

Ritual and History:

Pagan Rites in the Story of the Princess' Revenge (the Russian *Primary Chronicle*, under 945–946) ¹

Aleksandr Koptev

Introduction

The Kievan prince Igor is known to have been murdered by tribesmen of the tributary Drevljans during a journey he made to their country with the purpose of collecting the tribute. The case is described in the *Primary Chronicle* under the year 945:

6453 (945). In this year, Igor's retinue said to him, 'The servants of Sveinald are adorned with weapons and fine raiment, but we are naked. Go forth with us, oh Prince, after tribute, that both you and we may profit thereby'. Igor heeded their words, and he attacked Dereva in search of tribute. He sought to increase the previous tribute and collected it by violence from the people with the assistance of his followers. After thus gathering the tribute, he returned to his city. On his homeward way, he said to his followers, after some reflection, 'Go forward with the tribute. I shall turn back, and rejoin you later'. He dismissed his retainers on their journey homeward, but being desirous of still greater booty he returned on his tracks with a few of his followers. The Derevlans heard that he was again approaching, and consulted with Mal, their prince, saying, 'If a wolf comes among the sheep, he will take away the whole flock one by one, unless he be killed. If we do not thus kill him now, he will destroy us all'. They

¹ The article is based on my paper 'Water and Fire as the Road to the Mythic Other World: Princess Olga and the Murdered Ambassadors in the Russian *Primary Chronicle*, under 945' delivered at the *Septième Colloque International d'anthropologie du monde indo-européen et de mythologie comparée "Routes et parcours mythiques: des textes à l'archéologie"*, Louvain-la-Neuve, March 19–21, 2009. I am very grateful to Professor Claude Sterckx (Université libre de Bruxelles) for his friendly support and for his kind permission to republish here the materials used in my 'An Indo-European Funeral Ritual in the Russian *Primary Chronicle sub anno 945*', *Ollodagos: Actes de la Société Belge d'Études Celtiques*, XXIV (2010), 181–221. My thanks also go to my dear friend, Dr. Philip Line (Helsinki) for reading a draft of this paper and for taking the time to discuss points arising. He bears no responsibility for opinions here expressed.

then sent forward to Igor' inquiring why he had returned, since he had collected all the tribute. But Igor' did not heed them, and the Derevljans came forth from the city of Iskorosten' and slew Igor' and his company, for the number of the latter was few. So Igor' was buried, and his tomb is near the city of Iskorosten' in Dereva even to this day.²

The story was also known to contemporaries outside Kievan Rus'. Leo the Deacon, the Byzantine historian born around 950, adds some remarkable features to the circumstances of the Prince Igor's death. Describing the meeting between the prince Svjatoslav and the Byzantine Emperor John Tzimiskes in 971, Leo the Deacon puts the following passage into the mouth of the Emperor:

I believe that you have not forgotten the defeat of your father Ingor who, having disdained the oath treaty, had come to our capital with a huge army on ten thousand ships, and arrived at the Cimmerian Bosphorus with only ten boats, himself becoming the messenger of his troubles. I do not mention his even more pitiful destiny when, having gone on a campaign against Germans, he was taken prisoner by them, tied to the trunks of trees and torn in two.³

Although the tale of Igor's death contains valuable information that itself needs a comparative analysis, in this article I intend to examine the events that happened after the murder of the prince. His killing precipitated a series of violent deaths performed by the servants of Prince Igor's widow, Princess Olga. First, she ordered that the embassy from the Drevljans who arrived in Kiev be buried alive in a deep ditch dug in the yard of her palace. Then she demanded that the Drevljans send to Kiev their 'noblest men' and her

² *The Russian primary chronicle: Laurentian text*, S. Hazzard Cross and O.P. Sherbowitz-Wetzor trans. and ed., The Mediaeval Academy of America: Cambridge, MA 1953 (hereafter *The Russian primary chronicle*), 78. For this and the following fragments of the Russian text according to the Laurentian (1377), Radziwill (1490s), Academy (the end of 15th century), Hypatian (ca. 1425), and Khlebnikov (16th century) compilations, see *The Pověst' vremennykh lët: An Interlinear Collation and Paradosis*, Donald Ostrowski with David J. Birnbaum and Horace G. Lunt ed. and coll. (Harvard Library of Early Ukrainian Literature, Texts 10: 1–3), Harvard 2003 (hereafter *The Pověst' vremennykh lët Interlinear Collation*), 326–378.

³ See Leonis Diaconi *Historiae*, B.G. Niebuhr ed., (Corpus scriptorium historiae Byzantinae 11), W. Weber: Bonn 1828, 6.10, 106; *The History of Leo the Deacon. Byzantine Military Expansion in the Tenth Century*, trans. and annot. by Alice-Mary Talbot and Denis F. Sullivan, (Dumbarton Oaks Studies 41), Washington, D.C. 2005, 156, and the comment of Hans Ditten, 'Zu Germanoi-Derevljane in Leon Diakonos' Geschichtswerk, VI, 10', *Byzantinoslavica* 45 (1984), 183–189, here at 188.

servants set fire to the bathhouse where the men washed themselves, so that they were burnt alive. Finally, the princess went to the place where her husband was buried and, during a funeral banquet, ordered the massacre of thousands of Drevljans. Next year Princess Olga departed for the land of the Drevljans with the Kievan army, where she besieged and burned their capital, slaughtering the majority of its population. The medieval compiler of the *Primary Chronicle* and modern scholars alike see in the series of violent deaths successive stages of revenge by Princess Olga on the Drevljans for the murder of her husband.⁴

Francis Butler argues similarity of the vengeance committed by Olga to the acts of revenge performed by the epic Germanic women, Guðrún in the Eddic *Atlamál in Groenlenzko* and the prose *Völsunga saga*, Skjalf the daughter of a Finnish chieftain in *Heimskringla* (*Ynglinga saga*, chapter 19), and Queen Krimshild (Grimhild) in *The Song of the Nibelungs* (*Nibelungenglied*).⁵ He assumes that the stories of the four women all arise from a common proto-epos (or proto-ethos) with a distinct code for feminine behaviour. The motive of revenge is, however, unusual in Russian literature and folklore, and it may have been added to the story under an external, most likely Scandinavian, influence.⁶ This can be seen clearly in the similar story of the revenge of Princess Rogneda of Polotzk, known from the *Laurentian Chronicle* under the year 1128 (as well as in two manuscripts closely related to it, the *Radziwill* and *Academy Chronicles*).⁷ The motif of Rogneda's

⁴ For instance, see Vasilij Nikitich Tatischev, *Istorija Rossijskaja*, 2, "Nauka": Moskva, Leningrad 1963, 44–45; Nikolaj Mikhajlovich Karamzin, *Istorija Gosudarstva Rossijskogo*, 1, "Kniga": Moskva 1989, 120–121; Sergej Mikhajlovich Solovjev, *Sochinenija v 18 tomakh*, 1, "Nauka": Moskva 1988, 147–148; Vladimir Vasiljevich Mavrodin, *Obrazovanie Drevnerusskogo Gosudarstva*, Izdatelstvo Leningradskogo universiteta: Leningrad 1945, 248–9.

⁵ Francis Butler, 'A Woman of Words: Pagan Ol'ga in the Mirror of Germanic Europe', *Slavic Review* 63 (2004), 771–793.

⁶ See Sergej Leonidovich Nikolskij, 'O kharaktere uchastija zhenschin v krovnoj mesti (Skandinavija i Drevnjaja Rus')', in *Drevnejšie Gosudarstva Vostočnoj Evropy 1999*, "Vostochnaja literatura": Moskva 2001, 160–168. For vengeance in medieval Scandinavia, see Kaaren Grimstad, 'The Revenge of Völundr', in Robert J. Glendinning and Haraldur Bessason (eds), *Edda: A Collection of Essays*, University of Manitoba Press: Winnipeg 1983, 187–209; William Ian Miller, 'Choosing the Avenger: Some Aspects of the Bloodfeud in Medieval Iceland and England', *Law and History Review*, 1 (1983), 159–204; *idem*, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland*, The University of Chicago Press: Chicago, IL 1990, 179–220; *idem*, 'In Defense of Revenge', in Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (eds), *Medieval Crime and Social Control*, University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis 1999, 70–89. Cf. Susanna A. Throop and Paul R. Hyams (eds), *Vengeance in the Middle Ages: Emotion Religion and Feud*, Ashgate: Farnham – Burlington, VA 2010.

⁷ Inés García de la Puente, 'The Revenge of the Princess: Some considerations about Heroines in the PVL* and in other Indo-European Literatures', in *Medieval Slavonic Studies*, Institut d'études slaves: Paris 2009, 193–202, at 196–197, discusses the similarity of Rogneda's vengeance to the Scandinavian legend of Guðrún's revenge, in *Heimskringla* (chapters 76–78) and in *Völsunga saga* (chapters 34 and 40). Also see Adolf Stender-Petersen, *Die Varagersage als Quelle der Altrussischen Chronik*, (*Acta Jutlandica* 6, 1), Aarhus–Leipzig 1934, 210–244: esp. 215–220.

vengeance, her attempt to kill her own husband, seems to me an obvious later addition to the original story of Rogneda, known in the *Primary Chronicle* under the year 980. One can surmise that this came about through later influence, in which the princess Rogneda and her father Rogvolod (Norse: *Ragnvald*) were imagined as Varangian (Scandinavian) rulers of Polotzk.⁸ Shakhmatov is almost certainly correct when he suggests that the story derives from the later Novgorodian tradition, which asserted the superiority of the clan of Jaroslav's descendants in comparison to Rogvolod's descendants ruling in Polotzk.⁹ The Jaroslavichi were known for their propensity to adopt Scandinavian culture. The article of Butler demonstrates that from the perspective of the compiler of the *Primary Chronicle* in the 1110s, Rus' knew and accepted those symbolic gestures relating to the vengeance of which we know from the Scandinavian storytellers, rather than the tenth-century Kiev was within the Nordic cultural region. The story of Olga's revenge could be the product of a literary exercise by the learned compiler drawn into the tradition of symbols and rituals common to early medieval Northern and Eastern Europe of his time. A comparison with the story of Rogneda allows suggesting that there could be also an earlier version of Olga's relationship with the Drevljans which had nothing to do with the idea of vengeance.

For the purpose of our investigation it is important to stress that Prince Jaroslav's dynasty was close connected through kinship with the noble families, politics and culture of the northern European world. The relationship started in 1015–1019 when Scandinavian mercenaries helped the Novgorodians in their struggle against Kievan dominance and the Novgorodian prince Jaroslav married the princess Ingegerd Olofsdotter, daughter of the king of Sweden. Later Jaroslav's son Svjatoslav was married with Oda, daughter of a certain 'Count Lippold', and the sister of Burkhard,

⁸ The legend surrounding Rogneda is closely related to the legend about the Chersonese princess and the prince Jaropolk's widow, all being raped by Prince Vladimir. See Aleksej Aleksandrovich Shakhmatov, *Razyskanija o Russkikh letopisjakh*, "Akademicheskij projekt", "Kuchkovo pole": Moskva 2001 [1908], 101–103 and 129–130; Dmitrij Sergeevich Likhachev, 'Kommentary', in *Povest' vremennikh let*, V.P. Adrianova-Peretz ed., 2nd revised edition, "Nauka": Sankt-Petersburg 1996, 449; Inés García de la Puente, *Perspectivas indoeuropeas en la Cronica de Nestor: analisis comparado de su contenido con el de otras tradiciones indoeuropeas. Incluye traduccion al espanol*, Unpublished PhD thesis, Universidad Complutense de Madrid 2005, 273–275 (I am very grateful to the author for access to the thesis).

⁹ Shakhmatov 2001, 109, 130, 177, 181–182, 267, 370, argues that both the versions of the legend as it appears in the *Primary Chronicle* under 980 and the version of the *Laurentian Chronicle* under 1128 derive from a previous legend that appeared in a hypothetical *Novgordian Compilation*. He favours the priority of the readings of the version under 1128 over the ones under 980. Meanwhile, Francis Butler, 'The House of Rogvolod', in F.B. Uspenskij ed., *Imenoslov. Istoricheskaja semantika imeni*, 2, "Indrik": Moskva 2007, 189–204, at 198–200, favours the chronological priority of the version under 980.

provost of Trier. Oda's grand-uncles were Pope Leo IX and Henry III, Holy Roman Emperor. Jaroslav's daughter Elizabeth was married to Harald III (*Hardrade*) of Norway, who had attained her hand by his military exploits in the Byzantine Empire. Another daughter may have been the Agatha who married Edward the Exile, heir to the throne of England and was the mother of Edgar Ætheling and Queen Margaret of Scotland. Jaroslav's grandson Vladimir Monomakh's second marriage was to Gytha of Wessex, the daughter of Harold Godwinson, the last Anglo-Saxon king of England before the Norman Conquest. Gytha was the mother of Mstislav the Great (also called Harald), the last ruler of united Kievan Rus'. In 1095–1122, Mstislav was married to Princess Christine, daughter of King Inge I of Sweden. Their oldest daughter Ingeborg married Canute Lavard, a Jarl/Duke of Sleswig (who temporarily put an end to the attacks of the Slavic tribes and was elected 'King of the Obodrits') and was mother to Valdemar I of Denmark. Her sister Malmfred was first married to Sigurd I of Norway and second to Eric II of Denmark.

Thus, the family of Prince Vladimir Monomakh and his son Mstislav the Great was closely connected with the Scandinavian world. It was during their period of rule, ca. 1110, that the *Primary Chronicle (Tale of Bygone Years or Povest' vremennykh let)* was supposedly created by the monk Nestor in the Kievan Pecherskij monastery. However, Nestor did not write the whole text of the chronicle from nothing; he used the chronicles of the previous compilers, which originated in at least ca. 1039. At this time the Novgorodian prince Jaroslav (called later 'the Wise') finally established himself as the only Kievan ruler (his last rival having died in 1036) and his political regime brought about many innovations in Russian culture. According to the reconstruction of Aleksej Shakhmatov, the building of the Church of St. Sophia in Kiev was accompanied with the making of the *Oldest Compilation (Drevnejshij Svod)*, and the dedication of the Church of Sophia in Novgorod with the compilation of the *Novgorodian First Chronicle* in ca. 1050. According to Shakhmatov, a *Compilation* was made by Nikon, a learned monk of the Pecherskij monastery, in 1073. The changing political and cultural situation under Jaroslav's descendants demanded the recovery of some of the ideas which had inspired the *Oldest Compilation*. For similar reasons the *Initial Compilation (Nachalnyj Svod)* was written in 1093–1095, during a period of sharp rivalry between the grandsons of Jaroslav the Wise, Svyatopolk Izjaslavich and Vladimir Vsevolodovich Monomakh.

This was the background against which the *Primary Chronicle* was compiled by Nestor, at the time when Prince Vladimir Monomakh and his

successors began their domination in the Russian commonwealth. The chronicle of Nestor was supposedly twice redacted, in about 1116 and 1118, under the influence of Vladimir Monomakh and his son Mstislav.¹⁰ Every stage of Shakhmatov's reconstruction has been much discussed, and continues to be discussed in modern scholarship: there seems to be greater doubt about the *Oldest Compilation* and Nikon's compilation of 1073 than about the *Initial Compilation* of the 1090s, which in one or another form has been accepted by many scholars.¹¹ Keeping in mind that Shakhmatov's reconstruction is not indisputable, his chronology of the early annalistic records is followed here, as it is the best available.¹²

One of the first scholars who tried to look beyond the motive of revenge for the events of 945–946 was Dmitrij Likhachev, who suggested that the text of the chronicle concealed archaic notions which required interpretation.¹³ Likhachev assumed that the princely succession of the

¹⁰ A separate problem is the redactions of the *Initial Compilation* in the 1110's. See Ludolf Müller, 'Die "dritte Redaktion" der sogenannten Nestorchronik', in Peter Brang ed., *Festschrift für Margarete Woltner zum 70. Geburtstag am 4. Dezember 1967*, Winter: Heidelberg 1967, 171–186; Oleg Viktorovich Tvorogov, 'Suschestvovala li tretija redakcija "Povesti Vremennikh let"', in N.M. Botvinnik, E.I. Vaneeva (eds), *In Memoriam: Sbornik pamjati Ja.S. Lurje*, Sankt-Peterburg 1997, 203–209; Donald Ostrowski, 'Principles of Editing the Primary Chronicle', *Paleoslavica* 7 (1999), 5–25; Alan Timberlake, 'Redactions of the Primary Chronicle', *Russkij jazyk v nauchnom osveschenii* 1/2001, 196–218; Aleksej Alekseevich Gippius, 'K probleme redaktzij Povesti vremennikh let', *Slavjanovedenie* 5/2007, 20–44; 2/2008, 3–24; Petr Petrovich Tolochko, 'Redakcija Povesti Vremennikh let igumena Silvestra: istoricheskaja realnost' ili uchenaja fiktzija?' *Ruthenica* 7 (2008), 130–139.

¹¹ See Mark Khaimovich Aleshkovskij, *Povest' vremennikh let: Sudjba literaturnogo proizvedenija v Drevnej Rusi*, "Nauka": Moskva 1971, 57–62; Jakov Solomonovich Lurje, 'Genealogicheskaja skhema letopisej XI–XVI vv., vkljuchennykh v sostav "Slovarja knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnej Rusi"', *Trudy Otdela Drevne-Russkoj Literatury* 40 (1985), 190–205; Vladimir Jakovlevich Petrukhin, 'Nikon i Tmutorokan': K probleme rekonstrukcii nachalnogo russkogo letopisanija', in *Vostochnaja Evropa v drevnosti i srednevekovje: Avtor i tekst. XV chtenija pamjati V.T. Pashuto. Moskva 15–17 aprolja 2003 g. Materialy konferenczii*, Moskva 2003, 194–198; Donald Ostrowski, 'The Načal'nyj Svod Theory and the Povest' Vremennyx let', *Russian Linguistic* 31 (2007), 269–308.

