byzantine coins found in Sweden, see BCFS. See also above, 141–68.
54 Wynne-Jones 2010.
55 Most work has concentrated on connections, but for some distinguished examples of comparative study see the work of Victor Lieberman, R. I. Moore and Chris Wickham.
56 Íslendinga saga 32.
57 For a comparison, see above, 345–62.
Jónsson at the Battle of Víðines in 1208, "where he had fought mightily". No wonder that this sword was desired by those more powerful than Thorvard the bóndi. Sturla Sighvatsson, the eighteen-year-old son of the chieftain, Sighvat Sturluson, first tried to buy Mail-Biter from Thorvard, but he refused. Reckoning on the problems that might come from defying the son of a man like Sighvat, Thorvard offered to lend the sword to Sturla, but nothing came of it. Things came to a head when Sturla rode up to Miklagärðr and took the sword from the farmer's own room. As he stood trying to unsheathe the Byzantine weapon, the alarm was raised. The local priest, Thorvard himself and the people of the farmstead, men and women, came rushing to the call, grabbing at the sword and pushing Sturla outside. As he lost his grip on the treasure, Sturla raised his axe and struck Thorvard so hard his skull split open. The bóndi was lucky; he survived. Sturla was perhaps luckier still; after a good telling-off in public from his father the potential for further trouble was defused when compensation was agreed between Sighvat and Thorvard.

There is no space here for a full commentary on all the myriad connections, comparisons and meanings that could be squeezed from this episode of Íslendinga saga. But this story from a local world is the kind we need to find a way to tell the history of the Viking global world. On the one hand, we can use it as evidence for long-distance connections and movements. The name of Thorvard's farm traces a 'line of desire' between the cold waters of Eyjafjörður and the warmer shores of the Bosporus. Miklagärðr was simultaneously the name of an Icelander's home and, as we have already noted, the Old Norse title for Constantinople itself. Although the saga tales that have survived about him do not explicitly state it, Sigurd the Greek was almost certainly a member of the Varangian Guard, the Byzantine emperor's elite northern bodyguard, before returning to Iceland around 1197. We have no information about his travels, whether he took the old way through the Baltic and Rus or went via western Europe and the Mediterranean. In any case, he must have been one of the last Icelanders to take the long road east. The Varangian Guard effectively disappeared after the sack of Constantinople in 1204. By the 1240s the Mongols had severed the connections between Byzantium and Scandinavia.

58 Íslendinga saga 32; tr. Saga of Hvamm-Sturla 153.
59 VB, 221–22. Sigurd the Greek also appears in Guðmundar saga dýra 16, 18, 23.
60 From the early twelfth century, Scandinavian crusaders such as Eric the Good of Denmark, Sigurd the Jerusalem-Farer of Norway and Earl Rognvald of Orkney, travelled to Byzantium via the western route: Ashley 2013. For the end of the Varangian Guard see Dawkins 1947; VB, 122–76.
While there is abundant archaeological evidence from the Scandinavian mainland of Byzantine objects travelling north, very few examples have been found in Iceland. Nevertheless, the story of Mail-Biter provides evidence that similar exotica were at least imagined as having been brought there too. Scattered throughout the Sagas of the Icelanders (Íslendingasögur) are a few more traces of such Byzantine ‘textual objects’. The fullest and most famous is the description of Bolli Bollason from Laxdœla saga, who after a decade serving in the Varangian Guard returned in triumph to Iceland:

Bolli had brought with him a great deal of wealth from abroad and many treasures given him by princes. He had become such a fine dresser by the time he returned from his journey abroad that he wore clothes of scarlet or silk brocade and all his weapons were decorated with gold. He became known as Bolli the Elegant…He took eleven men with him, and all of them were dressed in clothes of scarlet and mounted on gilded saddles. They were all comely men, but Bolli was in a class by himself. He wore a suit of silk brocade given to him by the emperor, with a cloak of red scarlet outermost. About his waist he had girded the sword Leg-biter [Fótbítr], now inlaid with gold at its top and shank, and gold bounds wound about its hilt. On his head he wore a gilded helmet and he had a red shield at his side with the figure of a knight drawn on it in gold. He had a lance in his hand, as is common in foreign parts.

Bolli is said to have returned to Iceland wearing pellskledi, usually understood as the silk clothing evidenced both textually and archaeologically as part of Scandinavian-Byzantine exchanges. He also carries a lance that may have been imagined as having a Byzantine origin, while his sword, Fótbítr (which can be translated as either Foot- or Leg-Biter), was modified and beautified on his travels. The saga had earlier told of the origin of the sword in Norway, where it had, rather fittingly, a fine walrus ivory hilt but was without any overlay of silver or other precious metals. Unless real swords with Byzantine decoration turn up in Iceland we can do little more than speculate about the ways in which a sword such as Mail-Biter may have been physically changed during its journey. But since Laxdœla saga implies that adaptations were made to swords taken from Scandinavia, it is a reasonable assumption that some kind of material do-

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61 Some eastern Mediterranean beads have been recently found at Hríðbrú in the Mosfell valley (Mosfellsdalur): Elín Hreiðarsdóttir 2014.

62 I would not classify the famous Bjarnastaðahlíð/Flatatunga Last Judgement wooden panels as a ‘Byzantine’ object, for all the frequent descriptions of it as such in the literature. Although they have some stylistic analogues in Byzantine-Venetian art, their Ringerike-style ornamentation marks them as an indigenous Scandinavian-Icelandic re-imagining of the source material: Selma Jónsdóttir 1959.

63 Laxdœla saga 77; tr. Saga of the People of Laxardal 171–72. For a full discussion of this and other Icelandic texts, see above, 345–62 (Sverrir Jakobsson in this volume, to whom I also offer thanks for linguistic advice on this passage).

64 Laxdœla saga 86, where Bolli’s spear appears in association with a gold ring, said to be a gift from the Byzantine emperor. For silks, see Geijer 1979; Hägg 1984; ER, 128–29, 141–42; Vedeler 2014.
mestication normally did occur. There are examples of Viking-Age swords marked with alphabetic lettering and Scandinavian-style decoration, while there are rare examples of runic inscriptions on scabbards and hilts, most likely dating from the eleventh and twelfth centuries.\textsuperscript{65}

If only archaeology can definitively answer that question, written histories can offer a vision of how Mail-Biter and other Byzantine objects were domesticated into the values and culture of Iceland. Despite their obvious drawbacks relative to things we can actually see and handle, these textual objects are worth examining as they provide one of the few glimpses from the Viking world of objects still active and in movement before they are consigned to the ground. In the sagas—and most likely in the real Iceland of the middle ages—a weapon marked a man, for good and bad. In \textit{Hallfreðar saga}, the rival of Hallfred the Troublesome-Poet (\textit{vandréðaskáld}), Gris Saemingsson, owns a sword and a gold-inlaid spear given to him by the Byzantine emperor. The honour he had gained in travelling to Byzantium had made him an important man locally, wealthy and popular.\textsuperscript{66} In \textit{Hrafnkel's saga Freysgøða}, the otherwise rather ineffectual Thorkel Thjostarsson attracts attention and respect at the Althing because of his ornamented sword and good quality clothes. He had been in \textit{Miklagarðr} in the service of the emperor for six years and the implication is that his fine objects were of Byzantine origin. By contrast, later in the same saga the merchant Eyvind Bjarnason, who has also been in Byzantium, is marked out by his clothes and beautiful shield as an object of revenge in a feud between his brother Sámr and Hrafnkel, leading to his death.\textsuperscript{67}

Our discussion has already strayed away from long-distance connections into particular Icelandic concerns to do with honour, feuding, competition and local hierarchy. We cannot write about these tales of the global world without recognising that they are embedded within the values of local worlds. Indeed, they only reach narrative form because they said something important to those worlds. Our author Sturla Thórdarson (1214–1284) crafted his story to point out one of the most pressing of Icelandic problems in the middle ages: the difficulties that occurred when relations went sour between chieftains and local farmers.\textsuperscript{68} The bad blood on both sides that led to things

\textsuperscript{65} \textit{Laxdœla saga} 29; for inscribed blades, see Kirpichnikov et al. 2001; for runic inscriptions on scabbards, see Snædal Brink & Strid 1982. For the interesting example of the sword-mount from Greenmount, Ireland, inscribed with a Scandinavian runic inscription recording an Irish name, see Olsen 1954, 180. There is evidence from Viking-Age mainland Scandinavia for indigenous hilts added to imported Frankish blades: Martens 2004.

\textsuperscript{66} \textit{Hallfreðar saga} 4, 10.

\textsuperscript{67} \textit{Hrafnkel's saga Freysgøða} 3–4, 8.

\textsuperscript{68} For general discussion and entry into the Icelandic bibliography, see Byock 2001, 118–41, 308–23; Miller 1990 is always stimulating and relevant on all matters relating to dispute and settlement; also, Firth 2012.
getting out of hand is woven into the heart of the tale. The Eyjafjörður big farmers (stór-bændr) “did not get on very well with Sighvat. It seemed to them that he had neither inherited nor ódal rights in that district.”69 The other side of the case is put by Sighvat’s younger son, Tumi, after Thorvard was wounded: “[He] said that there were as many others who should go away as should be beaten, and said that it just proved that the bændr could not be counted on even if one did treat them well.”70 Despite being nephew to Sighvat and cousin to Sturla and Tumi, Sturla Thórdarson’s narrative presents the actions of his kin over the matter of the sword as high-handed and dishonourable. Sighvat makes a great show of disciplining his son for striking Thorvard, but later tells him: “This matter doesn’t seem as bad to me as I am pretending, but I know I have to raise a big outcry. However you must pretend not to know all this.” Later Sighvat sent for Thorvard in Saurbær and was reconciled with him; compensation was set at thirty hundreds, but that fine was slow to appear.71

How should a chieftain behave toward local farmers? What level of deference should the farmers show to chieftains? The valleys of northern Iceland in the thirteenth century were riven with conflicts, competition over status and memories of the recent (and distant) past. Reading behind the surface narrative, Sturla Sighvatsson’s willingness to risk so much to get Mail-Biter could be understood less as personal covetousness than as an astute political move. Íslendinga saga strongly suggests that the ‘line of desire’ that pulled him into his attempt to seize Mail-Biter could have had as much to do with the still-fresh memory of Sveinn Jónsson fighting well at Viðines nine years earlier as it was with the sword’s origins in the Byzantine Miklagarðr. Sturla was ambitious for himself, he knew his family’s status in Eyjafjörður was still fragile in the eyes of the local farmers, and perhaps he hoped that gaining the charismatic sword would help build authority and turn aspirations into lasting power. The fact that the heroic Sveinn had died at the hands of a faction that included Sturla’s kin would only have strengthened the attraction of holding Mail-Biter, as a means of symbolically appropriating the residual power of their old opponents.72 Although that particular gamble failed, the overall plan eventually succeeded. As the saga says: “Sighvat Sturluson roused great envy when he first settled in Eyjafjörður; but most of the bændr liked him better when he had lived

69 Íslendinga saga, 32; tr. Saga of Hvamm-Sturla 153.
70 Íslendinga saga, 32; tr. Saga of Hvamm-Sturla 154.
71 Íslendinga saga, 32; tr. Saga of Hvamm-Sturla 154.
72 Although the references to Sveinn Jónsson are scarce, the tales told about him, especially his brave and laconic death, imply that he was regarded by all sides with honour and respect: Guðmundar saga dýra 14 and Íslendinga saga 21, 24.
there longer.” That is the world in which our Byzantine sword comes to rest and from which we cannot entirely disentangle it.

But to conclude, there remains one fundamental question: just how much did Byzantium and other exotic places actually matter to the Vikings? Historians can and should mine the sagas for their own global purposes, but care should always be exercised to avoid overstating the ‘lure of the exotic’ over medieval men and women themselves.\(^74\) The lesson of the tale of Mail-Biter must be that while thirteenth-century Icelanders maintained a curiosity about Byzantium, they did not really care about it; they cared about Iceland. Thorvard’s home of Miklagard itself is symptomatic of that, for if it were even potentially named with Constantinople in mind, then not only the Hippodrome but the Great City itself could be imagined as a farm.

The primary importance to contemporaries of local over global significance is clear in the sagas from the fact that while Greek-farers may have brought impressive weapons and fine clothes back with them, so did travellers to Norway or the British Isles. A shadow is thrown over both the historical and the Byzantine significance of Bolli Bollason’s Varangian finery, when it is set alongside the description from earlier in Laxdœla saga of Olaf Hoskulssson the Peacock (pái):

> He wore a coat of mail and on his head a helmet with golden plates. At his waist was a sword, its hilt inlaid with gold, and in his hand he held a spear with a hooked blade, also highly decorated.

Before him he held a red shield, with the design of a lion in gold.

During his adventures in Ireland and Norway Olaf receives further gifts, including a gold-inlaid spear and a decorated sword from his grandfather, King Myrkjartan of Ireland, and a suit of scarlet clothes from King Harald Greycloak of Norway.\(^75\) Olaf’s own son, Kjartan, is honoured with a very similar description:

> Kjartan...took out the suit of scarlet that King Olaf had given him in parting and other finery. He put on his sword, King’s Gift [konungenaur], and on his head had a helmet with gold plating, and a shield with a red front and a gold cross marked on it. He also held a spear, the socket of which was inlaid with gold. All of his followers wore brightly coloured clothes.

The saga author may have imagined some of these items as heirlooms, passed down from father to son. But both his clothes and King’s Gift, described in the saga as “very

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\(^{73}\) Islendinga saga 43; tr. Saga of Hvaam-Sturla 184. There is a narrative pattern of fine swords and other status objects being lent, borrowed or stolen in the Sagas of the Icelanders, something that is worth further research in the light of the tale of Mail-Biter in the Islendinga saga.

\(^{74}\) As Winroth 2012, 76–84 (ch. 6: “The Lure of the Exotic”), terms the love of foreign objects in the Viking world.

\(^{75}\) Laxdœla saga 21–2; tr. Saga of the People of Laxardal 40, 43–44.
precious and highly decorated", are given to Kjartan himself by Olaf Tryggvason in Norway.\textsuperscript{76}

All three descriptions should be compared with the description from \textit{Heimskringla} of King Magnus Barelegs of Norway at his final battle in Ireland:

King Magnus wore a helmet and had a red shield with a gold lion on it. He was girt with an excellent weapon, the sword called Leg-Biter \textit{(Legghírr)}, which had an ivory hilt and a handle wound with gold. He had a halberd in his hand and, over his tunic, he wore a red silk doublet with a lion embroidered in gold silk, both front and back. It was the general opinion that no one had seen a braver or a more gallant man. Eyvind [the king’s marshal] also had a red silk doublet in the same style as the king’s.\textsuperscript{77}

King Magnus’ red \textit{silkiþýpr} sounds as if it incorporated a genuine Byzantine lion silk, several of which survive in western Europe, most likely as the result of diplomatic gifts to Carolingian and Ottonian rulers. Magnus’ doublet probably came to him through Germany or possibly in the treasures brought back from Constantinople by his grandfather, Harald Hardrada. Yet at no point are its likely Byzantine origins thought worthy to be mentioned. The lion silk signifies Magnus’ bravery and status rather than his kingdom’s place in networks of diplomacy and exchange.\textsuperscript{78}

Fascinating as these literary and archaeological connections are, they are significant because they point towards a kind of ideal kit that an ambitious Scandinavian ‘big man’ should own. Bolli, Olaf the Peacock, Kjartan and King Magnus are all accompanied by decorated spears and named swords (often with uncanny properties), gold helmets, expensive clothes of scarlet, red shields with golden heraldic devices and followers dressed in fine clothes. Gris Saemingsson, Thorkel Thjostarsson, Eyvind Bjarnason and Sigurd the Greek all own elements of it and, like Bolli, they were all said to have been to Byzantium. Yet while the empire was known to be supremely rich in ‘red gold’, it was not uniquely so, nor was its material culture always more charismatic than other places. Indeed, these special objects are as closely associated in the sagas with Norway as they are with Byzantium. Hallfred the Troublesome-Poet also had the kit—sword (and silver-inlaid axe), quality clothes, helmet and arm-ring—but like Olaf’s and Kjartan’s, his came as gifts from Norwegian rulers, Earl Hakon the Powerful and King Olaf Tryggvason.\textsuperscript{79}

\textsuperscript{76} \textit{Laxdœla saga} 43–44; tr. \textit{Saga of the People of Laxardal} 98, 100.

\textsuperscript{77} \textit{Magnúss saga Berfætts} 24; tr. in Somerville & McDonald 2010, 171. Snorri Sturluson’s account of Magnus is developed from that of \textit{Morkinskinna}; also see \textit{Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar} 104.

\textsuperscript{78} For lion silks and their uses, see Muthesius 1997, 34–43. On the meanings and roles played by silk as a marker of rank and power, see Fleming 2007; above, 281–304.

\textsuperscript{79} \textit{Hallfreðar saga} 5–6, 9.
It mattered less where these objects came from—although foreign origins of any sort shed some glamour onto them—than that they associated their owners with established power outside Iceland, be it earl, king or emperor. Even then, what mattered was what you did with them and how you acted when you got back home. These exotic objects only achieved real meaning and power after being domesticated or indigenised into a local world. That they fitted into inherited Scandinavian expectations, values and beliefs came first. In that sense, a sword like Mail-Biter had effectively ceased to be Byzantine at all. Its back story was not unimportant, but secondary. Perhaps it was invented. Indeed, how many Icelanders would have known what a real Byzantine sword looked like? Could Mail-Biter have been a local product of the western Scandinavian diaspora, taken by Sigurd the Greek to Constantinople, which by a process of exoticisation had Byzantine origins foisted upon it on its return journey and then had to be domesticated back into Icelandic culture?

We will never know, but such are the ironies, complexities and fascination of the circuits and networks of the Vikings. Global world, local worlds: in the end, they can often appear pretty much one and the same thing.

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80 One model for the real Mail-Biter might be seen in the eleventh-century Dybäck sword, found in Scania, Sweden. With a hilt and scabbard mount of gilt-silver and inlaid niello, with gold wire on the grip, the sword is a hybrid production typical of the Viking diaspora, showing strong Anglo-Saxon influences on a southern Scandinavian weapon. The sword may have been made in Denmark or possibly Anglo-Scandinavian England. It certainly fits the image of a good sword found in the sagas: Graham-Campbell 1980, no. 250; Graham-Campbell 2013, 129–30.
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PART IV

CHRISTIANITY AND THE INTENSIFICATION OF CONTACTS
The cult of relics was one of many Christian traditions which began to trickle into Rus thanks to the principality’s increased contacts with the Byzantine empire from the late ninth century onward. Although it would be impossible to determine precisely when these items first became known in eastern Europe, Varangian leaders seem to have been introduced to them well before the official conversion of Rus to Christianity c. 988. The *Primary Chronicle*, the earliest historical source from Rus which has been reconstructed on the basis of the later *Laurentian* and *Hypatian* chronicles, includes the text of a trade agreement concluded in 911 between the envoys of the pagan prince Oleg and the Byzantine emperor Leo VI. Following the conclusion of the negotiations, the envoys were treated to a viewing of Constantinople’s most prized relics:

> And the emperor Leo [VI] honoured the Rus forces with gifts...and presented his servant to them to show them the church treasures and the golden palace and the wealth within them: much gold and palls and precious stones, and the [relics] of the Lord’s Passion: the crown [of thorns] and the nails and the purple robe, as well as the relics of the saints. And he taught them his faith and showed them the true faith.¹

This description was written down in its surviving form about two hundred years after the event, but it is probably largely accurate: the treaty between Byzantium and the Rus transcribed in the chronicle’s previous entry is widely acknowledged as genuine, and negotiations of this kind often involved both proselytising and displays of wealth.² But in addition to providing information about diplomatic protocols, the passage is prescient about the cult of relics in Rus, some distinguishing features of which included their role in the process of conversion and their association with princely power.

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² On the date of the composition of the *Primary Chronicle* see *Pověst’ vremennyykh lět*, vol. 1, xvii–lxv. The status of the treaty of 911 and related documents is discussed in *ER*, 103–08.
Although Oleg and his retinue could scarcely have predicted it, relics had become an integral part of religious life in their principality less than a century after the conclusion of the treaty. Relics enjoyed widespread veneration in pre-Mongol Rus, and a variety of sources point toward their prominent role in politics and diplomacy, in addition to church ceremony. The Rus seem, indeed, to have taken relics so much to heart that they quickly developed new traditions for their veneration which were unlike those found in contemporary Byzantine culture. Several studies have examined the nature of these new practices and their implications for the emerging cult of saints in Rus. In particular, Gail Lenhoff and Fjodor Uspenskij have discussed the Rus fascination with incorrupt relics and the necessity of this attribute in determining the sanctity of the deceased, despite its relative unimportance in Byzantium. Lenhoff concludes that the discovery of incorrupt relics arose, at least in part, from vestiges of ancestor worship which “encouraged the attention to a corpse that was a precondition to discovering its incorruptibility”. At the same time, the focus on the incorruptibility of the saintly body was one of the means by which Rus society distanced itself from paganism and its associated burial practices. Uspenskij emphasises the differences between Rus and Scandinavia on the one hand, where incorrupt and intact relics were prized, and Byzantium on the other, where the faithful preferred dry bones which could be broken up and distributed.

In addition to questions of incorruptibility or lack thereof, the cult of relics grew through the efforts of local secular and ecclesiastical leaders to establish their cults. The discussion of such efforts in the sources provides vital information about how and by whom relics were venerated, and allows further comparisons to be made between Byzantium, Rus and Scandinavia. While the importance and novelty of incorruptibility in the north cannot be denied, it is also necessary to assess the common features which appear across the entire region, and in particular the role of elites in encouraging and popularising relic cults. In Byzantium, a strong tradition of imperial relic collecting focused primarily on Christological and New Testament relics, while the abundance of less prestigious relics which were available to venerate outside the palaces is also well attested. Scandinavian rulers seem to have been responsible for obtaining prestigious foreign relics, while the cults of local saints were promoted primarily by bishops. In Rus, despite the presence of relatively influential bishops and monasteries, the fate of relics seems to have depended to a large extent on princely involvement in

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3 Lenhoff 1993, 264.
4 Uspenskij 2003.
5 James 2003, 49.
6 Antonsson 2005. Antonsson notes the partial exception of Denmark, which had more influential monasteries and stronger connections with the rest of Europe.
their cults, a phenomenon which will be the main focus of the discussion below. The reasons for these diverse practices are complex, and it would be beyond the scope of the present study to make detailed comparisons among the three regions or propose direct pathways of influence. The intersection of secular and ecclesiastical power in the construction of relic cults is, however, vital to understanding the role of these objects in medieval religious life, and it is hoped that this study will complement the work of scholars such as Liz James and Haki Antonsson by encouraging broader comparative study of elite influence on the cult of relics in northern and eastern Europe.

Relic collecting had not always been the preserve of elites, and began well before Christianity gained imperial patronage. John Wortley has argued that the tradition may have started in Roman Egypt, where it was common for pagans and Christians alike to store the mummies of family members in their homes. Christians may have begun distributing fragments of the preserved bodies in the belief that they had healing powers, particularly if they belonged to martyrs or holy men.7 But despite these humble origins, imperial interest in relics began early: the re-foundation of the city of Byzantium as a new Christian capital necessitated its adornment with accoutrements of the new faith, inspiring Constantine I and his mother Helena to seek out relics from across the empire. The fruits of the relic collecting expeditions of these and later rulers were deposited in Constantinople, where they contributed to a growing collection which soon became the envy of the Christian world.

In Byzantium, most high-prestige items associated with Christ and the Mother of God were inaccessible to the public.8 Instead, they were used to protect the capital and the army: the seventh-century historian Theophylact Simocatta describes the emperor Maurice marching off to war preceded by fragments of the True Cross raised on a golden pole, and the use of the Mother of God’s garments to defend Constantinople is mentioned on several occasions.9 In the decades prior to the conversion of Rus, the Byzantine re-conquest of territory in the Middle East inspired a new wave of imperial relic-collecting, which had been cut short in the seventh century by Arab expansion. Between the 940s and 970s, Constantine VII, Nikephoros II and John I presided over or participated in the acquisition of a number of Christological and other New Testament relics, including the mandylion, the Holy Tile, the Holy Blood, and the arm and hair of St John the Baptist.10 The mid- to late tenth century thus witnessed a resurgence of imperial enthusiasm for collecting relics which, presumably, remained off-limits to those outside the palace. The Byzantine cult of relics therefore reflected the social hi-

7 Wortley 2006.
8 James 2003, 49.
9 Theophylact Simocatta, History, 156; Baynes 1949.
erarchy of Byzantine society, with the emperor—God’s vice-regent on earth—having more or less exclusive access to the relics associated with God’s life on earth, while the common people directed their veneration toward various lesser saints.

In addition to being venerated at home, Byzantium’s wealth of relics was used both in diplomatic exchanges, as discussed above, and in mission work. In accordance with the seventh canon of the seventh ecumenical council, relics needed to be placed in the foundations of all churches, and it is likely that Byzantium supplied the necessary relics for many Rus churches during the pre-Mongol period. The presence of large numbers of relics in Rus can also be inferred thanks to the discovery of various types of reliquaries. Particularly numerous are encolpia, typically cross-shaped pendants worn around the neck. Although most of these items featured a portrait of Christ on the obverse, Anna Peskova has noted that the vast majority, which were mass produced for a popular market, could not possibly have contained fragments of the True Cross or other Christological relics. They were probably filled instead with oil or water which had come into contact with relics during the course of church ritual. Such artefacts provide important evidence about the existence of relics and their use in popular and official devotional practices, but the saints from whom the relics were thought to derive can only be identified in a handful of cases. For example, a Slavonic inscription on a reliquary casket discovered in the foundations of the Cathedral of the Saviour in Chernigov, construction of which began in 1030–1031, consists of the names Panteleimon, Akakii and Makavei. A number of altar crosses and reliquary pendants from the pre-Mongol or early Mongol period had cross-shaped recesses to hold fragments of the True Cross. An inscription on one of these items notes that it was donated to the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom in Novgorod by Archbishop Anthony. Another unusually long inscription reveals that the cross in question was commissioned in 1161 by Princess Evfrosiniia of Polotsk for her monastery, and that it contained relics from the grave of the Mother of God and Sts Stephen, Panteleimon and Demetrios. Such inscriptions are, however, unusual, and for the vast majority of relics no information is available.

More profitable than trying to track down such elusive facts is to examine the characteristics of the smaller but still significant number of relics which are discussed

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15 Sterligova 1996, 134.
16 Russkie datirovannye nadpisi 32–33, plate 31.
in locally produced literary sources. Such an approach cannot produce anything like a complete list of names or reveal the total number of saints whose relics were in circulation in Rus, but it does shed light on the development of local veneration and the attributes which were prized by the elite. In particular, the surviving sources point toward close princely involvement in the cults of the relics which gained prominence. Regardless of the type of saint from which it originated, a relic had to be connected in some way with princely authority in order to leave a lasting legacy. Although not all relics with princely associations were widely discussed, those which were could invariably claim significant contact with the ruling family. This phenomenon is well known in the cases of the relics of princes themselves. The attention lavished on the bodies of Boris and Gleb in particular by members of their extended family is extensively documented in contemporary sources and has been widely discussed in scholarship. The invention and translation of the relics of other members of the princely clan, such as Olga and Igor Olgovich, are also documented in various sources, while the lack of miracles performed by the relics of Vladimir Sviatoslavich was a subject of note and apparently something of an embarrassment to the churchmen of Rus. Because the subject is relatively well studied, the fate of princely relics will not be addressed in the present investigation. More surprising than princes’ concern for the relics of their own kinsmen was the apparent requirement that the relics of other types of saints had to pass through a prince’s hands in order for them to become widely venerated. Whatever their origins, the princely associations of these relics seem to have been more important in establishing their cult than the prestige of the original saint. The fates in Rus of a number of New Testament and early Christian relics reveal a distinct lack of interest even in normally sought-after items if they had no ties to the ruling family. The altar crosses discussed above show that various ecclesiastical establishments in Rus possessed the most coveted of all relics: fragments of the True Cross. Yet despite the immense prestige of these items, no record mentions them other than occasional

17 Knowledge of relics and related church observances also came to Rus via translated hagiographic and liturgical texts, although the relics themselves did not accompany the texts. These sources will therefore not be used, since the purpose of the present study is to investigate the cults of relics which actually existed in Rus.
18 For a summary see Hagiography of Kievan Rus’ xxvi–xxix.
19 Ipat’evskaiia letopis’ 4.08 (Igor Olgovich). The text which discusses the relics of Olga and Vladimir, Memorial and Encomium for Volodimer, was probably compiled in the early Mongol period from earlier material. See Hagiography of Kievan Rus’ lxxxii–xcv, 165–81. The relics of two other princes, Mstislav Vladimirovich and his son Vsevolod Mstislavich, may also have been venerated in the early period, but this is discussed only in later sources. See Golubinski 1969, 58, 61.
inscriptions on the items themselves. The Hypatian Chronicle’s entry for 1134 mentions another, somewhat mysterious, Christological relic, described as a “corner tile from the Holy Sepulchre”. This was brought, apparently to Kiev, by a certain Dionisii on behalf of Miroslav (both non-princely names), but nothing else is known about it. The same lack of interest can be observed in connection with another memento of first-generation Christianity. The Apostle Andrew is described in the Primary Chronicle as visiting the future site of Kiev and planting a cross on a hill above the Dnieper after predicting the emergence of a Christian city there. Curiously, however, no remnants of the visit of this prestigious saint are mentioned in later writings, although the cross might have had a distinguished afterlife as a relic. The silence about St Andrew’s cross may be partially explained by the observation that it had no possible connection with the princely clan, since no amount of anachronistic optimism on the part of the chronicler could push the genealogy of the princes back to the first century. Thus, a relic with great potential local and international significance aroused no interest beyond its original mention in the chronicle.

In all of these cases, negative evidence should not be pressed too far, particularly given the paucity of sources from Rus. Yet the fate of the relics of the True Cross, the Holy Sepulchre and St Andrew differs significantly from that of various other early Christian relics which made their way to Rus with the assistance or active participation of the princely clan. In its entry for 1218, for example, the Laurentian Chronicle describes the bishop of Polotsk’s arrival in Vladimir from a journey to Constantinople. The bishop may have been sent by the local prince, Constantine Vsevolodovich, since the chronicle notes that the bishop “brought him a part of the Passion of the Lord”, as well as relics of Mary Magdalene and the hands of St Longinus, the centurion at the Crucifixion who recognised Christ’s divinity. The entry relates at some length how the prince organised the adventus, or formal greeting of the relic, placed it in the Church of the Ascension, and ordered the celebration of matins in various churches and a pro-

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20 Evfrosiniia’s cross is an example of a relic with a connection to the princely clan which is nevertheless not discussed in the sources. Although references to it may have been lost, it is also possible that the princess’ sex may have caused her and her cross to be ignored by the male monks who produced most of the literary sources.

21 Ipat’evskiaia letopis’ 295. For a discussion of this item and the people involved in its translation to Rus see Tolochnko 2009, 429–31.

22 PVL 9; RPC 54.

23 The Tale of the Princes of Vladimir asserts that Riurik, the semi-mythical progenitor of the princely clan, was a descendent of a certain Prus, a “relative” (srodnik) of the emperor Augustus: Skazanie o kniaz’iakh vladimirskikh 174–75. However, there is no evidence for the circulation of this story before the sixteenth century: “Skazanie o kniaz’iakh vladimirskikh”, SKKDR vol. 1 <http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru/Default.aspx?tabid=2048> [accessed 15 August 2013].
Although the bishop had an important role in the ceremony, the prince was clearly central to its organisation and one of the chief participants. His involvement was probably the reason for the extended coverage of the event in the chronicle.

Perhaps the most famous early Christian relics in Rus were those of St Clement and his disciple Phoebus, which, perhaps not coincidentally, had a firm connection with the princely clan. The *Primary Chronicle* reports that, following his capture of and eventual baptism in the city of Cherson c. 988, Vladimir Sviatoslavich took these and a number of other artefacts back to Kiev. He seems to have deposited the relics in his new Church of the Mother of God (the so-called Tithe Church): the German chronicler Thietmar of Merseburg mentions that Vladimir was buried in a church dedicated to St Clement in Kiev which is otherwise unknown, but the *Primary Chronicle* states that he was buried in the Tithe Church. It is thus likely that Thietmar confused the name of the church with what must have been its most famous attraction, both in Kiev and beyond. The presence of the relics of St Clement inspired at least two original and closely related compositions, “The Miracle of St Clement and the Youth” and “Discourse on the Renovation of the Tithe Church”. Although the date of these texts is unclear, there is universal agreement that they were written in the pre-Mongol period. Significantly, both compositions refer to the saint’s journey from Rome to Cherson to Rus, of which he is described as a heavenly protector. They also list princes first among the various groups of people who offer him praises, and the “Discourse” refers to the relics’ translation by Vladimir. They are mentioned again in the entry for 1147 in the *Hypatian Chronicle*, which refers to the ordination of metropolitan Clement Smoliatiarch with the head of St Clement, “as the Greeks ordain with the hand of St John.” This irregular ordination, made without the approval of the patriarch of Constantinople, apparently called for the use of a potent relic which symbolised the independence of the Rus princes and church, thanks to its association with Vladimir’s actions in Cherson.

24 Lavrent’evskaia letopis’ 441–42. The exact meaning of the phrase “a part of the Passion of the Lord” is unclear, but it was clearly a relic connected with the Crucifixion.