¹² See Mikhail Dmitrievich Pricelkov, *Istorija russkogo letopisanija XI–XV vv.* 2nd ed., "Dmitrij Bulanin": Sankt-Peterburg 1996, 49–84; Sergej Bugoslavskij, "'Povest' vremennikh let" (spiski, redaktzii, pervonachalnij tekst)', in N.K. Gudzij red., *Starinnaja russkaja povest': Statji i issledovanija*, Moskva–Leninrad 1941, 7–37; Dmitrij Sergeevich Likhachev, *Russkie letopisi i ikh kulturno-istoricheskoe znachenie*, Moskva–Leningrad 1947; Lev Vladimirovich Cherepnin, 'Povest' vremennikh let, ee redaktzii i pedshestvujuschie ej letopisnye svody', *Istoricheskie zapiski* 25 (1948), 293–333; Oleg Viktorovich Tvorogov, 'Povest' vremennikh let', in *Slovar knizhnikov i knizhnosti Drevnej Rusi. T.I.: XI – pervaja polovina XIV v.* Leningrad 1987, 237–243; Jakov Solomonovich Lurje, 'Skhema istorii letopisanija A.A. Shakhmatova i M.D. Priselkova i zadachi daljneshhego issledovanija letopisej', *Trudy Otdela Drevne-Russkoj Literatury* 44 (1990), 185–195; Donald Ostrowski, 'Introduction', in David Ostrowski, David Birnbaum, Donald J. Lunt (eds) *The Povest' vremennyx let: An Interlinear Collation and Paradosis*, The Ukrainian Research Institute of Harvard University: Cambridge, MA 2003, XXXII–LXI; Aleksej Alekseevich Gippius, 'Rekosha družhina Igorevi... K lingvotekstologicheskoi stratifikacii nachalnoj letopisi', *Russian Linguistics* 25 (2001), 147–181. Cf. Andrzej Poppe, 'A.A. Shakhmatov i spornye nachala russkogo letopisanija', *Drevnjaja Rus': problemy medievistiki* 3 (2008), 76–85.

¹³ Likhachev 1947, 132–138; Idem, 'Kommentary', in *Povest' vremennikh let*, V.P. Adrianova-Peretz ed., "Nauka": Moskva–Leninrad 1950, T. 2, 296–297; Idem, 'Narodnoe poeticheskoe tvorcestvo vremeni

Drevljans was not dependent upon the birth and lineage of the prince, but that the one who succeeded in killing the previous prince and marrying his widow became the heir of the throne. Thus the Drevljan prince, Mal, whose envoys were killed on the order of Princess Olga, had intended to take princely power in Kiev. Therefore, Likhachev interpreted the murder of Mal's wedding envoys as a conflict between innovative patriarchal principles of the Poljanians and the obsolete matriarchical rules of the Drevljans.¹⁴ By murdering the envoys Princess Olga demonstrated her refusal to marry the prince Mal. The chronicle, as a literary narrative, describes the story with metaphors borrowed from a funeral ritual. According to the folkloric tradition, Princess Olga offered riddles to the Drevljans and they were unable to unravel them. Allegory in the words of the princess had a dual sense: Olga gave the Drevljans the choice between wedding and burial. The situation has many analogies in Russian fairy tales, where an erroneous resolution of the stated task entailed inevitable death. According to Likhachev, the thrice-repeated massacre of the Drevljans also has a symbolic meaning and was borrowed from the folkloric genre, where there is a rule that all significant events be repeated three times.

Following Likhachev, Boris Rybakov surmised that the *Primary Chronicle* unified three versions of Princess Olga's revenge, which were written in different genres: the annalistic compilation, the epic legend and the political tractate in the form of a fairy tale.¹⁵ Each of the versions represents a fictitious story about different events. The story of the murder of the Drevljan nobility in the princely yard in Kiev and the massacre of five thousand Drevljans after the funeral banquet are not considered real events by Rybakov, because in the chronicle there is another, more plausible version of the war between Kiev and the Drevljans. Rybakov assumes that Olga's revenge was described by the compiler according to the pattern of the pagan princely funeral ritual: burial in a boat, burning in a 'house', building of a burial mound, *trizna* and funeral banquet.

Thrice-repeated actions, the three forms of Olga's revenge, are of folkloric origins. The princess is represented by the compiler as an epic wise heroine, who defeats her enemies by her own wit and with the help of only a 'small' retinue. The events are represented in fantastic epic form as the

rastzveta drevnerusskogo rannefeodalnogo gosudarstva X–XI vv.', in V.P. Adrianova-Peretz ed., *Russkoe narodnoe poeticheskoe tvorčestvo*, Moskva–Lenindrad 1953, 163–167; Likhachev 1996, 435–439.

¹⁴ For useful comments on the way of choosing rulers and on matriarchy, see Butler 2004, 775 n. 24; 777 n. 37.

¹⁵ Boris Aleksandrovich Rybakov, *Kievskaja Rus' i russkie knjazhestva, XII–XIII vv.*, "Nauka": Moskva 1982, 360–362; *idem*, *Jazychestvo Drevnej Rusi*, "Nauka": Moskva 1987, 365–375.

performance of a grandiose pagan funeral ritual. Its first stage is represented by the people in a boat on the burning logs of oak, the sacred tree of Perun. Then the 'best' of the Drevljan nobility were burnt in a bath-house, actually departing to the otherworld together with their prince. Rybakov emphasizes here the archaic custom which demanded that the princely (royal) retinue should die together with their patron. And finally, the ritual ended with the sacrifice of thousands of people on the new funeral mound. All this resembles not only the contemporaneous funeral ritual described by Akhmed Ibn Fadlan in 921, but also a much more ancient mound burial of the Scythians, which was accompanied by mass human sacrifices. In Rybakov's opinion, the legendary story of the burning of the city of Iskorosten with the help of incendiary pigeons and sparrows also belongs to the epic genre based on folklore. Rybakov surmised that the whole story of Princess Olga was a political tractate, which was created by a contemporary compiler of the events described in the tenth century. It was forty years before Kievan Rus' was converted to Christianity, and the author of the treatise wrote from the point of view of a pagan priesthood. Christian compilers of the late eleventh century borrowed the story from a pagan chronicle.

By contrast, Igor Frojanov assumes that the compilation of the events of 945 was not made earlier than the late eleventh or the early twelfth century.¹⁶ Rejecting the idea of funeral and wedding rituals, Frojanov sees in the chronicle's story the description of actual events of the mid-tenth century. In his opinion, the background to the events was a pagan custom of taking princely power by the murdering the reigning prince. The compiler, who wrote a hundred and fifty years after the time of Princess Olga, rewrote the obsolete custom as a wedding ceremony. In reality, the arrival of the Drevljan envoys at Kiev was a customary procedure occasioned by the transfer of power to the Drevljan prince Mal, the victor of a struggle in which the Kievan prince Igor had been killed. The Drevljan ambassadors arrived at the Poljanian capital as representatives of an enemy tribe entering an alien country. Therefore, in Frojanov's opinion, the savage reprisals taken against them were a continuation of the war, Kiev's fight for its own independence rather than revenge by the princess. Frojanov stresses the ritualistic character of Olga's actions, which allows him to treat both massacres of the Drevljans in Kiev as sacrifices to the underground gods and the heavenly gods. The sacrifices had the character of a purification, because

¹⁶ Igor Jakovlevich Frojanov, *Drevnjaja Rus'*, Izdatelstvo "Zlatoust": Moskva, Sankt-Peterburg 1995, 59–72.

the Drevljans were strangers in Kiev and their 'best men', who were burnt in the bath-house, had the reputation of magicians and wizards. The third mass execution of Drevljans, completed after the funeral banquet on Prince Igor's grave, is considered by Frojanov an offering to the prince. The triple human sacrifice – burial in a pit, burning in a bath-house, and massacre on the grave – were performed by the Kievan community in connection with the preparation of a military campaign against the Drevljans. The compiler of the *Primary Chronicle* reinterpreted the human offerings, which Princess Olga gave to the gods from the name of the Poljanians, as her vengeance. In this way the Christian compiler tried to reconcile two conflicting images of Princess Olga, the first Christian ruler in Kiev and the pagan princess who performed human sacrifices. Vengeance was more acceptable than pagan sacrifice, especially when performed before Olga was baptized.

Recently Inés García de la Puente has considered the revenge by Princess Olga in the context of the Indo-European mythological tradition.¹⁷ Like Likhachev and Frojanov, she examines the marriage of Olga with Prince Igor and the marriage proposal by Prince Mal in the light of the idea of the woman as keeper of sovereignty among early peoples. She finds analogies to Princess Olga in the images of Queen Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey*, Draupadī in *Mahābhārata*, Brunhild in *The Song of the Nibelungs*, and Rhiannon in the Middle Welsh prose tales of the *Mabinogi*, as each of them delivered the kingdom to her spouse (respectively Odysseus, Arjuna, Siegfried and Gunther, and Pwyll). Unlike Frojanov, Inés García follows the narrative of the medieval compiler, according to which Prince Igor was killed by the Drevljans for his greed and three groups of Drevljans were sent to Kiev to ask Olga to take their prince Mal as her husband. The first group was buried alive in their boat, the second group was burned alive in the bath-house, and the third group was slaughtered in Igor's funerary ritual.

The three revenges *sub anno* 945 repeat the same narrative structure, while the fourth action of the princess is structurally and temporarily separated from the former ones. Although Olga went on to take further revenge by besieging the Drevljan city in the following year (946), this is considered another story, which should be kept separate from the legend of her three-stage scheme to go among the Drevljans under the pretence of a marriage proposal.¹⁸ With a possible link to Scandinavian *Kriegslistanekdoten*,

¹⁷ García de la Puente 2005, 255–272.

¹⁸ Robert L. Fischer, 'Indo-European Elements in Baltic and Slavic Chronicles', in J. Puhvel ed. *Myth and Law among Indo-Europeans, studies in Indo-European comparative mythology* (Publications of the UCLA, Center for the Study of Comparative Folklore and Mythology 1), University of California Press: Berkeley, CA 1970, 147–158: at 157.

the fourth act of revenge may be a later addition to the *Primary Chronicle*. The idea of a later interpolation, added by Nestor to the *Initial Compilation* of 1095, was already proposed by Aleksej Shakhmatov.¹⁹ This followed from his observation that the story of the capture of the Drevljan capital is missing from the 946 entry in the *Novgorodian First Chronicle*.²⁰ In the opinion of Vasilij Istrin, however, the story of the fall of the Drevljan city Iskorosten with the help of incendiary birds is not an interpolation, because it logically follows on from the previous narration.²¹

The first three murders may be considered manifestations of the Dumézilean three functions, but the fourth one is more difficult to interpret. This is perhaps why Inés García dismisses the fourth revenge of the princess with an entirely different explanation. The multiplicity of stories of incendiary birds in the medieval Germanic and many other ancient and medieval traditions leads her to conclude that the story of Olga's capture of the Drevljan capital had a fictional and legendary character. She points to a literary *trickster* in many parts of Princess Olga's history (Olga's speech to the Drevljan envoys; the capture of Iskorosten with the help of incendiary birds; Olga's response to the Byzantine Emperor's proposal). This is why she focuses her attention on the first three stages of the vengeance, identifying in them an analogy with comparable Indo-European literature and Georges Dumézil's theory of the three functions. The threefold murder gives a tripartite structure to the narrative, in which the first function (F1) corresponds with sacrality and sovereignty, the second (F2) with war and physical force, and the third (F3) with wealth and fertility.

Robert Fischer had already pointed out that Princess Olga brought revenge upon all three social classes: warriors, rulers, and common people, in that order (see Fig. 1).²² The 'best men, twenty in number', whom the prince Mal sent to Kiev as envoys and who were killed in the first phase of Olga's revenge, he sees as warriors. Her second group of victims were the distinguished men 'who governed the land of Dereva', that is, the rulers. And finally, the people at large became victims, the five thousand participants in their own funeral feast. Fischer draws attention to the fact that the methods of killing the representative members of each social group present problems from an 'Indo-European point of view'. Burial alive is

¹⁹ Shakhmatov 2001, 84–87, 250–151, 266–167.

²⁰ *Novgorodskaja pervaja letopis starshego i mladshego izvodov* (Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisej, t. 3), 'Izdatelstvo Akademii Nauk SSSR': Moskva–Leningrad 1950 (reprint Moskva 2000), 112–113.

²¹ Vasilij Mikhajlovich Istrin, *Zamechanija o nachale russkogo letopisanija: Po povodu issledovanij A.A. Shakhmatova*, Leningrad 1924, 56–57.

²² Fischer 1970, 157–158.

usually taken as appropriate to the third function, while deaths by fire and by the sword belong to the second function. In Olga's story, however, the first revenge episode is connected with the Scandinavian theme of ship burial rather, than with an appropriate form of execution with respect to Indo-European ideology. Also, the second execution by burning befits rather the second function, not the first function in Olga's case. In the massacre of common people, the means of death was the sword.

Motive	Social class		Method of death	
first revenge	warriors	F2	live burial	F3
second revenge	rulers	F1	fire	F2
third revenge	common people	F3	sword	F2

Fig. 1

On the whole Inés García sympathizes with Donald Ward's elaboration of Dumézil's concept, according to which the three functions correspond to the Indo-European threefold death pattern as practised among Germanic-speaking peoples and Celts.²³ The first function (F1) may be associated with hanging; the second (F2) with weapon (or burning); and the third (F3) with drowning (or burial alive) (see Fig. 2). On this basis she proposes that the kind of death inflicted in the first stage of the revenge, burial alive, is a representation of the third function (F3). Following Likhachev, she gives the first stage of revenge a folkloristic interpretation: Olga's words are a concealed riddle foretelling death, the death in the boat perhaps betraying Scandinavian influence. Burning has a purifying connotation in Indo-European cultures, so that, to take a comparative Indo-European approach, the kind of death used for the second revenge, fire or burning in a bathhouse, might be related to the first function (F1), which traditionally relates to the sacred and to sovereignty. In *Ynglinga Saga* Snorri Sturlusson describes the death of Odin, who is traditionally considered a representative of the first function, as follows: 'Odin was burnt, and at his pyre there was great splendour. It was their belief that the higher the smoke arose in the air, the higher he whose pyre it was would be raised; and the richer he

²³ Cf. Donald J. Ward, 'The Threefold Death: An Indo-European Trifunctional Sacrifice', in J. Puhvel ed. *Myth and Law among Indo-Europeans, studies in Indo-European comparative mythology* (Publications of the UCLA Center for the Study of Comparative Folklore and Mythology 1), University of California Press: Berkeley, CA 1970, 123–142.

would be, the more property that was consumed with him'. Finally, the third vengeance resembles a pre-Christian funerary ritual (*trizna*), and the method of death, slaughter by weapon, can be tentatively classified as the second function (F2).

Motive	Kind of death	Indo-European classification
first revenge	buried	F3
second revenge	burnt	F1
third revenge	slaughtered	F2

Fig. 2

The motif of the three deaths may originally derive from sacrificial practice among Indo-Europeans.²⁴ In the chronicle, Princess Olga's main role is foreteller and architect of the revenge. If the three-revenge motif under 945 derives from a threefold Indo-European pattern of death, it is not clear how was it perceived when the *Primary Chronicle* was compiled. It is likely that the compiler used the description of the rites as just another anecdote related to the cunning Olga, because the original sense was already lost.

In my opinion, those scholars who see a pre-Christian ritual in Princess Olga's actions are on the right track. For instance, Rybakov assumed that the description of a funeral ritual was used by the compiler as the form for his interpretation of real events. From this point of view, the real vengeance of the princess to the Drevljans was represented in the epic style of oral tradition and acquired the form of legend coloured by folkloric additions and attributes. By contrast, I suggest that Princess Olga's 'revenge to the Drevljans' appeared in the chronicle as a result of the compilation work completed in the second half of the eleventh century, rather than immediately after the events of the 940s. The Christian compilers who worked on the chronicle in the time of Jaroslav and his descendants could not have invented the description of pagan rites performed by Russian princes before the conversion of Rus'. If the chroniclers knew something of the ancient rituals which Princess Olga performed after the death of her husband, they had to find an appropriate literary form in which the pagan rituals could be converted into a more or less neutral narrative. The idea of revenge was such a suitable form, unrelated to the opposition between

²⁴ David Evans, 'Agamemnon and the Indo-European Threefold Death Pattern', *History of Religions* 19 (1979), 153–166.

Christianity and paganism. My hypothesis is that in the story of revenge we have a series of rituals related to the death of the Kievan prince.

The arrival of the Drevljan embassy

But Olga was in Kiev with her son, the boy Svjatoslav. His tutor was Asmund, and the troop commander was Sveinald, the father of Mstikha. The Derevljians then said, 'See, we have killed the Prince of Rus'. Let us take his wife Olga for our Prince Mal, and then we shall obtain possession of Svjatoslav, and work our will upon him'. So they sent their best men, twenty in number, to Olga by boat, and they arrived below Borichev in their boat. At that time, the water flowed below the heights of Kiev, and the inhabitants did not live in the valley, but upon the heights. The city of Kiev was on the present site of the residence of Gordjata and Nicephorus, and the prince's palace was in the city where the residence of Vratislav and Chudin now stands, while the hunting grounds were outside the city. Without the city stood another palace, where the palace of the Cantors is now situated, behind the Church of the Holy Virgin upon the heights. This was a palace with a stone hall. Olga was informed that the Derevljians had arrived, and summoned them to her presence with a gracious welcome. When the Derevljians had thus announced their arrival, Olga replied with an inquiry as to the reason of their coming. The Derevljians then announced that their tribe had sent them to report that they had slain her husband, because he was like a wolf, crafty and ravening, but that their princes, who had thus preserved the land of Dereva, were good, and that Olga should come and marry their Prince Mal. For the name of the Prince of Dereva was Mal.²⁵

The tale of the envoys from the people, who had killed the prince and then came with the proposition to marry his widow, looks a bit strange. Some Russian scholars try to interpret the story as an ancient custom, according to which the power formerly held by the prince was obtained through marriage to a woman (girl) of the ruling family.²⁶ In this case, the princess

²⁵ *The Russian primary chronicle*, 78–79. For another English translation, see Butler 2004, 779.

²⁶ Likhachev 1996, 435–439; Boris Aleksandrovich Rybakov, *Jazychestvo drevnikh slavjan*, "Nauka": Moskva 1981, 360–362; Rybakov 1987, 365–375; Frojanov 1995, 59–72. Cf. García De La Puente 2005, 256.

Olga held power in Kiev, and the Drevljans, by marrying their prince Mal to her, wished to achieve control over the whole Kievan polity.

However, another interpretation of the tale is possible, based upon the folkloric motif of association between death and marriage.²⁷ In this motif, widespread in Russian fairy tales, the love of the deity of death causes a human to die, as the deity carries him or her away to its own kingdom for marriage. The historical connection between Slavic marriage and funeral rites has recently been examined by Valerija Eremina, whose book is devoted to the symbolism of rites of transition.²⁸ Eremina shows how widespread the idea of the joint death of husband and wife, or two lovers, is in Slavic folklore and ritual tradition.²⁹

Akhmed Ibn Fadlan, the secretary of an Arabic embassy to Bulgar, saw such a burial-marriage ritual on the lower Volga in 921. The funeral of a Rūs (Rūsiyyah) noble was accompanied by the sacrifice of a girl and was arranged as her marriage to her deceased master:

I was told that when their chieftains die, the least they do is to cremate them. I was very keen to verify this, when I learned of the death of one of their great men. They placed him in his grave (*qabr*) and erected a canopy over it for ten days, until they had finished making and sewing his <funeral garments>. In the case of a poor man they build a small boat, place him inside and burn it. In the case of a rich man, they gather together his possessions and divide them into three, one third for his family, one third to use for <his funeral> garments, and one third with which they purchase alcohol which they drink on the day when his slave-girl kills herself and is cremated together with her master. (They are addicted to alcohol, which they drink night and day. Sometimes one of them dies with the cup still in his hand.) When their chieftain dies, his family ask his slave-girls and slave-boys, 'Who among you will die with him?' and some of them reply, 'I shall.' Having said this, it becomes incumbent upon the person and it is impossible ever to turn back. Should that person try to, he is not

²⁷ See Vladimir Jakovlevich Propp, 'Istoricheskie korni volshebnoj skazki', I.V. Peshkov ed., *Sobranie trudov V.Ja. Proppa*, Izdatelstvo "Labirint": Moskva 1998, 112–436.

²⁸ Valerija Igorevna Eremina, *Ritual i Folklor*, "Nauka": Moskva 1991, 83–101, 121–164.

²⁹ Valerija Igorevna Eremina, 'K voprosu ob istoricheskoj obshnosti predstavlenij svadebnoj i pogrebalnoj obrjadnosti (Nevesta v "chernom")', *Russkij folklor* 24 (1987), 21–32; Eremina 1991, 166–92. Cf. Albert Kashfullovich Baiburin, Georgij Akhillovich Levinton, 'Pokhorony i svadjba', in V.V. Ivanov, L.G. Nevskaja eds., *Issledovanija v oblasti balto-slavjanskoj dukhovnoj kultury. Pogrebalnij obrjad*, "Nauka": Moskva 1990, 64–99; Vassil Garnizov, 'Smert = svatba', *Problemi na bolgarska folklor* 8/1991, 247–252.

permitted to do so. It is usually slave-girls who make this offer. When that man whom I mentioned earlier died, they said to his slave-girls, 'Who will die with him?' and one of them said, 'I shall.' So they placed two slave-girls in charge of her to take care of her and accompany her wherever she went, even to the point of occasionally washing her feet with their own hands. They set about attending to the dead man, preparing his clothes for him and setting right all he needed. Every day the slave-girl would drink <alcohol> and would sing merrily and cheerfully. On the day when he and the slave-girl were to be burned I arrived at the river where his ship was. To my surprise I discovered that it had been beached and that four planks of birch (*khadank*) and other types of wood had been erected for it. Around them wood had been placed in such a way as to resemble scaffolding (*anābīr*). Then the ship was hauled and placed on top of this wood. They advanced, going to and fro <around the boat> uttering words which I did not understand, while he was still in his grave and had not been exhumed. Then they produced a couch and placed it on the ship, covering it with quilts <made of> Byzantine silk brocade and cushions <made of> Byzantine silk brocade. Then a crone arrived whom they called the 'Angel of Death' and she spread on the couch the coverings we have mentioned. She is responsible for having his <garments> sewn up and putting him in order and it is she who kills the slave-girls. I myself saw her: a gloomy, corpulent woman, neither young nor old. When they came to his grave, they removed the soil from the wood and then removed the wood, exhuming him <still dressed> in the *izār* in which he had died. I could see that he had turned black because of the coldness of the ground. They had also placed alcohol, fruit and a pandora (*tunbūr*) beside him in the grave, all of which they took out. Surprisingly, he had not begun to stink and only his colour had deteriorated. They clothed him in trousers, leggings (*rān*), boots, a *qurṭaq*, and a silk caftan with golden buttons, and placed a silk *qalansuwwah* <fringed> with sable on his head. They carried him inside the pavilion on the ship and laid him to rest on the quilt, propping him with cushions. Then they brought alcohol, fruit and herbs (*rayḥān*) and placed them beside him. Next they brought bread, meat and onions, which they cast in front of him, a dog, which they cut in two and which they threw onto the ship, and all of his weaponry, which they placed beside him. They then brought two

mounts, made them gallop until they began to sweat, cut them up into pieces and threw the flesh onto the ship. They next fetched two cows, which they also cut up into pieces and threw on board, and a cock and a hen, which they slaughtered and cast onto it. Meanwhile, the slave-girl who wished to be killed was coming and going, entering one pavilion after another. The owner of the pavilion would have intercourse with her and say to her, 'Tell your master that I have done this purely out of love for you.' At the time of the evening prayer on Friday they brought the slave-girl to a thing that they had constructed, like a door-frame. She placed her feet on the hands of the men and was raised above that door-frame. She said something and they brought her down. Then they lifted her up a second time and she did what she had done the first time. They brought her down and then lifted her up a third time and she did what she had done on the first two occasions. They next handed her a hen. She cut off its head and threw it away. They took the hen and threw it on board the ship. I quizzed the interpreter about her actions and he said, 'The first time they lifted her, she said, 'Behold, I see my father and my mother.' The second time she said, 'Behold, I see all of my dead kindred, seated.' The third time she said, 'Behold, I see my master, seated in Paradise. Paradise is beautiful and verdant. He is accompanied by his men and his male-slaves. He summons me, so bring me to him.' So they brought her to the ship and she removed two bracelets that she was wearing, handing them to the woman called the 'Angel of Death', the one who was to kill her. She also removed two anklets that she was wearing, handing them to the two slave-girls who had waited upon her: they were the daughters of the crone known as the 'Angel of Death'. Then they lifted her onto the ship but did not bring her into the pavilion. The men came with their shields and sticks and handed her a cup of alcohol over which she chanted and then drank. The interpreter said to me, 'Thereby she bids her female companions farewell.' She was handed another cup, which she took and chanted for a long time, while the crone urged her to drink it and to enter the pavilion in which her master lay. I saw that she was befuddled and wanted to enter the pavilion but she had <only> put her head into the pavilion <while her body remained outside it>. The crone grabbed hold of her head and dragged her into the pavilion, entering it at the same time. The men began to bang their shields with the sticks so that her screams could not be heard and

so terrify the other slave-girls, who would not, then, seek to die with their masters. Six men entered the pavilion and all had intercourse with the slave-girl. They laid her down beside her master and two of them took hold of her feet, two her hands. The crone called the 'Angel of Death' placed a rope around her neck in such a way that the ends crossed one another (*mukhālafan*) and handed it to two <of the men> to pull on it. She advanced with a broad-bladed dagger and began to thrust it in and out between her ribs, now here, now there, while the two men throttled her with the rope until she died. Then the deceased's next of kin approached and took hold of a piece of wood and set fire to it. He walked backwards, with the back of his neck to the ship, his face to the people, with the lighted piece of wood in one hand and the other hand on his anus, being completely naked. He ignited the wood that had been set up under the ship after they had placed the slave-girl whom they had killed beside her master. Then the people came forward with sticks and firewood. Each one carried a stick the end of which he had set fire to and which he threw on top of the wood. The wood caught fire, and then the ship, the pavilion, the man, the slave-girl and all it contained. A dreadful wind arose and the flames leapt higher and blazed fiercely. One of the Rūsiyyah stood beside me and I heard him speaking to my interpreter. I quizzed him about what he had said, and he replied, 'He said, 'You Arabs are a foolish lot!'' So I said, 'Why is that?' and he replied, 'Because you purposely take those who are dearest to you and whom you hold in highest esteem and throw them under the earth, where they are eaten by the earth, by vermin and by worms, whereas we burn them in the fire there and then, so that they enter Paradise immediately'. Then he laughed loud and long. I quizzed him about that <i.e., the entry into Paradise> and he said, "Because of the love which my Lord feels for him. He has sent the wind to take him away within an hour." Actually, it took scarcely an hour for the ship, the firewood, the slave-girl and her master to be burnt to a fine ash. They built something like a round hillock over the ship, which they had pulled out of the water, and placed in the middle of it a large piece of birch (*khadank*) on which they wrote the name of the man and the name of the King of the Rūs. Then they left.³⁰

³⁰ The translation by James E. Montgomery, 'Ibn Fadlan and the Rusiyyah', *Journal of Arabic and Islamic Studies* 3 (2000), 1–25. Other English translations, see Hamilton M. Smyser, 'Ibn Fadlān's

Both Arabic and Byzantine authors point to the Slavic and Rūs custom of burning the wife, alive or dead, together with her dead husband.³¹ Especially impressive is the information of the Arab historian and geographer Al-Masudi (*The Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gems*, chapter 17), written down about 943–947, who writes that if a Slavic or Russian man happened to die unmarried, or a widower, he was married off after death:

One of the various pagan nations, who live in his country, are the Sekalibah (Sclavonians), and another the Rus (the Russians). They live in one of the two sides of this town: they burn the dead with their cattle, utensils, arms, and ornaments. When a man dies, his wife is burnt alive with him; but, when the wife dies, her husband is not burnt. If a bachelor dies, he is married after his death. Women are glad to be burnt; for they cannot enter into paradise by themselves. This usage prevails also among the Hindus, as we have said. But the Hindus never burn a woman with her husband, unless it is her own wish.³²

Here we see the same association of burial and wedding rituals that appears in the story of Princess Olga in the *Primary Chronicle*.³³ Al-Masudi compares

Account of the Rūs with Some Commentary and Some Allusions to Beowulf', in J. Bessinger and R.P. Creed eds., *Franciplegius: Medieval and Linguistic Studies in Honour of Francis Peabody Magoun Jr.*, New York University Press: New York 1965, 92–119: 92–102; Ahmed ibn Fadlan, *Ibn Fadlan's Journey to Russia: A Tenth-Century Traveler from Baghdad to the Volga River*, Richard Nelson Frye ed. and trans., Markus Wiener: Princeton, NJ 2005. A French translation, see Tadeusz Lewicki, 'Les rites funéraires païens des Slaves occidentaux et des anciens Russes d'après les relations - remontant surtout aux IX-X siècles - des voyageurs et des écrivains arabes', *Folia Orientalia* 5 (1963), 1–74, at 32–42. A Russian translation, see Andrej Petrovich Kovalevskij, *Kniga Akhmeda Ibn Fadlana o ego puteshestvii na Volgu v 921–922 gg.*, Kharkov 1956, 42–44.

³¹ Aleksandr Aleksandrovich Kotljarevskij, *O pogrebalnykh obyčajakh u jazycheskikh slavjan*, Moskva 1868, 42–43, 46–49, 54–55, 57–59, 61, 63–68, 73, 79, 82–83, 93–95; Daniil Abramovich Khvolson, *Izvestija o Khazarakh, Burtasakh, Bolgarakh, Madjarakh, Slavjanakh i Rusakh Abu-ali Akhmeda Ben Omar Ibn-Dasta*, Sankt-Petersburg 1869, 127–135; Avraam Jakovlevich Garkavi, *Skazanija musulmaskikh pisatelej o Slavjanakh i Ruskikh*, Petersburg 1870, 129, 136–137, 193, 221; Lewicki 1963, 10–29;), H. Göckenjan und I. Zimonyi (eds), *Orientalische Berichte über die Völker Osteuropas und Zentralasiens im Mittelalter: die Ġayhānī-Tradition* (Ibn Rusta, Gardīzī, Ḥudud al-Alam, al-Bakrī und al-Marwazī), (Veröffentlichungen der Societas Uralo-Altaica 54), Harrassowitz: Wiesbaden 2001, 77 (Ibn Rusta), 178, 181–182 (Gardīzī).

³² El-Mas'ūdī, *Meadows of gold and mines of gems*, trans. by Aloys Sprenger, 1, London 1841, 408.

³³ Kotljarevskij 1868, 58, 73. Cf. Mirko Barjaktarović, 'Običaj sklapanja "braka" sa mrtvatzem', *Glasnik Etnografskoga instituta* 39/1990, 95–105; Daniza Bokić, 'Posmrtna svadba na teritoriju južnikh Slovena', *Kodovi slovenskikh kultura* 3/1998, 136–153.

these Russian customs with similar Indian ones, which suggests that they may have originated from a common Indo-European tradition.³⁴

Following this, one can surmise that there was an original version of the tale of Prince Igor's death, in which the messengers offered his wife the opportunity to be buried together with her husband. Later, a Christian compiler put the description of the funeral ritual into the context of the war with the Drevljan tribe, headed by their prince Mal. There are, however, doubts as to whether a Drevljan prince of this name really existed. The name 'Mal' could originate from a misunderstanding by compilers of the ritual words that usually accompanied the Russian wedding ceremony, for instance: 'you have a bride, and we have a prince small (*mal*) for her' or 'would your bride like to marry our prince small (*mal*) and brave'. The wording 'prince small' (*knjaz mal*) is a euphemism for bridegroom; the compiler most likely converted the common name into the personal name.³⁵ Thus the prince Mal is probably an annalistic fiction.³⁶

After the death of Prince Igor, the messengers offer his wife, according to the local custom, the chance to join her deceased husband on the funeral pyre, rather than to marry their living prince. In the *Pereslavian Chronicle*, there is a fragment of the so-called 'dream of prince Mal', which tells what he saw in his sleep after the Drevljans had sent two groups of envoys to Kiev. The prince Mal, preparing for the marriage, dreamt that when Princess Olga arrived she gave him many rich and decorated clothes and other valuable things, and the boats that would carry him during the wedding ceremony.³⁷ In this case, the 'sleeping' prince is the dead Prince Igor, who is waiting for his funeral.³⁸ In the ritual described by Ibn Fadlan, the Rūs (Rūsiyyah) buried their noble men in boats, which provides an explanation for the boats in Mal's dream. Analysing the ritual by Ibn Fadlan, Hamilton Smyser points out that the dead leader was buried in a temporary roofed

³⁴ Cf. Manuel-Antonio Marcos Casquero, 'El sacrificio de la mujer viuda en el mundo indoeuropeo', *Gerión* 19 (2001), 253–292; Jörg Fisch, *Burning women: a global history of widow sacrifice from ancient times to the present*, trans. by R.K. Rajan, Seagull: London, New York 2006, 44–49.

³⁵ After the Drevljans arriving in Kiev proposed that Olga should marry their prince Mal, the compiler added 'for the name of the Prince of Dereva was Mal'. The addition shows the words were an explanation by the compiler rather than the text of the original story. In other words, 'the prince Mal of Dereva' appeared in the text only after the compiler had explained the original expression 'prince small (*mal*)'.

³⁶ Another possible theory is that the name 'Mal' is a distortion of the Gothic title or dynastic name 'Amal'. See Andrej Leonidovich Nikitin, *Osnovaniya russkoj istorii. Mifologemija i fakty*, "Agraf": Moskva 2001, 204, 208, 212. For speculations on the personality of Mal, see Shakhmatov 2001, 267–268.

³⁷ *Letopisetz Pereslavlaja Suzdaljskogo (Letopisetz russkikh tzarej)* (Polnoe sobranie russkikh letopisej, T. 41), V.I. Buganov, B.A. Rybakov eds., Arkheograficheskij tzentr: Moskva 1995, 15.

³⁸ Likhachev 1996, 437 compares the dream of Prince Mal with the description of the funeral ceremony of Prince Vladimir Galizkij in the *Primary Chronicle* under 1152, and the dream of Prince Svjatoslav of Kiev in *The Tale of Igor's Campaign (Slovo o polku Igoreve)*.

grave for ten days, while funeral clothes were prepared and other arrangements made.³⁹ In the case of Igor's death, this period seems to be the time during which the Drevljans sent their messengers to inform Olga. Following the custom in Ibn Fadlan's description, the enslaved servants of the deceased were asked who would die and follow him, and a young woman volunteers herself. The noble Rūs died during a journey along the Volga River, far from his family. Igor's situation was different; he had his wife (and perhaps concubines) in Kiev, near the place of his murder. The Drevljan envoys arrived in Kiev, most likely to ask Olga whether she would accompany her husband herself or find a substitute among the prince's concubines or slaves.⁴⁰

Actually, the ceremony for which the Drevljans arrived in Kiev seems to have been a posthumous wedding of the deceased prince.⁴¹ Therefore, they performed the scene of matchmaking. But Princess Olga made them participants in another ritual. The accent on the wedding embassy found in the *Primary Chronicle* probably originates from the association between the custom of the posthumous wedding and the widespread folkloric image of a proud, independent and unapproachable woman-warrior/regent who refuses to marry any suitor of lower dignity than she. Written at the stage when the Russian annalistic tradition was in its infancy, in the eleventh century, the image of Princess Olga seems to be constructed on the basis of such an idea because she had ruled alone in Kiev for some time. This figure of an independent woman-ruler bears comparison with the Scandinavian heroine Sigrid the Haughty (*Storråda*), a Nordic queen, who received her cognomen on account of her independent character. Sagas ascribe to her a prominent role in the politics of her time and depict her as a very wise woman who also had the gift of prophecy.⁴² Prince Igor (*Ingvar*) and Princess Olga (*Helga*) were said to be of Scandinavian origin, Varangians (*Varjags*), so

³⁹ Smyser 1965, 107–108; William Sayers, 'An Irish Perspective on Ibn Fadlan's Description of Rus Funeral Ceremonial', *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 16 (1988), 173–181: at 173.

⁴⁰ Oleg Mikhailovich Rapov, *Russkaja tzerkov v IX–pervoj polovine XII vv. Prinjatje khristianstva, "Vysshaja shkola"*: Moskva 1988, 156 guesses that Princess Olga adopted Christianity in order to avoid being sacrificed during her husband's funeral. For a critical note, see Vladimir Jakovlevich Petrukhin, *Nachalo etnokulturnoj istorii Rusi IX–XI vekov, "Rusich"*: Smolensk, "Gnosis": Moskva 1995, 230, 205–215.