25 PVL 49–50, 52; RPC 111–13, 116. There is some confusion surrounding the relics because Constantine the Philosopher (St Cyril) is said to have discovered the relics of Clement in 860 during his mission to the Khazars and subsequently taken them to Rome. Christian Raffensperger proposes that the pope at the time of Vladimir’s baptism, John XV, sent the relics back to Cherson “to celebrate his conversion or to influence him toward the micro-Christendom of Rome”: Raffensperger 2012, 164.

26 Thietmar of Merseburg, *Chronicon* 359; PVL 58; RPC 124.

27 For a summary of this discussion see Karpov 1992.


29 Ipat’evskaiia letopis’ 341.
An exception to the rule that relics were only discussed if connected with a prince is found in pilgrimage accounts. Daniel, the abbot of a monastery in Chernigov, travelled to the Holy Land in the early twelfth century and left a detailed account of his visits to a large number of sites associated with saints and events in the Old and New Testaments. His work discusses many relics, some of which are also mentioned in other Rus sources, such as the Holy Sepulchre and the grave of the Mother of God.30 Even more information is found in the account of Dobrynia Ladreikovich, who later became archbishop of Novgorod under the name Anthony. During his visit to Constantinople in about 1200, Dobrynia venerated and described a large number of relics, making his account a valuable inventory of the City’s treasures on the eve of the destruction it suffered during the Fourth Crusade.31 These accounts are unusual, however, since one of their main aims was to describe relics, the veneration of which was a primary purpose of any pilgrimage. Furthermore, because they recounted journeys to foreign lands and discussed, for the most part, relics which remained inaccessible in Rus, the authors would have had little to say about princely involvement with the relics in question even if they had wanted to.

More interesting for the purposes of this study is the difference between Dobrynia’s own account of the relics he acquired in Constantinople and that which is found in the Novgorod First Chronicle. In various manuscripts of Dobrynia’s narrative, he notes that he possessed garments of St Theodore Stratelates, relics of St Basil and pieces of stone from the grave of St John the Theologian.32 Tatiana Tsarevskaiia has argued that Dobrynia’s baggage also included relics of St Barbara, to whom he founded a church after becoming archbishop, and fragments of the True Cross, which were placed in an altar cross in the Cathedral of the Holy Wisdom in Novgorod and are identified in a later inventory and an inscription, as discussed above.33 But despite the prestige of these items and Dobrynia’s later fame as archbishop, none of these relics is discussed in other sources. The chronicle instead mentions a different item altogether, noting in its entry for 1211 that Dobrynia “brought with him the Holy Sepulchre” (or, more likely, a part or model thereof).34 Although the compiler of the chronicle probably had or could have obtained more detailed information about the relics which Dobrynia brought back, he chose only to make a brief (and possibly erroneous) note of one of the most prestigious items, an approach which is in keeping with the discussion of other non-princely relics in Rus sources.

30 Daniel, Khozhenie 14–19, 35–36.
31 Anthony of Novgorod, “Kniga palomnik”.
32 Anthony of Novgorod, “Kniga palomnik” 56 (Basil), 59–60 (Theodore), 64, 90 (John).
33 Tsarevskaiia 2000.
34 Novgorodskaiia pervaiia letopis’ 52 (older recension), 250 (younger recension).
The treatment of relics from later centuries differs little from that of early Christian items. A text which mentions both categories is found in the *Paterik of the Caves Monastery* in Kiev, among the oldest and by far the most prestigious in Rus. It concerns the construction of the monastery’s Cathedral of the Dormition in the early 1070s, and relates that four Byzantine craftsmen were summoned to Blachernai by the “empress”, who commanded them to build a church in Kiev in her name. For the construction of the church, she gave them enough gold for three years, an icon and the relics of seven saints to put in the foundation: the martyrs Artemios, Polyeuktos, Leontios, Akakios, Arethas, James and Theodore. Following the arrival of the craftsmen at the Caves Monastery, the elders Anthony and Feodosii explained that the “empress” was in fact the Mother of God, and Christ himself later appeared to Anthony to reveal where the cathedral was to be built. A related discourse in the *Paterik* mentions only that “relics of holy martyrs were placed under all the walls”, and adds that portraits of the martyrs were painted on the walls above their relics.  

The identities of some of the saints whose relics were sent to Kiev are not clear. The *Synaxarion of Constantinople* lists only one martyr named Arethas and one named Artemios, but four named Akakios, five named Leontios and two named Polyeuktos. This list can be further narrowed since one of the Akakioi and two of the Leontioi were members of larger groups who are usually identified collectively (the Forty Martyrs and Forty-Five Martyrs). In the case of James and Theodore, however, the lack of distinguishing epithets indicates that James was one of the saints by that name mentioned in the New Testament, and Theodore was either Theodore Teron or Theodore Stratelates, both famous military saints whose veneration had flourished under the Macedonian emperors. The arrival of the relics of the first five martyrs must have been an honour for the new monastery, while possession of the relics of St James conferred a tangible connection with early Christianity which was even more venerable than the relics of Sts Clement and Phoebus. Both Theodores, moreover, were prized as military patrons in Rus, and sigillographic evidence shows that it was one of the most common baptismal names for princes.

The importance of these saints, and the donation of their relics by the Mother of God herself, might have been expected to endow this event with profound significance for the monastery. Yet the relics did not inspire the dedication of any chapels in the cathedral, and they are not mentioned in any other sources, despite the fact that the

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35 *Paterik* 6–8, 9.
37 White 2013, 115–16.
inhabitants and alumni of the Caves Monastery produced many of the written sources from the pre-Mongol period. Following their arrival, the relics do not seem to have inspired much interest, and the discourses in which they are mentioned were not recorded until the late twelfth or early thirteenth century. Their author, Simon, bishop of Vladimir-Suzdal, was a particularly learned man who spent the early part of his career in the Caves Monastery. As Muriel Heppell has shown, Simon took a keen interest in the monastery’s early history and rescued the *Life* of its founder, Anthony, from obscurity. The same seems to have been true of the story of Mary’s gift of relics which, were it not for Simon’s research, may well have been lost. By contrast, the other known contributors to the *Paterik*, including Nestor, who probably entered the monastery shortly after the events described in the story, and Simon’s contemporary Polikarp, make no mention of it. Although much remains unknown about the fate of the relics, the lack of princely involvement may go some way toward explaining their failure to excite general interest.

Compare the fate of Theodore’s relics with an item related to Demetrios, another military saint. The *Laurentian Chronicle* notes in its entry for 1197 that “the grave slab of St Demetrios was brought from Thessalonica”. More detail about this event is provided in the eulogy to Grand Prince Vsevolod Iurevich following his death in 1212:

He brought the grave slab of the holy martyr Demetrios from Thessalonica, which continually exudes *myron* for the healing of the sick, and placed it in the cathedral [of St Demetrios in Vladimir]. And he also placed there a shirt of the same martyr.

Vsevolod probably learned about the “grave slab”, seemingly a life-size panel icon, during his long exile in Byzantium beginning in 1162, when he was eight years old. Thirteen years earlier, the emperor Manuel I Komnenos had requisitioned a similar *myron*-exuding item from the saint’s cathedral in Thessalonica and brought it to the capital, where it is likely to have remained on display during the young prince’s sojourn in the capital. The “grave slab” was not a relic in the strict sense, since it had not come in contact with Demetrios’ body and was not part of it. The saint’s body was, however, notoriously impossible to locate, and in the absence of corporeal relics the faithful associated the *myron* which emanated from his cathedral and the “grave slab” with his blood. The “shirt” is probably a reference to the saint’s blood-stained *chlamys*,

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38 *Paterik* xxiv–xxvi.
39 Heppell 1952.
40 *Paterik* xviii, xxiii–xxix.
41 *Laurent’evskaiia letopis’* 414.
42 *Laurent’evskaiia letopis’* 437.
43 For a detailed discussion of this item and the events surrounding it see White 2014.
a traditional secondary relic which is mentioned in a number of Byzantine hagiographic texts. 44 Although the chronicle account of the translation of these items to Rus is relatively laconic, it is significant that the event is mentioned on two separate occasions, and that it was clearly one of Vsevolod’s most noteworthy deeds in the eyes of the chronicler. Furthermore, the reference to the grave slab continuing to exude myron indicates that it was being actively venerated and associated with the prince thanks to its location in the cathedral which he founded.

Relics of saints from Rus, like those of their predecessors from earlier centuries, were given significant attention only if they could claim a connection with the princely clan. The relics of Anthony of the Caves Monastery, for example, aroused little interest. This seems extraordinary, given his central role in the establishment of monasticism in Rus, his pilgrimages to Constantinople and possibly the Holy Land, and his sojourns in a monastery on Mount Athos. 45 Furthermore, his relics were not neglected because they had been lost. A reference to them is found in the Life of his successor Feodosii, probably composed in the late eleventh century by the monk Nestor and incorporated into various collections, including the Paterik. It notes that, shortly after founding the monastery, Anthony retired to a nearby cave where he remained for forty years, and that “his honoured body lies there to this day”. 46 This comment appears again in the Primary Chronicle’s entry for 1051, as well as another section of the Paterik entitled “An account of why the Caves Monastery is so called”, which adds that Anthony’s relics are “performing miracles to this day”. Although the relationship among these texts is still debated, the comments about Anthony’s relics do not seem to have been separate, original compositions, but rather to derive from the Life of Feodosii and the Life of Anthony or a similar text. 47 The Life of Anthony was, as discussed above, rediscovered by Simon of Vladimir-Suzdal after decades of neglect, only to be lost again, and a number of scholars have commented on the decline in Anthony’s popularity in the twelfth century. 48 Although the recopying of these fragments hints at some interest in Anthony’s relics, Rus authors had little to say about them beyond the most general pious comment.

At least some of this neglect may be explained by Anthony’s avoidance of, and difficulties with, the princely clan. Unlike his successor Feodosii, who will be discussed below, Anthony does not seem to have been comfortable interacting with the representatives of worldly power, nor was he particularly attached to Kiev or Rus in general, and when difficulties arose, his instinct was to run away. “An account” describes how

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44 White 2014.
45 Paterik 18–20.
46 Paterik 42.
47 Paterik xlv, 21; PVL 69; RPC 140.
his tonsure took place on Mount Athos, from which he only returned to Kiev at the request of his superior. He left Rus again for the refuge of “the Holy Mountain” when a succession war broke out among Vladimir’s sons in 1015 and returned after the victory of Iaroslav, only to leave again for unspecified reasons. Once again, he was persuaded to go back to his homeland by the superior, who “received a message from God”.49 Thereafter, Anthony settled in a cave in Kiev and began to attract disciples and became well known. As is often the case with ascetics, however, he longed to return to the solitary life and soon withdrew to another cave, as discussed above, leaving the monks under the leadership of his disciple Varlaam.50

The Paterik mentions a few occasions when Anthony had positive interactions with members of the princely clan, although one of them was indirect. According to “An account”, as the number of monks living in Anthony’s original cave increased and living conditions became crowded, they decided to build a monastery and went to Anthony for approval. Anthony agreed and realised that they would need to request permission from the current prince, Iaroslav’s son Iziaslav, to occupy the hill above the cave. Anthony did not approach Iziaslav in person, but sent one of the monks, who was successful in his request.51 Iziaslav appears again in one of the compositions of Simon, bishop of Vladimir-Suzdal. The discourse relates that Iziaslav, his brothers Sviatoslav and Vsevolod, and the Varangian refugee prince Shimon visited Anthony and asked for his blessing prior to a battle with the Polovtsy in 1068. Following Shimon’s plea for protection, Anthony predicted that he would survive the battle. Thereafter, Shimon returned to Anthony and gave him gold ornaments for the Cathedral of the Dormition, which was still to be built. Anthony was clearly pleased with this and gave Shimon the new Christian name of Simon. Revealingly, however, after renaming Simon, Anthony turned him over to Feodosii, who became his spiritual father.52

Thus, even when accepting donations to the monastery from princes, Anthony was desperate to get away from them as quickly as possible, and preferred not to meet with them in person at all. This can be partially explained, no doubt, by his love of the eremitic life, in pursuit of which he also left his disciples. Yet even while living alone in his cave, he was willing to have occasional interactions with the brothers: he was present for the arrival of the Byzantine craftsmen, instructed new recruits, and was consulted about the appointment of a new superior after Varlaam moved to another monastery.53 In this respect his behaviour was not unlike that of his namesake Anthony

49 Paterik 18–20.
51 Paterik 21–22.
52 Paterik 2–5.
53 Paterik 22–23.
the Great, who also emerged periodically from contemplation to instruct his disciples but famously showed no interest in a letter he received from Constantine I and his sons.  

Unlike in the case of Anthony the Great, however, the texts about Anthony reveal conflicts with the secular powers, during which, in characteristic fashion, he fled from Kiev. On two occasions, Anthony had to escape from his benefactor Iziaslav. The *Life of Feodosii* includes a story about the tonsure of Varlaam, the son of one of Iziaslav’s boyars, and Efrem, the prince’s favourite eunuch, against the prince’s wishes. When Iziaslav heard about this, he summoned the superior Nikon and demanded that he force the new monks to return, while “Anthony and those with him took their clothes and left their own place, intending to go to another district”. Anthony later incurred the prince’s wrath by intruding in his political affairs. In its entry for 1074, the *Primary Chronicle* relates that:

> Iziaslav arrived from the Poles, and began to get angry at Anthony because of Vseslav. And Sviatoslav caused Anthony to escape by night to Chernigov. Once he arrived in Chernigov, Anthony was attracted to the Boldiny hills. After digging a cave, he settled there.

The implication of this passage is that Anthony chastised Iziaslav for breaking his promise of safe passage to his rebellious cousin Vseslav and throwing him in prison. As on previous occasions when he had left Kiev, Anthony was clearly prepared to resume the solitary life in a new location, but returned to Kiev under unknown circumstances by the time the Byzantine craftsmen arrived in 1072.

Anthony’s eremitic inclinations, and the lack of interest in his relics, contrast sharply with those of the superior Feodosii, a monk in the coenobitic mould who was closely involved with the secular authorities from an early age. The *Life of Feodosii* relates, for example, that as a child, his exceptional humility attracted the attention of the governor of Kursk, who rewarded him with fine clothes. Although Feodosii gave away the clothes, he did not avoid interaction with the governor, and served at a feast he held for the local nobility. After he became superior of the monastery, Feodosii became well connected with the ruling classes of Kiev. The *Life* mentions several occasions when princes or boyars came to him to confess their sins and make donations to the monastery. Feodosii had a particularly close relationship with Iziaslav, and the

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55 *Paterik* 36–38.
56 *PVL* 83; *RPC* 162. Sviatoslav was also involved in the incident with Vseslav (*PVL* 72; *RPC* 145–46) but had presumably repented. The actual date of Anthony’s flight was 1069 (Heppell 1952, 55).
two visited each other frequently. Yet when Iziaslav was expelled from Kiev by his brothers Sviatoslav and Vsevolod in 1073, Feodosii did not run away. Rather, he expressed his disapproval to Sviatoslav so strongly that the prince threatened to throw him in prison. Feodosii called Sviatoslav’s bluff and eventually agreed to meet with the prince, but continued to implore him to restore his brother to the throne. Later, Sviatoslav donated property to Feodosii on which to build the Cathedral of the Dormition and began digging the foundation himself, and on his deathbed Feodosii entrusted the monastery to the prince.

Feodosii remained in the spotlight of Rus high society after his death. The *Paterik* includes a lengthy discourse about how his relics were unearthed from their resting place in a cave, accompanied by miraculous signs, and translated into the Cathedral of the Dormition with great fanfare in the presence of all the bishops and superiors of Rus, as well as monks and pious people. Although the presence of princes is not mentioned at this ceremony, the discourse goes on to describe how the superior Feoktist successfully petitioned prince Sviatopolk to add Feodosii’s name to the *synodikon*, a liturgical text which included praise of the pious departed. The metropolitan of Kiev then instructed all of the other bishops to include Feodosii’s name. Princes continued to venerate Feodosii after the translation of his relics: another discourse relates the story of George, son of Simon-Shimon, who decided to decorate Feodosii’s coffin with gold and silver plate, and the miracles which accompanied his efforts.