⁴¹ On the interpretation of Ibn Fadlan's narrative as a posthumous wedding, see Smyser 1965, 111, cf. Sayers 1988, 177–178.

⁴² See Elena Aleksandrovna Rydzevskaia, *Drevnaja Rus' i Skandinavia v IX–XIV vv. (materialy i issledovanija)*, "Nauka": Moskva 1978, 196–197.

it is generally agreed that they must follow the same principles of behaviour as heroes of Scandinavian sagas.⁴³

However, perhaps more significant in this respect is that the Russian annalistic tradition was created between 1039 and 1118, when Kiev was ruled by the descendants of Jaroslav the Wise and Ingegerd Olofsdotter of Sweden, who was said to be a granddaughter of Sigrid the Haughty. Sigrid is known to have had many suitors because of her wealth and nobility, and once had a Norwegian king Harald Grenski and a Russian prince Vissavald burnt to death inside a house in order to discourage other petty kings from proposing to her.⁴⁴ It is possible that this Swedish tale was known at the court of the Kievan ruling clan, the *Jaroslavichi*, and had an influence on the story of Princess Olga. The motive of revenge, unusual in Russian literature and folklore, may also have been added to the story of Olga under the same Scandinavian influence.

The first embassy was buried in a boat

Olga made this reply, 'Your proposal is pleasing to me; indeed, my husband cannot rise again from the dead. But I desire to honour you tomorrow in the presence of my people. Return now to your boat, and remain there with an aspect of arrogance. I shall send for you on the morrow, and you shall say. 'We will not ride on horses nor go on foot; carry us in our boat'. And you shall be carried in your boat'. Thus she dismissed them to their vessel. Now Olga gave command that a large deep ditch should be dug in the castle with the hall, outside the city. Thus, on the morrow, Olga, as she sat in the hall, sent for the strangers, and her messengers approached them and said, 'Olga summons you to great honour'. But they replied, 'We will not ride neither on horseback nor in wagons, nor go on foot; carry us in our boats'. The people of Kiev then lamented, 'Slavery is our lot. Our Prince is killed, and our Princess intends to marry their prince'. So they carried the Derevlans in their boat. The latter sat on the cross-benches in great robes, puffed up with pride. They thus were borne into before Olga, and when the men had brought the Derevlans in, they dropped them into the trench along with the boat. Olga bent over

⁴³ Fedor Borisovich Uspenskij, *Skandinavij. Varjagi. Rus': Istoriko-filologičeskie očerki*, "Jazyki slavjanskoj kultury": Moskva 2002, 45–49, assumes that Olga could be a Slav who was given her name in honour of Prince Oleg (*Helgi*).

⁴⁴ Oddr Snorrason, *The Saga of Olaf Tryggvason*, T. M. Andersson trans., (Islandica 52), Cornell University Press: Ithaca, NY 2003, c. 43, 90.

and inquired whether they found the honour to their taste. They answered that it was worse than the death of Igor'. She then commanded that they should be buried alive, and they were thus buried.⁴⁵

Scholars noted the resemblance between this story and a funeral ceremony long ago. The boat in which the Drevljan envoys were placed before being buried in a pit is associated with the boat in which the body of a Russian noble man was burned in Ibn Fadlan's narrative.⁴⁶ The boat buried as a vehicle to another world is known especially in the funeral customs of medieval Scandinavians.⁴⁷ There is also other evidence of ship/boat burials among the Ruthenes, who lived on the Baltic coast,⁴⁸ in the Merovingian kingdom,⁴⁹ in early medieval England,⁵⁰ and in Kievan Rus'.⁵¹ The *Prose Edda*, written by Snorri Sturlusson ca. 1200, depicts the burial of the Scandinavian mythical deity Balder, a son of Odin and god of the summer sun, whose body was burned on a ship:

The Æsir took the body of Baldr and brought it to the sea. Hringhorni is the name of Baldr's ship: it was greatest of all ships; the gods would

⁴⁵ *The Russian primary chronicle*, 79. For another English translation, see Butler 2004, 779–780.

⁴⁶ Lewicki 1963, 25, 30–59; Smyser 1965, 92–102; Kovalevskij 1956, 42–43; Morten Lund Warmind, 'Ibn Fadlan in the Context of his Age', in O. Crumlin-Pedersen & B. Munch Thye eds. *The ship as symbol in prehistoric and medieval Scandinavia: papers from an International Research Seminar at the Danish National Museum, Copenhagen 5th–7th May 1994*, (Studies in archaeology & history 1), National Museum of Denmark: Copenhagen 1995, 131–137; Montgomery 2000, 1–25; Wladislaw Duczko, *Viking Rus': Studies on the Presence of Scandinavians in Eastern Europe*, Brill: Leiden 2004, 138–153.

⁴⁷ Major 1924, 113–150; Smyser 1965, 106–107; Gleb Sergeevich Lebedev, 'Shvedskie pogrebenija v ladje VII–XI vv.', *Skandinavskij sbornik* 19 (1974), 155–186; Hilda Roderick Ellis Davidson, 'The Ship of the Dead', in H.R. Ellis Davidson ed., *The journey to the other world*, D. S. Brewer: Cambridge 1975, 73–89; Michael Müller-Wille, 'Boat-graves: Old and New Views', in Crumlin-Pedersen & Munch Thye 1995, 100–109, cf. 20–24, 87–99.

⁴⁸ Saxo Grammaticus, *Gesta Danorum*, J. Olrik et H. Ræder ed., Levin & Munksgaard: Copenhagen 1931, 5.8.1.

⁴⁹ *Gregorii episcopi Turonensis Libri Historiarum X*, B. Krusch and W. Levison (eds), (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum 1:1), 2nd ed., Hannover 1951, 6.46; *Liber historiae francorum*, B. Krusch ed. (Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum 2), Hannover 1888, c. 35, 241–328.

⁵⁰ Rupert Bruce-Mitford, *The Sutton Hoo Ship Burial*, 1, British Museum: London 1975, 230–435. On the funeral of the Danish king, Scyld, in the Anglo-Saxon *Beowulf* (lines 32–52), see C.B. Kendall and P.S. Wels eds., *Voyage to the Other World. The Legacy of Sutton Hoo*, (Medieval studies at Minnesota 5), University of Minnesota Press 1992, 47–78.

⁵¹ *Skazanie i stradanie i pokhvala muchenikam svjatym Borisu i Glebu*, D.S. Likhachev et al. (eds), (Biblioteka literatury Drevnej Rusi 1), "Nauka": Sankt-Peterburg 1997, 346; cf. Dmitrij Nikolaevich Anuchin, 'Sani, ladja i koni, kak prinadlezhnosti pokhoronnogo obrjada', *Drevnosti. Trudy Moskovskogo arheologicheskogo obshchestva* 14 (1890), 152–184; A. Stalsberg, 'Scandinavian Viking-Age boat graves in Old Rus', in R.K. Kovalev and H.M. Sherman eds., *Festschrift for Thomas S. Noonan = Russian History/Histoire russe* 28 (2001), 359–401.

have launched it and made Baldr's pyre thereon, but the ship stirred not forward. <...> Then was the body of Baldr borne out on shipboard; and when his wife, Nanna the daughter of Nep, saw that, straightway her heart burst with grief, and she died; she was borne to the pyre, and fire was kindled. Then Thor stood by and hallowed the pyre with Mjölnir; and before his feet ran a certain dwarf which was named Litr; Thor kicked at him with his foot and thrust him into the fire, and he burned. People of many races visited this burning: First is to be told of Odin, how Frigg and the Valkyrs went with him, and his ravens; but Freyr drove in his chariot with the boar called Gold-Mane, or Fearful-Tusk, and Heimdallr rode the horse called Gold-Top, and Freyja drove her cats. Thither came also much people of the Rime-Giants and the Hill-Giants. Odin laid on the pyre that gold ring which is called Draupnir; this quality attended it, that every ninth night there dropped from it eight gold rings of equal weight. Baldr's horse was led to the bale-fire with all his trappings.⁵²

The scene looks like a euphemism for the sacrifice of Nanna together with her deceased husband.⁵³ The ship or boat in the funeral ritual most likely plays the role of a vehicle to another world. Many scholars prefer the explanation that the boats from the graves of the Viking Age were intended to serve as ferries conveying their lifeless passengers on to Valhalla.⁵⁴ This notion draws its inspiration in part from the Greek myth of Charon, the ferryman who grants the dead passage across the rivers Acheron and Styx to Hades in exchange for the fee of a coin. Such transport was necessary to people who believed that water surrounded their world.⁵⁵ The idea that an ocean encircled the earth is widespread in Slavic folklore, as well as in the folk traditions of many other peoples.⁵⁶ Only by crossing this expanse of

⁵² Snorri Sturlson, *The Prose Edda*, translated by Arthur Gilchrist Brodeur, Bibliobazar 2008 [1916], *Gylfaginning* c. 49, 81.

⁵³ Other examples of similar female sacrifices in early Germanic funerals are discussed by Hilda Roderick Ellis Davidson, *The Road to Hel: A Study of the Conception of the Dead in Old Norse Literature*, Greenwood: Westport, CT 1977, 50–58; Smyser 1965, 109.

⁵⁴ See Michael Müller-Wille, 'Bestattung im Boot. Studien zu einer nordeuropäischen Grabsitte', *Offa* 25/26 (1968/69), 1–203; Idem, 'Boatgraves in Northern Europe', *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology and Underwater Exploration* 3 (1974), 187–204.

⁵⁵ See Walter Keating Kelly, *Curiosities of Indo-European Tradition and Folk-lore*, Elibron Classics: London 2006 [1863], 119–136; Martin L. West, *Indo-European Poetry and Myth*, Oxford University Press 2007, 389–390.

⁵⁶ See Valerija Igorevna Eremina, 'Istoriko-etnograficheskie istoki motiva "voda-gore"', in B.N. Putilov ed., *Folklor i etnografija. U etnograficheskikh istokov folklorikh sjuzhetov i obrazov*, "Nauka": Leningrad 1984, 195–204; Eremina 1991, 55–82; Miriam Mencej, 'The Image of Water as the Border between this World and the Other-World', *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 1 (1998), 205–224; *idem*,

water in a boat or a ship can the dead pass into the otherworld.⁵⁷ The flying ship, which carries the heroes of fairy tales away to another world of happiness, is an analogy of death.⁵⁸

According to the *Ustjuzhskaja Chronicle*, Princess Olga ordered that a wide and deep hole should be dug in the palace yard and live coals of oak put into it.⁵⁹ The fire into which Princess Olga threw the Drevljan envoys, like the water and the boat, was a kind of vehicle to another world.⁶⁰ Rūs (Rūsiyyah) and Slavs worshipped fire and often used it during their ritual ceremonies.⁶¹ Fire as a means to enter another world resembles the folklore motif of a 'fiery river *Smorodina*' between the kingdom of a hero and the other world.⁶² The name of the 'river *Smorodina*' means 'stinking river', because it is not water that runs in the river, but fiery flames, which leap higher than the trees in the forest.⁶³ The essential attribute of the fiery river is the so-called 'Red-hot bridge' (*Kalinovyj most*). It is the bridge over the fiery river, which is red from heat of the flames below. Another name of the bridge is 'Copper' (*Mednyj* > *Medjanoj*), also representing the colour that it

'Slavjanskije narodnye verovanija o vode kak granice mezhdju mirom zhivykh i mirom mertvykh', *Slavjanovedenie* 1 (2000), 89–97; Oleg Nikolaevich Trubachev, *Etnogenez i kultura drevnejshikh slavjan: lingvističeskie issledovanija*, "Nauka": Moskva 2002, 189–191, 424. In folk songs, the crossing of the river Dunaj is often regarded as symbolic of rites of passage, marriage or death. See William E. Harkins, 'The Symbol of the River in the Tale of Gore-Zločastie', in R. Magidoff et al. eds., *Studies in Slavic Linguistics and Poetics in honor of B.O. Unbeggann*, New York University Press 1968, 55–64; Dmitrij Alekseevič Machinskij, "'Dunaj" russkogo folklora na fone vostočnoslavjanskoj istorii i mifologii', in K.V. Chistov, T.A. Bernshtam eds., *Russkij Sever: problemy etnografii i folklora*, "Nauka": Leningrad 1981, 110–171; Eremina 1991, 55–82, 149–164. Trubachev 2002, 190–191 argues that the Slavic word for 'paradise', *rajb*, was related to **rojь*, **rěka* (river) and had the meaning 'the world over the river'; cf. the Finnish *raja* – border.

⁵⁷ On the symbolism of passages over the river in Russian fairy tales, see Propp 1998, 295, 324, 334. Cf. Jens Peter Schjødt, 'The Ship on Mythology and Religion', in Crumlin-Pedersen & Munch Thye 1995, 20–24.

⁵⁸ See Aleksandr Nikolaevich Afanasiev, *Narodnye russkie skazki*, 1–3, "Nauka": "Literaturnye pamjatniki": Moskva 1957, n. 138, 144.

⁵⁹ *Ustjuzhskaja letopis* (Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisej, t. 37), "Nauka": Leningrad 1982, 19 and 58; cf. Kirpichnikov 1897, 60–61.

⁶⁰ Leo Diaconus (*Hist.* 9.6, 21–27) relates the burning and drowning of captives in the river during the funeral of the noble Russian warrior Ikmor.

⁶¹ The importance of fire-worship among the Slavs features prominently in Arab accounts: Peter Benjamin Golden, 'Al-Sakaliba', in C.E. Bosworth, E. van Donzel, W.P. Heinrichs and G. Lecomte eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 8, 2nd ed., Brill: Leiden 1995, 876–887. See further Marija Gimbutas, *The Slavs*, Thames and Hudson: London 1971, 151–170. On the custom of cremation by the Rūs and the Slavs, see Kotljarevskij 1868, 42–43, 46–49, 54–55, 57–59, 61, 63–68, 73, 79, 82–83, 93–95; Trubachev 2002, 207–212.

⁶² Propp 1998, 299–300; Eremina 1991, 151–152.

⁶³ Sometimes the fiery river was called *Puchaj*-river, that is, the river whose water became swollen and is boiling. Cf. the Old-Russian *puchina* – abyss.

turned in the heat.⁶⁴ On the Red-hot Bridge, the heroes of Russian fairy tales met the monsters which came from another world and battled with them.

Why, it might be asked, are all the patterns of the funeral rite connected with the murder of the Drevljan envoys, rather than with the burial of Prince Igor? The Drevljan ambassadors arrived in the capital of Princess Olga as 'good guests' (Olga's words), rather than as representatives of a hostile tribe. Landing in Kiev, they received Princess Olga's order to appear in her court next day, and responded in a very strange way, refusing to use any Kievan vehicle: 'We will ride neither on horseback nor in wagons, nor go on foot; carry us in our boats'.⁶⁵ If we follow the compiler of the *Chronicle* literally, one can see that the Drevljan envoys did not set foot upon Kievan soil, but after having been carried in their boats, were sent straight to the world of death. In other words, Princess Olga, who acts as a master of ceremonies, did not receive the ambassadors, but sent them. In this scene, they were actually sent by the Kievan princess to a God (or Gods) of another world with the mission to deliver the message of Prince Igor's death. Therefore they were messengers, and this role is combined in the *Primary Chronicle* with their previous role as ambassadors from the Drevljans. Delivery of the important message was the honour which the princess promised to bestow upon them, and with which they sat in the boat 'puffed up with pride'. At the final moment, Olga looked out from the window of her palace and gave a farewell speech to her messengers, inquiring of them, according to the majority of compilers, 'whether they found the honour to their taste, they answered that it was worse than the death of Igor'.⁶⁶ The phrase is usually understood to mean that Olga inquired of them ironically, scoffing, as taking in mind, under the 'honour', their suffering, and they then answered that their torments were worse than the death of Igor. But the original text allows a different interpretation: Olga's question 'what kind of honour they received' means 'what kind of *honour* task they received', or even more exactly she asked them to repeat 'what kind of *message* (*вєсмь* 'message' > *чєсмь* 'honour') they received'. They loudly answered, literally,

⁶⁴ The Russian names *reka Smorodina* and *Kalinovyj most* are formed following the homonymy between the words 'kalína' (snowball tree) and 'kálina' (burning) (*kalinovyj* = *kalényj*, i.e. red-hot), 'smorodina' (currant) and 'smórod' (stench). The similarities may originate from the magic substitution of a sacred name by a common one, of unknown by known. Many rivers with the name *Smorodina* in Ukraine and central Russia give the impression that the mythic river was also called according to shrubbery.

⁶⁵ Likhachev 1996, 435–436 sees here elements of folkloric influence. Cf. García De La Puente 2005, 259. They might have been formed during the period when the tale was orally transmitted, from ca. 946 to ca. 1039/1110, when the sacred ritual had been transformed into a profane story.

⁶⁶ *Novgorodskaja pervaja letopis*, 112; *Ustjuzhskaja letopis*, 20 and 58; *The Pověst' vremennykh lét Interlinear Collation*, 350.

that 'it (the message) especially concerned the death of Igor' or 'they are sending concerning the death of Igor'. After that the princess ordered that they be covered with earth.

In the *Laurentian* and *Hypatian* versions of the *Primary Chronicle*, after the messengers were dropped into the trench along with the boat, Princess Olga 'bent over (the trench) and inquired' of them.⁶⁷ However, before that she welcomed them into her palace; therefore, a later compiler was more accurate when he wrote that the princess looked through the window of her palace when she appealed to the messengers.⁶⁸ The scene resembles the mythological motif of 'window goddess' or 'woman at the window'.⁶⁹

Certainly the 'woman at the window' was an aspect, perhaps priestess, of the ancient Mother-goddess (for instance, Inanna/Ishtar/Astarte in the Near East). She was called 'queen of the windows' by the Assyrians and her name, becoming the name of a minor goddess, Kilili, has been associated with the *kililu*, 'the mural crown' worn by Assyrian queens. The Sumerians called her '(One) who leans in (or looks out of) the window' or '(One) who answers/ commands from the window'. She was considered wise in the sense of 'skilled' or 'knowing'.⁷⁰ One of the epithets of the Greek goddess Aphrodite, who was identified with Astarte, was *Parakypousa*, 'Peeping out (of a window/door)'. According to Plutarch (*quest. Rom.* 36), the early Roman queen Tanaquil was considered an incarnation of a similar goddess when she, from the window, advised the people to make Servius Tullius their king. Plutarch writes that King Servius preserved close ties with the goddess of his Fortuna, and their relationship was conducted through the window. It must be added that Tanaquil was also responsible for the assumption of Roman kingship by her husband Tarquinius, so that one modern scholar called her 'a maker of kings'.⁷¹

⁶⁷ *Lavrentjevskaja letopis: povest' vremennih let* (Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisej 1), Leningrad 1926, 56; *Ipatjevskaja letopis* (Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisej, t. 2), Sankt-Peterburg 1908, 45. *The Povest' vremennykh let Interlinear Collation*, 349.