Of all the saints whose relics are discussed in Rus sources, Feodosii had by far the closest relationships with princes during his lifetime. Yet this type of interaction was not necessary even for saints who lived in Rus in order for their relics to become widely venerated. As the case of another churchman, Leontii of Rostov, shows, a cult of relics could spring up even if a prince took an interest in a saint many years after his death. Very few facts about Leontii’s life can be reconstructed with any accuracy. Although it is safe to assume that Rostov did have a bishop by that name, the sources give conflicting accounts about him. The *Paterik* of the Caves Monastery mentions Leontii briefly in a list of bishops who had started their careers as monks in the monastery. It describes Leontii as a citizen of Rus and the first bishop of Rostov, and claims that he suffered martyrdom at the hands of pagans there. By contrast, according to the oldest

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58 *Paterik* 49–50, 54, 60–62, 64, 68–69.
59 *Paterik* 74–78.
60 *Paterik* 78–81.
61 *Paterik* 89–93.
62 *Paterik* 93.
63 *Paterik* 95–99.
64 *Paterik* 118.
surviving *Life* of the saint, Leontii was from Constantinople, became the third bishop of Rostov and did not die a martyr’s death.\(^{65}\) Whatever the facts of his background, Leontii was probably active in the mid-eleventh century, when north-eastern Rus was still a frontier and only tenuously under the control of Kiev.\(^{66}\)

Notwithstanding its inconsistencies with the *Paterik*, Gail Lenhoff has demonstrated that the *Life*’s account of the origin of Leontii’s cult is relatively reliable. It relates that, after his successful establishment of the diocese of Rostov, Leontii was buried in the Church of the Mother of God. Almost a century later, during the reign of Andrei Bogoliubskii in Vladimir, the church burned down. The prince ordered that it be rebuilt, but the people of Rostov petitioned for a bigger church. While digging the expanded foundations, they unearthed a grave containing Leontii’s incorrupt relics. Word of the discovery was sent to Bogoliubskii, who recognised the significance of the event and sent a stone coffin for Leontii’s re-burial in the new church.\(^{67}\) Although the formal canonisation of Leontii does not seem to have occurred until the 1190s, the prince’s actions show that he took a serious interest in Leontii and was keen to promote a potential saint in his territory.\(^{68}\) Despite earlier claims that the *Life* was largely a work of propaganda designed to bolster Bogoliubskii’s efforts to establish a new metropolitan in Vladimir, Lenhoff and others have pointed out that the promotion of a saint from the rival city of Rostov was inconsistent with such an agenda.\(^{69}\) Indeed, the invention of the relics may well have been part of an effort by the citizens of Rostov to boost the prestige of their own city.\(^{70}\)

What is clear, in any case, is that Bogoliubskii managed to attach his name to that of Leontii by supporting the cult from the outset. This was doubtless useful as part of the prince’s broader policy of constructing a new and independent religious identity for north-eastern Rus, which involved the establishment of several other feast days.\(^{71}\) Conversely, his attention was probably also instrumental in ensuring the long-term viability of Leontii’s cult. The next redaction of the *Life*, composed at some point in the thirteenth or early fourteenth century, shows that, if anything, interest in Bogoliubskii’s role in the cult had increased since the prince’s own time. In addition to the remarks about the prince’s donation of a stone coffin, the text includes a new section about the translation of Leontii’s relics, which begins by describing Bogoliubskii’s ar-

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\(^{65}\) Semenchenko 1989, 250.

\(^{66}\) Lenhoff 1992, 364.

\(^{67}\) Semenchenko 1989, 250–51.

\(^{68}\) Lenhoff 1992, 373, 377.

\(^{69}\) See Lenhoff 1992, 369 for analysis and references to other discussions of the problem.

\(^{70}\) Semenchenko 1989, 245.

\(^{71}\) On Bogoliubskii’s religious and cultural programme see Hurwitz 1980.
rival in Rostov, his prayers at the saint’s coffin and veneration of his body. A later redaction of the Life even includes fragments from the semi-hagiographic Tale of the Murder of Andrei Bogoliubskii. The prince’s participation thus seems to have been a crucial element in the formation of the cult of Leontii’s relics which later generations of authors continued to recognize.

The evidence considered above shows that relics, no matter how prestigious, tended not to be discussed in Rus sources unless they had a connection with the princely clan. Yet it is clear that this pattern did not reflect a xenophobic rejection of non-Rus saints: examples abound of New Testament, early Christian and Byzantine saints whose relics became objects of interest after coming into contact with a prince decades or centuries after their deaths. But despite the apparent significance of their role in this area of religious life, princes did not control the production of most written sources in Rus. Although branches of the clan could exercise some influence over local chronicles, it is unlikely that they were closely involved in other types of writing about religious topics, which was primarily the domain of monks. It seems, rather, that monks and other members of the clergy, whether consciously or not, devoted more attention to those relics which had a princely connection, while others were politely left to gather dust.

Although the precise reason for this phenomenon would be impossible to reconstruct, two possibilities suggest themselves. Rus churchmen were probably aware of the tendency in Byzantium for the most prestigious relics to be connected with the imperial household. Although Rus had very few first-class relics, it did have a ruling family. A transposition may have been made, through misunderstanding or necessity, resulting in the perception that contact with rulers bestowed the highest sanctity, rather than that rulers possessed relics which were independently prestigious thanks to their resources and influence. This perception seems to have become well established as the princely clan proliferated and individual princes attempted to enhance the positions of their local churches by, among other means, promoting cults of relics, thus leading to the neglect of the many other relics in circulation in Rus. Another, possibly complementary, possibility involves the perceived sanctity of princes themselves, as is clear from the number of princes who were either officially venerated as saints or described in quasi-hagiographic terms, as in the case of Bogoliubskii. Although the Rus did not, like the Byzantines, conceive of their rulers as God’s vice-regents on earth, the clan did collectively possess a more amorphous sort of holiness, at least in the eyes of churchmen. This holiness manifested itself in the cult of relics, which, it seems, needed the ‘princely touch’ in order to be truly efficacious.

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Christianity on the move: the role of the Varangians in Rus and Scandinavia*

John H. Lind

Some initial remarks on terminology

Few words go through history without semantic changes. This is also the case with words that are important in our context. It goes without saying that it is necessary to be aware of such changes, especially if they occur during the period under investigation.1 In this paper the term ‘Varangians’ is used to denote Scandinavians active in the east, along the eastern European rivers and in Byzantium. It is, however, used in a slightly anachronistic manner, so that it also covers the period when Scandinavians in the east were still exclusively known as Rus. This seems to have been the case until at least the mid-tenth century, when the term ‘Rus’ began to take on a wider meaning, encompassing the East Slavonic majority-population in and around Kiev. Originally both ‘Rus’ and ‘Varangians’ were functional rather than ethnic terms. While the term ‘Rus’ at first seems to have been linked to the organisation of naval warfare in oared ships among early Swedes, with a presumed prehistoric form *rōþ, the term ‘Varangians’ (Old Norse Væringjar) was used about persons enlisted by oath in some kind of commercial or military organisation.

When the change from Rus to Varangians took place, the term Varangians was used first and foremost about Scandinavian newcomers, such as those auxiliary forces whom Rus princes called upon to support them in their internal struggles or for major

* Most renderings are the author’s, but for convenience reference is given to the standard translations.

1 Thus it is disturbing to see Henrik Birnbaum claiming that Patriarch Photios in his homilies “described the Varangian assault and siege of Constantinople” (Birnbaum 1993, 45), although Photios of course used the term Rhōs (Photios, Homilies 74–110). It is hardly less disturbing that Daniel Kaiser, in translating the term ‘variag’, as it appears in various versions of the Russkaia pravda, found it necessary to replace ‘Varangian’ with ‘Viking’ (Laws of Rus’ 12, 16, 22–23, 35, 129). Unlike ‘Varangian’, the term ‘Viking’ was never used at the time about Scandinavians as such unless they—like persons of any other ethnic or geographic origin—appeared to the Germanic people as pirates or enemy warriors (Lind 2011).
campaigns. The term was, however, also used in retrospect by the compilers of the early chronicles, the *Primary Compilation* (Nachal’nyi svod) in the 1090s and the *Primary Chronicle* (*Povest’ vremennykh let* or *Tale of Bygone Years*) in the 1110s, who obviously felt the need to explain to their contemporaries who the original Rus had been, now that the term was used to denote the Slavonic population as well. The confusion this brought about in later historiography is well known.

The term Varangian/Varangians also underwent semantic changes over time, although it did continue primarily to denote Scandinavians. Already in the late eleventh and early twelfth centuries, after the people of Scandinavia had become firmly linked to the Latin church, the term Varangian, if it had religious connotations, came to suggest Christianity in its Latino-Roman form. Later, when Scandinavians took part in the crusades and these were also directed against Orthodox populations, the term Varangian gradually fell out of use. Instead, Scandinavians became merged with the amorphous group labelled the ‘mute ones’ (*Nemtsi*), a derogatory term that came to characterise the enemies of the Church Slavonic rite: because of their exclusive use of the Latin rite, they could not communicate with God in their own language.

**VARANGIAN CHRISTIANITY**

When I first became interested in the role that Varangians may have played in spreading Christianity in Rus and Scandinavia, I also coined the phrase ‘Varangian Christianity’ to indicate the types of influence that could, in my opinion, be assigned to Varangians. I used it to account for certain curious phenomena I found when observing early Christianity in Rus and Scandinavia, but which could perhaps be explained as result of early Christian Varangians travelling between Byzantium and Scandinavia through Rus.

Foremost among these phenomena are the intriguing remnants in the Finnish Christian vocabulary of a number of words that, as linguists agree, can only have their

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2 The existence of the *Primary Compilation* is sometimes questioned (see, for example, Ostrowski 2007); but its existence is upheld by Gippius (2012a; 2012b). According to my view, originally advanced (in Danish) in 1994 and summarised in Lind 2010, 185 n. 2, there can be no doubt that for the early period the *Novgorod First Chronicle* (younger recension) contains a text that was reworked in the *Primary Chronicle*. So, presumably, did the *Novgorod First Chronicle* (older recension) in its now lost first part.

3 In the Byzantine context, the Varangian Guard came to consist of groups other than Scandinavians, not least Anglo-Saxons; see, for example, EB; Shepard 2010.


5 For my view on these changes, see Lind 2001a; Lind 2001b; Lind 2010.

6 In a note to his 1978 English translation of Sigfus Blöndal’s book *The Varangians of Byzantium* (*VB*, 6 n. 2), Benedikt S. Benedikz employs the term ‘Varangian Christianity’ as a translation of *vera variazhskata*, used in later Rus texts as equivalent to Latin Christianity.
Christianity on the move

origins in Old East Slavonic, perhaps with Old Church Slavonic as a medium. They include such fundamental Christian terms as:

- pappi < pop (попъ) = priest;
- risti < krest (крестъ) = cross;
- pakana < pogan (поганъ) = heathen;
- kummi < kum (кум) = godfather;
- raamattu < gramota (грамота) = bible, scripture;
- räähkä < grekh (грехъ) = sin; and
- paasto < post (постъ) = lent.

Elsewhere in Europe the reform papacy brought the use of the Church Slavonic rite to an end. Thus in 1080 Pope Gregory VII denied Duke Vratislav II of Bohemia the right to use Church Slavonic. Moreover, although as late as 1095 the Sázáva Monastery could deposit relics of the recently-canonised brothers Boris and Gleb in a new altar consecrated at the occasion, it was just over a year later that the last vestiges of the Cyrillo-Methodian mission in Bohemia were eradicated—when the Slavonic community in the monastery was expelled and replaced by a Latin one. Nevertheless we find these remnants of Church Slavonic in distant Finland.

Traditionally the Finns are thought to have adopted Christianity only as a result of a Swedish crusade in the wake of the Second Crusade to the Holy Land in 1147. If that had been the case, a Latin vocabulary would automatically have been introduced at the same time. Here we must remember that the crusades were sponsored by a reform papacy that, as we saw, wished to centralise, dominate and make local Christian usages conform to a strict set of rules. To assume that Church Slavonic vocabulary could have been introduced later in the middle ages—replacing a corresponding Latin vocabulary—is far-fetched. Consequently these Church Slavonic words must have been introduced prior to the crusades in the twelfth century.

Moreover, for this vocabulary to have survived the Latin mission work that followed the crusades, a substantial number of Christians familiar with the Church Slavonic rite must already have been present in the regions that were first targeted by

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8 Gregory VII, Correspondence 148; see also Lind 2001c, 140–41.
9 Fontes rerum Bohemicarum vol. 2, 251: “sancti Glebii et socii eius”. Perhaps the failure to mention Boris explicitly indicates that the veneration of Gleb at first took precedence over that of Boris.
10 Fontes rerum Bohemicarum vol. 2, 252.
12 Lind 2015.
the western crusades: Satakunta, including Eura (Luistari), and Vakka-Suomi, including Laitila-Kalanti, in the south-western part of present-day Finland. This is precisely the region where archaeological data corroborates the presence of Christians at least a century before the crusades. In fact, according to Paula Purhonen, there were no pagan burials later than the first decades of the eleventh century in Laitila-Kalanti.13 With regard to early Christianity in this region, one should note that during the eleventh century Finns, according to Pirkko-Liisa Lehtosalo-Hilander, “began to bury their dead in separate inhumation cemeteries”, some even supplied with belfries. In itself this indicates the existence of an early church organisation a century before the crusades to the region. Furthermore, Viking-Age finds in the same region on the one hand show similarity with finds in Scandinavia, and on the other display Byzantine influence. This indicates that the population here had links both with Sweden and with Byzantium, just as we have archaeological evidence along ‘the way from the Varangians to the Greeks’ that people from Finnish territory took part in traffic along this route.14

In ascribing this degree of influence to Varangians, we should keep at least two facts in mind. Firstly, that Varangians over the centuries must have travelled between Scandinavia and Byzantium in their thousands. Otherwise Byzantine emperors would not have been able to field armies containing several thousand Varangians in a single battle, as Constantine IX Monomachos did in 1045.15 These Scandinavians must have belonged to the higher levels of society, possessing both the training necessary for acceptance into Byzantine military service, and the pecuniary means to reach Byzantium. Secondly, that Varangians were heavily involved in the early spread of Christianity in Rus, no doubt influenced by their contact with Greek Orthodoxy.

EARLY CHRISTIANITY BEFORE THE CONVERSION OF RULERS IN THE SCANDINAVIAN SPHERE: THE RUS-BYZANTINE TREATIES

The official baptism of a ruler has traditionally been seen as an epoch-making event in a country’s history both by ecclesiastics and among scholars. This has been amply demonstrated by the many millennial celebrations, with numerous conferences and publications, in countries whose rulers officially adopted Christianity in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. Some of the rulers in these countries were certainly aware of the importance of their baptism: none more so than the Danish king Harald Bluetooth. Baptised around 965, Harald had perhaps the most famous runestone of all raised in commemoration of the event. Apart from presenting an early indigenous im-

15 VB, 105.
age of Christ, King Harald made several claims in the stone’s inscription, one of which was to have “made the Danes Christian.”\textsuperscript{16} The stone is therefore often presented as the ‘baptismal certificate’ of the Danes.

However the actual baptism of King Harald is mentioned in some detail in a contemporary source, the \textit{Chronicle of the Saxons} by Widukind of Corvey, who died soon after 973. Here, in a chapter on how the Danes became Christians and before he related how the cleric Poppa persuaded the king to be baptised,\textsuperscript{17} Widukind started with the claim that “The Danes were Christians of old, but they nevertheless served their idols in pagan rites...”.\textsuperscript{18} This could suggest that individual Danes at the time practised religious syncretism. It could, however, also suggest that Denmark was a syncretic society, allowing different religions to co-exist, so that individual Danes could be either Christian or pagan, adhering to the traditional Norse religion. This does not exclude the possibility that pagans could legitimately, from their point of view, include Christ or even a Christian saint in their pantheon. This phenomenon is well known in written sources in the region from a slightly later period,\textsuperscript{19} and it could, for instance, explain the joint presence of Thor’s hammers and crucifixes in burials.\textsuperscript{20}

Although Widukind’s claim of ancient Christianity among the Danes has traditionally been disregarded or disbelieved by historians, archaeologists with their new means of exact dating have unearthed several Christian burial grounds in Denmark from periods much earlier than the baptism of King Harald Bluetooth. One of the most recent and also most important discoveries was made in Denmark’s oldest town, Ribe (founded around 710) close to the later cathedral, where a Christian burial ground in continuous use from the ninth to the mid-eleventh century has been exca-

\textsuperscript{16} “King Harald ordered these kumbls [monuments] made in memory of Gorm, his father, and in memory of Thyra [Þyrvé], his mother; that Harald who won for himself all of Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christian”: <http://runer.ku.dk/VisGenstand.aspx?Titel=Jelling-sten\_2> [accessed 11 January 2014].

\textsuperscript{17} Because Widukind states that at the time of writing this Poppa now lived the life of a bishop, he has been identified as Archbishop Volkmar of Cologne (965–969).

\textsuperscript{18} “Dani antiquitus erant Christiani, sed nichilominus idolis ritu gentili servientes”: Widukind of Corvey, \textit{Res gestae Saxonicate} III.65, 168.

\textsuperscript{19} Among the Baltic Wends, at least those inhabiting the island of Rügen, the well-documented veneration of St Vitus, patron saint of Corvey Monastery, was transformed into the pagan veneration of the four-faced idol Svantevit, a cult only abolished after the Danish crusade in 1168: Bysted 2012, 76–77.