⁶⁸ Therefore the compiler of the *Khlebnikov Chronicle* added the words 'Olga descended to them (from the palace) and bent over the trench'. See *The Povest' vremennykh let Interlinear Collation*, 349.

⁶⁹ On the 'window goddess', see Alberto Borghini, 'Riflessioni antropologiche sopra un mito di proibizione: la ragazza alla finestra (Ovidio, met. 14, 695–761, e Antonio Liberale, met. 39)', *Materiali e discussioni per l'analisi dei testi classici* 2 (1979), 137–161; Cristiano Grottanelli, 'Servio Tullio, Fortuna e l'oriente', *Dialoghi di Archeologia* 3rd ser. 5 (1987), 71–110; William A. Ward, 'The Goddess within the Facade of a Shrine: A Phoenician Clay Plaque of the 8th Century B.C.', *Rivista di studi fenici* 24 (1996), 7–19; Francesca Di Marco, 'Tecla di Iconio e le donne alla finestra', *Storia delle donne* 3 (2007), 77–98.

⁷⁰ Pirjo Lapinkivi, *The Sumerian Sacred Marriage in the Light of Comparative Evidence*, (State archives of Assyria studies 15), Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project: Helsinki 2004, 233–234.

⁷¹ Paul-Marius Martin, 'Tanaquil, la «faiseuse» de rois', *Latomus* 44 (1985), 5–15.

In the Bible, we find the story of a daughter of Eth-Baal, king of Sidon, Jezebel, who was a devotee of the Canaanite goddess Asherah (Astarte), the main female deity of her Phoenician home state.⁷² After her marriage with King Ahab of the northern kingdom of Israel, Jezebel persuaded him to become a worshiper of Baal. Their idolatry and impious behaviour, especially the murder of Naboth the Jezreelite, provoked the God's wrath, and eventually Ahab was killed in battle, and later his son and successor, Joram, was treacherously slain by his ambitious general Jehu. Jezebel was left alone and vulnerable in Samaria, at the mercy of Jehu, now king of Israel, and a man who blamed her 'countless harlotries and sorceries' for most of the problems of the land. When Jehu arrived in the city, Jezebel painted her eyes, adorned her head and *looked out of the window*. As Jehu entered the gate, she greeted him with the question of peace, but he lifted up his face to the window calling his servants and ordering to throw her down *from the window*. So they threw her down, and her body was trampled down by the horses. Her mortal remains were buried by order of Jehu for she is a king's daughter. The story of Jezebel, defiantly and bravely confronting her enemy from a window, may be associated with the motif of 'woman at the window', or even originated from a Phoenician 'window goddess'.

Some features of Jezebel's story may have been used during the creation of a preliminary history of Princess Olga, to which the motif of revenge was added later. An early Russian compiler, perhaps, borrowed them, together with the topic of the brave queen and timid king (Jezebel and Ahab, Olga and Igor), from the Bible because they resembled contemporary folk beliefs known to him.⁷³ In Slavic belief, the window symbolically connects the house with another world.⁷⁴ Like a door, a window can be used to enter the house, but, in contrast to the door, the window is an unregulated entrance. According to Slavic folklore, in heaven there is a window through which the sun looks at the earth.⁷⁵

⁷² See the Orthodox (Sinodal) Bible: 3. *Kings* 16 – 4. *Kings* 9; the English Standard Bible: 1. *Kings* 16 – 2. *Kings* 9.

⁷³ According to the Russian compilations from the *Chronicle* of George Hamartolus, the story of Jezebel and Ahab was known in Kievan Rus'. See *Vremennik Georgija Monakha (Khronika Georgija Amartola)*, translated by V.A. Matveenko, L.I. Schegoleva, "Bogorodskij pečatnik": Moskva 2000, 5.75–77, 154–155.

⁷⁴ See Albert Kashfullovich Baiburin, *Zhylyshche v obrjadakh i predstavlenijakh vostochnikh slavjan*, "Nauka": Leningrad 1983, 140–145; Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov, 'K simvolike okna v mifologicheskoi traditsii', in *Balto-slavjanskije issledovanija* 1983, "Nauka": Moskva 1984, 164–186: at 184–185.

⁷⁵ Trubachev 2002, 213 points to the link between the notions of 'window' (*okno*) and 'eye' (*oko*) in Russian.

Ibn Fadlan relates that during the funeral ceremony, the girl who was chosen to die with her dead master looked into the world of the ancestors through the wooden construction specially built for the ritual, which resembled an extempore 'window', or a 'doorframe'.⁷⁶ According to Ibn Fadlan, the men lifted the girl up, and she, looking into the 'well', reported on her visions of the 'other side', a green and beautiful paradise, her dead father and mother, other relatives and her dead master.

The scene of Princess Olga at the window resembles not only this, but also the portrait of the goddess Demeter in the frescos at the Bolshaja Bliznitsa tumulus (fourth century BC) on the Taman Peninsula. The portrayal is placed against a blue background, which is surrounded by the frame imitating a breach in the vault (window); through that the goddess looked into the tomb (another world).⁷⁷ Therein, into another world, Princess Olga looked from the window of her palace, making a farewell speech to the messengers.

The fact that the messengers, burned in a boat, were covered with earth shows the location of the world into which they were sent, under the ground. The chthonian deity of the underworld seems to have been Veles (Volos).⁷⁸ He was one of the two deities by whose names the Rus' swore in the treaties with Byzantium in 907 and 971. In the conception of Vjacheslav Ivanov and Vladimir Toporov, the chthonian Veles acted as the eternal opponent of the celestial Perun, according to the primeval myth of foundation.⁷⁹ The fact that Veles was the object of the first embassy of Princess Olga shows him as an 'old god' in comparison with Perun.

Thus it seems possible that the 'murder' of the Drevljan envoys was the first part of the princely funeral ritual rather than the first stage of the princess' revenge. In the ritual the ambassadors played the honorary role of messengers to the god of the underworld.

⁷⁶ Sayers 1988, 173. Cf. Kotljarevskij 1868, 77.

⁷⁷ See Elena Anatolievna Savostina, 'Sakralnoe prostranstvo i pogrebalnij obrjad bosporskikh grobnitz', in V.V. Ivanov, L.G. Nevskaja eds., *Issledovanija v oblasti baltoslavjanskoj dukhovnoj kultury: Pogrebalnij obrjad*, "Nauka": Moskva 1990, 237–247, at 243–244.

⁷⁸ Roman Jakobson, 'The Slavic God Veles and His Indo-European Cognates', in *Studi linguistici in onore di Vittore Pisani*, Paideia: Brescia 1969, 579–599. For a Baltic parallel, see Marija Gimbutas, 'The Lithuanian God Velnias', in G. J. Larson, C. S. Littleton, & J. Puhvel, eds., *Myth in Indo-European antiquity*, University of California Press: Berkeley, CA 1974, 87–92. On the connection of Veles with Varuna, see Trubachev 2002, 428.

⁷⁹ Vjacheslav Vsevolodovich Ivanov, Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov, *Slavjanskije jazykovye modelirujuschie semioticheskie sistemy (Drevnij period)*, "Nauka": Moskva 1965; *idem*, *Issledovanija v oblasti slavjanskikh drevnostej*, "Nauka": Moskva 1974.

The second embassy was burned in a bathhouse

Olga then sent messages to the Derevlians to the effect that, if they really required her presence, they should send after her their distinguished men, so that she might go to their Prince with due honour, for otherwise her people in Kiev would not let her go. When the Derevlians heard this message, they gathered together the best men who governed the land of Dereva, and sent them to her. When the Derevlians arrived, Olga commanded that a bath should be made ready, and invited them to appear before her after they had bathed. The bathhouse was then heated, and the Derevlians entered in to bathe. Olga's men closed up the bathhouse behind them, and she gave orders to set it on fire from the doors, so that the Derevlians were all burned to death.⁸⁰

In the burning in a bathhouse, Igor Frojanov sees a sacrifice to the gods of the upper zone of the Universe.⁸¹ I suggest that the second group of Drevljans were the messengers who were sent, with the help of the fire, into the heavens where they were obliged to inform the celestial gods of Prince Igor's death. The compiler emphasizes that Princess Olga demanded that the Drevljans send their best men (*narochitye muzhi*). The gods of the upper world were regarded as the highest deities, and the messengers to them had to be of a suitably high status.⁸²

The embassies to the gods of the lower and upper worlds were probably necessary because the Kievan prince was considered the sacred lord of the terrestrial world, the sovereign of all people and all beings in his territory, a kind of terrestrial deity. In this situation, it was natural to inform the gods, who correspondingly ruled in the cosmic spaces, the Heavens and the Underworld, about the death of their divine brother. It remains, however, an open question whether the Kievan prince was a sacral figure; some evidence would indicate that the early Russian princes have had indeed special relations with the sacral sphere.⁸³ If it was so (and we can state that only after future searching of new arguments and new approaches

⁸⁰ *The Russian primary chronicle*, 79–80. For another English translation, see Butler 2004, 781.

⁸¹ Frojanov 1995, 59–72.

⁸² Both Drevljan embassies consisted of noble men. According to the *Pereslavlean Chronicle*, the first messengers were the 'noblest 20 Bojars' and the second '20 distinguished men'. See *Letopisetz Pereslavlaja Suzdaljskogo*, 14 and 15.

⁸³ See Oleksiy Tolochko, 'Problems of the Rurikids and Sacral Legitimation', in A. Al-Azmeh and J.M. Bak (eds), *Monotheistic Kingship: The Medieval Variants*, Central European University, Department of Medieval Studies: Budapest, New York 2004, 249–268, at 251.

to the evidence we have), it nevertheless is difficult to realise what kind of relation to the divinity the prince had; whether he was a mixed human-divine person, or a vicar, representative of the gods.

The assumption that the concept of the three worlds existed in Kiev is made on the basis of an interpretation of the so-called Zbruch-idol of the tenth century, which was found in the river Zbruch in modern western Ukraine (medieval Galicia).



Fig. 3. The statue of Zbruch-idol discovered during a drought not far of the village Gusjatin in 1848 is now on display in the Archaeological Museum in Krakow, Poland.

The Zbruch-idol is a 267cm high tetrahedral pillar of grey limestone with three tiers of reliefs (see Fig. 3).⁸⁴ These three rows of images most likely reflect the ancient concept of a three-world Universe, which consisted of the Heavens (the world of Gods), the Earth (the world of people), and the

⁸⁴ Gabriel Lenczyk, 'Swiatowid Zbruczanski', *Materialy Archeologiczne* 5 (1964), 5–59; Rybakov 1981, 460–464; *idem* 1987, 236–251; Dmitrij Jakovlevich Telegin, James Patrick Mallory, *The Anthropomorphic Stellae of the Ukraine: The Early Iconography of the Indo-Europeans*, (The Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph Series 11), Institute for the Study of Man: Washington D.C. 1994, 77–86; Wojciech Szymański, 'Posąg ze Zbrucza i jego otoczenie', *Przegląd Archeologiczny* 44 (1996), 75–116.

Underworld (the world of Monsters). The monsters held up the terrestrial world.⁸⁵ In the top tier of the idol the face of a figure was represented on each of its four sides, and the top of the pillar was made in the form of a single hat, which rested on their heads.

These figures in the upper tier were bigger than the others and seem to be images of celestial deities: one of them holds a sheaf of corn, another a ring, the third has a horse and a sword, and the fourth is empty-handed. The figures in the middle tier are of lesser proportions than both the gods of the upper world and the figures in the lower tier. Here we see two male and two female figures. Their relatively small proportions show the transitional nature of the world represented on this tier. Perhaps they symbolised the terrestrial world between the upper, celestial world, and the lower underground world. The lower stage is adorned with a male figure, which supports the celestial and the terrestrial worlds upon his shoulders. The figure is represented on only three sides of the pillar. The reason for this may be that mythical monsters from another world are usually depicted with three heads. Tripartite organisation of the universe has an analogy in Scandinavian mythology, in which the 'middle earth' of people (*Midgard*) is surrounded by the ocean that divides two other worlds, the upper Valhalla and the lower Hel.⁸⁶

Unfortunately, we have evidence neither of the origin of the Zbruch-idol, nor of any association with a particular tribe or people. The statue was discovered in eastern Galicia, the ancient population of which was possibly a mixture of the so-called Khalyzians (*Khalisioi* in Greek, and *Khvalisy* in Russian), an Iranian people, Slavs (White Croats) and Celts (Gallic people, Gauls).⁸⁷ The neighbouring land of the Drevljans was inhabited by, perhaps, a mixture of Slavs and distant issue of the Goths (*Tervingi*) long ago had extended from the Scandinavia to the Black Sea.⁸⁸ Another four-headed statue, called Chetyrebog ('four-god'), stood in Tesnovka, near Kiev, until 1850. Prehistoric stone stelae depicting the same god, helmeted and holding

⁸⁵ The celestial gods of the upper world could have been 'younger gods', while the chthonian 'monsters' on the underworld could be the so-called 'older gods'.

⁸⁶ The Scandinavian tripartite model of the Universe is represented on the Gotland picture stones. The upper world there is marked with solar signs and the lower one with a monster. See Ellmers, 'Valhalla and the Gotland Stones', in Crumlin-Pedersen & Munch Thye 1995, 165–171.

⁸⁷ On Celtic analogies to Zbruch-Idol, see Janina Rosen-Przeworska, 'La tradition du dieu celtique à quatre visages chez les Protoslaves et les Slaves occidentaux', *Antiquités nationales et internationales* 4:14–16 (1963), 65–69.

⁸⁸ Leo Diaconus (*Hist.* 6.10) writes that the people, who murdered Prince Igor, were Germans, and the Gothic '*Tervingi*' is of the same meaning as the Russian '*Drevljane*', i.e. 'forest people'. See Nikitin 2001, 204, 208, 212. On the Goths in the Eastern Europe, see Hakon Stang, *The Naming of Russia*, (Universitetet i Oslo, Slavisk baltisk avdeling, meddelelser 77), Oslo 1996, 194–299.

a cornucopia in his right hand, and occasionally with a horse engraved on the back, are known from various Slavic territories.

The god of the Zbruch statue is often identified with the West Slavic god Sventovid, worshiped especially on the island of Rügen.⁸⁹ The name of Sventovid resembles the Russian word 'svet' (light) close to 'svjat' (sacred).⁹⁰ Saxo Grammaticus (*Gesta Dan.* XIV, 564) ascribed to the god Sventovid the same attributes as the Zbruch deity has: horn, horse, and sword. According to Snorri Sturlusson's *Prose Edda*, Odin was a holder of the gold ring, called Draupnir, which he laid on the pyre of his son Balder; it had the quality that every ninth night there dropped from it eight gold rings of equal weight. The quadripartite figure of the Zbruch-idol is reminiscent of the Indian Brahma, the Roman Janus, and the Greek Apollo of Amyclae, as Bernard Sergent showed.⁹¹ The deity was obviously of Indo-European origin and perhaps personified the quadruple seasonal division in the annual cycle.

We have no information to which gods of the upper world the Drevljan noble men were sent by Princess Olga. Celestial gods were usually connected with worship of the sun and thunder. The Heaven and the Sun as Russian deities, *Svarog* and *Dazhbog*, are mentioned in the *Hypatian Chronicle*, under the year 1114.⁹² Svarog is equated with the Greek smith god Hephaestus and identified with the generative and sexual powers of fire, and the solar god *Dazhbog* is regarded as Svarog's son. This evidence is much discussed. On the one hand, the name *Dazhbog* resembles Greek *Zeus*, Roman *Jovis*, Sanskrit *Dyauh*, Latvian *Dievs*, Germanic *Tyr*, and most likely originated from the basic Indo-European **deiuo*-.⁹³ The Sanskrit name *Svarga* and the Persian *xwar* indicate an Indo-European etymological relationship with Svarog.⁹⁴ Svarga is a heaven, presided over by Indra, where the righteous live in a paradise before their next reincarnation. On the other

⁸⁹ On the problem, see Szymański 1996, 75–116; Roman Zaroff, 'The Origins of Sventovit of Rügen', *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 5 (2002), 9–18.

⁹⁰ See Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov, 'Ob odnom arkhajchnom elemente v drevnerusskoj dukhovnoj kulture - *svet-', in B.A. Uspenskij ed., *Jazyki kultury i problemy perevodimosti*, "Nauka": Moskva 1987, 184–252.

⁹¹ See Bernard Sergent, 'Svantovit et l'Apollon d'Amyklai', *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 211 (1994), 15–58.

⁹² Cf. Rybakov 1981, 266–352, 434; *idem* 1987, 440–442; Lidija Viktorovna Sokolova, 'Dazbog (Dazdbog)', in *Enziklopedija "Slova o polku Igoreve"*, 2, Sankt-Peterburg 1995, 79–82.

⁹³ Alexander Gieysztor, 'The Slavic Pantheon and New Comparative Mythology', *Quaestiones Mediaevali* 1 (1977), 7–32; Lotte Motz, 'The Sky-God of the Indo-Europeans', *Indogermanische Forschungen*, 103 (1998), 28–39. Cf. Václav Machek, 'Essai comparatif sur la mythologie slave', *Revue des Études Slaves* 23 (1946), 48–65; Adolf Stender-Petersen, *Russian studies*, (Acta Jutlandica 28: 2; Humanistisk serie 43), Aarhus 1956, 45.

⁹⁴ Machek 1946, 60; Stender-Petersen 1956, 51–52; Nikos Čausidis, 'The Slavic Pantheons in a Visual Medium – Svarog', *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 1 (1998), 75–92.

hand, the name of *Dazhbog* resembles a typical euphemism from two Russian words *dazh* (*daj*) – ‘give’ and *bog* – ‘god’ that means ‘the god who gives, giving god’.⁹⁵ Therefore, it is frequently considered a pseudo-theonyme,⁹⁶ although in this case the sacred unutterable name of god, **Dejuo-*, is very close to its folk euphemistic substitute *Dazhbog* (*Dajbog*). Scholars frequently refute the reality of *Dazhbog*, because in the sources he forms a pair with the solar god Khors (from the Iranian solar term *Xorsed*); the latter is considered a sacred name, while the former is its profane substitute.⁹⁷ However, one can see in the pair of gods an analogy to Varuna and Mithra.⁹⁸

In Old Russian texts, Khors also forms a strong pair with Perun. In the *Primary Chronicle* the thunder-god Perun is represented in a pairing with Veles during the reign of Prince Oleg in 907 and Prince Svjatoslav in 971. Under Prince Igor, the *Primary Chronicle* names Perun alone the main deity, while under his grandson, Prince Vladimir, in 978–988, Perun appears at the head of a pantheon of five (or six) major deities.⁹⁹ His statue was made from oak, the tree of Perkunas or Perun, according to the *Gustinskaja Chronicle*, and the sacrificial fire was kept up with oaken firewood.¹⁰⁰ Therefore the use of oaken coals to fill the pit in which the Drevljan envoys were to burn indicates the presence of Perun in the ritual concerning Veles.¹⁰¹

⁹⁵ Aleksandr Borisovich Strakhov, ‘Lovushki “narodnoj” etimologii’, *Palaeoslavica* 13 (2005), 19, considers the name of Svarog (*svarschik* – smith, from **sv̅ariti*) literary, generated in the Christian epoch. In the name of *Dazhbog* (lit. ‘given by the god’, ‘god’s gift’, a version is the name *Bogdan* (*Богданъ*) he sees a calques of the Greek Θεοδοτος (*Федот*).

⁹⁶ See Leszek Moszyński, ‘Daž(d)ь-bogъ - rzekomy prasłowiański teonim’, *Slavia orientalis* 38 (1989), 285–291.

⁹⁷ Vasiljev 1987, 133–156; Toporov 1989, 103–126; Lidija Viktorovna Sokolova, ‘Khors’, in *Entzyklopedija “Slova o polku Igoreve”*, 5, Sankt-Peterburg 1995, 187–188.

⁹⁸ Nikos Čausidis, ‘Dažbog in Malala’s Chronicle and His Relations with Other Medieval and Folkloristic Sources’, *Studia Mythologica Slavica* 3 (2000), 23–42 recently argued that *Dazhbog* was an incarnation of chthonic zones of the universe, an opponent to the celestial god Svarog.

⁹⁹ Marija Gimbutas, ‘Perkūnas/Perun. The Thunder God of the Balts and the Slavs’, *Journal of Indo-European Studies* 1 (1973), 466–477; Mark Yoffe, Joseph Krafczik, *Perun: The God of Thunder*, Peter Lang: New York 2003; Lev Samuilovich Klein, *Voskreszenie Peruna: K rekonstruktzii vostochnoslavjanskogo jazychestva*, Evrasia: Sankt-Petersburg 2004.

¹⁰⁰ *Gustinskaja letopis* (Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisej 40), Sankt-Petersburg 2003, 44.

¹⁰¹ On the offerings for a big oak on the island Khortitza, performed by Rus’, see Constantine Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando Imperio*, Gy. Moravcsik and R.J.H. Jenkins eds., (Corpus fontium historiae Byzantinae 1), rev. ed., Dumbarton Oaks Centre for Byzantine Studies: Washington D.C. 2006, c. 9, 56–57. Cf. Thomas V. Gamkrelidze, Vjacheslav V. Ivanov, *Indo-European and the Indo-Europeans: a reconstruction and historical analysis of a proto-language and a proto-culture*, 1, ed. by Werner Winter; with a preface by Roman Jakobson, English version by Johanna Nichols, (Trends in linguistics, Studies and monographs 80:[1]), de Gruyter: Berlin 1995, 612–619; Rybakov 1987, 210, 374–375; Tatjana Anatolievna Agapkina, Andrej Ljvovich Toporkov, ‘Materialy po slavjanskomu jazychestvu (drevnerusskie svidetelstva o pochitanii derevjev)’, in *Literatura Drevnej Rusi: Istochnikovedenie*, “Nauka”: Leningrad 1988, 224–235.

The description of the second stage of the ritual ('second revenge') in the *Primary Chronicle* seems to be distorted by Scandinavian influence on the compiler, who wrote at the beginning of the twelfth century.¹⁰² The burning of enemies in a house was a well-known motif in medieval Nordic culture, but it is not found in earlier Russian tradition.¹⁰³ The tale of Sigrid the Haughty, who burnt Harald Grenski and Vissavald inside a house, closely resembles that of Princess Olga.¹⁰⁴ In both stories, the princely widows, Olga and Sigrid, consider their suitors unworthy of their own high status (this is one of the reasons for the appearance of the prince *Mal* (small)) and burn them with their retinue (their matchmakers) in a house. In contrast to Snorri's story of Sigrid, whose only motive was pride, the *Primary Chronicle* explains the behaviour of Olga as revenge for the murder of her husband. Considering Olga (~920–969) was a generation older than Sigrid (~968–before 1013), Elena Melnikova suggests that both stories had a common source, the tale of Princess Olga's revenge, which originated among the Varjag retinue of the Kievan princes.¹⁰⁵ Later, in her opinion, the story was brought to Scandinavia by the Vikings, lost its eastern European aspects, became a part of fiction, and was added to the name of Sigrid. However, it is quite possible that the tale of Sigrid's harsh treatment of her suitors appeared to explain her cognomen 'the Proud', and was not borrowed from the story of Olga. Both stories had their basis in folkloric *topoi* of strong women, and the tale, disclosing the savage customs not appropriate to the Russian folklore unlike the Scandinavian sagas, may rather have been transmitted by Swedish relatives of the Kievan ruling family to the Russian annalists. Specific to the Russian story, the burning in a bathhouse as opposed to a dwelling house is a known motif in Indo-European poetry.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² On Scandinavian parallels for Olga's behaviour, see Nora Kershaw Chadwick, *The beginnings of Russian history: an enquiry into sources*, Cambridge University press: Cambridge 1966 [1946], 28–33; Judith Jesch, *Women in the Viking Age*, Boydell Press: Woodbridge 1991, 111–115.

¹⁰³ On the burning of an enemy/rival in a house, see *Brennu-Njálssaga*, F. Jónsson ed., (Altnordische Saga-Bibliothek 13), Halle: Niemeyer 1908, 299–303; *Heiðarvíga saga*, Kr. Kálund ed., (Samfund til Udgivelse af Gammel Nordisk litteratur 31), Möllers bogtrykkeri: Kjöbenhavn 1904, 13–14; Svend Grundvíg, *Danmarks gamle folkeviser*, 3, Gyldendalske boghandel: Kjöbenhavn 1862, 46–48; *The Nibelungenlied*, Margaret Armour trans., (Medieval German Series), Cambridge, ON 1999, 157–160 ('Thirty-sixth adventure – How the Queen bade them burn down the hall'). Cf. Butler 2004, 780–782 and n. 51.

¹⁰⁴ The Russian suitor for Sigrid's hand, Vissavald, cannot be identified in Russian history.

¹⁰⁵ Elena Aleksandrovna Melnikova, 'Predaniya o pervykh russkikh knjazjakh: skandinavskie kuljturnye tradicii v vostochnoslavjanskoj srede', in *Mezhkuljturnyj dialog v istoricheskom kontekste. Materialy nauchnoj konferenczii* (Moskva, 30–31 October 2003), Moskva 2003.

¹⁰⁶ See West 2007, 444.

At the same time, it may go back to the Russian custom of stoking bathhouses for the deceased.¹⁰⁷

The bath house in which the Drevljan noble men were burnt could also be the folkloric substitute of a building, which was specially prepared for the sacrifice.¹⁰⁸ Such a construction, according to Ibn Fadlan, was built on the ship as a house in which the dead body would be placed and the rituals performed.¹⁰⁹ During the funeral of the Lithuanian Great Prince Gediminas, which was accompanied with human sacrifice by burning, the victims were enclosed in a wooden or wicker structure, which resembles the ‘wickerman’ figures, described by Julius Caesar (*Bell. Gall.* VI, 16) in Gaul, also used by the druids in sacrificial rituals.¹¹⁰

The massacre of the Drevljans on Prince Igor’s tomb

Olga then sent to the Derevljans the following message, ‘I am now coming to you, so prepare great quantities of mead in the city where you killed my husband, that I may weep over his grave and hold a funeral feast for him’. When they heard these words, they gathered great quantities of honey and brewed mead. Taking a small escort, Olga made the journey with ease, and upon her arrival at Igor’s tomb, she wept for her husband. She bade her followers pile up a great mound and when they had piled it up, she also gave command that a funeral feast should be held. Thereupon the Derevljans sat down to drink, and Olga bade her followers wait upon them. The Derevljans inquired of Olga where the retinue was which they had sent to meet her. She replied that they were following husband’s bodyguard. When the Derevljans were drunk, she bade her followers fall upon them, and went about herself egging on her retinue to the massacre of the Derevljans. So they cut down five thousand of them; but Olga returned to Kiev and prepared an army to attack the survivors.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁷ Likhachev 1996, 437.

¹⁰⁸ On the possible archaeological analogies of the funeral ritual, see Anatolij A. Aleksandrov, ‘Olginskaja toponimika, Vybutskie sopki i Rusy v Pskovskoj zemle’, in *Pamjatniki srednevekovoj kultury. Otkrytija i versii: Zbornik statej k 75-letiju V.D. Beletzkogo*, Sankt-Petersburg 1994, 22–31.

¹⁰⁹ An old-Russian term for coffin, *domovina*, has the same root as the term for house, *dom*. See Lidija Georgievna Nevskaja, ‘Semantika doma i smezhnikh predstavlenij v pogrebalnom folklore’, in *Balto-slavjanskije issledovanija 1981*, “Nauka”: Moskva 1982, 106–121, cf. Smyser 1965, 108.

¹¹⁰ Dean A. Miller, ‘Women of Power Compared in the Celtic and Slavic Tradition’, in Tatjana Mikhailova, Séamus Mac Mathúna, Maxim Fomin and Grigory Bondarenko eds., *Proceedings of the Second International Colloquium of Societas Celto-Slavica (Moscow, 14–17 September 2006)*, (Studia Celto-Slavica 2), Moscow 2009, 128–135: at 131.

¹¹¹ *The Russian primary chronicle*, 80. For another English translation, see Butler 2004, 781.

The third sacrifice, offered by Princess Olga near the Drevljan settlement Iskirosten and depicted by the compiler as her 'third revenge', was completed during the funeral feast on the tomb of Prince Igor. The participants were the widow, her retinue and a number of Drevljans. The figure of five thousand massacred is obviously inaccurate because, according to the next story, the majority of Drevljans survived and withstood a siege by Olga's army within a year. 'Five thousand dead' is an 'epic number', a symbolic replacement of the notion 'many'. In reality a certain number of Drevljans was sacrificed. Herodotus (IV, 72), who describes the similar funeral custom of the Scythians, gives the number of warriors who were killed to accompany their chief on his journey to the other world as fifty. The Drevljans were sacrificed when they were drunk, just as the girl in the funeral feast of the Russian noble man described by Ibn Fadlan was forced to drink several bowls of strong drink (*nabīdh*) before she was sacrificed.¹¹²

The word '*trizna*' in the *Primary Chronicle* is considered a notion for the custom of war games during the funeral feast of a dead chief. Later, the word became a synonym for funeral commemoration and the funeral banquet.¹¹³ According to Vladimir Toporov, the *trizna* could be organized as a 'three-stage' battle (**tri > *trizna*) between the warriors of the princess and the Drevljans.¹¹⁴ Leonid Gindin surmises that such a *trizna* might have been organized as a real combat, like the gladiatorial contests in Rome, not merely as military games.¹¹⁵ Seen in this light, the war between Olga's army and the Drevljans, which the *Primary Chronicle* tells of after the massacre, may be an indirect description distorted memory of the same event. In this case, the Drevljans who were massacred on Olga's orders could be those who died in the military games; there the result of the combat, usually influenced by the favour of the gods, was preordained by the princess, who ordered her servants to make the Drevljans drunk and her warriors to kill them.

¹¹² Butler 2004, 782–787, compares Olga's order her followers to serve the Drevljans and make them drunk with the custom in medieval Europe, according to which the queen was responsible for serving ceremonial drink at feasts.

¹¹³ Kotljarevskij 1868, 114–117; Izmail Ivanovich Sreznevskij, *Slovar Drevnerusskogo jazyka (Materialy dlja slovarja Drevne-Russkogo jazyka po pismennym pamjatnikam)*, 3:2, "Kniga": Moskva 1989 [1893], 995–997; Rybakov 1981, 274; Leonid Aleksandrovich Gindin, 'Obrjad pogrebenija Attily (Iord. 49, 256–259) i "trizna" Olgi po Igorju (PVL, 6453 g.)', *Sovetskoe slavjanovedenie* 2/1990, 65–67; Likhachev 1996, 437–438. Cf. Sayers 1988, 176.

¹¹⁴ Vladimir Nikolaevich Toporov, 'K semantike troichnosti (slav. *trizna i dr.)', in *Etymologia* 1977, "Nauka": Moskva 1979, 3–20.

¹¹⁵ Gindin 1990, 67. Many scholars assume the origin of the Roman gladiatorial combats to have been in ritual, rather than the sport they later became.

Ibn Fadlan perhaps also observed a *trizna* during the funeral of the noble Rus, but, being an Arab, he noticed only the drinking-bout in the ritual.¹¹⁶ Dmitrij Ilovajskij drew attention to Ibn Fadlan's information about the dividing of the goods of the dead noble Russian into three parts, of which one part was used for the funeral clothes, the other was left to the family, and the third was spent on the funeral drinks.¹¹⁷ Ilovajskij sees in the word "*trizna*" a third part of the goods used for the funeral banquet, but the three parts can also be regarded as corresponding to the three parts of the Universe – Heaven (the burning goods), Earth (the part for the family), and the Underworld (the drinks drunk during the funeral banquet).¹¹⁸ The rituals performed by Princess Olga were incorporated into the integral ideological system structured with the three stages:

upper	heaven	fire	solar gods	future
middle	earth	earth	people	present
lower	underground	water	chthonian monsters	past

Fig. 4

The description of the burial itself was not necessary for the Kievan annalist, as the princess' revenge on the Drevljans became the main theme of the tale. The compiler selected from the oral tradition only that material which concerning the killing of them. Fortunately, we have the account of the Rūs burial by Ibn Fadlan, which enables us to reconstruct the missing part of the ritual.

Burning the city Iskorosten with the help of pigeons and sparrows

6454 (946). <...> Olga hastened with her son to the city of Iskorosten', for it was there that her husband had been slain, and they laid siege to the city.¹¹⁹ <...> The Derevlians then inquired what she desired of them, and expressed their readiness to pay honey and furs. Olga retorted that at the moment they had neither honey nor furs, but that

¹¹⁶ Kotljarevskij 1868, 79.

¹¹⁷ Dmitrij Ivanovich Ilovajskij, *Nachalo Rusi*, Izdatelstvo "Olymp": "Ast": Moskva 2002 [1890], 39–40; Kovalevskij 1956, 143, 245; Toporov 1979, 14 n. 34.

¹¹⁸ Aleksandr Borisovich Strakhov, 'Iz oblasti obrjadovoj terminologii: tz-slav. *трызна*, (*б*)*дынъ*, etc.', *Palaeoslavica* 10 (2002), 172–181 argues against the connection between *trizna* and three.

¹¹⁹ Although the city-name 'Iskorosten' resembles the metaphoric expression 'Spark city' (Dean Miller's supposition), scholars associate it with a real place. On the city Iskorosten/Korosten, see Gottfried Schramm, 'Korosten' in der Frühgeschichte der Rus': ein Ortsname als historische Quelle', *Russia medievalis* 9 (1997), 35–42.

she had one small request to make. 'Give me three pigeons', she said, 'and three sparrows from each house. I do not desire to impose a heavy tribute, like my husband, but I require only this small gift from you, for you are impoverished by the siege'. The Derevlians rejoiced, and collected from each house three pigeons and three sparrows, which they sent to Olga with their greeting. Olga then instructed them, in view of their submission, to return to their city, promising that on the morrow she would depart and return to her own capital. The Derevlians re-entered their city with gladness, and when they reported to the inhabitants, the people of the town rejoiced. Now Olga gave to each soldier in her army a pigeon or a sparrow, and ordered them to attach by a thread to each pigeon and sparrow a piece of sulphur bound with small pieces of cloth. When night fell, Olga bade her soldiers release the pigeons and the sparrows. So the birds flew to their nests, the pigeons to the cotes, and the sparrows under the eaves. Thus the dove-cotes, the coops, the porches, and the haymows were set on fire. There was not a house that was not consumed, and it was impossible to extinguish the flames, because all the houses caught fire at once. The people fled from the city, and Olga ordered her soldiers to catch them. Thus she took the city and burned it, and captured the elders of the city. Some of the other captives she killed, while she gave others as slaves to her followers. The remnant she left to pay tribute.

120

The capture of a hostile city with the help of incendiary birds is a recurring theme in medieval literature.¹²¹ Because such a mode of capturing cities is not possible in reality, one can suppose that in the background of the story is a figure of speech, metaphoric construction, which was coloured by poetical fantasy. 'Incendiary birds' as the figure of speech obviously had another meaning than it received from the Old Russian compiler and other writers, who used the image to describe the ruse of their heroes and explained it as a destructive agency by which a hostile city can be burnt. Of those who recorded similar stories the closest to Kievan Rus' territorially were the Scandinavians Saxo Grammaticus and Snorri Sturlusson. Saxo refers to the

¹²⁰ *The Russian primary chronicle*, 80–81.