\textsuperscript{20} There is of course always the possibility that a Thor’s hammer could have been seen as the Cross of Tau. That seems at least to be the case when they appear alongside ‘normal’ crosses on a Danish Romanesque baptismal font, depicted in Capelle 2005, 176. According to Capelle, syncretism was not a dominant feature in Denmark, where paganism and Christianity did not merge but co-existed over a long period.
vated. The situation is the same in other countries on the fringes of Christendom. It is certainly the case in Rus, where Varangians—judging by an ever growing amount of archaeological data—seem to have been an important, although by no means the only group among the early Christians. Thus the fact that the Church Slavonic rite gained ascendancy over the Greek suggests that Christianity also spread among the Slavonic majority population in the southern part of Rus, profiting from the presence in Bulgaria of Church Slavonic translations of the scriptures and liturgical books. The choice of the Church Slavonic rite may also reflect a wish by the ruling circles to keep the Greek church hierarchy in Constantinople as well as in Kiev at a distance.

Seen against this background, the decisions by rulers to adopt Christianity, although no doubt important, had perhaps more to do with the process of state formation and stabilisation of their rule than with the spread of Christianity. If so, the situation could be said to resemble that of the Roman empire at the time of Constantine the Great. In a sense the rulers of newly-Christianising countries in the tenth and eleventh centuries were simply emulating Constantine. Vladimir Sviatoslavich’s younger contemporary Ilarion, the first native metropolitan of Kiev, was well aware of this.

Accordingly Ilarion includes a eulogy to Vladimir in his so-called Sermon on Law and Grace (Slovo o zakone i blagodati). Here Ilarion not only equates Vladimir with Constantine, but he also equates Vladimir and his grandmother Olga-Helena/Helga—who had been baptised before Vladimir—with Constantine and his mother Helena—who had likewise been baptised before her son. In his references to how Vladimir’s son Jaroslav and his daughter-in-law Irina (the Swedish princess Ingegerd), together with their children and grandchildren, had promoted the Christian faith, Ilarion clearly associates the spread of Christianity not only with Vladimir’s choice to be baptised, but also with the further deeds of the dynastic line that he founded. This alliance be-

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22 CRCM.

23 Petrukhin & Pushkina 1998; VR, 136–37; Petrukhin & Pushkina 2009. This can be updated with articles in a recent anthology: Androshchuk 2013; Eniosova & Pushkina 2013; Kovalenko 2013 and papers in the present volume. Jonathan Shepard has recently summarised the archaeological data: Shepard 2009, 193–95, 205–06, where he suggests at least an element of religious syncretism and eclectism among Rus. But as we shall see, the Rus-Byzantine treaty of 944 makes a clear distinction between Christian or “baptised” Rus on the one hand and pagan or “unbaptised” Rus on the other, as seen from a Byzantine perspective.


25 Ilarion, “Slovo o zakone” 48–50. Ilarion wrote his sermon no later than, and not much earlier than, 1050, because Jaroslav’s wife, Ingegerd/Irina, who died in 1050, is described as being alive, while it is suggested that the couple already had grandchildren.
tween dynasty and ecclesiastical hierarchy is the same as we find in other newly-Christianising countries, which soon found support in the sanctification of members of the dynasties (see below, 430).

The close relationship Iaroslav Vladimirovich (d. 1054) obviously had with Ilarion, whom he raised to the office of metropolitan in 1051, could suggest that Iaroslav wished to keep the Greek churchmen in Kiev at arm’s length. This allows us to see an analogy with another Scandinavian royal house. Iaroslav’s decision to elevate Ilarion to the metropolitanate coincided with the decision of his brother-in-law in Sweden, King Emund the Old, to keep an English-born cleric, Osmund, as a court bishop. This was commented upon by a furious Adam of Bremen, seeing that Osmund was independent of the archbishop of Hamburg-Bremen who, in Adam’s view, had the Apostolic authority to ordain bishops for Scandinavia. At the same time Iaroslav’s son-in-law Harald Hardrada of Norway, confronted with these ‘Apostolic’ claims, asserted that he did not know who was archbishop in Norway or who had power there except himself. Obviously this close-knit family of rulers attempted to monopolise power over their respective churches for themselves.

Irrespective of Ilarion’s emphasis on Vladimir Sviatoslavich’s decisive role in bringing Christianity to Rus—and the role his grandmother Olga may have played earlier—as we have seen, the archaeological evidence has shown that, as in Denmark, Christians were already in Rus well before Vladimir decided to be baptised.

However, in addition to the archaeological evidence and the written sources that tell us about Princess Olga’s baptism we have a further group of sources that illustrate the early process of Christianisation in Rus: namely the treaties the Rus concluded with the Byzantine emperors in the first part of the tenth century, at a time when these Rus were still Scandinavians or of recent Scandinavian descent. The treaties were included in the Primary Chronicle, compiled in the 1110s. Access to these treaties, with their fixed chronological points, may even have prompted the compiler of the Primary Chronicle to compose his work, since they allowed him to create his overall annal-

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26 In doing so Iaroslav may have been inspired by his great-grandmother, Olga; by upholding links to the west, as Hollingsworth suggests, Olga may have attempted to organise a national church: Hagiography of Kievan Rus’, lxxii. See also Nazarenko 2001; Shepard 2009, 203–04; Jackson 2010, 161–62.
27 Adam of Bremen, Gesta 348.
29 This is clear from the names of the rulers (Oleg/Helgi and Igor/Ingvar), envoys and other magnates, on whose behalf the treaties were concluded (more than seventy names are mentioned in the 944 treaty), see Mel’nikova 2004.
tic framework, replacing the relative chronology of his immediate chronicle source.\textsuperscript{30}

The original texts were probably written in Greek but were translated into Old East Slavonic before they were inserted into the chronicle. It is generally agreed that these texts offer a faithful rendition of the original treaties with a few minor adaptations to twelfth-century forms.\textsuperscript{31}

In the first treaties, concluded in 907 and 911, the term Christians is used in the text as synonymous with Greeks, whereas the Rus and their ruler, Prince Oleg, are described as pagans, who swear their oaths by their gods and on their weapons,\textsuperscript{32} just as the Danes did, according to Adam of Bremen, when they made peace with the Franks in the time of Louis the Pious: “the Danes swore on the treaty according to the tradition of the people an unbreakable oath by their weapons”.\textsuperscript{33}

In the next and most comprehensive treaty from 944 this has changed.\textsuperscript{34} The treaty can be divided into sixteen articles and lists no fewer than seventy-two or seventy-three names by whom—or on whose behalf—it was concluded. But by contrast to the previous treaties, the treaty of 944 repeatedly distinguishes between Rus who are still pagan and Rus who have become Christians.\textsuperscript{35} For example, at the beginning of the treaty separate punishments are meted out to would-be transgressors among the Rus: those who are baptised face “God with damnation and destruction both in this world and the next”; those who are “unbaptised” risk being “slain by their own swords, laid low by their own arrows or by any of their own weapons”.\textsuperscript{36}

In this treaty the Rus are required to take separate oaths on three occasions, depending on whether or not they are baptised: once within the treaty text itself and twice in connection with its confirmation. The first instance occurs if a Rus slave should escape during his stay in Byzantium. If the slave is not found, his owner can

\textsuperscript{30} Nevertheless the relative chronology of the Primary Compilation is in some respects superior to the constructed chronology that the compiler of the Primary Chronicle superimposed on his work. Thus by extending the arrival of the Riurikids back in time, so as to allow Askold and Dir to be presented as “Riurik’s men” and thereby illegitimate rulers in Kiev around 860, the compiler of the Primary Chronicle makes his genealogy of the early Riurikids look highly suspect, with Riurik fathering Igor before 879 and Igor marrying Olga in 903 but only fathering Sviatoslav in the early 940s, a date that is confirmed by Constantine VII Porphyrogennetos.

\textsuperscript{31} Malingoudi 1994; Malingoudi 1995; Malingoudi 1997; Bibikov 1999.

\textsuperscript{32} Lavrent’evskaiia letopis’ 30–38; RPC, 64–69.

\textsuperscript{33} Adam of Bremen, Gesta 208.

\textsuperscript{34} Lavrent’evskaiia letopis’ 46–53; RPC 73–78.

\textsuperscript{35} The large number of magnates on whose behalf the treaty was concluded indicates that Rus, as also suggested by Jonathan Shepard, was at the time an oligarchy rather than a monarchy: Shepard 2009, 201–04.

\textsuperscript{36} Lavrent’evskaiia letopis’ 47–48; RPC 74.
receive compensation from the Byzantine authorities if he swears to this fact: the baptised “according to his faith”, the un-baptised “after his custom”.37

Before relating the two final oath-takings, the treaty text proclaims that it has been put into writing on two parchments. One was adorned with a cross and “our names” (i.e. the names of the Byzantine emperors); the other had the names of the Rus envoys and merchants. The text then goes on to stipulate that the Rus envoys were to “accompany the imperial envoys to the Rus grand prince, Igor, and his people; receiving the parchment they should by oath confirm what had been agreed upon and written in the parchment on which our [the emperors’] names are written”.38

After this we have the two accounts of the oath-taking on the part of the Rus. Firstly, the Rus envoys while still in Constantinople take what—in the words of Jana Malingoudi—amounts to a ‘negotiator oath’ (Unterhändlereid): they swear both for themselves and on behalf of Prince Igor that the treaty will be observed. The respective punishments for baptised and unbaptised transgressors are spelled out in even more detail than they had been in the initial clause of the treaty quoted above. Of particular interest is the fact that the baptised negotiators are said to have taken their oaths in a church dedicated to St Elijah (or Elias).39

This is followed by an account, presumably composed by the accompanying Byzantine envoys, of the actual ratification (Ratifikationseid) of the treaty in Kiev performed in accordance with the stipulation in the treaty text itself:

in the morning, Igor summoned the envoys, and went to a hill on which there was a statue of Perun. The Rus laid down their weapons, their shields, and their gold ornaments, and Igor and his people took oath, that is those who were pagans, while the Christian Rus took oath in the Church of St Elijah.

This account must have been brought back by the Byzantine envoys together with the ratified treaty with which it would have been kept. With this the chronicler writing in the 1110s ends his quotation from the treaty texts. He must, however, have felt that at least two points needed explanation. Concerning the Church of St Elijah he therefore added: “which is above the creek, in the vicinity of the Pasyncha square and the quar-

37 Lavrent’evskaiia letopis’ 52; RPC 75.
38 Lavrent’evskaiia letopis’ 52; RPC 76–77.
39 Lavrent’evskaiia letopis’ 52–53; RPC 77. The church in question was most likely the ‘New Church’ (Nea Ekklesia) in the Great Palace, which was amongst others dedicated to St Elijah or, perhaps, a separate Church of St Elijah close by, both erected by Basil I: Ebersolt 1910, 130–37. See also Brubaker 1999, 161–62.
40 Lavrent’evskaiia letopis’ 53–54: “zautra prizva Igor’ sly, i pride na kholm, kde stoiashe Perun, pokladosa oruzh’e svoe i shchit i zoloto, i khodi Igor’ rote i liudi ego eliko poganykh Rusi; a khresteianuiu Rus’ vodisha rote v tserkvi sviatogo Il’i”; RPC 77.
ter of the Khazars". And for the benefit of those of his contemporaries who thought that Rus Christianity began with the conversion of Prince Vladimir, and who were perhaps uncertain as to who exactly the Rus were, the chronicler expounded: “this was, in fact, the cathedral church, since many of the Varangians were Christians.” Here the change from quoting the treaty texts to commenting on them is signalled by the use of ‘Varangians’ for the Scandinavians or people of Scandinavian descent, instead of the treaty text’s ‘Rus’.

The distinction drawn repeatedly in the 944 treaty between the pagan and Christian Rus, not least with regard to oath-taking and especially in connection with the ratification in Kiev, shows that more than a generation before Vladimir Sviatoslavich’s decision to have himself baptised, Rus Christianity had gained such status that the Byzantine authorities considered it necessary to provide for ratification of the treaty by representatives of the Christians. As performative sources, these treaty texts are far superior to other narrative sources on the spread of Christianity among the Scandinavians—whether this concerns Scandinavia proper or Rus—even compared to the contemporary account of Widukind with regard to Christianity among the Danes.

THE RATIFICATION OF THE 944 TREATY IN THE CHURCH OF ST ELIJAH, KIEV

The fact that both the oath by the Christian Rus envoys in Constantinople and ratification in Kiev by the Christian Rus took place in a church dedicated to St Elijah has led some to doubt the reliability of the account. After scholars became aware that a Church of St Elijah existed in Constantinople, it was the ratification in a Kiev church of the same name that was called into doubt, despite the chronicle compiler’s seemingly precise knowledge of its location in Kiev.

Recently Oleksiy Tolochko has postulated that the report of the treaty’s ratification in a Church of St Elijah in Kiev is not only “erroneous” but even “fictitious”. In his argument Tolochko seems to be guided by a firm belief that Christianity played scarcely any role in Rus—or at least in Kiev—at the time. He contends that the account of the ratification in Kiev cannot have formed part of the treaty texts, despite (as quoted above) such a ratification having been provided for in the treaty text itself, as Tolochko himself admits. In fact, one gets the impression from Tolochko that the treaty text’s stipulation of the need for such a ratification by Prince Igor in Kiev makes the ensuing account of the ratification even more suspect: this stipulation—in Tolochko’s view—

41 Lavrent’evskaja letopis’ 54: “iazhe est’ nad ruchaem konets’ Pasyn’che besedy i kozare”; RPC 77.
42 Lavrent’evskaja letopis’ 54: “se bo be sbornaia tserki, mnozi bo besha Variazi khrestiani”; RPC 77.
43 Pamiatniki russkogo prava 50. See also Malingoudi 1994, 46 n. 100; Malingoudi 1995, 90 n. 95.
itself inspired the chronicler to fabricate an account of the ratification. Why the author should have done so remains unasked and unanswered by Tolochko. Similarly, it remains unanswered why the chronicler should invent a Church of St Elijah in Kiev for the occasion, together with a Christian community, thus inadvertently diminishing the importance of Princess Olga and Vladimir Sviatoslavich as promoters of Christianity in Rus, a concept which he otherwise highlights in his chronicle.

The gist of Tolochko’s argument seems to be that if a Church of St Elijah existed in Constantinople at that time, another could not co-exist in Kiev. By the same token, all references in Rus texts to churches of Hagia Sophia in Rus should be considered equally fictitious—especially those no longer in existence—because of the famous example in Constantinople. This would apply to the church of Hagia Sophia in Kiev that is mentioned in the Novgorod chronicles under the year 1017, and to the one in Novgorod with thirteen cupolas that is said to have been destroyed by fire in 1049. The latter report is of particular interest, because the Novgorod chronicler is able to place this church in the topographical townscape of his own time, around 1167, just as the author of the *Primary Chronicle* was able to do with regard to the Church of St Elijah in Kiev over a similar timespan.

We should also consider that the Church of St Elijah in Constantinople was chosen for the event because it may have had special significance for Varangians visiting Constantinople, and it is therefore hardly surprising that the Varangians should have

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44 “the account of the St Elijah church in Kiev is erroneous, being found in the fictitious account of the treaty’s ratification supposedly held in Kiev. This invented story was based entirely on the idea of what protocol should look like, which was supplied by the text of the treaty itself”: Tolochko 2011, 65. In a recent article Tolochko has elaborated his point of view further: Tolochko 2013.

45 In his 2013 article Tolochko tries to bolster his argument by claiming that “the entry for the year of 945 consists of two distinct parts: the text of the treaty signed in Constantinople and the story of its endorsement in Kiev by the prince and his men”, where the first is “documentary”, while the second one is “overtly narrative”. This, according to Tolochko, is “a typical arrangement for the author of the *Primary Chronicle*, he attaches a similar (in manner, though not in content) story to the treaty of 911. This later one clearly reveals its early twelfth-century origin and most certainly was invented by the chronicler himself”: Tolochko 2013, 112. Here Tolochko refers to the account of a tour of churches and holy places in Constantinople that the Rus envoys were given after the conclusion of the treaty that was inserted into the chronicle immediately after the text of the 911 treaty. There is, however, hardly any similarity between this account (see below, 420) and the account of the ratification oath in 944. It is difficult to see how the nature of the first account necessarily reflects on the nature of the second.

46 “It stood in the episcopal quarter above the Volkhov, where Sotko now erected the Boris and Gleb church in stone”: *Novgorodskaja pervaia letopis’* 180–81. See also the entry s.a. 1167 in the same chronicle on the foundation of the church of Boris and Gleb by Sotko Šytinich: *Novgorodskaja pervaia letopis’* 219.
used the same dedication for a church in Kiev. That is, after all, how church dedications spread. Moreover there is an obvious reason why newly-baptised Varangians might have venerated St Elijah, since he was the Christian counterpart of their favourite pagan god Perun-Thor. St Elijah had already by this time become the patron saint of fur-traders and furriers, providing the Varangians with an additional reason to dedicate a Christian church in Kiev to him. Tolochko’s argument is therefore open to doubt and the fact remains that Christianity had—at least by 944—gained prominent standing in the polity of Rus.

No doubt most of these early Christian Rus were baptised in or from Byzantium, since they were exposed to Orthodox Christianity when visiting Byzantium or while spending time in Byzantine service. It could have happened as a result of the missionary activity mentioned by the compiler of the *Primary Chronicle* in his rendition of the text of the 911 treaty. Here we are told how Emperor Leo VI had the Rus envoys shown:

> the beauties of the churches...the relics of the Lord’s Passion: the crown, the nails, and the purple robe, together with relics of saints. They also instructed them in their faith, and demonstrated to them the true faith.

47 The dissemination of saints’ cults in the Varangian milieu has recently been studied by Ildar H. Garipzanov: Garipzanov 2010a; Garipzanov 2010b; Garipzanov 2011; Garipzanov 2013.


49 The basis for the veneration of the prophet by furriers was presumably the fact that the Nea Ekklesia, where the baptised Rus envoys are thought to have taken their oath on the treaty, held as one of its most prominent relics the prophet’s sheepskin, mentioned by Constantine VII Porphyrogenetos in *De cerimoniis*: Klein 2006, 92 n. 87; Magdalino 1987, 56–60.

50 Tolochko’s latest contribution to the subject in particular is marred by a number of speculative arguments. Having denied the existence of a Christian community in Kiev—and here he has not considered the archaeological evidence, stressing instead that no written sources support “Christians among the Kiev population”—Tolochko clearly needs to downplay the role of Christian Rus in concluding the treaty. The initial threat to Rus transgressors in the treaty, according to their baptised or unbaptised state (see above), is found “puzzling”: Tolochko 2013, 116. The account of oath-taking in connection with runaway slaves is dismissed as “clearly corrupt”: Tolochko 2013, 117 n. 20. The presence of Christian Rus at the negotiators’ oath-taking in the Church of St Elijah in Constantinople, obviously the most difficult to get around, is explained as a result of a postulated Byzantine demand that some baptised Rus—not, according Tolochko, available among the Rus envoys—should perform an oath “on the Palace premises...[as] formal proofs of their [the Rus’] faithful observance of the treaty’s conditions. *There happened to be some other Ruses at hand*, however, who could take an oath, and in a Christian manner at that. They vouched for their fellow countrymen and witnessed the treaty on behalf of the Rus’ side...The impression is that the members of the latter [group of Christian Rus] simply happened to be in Constantinople when the envoys arrived, which meant that their loyalty should be reaffirmed but they were not part of the delegation”: Tolochko 2013, 119 (author’s italics).

51 *Lavrent'evskaiia letopis’* 38; RPC 68–69.
This is one of the few accounts we have of Byzantine attempts to convert the Rus after the early endeavours of Patriarch Photios.\textsuperscript{52}

Two of Patriarch Photios’ homilies concern the Rus attack on Constantinople in June 860;\textsuperscript{53} and in an encyclical of 867 to the oriental patriarchs, Photios claimed that the terrible “Rhôs” had now abandoned paganism and accepted bishops and priests from Constantinople.\textsuperscript{54} The long-term effects of the Photian mission are often dismissed, with the Rus in the early tenth century being described as out-and-out pagans on the strength of the early treaties made with Byzantium. However, we should recall that Prince Oleg and his men were then newcomers from the north, who are said to have seized power from Askold, Dir and their entourage. These would have been the Rus whom Photios’ missionary efforts targeted. Even though Oleg and his people remained pagan, a Christian substratum among the Rus could have survived from Photios’ time, facilitating the progress of Christianity later in the tenth century. It may even be that believers from the era of Askold and Dir surfaced when the 944 treaty was concluded. This would not only explain the presence of Christian Varangians, but it would also highlight the oligarchic structure of Rus. In addition to the ruling prince, many magnates and merchants were represented at the conclusion of the treaty in 944, in contrast to the 911 treaty which was exclusively ratified on behalf of Prince Oleg.

THE PATERIK OF THE KIEVAN CAVES MONASTERY

As mentioned above, when I began to explore the concept of ‘Varangian Christianity’, my aim was to explain phenomena found in early Scandinavian Christianity that reflected the influence of the Orthodox church as conveyed through the Varangians. However, Varangians were not only active in transmitting Christian influences from the east to Scandinavia. Once Christianity had been firmly established in Scandinavia, to a large extent based on influences from Anglo-Saxon England, Christian Varangians baptised in the west were also able to influence Christianity in Rus, even in one of the centres of Russian Orthodox spirituality: the Kievan Caves Monastery. Evidence of this can be found in the monastery’s *Paterik*.

At the time this was under way, the term Varangian was already becoming associated with Latin Christianity in religious or confessional contexts. At first this did not pose a problem in Rus, as we shall see. But by the mid-twelfth century, as local ecclesiastics belatedly—in contrast to their Greek colleagues—became aware of the rift between Constantinople and Rome, it did raise questions: questions which Rus

\textsuperscript{52} This and other early attempts at spreading Christianity among the Rus is discussed in Janson 2011, 41–45.

\textsuperscript{53} Photios, *Homilies* 74–110.

\textsuperscript{54} Photios, *Epistulae et amphilochia* vol. 1, 49.
churchmen felt needed to be asked and answered. We have fairly securely dated evidence of this change in attitude in a text from the mid-twelfth century, attributed to the Novgorodian monk Kirik (Вопросание Кирика). Here we find a list of questions put to Archbishop Nifont of Novgorod (1130–1156). One question concerns Orthodox people who bring their children to a “Varangian priest” to be baptised. These are now said to be “dual believers” and must accept six weeks’ penance. Another question concerns a person baptised in the “Latin” faith, who wishes “to convert to us”. He should, according to Nifont, attend an [Orthodox] church for seven days, take an [Orthodox] Christian name and say four prayers a day.\footnote{Pamiatniki drevnerusskogo kanonicheskogo prava 22, 31. See also Jackson 2010, 160–61.}

The first question in particular shows that it must have been quite a common practice for Novgorodians to go to the Varangian priest at St Olaf’s Church to have their children baptised, just as other townsfolk did at Novgorod’s many other churches. The archbishop’s responses clearly reveal a new attitude, at least among ecclesiastics, to an issue that had not earlier been seen as problematic, and that some people in Novgorod still did not see as such.

It is against this background that we shall take a closer look at some of the texts in the Paterik of the Kievan Caves Monastery. The Paterik is undoubtedly one of the best known and most important religious literary works of medieval Rus, but it has had a complex history, combining, as it does, texts that originate in different periods. In form it is not strictly a Paterik, that is, the sayings of or by renowned monks (‘fathers’) of the monastery. Instead, to quote a leading scholar of the Paterik, Fairy von Lilienfeld, it is a “collection of stories and other texts for the praise of the monastery as a sacred place where so many holy fathers had lived”.\footnote{von Lilienfeld 1993.} However, von Lilienfeld also claims that these stories and texts revealed the Caves Monastery to be “not only a stronghold of piety, but also of ‘the Constantinople connection,’ i.e., of the ‘Greek faith’, opposed to the Latin one…”\footnote{von Lilienfeld 1993, 75 n. 4.} This is a claim to which we shall return later.\footnote{For the Paterik in general, see Ol’shevskaia 1987a. For Simon and Polikarp, see Ol’shevskaia 1987c; Ol’shevskaia 1987b. See also Muriel Heppell’s introduction to her translation of the Paterik: Paterik xvi–lii.}

The Paterik as we know it is based on letters exchanged between Simon (d. 1226), a former monk in the Caves Monastery but now a bishop in Vladimir-Suzdal, and his pupil Polikarp.\footnote{For the Paterik in general, see Ol’shevskaia 1987a. For Simon and Polikarp, see Ol’shevskaia 1987c; Ol’shevskaia 1987b. See also Muriel Heppell’s introduction to her translation of the Paterik: Paterik xvi–lii.} Polikarp, still a monk in the monastery, disclosed in a now lost letter to Simon that he was not satisfied with his humble position as a monk and had ambitions to rise in the hierarchy to the office of bishop—an ambition that in itself made Polikarp unfit for the office, in Simon’s view. In his response, which became the
Christianity on the move

fourteenth ‘tale’ (slovo) in the Paterik, Simon tried to dissuade Polikarp from this path and convince him to stay in the monastery. He pointed to the holiness of the place, derived from the many notable and pious monks who had preceded them in the caves.  
In the same letter Simon included accounts of a number of these monks as models for Polikarp to follow. To these descriptions he later added fifteen separate tales. These not only convinced Polikarp to remain in the monastery, but also inspired him to supply additional tales about monks and events there. These were based on the sources available to him and were provided in part by the then abbot of the Caves Monastery, Akindin (1214–1231). Polikarp continued to do this even after Simon had died. These two series of tales, supplemented by a few separate items such as Nestor’s Life of Feodosii (Tale 8)—by far the largest piece in the collection—constitute the Paterik today.

The collection was copied throughout the middle ages, but like most written sources for the early history of Rus, our extant manuscripts are late. All the remaining manuscripts of the Paterik date from the fifteenth century onwards. These manuscripts (including a couple of early printed versions) can be grouped into several redactions of which the earliest, the Arsenievskii, dates to 1406. This is shorter than two redactions from 1460 and 1462, both made by Kassian, a monk in the monastery. These Kassian redactions are considered to reflect the original collection best, both in content and structure. Of these two redactions, it is the Second Kassian Redaction from 1462, with thirty-eight tales altogether, that forms the basis of modern editions.

In general, we know little about the sources available to Simon and Polikarp. Some quite similar texts are found in the Primary Chronicle and Simon advised Polikarp to consult the Old Rostov Chronicle, which on internal evidence can be dated to the mid-twelfth century, and which may explain the similarity between these texts and the Primary Chronicle. Another source that may have been of major importance with

59 Kievo-Pecherskii paterik 354–60; Paterik 113–20; Simon briefly repeated his admonition at the end of Tale 19: Kievo-Pecherskii paterik 374; Paterik 130.
60 Nestor became a monk in the Caves Monastery between 1074 and 1078. This tale is immediately followed by an account of the translation of St Feodosii’s relics in 1091, likewise attributed to Nestor. While in the monastery Nestor also composed a Life of the murdered sons of Vladimir Sviatoslavich, Boris and Gleb, and some scholars link Nestor to the compilation of the Primary Chronicle.
61 An exception to this rule are the birch bark letters unearthed by archaeologists in Novgorod.
62 In Tale 14, Simon lists by name fifteen monks who had gone on to become bishops and tells Polikarp that, if he wants to know more, he can look in the Old Rostov Chronicle (pochti Letopistsa starogo Rostovskago). This will bring the number to more than thirty, and up to and including Simon himself “sinner that I am, it will, I think, be almost fifty”: Kievo-Pecherskii paterik 360; Paterik 118–19. This calculation suggests that the Old Rostov Chronicle should be dated around the middle of the twelfth century. In his time, the prominent linguist and founder of modern chronicle research, Aleksei Shakhmatov (1897) argued that Polikarp had at his disposal a lost
regard to the earliest period is a *Life of St Anthony*, now lost. Otherwise oral information may have been available, especially with regard to the tales we shall focus on here.

One problem we are faced with is that texts describing the earliest period of the monastery can—and sometimes demonstrably do—contain later chronological overlays. However, this is not so important when considering the texts of relevance here: these seem to me to disprove Fairy von Lilienfeld’s claim that the *Paterik* shows the Caves Monastery to be “not only a stronghold of piety, but also of the Constantinople connection, i.e., of the ‘Greek faith’, opposed to the Latin one…”.

The formative years of the monastery were in the mid-eleventh century, when two monks later recognised as saints, Anthony (d. 1073) and Feodosii (d. 1074), were active. The origin of the Caves Monastery lay in St Anthony’s decision to settle in a cave called the ‘Varangian Cave’. The *Paterik*’s compilers do not focus on this stage, though, but on the transformation of this cave hermitage into a monastery, which began with the building of a cathedral dedicated to the Dormition of the Mother of God in the 1070s. It is to this later stage that the *Paterik* devotes its first three tales, which in their present form were composed by Bishop Simon. It is these three tales that are important in our context.

In the first tale we learn about the miraculous role of a prominent Varangian called Shimon (Sigmund) in the building of this cathedral. The tale starts by listing Shimon’s family relations in so far as they were relevant:

> In the Varangian land lived a prince by the name of Afrikan, brother of that Iakun (Hakon the Blind) who lost his golden coat fighting with Iaroslav against the ferocious Mstislav; this Afrikan had two sons, Friand and Shimon. After their father’s death Iakun [now back in Scandinavia] expelled both brothers from their lands. Shimon came to our pious Prince Iaroslav who, receiving and treating him with honour, assigned him as senior to his son, Vsevolod, and he received great power from Vsevolod.

*Chronicle of the Caves Monastery*, which was also used when the *Primary Chronicle* was compiled in the monastery in the 1110s.

63 It is referred to in several of the *Paterik*’s tales, for the first time in Tale 3. On the *Life*, see Tvorogov 1987.

64 *Lavrent’evskaia letopis’* 155–60; *RPC* 139–42.

65 According to the *Primary Chronicle*, the cathedral was founded in 1073 and consecrated in 1089: *Lavrent’evskaia letopis’* 207–08; *RPC* 156, 179.

66 Or “Iakun the Handsome”, according to a widely accepted emendation in the *Primary Chronicle*’s account of the battle between Iaroslav and Mstislav s.a. 1024: *slep* > *slept*: *Lavrent’evskaia Letopis’*, 148, footnote A. Inconclusive attempts have been made to identify this Iakun with various Scandinavians called Hakon.

67 *Kievo-Pecherskii paterik* 296; *Paterik* 1.
In 1068, before attempting to fend off a Polovtsian attack on Rus, the three ruling princes, joined by Shimon, visited Anthony in his cave to ask for his blessing. Anthony predicted their defeat, but promised Shimon that he would survive and would eventually be buried in the church that was still to be built in the monastery. Wounded in battle, Shimon turned his eyes towards heaven where he saw a large church, similar to one in an earlier vision he had experienced in Scandinavia, when threatened by shipwreck. He now prayed to the Lord to save him through the intercession of his Mother and the venerable Fathers Anthony and Feodosii.

Soon afterwards Shimon told Anthony of his two visions. He also told Anthony that his father had made a cross, on which Christ had been painted in the way “the Latins venerate” (iako zhe latina chtut). His father had adorned Christ with a belt (poias) of gold and a golden crown (venets’). When Shimon was expelled from Scandinavia he had taken both the belt and the crown from the cross. While doing so, he heard a voice from the image of Christ telling him never to put the crown on his own head, but to take it to the place prepared for it, where a church dedicated to “My Mother will be built by the venerable Feodosii. Into his hand you shall give this, so that it can hang over my altar.” Shimon told Anthony that the belt had appeared in his earlier vision, when he was shipwrecked. In this vision the church was measured using the belt—twenty cubits (lokti) in width, thirty in both length and height, and fifty with the cupola. At this point Anthony pronounced, “Child, from now on you will not be called Shimon, but your name will be Simon.” Anthony then summoned Feodosii so that he could receive the belt and the crown, and from this point the tale focuses on Feodosii and Simon-Shimon, who donated many gifts towards the building of the church.

During a conversation with Feodosii, Simon-Shimon asked him to pray both for him and for his descendants. Feodosii promised to do so. Simon-Shimon prostrated himself and refused to part with Feodosii until he received this prayer in writing. Moved by love, Feodosii agreed and wrote the prayer down. Significantly, the author added that “from that time it became the practice to place the same prayer in the hands of the dead. Before then nobody in Rus had done so”. In both the second and the third tale the Paterik returns to some of the stories linked to Simon-Shimon, now only referred as “the Varangian”.