¹²¹ See Helen M. Cam, 'The Legend of the Incendiary Birds', *English Historical Review* 31 (1916), 98–101; Davidson 1976, 19–21, 215–216; Jan de Vries, 'Normannisches Lehngut in der isländischen Königssagas', *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 47 (1931), 51–79.

story of King Hadding's capture of the city Duna in 'Hellespont' (perhaps Daugava or Western Dvina)¹²² as follows:

Then Hadding was taken by Loker [the tyrant of the Kurlanders], and found by very sure experience that every point of the prophecy was fulfilled upon him. So he assailed Handwan, king of the Hellespont, who was entrenched behind an impregnable defence of wall in his city Duna, and withstood him not in the field, but with battlements. Its summit defying all approach by a besieger, he ordered that the divers kinds of birds who were wont to nest in that spot should be caught by skilled fowlers, and he caused wicks which had been set on fire to be fastened beneath their wings. The birds sought the shelter of their own nests, and filled the city with a blaze; all the townsmen flocked to quench it, and left the gates defenceless. He attacked and captured Handwan, but suffered him to redeem his life with gold for ransom. Thus, when he might have cut off his foe, he preferred to grant him the breath of life; so far did his mercy qualify his rage.¹²³

It is not the only town captured by this unusual method in Saxo's work. The same tactic was used by a mythical Danish king, Fridleivus I (Friedleif), during his war in Ireland. According to Saxo:

While Fridleif was besieging Dublin, a town in Ireland, and saw from the strength of the walls that there was no chance of storming them, he imitated the shrewd wit of Hadding, and ordered fire to be shut up in wicks and fastened to the wings of swallows. When the birds got back in their own nesting-place, the dwellings suddenly flared up; and while the citizens all ran up to quench them, and paid more heed to abating the fire than to looking after the enemy, Fridleif took Dublin.¹²⁴

Snorri Sturlusson, in the Saga of Harald Hardrade, mentions, among other acts of bravery by the future Norwegian king Harald, the capture of an unknown city with the help of incendiary birds during his service under

¹²² For the tradition of Hellespont by Saxo, see Adolf Stender-Petersen, *Varangica*, Aarhus 1953, 199–219.

¹²³ Saxo Grammaticus, *The Danish History*, Books I–IX, translated by Oliver Elton, New York: Norroena Society 1905, 1.6, 10 (accessed at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/saxo/saxo01.htm>).

¹²⁴ Saxo Grammaticus, *The Danish History*, 4.10 (accessed at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/neu/saxo/saxo04.htm>).

George Maniakes in Sicily. It is noticeable that Harald Hardrade is known to have visited Kievan Rus' several times; he had a close relationship with Prince Jaroslav the Wise and married his daughter. His stratagem in Sicily resembles the story of the capture of Iskorosten:

Now when Harald came to Sicily he plundered there also, and sat down with his army before a strong and populous castle. He surrounded the castle; but the walls were so thick there was no possibility of breaking into it, and the people of the castle had enough of provisions, and all that was necessary for defence. Then Harald hit upon an expedient. He made his bird-catchers catch the small birds which had their nests within the castle, but flew into the woods by day to get food for their young. He had small splinters of tarred wood bound upon the backs of the birds, smeared these over with wax and sulphur, and set fire to them. As soon as the birds were let loose they all flew at once to the castle to their young, and to their nests, which they had under the house roofs that were covered with reeds or straw. The fire from the birds seized upon the house roofs; and although each bird could only carry a small burden of fire, yet all at once there was a mighty flame, caused by so many birds carrying fire with them and spreading it widely among the house roofs. Thus one house after the other was set on fire, until the castle itself was in flames. Then the people came out of the castle and begged for mercy...¹²⁵

Vasilij Vasilevskij suggested that Scandinavian warriors, Varjags (in this case Varangians), who served in the Byzantine army in Anatolia and visited Mesopotamia, brought similar tales from there.¹²⁶ He quotes an Armenian historian of the early eleventh century, Stepanos Taronetsi Asoghik, who wrote in his *Universal History* of the wisdom of Khosrow, the emir of Baghdad at the end of the tenth century. When the people of one town he was besieging refused to open the gates, Khosrow demanded that they give him one dog from each house as a tax. He ordered that the dogs be smeared with oil, set alight and set free. The dogs, attempting to escape the fire, fled to their homes in the town, using the passageways through which people

¹²⁵ Snorri Sturlusson, *Heimskringla or The Chronicle of the Kings of Norway*, trans. by Samuel Laing, London 1844, *Saga of Harald Hardrade* 1.6 (accessed at <http://omacl.org/Heimskringla/hardrade1.html>).

¹²⁶ Vasilij Grigorjevich Vasilevskij, 'Varjago-Russkaja i Varjago-Anglijskaja družhina v Konstantinopole XI i XII vekov', in V.G. Vasilevskij, *Trudy*, 1, Sankt-Petersburg 1908, 233–4. The arguments of Vasilevskij are repeated by Stender-Petersen 1934, 147–155.

could not pass. Thus they set fire to the town. In Asoghik's opinion, by this clever stratagem, Khosrow proved himself the equal of the Biblical hero Samson and Alexander the Great. According to *Judges* 15: 4–5,

So Samson went and caught three hundred foxes, and took torches; and he turned them tail to tail, and put a torch between each pair of tails. And when he had set fire to the torches, he let the foxes go into the standing grain of the Philistines, and burned up the shocks and the standing grain, as well as the olive orchards.¹²⁷

In the same manner, Alexander used incendiary birds to set fire to a wooden palace, which was built on a very high rock. This last story, however, is not known from any ancient author, and one can surmise that it was a local Armenian folktale derived from the Biblical story of Samson. In Armenia, there was a pagan custom to release pigeons to fly during the festivals of Aphrodite (*Vardavar* – a festival of opening roses), which then was interpreted in Christian times as a memory of Noah's thrice sending the pigeon to search the earth.¹²⁸ The legendary emir Khosrow also ordered that pigeons be smeared with oil, set alight and freed so they would fly to heaven.

It would be going too far to argue that these fabulous stories were fabricated by Asoghik, but Harald Hardrade is hardly likely to have brought them to Kievan Rus' and Scandinavia.¹²⁹ There is no proof that the motif of using birds as stratagem to burn a town, ascribed to Alexander the Great by Asognik, was widespread (or even known) in the Near East. Snorri Sturlusson, who wrote in the first third of the 1200s, was the true author of the story of incendiary birds in the *Saga of Harald Hardrade*, rather than Harald himself. Also Saxo, who finished his *Gesta Danorum* about 1187, must have had a different source than the hypothetical tales of Harald's warriors. Therefore the Russian tale of Princess Olga's pigeons and sparrows also had a different origin than the Anatolian legend elaborated by Scandinavian warriors for their commander, Harald Hardrade, and presented to the population of Kiev (who, it seems, forgot this particular

¹²⁷ The Biblical story is close to Ovid *Fasti* 4, lines 679–682, which was also examined by Georges Dumézil, *Archaic Roman Religion*, tr. by Ph. Krapp, The John Hopkins University Press: Baltimore & London 1996, 375–376.

¹²⁸ The pre-Christian festival resembles the Iranian *Sādāh* and the Roman *Cerealia*, in which animals and fire were used in a similar way. See Dumézil 1996, 375–376.

¹²⁹ Stender-Petersen 1934, 142–146, 153 argued that the *Saga of Harald Hardrade* was the original source of the motif for the whole Nordic tradition; Harald's warriors brought it to Rus', then to England, and from there it got to Saxo in Denmark.

story almost immediately but employed the pleasing motif in a tale about their own ancient princess Olga!).

Shakhmatov considered the story with incendiary pigeons and sparrows as a later interpolation added by the author of the *Primary Chronicle* in ca. 1110.¹³⁰ If to follow this viewpoint, the legend of Iskorosten's capture by Princess Olga remained a part of oral tradition until the twelfth century (1110–1118), while the story of her threefold revenges was possibly written down as early as ca. 1039. Thus Olga's story has nothing to do with Asoghik's novels. Harald Hardrade served in the Byzantine guard until 1042, when he returned to his homeland, staying in Kiev for some time to marry. His tales of incendiary birds, if he had any, according to Shakhmatov's interpretation, were not used in the compilations of the 1070s and the 1090s. In addition, the version of Olga's story that we possess is older than the versions of the Scandinavian tales of Hadding and Harald recorded by Saxo and Snorri, although this does not mean that the *Primary Chronicle* was the source for them.

The western stories had a predecessor in an Old French *chanson de geste*, named '*Gormond et Isembard*', which Ferdinand Lot and Joseph Bédier dated the second half of the eleventh or first half of the twelfth century, to about 1088 or even 1068.¹³¹ The poem tells the story of a young French lord Isembard, who is cruelly persecuted at the court of his uncle, King Louis. Isembard goes into exile in England, joins the Saracen king Gormond renouncing Christianity and incites his new friend to attack France, to destroy Isembard's own lands and the surrounding countryside, and to burn down the Abbey of Saint-Riquier. The poem appears to have some foundation in an invasion of Norsemen who burned the Abbey of Saint-Riquier in February 881 and were defeated by Louis III six months later at Saucourt-en-Vimeu. Before that, while in England in 879, the friends took part in the attack on Cirencester by the Danish king of East Anglia, Guthrum; the city was captured with the help of incendiary sparrows. The king *Gutrum* (*Godrum* or *Gorm*) was obviously the prototype of the legendary 'Saracen' *Gormond* (Lat. *Gormondus*).

The poem with this plot was known in England at the beginning of the 1100s; Geoffrey of Monmouth referred it in his *Vita Merlini* (lines 593–

¹³⁰ Shakhmatov 2001, 84–87. Istrin 1924, 56–57, refused the supposition of an interpolation.

¹³¹ See Ferdinand Lot, '*Gormond et Isembard, recherches sur les fondements historiques de cette épopée*', *Romania* 27 (1898), 1–54; Joseph Bédier, *Les légendes épiques: recherches sur la formation des chansons de geste*, 4, 2nd ed., Honore Champion: Paris 1913, 21–91. Also cf. Stender-Petersen 1934, 132–139.

594), dated approximately to 1138.¹³² The image of burning birds, thus, may have been known to Gytha (d. 1098), who, after the death of her father Harold Godwinson, was married to Waldemar, king of Ruthenia, that is, Vladimir Monomakh, the famous ruler of Kievan Rus'. Gytha's husband and the son Mstislav the Great were very opened to the Scandinavian cultural influence and also actively encouraged the writing of annals and chronicles, so that the *Primary Chronicle* was supposedly redacted under their influence, in 1116–1118. This, according to Shakhmatov, seems to be the time when the incendiary sparrows and pigeons were added to the story of Princess Olga.

It may be asked, however, whether the incendiary birds were absolutely extraneous to the original story of Olga, or whether the Christian compiler adopted it because its features were familiar to him, perhaps resembling known customs that involved use of birds? The tale could be of very ancient origin with roots in mythology and cultic use of birds. Felix Liebrecht describes ancient Roman, Iranian and Celtic festivals connected with solar and fertility cults.¹³³ Fire and pyres played an important role in such celebrations; they helped to preserve the sun's energy during the dark winter period. Incendiary birds were used in such festivals, perhaps as a means of delivering fire from another world.¹³⁴ The fairy Firebird (*Zhar-ptitza*) of Russian mythological folklore, a magical glowing bird from a faraway land, is a ritualistic burning bird from another world.¹³⁵ Elena Rydzevskaja, therefore, is inclined to think that ancient Iranian tradition, with the elaborated motif of incendiary birds, exerted influence upon east Slavic folk culture long before the Scandinavian voyages to Byzantium in the eleventh century.¹³⁶ The story, in which Harald Hardrade uses incendiary birds, in her opinion, was created on the model of the earlier tale of Princess Olga. Indeed, the motif of birds from another world, and as a delivery service to another world, is widespread in east Slavic folklore; in particular,

¹³² The English poet Lajamon of Areley, Worcestershire, in his poem *Brutus*, 29343–29348 (about 1204) following the Anglo-Norman poet of Jersey, Robert Wace, *Roman de Brut*, 14029 (about 1155), whose chronicle of British history was based on the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth, writes that Cirencester was called Sparrow-chester after that event. On the discussion of this, see Bédier 1913, 71; Cam 1916, 100.

¹³³ Felix Liebrecht, *Zur Volkskunde: alte und neue Aufsätze*, Heilborn 1879, 261–255.

¹³⁴ See Kelly 2006, 74–76, 175–179, 201–203.

¹³⁵ The Firebird concept has parallels in the Iranian legends of magical birds, especially *Simurgh* of Persian mythology, the Indian *Garuda*, the bird of the Hindu god Vishnu, the *Phoenix* of Greek mythology, the Egyptian bird *Bennu* that is said to be the soul of the Sun-God *Ra*, the Czech *Pták Ohnivák* (Bird Fire-like), and the Grimm brothers' fairy tale *The Golden Bird*.

¹³⁶ Rydzevskaja 1978, 202.

the fairy ship on which the hero could sail to another world, is symbolically identified with a bird.¹³⁷

The sparrows and pigeons that appear in the *Primary Chronicle* were not casually gathered by the princess' warriors; Princess Olga asked for three pigeons and three sparrows from each Drevljan house as a tax. The particularities of the story are absent from Harald's story and are therefore hardly likely to have been borrowed from his saga (they are more likely to have been borrowed from *Gormond et Isembard*). One can surmise that these species had a special significance among birds because they were typical urban birds. However, the idea of a 'military' use of sparrows and pigeons seems to be secondary and to originate from the symbolic meaning of the birds. Mythological treatment of sparrows and pigeons by the eastern Slavs connected them with the world beyond. According to an omen, for instance, a sparrow that flies into the window promises great misfortune and a death in the house.¹³⁸

In the *Ynglinga saga*, Snorri Sturluson relates the story of King Dag, who was so wise that he understood the language of birds. He had a sparrow which told him much news, and which flew to different countries. Once the sparrow flew to Reidgotaland, where he flew into a peasant's corn-field and took his grain. The peasant came up, took a stone, and killed the sparrow. King Dag was ill-pleased that the sparrow did not come home, and when he inquired after the sparrow in a sacrifice of expiation, he got the answer that it was killed. Thereupon he raised a great army, and went to Gotland, where he plundered and the people fled before him. King Dag returned in the evening to his ships, after having killed many people and taken many prisoners. As they were crossing a river, a labouring thrall came running to the river-side and threw a hay-fork into their troop. It struck the king on the head, so that he fell instantly from his horse and died. The river and the passage over it, which are connected with the death here, are symbols of a chthonic world; and the sparrow of Dag takes the role of bird of the underground gods in the story, in the same way that eagles or falcons were birds of the celestial gods.

In Slavic pagan rites, preserved in modern folk customs in which sparrows are linked to the idea of fertility and calendar rituals, they appear as dangerous birds connected with the chthonic world. In the countryside of

¹³⁷ See Propp 1998, 295.

¹³⁸ Ljudmila Aleksandrovna Tuljtzeva, 'Simvolika vorobja v obrjadakh i obrjadovom folklore (v svjazi s voprosom o kulte ptit v agrarnom kalendare)', in V. Sokolova ed., *Obrjady i obrjadovij folklor*, "Nauka": Moskva 1982 163–179; Aleksandr Viktorovich Gura, 'Vorobej ispechen', in V.N. Toporov ed., *Philologia slavica: K 70-letiju akademika N.I. Tolstogo*, "Nauka": Moskva 1993, 43–49.

Belarusian Polesje, the people who visited houses on the eve of New Year to wish their masters happiness (*shedrovalniki*), threw a sparrow into the house and then threatened to burn it or cut its beak to prevent the sparrows from eating the masters' millet. At Christmas, sparrows are called 'blend' in order that they will not catch sight of sowed crops. In the countryside ovens are usually stoked before daybreak or after sunset so that sparrows will not see the smoke; sowing is also performed silently before daybreak or after sunset. Things that had been in contact with the deceased could be used to pacify sparrows: for instance, the field was fumigated with the shavings from an old coffin, or seeds for sowing were mixed with sand or earth from a grave.

The connection between sparrows and the chthonic world generated fear of them and contributed to their image as the birds of death. The image of the captured city with the bodies of dead inhabitants in the streets, over which only the surviving birds fly, is regarded as the result of these birds' deeds. The mythological idea of a fiery space, which messengers from another world must overcome, generated the idea of incendiary birds as carriers of destructive fire from the other world.

The connection between sparrows and fire is found in many popular beliefs and customs. On New Year's Eve girls tried to predict whether they would be married or not by throwing sparrows into the oven: if the sparrow flew out of the fire, the girl also was destined to 'fly out' of her house. When fowling sparrows for these magic manipulations the hunters threatened to burn their beaks. In western Ukraine and Belarus the caught sparrows were burnt or dried in the oven and pounded, and in spring their ashes or powder was mixed with corn and used during the first sowing. Among the southern Slavs and in Ukraine and Belarus there was a custom to eat baked, boiled or dried sparrows at Christmas and on New Year's Eve, that is, at the winter solstice. The motif of the baked sparrow also appears in Croatian and Ukrainian comic and wedding songs. Sometimes, before eating the sparrow, the people touched their cattle with it. As a bird from another world, the sparrow was considered a carrier of fertility.

Among the Ukrainians and Poles there was a popular belief in the so-called Sparrow Night, when all sparrows gathered at a council with the god of another world, the devil or the major of sparrows (*gorobjevyj*), who measured them with huge yardstick. Sparrows which found no place on the yardstick he brushed off from its edges and allowed to go and reproduce, but those which remained on the yardstick he cast into hell or killed. The Sparrow Night was a night with a strong thunderstorm and sheet lightning; it was considered the time when evil forces raged. In Kievan Rus', Sparrow

Night was regarded as the time when some kind of heavenly battle occurred. The first known mention of the Sparrow Night occurs under the year 1024 in the *Tverskaja Chronicle*, where the great battle of Listven between the warriors of Prince Jaroslav the Wise and his brother Mstislav is described.¹³⁹

Most frequently the Sparrow Night is associated with one of the last nights in June, before the festival of *Ivan Kupala*, Midsummer Night, or about the first of September, when the New Year started according to the old Russian calendar.¹⁴⁰ In other words, the burning of sparrows before the New Year symbolised purifying the Universe of the last year's chthonic surplus. Burning has a purifying connotation in Indo-European cultures. At the same time, these birds of another world made the fields produce good harvests and the cattle and people more fertile, because the energy they brought from these other worlds was very useful, within reasonable limits.

Thus, the birds burned by the Kievan warriors symbolised the purification of Iskorosten from the pollution which sullied the city as a consequence of the murder of Prince Igor by its inhabitants.¹⁴¹ According to the *Pereslavian Chronicle*, Princess Olga asked the Drevljans to pay the tribute of birds as an 'offering to the gods'.¹⁴² In other words, Princess Olga performed the ritual of purification before accepting the city as part of her domain.¹⁴³ It is likely that in its original form the story described the delivery of the required tribute of sparrows and pigeons baked in pastry for the festive banquet by the Drevljans of Iskorosten. And this convivial dish is associated in the legendary story with the custom of burning the messengers from another world as the means to cleanse the city.