68 Kievo-Pecherskii paterik 298; Paterik 3.
69 Kievo-Pecherskii paterik 298; Paterik 3.
70 Kievo-Pecherskii paterik 300; Paterik 4.
71 The second tale in the Second Kassian Redaction, used here, is the third in the First Kassian Redaction and vice versa: this is one of the few differences between the two redactions.
In the second tale, craftsmen from Constantinople come to Anthony and Feodosii, guided by the Mother of God in order to build “her church”, as mentioned in the first tale. The Mother of God had told them that, ordered by her Son, she had already sent his belt as a measure for the church. Together with relics to be placed in the foundation of the church, the craftsmen also brought an icon of the Mother of God, which, in the words of Anthony:

nobody can have given [this] except she herself, her son, the Lord God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, whose belt and crown were brought from the Varangians as the measure for the width, length and height of this precious church.\(^{72}\)

In the third tale we find a similar reference to the miraculous origin of the church and the role the Varangians played, when we read:

Brothers, what is more miraculous than this? Even if you read through the books of the Old and New Testaments, nowhere will you find such miracles about holy churches as about this: from the Varangians and from Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, from his praiseworthy, divine and human-like image, comes the crown of Christ’s holy head. We have heard the divine voice from the image of Christ that has ordered the crown to be brought to the place prepared for it; and the heavenly voice ordered the measurement of the church, already revealed before its creation, to be made by this belt. Likewise came the icon from the Greeks with the craftsmen, together with relics of holy martyrs, placed under all the walls, where they themselves are depicted on the walls above the relics.\(^{73}\)

It should be noted that these references to Varangians and the Christianity they represent are linked to the Latin church, and it would be wrong to say that Simon-Shimon’s form of the faith played no role for the original author of the first three tales; however, his view is far from negative. Thus, despite following the Latin rite, Simon-Shimon is perceived as a quasi-divine messenger from both Christ and his Mother to Rus and to the Caves Monastery. The belt and crown taken by Simon-Shimon from an explicitly Latin image of Christ are treated by the monastery as just as holy as the icon of the Mother of God, brought from Constantinople in the second tale. All three tales stress that the belt was to be used as a measure for the new church. And the choice of words when describing the crown in the third tale (“from the Varangians and from Our Lord Jesus Christ himself, from his praiseworthy, divine and human-like image, comes the crown of Christ’s holy head...”) endows ‘Varangians’ with an almost Christ-like quality. Regardless of whether it was actual Latin practice to place a written ‘absolutory prayer’ in the hands of the dead, it is worth noting that the author stresses that this future Or-

\(^{72}\) Kievo-Pecherskii paterik 304; Paterik 8.
\(^{73}\) Kievo-Pecherskii paterik 306; Paterik 9.
thodox practice was introduced by and taken over from a Latin Christian. Elsewhere in the tales of the *Paterik*, Varangians and their faith are linked with the Latin rite, although this may represent a later chronological overlay.

As we have seen, the cave in which Anthony decided to settle was called the Varangian Cave. This is the subject of the seventh tale, where it is said that the cave had originally been dug out by Varangians. Who these Varangians were and what they represented is not mentioned here. However, Tale 33 returns to the question and there the name is explained by treasure found in the cave and said to be a Varangian hoard because it contained “Latin chalices” (s“udy latin’stii”). This story, whether it is true or not, does convey a thirteenth-century view that the origin of the Varangian Cave was—like early Christianity in Rus—linked to Christian Varangians who had used the cave before Anthony decided to settle there.

In one of the last and perhaps latest tales, Tale 37, we find a further story concerning the nature of the Varangian faith where this is seen as equivalent to Latin Christianity. However, this time the tale takes an overtly anti-Latin position, and is entitled “The Orthodox Prince Iziaslav’s Enquiry about the Latins”. Here the Varangian faith (*vera variazhskaia*) is purportedly explained by Feodosii to Iziaslav Jaroslavich, but this attribution to Feodosii seems wrong. It is more likely to have been the later abbot of the monastery, Feodosii ‘the Greek’ (*Grek*) (1142–1156), who puts across the by now adversarial Byzantine position on the Catholic church. It might have been this tale

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74 Today this type of prayer is called an ‘absolutory prayer’ (*razreshitel’naiia molitva*). It is referred to once more in Tale 10, in which we are told that Simon-Shimon’s son, George, made a large donation to the monastery so that St Feodosii’s coffin could be covered in silver and gold. This event is said by the *Ipat’evskaiia letopis’* to have taken place in 1130, where George is termed “Georgii Rostov’skiy i tysiachkoi”: *Ipat’evskaiia letopis’* 293. By then Simon-Shimon’s son held a high position as princely agent in the Rostov region under Prince Iurii Vladimirovich Dolgorukii. Towards the end of Tale 10 we are told that George wrote a letter to his descendants, telling them that they were all mentioned in the prayer that Feodosii had given to his father, and that Feodosii would continue to pray for them; that he, George, had himself placed the prayer in his dying father’s hand; and that in a vision his father had told him that through Feodosii’s prayer he had received all blessings. Tale 10 ends by affirming that his (Simon-Shimon or George’s) great-grandsons continued to show the monastery their affection (*Kievo-Pecherskii paterik* 330–36; *Paterik* 98–99). Thus Simon-Shimon’s family was still linked to the monastery at the time when Bishop Simon and Polikarp’s exchange of letters were forming the basis of the *Paterik*.

75 *Kievo-Pecherskii paterik* 316–22; *Paterik* 19.

76 *Kievo-Pecherskii paterik* 454; *Paterik* 188–189.

77 For this see also Stender-Petersen 1953, 145–46.

78 On this see Podskalsky 1996, 294–301; Nazarenko 2009, 275–77. Heppell thinks that Tale 37 was only included in the *Second Kassian Redaction* in 1462, as a reflection of the strong anti-Latin sentiment in the Orthodox church after the Council of Florence in 1439: *Paterik* xx. See also her discussion concerning the attribution of the tale: *Paterik* 211 n. 664. For those who might still
that inspired Fairy von Lilienfeld to attribute anti-Latin sentiment to both the Caves Monastery and the _Paterik_.

There is, however, a further instance in the texts under discussion that needs to be addressed. At the end of the first tale, after Simon-Shimon has received the absolutionary prayer from Feodosii, a kind of epilogue has been attached to the text with a short outline of what became of Simon-Shimon and his son George. Here we are first told that Simon converted to Orthodoxy under Feodosii’s tutelage, together with his entire household of 3,000 individuals, including priests, so that from being a “Varangian” he became a “Christian”, “leaving behind Latin error” (оставив’ латин’ску бест’). The text goes on to relate that after his death, Simon-Shimon was the first to be buried in the church he had first seen in his visions, just as St Anthony had predicted. From then on, as also related in Tale 10, his son George had a great love for that holy place, and the tale ends by relating George’s flourishing career under Vladimir Monomakh and Iurii Dolgorukii.79

The edge against Latin Christianity in the phrase “leaving behind Latin error” is clearly at odds with the generally positive attitude elsewhere in the same tale and in the two that follow. On the other hand it accords well with the negative attitude towards the Latin rite that later became associated with the Varangians. This attitude began to creep in from the mid-twelfth century in Novgorod, but it may have been more outspoken in Kiev, where Greek ecclesiastics were undoubtedly more numerous and influential than in Novgorod.80 Therefore the phrase “leaving behind Latin error” is best explained if we see it as part of a chronological overlay that was added to the original tale, together with the information about the career of Simon-Shimon’s son. As we have seen, George Simonovich was involved with the monastery in 1130, when he donated the silver and gold necessary for the adornment of St Feodosii’s shrine described in Tale 10.

In support of this we can note the apparent duplication in the first tale of Simon-Shimon’s conversion to Orthodoxy. In the section of the tale which I suspect to be a chronological overlay, Simon’s conversion is seen as a dramatic event that took

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79 _Kievo-Pecherskii paterik_ 300; _Paterik_ 5.
80 On anti-Latin feeling among Greek ecclesiastics in Kiev see, for instance, Nazarenko 2009. Many of the anti-Latin writings by Greek churchmen in Kiev were directed against the marriage ties forged between Riurikid princes and members of Latin Christian families in the west, but as Nazarenko shows, these writings made little impression on contemporary Rus rulers.
place under instruction from Feodosii. However, earlier on the brief phrase spoken by Anthony—“Child, from now on you will not be called Shimon, but your name will be Simon”—certainly signified Simon-Shimon’s adoption into the Orthodox community; it was at this point that he was given a ‘Christian’ name, as described in the Voprosanije Kirika. That the honour of having guided Simon-Shimon into the Orthodox flock is transferred from Anthony to Feodosii can be explained by the latter’s ever growing reputation in the Caves Monastery as its founder and patron saint, while Anthony gradually became a more peripheral figure. Anthony’s eclipse at the expense of Feodosii can be seen in the donation by Simon-Shimon’s son to a shrine for Feodosii. From this analysis of the use of ‘Varangian’ and ‘Varangians’ in connection with Christianity in the first three tales of the Paterik, it is clear that the monks of the Caves Monastery held the early Varangian Christians in high regard, seeing them to a large extent as co-founders of Christianity as it was practised in the monastery, despite their association with the Latin rite. Thus in these tales Christianity is presented as a blend of influences from both Constantinople and the Latin west, much as I think the term ‘Varangian Christianity’ should be understood.

THE TWO VARANGIAN MARTYRS

Not all the Christian Varangians mentioned in the Paterik were linked to Christianity in its Latin form. In the fourteenth tale, in which Simon urges Polikarp not to seek honour in the form of a bishop’s rank but to focus on the humility that befits a monk, Simon lists those monks of the Caves Monastery who had gone on to become bishops. The first of these was a certain Leontii, who as bishop of Rostov was martyred in the 1070s. In the words of the tale he is said “with the two Varangians to be the third citizen of Rus to be crowned by Christ, for whom he suffered”. It is worth noting that, according to this tale, the two Varangians preceded Boris and Gleb as ‘proto-martyrs’ of the Rus church, and the latter are not even mentioned. This suggests that Simon’s

81 See above, 425.
82 See above, 421.
83 “i se tretii grazhanin byst’ ruskago mira, s’ onema variagoma venchasia ot Khrista”: Kievo-Pecherskii paterik 360; Paterik 118.
84 The status of these two Varangians as the first Rus martyrs is generally overlooked in modern scholarship. Thus Paul Hollingsworth time and again characterises Boris and Gleb as “the first Rus saints”, without mentioning the two Varangians (Hagiography of Kievan Rus’ xxvi–lvi; Hollingsworth 1999, 203) and Haki Antonsson even claims that Boris and Gleb were the only native saints of Kievan Rus: Antonsson 2004, 74. Apart from the translation of St Feodosii’s relics in 1091 (see above, note 60) and his subsequent inscription on a sinodik in 1108, it is only for Boris and Gleb that we have evidence of some form of formal canonisation in the written sources, with mention of the translation of their relics in 1072 and again in 1115. However, the two brothers were a high-profile case, described in a chronicle serving to legitimise the Riurikid dynasty,
source for this information was early. It also suggests that, contrary to the opinio communis, the cult of Boris and Gleb did not get off the ground before 1072, when Iaroslav Vladimirovich’s three sons Iziaslav, Sviatoslav and Vsevolod—in a late show of unity—joined forces with the ecclesiastical hierarchy to perform a solemn translation of the saintly brothers’ relics to a new church in Vyshgorod. This translation in 1072, together with the renewed translation in 1115, shows their cult to be a joint initiative of churchmen and princes. Similar initiatives can be seen in other newly-converted countries, where kings and princes such as Olaf in Norway and the two Cnuts in Denmark—murdered or slain in battle—were conceived of as martyrs through comparable collaboration between rulers and church leaders. The apparently late appearance of the cult of Boris and Gleb has consequences for the debate as to whether there is a link between the hagiographical texts of these two martyrs and St Olaf of Norway.

The martyrdom of the two Varangians is best known from the *Primary Chronicle*, where it is recorded under the year 983. This was only a few years before Vladimir Sviatoslavich decided to adopt Christianity at the same time as his marriage to a Byzantine princess. According to the chronicle, Vladimir’s baptism was preceded by a period of pagan revival during which Vladimir returned from battle victorious and wished to make a sacrifice to the idols (kumiry). It was proposed that lots should be cast for a youth and maiden to be sacrificed. The chronicler relates the story of a certain Chris...

which had an interest in having the two brothers recognised as saints. We cannot expect ‘minor’ figures to be given the same exposure. In any case the question of what constituted an act of canonisation as opposed to evidence of (ecclesiastical or popular) veneration at that time is moot, and the fact remains that here in an ecclesiastical text, emanating from a monastery that otherwise took part in the promotion of the cult of Boris and Gleb, the two Varangians are singled out and venerated as the first martyrs in Rus before Boris and Gleb were included in their company.

Lavrent’evskaiia letopis’ 181–82; RPC 154–55. In the controversy over the date and origin of the cult of Boris and Gleb, two prominent scholars in the field have taken opposing views on many issues: Ludolf Müller has argued for an early date, whereas Andrzej Poppe has argued in favour of a late date, linked to the two translations of the brothers’ relics in 1072 and 1115: Müller 1995; Poppe 1994.

Several scholars have expressed views on this, see e.g. Reisman 1978; Antonsson 2003. Both assume an early date, that the cult of Boris and Gleb was promoted during the reign of Iaroslav Vladimirovich (d. 1054). In both the cult of Boris and Gleb and that of Olaf, Reisman sees remnants of Varangian paganism. For criticism of Reisman, see Poppe 2007. Against the view that the cult of Olaf influenced Iaroslav’s assumed promotion of his half-brothers’ cult, Antonsson suggests that influences could have gone both ways, a view he further develops in Antonsson 2007, 115–21. In a recent anthology the question was raised again by Monica White and Marina Paramonova. Here White finds that “the Scandinavian influence on the cult of Boris and Gleb is undeniable” (White 2010, 106); whereas Paramonova finds little evidence of any influence from or to other cults in eastern or northern Europe (Paramonova 2010). I tend to agree with Paramonova.
tian Varangian, who had arrived from Greece. This Varangian had a son upon whom the lot fell. When the father refused to hand over his son, Vladimir’s men forced their way into the Varangian’s mansion and killed them both. In the *Primary Chronicle* the account of the killing ends by proclaiming that “nobody knows where they laid them”, a phrase not found in the *Novgorod First Chronicle* (younger recension), which otherwise offers a similar text. The addition in the *Primary Chronicle* probably reflects a wish at the time of its compilation in the 1110s to locate the relics of the Varangians.87 The Varangian’s mansion itself is said to have been located on the spot where, soon after his conversion, Vladimir built the first major stone church in Kiev. Dedicated to the Mother of God and also known as the ‘Tithe Church’ (Desiatinnaia Tserkov’), it is where Vladimir was later buried. The account of the killing of the two Varangians in the *Primary Chronicle* is followed by lengthy reflections on the humiliation the devil suffered through the martyrdom of the two Varangians, who are said to have “received the heavenly crown, with the holy martyrs and the righteous”.

The names of the two Varangians are not mentioned in the chronicle text, but in hagiographic tradition they became known and venerated as “Fedor the Varangian and his son John”, with 12 July (Old Style) as their feast day. No separate *Life* of the two martyrs has been preserved from the earliest period. But so-called *Prologue Lives* do appear in the earliest known versions of Byzantine *Synaxaria* found in Old East Slavonic translation. Known in Old East Slavonic as *Prologues* (prologi or profiles),89 these are preserved in manuscripts from the thirteenth and fourteenth century onwards, where the name of the son appears.90 The father’s name, Fedor, only turns up in later redactions from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.91 However, the father’s name is seemingly revealed in an early version of the *Prologue Life* of St Vladimir, the

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87 The church historian Evgenii Golubinskii, and others after him, claimed that among the relics venerated in the Caves Monastery were those of the two Varangians: Golubinskii 1903, 211. However, had the monastery been in possession of these relics, the *Paterik* would undoubtedly have mentioned it.

88 “primerie venets’ nebesnyi s” sviatymi mucheniki i pravedniki”: Lavrent’evskaia letopis’ 82–83; RPC 95–96. For the *Novgorod First Chronicle* (younger recension), see Novgorodskiaia pervaia letopis’ 130–31. It has to be said that there is no firm textual evidence to show that the account in the *Novgorod First Chronicle* is not a reworking of a text from the *Primary Chronicle*, which was available to and used by later Novgorod chroniclers.

89 Study of the *Prologues* has advanced recently, leading to debate over both terminology and methodology; see e.g. Prokopenko 2012. See also Tolochno 2011, 60–62.


91 For discussion of this, in addition to Lukin and Vvedenskii, see Stender-Petersen 1953.
man responsible for the Varangians’ murder. It claims that on the site where the citizens of Kiev were baptised, after Vladimir himself had accepted baptism, “now stands the church of the Holy Martyr Tur [or Tury], the first intercessor in favour of our salvation”. This can only refer to the Varangian father, and the name must be interpreted as his original Scandinavian name, corresponding to the Norse Þórr or Þórir/Þūrir (Thor/Thorir/Thurir). That would fit well with the choice of Fedor (Theodōros) as his baptismal name.

As noted above, according to the *Primary Chronicle* Vladimir decided to build his future burial church, the Tithe Church, on the site of the two Varangians’ martyrdom. When excavations in 1908–1914 exposed wooden structures under the ruined church, these were immediately thought to be remnants of the Varangian’s mansion. After Mikhail Karger’s investigations in the 1950s, however, most archaeologists considered the Tithe Church to have been built on the site of a former pagan cemetery and that these structures were the remains of a chamber grave. Nevertheless some authorities on Kiev, such as Petr Tolochko, cling to the idea that the structures are remnants of the Varangian’s mansion: “there can be no doubt at all that the Tithe Church was established on the blood of the first Christians.” In 2006–2011 new investigations on the site of the church made it possible to re-examine what is once more referred to as the “mansion of the Varangian” (dvor Vāriaga). If in fact Vladimir decided to build his first major church in the 990s on the site of the Varangians’ martyrdom, this would be the earliest indication of their veneration as martyrs, and indeed would make them ‘proto-martyrs’ of Orthodoxy in Rus. Even if the story is a later invention, added when the *Primary Chronicle* or its predecessor was compiled in the 1090s or 1110s, it is still a sign of their early veneration in the Orthodox church of Rus.

92 “idezhe i nyne cerkvi est’ sviatoiu mucheniku Turova, i t’i byst’ pr’vyi khodatai nashemu spase-niu’: Pichkhadze et al. 2005, 305–06. This is the account in the earliest versions of the *Prologue Life* of St Vladimir discussed in Shakhmatov 1907. Based on this and other observations by Shakhmatov and Stanisław Rożniecki, Stender-Petersen also considers it possible that there is a link between the Church of the Holy Martyr Tur or Tury and the mention of a “Turova bozhni-ssa” in the *Ipatievskaiia Chronicle* s.a. 1146: *Ipat’evskaiia letopis’* 321; Stender-Petersen 1953, 142–44.

93 Other interpretations have been suggested. These are discussed in Lukin 2009, 82–84.

94 At the time baptismal names were often, if not always, chosen so that they began with the same letter as the given name: Olga/Helga-Elena/Helena; Vladimir-Vasilii; Ingegerd-Irina, etc; or as we saw: Shimon/Sigmund-Simon.

95 The changing views are surveyed in Lukin 2009, 91–96.

96 Tolochko 2009, 163–73: “v tom chto Desiatinnaia tserkov’ byla postavlena na krovi pervykh khristian, nikakikh somnenii byt’ ne mozhet”.

97 Komar 2012, 311.
In contrast to the other Varangians mentioned in the Paterik, these two Varangian martyrs can clearly be seen to be an intrinsic part of Orthodox Christianity in Rus, without any Latin connotations. The same goes for our third ‘Varangian’ saint.

THE THIRD VARANGIAN SAINT

Scholars have long been aware of the close textual interrelationship between the accounts of the two Varangians’ martyrdom in the chronicle and in the Prologue Life. Based on the fact that the Prologue Life does not include the story of Vladimir building his Tithe Church on the site of the Varangian’s mansion, Pavel Lukin has recently suggested that the two versions have a lost Life as a common source, which could perhaps tentatively be dated to the 1070–1090s. The textual evidence for this lost Life may not be strong, but other considerations may support such an early dating of the Prologue Life.

As we saw above in Tale 14, the martyrdom of Bishop Leontii of Rostov in the 1070s made him only the third martyr in Rus after our two Varangians, sidestepping Boris and Gleb. Interestingly the two saintly brothers seem to have suffered the same fate in the early version of the Prologue. At least that is the impression given by one of the palimpsests from Mount Sinai and now held by the Russian National Library.

This Bulgarian thirteenth-century miscellany does not contain the Prologue as such, but only three Rus Prologue Lives excerpted from an Old East Slavonic original: those of Olga (11 July), our two Varangians (12 July) and Vladimir Sviatoslavich (15 July). But considering the omission of Sts Boris and Gleb, could it not be that Prologue Lives of these Rus saints existed as a group when the Greek Synaxarion was translated, and that this group of saints was included in an early Prologue before the veneration of Boris and Gleb caught alight after the translations of their relics in 1072 and 1115?

While early short Lives of both Olga and the two Varangians may well have been composed by this time, what was the situation with regard to a Life of Vladimir Sviatoslavich? Despite the efforts in the eleventh century of Ilarion in his Sermon and Iakov the Monk in his Eulogy (Pamiat’ i pokhvala kniaziu Volodimeru) to promote Vladimir’s sanctity, it is generally assumed that Vladimir’s actual veneration as a saint was late in developing.

However, this is how Vladimir is presented in his Prologue Life: “On

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98 Lukin 2009, 91–94
100 One must concede that the Prologue Life of St Vladimir does praise him as progenitor of “the holy martyrs Boris and Gleb”, possibly a dynastic attempt to promote the veneration of Vladimir’s two sons: Pichkhadze et al. 2005, 307.
101 See, for example, Fennell 1988; Nazarenko 1996 and the discussion in Pichkhadze et al. 2005, 292.
the same day [15 July], the death of the blessed Grand Prince Vladimir, having Christened the Rus land. Vladimir, son of Sviatoslav, of Varangian stock…” (author’s italics).  

Why did a churchman in Rus find it necessary—or important—to stress that Vladimir was of Varangian stock? When would this have been possible? Is it conceivable that he would do so at a time when the term ‘Varangian’ was tainted by being closely associated with Latin Christianity, as it became during the twelfth century? 

If we are to answer these questions, we must try narrow down the interval in which a churchman wishing to stress Vladimir’s Scandinavian origins could do so by using the term ‘Varangian’. I think we must accept that this could not have been after ‘Varangian’ had become linked to the Latin rite, with all its negative connotations: that is, after the beginning of the twelfth century. On the other hand, this description of Vladimir as being of Varangian stock must belong to a period when it no longer made sense simply to say that Vladimir was of Rus stock, as the envoys had presented themselves in the tenth-century treaties with Byzantium (my ot roda ruskago). 

At that time the term ‘Rus’ indisputably singled out the envoys as Scandinavians or of Scandinavian descent. But this was no longer the case even before Vladimir died, and certainly not later in the eleventh century. By then Rus had come to signify the population of Rus at large. Therefore the identification of Vladimir as “of Varangian stock” must belong to a time when Vladimir’s Scandinavian descent could only be defined by using the term Varangian. Broadly speaking, that means the eleventh century and possibly the first decades of the twelfth. This was when chroniclers found the term Varangian useful to explain to their contemporaries who the original Rus and founders of the Rus polity actually were; when it was found useful to explain how Christian Rus, with their Church of St Elijah in Kiev, could appear in connection with the 944 treaty; and when monks in the Kievan Caves Monastery could still accept Christian influences from both east and west on equal terms. 

In light of all this, the Prologue Life of St Vladimir was most likely composed for the translation of the Greek Synaxarion in this period. If so, it would seem that Ilarion and Iakov the Monk were more successful in their promotion of Vladimir’s sanctity than is generally supposed. Moreover, if we accept that the Prologue Life of Vladimir

103 Lavrent’evskaia letopis’ 32–33, 46; RPC 65, 73.  
104 See above, n. 90, 91.  
105 In an analysis of accounts of Vladimir’s baptism in works by early western authors such as Thietmar of Merseburg (d. 1018) and Peter Damian (d. 1072), Aleksandr Nazarenko suggests that signs of Vladimir’s sanctification were present in these sources by the first third of the eleventh century: Nazarenko 1996, 35–36. See also Preobrazhenskii 2009.
was included in the translated *Synaxarion* as part of a group containing two other short Lives of Olga and the Varangian martyrs, this would support Pavel Lukin's suggestion that a lost Prologue Life of the two Varangians from the same period was, in fact, the common source of both the chronicle account of their martyrdom and the extant Prologue Life. But the question remains: why did a churchman find it so important to emphasise Vladimir’s Varangian origins in his Prologue Life, virtually making him into a third ‘Varangian’ saint?

**IN CONCLUSION**

In this study on the role that Varangians may have played in spreading early Christianity, our focus has been on their activity in the east rather than in Scandinavia proper. We have seen how by the middle of the tenth century, when Scandinavians or people of Scandinavian descent were still known as Rus, the presence of Christians among these Rus gave Christianity a prominent standing when it came to concluding an international treaty with the dominant power to the south, Byzantium. This status may have been facilitated by traditions surviving from the missionary activity of Patriarch Photios in the 860s.

We do not know how long Christianity was able to maintain its prominent standing after 944. It may have ended with the death in 969 of the first Christian regent, Igor’s widow Olga. While still keeping in contact with western churchmen, Olga had accepted baptism in Constantinople, probably in 957 but perhaps a decade earlier. However, upon assuming independent rule when he reached his majority around 960, her son Sviatoslav Igorevich (d. 972) is reported in the *Primary Chronicle* categorically to have refused his mother’s plea to be baptised. When he signed a further treaty with the Byzantine emperor in 971, he did so by swearing his oath on his pagan gods.

If Christianity still had any status in society after Sviatoslav’s reign, this did not save the two Varangians in 983, when they fell victim to Vladimir Sviatoslavich’s apparent revival of paganism prior to his conversion a few years later. Thus they became the first recorded martyrs in the emerging church of Rus and were venerated as such. In the long run, though, their position as ‘proto-martyrs’ was more or less forgotten, in Rus as well as in modern scholarship. The Riurikid dynasty, supported by the ecclesiastical hierarchy, managed to promote their own martyrs in the shape of the two princelings, Boris and Gleb. Nevertheless, before that happened a Prologue Life describing the two Varangians’ martyrdom seems to have been composed in the second half of the eleventh century. So too, it would seem, was a Prologue Life of the man implicated in their deaths, St Vladimir: a life that likewise stressed Vladimir’s Varangian origins.

As Scandinavians returning as Christians from Byzantium, the Varangian father and son seem typical of those Varangians who, one or two generations earlier, had
made the same journey and thus contributed to the formation of early Christianity in Rus. Later, towards the end of the eleventh century, the situation was different in many respects. First and foremost, Christianity had struck root both in Rus and in the Scandinavian homeland—the former linked to the Orthodox church, the latter to the Latin. In both regions there seems to have been a growing awareness of differences between Greek Orthodoxy and the Latin rites of the west. Nevertheless, at the beginning these differences mattered hardly at all.

In Rus this can be seen in the early history of the Kievan Caves Monastery, as described in the monastery’s Paterik. In addition to the more or less accidental naming of the two Varangians as ‘proto-martyrs’ in Rus, other Varangians rooted in the Latin confession and epitomised by the magnate Simon-Shimon are given prominent roles. They were instrumental not only in the material foundation of this celebrated monastery but, bestowed with almost Christ-like qualities, these Varangians are also depicted in the Paterik as co-founders of the Christianity that came to be practised there. As a result, Christianity is presented in the Paterik as a blend of influences from both Constantinople and the Latin west, much as I think the term ‘Varangian Christianity’ should be understood.
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Glossary

A: Arabic
G: Greek
L: Latin
ON: Old Norse
OS: Old Slavonic

Althing (alþingi) [ON] assemblies of free men (þing) which took place regularly in early Scandinavian society; in Iceland, the Althing was an annual meeting which took place around mid-summer at Þingvellir from the early tenth century on

basileus (m.), basilissa (f.) [G] main formal designation of the Byzantine emperor from the seventh century on

Black Earth region of original settlement in Birka (see Fig. 11.1 on 257)

bóndi (s.), bændr (pl.) [ON] literally ‘head of the household’; generally used of farm-owners or property-owners; free men with the right to bear arms; obliged to follow a chieftain and accompany him to the spring þing; and either to pay a þing-attendance tax or to participate in the Althing

Borre-style (see also Ringerike-style and Urnes-style) popular from the later ninth to mid-tenth centuries in areas settled by the Vikings, and taking its name from a find at Borre, in Vestfold, Norway, this style was used mainly for jewellery and woodwork decorations and featured plaited knots and ring-chain patterns, together with stylised animals

bracteate (from [L] bractea, a thin piece of metal) Migration Period medallions worn as jewellery; generally flat, thin, single-sided discs made of gold

chape the metal plate of a scabbard, especially that which covers and protects the point

chrysobull ‘golden bull’, from ‘gold’ ([G] chryso-) and ‘seal’ ([G] boulla) the imperial chancery’s most solemn document, usually dated, and bearing the emperor’s signature in purple ink and a golden boulla

Danevirke Viking-Age defensive earthwork which aimed to separate the Jutland peninsula from the northern Frankish realm (see Map 1.2)

dirham [A] (from [G] drachma) standard Islamic silver coin

divitision [G] long ceremonial silk tunic for use on the highest state occasions in Byzantium; worn belted under the loros by the emperor and sometimes other court officials

Edda two thirteenth-century Icelandic books which are our main source of knowledge about Scandinavian mythology; can refer to either the Prose (Younger) Edda, a handbook of Icelandic poetry written c. 1230; or the Poetic (Elder) Edda, a handbook of Icelandic poetry attributed to Snorri Sturluson

epimanikion (s.), epimanikia (pl.) [G] thickened fabric cuffs, normally of brocade, which form part of the liturgical vestments in the eastern Orthodox church

follis (s.), folles (pl.) [G] principal copper coin worth 288 to the nomisma

futhark [ON] form of runic alphabet; the older futhark was used by Germanic tribes from the second to eighth centuries; the younger futhark (also called Scandinavian runes) was a reduced form of the older futhark (see Fig. 8.5 on 192)

Garðaríki [ON] ‘the realm of cities’, used to mean the land of the Rus
Byzantium and the Viking World

**hack-silver** silver fragments treated as bullion, either for ease of carrying before melting down for re-use, or simply used as currency by weight; common among Vikings, as a result of both raiding and trading

**lawspeaker** senior regional official in Scandinavian society, often presiding over the bing, acting as a judge and formulating the laws as decided at the bing

**loros** [G] long brocade scarf, studded with precious stones, draped around the shoulders and upper body and worn by the Byzantine emperor and empress

**Migration Period** although the migration of the Teutonic tribes beyond the Roman empire—the Visigoths, Ostrogoths, Lombards, Franks and Vandals—started in the second century, the term Migration Period usually describes the great movements in the fifth and sixth centuries

**Miklagårdr** [ON] Constantinople

**miliareson** (s.), **miliaresia** (pl.) [G] the basic silver coin, introduced by Emperor Leo III (717–741) and worth 12 to the nomisma; characteristic in eighth- to eleventh-century Byzantium

**monoxylon** (s.), **monoxyla** (pl.) [G] literally ‘single piece of wood’ or ‘timber’; Byzantine term for the craft used by the Rus to navigate the River Dnieper and then sail across the Black Sea to Constantinople

**niello** mixture of copper, silver and lead sulphides, used to create a black inlay on engraved metal

**ódal** [ON] land held in absolute ownership, without obligation or service to an overlord (in western terminology, allodial)

**passement** edging on a garment with decorative braiding

**patrikios** [G] senior Byzantine court-title, often bestowed on holders of offices such as stratēgos

**penannular brooch** used to fasten clothes, featuring a large pin attached to an incomplete circle

**pommei** the knob terminating the hilt of a sword

**prooimion** (s.) **prooimia** (pl.) [G] preface, preamble

**Ringerike-style** (see also Borre-style and Urnes-style) a late tenth- and eleventh-century form of Scandinavian decoration featuring animals and entwined leafy scrolls; named after the Ringerike district near Oslo which provided much of the sandstone used in carving this style

**samite** a rich silk fabric worn in the middle ages, sometimes interwoven with gold

**scabbard** the case or sheath which protects the blade of a sword

**sebastos** (s.), **sebastoi** (pl.) [G] court-title introduced by Alexios I Komnenos and conferred on members of the Komnenian elite or foreign rulers; the root for other titles such as pansebastos

**sericin** the gelatinous constituent of silk; the gum which coats silk fibres, enabling them to stick together

**silk tabby** a general term for a silk taffeta, originally striped but later applied to silks of uniform colour waved or watered; named after the quarter of Baghdad in which it was originally manufactured

**sinodik** [OS] a list of the dead to be remembered in church services

**skald** [ON] Scandinavian poet of the middle ages
Glossary

**skraeling** [ON] term for indigenous inhabitants of North American and Greenland

**solidus** (s.) **solidi** (pl.) [L] ([G] nomisma/nomismata) gold coin struck at 72 to the pound of gold, valued at 12 miliaresia

**Svear** one of the two main Swedish peoples (along with the Götar), who were based around Lake Mälar

**Synaxarion** [G] a compilation of Lives of saints in the eastern Orthodox church

**tablet-woven** a weaving technique using tablets or cards, commonly used for belts and straps in the Viking Age

**Tating-ware pottery** eighth-century Rhine-land-made ceramic pitchers, decorated with applied tin foil, and widely traded around the North Sea zone

**terminus post quem** (tpq) [L] the date after which an artefact must have been deposited

**Thing** (Þing) [ON] an assembly of free men in Scandinavian society

**Urnes-style** (see also Borre-style and Ring-erike-style) named after the stave church at Urnes, Sogn in western Norway, a twelfth-century reconstruction which incorporated earlier timbers; it is these timbers which give the name to this mid-eleventh to early twelfth century style showing animals biting each other along with a thin, interlacing or inter-penetrating ribbon

**Viking Age** a period of Norse expansion and conquest from the later eighth to the mid- to late eleventh century

**Vinland** Scandinavian term for North America
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