What about the pigeons? In the *Mahābhārata* (III, 7, 130), there is a story about King Usinara. When he performed a sacrifice, Indra and Agni presented themselves to him at his sacrificial ground, Indra assuming the shape of a hawk, and Agni that of a pigeon. In fear of the hawk, the pigeon fell upon the king's thigh, seeking his protection. The hawk demanded that his food be returned to him, but the king refused. Then the hawk said: 'Being deprived of food, my life, O ruler of men, will surely leave this body,

¹³⁹ *Tverskoj letopisetz*, (Polnoe Sobranie Russkikh Letopisej 15), "Jazyki russkoj kultury": Moskva 2000, 144–145.

¹⁴⁰ Tatjana Anatolievna Agapkina, Andrej Ljvovich Toporkov, 'Vorobjinaja (rjabinovaja) noch' v jazyke i poverjakh vostochnykh slavjan', in *Slavjanskij i balkanskij folklor: Rekonstrukcija drevnej slavjanskoj dukhovnoj kultury: istochniki i metody*, "Nauka": Moskva 1989, 230–253: 249–252.

¹⁴¹ On the purifying significance of rites using burning animals, see Dumézil 1996, 376.

¹⁴² *Letopisetz Pereslavlja Suzdaljskogo*, 16.

¹⁴³ Likhachev 1996, 438–439 assumes that Olga gathered from the Drevljans for performing a 'sacrifice ritual'.

and at my death, my wife and children will surely perish. So by protecting this single pigeon, O pious king, thou dost not protect many lives. The virtue that stands in the way of another virtue, is certainly no virtue at all, but in reality is unrighteousness'. One after the other the king suggested a bull, a boar, a deer, and a buffalo instead of the pigeon, but the hawk refused to take them and asked to cut off a portion of the king's own flesh, and weigh it in a balance, against this pigeon. The highly virtuous king cut off a portion of his own flesh and did as asked. But when he found that the pigeon exceeded his flesh in weight, he cut off another portion of his flesh, and added it to the first. When portion after portion had been successively added to be weighed against the pigeon, and no more flesh was left on his body, he mounted the scale himself, utterly devoid of flesh.¹⁴⁴ Then the hawk said, 'I am Indra, O virtuous king, and this pigeon is Agni, we had come unto your sacrificial ground, desirous of testing your merit'.¹⁴⁵ The pigeon in this story relates to sacrifice, death, that is, another world, and represents Agni, the god of fire.

In older Russia, there was a folk belief that if pigeons were in the house, the house would be safe from fire and happiness and good luck would always be present there. There existed many beliefs which connected the pigeon with fire. One superstition forbade the killing of pigeons, because this would make the god Veles angry and he would cause the cattle to cease propagating. Veles was regarded as the 'cattle god', a symbol of richness and prosperity, but, at the same time he was a chthonic god, and pigeons were always his concern.

According to another popular belief, in order to extinguish the flames of a burning house, it was necessary to throw inside a white pigeon. In other words, the fire could be extinguished by the magic use of its own symbol. On the other hand, if a pigeon flew in through the window, this was considered an omen that a conflagration would occur. The belief seems to be a part of the mythological idea, according to which the fire elements of another world can penetrate to our world through the window, which symbolically connects the worlds in sacred space. Ilovajskij surmised that the pigeon acts here as a messenger of the heavenly god.¹⁴⁶ However, the pigeon's connection to other worlds beyond the earthly one was rather

¹⁴⁴ The motif of the main hero feeding a mythical bird with a part of its own body during a visit to another world is widespread in Russian fairy tales.

¹⁴⁵ See *The Mahabharata of Krishna-Dwaipajana Vjasa*, translated by Kisari Mohan Ganguli, 1883–1896, 271: 3. 7, 130–131 (accessed at <http://www.sacred-texts.com/hin/m07/index.htm>)

¹⁴⁶ Ilovajskij 2002, 274.

ambivalent: fire separated the earthly world from both the celestial world and the underworld.

In Greco-Roman antiquity, pigeons were associated with the goddess of love, Astarte, Aphrodite or Venus, who symbolized fertility or the Mother Goddess. As sacred birds of Aphrodite, pigeons were kept in the temples of the goddess on the island Kythira and in Paphos, Cyprus. According to the mythic story told by Herodotus (2.54 and 57), two black doves had flown from Thebes in Egypt, one to Libya and one to Dodona; the latter settled on an oak tree, and there uttered human speech, declaring that a place of divination from Zeus must be founded there; the people of Dodona understood that the message was divine, and therefore established the oracular shrine. The dove which came to Libya told the Libyans (they say) to make an oracle of Amun; this also is sacred to Zeus.¹⁴⁷ The prophetesses of Dodona who pronounced oracles were called 'doves' (Πελειάδες). In the classical era the seeresses represented Zeus and dressed as messengers of the celestial god, while in the archaic period they most likely represented a chthonic female deity.

The Biblical story of the Flood told of a dove, which Noah let out from the Ark to find out whether the waters had receded from the earth and whether God had made peace with people; as a message from God the dove brought back an olive leaf in its beak (*Genesis* 8). The pigeon with an olive (palm) branch is the symbol of victory over death. In archaic times, the pigeon was the preferred bird for offerings to Yahweh (*Levit.* 1: 14–17). In Christianity, just as the pigeon from Noah's Ark brought an olive branch as a sign of peace between God and the human race, and did not find any place of safety but the Ark, so the Christian does not find refuge and rescue anywhere, except within the Church. Christianity borrowed the classical idea according to which pigeons symbolized the heavenly world, purity and peace. According to the New Testament, 'And when the time came for their purification according to the law of Moses, they brought him up to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord and to offer a sacrifice according to what is said in the law of the Lord, 'a pair of turtledoves, or two young pigeons' (*Luke* 2:21–24). A dove descending from heaven as the symbol of the Holy Spirit appears in the description of Jesus' baptism (*John* 1:32).

Thus, in both the polytheistic and the Christian consciousness, pigeons like sparrows acted in the role of intermediaries between the

¹⁴⁷ On the oracle of Dodona, see David Evans, 'Dodona, Dodola, and Daedala', in G. J. Larson, C. S. Littleton, & J. Puhvel, eds., *Myth in Indo-European Antiquity*, University of California Press: Berkeley, CA 1974, 99–130.

worlds. This seems to be the reason why, in the story of the *Primary Chronicle*, Princess Olga used them as the means of purification. Sparrows were connected with the chthonic underworld, and pigeons, under the influence of Christianity, were considered as messengers from the heavenly world.

For the Christian compiler, the pigeon, unlike the sparrow, was a messenger of the Heavenly Lord who had given the Drevljan country under the control of Princess Olga and her son Svjatoslav. As used by the compiler, the image of burning pigeons, which were sent by Princess Olga to Iskorosten, contained the idea of connection with the will of the supreme God. At the same time, the image of pigeons and sparrows flying to the Drevljan city appears as a symbol of the death descending on it, connected with the description of the massacre completed according to Olga's order. Thus, the idea of incendiary birds was comprehensible to both pagans and Christians. The addition of the story of Iskorosten's capture with the help of incendiary birds to the original story of Olga's revenge shows that the author of the *Primary Chronicle* had at his disposal a description of the pagan purifying ritual. This knowledge enabled him to use the Scandinavian theme, which was likely to be to the taste of his audience, the Jaroslavichi clan.

Conclusion

My interpretation suggests that there existed an original story in which Princess Olga's actions had nothing to do with revenge for the murder of her husband. Step by step, she performed the funeral rituals appropriate for a prince's death: the sending of messengers to the lower and upper worlds, the funeral games and banquet (*trizna*) on the tomb of the dead husband, and the purifying of the Drevljans from the pollution of the murder. The full description of the princely funeral ritual shows that its author had at his disposal some factual material. However, the funeral and the purifying rituals are represented in the *Primary Chronicle* in a different context than that in which they could be performed in reality. Aspiring to evade the conflict between Christianity and the description of the pagan rites, the compiler elaborated on the original version, representing the rituals as stages of revenge. In the chronicle the description became a part of a historical process, in which the ancient rituals were converted into historical events. In this new context, the behaviour of real historical persons has an entirely different meaning and sense than they would have had in reality.

According to Francis Butler, from the chronicler's perspective, Olga's vengeance was morally justifiable because it advanced the interest of her son, the Rurikid's dynasty, the people of Rus', and God's plan for salvation.¹⁴⁸

It is hardly likely that the chronicler deliberately refashioned the evidence of the rituals in the description of revenge. Obviously the compilers of 1039 or 1110 were not participants in the events that happened in the time of Prince Igor and Princess Olga, in 945–946. It also seems highly improbable that an early Christian compiler constructed the rituals in order to elevate and honour the ancestors of Jaroslav the Wise, Prince Igor and Princess Olga, as pagan sacral sovereigns. The transformation of original evidence seems to have taken place through repeated oral transmission; the keepers of the information related the deeds of Princess Olga and her contemporaries, while their audience perceived the information in their own way and gave it their own explanation. The changing consciousness of the epoch, especially after the Rus' had adopted Christianity, demanded a new interpretation of the events as told by the eyewitnesses. The next generation that received the story had already lost contact with its origins and, in compliance with the specific character of genre and the expectations of listeners, saw it as full of folkloric details and symbols. Thus customs and events which originally had a sacred meaning received a rational treatment suitable for a different epoch. They became a part of folklore and could absorb influence from other genres and traditions. In the case of the story of Olga, the most important of these was the influence from Scandinavian oral culture familiar to the Kievan ruling house.

The discrepancy between the version of the story in the *Novgorodian Chronicle* and the *Primary Chronicle*, and the lack of incendiary birds in the former, shows that different ideas inspired their authors. In the *Novgorodian Chronicle*, the funeral rituals are represented as three stage of revenge, which corresponds to the three Indo-European functions of Georges Dumézil (see Fig. 5). The first stage, which unifies Prince Igor's murder by the Drevljans and Princess Olga's savage reprisal on the Drevljan envoys, can be associated with the first function (F1). Igor and Olga represent here the idea of sovereignty divided between the military (or ritualistic) and sacral leaders. Prince Igor was killed during a military campaign (Leo the Deacon) or an expedition to collect tribute (*Primary Chronicle*), one form of which, *poljudje*, was close to the Nordic *veizla*. The latter case testifies to the ritualistic character of the relationship between the prince and the Drevljans.

¹⁴⁸ See Butler 2004, 793, cf. 790: by killing the Drevljans and avoiding marriage to Mal, Olga saves her son's life and Rus' from conquest. For medieval views on vengeance, see Throop and Hyams 2010.

Igor's widow acted as master of ceremonies giving instructions to the participants in the murder of the Drevljans and to the Drevljans themselves. Actually, she acts as a priestess sending the messengers to the gods or performing the sacrifice. Thus, Prince Igor and Princess Olga symbolize military (ritualistic) and priestly (sacral) co-rulers.

The second act of revenge is associated with the second function (F2), which symbolizes the military aspect or war. Olga invited the 'best men' of the Drevljans (their nobility) to the bath-house. Indeed, they are described as warrior aristocracy, *boyare*, 'best warriors'; the old-Russian term '*muzh*' (*муж*) for a man being equivalent to the Latin '*vir*'.

The third act of revenge during the funeral feast, in which thousands of people were killed, links to the third function (F3). The symbolism of this function is associated with wealth, fertility, economic activity, and ordinary people. All this was represented in the funeral banquet and games on the prince's tomb, when the multitude of people ate, drunk and displayed their abilities and riches.

Function	Literary motive	Legendary event	F: symbolism
F1	first revenge	Prince Igor's death and the selected Drevljans' sacrifice by Princess Olga	military and sacred co-rulers
F2	second revenge	Noble Drevljans were killed	warriors
F3	third revenge	Thousands of people were killed during the funeral banquet	people

Fig. 5

The version in the *Primary Chronicle* includes the additional story of the capture of Iskorosten, which originated in a purifying ritual. It is possible that the purifying ritual was known to the Russian chroniclers, as it may still have been in use during the eleventh and twelfth centuries. The literary form of its description was most likely fashioned under the influence of the adopted folkloric motif of capturing cities with the help of incendiary birds. Obviously the compiler of the *Primary Chronicle* did not see a purifying ritual in the story of the capture of Iskorosten; for him it was a continuance of the vengeance. If it is believed that the story of incendiary birds was added by the compiler from an unknown source, we have to accept that the former

orientation of the whole narrative on the trifunctional model was deformed by the addition. Then the new distribution of the events among the functions would be fashioned in a new manner (see Fig. 6).

The first and second acts of revenge, which closely relate to the Kievan ruling house and its relationship with the gods, can both be associated with F1. The story of Prince Igor's death disappears from the picture, and his figure is replaced by the prince Mal. Princess Olga had first ordered that the envoys of Mal be killed, and then demanded that the 'best men' of the Drevljans be sent to Kiev, actually to be sacrificed. The two aspect of sovereignty, military and priestly, are preserved in this version too. F2 is necessarily re-associated with the third stage of revenge, during which thousands of people were massacred by Olga's warriors. These warriors and funeral military games (*trizna*) act here as symbols of war and military aspect of force. The challenge of the former system gives room for the fourth stage of the vengeance, which in this case represents F3. The burnt Drevljan city and its murdered inhabitants symbolize the wealth of the tribe and the common people.

Function	Literary motive	Legendary event	F: symbolism
F1	first revenge second revenge	Drevljan embassy was sacrificed; noble Drevljans were killed	ritual and priestly co-rulers
F2	third revenge	funeral military games and banquet	warriors
F3	fourth revenge	Drevljan town was burnt and its dwellers were massacred	people

Fig. 6

However, something of the original events or beliefs may lie behind the incendiary birds, which were considered as the birds from the underworld, in the pagan belief system, rather than from the heavens. The series of three consecutive mass murders need not be separated from the story of Iskorosten's capture; they were two different kinds of event. Having performed the three rituals, Princes Olga sent messages from the terrestrial world to the other contiguous parts of the universe. The incendiary birds, by contrast, brought a fiery energy from another world to the terrestrial one.

Therefore, the story of the capture of Iskorosten can be regarded as a reflection of the fourth function, according to the theory of Nick Allen.¹⁴⁹

Allen points out that Dumézil's three functions depict the internal aspect of society and its ideology, and proposes a fourth which focused on the realm which lies outside the classical three. The external aspect of society presupposes the existence of 'otherness' which is represented by 'the other, outside or beyond'. The notion of the fourth function was elaborated in order to describe a reality wider than the world of the homogenous community. The external world has two forms of influence on society. One associates with the internal world, however, preserving its own external characteristics, strong 'otherness' or the 'otherness' with the sign 'minus'. The other penetrates into the internal world from the outside and therefore has ambiguous characteristics, being partly 'own' and partly 'alien'. To this difference between the two types of 'otherness' Nick Allen designates the signs F4+ and F4-.

The first step in conceptualisation of the fourth function was made on the basis of material from the varna schema of classical Hinduism. According to Dumézil, the three twice-born varnas represent three functions. The fourth varna of shūdra was outside of the circle of the twice-born. Labelled as once-born outsiders the shūdra are the clearest example of devalued representatives of the fourth function (F4-). For the positively valued (F4+) the instance of the 'problem of king' seems to be especially significant. Like the devaluated outsiders, the hypervaluated king was considered to be outside the internal social circle in the public mind, because his position was equated to that of the supernatural beings, gods. Of course, one can accommodate the figure of king (or comparable prince) within the first function (F1), but Allen rejects this accommodation and assumes that the king should be associated with the fourth function in its positive aspect (F4+).

In the *Primary Chronicle* under 945–946, two events, Prince Igor's death and the devastation of Iskorosten, lie outside the triple vengeance performed by Princess Olga. The nucleus of the story is formed by the burial, immolation and massacre of the Drevljans. In the original version, they formed the key group of rituals related to the prince's burial. They are closely connected by one and the same idea of the funeral rite: that is they

¹⁴⁹ See Nicholas J. Allen, 'The Ideology of the Indo-European Dumézil's Theory and the Idea of a Fourth Function', *International Journal of Moral and Social Studies* 2 (1987), 23–39; *idem*, 'Some gods of pre-Islamic Nuristan', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* 208 (1991), 141–168; *idem*, 'Romulus and the fourth function', in E.C. Polomé ed., *Indo-European Religion after Dumézil*, (Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph Series 16), Washington, D.C. 1996, 13–36.

relate to the sacral space connected with the Kievan principedom. In the secondary version of the chronicle, the three revenges can be clearly associated with the three Dumézilian functions. By contrast, Igor's death and the burning of Iskorosten happened in alien territory, in the Drevljan country, which appears here as the euphemism of another word.¹⁵⁰ Both themes can be attributed to the fourth function, Igor's death to its positive aspect (F4+) and Iskorosten's burning to the negative one (F4-). Prince Igor's expedition to collect tribute in Dereva depicts him as military (ritualistic) sovereign who operated outside his own (Poljanian) society, where he was replaced by Princess Olga in the role of priestly ruler. In addition, the destruction of Iskorosten and massacre of its inhabitants during the fourth stage of Olga's revenge portray the people outside the circle of rituals, while the similar massacre of the Drevljan people at Igor's tomb belonged to the circle of the funeral rite. Thus, the whole functional construction of the narrative under consideration on the basis of Nick Allen's theory can be represented in the form of pentadic, rather than triadic system:

Function	Literary motive	Legendary event	F: symbolism
F4+	tribute collection	Prince Igor's 'sacrificial' death	military (ritualistic) ruler
F1	first revenge	Selected Drevljans were sacrificed by Princess Olga	priestly (sacred) ruler
F2	second revenge	Noble Drevljans were killed in a bath-house	warriors
F3	third revenge	Thousands of people were killed during the funeral banquet	people, belonged to the circle of rite
F4-	fourth revenge	The destruction of Iskorosten and massacre of its inhabitants	people outside the circle of rite

Fig. 7

Aleksandr Koptev, Doctor of historical sciences

Docent of Tampere University

Aleksandr.Koptev[at]uta.fi.

¹⁵⁰ For the theoretical aspect of the narrative structure, see Dean A. Miller, 'Who Deals With the Gods? Kings and Other Intermediaries', in Edgar C. Polomé ed., *Miscellanea Indo-Europea*, (Journal of Indo-European Studies Monograph Series 33), Washington, D.C. 1999, 261–274: at 266.